



Helen Adair

Louis Becke

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HELEN ADAIR

By
LOUIS BECKE

TORONTO
THOMAS ALLEN
1903

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO
MY GOOD FRIEND
JOHN RAE, LL.D.
I DEDICATE THIS TALE OF OLD COLONIAL DAYS
AS A TOKEN OF
ESTEEM AND REGARD

DUBLIN,
January 1, 1903

CHAPTER I

“It is time to go home, Helen.”

“Yes, madam. The sun is over the spur of the range.”

“I wish it would stop there. I hate it, don’t you?”

“No, madam, I do not hate the sun.”

“Well, you know what I mean, girl, perfectly well. I don’t mean that I hate the sun itself, but I hate to see it day after day, and feel it drying the flesh on one’s bones, and turning one’s face and hands browner and browner every day, and sapping all the life and energy out of one’s spirit. You know what I mean, don’t you?”

“Yes, madam.”

“‘Yes, madam,’ and ‘No, madam!’ How irritating you are to-day, Helen! If there is anything I detest it is to have one’s questions answered in monosyllables. It grates on my nerves. It is quite bad enough to sit here and listen to those wretched cattle bells ding-donging all about us without your making matters worse.”

Helen turned her dark, beautiful face to her mistress, and moved back the sides of her coarse sun-hood with her brown, shapely hands.

“I am sorry I have annoyed you, madam.”

Mrs. Lathom, a pretty, “dolly-faced” little woman of five-and-twenty, shook her yellow curls petulantly, and then leant back against the smooth bole of the tree under which they were sitting.

“I did not say you annoyed me, but I think you are very thoughtless. I have such a lot to put up with, and no one has the slightest feeling for or sympathy with me. I declare I might as well be a convict woman for all the consideration that is shown me.”

The face of the girl to whom she spoke flushed deeply, then suddenly paled. But Mrs. Lathom took no heed. Her own petty troubles were far too important to her to allow what she called her mind to consider the effect of her ceaseless and rambling chatter. For a moment or two, however, she remained silent, immersed in the study of two beautiful white hands, covered with an unnecessary display of rings, and a frown puckered her fair brow as she discerned a tiny freckle on one of her knuckles.

“Why did you not remind me to put on my gloves, Helen? My hands will be positively hideous soon, with these detestable freckles, and stings from sandflies and mosquitoes.”

“I did remind you, madam,” replied the girl in the same listlessly-respectful monotone; “the sandflies have been very troublesome lately. That is why the

cattle and horses keep shaking their bells so much. The sandflies get inside their ears.”

“Bother the cattle and horses! Why can’t they get rid of them in some other way than by clanging their horrible bells?”

Something like the faint flicker of a smile moved the girl’s lips—“They do try very hard, madam. There are always a number of them standing in the creek with only their heads out of the water. They stay there sometimes for many hours together. But the poor horses suffer most.”

“What is the earthly use of telling me such silly things? I can’t stand up to my chin in the creek all day, can I? But I might as well do that as live in this disgusting place. It’s too bad of the Governor to send Captain Lathom here when he knows I am not strong.”

The patient, wearied listener made no reply. For six months past—ever since she had come to Waringa Creek township with Captain and Mrs. Lathom—she had heard the same complaint almost daily, sometimes made with sullen anger to Lathom himself, sometimes to the few visitors who came to the house, and always to Helen herself.

“Don’t you hate the place?” asked Mrs. Lathom presently, in a more amiable though condescending tone to the girl. “Would you not be delighted to go back to Sydney again, instead of living in this wretched bush?” She spoke with assumed carelessness, but the girl, who could sometimes read her shallow mind as if she were a child of ten, knew well that behind the apparently simple question there lay a motive.

“I do not like the place, madam, but I do not hate it.”

“But you would like to go back to Sydney?” And Mrs. Lathom looked at her eagerly.

“No, madam, I should not.”

“You silly girl. Why not?” she persisted.

“I do not like the bush, madam,” was the cold reply, “but I like it better than I do Sydney.”

“Then you must make it your business to like Sydney,” said Mrs. Lathom; and her voice grew sharp. “I will not put up with likes or dislikes from—from _____”

“From a convict, madam.”

“I did not say that. You are very rude to interrupt me when I am speaking, especially when I wish to confer a favour on you. But you must remember your position.”

“I can never forget it.”

The words were uttered with a quiet dignity, and the dark eyes met Mrs. Lathom’s so steadily, that she felt slightly uncomfortable.

“Well, I’m sure I’m very good to you, Helen, and have done a great deal

for you in many ways.”

“For the *kindnesses* I have received from you, madam, I am grateful,” the girl answered slowly, though her whole passionate nature was in revolt when she thought of the daily bitterness and ignominies heaped upon her by the thoughtless, selfish, and shallow-brained creature who sat before her languidly fanning her face with a dainty Indian fan. But distinct as was her emphasis on the word “kindnesses” Mrs. Lathom did not detect it.

“Now, Helen,” she went on, “as you have no doubt seen, Captain Lathom is very peculiar in his ways, and . . . but he really is very slow to understand things. But he has quite a high opinion of you—quite, I assure you. In fact, he has *said* so distinctly.”

“Captain Lathom has always been most kind and considerate to all the convicts under his care, madam.”

“Quite so; and I am glad you appreciate it, but then, of course, you are much superior to the—the——”

“Other convict women, madam.”

“Exactly. And, of course, when you were assigned to us, I noticed that at once, and told Captain Lathom that I was sure, whatever your past character had been, you were quite superior in your manners and looks to the rest of the unfortunate creatures who came out in the *Julia*.”

“I thank you, madam;” and the girl’s hands clenched together in her lap as she bent her head lower, and set her teeth hard.

“Yes, indeed,” resumed Mrs. Lathom complacently, “and Captain Lathom at *my* especial request, and on account of *my* interest in you, managed to secure your assignment to us, although the Governor, who is an extremely vulgar man, in spite of his being a soldier and a supposed gentleman, was very averse to military officers having female convicts assigned to them as servants. Now, I am sure you feel grateful.”

“I *am* grateful to Captain Lathom. He has made me feel that I am still a human being, and not a brute beast.” Her dreary monotone did not change, though her frame was quivering from head to foot.

“How very strangely you talk, Helen. I am sure I do not consider you a ‘brute beast.’ Quite the reverse; and I am sure I have shown it on many occasions. Have I not?”

No answer came from the girl beyond a mute inclination of the bowed head.

“Now, as I have said—or did I not say so? I quite forget, you interrupt me so—Captain Lathom really does not understand that I am ill—really ill—and thinks that there is no necessity for me to return to Sydney, when Dr. Haldane is ‘only thirty miles away’—as if thirty miles were thirty yards! And I detest Dr. Haldane, with his bushy whiskers, and his horribly coarse voice, and

vulgar manners, like all those East India Company men;" and she shuddered affectedly, and looked at her companion's face. It betrayed neither interest nor sympathy.

"Well, as I told you, Helen, Captain Lathom has a very high opinion of you, for, of course, he has not failed to see how very attentive you are to me. And he thinks that you are absolutely truthful. Indeed he has said as much."

"Captain Lathom has always been most kind and generous to me, madam. It is not in his nature to be otherwise to any one. Even the men in the chain gang know that."

"The horrid creatures! Please don't talk about them. One of them threw a hammer at him once and tried to kill him, and yet he was so foolish as to overlook it instead of having the man sentenced to two hundred and fifty lashes—the minimum penalty."

The girl made no answer. She knew the story, and knew how the kindly-hearted Lathom, and the equally compassionate Surgeon Haldane had represented to the authorities that Convict No. — was mentally deranged, as was indeed the case, and so saved the unfortunate wretch a fearful punishment.

"As you say, he is very considerate and kind, Helen; and gives such a lot of attention to his official duties. But—I am sure I can trust you, can I not?"

"I am a convict, madam."

"How tiresome you are!" and Mrs. Lathom's blue eyes flashed angrily; then in another moment she smiled sweetly.

"I want you to do something for me, Helen. I will reward you well for it."

"I do not wish for any reward, madam. I shall be glad to serve you if it lies in my power to do so."

"How nicely you speak! Well, you *can* serve me. I want you to tell Captain Lathom that you are sure I am not at all strong, and ought to go away to Sydney. He is so strong himself that he cannot understand any one being weak and ill. And he would think seriously of it if you told him."

The darkening shadows of the day hid the smile of contempt on the girl's face. "It would be great presumption on my part, madam, to speak to Captain Lathom on such a subject as your health."

"Of course it would—if I did not tell you to do so. But I wish you to do so."

"I will speak to him, madam."

"That is right. I am sure you are a sensible girl, and will know exactly what to say. Now let us return to the house."

They walked slowly along the narrow, winding and dusty path that led from Captain Lathom's house to the bank of Waringa Creek. On each side of them was an endless vista of grey gum-trees, from the smooth, round boles of which hung strips and patches of russet-hued bark, cracked and blistered by the

summer sun. Presently they came to the outer paddock, a wide, grassless expanse of fifty acres, enclosed in a rough three-railed fence of gum slabs, and entered by slip-rails. The girl stepped before her mistress, and lowered one end of the heavy rails for her mistress to step over; then again fell behind to her usual distance.

Within the larger paddock was a smaller one, in which stood Captain Lathom's quarters and those of the five-and-twenty soldiers who formed the convict guard. Here, although the settlement had only been formed two years before, some cultivation had been effected, though the intense summer heat had given all the vegetation a parched-up appearance. A patch of an acre of maize, now fully ripened, and waiting to be pulled, still showed some vestige of green, and in and among the long row of stalks great grey and yellow pumpkins lay baking in the sun; beyond this, and directly in front of the house itself, was a flower garden—Helen's particular care, and her solace and pleasure whenever she could escape from an almost continuous attendance on "the captain's lady."

The house itself was of good size and neat appearance. It was built of freestone hewn by convict hands from the hated quarries situated on the spur of the range, four miles away from the settlement. The roof was of shingles, and though the building was but of one storey, the rooms were spacious, lofty, and cool, for a wide verandah encompassed it on four sides, and one end was entirely covered in with the dense dark green foliage of a passion-fruit vine, trained from post to post. About a hundred yards away from the commandant's dwelling was that of his second in command, Lieutenant Willet; it was merely a two-roomed cottage, but solidly built of stone. In a line with the officers' houses were the soldiers' quarters—a rough, slabbed building with a bark roof—and the prisoners' "barracks," a low, long, strongly built stone edifice with barred windows and a massive door, stood within a stone's throw of it.

Without the bounds of the "official," or rather military, portion of the settlement was the township, which consisted of a determined attempt at a long and perfectly straight street, on either side of which were the houses and stores of free settlers, and some emancipated convicts. One end of the street touched the bank of Waringa Creek, where a wharf had been built; the other was lost in a maze of giant gum-tree stumps not yet uprooted from the soil, and which were to be seen extending right up to the edge of the bush, the said "bush" being a dense forest of huge blue gum, "blackbutt," and tallow-wood trees, interspersed with a thick undergrowth of smaller trees, for the "street" followed the trend of the creek, and the soil was rich and moist from the thick alluvial deposit left upon it almost every year when the creek was in flood and overflowed its banks.

"The captain's lady," as the people of Waringa called Mrs. Lathom,

stepped languidly up on the verandah, followed by Helen, and seated herself in a cane lounge placed near one of the green-painted French lights which opened into the dining-room.

“Go and see why the lamps are not lit,” she said pettishly to Helen. “I hate coming into the house at dusk and finding it in darkness.”

The girl stepped silently inside, and in a few minutes the dining-room lamp was lit and sent a soft glow of light through the windows out upon the garden. Mrs. Lathom lay back in the lounge, her hands clasped behind her head. She was thinking of her husband, and her mouth hardened. What if he again refused her? He had better not, she thought. He was so dense at seeing things. Well, he would have to understand that she was not going to waste her days in such a wretched spot as Waringa Creek, when she could be in Sydney enjoying herself. She was sick to death of his plans and schemes for the improvement of the settlement—frittering away his time when he could return to Sydney if he but chose to ask to be transferred. How delightful it would be to be back in Sydney once more and hear her name again—“the beautiful Mrs. Lathom,” “Lathom’s pretty wife is coming,” “I am taking Mrs. Lathom for a ride,” “you looked simply lovely last night”! She smiled to herself, and then wondered what Lieutenant Maurice Wray would say to her when she next met him.

“I’ll write to him to-night, and tell him to expect me,” she said aloud.

“When do you wish dinner, ma’am?” said a rough-looking, coarse-faced woman, coming to the door.

“When Captain Lathom returns—no matter how late it is. Send some one to tell Sergeant Rush that I wish to see him. And tell Helen to come to me.”

Helen was the first to arrive.

“You need not stay in, Helen,” she said, with unusual graciousness. “Perhaps you would like to walk down to the creek and see if the boat is coming. I do not expect Captain Lathom will be here till nine o’clock, and I know you are fond of the creek. I shall write a letter or two.”

Helen thanked her, and at once put on her hood and went out. She loved to sit on the river bank in the dusk of the evening and listen to the sounds of the night, away from the hateful surroundings of the grim and squalid settlement.

Presently a heavy footstep sounded on the verandah, and Sergeant Rush stood before the lady and saluted.

“Good evening, Sergeant. I want to know if there is any one leaving here for Newcastle to-morrow.”

“Yes, ma’am. One of the Tucker boys is going there by road to try and buy some sugar. There is a Dutch ship just arrived from Batavia with a full cargo.”

“Then tell him to call and see me. I want some letters posted for me.”

“Yes, ma’am;” and again the soldier saluted, and then strode off to his quarters.

“Another letter for Mr. Maurice Wray, I’ll be bound,” said Sergeant Rush to himself. “I’d give a month’s pay to see her caught.”

CHAPTER II

As the girl walked slowly down the path, the outline of which could now only be discerned by the light of the stars, Captain Lathom's collie dog came running after her, and thrust his cold nose against her hand with a whine of satisfaction. In his affections Helen came next to his master, and he knew that she understood him when he so often sat on the verandah steps, whining, and gazing wistfully down the path after "the captain" when the latter had told him with unaffected sternness to stay with his mistress, though to his mistress poor Russ was generally "an odious creature," who would insist on following his master about the house whenever he was at home.

"Come, Russ. We shall have a whole hour or more to ourselves."

The dog leaped ahead, and plunged into the underscrub in search of paddymelons or bandicoots, or some predatory iguana stealing through the thick carpet of dry leaves towards the settlers' fowl-houses.

The road to the wharf led in a straight line from the commandant's house, and showed like a riband of white through the dark vista of lofty trees on each side. It was ankle deep in soft powdery dust, still warm to even the booted foot from the rays of a scorching Australian sun. At the verge of the bank, however, the dust ended, and gave place to a wide "corduroyed" path of rounded saplings, neatly levelled with a filling of small stones. Here, too, the prospect, even at night, was decidedly pleasant, for the vegetation was dense and luxurious, and nearly all the trees growing near the water had their trunks enwrapped in masses of creepers—wild convolvulus, mulberry, and the climbing date, the sub-acid fruit of which were locally called "black-puddings," and the air was filled with the rich perfume of many flowers and plants, for there is no truth in the so often quoted statement that in Australia the flowers "are without smell and the birds without song."

At the foot of the corduroyed road was the little jetty, and as Helen stepped down the bank she saw the figure of Tim Doyle, an old "lifer." He was engaged in lighting a lantern that was placed on one of the jetty bollards.

"Good evening, miss," he said, in a rich Irish brogue. "Sure, an' I was just afther wondering if ye'd be coming down the night."

He limped—for he was very lame—towards her, carrying an empty box in one hand, and set it down for her to sit on.

"Thank you, Tim. It is a beautiful night, is it not?"

"It is that!" and the old man sat down on the wharf beside the girl and clasped his hands around his knees. A short clay pipe was in his mouth, and she could see that it was empty.

“Isn’t your pipe alight, Tim?”

“It is not. Sorra a bit of tibaccy have I seen this God’s blessed day.”

Helen laughed softly as she put her hand in her pocket and drew out a piece of strong rich twist tobacco.

“I did not forget you, Tim.”

Captain Lathom always left a little pile of tobacco on the store-room shelves when he went to Sydney, and knew that Helen would distribute it wisely.

Tim took it eagerly and pressed it ecstatically to his nose. Then he delved his hand into the pocket of his coarse canvas jumper, drew out his knife, cut some tobacco, quickly filled his pipe, and lit it carefully with a long ill-smelling, sulphurous wooden match, which he took from a round, green paper box. He puffed with silent content for a few minutes, then took the pipe from his mouth and gazed up into the girl’s face, and at the same moment the dog Russ came up and coiled himself contentedly at Helen’s feet.

“’Tis the black spot of sorrow I see in your eye to-night,” he said, with an inquiring and timid inflection in his husky old voice, as he looked into her face.

“I am a little tired, Tim; that is all. But I did not think I was showing it in my face.”

“’Tis your eyes, dear. Sure an’ it’s mesilf that knows whin they are dulled wid sorrow, or bright wid joy.”

“There is not much joy in my life, Tim. Neither is there in yours.”

“Thru, darlin’. But it’s God’s will, and there’s a hivin above us.”

Helen sighed. “Yes, Tim; I try to think of that. But I often wish that I were dead.”

“Sure, dear, ye are but a slip of a girl yet, and death is a long way off from ye. ’Tis only an ould wreck like meself that should be thinkin’ of death.”

“You have had a hard life, Tim.” She put out her hand, and placed it softly on the old man’s head.

“A hard, bittther, cruel life, dear. An’ yet I niver did any wan in God’s wurruld any harm. An’ see me now! Just fifty-five years it is since I first saw the sun shinin’ bright on the water av Carlingford Lough, and heard the swate blating of the mountain sheep on Slieve Foy. God help me, but it’s happy I’d be to-night av I cud but wanst more see my mother’s bit av a cabin jist above the ould castle that bloody King John built in the days of Noah, or beyant, for that matter, for ’tis a terrible ould place.”

Helen made no remark in reply, and Tim gazed wistfully upwards to her face. She knew the places of which he spoke, and yet, often as he had tried to get her to speak of her native land, she either quickly changed the subject or relapsed into silence.

“Listen, Tim,” she said, raising her hand; “I think I can hear the boat coming.”

The old man bent forward. “Aye, ’tis the boat, shure enough. She’s just the other side av the long point, an’ will be here in another quarter av an hour.”

The point to which he referred stretched out from the left bank of the creek, and was within two miles of the junction with the river, which entered the Pacific many miles away at the Port of Newcastle, or Port Hunter as it was more generally known. Although there was a very good dray road along the river bank to the seaport, most of the settlers used boats as means of transport for their supplies, except after heavy rains, when such an enormous volume of water rushed seawards that it was quite impossible for boats or sailing vessels to make headway against it, and steamships were unknown in those days in the Southern Seas.

“I can see her light now, Tim,” said Helen presently.

“It is, sure enough, miss;” and the old fellow hobbled off to the shore end of the jetty, where a bell was suspended from a post. He rang it loudly, and in a few minutes voices were heard, as the settlers came down the bank, and then a measured tramp, tramp, sounded on the corduroyed path, as Sergeant Rush and some of his men marched down to meet the commandant. Helen herself, having no wish to be detained on the jetty by some of the gossiping women who had come with their husbands to await the boat, slipped quietly away to one side, and sat down on the bank at a spot which gave her a good view.

“Keep quiet, Russ,” she said to the collie, who could now hear his master’s deep voice talking to the men in the boat, and was straining at her detaining hand on his collar; “you must wait till he gets out of the boat.”

The boat was heavy and deeply laden with stores and supplies for the small garrison and the prisoners, as well as with some goods for some of the settlers; she was manned partly by soldiers and partly by good-conduct prisoners. Captain Lathom was the first to step out, his uniform soiled and crumpled.

“Good evening, Sergeant,” he said, returning Rush’s salute, as he stood beside the lighted lamp. “Get the boat unloaded as soon as possible. She is leaking considerably, and I fear some of the meal may have become wetted. Then let the crew have their supper and turn in. We have had a very long and hard pull, for there has not been a breath of wind since we started. How is Mr. Willet?”

“Still confined to his bed, sir.”

Something like a frown passed over Lathom’s face, but he made no remark. Lieutenant Willet’s continued attacks of indisposition were becoming somewhat too frequent to please his superior, who surmised, correctly enough, that they were largely brought about by Mr. Willet’s inherent laziness and aversion to any exercise not immediately connected with the performance of

his military duties.

“There, Russ; you may go now,” said Helen to the dog, as she saw Captain Lathom coming towards her. He was walking slowly and somewhat wearily, for he was quite as tired as his boat’s crew, with the long day on the river under a fierce sun.

The dog shot off from Helen’s side, and in another instant was leaping upon his master, uttering short, sharp barks of delight, and then running round him in circles.

“Well, Russ, old fellow, how are you? Now, there, that will do, and don’t make such a noise.”

At the top of the rise he caught sight of Helen standing by the side of the path. “Is that you, Helen?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Mrs. Lathom quite well?” He never said “Your mistress” to her when he spoke of his wife, and for this simple consideration she was not ungrateful.

“She has been complaining of the heat, sir, and says she has not been feeling well all day, sir.”

Lathom nodded. “It has been a terribly hot day, indeed.” He paused a moment or two. “Do you not want to go down to the boat, Helen?”

“No, sir, unless there is anything I can bring to the house for Mrs. Lathom.”

“Oh, there is no need for you to do that. Old Tim will bring up everything that is wanted to-night.” Then he added, in his usual kindly tone, “I thought that you might like to talk to some of the settlers.”

“No, thank you, sir,” she replied, as she fell back a little.

He nodded good-naturedly, and stepped out along the dusty road, and a few minutes later entered the house. His wife was awaiting him on the verandah.

“It has been such a dreadful day, Fred,” she said, as he bent down and kissed her. “I am so glad you have come back. The heat has made me feel quite faint.”

He made some sympathising remark, and then sat down wearily.

“You look tired,” she said.

“I am—very tired, Ida. Shall I have time for a plunge in the creek before dinner?”

Mrs. Lathom smiled an assent. “Of course. Dinner will not be ready for half an hour yet.”

Lathom went inside the bedroom, took his towels and a change of thin clothing, and followed by the still excited Russ, slipped out into the starlight, and took his way along the same narrow winding path that had been traversed earlier in the day by his wife and Helen.

CHAPTER III

At nine o'clock next morning Captain Lathom was breakfasting alone, Mrs. Lathom seldom rising until between ten and eleven o'clock. Russ sat beside his master's chair, patiently waiting for him to finish, when he knew he could accompany him on his usual round of inspection.

The captain's face wore a somewhat troubled expression, and as soon as the meal was over he rose wearily, and went on the verandah, where he paced to and fro for a quarter of an hour. Then catching sight of Helen, who was at work in the garden, he walked over to her.

"Good morning, Helen," he said; "what are those plants you are covering over with bushes?"

"Young passion fruit, sir. There are only eight or nine, and I always shade them as soon as the sun begins to get too strong. I promised old Tim six of them to plant round the stables, where the soil is very rich and deep. When they grow up in a few years, they will cover the whole roof, and make the stables very cool."

"A few years is a long time to look forward to," said Lathom, with a good-natured smile. "By the way, Helen, you have not been at all well lately, I hear."

She looked up astonished. "I am very well, sir, thank you. I am never ill."

"Oh, Mrs. Lathom told me last night that she was sure you were far from well, but did not like to say so."

Helen's face flushed, but she made no answer.

"You see," he went on, "this is a peculiar climate, and one must be a little careful, though I never imagined that there was anything wrong with you. Would you like to see Dr. Haldane? He is coming here to-day."

"No, thank you, sir. I am quite well, indeed. I do not feel the heat like Mrs. Lathom. She has complained very much lately."

Lathom nodded. Then he said, "She has had several fainting fits of late, she tells me. Why did you not let me know of this?"

Again the girl's face flushed deeply, and she felt an almost irresistible desire to cry out, "It is false. She is deceiving you, and asked me to help her in her deceit." But she bent her head, and said nothing.

"I am sorry you did not tell me," went on Lathom gravely, "for I never imagined that there was really anything wrong with Mrs. Lathom's health. Now I can see that there is, and as she thinks that she will get better in Sydney, I am sending her down there for a few months. You will, of course, accompany her. She tells me you are very anxious to go."

"I should like to be near the sea again, sir, although I do not like Sydney."

“Ah, yes; I remember now that you were very anxious to be assigned to Major Cartwright at Port Macquarie. Why did you wish to go there? It is a very pretty place, but the country round about still very unsettled. Do you know Major Cartwright’s family?”

“No, sir,” she replied, with such very evident constraint that, seeing his questions were causing her some distress, he pursued the subject no longer.

“Well, you must take good care of Mrs. Lathom, Helen. I have a great deal of confidence in you; you know that, do you not?”

“Thank you, sir. You do me great honour.”

The captain affected not to hear the low, murmured remark as he walked away towards the stables.

“Poor girl,” he said to himself; “I wonder what is her real story? And what on earth made her pass counterfeit money? There is no more of the criminal instinct in her than there is in me! An educated, refined girl like her descend to the practice of downright rascality! Absurd! And yet she was not only proved guilty, but admitted her guilt! Hang me if I can understand it.”

As he came to the stables his meditations were cut short by seeing old Tim conversing with a mounted man, whom he recognised as Dr. Haldane’s servant.

“Where is the doctor, Hawley?”

Hawley, a fine stalwart young man (formerly a private in a dragoon regiment) saluted, and handed Lathom a note. “He is coming, sir. I was just bringing this to the house, sir.”

Lathom opened the note, and read it, and in an instant an angry expression clouded his face, and something like an oath escaped his lips.

“Very well, Hawley. Put your horse in the paddock—the doctor will be staying here to-night.” Then he turned on his heel, and walked towards Lieutenant Willet’s quarters.

“What’s the matter wid the captain at all at all?” asked old Tim of the doctor’s servant.

Hawley’s sunburnt face relaxed into a smile. “Did you hear him swearing under his breath? Well, that is just the very thing that the doctor said—and a good deal more beside—when *he* got a note last night. ’Twas from the parson. He sent it to say that he had heard the doctor was going over to Waringa to see Captain Lathom, and that he would come with him. The fat-faced old hog dined and slept at our place last night, and the doctor was as grumpy as a bear. He gave me a note last night, and told me to start off at daylight with it for Captain Lathom. The captain don’t like the parson, I think.”

“Like him!” and old Tim’s withered features, as he spat on the ground, expressed the deepest contempt; “how cud a gentleman, born an’ bred, *like* a baste like *him*? Bad luck an’ an evil ind to all such flogging devils as the

Riverend Joseph Marsbin. Sure an' his name makes me mouth dirty when I spake it." And again he spat on the ground.

"He's got no liking for you Irishers, that's certain," said Hawley sympathetically. He was himself an emancipated convict, and therefore had no hesitation in speaking freely to the old man. Neither was there any love lost between the ex-draught and the clergyman, for the latter had an unpleasant way of letting even an emancipist know that he (the Rev. Joseph Marsbin) had an intimate knowledge of official documents concerning the names of prisoners and their offences, dating from the very earliest days of the colony. And there was nothing he liked better than to make use of his knowledge at very uncomfortable moments.

"May the curse av the wake, an' the sufferin' an' the oppressed, lie on his wicked sowl whin he comes up for judgment," said the old man fervently, as he clasped and raised his toil-stained hands to heaven. "Ah, God above, sind some punishment on earth to this cruel man before Ye sind him to hell. Punish him for that bloody day at Parramatta; smite him wid some tirrible afflictin' disease; let his childhren's childhren hate and despise his mimory; let the tares an' the groans and the could sweat av those he has persecuted an' murdered _____"

"Stop, old man," cried the ex-soldier, with a shudder; "don't say any more, for God's sake. You'll put me off eatin' breakfast, and I'm sharp set, I can tell you, after a thirty-mile ride."

The old man's excitement vanished at once.

"Sure an' I was forgettin' ye. Come along wid me to the house."

Just as Mrs. Lathom entered the dining-room her husband strode up on to the verandah, with Russ at his heels.

"Ha, here you are, Ida. Look at this;" and he laid Dr. Haldane's note on the table before her. She read it.

"DEAR LATHOM,—I am sorry to say that you will have to entertain two guests instead of one. Marsbin came here this evening and coolly informed me that having heard I was paying you a visit he had decided to come with me, 'as it would be pleasant for us to travel in company.' Hang the fellow.—Yours, GEORGE HALDANE."

Mrs. Lathom shrugged her shoulders. "Very annoying, Fred. I trust he will not stay long."

"So do I, Ida. But I fear he will contrive to spend two or three days here, make as much mischief as he can in the settlement by his usual ill-timed interferences, and then say something ill-natured about me to the Governor."

"Never mind, dear. We must try and be as gracious as we can to him," said

Mrs. Lathom, who knew that the reverend gentleman stood high in the opinion of the Home Office, and therefore might be of use to her in some way or another if she wanted his influence; “and, after all, I am told that he can be very companionable and unbend himself in a remarkable manner after dinner—to gentlemen.”

“I don’t like the man, Ida. In fact I detest him. He is a bigot; and has used his powers as a magistrate in a manner that cannot be too strongly condemned. He is more hated than any man I know of in the colony. The Governor, I may tell you—in confidence, Ida—does not like him, and has told me so. But the fellow has great influence at Home; and there is this to his credit—he really believes in what he preaches, and no one can accuse him of being a hypocrite.”

“Then why do you object to him so much, Fred? If he is no hypocrite, and . . . and has so much influence with those at Home, surely he is a man whom it is worth your while to cultivate, and make a friend of, and surely in this horrible country we need friends, and——”

Lathom placed his hand tenderly on his wife’s shoulder.

“Ida, dear, you can hardly realise how very distasteful it is to me to be compelled by the exigencies of duty to receive this man as my guest. I said that he was a bigot. I should have added, a cruel and merciless one. The severity of the sentences he has helped to inflict upon unfortunate prisoners for the slightest misdemeanours are enough to sicken one not entirely devoid of humane feelings. I have often wondered, Ida, if he ever thinks of those sacred words, ‘Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy’! Oh, ’tis heartbreaking, saddening, deplorable beyond words that such things can be! A man who is supposed to teach the gospel of our Saviour——”

Mrs. Lathom shivered. “How strangely you talk, Fred. No one would think you were a soldier to hear you speak. And we *must* be civil and nice to Mr. Marsbin. He has great influence—and—and the convicts are dreadful characters.”

“Ah, Ida, you do not know how I pity them, especially the worst, the most vicious, the most degraded. The Governor, thank God, is a humane man, and though he may err at times by being over-lenient, ’tis a noble fault. Would that there were more men like him in the colony.”

“Mrs. Feilding says that Mr. Feilding thinks the Governor is making a great mistake in pampering and pardoning some of the convicts.”

Lathom made a gesture of contempt. “Feilding is like nearly all the civilian officials, my dear. He thinks that the convict system was created for the benefit of creatures like himself to fatten upon. God knows that some of the military men here are bad enough, but the civilian are worse. Feilding himself, in England, was only a vulgar little clerk to a pettifogging Old Bailey lawyer, and by some mischance was given an appointment here. As for Mrs. Feilding, she

is but a shallow-brained chattering idiot, with no thought beyond dress, and an intense desire to hang on to the Governor's coat-tails."

Then the irate commandant of Waringa strode out to attend to some of the many duties which always demanded his attention, and of which he was never neglectful.

CHAPTER IV

Shortly before eleven o'clock the expected visitors arrived, Dr. Haldane and the clergyman riding abreast, and followed by the latter's two armed servants, one of whom led a packhorse. Lathom met them at the steps and bade them welcome, and the two attendants were sent off to the servants' quarters, where they would have ample opportunity to exchange gossip and talk about their respective masters.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in," said the commandant, as he shook hands with his guests. "Mrs. Lathom begs of you to come to her first, before going to your rooms. She will not detain you longer than is necessary for you to take a little refreshment, of which I am sure you stand in need after so long and so hot a ride."

"Indeed, Lathom, it is most thoughtful of her; for, unlike our reverend friend here, I can never restrain my carnal longings when I know that liquid refreshment is near;" and Haldane, a huge, broad-shouldered, flowing whiskered man, slapped Lathom on the shoulder, and laughed boisterously.

"The weather has indeed been most ungracious," said the clergyman in slow, harsh, ponderous tones, as he walked towards the dining-room, "but yet we must not presume to question the decree of an all-wise Providence. Hum, ha!"

Mrs. Lathom came forward with outstretched hand. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Marsbin. I was so charmed when my husband told me that we should have the honour of your company."

The clergyman bowed over the white hand and murmured something inaudible, though it ended with his usual half-coughed "Hum, ha!" with which he invariably closed even the shortest remark; then the "captain's lady" greeted Haldane (whom she sincerely hated, and who knew it), and then indicated, with a bright smile, the spirit stand and wine decanters on the table.

"Now, Fred, I shall leave you to look after Mr. Marsbin and the doctor until luncheon; I have no doubt but that presently you will all have much to say to each other. To you, Mr. Marsbin, who have so lately been in Sydney, I look to tell me all the latest news. Captain Lathom never thinks of me in that respect. He brings me the *Sydney Gazette* with an air of triumph, and thinks he has achieved marvels, when, as you know, that horrid paper contains no news that is not from four to six months old, and I really dread to open it, for one-half of it is occupied with shipping matters, and the other half with notices of absconded prisoners, and of official reports."

"The mournful exigencies of the condition of this colony—largely

populated by a criminal and godless community of persons of innate depravity of mind, necessitate, my dear lady, a dignified austerity of tone in the newspaper press of the colony, an austerity that later on, when a better condition of life prevails, may—and *I* personally shall not be averse to such a departure—give place to the lighter and less momentous things of life, and chronicle the gaieties and harmless frivolities that are inseparable from a more refined society. Hum, ha!”

As he spoke the clergyman sank slowly back into a comfortable chair, and half-closed his dull, heavy-lidded eyes, and crossed his thick, white, yet shapely hands across the long-vanished line of demarcation that had once existed between his chest and his stomach.

Mrs. Lathom smiled sweetly as Haldane opened the door for her, and then Lathom showed the clergyman to his room. In a few minutes he returned to the doctor.

“Haldane, old fellow! How glad I am to see you again!” and in his quiet, undemonstrative manner he placed his sun-browned hand on his friend’s arm. “Come, let us have another glass of wine together before you go to your room.”

“Wine, Fred, wine! ‘No, an’ you love me, no more wine.’ I drank claret just now for the proprieties only, observe you, my melancholy New Holland knight of La Mancha, who is for ever tilting at the impregnable fastnesses of official stupidity. No, no wine, my boy, but a good, stiff half-tumbler of good honest brandy with good honest water. I want it—after listening to the exordium of our clerical friend.”

Lathom laughed—and his laugh was always pleasant to hear. “Indeed you shall, George, and I’ll join you. You don’t know how glad I shall be to see that man’s back. There is something so repellent about even his manner of speaking that every time he opens his mouth it jars me. No wonder the prisoners hate him.”

“Hate him!” said the doctor, as he poured himself out some brandy. “I would not like to stand in his shoes, Fred. One of these days a bullet will be coming out of the bush and take him in the back, and some poor wretch—half a dozen perhaps—will dance in the air for it. Well, your good health, Fred. How are matters progressing at Waringa?”

“Fairly well. His Excellency said some very complimentary things to me in his last letter, and hinted at the possibility of his paying a visit here after the worst of the summer is over. By the way, my wife is shortly returning to Sydney for a few months. She has latterly had several fainting fits, and I am feeling somewhat anxious.”

“Weather has been very trying lately,” said the doctor, trying to speak with sympathy, but not succeeding too well in the effort; “no doubt she will find

that the sea air will do her good. Do you accompany her?"

Lathom shook his head. "No, I cannot, unfortunately; I should not like to apply for leave just now. However, she is taking Helen with her, and they can go down to Port Hunter very comfortably in the boat, and from there by sea to Sydney."

Haldane nodded. "You'll feel lonely. Better invite me to come and stay a few weeks with you. I want to murder some of those ducks in the creek."

Lathom's face lit up with pleasure. "I shall be delighted. 'Tis just like you to suggest what I fear will be an inconvenience to you. And yet I quite intended to ask you to come."

"Then it's settled. I'll come next week, and kill every duck within ten miles."

During luncheon Mr. Marsbin told Mrs. Lathom all the latest news—the arrival of a fleet of transports under the convoy of His Majesty's ship *Marlborough*; the dinner given by the Governor to the captain and officers; the advent of two fresh "Methody" parsons, and two "Papist" priests; the political troubles in Ireland and "at home"; the condition of the penal colony in Van Dieman's Land; the intrusion of American whaling and sealing ships into southern seas, and their alleged frequent interferences and collisions with the crews of colonial vessels; and, lastly, the spread of bushranging, not only in Van Dieman's Land, but in New South Wales.

"'Tis indeed a sad state of affairs, dear madam," he said, after describing an attack made by a band of escaped prisoners on the estate of Mr. Feilding, only fifty miles from Sydney. "Mistaken leniency has now grown into such direct maladministration of justice that there will be, I fear, such an accession to the numbers of these desperately evil men before long, that human life will be rendered unsafe even in the more thickly settled portions of the colony. The troops at the disposal of the Governor are few—so few that His Excellency does not, I imagine, realise that a combination of these villains may one day result in a terrible massacre of the good, the law-abiding, and even the repentant. Hum, ha."

"Ah, sir, not that, I trust," said Lathom quietly; "individual cases of pillage, ending in murder, by some case-hardened ruffian, are indeed common enough, but the community at large need have no fear of these wandering bands of escaped convicts constituting a serious menace to their lives by making anything beyond a half-hearted raid upon some isolated estate such as that of Mr. Feilding. Their main object is to obtain food, of which they are always in want. Were any of Mr. Feilding's people maltreated?"

"No blood was shed," replied the clergyman in his deep, rasping voice, "but the villains seized and bound all the servants, plundered the store-room of provisions and spirits, and openly told Mrs. Feilding that had they found her

husband at home they would have cut off his ears and given him a flogging! Little did they dream that Mr. Feilding himself was concealed above the ceiling of the very room in which they sat carousing! Hum, ha!”

Lathom uttered an angry exclamation of contempt. “Do you mean to say, sir, that Mr. Feilding played the coward, and left his wife to face a gang of escaped convicts? ’Tis monstrous. I have no sympathy with him. ’Twould have served him but rightly had they carried out their threat.”

“I fear, Fred, that you are rather too hasty in asserting your opinion,” said Mrs. Lathom coldly. “What could one man do against seven?”

“Nothing, perhaps. Much, most probably. But then one must not expect too much from a creature of Feilding’s calibre in time of danger. How such a contemptible person was given a responsible position passes my comprehension. He is utterly unfitted for it—not one single qualification does he possess.”

The clergyman’s fat face darkened, and something like a scowl gathered on his coarse fleshy forehead. Haldane leant his elbow on the table, and gave his host an encouraging nod of interest and sympathy to proceed, for he knew that “flogging Feilding” had received his appointment as a magistrate of the territory through Marsbin’s influence alone, and he was inwardly smiling with delight at the clergyman’s discomfiture.

“Go on, Fred,” he said. “I, as you know, am deeply interested in this subject, not only as a fellow-magistrate with you, reverend sir”—and he bowed to Mr. Marsbin—“but for other reasons. By heavens, madam—sir, I beg your pardon”—and again he bowed solemnly to the clergyman—“but ’tis a shocking thing to hear that one of His Majesty’s magistrates played the cur in the presence of his own wife. Egad, did our outspoken king know of such disgraceful conduct, he would make short work——”

“Sir, we should thank you to allow Captain Lathom to continue,” said Marsbin, turning down his lips. “But I presume that his Majesty would feel astonished and grieved to learn that in this young country there is growing up an indifference—nay, callousness—to the principles of law, order, and religion, that can only end in rebellion and disaster. Hum, ha! Pray proceed, Captain Lathom, with your indictment of Mr. Feilding.”

Mrs. Lathom rose. “Now you are going into all sorts of things of which a poor little woman can have but scanty knowledge, so I shall leave you. But I shall be bold enough to say that I feel convinced that—that the dangerous condition of affairs to which Mr. Marsbin alludes so guardedly may be very imminent unless we have a governor sent to us who—who will protect the superior classes from the encroachment of emancipated convicts.”

“Bravo, Ida!” laughed Lathom, as he opened the door. “ ’Tis the first time I have heard you speak so strongly;” and he placed his honest hand caressingly

on her shoulder as she went out.

“Mrs. Lathom’s sentiments do her the greatest honour, sir, and I congratulate you on the possession of so gifted a wife. ’Tis eminently pleasing to me, sir, to meet such a lady as Mrs. Lathom;” and then, all his fighting blood up, he looked Lathom squarely in the face.

“Now, sir, let us talk. Put aside the fact of my sacred office. Put aside the fact—which I shall now avow—that the Home Government, on my recommendation *alone*, appointed Mr. Feilding to the position he now occupies, and tell me, sir, why you object to this worthy gentleman? Hum, ha!”

Lathom motioned to his soldier servant, who (with Helen) had been waiting, and had discreetly retired out of hearing, to bring the spirit-stand.

“Thank you, Walsh. That will do; you need not wait. Helen, please see to Mrs. Lathom. No doubt she will like some tea;” and eager and half-angry as he was to come to battle with the clergyman, he spoke, as was his invariable custom, with a simple courtesy that again made Mr. Marsbin turn down his lips and then raise his heavy fat-lidded eyes as if appealing to Heaven to note that he, at least, did not approve of an officer in the King’s service speaking in such an unduly condescending manner to a female convict. But Lathom was ready for him.

“Now, Mr. Marsbin, we three can talk freely. You have asked me why I object to Mr. Feilding as a magistrate. In the first place, his legal attainments are of the most rudimentary character, and that disqualification, added to an infirmity of temper, have made his decisions notorious throughout the colony; in the second, he is not a gentleman, either by birth, education, or instinct, and never having tried to act as one, cannot therefore inspire respect either in his brother magistrates or in the minds of the public generally; in the third, his intemperate habits, his coarse language, and even his personal appearance, render him an object of derision and contempt.”

The clergyman was silent. Haldane watched his face keenly. Then Lathom resumed—

“I think, sir, that you, as a clergyman, will most heartily agree with me that it is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of public decorum and morality, and for the present and future welfare of this colony, that the private lives of the civilian officials—men who bear most weighty responsibilities on their shoulders—should be above suspicion.”

“Certainly, sir. I approve of your sentiments.”

“Unfortunately, the very reverse obtains in too many cases, with the not unnatural result that many thousands of men and women who have been sent here for crimes against society, instead of being helped to redeem themselves by a proper example being set them by those in authority, sink deeper and deeper into vice. Then the fearful punishments which follow, instead of being

a deterrent, act in exactly the reverse manner by rendering them indifferent and callous. Is it any wonder, then, that we hear of these attacks on isolated settlers, these burnings and pillages? Ah, sir, in my opinion our Convict System is entirely wrong. It punishes with terrible severity. It does little to redeem, little to elevate. I sincerely trust that its existence will soon be brought to an end, for the manner in which it is administered is a disgrace and a blot upon the fame of the British nation, and cannot longer be tolerated by the free settlers of this colony.”

He paused, and then, with flushed cheeks and brightening eyes, went on—

“This attack on Feilding’s house, now. We all know that Feilding has a number of well-armed servants, who are quite able to protect him. That they did not do so gives me no surprise; no doubt they were in collusion with the escaped convicts. And yet only five miles from Mr. Feilding’s house is Major Waller’s farm, inhabited by but four persons—the major, his wife, and his two daughters. Waller himself is, as you know, a rheumatic cripple, and unable even to hold a pistol in his hand. Yet his house contains much more than that of Feilding to tempt any lawlessly-inclined person. How is it that he has never yet been attacked? For seven years he has lived in the most absolute security.”

“It has long been known to me, sir,” said Marsbin severely, “that Major Waller has on several occasions shown a misplaced sympathy with the criminal classes.”

“Misplaced! No, sir, not misplaced, but a human, an honourable sympathy—a sympathy that does him the greatest credit. As a disciplinarian he was the terror of his regiment; as a gentleman and a Christian he gained the respect and, I firmly believe in some cases, the love and gratitude of certain convicts who were rapidly being turned into wild beasts by the floggings given them until they came under his control.”

Then seeing that Mr. Marsbin’s face was flushing purple with anger, he ceased, and at once became the courteous host, with but the one thought of entertaining his guest.

“Now, Mr. Marsbin, will you give me the pleasure of showing you over the new maize mill we have just erected on the banks of the creek? ’Twill prove, I trust, a great boon to the settlers hereabout.”

“Any enterprise that conduces to the improvement of the country has my approval and interest, sir,” said the clergyman pompously, as he rose. “I will accompany you with pleasure. Hum, ah!”

CHAPTER V

That evening at dinner Lieutenant Willet, the second in command to Lathom, was present, having sufficiently recovered to accept Mrs. Lathom's invitation to meet Mr. Marsbin and Dr. Haldane. He was a good-looking, but slow moving, dull-witted young man, and had, so his superior officer one day had told the doctor, but two motives for existing at all—sleeping and eating. Mrs. Lathom, who, when she first came to Waringa to join her husband, had endeavoured to draw him into a flirtation in order to while away the time during Lathom's frequent absences, had so signally failed—purely from want of perception on the part of Mr. Willet—that she had abandoned the attempt in disgust after a few weeks. For although Lieutenant Willet was always pleased to accept an invitation from the captain's beautiful wife (or any one else) to lunch or dinner, he invariably went to sleep as soon as he had satisfied his appetite, which was always very robust, even when he declared he felt ill and was barely able to attend to his military duties.

In addition to Mrs. Lathom, there was another lady—Mrs. McNab, a round-faced, merry-hearted little Scotswoman, who, with her husband, Captain McNab, lived six or seven miles down the river from Waringa. He was a retired naval officer, who, after a long and honourable career in the Service—the latter years of which were spent in Australian waters—had received a large grant of land from the Crown in the neighbourhood of Waringa, where he was rapidly becoming a man of flocks and herds.

Lathom had a sincere regard for McNab and his wife—whom the ex-captain had married late in life, and who was the daughter of one of the colonial officials—and knew that they would be glad to meet Haldane, for not only was he a friend but a fellow-countryman of theirs.

"Why, how is this, Mrs. McNab?" he said to her when she rode up alone. "Where is McNab?"

"He is so sorry, Captain Lathom, but he cannot come. He is expecting a visitor from Sydney this evening or to-morrow morning, and begs you and Mrs. Lathom to excuse him."

"Ah, well, *you* have come, so we'll forgive him. Haldane will be sorry, and so will my wife, as she is going to Sydney for a few months, as she told you in her note."

"And indeed Hector wished very much to come. But this visitor—a Mr. Lugard—appears to be a friend of the Governor, who has written to Hector and asked him to do all he can to help him with regard to some inquiries he is making concerning some missing person or persons—prisoners, I imagine,

from what Hector said. And then he—the coming visitor, I mean—has also been recommended to Hector by the Commissary-General, so you see it would not do for my husband to be away from home when he arrives. Hector is like you, Captain Lathom, in his admiration for the Governor, and is always glad to be able to oblige him in any way.”

“Yes, indeed; I know that. Has your visitor just arrived from England?”

“Oh, no, from Batavia. He came to Sydney in the Dutch vessel—the *Leeuwarden*—which arrived there a few weeks ago. From what Hector said to me he seems to be a person of means, who has come to the colony solely for the purpose I mentioned.”

“Well, I am sure we shall be glad to see him at Waringa if he makes any stay with you,” said Lathom politely, but truthfully; for he was always glad to see and entertain any stranger.

Dinner was to be served at six o’clock. An hour before that time, Helen was in the garden picking some of the few remaining flowers to adorn the dinner table, at which she was to wait—a duty she especially detested when visitors were present, but which she never tried to avoid—when old Tim limped up towards her, carrying in his hand a bunch of wild convolvulus flowers.

“Thank you, Tim,” she said gratefully, “that is just the very thing I wanted, but I had not the time to go down to the creek for some, and the table would not look at all nice with only these few poor flowers from the garden.”

“Yis, yis, dear,” he said in low tones; “but ’twas not to bring ye the flowers I came.”

He looked round carefully to see that no one was near them, and then quickly slipped a small, tightly rolled-up piece of paper into her hand.

“’Tis a letther for ye, dear. Hide it away, darlin’, hide it away, till ye can rade it alone.”

She slipped it into the bosom of her dress, and as she proceeded to arrange the wild flowers which the old man had brought, her hands trembled.

“Oh, Tim, Tim, don’t go away just yet. You must tell me. . . . Take up that fork, and pretend to dig about the border, and I shall sit down here, near you. Quick, Tim, do be quick. Mrs. Lathom may come here at any moment. Who gave you the letter?”

Tim took up the garden fork and proceeded to turn up the soil in a leisurely manner, as Helen sat down on the border and again re-sorted her flowers.

“’Twas wan av the boat’s crew, darlin’; ye know the man, sure—Martin Roche, the lifer.^[1] ’Twas given to him in Newcastle by another man, who brought it from Sydney. Says Roche to me the mornin’, ‘I’ve a bit av a letther for Helen Cronin, will ye give it to her?’ an’ wid that he slips it into me hand and tould me ’twas given to him in Newcastle. An’ it’s wishin’ ye lashin’s av

good news in it, I am.”

“Thank you, Tim, I hope it does. You are a true friend to me, Tim. Some day, perhaps, I may be able to help you as you are now helping me,” said Helen. “Now go away, please. Here is Mrs. Lathom coming.”

Old Tim’s withered face screwed up into an expression of angry contempt. “Aye, darlin’, I see her, an’ the ‘dirty, ugly ould man’ who stumps about wid his lame fut will get away fast enough. Sorra the day that a gintleman like the captain married a could-hearted divil like her.”

He limped away as Mrs. Lathom came up.

“Are *those* all the flowers you have, Helen?”

“Yes, madam.”

“Well, I must make them do. But I think you might have had more, considering the time you fritter away over the garden. Bring them in at once, then change your dress, and do try to appear with a less flushed face at dinner time. If there is anything that annoys me it is to see you with a flushed face. I want my servants to look as cool as possible, and I really wanted you to look nice this evening, as Mr. Marsbin is here. But you never consider my wishes.”

Helen made no answer as she took up the flowers and followed her mistress to the house. At any other time Mrs. Lathom’s contemptuously patronising manner of speaking to her would have filled her with a dulled resentment, but now she was too excited to think of aught else than the little roll of paper in the bosom of her dress.

As soon as she entered the house she went to her room, and hurriedly tearing off the soiled outer covering of coarse paper with which the envelope containing the letter was enwrapped, she looked for the address on the envelope itself, but found it was blank. Breaking the wafer seal, she took out a small sheet of paper, on which was written—

“A friend, who brings good news, is coming. Wait patiently; for liberty is near for father and for child.—ANNALONG.”

The girl pressed the paper to her lips, and then fell on her knees and breathed a silent prayer. Who was the writer of the few words she could not conjecture, but they filled her with joyful hopes, and as she donned another dress in lieu of that which she had been wearing, her veins tingled with excitement and expectation. For Annalong had once been her home in far-off Ireland, and there she had been born, and no one in all Australia but her own convict father knew of it, so perhaps this unknown friend who had sent this letter by friendly hands had seen him. Ah, her dear father! How she longed to throw her arms around his neck and weep out her sorrows on his bosom, and tell him how she had followed him through shame and degradation and misery

unutterable, so that even if it were but to see each other once more in this life, they might die together.

Hastily brushing her hair, as Mrs. Lathom gave the bell an impatient ring, she walked along the verandah to the dining-room, and presently, with Walsh, was busied in carrying in the dinner. Haldane, who always spoke kindly to her, gave her a cheerful nod as he took his place at the table, so also did Mrs. McNab, whilst even Mr. Marsbin looked at her somewhat approvingly.

“Well, Mrs. McNab,” said Haldane presently, “what fresh news from Sydney? Lathom tells me that McNab had letters yesterday.”

“Nothing of great importance, doctor, except that the paper is full of the doings of the bushranger, Hewitt.”

“Ha, that villain!” exclaimed the clergyman. “And pray, madam, of what fresh crime has he been guilty?”

“Something very daring this time. Indeed it reads like an exploit of Claude Duval, and the more so inasmuch that there was a young—and of course beautiful, we must suppose—lady who figures in it.”

“And I am told that Hewitt is a remarkably handsome young Irishman,” said Lathom, with a laugh. “Pray go on, Mrs. McNab.”

“Well, it seems that Major Cartwright and a number of the military have been scouring the bush in the vicinity of Port Macquarie for some weeks past in the hope of catching Hewitt, who, as you know, succeeded in escaping from Port Arthur in Van Dieman’s Land, nearly two years ago. Why he came to this colony is a mystery, as he could very easily have got away to America in the sealing vessel which took him away from Van Dieman’s Land. But the sealing ship put into Sydney, and Hewitt went ashore there, although he must have known there was a hue and cry, as there always is if the escapee is an Irish political prisoner. However, he succeeded in secreting himself somewhere near Sydney, and the next heard of him was his waylaying the Commissary-General at Hunter’s Hill, and robbing him of two hundred pounds in gold. Then he appears to have made his way northward along the coast-line—first to Newcastle, and from there to Port Macquarie.”

“Plucky fellow,” said Lieutenant Willet; “shouldn’t like to attempt such a thing myself.”

“The mere recklessness of a hardened and criminal nature, sir, cannot be called ‘pluck.’ It is but what might be expected of a man whose hand is against that of lawful authority, and who was sentenced to transportation as a seditious person. Hum, ha!”

Haldane’s eyes twinkled. “Exactly, sir. No doubt he is a man who would not hesitate to rob the Governor himself. But we await your story, Mrs. McNab.”

“Well, he seems to have found several safe hiding-places along the coast,

quite close to the towns, and one day he actually appeared in the streets of Port Macquarie riding a beautiful horse, which he had stolen from Colonel Douglas Stacey, of Rolland's Plains. He put up at the hotel, made the acquaintance of a number of the civilian authorities, and asked them many questions concerning the prisoners there—especially those from Ireland, made notes in a pocket-book, spent money lavishly in refreshments, and finally rode off to Major Cartwright's house and inquired for him."

"The effrontery of the villain!" ejaculated the clergyman.

"The major, it so happened, was not at home, but Mrs. Cartwright was, and the gentlemanly stranger, who introduced himself as 'Mr. Vincent,' and represented himself as a personal friend of Lord De Frere, who is Mrs. Cartwright's father, actually had lunch with her. And he certainly did know not only Lord De Frere, but the De Frere estates in Ireland very well and told Mrs. Cartwright that he had often nursed her on his knee when she was a baby. Then he went off, saying he would call again when the major returned home. The next heard of him was that he had been to Major Innes's place at Lake Innes, where he was also hospitably entertained as 'Mr. Vincent.' From Major Innes he heard that the Government schooner from Sydney to Port Macquarie had put into Camden Haven through stress of weather, and that Judge Gibson and Miss Gibson, his daughter, were passengers; also that there was over £900 on board—Officials' salaries and soldiers' pay."

"Ha, this *is* interesting," said Haldane.

Mrs. McNab smiled and resumed, "He remarked to Major Innes that he trusted the schooner was well manned, as there were, he had heard, several escaped convicts in the vicinity of Camden Haven, men who would not hesitate to attempt to capture the *Edith*. Poor Major Innes fell into the trap, and said that there were but six persons on board, exclusive of the captain and Judge Gibson and his daughter."

"Ah, Mrs. McNab," said Lathom, "I think I can guess what followed."

"Yes, indeed. He bade Major Innes and his family good-bye, for he had promised, he said, to return to Port Macquarie to dine with the Cartwrights. Three hours later he was at Camden Haven—it was then dark—in company with two other adventurous gentlemen like himself. They shouted to the schooner to send a boat ashore, as they had a message from Major Cartwright. A boat with the captain and two sailors put off, and the moment they landed they were made prisoners, and their arms taken from them by 'Mr. Vincent' and his two comrades, who tied them up securely and then went off in the boat to the *Edith*."

"As soon as they stepped on deck the mate and the two remaining seamen had pistols presented at their heads, and were quickly made prisoners. Then 'Mr. Vincent,' with many apologies to Judge Gibson said that he was Hewitt

the bushranger, and that ‘the exigencies of his profession necessitated him calling on board at that late hour and relieving His Honour from the responsibility of conveying £900 to Port Macquarie in such an ill-manned and unprotected vessel as the *Edith*.’

“Then, after taking the money, he liberated the schooner’s cook, made him prepare a meal, and insisted upon the judge and Miss Gibson joining him in eating it. The judge, as you know, is a humorist, and accepted the situation, especially as Hewitt politely assured him that he would not dream of taking ‘any emolument’ either from himself or his daughter. Then after spending an hour on board, he liberated the mate, went on shore and freed the poor captain and his boat’s crew, brought them on board again, and asked Mr. Gibson to be allowed the honour of kissing his daughter’s hand.”

“The villain!” exclaimed Mr. Marsbin; “and no doubt he succeeded?”

“He did,” replied Mrs. McNab merrily.

“And I’ll guarantee that Gibson did not try to hide himself, like Feilding,” said Haldane, with a laugh.

[1] A “lifer” meant a man sentenced to penal servitude “for the term of his natural life.”

CHAPTER VI

“A most daring and desperate villain, truly,” said the clergyman, laying down his knife and fork, crossing his smooth hands across his rotund figure, and looking severely at Dr. Haldane, as if to reprove him for his ill-timed levity, “yet we must trust he will soon be brought to justice, and pay the penalty of his crimes on the gallows. There is a reward of fifty pounds for his apprehension. He cannot long escape, and his execution should be made as public as possible. Only by such publicity can the evil-minded and wicked be brought to realise the terrors of the law, and be restrained from a further indulgence in the paths of crime. Hum, ha!”

Lathom shook his head in grave dissent, as Mrs. McNab resumed—

“The three robbers were all well-mounted, and a hot pursuit followed; but they separated, and were not again seen in company. Hewitt, however, came upon three of Major Cartwright’s men when they were asleep, took away their arms, and left them in peace until the morning, when he rode up and called on them to surrender. He was quite affable, and beyond taking all the tobacco they possessed did not harm them. He told them that he was making off towards Sydney again, and that he would be heard of in a few weeks. And this was no doubt true, for it is now rumoured that he has been seen within a few miles of Newcastle, where he has many sympathisers.”

“No doubt, madam, no doubt,” said Mr. Marsbin. “This man Hewitt was sent out—instead of being hanged at home—for seditious practices in Ireland, and among the prisoners in the Newcastle district are many of his fellow-countrymen, dangerous Papists, and disloyal to a degree—men, who like Hewitt, delight in the practice of crime, and do not stop at murder.”

“It is false! He never was, and never could be a murderer! He is a man, and a gentleman! Only savage and vindictive laws have made him act as a felon!”

All Captain Lathom’s guests half-rose from their seats in astonishment and gazed at Helen, who, with her head thrown proudly back, and her dark eyes blazing with anger, was leaning with one hand against a side table, her whole frame shaking with excitement.

Walsh put his hand on her arm, and whispered something as Lathom left his seat and came towards her.

“You can leave the room, Helen,” he said quietly. “You are not quite well, I think, or would not have been so rude. Walsh can do all that is necessary.”

The girl bent her head, bowed in mute apology to Mrs. Lathom, who looked at her with the deepest resentment, and left the room.

Lathom returned to his seat, and Haldane, always tactful, even though so

rough in his manner, said, "Heat, heat, Lathom. That's what's the matter. Heat and nerves. Do you know, Mrs. Lathom, that I envy you your trip to Sydney, where the sea breezes will bring back the roses to your cheeks. The weather during the past week has been enough to sour the temper of a saint. By the way, Lathom, you want a change yourself. 'All work and no play!' You should make him follow you, Mrs. Lathom."

"Sydney has no attractions for Fred, Doctor Haldane. It is not the slightest use my trying to get him to apply for a removal. He thinks too much of Waringa."

"And Waringa has thriven well under his judicious care, madam," said the clergyman, who really had a feeling of admiration and respect for his host; and, in his ponderous manner, desired to show it. "I have never seen in the course of my travels throughout the colony a more thriving and well-ordered community. Hum, ha!"

Lathom expressed his thanks, and then the conversation drifted into other channels. The ladies, after leaving the gentlemen to their wine and cigars, retired to Mrs. Lathom's own room to discuss the latter's intended visit to Sydney. Presently Helen came in to them with tea. Her mistress looked at her keenly, and in something less than her usual sharp manner when she was annoyed, asked her what had made her "behave so ridiculously."

"I am very sorry, madam. I hardly knew what I was saying. I trust you will excuse me."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Lathom graciously. "I suppose you will be more particular in future not to startle us in that way again. I am quite sure that Mr. Marsbin felt very much annoyed at your rude exclamation. I trust that this man Hewitt is not known to you—as we really might have inferred?"

Helen made no answer, but her face showed a darkening flush, and Mrs. McNab whispered to her hostess to say nothing more.

"Oh, but indeed I must," said Mrs. Lathom, with childish petulance. "What should a girl like her have to do with such a man? Now, tell me, Helen, at *once*, do you know this Hewitt?"

"I beg of you, madam, to pardon my not answering your question. I—I do not feel very well to-night."

"Very well, you may go. I think you had better go to bed."

"Poor thing," said Mrs. McNab; "she certainly does not look at all well. I could see that her hands were trembling."

"I'm afraid I treat her too well. She really can be quite obstinate, and almost sullen at times. I've tried to show her, too, that I take an interest in her welfare, but instead of being thankful, I really believe she resents it."

Mrs. McNab made no answer. She was a sympathetic little woman, and knew that Helen was suffering from some mental strain which she was hardly

able to bear, and that Mrs. Lathom's ill-timed questioning, had it been continued, would have probably led to another such passionate outburst as she had heard in the dining-room half an hour before. And secretly she resolved to at least speak a few words of sympathy to the girl in the morning, if an opportunity of so doing were afforded her.

Late that night, after every one in the commandant's house but herself had gone to bed, Helen stepped out of her room, the door of which opened out on the verandah, and sat down on the steps. A faint air was blowing from the creek, and no sound broke the silence of the night but the steady footfall of the sentry stationed at the barrack-gate near by. Overhead was a star-studded sky of deepest blue; and the forest-clad spur of the mountain range in which were the dreaded "Quarries," though its nearest point was four miles distant, loomed up so distinctly in the clear night air, that it seemed within a few hundred yards. Down from the base of the range a thin grey mist—the precursor of another hot day—was beginning to arise and envelop the tops of the lofty gum and tallow wood trees which stretched along the banks of the creek in an unvarying monotony of outline.

As she sat leaning against one of the verandah posts, and looking dreamily down towards the landing-place, she thought of the events of the day—the letter given to her by old Tim taking first place in her musings. Who could have written it? Not Vincent Hewitt, surely! What could he—a proscribed man, hunted day and night—do towards giving her father and herself liberty? And then, besides that, surely he had forgotten her and the old, old days when, as boy and girl lovers, they had wandered together in the green lanes by Annalong, and under the shadow of Slieve Donard. And that was five years ago—five long years of misery and woe—and never but once had she heard his name spoken since, when Captain Lathom, in her hearing, had one day read out to Dr. Haldane the names of a batch of Irish prisoners just arrived, who had been transported for sedition, and among them was "Vincent Hewitt, of Kilkeel, County Down, fourteen years." No, she thought, it could not be Vincent. Yet it must be some one who had known her father—some one who had not forgotten him, and was perhaps at that very moment not far away either from him or from herself. There was, she had been told, an almost perfect system of communication between not only the Irish political prisoners in the colonies, but between the convicts generally. Sometimes this was accomplished by means of letters passed from hand to hand and taking many months ere they reached the persons for whom they were intended; sometimes verbally, when an interchange of prisoners took place from one settlement to another, and a friendly gaoler or soldier guard would turn aside his head as he saw two men from different gangs exchanging a whispered word. Many prisoners, she knew, had succeeded in escaping, even in the very earliest days,

when Australia was generally spoken of as “Botany Bay,” and her cheeks flushed when she remembered the daring deed of Will Bryant, the transported English smuggler, who, with his young wife and two infant children and five trusted fellow-convicts, had seized a small boat in Sydney Cove and sailed her more than three thousand miles to Timor.^[1]

Ah! she thought, how happy would she be to make such an attempt with her father! The brave and beautiful Mary Bryant had seen one of her children die in the boat from starvation and exhaustion, had seen her heroic and dying husband recaptured by the savage and infamous Edwards of the *Pandora*, the pursuer of the *Bounty* mutineers, and had heard his last sigh as, with his hand in hers, he breathed his last in the Dutch hospital in Batavia, and left her with her sickly babe alone in the world—and a prisoner still.

The tears filled her eyes as she thought of the sad story, which she had read when she was a child. For poor Bryant, just ere he died, wandered in his mind, and had sat up on his pallet and spread out his arms with a smile on his face and cried out weakly, “Look, Mary! The sea, the open sea at last—God’s own blue sea! Hold up our boy Emmanuel, and wake the babe, my girl. Oh, liberty, liberty, and life at last!”

And the poor young wife, whose boy Emmanuel lay buried under the torrid sands of the Queensland coast two thousand miles away, had cried out through her falling tears, “Yes, yes, dear Will. See, the babe is here, and laughs, but Emmanuel sleeps.”

Suddenly Helen was aware of something being near her, and presently Russ, who was a keen watch-dog and was lying down in front of the dining-room door, stood up and growled as he caught sight of a figure moving cautiously about among the trees in the garden a few yards away. Then he barked loudly and repeatedly, and the figure vanished just as Captain Lathom stepped out on the verandah. He caught sight of Helen at once.

“Who is that?”

“It is me, sir.”

“What is Russ barking at?”

“I do not know, sir. I fancied I saw something moving among the trees just now, but whatever it was it has gone now.”

Lathom called the dog to him, and then walked over to the place Helen had indicated. There was nothing to be seen. Then he went over to the sentry, and asked him if he had seen anything.

“Nothing, sir, except that some of the horses in the little paddock seemed a bit restless just awhile ago.”

“Native dogs prowling about, I suppose,” thought Lathom, as he went back

to the house. Helen was awaiting his return.

“What are you doing up so late, Helen?”

“I could not sleep, sir, and came out to sit on the verandah a little while.” She paused a moment, and then said hurriedly, “I am very sorry, sir, for what occurred this evening. I trust you will not think I intended any disrespect to you. But——”

“But you must not let your feelings carry you away, Helen,” said the commandant kindly. “We had better let the matter drop. So good-night.”

He went to his room, and Helen to hers, and Russ again laid himself down in front of the door with a contented sigh, and the house was once more silent.

But in the stables old Tim and another man were conversing in whispered tones.

“Sure, I tould ye, sor, that the dog would see ye at wanst. An’ the captain is a powerful light sleeper. For the love av God and the sake av the girl, an’ your honour’s own life, do not attempt any more. It’s meself that’ll be prayin’ for ye both to-night.”

“Thank you, old man,” said the visitor, as he took Tim’s hand; “I will run no further risks, but when you see her in the morning, tell her that Vincent Hewitt is near, and will see her soon. And tell her that never for one day since I saw her last has she been absent from my thoughts.”

“I will, I will indade,” said the old man energetically. “Maybe ’twas you, sor, that sint her the lethter she got the day?”

“A letter! No. I sent no letter,” replied the stranger. “Now, good-night. My horse is on the other side of the creek, and I must swim across again.”

[1] This extraordinary feat of Bryant and his fellow-convicts—which outrivalled Bligh’s famous boat voyage—is described in “A First Fleet Family” (T. Fisher Unwin: London).

CHAPTER VII

At nine o'clock on the following morning Captain McNab was standing at his gate talking to his guest, who was about to start for Waringa.

"Thank you very much for your kindness to me, Captain McNab," he said as he shook hands with his host. "I shall look forward with pleasure to spending another night here on my way back to Sydney."

"And I shall be very glad to have you stay with us all the time you are in the district, Mr. Lugard, if you could so manage it. I wish you all success in your inquiries. You will find Lathom a good fellow, and he will, I know, do all he can to assist you. Tell him that I'll be over at Waringa in a day or so to say good-bye to Mrs. Lathom and see our friend Haldane. Now, are you quite sure about the road? Won't you let me send a man with you?"

"Not at all—not at all. I should be a poor sort of creature if I lost myself between here and Waringa. And I shall go so slowly that I cannot possibly go astray. Like yourself, sir, riding is not one of my most shining accomplishments, and I feel more at home on a ship's deck than in a saddle."

With a smile and a wave of his hand to the genial old captain, Lugard turned his horse's head, and in a few minutes was out of sight from the house, and riding along the main road to Waringa. Captain McNab stood and watched him disappear.

"A very pleasant fellow indeed," he said to himself; "every inch a gentleman, and as fine a looking young man as I've ever seen. Well, I shall be glad to see him again. He and Lathom will get on splendidly together."

Lugard certainly deserved the complimentary terms which the ex-naval officer had applied to him. About twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, and of medium height, his figure, even when seen at the disadvantage of being on horseback, was a model of symmetrical proportion and muscularity, and his extremely handsome features, which were deeply bronzed by exposure to tropic suns, were rendered the more striking by clear grey eyes, which, though ever on the alert, yet always seemed in meditative repose. His dark brown beard and moustache he wore in a fashion then somewhat unusual, the former being carefully trimmed to a point and the ends of the latter curling up half-way across his cheeks. He was dressed in a light grey suit of thin tweed, a soft Panama hat, and wore well-fitting Wellington boots, which protected his legs from the feet to the knees from the insidious and irritating grass seeds, which at that season of the year rendered travelling over any part of open, grassy country exceedingly unpleasant to even a mounted man whose legs were unprotected either by high boots or leggings.

Letting the reins fall on his horse's withers, he took out his pipe and a plug of dark, strong tobacco, cut up a pipeful, and presently the smoke was curling around his bearded face, as the old stock horse he was riding walked steadily along the road.

"Take it easy, old fellow," he said, "and give me a chance to enjoy some of the old Dutch skipper's tobacco. I've had to smoke more bad cigars since I came to this infernal country than I've ever smoked in my life, and it's a godsend to get at one's pipe again. Eh! what do you think, old horse? That's right, shake your weather ear if you mean 'No,' and nod your old coffin-shaped head when you mean 'Yes,' and we'll get along together rippingly. Take your own time, but don't go to sleep, and may you never be turned into salt horse, and poor devils of sailor men have to eat you. I swear I'll recognise you again if ever I come across a bit of you in a harness-cask, for I know every lump and knot in your poor old carcass, although we have only been acquainted a few days. But you're a good old beast in spite of your looks, and mustn't take my chaff in bad part. Eh! That's right, nod your head again and snort. We understand each other, don't we?"

Evidently Mr. Lugard was in a good humour with himself and with the world in general, for after he had finished his pipe he began to sing in a clear, pleasant voice, and laughed loudly when two scrub wallabies which had been lying down dozing under the shade of the trees lining the road, sprang across right under the horse's nose and disappeared swiftly among the timber on the other side.

Half an hour later, the road narrowed into a track, which descended the side of a long gentle slope, at the bottom of which was a small, running stream of clear, cool water, almost concealed from view by the density of the tangled foliage which grew along its banks. Here the traveller dismounted, and letting his horse feed on the soft grass growing among the boulders lining the edge of a fairly-sized pool, he knelt down and drank.

"Just lovely! And what a place for a bathe!" he said as he looked at the clean pebbly bottom of the pool. "It's too good a chance to miss; so here goes."

In a few seconds his clothes were lying on the bank, and he was revelling in the delightfully cool and bracing water, swimming round and round the pool, diving to the bottom and scaring into the nooks and crevices hundreds of small, handsome fishes like grayling. Presently, as he sat on a smooth round stone, and was amusedly watching the alarmed little beauties poking out their heads and staring with bright, beady eyes at the strange apparition of his feet, he heard the sound of some one approaching from the track on the opposite side of the creek, and there emerged a youth riding one horse and leading another.

“Good morning, sonny,” cried the bather.

“Mornin’,” replied the boy, slowly walking his horses through the water, and staring so fixedly at the upper portion of the man’s figure that the latter laughed.

“What are you looking at?”

“Thought you’d been an’ cut yerself all over yer chest,” said the lad laconically, still staring. “Why it’s a bird, ain’t it? A eagle?”

Mr. Lugard smiled. His chest was tattooed in blue and vermilion with an outspread eagle with pinions extended from shoulder to shoulder and grasping in the talons of the right foot the flagpole of the banner of the American Republic. The whole device was beautifully executed, and made a very striking effect.

“Yes, sonny, as you say, it is an eagle—a bird we are uncommonly fond of in my country.”

“Wot! Do you eat ’em?”

“No; but we think a lot of them all the same. Got any in this country?”

“Lots. I heerd about one that was shot at Barranjoey. He was near as big as a two-year-old bull calf. They carries lambs away too.”

Lugard nodded, and then, as he proceeded to dress, he encouraged the boy to talk by asking him where he was going, and was surprised to hear that he was proceeding all the way to Newcastle.

“What is taking you all that distance?”

“Sixty mile, or a hundred mile, ain’t no distance,” drawled the youngster, as he got off his horse and began filling an exceedingly dirty clay with some coarse tobacco. “My old man is sending me there to buy two bags of sugar, as we heerd there was a shipful of it in Sydney, an’ it orter be a lot cheaper now.”

“Yes, it should. I came to Sydney in that same ship. But it’s a long ride to Newcastle for two bags of sugar.”

“Better than paying three bob a pound for it at Waringa.”

“I suppose it is. So you come from Waringa? Been living there long?”

“Borned there.”

“Do you know Captain Lathom’s place?”

“Course. Know him an’ every one else. I seed Mrs. Lathom this morning when she give me some letters to post for her in Newcastle. I heerd she’s goin’ ter Sydney soon fur a spell.”

Lugard became suddenly interested. “Is Captain Lathom going too?” he asked.

“No, but she’s taking Helen Cronin with her, so I heerd.”

“Who is Helen Cronin?” asked Lugard carelessly, as he refilled his pipe.

“Mrs. Lathom’s servant—and a right good sort she is, too, I can tell yer. Lot more prettier’n Mrs. Lathom, I heer coves say, but *I* don’t think much of

her looks. Mrs. Lathom would be my dart if I was a growed-up cove and wanted to start courtin', and she wasn't hitched to any other chap. My word, yer orter see her yaller hair, and the rings she wears."

"Well, I shall see her sonny, some time to-day, I suppose; and if I don't, I'll take your word for it that I've missed something. When is she going away?"

"Day or two, I believe. Maybe she's going down with the parson."

"Parson. Who is the parson?"

"Old flogging Marsbin. He's at Waringa now, the old cow, an' I heerd he was goin' ter Sydney. I wish the" (here the lad uttered some exceedingly vigorous and shocking adjectives) "fat swine would get drowned, or jolly well shot by the bushrangers."

"I've heard of the Reverend Mr. Marsbin," said Lugard, as he began to pull on his boots. "He does not appear to be liked—by you at any rate."

The youth grinned and sucked at his pipe, and then went on to relate all the local gossip, in which his listener also displayed an interest. Then after he had succeeded in learning all that could be learned he asked the boy his name, and was informed that it was Sam Tucker.

"Well, Sam, you're a pretty smart sort of a youngster, I can see, and I wish you a pleasant journey and a safe return. Now, will these two half-crowns be any use to you?"

"*Rather*, mister," was the eager reply. "I want ter buy some powder and caps fur my gun. Father wouldn't give me no more 'n two bob, an' told me he'd gimme a welt on the head if I wasn't satisfied."

By this time Lugard had finished dressing, and catching his horse, he gave young Tucker a pleasant farewell, and rode on.

"That was a lucky meeting," he said, as he struck into the track on the other side of the creek. "A day or two later, and I should have missed Miss Helen Adair, of Annalong, and have had to follow her to Sydney, where it would be rather difficult to talk to her, I imagine."

When he had left the creek a mile behind him, the sun began to make itself felt, and as the country was now fairly open, he turned off from the track and rode under the shade of the tree-tops. This was better than the hard soil, for the ground, where it was not grassed, was covered with the *débris* of the thin sheets of bark which had peeled off the smooth boles of the grey gum-trees.

A sound like the faint bellowing of a cow or bullock made him look to the right, and he saw what was evidently a small swamp about two hundred yards away, for the margin was surrounded by thickly growing reeds, and he now noticed for the first time that there were a number of well-beaten cattle tracks about him, all converging towards the reeds. Rising in his stirrups, he saw the shimmer of water, and in it, or on it, something white, which appeared to

move, and again he heard the cry of a beast.

“Get up, old coffin-head, and let us see what it is,” he said, making his horse trot, and heading towards the swamp. The moment he reached the edge, and looked through a passage in the reeds, he saw that the white object was an unfortunate cow standing in the centre of the swamp beside her young calf, which was hopelessly bogged, and looked to be nearly dead from exhaustion and starvation. Within a few feet of the poor creature was a dry spot on which sat three native dogs watching the dying calf with hungry eyes, and snapping and snarling at the poor mother every time she tried to drive them away.

Lugard slipped quietly to the ground, and took his pistol from its pouch. It was an exquisitely finished double-barrelled weapon, and had done its owner good service on many occasions. He dropped on one knee, and, picking out the largest of the three dingoes, fired; the creature fell dead, and as the other two sprang off across the swamp a second bullet caught the foremost on the ribs and rolled it over. It struggled to its feet again, however, and tried to reach the shelter of the reeds on the margin of the swamp, but after running a few yards it stopped, sat on its haunches and began to lick its wound.

“I must put you out of your misery, my friend,” said Lugard, “but, as I don’t want to waste a bullet, I’ll settle you by knocking you on the head.”

He stood up and, still holding the pistol, began to run round the edge of the swamp towards the dingo, when a man suddenly emerged from behind a large grey gum and levelled a pistol at his head.

“Put your hands up, or I’ll send a bullet through your skull!” cried the stranger sharply. “I’m Hewitt, the bushranger!”

“*Are you indeed!*” answered Lugard coolly; and instead of obeying Hewitt’s command, he let his right hand, in which he held his pistol, drop to his side. “You’re out very early this morning, Mr. Hewitt. And you’ve taken a mean advantage of me. And do you know that you have a very dirty face?”

The bushranger laughed grimly. “And you’ll have a white one presently if you don’t look smart, my friend. I’m in no humour for joking. Put your hands behind your back and then turn round.”

“My dear sir! Why should you go to so much trouble as to tie my hands behind my back? I have very little money in my valise, I assure you—hardly sufficient to repay you for the trouble of taking it. And I am very anxious to settle that creature over there—a dingo I believe you call it in Australia. But perhaps you will be so good as to put another bullet into it instead of into me. I assure you I will not try to escape.”

Hewitt’s face flushed darkly. “I’ll take every good care of that, my fine fellow. Now cease this fooling, and do as I tell you. I’m not a man to be trifled with.”

“I can see that, Mr. Hewitt. I believe you *would* put a bullet into me if I

made you cross. A man with an empty pistol standing in front of another man with a loaded one is in a very delicate position for argument. So——” He paused for a moment or two, and still keeping his eyes fixed steadily on Hewitt, went on as if talking to himself more than to the man before him: “As I was saying, I won’t argue with you. I am, to a great extent, a man who strives to avoid giving his fellow-man unnecessary trouble, and I again assure you that you would be wasting your doubtless valuable time in lashing my hands behind my back when it is in my power to relieve you of such a task. *So, there you are!*” and quick as lightning, he raised his arm and sent his pistol, which he was holding by the barrel, into Hewitt’s face. It struck him right between the eyes with such terrific force that he fell back, half-stunned. In an instant Lugard was upon him, wrenched his pistol from his hand and put the muzzle to his forehead.

“Now, Mr. Hewitt,” he said pleasantly, “I must trouble you to submit to the trifling operation that you contemplated performing upon me. Your hands, please.”

He took his opponent’s hands, and deftly lashed them together with a silk handkerchief behind his back, took Hewitt’s second pistol from his belt, then raised him to a sitting position, and looked at him with a humorous expression, which, however, vanished in a moment when he saw that the blood was pouring down Hewitt’s face, for the pistol had inflicted a deep gash in his forehead.

“That’s a severe cut I’ve given you. Have you a handkerchief?”

“No.”

“Ah well, I suppose I must trust you. I have your two pistols—and wretched things too they are, when compared to mine—and so here goes.”

He stooped down and untied the man’s hands, and taking the handkerchief, bound it tightly round his head, so as to stay the flow of blood. Then, picking up Hewitt’s pistols, he again rose, and looked at the wounded dingo.

“Have you ever tried shooting with the left hand, Mr. Hewitt?” he said to his opponent, who was now looking at him with a face devoid of any sign of resentment. “You would find it a most useful accomplishment in your profession. Now, these weapons of yours are clumsy, smooth-bore affairs, if you will pardon my saying so, and mine is rifled. But still——” He raised his left hand and fired, and a cry of admiration burst from Hewitt as the dingo fell dead, for the bullet struck him in the head.

“Ah, they’re better than I thought,” said Lugard, as he threw the empty weapon on the ground, and half put the loaded one in his pocket. Then that, too, he withdrew and dropped carelessly.

“Now, my friend, I think I mentioned, when I first had the pleasure of seeing you, that your face was dirty; the slight accident with which you have

met has now rendered it even more unsightly. Although I am a sailor, and used to seeing dirty faces, and occasionally, blood, the sight of both is very repellent to me. Therefore I would suggest that you wash your face in the swamp. It is a remarkably good-looking face. But first of all let me offer you some very excellent brandy—I am sure it will do you good.”

He walked leisurely over to his horse, and with his back to the bushranger, near to whose hands lay the loaded pistol, took a flask of brandy from his saddle bag, and returned. Hewitt had not moved an inch.

“Take it neat?” asked Lugard, as he poured some of the liquor into the silver cup.

Hewitt nodded, then stood up and stretched out his hand.

“Your health, sir,” he said quietly. “I don’t know who you are, but you’re a damned fine fellow.”

“Thank you for the compliment. Now I think you might wash your face, eh? Then perhaps you will lend me a hand to put that calf out of the bog?”

“I’ll come now,” replied the other, his face flushing scarlet under the sunburnt skin.

The two walked through the reeds, and into the shallow water to the cow and calf, and in a few minutes the latter was dragged out and, followed by its mother, who tried hard to push the rescuers away, carried to firm ground, and set on its feet.

“Will it live?” asked Lugard.

“Yes,” replied the bushranger, “though it is pretty nearly perished from thirst. Stand quiet, you old fool, whilst I hold your baby up on its feet.”

Lugard laughed as Hewitt put his hands under the wet and muddied calf and held it on its staggering feet whilst the cow stood quietly over it and let it drink from her distended udder. In ten minutes it was satisfied, and then Hewitt let it lie down.

“It’ll be all ready for another drink soon,” he said, “and there is plenty of grass for the cow all round the swamp, so she need not have to leave it.”

“Now please wash your face, Mr. Hewitt, and I’ll wash my hands. By the way, where is your horse?”

“Just over there in that clump of trees. I had just unsaddled when I saw you come along and shoot the dingoes. By Jove, you *can* shoot too!”

“Fairly well, fairly well. Now, Mr. Vincent Hewitt, we’ll take a drop of brandy together, before we make ourselves decent. Then I want to talk to you on some business that will interest you.”

“What is it?”

“I want to talk to you about some relatives of yours—Miss Helen Adair and her father. I have come ten thousand miles to see them.”

Amazement was depicted to such an extent on Hewitt’s face that he could

only stare blankly at Lugard, who laughed at he put out his hand.

“My name is Lugard, and I am a friend. Now hurry up and wash your face, and then we can talk. I hope to see your cousin Helen very soon.”

“She is at Waringa,” cried Hewitt at last, as he shook the hand extended to him.

“I know that. Now don’t try and make me talk now, for I won’t. I must first rid myself of this mud.”

CHAPTER VIII

Hewitt, his face aflame with excitement, was the first to return to the spot where the encounter had taken place. Lugard, calm and *insouciant* as ever, followed him a few minutes later, and pulling up some tufts of dry, clean grass, proceeded to use them as a dust brush upon the sleeves of his coat, carefully removing all traces of mud and dust. Then from his saddle-bag, he produced a small ivory-backed hand glass, surveyed his handsome features therein, trimmed his Vandyke beard and pointed moustache with a comb, and then politely handed both articles to the impatient Hewitt, who would have waived them aside as irritating and non-essential things, under the circumstances, but his natural Irish politeness made him accept them with a good grace.

Then, after filling and lighting his pipe, and waiting for Hewitt to do so also, Lugard seated himself comfortably on the grass and began to speak.

“First of all, Mr. Hewitt,” he said, with a laugh, “I owe you an apology for being so hasty, but you must admit that you took me by surprise, and did not give me time to think. Now, although I am pretty familiar with your story generally, and know all about your escape from Tasmania, and indeed meant to get into communication with you, I did not dream of your being anywhere within a hundred or two miles of Waringa. Then, when you so suddenly covered me, and told me your name, I did not for a moment connect Hewitt the bushranger with Vincent Hewitt of Annalong. And so, you see, the result was that nasty cut on your forehead, for which I am really very sorry.”

“Then how did you find out I was one and the same person?”

“Very easily. I was told by those who sent me to this infernal country to seek your uncle, your cousin, and yourself, that you had lost the first finger of your left hand, and that two others were crippled.”

“Yes, a warder’s bullet at Port Arthur did that for me when I made my first attempt to escape.”

“So, of course, it was easy for me to recognise you after you fell and I saw your hand. Now, as I want to be at Waringa in good time to-day, I’ll get through my story as quickly as possible, first of all telling you that I was sent to Australia for the purpose of effecting the escape of your uncle, your cousin, yourself, and the two Montgomery brothers.”

“Henry Montgomery is dead—he died in Tasmania.”

Lugard nodded. “I know. I have learnt a good deal since I arrived in the country. The other brother is, however, now in Sydney, where he is employed in the Commissariat stores. Him I have already seen and prepared him. Your uncle is at Port Macquarie, whither I must go in due course; your cousin Helen

is at Waringa, in Captain Lathom's service; and this morning—just previous to my meeting with you—I learnt from a boy whom I met, that she is just on the eve of leaving for Sydney with Mrs. Lathom."

"I know that," cried Hewitt. "I was at Waringa late last night, and tried to see her, and in fact did see her, sitting on the verandah, but Lathom's dog saw me, and Lathom himself came out to see what it was barking at, and I had to get away."

"Oh, well, if all goes right, you will have plenty of opportunities of seeing her before a month is out, for now that I have met you, you can materially assist me to expedite matters. And I managed to let your cousin know by a carefully worded note, sent by sure hands, that a friend was near. More I did not dare say."

"Ah, it was you, then, from whom she received the note old Tim Doyle spoke of to me! It was given to him to give to her by one of Lathom's boatmen, who got it from some one in Newcastle."

"That's right; and the Newcastle man had it given to him by a man from Sydney—a soldier whom Patrick Montgomery said I could trust. I'm glad she received it safely."

"And who are the friends who are doing all this?" inquired Hewitt eagerly.

"Most of the money has been found by Walter Adair, of Boston, your cousin's father's brother. He has given ten thousand dollars, and other Irishmen in the United States who have relatives undergoing penal servitude in Tasmania and New South Wales, have given another five thousand, of which the father of the two Montgomerys gave a thousand, for instance. I was selected to undertake the enterprise, or rather I volunteered for it, for I was in the employ of Walter Adair. I was master of one of his ships in the China trade, and when he told me of the scheme he had afoot, I offered my services. That was more than a year ago, and a mighty tedious business it has been, Mr. Hewitt, I can assure you. First of all, I had to go to Washington to get letters to the American Minister in London. Then I went to London, and the Minister, who pretty well knew what was the real object I had in view, took me to the Home Secretary and asked that facilities should be given to me to make certain inquiries in New South Wales and Tasmania concerning the survivors—if any—of a convict named Ascott, who was sent to Botany Bay with the First Fleet. This Ascott had greatly distinguished himself in the early days by his bravery, when the *Sirius*, frigate, was wrecked at Norfolk Island, had been pardoned and rewarded by Governor Phillip, had married, been given a large grant of land, and died about twenty years after, leaving several children. Now we knew that all these Ascott children had left Australia and settled in America, but it suited us to make the Home Office believe that we thought them to still be in Australia (by 'we' I mean, of course, Walter Adair, the relatives of the

Montgomerys, and myself), and that as a brother of the convict Ascott had died in Philadelphia intestate, and left a large property, his solicitors were anxious to find out the surviving members of the family, and had commissioned me to make search for them.

“At that time the British Government was spreading itself to do nice things for the United States, and so I had no trouble in getting all the facilities I desired. I was given letters to the Governor of New South Wales, and to several other highly-placed officials. From London I went to Batavia in one of the East India Company’s ships, and at Batavia I took passage in a Dutch barque—the *Leeuwarden*—for Sydney, and here I am; and a very tedious affair it has been, I can assure you, and I’m heartily sick of it.”

He paused, and then resumed with something like a frown upon his handsome face.

“The worst part of the business is this—owing to the heavy and unlooked-for expenses that I have had to incur, there is not much of the three thousand pounds left. For six months past an American whaleship, the *Palmyra*, has been hanging about the coast expecting me. Her captain is to have a thousand pounds for his share of the work—which is simply to receive his passengers on board, and make sail for Callao, from where they can get to the United States. Now, I should have arrived in Sydney at least five months ago, but I have had bad luck from the start. I came via Batavia, to save time, instead of which time was lost, and the old *Leeuwarden* was twice ashore in Torres Straits. Then when we did get to Sydney, I found that the *Palmyra* had twice been there, ostensibly to sell what whale oil she had on board, but really to find out if I had arrived, and what was to be done. Her captain left a letter for me with safe hands, and said that although he did not mind hanging on for another two or three months, it was risky, as the authorities were becoming suspicious of his vessel hanging so long about the coast, killing small humpback whales, when the rest of the American whaling fleet had sailed northward three months ago to the sperm whaling grounds.”

“I believe I have seen that ship,” interrupted Hewitt. “Is she what you call a brig—a vessel with two masts and yards on each.”

“Yes, the *Palmyra* is a brig. I have never seen her, but that I know is her rig.”

“Well, she was cruising along the coast only a few weeks ago between Smoky Cape and the Manning Heads. I saw her several times near Port Macquarie.”

“I trust she is about there still,” said Lugard. “Miss Adair’s father is at Port Macquarie, and, all going well, Miss Adair herself will go there before long—but we’ll talk about that later on. Well, as I was saying, the captain of the *Palmyra* is feeling nervous. Naturally enough, he doesn’t want to have his ship

seized, and find himself in gaol in Sydney for aiding prisoners to escape. Then, too, he hinted that he would like to see some money as a proof of my *bona fides*. This had to be attended to; it would never do for us to be left in the lurch. So I left £500 with the friends who are working with me in Sydney for this Captain Carroll, and wrote him a long letter as well, telling him the cause of the delay, and adding that I should certainly be back in Sydney within eight weeks, and hoped by that time to have perfected my plans. I daresay that by this time the *Palmyra* has been in Sydney Harbour for the third time, and the £500 will quite satisfy Carroll. I asked him when he next came to Sydney to give out that his brig was leaking, discharge or sell what oil he had taken, put his vessel on the beach somewhere, and take a long time over his repairs. This will keep the authorities from putting a watch on him.”

Hewitt said that he (Lugard) had thought matters out very carefully.

“As carefully as I could. But the money is going, and I have barely a thousand pounds left. Of that, Carroll is to receive another £500—and Heaven knows what I am to do if I run short at a critical moment.”

Hewitt laughed. “I can help you considerably. I can lay my hands upon £700 in a few days. The money is safely planted on the coast not far from Port Macquarie. I placed it there with the intention of using it to effect the escape of my uncle, my cousin, and myself, little knowing that there were others working for the same object. I had heard that a girl named Helen Cronin was servant to Mrs. Lathom, of Waringa, and felt sure it was my cousin Helen. Cronin was the name of the old family nurse at Annalong, and I determined to try and see her. That is how you and I happened to meet.”

“But this money——”

Hewitt laughed again. “Pay for His Majesty’s soldiers and civilian officials at Port Macquarie, Rolland’s Plains, and other townships. I learnt that it was on board a small vessel then weatherbound at Camden Haven, and with two trusted comrades went on board and took it.” And then he told the story in detail, adding that as soon as the money had been taken ashore he had given £200 of it to the two men who had assisted him in the enterprise.

“We parted company the following day, and I was glad enough of it too, although they served my purpose very well, for I could not have done anything single-handed. They said they were quite satisfied with a hundred pounds each, and so we parted. But I took good care that they did not see me plant the money. We all knew that the whole country side—soldiers and warders—would be out after us in a few hours, so they doubled back inland towards the Macleay River. I only met them by the merest chance, after I had been doing myself the honour of drinking a glass of wine with old Major Innes. The poor devils were new hands at the bushranging trade, and as a matter of fact were all but starving when I came across them. They had stolen their horses from

Cockburn's Gwalior cattle station on the Hastings River, their arms from a road party, and were thinking of trying to reach Newcastle. Poor beggars, I'm sorry for them."

Lugard listened with the greatest interest to Hewitt's story of his surprise of the *Edith*. Seven hundred pounds would be likely to prove of the greatest use to him, and so, after some consideration, he said he would use the money if occasion demanded it.

"I am quite aware that I am asking you to let me have the use of the proceeds of a robbery," he said, "but I must not let that stand in my way. I daresay if you had taken it from private individuals I should think twice before applying one sovereign of it to further my mission. But as matters stand we may need it. Now, Mr. Hewitt, just listen carefully to me, and I shall tell you what I think should be done. First of all, I should advise you not to attempt to see your cousin—I suppose you are very fond of her, by the way?"

Hewitt's face flushed. "I have loved her ever since I was a boy of twelve, and though I am now a disgraced and broken man, I have yet a wild hope that in some other land I can make her my wife. And I am a desperate man. When I escaped from that hell upon earth—Tasmania—it was with the one idea of seeing her again. I had heard that not long after her poor father had been transported she had followed him—as a convict herself."

Lugard nodded. "It is a sad, sad story, Mr. Hewitt. From what her uncle Walter told me it appears that after her father's trial and conviction she made her way to Dublin, and as Helen Cronin actually passed base money for the purpose of getting herself arrested. And arrested she was, and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. But the poor girl has never seen her father since she parted from him in Ireland. He was sent to Port Macquarie, where he has been kept ever since as a "good-conduct" prisoner, and she, fortunately for herself, was assigned to Mrs. Lathom. Lathom is, from all I can hear of him, a good man and a gentleman."

"I, too, knew that my uncle John Adair was sent to Port Macquarie," said Hewitt, "and I made several attempts to see him, but I could not even find out where he was employed. If I had known his number, I should have succeeded; but I dared not ask for him by name, for although he is a 'good-conduct' prisoner, the officials are very alert and keen to prevent any one from getting into communication with Irish prisoners who have been sent out for sedition. So I had to give it up. But I did succeed in hearing about 'Helen Cronin' from one of the civilian officials at Port Macquarie, and, as I said, felt convinced that she was my cousin."

"Well, I trust all will end happily. Now, this is what I suggest you should do. You say that you have many secure hiding-places along the coast between Port Macquarie and the Manning River Heads?"

“I have several places in which I can remain in absolute security; the country along the coast is practically uninhabited—only a very few settlers, and they widely apart. Some of them I can trust to supply me with food, and even if I did not go near them, fish and game are plentiful. No one need starve on the sea coast.”

“Do you know of any place where you can get a good view of the sea? a place where you could live, say for a month, or more if need be, and where a boat could be sent ashore and hidden till it was wanted, or where the *Palmyra* herself could come in close to the land, and yet not be seen from the Signal Hill at Port Macquarie?”

Hewitt thought for a few moments.

“Yes, I know of one place in particular. It is called Cattai Creek, and is in a bend of the coast, thirteen miles from Port Macquarie. It is a series of swamps which connects with Lake Innes. I have often camped there, and am sure that no vessel, even with all her sails up, could be seen there from the Signal Hill.”

“Well, then, Hewitt—I’ll drop the ‘Mr.’ now, I think—you had best make your way there, and make yourself as comfortable as you can till you see or hear from me, or see the *Palmyra* or a boat from her come ashore. Now, take this pencil and make me a rough plan of the entrance to this Cattai Creek, as near as you can.”

“You will recognise the place by one of the headlands. It is a low, but straight up-and-down cliff of what looks like stone but is really only hard sand.”

“Very well. Now let us arrange about signals.”

This was soon done, and then Lugard told his new friend that he (Lugard), after he had seen Helen at Waringa, would hasten back to Sydney as quickly as possible, “unless,” he added, “she and I decide that I must first go to Port Macquarie and see her father. And I really cannot decide now whether or not it would be better to go there after I leave Waringa or return at once to Sydney and come up here in the *Palmyra*, meet you again, and then make our final plans. So much depends upon your cousin herself. If she and your uncle can be brought together at Port Macquarie, then the rest will be made easy. Now, I think I have said all that is necessary. You know all about the signalling, and if you do not see the brig for even six or eight weeks, you must try and be patient.”

“Indeed I will be patient.”

“You are sure you can find the money easily?”

“Quite. I have hidden it in a scrub, two miles from Camden Haven, and Camden Haven is only eight miles from Cattai Creek. My hiding-place there will be about a quarter of a mile up the creek, on the top of a thickly timbered bluff, from where I can see, not only along the coast, but all over the lagoons,

right up to Lake Innes.”

“Good. I shall have no trouble in finding you. You had, however, better get your money from where you left it, and take it to your new camp, in case of emergency—I mean in the event of our having to make a hurried run from the coast.”

“I understand.” Then he added with a laugh, “I must tell you that even at this moment I have nearly £150 in gold. Some time ago, near Sydney, I borrowed £200 from the Commissary-General there.”

Lugard smiled. “I heard of that. And now I think of it, tell me, before we part, what made you call on me to ‘stand and deliver’?”

“Devilment, I suppose,” replied Hewitt, with a laugh, “though I ought to have known from your dress that you were not a Government man. But I think I shall be satisfied now with my ‘bushranging’ exploits, unless something very good in the way of Government money falls in my path.”

Lugard shook his head, and begged him to run no more risks.

Half an hour later they parted with a warm hand-grasp, Hewitt turning northward to the coast, and Lugard keeping to the road for Waringa.

CHAPTER IX

It was sunset, and on the broad stone verandah of the house of Mr. Commissary-General Rutland, which overlooked the waters of Sydney Harbour, were a number of guests. Some of the gentlemen who were chatting with the ladies were in either naval or military uniform, others were civilians whose position, irrespective of their social qualifications (or disqualifications), could not be disregarded by Mrs. Rutland, whatever might have been her inclinations, and so her "garden dinner party," as she called it, was very largely attended. Greatly to her annoyance, however, the expected lion of the evening, the Governor himself, had, almost at the last moment, sent an apology through his secretary: "His Excellency regretted that a slight indisposition prevented him," &c., &c.

"'Tis so very annoying, Tom," said Mrs. Rutland to her husband, a big, clean-shaven and good-tempered man, as she handed him the Governor's note, "especially as Mr. Marsbin has returned from his journey up country. Then, too, there are Mr. and Mrs. Feilding and Mrs. Lathom. I'm sure Mr. Marsbin will be quite angry when he comes and finds the Governor is not here, and _____"

Rutland laughed. "Do you know if he knew that Marsbin was coming?"

"Of course he did. I met Mr. Perry" (the Governor's secretary), "and said that Mr. Marsbin and the Feildings would be here."

"Ah, Rose, my dear, that accounts for the old gentleman's 'indisposition.' He doesn't like the parson, I know, and absolutely loathes Feilding. And 'pon my soul I wish you had left Feilding out. He'll be drunk and offensive about ten o'clock."

Mrs. Rutland shrugged her shoulders. "I couldn't get out of it, Tom. But Marsbin will have a modifying effect on Mr. Feilding, I am sure. The little man is afraid to look him in the face."

"Marsbin is a fearful dull-head himself, Rose; but he behaves like a gentleman. Feilding, however, is incorrigible. At the same time we must grin and bear it. Oh, heavens above, here are the two McIvor girls!" and the good-natured Commissary groaned. "I suppose the rest of the family will turn up as well."

"They always do, Tom. Mr. and Mrs. McIvor are in the garden. Mr. Dougal McIvor, the eldest son——"

"That fearful looking fellow with the red hair, who always brings a flute _____"

"Is coming presently with Miss Jeannette McIvor——"

“Old Mac’s sister! Good heavens, Rose! She’s as blind as a bat, and as deaf as a post. Why in the name——”

“And Master Ian McIvor, the second son, is coming after dinner ‘with his violin,’ so his proud mother just told me, in case I ‘induced her dear girls to sing.’ So Dougal and Ian and the ‘dear girls’ are likely to give us a musical treat.”

“And I shall have to take in the deaf old woman to dinner and spoil my own, bawling out answers to the ridiculous questions she asks. It’s too bad of you, Rose!”

“My Dear Tom! How could we leave them out? And then the girls are not so bad as they look. Lieutenant Wray always has great fun with them, and flirts with them both.”

“Wray would flirt with anything in the shape of a young woman, even if she were as plain as a deal board—that is if there was no better material available. But on this occasion you will find that the McIvor girls won’t see much of him. Look down there, by the sea-wall.”

Mrs. Rutland looked, and frowned slightly. “It’s rather rude of him to take Mrs. Lathom away from the rest of my guests. But he always was a very thoughtless, careless young man.”

Rutland laughed somewhat cynically. He, like a good many other people in Sydney, suspected that there had been something more than a mere flirtation between the young officer and the beautiful Mrs. Lathom, and that now she had returned to Sydney it was pretty sure, he thought, to be renewed, especially as Lathom himself was out of the way.

“Both she and he are treading on dangerous ground,” he said presently, as he watched the lady and gentleman sauntering along by the sea-wall, which enclosed the lower portion of the Rutland’s grounds. “Lathom is one of your slow-going men—in some things—but in a matter of that kind”—and he motioned towards Mrs. Lathom and Wray—“he’d be quick to act, once he suspected. And he’d break Wray up like a cardboard box—if he didn’t call him out and shoot him, or run him through.”

Mrs. Rutland gave a shiver. “What a thing to say, Tom! Surely you don’t believe that there is anything serious——”

“I believe that Mrs. Lathom is a fool—a young, pretty, and childless fool, married to a man who idolises and trusts her too implicitly. I daresay, Rose, that if she had a child to care for and to think of, it would help her to realise that her husband is so immeasurably her superior, and so good a fellow all round, that she should think herself a lucky woman. But she doesn’t understand the man, and so is making a fool of herself with Wray, who has about as much principle in him as a rat. Underneath all that happy-go-lucky, innocent style of his there is a damnable lot of villainy, and it strikes me that

this money that he has had left him won't do him much good. Cards, and—and the attractions of the fair sex will soon finish his money if they don't finish him. However, he is leaving the Service—so he tells me—and I don't suppose he'll stay in Australia longer than he can help.”

“How much money was left him?”

“About thirty thousand or so. The first thing he did, I know, after he got the news of his brother's death, was to raise a thousand pounds from old Lamont, the ship-broker. About half of it went to pay his gambling debts, and the other half won't trouble him long. I can fancy old Lamont sitting in his filthy little den in Queen Charlotte Place, and rubbing his hands in expectation of a second visit from our gallant young friend. And that second visit won't be long deferred, I imagine, as Wray was playing with Feilding and some others like him last night. Of course he won pretty heavily—Feilding and that thundering scamp of a Macartney took care of that. They are only casting bread upon the waters—to get it back seventy-fold.”

“Surely Colonel Macartney and Mr. Feilding would not lead him on to play?”

“Lead him! He doesn't want any leading, and he thinks he's as smart as they are. Macartney is a pretty shady fellow, and left the Company's service in India somewhat hurriedly, I am told—in fact, he and Feilding will rook Wray to a dead certainty. And he deserves it; but I daresay he would rook them if he knew how to do it.” And then the Commissary walked off to the rest of his guests.

Too absorbed in each other's society to even think that they had been observed by their host and hostess, Mrs. Lathom and Wray took their way along the sea-wall till they reached a path thickly bordered on each side by shrubbery, and where they could not be discerned from the house. Then Wray drew Mrs. Lathom to him and kissed her passionately.

“Six months, Ida. Six long months since I last kissed you. . . . Come, there is a seat here, at the end of the walk, where we can at least have ten minutes' talk.”

“Oh, Maurice, Maurice, I am so frightened that some one may come. And yet I am not frightened. But I have been so unhappy, and now almost the first thing I hear is that you are going away. And you never even wrote and told me.”

“How could I, dearest, when I only heard of my luck a few days ago?” he replied, as with his arm around her, he led her to the seat, “and then I heard from the Feildings that you would be in Sydney in a few days——”

“From the Feildings! Did you not get my letter telling you that I was coming?”

“The last letter I had from you came to me a month ago, and you said

nothing about your coming then.”

Mrs. Lathom’s face paled. “I do hope it has not been lost. I gave it to a settler’s boy to post at Newcastle.”

“Don’t be distressed, Ida. It will turn up safely. I daresay it may be at my quarters at this moment; the mails from Newcastle are often very irregular. Now listen to me, dearest. I have much to say to you, and yet, had you not come to Sydney, I could not have dared to have written it. To-morrow, however, we must meet somewhere where we can be undisturbed. For the present”—and he drew her yielding figure to him again and kissed her—“I must be content with being with you for a few minutes, and to tell you what I suppose you have already heard—my brother has died and left me something like thirty thousand pounds.”

“I am glad, Maurice, very glad for your sake—but I know what it means for me;” and something like tears filled her eyes.

“It means——” and he put his lips to her ear, and whispered a few words.

She looked at him, and her hands trembled. “Not that Maurice, not that. Much as I love you, do not, ask me to do that;” and then she wept in earnest, “Oh why did we not meet before?”

“Because Fate denied us, Ida, dear; but now there is nothing to prevent our future happiness. Surely, Ida you will not send me away from you for ever! If you do, you would make yourself as unhappy as you would make me. There is no one in all the world so dear to me as you, Ida.”

She pressed one hand to her eyes and made no answer as Wray, speaking quickly, but in low, passionate tones, urged his love and devotion; and then he gently took her hand away, and made her look at him.

“Come, Ida, dearest, look up. I thought to see those dear eyes of yours lighten with joy at my news, instead of filling with tears. I know you love me, and will not send me away, to go to the devil—as I shall if you cast me off.”

“Oh, Maurice, Maurice, you are very cruel to me! You know I have never loved any one but you. But I am afraid, horribly afraid to do what you ask.”

Again the man pressed his suit—knowing full well that even if she said “no” at that time, that on the morrow she would yield. And in his own selfish way he loved her.

“Oh, Maurice, let me go. I cannot talk, I cannot think now. It is such a terrible thing to do. And we could never live in England.”

“I have no intention of trying it dearest. We shall live abroad—the Continent; at Venice, Naples, Rome—wherever my Ida wishes.” He stopped, for the sound of voices came from somewhere near them. “Now go back, dearest; and you must let me know this evening where I shall see you, my darling, to-morrow.”

“I shall be alone all to-morrow afternoon,” she whispered as she rose. “I

am staying with the Graingers, and know they are going to Parramatta in the morning. They asked me to go with them, and I would not promise, as of course I wanted to see you first. I shall say I have a headache and stay at home. They won't be back till six o'clock."

A few minutes later they strolled leisurely back to the house, and mixed with the other guests, and during the remainder of the evening, Lieutenant Wray devoted himself assiduously to old Miss Jeannette McIvor and other elderly spinsters, for he was acute enough to see that Mrs. Rutland evidently had some suspicion that his meeting with Mrs. Lathom was prearranged.

Mrs. Lathom also took care not to give cause for comment, and left early in the evening, saying that she had not yet quite recovered from the fatigue of the journey from Waringa. She was escorted home to the Graingers' house on Dawes Point by Mr. Dougal McIvor—much to the delight of the guests generally.

"Not only the most beautiful, but the most compassionate of ladies," said the Commissary in a whisper to her as she bade him good-night.

"Why the 'compassionate'?" she asked, with a merry laugh, for she was wildly elated and excited, and knew that her beauty and vivacity had not only aroused the admiration of the men, but made nearly all the women jealous and resentful—and that together with Wray's passionate declaration of love, which was still sounding in her ears and echoing in the poor little thing she called her heart, had given her a fictitious strength and gaiety.

"Because," said the Commissary (who had a great sense of humour) "you are taking away the rufous-haired gentleman with the flute. I saw him looking for the thing about ten minutes ago when you filled him with joy by accepting him as an escort. The flute is a direct incitement to murder to a fat old man like me; so I put it under the piano for two reasons. One was that I thought he might take it with him and offer to play to you and the Graingers for an hour or so—'tis a willing beast with its flute—and the other was that when he comes back here, after seeing you home, he won't be able to find it, and we shall escape."

Mrs. Rutland came up.

"Oh, Mrs. Lathom, I quite forgot to ask you—how did you like Mr. Lugard. Tom, here, has never ceased talking of him. He certainly is a very gentlemanly man—for a merchant seaman."

"I liked him very much indeed, Mrs. Rutland, and so does my husband. He only stayed at Waringa for two days, and then resumed his journey to Port Macquarie. He is making some inquiries about some people named Ascott, and Fred is assisting him as much as he can."

Just then Mr. Marsbin, accompanied by Mr. Feilding, appeared. Feilding, who was an under-sized, scrubby little man with protruding eyes and a vile,

twisting mouth, was already somewhat unsteady on his feet, but contrived to bid Mrs. Lathom good-night without tripping over his own pedal extremities. Marsbin, who was a more seasoned and judicious toper, bent gracefully over the hand extended to him.

“Good-night, my dear Mrs. Lathom. Your early departure is, I know, necessitated by the fatigue you have undergone on your journey—or, may I be permitted to say, our journey, inasmuch, as I had the extreme felicity of being honoured by your worthy husband for your safe conveyance to Sydney. And I am rejoiced indeed to see that, despite that fatigue, your bright eyes have lost none of their brilliancy, nor your fair cheeks any of the glow of youth and beauty. Hum, ha!”

Half an hour later, Mrs. Lathom was in her bedroom, where Helen was awaiting her.

“Oh, Helen, I am so tired, and yet I don’t feel a bit sleepy. I have had such a delightful evening. And you too, Helen! How nice you look to-night. Sometimes you look quite pretty—you really do. And ever since we left Waringa you have seemed so different, and so much more contented.”

Helen turned her dark, quiet eyes upon her mistress.

“I am much more contented, madam, for I feel much happier.”

“Why, Helen? Do tell me. Tell me when you are doing my hair. Have you a lover in Sydney? You can trust me, Helen. Every woman—that is a young and pretty woman—must have a lover. Don’t you think so, Helen?”

“I have no lover, madam. But I am very happy now.”

“Of course you are, now you are away from Waringa. Helen, I hate, I hate Waringa. Now do my hair.”

CHAPTER X

Helen was indeed, as she had told Mrs. Lathom, much happier, for not only had old Tim given her Vincent Hewitt's message, but she had seen Lugard and he had told her that which had filled her aching heart with joy.

When the handsome young American arrived at Waringa, he was received most hospitably by Lathom, who, although he was busied in making preparations for his wife's departure, was really pleased to meet him, and anxious to render all the aid in his power towards the fulfilment of a quest that he (Lathom) little knew was entirely fictitious; and Lugard for the first time inwardly resented the duplicity he had now to practise upon a man of such an open and unsuspecting nature as his host. He therefore sought to salve his conscience as much as possible by taking the earliest opportunity of telling Lathom that he was pretty sure, from what he had already learned, that he would gain the information he desired either from the prison records at Port Macquarie (where the elder Ascott had once lived) or by a further and more extended research in Sydney. This he did so as to avoid discussing the matter with Lathom, whose eagerness to assist him in his "search" made him feel both uncomfortable and ashamed.

He had not to wait long before he both saw and spoke to Helen—for soon after he had been shown to his room old Tim tapped at the door.

"The masther thought maybe ye'd like a bath, yer honor. There is a bath-house just beyant, sor, over near the ind av the verandah. Shall I show ye, sor?"

"Thank you," replied Lugard. "I shall be very glad indeed to get rid of the dust;" and then he noticed that the old man was lame, and instantly remembered he was the person of whom Vincent Hewitt had spoken as having promised to convey a message to Helen.

"Are you Tim Doyle?" he said quickly.

"Yes, yer honor."

"Then you are a man I can trust. I met Mr. Hewitt a few hours ago, and he told me you would help me."

"Is he safe, yer honor?" asked Tim, eagerly.

"Quite safe. But I cannot talk to you now. I want you to tell Helen Cronin that the friend who sent her the note the other day is here, and *must* see her as soon as possible. She must tell you where she will meet me. You will not fail me?"

"Indade I will not, yer honor," replied Tim in low tones; and then he led the way to the bath-room, not daring to ask Lugard any further questions, for

other servants were about. Helen, he knew, was in the room used as a laundry, so he hurried quickly away to her.

Lugard's apartment was fortunately situated at the extreme end of the verandah, and some distance from those occupied by Dr. Haldane and Mr. Marsbin, who were not then in the house, having gone to visit the Quarries; so Tim, as soon as he saw that Lugard had finished his bath, limped along in front of him, carrying the visitor's boots, which he had hurriedly cleaned.

"Yer honor's boots," he said, as he entered the room; and then he smiled and added—

"She sends her heart's thanks and compliments to your honor, and if your honor will come wid me at six o'clock this evening, I'll take ye to a place on the path leading to the creek, where she'll be waiting for ye an' where ye can talk for an hour or more, as the captain an' Mrs. Lathom are going ridin' an' won't be back till past seven o'clock. An' will your honor make good friends wid Russ, the dog, as he is sure to follow her."

"Give her my thanks, and tell her that I won't forget about the dog, Tim."

It was then five o'clock, and as soon as Lugard entered the dining-room he was introduced to Mrs. Lathom by her husband.

"You must not think us discourteous, Mr. Lugard, in leaving you for an hour or two before dinner," said Lathom, "but my wife wishes to make a short round of visits to some of our neighbours, as she leaves for Sydney to-morrow. We shall return soon after seven with Mr. Marsbin and Dr. Haldane, who have ridden over to the Quarries."

Lugard begged them not to be concerned about him, and said that he would take a stroll along the banks of the creek until their return. So after Mrs. Lathom had had tea brought in, she and Lathom rode off, much to the satisfaction of their visitor, who until nearly six o'clock whiled away the time with Lieutenant Willet, whom he discovered in his quarters engaged in eating an enormous water-melon.

Russ, who had been "introduced" to Lugard by Lathom, had taken very kindly to the American, and had followed him to Willet's quarters, the poor dog knowing that Mrs. Lathom hated to have him following his master whenever she was with him.

Leaving Lieutenant Willet, Lugard strolled towards the stables. Tim was awaiting him, and the two walked slowly down the road till they reached the track that led more directly than the road to the river, and in a few minutes they were quite out of sight of any one coming from or going to the house. The evening was very calm and quiet, and as the old man limped beside him, Lugard could not but be impressed by the beauty of the scene, for the rugged range to the westward of Waringa, which had looked so grim and forbidding an hour or two before, was now bathed in the yellow rays of the sunken sun,

and far to the northward the forest-clad spurs were fast changing from a dull and misty green to a rich and glorious purple. Then, as they emerged upon a cleared space, the silvery waters of a clear stretch of Waringa Creek lay before them like a huge mirror of burnished silver, on which a flock of black swans floated almost motionless.

“I can leave ye now, yer honor,” said Tim; “see, there is Miss Helen standing beside that big grey gum on the bank. I’ll stay here and let you know if any one should be comin’ along. Come, Russ, me bhoy.”

Lugard advanced to the quiet girlish figure that awaited him beside the tree, and raised his hat.

“Miss Adair,” he said simply, “I am very, very glad to meet you.”

“And I you, Mr. Lugard,” she said tremblingly, as she put her little sunburnt hand in his, and raised her dark eyes to his face; “your message has made me very happy. Will you tell me quickly, please, about my father. Is he well?”

“Yes—as far as I know, and I trust that it will not be long before you will see him. But I have quite a long story to tell you, Miss Adair. Are we safe from interruption here?”

“Quite. No one but Captain and Mrs. Lathom and I ever use this path. A little further on there is a fallen tree, where we can sit down.”

She led the way, and as soon as she had seated herself turned her face, now aglow with suppressed excitement, to the American, whose manner was very respectful and sympathetic.

“I must tell you first of all, Miss Adair—before I speak of myself and my mission to your father and you—that only a few hours ago, by great good fortune, I met your cousin Vincent.”

“So Tim told me;” and then she blushed deeply. “Of course I had not the most remote idea who it was that came to the house last night until Tim gave me his message very early this morning. It seems that he had been hiding in the ti-tree scrub on the creek nearly all the previous day, endeavouring to see Tim, whom he knew could be trusted, so as to send a message to me, but did not succeed till nearly midnight. Then Tim urged him to wait until the morning, but my cousin was too impatient. The sentry would certainly have seen him had he approached the house any closer!”

“Ah well, it will not be long, I trust, before he does meet you,” said Lugard kindly. “Now let me tell you who I am and what has brought me here.”

Then he told in more ample detail all that he had related to Hewitt, adding that he was pleased that Helen was going to Sydney, as it would greatly facilitate matters.

“I am glad of that, Mr. Lugard, for it was my intention to this very day ask Captain Lathom, who has been most kind to me, to let me leave his service, if

Mrs. Cartwright, of Port Macquarie, would let me enter hers as an ‘assigned’ servant. I would not dare to ask Mrs. Lathom—she would never consent. And when I did ask him, I meant to tell him my real name and my miserable story, for I am sure he would not only be sympathetic, but grant my request, if he possibly could do so. In fact, I should have told him why I wanted to go to Port Macquarie when I was first assigned to Mrs. Lathom, but I dreaded to do that, for fear that if I was sent there and the authorities discovered I was not Helen Cronin, but the daughter of John Adair, it would perhaps result in my poor father being transferred back to Sydney, or even some more distant place, and that I might never see him. Mr. Marsbin, the clergyman who is now staying at Waringa, has the greatest detestation of Irish prisoners, and unfortunately he has such a very great influence with the Home Office that the colonial officials will do almost anything he wishes.”

“Surely the fellow would not attempt to prevent a daughter from meeting her father!”

“He has done far more cruel things than that, Mr. Lugard. Still I have heard Captain Lathom say that the man is not cruel by nature, but only an unreasoning bigot, and a fanatical believer in the lash as a cure for all offences.”

“What a brute!” was Lugard’s comment. “I heard a good deal of him in Sydney. What is the cause of his antipathy to Irishmen in particular?”

“I cannot tell; but his dislike to them is notorious, especially to those—of course I mean prisoners—who are Roman Catholics. And although my father and myself and all our branch of the Adair family are Protestants, our very names would be repellent to him, for”—and here for the first time a smile lit up her beautiful face—“both branches are strongly imbued with the rebel taint. My paternal grandfather was deeply involved in the troubles of ’98, and only escaped death or a long imprisonment by fleeing to France, where he died; another relative fought at and was killed at Vinegar Hill, and my own unfortunate father was, as you know, transported for publishing seditious pamphlets, and my poor cousin Vincent, then hardly more than a boy, for being concerned in the same offence.”

“It is very sad, Miss Adair, that you should have to suffer as well.”

“I have tried hard not to think of myself, Mr. Lugard,” she said simply. “Some day, perhaps, when—oh, how it makes my heart leap to think of it!—when you and my father and poor Vincent and myself are sailing away together from this dreadful land, I shall tell you my story. Sometimes it seems to me when I think of it that I am really Helen Cronin, ‘Number 7089,’ and no one else, and that the Helen Adair of the old, happy days in Annalong is only a fantasy of my disordered mind.”

She ceased speaking, and Lugard, seeing that she was struggling bravely to

restrain her tears, assisted her by at once becoming practical, and continuing certain instructions.

“Now, Miss Adair, this is what I shall do: I shall go on to Port Macquarie and see your father, and tell him of the arrangements I have made with your cousin Hewitt. I shall have no difficulty in seeing and conversing with him, as my letters from the Sydney authorities will give me ample facilities to prosecute my ‘Ascott’ inquiries. Your cousin, who is already on his way back to the Port Macquarie district, will arrive there before me, and I shall probably see him also, as I can easily find his hiding-place, which I shall carefully describe to your father. I shall try and arrange matters so that as soon as the *Palmyra* appears on the coast your father will escape from the town during the night, and make his way to your cousin’s retreat. There he will be perfectly safe, even if the *Palmyra* should be delayed for a week or longer. As for myself, I shall return to Sydney from Port Macquarie as quickly as possible so as to see Captain Carroll, and, as you will be there, I can then easily communicate with you, as of course I shall call ‘to see Mrs. Lathom.’ All going well, I hope to see both you and Patrick Montgomery safely on board the *Palmyra* within a few days after I return. You will always be prepared?”

“Indeed I will. Oh, Mr. Lugard, you have made me feel like a girl of ten.”

“I may have to turn you into a boy of sixteen before I get you away from Sydney,” said the American, with a laugh; “in fact, I’m pretty sure of it. You will not mind?”

“You mean a disguise. Oh, no, Mr. Lugard. But how shall I manage?”

“I will see to that. There is a rascally old ship-chandler named Lamont, who is my agent in Sydney, and he will provide you with the necessary clothes. You and Montgomery will have to meet me at his place.” Then he added with a merry twinkle in his brown eyes—“I shall try hard to avoid asking you to cut off your hair, Miss Adair.”

“It would grow again. I should not mind.”

They remained conversing till Lugard, looking at his watch, saw that it was nearly seven o’clock.

“I must return to the house now, Miss Adair. And as I shall not probably have an opportunity of speaking to you again before I leave to-morrow morning, I shall now bid you good-bye till we meet again.”

She put out both hands to him, and her eyes filled with tears.

“You have made me very, very happy,” she said.

Lugard raised her left hand to his lips and bent low over it.

“You do me great honour, Miss Adair. And I am proud to be of service to you.”

Late that night, as Lugard, after bidding good-night to his host and hostess and the other guests, walked along the verandah to smoke a pipe before turning

in, he saw a light in Helen's room, and knew she was writing a long letter to her father, which she was to send to him by Tim in the morning.

The sailor leant against one of the verandah posts, hands in pockets, and looked at the shadow of Helen's figure silhouetted against the blind. Then he spoke to himself—

“That's her shadow. And she can only be a shadow to you, Mr. Jim Luard. So don't be a dreaming fool.”

CHAPTER XI

In a dingy little office in an equally dingy and ramshackle building in Queen Charlotte Place, over the door of which was inscribed, "Morgan Lamont, Ship-chandler and General Outfitter," sat an exceedingly dirty old man engaged in making up accounts. On the table, which was littered over with soiled account books, bill heads and correspondence, were burning two tallow candles, and over the doorway leading into the passage a badly trimmed ship's riding light helped to accentuate the squalor of the apartment generally.

Mr. Morgan Lamont—who, in his earlier years in England, had borne the name of Moses Lowenthal, was evidently in a pleasant frame of mind, for as he cast up a row of figures with his dirty right hand, he rubbed his stubbly chin with his left, and smiled, or rather grinned, continuously, and accompanied the distortion of his face by an unpleasant hissing sound through the fragmentary remains of his teeth.

Presently the door opened, and Mrs. Lamont, the wife of his bosom, and the aider and abettor of his villainies, entered, and remarked that, as it was seven o'clock, it was time they had supper.

"Yes, my dear. I am coming; and we must get supper over early, as I expect a visitor in some time to-night," he replied in an accent that unmistakably denoted his origin.

Mrs. Lamont did not bear much resemblance to her husband, as so often occurs with some married couples whose interests in life are identical; for, while he was thin and scraggy, and wore garments that a rag-picker would not have rushed at with frantic haste if he found them in the gutter, she was fat and unpleasantly coarse-looking, and her dress of soiled green silk was not devoid of ornament in the form of a massive gold chain, which fell from her neck to her ample waist, and her fat fingers were covered with rings, the brilliancy of the gems in which—diamonds and rubies—were only out-vied by the long emerald pendants in her thick ear lobes.

"Well, Rachel," said the ship-chandler, as he seated himself at the supper table, which was in a comfortably furnished apartment looking out into the street, "business was better to-day."

"Dot vas good, Mo," and Mrs. Lamont's beady black eyes twinkled approvingly as she poured out the tea; "vas it mit der captain of the *Leeuwarden*?"

Lamont nodded. "Yes, with him, and with the Yankee skipper, too. They were both here to-day. I sold the Dutchman a suit of condemned sails for his ship. I bought them for £20 from the *Hashemy* transport, and sold 'em to him

for £60.”

“Got de monish?”

“What do you take me for, Rachel? Then Captain Carroll came in on that particular business, which will be finished pretty soon now, and I bought his whale oil—a hundred barrels, and sold it again to Lloyd & Co. at a profit of fifty per cent.”

“Ah, Mo, vat a peety ve haven’t got no son mit your prains to carry on the pizness.”

“Do you think I’m going to die right away?” snapped the old man. “Well, then, besides that, I’ve got a letter from that other Yankee who is in the game with the skipper of the *Palmyra*, and he tells me that I may expect him in Sydney to-morrow, and that he wants me to have some suits of clothes ready.”

“Vat vill you make out of the whole pizness, Mo?”

“Don’t know yet. That fellow Luard is a hard nut to crack, Rachel. But so far I have had a hundred from him on account, and think I shall get another out of him when the people he has come for, are safe on board the *Palmyra*.”

Mrs. Lamont bent over to her worthy spouse. “Vat a peety it is, dot ven you haf got the monish you can’t blow the gaff on him quietly, and get the reward.”

“Don’t be a fool, Rachel. Do you think I’m going to run myself into danger? Why, if I was to play the double, I get ten years in irons on Cockatoo Island at the least. No, and besides that, I do a pretty good business with the prisoners year in and year out, and hope to do a lot more.”

Mrs. Lamont sighed. “Vell, you know pest, Mo, my tear. But it does seem a peety—ven you think of the reward that will be offered. How many are peoples there?”

“Four; three men and a woman.”

“Dot would be two hundred poundts, Mo. Vifty poundts a head. Don’t it seem sinful dot ve can’t ged it?”

“And I should get knocked on the head for it some dark night, even if the Government didn’t do anything to me,” retorted the ship-chandler. “Now, don’t go on talking about things you don’t understand, but get supper over. I told you I expected a visitor. Put my office a bit straight, and leave some glasses and a bottle of the best French brandy on the table.”

“Ah, then it is Mr. Wray who was comin’.”

Lamont grinned and nodded. “Yes; I didn’t think he’d come so soon, though. I got a note from him this morning telling me that he wanted to see me on important business. When he comes, lock the front door and put out the lights.”

A few minutes after eight o’clock gunfire, Mrs. Lamont opened the street door to Lieutenant Maurice Wray, who was in plain clothes. He was in

excellent spirits, and saluted the fat Jewess with such cordiality that she imagined he had been dining well (most people “dined” at six o’clock in the old colonial days), and felt assured that her husband would do “good pizness” with the visitor. But in this she was mistaken, for Wray, who was a remarkably astute young gentleman, had kept his head perfectly clear for the occasion of his visit to Mr. Lamont, which was of an all-absorbent and momentous nature to him. Nevertheless he paid Mrs. Lamont some florid compliments.

“I declare, Mrs. Lamont, that it is a wonder to me how you contrive to look so cool in such detestable weather. Being in uniform all day, I longed for the night so as to avail myself of cooler clothing, and now, by Jove, ’tis as close and sultry as it was at noonday, when Captain Frobisher and I marched our company in from Waverley. Is it not a detestable country, Mrs. Lamont?”

“Shockin’, Captain,” replied the lady, as she ushered him in. “I often vish that I vas vonce more pack in old London in the vinter time, a-carryin’ my father’s dinner to him from vere ve lived in Blackfriars to the tailor’s shop he vorked in at Duke Street, Adelphi;” and she sighed genuinely.

Wray was a curiously constituted man, and at that moment his nerves were high strung. He knew that the woman bore as bad a character for trickery and all-round villainy as her husband, but her simple remark made him feel that after all there was still something good in her callous heart. And perhaps he might need her aid, as well as that of her husband.

“Ah well, you’ll go back there some day, Mrs. Lamont, but instead of walking you’ll drive round in your carriage and look up your old friends. I know that you Jewish people, although you bleed us Christians pretty freely, are very good to your own poor, and I am sure that when you go home a rich woman you will help those who have not been so fortunate.”

“Vell, ve Jewish people do stick to vun another, Captain,” she said, pleased at the compliment.

“Then, as I may never see England again, and have never done anything but think of myself all my life, I want you to take these five sovereigns and spend them on the poor Jewish children who work in that big factory somewhere near Battersea. When I was a boy I used to watch the poor little beggars trudging through the snow on dark winter mornings, wet, cold, and I daresay hungry.”

The woman’s eyes softened as she slipped the money into her pocket.

“You are a shentleman, Captain, if ever vas. An’ s’help me God, I von’t do nodings improper vith your money. I vill give it to Rabbi Cohen, of Battersea, s’help me God, I vill, and tell him who sent it.”

Wray smiled and nodded, and then entered the office where Lamont awaited him.

“Come in, Mr. Wray, come in. Rachel, don’t let us be disturbed.”

“Very well, but wait a moment before you begin talking pizziness, my tear;” and the stout lady bustled off hurriedly, returning a few minutes later with a bottle of champagne, which she placed on the table beside the brandy. “Mo” opened his eyes in wonder.

“Id is all right, my tear. Captain Wray has shust given me a handsome present for de poor liddle Jewish children in London, and I vant to show him dot ve are not ungrateful. Id is good vine, Captain—two hundred and forty shillings the dozen.”

Wray laughed. “Thank you, Mrs. Lamont; I’ll drink your very good health and prosperity. I’ll open it at once if you will take a glass with me;” and despite the mutely-eyed protest of old “Mo” the officer deftly prized off the wire, filled three glasses, and bowing politely to the lady, repeated his good wishes.

Then, as soon as Mrs. Lamont closed the door behind her, he settled himself in his chair and went into “business” without further ado.

“Now, look here, Lamont, I don’t want to stay here all night talking. I’ve come to see you on two matters. The first is this: I want five thousand pounds in cash. What will you do it for? Don’t begin to haggle, but come to the point at once.”

“Five thousand pounds is a large sum, Mr. Wray,” said the old man, compressing his lips. “I should have some trouble in raising it. When do you want it?”

“That depends on the second matter of business on which I have come to see you. If we come to an arrangement on the first, I shall want it in a few days; if we don’t then, there is an end of it. I shall go elsewhere.”

There was such decision in his voice and manner that Lamont knew that his threat of “going elsewhere” was not an idle one, and his avaricious soul shook in its miserly case.

“Let me consider a minute, Mr. Wray,” he said, as he picked up a pencil and began to calculate on a sheet of paper.

“You can have the money within forty-eight hours on these terms,” he said presently, and then he named them.

Wray thought for a few seconds. “That means I pay you twenty-five per cent. for twelve months’ accommodation. Now, look here, Lamont, Lloyd’s people, who are not money-lenders, but merchants, told me the other day that I could obtain a few thousands from them any time I wanted the money at the ordinary rate of interest, ten per cent.”

“Well, they are friends of yours, you see, Mr. Wray, and they have a right to do what they like.”

“Just so. But now I’ll be frank with you. I don’t want to go to them for such a large sum; I don’t want it to be known that I have raised £5,000, and I

know I can trust you to mind your own business in the matter. So I'll close with you——”

Lamont tried hard to conceal a smile of satisfaction. “I never talk about my clients, and——”

“I'll close with you,” continued Wray, “if you will arrange the second matter.”

“What is that?”

“Something that you can easily do, and I cannot. I intend going to a South American or other foreign port, and want to leave the colony quietly, and the sooner I can do so the better I shall like it, and the better it will be for you, as I shall give you a hundred for your services. Now, you are in the shipping business, and can make the necessary inquiries—I could not; people would wonder why I was going to South America instead of to England. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly,” replied the ship-chandler, as he ran his finger down a written list of the shipping then lying in port. “Here are four ships: the *Mathilde*, brig, sails for Samarang in a week; the *Protector*, ship, for Calcutta in a week; the *Resolution*, ship, for Manila ten days; the *Leeuwarden*, Dutch ship, for Valparaiso in about a week.”

“Ha, the last one you named I think will do. Do you know the captain well? Has she good accommodation?”

“Yes, I have done business with the captain, and have been on board the ship. She has very good accommodation. That Mr. Lugard, who arrived here a few weeks ago, was a passenger in her from Batavia, and he told me that she is a fine ship. She was formerly one of the Dutch East India Company's ships.”

“I see. Is the captain a man to be trusted?”

“I'll guarantee that,” said Lamont, with a sly smile, as he thought of certain transactions which had taken place between himself and Captain Jan Schouten, transactions which would not have met with the approval of the Port Jackson authorities.

“Ah, the usual smuggling work, I suppose. Well that is nothing to me. Now I'll come to the point. I want you to arrange with him for the passages of a lady and gentleman to Valparaiso. I want the whole of the passenger accommodation—he must not take any others.”

Lamont nodded. He guessed pretty well who was the lady.

“I don't think it at all likely that there would be any other passengers applying for berths,” he said; “very few passengers leave Sydney for South American ports. Now, if it were the *Protector* for Calcutta, there might be a dozen. When do you want this matter seen to?”

“At once. Tell the captain that he will get £200—one hundred down and the other hundred as soon as the ship has put to sea. But, stop a moment, I

forgot—the lady may bring a female attendant. If such is the case, I will give another £50. Will that satisfy the fellow?”

“More than satisfy him.”

“Well, then, Lamont, I leave the matter to you. But you must make him understand that the lady and myself will not expect to be served with the usual merchant ship fare. You understand.”

“Quite, sir,” replied Lamont obsequiously; “but why not let me provide you with a private supply of provisions and wines that will be more acceptable than even the very best that a Dutch captain could give you—unless he bought them from me?”

Wray laughed at the man’s astuteness. “Very well, Lamont. Send on board all that you think is necessary, up to a hundred pounds. And see that the cabins are done up nicely. The lady is not very strong. Now good-night. You can let me know all your arrangements in detail when they are completed. By the way, how are we to get on board unobserved?”

“Leave that to me, Mr. Wray. I shall see that you suffer no—or very little—inconvenience. Of course the *Leeuwarden* will have to undergo the usual search for prisoners attempting to escape, by the port authorities, before she gets under weigh, but Captain Schouten will see that you and Mrs.—Mrs.—er _____,”

“Thompson.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Thompson are neither seen nor disturbed. I will see him early to-morrow morning.”

Then Mr. Lamont ushered his visitor out, and bade him good-night.

“Vas it goot pizness, Mo?” asked Mrs. Lamont, as her husband returned to his office and set to work again at his papers.

“Very good, Rachel. When there is a young handsome man with thirty thousand pounds, and a young and handsome woman who he has no right to meddle with, there is always good business for some one.”

“Who is it?” asked the Jewess, with eager feminine curiosity. “Is it Mrs. Lathom? Dere has been some gonsiderable talks aboutt them. Has Captain Lathom found out all aboutt it?”

“You bring me some more candles, and go to bed.”

CHAPTER XII

On the summit of one of the low, wooded bluffs at the entrance to Cattai Creek, Vincent Hewitt sat, smoking his pipe and looking out upon the sea, to where, five or six miles to the southward, a vessel lay becalmed. At dawn he had seen her—a small white spot on the horizon, and had watched her till noon, creeping slowly along before a faint south-easterly breeze; then the wind had died away, and his doubts as to whether it was the *Palmyra* or not could not be satisfied. It was now four o'clock in the afternoon, and the vessel still seemed to be in the same position as she was at midday, though in reality she had been carried several miles nearer by the current setting northward.

Lugard—who seemed to foresee every contingency that might arise, had told him that if it should happen to fall a calm when the *Palmyra* made her appearance off Cattai, he (Vincent) was not to attempt to attract the vessel's attention by making the smoke signals agreed upon, for it would be incurring unnecessary risks. A small, but armed, Government cutter was usually stationed at Port Macquarie, and the master, were his suspicions aroused by the presence of the *Palmyra*, could easily bring his vessel out of the harbour, even in a calm, by means of sweeps, and board the suspected craft.

Still, anxious as he was as to the identity of the becalmed ship, the young Irishman was well content. Fifteen days before, as he was asleep, in the rude hut which he had built on a small thickly-wooded island in Cattai Swamps, a boy awakened him, and said that a man who wanted to see him was at his father's house. Instantly surmising who it was, Hewitt took his pistols and followed the boy along a cattle track till they reached the Lake Innes road, near which was a roughly-built, bark-roofed dwelling, the home of an emancipist convict named Bolton, who had afforded Hewitt food and shelter.

The moment he stepped inside, his hand was grasped by Lugard, who was having supper, and pressed his visitor to join him.

"I have good news for you, Hewitt. I have seen and spoken to Mr. Adair, and you may expect to have him with you now very shortly."

Hewitt's eyes glistened. "How is he?"

"Very well. Major Cartwright, he says, is a most humane man, and has shown him all the kindness that lay in his power, so also has Major Innes, of the Lake. And that reminds me to tell you that I am now on my way to the Lake, where I am to sleep to-night; then I am hurrying on to Sydney as quickly as possible to meet Carroll, who will, I expect, be there awaiting me. Now, as we eat, we can talk, and I can tell you all that has been done."

Hewitt remained with Lugard till dusk, and then the two men parted, with a

warm hand-grasp, Lugard riding on to Lake Innes, along the road, and Hewitt returning to his hiding-place in the swamp.

Every morning, after the first week since he had seen Lugard had elapsed, he began to keep a careful watch for the *Palmyra*. The American, he knew, would be quite five days in reaching Sydney *via* Newcastle, and then perhaps there might be unforeseen delays, of which he (Hewitt), a landsman, could know nothing. Nevertheless, from the seventh day, he always arose at dawn, crossed the swamp, and made his way to the bluff at the entrance of the creek, from whence he carefully scanned the sea, in the hope of seeing the expected sail, which meant so much to himself and to his relations.

For the first two weeks he watched in vain, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by the boy Bolton, who usually brought him a supply of food—boiled corned beef, milk, and eggs—every second day; but nothing had met his eyes but the wide expanse of ocean, grey and dull at the dawn, and blue and sparkling in the sunshine, when the hazy sea mists were blown away by the south-east breeze. And then, to his joy, on the dawn of the fifteenth day, a sail appeared to the southward.

As the sun dipped towards the spurs of the mountain—which Cook had named Mount Sea View, Hewitt arose, and leaning against the gnarled and knotted trunk of a stunted honeysuckle growing on the bluff, gazed longingly at the becalmed vessel. Little as was his knowledge of nautical matters, he could see that she was not only a square-rigged vessel, but was of some size. Had she been broadside on, he could have decided whether she had two masts or three. The *Palmyra*, he knew, had two masts with yards on each—and there his means of identifying her for the present began and ended, although he had seen her on several previous occasions, cruising along the coast.

“Blow, good wind, blow right hearty,” he said, repeating an expression he had often heard the seamen of the convict transport which brought him to Tasmania use when the ship was becalmed on the voyage out.

Just as he was about to turn away and leave the spot he saw the emancipist Bolton riding along the beach towards him, so he waited.

“That’s the ship you are waiting for, Mr. Hewitt,” cried the man, as he rode up to the bluff and dismounted.

“Are you sure, Bolton?”

“Dead sure. I’ve just come from Camden Haven, and when I was spelling my horse a bit on top of the Green Hills, I saw her right abreast of me, and knew her by the whaleboats hanging from her davits. It is a pity it is such a calm, as you can’t make your signals to her. That old covey, Murchison” (the master of the Government cutter at Port Macquarie) “is as cute as a fox, and perhaps he has sighted the ship already from Signal Hill, or Nobby’s. He’s always up at the Pilot Station when he’s not aboard the cutter, and Mr. Lugard

told me that he heard that Murchison had sent a letter up to Sydney, saying that this here brig was always hanging about the coast, and he thought she was worth watching.”

“Oh, well, it doesn’t matter, Bolton. Murchison is a smart old fellow, but from what Mr. Lugard said to me, Captain Carroll of the *Palmyra* is smarter still, and is not going to be caught. Mr. Lugard told me that it was not unlikely that Captain Carroll would sail his ship right up to the port and come ashore in his boat on the excuse of buying a bullock for his crew. As for making signals, I will do exactly as Mr. Lugard wishes. But at the same time, if Mr. Adair knows the ship is here and gets a chance to slip away, he may get here to-night.”

Bolton nodded. “Just so. I shall keep a good look out for him. Me and my boy Ted will go to Tacking Point in an hour or so and camp there for the night, so if Mr. Adair does get away he’ll be bound to see our fire—or rather two fires—and know who we are. And if he doesn’t show up to-night, I’ll camp there until he does. No one will trouble us. Major Cartwright’s overseer knows that some of my cattle stray about Tacking Point, and if by any chance a patrol routed us out, they would not suspect anything was afoot. Now I had better be going.”

“And I shall stay here for the night. I have my blanket, and shall be comfortable enough.”

CHAPTER XIII

In the dining-room of the commandant's house at Waringa, Dr. Haldane was stretched out on the sofa waiting for his host, who had promised to accompany him on a shooting excursion along the banks of the creek as soon as he had finished reading some letters that had just arrived from Sydney.

The morning was gloriously bright and warm, and the doctor every now and then looked impatiently out of the window to where Hawley, his servant, with a packhorse carrying their guns and provisions for the day, was awaiting him and Captain Lathom. At last, however, he heard his host's footstep, and in a few moments the commandant entered the room.

"Ha, here you are at last, Fred!" cried the burly surgeon, springing to his feet. "Old Tim has just told me that the ducks——"

He stopped suddenly and looked at his friend in astonishment. Lathom's face was pale and full of trouble.

"You must let me off, George," he said quietly. "I have just received some news that necessitates my leaving Waringa as quickly as possible—to-morrow, in fact—and I do not know when I shall return."

He sat down and put his hand to his forehead; then he rose again and suddenly put out his hand to Haldane.

"Is it very serious, old man?" inquired the latter.

"Very, George. And you are an old and true friend. I must tell you. I can't believe it—this, this awful thing which has come upon me."

"Tell me, old man. What is it? Has anything happened to your wife?"

"I fear so, George," he said, trying to speak calmly. Then by an effort he pulled himself together. "Do you mind putting off your shooting for half an hour and walking down to the creek with me? I think I can tell you better when we are out in the open air."

Haldane stepped to the window and called to his servant:

"Take off the pack-saddle, Hawley. We are not going to-day. But you can take my gun and go yourself, and see what you can get. Stay as long as you like. I won't want you till this evening."

In a few minutes he and Lathom were walking down the path to the creek. As soon as they reached the fallen tree to which Helen had taken Lugard on the evening of his arrival at Waringa they stopped and sat down, and Lathom took some letters from his pocket.

"This, George," he said, as he opened one, "is purely official. In it I am instructed to at once proceed to Port Macquarie and take charge. Poor Cartwright has died suddenly."

“That is, of course, promotion for you.”

“Of course, and much as I like Waringa, I cannot but feel pleased at being appointed to such an important post. There were half a dozen men in Sydney struggling for the place when Cartwright was appointed. With this brief notification there is a long private letter from the Governor, who, as you know, is a friend of mine of long standing. Here is what he says in reference to my appointment: ‘You must go there direct, and go *quickly*. There is absolutely no one here whom I could trust sufficiently to fill such an important post, even temporarily. Once you are there, all the rest will be easy, as I shall get the home people to confirm my appointment of you. But Collie, Feilding, Elphinstone, and two or three others have already been pestering me, and Collie has a lot of influence at home and knows how to use it, and Marsbin asked me point-blank to give the place to that little ruffian Feilding, and had the confounded impertinence to tell me that he (Marsbin) had himself written to the Home Office on Feilding’s behalf and that the people at home would not be pleased if I appointed any one else, even temporarily. I told him that I considered it very unlikely that the post would be given to a civilian, and wound up by saying that I considered Feilding a most unsuitable man. So I had the best of the parson there; but nevertheless Marsbin can do almost anything he likes with the home people. But you need have no fear. My recommendation of you is so strong that, much as they listen to Marsbin, they won’t go against me in this matter. I am sending Turnbull of the 77th to relieve you. If Willet was not such a lazy beast I should have thought of him. But you *must* hurry up.’ ”

Folding the Governor’s letter up again, Lathom placed it in his pocket.

“I need not tell you, George, how pleased I was when I read that—only an hour ago. Then I got a shock—a terrible shock, which has blasted my life;” and then for the first time his voice shook.

“Just after I had finished reading the Governor’s letter in came Sergeant Rush. ‘What is it, Rush?’ I asked. He looked awkward and confused, and wouldn’t look me in the face, but handed me this”—and Lathom showed Haldane a third letter—“and said it had been picked up on the road yesterday. The envelope, as you see, is not only so soiled with mud and rain as to render the address undecipherable, but is in pieces.

“‘I think, sir,’ he mumbled, ‘it is Mrs. Lathom’s letter. Just before you came back from Newcastle last time she gave a letter to young Sam Tucker to post in Newcastle, and the boy told his father that he’d lost it, and his father told me.’

“‘I see, Rush. And how did you get it?’ I asked.

“‘One of Trenfield’s little girls found it, sir. She was taking it home to give it to her mother. A most inquisitive person, sir, that Mrs. Trenfield. So I made

the child give the letter to me, sir, feeling certain that it was the one Mrs. Lathom gave to young Tucker.'

"'Thank you, Rush,' I said. 'You did quite right.' Then I sent him away. As soon as he had left the room I again tried to make out the almost obliterated address, but failed, and then, thinking it might be a letter of some importance to one of my wife's friends in Sydney whom I was sure to know, and to whom I could forward it, I looked at the letter itself."

He paused and then said slowly and painfully, "It was from my wife to Lieutenant Wray, and begins, 'My dearest Maurice.'"

The big doctor cursed Ida Lathom under his breath; then he placed his hand on his friend's arm.

"You are certain, Fred?"

"Only too certain, George. I read the letter through to the end. It is damning—absolutely damning. I can never live with her again."

"You will go to Sydney at once?" asked Haldane.

"No, George. That I cannot do in view of this urgent letter from the Governor. But you will help me?"

"To the last, Fred. And if you fail to kill the fellow, or he hits you, I'll have him out myself."

"We must leave that till later on, George. But you must go to Sydney for me, see her, and tell her that I know everything. I'll tell you this evening what to do about money matters. I can raise a thousand pounds. She must go home to her people by the first ship, and the lawyers in England will do the rest. I will give you a letter to her."

"She hates me, Fred," said Haldane bluntly, "but I shall do all you wish."

"I did not know that she hated you, George. But nothing can surprise me now. Thank God we have no child."

Haldane made no answer. His heart was overflowing with sympathy for his old friend, but he was a man of few words.

"When shall I start, Fred?"

"To-morrow, George, if you will. And I too shall leave for my new post. I'll give you all the necessary papers to-night. As for Wray, I leave myself in your hands. I'll come to Sydney as soon as ever the Governor will grant me leave—and after she has gone. Now let us go along the creek for a little walk. My nerves want steadyng a bit. And I don't want to keep to myself too much, George. I don't want to think."

Then, ere they left the old dead tree, Lathom lit a match, and putting his wife's letter on the ground, set it alight, and saw it burn to ashes.

CHAPTER XIV

Just as the dawn broke, Vincent Hewitt was awakened by the sound of approaching horsemen, and springing to his feet, a cry of delight burst from him when he saw riding beside the emancipist Bolton an old man whose face was lit with joy.

“Vincent my boy, my dear, dear boy! Thank God for this!” he cried as he dismounted from his horse and threw his arms around his nephew.

The tears fell from the young Irishman’s eyes as he pressed the old man to his bosom. “Thank God indeed, uncle; but there, you are, I can see, nearly worn out, so I shall not let you talk until you are rested. Sit down there on my blanket awhile. I must see where the ship is, and if it will be safe to make my signals. All going well, we may be safely on board in two or three hours.”

Then, calling to Bolton to come with him, he ran to the edge of the bluff and looked seaward. A gentle breeze was now blowing from the south-east, and the sea-haze of the early dawn was fast vanishing before it and under the blaze of the red morning sun, which had just lifted above the horizon.

“There she is, sir,” cried Bolton, pointing to the northward; “the current has carried her nearly abreast of Tacking Point.”

“Is she coming this way?” asked Hewitt anxiously.

“No, she is standing off the land, sir, but as soon as she sees our signals you may be sure she will tack. She is about four or five miles away as far as I can judge, and will easily see the smoke.”

The signals had already been prepared—three small heaps of well-dried brushwood covered with some green leaves, the latter being intended to ensure a rather thick smoke. The heaps were a hundred yards or so apart, and had been so arranged by Bolton that the fires could be quickly extinguished when necessary, and even if the three columns of smoke were seen by any one else besides the people on board the *Palmyra*, Bolton assured Hewitt that it was very unlikely any suspicion would be aroused.

“You see, sir, there are a great many blacks on the coast, and old Murchison, cute as he is, and suspicious as he may be of the *Palmyra* hanging about the coast so long, won’t connect our signals with her. He’ll think they are only the usual black fellows’ fires, that can be seen anywhere along the coast early in the morning; and besides that, although Mr. Adair’s escape was no doubt known last night, they won’t look for him this way. He’s put them off on a false scent, as he’ll tell you presently. So let us light up, sir, as quickly as possible. Never fear but that they are keeping a bright look-out on board, as Mr. Lugard told us they would.”

“Very well, Bolton. You light the farthest heap, and I’ll attend to the other two.”

In a few minutes three small columns of thick smoke were ascending from the bluff, and Hewitt and Bolton, standing on the edge of it, anxiously watched the effect. The brig at this time was standing off, close hauled under the usual canvas set by whaleships when cruising for whales in fine weather—fore and main-topsails, top-gallantsails, staysails and jibs. The sea was as smooth as a lake, and as the sun rose higher it quickly changed from purple grey to deepest, brightest blue. From where the two men stood, they could easily discern the starboard bow and quarter boats hanging from the davits, and saw that although the wind was so light, the vessel was slipping through the water at a very fair pace.

“Mr. Lugard told me that the captain says she is a very speedy ship,” began Hewitt, when Bolton gave a loud “Hurrah!” and threw his hat in the air.

“She sees the signal, Mr. Hewitt! See, she is going about. Out with the fires.”

Running back to the fires, they extinguished them as quickly as possible, and when, after ten minutes of hard work, they looked seaward again, they saw the brig was standing in, and more sail was being made.

“That means that Captain Carroll is sending a boat ashore at once, doesn’t it?” asked Bolton.

“Wait a moment, and we’ll see,” replied Hewitt, taking Lugard’s written instruction from his coat pocket; “we must not make any mistake. Ha, here it is, marked ‘No. 7’;” and he read:

“If Captain Carroll sees the three smokes during daylight, he will understand that Mr. Adair has escaped, and is with you. In that case, if the weather allows, and he thinks it advisable not to wait till night time before sending a boat ashore, he will notify you of his intention by lowering a boat and towing it astern for some little time before sending it ashore. If, however, he decides not to send a boat ashore during daylight, no boat will be lowered; but, weather allowing, he will stand in close to the mouth of the creek as soon as it becomes dark. In that case he will look to you to light a small fire on the north side of the entrance.”

“That is clear enough, Bolton, isn’t it? Now we must wait and see what follows.”

“No need to wait,” said Bolton, who was shading his eyes from the bright sunshine with his hand; “I can see a boat being lowered now. Look near the stern, sir.”

The brig came to the wind for a minute or two, and Hewitt saw the boat lowered; then she was veered astern, and the brig's sails again filled.

"She will be abreast of the mouth of the creek in another hour, sir," said the emancipist, as he sat down and began to fill his pipe. "You had better go and tell Mr. Adair to be ready, sir. It will take him half an hour to walk across that long stretch of sand, and he is not strong. I'll wait here, and the moment I see the boat leave I'll give you a call."

But when he reached his camping place, Hewitt found the old man so sound asleep that he did not then disturb him. Bolton's son had carefully covered his face with a soiled pocket-handkerchief, for which Hewitt gave him a smile of approval.

"Good boy, Ted," he said in a whisper, "don't disturb him yet. I'm going away for a few minutes; if he awakens, take him to your father and say I'll be with them in less than a quarter of an hour."

"Right, sir."

Hewitt dived into the scrub till he came to a cattle track, which he followed for about three hundred yards. Then he came to a clump of pandanus trees, one of which was decaying, and had a large hole in the trunk about a foot from the ground. Inserting his hand, he drew out a small canvas bag. It contained two hundred and fifty sovereigns—all that was left of the eight hundred he had formerly possessed—two hundred of which he had taken from the Commissary and seven hundred from the Government schooner—the remaining six hundred he had given to Lugard at their last meeting in Bolton's house. Returning as quickly as possible to the camp, he met the emancipist coming towards him at a run.

"Hurry up, Mr. Hewitt; the boat is half-way ashore."

"Just one moment, Bolton," said the young man, taking his hand; "you have been a good friend to me and I know that whatever you have done for me was done with a right down good will—with a heart and a half, as we say in Ireland. Now I told you I had some coin planted——"

The bushman waved his disengaged hand impatiently. "Let be, sir, let be. I ain't agoin' to take any money from you."

"Indeed you are, Bolton. Man, you must. For the sake of the old woman and kids. D'ye think I'd insult you by asking you to take payment for what you've done for me? No, indeed. No, indeed. 'Tis but a present for the old woman, I say; and when you go back, tell her that I shall never forget her kindness. And say good-bye to all of the youngsters, and tell them how sorry I am I could not come and see them once more."

Then he took fifty sovereigns from the bag, and disregarding the man's sincere protests, opened his shirt and dropped them inside.

"Now not another word from you, Jack Bolton. Come, let us call my uncle.

You must bid us good-bye here, Bolton. It would not be wise for you to come with us to the boat. It may be that some one might be about and see you—and you know what that means.”

“Ten years’ hard on Cockatoo Island,” replied Bolton, with a grim smile, as he strode along beside the young man.

A quarter of an hour later the emancipist and his son, standing on the verge of the bluff, saw the two men walking over the long stretch of white, clinking sand towards the boat, which was pulling in quickly to the beach. She was manned by five men, and the moment she grounded, the officer in charge jumped out, and met John Adair and his nephew with outstretched hand. Five minutes later the boat had pushed off again, and was making for the brig.

The breeze was freshening, and presently the vessel went about and came in towards the boat, which, as soon as it came alongside and the escapees ascended to the deck, was again hoisted up, and the *Palmyra*, with her white cotton canvas shining brightly in the morning sun, stood off to the eastward.

“Welcome on board the *Palmyra*, gentlemen,” said a big, stout man, dressed more like a farmer than a sailor, as Hewitt and his uncle stepped on board; “I thought this thing was never coming off. Now come below, and get a right down good meal and a change of togs, and then we’ll say ‘blow ho’ for Sydney, and the young lady and Captain Jim Luard.”

CHAPTER XV

Cumberland Street, on the west side of Sydney Cove—now called the Circular Quay—was, in the old colonial days, the fashionable street of Sydney, and, where it overlooked Lower George Street, were a number of very handsomely-built and substantial stone mansions, occupied principally by civil and military officials and their families, with a sprinkling of commercial magnates. (At the present time these buildings are ghastly, forlorn eyesores, and the once aristocratic Cumberland Street has become perhaps the most squalid thoroughfare in all Sydney, and the former homes of the military and civilian officials, with their once beautiful gardens and lawns, are now third-rate lodging-houses, with broken windows covered with sheets of rusty tin, bagging, or such other material, or with glassless sashes stuffed with decayed clothing to keep out the wind and rain and discourage bailiffs.)

At a window of one of the most imposing of these houses Helen was sitting with a book in her lap. The day was very bright and warm, and the calm waters of the beautiful harbour lay beneath her, sparkling in the sunshine, its bosom flecked with the white sails of a number of small boats passing to and fro to the various inlets and bays, whilst farther down towards the heads, a noble frigate under every stitch of sail was creeping slowly up to her anchorage in Farm Cove.

The house itself was very quiet, for, with the exception of one or two servants, Helen had been alone since early in the afternoon; Mrs. Grainger, accompanied by her daughters and Mrs. Lathom, having gone out driving, although the latter would have infinitely preferred to have remained at home.

“I must go, Helen,” she had said, “although I really do not feel well.”

“You certainly have not been well for the past week, madam,” said Helen sympathetically; “the weather is very trying, too. I think it would be better if you remained in and rested.”

Mrs. Lathom laughed somewhat hysterically.

“Rested! I wish I could rest, but I cannot. I must be doing something, and I may as well be driving with Mrs. Grainger as sitting at home and meeting people who talk me to death. I wish—Helen!”

“Yes, madam?”

“I wish—oh I wish—I had never left Waringa, much as I loathed the place.”

The words escaped her on the impulse of the moment, but they were uttered with vehemence, and her eyes filled with such sudden tears that Helen placed her hand gently on her mistress’s arm.

“Do not go out, madam. You really are not well enough. Let me get you some tea, and I will tell Mrs. Grainger that you are going to lie down for a few hours.”

“No, don’t. I said I would go, and I would rather go than stay at home. But you are a good girl, Helen, to be so concerned over me. Sometimes I have been very unkind to you.”

“Never intentionally, madam,” was the gentle reply. “Now at least let me get the tea.”

“No, but bring me a glass of wine, and then I must hurry downstairs, as they are awaiting me.”

In a few minutes she had gone, and Helen again took up her book, wondering what it was that was making her beautiful and petulant mistress so restless and unhappy of late. On several occasions when she had entered Mrs. Lathom’s room, she had found her in tears; at other times she would be wildly and apparently happily excited, overflowing with gaiety and youthful spirits; then on the following day it would be more than likely she would be either despondent or irritable. During this time—in fact almost from the day they had arrived in Sydney—her demeanour to Helen had changed greatly for the better, and this had been an added factor to the girl’s secret happiness, and her warm, responsive nature made her quickly forget many long months of almost daily humiliation, which, but for Captain Lathom’s unfailing kindness and consideration for her position, would have been all but unbearable.

“How can she be cold and indifferent to such a man?” Helen had often said to herself. “If I were his wife, and he loved me as he does her, I should be one of the happiest women on earth.”

The afternoon wore on, and as the westering sun cast long shadows across the smooth waters of the cove, the notes of a bugle sounding from the battery on Dawes Point rang clearly through the air, and Helen knew it was six o’clock, and that if she intended to have her usual evening walk before Mrs. Lathom returned, she would have to start at once.

Putting on her sun-hood, she went downstairs, and then out across the lawn into the silent, hot street, which led down towards the verdant slopes of Dawes Point. As she walked along the side of the low, stone wall which divided the street from the military reserve, a rather well-dressed, dark-faced and good-looking man, who was leaning over the wall a few hundred yards away, stood erect and, when she was near enough, raised his hat.

“I am Patrick Montgomery, miss. I come from Captain Lugard.”

“To see me?” asked Helen eagerly.

“Yes, miss. He had no time to write a note, having only arrived in Sydney this morning from Newcastle. Your father and Mr. Hewitt have both safely escaped, and are now on board the *Palmyra*.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed the girl as she walked beside the man so as not to attract too much attention from inquisitive passers-by. “When did Mr. Lugard hear this?”

“Only an hour or two ago. He got word from a sure source that both Mr. Adair and Mr. Hewitt succeeded in getting safely on board at the same time. Then he came and told me to try and see you, and that I should most likely find you somewhere on the Point between six and seven o’clock, and tell you the news. If I could not meet you I was to let him know at once at the Currency Lass Inn, and he would have a note sent to you. But he would prefer to see you this evening. It is most important.”

“I shall not fail him. Where does he wish me to meet him?”

“At the signal-keeper’s quarters on Fort Phillip at a quarter to eight o’clock. The signal-keeper can be trusted, and his wife will meet you at the small gate. Captain Lugard says he will not keep you later than half an hour, and you can walk there in five minutes from Mrs. Grainger’s house by crossing the hill here.”

“I know the way. Tell Captain Lugard that he may depend on me. Is he quite well?”

“Very well indeed, Miss Adair. And he is greatly pleased that all has gone well so far, but he is anxious to get further news of the whereabouts of the *Palmyra*. He fears she has been becalmed. Now I must say good evening, miss. Some of the warders who are off duty may see me talking to you, and prove inquisitive.”

“Good evening,” said Helen, smiling into the man’s face as she held out her hand to him. “I will hurry back home at once, as I must tell Mrs. Lathom that I wish to go out for a little. She is out driving, but will be back in less than half an hour.”

“She may prevent you, miss,” said Montgomery anxiously.

“No, I have no fear of that.”

Returning to the house as quickly as she could walk without attracting too much attention by displaying overhaste, she sat down to rest awhile, and removed her hood so that the soft night air might cool her flushed but happy face.

Soon after seven she heard the sound of voices and laughter ascending from the hall, and knew that Mrs. Lathom had returned, and presently she met her mistress on the stairs.

“Not out yet, Helen,” she said pleasantly.

“I have been out, Mrs. Lathom, for a few minutes, but will be very glad if you will allow me to go out again till half-past eight.”

“Of course you may, child,” was the gracious reply. “I am going for a row on the harbour for an hour or two, and so you need not hurry back. You are not

ever asked for your pass, are you?"

"Never, madam," replied Helen, with a faint smile; "but I have never been out after eight o'clock, except when with you."

"Well, run away, child;" and Mrs. Lathom waved her hand lightly to the girl and went into her own room to change her riding-dress. She was in high spirits, for she had found awaiting her a messenger with a note from Wray, begging her to meet him at eight o'clock.

"The Rutlands and Feildings are making up a party of eight or ten to pull round the war-ships in Farm Cove, and I promised to try and get you and the two Misses Grainger to come. Do say yes. I do so want you to come. I will bring you home."

With her heart beating with joyful expectancy, Helen left the house in ample time to keep her appointment with Lugard. Crossing the street, she soon gained a narrow rocky path which led almost directly to what was called in those days Fort Phillip—a substantial stone edifice named after the first governor of the colony. At the main gate she was unchallenged by the sentry—much to her relief—and the man civilly pointed out to her the signalman's quarters, to which access was gained by a small postern door in the wall. At the gate, which was open, a woman was sitting. She rose as Helen approached, and bade her enter.

"Walk straight in, if you plaze, lady," she said with an unmistakable Irish brogue, "an' I'll close the gate. The captain came but tin minutes before ye."

The door of the little house opened, and Lugard, looking, Helen thought, handsomer than ever, stepped out to her with outstretched hand.

"Come inside, Miss Adair. We shall not be disturbed," he said, as she put her little white cottoned-gloved hand in his—so brown, smooth, and sinewy. "Mrs. Mullane will keep good guard, and Mullane as well. Now sit down. But first take off your hood; the room is none too airy, and it would not be wise for us to stay outside and talk—one of the sentries might notice two strangers, and wonder who were Mullane's visitors."

"Thank you;" and removing her hood, Helen sat down on one of the two chairs in the room. "But before you tell me anything, Mr. Lugard, let me tell you how very, very grateful——"

"Please do not thank me, Miss Adair. But even if it were not my duty, it would be my pleasure to serve you—anywhere, in any way."

His eyes looked so earnestly into hers, that Helen's dropped, for she read in them ardent admiration.

"You are very good to me," she said softly.

"Now I will tell you in detail what Montgomery has told you in brief,"

resumed Lugard; and he then related the manner of her father's and Hewitt's escape, adding that he had himself but heard the news a few hours previously.

"The convicts, as you know, Miss Adair, have an excellent system of communication, and almost as soon as I reached Sydney, that old rascal Lamont told me that he had just heard that your father and cousin succeeded in getting away together from Hewitt's hiding-place at Cattai Creek on board the whaler; furthermore, as far as Lamont knows, the authorities at Port Macquarie did not observe the vessel, or if they did, have not connected her with your father's disappearance. Bolton, the man who assisted us, is not a suspect, and would be certain to do all he could to throw the officials off the scent. However, I can easily ascertain to-morrow what the Sydney authorities know—if they know anything at all."

"But where is the ship now, Captain Lugard?"

"Ah, I wish I could tell you that! But do not be alarmed. The weather for the past week has been much against her making her appearance so far south as Sydney—there has hardly been any wind at all. It is my belief that Captain Carroll, fearing he might be overhauled, availed himself of what wind there was by standing to the eastward, and I shall look forward to be in communication with him at any time after to-morrow. I am having a good look-out kept, and the moment the brig is sighted you shall hear from me. Now tell me, will you, if I send you word, be able to leave Mrs. Grainger's house at any time of the day or night?"

"Yes."

"Good. If I am obliged to send for you in the day-time, you must make your way to old Lamont's place, where you will be safe until such time as we can get away out of Sydney to meet the brig. Montgomery will meet us at a given spot once we are safely out of the town and on our way to the coast. But I will not send for you in the day-time unless the urgency of immediate action is very great; I shall try to manage that you can walk to Lamont's house in the evening. You will have to put on a suit of boy's clothes—it will be better to do that than run unnecessary risks."

"I will do whatever you tell me, Mr. Lugard. Have no fear for me."

"I am sure of that; I know you are a brave young lady," said the American, who then gave her detailed instructions how to find Lamont's house and a secret entrance thereto leading from a back lane.

Then, after some further conversation, Helen rose, and bade the sailor good-night.

"Good-night, dear Miss Adair. Mrs. Mullane will see you safely home. I shall remain here for a while, and then slip away quietly."

CHAPTER XVI

A quarter of an hour after midnight, at the landlord of the "Currency Lass" was seated in his own private parlour counting his day's takings, he was disturbed by the sound of angry voices upstairs, and almost at the same moment a knock sounded on the front door.

"What is the matter upstairs, Joe?" he called to the boots, who was just then descending.

"They're quarrellin' sir—Colonel Macartney an' Mr. Feildin' an Mr. Wray—but Mr. Lugard has quietened 'em down. I heard him tell Mr. Feildin' that if he didn't sit down he'd throw him downstairs."

"Ah, *he's* the right sort of man! Now, open that door quick and see who is there. I hope it ain't any more soldier gents—they're enough to drive one mad with their gambling and barneying."

The boots opened the door, and in an instant became very respectful when he saw who was the visitor.

"Mr. Commissary Rutland, sir," he announced.

The landlord jumped to his feet with alacrity and saluted the great man.

"How are you, Bennett?" said the good-natured Commissary. "Who is upstairs?"

"Mr. Feilding, Colonel Macartney, Mr. Wray, and Mr. Lugard, sir."

"All going it pretty heavily, I suppose, eh, Bennett?"

"They have been playing since ten o'clock, sir," replied the landlord, who then added—knowing that he could speak freely to the Commissary—"and I shall be glad when they stop. Mr. Wray and Mr. Feilding were quarrelling a few minutes ago, and Mr. Lugard had to interfere, or I daresay there would have been a fight, sir. Mr. Wray has taken a little too much, and so has Mr. Feilding, and Mr. Feilding is a very nasty-tempered man when he gets that way. Mr. Lugard threatened to throw him downstairs just now, sir, so the boots was telling me."

The Commissary smiled but said nothing, but the landlord knew that had Lugard carried out his threat he (the Commissary) would not have felt sorry. Nearly every one of Feilding's acquaintances—friends he had none, except the Reverend Joseph Marsbin—disliked the man, although they invited him to their houses and card parties. Moreover, there had grown up a suspicion that he and Colonel Macartney were not altogether straight in the manipulation of cards, and it was believed that the two "worked" together. Rutland had hinted as much as this to Lugard one day, not out of direct animus to the little magistrate, but merely as a friendly warning to the young American, whom he

liked greatly.

“I guessed as much,” Lugard had replied with a nod, “but I’ll keep my weather eye lifting for the gentleman, and if he gets to windward of me, I’ll do one of two things—I’ll either forgive him for his cleverness, or I’ll shake the life out of him.”

The Commissary paused for a moment with his hand on the newel of the staircase, uncertain whether to go upstairs or not. He had come in at that late hour expecting to find some of his military friends there as usual—men with whom he would often remain playing till the small hours of the morning—and he had no wish to meet either Macartney, Wray, or Feilding. However, he quickly decided when the sounds of a fresh altercation reached his ears, and he heard Macartney say in furious tones, “By heavens, sir, I quite agree with Mr. Feilding, and let me tell you that I resent your interference in this matter as much as he does. It is presumptuous.”

“Your resentment will not make me change my opinion,” replied Lugard’s cool, clear voice. “I say that Lieutenant Wray is *not* going to play any more to-night.”

There was a sudden smash of glass, and the Commissary sprang up the stairs, three steps at a time, and pushed open the door, just in time to prevent Macartney and Feilding attacking Lugard with chairs. The American was standing with his back to the fireplace, and Rutland saw that the overmantel behind him was shattered. Wray, whose flushed face showed that he had been drinking too much, was on his feet beside the American, but as he saw Rutland enter, he threw himself unsteadily into a chair, laughed, and said:

“What a devil of a row over nothing. Macartney, you’re an out and out beast. It’s a pothouse trick to throw a decanter at a man.”

Rutland walked over to Lugard and shook hands with him; Feilding and Macartney sat down sullenly and glared viciously at the American.

“How are you, Mr. Lugard? Sorry I’ve intruded.” Then turning round quickly and facing Macartney—“What is wrong, Colonel. You don’t mean to say that you threw a decanter at Wray?”

“I threw it at that fellow there,” replied Macartney, husky with passion and pointing to Lugard, “and very sorry I am that I missed him.”

Rutland looked at him in contemptuous silence; then his glance fell on Feilding, whose ugly features were twitching with ill-concealed passion.

“May I ask what was the cause of the disturbance, Mr. Lugard?” said Rutland suavely.

“Better hear the version of those two”—he paused for a second—“gentlemen there”; and cigar in mouth he nodded nonchalantly towards his opponents.

Feilding sprang to his feet excitedly.

“Mr. Lugard has won four hundred and thirty pounds from me——”

“But I have not yet received the money,” remarked Lugard.

Feilding glared at him like a tiger, went to the writing-table, sat down, and began to write. No one disturbed him by speaking.

In a few minutes he had finished, and coming over to Lugard with a slip of paper in his hand, gave it to him.

“There,” he snarled, “is an order on my bankers for £430. If you’re too anxious to wait till the morning to cash it——”

“Oh, I’m in no hurry, sir,” replied Lugard quietly, who knew that the man’s paper was better than his character; and putting the order in his pocket, he resumed his former careless attitude.

“Well, sir, as I was saying,” began Feilding again, addressing himself to Rutland, who had now seated himself and was looking stolidly before him, although he found it hard to conceal his pleasure at Feilding’s losses, “at I was saying, Mr. Lugard, after winning £430 from me, coolly refuses to play any longer, and urges Mr. Wray to cease playing. I’ve never heard of such a thing. Monstrous! No gentleman——”

“It that so, Mr. Lugard?” inquired the Commissary.

“Yes,” was the laconic reply.

“It’s all very well for you to say ‘yes’ in that lordly style,” growled Macartney, “but why the devil did you prevent Wray playing?”

Lugard straightened himself up, then came forward and seated himself within a yard of Macartney, and then crossing his arms over the back of the chair, said:

“Lieutenant Wray will, I am sure, pardon my saying so”—he turned and gave Wray a friendly nod—“but in my opinion he has a little—just a little—too much liquor aboard to play with *you*, Colonel Macartney. And therefore, as Lieutenant Wray is, in a manner, my host to-night, I thought that the exigencies of the situation called for my friendly interference on his behalf.”

“By heavens, sir,” cried Macartney, furiously striking his clenched hand on the table, “you had better be careful of what you say. I’ll have none of your saucy ambiguity. What do you mean to insinuate?”

“Nothing in particular beyond the fact that Lieutenant Wray has lost—how much, Mr. Wray?”

“Nine hundred,” replied Wray sullenly, but as he spoke he drew his chair nearer to Lugard.

“Has lost nine hundred pounds, Colonel Macartney. And I think he played very badly, and you—exceedingly well.”

There was a dead silence.

“You’ll answer to me for this,” said Macartney hoarsely, as both he and Feilding rose to their feet together.

“I don’t think so, Colonel Macartney. I have no intention of fighting a duel with you, if that is what you mean. Neither will I give you another chance to throw a decanter at me, for I don’t intend to play cards with you again, under any circumstances, and I would advise you”—he turned to the Commissary—“Mr. Rutland, as well as Mr. Wray, to play very carefully with two such gentlemen as Mr. Feilding and Colonel Macartney.”

Rutland looked at the two men. He quite expected to see Macartney make a dash at Lugard, but the American was on his guard; as for Feilding, he was too insignificant physically to be considered. For some seconds no one spoke, then the Commissary said coldly:

“I presume that you know what Mr. Lugard *means*, Colonel Macartney, and you also Mr. Feilding.”

“Do you mean that I’ve been rooked, Lugard?” cried Wray, with sudden fury.

Lugard jumped up from his chair, and eyed both Feilding and Macartney steadily. The ex-soldier was breathing heavily, and his clenched hands, and indeed his whole frame, were trembling with passion; the magistrate who stood beside him looked the personification of fear and hatred combined as he glared at the American, waiting for him to speak. He had not to wait long.

“I mean that neither of these gentlemen play an honest game,” was the slow reply to Wray’s query.

An oath burst from Macartney. “By God, sir, I’ll *make* you fight for this. If I can’t make you fight, I’ll send my nigger servant to thrash you in the street.”

Lugard disdained to reply, and turning his back on both Macartney and Feilding, went up to Rutland and offered him a cigar, just as the Commissary gave them a cold “good evening.” In another minute the front door was opened for them, and their footsteps were heard as they descended to the street. Then both Rutland and Wray, by a common impulse, grasped Lugard’s hand, and the latter thanked him fervently.

“And I, too, thank you,” said the Commissary. “I always suspected Macartney of cheating, and of course, after what has happened to-night, I am at liberty to tell my friends that my suspicions are now practically confirmed.”

“I am glad to be of service to you,” said Lugard. Then he added with a laugh, as he rang the bell for the landlord, “and I am especially glad that I won that £430 from that little greeny-eyed ruffian. I want £200 of it for an especial purpose—to repay money borrowed by a friend of mine from another man whom I have found to be a very good fellow.”

Then, after a little further conversation, Lugard said good-night, and left the commissary and Wray together.

CHAPTER XVII

Under a blue sky, studded with myriad stars, Lugard walked leisurely home to his hotel, which was situated less than half a mile away from the "Currency Lass." He was, despite the anxiety he was feeling concerning the whereabouts of the *Palmyra*, in a bright mood, the primary cause of which he believed to be his luck at cards a few hours before, though in reality it was Helen herself. Since his first meeting with her at Waringa she had been constantly in his thoughts; try how he would not to think of her, she was ever before him, and her soft, sweet voice seemed to be still murmuring the words, "Ah, you have made me so very, very happy," as she had raised her dark, tear-filled eyes to his when they had stood together under the canopied gum-trees by the shining waters of Waringa Creek.

"Well, I'm glad I've won that money from that measly-faced little hound of a Feilding," he said to himself as he sauntered along the silent street; "I'm glad for her sake, as I know the dear little soul has wept many a bitter tear over that matter of her cousin Hewitt and the Commissary. However, I'll cash the order to-morrow and give her two hundred sovereigns to send to Rutland, or else send it myself to him before we skip out of this cursed convict hole. And Rutland himself is a good fellow;" then he laughed, for he could not disguise from himself the fact that it was not because Rutland was a good fellow nor yet because he (Lugard) really had a strong liking for Vincent Hewitt that made him wish to return the money to the Commissary, but because he was longing to see Helen's eyes lifted to his once more and hear the sweet melody of her voice as she would put her hand in his again. Then he suddenly quickened his footsteps, and, turning off from Macquarie Street, walked half-way down the grassy hill overlooking Farm Cove, and, careless of the heavy dew, threw himself upon the ground and began to smoke. It wanted another hour to daylight, but he was now in no mood to go to his hotel and turn in till breakfast-time. Already the mist which had lain upon the quiet waters of the harbour was beginning to thin and lift before a light air from the eastward blowing through the Heads, and he was well content to idle away an hour or two and wait the rising of the sun and the glorious panorama it would reveal.

"What a great blockhead I am to keep thinking of her!" he said, falling into his old habit of talking to himself. "Hewitt has first claim on her, and I suppose she must be in love with him, else why did she defend him so fiercely against that bloated old hog of a parson? . . . I wish I knew. . . . Hewitt's a fine fellow, and they've known each other since childhood. . . . There's no mistake about *him*, anyway. Yet, perhaps, after all, it's only a cousinly feeling on her part,

and if so I'm not going to throw away my chance, whatever it may be, good or bad. I'll soon find out how the land lays once we are safe on board the *Palmyra*, . . . and all is fair in love and war, especially when you're in love with one of the sweetest little women in the world like Helen Adair. . . . But no dirty tricks, Jim Lugard, do you hear?—no trying to creep to windward and take the wind out of the other fellow's sails, especially if she cares for him at all. Play a fair game and no piracy, my boy."

Slowly the mist cleared and revealed the harbour bit by bit from the steep-to cliffs of rugged Middle Head, whose base was foam-washed by the long sweeping roll of the Pacific as it swept in through the Heads, to the white beaches of Sirius Cove and Neutral Bay, nestling at the feet of the fair, forest-clad, and sloping hills, and further westward, to the grassy summit of Goat Island and the broad curve of the swiftly-flowing Parramatta.

Presently Lugard sat up and looked at the shipping lying in Farm Cove and about Pinchgut and Neutral Bay. Nearest to him was the *Marlborough*, frigate, her lofty spars towering high over those of a squat little brigantine lying close alongside; further away and just off the point now named Lady Macquarie's Chair was a fat, motherly-looking old barque, painted yellow, with bulging quarter galleries and full, bluff bows—the true Dutch East Indiaman. She was the *Leeuwarden*—the ship in which Lugard had come to Sydney; and as he looked at her he was reminded of a promise he had made to Captain Jan Schouten to pay him a visit on board one day. "Why not to-day?" he thought. The genial old Dutch skipper was, he knew, a very early riser when in port and was accustomed to take his cup of black Java coffee, mixed with a strong dose of Schiedam as soon as he came on deck. And, as if in response to his thoughts, the stout figure of Captain Schouten at that moment appeared on the poop-deck of the barque, and Lugard jumped to his feet and gave a loud hail. But he was evidently too far off to be heard, for neither the captain nor any of the few hands on deck took any notice—the former continued to pace to and fro on the poop and the latter to go about their duties on the main deck.

Descending the hill till he came to the water's edge, Lugard again hailed, and this time was both heard and recognised by the Dutch captain, and in a few minutes a small scow which was lying alongside put off and he was sculled on board.

Schouten welcomed the American most heartily, and at once made him promise to remain for breakfast.

"Look you, mine friendt Lugardt," said he as his negro steward brought them coffee and Schiedam, "I vas zick to det of tis badt convict place. Dere is nodings to see but zoldiers mit dere ret goats and poor hongry brisoners. Gif me Patavia. Allemachte! Patavia is a fine place—goot company, goot food and trink, and"—he winked his fat eye—"blendy of dose breddy little prawn

Javanese fraus.”

Lugard laughed. “You’re right about Sydney, captain. It is a dull place, as you say, and I shall be glad when I see the last of it. When do you sail, captain?”

“I am ready to lift mine anchor dis morning, but I have me some pizness to do mit dot oldt Shew man, Lamont. He bromise me he vas come aboard dis morning and settle dings up.”

“Oh, well, he’ll turn up sure enough,” said Lugard, who knew that the ship-chandler and Captain Jan Schouten were old acquaintances and had done many a profitable bit of business in defrauding the revenues of the colony; “and, talk of the devil, here he comes round the point.”

It was indeed Mr. Morgan Lamont who was coming off to the good ship *Leeuwarden*, pulled by two of his own employés. He scrambled up the side-ladder with remarkable agility for a man of his years, and a few seconds later stood on the poop and shook hands with Schouten and the American.

“I am surprised, but very glad to see you here, Captain Lugard,” he said politely. “I have a letter for you which I received last night, and I intended sending it to you by one of my men after breakfast. Here it is.”

“Thank you,” said Lugard, who at once walked to the other side of the poop, leaving the Dutchman and the Jew together.

The letter was from the emancipist Bolton, at Port Macquarie, and had been forwarded to Sydney through the usual mysterious convict agencies. Lugard read:

“Number 17412” (Helen’s father) “was not missed for nearly three hours. Two parties were at once sent out in search of him, and in the morning one of them came to my place. I told them that I felt pretty sure that he had made off inland up along the left bank of the Hastings River towards Rolland’s Plains. This party consisted of a sergeant, three privates, a constable, and a black tracker named Kooyal. I gave Kooyal a pound of tobacco on the quiet, and told him what to do, and he led them the devil’s own chase into the bush for two days. The other party went along the beach towards Point Plomer and Smoky Cape, and of course returned without seeing a single track.

“Then came a ticklish time. At nine o’clock in the morning the *Palmyra* was sighted off Camden Haven by a party of timber-cutters working under an overseer named Duke, who, knowing of Mr. Adair’s escape, at once rode into town and told the commandant that it was not unlikely that No. 17412 had managed to get on board the whaler. Of course Duke was looking forward to getting a share of the

£50 reward, and urged the commandant to send the Government cutter out to search the brig. Murchison soon got his orders and put to sea, but had his trouble for nothing, for when he was abreast of Cattai Creek, he met the *Palmyra*, sailing leisurely along under cruising canvas back towards Port Macquarie. Carroll brought to, and then came aboard the cutter in one of his whaleboats, and asked Murchison if he thought that he (Carroll) could buy a bullock cheaply at the port, also how much water was there in the bar, &c., &c., as he thought of taking the brig in and giving his crew a few days' liberty. Murchison answered his questions, and then bluntly told him that the cutter had been sent out to search his ship—a convict had escaped, and it was thought that he might have got on board the *Palmyra*. Carroll laughed, and asked Murchison to come aboard and make a thorough search and drink some good Bourbon whisky. But quite satisfied that Mr. Adair was not on board the whaler, Murchison declined, and Carroll went back to the brig, which then kept company with the cutter till they were off the bar. Carroll then went ashore and bought and killed a bullock, remained an hour in the town, and then went off, and soon after the brig stood out to sea again. No attempt was made to board and search the brig, while she was lying off and on outside the bar, for when Murchison made his report to the new commandant, who is Captain Lathom, he was told not to subject the American captain to any further annoyance, as the Governor was most anxious to encourage the visits of American ships to the colony.

“I cannot make out what brought the brig back here again, unless it was that she could make no headway south against light winds and a strong current; and perhaps when Captain Carroll sighted the cutter he thought best to put a bold face on it.”

Lugard put the letter in his pocket, and then sat down and waited till Lamont and the Dutchman had concluded their business.

CHAPTER XVIII

The ship-chandler's business with the skipper of the *Leeuwarden* was concluded almost as soon as Lugard had finished reading Bolton's letter, and then Lamont, declining the captain's invitation to remain to breakfast, hurried on shore again, after a few brief words with the American concerning their own business.

"You may rely on me coming or sending to you the moment I hear any fresh news, Captain Lugard," he said as he went over the side into his boat. "If she makes the land anywhere between Sydney and Port Stephens we'll get the news within twenty-four hours. But I think with you that Captain Carroll will run past Sydney and make for Botany Bay or Port Hacking."

"I hope he does," said the American. "As you say, it will be so much easier for my friends and myself to get aboard at Botany or Port Hacking, where we are not so likely to be observed, than trying to get through the Heads at night-time in a boat."

When Lugard returned to the poop to rejoin the captain he found him giving orders to the mate to call the hands to lift anchor and loose sails.

"Why, are you off to sea this morning?" inquired the American.

"Nod at all, my friendt," said Schouten; "I am only going to shange my berth before I do go to sea, vich vill pe zoom time to-morrow, I expectd. I am daking der ship over to de odder side of the harbour, vere ve can be nice und quiet;" here he winked mysteriously, slapped Lugard on the shoulder and asked him to come below.

"I shall make me some moneys oud of this trip," he said, with his fat, husky laugh, as he motioned Lugard to a seat at the cabin table, and then as he knew he could confide in his former passenger, he told him that Lamont's visit to the *Leeuwarden* at that early hour concerned two passengers, a lady and gentleman, who for reasons of their own desired to come on board the barque as privately as possible, and therefore he (Schouten), at Lamont's request, was moving the ship over to Sirius Cove, at which place the passengers could come on board unobserved. Most likely, he said, they would be on board that night; and then, lifting the hatch of the lazarette, under the cabin table, he showed Lugard a cunningly contrived hiding-place.

Lugard shook his head, and remarked that two persons could not long remain in such a close, unventilated place.

The Dutchman laughed, and said he was well aware of that, but that they would only be there for half an hour or so, whilst the ship was being searched in the usual manner for absconding convicts. And, he added, Lamont would

take care that the search was a very perfunctory one—a few guineas given to the head constable (himself an ex-convict and a customer of the Jew) would be all that was required.

“Und den, you see, mine friendt Lugart,” said the skipper as he closed the hatch, “vonce ve are outside der Heads, dese two durdle doves can be as happy as ter day is long;” and he threw open the door of a stateroom. Lugard looked in and saw that the cabin had not only been newly done up but was furnished in a most elegant style.

“Who are they, Schouten?” he inquired, with a certain amount of interest.

“Mynheer Thompson und Frau Thompson—dot is all I know,” replied the Dutchman, with another wink of his fat eye, “but I should think dot der old Shew man knows more than I vas know.”

“I guess he does,” said Lugard, with a laugh. “Well, I wish you and your passengers, whoever they are, a pleasant and speedy voyage to Valparaiso. No, please don’t ask me to stay to breakfast. I’ll go ashore now, before you get under weigh. Like yourself and Lamont I have some particular business to which I must attend. So good-bye, Schouten, and good luck to you and to the *Leeuwarden*.”

He shook the hand of the good-natured old Dutch skipper warmly, and in a few minutes was on shore again and on his way to his hotel.

“Any letters for me?” he asked of the waiter as he sat down to his breakfast.

“No, sir; none this morning. Was you expecting any, sir, anywhere from the northward—Port Hunter” (Newcastle) “way, sir?”

Lugard, ever on the alert, looked up with raised eyebrows. “No,” he said carelessly as he broke an egg, “not from Newcastle more than from any other place. I have no acquaintances up that way that I know of who would be likely to write to me.”

“That’s fortunate, sir, because if you had, and they wrote to you, you wouldn’t get any letters for a long time—there’s fearful floods in the Hunter River district, and quite a lot of people have been swept away and drowned. I hear that it is likely there may be no communication between Sydney and the settlements to the north of the Hunter for another fortnight, as the rivers are still rising all through the district.”

Lugard nodded and went on with his breakfast. The news had no interest for him, especially at that moment, when his mind was bent upon the one thing—the whereabouts of the *Palmyra*. Yet although he could not dream of such a contingency as the rising of a river interfering with the course of events in which he was so deeply concerned, it had in reality much to do with his future.

For at that very moment, as he sat calmly eating his breakfast, with the bright morning sun flooding the room, honest George Haldane, a hundred

miles away, was striding to and fro under the soddened foliage of the gum-trees lining the bank of a tributary of the Hunter and cursing his own luck in particular and the ways of the universe in general.

“Four days—a week perhaps—before we can swim this cursed creek, you say, Hawley,” he said to his ex-soldier servant; “hang it, man, what makes you such a dismal prophet of evil? Man alive, we—or at least I—*must* get across this creek to-day or to-morrow.”

“I’m quite willing to try, sir; but Boora here”—and he pointed to a black fellow who was squatted on the sodden ground near them smoking his pipe in stolid content—“says that we’ll be drowned if we do try. And Boora is reckoned to be pretty reliable, sir.”

Haldane swore, then sighed to himself. Much as he disliked Mrs. Lathom, he would willingly have risked his life over and over again to save her from the open disgrace and shame which he was sure would result all too soon unless he could get to Sydney and rescue her from her fatal infatuation from Wray.

“Heavens above!” the doctor cried to himself as he stamped up and down the muddied bank and watched the surging, roaring yellow flood tearing past him on its way to swell the still mightier volume of the Hunter, “to think any woman could be such a hideous, glaring fool! Lathom, as fine a fellow as ever wore the King’s uniform, high on the road to advancement, good-looking, and a long way better educated than ninety out of every hundred soldier men one meets nowadays, and loving her, shallow fool as she is, better than his life! What in God’s name could she see in a man like Wray—a man whose dissolute life was common talk—is common talk now in Sydney, as she and every other woman in the colony knows? Heaven preserve me from making a fool of myself by marrying any woman under the sun! Ten chances to one that I would meet with poor Lathom’s luck. Poor Fred! Thank God he doesn’t know I’m stuck up here on the bank of this infernal creek instead of being in Sydney. Lord! how I should like to have Mr. Maurice Wray in front of me at twelve paces, or better still, take it out of him with a good green-hide horsewhip. Perhaps, however, *he* is careful if she is not, and people may not be talking as much as I imagine. Then there is that girl Helen Cronin with her. . . . I’ll stake my life that *that* girl can neither be corrupted nor bribed. I know she is devoted to Lathom, and has strength of will and character enough, I believe, to make her mistress feel very uncomfortable if she noticed any wrong between her and Wray;” and then once more he sighed, “Poor Fred,” and stared gloomily at the wild rush of seething waters, chafing out his true, honest soul at this unforeseen obstacle to the journey upon which he had set out in such haste, for his affection for Lathom was that of a brother.

A few days before, ere Lathom had been given the letter which had

wrecked his happiness, the rough, burly surgeon would have rejoiced at the torrential downpour which, while bringing devastation and ruin to the settlers near the coast, meant a good season and prosperity to the people of Waringa and its vicinity, who for long months past had anxiously awaited the breaking up of the drought. Haldane himself was one of the largest stockholders in the district, and the sudden rains meant much to him financially, but he would have been well content to see every beast on his run perish of starvation and thirst if he could have got to Sydney before the rivers came down.

“Boora,” he cried in desperation to their sooty-skinned guide, “how long would it take us to follow the creek up to the head?”

The black fellow shook his head. It could not be done under a week he said; dense scrub, impenetrable even to cattle, lay between them and the head waters of the swollen creek; and to make a *détour* was impossible, as all the open country on both sides of them was under water, and would remain so until the creek began to fall. There was nothing for them to do but to wait. And having expressed his views, which Haldane knew were only too correct, Boora re-lit his pipe and went to search for some dry firewood for the coming night.

CHAPTER XIX

Whilst Lugard was placidly eating his breakfast in his hotel, and Captain Jan Schouten was sailing the lumbering old *Leeuwarden* over to Sirius Cove, the Reverend Joseph Marsbin was entertaining a visitor in the person of Mr. Feilding, who, knowing that the clergyman was a very early riser, had called before eight o'clock. He found the portly gentleman seated in a summer arbour in the garden, awaiting the breakfast-bell.

"I am rejoiced to see you, my dear sir," said Marsbin in his thick, ponderous tones as he extended his fat hand to the foxy little magistrate, who bent over it as if it were the hand of the king himself; "it is, as you know, my custom to arise at six, and after spending an hour in walking over the grounds and seeing the results of the previous day's labour of my assigned servants in the various fields, to retire to the seclusion of this rustic shed for rest and meditation till the morning meal is announced. It is now within five minutes of eight of the clock, and it will afford me great pleasure, my dear sir, if you will partake of that meal with me. Hum, ha!"

"With pleasure, reverend and dear sir," said the magistrate, with a servile smile, as he rubbed his hands together and again bowed to the long-winded parson. "I shall be delighted, especially as I have called to see you on a matter of importance—that is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it is a matter of importance. But in your opinion it may not be so, in which case you will pardon my trespassing upon your valuable time and soliciting your esteemed advice."

The reverend gentleman swallowed the oily flattery of the little man with a pleased but dignified inclination of the head, and then rising and placing his arm in Feilding's, the two left the summer arbour just as the breakfast-bell rang, and entered the dining-room, a spacious, well-furnished apartment, carefully shaded from the hot Australian sun by French blinds which covered all the lights.

After the usual lengthy grace which was common in those days, the two convict servants—a man and a woman who were in attendance—were dismissed by their master, and the two gentlemen gave their attention to their breakfast without further allusion to the object of Feilding's visit. But Feilding knew that eating was an important matter with the Reverend Joseph, whose reputation as a good trencherman was widely established in the colony of New South Wales, and that it would be a fatal mistake for him to broach the subject of his visit till the minister had amply satisfied his carnal yearnings. Blunt Dr. Haldane had once grimly remarked to the Governor, after witnessing the

cleric's performances at His Excellency's dinner-table, "Gad, sir, I believe the fat parson enjoys a good dinner as much as he does sitting on the Bench and giving some poor devil a hundred for 'contumacy and insubordination';" and the genial, kindly-hearted Governor, who had no cause to love the Reverend Joseph, at first laughed, then sighed and whispered back that they must hope for the best—perhaps the worthy gentleman might be given a bishopric at home.

"I doubt if the man would accept it, sir," growled the doctor. "He would find the intonation of psalms and hymns deadly dull after the merry swish of the 'cat' to which he has been so long habituated, and to which he has sent so many of those whom he calls 'the unregenerate and hardened.'"

However, breakfast was finished at last, and with a sigh of satisfaction Mr. Marsbin leant back in his chair for a moment, then bent his head and returned thanks.

"Now, my dear sir," he said, with beaming ponderousness to Feilding, "pray tell me in what way I can be of service to you."

"Oh, sir, I do not seek to secure any advantage or favour for myself at your esteemed hands," replied Feilding, in his harsh, rasping voice, which sounded like a file playing on the teeth of a rip-saw; "I merely came to confide to you—before all else—knowing your deep interest in the colony and its welfare, my suspicions of the *bona-fides* of that person Lugard."

The clergyman became interested at once. "I must confess that I am not altogether satisfied in my mind with regard to Mr. Lugard. The Governor, however"—here he smiled sourly and turned down the corners of his lips—"seems to consider him as a trustworthy and reliable person, inasmuch as His Excellency has honoured him by repeated invitations to Government House. Hum, ha!"

"His Excellency is a most unsuspecting man, sir."

"Ha, indeed! Not only unsuspecting, but unthinking and wanting in that matured and calm judgment which is so essential a requirement for such a high and responsible position as that of a Governor of one of His Majesty's colonies." His fat, heavy features darkened with sudden anger. "I may as well tell you now, sir, in regard to your application for the position of superintendent at Port Macquarie, which I strongly recommended as certain to be agreeable to the home authorities, His Excellency was so good as to inform me that he considered you to be 'a most unsuitable man.' I was deeply hurt at his manner, and still more astonished at his appointment of Captain Lathom—a most worthy man in many respects, but whose ill-judged leniency to the convicts committed to his charge has been, and is still, most notorious. Hum, ha!"

"Most notorious, sir," chimed in Feilding, his small shifty eyes glittering

with spite, for he hated Lathom as much as he hated the Governor, whose scorn and contempt for himself had been expressed unofficially more than once; “most notorious. Still I bear Captain Lathom no ill-will for his good-fortune——”

“Certainly not, my dear sir. I am sure you are above any such petty feeling of animosity,” said the clergyman, who had now recovered his equanimity; “and you need have no fear of the final result. *My* strong recommendation of you, which is now well on its way to the Home Office, will receive the attention it merits, despite His Excellency’s rashness in thrusting Captain Lathom into the position. But we are straying from the subject; this American _____”

“You are no doubt aware, sir, that the *alleged* object of his mission to the colony was to discover if any of the descendants of a convict named Ascott, who came to the colony with the First Fleet, were in existence. Now, he has had ample time to make inquiries; in fact, I know that he told Rutland that after his visit to Port Macquarie he was satisfied that there were no descendants, male or female, of the convict Ascott alive—or at least alive in this colony.”

“Hum—ha! Proceed, sir.”

“Now, sir, it is my belief that this man is here for some illegal purpose; possibly he is the emissary of some foreign government sent out to ascertain the condition of the colony’s defences; or, again, he may be in collusion with that detestable gang of villains in England who have already succeeded in effecting the escape of several Irish rebels from Van Dieman’s Land.”

The clergyman’s heavy face darkened again. “Ha! he must be watched, Feilding; he must be watched. Yet, as he is, in a measure, under the Governor’s wing, we must proceed with caution.”

“Undoubtedly, sir,” said Feilding, with an evil smile, for he knew that Marsbin and the Governor were on bad terms, though the former was careful to conceal his antagonism to the latter as much as possible from the military and civilian officials of the colony; and that he (Marsbin), though not capable of descending to direct misrepresentation of facts, would be sincerely pleased to see the Governor either suspended or recalled.

“With caution—great caution,” continued the clergyman. “Neither you nor myself must place ourselves in a false position.”

“I understand, sir. I shall be most cautious. Fortunately my position as a magistrate and Inspector of Prisons gives me certain powers which will enable me, if necessary, to act without consulting his Excellency. I can have this man arrested on suspicion of being a dangerous person—with the concurrence of another magistrate.”

“You may rely upon my aid, sir; but I rely upon your judgment and discretion to make no mistakes. It is a serious matter to arrest a subject of

another nation.”

Feilding put his hand in his pocket and drew out a sheet of paper, which he handed to Marsbin.

“Last night, sir, I was in the company of this Mr. Lugard, together with my friend Colonel Macartney, and Lieutenant Wray. It is, as you see, the beginning of a letter, which for some reason he did not finish, and placed in his pocket, most probably. In removing his coat—the evening was very warm when we sat down to play—it must have fallen out. I took the liberty of picking it up unobserved and putting it in my pocket, for”—his eyes sparkled malevolently—“I have always been suspicious of this Mr. Lugard, if Lugard is his name.”

It was indeed the beginning of a letter which Lugard intended to despatch to Helen that evening, but just as he had begun to write Wray had come in. There were, fortunately, but a few lines:

“MY DEAR MISS ADAIR,—Pray be prepared now at any moment. There is every indication of this long spell of calm weather breaking up, and the ship should——”

“Ha!” and the clergyman bent his brows. “Adair, Adair—*Miss Adair!* Do you know of any such woman?”

“No, sir—not even among the convicts; but there is a John Adair, an Irish rebel, under penal servitude at Port Macquarie.”

“Ha! so there is! A pestilent traitor! I remember the name now. You have good grounds for your suspicions, my dear sir. Have this man Lugard well watched. It is quite likely he is a dangerous person. But be careful not to alarm him.”

A few minutes later Feilding took his leave, well satisfied with his morning’s work, and thirsting for revenge.

CHAPTER XX

Towards noon of that day the heat became so intense and stifling in the sun-baked streets of the town itself that even Lugard, accustomed as he was to torrid climes, eagerly sought the shady side of the road, as he took his way towards the "Governor Phillip," an hotel, or rather inn, much frequented by the masters of ships, British and foreign, which visited Port Jackson. Here it was his practice to remain for half an hour or so every day, ostensibly for the purpose of reading the English newspapers (from six to eight months old) and such other literature as was disposed about the coffee-room table, but in reality to listen to the shipping news of the port as discussed by the ship-masters who frequented the place.

"Good morning, sir," said a dark-faced, black-whiskered merchant skipper named Graves, as he entered the bar. "How do you like this kind of weather?"

"Not much, I can assure you, captain," replied the American, as he sat down. "I reckon I'm pretty tough, but this is as bad as Calcutta or Rangoon or any such devil's hole, and I'll be glad when it begins to cool off a bit."

"That won't be very long. We're going to have a nice stiff south-easter before another hour. Hallo, Melville!" and Graves shook hands with a newcomer, whom he introduced to Lugard as Captain Melville of the transport *Troubridge*, which had just arrived from Van Dieman's Land, where she had landed her cargo of convicts.

"Did you see any ships coming up along the coast?" asked Graves, and Lugard listened eagerly for his answer.

"Yes, I saw the *Julia*, transport, off Cape Howe, and this morning at daylight a small four-boat whaling brig passed us within hailing distance. She seemed to be heading Botany Bay way."

"Ah! that's the *Palmyra*. She's been cruising up and down the coast for a good many months, and has been in here a couple of times to refresh. I daresay the skipper is trying Botany or Port Hacking for a change. He was telling me that Port Jackson was a bit too expensive for him to come into oftener than he could help."

Lugard had heard quite enough, and in a few minutes he bade Graves and his friends good morning, and set off towards Lamont's store in Queen Charlotte Place, feeling almost sure that the Jew would have some news for him.

As he walked along the hot, dusty street the change of the weather, which had been predicted by Graves, came about. Heavy masses of dull, black clouds were quickly gathering towards the southward and eastward, and before he

reached the ship-chandler's yard the first drops of rain began to fall, and in a few minutes a steady downpour set in.

He took off his wide Panama hat and let the sweet, refreshing rain beat down upon his black, wavy hair as he walked unconcernedly on.

"Ah! here comes the wind, too—thank Heaven for that! Carroll, in the *Palmyra* must be at anchor by this time, and I should hear from him in a few hours. I wonder what my sweet little Helen is doing now." He laughed aloud. "My sweet Helen! No, Jim Lugard; sweet she is, but not for you, my boy, so don't be a fool and dream of impossible things."

Mrs. Lamont, standing at the side entrance door to her husband's establishment, smiled in open astonishment as the handsome young captain came leisurely towards her through the pelting rain.

"Vy, Captain Lugard, you must be vet through. Oh, dear me; you must let me send some one to your hotel for a change."

"Not at all, not at all, Mrs. Lamont. I assure you I enjoy it. And I'm not quite so wet as you imagine. Is Mr. Lamont in?"

"Yes, captain, but he is engaged just now. Please come into the sitting-room and I'll tell him you are here. He won't keep you waiting for more than a few minutes, I am sure."

Lugard entered the sitting-room and took a seat by the window, and after waiting about five minutes he heard the Jew's voice; he was speaking in rather low tones, but still Lugard heard all that he said very distinctly.

"Certainly, at whatever time you like. My boat will be anchored off the Battery at nine o'clock to-night, and the two men in her will wait there till you and the lady come. You need not hail them—they will be on the look-out for you. The sentries will take no notice of a boat lying off the Battery with two men in her, fishing. And you'll be on board the *Leeuwarden* in a little over an hour from the time you start. I saw Captain Schouten this morning; everything, you will find, has been done satisfactorily, and you will see that all your own luggage is there before you. The captain told me that he will sail as soon as possible after the search-boat has left the ship for the shore—in fact, the moment the boat leaves you will be able to go into your cabin with safety. But on no account must you or the lady go on deck until the ship is well clear of the Heads; for not only would you be seen by the people of the other ships you will pass, but the look-out on South Head would be sure to observe you, and he might perhaps, cause trouble. He, and all the other signal-service men know that there was no female on board the *Leeuwarden* when she arrived here from Batavia, and seeing one when she was leaving, it is more than likely they would signal to the guard-boat to stop the barque and make inquiries."

"I understand, Lamont. I shall be very careful. Now, good-bye."

Lugard, generally so collected, gave a start of astonishment as he

recognised Wray's voice, and stepping softly away from the window near which he had been sitting, he saw the young officer pass out into the street and walk quickly away.

"So it is my gallant young soldier friend who is one of Captain Jan Schouten's passengers! I wonder who is the lady," he thought, as he tried to remember the names of several women—reputable and otherwise—whom he had heard coupled with Wray's.

Lamont entered the room and put an end to his brief musings.

"Any letter, Lamont?"

"Not yet, sir. But my clerk tells me that the *Troubridge* has just arrived and reports having seen the *Palmyra* heading towards Botany; so it is extremely likely we shall get a letter from Carroll in the course of a few hours."

"Quite so. I shall send word to Miss Adair at once to be in readiness to come to you here at any time to-day or to-night which you may think advisable. You, of course, will communicate with Montgomery. Are you quite sure he will find the spot where he is to meet us?"

"Quite sure—even if it is dark he cannot miss you. You and Miss Adair must ride, and the man I am sending with you will take a spare horse for Montgomery, as maybe you have to go on for three or four miles beyond the spot where you will meet him. But that will depend upon what Carroll says in his letter. Anyway the guide can be trusted to make no mistake; he knows every foot of the coast both at Botany Bay and Port Hacking, and I'm pretty certain that you will find the boat from the *Palmyra* awaiting you at what is called 'Captain Cook's Landing Place.'"

Lugard then inquired if he and his party would run any risk of being observed and waylaid by any of the patrols of soldiers or constables, but the ship-chandler assured him that such an event was most unlikely to occur.

"You see," he said, in explanation, "all that part of the country is either covered with tea-tree scrub or consists of a series of water-holes or swamps. Although it is frequented in the daytime by men who go there to shoot kangaroos and ducks, no one lives there, on account of the swarms of mosquitoes which infest the place. It is only within the confines of, or near the town that you will run risks; if you see a patrol coming you must use every endeavour to avoid it; if you are challenged, all you can do is to ride as hard as you can and get into the scrub. My man will not fail you, but you must stick to him closely. And, in conclusion, remember this—that although you may not meet a mounted patrol, both constables and soldiers, when on foot, only challenge a mounted man once, and then fire immediately if he does not halt."

Lugard nodded, and then, after a little further conversation with the ship-chandler concerning the final payment he (Lamont) was to receive, he took up a pen and wrote a few lines to Helen, telling her on no account to leave the

house, as the *Palmyra* was very near and that he might have to send for her to come to Lamont's house that afternoon, though he hoped he should not have to do so till darkness set in. He closed and sealed the note and gave it to Lamont, who called in his own female servant and told her to hand it to Helen herself.

"Ask to see Mrs. Lathom's maid—Helen Cronin—and tell her that there is no answer."

Bidding the Jew good morning for the present, the American went to Feilding's bankers and cashed that gentleman's note for £430, taking the payment in gold and notes. The latter, which amounted to £200 he carefully enclosed in an envelope and with it a sheet of paper on which he wrote:

"With Vincent Hewitt's compliments."

Then he addressed it to Mr. Commissary Rutland, put it into his pocket and walked out of the bank, smiling to himself, for he intended, all going well, to forward it to the worthy official before Helen and himself left Sydney for ever, and he was picturing to himself Rutland's look of astonishment when he opened the letter and saw the contents.

"And it will please Hewitt, too," he said aloud, as he swung along to his hotel.

But it was of Helen of whom he was thinking most.

CHAPTER XXI

At four o'clock that afternoon Mrs. Lathom was seated in her bedroom in the Graingers' house, looking intently at a letter which lay outspread upon her lap, and thinking of the step she would be taking in a few hours.

"If anything should go wrong"—she shuddered at the thought—"I should die of fright. Oh, how I wish it were over! Five hours to wait—or, at least four and a half before I can leave here. Oh, heavens! if any of the Grainger girls should waylay me before I can get out!"

She looked at the note again and read:

"Come at nine, or as soon after nine as possible. Don't put your bonnet on when you come downstairs, for fear Mrs. G. or the girls might see you as you pass the drawing-room. They would be sure to ask you where you were going and offer to come with you. But throw a light shawl over that sweet little head, as the night air is sure to be chilly. Then, once you reach the verandah, go down the steps at the north end and into the lower garden at the back of the house. No one is likely to see you, as the trees are so thick, and, even if they did, they would only think you were walking about enjoying the cool night air. The gate leading out through the end of the garden is, as you know, never locked until eleven. Unlatch it and then walk to the end of the terrace, where you will find me awaiting you. Of course something may prevent my darling from leaving until very late, but do try, dearest, for your own sweet sake, to get away as soon as you can after nine. Fortunately Mrs. G.'s butler seldom locks the house up before 11.30—and ah, dearest, I so long for you!"

A smile lit up her fair, sweet face as she pressed the letter to her false lips—the smile of a woman conscious of her beauty and her power of intrigue. For weeks past her life had been one continual lie; and that first yielding to Wray, which long months ago had cost her a morning's tears, she now looked back upon with complacency, and Wray was a past-master in the art of teaching her deception. Of her husband she now never thought, except when, at her lover's instigation, she wrote to him once a week in terms of affection, telling him all the local gossip and of how she had spent her days.

"Nothing like being a dutiful little wife, Ida," Wray had said to her one day when she petulantly refused to write the usual letter to Waringa; "of course, darling, I know it is hard," and he pressed his lips to hers. "I am not jesting

now. But it is best for us both, dearest, to keep it up. It may save us a lot of trouble. Look what the difficulties would be for us if he did take it into his head to apply for leave and come down to Sydney? No, Ida, we have been very careful, and must continue to be careful to the very last. And it would be an excellent idea to leave the letter you are writing to-day somewhere in the drawing-room where Mrs. Grainger can see it. She could no more resist reading it than she can help breathing. And always say something about me—‘Mr. Wray called to-day’; or ‘Mr. Wray and Captain Treherne called to-day and brought me some beautiful flowers,’ and all that sort of thing.”

She laughed, then said contemptuously, “I do; I nearly always say something about you—but he is too much of a fool. I need never fear that he will become jealous of me.”

“Perhaps not,” said the astute Wray; “but there are plenty of gossiping women in Sydney, and nine-tenths of them don’t like you, so it is better for you to tell Lathom of all the polite attentions you receive from Lieutenant Wray than that some spiteful cat of a woman should.”

“Did you say *all*, Maurice?” she asked, raising her laughing eyes to his.

But she had taken his advice, and as the days went by both her and his caution increased and their stolen meetings ceased; and although they met occasionally at Mrs. Grainger’s and at other houses in Sydney no one of the other guests except Rutland and his wife now suspected the beautiful Mrs. Lathom of taking more interest in the handsome young soldier than she did in any of the many other men whom she met. Formerly there had been considerable talk about them when Lathom had been stationed in Sydney; but since that meeting at Rutland’s garden party she had arranged matters so carefully with Wray that even Helen had had no cause to think that there was anything closer than friendship between her mistress and Wray.

“So far I have managed everything beautifully with the Graingers,” she thought, as she leant back on the couch. “I could not have come to a better house, and it is easy to see that Milly Grainger has hopes of Maurice—the great gawky creature.”

She rose and touched a bell; it was answered by Helen.

“Will you go downstairs and make me a cup of tea, Helen? Ask the cook to let you make it—yours is always so much nicer than hers. Then, if you like, you can go out for the rest of the evening; you need not return till late. I shall go to bed soon after nine, so there will be nothing for you to do.”

“Thank you, madam. I may go out later on in the evening,” said Helen, turning away her face to hide the burning blush that suffused her soft cheeks; for she had received Lugard’s hurried note, and her heart was beating with joyous expectancy.

“Helen,” said Mrs. Lathom suddenly, “come back for a minute. Just sit

down there beside me. I want to say . . . I have been very cross with you sometimes, I know, but I never meant to be—as I have told you before.”

“I do not think of that,” said the girl softly; “I try to think only of how often you have been kind to me.”

Something like a mist dimmed Ida Lathom’s eyes for a moment, and when she next spoke her voice, too, was soft. She put her hands on Helen’s head, and stroked her hair.

“What lovely hair you have, Helen. Now, I’ll tell you what I heard a gentleman say of you—it was Captain Treherne; he said that you were a strikingly handsome girl, and that even if you were plain or downright ugly that your hair and the way you walk would make you beautiful.”

Helen blushed and laughed—“I do feel very flattered, madam; but I must tell you that I overheard Captain Treherne make that remark. I was mending your slipper at the time on the verandah, and could not help hearing what he said, for he has a very loud voice.”

“Well, you *are* a very handsome girl, Helen. I suppose one person at least has told you that;” she paused and, still stroking the girl’s hair, asked meditatively, but with childish vanity, “Would you call me a very pretty woman, Helen?”

“You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,” replied Helen, with honest impulsiveness. “Once at Waringa, Nellie Tucker brought me a lovely white waterlily and said it was ‘as sweet and good to look at as the mistress herself.’ ”

Mrs. Lathom bent down and kissed her, and this time Helen felt a tear fall upon her cheek.

CHAPTER XXII

Lugard had just returned to his hotel, and was sitting down on a shady part of the verandah watching the purple shadows of the night creeping over the harbour, when a man came up to him.

“Are you Captain Lugard, sir?” he asked, touching his cap.

“Yes.”

“Mr. Lamont would like to see you at once, sir. He begs you to lose no time, and said I was to say that all is well and everything is ready.”

“Tell him I shall be with him in twenty minutes,” he said, placing half a sovereign in the hand of the messenger, who went quickly but quietly away, but not so quickly as not to be observed by a man who was idling up and down the street, smoking a dirty pipe. This man was one of Feilding’s spies, and he at once went off on the track of the messenger (who was a man unknown to him) to endeavour, by the expenditure of a few shillings, to ascertain the object of his hurried visit to the American captain, and then report the result of his inquiries to Mr. Feilding.

By this time Lugard was in his room, hurriedly putting a few of his personal effects into a small valise; the rest he intended leaving for whoever liked to take them. In an envelope addressed to the landlord he put more than sufficient money to cover his bill, and left it under his pillow, where he knew it would soon be discovered.

“Going out before dinner, captain?” asked the landlord’s wife as he stepped into the hall, valise in hand.

“Yes, I’m going to dine on board the ship in which I came to Sydney, and very likely I shall sleep on board also; so good-night.”

Once out in the street he stepped briskly along, and arrived at the ship-chandler’s within the twenty minutes. Mrs. Lamont met him at the door and at once ushered him into her husband’s office.

“Ah! here you are, Captain. We have no time to lose. The brig is cruising about between Botany and Port Hacking, and Carroll is sending a boat ashore to-night. Here is the letter, which reached me shortly after you had left. You will see that, as I thought, his boat will await you at Cook’s Landing Place.”

Lugard read the note, which was brief and explicit. The captain of the brig did not care to run into Botany Bay and anchor, but would cruise to and fro off the Heads, as if engaged in his proper pursuit of whales, but for the next two evenings he would send a boat ashore to “Captain Cook’s Landing Place” in the hope that Lugard and his party would be there. The boat would wait there till nearly daylight.

“That is clear enough,” said Lugard, “have you sent a reply?”

“Yes, I did not keep the messenger waiting ten minutes. I wrote that you, Miss Adair, and Montgomery would be at the rendezvous by two o’clock in the morning at the latest, though it was quite likely you might get there sooner. Then, so as to lose no time, I sent a note to Miss Adair to come here to you at once. We may expect her at any minute now.”

“You have done well, Lamont, and have served me faithfully. Now, whilst we are waiting for Miss Adair, let you and I settle up. I have brought the money with me.”

This business was soon concluded, and the two men shook hands. Lamont, though an avaricious man, had acted fairly and squarely enough, and Lugard, to show his appreciation of his conduct, added twenty-five guineas over and above the sum agreed upon.

Mrs. Lamont tapped at the door.

“Morgan, the young lady is here.”

“Well, you know what to do. Hurry up, woman; time is everything.”

Half an hour later, Helen, her beautiful hair cut off close to her head, and dressed in a suit of dungaree clothing, such as would be worn by the cabin-boy of a merchant ship of the period, was ready, and Mrs. Lamont called to Lugard to come into the dining-room. The Jewess, whose woman’s heart was stirred with genuine sympathy, pointed to the thick masses of hair lying on the table, and Lugard saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

“Please do not cry,” said Helen kindly, as, giving one hand to Lugard, she placed the other on Mrs. Lament’s fat arm, “my hair will soon grow again.”

“Ah, but it is such lofely, lofely hair,” said the woman, “und every time I heard the scissors clip it made my heart ache.”

“Here, roll it up in this,” said Lugard, giving her his silk handkerchief, “and I will take it with me.” He turned to Helen—“May I?”

“If you wish, Captain Lugard,” she said softly.

But the handkerchief was too small, and the Jewess, taking off her own silk apron, succeeded in compressing the whole of the dark, shining locks into such a compass that Lugard was able to put it inside the breast of his coat.

“Make haste,” cried Lamont impatiently, from the next room.

Bidding the Jewess good-bye, Helen and Lugard went out into the passage, where Lamont was waiting; a tall, wiry, and clean-shaven man was standing beside him.

“This is Sam Cole, your guide, Captain Lugard. He will take you to the ‘Dog and Duck’ public-house on the Parramatta Road, where the horses are. It is a very rough place, and frequented by the worst characters in Sydney, bond and free; but you and the young lady will not be molested—Cole will see to that—during the short time you will have to remain there. He will have to

saddle the horses and take them quietly away to the end of the paddock, from where you can get away unobserved by any of the constables who may be about the 'Dog and Duck.' Montgomery will join you later on. Now, that is all. Good-bye, captain; and good-bye, young lady. I wish you every success and a happy termination to your voyage."

Helen and Lugard bade him farewell, and followed the guide down the yard to the back entrance, and in a few minutes all three were out in the street, Cole leading the way. He took them through the most unfrequented streets till they were in sight of the "Dog and Duck"—a small two-storied building, from the doorway and windows of which a stream of light was issuing, and the sounds of music and singing showed that some conviviality was taking place.

The guide uttered an oath. "Curse the thing! We must wait here a bit, sir. It would never do for you and the young lady to wait at the 'Dog and Duck' whilst I get the horses out. I can see soldiers moving about inside; they belong to the 102nd, and are about the worst lot of men in Sydney. Once you and the young lady were inside they would want you to drink with them, and if you refused they would pick a quarrel with you, and most likely rob you of everything you possess. I think it will be best for you to wait here, and I'll go on and get the horses. I'll ride one and lead the other two. I hope you can sit a horse, Miss, as we may have to ride hard."

"Have no fear of me," said Helen, "I can sit a horse like a native."

At that moment they were standing under a grove of grey gum-trees which stood a little way back from the Parramatta Road, and although the night was starlight they were safe from observation, owing to the shadow of the trees, from any one passing along the road.

"Well, I'll be off now——" began the guide, when suddenly a voice cried, "Stand, in the King's name!" and two men advanced towards them from a clump of lantana bushes about thirty yards distant.

"They are constables!" whispered the guide to Lugard; "we're done for, unless——"

"Stand by me," said Lugard quickly. "You take the little one, I'll take the big one. I'll give you fifty pounds."

"Done. It's a hanging matter for me if I'm caught in this business. You must take me with you now, sir, out of the country."

Lugard slipped his double-barrelled pistol into the guide's hand. "Stun your man with that, I'll manage mine easily enough;" then he pushed Helen behind a tree just as the two men came up. Each man carried a pistol, and a pair of handcuffs hung from each of their belts.

"I arrest you, Captain James Lugard, and those with you," said the bigger man of the two, covering the American with his pistol.

"On what charge?"

“That’s not for me to say. You’ll find out all about it in the morning. Just put your hands out.”

Lugard gave Cole a quick glance, then held out his hands quietly; the constable put his pistol back into his belt so as to get at the handcuffs, when Lugard sprang at his throat and bore him to the ground, and at the same moment Cole, whose right hand was behind his back, raised it with a lightning speed and dealt the smaller constable a blow on the temple with the butt-end of his pistol. He fell without a sound.

Lugard, with his teeth set hard, was kneeling on the big man’s chest strangling him into insensibility. In a minute or so he rose, panting.

“Don’t be alarmed, Miss Adair; stay where you are for the present. Cole, is your fellow quiet?”

“He won’t move for another hour.”

“Gag him with a bit of stick, and tie his hands behind his back and I’ll do the same with this brute. Then we’ll drag them over into that clump of bushes and leave them there.”

Cole, an emancipated convict, with a deadly hatred of constables, individually and collectively, chuckled with glee, and in a few minutes the two insensible men were securely bound and gagged and dragged into the thick *lantana* scrub.

Then Lugard and the emancipist consulted as to what should be done, and a decision was soon arrived at.

“Danger or no danger, sir,” said the guide, “I’ll go in and get the horses; we can’t walk to Botany—at least the young lady could not. It would nearly kill her to get there by two in the morning. Wait here for me. If anything goes wrong and I do not come back in a quarter of an hour, God knows what you and the lady will do.”

“Why not let us try and walk?” said Helen; “it is too risky for you to try and get the horses.”

“No, Miss; as long as there are no other constables on the look-out for us, I can saddle the horses and have them here easily in a quarter of an hour. I have a friend at the ‘Dog and Duck’ who is on the look-out for us, and he will help me to get the horses. And if I can’t get them I will come back and we’ll foot it to Botany.”

Lugard gave him a pull at his flask, and the man set off towards the public-house.

CHAPTER XXIII

Under the dark shadows of the great gum-trees Helen and Lugard waited as patiently as they could for Cole's return. Every now and then a burst of drunken revelry, mingled with oaths and laughter, came from the "Dog and Duck," and Helen, almost unconsciously, drew nearer to her companion.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Adair," he said, "we are not likely to be disturbed by any of that roosting crew over there."

"I am not afraid, Mr. Lugard—that is, I am not afraid of anything that may happen to me, personally, but I do hope that nothing will befall our guide. If he is arrested and convicted of being concerned in aiding the escape of convicts it certainly means his going back to the chain-gang for the rest of his days."

"Poor fellow! He said it meant hanging."

"He clearly thought so, Mr. Lugard; but the horrors of the convict system have lessened somewhat during the past ten years, and offences that were once punished by death are now met by hard labour on the roads or in the quarries. *I* would prefer to die."

Lugard nodded, and his hand touched hers lightly. "Aye, indeed, Miss Adair. Better for a man to die—to take his own life, even—than to live as I have seen some of those wretched convicts live—if one can call such a dreadful existence living."

"I knew of many cases, Mr. Lugard, where men, heartbroken and despairing of mercy from man or help from God, have deliberately committed a crime that would bring them to the gallows and end their sufferings," she said sadly.

"At Waringa?"

"Ah, no—not at Waringa. Even the most hardened and debased of the prisoners that work in the quarries there knows that he has a protector—not a merciless tyrant and taskmaster—in Captain Lathom. Few people, except the prisoners themselves, know what a brave, unselfish, noble man he is."

"It was fortunate for you, Miss Adair, that you were assigned to such a master."

"Fortunate! I have never thought of him as a master, but as a friend sent by God to inspire me with hope and courage for the future. Very often, when Mrs. Lathom's contemptuous manner of addressing me has filled me with shame and anger, and brought the tears to my eyes, has Captain Lathom's 'Never mind, Helen, Mrs. Lathom spoke hastily,' made me go to my room and cry like a little girl. His sympathy meant so much to me, and, indeed, to all the prisoners at Waringa. Yet he can be stern when there is reason for it, though he

can never be harsh or unjust, like Mr. Marsbin or Mr. Feilding.”

“Mrs. Lathom is a very beautiful woman—that is, for a fair woman,” said Lugard, trying to look into Helen’s eyes.

“Very beautiful.”

Some words came to Lugard’s lips, but he checked himself. That was not the time nor place, he thought, to tell this girl who had crept into his heart that there was no other woman’s beauty to compare with hers. He thought of Vincent Hewitt—and was himself again.

“Listen!” Helen placed her hand on his arm and bent forward. “I can hear horses coming—they are trotting. Yes, it is our guide. I can see him. Look over to the right of the clump of lantana bushes.”

It was indeed the faithful Cole, who, a minute or two later, trotted up, leading two horses.

“Let the lady ride that horse,” he said, pointing to one of the two he was leading, “he’s often carried a side-saddle; and as soon as we are clear of the town I’ll fix up a substitute for one; there’s no time to do it now.”

“I don’t mind, Cole,” and Helen was in the saddle before Lugard could assist her, and then, without wasting a moment, they set off at a quick walk, the guide leading and Helen and Lugard riding abreast, a few feet behind. Passing the public-house at a distance of a hundred yards or so, they left the road and turned to the left through a paddock strewn with fallen timber.

“This will save us a good two miles,” said the guide, “and besides that, we’ll be off the main road. We’ll find Montgomery waiting for us about a mile on. He’s all right, and has a good horse. I took care of that last night; and lucky it is I did, instead of trusting to get one for him from the ‘Dog and Duck.’ Now, come on, please.”

He struck into a smart canter, Helen and Lugard following closely at his heels, and after crossing numerous watercourses and dry gullies, they emerged out upon a small, sandy plain covered with grass-trees and stunted honeysuckle. Here Cole pulled up, and then gave a loud whistle. It was answered immediately, and in a few seconds Helen and Lugard were exchanging greetings with Montgomery, who was not only well-mounted but well-armed.

“Now, get off a few minutes, Miss,” said the guide to Helen, “and I’ll turn that saddle of yours into a side-saddle in five minutes. We shall have to do some hard riding presently; but whenever we meet any one on the road you will have to ride ‘man fashion’ again. It won’t do for us to gallop—or even canter—past any one.”

Whilst he was improvising a saddle-horn from a short piece of green wood, and altering Helen’s stirrup-leather, Lugard told Montgomery of the encounter with the constables near the “Dog and Duck.”

“What were the men like, sir?” asked the Irishman.

Lugard described them as nearly as he could.

“One—the small chap—is one of the regular constables,” said Montgomery; “the big man is one of Mr. Feilding’s men; and now I come to think of it, I saw both of them hanging about his office yesterday. He must have set them to watch you, sir; else how should they know your name?”

“Very likely he did, Montgomery. He has a reason to dislike me, I know, but that is no reason why he should send constables to arrest me—unless, as is possible, he may have found out something about the business which brought me to this infernal colony.”

Montgomery nodded assent. “That is quite likely, sir. He is a close friend of Mr. Marsbin, and Mr. Marsbin knows everybody’s business. Anyway, I trust we shall soon be out of his reach, sir, in a few hours.”

As soon as Helen’s saddle was ready, the party mounted again, and Cole, leading them on to the wide, sandy road, set off at a brisk canter, which was maintained for nearly three-quarters of an hour. Then, when they came to a great reed-covered swamp, they pulled up to give the horses a short spell and a drink. As the animals’ hoofs splashed into the still water there arose a wild clamour, and the whirr and rush of wings of duck and teal and other water-fowl, as they rose and whirled swiftly away through the blackness of the night to some other retreat, to settle down with a splash and those many pipings and quackings so dear to the heart of the listening sportsman as he hears them in the grey of the morning, ere the red shafts of sunrise have pierced the mists that lie upon river and lake and swamp and sleeping lagoon.

Once more upon the road, which was now so soft and sandy that the horses had to walk for nearly a mile; then came firmer ground as the track led along the margins of a succession of deep water-holes and reedy swamps, the haunt of the soft-calling waterhen and the deadly black snake.

Presently the guide, turning in his saddle, called out to Lugard that there was now no likelihood of their meeting with any one, as he would presently strike across the country through the long grass and tea-tree scrub direct for “Cook’s Landing Place”; and so saying, he pulled up and lit his pipe with flint and steel. Montgomery followed suit, and Lugard turned inquiringly to Helen, and smiled as he held up his pipe.

Her dark eyes sparkled as they met his. “Yes, do smoke, Mr. Lugard—or shall I say ‘Captain’ Lugard? I like to see men smoking. Do you remember poor old Tim at Waringa? Oh, I used to love to watch him cutting up his tobacco and filling and then lighting his old, black, clay pipe. He used to sit at my feet in the evenings on the bank of the creek, and talk to me of ‘the ould cuntry’—he is an Irishman, as you no doubt easily discovered the moment he spoke to you—and as he smoked, all the hard lines on his poor, dear old

wrinkled face seemed to soften, and sometimes he would laugh—and make me laugh, too—as he would tell me some story of the smugglers in Dundalk Bay, and how they used to set traps for the revenue officers, and send them off on some wild-goose chase twenty miles away from the spot where they (the smugglers, I mean) really meant to land their ankers of French brandy and kegs of Schiedam. Old Tim did so relish telling me, and I loved to watch the clouds of smoke curling about his head as he sat at my feet with his hands clasped around his knees.”

“A pipe certainly is a great comforter, Miss Adair.”

“I am sure it is. I have often watched the expression of delight on a prisoner’s face when some one has given him a piece of tobacco, and quite often, too I have seen Captain Lathom, when he was tired and almost worn-out with a day’s toil, throw himself into a chair on the verandah, and light his pipe and then give *such* a sigh of satisfaction.”

“I daresay he has a pretty weary time of it at Waringa occasionally.”

“He is never weary of doing his duty—and more than his duty—Mr. Lugard. It used to make me angry to see that lazy fellow, Lieutenant Willet, lying sprawled out in his hammock under the verandah, imagining he was ill, and Captain Lathom doing his work for him. It used to make Dr. Haldane quite savage, and he once—jocularly, of course—told Captain Lathom that he pampered his second in command as much as he did the convicts in the quarries.”

“Dr. Haldane is well liked, is he not?” asked Lugard.

“Yes, indeed; for with all his roughness he is a most lovable man. And I have always liked him from the very first, simply because he is Captain Lathom’s greatest friend.”

She ceased speaking, and for some time they rode together in silence. Then suddenly Sam Cole reined in his horse and pointed to a dark, rounded shape looming before them about a mile away.

“That is the place, sir, where the boat is to meet us. It looks like a mountain standing by itself—on account of the big timber about it. Now, Miss Adair”—he turned to Helen with a good-natured smile—“all going well, you’ll see your father in another hour or two.”

She turned to Lugard and tried to speak, but the fast-falling tears choked her utterance, and all she could do was to put out her hand to him in token of her gratitude. For a moment he held it in his; then he raised it to his lips.

Half an hour later they emerged out upon the shore near the foot of a low, well-wooded bluff, at the base of which were huge masses of rock tumbled together in the wildest confusion.

“This is the spot, sir,” said the guide to Lugard, who, jumping off his horse,

gave a loud hail:

“*Palmyrans Ahoy!*”

“Aye, aye, sir,” was the instant reply. It came from behind a massive boulder of sandstone less than fifty yards away, and was followed by the appearance of several dark figures, one of which was in advance of the others.

“Is that you, Captain Lugard?”

“Yes. Who are you?”

“Dawson, the second mate.”

“All well on board?”

“All well, sir. Is the young lady here?”

“Yes.” And Lugard, after shaking hands with the officer, introduced him to Helen.

“Is my father well, Mr. Dawson?” she asked tremblingly.

“Quite well, Miss, and dying to see you. Captain Carroll had a hard task to make him and Mr. Hewitt stay on board to-night. They both pleaded to be allowed to come with me to meet you. Now, Captain Lugard, I am ready. The boat is just behind this boulder. Come, Miss Adair, your hand.”

CHAPTER XXIV

An hour after daylight the *Palmyra* was well outside Botany Heads, and, with all available canvas set, standing to the north-east, her yards braced up sharp to a gentle but steady breeze.

Pacing to and fro on the clean, white poop deck, were the master of the brig, Lugard, and Vincent Hewitt, all smoking their pipes and waiting for their coffee. Carroll, whose giant figure made those of Lugard and Hewitt seem dwarfed beside him, was in high good-humour and was talking volubly, emphasising his remarks by every now and then placing his huge hands on the shoulders of his companions.

“Well, gentlemen, we have got through all right after all, though we have been a mighty long time over it. Still, that is not your fault, Captain Lugard, so don’t think I’m grumbling—for I have no cause for grumbling. And to tell you the exact truth, although I like making money as well as most men, making money on this venture gives me an additional satisfaction because I feel that I’m taking something out of the Britishers. You see, it’s this way: my old dad was a pretty well to-do man at the time of the last war with Great Britain. He owned five whaleships, all sailing out of Nantucket, and four out of the five were captured by the Britishers. My poor old mother just gave up life quietly and died under the blow. I was away at the time, sperm-whaling off the Azores, and when I came back home I found only poor mum’s grave and a letter from dad, telling me that he had taken command of his last ship, and gone on a whaling cruise to the Pacific. That ship was never heard of again, but I believe she was cut off by the savages in the Feejee Islands and every man on board massacred. And then another thing that has soured me against Britishers is this: Burrowes, the commander of the brig *Enterprize*, which fought and captured the British brig *Boxer* off the coast of Maine in the last war, was a cousin of mine. He was killed in the fight—so was the captain of the Britisher for that matter—and, naturally enough, I’m not overflowing with loving-kindness towards anything English.”

“But there are some very good fellows among them, captain,” said Lugard; “Miss Adair, for instance, can tell you how one British soldier tried to make her unhappy lot bearable. They were our enemies; they are now our friends, and may they always remain so!”

“That is a very proper sentiment, Captain Lugard,” said Carroll, “but”—he slapped his right fist into his left palm—“there is going to be another turn-up before long. The Britishers want another licking badly, and I reckon that the only nation that can give them that licking is the United States. We have done

it twice and can do it again.”

Lugard laughed, and then stepped aside to take his coffee from the steward.

“Has Miss Adair turned in yet, steward?” he asked.

“No, sir,” was the reply; “just look down the skylight, and you will see.”

Seated on the well-cushioned transom lockers on the starboard side of the wide cabin were Helen and her father. The old man had fallen asleep in his daughter’s arms, and his grey head was pillowed against her bosom. Her eyes, shining with love and happiness, were bent upon the worn and haggard face, and her right hand gently stroked the scanty locks. A slight and unintentional movement made by Lugard caused her to look up, and then her dark orbs met his and a smile parted her lips as she raised her hand warningly, and whispered some words which he did not clearly hear.

But when seven bells were struck she came on deck. She had changed her sailor’s clothes for a dress of a thin blue material—one of many long before provided for her, at Lugard’s request, by Mrs. Lathom—and a wide-brimmed Quito hat shaded her face from the rays of the hot morning sun and concealed the loss of her long, dark hair. As she stepped from the companion-way on to the deck, Carroll, his first and second officers, Montgomery, Vincent Hewitt, and Lugard lifted their caps and advanced towards her.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” she said, her soft voice trembling with emotion as she held out her hand—first to Carroll, then to the others as they came forward—“my father is asleep on the cushions, and so I have left him for a little while . . . to tell you how I thank, how deeply I . . . my dear father and myself . . . Vincent, speak for me, I cannot,” and then came a long-pent-up sob—the sob of physical and mental exhaustion that some dull-minded people call hysteria.

Carroll sprang forward and took both her hands in his.

“Don’t say another word, Miss Adair. You are a real brave little lady, and I’m proud to have you on board the *Palmyra*. Now you must come below into my cabin—that is your cabin, for it is to be yours as long as you and your father remain on board this brig. The steward will bring you your breakfast in a few minutes, and, after you have eaten something you must lie down and get some rest.”

“Ah, Captain Carroll, don’t send me to bed like a little girl. I am sure I cannot sleep. I feel too happy. And I want to sit beside father, so that when he awakens he will find that I have not deserted him. Vincent—Captain Lugard, please plead for me.”

Vincent Hewitt, his face aglow with the love he could not conceal, placed his hand on her shoulder—“I think you should rest, Helen. You will be all the better for it.”

“Must I do so, Captain Lugard?”

Lugard swung round on his heel.

“I really cannot presume to advise you, Miss Adair,” he said, in such coldly polite tones that Helen flushed deeply, and without another word allowed Captain Carroll to take her below. Why should Lugard, who had always been so kind to her in the past, speak to her like that? she wondered as she went into Carroll’s cabin.

Lugard, leaning over the weather rail, was thinking deeply, when Vincent Hewitt’s voice disturbed his meditations.

“Do you know what are the Captain’s intentions, Lugard, as regards my uncle, my cousin, Montgomery, and myself. Are we to make the voyage to America in the *Palmyra*?”

“No. It was originally planned—as I told you the first time I met you—that Carroll, for the sum of £1,000, was to land you all at Callao, at which port you would have no trouble in getting passages to America, for there is always a homeward bound American ship or two to be met with either at Callao or Valparaiso. But at this season of the year it would take the *Palmyra* nearly two months, or perhaps more, to get to Callao. She would have to contend with light head-winds and calms, and the voyage would be wearisome and distressing. Moreover, in the agreement made with Captain Carroll, he was given the right to pursue his business of whaling whenever opportunity offered of lowering his boats. And although he is to receive another £500—I have already, as you know, given him £500—we must bear in mind that he has been much longer on the coast, waiting for us, than he expected to be, and the £1,000 he receives is by no means too handsome a sum when we take into consideration the loss of time he has incurred. He certainly could have filled this brig twice over with sperm oil had he left the coast and cruised in the South Seas, instead of hanging about the Australian shore and catching humpback whales, the oil of which is of much less value than that of the sperm whale.”

Hewitt nodded. “So I have heard. What, then, are his plans?”

“He and I discussed the matter this morning, and we have both come to the conclusion that it will be best to proceed to some port in the East Indies—say Batavia—where we are certain to meet with plenty of ships, either British or American, bound to New York or Boston. In fact it is not unlikely that we may run across one of your uncle Walter’s ships somewhere around the Moluccas. He has three in the China trade—I was master of one—and four in the East India trade. If we should be so fortunate I should feel very pleased, for I can see that your uncle John is in a weak state of health, and the *Palmyra* is a very small vessel; so the sooner he can be transferred to a more comfortable and larger ship the better it will be for him.”

Carroll came up and joined them. “Well, I’ve made the young lady eat a

little breakfast. Poor little girl! She has held up bravely, but can do so no longer, and once she is asleep we must take care not to disturb her. You must take good care of her, Mr. Hewitt.”

“I mean to do so for the rest of her life,” replied Hewitt, with a smile.

“Ah, indeed! Then you are a lucky man, sir. A sweeter girl never trod a ship’s deck than Miss Helen Adair. Don’t you agree with me, Lugard? I suppose you won’t wait till you reach America, Mr. Hewitt? Well, there’s plenty of parsons between here and New York—Batavia is full of them.”

Hewitt laughed. “I can’t tell at present, captain. In fact, although I have loved her since we were boy and girl in the old country, and gathered primroses and buttercups together in the County Down countryside, I have never had the chance of asking her to be my wife; and, indeed, God knows I never thought of ever being able to do so. But during all the black years of my convict life she was never absent from my thoughts, and I think she knows I love her well.”

He spoke with much deep sincerity and such utter simplicity that even Lugard, whose face, as he listened, was cold and impassive, was moved.

“If you have her love, you are indeed a happy man,” he said quietly, as he turned away and descended to the main deck, oblivious of the fact that eight bells had struck and breakfast was ready.

CHAPTER XXV

A dull, leaden sky lowered heavily down upon a wild and savage sea, thrashed into a seethe of foam by a fierce easterly gale, that for five days past had smitten the Australian coast from Cape Howe to Great Sandy Island. Hove-to on the port tack was the little *Palmyra*, minus her boats, deck-house, try-works, and most of her bulwarks.

Standing at the break of the short poop, Carroll was conversing with Lugard, as they looked at the watch, who were toiling at the pumps. Presently Dawson, the second mate, came aft.

“Well?” said Carroll interrogatively to the officer.

“Pretty bad, sir. We can just keep it under and no more. But the men are becoming exhausted.”

Carroll nodded. “I know that. I’m afraid we’ll have to run for it, eh, Lugard?”

“I’m afraid, so, captain. I feel pretty sure by the way the water is coming in that a butt-end has started. But it’s a risky thing to run before a sea like this.”

“She can do it,” said the big captain, adding, with a grim smile, as he indicated the bare, swept decks, “there’s nothing to harm even if we do get pooped. That’s the beauty of the thing—we have no boats, no deck-house, no try-works, in fact nothing to lose; and to tell you the truth, now that we must run, I’m not sorry that our four boats are gone. We could not have taken them inboard, and they would only be carried away, davits and all, five minutes after we put some more canvas on her, and turned our tail to the sea. He paused a moment, and then turned to Dawson.

“Well, we’ll run, Mr. Dawson. But where on earth we are going to run to, I’m hanged if I know just yet. Come below, Lugard, and we’ll study it out.”

They descended the companion-way into the quiet cabin. On one of the transom lockers was Vincent Hewitt, sound asleep, worn out with his exertions at the pumps during that and the previous day. On the other locker was the mate of the brig, also buried in slumber. Too anxious to turn in in his own cabin, he had thrown himself down on the transoms to snatch an hour’s sleep. The door of Carroll’s cabin, now occupied by Helen, was open, and as she heard footsteps she came out. Her face was very pale, and the men saw she had been weeping.

“How is Mr. Adair?” said Lugard.

“Very weak, Captain Lugard. But he is awake, and asked me to find out how matters were progressing with the ship.”

“Not too well, Miss Adair,” said Carroll, as he motioned her to a seat, “but

as the weather shows no signs of moderating, I have decided to run before the gale and seek shelter somewhere on the coast. So you can tell Mr. Adair that within twenty-four hours we shall be in smooth water, and he will then be able to have some rest and regain the strength he has lost during the battering about we have had the last few days.”

“Thank you very much, Captain Carroll. My father will be pleased”—her voice broke and then two tears rolled down her cheeks. “He is dying, and he knows it. Only half an hour ago he said to me that he knew he would not live for many days, and that if he were a rich man he would ask you to, if possible, let the ship touch at some place, even if it were a desert island, where he could be buried in God’s earth instead of being consigned to the deep.” She tried to smile through her tears. “We are Irish you know, captain, and——”

Carroll placed his huge hand on hers. “Tell him, my dear, that in less than twenty-four hours he will be on shore, in a tent, with you as nurse, and Captain Jim here and myself as assistant nurses.” Then, as he looked into Helen’s sad, dark eyes, he added softly, “and tell him also that I will come in and see him as soon as Captain Lugard and myself have had a look at this chart.”

Helen bent over to him and spoke in a whisper, “How kind you are, Captain Carroll! You will make my poor father’s last hours very happy. He knows he is dying, and so do I, and yet he is not afraid of death. But he—and oh! so did I—dreaded the thought of the sea as his last resting place.”

Lugard rose and gently led her to her cabin door. “Try and rest, Miss Adair. It may be that your fears for your father are groundless.”

She shook her head as she put her hand in his. “Ah no, Captain Lugard. I saw my mother die, and I have seen some of the prisoners at Waringa die, and I think I know now when death is near. And so does poor father. He is very old and very weak, though so brave. And——”

The old man’s feeble voice interrupted her.

“Come in, my child; come in, Captain Lugard. I have heard all you have said. Come in, and let me feel your hand in mine for a moment; and good Captain Carroll, too. I shall not keep you long, for I know you have many duties to attend to on the ship. But that which the captain has said has made me well content. I know my time is near, but I have no fear of the morrow. And I should like to say farewell to Captain Carroll.”

Lugard, when he heard the faint voice, entered the cabin with Helen, and placed his hand gently on the old man’s scanty white locks; Carroll followed and stood beside him, his rugged face softening as he saw the grey shadows of coming dissolution of soul from body creeping over the worn features.

He bade them farewell in a few words, and then asked for Vincent Hewitt. “I have already told him of my wishes in regard to Helen,” he said to Lugard, “but I wish to write to my brother Walter concerning money matters, and, as

my letter will be a long one, Vincent will write it for me. And you, Helen, my dear child, must lie down and rest a few hours.”

Returning to the main cabin, Carroll and Lugard called the mate, and with him studied the chart of the coast.

“We are now thirty miles or so from Sugarloaf Point,” said the whaleman, indicating a spot on the chart. “And we should see the land in another hour or two, for the current is setting us dead on to it at the rate of three knots or more. And it’s a mighty bad coast hereabouts—no shelter anywhere from Sugarloaf Point right up to Smoky Cape, except Port Macquarie—and we don’t want to go *there*, even if we could get in over the bar in such a gale as this. Now, just round Smoky Cape there is a snug little place where we can lie quiet enough, and where there is a fine sloping beach, on which we can put the brig and get at this worrying leak. You know the place I mean, Grey, where we bathed in the little creek?”

Grey, the mate, nodded. “That’s the very place for us, sir—Trial Bay. I had a good look at it. We couldn’t get a better spot to put the brig on the ground if it was made for us.”

“But is there any settlement there?” asked Lugard anxiously.

“No, nor none nearer than Port Macquarie, which we shall pass to-night. And we can lie so close in that we might be there a month without being seen. Melville of the *Troubridge* told me that all the country round is uninhabited except by niggers, who are plentiful enough; but we are too strong for them to interfere with us. And in any case we should be able to get at the leak and be at sea again in three days at most.”

“Then the sooner we reach Trial Bay the better,” said Lugard. “It’s no use our trying to claw off the land; we can’t do it. And we are making water too freely to please me.”

“Very well, then,” said Carroll, as he led the way on deck. “Call the other watch, Mr. Grey.”

A quarter of an hour later the little brig was flying before the gale under all the canvas she could safely carry, and the two captains, as they stood on the poop and looked astern at the wild, chasing seas, and saw the furious speed at which the vessel was driving, congratulated each other that she was able to outrace them.

“Shake her up, lads; shake her up!” cried Carroll to the men, who were again at the pumps. “The less water in her the quicker she’ll go, and the sooner we’ll be lying snug on a nice sandy beach. Those of you who want coffee can get as much as they like from the steward; those who want rum can get it from the second mate.”

All night long the brig flew northward, and at dawn the great blue-grey mound of Smoky Cape was only ten miles distant.

CHAPTER XXVI

Whilst the little whaling brig was plunging and swaying before the fierce blast of the savage gale that, as she ran for her haven of safety, was smiting the long eastern seaboard, and the two captains stood watching the loom of Smoky Cape; Dr. Haldane, booted and spurred, was seated talking to Rutland in a private room at the "Currency Lass." He had only arrived in Sydney on the previous day, and, without even delaying to change his travel-stained clothes, went directly to Mrs. Grainger's house, where he was told that Mrs. Lathom and her maid, Helen Cronin, had left Sydney a few days previously.

"It's a sickening business, Rutland," he said; "but, after all, it will be the best thing in the end for poor Lathom. She'll never come into his life again."

"Do you think the Graingers have any idea of what has really occurred?" asked the Commissary.

"No, I do not. Mrs. Grainger seemed very much distressed at Mrs. Lathom's sudden and mysterious departure. 'Just fancy her leaving me in such a manner!' said the poor lady. 'I can only conclude that she must have been worrying about her absence from Captain Lathom, and that her brain became slightly affected. Else why should she (and the maid, too) leave my daughters and me in this strange fashion—at night-time and without one word of farewell? Of course she has gone to join him at Port Macquarie!'

"I was not going to tell her that *I* knew that that was very unlikely—it would have only increased the poor woman's distress. She simply thinks that Mrs. Lathom"—here the good doctor smiled grimly—"in her anxiety to see her husband again, became slightly off her head, and has gone by water to Broken Bay, where there was a Government schooner waiting to take a detachment of the 102nd to Port Macquarie. The captain of this schooner would, she was confident, give Mrs. Lathom and her maid a passage. Of course, I quite agreed with the good lady's mental-derangement-of-Mrs.-Lathom theory, especially as she and her daughters had noticed that Mrs. Lathom had latterly shown the most extraordinary changes of mood, especially after writing to or receiving a letter from her husband. And as an absolute and convincing proof of her mental condition, she had not taken away any clothing except that which she was wearing at the time; the same with Helen Cronin."

Rutland nodded. "You did quite right, Haldane. But, speaking of this girl Cronin, I have heard Lathom himself say that he believed her to be thoroughly truthful and honest, and that she was no criminal. I suppose she must have been bought over by Lathom's wife."

"I don't know what to think of it, Rutland. Like Lathom, I believe the girl

to be honest, straightforward, and above suspicion. Furthermore, she is a lady, and I don't believe that her name is Cronin any more than yours is Rameses. I cannot possibly imagine a girl with such a face as hers becoming a party to anything wrong—and, well, I won't believe it; I can't." He paused awhile, and then resumed—

“As soon as possible, after leaving Mrs. Grainger, I went to work and made inquiries from the harbour authorities, and found that no vessel of any description had left for Broken Bay for a week past, and if one had left, and the two women had sailed in her, the fact would have been very well known in a few hours, for Mrs. Lathom and her maid leaving Sydney in a little coasting vessel would naturally have aroused some wonder and considerable comment. So, satisfied on that point, I considered if it were possible that she really had (in a sudden fit of penitence) tried to go to her husband, and, accompanied by the girl, set off to either Broken Bay or Port Hunter, by way of Parramatta—a long and trying journey, especially when all the rivers are in flood. I went to the livery people and made inquiries; no one had hired either saddle horses or trap to go even to Parramatta, as the roads were too bad; and all traffic between Sydney and Parramatta was carried on by the Commissariat steamer *Pelican*. Now the skipper of the *Pelican* knows Mrs. Lathom by sight as well as you know me. I went down to Darling Harbour and saw the old fellow, and said casually that I supposed Mrs. Lathom and her maid had travelled by the *Pelican* to Parramatta a few days ago. ‘Not with me, doctor,’ he said, with a snort. ‘I wouldn't be likely to forget it if she had. The last time she travelled with me she made me spread the after-awning so that she could sit on deck and be waited on hand and foot as if she were a real princess. The cabin of the *Pelican* is good enough for most officers' ladies, but not good enough for her—she, with her long yaller ringlets, and parasols, and smellin' salts an' such!’ ”

Rutland could not help smiling. “Old Cunningham is a very outspoken mariner, and I have no doubt but that the lady tyrannised over him all she could—it's her nature.”

“It is and always was! Well, there was only one more thing for me to do, and that was to find out whether Mr. Maurice Wray was in town or not. I went to his rooms in York Street and was informed by his landlady that he had gone away on a shooting trip somewhere in the vicinity of Parramatta, and might not be back for a week or two. Then I went to the Barracks and saw Treherne, Fanning, and others; they all told me the same thing, and no doubt believe he really is away shooting, although Treherne remarked that it was a curious thing for a man to go away in such weather as we have had lately. ‘But,’ he added, ‘it's better for him to be wading about in the swamps shooting ducks than staying in Sydney and being rooked by Feilding and Macartney.’ That finished

my inquiries, and I came to the conclusion that Wray and Mrs. Lathom must have left the colony in some homeward or foreign bound ship.”

“No doubt about it,” said the Commissary, “though how they managed to do it I cannot understand. Every vessel that leaves the port has to undergo a strict search for absconding prisoners, and both Wray and Mrs. Lathom are well known to all the officials. Their presence on board as passengers together would have excited great wonder—they must have stowed away very cleverly.”

“Wray is a moneyed man, and money will do much. Anyway I found that two foreign-bound ships have sailed lately, the *Protector* and the *Leeuwarden*, but am assured that neither took a single passenger—or, if they did, such passengers were not seen.”

“I wonder now,” said Rutland suddenly, “if Lugard was concerned in this matter! By Jove, I begin to understand things. Now just listen to my theory.”

CHAPTER XXVII

“As I was telling you,” resumed Rutland, “there was a fearful row at the ‘Currency Lass’ the other night. I came in at the tale-end of the affair. Macartney was slightly drunk, and had thrown a decanter at Lugard, who had induced Wray to stop playing. Lugard took things very coolly, and insinuated to Macartney and Feilding before me that they had been rooking Wray, who was not sober enough to play; Macartney and little Feilding looked murder at the American, especially when he made Feilding give him an order on his bankers for £400 or so, and contemptuously refused to fight Macartney. After Macartney and his fellow-shark had gone off, Lugard remained with Wray and me for half an hour or so, and then went home.

“Now, I always took the American to be just what he represented himself to be—the agent of some people who were seeking information about the family of a convict named Ascott, who was transported in Governor Phillip’s time, so you can imagine my astonishment when I came down to my breakfast the other morning to hear from my butler that there were printed bills just then being put up in the town offering a reward of £100 each for the apprehension of ‘James Lugard, said to be a citizen of the United States, Patrick Montgomery, and Samuel Cole.’ Then followed a personal description of each of the three, and an intimation that Lugard and the man Cole had attacked two constables who were sent to arrest the former, bound and gagged them, and then, with the man Montgomery, made their escape.

“I came over to town as soon as possible, and here a fresh surprise awaited me at my office. You may remember that some time ago I was stuck up by Hewitt the bushranger, and relieved of £200?”

“Perfectly,” said Haldane.

“Well, on the night of the row at the ‘Currency Lass,’ as Lugard was bidding Wray and me good-night, or rather good-morning, he said, as near as I can remember ‘I’m glad I’ve won that money from that little ruffian Feilding. I want £200 for a particular purpose—a friend of mine borrowed £200 from a man whom I know to be a very good fellow.’ From this remark I gathered that he (Lugard) was going to present this money to his friend so as to enable him to repay the loan.

“As soon as I entered the office, my clerk handed me a packet addressed to me. I opened it and found it contained £200 in notes, with a line—‘With Vincent Hewitt’s compliments and thanks for the loan.’ Of course I was very delighted, but at the same time somewhat fearful that Mr. Hewitt had made a still larger haul and had sent me stolen notes. However, I knew I could soon

ascertain if they had been stolen, and so for the time put them into my safe—for I was anxious to find out all the details of Lugard's affair with the constables. I always liked the man, and I really felt concerned to know on what charge they had tried to arrest him.

"I soon learnt all that I wanted to know, for just as I left my office, I met Marsbin, Feilding, and the head constable coming down the street. They had just come from the Governor, and Marsbin was swelling with importance, Feilding green with rage. Dismissing the head constable, the parson and his toady hurried me into the 'Governor Phillip,' and then told me their story.

"Feilding, it seems, had reason to suspect Lugard of being in the colony for some illegal purpose, and had communicated his suspicions to the parson. He (Feilding) had picked up a partially written letter which Lugard had dropped that night at the 'Currency Lass,' and the parson gave me a tracing of it. Here it is," and Rutland handed a slip of paper to Haldane. "It was undoubtedly Lugard's writing, which I know well." The doctor read it.

"MY DEAR MISS ADAIR,—Pray be prepared now at any moment. There is every indication of this long spell of calm weather breaking up, and the ship should—"

"Neither the parson nor Feilding know of any woman in the colony—bond or free—named Adair, but they both knew of John Adair, No. 17412, an Irish political prisoner serving his time at Port Macquarie. That gave them a clue, and Feilding put on two men to watch Lugard's movements. The parson—who, to do him justice, is as astute as he is merciless, also went to work in the meantime, and found out that the American, in the course of his inquiries concerning the Ascott family had been to Port Macquarie. This was certainly suspicious in connection with his letter to 'Miss Adair' and the fact of John Adair being a prisoner at Port Macquarie. Marsbin went to the Governor and told him that he believed Lugard was up to some mischief in connection with one or more of the Irish political prisoners. The Governor, who loathes the parson most fervently, was rather sharp with him, and refused to comply with his request to have Lugard arrested on suspicion. And then, by an extraordinary coincidence, just as Marsbin was reiterating his opinion that Lugard's visit to Port Macquarie was in connection, not with the Ascott family, but with the Irish prisoners there, a letter was brought to His Excellency informing him that John Adair had escaped from custody, and, although a most rigorous search had been made, had not been recaptured. The messenger who brought the letter was the master of a small coasting vessel which had just arrived from Port Macquarie."

Then, as briefly as possible, Rutland went on to say that this letter, which

was written by the new Commandant at Port Macquarie—Lathom himself—after giving details of the search made for No. 17412, stated that as a man named Duke, a convict overseer, was strongly of the opinion that the escapee had succeeded in getting on board an American whaling brig then off the coast, he (Lathom) had sent out the Government cutter to intercept her. Duke's suspicions, however, were entirely unfounded, for the suspected vessel was actually met with on her way to Port Macquarie in order to buy a bullock for the crew, and Murchison, the master of the cutter, although he was invited by the American captain to come on board and search the ship, wisely refrained from doing so, knowing that the Governor was very anxious to encourage the visits of American vessels to the colony. Lathom had commended Murchison for his discretion, especially as the captain of the brig himself came on shore a few hours later, bought a bullock, and spent some time in the township.

“But,” Rutland went on to say, “the parson was so persistent in urging the Governor—the dear old fellow!—to have Lugard arrested as a suspected person, that he lost his temper, and said that as Marsbin was himself a magistrate, and Feilding another, they could issue a warrant on their own responsibility. He said, ‘To be quite frank with you, sir’ (this was told me later on by the Governor himself), ‘I am not going to be made yours and Feilding’s cat’s-paw. My opinion of Mr. Feilding you know, my opinion of you I can now express freely—I consider you ought to be relegated to your own particular work, which is of an ecclesiastical character; you are a disturbing element, and a confounded nuisance to the colony generally.’”

“I bade the two gentlemen good-bye, after expressing my belief to Feilding—who is a detestable little brute—that he and Marsbin were wrong in their imagining that Lugard was other than what he represented himself to be. ‘You’ll soon see,’ said the creature, with a malevolent grin. ‘I’ll lay him by the heels in a day or so.’”

Then Rutland told the doctor how on his return to his office he took the notes which had been sent him to the bank, and found out there that they had been paid out to Captain Lugard as part of an order drawn in his favour for £430 by Feilding!

“This *was* a surprise to me. What on earth could a man like Lugard have to do with Vincent Hewitt, an escaped convict and bushranger? Then I remembered that Hewitt had been in the Port Macquarie district quite recently, and he and two other escaped prisoners had captured the Government cutter at Camden Haven, and that Lugard had been to Port Macquarie soon after the affair. It certainly did look fishy; and the order had been cashed by Lugard himself! Then I began to understand the meaning of his apparently casual remark concerning ‘the friend’ of his who had borrowed £200 from a man whom he (Lugard) knew to be a ‘very good fellow’—meaning myself.”

“I see, I see, Rutland,” said Haldane; “this is most interesting. Go on.”

“Well—and this is the part of the story that I believe brings Lugard in with Lathom’s wife—when the two constables called on Lugard to surrender, he was accompanied by two other persons. One was Samuel Cole, an emancipist, and the other who was unknown to them, the constables described as a youth of about seventeen or eighteen, dressed in sailor’s rig. This youth was certainly not Patrick Montgomery, who is a big fellow of six feet.”

“Surely you don’t mean to say you think this sailor lad was Mrs. Lathom?” cried Haldane in astonishment. “What on earth would she be doing with Lugard? And where would Wray be?”

“Ah, that’s a bit of a puzzle! But here are some links in my chain of supposition that Lugard is associated with the disappearance of Lathom’s wife: First, this American whaling ship, the *Palmyra*, has been hanging about the coast for over a year, and visits Port Jackson so frequently that everyone wonders at it. Second: After the escape of John Adair from Port Macquarie the *Palmyra* appears at Botany Bay, and was certainly there the night of the affray between Lugard and the constables. Third: Some duck-shooters in the Botany swamps saw *four* persons riding at a gallop along the track to Cook’s Landing Place. Fourth: The *Palmyra* put to sea that night, and on that same night Mrs. Lathom and her maid Helen also disappear.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

Haldane agreed with the Commissary that the simultaneous disappearance of Mrs. Lathom, Helen, Wray, Lugard, and Montgomery and Cole was certainly very curious, and that it was possible that Wray, who felt grateful to the American seaman for protecting him from being further cheated by Feilding and Macartney, had told him something of the relations existing between Ida Lathom and himself, and Lugard, in return for this confidence, had offered to take them away from the colony in the whaling brig.

“For instance, doctor,” continued Rutland, “what could have been easier than for Lugard to say to Wray, ‘I’ll help you through in this matter with your lady love. You can both get a passage away in the *Palmyra*.’ And from such a God-forsaken and deserted place as Botany Bay they could have got away without notice—they could not have done so in Sydney. Then, again, Lugard may have made it a matter of business; Wray had come in for thirty thousand pounds, and he—if he really is as infatuated with Mrs. Lathom as she is with him—would not hesitate at spending a thousand or so in order to get away without beat of drum.”

Haldane nodded. “It’s a wretched, beastly business. I don’t know what is best for me to do. I suppose I might as well go to Port Macquarie and tell Lathom that she has gone?”

The Commissary had just said “Yes,” when a knock came to the door, and a young man in the uniform of a naval lieutenant entered the room.

“Hullo, Mr. Rutland! How do you do?” he said, extending his hand. “How is Mrs. Rutland? Well, I trust?”

“Quite well, Ralston. This is my friend, Mr. Haldane—Haldane, Mr. Ralston of H.M.S. *Marlborough*. Sit down, Ralston;” and he rang the bell for the waiter. “What brings you ashore in full fig at this time in the morning?”

“Most important business,” replied the young officer, with a laugh; “so important that I already feel I shall fly my own flag and be buried in Westminster Abbey or St. Paul’s, with my bier bedewed by the tears of the mourning British public. I’m going off in chase of a pirate ship, or something of that character. But I want a stiff brandy—want it sadly, or badly, for my newly acquired and tremendous responsibilities have so unnerved me that I must take to strong drink. And then I also want our esteemed Boniface Bennett to put me up a case or two of grog as well to take aboard my new command.”

“New command?” said Rutland inquiringly to the young man, who had made himself an especial favourite with Mrs. Rutland and the Commissary’s family generally by his frank, ingenuous manner.

“Yes,” replied Ralston, with a merry twinkle in his bright eyes. “I am promoted to be commander of His Majesty’s ship *Coot*—and a rare old coot she is, too: leaks like a basket, and sails as fast as a one-legged horse can gallop.”

Both Haldane and Rutland knew the vessel—a good-sized brigantine which had for many years been employed by the Government in conveying stores, and occasionally soldiers, between Van Dieman’s Land and Port Jackson. She was old, a rather poor sailer, and carried six guns.

“Surveying service?” asked Rutland, with kindly interest.

“Surveying service, indeed! Did I not tell you just now, Mr. Rutland, that I am going off in pursuit of a pirate;” and then, dropping his jesting tone, he said, “The fact is, Mr. Rutland, there has been an escape of convicts, and the Governor this morning sent for the Commodore. The result of their interview was that orders were given to get the old *Coot* ready for sea immediately. Then the Commodore told me that I was to have command, and that I was to report myself personally to the Governor, who would give me certain instructions. Off I went, and saw the old cock. He was very kind to me, and told me that I was to search for an American whaling brig called the *Palmyra*, in which these convicts are believed to have escaped, and if I found them on board, to seize the vessel and bring her back. It seems a curious business, and the old gentleman, I could see, is very much upset. There is a Captain Lugard mixed up——” He stopped suddenly, remembering that he had met Lugard at Rutland’s house.

“Go on, Ralston. Tell us all you can with propriety,” said the Commissary earnestly; “both Dr. Haldane and I are very much interested in this matter, and, indeed, were speaking of Captain Lugard and this very ship when you came. As you know, he was a visitor at my house, and I sincerely regret he is mixed up in this affair.”

“And the Governor seems worried over it, too,” said Ralston. “He told me that I should have to proceed with the greatest circumspection. Lugard, he said, had brought letters from the Home Government which he considered quite established his *bona fides*. He came here to search for some person, and he (the Governor) said he was between two stools. If he failed to despatch a vessel in search of the *Palmyra*, the Home Government would raise a devil of a row; if he made a mess of it by having an American ship overhauled, and no escaped convicts were found on board, he would be held equally to blame. But it seems that there actually was a warrant out for Lugard’s arrest, and on that ground alone he must proceed, although I can see that the old fellow doesn’t like it. He says that there is no definite evidence that Lugard was concerned in the escape of some Irish prisoner from Port Macquarie, although he certainly did resist arrest upon a warrant issued by a Mr. Feilding—a magistrate here—and he and

a man named Cole knocked the constables down and gagged them. It's a curious business. Now I must be off and see Bennett. I may have to cruise along the coast as far as Endeavour Straits, and, being of a luxurious habit, want to provide myself with some few delicacies for my tender stomach."

"When do you sail, Mr. Ralston?" asked Haldane quickly.

"About six o'clock this evening—as soon as I get my stores, &c. on board."

Shaking hands with Rutland and his friend, he went off, and then Haldane said to the Commissary:

"Rutland, I don't know whether I am doing wisely or not; but I'm off to the Governor to get his permission to sail in the *Coot*. He won't refuse me a favour. I need not tell him why I want to go—anyway, he may not ask. If he does I'll tell him. And he is a firm friend of Fred Lathom."

Rutland grasped his hand. "You are a good fellow, Haldane. But what will you do if Ralston should overtake this vessel, and you find Wray and Mrs. Lathom on board?"

"I can't tell, Rutland. I must think it out later on. I want to spare Lathom all I can. And if they *are* on board, I'll try hard to see that Wray does not come back to Sydney with her. *He* is not wanted by the authorities, and possibly I can manage to get him put ashore at one of the settlements on the coast, or else on board some other ship bound away from Australia. I won't mince matters with him; I can make him fight as a last resort. Oh, it's a damnable business, Rutland!"

"It is, indeed!" said the ruddy-faced Commissary, with genuine sympathy in his voice. "Now, tell me, what about money? You may need some."

"I may indeed. Will you lend me £500 till I return, whenever that may be?"

"More if you want it, Haldane. Get you off to the Governor, and I'll have the money ready for you in gold when you return. Now for Heaven's sake, don't go writing me out an I.O.U. when time presses!" and the kind-hearted official literally pushed his friend out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIX

Just as the *Palmyra* rounded Smoky Cape and brought-to in smooth water under the lee of the headland, John Adair died, quietly and peacefully, with Helen kneeling at his side.

The brig came to an anchor less than a cable length from the shore. The tide was on the ebb, and therefore Carroll, as the vessel could not be beached for another eight hours, when it would be full flood, told the mate to get the one "stand-by," or spare boat, up from the 'tween decks, where it was always carried, and make it ready to go on shore.

A few minutes later Vincent Hewitt came on deck and told the captain that his uncle was dead.

"Poor girl!" said the whaleman; then turning to the crew he held his hand up warningly to those of the crew who were getting the boat up from the hold.

"Go easy, men—make as little noise as possible. Mr. Dawson, half-mast the colours."

The rough seamen responded with a low and willing "Ay, ay, sir," to their captain's command, for they knew as they saw the second mate take the brig's ensign out of the flag locker, that the "old passenger," as they had termed John Adair, had passed away, and proceeded with their duties in that silent manner which, primarily the result of the habit of unquestioning obedience to their officers' orders, became the more marked and subdued when they knew that Death had come amongst them.

As soon as the boat was in the water Carroll and Lugard went below to get arms and ammunition for themselves and the boat's crew. They stepped very quietly, but Helen heard them, and came out of her father's cabin. There was no need for them to tell her of their deep sympathy—she could read it in their faces, as they silently pressed her hand in turn.

"Captain Lugard and I must leave the ship for an hour or two, Miss Adair," said the master of the brig, "we wish to search for a suitable spot to beach her; but Mr. Grey and the steward will be at your service, and your cousin will, of course, remain with you."

"You are all very kind to me, Captain Carroll; and I am, I assure you, very, very grateful for all the attention you gave my poor father." She tried to smile through her tears. "Now, I shall not cry any more; I must remember that you have much to do, and I want to help and not hinder you. Please tell me when you wish to—to take my father——"

Lugard interrupted her gently—"Not to-day, Miss Adair. Captain Carroll thought that you would approve of to-morrow morning."

“And Captain Lugard thought, Miss, that perhaps you would like to choose the spot where you wish your father to be buried. He will take you on shore when we return if you wish.”

“Ah, Captain Lugard!” said the girl gratefully, “that is indeed thoughtful of you. I shall never, never forget your kindness not only to me, but to my father; and to my cousin as well, for he owes his liberty to you.”

“It is a happiness to Captain Carroll and myself to do all that we can for you, Miss Adair, whilst you are on board the *Palmyra*” replied the young American gravely, as if he were alluding to the present only, and did not wish to recall anything that he had done in the past. “Would you like to come ashore in about two hours from now. It is still blowing hard, but the rain has ceased.”

“Thank you, Captain Lugard; I shall be quite ready.”

Ten minutes later the boat pushed off from the brig and headed for the mouth of a small stream which debouched into the sea less than three hundred yards from where she lay.

“Poor little hooker!” said Carroll, as he gazed back affectionately at his vessel, “she looks little better than a wreck. Ha, Grey has started the men at the pumps again! I should have told him to let them rest until we get back—they make a fearful noise, and I don’t want that poor girl to be disturbed more than we can help.” Then he called out, “Back, port,” to the crew, swung the boat’s head round with the great steer oar, and hailed the mate.

“Let the pumps stand awhile, Mr. Grey. We’ll take a rousing good spell at them when I come back.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” replied Grey, who at once guessed the reason for the order, and once more the burly skipper slewed the boat round for the shore.

“You must try and keep the young lady on shore for two hours or more if you can, Lugard,” he said to his friend; “you see, I want to fix the poor old gentleman up in a real shore-going fashion, and I don’t want her to come on deck and see the carpenter at work on some teak planks I have in the ’tween decks. It’s a knock to any woman’s feelings to see coffin-making going on, on board a ship, especially when she knows it is to hold some one very dear to her. So I’ve told Chips to go about his work very quietly down in the ’tween decks till I get back. Then I’ll lend him a hand and we’ll finish the job on deck once you get the girl out of the way. And look here, Jim, how will this do? I’ve got a roll of white China silk which will come in well for the inside lining; and then you know them big brass handles on those long drawers in my cabin? Well, as soon as the girl is out of the ship, I’ll take four of ’em off, and get one of the hands to clean and polish ’em bright with vinegar and sandpaper. Then I’m going to polish and varnish the whole thing in regular Boston high-style, and then we must get particulars of the old man’s age, his full name and all that, and we’ll cut the lettering out of a sheet of copper. How will that do?”

"You *are* a good fellow, Carroll," said the younger seaman, "and I am sure that that poor girl will not forget you in her prayers."

"Well, we must do all we can to help her in such trouble," said the whaleman simply; "it would be downright wicked of us if we didn't. Then, I have daughters of my own, and that makes me feel soft over this girl."

The boat touched the beach near the mouth of the little stream, and the two men got out and stood on the hard, white sand which fringed the bay. The place was very quiet, and so sheltered by the high, wooded headland of the Cape that the violence of the still raging storm could only be imagined by the heaving billows to the eastward and the swaying of the great forest trees which clothed the sides of the lofty hills whose sloping spurs stretched down to within a few hundred yards of where the boat lay.

Shouldering their guns, the captains set out along the beach towards a spot which, seen from the brig, indicated deeper water close into the shore than in any other part of the bay. The rain had now quite ceased, and here and there a blue patch of sky was visible in the grey dome of the heavens; and, as they walked, a bright sun-blade pierced the clouds, and for a few moments shone upon the fringing beach and tree-clad hills. Swimming quite close to the margin of the sand were vast schools of fish—principally mullet, gar-fish, and whiting—which showed scarcely any signs of fear of the intruders, merely moving lazily away for a few feet and again resuming their former position as soon as the men had passed.

"We must get a cast of the seine here," said Carroll; "we can fill a boat down to the gunwales in an hour, and it will be a change from the eternal salt horse and rusty pork."

"There are also plenty of kangaroos and scrub wallabies about here, I am sure," said Lugard. "Anyway this is exactly the same kind of country as that about Port Macquarie and Cattai Creek, and there I have seen many hundreds of them every day. We might shoot a few, and get fresh meat as well as fresh fish. This is certainly a lovely little place for a few days' sport, and I wish we had the time for it."

"Well, we might manage the shooting as well as the fishing. Once we get the brig on the beach and find the leak, Grey will look after her, and you and I will see to the kangaroos. And to tell you the truth, although I want to get away as quickly as possible from this infernal coast, I'm afraid that this gale is not half blown out yet. I don't like to see the sky clearing in this curious, patchy way. Shouldn't be surprised if the worst of it has yet to come; if so, we are better off here than at sea."

"Neither do I like the looks of the weather, and if it were not for the danger of some settler or a passing vessel seeing the brig and reporting us either at Port Macquarie or Sydney, I should like to be here for a few days. We don't

want to be caught here, even lying at anchor—let alone being on the beach, hard and fast.”

A few minutes' walking brought them to the spot they had observed from the brig; a very brief examination showed it to be well fitted for careening the brig, and Carroll decided to put her ashore as soon as the tide was at full flood.

An hour sooner than was anticipated the boat returned to the ship, and shortly afterwards again left for the shore, carrying Helen, Lugard, and one of the boatsteerers—a young Western Islands' Portuguese named Manuel Castro—who was an excellent shot, and who, with the two other men who manned the boat, was to skirt the low scrub at the foot of the spurs, and endeavour to shoot some kangaroos or any other game they might fall across.

CHAPTER XXX

Two days had passed. John Adair had been buried on the seaward slope of a gently-rising spur which overlooked the deep blue waters of the quiet little bay. The spot was one of those small natural clearings so often met with in the forests of the eastern littoral of Australia—a sward of light-green, closely-knit couch grass in the midst of a grove of wild apple-trees, and tall, stately bangalow palms, the haunt of the sweet-voiced bell-bird and the gorgeous-plumaged king parrot. The place had been discovered by Lugard, who had pointed out the graceful fan-like leaves of the clump of bangalows to Helen, and Manuel Castro and the other two seamen soon cut a passage through the low thicket scrub that lay between the base of the spur and the beach at high-water mark. At the head of the old man's grave, Patrick Montgomery and Cole had placed a tall cross made from the trunk of a blackbutt tree found lying prone beside the little stream that trickled below; it faced towards the sea, a glimpse of which could be seen through the smooth, grey boles of the palms and slender, mottled trunks of the wild apples.

Towards noon of the third day the *Palmyra* was ready to be floated again, as soon as the tide served. The principal leak was found to be caused—as Lugard had surmised—by the starting of a butt-end under the counter on the port side, whilst on both port and starboard sides amidships the caulking had worked out of her planking owing to the severe straining she had undergone at the outset of the gale. This, of course, had to be remedied, even though it necessitated the vessel being delayed several days; for, after the started butt-end had been made secure and the port side well caulked, Carroll had to await another tide in order to cant her over to port so as to get at the starboard side. This had meant a great deal of work for the crew from the first; for in order to well careen her a number of barrels of whale oil had to be hoisted on deck and made secure on one side as well as the want of bulwarks would permit. Then after the repairs to the port side had been effected, another flood tide had to be awaited, so as to get the ship on an even keel before the casks could be moved across the deck again. Yet, although the men had worked most willingly, the delay caused by John Adair's funeral—which was attended by half of the ship's company—had been very considerable, and then in addition to the damage she had sustained to the hull, the vessel's standing rigging, it was found, would need to be set up and many defects aloft made good before she could safely put to sea again.

By this time, although the sky had cleared and the wind lessened in its violence, it was still blowing hard, and Carroll congratulated himself on his

luck in being in such a sheltered situation, where he could go on with the needful repairs.

“After all,” he said to Hewitt and Lugard, “we should not grumble—we might have fared worse.”

“You take things very philosophically, Carroll,” remarked the younger captain, “considering you have lost all your boats but one, and try-works, and that as far as any more whaling goes the voyage is over.”

“That is so—but it can’t be helped. And we’ll be in the East Indies all the sooner, though the Lord knows I shall turn green when I hear ‘There she blows’! sung out, and know it is no use lowering our one boat to kill a whale that, although we could cut it in, we couldn’t try it out.”

“I have no hesitation in saying this, Captain Carroll, although I say it on my own responsibility—that when Mr. Walter Adair learns of the misfortune with which you have met, he will amply compensate you for your loss.”

“I am sure he will,” said Hewitt earnestly; “he has no children of his own, and I know that for the sake of my cousin Helen—if for no other reason—he will be anxious to prove his gratitude to you.”

“I don’t count on getting anything that I’m not entitled to, gentlemen,” said the big man, with a laugh, “but, at the same time, if Mr. Adair is going to be extra good to me I’m not the man to put my finger in my mouth and look down at my toes and say, ‘Please don’t’ to him.”

They were at this time on shore in a large tent made from a spare foresail; for when the brig was canted over on her side the good-natured whaleman insisted that for Helen’s comfort a shelter should be put up for her on a dry, sandy mound at the mouth of the little stream running into the bay; and here, ever since her father’s burial, Helen had spent most of the time, guarded at night by Patrick Montgomery, Cole, and Manuel Castro.

And, as the burly captain was speaking, she entered the tent, carrying a large bunch of “velvet,” sometimes called “flannel” flowers, which she had gathered during her walk along the base of the mountain spur which would be for ever dear to her memory.

“Are they not wonderful flowers, Captain Carroll?” she asked, as she sat upon the rough seat which Hewitt eagerly brought to her. “See”—and she handed the bunch to the whaleman—“what soft, white, velvety petals, and such a strange pale green centre. There are so many about here, growing even in the sandy soil just above the beach. At Waringa I used to find a few, but Mrs. Lathom did not like them, so I never brought them to the house—she said they looked like nuns who had taken the veil—but Captain Lathom was very fond of them, and was always so pleased when I brought him some. He loved flowers, and told me of some he had seen in the West India Islands when he was there before he was married. There was one in particular of which he told

me—oh, how I should love to see it!”

“What was it like, Miss Adair?” said Lugard.

“Oh, it must be lovely, Captain Lugard! You know how Captain Lathom speaks—so quietly and gravely, and yet how his eyes light up when he is really interested in anything. He told me that this flower—it is an orchid—grows on a rough, coarse stalk like that of a hollyhock, but that when the bud unfolds it reveals a tiny little white dove, with wings and beak and breast, nestling upon the top of what looks like a cross. The Spanish people, he said, called it, ‘the flower of the Holy Spirit.’ ”

“I have seen the flower, Miss Adair. It is indeed very wonderful, and Captain Lathom described it most accurately,” said Lugard. “Now, I’m off for a long walk to the top of the cape to see how it looks outside to the southward. Will you and Hewitt come, captain?”

“I’m only too glad,” replied Hewitt. “Come, Captain Carroll, bring your gun. We are sure to get a wallaby or two.”

The three men started off, leaving Helen in the care of Cole and Montgomery, for although no recent signs had been seen of any aboriginals being in the immediate vicinity it was considered safest to keep a constant watch, for the tent could have been very easily approached by the stealthy savages through the thick scrub between the beach and the base of the spur, and the occupants speared or clubbed within sight of the brig; so either Montgomery or Cole, with one of the crew, was always on guard.

The climb to the ridge of the spur which stretched out so far into the sea, and had been named “Smoaky Cape” by the gallant Cook, was not so difficult as it seemed to be from the shore, and in a little more than an hour they found themselves on the actual summit of the cape itself, an open, well-grassed space of about two acres in extent, and completely sheltered from the violence of the wind by a thick growth of honeysuckle and stunted gum-trees. A number of wallaby were feeding quietly on the rich, green herbage, and Carroll and Hewitt each succeeded in shooting one, but Lugard, who had fired at the largest of the lot, only succeeded in wounding it, and the animal at once leapt away in the direction of the sea-face of the cape.

“Take care you don’t go over,” cried Carroll warningly, as Lugard, hastily reloading his gun with a bullet instead of shot, started off after the creature.

“All right,” he shouted back; “there’s a big fringe of thick scrub growing along the top of the cliff, and that is where I’ll get him. I can’t fall through the scrub;” and in a few seconds he was out of sight.

As Carroll and Hewitt were examining their wallabies they heard the report of Lugard’s gun; then his voice calling to them:

“Come here, quickly!”

Descending the dangerously-steep side of the Cape for about a hundred

yards, they entered the belt of scrub, where they found Lugard. He was standing in the midst of the timber looking through the trees out upon the sea.

“Where is the wallaby?” asked Hewitt.

“Down there somewhere; but never mind it now. Look there.”

He pointed away to the southward to a large vessel that was running before the gale under storm canvas, and was at that moment not more than three miles away. She had lost several of her upper spars, but seemed to be making good weather of it otherwise.

“She is bound to see us,” said Hewitt anxiously.

“Certain to,” said Lugard; “but I don’t think it will matter even if she runs round the cape and takes shelter as we have done—her skipper and I are good friends. That is the *Leeuwarden*. I know her looks too well to make any mistake.”

“What is to be done?” asked Carroll.

“Nothing. We can’t stop her from running in here for shelter, can we? And Jan Schouten is not a bad old fellow. Let us get down to the brig as soon as we can, or he’ll be round the Cape and at anchor before we are on the beach.”

Leaving the two wallabies where they were lying, the men started off on their return.

CHAPTER XXXI

As soon as the three men emerged from the scrub upon the beach, they met Helen, who was accompanied by Patrick Montgomery, armed with rifle and cutlass.

“What is the matter captain?” asked Helen anxiously; “has anything happened? It frightened me to see you all running.”

“Don’t be alarmed, Miss Adair. It is only a large ship just coming round the cape.”

Her face paled. “Not a King’s ship, I trust, Captain Carroll?”

Lugard smiled. “No indeed, Miss Adair. ’Twould be awkward for us and the rest of the people on board the *Palmyra* if we were caught here. This is a Dutch merchant ship of whose captain you have heard me speak. His name is Jan Schouten, and he is a friend of mine.”

“Oh, of course—the captain of the *Leeuwarden*.”

“Here she comes, sir,” cried Montgomery, and, as he was speaking, the barque swept past the steep-to face of the cape, and then hauled to the wind so as to bring-to under its lee. Her sudden appearance caused the greatest surprise on board the *Palmyra*, whose crew were all clustered together watching the stranger, who presently, after a cast or two of the lead, brought-to about a quarter of a mile distant from the careened brig, and as her cable spun through her hawsepipe the Dutch colours were run up, and responded to by the *Palmyra*.

“Ah, that’s right,” said Carroll. “I was wondering if Grey would hesitate about showing our colours when he must know that the skipper of the barque knows us pretty well, having seen us twice in Port Jackson. Schouten will be sending a boat to us as soon as he has snugged down a bit.”

“Sure to,” said Lugard, who seemed to be lost in sudden meditation, as with hands in his pockets he stared blankly at the Dutch barque. Then he swung round on his heel to Carroll, and drew him aside for a few minutes, speaking in a low tone.

“Certainly, I leave everything to you,” said the whaleman, who then addressed Helen.

“Miss Adair, for very good reasons we wish you, Mr. Hewitt, Montgomery, and Cole to go into the tent and remain there till we send the boat for you about dusk. There is no danger, but Captain Lugard and I do not wish any of you to be seen. Good-bye for the present.”

Helen and the two men at once obeyed without the slightest questioning, and Carroll and his friend walked quickly down the beach to the brig.

“Now I’ll tell you the story as briefly but as fully as I can,” said Lugard, and taking the big man by the arm, he first told him of what he had heard from Schouten about the two passengers expected on board the *Leeuwarden*, then of his subsequently overhearing a conversation in Lamont’s house between the Jew and a visitor who were in another room, concerning these same passengers, and the elaborate plans made for their flight that night by the old Jew.

“Then,” continued Lugard, “I heard Lamont’s visitor, as he was leaving, speak loudly enough for me to recognise his voice; and it made me jump with astonishment, for I knew the man well. And his name isn’t Thompson; but that’s of no consequence to us. I rather like him.”

“Do you know who the woman is?”

Lugard shook his head. “No, I do not. But I do know the man—he’s a soldier officer who has come in for a fortune. He has seen Miss Adair scores of times at Lathom’s house, and—*can it possibly be she?*”

“Who?”

“Oh, a woman I know, and who Miss Adair knows well, too,” he continued guardedly, for he had just remembered that he had on several occasions heard Wray’s name coupled with that of Mrs. Lathom, “but it is no use surmising. What we must do is to prevent Miss Adair herself seeing, or being seen, by Schouten’s passengers—it would upset her terribly, perhaps. And the sooner we get to sea the better.”

Carroll assented, and said the brig would be not only afloat, but could get under way in three hours, and that Helen might come off and go to her cabin before the vessel began to haul off into deep water; for as she rose to an even keel, he would begin to re-stow her cargo so as to save time. This was very satisfactory to Lugard, who was now most anxious to have the *Palmyra* at sea again.

“There was bound to be a big hue and cry after the *Palmyra*,” he said, “and quite likely the *Leeuwarden* may be wanted as well. So ’tis best to be careful.”

Just at they reached the brig’s tide one of the boatsteerers called out that a boat was coming from the barque.

They went on deck—Carroll to hurry up the preparations for floating the brig, and Lugard to look at the boat, which he soon saw was steered by the fat old Dutchman himself.

“Good morning, Captain Schouten,” he cried.

“Ah, goot morning, mine friend Lugardt,” replied the skipper, standing up and waving his hat. “I dort it vas you, und der *Palmyra*.”

“It is,” said Lugard cheerfully, pleased that Wray was not in the boat. “Pull right up here under our stern—there’s enough water there, and I’ll put a ladder over for you.”

The moment Schouten climbed up and stood on the poop he shook hands most heartily with Lugard, inquired what was the matter with the brig, and offered such assistance as he could afford.

“Thank you, captain, but we are nearly over our troubles now, and are putting to sea again in a few hours. Ha! come here, Carroll. This is my good friend, Captain Jan Schouten of the *Leewarden*. Come, let us go below and see what the steward can give us.”

As soon as they were seated over a glass of grog, Lugard took Schouten into his confidence, and asked him not to let any of his people on shore until after the brig had left.

The old man grinned and smacked the American on the shoulder—“Dond you haf no fears, my friendts, I vill do as you vish. Und you vill do the same by me, eh?”

Lugard nodded at him approvingly.

“You haf nod forgodden dot I, too, haf some passengers on mine schipp?” asked Schouten, with an atrocious wink, “and dot dey mide not pe too anxious to meet any peoples who come from Sydney?”

“Ah, yes, I remember now.”

“And look you, Captain Lugardt; I vill tell you dis,” and he lowered his voice and said that only half an hour previously, as he was scanning the brig and the tent through his glass, “Mr. and Mrs. Thompson” had come on deck and inquired the name of the stranded vessel. Schouten told them, and added that he would lower a boat and visit her, as there was a man on board who was a friend of his—an American who had come to Sydney from Batavia in the *Leeuwarden*—a Captain Lugard.

“Whom did you say?” Mr. Thompson had asked sharply.

Schouten repeated the name, and then, to use his own words, the lady went “as vite as a ghost, and nearly fell down on the deck,” and her husband had to carry her below. “Then,” the good-natured Dutchman went on to say, “the lady’s husband come to me und say, ‘Mynheer Schouten, vill you do me the good favour, and I vill pay you fifty poundts. I do not vant Captain Lugardt—who is a goot gentlemans enough—to see me; so my vife und myself vill keep to our cabins.’”

“Poor devils!”

“Und I dold him dot he need haf no fears, und dot I did not vant any fifty poundts nor fifty schillings; und dot as soon as I had sent me oop mine new royal masts und top gallant masts, I would sail me away quickly.”

“You need not hurry on our account,” said Lugard, grasping his hand. “You can tell your passengers that this brig will not be here for three hours longer. Now, tell us how you have fared in this gale?”

Half an hour later the Dutch captain bade Lugard and Carroll farewell, and

returned to his ship, and just as darkness fell, the crew of the little brig manned her windlass, and with a rousing chanty lifted her anchor as the topsails were loosed, hoisted, and sheeted home. Then Carroll canted her off to starboard, and she slowly passed close under the high, square stern of the larger vessel—so closely and so slowly that Helen, looking out from her own window, could have seen into the spacious, well-lighted cabin through the two wide ports, were it not for the scarlet curtains with which they were draped to keep out the night air. But suddenly those of the port nearest to Helen were drawn aside, and a fair face appeared—the face of Ida Lathom. For a moment or two they looked at each other in silent amazement, then the curtains were drawn swiftly together again, and the *Palmyra* passed ahead, out to the open sea.

CHAPTER XXXII

A soft air, carrying with it the sweet, earthy smell of the rich, red soil of the mountain forest, crept down to the sea, and slowly dispelled the thin haze that had lain upon it ever since sunset.

It was just before dawn, and only the steady pacing of the officer on watch, broke the silence of the deck as Lugard, who had been sleeping on the top of the skylight, rose, went to the break of the poop, and leant over the fife rail, where he was presently joined by Carroll, who came from below.

“Still calm,” said Lugard.

“Aye, but we ought to get a breeze this morning. Can you still see the Dutchman?”

“No, but we shall as soon as the mist lifts a bit. Ha! there he is,” and Lugard pointed to the indistinct outline of the *Leeuwarden* about three miles away.

It was the fourteenth day after the brig had left Trial Bay. For the first week she had run along the coast at a great rate before the strong south-easterly, then came light winds, and finally, when within sixty miles of the chain of low, sandy islets called Wreck Reef, a dead calm, which so far had lasted for thirty-six hours. On the previous afternoon the Dutch barque had been sighted coming up astern, but the wind failed her also, and during the night both vessels had lain becalmed. Lugard was not surprised at the appearance of the barque, for Schouten had told him that he meant to go north about round New Caledonia, believing that by so doing he would make a quicker passage to Valparaiso than by beating to the eastward.

Lugard was now quite certain that it was Mrs. Lathom who was Wray’s companion, for ten minutes after the brig had passed the barque in Trial Bay, Helen had come to him on deck, and, placing her hand on his arm, had asked him if Captain Schouten’s wife was with him on the *Leeuwarden*.

“No,” he replied.

“Then are there any women passengers?” she asked.

“There is one,” he answered evasively.

“I saw her. She drew aside the curtains of a stern window. I had a good view of her face, and—and she was so exactly like Mrs. Lathom that I thought I must be dreaming. She looked across to me, and I fancied I saw her lips move as if to speak; then suddenly the blinds were drawn together again.”

“You have had much to trouble you of late, Miss Adair,” said Lugard gravely, “and the great sorrow you have just experienced would no doubt bring back to your memory people and scenes——”

"I know what you mean," she interrupted, "but the resemblance was so startling that for the next few minutes I was quite unnerved. Of course it must have been the lady passenger. I wonder who she is?"

"A Mrs. Thompson, so Schouten told me," he answered, with a little assumed impatience.

"It was a very beautiful face——" began Helen, when he turned sharply away from her and called to the second mate who was for'ard.

"All right, Mr. Dawson, I am coming," and he disappeared down the poop ladder, and Helen saw him no more that night.

And as he leant on the fife rail smoking his pipe, dreamily gazing out upon the smooth, sleeping ocean, and thinking of the events of the past year, of Lathom and his beautiful wife, of Wray and the scene at the "Currency Lass," and of Helen—always of Helen—his musings were broken by the mate telling him that a sail was in sight to the northward, hull down. Taking his glass, he walked for'ard and went aloft on the fore topgallant yard.

In the quiet cabin of the brig, two persons were seated together on the transom locker—Helen and Vincent Hewitt. She, always of early habits, was generally on deck soon after sunrise, but this morning she had seated herself on the comfortably cushioned transoms which ran close to the two square, old-fashioned, ports, and leaning her face on her hand was watching the gambols of some small fish playing about the rudder, when she was joined by her cousin.

"Not coming on deck, Helen? The sun is well up, and the sea is as smooth as glass."

"No, Vincent. I shall stay here for awhile. Do look at these fish; see how they dart about the rudder every time it moves. Come here, beside me, there is plenty of room."

He sat, or rather knelt beside her, and as his face came close to hers, he kissed her lips. Something like a flash of anger tinged her cheek, and she drew quickly away from him. When her father was dying, and after his death, and when her heart was wrung with grief, her cousin had often kissed her, and she had kissed him, as a brother and sister would kiss when some mutual sorrow had befallen them, but the kiss he had just given her was that of a lover.

"Helen, dear," said Hewitt, taking her hand, and his handsome face glowed as he gazed into her dark eyes, "you must not be angry. You will soon be my wife——"

"Stop, Vincent," she said gently but steadily; "you will remember that on the morning after our escape, when you asked me to be your wife, I told you that although I had always loved you as my cousin I had never thought of you as a husband. And, Vincent dear, do not ask me again. It grieves me to hurt you."

The man's face paled. "Surely, Helen, you cannot mean it! Almost the last words your father spoke to us was a wish that when we reached America we should be married."

"I know it, Vincent," said the girl, as her eyes filled with tears. "Do you think I shall ever forget anything that he said to me at that time? 'Dear child,' he said, 'Vincent loves you well, and if you love him in return, it would make me happy to know that when you reach America you will be his wife. But if the love is all on your side, Vincent, and her affection for you is but that of a cousin, you must not persuade Helen against her will—that would be wrong.'"

Hewitt was silent for a few moments. Then, as he looked at her pale, sad face, a great pity filled his heart, and he resolved to say no more to her until she was brighter and stronger. But hope was strong within him that he would yet win her. He would wait patiently.

"You must forgive me, Helen," he said, pressing his lips to her hand, "but you have always been in my heart, always, even when in Van Dieman's Land, when my heavy irons were cutting more into my soul than into my flesh; for it was the hope of seeing you once more that kept me from ending my misery by taking my own life, as many a poor devil did down there in that abode of horror—Port Arthur. And I can never forget those old days in Ireland, when you and I were boy and girl lovers, and——"

"Don't Vincent," she said pleadingly, "I cannot bear to think of those old, happy days. We have all suffered—you most of all, for father told me that he was never ironed, nor subjected to any of the awful cruelties inflicted upon so many other prisoners—and yet my sufferings, which were but little compared with yours, seem to have blotted all the happy memories of my childhood out of my mind for ever. So do not speak of those past days, dear Vincent. And think of me only as one who loves you for the ties of kinship that bind us, and for all that we—father, you, and I—have endured in common. Don't ask me to marry you"—she leant forward and kissed him on his sunburned forehead—"but take me safely to Uncle Walter, who will surely give me a home now that father is dead, and he has no child of his own. Oh, Vincent, life is very dull and grey and sad to me now!"

"I would give my life for you, Helen," he said huskily.

"I know it, Vincent. Now, please go on deck and I will follow you in a minute."

A heavy footstep sounded on the companion steps, and Carroll entered the cabin.

"Good morning, Miss Adair. Coming on deck to take your usual sun-bath? There is another ship in sight."

"Is she near?" asked Hewitt.

"No, you can't see much of her from the deck, but Captain Lugard has

been aloft, and says she is a brigantine.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

Soon after nine o'clock a light breeze sprang up from the eastward, and both the brig and barque were soon slipping through the water with all canvas set, and steering N. by W.—a course which would take them well clear of the dangerous islets of Wreck Reef. The *Leeuwarden*, heavy and cumbersome as she looked, was, in reality, a fine sailer, and it was with some chagrin and surprise that Carroll saw her soon after noon pass the *Palmyra* and steadily draw ahead.

“He'll pass Wreck Reef a good way ahead of us,” said Lugard; “what is the distance now?”

“Forty-five miles I make it, and on this course we shall pass about twenty miles to windward of it.”

“But these are very tricky currents around here, and I think we might as well let her come up a couple of points.”

“Oh, we are all right. Let us go on as we are; it's our best sailing point, and there will be an all but full moon at seven to-night. I've seen the main islet on Wreck Reef six miles away on a clear night. And anyway we have the Dutchman right ahead. He knows his way along here as well as I do, and we can safely follow him.”

Lugard was hardly satisfied, for although it was true that by reason of his many voyages to Sydney from Batavia the Dutch skipper was well acquainted with the Australian coast, and especially with the outlying islands and reefs both inside and outside the Great Barrier Reef, he was a somewhat careless navigator, and apt to run risks. But professional etiquette prevented his saying any more on the subject. There was always an excellent look-out kept on the *Palmyra*, day and night, and all three mates were thorough and careful seamen.

The same light easterly air which was carrying the barque and brig along their northerly course was also a beam wind for the brigantine sighted early in the morning; she was steering south, and at two in the afternoon Dawson, the second officer, who was looking at her with the glass, called to the captain and Lugard to come on deck at once.

“What is it, Dawson?” asked Carroll, as the officer handed him the glass.

“Well, sir, I reckon you and I know that fellow. Anyway, if you don't, I do. That's the *Coot*—that old six-gun crate that was lying in Sirius Cove when we were in Sydney the last time. If it ain't, then I'm a dead horse.”

“How do you know?” asked Lugard quickly.

“By her sails, sir. I took particular notice of them when she sailed into the Cove—an old foresail with three new cloths in the bunt, and one at each leech;

a narrow-gutted topsail with a hoist high enough for a frigate, and a topgallant sail as big as a table cloth with the foot of it cut half-moon shape by a blind sail-maker.”

“Carroll, I fear that Dawson is right,” said Lugard; “it will never do to let that fellow stop us, and unless we can show him our heels, he *will* stop us. I wonder what has brought him here—he was certainly in Sydney Harbour less than a month ago, repairing.”

“You said that there would be a hue and cry after us, Jim,” observed the whaleman placidly, “and here we are—I daresay this old box has been sent after us, and missed us when we were careening. Now the only thing to do is to get away from him before he can do us any damage. Hands to braces, Mr. Dawson. We’ll show the Britisher what this old blubber-hunter can do.”

He went to the wheel himself, and as the yards were braced up, he beckoned to Lugard, and, pointing to the four small guns on the main deck,^[1] said—

“If I had a long twenty-four instead of those, I’d give His Majesty’s *Coot* all she wanted——”

The loud boom of a cannon-shot interrupted him—the brigantine had luffed, and a puff of white smoke was floating from her side.

“He wants the Dutchman to heave-to,” cried Lugard, springing upon the quarter rail so as to get a better view, and in a moment the greatest excitement prevailed on the brig, those of the crew not on watch running aloft to look.

“He’s lowered a boat, sir,” called out the third mate, who was up in the maintop with his glass, “it is full of men.”

“Hurrah! the Dutchman won’t heave-to!” shouted some one up for’ard. “Look, he’s braced up sharp.”

“So he has,” said Lugard to Carroll. “Ah! there’s another gun—the brigantine has sent a shot across Schouten’s bows. The boat is away now, pulling hard for the barque.”

“All the better for us,” remarked the whaleman, casting an eye aloft; “it will give us all the more chance of getting away. Hoist our colours, Mr. Dawson.”

Lugard jumped down from the rail—“We *must* get away, Carroll. Look at the Britisher now—he has filled, and is standing on after us, leaving his boat to deal with the Dutchman.”

“So he is,” growled Carroll, with an oath, “but by Heavens, he is not going to play any games on me. If he tries to board me, I’m going to fight.”

For a few minutes the two men intently watched the pursuing vessel, which presently went about, and, as she came to the wind, fired a shotted gun at the *Palmyra* as a peremptory signal for her to heave-to. The ball fell far short, but as the crew of the brig saw the splash, a deep and angry murmur burst from

them, and the captain's face purpled with rage.

"That's enough for me!" he cried hoarsely to Lugard. "Here, take the wheel a minute," and springing to the break of the poop he bellowed like a bull to the crew to lay aft.

"Men, that brigantine is chasing us, and if we are captured it means that you, the officers of this ship, Captain Lugard, and myself, will rot in a Sydney gaol; and God knows what would be the fate of the young lady and Mr. Hewitt, and the other two men. Now you all know that your lay^[2] is one-third of the money I get for this venture in addition to your lay for the voyage: and you knew the risks, didn't you?"

"Ay, ay, sir," they responded.

"Well, I'll cut it short. If the wind falls light, we can't get away from that brigantine's boats; and, I swear I'll sink them if they come alongside. Will you stand by me, for the honour of the old flag?"

"Ay, ay, sir, we will," shouted the acknowledged leader of the crew, a big boatsteerer from Martha's Vineyard, and, "Serve out the arms! serve out the arms!" cried the others excitedly, as they tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get to the cabin; whilst Lugard, assisted by Hewitt, Montgomery, Cole, and the brig's cooper, got ready the four guns, for which there was a plentiful supply of ammunition.

The crew of the brig numbered thirty men, nearly all of whom were native-born Americans, the exceptions being Manuel Castro and two or three other Portuguese. They were all accustomed to the use of firearms, as were the crews of all whaleships who cruised among the islands of the South and North Pacific in those days.

In the meantime, whilst these preparations were going on, the *Leeuwarden* had continued her course, setting every stitch of canvas she could carry, except stun-sails, and keeping away to the N.W.; but the boat, manned by twenty sturdy bluejackets, was urged along in pursuit at such a pace that the distance between the two was slowly but surely diminishing.

"Oh! the idiot," said Lugard to Hewitt, as, desisting from his labours for a moment, he watched the chase of the barque, "why doesn't he set his stun-sails now that he is running free!—he could add another two knots to his speed." Then he walked aft to where Helen was sitting on the poop. She rose as he came to her, his dark face flushed with excitement.

"May I remain on deck, Captain Lugard?" she asked quietly. "I should like to—if I am not in the way."

"Stay until I—until we—ask you to go below," he replied.

"Thank you. I am not afraid, but I do hope that there will be no bloodshed," she said, as she resumed her seat, and lifted her eyes to his.

"There will be no bloodshed, Miss Adair, if we can possibly avoid it. And I

honestly believe we can and shall avoid it. I do not think that brigantine will even be able to get near enough to do us any damage with her guns," he said reassuringly.

"I do indeed thank God for that. Believe me, Captain Lugard, I do not feel for myself. I would gladly give myself up to that King's ship, and resign my liberty for ever, rather than know that I was the cause of the taking of one human life."

"Do not fear," he said, in almost whispered tones, "you shall not go back to Australia;" then he quickly went to the weather rail to join Carroll, just as the latter gave a loud, laughing "Ha, ha!"

"Look, look!" he cried, "the Dutchman has only been playing fox! See, he's setting all his stun-sails, and is simply running away from the boat."

For the moment Lugard did not answer, for he was watching the *Coot*, at this time to leeward less than half a mile distant from and nearly abeam of the brig. As he watched, the brigantine sent a second shot at the *Palmyra* to heaven. It struck the water a long way short, and Lugard laughed and gave his attention to the Dutch barque and the boat in chase of her.

The astute skipper of the *Leeuwarden* had indeed been "foxing," as Carroll had said. He was quite certain that his vessel could easily run away from the boat, and so determined to do all he could to save the *Palmyra* from capture. To Wray's passionate pleadings and offers of money to crack on all sail he had turned a polite but deaf ear, but finally taking pity on the man, he removed his pipe from his mouth and said:

"Mynheer Thompson, dond you fill yourself mit troubles. I know vat I vas doing. I vill let dat man-of-war poat coom oop und oop, and I vill go on und on und on until dose poor tuyvels of sailor mens vill be very tired, und den ven dey begin to coom too close to mine goot schipp, I vill set me mine stun-sails, and away ve vill go like schmoke—so," and taking a long pull at his pipe he shot out a puff of smoke from his distended cheeks.

"But why not put more sails on the ship now?" queried Wray.

"Pecause, mynheer, I vant to help mine goot friendt Lugardt und der captain of dot brig all I can, und I can help them very mooch by enticing dis boat full of mens to follow me. Ven dey see dot dey cannot poard my schipp, they vill turn pack und try to catch der *Palmyra*."

Wray was still mystified, until Schouten gave a broad smile, and said:

"I dond know, mynheer, vat ter tuyvel der *Coot* do fire her guns at my schipp for, und chase me as if I vas a bad pirate mans; but I do know that there are some beoples from Sydney on board der *Palmyra* who are in great tanger if der *Coot* catches *them*;" and then he went on to say that as the barque and the brig had both sailed on the same day, and Lugard had informed him that several prisoners were missing, he suspected that the authorities had sent the

Coot in chase, to try and overhaul both vessels if possible, and to search them for the absconders.

Wray heaved a sigh of relief. "I am glad you have told me this; it is a load off my mind. But I am not going back on my word. I offered you another £500 not to let that boat board your ship. I will pay you the money whenever you assure me we are safe."

Schouten scratched his head. "You must be der richest shentleman's I ever see. Vell, I will dake der money if you gif it vit a goot heart."

"I will indeed."

"Den go you below, and loss away der dears from der eyes of der breddy little lady, und dell her from me dat in two hours more ve will be a long way from der oldt *Coot*, vich ve vill see no more."

As Wray entered the cabin Ida Lathom, almost fainting with terror, fell into his arms.

"Look up, dearest; do not weep any more. We are safe—quite safe. There, come, sit here, and I will tell you how very groundless were our fears."

[1] All whaleships in those days were well-armed, especially those cruising among the Pacific Islands.—L.B.

[2] A whaleman's "lay" is the moiety or share of the proceeds of the cruise on which, both officers and men ship instead of wages.

CHAPTER XXXIV

When Lieutenant Ralston made his humorous remark to Mr. Commissary Rutland concerning the sailing qualities of his new command he was not aware of the fact that a few weeks previously the brigantine, whilst undergoing some very necessary repairs, had had her mainmast shifted two feet further for'ard. The result of this alteration was a very material improvement in her sailing powers, as Carroll soon discovered, for after firing her second shot she continued her chase of the brig, apparently leaving the boat, which was vainly pursuing the *Leeuwarden*, to take care of itself; for Ralston was determined to make the brig bring-to, not only as a matter of duty, but also because his professional pride as a seaman would not allow him to let her slip through his fingers. The breeze by this time had weakened—much to his satisfaction—although a rising bank of clouds to the southward denoted both wind and rain from that quarter, and he therefore determined to send away his only other boat and make a dash for the brig before it was too late; for not only was she slowly but surely outsailing the *Coot*, even in such a light breeze, but he knew that in another hour or so the coming squall would give the chase every chance of getting away, especially as he was now beginning to feel somewhat anxious about leaving the cutter, which was chasing the barque, exposed to the violence of a tropical squall (which might last several hours) especially as she was very deep in the water, owing to the number of men she carried.

He walked to the weather rail, and looked at the whaling brig, which was almost within cannon-shot of the nine-pounders, with which the *Coot* was armed, and saw that she was still steadily drawing ahead.

“Bos'un, tell the gunner I want him.”

The gunner, a short, square-set man, with “sea-dog” writ large on his rough, hairy face, came aft.

“Donaldson, pick out a dozen of the eighteen men we have left, and you, bos'un, have the second cutter ready to pipe away in ten minutes to board that brig. You will go in her, Mr. Donaldson. I'll give you further instructions presently.” Then he descended to the cabin. Only two persons were there—Dr. Haldane and Captain Lathom. They were seated at the table, smoking in silence.

“Well, gentlemen, this is a most horribly vexatious business, and I wish His Excellency had picked upon some one else to command this confounded brigantine. I'm hanged if I know what to do—but I must do something. This Yankee fellow won't heave-to, and is apparently ready to fight into the bargain, but if I don't board him within half an hour he'll give us the slip

altogether, and I'll be soundly bullied for it when I get back to Sydney, although the Governor—who is Naval Commander-in-chief—expressly desired me to try and avoid 'harsh measures.' Then, when you come on board, Dr. Haldane, you bring from him a letter telling me that as the Dutch barque sailed from Sydney at the same time that the Yankee left Botany Bay I must stop her also should I come across her. Then on the top of this he sends me a third letter just as the anchor is underfoot, desiring me to call in at Port Hunter for you, Captain Lathom, and land you at Port Macquarie—and a very unlucky thing it was for you."

Lathom, who looked worn and ill, and ten years older than when Haldane had seen him last at Waringa, smiled.

"That is not your fault, Mr. Ralston; you are not responsible for the weather, and I know that had it been possible for you to have landed me at Port Macquarie you would have done so. Neither of us are to blame; the Governor, knowing I was at Port Hunter in connection with the escape of Prisoner Adair, and that I should be glad to get back to my post by the very first opportunity, naturally enough thought of the *Coot*—and here I am."

"Well it seems selfish for me to say so, Captain Lathom, but I'm very glad of your company, and I am sure Dr. Haldane was delighted when I told him you were at Port Hunter. Now I must be off on deck, and send that boat away. I am sending the gunner in charge; he's a careful, steady man. I would go myself, but I can't leave the ship, being the only man on the *Coot* able to navigate, except Mr. Coffe, who is away in the cutter after the Dutchman. I sincerely trust the Yankee won't fight, but give in decently when Donaldson gets alongside."

"I wish it also, Mr. Ralston," said Haldane.

"I could, I believe, cripple him by bringing down some of his spars, for he is within range; but I don't want to do it. One reason it that I saw at least one woman on board, and the chances are that she would be the first person to be hit, or perhaps killed."

Haldane touched Lathom's foot with his own under the table.

"I should like to go with the boarding party, Mr. Ralston," he said; "my services may be required."

"It is very good of you, doctor; I hardly like to consent to your exposing yourself, but——"

"Tut, tut! I've been under fire before now," replied Haldane, as he rose.

"Well, the boat will be ready in five minutes," and so saying the young officer left the cabin.

"George," said Lathom hurriedly, "if it is her, for God's sake get her to come with you on board the *Coot* if Ralston seizes the brig, and I will leave this vessel and go on board the *Palmyra*. But if she *must* be told that I am here,

tell her that she need have no fear—I shall take care we do not meet. God knows I will do all I can to spare her. As for Wray—well, we shall have to tell Ralston the story.”

“I will do my best for you, my dear old friend,” replied Haldane.

Ten minutes later the second cutter left the brigantine, and as she pushed off, Ralston, as a last hope, signalled, “Heave-to, or I will sink you.”

No notice was taken, and the only person now visible on board was the man at the wheel.

But Carroll and Lugard had made their plans, and every man was in readiness not to repel boarders, but to evade them.

“Now, men,” said Carroll, addressing his crew, who were all sitting down on the deck so as to avoid being seen, “Captain Lugard and I have worked this thing out. We will give that boarding party the go-by. Be ready, when I give the word, to jump to the braces, and we’ll go round like a humming-top, and be off on the other tack before the Britisher knows it. Then all you’ve got to do is to skip below as quick as you can, for we’ll have to run right past the brigantine, and we’ll get her broadside, sure enough, and I don’t want any of you boys to get hit in the eye with a nine-pound cannon-ball.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” growled the men, disappointed at Carroll not allowing the boat to come alongside.

Then Carroll, Lugard, and a dozen seamen sprang up on the poop; the mate, with half a dozen more, went for’ard to attend to the head sheets, and the rest of the officers and crew stood in the waist, silently expectant.

“Let her go off a bit,” said the captain to the steersman.

“Let her go off a bit, sir.”

As the brig paid off, Carroll and Lugard watched the boat, now almost midway between the two vessels, her crew sending her through the water in gallant style.

“We’ll do now, Jim, I think?”

“Yes, put her round.”

Carroll made a gesture to the steersman, who put his helm down quickly, and the *Palmyra* spun round on her heel so steadily and swiftly that Ralston, who was anxiously watching, could not repress an exclamation of admiration, so smartly were her yards braced up on the other tack. In an instant, however, he discerned the reason of the manœuvre.

“Pipe ’bout, bos’un!” he shouted.

Shrilly sounded the whistle, and then came the bull-like bellowing roar of the bos’un’s voice as he repeated the order, and the few bluejackets on board jumped to the fore-braces.

“Pull, my hearties, pull!” shouted the gunner to his crew, as he slewed the

boat's head round, and headed her so as to intercept the brig.

Lugard ran for'ard and stood on the topgallant foc'scle.

"Keep off! keep off! or, by heavens, we'll run you down if you get athwart our hawse!" he cried fiercely to the gunner, pointing his pistol at him, and as he spoke ten or twelve of the brig's crew, who had disregarded Carroll's orders to remain below, jumped up after him, and presented their muskets at the boat.

But Donaldson took no heed. With a shout of encouragement to his crew, he deliberately steered for the brig's forefoot, intending to throw a grapnel over the bobstay, and then let the boat swing alongside under the fore-chains.

"Hard up, hard up!" shouted Lugard to Carroll; but it was too late, for either by accident or design the brig, instead of paying off, came up a couple of points, and crashed into the boat, the chain bobstay cutting her nearly in halves. Half of her crew were at once thrown into the water, and would have drowned as the brig swept by them had not Dawson and Carroll thrown overboard the wheel gratings and some spare boat oars, which were lashed to the after rail. Three of the occupants—two bluejackets and Dr. Haldane—had just succeeded in getting footing on to the bobstay itself, and were holding on to the martingale-guys, when, the brig still forging ahead, the boat parted amidships, the remainder of the crew clinging to the two halves, which quickly went astern, one on the weather, the other on the lee side.

"Quick, you men, get up here on the bowsprit!" cried a well-remembered voice to Haldane, and Lugard leant over and extended a helping hand. "You'll be washed off and drowned if you stay there."

Scarcely had Haldane and the two seamen clambered on board, when Carroll's loud voice rang out, as, taking the wheel himself, he cried:

"Down below, everybody!"

"Lie down, sir, lie down," said Lugard to the doctor, "the brigantine is luffing to give us a broadside."

The four men flung themselves flat down on the topgallant foc'scle, and no one remained erect but Carroll at the wheel.

Ralston, anxious to cripple the brigantine only, waited till she was within a cable length, and, sighting his guns for her foremast, fired.

There was a crashing of timber, and a big splinter was ripped out from the foremast just below the futtocks, but no other damage was done.

Carroll took off his cap and bowed politely to Ralston, and then, as the hands came tumbling up from below, he shouted out:

"All hands shorten sail!"

CHAPTER XXXV

As the crew of the *Palmyra* sprang aloft to shorten sail Lugard and Haldane went aft, and the latter waved his hand to Ralston and Lathom, who were both standing on the quarter-deck of the brigantine. They waved their hats to him in reply, and then the distance between the two vessels rapidly widened. The only remaining boat the *Coot* possessed—a small dinghy, carried on davits at the stern—was being lowered to rescue the gunner and his crew, for Ralston's chief concern now was first to get these men on board and then pick up the first cutter before the coming squall overtook and swamped her; once this was done, he intended to keep up the chase.

As Haldane stood on the after-deck the captain of the whaler eyed him sourly and wondered who he was until Lugard told him in a few hurried words.

"This is Dr. Haldane. He is a civilian passenger on the *Coot*, and only came with the boarding party in case his professional services were required."

Carroll's face lightened. "Well, Dr. Haldane, I'm sorry for you. You and the two men with you will have to stay on board until we meet with some vessel bound to the colonies. I have but the one boat, and I'm not going to run any more risks by trying to send you back to your ship. As it is, I had a task to restrain my crew from firing into her just now, after the unwarrantable attack she has made upon this vessel. But," he added, looking at the doctor's dripping garments, "you had best go below, and my steward will give you a change of clothes, and Captain Lugard will give you something to take the taste of salt water out of your mouth."

"Thank you," said Haldane, as he followed Lugard, who took him into his own cabin. The moment they were alone, the doctor put his hand on Lugard's shoulder and looked steadily at him.

"Captain Lugard, I have no unfriendly feeling to either Captain Carroll or yourself—quite the reverse—and I now ask you, as man to man and in confidence, to answer me one question."

"What is it?"

"There is a lady on board?"

"There is."

"Is she Mrs. Lathom, of Waringa?"

"No."

Haldane gave a sigh of relief, and for a moment or two Lugard eyed him curiously. "You will see the lady herself presently, Dr. Haldane; but first take a stiff peg whilst I tell the steward about getting you a change."

A quarter of an hour later Lugard knocked at the door.

"I've come in to have a quiet talk with you, Dr. Haldane. What I now tell you you would yourself discover before many hours." He paused a moment. "I made your acquaintance at Waringa under false colours as far as the motives of my visit were concerned. I came to the colony to effect the liberation of certain Irish prisoners—John Adair, his daughter, and two brothers named Montgomery. I succeeded."

"I am aware of it; I heard the story—or rather the stories of Adair's escape and your attempted arrest—from Rutland. Believe me, sir, when I tell you that the Irish political prisoners have always had my sympathy."

"Then you will extend that sympathy to John Adair's daughter. John Adair himself is dead. He died on this ship in her arms. You know her. You and Lathom have been kind to her in the past, and she now wishes to see you."

"I have been kind to her! I did not know either Adair or his daughter."

"Not poor Adair himself, but you knew Helen Cronin."

Haldane sprang to his feet and grasped Lugard's two hands. "Good heavens! Helen Cronin! And she is here! Let me see her at once!" he said.

"Presently, doctor. Now, a little while ago you asked me, as from man to man, if Mrs. Lathom was on board this ship. Let us be frank. You expected to find her here, did you not?"

"I did."

"With Lieutenant Wray?"

"Yes." And then, releasing Lugard's hands, he sat down and said quietly:

"I see you know the miserable story of my poor friend and the wretched woman who has dishonoured his name. How you learnt it I do not ask. But I do ask you to tell me if you know where she is."

Lugard considered his reply; then he asked slowly, "You are Lathom's friend?"

"His steadfast, his best, his truest friend. Do you know he is on board the *Coot*? Did you not see him wave his hat to me?"

Lugard stared at him. "Captain Lathom? How came you and he to be together? I thought he was appointed to Port Macquarie."

Haldane rapidly told the story.

"It's a horrible, a cruel thing that such a good fellow should marry such a worthless woman, Dr. Haldane. Now you have asked me to tell you where she is. She and Wray are together on that Dutch barque."

"Ha! Did you see them?"

"No, but I know they are on board." And then he told Haldane all he knew, from the time of his overhearing Lamont and Wray discussing the means of flight, to Helen's brief vision of Ida Lathom's face in the stern port of the *Leeuwarden*.

"And now, Dr. Haldane, you know all that I can tell you. I think I have

persuaded Miss Adair that she was labouring under a delusion when she thought she saw Mrs. Lathom. Let her still think so. Why should she know the miserable, squalid truth?"

"You are right. She is a good woman. Lathom, I know, thinks very highly of her, and both he and I feel certain that she is a girl of good birth and education."

"She has the most grateful remembrances of Captain Lathom——By the way, you might as well avoid mentioning the fact of his being on the *Coot* to her."

"Certainly," replied Haldane, as he followed the American into the main cabin, where Helen was seated awaiting him.

"My dear Miss Adair, I am glad to see you again," said the surgeon kindly, as he pressed her hand and sat down beside her.

"And I to see you, Dr. Haldane," she said warmly. "How is Captain Lathom?"

"Quite well. Now tell me all about yourself and your adventures."

Leaving them together, Lugard went on deck, and was just in time to catch a glimpse of the *Leeuwarden* ere the thick, blinding rain-squall hid her from view. She, too, had shortened sail, and the boat which had chased her was, he was glad to see, pulling hard for the *Coot*.

"There is a lot more wind behind this," shouted Carroll as Lugard approached.

"Yes," he replied, as he turned his back to the wind and rain and leant against the weather rail, "lots of it."

Under her two topsails and a reefed fore-course only the brig was now tearing through the water at nine or ten knots, the wind gradually increasing in strength. At sunset it began to moderate and when the moon rose she was doing about eight knots over a comparatively smooth sea. The *Leeuwarden* was still in sight when the cabin table was laid for supper, and Helen, Haldane, Lugard, Hewitt and the mate had just seated themselves when the brig heeled over to a fresh rain-squall.

Carroll put his head down under the lee side of the skylight.

"Go on with supper. Don't wait for me. This is a bit of a teaser. It's as thick as peasoup."

Just as supper was finished, and whilst the vessel was still flying before the squall, there came a dreaded cry from the look-out.

"Breakers right ahead! Hard down, sir, hard down!"

It was too late, for even as Carroll shouted "'Bout ship!" and the wheel spun round, the brig struck with an appalling crash, heeled over to port, and remained hard and fast for a moment or two until a great roller caught her broadside on and carried her, grinding and crashing the coral beneath, further

up on the reef.

And almost at the same moment a blue light cast its ghastly glare over the wild turmoil of seething foam, and revealed the *Leeuwarden* lying broadside on the reef half a cable length away, with her foremast gone and the seas breaking over her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Lugard, always cool and collected, was the first to speak.

“Stay here, Miss Adair. Please do not attempt to come on deck, or you may be hurt, or perhaps killed by a falling spar. Hewitt, and you also Dr. Haldane, please remain in the cabin.”

The mate had already rushed on deck, and Lugard quickly followed.

“The brig is done for, Jim,” cried Carroll, “and so is the Dutchman. Then he roared out:

“Jump, Jim, jump! Look out, men!” and he sprang to the main rigging.

A huge, mountain wave came towering along, its curling, wavering crest hissing viciously as if it were some sentient, malignant creature bent on destruction and death. It broke within a few fathoms’ length of the brig, and then the mighty wall of foam lifted her stern high up, and literally carried her completely over the reef into the smooth water of one of the many channels which intersect the labyrinth of Wreck Reef.

A quarter of an hour later, Carroll succeeded in bringing her to, and anchoring in ten fathoms just as the moon revealed itself for a few minutes from out the thick rain mist.

“God help the poor Dutchman!” said the mate, pointing to the *Leeuwarden*, which continued to burn blue lights, appealing for assistance. She had fallen over on her beam ends, her decks facing seaward, and every few minutes seas would make a clear breach over three parts of her length. All of her boats appeared to have been washed away, except one in the waist, which had been hopelessly crushed by the fore-yard when the foremast fell. Clustered together on the topgallant forecastle were all her people—having taken refuge there by Schouten’s orders, for the ship’s head was canted somewhat away from the sweeping seas, and he feared that she would part amidships at any moment.

“God help them indeed!” said the mate pityingly, “they won’t be there much longer.”

Lugard, who was watching, nodded. “Are we making much water, Mr. Grey?”

“A good deal, but nothing serious. We can easily keep it under.”

“Then you can spare a boat’s crew;” and he went to Carroll, who was with the carpenter on the main deck.

“Carroll, will you let me take five hands and go to the assistance of those poor people? That barque won’t hold together another half-hour, and the tide is rising fast. I can see them trying to make a raft.”

“Ay, ay, Jim! We must do what we can for them. I told Dawson just now to

burn a flare to show them we will do something for them. But you will have a hard matter to get alongside in such a hellish sea. Thank God we did not lose our boat!"

Lugard sprang up the poop ladder, and called for volunteers, and every man on board rushed aft. He picked on Manuel Castro, three other boatsteerers, and the third mate, and in ten minutes the boat was away, pulling through one of the narrow channels in the reef, so as to get to the *Leeuwarden* from seaward. As he came within hailing distance the shipwrecked people gave a cheer, and Schouten, watching his chance, ran along the working, straining deck, and gained the mizzen rigging. He called out to Lugard and warned him not to attempt to come alongside, as the ship was lying amongst a lot of rocks, whose black, jagged teeth revealed themselves in the dim moonlight every now and then as the combing seas tore past the barque to fall into the smooth water on the inner side of the reef.

"Ay, ay, I can see that, Schouten. But I can come close up under your stern, and you must let your people jump overboard one by one. Stand by and catch this line. Make it fast to the weather rail, so that I can haul in on it as soon as you are ready. Then I'll heave you a light line for any one who can't swim. Hurry up, for God's sake! There's no time to lose."

The Dutchman, who was as calm and imperturbable as usual, quickly made the line fast and then went for'ard again. He spoke a few words in Dutch to the officers and crew, and then turned to Wray, who was seated on the deck with Ida Lathom's head pillowed against his shoulder. Her slight figure was covered with a seaman's oilskin coat to shield her from the drenching spray which every now and then flew over her and her companions.

"Mr. Thompson, dot goot, prave yentleman Captain Lugardt haf now coom to take us away. Vill you und der poor leedle lady coom first. She may have to joomp into der vater, but Captain Lugardt is a fine zailor man, und she need haf no fear."

"Come, Ida," and Wray raised her, half-fainting with terror, and then bent forward and said in low tones to Schouten:

"There are two of your men here badly hurt; they cannot move. Help me across the deck with my wife, then we shall get those two injured men next. I stay with you."

"No, no, Maurice. I will not go without you. I would rather die than leave you. Oh, Maurice! have pity for me; do not send me away from you!"

Wray made a gesture to Schouten to lead the way, and lifting Mrs. Lathom in his arms as if she were a child, he, with the carpenter on one side and the captain on the other supporting him, carried her along the higher side of the deck to the stern, just as another heavy roller swept inward, lifted the barque ten feet high, and then let her down again upon the coral with that peculiar

motion in the after part which denoted that the ship had broken her back.

“Stand by, Captain Schouten,” shouted Lugard, “don’t drop the lady overboard! I’ll come under your counter in a minute and take her aboard nicely.”

Wray placed Mrs. Lathom in Schouten’s arms, and clambered down to the lee rail, which was under water.

“For God’s sake, Lugard, save her! I’ll give a thousand pounds——”

“Be hang to you an’ your tousand pounds!” cried Manuel Castro, “do you think sailor man wan’ money at such time? Be quick; look after de lady and be rady to drop her in boat.”

Lugard, grasping the long steer oar, was watching the backwash of the roller, and the straining line made fast to the rail of the barque. His crew were the pick of the brig’s company—men who constantly faced danger and death in their vocation as whalemén.

“Now, boys, now is our chance,” cried Lugard. “Stand by with the lady, Captain Schouten.”

Three of his crew who were for’ard threw their oars inboard, seized the line, and within five minutes hauled the boat right under the barque’s counter, and Schouten placed Mrs. Lathom in Manuel Castro’s arms.

“Back, men, back!” said Lugard, as quietly as if the boat were shoving off from a wharf, and as the crew unitedly took to their oars again and backed off over a towering sea, he called out to Schouten to bring along the injured men. This took some little time, for one man had a broken leg and the other was unconscious owing to a blow on the head. Then came five more of the crew, who each in turn jumped overboard, and either swam to or were hauled into the boat with the second line.

“Come on,” cried Lugard to Wray, “there’s room for you. Jump!”

“Not I,” he answered. “I stay here with this good fellow.” And he made a gesture towards the Dutch captain.

“Vill you take mine moneys und mine schipp’s papers?” shouted Schouten.

“Ay, ay, pass them along, and make haste. You’ll part amidships soon.”

Several very heavy bags of coin and the ship’s papers and chronometer were then deftly caught by Castro, and then, with a wild cheer, the gallant whalemén bent to their oars as Lugard swung the boat’s head round to the galloping seas.

In less than half as hour he was alongside the *Palmyra*, and the injured men were at once carried to the cabin, Mrs. Lathom at first refusing to leave the boat.

“For God’s sake, Mr. Lugard, let me go back with you!” she pleaded passionately. “If *he* is to die, let me die with him.”

“I will bring him to you safely,” said Lugard, with a great pity in his heart,

as he gently released her hands from his wrist, and then Manuel Castro placed his arms around her waist and lifted her up to Carroll.

As the burly whaleman carried her down into the cabin, Helen met him, and in another moment Mrs. Lathom, with a trembling cry, fainted in her arms.

Haldane, who, with the steward, was busily engaged in attending to the two injured seamen, turned his head.

“Take her to *your* cabin, Miss Adair. I have no time for *her*. She will come to presently.”

His harsh, strident tones, and his stern, set face struck Helen with a wondering fear. She bent her head in assent to his command, and carried Mrs. Lathom away.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Just as Lugard and his crew pushed off from the *Palmyra* for a second trip, the Dutch barque parted amidships, her after portion falling over and sinking in the deep water on the outer side of the reef. But Schouten had been hard at work, and a very substantial raft had been put together from the yards of the fallen foremast, which was still lying alongside, thumping and swaying under the bows. And so, as the whaleboat from the brig breasted the rushing billows, and Carroll and his officers lit flare after flare to guide the boat on its way, they saw Schouten and the rest of the ship's company take their places on the raft, and let it drive before the sweeping seas over the reef towards the smooth water inside; for the Dutch captain, knowing that the tide was flowing, was confident that the structure, heavy and unwieldy as it was, would be carried safely over.

But Lugard knew what Schouten did not know—that on the inner edge of the reef were a number of jagged boulders, just awash, and if the raft struck one of these it would be fatal to those aboard.

He swung the boat round in mid-channel.

“Pull, boys, pull your hardest; we must get up to that raft before she gets amongst the rocks.”

As the boat headed directly across the reef, with the flying rollers catching her broadside on, Carroll and his mate shouted frantically to him to let the raft drive. He waved his hand in reply, and went on; his crew knew that they had a man at the steer oar who was as good as their own captain, and then, as if to encourage them, the moon burst through a bank of dull cloud and lit up the seething, foamy waste.

But swiftly as the boat was urged along over the shallow water on the reef, she could not overtake the raft, which was driving before the roaring breakers at a furious speed, spinning round and round like a top, striking a pinnacle of coral rock every now and then, and careening over into the boiling surge around.

And then Manuel Castro, who was pulling stroke, uttered a warning cry as a huge, mountainous wave came speeding silently and viciously along, and Lugard had only time to slew round head on, when it broke with a sullen roar, and all but swamped the boat; then it overtook the raft, and buried it deep down.

With two of the crew baling out, and the other three pulling, Lugard put his boat's head for the raft, on which he could now see but eight or ten of the twenty men which had left the barque—the rest had been swept away and

drowned.

As he came alongside, Schouten, who, with a man lying across his knees, was seated on the after end of the raft, raised his hand with a gesture of despair.

“Ten goot men haf gone.”

“Jump in, every one!” cried Lugard.

The Dutchmen quickly clambered into the whale boat. Schouten remained till the last. Then raising the prone figure which was lying so quietly across his knees, he said:

“Der poor yentleman it very badly hurt, Captain Lugardt. Shust lay him down carefully.”

Wray, for it was he, was dying, and knew it, for as he was lifted into the boat, he raised his hand feebly to Lugard, signifying that he wished to speak. The American bent down over him, and even in the moonlight could see that he had not many minutes to live, for his back and ribs had been crushed by his falling between the raft and the ship just as the former was casting off.

“Schouten has over two thousand pounds of mine. Tell him to give it to *her*. And tell her to try and forgive me. Good-bye, Lugard.”

Before the boat reached the brig again he was dead and Castro covered his face with a jacket.

Carroll met the shipwrecked men at the gangway and, sailor-like, gave his hand to Schouten in sympathy.

“How many are gone?” he asked.

“Ten, und der yentleman passenger is dead in the boat.”

Lugard nodded confirmation of the news to Carroll, then drew him aside.

“You must tell her that the poor fellow is dead. We cannot possibly keep it from her. Where is the doctor?”

“Below; he told me that he had given Miss Adair a strong opiate for Mrs. Lathom.”

“Poor creature! her awakening will be sad enough. Ask the doctor to come on deck for a minute. I don’t want to go below just yet in these wet togs. I’ll change in the steward’s room.”

Haldane soon appeared. He shook hands warmly with Lugard, and was paying him a compliment on his skill and pluck in rescuing the shipwrecked men, when the American interrupted him:

“Lieutenant Wray is dead, Dr. Haldane.”

“Dead!”

“Died a few minutes ago in the boat. He was crushed between the raft and the barque.”

“Heaven forgive him his sins! Where is he?”

Lugard led the way to the ’tween decks, where Wray’s body was lying

covered with a rug; a ship's lantern hanging from one of the deck beams overhead, cast a faint light upon the stiffened figure; Haldane unhooked it, and drawing aside the rug, gazed at the dead man's face for a few moments. Then, with a sigh, he replaced the lantern, and without a word went on deck again with Lugard.

"Carroll will tell her," said the latter.

"Ay, she must be told, I suppose. She is now sleeping. So far she has not spoken a single word to any one—not even Miss Adair. Her nervous system has received a great shock."

"Of course she recognised Miss Adair?"

"I hardly think so—in fact she was in a state of collapse when she entered the cabin. It seems cruel to say so, but death would be best for her now. What has she to live for?"

Towards midnight the wind ceased, and a glorious moon shone out of a cloudiest sky of blue, and lit up the wild turmoil of surf upon the reef. Nothing was left of the *Leeuwarden*; but on two low, sandy islets a mile away inside the lagoon, her wreckage was piled up high on the white beach, which was shimmering in the moonlight.

The brig's decks were very quiet, for the men were exhausted by the toil of the night, and had turned in below together with the survivors from the barque; only an anchor watch was kept, for the vessel was lying in such smooth water that she was as steady as a rock, though there was an exceedingly strong current. The boat which had done such good service had been hoisted up, and there was scarcely anything on deck or aloft to denote the experiences of the previous few hours.

Just as two bells were struck, the second mate, who was lying on the poop, wrapped in his greatcoat, rose, and went to the main deck, where he was met by the two men keeping the anchor watch, for the pumps were sounded every hour, though only worked at two-hour intervals.

As the three men stood together, and the officer looked at the water-mark on the sounding rod, Ida Lathom's slender figure appeared on the main deck. She came along so softly that her bare feet made no sound. Over her shoulders she had thrown a cape of Helen's, and this, as she slowly came forward, she drew across her bosom as if she were cold, though the night air was soft and warm. As her glance fell upon the men, whose backs were towards her, she stopped for a moment, looked blankly at them, and then, muttering to herself, walked up to the main hatch, which was partly open, and looked down at the 'tween decks, as if in search of something. Then she stepped on the broad ladder leading below, and disappeared.

For some few minutes Dawson remained conversing with the two men, and then walked aft to ascend to the poop, when he met Helen and the steward.

“Oh, Mr. Dawson,” she cried quickly, “have you seen Mrs. Lathom? I awakened about five minutes ago, feeling that she had left my cabin. I got up at once, and called Mr. Grey and the steward; we have looked in all the staterooms. Is she on deck?”

“Hist, sir,” called one of the men whom Dawson had just left, “the lady is below,” and he pointed to the ’tween decks.

Mrs. Lathom was on her knees beside Wray’s body; she had removed the rug from his face, and was so motionless and rigid in her attitude that she might have been marble. Presently she slowly put out her hand, and in a mechanical, dazed manner, began stroking the dead man’s hair and face.

“Poor thing!” said Dawson, “we must get her away. We must not leave her there. Will you come with me, Miss?”

Helen followed him, and then as the officer drew aside she gently placed her hand on Mrs. Lathom’s shoulder.

“Come, Mrs. Lathom, lean on me.”

She obeyed, but still preserved the same stony silence, as Helen went with her up into the bright moonlight. Presently she stopped abreast of the gangway, and her lips moved as she murmured some inarticulate words; then suddenly she thrust Helen aside, and leapt overboard into the fierce current.

Shouting out his orders to lower the boat, the gallant Dawson sprang over the side, and in two minutes the brig’s decks were alive, as the whalemens rushed to the falls, and lowered away the boat, which was instantly manned, with the mate in charge.

But short as was the time occupied, the strong six-knot current swept Dawson so far astern that he was hardly discernible, and when the boat did get up to him Grey saw that he was alone.

“Did you see her?” asked the mate, as Dawson was hauled in.

“No. She must have sunk at once. I caught sight of the cape she was wearing—it was floating away on the current. There are some fearful eddies—I was twice all but sucked down.”

Until daylight the boat continued the search, and Grey was about to abandon it, when he caught sight of something lying on the beach of a tiny little islet only a few yards in extent. He turned the boat’s head towards it.

“’Tis her,” said Dawson, in a low voice.

They stepped out on to the firm, hard, white sand, and bending over her, saw that she had been dead for many hours. Very gently and reverently the officer and Manuel Castro carried her to the boat, and laid her down, and the Portuguese covered her pale, childish features with his silk handkerchief.

Then slowly and wearily the men pulled back to the brig, and Helen wept long and unrestrainedly in the silence of her cabin, as she knelt in prayer beside the woman whose unhappy story had been told to her by Dr. Haldane,

who, knowing that Helen had recognised the man lying dead in the 'tween decks, felt that it would be impossible to any longer conceal the truth.

Early in the morning a search party visited the larger of the two islands, and succeeded in finding the bodies of four poor Dutch seamen, and late in the afternoon they were buried in the sandy soil of a low thicket scrub, the haunt of myriads of terns and gulls, with the boom of the ever-restless breakers on the reef for their perpetual *requiem*. Then Wray was laid to rest near by. Lugard and Manuel Castro carried him to his grave, followed by as many of the men of both ships' companies as the whaleboat could carry.

Some little distance away on the eastern side of the island was a small clump of pandanus palms, growing on a hillock, their pale green fronds waving and rustling in the sea-breeze, and here Ida Lathom was carried at sunset the same day, Lugard reading the burial service of the Church of England over her as he had done for the seamen. Haldane, who was present with Helen, Schouten, Hewitt, Carroll and all his officers, was very grave, and sad as they returned to the boat.

"God grant there may be no more tragedies," he said to Carroll, as they walked slowly down the beach, "but I fear that the poor Dutch sailor with the injury to his head will not pull through; this has been a fateful voyage for you—and for poor Miss Adair as well."

"Ay," replied the whaleman, with a deep sigh, "a strange, fateful voyage indeed."

As it was Carroll's intention to leave the lagoon on the following afternoon by a passage he had discovered on the south-eastern side, Lugard asked him if he might take the boat at daylight and go ashore, as Hewitt, Montgomery, Cole, and himself wished to erect a cairn over Mrs. Lathom's grave. There was an abundance of flat coral slabs, well suited for the purpose lying on the shore, and a few hours would suffice for its completion. Helen and Haldane also wished to go with them.

"Very well, Jim. We have a lot to do on board, and you might as well be on shore with the doctor and Miss Adair as here. I'd put to sea right away if I could; but still, I don't suppose that that brigantine will trouble us any more. And if she does happen along she can't get inside the lagoon unless she jumps over the reef as we did, for she can't beat in through that narrow passage to the south-east."

So as daylight broke, the boat was manned by Montgomery, Cole, Haldane, and Lugard, and with Helen seated in the stern sheets, was just pushing off when Carroll appeared.

"Here, take these," he said, throwing some oilskins and rugs into the boat; "there is going to be a power of rain. I can see it banking up heavily to the eastward."

And he was right, for scarcely had the boat touched the beach when the wind came away from the eastward, bringing with it heavy rain, and Haldane, lifting Helen in his arms, set off at a run over the broken coral for the clump of pandanus palms, where he was soon joined by Lugard and the others, who quickly made a protection for her by stretching some oilskins between the trees.

“Please do not trouble about me, Captain Lugard. I wish you would let me come with you and the men, and see what you are doing. I am not afraid of getting wet.”

Lugard’s dark eyes lit up with pleasure, though he answered her in his usual cool but yet profoundly respectful manner.

“Ah, no, Miss Adair; please stay here under this shelter, rude and rough as it is. You must not expose yourself to these tropical rains on the coast—for to do so means fever.”

For quite three hours Helen remained under shelter, whilst the men, in the still pouring rain, worked at carrying up the coral slabs from the beach, and depositing them under the palms. Many of the largest and finest stones were a foot or two under water, and at these Lugard laboured. He had stripped to the waist, and once when he arose panting, and squared his broad, tattooed chest, as he drew in a deep breath, Haldane could not but admire the muscularity and gracefulness of his perfectly proportioned figure.

By this time the wind had become very light, but the warm, heavy rain had increased to such an extent that everything except the little islet was blotted from view, and the boom of the breakers on the reef had ceased simply owing to the continuous downpour having “flattened” the surf so much that instead of a fierce turmoil and seethe of flying spray and spume, there was now but a gentle swell, almost as placid and noiseless as the lapping of the tide upon the sandy shores of the inner side of the lagoon. Away to the westward, where the brig lay at anchor, the rain mist was as thick as a London fog, and Lugard had just told Haldane that he was afraid the *Palmyra* could not possibly find her way out of the reef in such weather, when Helen appeared on the bank above, and called to them to come and get something to eat.

“I have made quite a discovery,” she cried to Haldane, as they walked back; “quite near where you left me, I saw some pieces of timber—wreckage, I suppose is the proper term—half-buried in the sand, and on one there is a thick brass plate with the name ‘*Cato*’ on it.”

Haldane was at once interested, told her that it was a relic and a memory of the gallant and ill-fated navigator Matthew Flinders, who, in the *Porpoise*, in 1804, had been cast away on Wreck Reef when sailing in company with the transport *Cato*.

Presently Lugard, having dressed himself, joined them, and they all three

walked up to Helen's shelter where Hewitt and the two other men had made coffee and spread out the provisions they had brought on a piece of time-worn, weather-beaten plank.

Montgomery had just passed Helen a cup of coffee, when he raised his hand suddenly.

"Listen!" he said.

"What is it?" asked Helen.

"I fancied I heard the sound of oars quite near us—as if a boat were passing along the outer side of the reef."

They all listened intently for some seconds, and both Helen and Haldane fancied they heard a dulled *click, click*, as if oars were being rowed between wooden tholepins.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Haldane, with a laugh; "it is pelicans clamping their great mandibles simultaneously. There are hundreds of them quite near. I have often heard them on the mainland making this peculiar noise—it is their idea of music, I suppose."

"Quite right, sir," said Cole, "they open their wings, and snap their bills together all at once."

Half an hour passed, and then the rain suddenly ceased, the sun came out, the pinnated leaves of the pandanus palms around them rustled to a freshening breeze, and the thick mist disappeared as if by magic.

"Come," said Lugard, as he rose, "we must get on with——"

"*Surrender!*" cried a hoarse voice, and Coffe, of the *Coot*, followed by half a dozen seamen with drawn cutlasses, sprang into the grove of palm-trees.

"Back!" shouted Lugard, as, seizing Helen in his left arm, he drew his pistol and pointed it at Coffe, "back, I say; for we are all well armed and desperate men." Then he called to Montgomery, Cole, and Hewitt to follow him to the boat.

"Surrender, and avoid useless bloodshed!" cried Lathom's well-remembered voice, as he too appeared over the ridge of sand bank. "For God's sake, Haldane, get them to yield quietly. And you Mr. Coffe, I implore you _____,"

"Never will I, for one, be taken alive!" cried Hewitt, as, raising his pistol at a seaman who was pointing his weapon at his breast, he fired and shot the man through the body, and at the same time Coffe discharged his pistol at Lugard. The bullet struck him on the right arm, and smashed the bone, but in an instant he released Helen and took his pistol in his left hand.

"Run, Miss Adair, run for the boat!" he shouted as he dashed at the officer, and felled him with a blow from the butt-end of his pistol, just as Montgomery, a man of herculean strength, but whose pistol had hung fire, wrested a cutlass from a seaman, and cut him down with his own weapon, though another sailor

had at the same moment given him a terrible gash on the shoulder, whilst Cole, a man as active and wiry as a native cat, avoiding the sweep of a cutlass stroke from another man, tripped him up on the soft, yielding sand, stunned him with a kick on the head, tore his cutlass from his hand, and then rushed to aid Helen, who, with Lugard covering her retreat with his pistol pointing at a pursuing seaman, was pantingly toiling over the sand and broken coral towards the boat. As Cole overtook the man-of-war's man, he brought him down with a sweeping blow of the cutlass across his legs, and in another moment was with Helen.

"Into the boat, every one!" cried Lugard, running back. "Go, Hewitt, go and help your cousin. We are safe! Ha, Montgomery, no more of this work!" and he darted in front of the giant Irishman, who, maddened with the pain of his own wound, and the quick lust of the suddenly aroused instinct to slaughter, had drawn back his bloodied cutlass to thrust it through the heart of the coxswain of the landing party, who, half-stunned by a cut on the head, had sunk on one knee, but was bravely defending himself. "Away, away with you, away to the boat with Miss Adair, or I'll shoot you dead! See, the brig is under way, and coming to meet us outside the passage! Away, away with you! I'll follow——"

"May I die with the curse of Heaven on me if I leave you, sir!" cried Montgomery; but Lugard heard him not, for, with his cocked pistol in his left hand, he was now facing Haldane and Lathom.

"Back, gentlemen, back! I am a desperate man! My pistol has two barrels; and I will kill you both if you attempt to stay me. Back, I say! You shall never make a prisoner of that girl whilst I am alive."

Haldane threw out his arms supplicatingly, and Lathom himself extended his right hand, weaponless and as in friendship.

"Not enemies, not enemies, Lugard!" cried the surgeon. "See, all the landing party are either killed, wounded, or disarmed, and God knows neither Lathom nor myself seek to do you harm! But for Heaven's sake, let me see to your arm; you may lose it——"

Montgomery sprang forward and stood in front of Lugard, with his ensanguined cutlass ready to strike at either Lathom or the surgeon, but Lugard made him stand aside, and, dropping his pistol, held out his left hand to them in turn.

"Good-bye, Captain Lathom; good-bye, Mr. Haldane. I am glad indeed to hold your hands in mine before we part. As for my arm, doctor, it matters but little; we sailor-men can mend a broken bone in our own rough way, and the skipper of the *Palmyra* has set many a fractured limb in his whaling career, so I am not at all anxious about myself. Ah! there is the brigantine coming round the western horn of the reef, too far away to intercept us, for which I thank

God, for we have had enough misery and bloodshed as it is. And now, good-bye.”

Lathom and Haldane clasped his hand, and bid him a hurried farewell; and then Patrick Montgomery threw down his cutlass, and, lifting Lugard, who was weakening from loss of blood, in his arms, called out to the soldier and the surgeon:

“God bless you, Captain Lathom, and you, Dr. Haldane; for ye both are good men, as many of us poor prisoners know.”

He set off at a run, carrying Lugard as easily as if he were a boy, and as he ran, and Lugard waved his hand in farewell to Haldane and Lathom, the brig fired a gun as she swept over the smooth surface of the lagoon towards the passage through the reef.

As Montgomery reached the waiting boat and lifted his burden over the side, Helen extended her hand to him.

“Are you hurt, Captain Lugard?”

“Nothing to speak of, Miss Adair. Give way, men; and pull as hard as you can. The brig is now almost outside the passage, and in a few minutes will be hove-to outside waiting for us. Ha! she sees us.”

Then Helen, who saw that he was suffering intense pain from his broken arm, quietly tore off a strip from her skirt, and, despite his protests, made a sling, and Vincent Hewitt, as he bent to his oar, saw his sun-browned cheeks flush deeply as Helen’s hand touched his neck.

A quarter of an hour later the brig brought-to outside the passage, the boat came alongside, and, amid the cheers of the whalers, Helen, followed by her companions, ascended to the deck.

“Welcome back, Miss Adair!” cried Carroll. “Jim are you badly hurt? Put the two Britisher sailors ashore on the islet, Mr. Grey, and then hurry back again and hoist Up the boat!”

And as the *Palmyra* sped northward, and the low islets of Wreck Reef were left astern, Haldane told Lathom the story of his wife’s death.

“It is as well, George,” he said quietly; “it is as well for them both.”

Two years had passed, and on the broad lawn of a country house on the beautiful Highlands of the Never-sink, Helen was seated with her uncle, Walter Adair. An open letter, just received, was in her hand, and she and the old man were discussing its contents very earnestly, when Lugard, who had come to visit Helen that morning, walked towards them.

“Well, captain, when do you sail?” asked the old merchant.

“In a week or so,” he replied, as he seated himself.

“I am sorry it is so soon,” said Helen. Then she looked up frankly—“I have

some news for you, Captain Lugard. We shall have a visitor here in a fortnight—some one whom you would be glad to see.”

“Is it Lathom?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so,” said the American kindly; “and he is coming for you?”

“He says so,” and she blushed deeply. “I have just heard from him. He says he feels that he ought not to have left the service just as we are going to war with China.”

“Ah! he will not think so in another fortnight,” said Lugard, with a laugh. “Well, he is a lucky man, and as neither Hewitt nor I could win you, we shall feel sincere pleasure in knowing that you are marrying one of the best fellows that ever wore the King’s uniform. I must write to him.”

“Do, and I will give him the letter myself. He has never yet failed to speak of you in any of his letters, and I know he will be sorry to miss seeing you.”

“Ah, well, I shall be back from the East Indies in another year, and we shall meet then. How is Hewitt doing?”

“Very well indeed.” Then she told him how Hewitt, accompanied by Montgomery and Cole, had been sent by her uncle to take charge of a stock farm in Pennsylvania, and had done so well that they were in a fair way of becoming rich men in a few years.

“And who else do you think is coming over with Captain Lathom?” she asked.

“The big doctor?”

“No; I wish he were. It is some one who one day came to me when I was very, very unhappy, and he gave me something that made my aching heart leap for joy.”

The seaman looked puzzled. “Some one I know?”

“Yes, indeed, some one who brought me your first letter.”

“Ah! the old, lame man.”

“Yes, indeed, dear old Tim Doyle, who was always so kind to me. Captain Lathom got the Governor to pardon him, and is keeping the poor old fellow as his own man. And Russ comes too.”

“Lathom is a good, thoughtful fellow; no wonder people love him.”

“And no wonder people love James Lugard,” said the girl softly, as she clasped the seaman’s two hands in hers, “for he too is good, thoughtful and brave.”

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Helen Adair* by Louis Becke]