

# *For My Great Folly*

*Thomas B. Costain*

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# *For My Great Folly*

BY

*Thomas B. Costain*

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For My Great Folly

*To My Wife*

## P R E F A C E

THERE was a John Ward, of course. His story, as I have told it, follows the historical facts closely enough. He organized the Free Rovers in the Mediterranean and won a series of victories which loosened Spain's tight grip on the seas, returning then to find that his welcome home took the form of a hostile salvo from the guns of the *Rainbow*. Barred from England, which he loved with deep patriotic fervor, the real John Ward sailed back to Tunis, where he set himself up in high state, in a fine marble palace and with a harem. Here Captain John Smith visited him, possibly the last white man to see the bold sea-rover alive. Little is known about the man himself, and so the picture of him presented in these pages is completely imaginary.

There was an Ann Turner also, a pretty woman who invented yellow neck ruffs and did a thriving business with the ladies of the court of James I, ending up on the gallows as a result of her participation in the notorious Overbury case. The real Ann was undoubtedly much more guilty than I have made her out here, but some question arose at the time as to her share in the poisoning. She won a great deal of sympathy, and so she could not have been all bad. Archie Armstrong was the court jester, and it is a matter of record that he bullied and berated the king. His candor did not sit as well with the successor to the throne, the "Baby Charles" who became Charles I and lost his head by adhering to the stubborn policies his father had set. Archie, stout fellow, lost his post and returned to private life, marrying a rich widow and living comfortably ever after. The rest of the active characters are as fictitious as the train of events in which I have involved them.

My most serious purpose has been to present a full picture of the life of those crucial times, and I want to say that here I have adhered absolutely to the facts. There were Upright Men in England then, and curtals and foins and nips and patricos; shareholders bought the privilege of loquacity by rolling coins to the center of the board; the fine clothes were worn on wire frames and men trussed up their hose with "points"; sailors died in the Basket at sea, and Derrick was kept busy at home—Derrick, the hangman who gave his name to tools for the elevation of heavy bodies; people stuffed their noses with wormwood to escape the Plague and dosed themselves with "hickery-pickery" and snail-water; "cant" was on every tongue, and so the talk of the day had a bawdy edge to it, which is my excuse for some of the phrases which will be encountered in what follows. I have done my best to make the picture complete and authentic, having read or consulted considerably more than three hundred books.

T.B.C.

# *BOOK ONE*



THE BONFIRE WE BUILT on Shrubsole High was blazing furiously a good half-hour before John Ward arrived. Everyone was there, even Sheriff Cropper, who seemed at a loss as to what he should do under such circumstances. His eyes darted about suspiciously above a nose so curiously flattened at the point that I had often wondered if a sea mew figured somewhere in his ancestry.

The town drunkard sniffed with disappointment and demanded: "Where's the roasted ox and the fountain flowing with wine? Must we drink the great man's health in Adam's-ale? A fine nip-cheese lot, ye are!"

Sir Bartlemy Ladland created a momentary diversion by riding past and waving to us. He must have been in a great hurry, for he did not stop. I noticed that his saddle and stirrups were still swathed in black cloth, and that the tail of his horse was tied with a sable bow. It was over a year since his brother had died in Ireland, but he was very punctilious about such matters.

I was the first to see a horseman at the turn of the road from Wayland Spinney. He had a blue plume in his hat and long golden hair, so I knew it must be John Ward. I shouted in a voice hoarse with excitement: "He's coming! There he is! There he is!"

Someone near me chimed in: "Yes, that's Ward. I can make out his owling beak from here."

The cheer which went up could have been heard well out in the estuary. We had good reason to cheer. John Ward was a hero not only in our town, where he had been born and raised, but in all England. As a boy of seven he had seen the orange sails of the Spanish Armada from the side of a tiny English sloop, and he had been all over the world since. Now he was the most successful of the captains who braved the King's displeasure by harrying the Dons on the high seas. The thrill of earlier days had been recaptured when the word came that he had taken two great ships, the *Madalina* and the *Little John*, their holds stuffed with treasure. Ever since that day, the ballad makers had been comparing our bold John with Francis Drake of glorious memory.

He cantered up on a big gray horse, managing it very well for a sailor. His faithful friend, Joralemon Snode, followed on a scrubby roan. We were still cheering, and every hat was waving in the air. What a remarkable-

looking man he was! I knew he still had three inches the better of me, though I was considerably over the average in height. His fine head was carried on a massive pair of shoulders. His long legs bulged in his flame-colored hose, a matter for envy to spare-shanked fellows like me. A fur-tipped cloak of pease-porridge tawney was thrown about him, but it did not conceal the richness of his doublet with its many gold buttons (fifty-two, he told me afterward). The plume in his hat was almost as long as his hair, and his shoes were of lemon Cordovan leather. I always felt as though my mouth were hanging open when I looked at John Ward.

He twirled an arm above his head and shouted to us: "Here we are, fellow citizens! Back home again after giving the mangy beard of the Spanish king another good singeing."

There was a struggle for the honor of holding his horse. He got down and walked to the bonfire. His eye picked me out, and he laughed and called: "Holy Olaf, is that Roger Blease? I see you're trying to grow up to my size, my brave nooker." He came over and shook hands with me. "Roger, I had to look twice to be sure it was you."

The butcher brushed past me with his red ham of a hand extended. "Give us yer famble, Ward."

"It's great to be back," cried John in his booming voice, starting to shake hands all around.

Someone demanded, "A speech, Cap'n Ward, a speech!" The rest took it up. "Tell us what ye think of the gorbellied King, John," and "Tell us how ye beat the Jew-roasters, Cap'n Rufflecoat."

John Ward's blue eyes blazed around the tightly packed circle. "I'm a man of action, not words. But if it's gan-music you want . . ."

The word of his homecoming had reached us that morning. The Court-to-Dover mail does not ride through our town, and so there was much excitement in the punch-cutting shop when the horn of the return carrier sounded its brazen note outside. "It's a letter, and it's for you, master!" shouted Tod Tarsty, carrying it in with an eager hand. He was sure it was a matter of life and death, for above the address the words had been written: *Haste, Post, Haste!* and across the bottom was another urgent admonition with plenty of exclamation marks: *Ride for thy life! For thy life!! For thy life!!!*

"Tod," said Temperance Handy, taking the letter and smiling, "you act as though you had never seen one before, you ignorant young sprat."

“And no more have I, master,” answered the apprentice.

“Don’t you know that everyone who sends a letter through the mail tries to speed its delivery this way? They know the King’s men have a liking for taverns. Well, I’m afraid it’s nothing more than word from my brother Toby in Dover that our Uncle Griggs has died at last and left me the magnificent sum of five pounds out of his thousands.”

The outer sheet, smudged with ink from his thumb, fell to the floor as he read. I saw him shake his head as he flipped the page. “Uncle Griggs *is* dead and he’s left me nothing at all. It’s just like the old curmudgeon, but—well, it’s a disappointment, boys. I meant to use my share in getting out that new Gothic face. Something strong and fine and simple, with none of those gaudy, tricked-up figures of saints the French call capitals. Now we’ll have to wait.”

My tutor (the curious relationship between us will be explained in due course) had two prime grievances which cankered in his mind and led to frequent outbursts. One was that the art of making type should be called punch-cutting. To his way of thinking, anything that had to do with the making of books was the noblest of occupations, on a level with painting and sculpture and far above the scribbling of sonnets to a lady’s eyebrow. The other was the preference which our printers still had for French type. “Behold!” he would say when a new book came into his hands. “How can such lettering be read? This French stuff prints as black as the Old Rogue himself. If this sort of thing keeps up, I swear that every scholar in the world will be blind by 1650 at the latest!” He had a special dislike for the work of the great Geofroy Tory, who claimed he could not design a new letter unless he worked on a large sheet ruled off into as many as two thousand squares to allow him a proper sense of balance and proportion.

As I watched him skim the rest of his letter, I saw his expression change suddenly. “Lads, there’s real news after all!” he exclaimed. “The *Royal Bess* put in at Dover last night. John Ward came ashore, and he sends word by Toby that he’ll be home by four o’clock today!”

My feet came down from the block on which I had been resting them and struck the floor with a thump. The Spanish grammar fell from my hand.

“John Ward back!” I cried. “We must build a bonfire to welcome him, sir.”

“That we must, in spite of King James and his treaties,” said my tutor. He despised the new king because of the peace he had made with Spain, as everyone did, for that matter. “Well, Tod, you were right after all. Wash your face and get yourself uptown to spread the news.”

When Temperance Handy ordered his remaining pair of apprentices back to their work, I realized that I had reached an important decision. I got up from my chair in the corner where for so many years I had explored the mysteries of science and the world of strange tongues under his kindly tutelage.

“I’m through with studies,” I said.

His bushy eyebrows, which gave him something of the look of an aged fisting-hound, went up in surprise. “Well, Roger,” he said mildly, “I’m of the opinion that you’ve gone as far as you can under my poor direction. You might still go to college, and I’ve said so to your mother many times. But why this sudden decision? Can it have anything to do with the word about John Ward?”

I made sure there were no other ears within hearing distance. “That’s it, sir,” I said. “I’m going to sign on with him. It’s not sudden, though. I’ve had my mind made up for a long time.”

“Was it to become a sailor, then, that you’ve got yourself grounded in the classics? What will your mother and your aunt think about it?”

I knew only too well what they would think. “I’ve always intended to be a sailor,” I said. “Father helped lick the Armada, and he always said I should become a captain like him. I’m a Blease, and every Blease has been a sailor as far back as anyone can remember. It’s time I stood up for myself.”

“Mark Blease was a fine sailor, and you’re his son. But you’re a Pirie too. The Piries have never been sailors.” He took one of my hands and studied it with a shake of his head. “The human hand is the surest index of character. Yours is too soft for splicing ropes. I can’t picture you climbing the shrouds, my boy. I’m afraid you’re better suited for scholarship than a life at sea.”

“I’m not a Pirie.” I could feel the stubbornness come over me which I always experienced when Aunt Gadilda preached about the grandeur of their side of the family.

“Well, you have your own life to live. But I’m sure, Roger, you should talk to them before doing anything rash.”

Now I must explain something about myself and how I came to be taking my studies in a punch-cutting shop. My mother was the youngest child of Sir Ludar Pirie of Great Lunnington, and there had been a mighty to-do when she ran away and married Mark Blease, a fishing captain. Since my father’s death there had been little money in the house, but both Mother and Aunt Gadilda had been determined to have me educated like a gentleman. They could not afford a regular tutor, but neither would they

countenance the idea of sending me to the town school. Aunt Gadilda had thought of a compromise plan.

Everyone regarded Temperance Handy as the smartest man in town. His wealthy Uncle Griggs, a mercer in Dover, had wanted to make a minister of him and had paid his way through Cambridge. He had come out a Brownist, however, and so more of a candidate for the stake than for the stole. His uncle had washed his hands of him and had never forgiven him for choosing then the lowly occupation of a type maker. Handy had always been a rebel, a believer in all the wrong things. He was against the social order and had been known, in his rasher moments, to praise John Ball and the peasant leaders of central Europe. He was a scoffer also, laughing at all the pet beliefs of sober people, which was much harder for them to accept. There was no such thing as magic, he declared; and nothing stirred him to wrath more easily than the common fear of witchcraft. In this he was flying in the face of the Word, which warned men of evils the human eye could not see. Everyone knew that many old women, and some young ones as well, made compacts with the devil; that he visited them in the guise of a huge brown dog with a gold collar; and that, when they went out alone at night, milk pails detached themselves from their hooks on the wall and went clattering after them, a sure proof of satanic powers.

“We’ll pay Temperance Handy to teach him,” Aunt Gadilda had decided. “The man may be queer and a dissenter, but he *is* a scholar, and he can coach our Roger as well as any popish doctor at college.”

He had been glad enough to earn the three pounds a year they offered him, even agreeing more or less publicly not to air his unorthodox views in his role of teacher. I had spent the greater part of my time since in a corner of his shop that he allotted to me. I liked him from the start, and he, for his part, had proved himself a good instructor. It had not been easy for me. I had to be up each morning at four for services at home, with Mother yawning and quite as unhappy as I was over such early rising and Aunt Gadilda eyeing us both with bitter reproof as she read from the Book. Breakfast never varied, a dish of wheaten flummery without cream, summer and winter alike. It was a long walk to the shop, and sometimes I would eke out my meager fare by robbing apple and pear trees on the way. The hardest part of all was finding the Handy household, including the apprentices, breakfasting on roast ham and new bread when I arrived. Dame Handy was famous for her hams, which she prepared by a special recipe of her own, curing them in a mixture of stale beer, saltpeter, and rum, and rubbing black pepper into the bones. She never failed to offer me a slice, and I as regularly refused. The delicious odor of it nearly drove me crazy with longing, but I

could not bear to let them know how poorly we fared at home. I would be at work on my books by five o'clock, and it was seldom I returned home before the shadows of the medlar trees were long on the stone fences of the town.

The results had justified all these efforts, I suppose. At any rate, I had acquired a good classical education and could write and speak French tolerably well. I was now working on Spanish, Aunt Gadilda having become convinced that a knowledge of that abominable language was necessary since King James was so determined on close relations with the Dons. One thing I had missed: there had been little time to steal down to the docks and talk to the sailors there, who were always willing to be friendly with a son of Mark Blease. On rare occasions I had gone out with them and had found the lift of the deck under my feet more exciting than the best story from the classics and the bite of a raw wind on my cheeks more to my liking than any sport. At least I had said to myself that I did; it generally happened that I became seasick.

But now I was through with books and studies. I was determined to sail with our great captain of Free Rovers.

"Men of England," said John Ward, waving a hand on which gleamed a ring with an enormous diamond, "I'm proud to be welcomed home so warmly. I could not be sure that our windy old porridge pot at Theobalds"—he was referring to the King!—"allowed men to express their approval of what I am doing. But now I see that I was wrong. Englishmen will not be dictated to by a craven ruler who gives in to our mortal foes."

I had never heard the general contempt for the King stated as openly and daringly as this. He seemed to have no fear at all. He called James a "quaking puffin" and a "pusillanimous pander" who was so anxious to keep the peace with Spain that he shut his eyes to the undeclared war the Spaniards (he called them the Faggoters) were waging on our merchant ships everywhere. The King had sent my Lord Howard all the way to Madrid to make this disgraceful peace, with a train of forty gentlemen dressed in black velvet and riding black horses with gold trappings.

"He wasted ten thousand pounds to impress the Spaniards!" shouted Ward. "If he had spent that money on the upkeep of the Navy, the Dons would have sent forty gentlemen to London to ask peace. Instead we must now suffer under the one-sided treaty these gentlemen in black velvet brought back."

I could see the face of Sheriff Cropper growing redder as the speech went on, and I wondered if he was getting ready to take some action. He did nothing, however; and Captain Ward concluded with the statement that he was sailing back to the Inner Sea as soon as he could get his *Royal Bess* outfitted for a long cruise and that he would then “impress the Dons in the only way they understand, by the weight of my shot.”

Everyone crowded around him at the finish to clap him on the back and tell him what a great man he was, and to ask envious questions about the loot from the captured ships. There were women in the crowd, and at this point a bold piece named Doll Saunders brushed her way up close to him and insisted that she was going to have a kiss. John was only too glad to oblige. He swung her up in his arms until her heels were two feet off the ground and gave her a resounding buss.

“There you are, Fubbs,” he said. “There’s only one thing I would rather do than fight a Spaniard, and that’s kiss a pretty English girl. Are there any more?”

There were plenty more. Every woman there, married or single, wanted to be treated the same way. The men cheered them on as they lined up in a giggling row. John went down the file, sometimes adding for good measure a sound smack on the blind-cheeks.

I wanted to get a word with him, but I realized there would be no chance here. I edged up close to Joralemon Snode, who was standing unnoticed beside his resplendent captain. Joralemon was a deeply religious fellow who had wanted to be a parson (I almost wrote it “heaven-beck,” being more accustomed to that word) but had gone to sea because he worshiped John and always followed his lead. I noticed that he was thinner and more sickly-looking than ever.

“Jore,” I whispered, “I want to ship with you this time. When can I get a word with John?”

His startled eyes came round to mine. “You too, Roger? Every boy in town has the same idea. Half a dozen have spoken to me already.” He shook his head doubtfully. “Better think it over. It’s a rough life. I’m not sure you could stand it.”

“My father stood it. And you seem to have survived a long spell of it.”

“I don’t count. John has made me a combination parson and clerk. I don’t stand watch, and I’ve never been aloft.” His voice sank to an earnest whisper. “I mean it, Roger. Let rougher men fight this war out. It’s going to be a bloody business. It’s not for the like of you.”

“I want to go, no matter what it’s like.”

“You’ll live to regret it if you do. But I’ll tell John what you’ve said. He’ll be at the Cygnet’s Head after eight o’clock tonight. You could get a word with him there.” He shook his head again. “Seven men from town didn’t come back with us this trip.”

I was not happy over the doubts being expressed of my fitness for the sea, and so I was in no mood for further remonstrances when Temperance Handy came up behind me and insisted on adding to what he had already said on the subject.

“Listen to me, Roger. After that speech—and, mind you, I agreed with him—I’m more set against your going than before.” His eyes, peering into mine, showed how deeply concerned he was. He dropped a hand on my shoulder. “It isn’t just the dangers you’ll face at sea. I’m beginning to realize where all this is leading. Ward is right, but he’s a firebrand; he goes much too far. You’ll be involved in worse things than fighting Spaniards, my boy. In piracy and”—his voice sank lower—“in treason even. I don’t want to see you hanged at Wapping Stairs. And that’s what it’s likely to come to, mark my words.”

“I’ll have to chance that,” I said, although I had given no thought before to such possibilities. “If he’s right, and you say he is, then I should be prepared for any risks. England needs John Ward, and John Ward needs all the men he can get.”

“He can get them without any difficulty—men trained to the sea. They’re the kind he needs, not young sprats like you. No matter how willing you are, it would be folly to go. A great folly.”

I answered that I was going if John would have me, and that I would thank him to let the matter drop. “What’s more,” I added, with some heat, “I hope you won’t go to Mother about it. I don’t want any more lectures.”

He looked at me reproachfully. “You ought to know me better than that. I won’t go behind your back.”

Nothing more was said, and he drifted off toward home, turning up the collar of his jerkin, for it was growing chilly.

The last hand having been shaken and the last girl kissed, John disappeared with a group of his old friends. The crowd began to dissolve, and I decided it was time to go home also.

The air had a nip of autumn in it, and the sky over the treetops was still as blue as the cloaks all women were wearing nowadays in imitation of Queen Anne. Above the distant line of Wayland Spinney I could see the handsome towers of Appleby Court, and it was natural for my thoughts to turn on Katie Ladland, who lived there; and equally I could not think of



Katie without indulging in speculation on the subject of perfection in general. How lucky it was, I said to myself, that I had been born in this great age when life had come to such a complete and final flowering. The last important secret had been wrung from Mother Earth when Columbus proved the world to be round. The incomparable verse of Spenser and Donne and Sir Philip Sydney would never be bettered, nor the plays of our great dramatists. No man could be braver than John Ward or wiser than Coke. All men, in fact, were more learned as well as taller and stronger than ever before. The very peak of perfection had been reached in habit and manner and dress. We were building handsomer homes and more enduring churches, and the ships we sent out to sea were tall and fast and ineffably lovely with their bright sails and carved hulls. Yes, it was a great age, as close to the millennium as man would ever get; and I was happy that now I was going out into the world to play my part in it.

## 2

MY SPIRITS DIPPED as I turned to go home. Perhaps everyone was right in saying that I was not cut to the pattern of a sailor. John Ward might agree with them and refuse to have me. I was worried also because I had taken my station so close to the bonfire that a flying spark had burned a hole in my gray galligaskins. As I came in sight of our tall oak-beamed house, I was thinking dismally: What will Aunt Gadilda say to this?

Deciding that I had better put a bold face on it, I threw back my shoulders and stamped into the square room at the front of the house. I tossed my cap on the refectory table, which was already spread for supper, and said in confident tones: "John Ward's back, Mother. The whole town turned out to see him. We built a grand bonfire, and Sir Bartlemy Ladland rode by and waved to us. I got so close to the fire that I ruined these old gallyslops."

Before Mother could answer, Aunt Gadilda sniffed and said sharply: "You and your John Ward! I declare, young man, you should take shame to yourself. Your poor mother slaves and saves to provide for you, and you

burn great holes in your fine warm clothes. Let me see just what you've done, you good-for-nothing rogue."

Mother interposed in a tone of almost timid remonstrance: "Now, Gaddy, don't be hard on the lad. I think the damage can be easily mended."

"It's not so much the harm to the breeches, Meggy," grumbled my aunt, as she shrugged closer into her shabby old shawl. "Must he always be running after this low rascal of a John Ward? It's in no way meet that the own grandson of Sir Ludar Pine of Great Lunnington should hold such friendship for the son of an owling fisher captain. What will come of our plans for him if he demeans himself in this way?"

"My father and John's sailed together," I reminded her. "Was Father a smuggler too, then?"

They were huddled in front of the smallest fire that could be kept alive and still advertise itself to the outside world by a wisp of smoke at the top of the chimney. Mother was tiny and pretty, with deep gray eyes and hair that was still black and crisply curling. She always looked trim and neat, and yet she wore her starched ruffs as long as Aunt Gadilda did hers. My poor aunt, who was two years older, never looked anything but wilted and untidy. She also was small, but she was gaunt and rawboned where my mother was dainty.

The three of us sat down to supper without further words. I was hungry, and I looked at what had been provided with a deep sense of dissatisfaction. Here we were, the first family of the town if one left out of consideration Sir Bartlemy Ladland, whose great manor house lay a half-league north of the limits; and yet I was ready to wager that none other would be supping on such meager fare. I had hoped there would be herb pie, my favorite dish, in which the piquant flavor of chervil or sage was blended with the sweet of almond paste. There was a long dish of scalloped oysters, a loaf of raveled bread, and three small mugs of ale. The oysters were done in the French manner, with many herbs and a dash of brandy, and they were served on a fine silver dish; but this did nothing to disguise the fact that they were the commonest and cheapest of food in a town where the Free Dredgemen of the Hundred and Manor maintained the largest oyster beds in England. They were served so often at the behest of Aunt Gadilda that my stomach was ready to turn over at the very sight of them. I knew also before tasting it that the ale in my fine silver tankard was new and thin.

I dipped an unwilling spoon into the mess on my plate and remarked in grumbling tones: "We must be very poor, Mother. Why don't we ever have

beef or mutton? Must we always starve ourselves on fish and oysters? Every home where I go has wheaten bread, and sometimes even manchet.”

Aunt Gadilda spoke up, clipping her phrases in a curious manner as though she considered words a luxury and therefore to be indulged in sparingly. “Must we go all over that again, Roger?” she demanded. “If we waste our money now, how will we be able to fit you out when the time comes for you to take your proper place in the world? You must have a post at court, dear boy. For that you’ll need a horse and a servant of your own, and the very finest of clothes. Isn’t it worth a little scrimping now if it means you’ll wear silks and satins for the rest of your life and sit at the King’s table?”

I felt the secret inside me ready to explode into words at this, and I almost gave myself away. It was the sight of Aunt Gadilda herself, pecking with no appetite at a slice of the bread, which restrained me from speaking. Our Spartan regimen was, after all, hardest on her. She hated oysters and would never eat them. Any kind of fish, in fact, had a malignant effect on her, causing her face to swell and turn a yellowish shade like a ripe May apple; and so the economies she ordained left her with little to live upon but bread. I felt like saying that it was unjust to starve herself and Mother in order to lay by funds for my future, especially as I did not intend to go to court. But we had been all through that argument many times. My often-asserted desire to be a sea captain like my bold and bluff father, dead these ten years, affected Aunt Gadilda even more adversely than the taste of fish. Any mention of the sea or of seamen would send her stomping out of the room, her pinched face reflecting the scorn she had always felt for the poor match that the youngest daughter of Sir Ludar Pirie had made. Father had commanded the one ship our town fitted out for the Crown under the charter of the Cinque Ports. He had been a fine seaman, a duly elected jurat, and he had sat in the Guestling. I was jealous of his memory, for he had been a brave and forthright man and had enjoyed the respect of everyone, with the exception of the members of my mother’s family.

Knowing that nothing I could say would do any good, I bit the words back and proceeded to eat my oysters with as good a will as I could summon.

Mother, who was making the best supper of the three of us, asked about Sir Bartlemy Ladland. Had he seen me when he rode through Shrubsole High? Had he said anything to me? Had he been wearing his plum-colored cloak with the collar of miniver?

“Of course he didn’t see me,” I answered with some impatience. This took my thoughts back to John Ward, and I began to give them an

enthusiastic description of him. "You should have seen him, Mother. He paid twelve pounds for his doublet alone. Jore Snode told me. His hat was Spanish and cost sixty shillings without the plume. His hose didn't wrinkle at the knees the way mine do. I wish——"

Mother laughed. "Your friend John Ward has a handsome leg," she commented. "I've often noticed it. You are on the lean side, my poor Roger, and so you must always expect that your hose will wrinkle. You don't take after your father in that respect. Nor me either, for that matter."

Aunt Gadilda sniffed and said in hostile tones, "Really, Meggy, must you say such coarse things?"

"The old queen noticed men's legs and talked about them a great deal," protested Mother in self-defense. "They say Sir Walter Raleigh won favor with her first because he had such a well-turned shank. And King James likes trim men around him."

Aunt Gadilda looked daggers at her for this last remark, and my mother blushed and said hurriedly: "The Piries are thin-shanked on the male side. Do you remember, Gaddy, that even when Father became so very heavy near the end, his legs were still skinny? I think he should have worn pads. Well, Roger is that much of a Pirie, at any rate."

My thinness was a sore point with me, so I hastened to change the subject. "Sir Bartlemy still has black stirrups, but he was wearing the cloak with the miniver collar. He didn't stop."

"I was hoping he said something to you about our going to Appleby Court for Christmas," said Mother. "I'm counting on it, and I'm sure Katie would like us to be with them again this year."

I began to blush. It was no secret in the family that I was in love with Katie Ladland, but I felt foolish and presumptuous when any open reference was made to it. Aunt Gadilda, who had developed a recent dislike for Lady Ladland, sniffed and said she would prefer to spend the day right here at home. Mother replied sharply that she was taking a selfish attitude, and a dispute ensued which continued even when Albert Pett came in to remove the dish of oysters for his own supper with Fanny Trimble in the buttery.

We had to keep servants, of course. They were a necessary part of the struggle to maintain an outward semblance of genteel superiority. Albert Pett came into the room through a dark little serving pantry, in which he kept a handsome red suit of clothes. He was under orders to change into these company habiliments before answering the front door, but he would get back into his russet tunic and baggy smalls the instant the company left, or catch it from Aunt Gadilda. She never let a day pass without examining the red

livery for traces of moths or wear. It had been in use now for seven years and still looked as good as new.

"I zee bonfire, M'ims," remarked Albert with a pleased smile. "That John Ward, now, he's a one to give they Dons a fair trouncing. Ay, M'ims, whole town is proud o' John Ward."

"What is the man saying?" demanded Aunt Gadilda in an aggrieved voice. She was never able to make out what he said, or pretended not to, because she objected to his habit of addressing us familiarly.

"He's speaking of the bonfire this afternoon," explained Mother.

"I see the flames from yard, M'ims," declared Albert. Fire was an exciting thing to him, perhaps because he enjoyed so little of it in our cold house. "A bunny fire, M'ims, forty feet high. Pother o' wood burned to make such a fire."

Fanny Trimble put her head through the door to contribute a piece of news on the subject. She was a plump wench who kept Albert on a taut rein by refusing to marry him, although she was not adverse to an occasional scuffle in the buttery from which she would emerge with a red face and cap in disarray. "Plenty townsmen going wi' Captain Ward when he sails again," she said. "My brother Sim, and Harry Engle, and both they Bledsoe's. They hopes to come back wi' pockets full o' Spanish gold."

Aunt Gadilda sat up stiff in her chair and said in an angry voice, "Meggy, *must* we spoil our servants in this way?"

"I'm sure, Gaddy, I am very much interested in what Fanny was saying about the men of the town sailing with Captain Ward," declared Mother. She nodded at the pair, however, and they took the hint by disappearing through the door promptly. "It will be a good thing for Sim Trimble, I'm sure. He's never been worth his salt on land, certainly, and so let us hope that he *does* come back with his pockets full of gold."

"You know full well, Meggy, that His Majesty has forbidden his subjects to fight the Spanish," declared Aunt Gadilda. She was speaking ostensibly to my mother, but I could see that her eye was fixed on me, and I knew that the lesson in what she said was intended for my benefit. "Those that disobey him are pirates and subject to punishment. I hope that none of the men of the town are weak enough to go with this wicked Captain Ward. They'll suffer for it if they do."

Mother and Aunt Gadilda went back to their eternal needlework; and I, with great inner reluctance, took up a Spanish book. It was a loosely bound volume in tough brown leather with a wood print in the front of Philip II of Spain, that bloody-minded monarch whose name was linked in every

English mind with the Armada. I hated the book, and King Philip as well, but I had to make some effort to please them on what might be my last night at home.

I tried to appear studious as I stretched my legs out in front of the meager fire and glared at the scorbutic countenance of the hated king. My thoughts were not with Spanish syntax, however. They were concerned with the decision I had reached this day and the effect it would have on the lives of all of us.

“Roger!” exclaimed Aunt Gadilda. “You’re sitting on the cushion. It will be threadbare if you *will* be so careless.”

I put the velvet cover carefully to one side. It was the first time I had ever offended in this respect. “Sorry, Aunt,” I said. “I didn’t think about it.”

She nodded in forgiveness, believing that my absorption in study had been responsible for the lapse. In reality, however, I was thinking back over the years to that sad day when the word had reached us of the sinking of my father’s ship with all on board. It was a cold fall day, with a wind lashing the upper branches of the oak trees about the windows, and it had seemed to me that the end of the world had come. I had loved my tall father with his fine ruddy cheeks and his blustering ways and had been looking forward to the day when I would go to sea too, as all the Bleases had done. Never afterward could I hear branches brushing against our plastered walls without my thoughts reverting back to that time which had brought such a change in my life, with a longing to hear again the deep tones of my father’s voice as he said, “Ay, Roger, ye’re a pindling little lubber, but I’ll make a sailor of ye yet.”

Aunt Gadilda had posted down from Great Lunnington the very next day and had taken charge of the household. I remembered her saying to Mother: “There will be no more nonsense now, Meggy. You’ll have to live here, for both Geoffrey and Ralph have moved their families to Great Lunnington, and there’s no room left. But I’m going to stay with you and see to it that Roger is raised right. He’s a Pirie now, not a Blease. There’s to be no more talk of his going to sea. Nothing must satisfy us but a place at court for this fine little man of ours. It’s going to be hard. Father can’t help us, but we will save every penny. You and I will manage it somehow, Meggy.”

They had managed it somehow. Money had been laid away, in spite of the fact that outwardly we maintained some of the traditions of Great Lunnington. The people of the town had been taught to regard us as gentry and to pay us the respect due to the name of Pirie. And yet I knew that more had been laid out on the livery for Albert Pett than either of them spent on

clothes for themselves. Aunt Gadilda had proved herself an adept at all the sorry expedients incidental to the carrying out of their plan, and Mother also had come to learn.

I remembered in particular one afternoon when Lady Ladland was to pay us a call. I was very young at the time, and my excitement was almost unbearable when our dining-room table blossomed out with fresh fruit, with decanters of fine muscadine wine and oissy caprie, and, more important than all, a platter of marchpane, silvered on top with sugar and rich with almonds. It had needed all of Aunt Gadilda's vigilance to keep me from looting that fabulous display before our guest arrived. I stalked around it like a cat around a jug of cream, and I was too occupied in rosy anticipations to be interested at all in the fact that Lady Ladland brought her daughter Katie with her.

"Now, Roger, you must sit down and talk to little Mistress Catherine," said Mother. "She has come all the way from Appleby Court to visit you."

It was the first time I had seen Katie, and I thought her nice enough, and pretty enough; but I was too fearful that her presence would weigh against my chances in the distribution of the marchpane to be glad that she had come. Her eyes were large and as round as an Old Harry sovereign, and she seemed to find me worth staring at. She told me about her pet dog, who was called Walter, after Sir Walter Raleigh, I supposed, and I found this interesting because I had no dog of my own and wanted one more than anything in the world. She explained that she had not been allowed to bring Walter, which I thought a pity but entirely in line with the kind of injustice which children had to endure.

Between intervals of talk I maneuvered about the gorgeously laden table but was never able to help myself without discovering the bony hand of Aunt Gadilda clamped tightly on my wrist. Katie was helped liberally and, I thought, proved quite greedy in the matter of the marchpane. My share was two figs and a small cake which had lost most of its frosting.

After Lady Ladland had left, with the reluctant Katie in tow, I smacked my lips over the residue of that magnificent feast, thinking how well we would do at supper. But it was far from Aunt Gadilda's idea to let a greedy small boy benefit to that extent. Rich food could be used only to further social aims, and so the rector's wife and her three healthy children were invited over at once.

There had always been money enough for a necessary book, but never a penny for the things I craved. The only dog we ever had was Bessy, a spiteful little fisting-hound which one of my uncles sent to Mother. She had

loved the miserable beast, but that had given her no understanding of my longing for a real dog, a mastiff or a gazehound to romp with when I went out to the sand dunes or wandered in the thick groves of sorb and asp which fringed the town.

What I disliked most of all about it was that everything had to be done with an eye to appearances for the furthering of my all-important future. Our home was imposing from the front. Visitors were shown in through screens of richly carved oak, and there were tapestries and paintings from Great Lunnington on our walls. Back of this, however, and particularly in the bedrooms above, the house was as bare as a windswept moor. We had glass from Venice on the sideboard, a few fine pieces, but we used cheap specular stone to replace any panes which broke in our upper windows. Fanny Trimble rustled in a silk skirt when she waited on guests, but the coverlets on our beds were of the coarsest dagswain or even hopharlot. I hated this shabby kind of life, but I had endured it because I knew how unselfish was the love back of everything they did.

And now it was to end. The scheming and slaving of ten long years would soon be over, for I had made up my mind. I was going to take things into my own hands. I felt guilty over the decision I had reached, and yet the thought of what it was going to mean set my blood to racing. I dared not raise my eyes from the book for fear they would read my plan in them.

The tall clock in the corner struck nine. Mother smiled and yawned. "I'm tired and I'm cold. I think I shall go to bed, Gaddy. It's been a hard day, and you should come too. Will you continue your studies, Roger?"

"Yes, Mother," I answered. I was barely conscious of what she had said, for my mind now was with John Ward and that amazingly bold cruise of his through the forbidden Mediterranean—forbidden to English ships by order of another Philip, son of the well-hated king who had launched the Armada against England. I was dreaming of hot blue seas around Sicily, of the Lion of St. Mark's where the flat-capped Doges waged undeclared war against Anglo-Saxon mariners, of the fabulous port of Tunis, the home of the corsairs. My mind was filled with visions of palm-fringed islands and of Spanish galleons coming up over the horizon like castles awash.

Mother's hand fondled my hair as she passed me. I thought Aunt Gadilda was going to do the same, but she thought better of it and resolutely folded her arms under her shabby shawl. She was looking ill and, I thought, a little wistful.

"Roger," she said, "you've grown up. You're a man now."



I protested at this. I was sure that I would continue to grow. In fact, I was going to be very unhappy if I failed to pick up the three inches that John Ward had over me.

“You’re as tall as your grandfather,” declared Aunt Gadilda, as though it were wrong to wish for more than that. “I saw little of your own father, but I think you’ve outgrown him a full inch. You’re taller than any of your cousins at Great Lunnington.”

That went without saying. My cousins, who lorded it over me because I belonged to a poor branch of the family, were a lumpish lot, and I had always entertained an inner conviction of superiority as far as they were concerned.

She gave vent to a deep sigh. “I’m afraid, Roger, we can’t expect much from any of the boys at home. We’re depending on you to set the Piries back where they belong. You are our one hope.”

One light only was burning in the wrought-iron candelabrum. She moved it nearer to me. “I hope you’re not straining your eyes,” she said anxiously. “You know, Roger, we would be only too happy if we could make things easier for you. It makes me sad to see you reading with one candle. But—well, it won’t be long now.”

I nodded absent-mindedly. She came nearer and put a frail hand on my shoulder. “You know that everything we do is for your own good, don’t you?”

“Yes, Aunt,” I said.

This did not seem to satisfy her. Perhaps she had some inkling of the things which had been running through my mind. There was a catch in her voice as she repeated the question. “Roger, you do know that? You must never think we live like this because we are mean or miserly. Money means nothing to your mother or to me. We’ve done everything for you, Rogerkins. For your future. So that you too can be a great man, as your grandfather was. You must never believe anything else.”

She walked slowly toward the stairs, favoring her bad foot a little more than usual. I knew that she would go to bed in the dark, as Mother had done. A sense of guilt took possession of me, and for several minutes I was sure that my plan would have to be abandoned after all. They had devoted their lives to building a secure future for me, and I must not disappoint them now. But by slow degrees my resolution hardened again. After all, it was my own life. They had never consulted me about their plans. I had stood as much as I could of this cramped, petticoat-ridden existence. I had the blood of Mark Blease in my veins. I knew that I was not intended for the kind of life that a

great city like London offered. I had no stomach for the future they had planned, no willingness to scramble for favor at the court of a cowardly and unpopular king.

I was not a pindling little lubber any longer; and, as my father was not here to do it, I was going to make a sailor of myself. I was going to sea with John Ward.

### 3

WHEN I PUSHED THROUGH the door of the Cygnet's Head, it seemed that every man in town was there, the solid citizens as well as the tickle-pitchers and the swill-bellies. The return of John Ward had stirred things up, and feeling was running high over the Spanish question. From somewhere in the rear a voice was declaiming the words of a song which had swept the country:

He cites as thieves and pirates we,  
Who fight to keep the sea lanes free.  
No English ship will turn and flee!  
*The harbor bar is cleared!*

He, Philip of Spain, had been claiming, ever since the peace had been signed by our chicken-hearted Jamie, that no English ships had the right to venture into the Midland Sea or to trade with the Levant. Around the bonfire that afternoon there had been talk of what had happened to an honest merchantman, the *Trial*, overhauled by a Spanish ship-of-war near the island of Rhodes. The crew had been lodged in prison for two months, and they had been bastinadoed and drawn upon beams, until only four of them had been left alive. These poor fellows had then signed the confessions shoved under their noses and had been hanged at once for piracy; and the Spanish ambassador had taken the papers to Whitehall where King James had wagged his oversized head and acknowledged that the seizure of the ship was right and just. As I stood in the doorway, looking about me for a sight of John Ward, I heard a sailor reciting more details of this grim affair.

“First they took the purser and strung him up by the arms,” he was saying. “I knew him well these ten years, a decent little fellow from down Bristol way, with a wife and three tow-headed kinchers of his own. They tied cannon balls to both of his feet and then turned a ram loose on deck. It butted him back and forth until his wrists were cut to ribbons and he screamed so loud that even some of the cursed Dons begged the captain to cut him down. They didn’t let him off until both arms were broken and his muscles were hanging in shreds. And he still shook his head and swore himself an honest sailor and no pirate.”

Another voice chimed in bitterly: “Why must we have a Scotch loon for a king? It was an ill day for England when the old virgin drank her last glass of canary.”

This was heady talk, and it confirmed me in my resolution. If King James refused to uphold our rights on the seas, then all Englishmen must follow the lead of John Ward and take the fight on themselves.

John was nowhere to be seen, but Andrew Widdigate, the landlord, caught sight of me and motioned me to follow him. He led the way back to the kitchens where his wife and two maids were scurrying like mad to cook for their many guests. A goose and a haunch of beef were browning on spits, and Dame Widdigate was filling baked florentines with rich jam. The sight and smell of this wonderful food made me ravenously hungry.

“He’s gone,” whispered the landlord. “The harman-beck was here. John said you were to shake a stamper after him.”

I knew enough of tavern talk to make out of this that the constable had been in looking for John, and that the latter had left word I was to follow him. The cant of London was creeping more and more into everyday use. Temperance Handy lectured me continuously about it, saying that the purity of our well-nigh perfect tongue was being threatened. It did little good, I am afraid, for I was rather proud of my ability to “cut whids” with the best of them.

“Where did he go?” I asked.

The landlord looked cautiously at his wife and then winked. “He’s glazing a jill-flirt,” he said. “Can’t leave the little dells alone, that John. Go to the apothecary shop of Aaron Blazeby on the High. Back door.”

I said to myself: So Ann Turner’s back. I hope she didn’t bring her husband with her, or John may get into trouble.

He laid a slice of the goose on bread and handed it to me. “Tib o’ the buttery, roasted to a turn. Nothing to beat it. Powder into that before you go.”

I fell to with a great appetite, although by custom I was inclined to refuse. Did they guess how closely we ran things at home? Before I could give it more than a thought, the food had vanished. Widdigate then took me through a long and musty passage which led to the stables. Here he laid a cautioning hand on my shoulder.

“There’s something afoot,” he said. “The harman-beck’s been in twice. Tell John to watch out. And tell him he’s to see Sir Bartlemy Ladland tonight. Without fail. Now off with ye, lad.”

I passed our house on the way and was relieved to see that no lights were showing; my absence, then, had not been discovered. I was mystified over one part of my errand. Why was John to see Sir Bartlemy Ladland? Was he counting on Sir Bartlemy’s help in getting out of his difficulties? The rest was not hard to understand at all. The apothecary’s niece had always been favored with John’s attentions when he was home. To be honest about it, there had been a time when I went out of my way to pass the shop on the chance of seeing her about. She was very pretty, with golden hair and deeply shadowed violet eyes and a neat ankle. I nearly always caught a glimpse of her through the murky shop windows, and she never failed to smile. I had felt a little sorry for her. She was certainly well enough mannered, but for some reason the other girls in town would have nothing to do with her. They had been delighted when she married and moved to London.

The establishment was in darkness when I arrived. I went to the back door and gave a discreet knock. Apparently I was expected, for I heard a stealthy step inside at once. A low voice asked, “Who is it?”

“A friend of John Ward’s,” I answered. “I was told to call for him here.”

“Yes,” said the voice. I heard a bolt being drawn. The door swung back. “Come in, Roger.”

It was Ann Turner. She closed the door and then held up the candle so we could see each other better. She was dressed in black and was prettier than ever. In the uncertain light her eyes looked enormous.

“I didn’t know you were back,” I said.

“I arrived today. I’m a widow. Did you know? It’s going to be a very short visit. I’m returning to London as soon as possible.”

“I didn’t know. I’m very sorry to hear it.”

She got out another candle and lighted it from the one she was holding. Now I could see better, and I realized that there was something curiously different about the way she was dressed. She had discarded the farthingale which held women’s skirts out stiffly at the sides—that was it. As a result her trailing black gown fell gracefully and easily about her, even revealing

something of the slender line of her hips. There was a pleasant swish and rustle every time she moved. I wondered why women did not always dress this way.

“You needn’t be too sorry,” she said. “My marriage wasn’t much of a success. My husband was a doctor, but I soon found out that he worked for the Upright Man.”

The Upright Man! That was a predicament for a young bride. Before I could make any comment, she went on: “I hope you won’t think I’m hardhearted, Roger, but it was a great relief when I was free again. He was an old man and he drank heavily. He didn’t treat me very well. I married him to get out of this dreadful place. I guess you knew that.”

I had suspected it to be the case, for she had had a lonely time of it. I wanted to ask if her husband’s connection with the powerful head of London’s criminals had involved her in any difficulties; but, remembering that I had an urgent message for John Ward, I asked where he was.

“He’s upstairs.” She hurried to explain the reason. “He was hurt on the way here. But don’t look so startled; it wasn’t very serious and my uncle is attending to it now. John says he must leave as soon as it’s dressed.”

“The sheriff seems determined to get his hands on him.”

A step was heard approaching the shop. We stood close together, not daring to make a move. My companion clasped my arm tightly with her free hand, and I could hear her breath coming in excited gasps. I was afraid the light of the candles might show but found on a glance around that the curtains had been drawn tightly across the windows.

The steps seemed to pause but then moved on. We both sighed with relief. Ann even managed to laugh.

“I thought they were coming for him. What would have happened to us, Roger? Would they have taken us all? Living the way we did in London made me afraid of every knock on the door.”

“I must give him my message at once,” I said. “Every minute counts now.”

She was still holding my arm. “You’re looking well, Roger. I think you’ve grown a lot since I left town.”

“I’m an even six foot.”

“My! And you’re only eighteen.”

“I’m more than that,” I protested. “I’m nearly nineteen.”

We moved into the front room, which Aaron Blazeby used as his workshop. There was a large mortar on an acid-stained table and beside it a

dudgeon knife with a jagged edge. The walls were lined with bottle-filled shelves, and a skull grinned down at us from the darkness above.

At one side was a flight of stairs without a handrail. Ann said, as I began to climb: "Be careful. They're very narrow and steep. They should be, for they lead to a lady's bedroom."

I knew she was watching me, but I kept my eyes down. I did not know what kind of an answer I should make to that.

A door was open at the head of the stairs, and I saw John standing by the side of a bed. He was wearing his flame-colored hose, which covered him as far as his muscular hips, but otherwise he was naked. The apothecary stood beside him, applying something to his shoulder.

"Well, my kinchin coe, you got here," said John with a friendly grin. "I had an argument with one of the sheriff's men on the way, and he had a nervous manner of handling his petronel. The ball took a little skin off my shoulder."

"Something more than skin," grunted Aaron Blazeby, paying no attention to me but going on with his work. He had cauterized the wound and was now clamping a bandage on it. The apothecary was a little man, not especially clean, and with a twist in his neck which caused him to carry his head sideways.

The room was Ann's, as she had warned me. I saw an article of feminine apparel on the floor and the wire understructure of her farthingale in one corner.

"You'll have a stiff shoulder, Cap'n Ward," warned Blazeby.

"I'm not concerned about that. I'm afraid the harman-beck will have more than a stiff shoulder. I dropped him on his head over the nearest wall. Well, Master Apothecary, I won't need you for anything else. Roger will help me dress."

When Blazeby had made his way down the steep steps, John picked up his shirt from the bed, wincing perceptibly. "I judge from the look of you," he said, "that you have news for me."

I gave him the message from Widdigate and then added: "I want to go with you this time, John, if you'll have me."

He grunted with pain as he struggled to raise the shirt above his head. "Jore said something about it. So you want to be a pirate, do you? That's what we're going to be in the eyes of the King's law from now on."

"I don't care what we're called. I want to be in it."

“That’s the spirit! If you feel that way, I can use you; and many more like you. I’ll make a good sailor and a fighting man out of you, Roger. We’re going to go on breeding seamen in England in spite of old King Quodlibet. What do the family say about it?”

“I haven’t told them yet.”

“They won’t like it. Your mother will blame me for it.”

He stood without moving for a full minute. He was holding his shirt above his head with his good arm. It was of the finest silk and richly embroidered with gold thread. I was sure our house was run for a full year on what he had paid for it. His hair, which was the color of gold, fell below his shoulders. He might not be considered a handsome man by some, for his nose had the curve of a hawk’s and his jaw was too square; but he was a truly magnificent physical specimen. I wondered at the whiteness of his skin. Most deep-sea sailors were tanned to the shade of mahogany.

“So, I’m to see Sir Bartlemy Ladland,” he said at last. “This means our brave Jamie has refused to wink at my little exploits. I suspected as much when the constable creased my skin for me. I’m not surprised. He swore before I sailed that he would hang me if I took a fall out of his good friends the Dons. Well, we’ll have to move fast. I have no desire at all to swing on the chats. Nor do I want to keep the Great Man company in the Tower.”

He was referring, I knew, to Sir Walter Raleigh, who was still in the Tower under a sentence of death pronounced some years before. The last of the great captains of Queen Elizabeth’s time had outgrown his earlier unpopularity and was now recognized for what he was, the most versatile and remarkable man of his age. All England was angry at the way he was being treated, particularly as no one believed the trumped-up charge of treason on which he had been convicted. It was well known that King James was plucking him piecemeal of all his possessions for the benefit of his favorites.

John had tucked his gorgeous shirt under the top of his hose and was buckling a belt of soft leather around his waist. It had at least a score of eyelet holes in its lower edge, corresponding with an equal number in the reinforced silk of the hose top. He proceeded to bind them together with leather thongs, called points. It was a complicated business, and I watched with considerable interest. My own leggings were held up by no more than four points, tied to the bottom of my tunic, which accounted partly for the slackness which invariably showed at my knees. When John had finished with the last of them, he was so tightly trussed up that the silk of his hose fitted him like his own skin.

“What has Sir Bartlemy to do with this?” I asked.

John had drawn on his brown trunk breeches, which were slashed with velvet of the same color as the hose. This necessitated more tying of points to the upper edge of the belt. His fingers moved with impatient haste.

“Has it ever occurred to you, Roger,” he asked, “that it takes money to equip a ship-of-war? Behind every freebooter there’s always a man of position and wealth, or a group of them. They supply the money for the expedition and then sit comfortably at home and enjoy a very large share of the profits without taking any of the risks. I’m backed by such a group. Sir Bartlemy is one of them; in fact, he’s the main one. There is in addition a young man, very close to His Majesty, who was supposed to secure immunity for me. The others are wealthy men in the City, aldermen and the like. I deal mostly with Sir Bartlemy. He negotiated my letters of marquee from the Low Countries when Old Rumbleguts refused. Keep a close tongue about this, my lad, for Sir Bartlemy would be in serious trouble if his part in it were known.” He had clamped a frame of wire around his neck and was attaching his starched ruff to it. The ruff was an enormous affair, a full two feet wide. “Snap the wire at the back, Roger. And tie the ruff so that none of the wire shows. I always need help in getting into these things. That’s it. Now about Sir Bartlemy. I’m sure he has some urgent word for us, so we must get over there at once.”

“We?” I was almost too surprised to speak. Surprises, in fact, had been piling up on me the last few minutes, the greatest being the amazing information about our powerful neighbor. Sir Bartlemy Ladland was a quiet and studious man who was supposed to have no ambitions other than a desire for occasional conquests in a gentler game than politics. I found it hard to believe that he was concerned in as stern a business as that on which John had sailed.

“You, of course,” said John. “You’re going with me tonight. That is, if you meant it about joining me.”

“I meant it!” I exclaimed fervently. “But it hadn’t occurred to me we would be leaving so soon.”

“It’s tonight or not at all,” said my friend. “There will be no time for farewells, I’m afraid. I must go to Appleby Court and make my arrangements, and then we’ll lose no time in getting away. I’m taking no chances on what that mammering old bastard of a king will decide to do. The *Royal Bess* is lying off the coast, ready to sail at a moment’s notice. She was the *Madalina*, you know. I mounted thirty-two guns in her when I



changed the name, and she's now the sweetest and fastest craft that ever sailed the Midland Sea."

He had slipped into his sleeveless doublet and had turned his back so that I could button him up. I performed this task with great care, having regard to the costliness of the material as well as the tender condition of his wounded shoulder. "No, Roger, there will be no time to see your mother or that old dragon of an aunt. Sir Bartlemy will supply us with horses, and we may make up our minds now to a long ride tonight."

"I'll write them," I said. I had no thought of backing out, but I was realizing that this would make the blow harder for them. I was conscious at first of a deep sense of guilt. Then I let my thoughts jump ahead to the end of this adventure and immediately felt much better about it. I would come back with so much Spanish gold that the need for saving and scrimping would be over for all time. I would bring them silks and satins and fine jewels, and I would marry Katie Ladland, which they both hoped for above everything.

John was now putting on his enormous puffed sleeves, which had to be attached to the doublet with many more points. He winced once while I attended to this for him but otherwise seemed to be taking no discomfort from his injury. He began to strut about the room in all his finery, the most magnificent figure of a man I had ever seen or ever hoped to see. I felt small and insignificant beside him.

"I promised to take some lads from the town, but there won't be time to collect them now," he ruminated. "It's a pity, for I could use them all. I hoped to have none but Englishmen in the crew this trip. Well, I can pick up a few stout Dutchmen if need be. They're good enough."

"Don't you think we should hurry?" I asked. "The sheriff may come any minute."

"Let him try it," replied John easily. "Do you suppose the bully boys of this town would stand by and see trouble come to John Ward? I hardly think so." He picked the garment off the floor and held it up with a sly wink. "The little baggage! She left it there on purpose. Our pretty Ann wears fine main buntlings. Satin, no less, and will you take notice of the fineness of the lace! I have nothing better myself. What do you say, Roger, shall we take this along and let it flutter from our masthead?"

I thought at first he was serious about it and was going to protest. It was bad enough, to my way of thinking, that we could not sail under the flag of England. Then I noticed there was a twinkle in his eye.

"I see you don't approve," he said. "Well, you're right. If she were French, now, or even a dark-eyed señorita! But we couldn't treat an English girl that way. Not even our little Ann. By the way, Roger, you knew, of course, that she was not entirely adverse to a little niggling in the old days? You were a sly young dog and knew all about it, I'm sure. She's a widow now, and I thought— Well, I confess that I came here tonight with far pleasanter anticipations than to have her dirty old uncle dress a wounded shoulder for me."

He stamped down the stairs, and I followed at his heels, not too happy over the confidences he had reposed in me. I had suspected it, of course, for there had been plenty of talk in town about them; but I was fond of Ann and would rather not have heard this confirmation of it. John was in high spirits again and began to sing a verse of the song I had heard earlier at the Cygnet's Head:

We'll set our course and take our fee,  
From haughty Don and High Grandee.  
Philip, we'll sail in spite of thee,  
*And singe thy royal beard!*

Ann met us in the workroom below. Her uncle had retired to the back room, and I could hear him puttering about and talking to himself.

"It must be good-by now, my sweet and lovely Ann," said John in a gay tone. "I hoped to stay awhile in town and see a great deal of my little Mistress Goldenlocks. But Old Jamie won't have it that way. So I'm off. Give me a buss, sweetheart."

He put his good arm around her and squeezed her tight. Ann seemed to take it coolly enough, for she kept an interested eye on me over his shoulder the while. When she found that the width of his ruff made it impossible for him to kiss her, she puckered up her lips and looked at me as though to say: Perhaps *you* would have better luck.

"Take a heart-felt word of advice from me, Roger," said John. "When you have love-making in mind, never get yourself all dressed up like this. I have had no chance to ask you about your plans, Ann. Do you intend to stay here? It would be dull for you, I'm thinking."

"I'm going to London," she answered, trying to free her face from the close proximity of his ruff. "I'm going to open a little shop. Widows have to live, you know."

"A shop? What are you going to sell?"

"Clothes for ladies of the court. Fine ruffs and caps. And other things."

“Especially the other things,” declared John. “The ladies of the court will be sure to think that they would look as well as you do in—the other things. I’m sure you’ll have a great success. But when I come back, that will be a different matter, Fubbs. There’ll be no keeping of shops then.”

Ann’s face puckered up into a smile, but she continued to look at me around the huge puff of his sleeve. “Roger will come and see me in London, I hope,” she said.

“No, Roger won’t come and see you in London,” declared John. “Roger is sailing with me.”

She stepped back from him. “You didn’t tell me that,” she said, looking in my direction.

“I wasn’t sure he would take me.”

“This is your doing, John Ward!” said Ann. “You’ve talked him into it!”

“I’ve had nothing to do with it. It’s his own idea. And I can’t see that it’s any concern of yours, Mistress Ann.”

“No, it’s no concern of mine and thank you, John Ward, for reminding me.” Her face wore a look of real distress. “Roger, do you want to go? I don’t think it’s a—a very good idea.”

John said impatiently, “I’m going to make a seaman of our Roger. He shall play Grenville to my Drake. Keep your fingers out of men’s affairs, Fubbs.”

She looked at him intently. “I’m not interested in *your* affairs. I’m beginning to think I don’t like you any more. But I’ve always liked Roger.”

## 4

WE LEFT TOWN by a back road which led through the closely set firs of Wayland Spinney. There was a steep hill here, and when John and I had puffed our way to the top we could see that the Great Hall at Appleby Court was lighted up.

“Sir Bartlemy must have guests tonight,” I said.

John frowned. "Sir Bartlemy is a cautious soul, and he won't be happy if anyone should see us there. Even if we had the King's approval, he wouldn't want it known that he has dealings with a gory-handed pirate."

"He sent for you," I reminded him.

We plodded on in silence for a few minutes. "Roger," said my friend suddenly, "I've been thinking. This may be all wrong. I have no right to take you away from home. You've no idea what's ahead of you. It's the hardest kind of a life. What Ann said back there set me thinking. It's a filthy business, and the fighting is of the bloodiest kind. And what's at the end of it? Death, perhaps, in a Spanish prison—a very unpleasant death, I promise you. Or at the end of a rope. The glory of it is all in the beholding. Roger, you must be sensible about it. Turn around and go home. I won't think any the worse of you if you do."

"But what will I think of myself?" I demanded. My mind was running on the glory that Englishmen had won in the days of great Queen Bess. I was thinking of Drake sailing around the world, of Sir Richard Grenville and the *Revenge*, of the dread Armada turning tail and running to its destruction with English hornets stinging it to death. My father had fought against the Armada, and so had John's, and John himself. These men must have felt some of the glory they had earned. England needed men who were capable of the same kind of gallantry now, and men of commoner clay to work and fight back of the leaders.

I wanted to tell him what I was thinking, but all I could manage to say was, "No, I am going."

"There will be times when you'll regret it bitterly," said John. "Some days your flesh will crawl with the heat, and the sea will look like green fire, and the ship will stink like a charnel house. You'll live on the roughest food, and your hands will be cut to ribbons on the shrouds, and you'll never know what it is to have a full and decent sleep. You'll see things done every day which will sicken you to your very soul. I'm being honest with you, Roger. This is no life for a man with a single grain of fineness in him."

"I always thought Drake and Frobisher and Cavendish were fine men," I declared.

"No," replied John, "they were great men. There's a big difference."

"It's my duty to go. I've thought it all over, and I can see no other way. I want to go. The Bleases have always been sailors, and I am a Blease."

John had nothing further to say for a full minute. Then he nodded. "Have it your own way, Roger. Probably you're right about it, but I wanted to be

sure you went in with your eyes wide open. I'm glad you're coming with me."

The drawbridge over the moat at Appleby Court had not been raised for so long that the rusted chains had been cut. As we crossed the bridge I looked up at the gatehouse tower, and it seemed at such close range to stretch all the way to heaven. I was suddenly conscious of my mended jacket with its plain camelet sleeves and unmatched buttons of pewter and my ill-fitting kersey hose. Beside my gorgeous companion I would look like a plucked country crow, and so I had no stomach for facing Katie Ladland. She had no idea of the way I felt about her, of course; but I did not want to appear at such disadvantage in her eyes.

Hugh Parler, the porter, led the way in and escorted us up a winding stone staircase. This brought us to an apartment with a log snapping cheerfully in a stone fireplace. I recognized it as the first of the guest chambers which took up the full front wing of the house. I smiled as I read the couplet cut into the stone over the mantel.

*The sloven and the careless guest, the roynish nothing nice,  
To lodge in chamber comely decked, are seldom suffered twice.*

The point was well taken. It was a handsomely furnished room, and the habits of guests were often marked by a lack of care, to say the least. There was a long draw-table, several cushioned chairs, and even a Turkey carpet covering the stone floor. I went to a window which looked out over the quadrangle and saw that the Great Hall was crowded with guests. A tall oriel window gave me a full view of the interior, and I could see them bowing and dipping and swaying to the music. They were dancing a coranto, a slow and dignified measure.

"Who shall I say?" asked Parler, looking dubiously at us.

John answered him. "No names, if you please," he said. "Just say to your master, 'Little John and the Middle Course.' Can you remember that?"

When the porter had gone, John joined me at the window and said with a broad grin: "Sir Bartlemy entertains in high state. I ought to be leading a measure down there myself, because I've paid for a large share of all this. I brought back plenty of gold in the hold of the *Royal Bess*. I'm going to make a great heiress of little Katie Ladland before I'm through." Then he looked at me and his smile broadened. "Haven't I heard it rumored that one Roger Blease is very much enamored of the daughter of Appleby Court? No cause to blush, my boy. I'm sure it's an honest attachment, and the Piries can match quarterings with the Ladlands any day. An excellent plan all around. It would keep the loot in the family, in a way of speaking."

I was thinking that Katie would not be dancing, not being old enough to mingle with the guests. She would be in the East Gallery and peeping over the tapestried rail at the company. None of the ladies with their jeweled coifs and wide farthingales, who posed and bowed and swung in the slow turnings of the coranto, would be half as pretty as my Katie, with her sweet gray eyes and hair as black as the outside sky. My Katie? What presumption! I knew that I was an imbecile to harbor such a dream.

John had taken to pacing up and down the room with his incredibly long strides. "Sir Bartlemy wants me to try the Americas," he said, in a ruminating tone. "They're all for it, in fact, the fine young gentleman at court and the worthy merchants in the City. I don't agree with them. Granted there is more chance for gold off Barbados or Jamaica. But that isn't what I'm risking my life for, and the lives of all my crew. I aim to show the Dons that the flag of England has as much right in the Midland Sea as the red and yellow bars. I shall attack and sink any ship carrying the crest of Castile as long as they continue to seize English merchantmen. If we pick up cargoes in doing so, it will be so much gain. But, Roger, we don't sail for gain! That point must be made very clear to our gallant gentlemen."

Katie's father came into the room at this point, and it was clear that he was both troubled and annoyed at seeing me there. He was as richly attired as John, and I realized more fully than I ever had before that he bore a close resemblance to pictures of old King Harry. He sat down at the end of the table and tucked his thumbs aggressively in the slashings of his doublet.

"I expected you alone, Captain Ward," he said in his rich bass voice. "Why is Roger with you? I'm at a loss to understand this."

"Roger is sailing with me," declared John, seating himself at the other end of the table. His manner said plainer than words: That is how it is and I don't give a snap of the finger what you may think or say about it.

A look of genuine concern showed itself on Sir Bartlemy's broad and whiskered visage. "Indeed, Captain Ward! I'm not sure I can agree to that. Roger is young, and his mother has other plans for him. This is— Really, this is an annoying situation. It puts me in a most difficult position." He folded one silk-clad knee over the other and turned in my direction. "Roger, have you told your mother of this? I can't believe she has given her consent."

"I haven't spoken to her yet," I answered reluctantly. "It was this afternoon that I made up my mind. I intended to tell her tomorrow, but now it seems I must leave with John tonight, or not at all. I'm going to write her, sir. She will understand." I began to argue my case with all the earnestness

at my command. "I am of sailor stock, as you know, sir. My father went to sea when he was ten years old. It's high time I made a start."

He continued to regard me with a worried frown. "I don't like this," he muttered. "Really, I don't like it at all. I have a great respect and affection for Mistress Blease. What would she think if she knew I had been a party to sending you off to sea?"

"She'll never know, sir," I declared eagerly. "Certainly she'll never hear of it through me. How else could it reach her?"

Sir Bartlemy ran vexed fingers through his straggling beard. "I know you well enough to be sure you will keep a still tongue, Roger," he said at last. "Otherwise I would have no course open but to send you home. There is this to be said for you, my boy: your father wanted you to be a sailor. He said so many times. The decision, as I see it, then, is in your own hands."

He turned back to John. "Ward, we have matters of importance to discuss. Things have taken—well, quite a difficult turn. I'm deeply concerned. We must consider our course with the utmost care. It may not be wise for me to run too contrary to the royal will. I don't mind saying that I am disturbed, seriously disturbed." He got to his feet and patted out a wrinkle at his knee. "There's a small room off my library where we will be safe from intrusion. In fact, I'll make sure of it by locking the door. Then some food will be served here. For you and Roger." He looked at me again and smiled with a little more cordiality. "Catherine will want to say good-by. The little baggage was told to go to bed, but I'll swear it was her head I saw from a corner of the East Gallery not ten minutes ago."

They left the room together, and in a very few minutes Firk Besson came in, carrying a tray above his head. He began to lay plates and dishes of food on the table, grumbling openly at the additional labor which our coming had imposed on him.

"There," he said, slapping down the spoons and knives and whisking a slice of cold mutton into his own mouth. "Meat and a veal pie and the best bread in the house. And suckets. The best food you've had in many a long day, Master Blease. You'll make your knife move lively with *this* food I've brought you." He frowned at me. "No making yourself sick over it, mind you."

I waited until he had gone and then, I am afraid, my knife did move lively. There was a pitcher of red wine on the table. I had filled my cup and was lifting it to my lips when the door opened again. I heard a rustle of skirts and looked up.

It was Katie. She smiled and came a few steps into the room. Then she stopped as though not entirely sure of the propriety of paying me a visit.

I scrambled to my feet, almost spilling my wine. She had just turned fifteen but was looking very much grown up. Her hair was done in a new way, dressed high on her head with loops of seed pearls and allowing the tips of her ears to show. I had never seen her ears before. Her eyes were bright with excitement, and she was managing her wide skirts with an air which said plainly: I am no longer Katie, if you please; I am Catherine Ladland, and what do you think of me? I longed to tell her exactly what I thought of her but did not dare.

“Roger,” she said in a whisper. “Father sent word I was to go to bed but also that you were here. I think he expected I would come. What does it mean? Are you going away?”

“Yes,” I answered proudly. “I’m going with John Ward. To fight the Spaniards.”

She gave me a frightened look and came a little farther into the room. “Roger, what do you mean? You’re going to sea? I can’t believe it. You—why, you’re going to London soon. I have been thinking—Roger, you look different tonight. You look so *very* much older.”

“We both look different tonight,” I said, getting up my courage to tell her what was in my mind. “I could hardly be sure at first it was you. I thought it must be one of the ladies from downstairs, you looked so grown up and—and lovely. You took my breath away.” I paused and then added hopefully. “Katie, I never intended to live in London. I had to pretend because of Mother and Aunt Gadilda, but I’ve always meant to be a sailor. When John came home today, I made up my mind once and for all. I’m going with him.”

She was standing beside me now and looking up with troubled eyes.

“I believe I would want to go too, if I were a man,” she whispered. “But I’m frightened. Roger, you might be killed—or taken prisoner. I don’t dare think what that would mean.”

“You do like me, then?”

Katie had always been honest about things, and she did not hesitate to answer now. “Of course I like you. I always have. You know that, Roger. I like you well enough not to want anything to happen to you.”

We sat down on opposite sides of the table. I drank a little of the wine and began to talk about John Ward’s plans. He was going to Tunis first and was going to organize all the Free Rovers into one fleet. Then he was going to drive the Dons off the seas. It was going to be like old times, like Drake



sailing into Cadiz and burning the whole Spanish fleet under the king's nose. Leaning both elbows on the table, Katie cupped her chin in her hands and regarded me with serious eyes.

"But I don't understand," she said finally. "Isn't this country at peace with Spain now?"

"Nominally," I answered. "The two kings have signed a peace. But it's one-sided, Katie. The Spaniards are not observing it. They seize every English ship they find and then say they were pirates. They intend to gobble the trade of the whole world. They couldn't beat us, and so now they aim to get what they want by trickery. King James won't see what they are up to, and so men like John must fight the English cause on their own."

The frown between her eyes deepened. "Everything you say makes me more frightened," she said. "It will be very dangerous. I don't want you to go, Roger. Your mother's plan *must* be the best. You might become a great man in London. I—I may go to court soon myself. Father thinks Queen Anne will make me a maid of honor when I'm a little older. Perhaps in another year."

We talked it over for a long time. I indulged in bold predictions as to what it was going to mean to fight under John Ward. Glory and wealth and the esteem of all men—all men except King Jamie, of course. Perhaps even the King would change his mind when he found what we would do to the Dons. Katie continued to shake her head. I could see she had never heard of the *Trial*, and it was quite clear that she knew nothing whatever of her father's partnership with John Ward. When I told her that John was in the house and closeted that very minute with Sir Bartlemy, she opened her eyes wide.

"What business has he with Father?" she asked.

"He's seeking advice, no doubt, as to what he should do. All men of the town look up to your father."

"I want to see him!" she said eagerly. "Is he as handsome as everyone says? I hear he's the tallest man in England."

"I don't know about that, although I've never seen a taller. But I do know he's the bravest man in England." I leaned across the table and looked earnestly into her eyes in my anxiety to make her understand. "Katie, if you feel that way about him, how do you suppose I feel? I would die of shame if I didn't join him now that the chance has come."

She nodded slowly. "I suppose so," she said. Getting to her feet, she looked down at her skirt to make sure it had not become rumpled. "You haven't said a word about my dress, Roger. Do you like me in it? You're

going away, and I won't see you for years. I'll be a lady of the court when you get tired of fighting and decide to come back. I'll have suitors, I hope. Perhaps I'll even be married. Have you thought of that?"

"Katie!" I exclaimed. I wanted to implore her to wait for me, to promise that she would not marry, no matter how many suitors she had. But I could not manage to say it.

She may have known what I was trying to tell her, but if she did she made no effort to help me. "We must be reconciled, then, to not seeing each other for a long time," she said in a lighter tone. "Does that worry you at all? Still, there's nothing more to be said." Then she smiled and gave me one of her hands. "Would you care to watch the dancing? It's quite exciting."

Finally we came to the cavernous corner kitchen where fires blazed on open hearths and supper was being prepared for the guests. The Great Hall lay just beyond. We went through the buttery and climbed a short flight of narrow wooden steps to a balcony from which we could look down on the dancers. We sat on the floor and peeped through holes in the tapestry which covered the railing.

I had dined in the Great Hall on the preceding Christmas. There had been a huge Yule log burning, and the place had seemed bright and full of cheer. It looked much larger now. The roof was so high above us that the pennons hanging up there in the darkness made a faint and ghostly rustling in the drafts. Such sounds could be heard at odd intervals only, however, for the musicians were playing with might and main. The citterns were twanging and the bysardens wheezing and the drums thumping. The guests were dancing a galliard, and I found it hard not to laugh when it came to the lavolta, which is a sudden spring in the air; for the farthingales of the women were not well suited to such acrobats. They looked like marionettes when the strings are operated by amateur puppet-masters. I had heard much of the beauty of court costumes, but I must say that I was disappointed, for the V-shaped bodices worn by the women made them look unnaturally long-waisted. The men cut better figures, I thought. Katie saw nothing of this. Her interest in everything was almost breathless.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she said. "I can hardly wait to go to court. The Queen is a very fine dancer and loves masques. I love them too. There is Lady Govern now. I wonder what color her hair really is? Perhaps it's gray. I don't think I want to live to be that old."

"You needn't worry about that," I said. "You will always be lovely, Katie."

She squirmed around to look at me more closely. “Why, Roger, you *are* growing up,” she said. “You’ve made me a courtly speech. Did you really mean it?”

I was finding it intoxicating to sit so near her in the darkness. My courage began to come back.

“Katie, will you wait for me?” I asked.

She looked at me intently and then shook her head. “I will make no promises,” she answered. “You’re going away and you’ll be gone two years. Perhaps longer. I’ll be at court, and there will be many men there. I might fall in love with one of them. It would be very easy for me to give you a promise now, but later I might forget it. I wouldn’t want things to happen that way. When a promise is given, it must be kept. And so I think it would not be right for me to say yes to you now.”

I watched the strutting gallants on the dance floor, thinking that sooner or later Katie would fall in love with some stripling of the court.

She interrupted my train of thought by whispering, “I think we had better leave now.”

I got to my feet and helped her to rise. My face must have shown what I was thinking, for she squeezed my hand and said: “You needn’t be so tragic about it. I haven’t said I *would* fall in love with another man. I may never meet one I’ll like better than—than my memory of you.”

It was so late by this time that she decided we would be unlikely to meet anyone if we crossed the quadrangle. Perhaps she was not feeling equal to another venture through the Long Gallery. At any rate, we went out through the buttery door and proceeded cautiously in the dark through the inner gardens. It was very dark, and I stepped on a tennis ball, falling flat on my back and seeing immediately all the stars that the night clouds hid. It was most humiliating, for I had been dramatizing my disappointment by stalking in dignified gloom. Katie began to laugh. At first this made me angrier still, but then I saw the humor of it and was able to laugh also. “Poor Roger,” said Katie.

John was seated at the supper table when we reached the chamber in the gatehouse. He shoved his wine cup to one side when his eyes lighted on Katie and rose slowly to his great height. He stared at her for a moment and then turned to me.

“Roger,” he said accusingly, “you’re a lying, quibbling, conniving, understating dog. You only said she was beautiful.” Then he turned back to Katie. “You are Mistress Catherine Ladland, of whom I have heard not nearly enough. I am John Ward, a poor sea captain of no official standing,

and from this moment thenceforth your most faithful servant and abject admirer.”

Have you ever stood by and watched something that you have treasured within yourself crumble away before your eyes? Perhaps old King Harry had felt as I did now when they broke the news to him that his second Catherine had been unfaithful with a young blade of the court. Katie was looking at John Ward with a light in her eyes that I had never seen there before. But how could it have been otherwise? John was so big and compelling, with his hawklike nose, his bold mouth, and his blazing blue eyes. He was born to command the loyalty of men and the love of women. He had always had the one from me, and now Katie perhaps was in a fair way to yield him the other.

I had never been in a theater, but the thought went through my head that plays must be something like this: the three of us standing there with this situation between us and none of us saying a word.

It was John who broke the silence. “You’ve heard bad reports of me, I’m sure. That I’m enticing your friend Roger off to sea where I’ll make him into a pirate like myself.”

“No,” answered Katie, never taking her eyes off his face. “I’ve heard only the best reports of you, Captain Ward.”

“I’m glad of that,” declared my friend. “I would be very unhappy if you thought badly of me, Mistress Catherine. I’ve heard you may soon be going to court, and I’m wondering if you’ll change your mind about me then. It’s the rule there to agree with everything King Jamie says.”

“I won’t change my mind,” said Katie. “Not even if I go to court.”

“What do you think of our bold Roger’s electing to throw in his lot with me?”

She gave me a quick look, and then her eyes turned back to him, like iron to a magnet. “I’m not sure,” she answered. “At first I was against it. But now I—I think I’m able to understand it better.”

“Well spoken,” declared John. He leaned over and clapped me on the shoulder. “If the three of us had lived two hundred years ago, you would be begging the right to wear her colors, my bold Roger. And I—” He looked at Katie and added slowly, “I perhaps would be disposed to contest that great privilege with you.”

Katie blushed deeply and said, “I must go now. It’s very late.”

But John was not through. He had a receptive audience, and he was going to make the most of it. “I’m wondering about the future,” he said. “Your destiny, Mistress Catherine, is easy to read. In part, at least. You’ll be

a court beauty, and plenty of men will be in love with you. It will be difficult for you to remember two humble sailors fighting for a cause which went into eclipse when the Great Queen died. And yet I have a sense of conviction that you *will* remember. As for Roger, he has a head on his shoulders, and I think he may become the Ulysses of freebooters. Or a councillor high in royal circles if he ever elects to return to a life ashore. In that event, it seems to me certain that no one will be able to contest with him the right to wear those colors we were speaking of. As for me, I'm not a modest man, and so I make bold to assert that I shall give this country what she needs most at the moment: someone to fill as well as he may the shoes of the great Drake. The common men of England will think well of me even though the King stretches my neck at Wapping Stairs. My destiny is the easiest to read, for there's no doubt as to the course I must follow. No more doubt than there is to another matter: the devotion I'll always feel for Mistress Catherine Ladland."

Much as I admired John, I felt some impatience at the length of this speech. He was showing off for Katie's benefit. It was clear, however, that he had her full attention. She was too bemused to make any comment; and, to my relief, Besson broke up the tableau by putting in an appearance.

"It's very late," she said then. "I'm sure father thinks I retired long ago."

She looked at me briefly, then much longer at John, or so I thought. She gave us a curtsy and left the room. While in the room she had seemed quite mature and grown up, but it was little Katie Ladland I watched going down the steep stone staircase of the gatehouse, even though she wore a fine blue gown and had loops of pearls in her hair. I found myself wishing she had not changed.

"Have you supped, Roger?" asked John.

Firk Besson looked at the table and snorted. "It's well for him if he has," he said. He didn't seem to know who John was, but it would have made no difference.

Firk was right. A sparrow would have made out badly on what was left. The mutton was gone, and the veal pie was a hollow shambles of crust. The suckets, highly sugared fruit confections, had vanished. John was a hearty eater.

When the servingman had loaded his tray and departed, John went back to his chair and stretched himself out at full length. "There's been a change of plan," he said. "We're to stay here until tomorrow night. In the strictest seclusion, of course. Sir Bartlemy is developing nerves. He hasn't the heart for a gentleman adventurer, and he's hoping to get things patched up with

the royal gander. Tomorrow night we set out to make two important calls. One in London. The other—" He paused and winked at me to increase my suspense. "Where do you suppose we're to make our other call? At Theobalds."

"Theobalds!" I exclaimed. "The King's palace?"

"Yes, my bold Roger. We go to the King's palace. But not to see the King. Nothing as rash as that. I've no thought to let him get his greasy paws on me. We're going to talk instead to the young man I told you of before." He looked at me as though doubtful of the wisdom of further explanation. "Perhaps you're too young to know about this king of ours. He has—peculiarities. He likes men about him, young men. The one we go to see has rosy cheeks and curly hair and legs like a dancing master's. They say he can twist King Jamie around his finger. Sir Bartlemy is hoping he can persuade his master to look with a more lenient eye on my activities. I shall propose that a large share of future profits find lodgment in the empty royal purse."

I had heard plenty of talk about the King which I had never fully understood. I covered up my ignorance by asking who we were to see in London. My companion went into a second explanation with more relish.

"A man of a different stripe," he said. "You remember Chirp Bird, of course. A miserable fellow, Chirp. He was born a foin and would have become no better than a clapperdudgeon if luck hadn't come his way." I agreed entirely about Chirp Bird, who had been a thief at school and had always run whining at our heels. "Well, Chirp is in London and has become quite a swaggerer. But it's not Chirp we're to see, although we're sure to run into him. It's the man just above him. The boss of the cohorts of crime. The Upright Man of Alsatia."

"Things have been changing in the criminal world," John went on. "The Rogue-stalled are well organized today. There's an Upright Man in every town, and they're as powerful in their way as our old lummocks at Whitehall. Yes, there are kings of crime. Every nip who cuts a purse must turn part of it in. The looting of apple-squires goes into a common fund. The morts who walk the streets belong to the system as well as the owners of the ordinaries where gentlemen try their luck at the gaming tables. Well, we must see the boss crook of Alsatia because he and he alone can turn what we rieve from the Dons into good English mint."

He could see that I was puzzled, so he proceeded to explain his last point more clearly. "There's a business side to freebooting, Roger. When we take a Spanish ship, it is loaded to the gunnels with fine goods. Tapestries, gold plate, furniture, silks and satins and leather goods, sometimes even precious

stones. What are we to do with them? Sir Bartlemy and his friends can't open a shop in Cheapside to dispose of them or hawk them around the country like Irish toyles. The Upright Man takes all that off our hands. He can sell the stuff, at good prices too, although he won't turn back to us as much as half of what he gets. Still, it's the only way. I must talk to this rank fellow in Alsatia and strike a bargain with him."

I was feeling thoroughly disillusioned. It had never entered my head that there could be anything like this to sea adventuring. I had pictured it as clean and open fighting to prove our rights and to rescue the poor devils who pulled oars in Spanish galleys, not as a furtive business which made us partners with criminals. John sensed what was running through my mind and patted my knee encouragingly.

"Easy now, youngster," he said. "Drake had to do the same thing, and Cavendish, and even the Great Man in the Tower. The old queen used to drive a hard bargain for her share; and a big share it was. Would you have us throw the stuff overboard? Well, then, there you have it. You must face one bitter truth, Roger: the rosy dreams of youth are soon lost when you turn your hand to man's work. It's not only at sea, my fine sprat. Have you any idea what you would have faced if you had decided to go to court instead? Making friends with panders and pimps with noble tags to their names. You would have to wink at all manner of evil trades. A court post is trafficking in scandal and lies. Get this into your head: all life is piracy of one kind or another."

I was doing my best to digest this unpalatable statement and so made no answer. John changed the subject by remarking in an elaborately casual tone: "Your Katie is a pretty child. Perhaps you would be wiser after all to stay home and marry her."

I hesitated. "I'm very much afraid that Katie isn't for me," I said.

"Why not?"

"You've said yourself that her father is a rich man. Look at this place, and you have the answer. Would Sir Bartlemy consider me as a son-in-law? I won't come into any property worth mentioning."

"Money isn't everything. If Sir Francis Drake had been unmarried when he won his greatest fame, he could have had anyone in England. No heiress was too high-placed for a man like that. Great deeds level rank."

"Another Drake might have a chance. Were you thinking of me when you suggested that?"

He looked at me soberly. "To be perfectly honest, Roger," he said, "I wasn't."

SIR BARTLEMY was so determined to keep the fact of John Ward's presence in the house a secret that he escorted us himself to the library where we were to spend the night. It was in a corner of the left wing and had been the chapel in earlier days, when men thought much of religion and very little of learning. Our host looked up at the light flooding in through the stained-glass windows—it was a strange green glow, and I had started to wonder as soon as we entered how we would manage to sleep in such an eerie atmosphere—and said in apologetic tones: "This is the best I can do for you. The place is as full of guests as a granary with rats; and some of them not much more welcome, if I may speak my mind. In any event, it's highly unwise for any of them to know you're here. There are comfortable couches, and I left orders for blankets to be brought."

When he had gone I picked up our solitary candle and made a tour of inspection, cupping a hand around the flame to protect it from the drafts. The place was as cold as a tomb and about as cheerless under these circumstances. Partial partitions of dark oak had been built out from the walls on each side, having the appearance of high pews. They were banked with books, and on that account I looked about me with an awe that the ecclesiastical past of the place could never have induced. I could see nothing but the backs of fine tomes bound in red, blue, and brown leather—thousands of them, musty with age and containing no doubt the accumulated wisdom of the centuries. For the first time I felt a faint touch of regret that I had elected to go to sea. A man could spend a lifetime both pleasantly and profitably in such company as this.

John complained that his shoulder was stiff and that it was causing him some pain. I helped him to undress, even undoing his endless points. Then I wrapped him in blankets on a deep couch in one of the embrasures which I selected because it seemed to have the least smell of damp leather about it. He fell asleep immediately and snored with the complete surrender of perfect physical condition.

I wakened early, feeling cold and cramped. With my first flash of reason, I wondered if I had made the mistake of spending the night in St. Martin's, our rather fine tenth-century church. John sat up and rubbed his eyes, remarking cheerfully that he felt much better. The light through the windows



was bright and reassuring now, having something of the yellow of the sun about it.

I had slept in my clothes, having made sure that John got the better of the blanket division. He shook his head when he noticed my rumpled condition. "You're an untidy gilpie," he said. "Holy Olaf, you must never venture out in such a rig on a Fifth of November, or they'll burn you for an effigy of Guido Fawkes."

He grumbled while I helped him to dress because he had to wear the same clothes. I was to learn during the long time I was with him that he was the greatest of dandies. "I wish she could see me in my new green and yellow," he muttered, wincing a little as I adjusted the sleeve on his bad shoulder.

"She?"

"Your Katie. I've taken quite a fancy to her. She's a gay little spark, isn't she? I swear I've never seen the equal of her eyes."

This recalled to me what had happened when they met the previous evening, and my spirits took a drop. "I doubt if we'll see her at all today," I managed to say. "So it wouldn't do you any good if you had your other clothes."

"Probably not. Old Timid-and-Touchy will see to it that his one sweet chick isn't exposed any more to piratical influences." His voice showed a trace of irritation. "You speak as though I had two suits only. I'll have you know, my gentry-cove, that I've got fourteen."

Old Timid-and-Touchy came in to visit us shortly after, entering through a low door which communicated with his bedroom. He was muffled up in a brown shamoy robe which trailed on the floor but did not conceal the fact that he was in bare feet. On the top of his head was a ridiculously small nightcap of brown cloth, tied under his chin with a leather strap. He was in a mood of great amiability and greeted us with the hope that we had slept well.

His good spirits did not surprise me. It was known to everyone in town that Sir Bartlemy invariably wakened with a blandness which tapered off during the day and left him acid and unhappy in the hours of evening. It had been the reverse with his late-lamented brother, who rose in the deepest melancholy and did not enjoy any lift in mood until candlelight time, when he became so excessively jovial that he was ready to sell his birthright for much less than a mess of potage; he had, in fact, done that very thing and had died in Ireland in a condition of extreme poverty.

“There will be some breakfast for you soon, my good lads,” said our host, stretching himself out on the couch which John had vacated. I noticed that the soles of his feet were black. “I think it advisable to keep the servants in the dark about all this, and so my Katie will fetch it for you.”

“You’re being very kind, Sir Bartlemy,” said John, winking at me over his huge shoulder.

“No, no, not at all. I’m only sorry that I couldn’t put you in my best bedrooms. After all, you’re fighting for a good cause, and that would be my warrant.” He drew the shamoy collar tightly around his neck, for the cold was enough to strike into the very marrow of your bones. “I won’t have an opportunity to talk to you much today, and so I must take advantage of the present. Answer a question, if you please, Ward. What is your opinion of Macherie?”

“Macherie?” John was stamping about to keep himself warm. “Sir Nevil Macherie? I think less than nothing of him.”

Sir Bartlemy looked startled at this. “Come, come. He’s one of you. A Free Rover. He’s been cruising in the south for over a year, and I hear he’s done rather well.”

John picked up his gold chain, which had fallen to the floor, rubbing with an impatient finger the emerald which dangled from it before draping it around his neck. “Sir Nevil Macherie,” he declared, “is a long-snouted coward who knows nothing of navigation. You asked my opinion, and there you have it.”

It was proof of the matutinal amiability of our host that he was able to laugh, even though there was a slightly embarrassed ring to it. “I had hoped to hear the opposite from you. Sir Nevil’s a neighbor, in a sense. He has a place about ten miles south of here, as you probably know. Some gentlemen hereabouts assisted in fitting him out. His honesty, of course, is above suspicion.”

“I hope you were not induced to join in raising funds for him, Sir Bartlemy. His backers will get no good of it, I promise you.”

“Of course not. Ah—one venture of the kind is proving enough for me, I assure you.”

“Profitable enough, at any rate,” declared John.

There was an uncomfortable pause. Our host, whose face had become somewhat red, said with a suggestion of a titter: “If what you say is true, I’ve been completely wrong about the man. I even thought once—it was a fleeting idea, of course—that he might be a suitable husband for my daughter.”

John's laugh boomed out at that. "I'm sure you never gave it any serious thought. Mistress Catherine is entitled to someone much better than this slab-flanked fellow." He looked at me slyly. "What do you say, Roger?"

I was sure Sir Bartlemy had introduced the topic for a purpose. "I think," I said, "that Katie should have the best man to be found in all England."

"I am going to see that she gets him." I did not expect him to say anything more, but he proceeded to discuss his daughter's future with great seriousness, mentioning the sons of various great noblemen as possible candidates. They rolled glibly off his tongue: the heir of the Earl of Totness, the second son of "Charlie" (who turned out to be one of the Howards, the oldest family in England), and the nephew of the wealthy Lord Blessington. No subject could have been more distressing for my ears, and I thought John found no more enjoyment in it. He seemed as glad as I was when Katie herself appeared with a tray of food.

"We've been discussing your future, Doll," said her father, watching me out of the corner of one eye. "Both Roger and Captain Ward agree you must marry the finest and richest man in the country. I thought you would be glad to know of their good opinion."

Katie, who was wearing a dress which matched the gray of her eyes, seemed to like this no more than we did. "I'm sure it's very kind of them, Father, but if you don't mind I'll choose my own husband. I would prefer not to be discussed in this way."

Her father got to his feet. "I thought they would both be interested, my dear. We'll leave them to their breakfasts now, Doll. I must request, gentlemen, that you confine yourselves to this room until I let you know that it's safe to appear. Some of our guests are not departing until late in the afternoon. The books are at your disposal." He glanced down at the tray. "I see you've brought brandy. It may serve to keep the young men warm. A fire, I regret to say, is out of the question. I can't risk sending a servant in to lay it."

Katie seemed reluctant to go, but her father took her by the elbow and urged her through the door.

John was furious. He shook his fist at the closed door. "Was there ever a poorer creature than that?" he demanded. "I'm getting completely out of patience with him. He's afraid of his own shadow, and he hems and haws like a noddie saying grace before meat." He calmed down a little and gave me a wink. "But he's got a sharp eye in his head. He had noticed something, and so he went to great pains to serve notice on us, and on her as well. No trespassing!"

Katie had hardly looked at me while she was in the room. This was not to be wondered at after what John had said about my appearance. But she had watched him closely. I said to myself that it didn't matter now; we would both be away for years, and when we returned she would be married to the second son of Charlie or to someone equally suitable. My daydreams had come to an end.

After breakfast I began an inspection of the books, discovering that those in the embrasure where we had slept were all comparatively new. Of recent years there had been a general interest in what was called self-improvement, and many books had been printed on the subject. They were all here. I skimmed over the titles, surprised that there were so many: several issues of the *Horne-Book*, *The Mother's Blessing*, *Richard Whittington and His Great Rise*, *The Mirror of Worldly Fame*, *Directions for a Man to Choose His Mate*, *How to Become Rich*, *Panaceas for Health*. None of them appealed to me in my then state of mind, but I found something in another niche, a history of the Hundred Years' War. I was soon deep in its pages, with a blanket around my shoulders.

John found himself in less fortunate case. He had no liking for books, and so he paced up and down the room, stopping in front of me at intervals to complain of my absorption. "You'll never learn from print how to round Cape Passer in the teeth of a heavy blow," he said. "Do you find there how to trim a mains'l or to set your course when there's not a star in sight?"

As I paid no attention, he tried to catch me with talk of more urgent matters. "Roger," he said, "no matter how greedy Sir Bartlemy is for profits, I'll never stop a ship with English goods in the hold. He must get that through his cunning head." Another time he said: "Your Katie looks very well in gray. I've made love to plenty of women in my time. French girls and Spanish señoritas, and women of the desert with eyes like sloes. But there's nothing to compare with the sweetness of an English girl. There are times when I regret that I've been such a rough swad."

Tiring of the history, I found a moldy old book with dull gold lettering on the cover which I was able to decipher as *Sir Jehan Mandeville, His Travels*. I opened it, and then for a long time the mutterings of my companion fell on deaf ears. The chronicle of Prester John, that I found there, held me in complete thrall.

I don't know how long I read, but many hours must have been consumed in that way. I looked up finally and saw by the angle of the light through the windows that we had reached midafternoon. There was an emptiness in my stomach which confirmed this. Then I heard voices at the other end of the

room and a sudden silvery explosion of feminine laughter. I tucked the book under my arm and proceeded in that direction.

Katie was seated on the top of a four-step library ladder, her skirts tucked in tightly around her ankles, her eyes fixed on John Ward as he did justice to the dinner she had brought. She looked up at me with a contrite and, I thought, somewhat guilty air.

“Oh, dear, I hope your dinner isn’t spoiled,” she said.

John grinned at me over the rim of his ale tankard and said that he had called me. Katie nodded confirmation. “So did I.”

“How long have you been here?” I asked.

She started to say, “Not long—” and then stopped herself. “Half an hour, I’m afraid. I feel very guilty, Roger. I should have gone for you. Now your dinner is cold.”

“I hope you’ve had an interesting talk. But it was my fault. I was reading and didn’t hear you call.”

“It’s a very bad habit,” said John. “I’ve warned you against it. Some day it will cost you more than the loss of a dinner.”

Katie looked at the tray with an anxious eye. John had made serious inroads. I seated myself beside him and found myself facing the remains of what had probably been a very fine dinner. The book slipped from under my arm, but I did not pick it up; and, now that I come to think of it, I have never finished the story of Prester John.

“Captain Ward has been telling me stories of the sea,” said Katie. It was clear that she had enjoyed them. There was an almost breathless catch in her voice, and her eyes were shining. Her hair was done the old way again, and I decided that I liked it much better. “He makes it all sound fascinating, and I can understand now why you want to go, Roger.”

“It’s the only life for a man,” declared John. “But there won’t be any time for reading, Master Roger. When you hear the cook call, you’ll have to shake a lively stamper if you don’t want to go hungry.”

I did my best with the scraps of meat while John told her about sea superstitions. He was a good talker and made everything sound either very funny or very grim. Katie drank it in, giving me nothing more than scraps of attention. I said very little. I was thinking that another one should be added to the list of common superstitions: *never* let the girl you love meet a handsome and fascinating friend.

When I had finished, and it did not take long, Katie said regretfully that she must go; that her father had told her not to stay long. She stepped down

easily from the ladder, giving no more than a glimpse of ankle in a froth of lace.

She held out a hand to me and said in a tone that had become completely serious: "I'm proud of you, Roger. It's a brave thing you're doing, and I'm sure you'll become very famous. I'll think of you always."

"Thanks, Katie." There were many things I wanted to say; but this, I knew, was not the time to say them. I was acutely aware of the poor figure I cut, an "untidy gilpie" beside my tall captain in his handsome velvet. I contented myself with adding, "I'll think of you too. All the time."

She gave her hand to John then, and he squeezed it in both of his.

"I'll take good care of the young man," he said. "And I shall expect my reward for it when I return. We'll come back like conquering heroes, with bay leaves in our hair and our pockets full of rolling Spanish ribbin. Spare a little place in your thoughts for me."

"I shall," she said.

When she had vanished, with a swish of silk skirts and a very serious last backward glance, there was silence for a moment. "Well," said John, "our Katie is a most lovely and amusing lady. It's amazing how fast she grew up. She was a mere bantling with her hair in braids when I went away, and I'm sure she gave no promise at all of *this*."

"Our" Katie! Soon, I thought, he will advance the relationship another step and make it "my" Katie.

It was dark when Sir Bartlemy paid us another visit. He came in briskly, wearing the kind of short cloak which King Harry had made popular but which was seldom seen nowadays. The shoulders and sleeves were so extravagantly padded that a good six inches was added to the width of the wearer on each side. There was a portrait of the old king on the wall, and our host posed himself in front of it, his feet splayed wide apart and his thumbs tucked in the folds of his peg-topped breeches. It was clear he was very proud of the close resemblance.

"I'm afraid we're going to quarrel, Captain Ward," he said. The amiability of the morning had vanished, and there was a deep line of vexation between his eyes. "I've just learned of the very unwise things you said in your speech yesterday. You talked like a fool, Ward." His voice trembled. "I must insist that in future you exercise more care. You must keep that unruly tongue of yours under control, or we'll all be in trouble."

"What I say is my own concern, Sir Bartlemy Ladland," declared John. "And I may add that I allow no man the right to insist on anything where I am concerned."

“But what you said amounted almost to treason. The King’s Council might construe it as such.”

“If that is treason, things have come to a pretty pass in England. I don’t care what construction the King’s Council puts on my words. They all accept pensions from Spain, which seems to me much more treasonable than the honest criticisms I made.”

This seemed to increase the irritability of our host. “If you want to put your own head in the noose, it’s your right. But I must say this to you: if we’re to continue on our—our present basis, you owe it to me to put a curb on that tongue of yours.”

John said impatiently: “I’ll find someone to buy out your share, Sir Bartlemy. I’m as tired of our present basis as you seem to be.”

“No, no, there’s no call to go to extremes. We’ll get on, Ward, we’ll get on well enough in spite of everything. I’ve no wish to withdraw. A little more caution is all I ask. Well, you can be on your way now. You’ll find horses tethered in Wayland Spinney, and food in the saddle bags. Don’t ride through London.” His voice took on a note of excessive anxiety. “Use the utmost discretion, Ward. Stop first at the Bandy Tar. It’s a mile or so from Theobalds. Here’s a note for Sir Everard Clement. Send it over by messenger, and don’t show a nose outside the inn until you get his answer. It’s a dangerous errand you are on.”

John said in angry tones: “Be easy in your mind. I’ll take every precaution.” He added in a whisper to me, “The peery old fool is taking good care that we have no chance to see our Katie before we leave.”

## 6

OUR OBJECTIVE was the small town of Cheshunt; and, to avoid notice as much as possible, we set ourselves a roundabout course, riding through Southwark and the scattered suburbs to the west of London before cutting north into Hertfordshire. I had done very little riding, and so I was a mass of aches and pains by the time we reached the Bandy Tar.

It proved to be a small inn, filled with a smell of sour beer. Although it was barely six in the morning when we arrived, there were a number of people in the bar.

I had observed that there were women in the party, who had eyed us boldly, but I was too weary to take an interest in anything but the two beds in the low-raftered room to which we were escorted. It had been my intention to write a letter to Mother, but I tumbled into one of the beds without a moment's delay. It was six in the evening when I wakened up.

I realized at once that it was the sound of voices which had roused me from my deep sleep. John was sitting in a chair by the one window in the room, with his massive arms folded on his chest. I saw that he was seriously disturbed, for he was frowning unhappily at a most proper-appearing gentleman seated opposite him. I looked at the stranger with considerable interest, for it was clear that he was a great dandy. His golden hair was hanging in long curls over his broad white ruff. There was a tippet of green sarsnet around his shoulders and canions of the same color attached to his padded breeches. His cork-soled pantoffes were of bright yellow leather and of such a neat size that I wondered how he had managed to get his feet into them. His looks suggested that he was of an easy and even a languid disposition, but his voice by contrast was sharp and peremptory.

"I regret that I'm in no position to help you, Captain Ward," he was saying. "In fact, I'm disposed to regret even that I've had a hand in this at all. The royal temper is most uncertain. I might as well be frank with you and acknowledge that His Sowship looks at me these days with an unseeing stare in his eyes. He has no regard for anyone but a long loon from Scotland, a certain Robert Carr. 'Ud's blood, I find it galling to mention the fellow in civil conversation! Master Robert Carr comes from a flea-bitten place with the heathenish name of Ferniehurst, and he got himself trampled on in a tournament to attract the attention of His King's Grace. I'm completely out of favor. Master Carr is so set to oust me that all he would need would be a whisper about our little dealings, and I would be unrigged."

I sat up in bed. The effort involved was so great that I groaned aloud, and the two men at the window turned their heads in my direction. The stranger's eyes were blue and as large as a woman's, but a hard and calculating gleam showed in them when he realized that I had been listening.

"I trust, Captain Ward, that your young friend will know enough to keep a still tongue," he said uneasily.



"I'll answer for Roger Blease," said John. "You may rely on it, Sir Everard, that no word of this will get out through him."

Sir Everard Clement frowned and ran an impatient finger between his neck and the tight folds of his starched ruff. I wondered if it was the heat from the fire in the chimney or the agitated state of his mind which was responsible for his discomfort.

"If Master Carr continues to advance in the kingly favor, I may have to go to sea myself," went on our visitor in a tone of deep aggrievement. "I'm a poor man, or I should never have thrown in with you, Ward. And now His Sowship is turning all my prerogatives over to Master Carr. I shall starve, egad, if it keeps up. If our business overseas had not turned out so well, I wouldn't have a James shilling in my purse." He meditated darkly for a moment and then continued: "The country has come to a pretty pass when a lean Scot, with an empty head and a belly stuffed with collops, can lead the King around by the ear."

"That's not the worst thing we face," declared John. "It's hard to believe that our command of the seas could be lost in a few years without a blow being struck. And all because of a cowardly quirk in one twisted mind!"

"To be perfectly frank with you, there are compensations in my present situation," said Sir Everard with frowning concentration. "Now that I'm out of favor, I no longer have to occupy one of the three beds around the royal couch at night. One at each side and one at the end." His handsome lips twisted in a sardonic smile. "He's much given to fears, our doughty James. You must have heard that his clothes are padded because of his fear of assassins, and that the cellars are searched every night for more gunpowder. But even that doesn't allay the royal trepidations. 'Ud's teeth, he must also be securely hedged in by loyal supporters before he can go to sleep." He sniffed with disgust. "It's not pleasant. His Majesty has an aversion to bathing, and he sleeps with all the windows clamped down tight. The air in the royal chamber becomes positively foul before morning!"

I had managed by this time to get my feet to the floor. Every move I made in pulling on my hose sent waves of agony through my stiffened muscles. I was wondering what I could do about the crop of blisters I had raised, but at the same time was not neglecting to keep an eye on the pair at the window. I was surprised to note that John had fallen into a thoughtful note. He did not even smile at the ex-favorite's description of the kingly sleeping quarters.

"Clement," he said with sudden earnestness, "I'm wondering if you appreciate the gravity of the situation. This goes much deeper than a mere

determination on the part of a few sailors to disregard royal orders. I'm placing myself in the shadow of the gallows because I know that the future of this country depends on what her seamen do today. This is a small island, and the destiny of its people lies on the sea." He had placed his hands on his knees and was leaning forward, his eyes gleaming with ardor. "Spain has the world by the throat because of a lucky accident. An Italian found the Americas for them and so tossed untold wealth into their laps. It's unfortunate for the Dons that the Atlantic lies between them and the new El Dorado. They're compelled to maintain a great navy and to police the lanes of the Middle Course. If they did it well, they would hold all Europe in thrall. But they aren't sailors, they have no real liking for the sea, and so they do it badly. But we English are sailors. It's in our blood. We can sail around them like dogs around a bear at a baiting. When it comes to fighting, we beat them every time. They still frighten disobedient children with the name of El Draque."

He got to his feet and began to pace about the room. "We have broken their stranglehold on trade before and we can do it again. We still have the greatest opportunity ever offered to Englishmen. But mark this, Sir Everard: we must not give them a breathing spell. They have cozened James into making a peace they don't keep themselves. If we leave them alone now, they'll win a hold on the seas that we'll be unable to break later. They are recruiting sailors from other races. If we give up today, we surrender our chance to become a great nation. England will never again be anything but a small island, and the whole world will be harnessed to the might of Spain!"

I had never heard John make a long speech before. The earnestness back of what he said was a revelation to me. It made an impression on our resplendent visitor also, for I saw that Sir Everard had become thoughtful and attentive. He nodded gravely when John finished.

"God's-trewth, I believe you're right, Ward," he said. "I had never looked at it that way before. You talk like the Cornishman."

"I've never enjoyed the privilege of an acquaintance with Sir Walter Raleigh," answered John, "but I'm sure he must think about this as I do. If we had Raleigh to lead us now, things would be different, king or no king." He stopped short and felt his shoulder as though suddenly aware of the wound he had sustained before leaving home. "Is there no spirit left in England that we allow our eagle to be caged on a charge as flimsy as the gauze of a dancing girl's veil? Has the law lost its teeth?"

Clement held up a restraining hand. "Such words come close to treason, Ward. I still enjoy some small share of the King's favor, and I am frank to say I don't want to lose it. He won't see reason in the case of Raleigh. Prince

Henry has tried to move him a score of times without any success. Our Jamie is obstinate, and he hates the Great Man. I'm afraid Raleigh will not enjoy freedom again as long as James is king." He paused to help himself to snuff from an elaborately jeweled ivory case. "In spite of everything, I have a certain sympathy for the poor old fellow. He is a timorous man, born to rule over a tough race in a particularly violent period. He has a craze for peace because he thinks his personal safety depends on it. He's a coward, I grant you, but—you can't expect a puffin to act like an eagle, my dear Ward."

"The young prince will make a good king when his time comes," observed John. "God grant it won't be too late!"

There was a loud knock on the door. John and the courtier looked at each other with uneasy eyes. I could see that Sir Everard was disturbed, but he motioned John to stand back out of the light and went himself to answer the summons.

A truly amazing figure stalked into the room. At first I could not be entirely sure that the newcomer was human. He was so thick and squat of build that he reminded me of the curious creatures who thronged the pages of Mandeville. His eyes puzzled me most. There was a wild gleam in them as he stood in the doorway, rocking back and forth on his heels and staring at each of us in turn. They made me think of the eyes of an animal. In spite of this there was something a little ludicrous about him. He was like a wolf with a sense of humor.

"I heerd ye were here wi' company," he said to Sir Everard, "and I made bold to join ye."

I was surprised to see that Sir Everard was no longer worried. He even laughed.

"It's Archie," he said.

I had heard of Archie Armstrong, the court jester, of course. King James had brought him down from Scotland, and I knew that the English nobility, bitterly resentful of the influx of Scotsmen, had been especially critical of this importation. Archie was the exact opposite of their conception of a court fool, they being accustomed to sly fellows who skipped and pranced and sang bawdy songs. Archie was a man of deep opinions which he never hesitated to vent, no matter whose toes might be trampled on. King James might be the only one at court to laugh at the pawky sayings of his outspoken jester, but the impression was gaining ground in the country that under his plain woolen jerkin Archie was quite a bit of a man.

“Ay, it’s Airchie,” he said, with a dripping Lowland accent. “Airchie, the keeper o’ the royal conscience. A frail an’ chancey theeng, the royal conscience. I tell it to His Mujesty’s ain face that the keengdom wud be better aff wur Airchie the keeng an’ James the jester. Do ye doot that Airchie cud play the keeng?”

A change came over him so suddenly that I could hardly believe my eyes. He drew in his mouth until his protruding tongue seemed too large for it. His eyes became shifty and uneasy. The bones in his thick body seemed to have turned to water, for he sagged and swayed on wobbling legs. A reedy, whining voice, so unlike his own that at first I suspected someone else was in the room, issued from his pursed-up lips. “I wull hae ye ken I am Keeng o’ England, and I maun hae ma ain way. I am vury, vury oopset that ma soobjects doot the weesdom o’ the fine peace I hae made. Ony mon breaking the Keeng’s peace shall feel the heft o’ the Keeng’s hond. John Waird shall hangit i’ chains frae a bludy pirut. I swear it.”

It must have been a good imitation of His Majesty, for Sir Everard Clement doubled up with laughter. Though he had made a wry face at the allusion to hanging, John also was laughing. I joined with them as I pulled on my patched shoes.

“Archie,” declared the courtier, when his mirth had subsided, “I have a surprise for you, mon. Look well at this great hulking sailor. He’s a friend of mine, although on that point I count on you to keep a still tongue. His name happens to be John Ward.”

John was startled, but he need not have feared the consequences of this frank introduction. The muscles of the jester settled back into their customary mold. His eyes began to shine as before, except that now they were filled with surprise and admiration.

“Is it, noo?” he exclaimed. “I nicht hae kenned it wur John Waird. John, I am prood ta mak the acqueentance o’ sae bonny a fichter. Dinna fash yersel, lad. Airchie can keep a secret. Mon, mon, I theenk weel a’ye!”

“And so you have told His Majesty a hundred times,” affirmed Clement. “Archie, this bold fellow has come to me in the hope that I had some influence to wield in his behalf. I’ve told him that a certain Master Carr has the royal ear at the moment, and that it would be safer for him to get back on his ship and put the full length of the Channel between himself and the King’s justice. What do you say?”

Archie nodded his head in assent. He agreed it would be the canny thing for John to get back on the high seas until the royal displeasure had abated. Then he sat himself down on his broad haunches and plied my friend with

questions about his adventures at sea. Fixing his wide, staring eyes on the face of the freebooter, he begged to hear everything about the capture of the *Madalina* and the *Little John*, smacking his lips gustily over the details of the fighting. "Ay, mon, ay," he kept repeating. "So ye trouncit they popish diels!"

Supper was brought up, to my great satisfaction, for I was so ravenously hungry I could have gorged myself on Poor-John-and-a-Mullet. The four of us rubbed elbows as we plied our knives at a small table. Archie acknowledged that he had already supped but managed nevertheless to keep pace with us, doing full justice to the cold roast beef and old nappy ale. He never took his eyes off John and muttered at intervals, "Weel, weel, the turrible John Waird, is ut?"

He was truly an amazing fellow. He monopolized the conversation, blasting the members of the royal household and the highest officials of the land with shrewd and unsparing invective. He ridiculed the foreign policy of the King and spoke with bitter scorn of his theological pretensions. James, he declared, was a gnat-straining nonentity, a quibbling quodlibet, a caudge-pawed dunce, a pig in a pickadell. There was so much gusto to his talk that after no more than a half-hour of it I felt mentally exhausted.

He immediately obliged with imitations when new games were introduced into the conversation. His broad-featured face became by turns belligerent, crafty, mordant, sly, malevolent, lascivious. His accent could be laid aside completely when necessity arose, and several times he fell into the soft and cultivated manner of speech which was associated with the great universities. It was astonishing to me that he could even achieve a suggestion of half-tipsy but haughty languor when giving us his version of Queen Anne, flirting imaginary skirts with a preening desire to give glimpses of a fine ankle.

Once he laid down his knife to remark that it was a pity John was "no a sonsy laddie wi' his lugs still damp beneath his biggin."

"Why?" demanded John, frowning as though he did not relish the suggestion.

Archie explained that then he might attract the notice of King James, who liked tall young men. Had he not showered titles and wealth on a baker's dozen already? And now he was a "fair loon" over the long-legged Carr, even setting himself to educate the callow recruit from Ferniehurst. Laughing loudly in anticipation of our applause, he added in plain English: "He has dressed him up in satin and is teaching him dog Latin. He'll fill his mind with civil lore, and make him, eke, a councillor. He'll strap the Garter

on his knees, and let him share the royal fleas. So mark my words, this empty loon will rule o'er all of England soon." He rattled this off with unfaltering glibness, never finding it necessary to pause for the word he needed. After a long elaboration of the same theme, he concluded in all seriousness, "His Sowship will bring ill to the land with his daughty favorites."

It was dark before he finally ran down and remembered that he was long overdue at Theobalds to entertain the King. Even then he was loath to leave so appreciative an audience. He thumped both John and me on the back and announced that he had a plan. How would we like to enjoy a glimpse of the King "wallowing in his frowsty pigsty of a court?" It could be arranged with complete safety if we so desired it. Was not he, Archie Armstrong, the very Machiavelli of Merry Andrews? Leave everything to him. A word in the ear of Timothy a Pycons, who stood guard at the gatehouse and was a gossip of Archie's, would see us in with no questions asked. There was a window in the jester's own quarters which looked down over the Presence Chamber. Here we could sit and watch the high jinks, and no one would be the wiser.

Although I was nervous of the possible consequences, I found that the idea appealed to me very much. It might be my only chance to see the King, now that I had chosen a life at sea. It was clear that John was keen for it also. Sir Everard Clement was against the plan; but, when he realized how taken we were with it, he shrugged his shoulders and gave in. He even allowed that he would accompany us to supply the element of sanity to the proceedings which undoubtedly would be needed before the evening was over.

We set out on foot. A cloak had been supplied me at Appleby Court, and I wrapped myself up snugly in this. It was a monstrous thing of coarse brown cloth with a hood capacious enough for a full-wigged head, and make me look like a servingman. John and his rival in sartorial splendor, Sir Everard, had velvet cloaks with miniver collars, spangled in gold thread and lined inside with tufted satin. Archie wore no wrap of any kind and did not seem to feel any lack.

There is no part of the country more lovely than the strip of Hertfordshire through which the gentle New River meanders on its way to join the Thames. Elizabeth's Lord Burghley had appreciated this when he chose it for his handsome country seat at Theobalds. James had visited there on his way from Holyrood to London and had fallen in love with the long, gracious mansion at first sight. Nothing would content him but that it should become his own; and so Robert Cecil, son of Burghley by a second marriage and now the chief adviser of the King, had been forced to make a trade by

which he was given Hatfield House instead. Sir Everard talked of this as we walked over from Cheshunt, and Archie contributed some biting comments on Cecil, who was believed to be in the pay of Spain.

A brisk stretching of legs over pleasant country lanes, easy-sodded to the foot and arched with trees in which swifts rustled, brought us in short order to the red brick wall encircling the royal park. My heart began to beat a little faster when I saw the turrets of Theobalds looming up over the wall in buttressed tracery against the starry autumn sky. James might be all that rumor said; he might even be as gross as depicted by the unbridled tongue of the loquacious jester; but he was still King of England, and this was his favorite home, a shining mark to chain the fancy of a country boy.

Archie told us with a touch of awe that it took ten miles of brick wall to enclose the park, and that the upkeep of the palace cost enough to feed all of "auld Reekie," meaning the Scottish city of Edinburgh. He whispered in the ear of Timothy a Pycons and convinced that morose individual we were not objects of suspicion. The guard nodded and waved us in with his lantern. The jester then turned us sharply off the tiled walk leading to the main entrance and led the way across grass sward to an unlighted door in the right wing. I was so consumed with curiosity that I had fallen behind the others and did not hear what passed between our guide and the armed attendant at the door. Apparently the explanation given was satisfactory, for we were admitted without questioning.

We climbed a dark stairway single file and came out on a long corridor. Except for the thickness of the carpet, which completely muffled the sound of our footsteps, it was not as richly appointed as the galleries at Appleby Court. There was an undeniably musty odor about it which I found hard to reconcile with an abode of royalty. Archie turned sharply into a side hall and led the way up another narrow stair. Then we traversed a number of connected and rather mean apartments, at the end of which was a whitewashed room with two windows. One was small and high up near the ceiling, the other was lower and, although heavily curtained, emitted a narrow slit of light from the room beyond.

This was the jester's home, for he whisked a tartan jacket and cap from the one chair and motioned John to sit down. Sir Everard and I were bidden to make ourselves comfortable on an unmade bed in one corner, but the courtier shook his head and announced that he thought it wise on his part to put in an appearance below. He disappeared almost immediately with a suggestion of alacrity.

"I am late myself," said Archie. He produced a flask of wine from a cupboard, looked at it anxiously and even affectionately, and laid it with

open reluctance on the table. His air conveyed the thought that we were to apply ourselves to it if our thirsts should develop beyond the point of restraint, but that he hoped such a dire pass would not be reached. He then demonstrated that we could see everything that happened below by raising no more of the curtain than an inch at each side.

“Dinna show yoursel’,” he urged. He added that he would return as soon as his part in the proceedings was over, and that he thought it wise to lock the door in the meantime. We had best remember that he had succeeded in getting us through as his cousins Dugald and Sandy from Auld Reekie. Estimating the length of the single candle with a canny eye, he volunteered the conviction that we would see better if the room were in darkness and, receiving no denial from us, snuffed out the tiny flame with an almost savage thumb. A moment later, John and I were alone in the room.

John rose from the chair. “I have placed my neck in jeopardy on the word of a fool whose tongue clacks gossip at both ends,” he said. “Well, we might as well find if what we came to see is worth the risk.”

My angle of vision proved as satisfactory as Archie had predicted. I could see most of the Presence Chamber, which was long and stately and two stories in height. At one end was a raised dais with high-backed chairs on which were seated the King and Queen. My eyes focused instantly on the royal pair, and I drank in every detail of their appearance.

King James was fashioned so closely on the lines of the jester’s imitation that I believe I could have recognized him even if he had not occupied the dais. His eyes had the same sly look, and his mouth was so drawn in that hollows showed in both cheeks. He was, I thought, rather meanly attired, except that he wore a massive gold chain around his neck and that diamonds glittered on his fingers. Queen Anne, who had a reputation for dowdiness, was handsomely dressed in spite of it, with a farthingale so wide that the skirts flared enormously on both sides and even obtruded themselves on the shins of her royal spouse. She had been a pretty woman, I thought, for her hair was light and wavy and her eyes were pleasant. She seemed very much interested in the masque which was being performed on the floor of the Chamber, but the King’s attention to it was openly intermittent. He lolled in his seat and scratched his chest with an absent-minded air.

It was a dull masque, done by the ladies and gentlemen of the court. They had not been too well coached; some of them boggled and stammered over their lines, and none of them displayed any gift for elocution. I recognized all the stock characters: Error, Rumor, Curiosity, Credulity, Malice, Cupid.



The King yawned and looked as though he longed for the end of it. For the first time I felt sympathy for the much-criticized monarch and fancied that I could detect evidences of a dry humor in his rather melancholy visage. The masque finally reached its conclusion, and the Queen rose immediately and bowed to the King. Apparently she asked his permission to withdraw, for His Majesty bowed and there was much rustling all over the Chamber as the ladies of the court prepared to follow their queen into retirement for the night.

I was conscious of a deep sense of disappointment. Where were Prince Hal and the Princess Elizabeth? The hopes of the nation were centered in the manly young first-born, while the pretty young princess was the darling of all England, her popularity being enhanced by the fact that so little liking could be felt for the monarch himself. She was said to be lovely and high-spirited and very much like her unfortunate grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots. I had looked forward to seeing the royal children even more than the King and Queen, and I whispered a question about them in John's ear.

"They have their own homes, and it's very seldom they put in an appearance *here*," answered my friend, with an emphasis on the last word which conveyed his contempt for the court and the people in it.

I turned back to watch the proceedings below us. The Queen had already withdrawn. A tall young man with blond locks and ruddy cheeks had been motioned to a seat on the steps of the dais close by the King, and I was in time to observe that he did not take up his post until after a colloquy with a very young and very lovely lady in blue with straps of ermine on her bodice. I had already noticed her and had voted her the most attractive one there. Her eyes sparkled vivaciously, and she had chattered without pause in the ear of a vulpine-nosed nobleman with drooping black mustache and beard and a somber air. This veteran courtier had wagged his head and displayed his teeth in tittering appreciation of her sallies. He stood waiting for her now as she exchanged a final word with the handsome youth.

John had been watching this display also. He said to me in bitter tones: "Mark that lecherous old buzzard. Lord Harry Howard himself, Earl of Northampton, by grace of treachery and such consummate lying that Ananias himself has lost his pre-eminence. Lord Harry is Warden of the Cinque Ports as well as Privy Seal. A price-chiseling draper would make a worthier Warden than this bootlicking hypocrite and pander. My stomach turns at the sight of him. The girl is his niece. They married her to the young Earl of Essex and then packed the bridegroom off to the Continent to give the pair a chance to grow old enough for the privileges of matrimony. She's a lovely chit. How do you think she compares with our Katie?"

I had been thinking grudgingly that she was quite as beautiful, although lacking the sweet winsomeness and inner grace of the daughter of Appleby Court; but I now asserted stoutly that there was no comparison at all.

“No,” agreed John. “She can’t hold a candle to our divinity. But I’ll hazard a guess that the lively eyes of this hoyden will create plenty of havoc when she’s a little older.” The world was to learn later how accurate he was in this surmise. But John’s attention had now shifted to the gilded youth with the blond locks. “I’m of the opinion that yon long loon is the Master Carr we’ve been hearing so much about.”

I had already reached this conclusion myself; for, with the ladies gone, King James had begun to run his hand affectionately through the long locks of the handsome Scot. The whole air of the gathering had changed. The King’s indifference had vanished. He beamed over the edge of a tall gold winecup and called out impatiently for the merrymaking to begin. The courtiers, talking exuberantly and without any restraint, arranged themselves along both sides of the Chamber, leaving the center space empty. It was apparent that most of them were already in an advanced stage of intoxication.

The fun began with a loud roar of welcome for two stout young men who appeared at each end of the Chamber. One of them was accompanied by Archie and the other by a squat individual who, as we learned later, was Tom Derry, the Queen’s jester. Both masters of the motley were equipped with market baskets on their arms, and they carried broomsticks which, it was clear, were to be employed as lances. Archie had made himself up to resemble a knight, with a cock’s feather in his cap and breastplates of painted cardboard. He posed and strutted about the place, bowing with exaggerated gallantry to imaginary ladies in the balcony. Then he mounted on the back of one of the strapping youths, and Tom Derry followed his example at the other end. I could see that the King’s sides were already quaking with mirth.

“Ma siller’s on Airchie!” he cried, leaning back and crossing one clumsy leg over the other. “Ten pund he unseats the Derry wi’oot ony trooble at a’.”

“No one will take that bet,” said John. “I hear His Majesty never pays when he loses. Roger, there’s more to this buffoonery than meets the eye. I’m told that Archie has a great contempt for this other fellow, who returns it in kind. They’ve been egged on to fight it out. The Queen should have stayed to see fair play, I’m thinking.”

What followed was so funny that both John and I laughed as heartily as the foolish old monarch. The two youths charged as fast as they could, with

such heavy burdens on their backs, meeting in the middle of the room. Archie had all the better of the encounter. He aimed his broomstick with such deadly accuracy at the basket of the less agile Tom Derry that he sent the rival jester and his mount sprawling on the floor. Dismounting, he stalked over to his fallen opponent and planted a foot on his face, while declaiming in the high falsetto tones that court heralds employed: "Sir Archibald Armstrong, champion of His Most Christian Majesty, proclaims himself the victor and asserts his right under the rules of knightly combat to dispose of the trappings of his adversary to his own advantage. To wit, one pair of well-worn gallyslops and one moth-eaten jerkin, which will be gladly exchanged for a pot of ale. He further charges the defeated Sir Thomas Derry to betake himself back where he belongs and never show his ugly face again, nor match his weak wits in competition with his betters."

"Weel spoken, Airchie!" exclaimed the King. "I kenned wha' the ootcome wad be but nane o' ye wad cover ma ten pund. Ye are a puir-spirited lot."

He had risen to his feet to watch the fun and was laughing so hard that his weak underpinning gave way. He tottered down the steps of the dais and then collapsed in a heap of cushions from which his well-padded posterior protruded so conspicuously that, even from where we sat, it was possible to see that a large patch had been inserted in the green silk of his breeches. The whole gathering went into roars of merriment over the mishap. Archie immediately took his broomstick in hand and charged across the room, aiming the point at the royal backsides.

"Even Tom Derry couldna miss that target," he exclaimed.

But the King had already managed to squirm around into a sitting position. It was clear that he had not enjoyed his mishap and that he resented the laughter at his expense. There were tears of mortification in his weak eyes.

"Bad boys, bad boys!" he quavered. "Making sport o' your puir auld dad and gossip. This is maist unseemly. Maist unseemly. I willna forget it, dinna fear."

John turned away from the window and looked at me with disgust written all over his face. "And that," he muttered, "is the King of England. I hope you were properly edified, Roger."

Proceedings below settled down after that. Tom Derry disappeared, perhaps to doff the forfeited gallyslops and jerkin. Archie continued to strut about and prate of his skill. The King regarded him with a wrathful eye.

“Ye’re a fause loon, Airchie,” he said. “I am of a mind to hae yer wagging tongue sewed up.”

“Dinna ca’ in the royal tailor then,” countered the jester. “I wouldna want as puir a job done on ma tongue as he did on the royal breeks.”

The King smiled feebly. “Airchie, Airchie,” he childed. “I shouldna pay oot guid siller to a graceless loon wha flouts me tae ma vera face.”

“It was no yer face I was a’ set to flout,” responded Archie.

“Some day ye wull gae too far,” promised the monarch, “and then back ye’ll gang to the feelthy byre ye cam frae, wi’oot ears as weel as tongue.”

“I’ve seen and heard enough,” declared John, returning to his chair. He proceeded to light the candle and even cast a speculative eye on the wine flask. “I don’t enjoy sitting in the dark, so we’ll burn an inch or two of tallow, even if it breaks the heart of our canny host. His wine we’ll respect, however, but only because I judge it to be of the cheapest quality. Well, Roger, are you convinced you were wise in deciding against a career at court?”

“There was no doubt in my mind at any time.”

John fell into a reflective mood. “It hurts my pride to think of England with such a king,” he said. “I believe it’s true that sailors have a greater love for the homeland than those who stay ashore. They see foreign lands and judge them all poor in comparison, no matter how many tall tales they tell after they return. I’m happy when I feel the quarter-deck under my feet and the sea running high, but even then it’s likely that I’m thinking of England and the joy I’ll feel when I see her again. I grant you there are wondrous things to be seen. Off Tunis there’s magic in the blue of the sky and the dazzling white of the shore, yet I never come in sight of Gouletta but I think with regret of the chalk cliffs of Dover or the gentle rise of soft green hills behind the harbors of Devon. There’s nothing lovelier in the whole world than Wayland Spinney. The love of England grows in you when you sail the seas, Roger. But it’s going to be hard for me to forget the spectacle we’ve watched tonight.”

He went on in the same vein, expanding his belief in the greatness of our destiny. I listened avidly, but once, when he paused, I went back to the window and saw that a late supper was being served. The courtiers were eating and drinking with gusto, and the King was feeding himself soup with a spoon two feet long. This unusual utensil was necessary on account of the width of his ruff, but I saw that His Majesty was not too expert in the handling of it. A trickle of soup was running down a pleat in the ruff and dripping on the table.

Archie joined us, his eyes fired with his triumphs below. He said nothing about our use of his candle, but I noticed that he darted an appraising glance at the wine flask and seemed relieved to find there had been no lowering of the contents.

“Did ye see me spill Tam Derry?” he demanded. “The saft loon willna show his face here again in a hurry. Did ye hear them laugh when I nearly splintered ma lance on the royal prat?” He slapped his thigh and exploded into a loud roar of self-approval. Then he checked himself and said in serious tones, “It’s best ye bing a waste noo. Servents will soon be about like cackling-cheats, laying fires and putting warming-pans in beds. It’s high time ye wur aff.”

I needed no second invitation myself, as I was becoming fearful for John’s safety. We left the palace by the same route, but Archie then diverted our course to the rear, leading the way through a series of formal gardens. I had heard much about the beauty of the grounds at Theobalds and regretted that the sky had become overcast, making it impossible for me to see much. We passed through what I judged was the Dove House Court and walked by the Falconry and the Camel House before reaching a side gate in the brick wall. When we had passed to the road outside, Archie instructed us in whispers to take the first left turn, which would lead us back to the inn.

“The next brush ye hae wi’ the Spanish diels, gie them a stiff blow frae Airchie,” was his parting admonition.

To our surprise, we found Sir Everard Clement at the fork of the road with a groom and two fresh horses. He seemed almost desperately anxious to be rid of us.

“I think you would be wise to avoid Cheshunt,” he declared. “There’s no telling what might happen if you showed your face in public again, Ward. Your score has been settled at the inn, and I have taken the precaution of providing fresh horses for you. I make no secret of the fact that I’ll feel much better when I have seen the last of you.” He lowered his voice to a cautious whisper. “Did you see dainty Master Carr? And were you amused by your glimpse of the King’s gentlemen at their evening diversions?”

“Yes, to the first question,” answered John, swinging a leg over his mount. “It will be no news to you that I wasn’t overly impressed with the young man. As to your last question, I can only say that I shall be glad to feel the deck of the *Royal Bess* under my feet again.”

I climbed painfully into the saddle, wondering how I would manage to survive the ride ahead of us.

“I trust you’ll reach your ship safely,” said Clement. He began to scratch his ribs with almost vicious energy. “Why is the King so fond of this place? It’s full of fleas!”

## 7

JOHN, WHO RODE like a sailor, did not seem to be enjoying himself. He was as relieved as I was when we reached the outskirts of the city.

“London,” he said, “is a city for men. I’ve seen Paris and Rome and Venice, and I’ve even been as far inland as Vienna. They are all soft and dangerous, like women of the streets. London is the only town fit to welcome back a man from the sea. It’s a quarrelsome, hearty, speak-your-mind place. It feeds you solid beef and ale, and you need not question the honesty of the gold it gives you. The others are like old witches with sharp claws, or hunchbacked panders; but here in London your thief is a stout fellow who will have your purse or slit your weasand for you. You know just what to expect. When it comes to big towns, I’ll take London every time, and the Old Ruffian cly the rest of them!”

It was midnight when our horses felt paving stones under their feet, for we heard the nightwatch declaiming:

*“Twelve o’clock, look well to your lock.  
Your fire and light, and so good night.”*

We struck south toward the river, crossing Fleet Street and proceeding with great caution down Blackfriar’s. I knew we were now in the section of London known as Alsatia, where criminals of all kinds found harborage and the roots of the nether world were sunk deep. The streets seemed unusually crooked here, and there was a sinister suggestion about the tall dark houses from which no sounds issued. Several times the doors of taverns swung open to disgorge revellers, and I caught hasty glimpses of dimly lighted interiors and of ill-clad men who gathered in close groups as though plotting mischief. Once the flank of my horse butted against a lone pedestrian who scuttled to the side and then blistered us with the foulest flow of profanity I

had ever heard. I began to wonder if John had been entirely justified in his hearty praise of London town.

A mariner's sense of direction can desert him when he falls into a maze of twisting lanes and dark mews, and finally John had to stop at a tavern to ask directions. The landlord's close-spaced eyes narrowed into suspicious slits.

"So it's Robin Humperty ye're seeking," he said. "What have ye been up to, my fine buck? Have ye broken the head of an alderman or run foul of the watch? Robin's your man, in either case, but you'll have to pay him handsomely before he dups the jigger of Alsatia for ye."

"I want to play him stooleball for a tansey," declared John, looking his questioner steadily in the eye. "Is that enough for you to know before you answer a civil question?"

"Listen to me," said the landlord. "You're now in Alsatia, where the law runs the same for the poorest abram-man as for a flaming gentry-cove. Until I know your business, I'm of no mind to tell you where Robin is to be found."

John spun a gold coin in the air. It rolled under a table. The landlord winked and said: "Two blocks south and one to the right. A small house with a double window over the front door. Ye can't miss it, for the scrippets will be there to look ye over. If ye've let daylight into your man, ye'll pay plenty for a stalling ken."

No one made a move until the door closed behind us. Then we heard scuffling and a sound of bitter wrangling, ending in a loud wail of pain.

"What was it he said to you?" I asked.

"A stalling ken is a hide-out from the law," explained John. "Alsatia is recognized as a sanctuary, and no one is likely to come here at this hour of the night unless the King's men are after him. A scrippet is a watcher. I have a feeling that eyes have been on us from the moment we set foot in this stinking morass of crime."

We followed the landlord's direction and came to the house he had indicated. It stood in an unpaved square, backing at an angle against a taller building of brick. It was mean and inconspicuous and gave no outward signs of life. The square itself looked deserted, and so I was surprised to find, when we reached the door, that two men had materialized beside us.

"Who are ye and what do ye seek here?" asked one of them in a husky whisper.

He was a shapeless hulk of a man who nevertheless moved without any apparent effort. His companion, who was small and thin, was ostentatiously

clicking a long bagonet in its scabbard.

“My business is within and will be explained on the other side of that door,” said John.

The big fellow leaned so close to us that I got an unpleasant whiff of damp clothes and unwashed flesh. He studied us as well as he could in the darkness.

“Ye’re not hoskers,” he muttered. “Ye’re not stalled to the Rogue.”

“No,” said John, “we are not night workers and we have never taken your oath. Nor are we law-breakers looking for sanctuary. But mark this, my malodorous friend, *I have milled the sea.*”

The smaller man pushed his companion to one side. “That’s the kind of talk we know,” he said. “Get inside, Core, and tell the curtal.”

A few moments later we were motioned inside, and the doors closed behind us with a disturbing metallic rattle. We were in complete darkness.

“They take extraordinary precautions,” muttered John. “There are inside doors of solid metal. I think they may be of steel. At any rate, they closed automatically behind us.”

My eyes were getting accustomed to the dark, and I could see we were standing in a small anteroom and that another door faced us at the top of a short flight of stairs. I climbed the steps and tapped lightly with my knuckles. The inside door was of metal construction also. A wicket opened to our right, flooding the place with light. An arm shoved a lantern through and hung it on a bracket. The arm was then withdrawn and the wicket closed. Almost at once there was a click in the inner door, and a slot opened in the top panel, letting more light in.

“The dogs take no chances,” whispered John in my ear. “They’re looking us over up there. It’s harder to see their plaguy leader than King Jamie himself.”

Finally the inner door opened with a rattle of metal hinges. A familiar voice said, “Cly me, if it isn’t John and Roger,” and a tall fellow with skinny calves bowed to us elaborately in the strong light from the room beyond. I recognized my former playmate, Chirp Bird.

It was quite a different Chirp Bird, however, from the cringing hanger-on we had cuffed around so contemptuously on the commons off Shrubsole High. He now wore a white ruff and breeches with flashy codpieces, and there was a sword buckled to his belt. It was clear that he had come to fancy himself, for the dull blue eyes in his yellow freckled face watched us eagerly as though he wanted to ask: How does all this magnificence impress you?



“Keep names out of this, Chirp,” said John. “I think you must know the business that brings us.”

“I know the business that brings you,” repeated Chirp importantly. “I’ve been expecting you. But I wasn’t expecting Roger. This is a surprise, I must say. What is our little gentry-cove doing here?”

“I’m sailing with John,” I said, with pride in the announcement.

“Well, so you’re sailing with John! What does proud Mistress Blease think of that and the good Aunt Gadilda?”

“What they think is no concern of yours, Chirp,” said John impatiently. “Since you know what brings us here, see to it that we’re taken to Robin Humpéry at once. We have no time to waste in gossip.”

“Now I must ask you to keep names out of this,” declared Chirp. “We’ve as good reasons as you for not wanting them bandied around in the hearing of everyone.”

We were standing in a hallway which opened on a large room filled with men and women who were too busy over their cards and dice to pay us any attention. There was a hectic note to the play, and I could hear them scoring and counting with covetous emphasis—“tib and towser” from one, “tidddy and the ace” from another. Money passed from hand to hand with bitter grudging. The men were an ugly and pock-marked lot, and the women had been recruited from the trulls and callots of London. One only of the crew took any interest in us. He was a furtive wraith of a man, with a long purple-veined nose and a frightened eye. He was pacing up and down the hall, keeping his head alertly cocked on one side as though it were necessary even here to watch over his shoulder. I could sense a consuming fear in every line of him.

This unhappy individual plucked at Chirp’s elbow and asked in an almost breathless whisper: “Will he see me now? God’s furies, man, time presses!”

Chirp shook him off with impatience and, I thought, some fear as well. “Bide yer time, Culleton,” he said. “He’ll see ye soon enough, for your comfort. Don’t touch me! You have blood on your hands!”

The suppliant shuffled away, and Chirp’s thin mouth twisted into a grimace of distaste. “He knifed a wench in Southwark, and now he wants us to see him through. We’ll do it, on one condition. His pockets must be well lined!” He looked at John and winked. “All who do business with the Upright Man must have pockets that clink. How are yours, Sir Captain?”

“Again that is no concern of yours,” declared John. “I’m in as great a hurry as that evil-faced dog yonder, although for a different reason. Take me

to your Rich-arrayed Robin now. That's all I ask of you, Chirp Bird."

Chirp was determined to impress us with his importance. "You can talk to me as well as Rich-arrayed Robin," he said sulkily. "I'm the curtal of Alsatia, if you want to know. Your business can be settled between us."

John's patience was wearing thin. He sank his fingers in the velvet folds of my former playfellow's doublet and gave him a shake. "I didn't come here to waste my time with an oyster dredger, dressed up to pass as a man. Take me in to your master, and no more words about it!"

Chirp slipped out of his grasp and brushed his finery into place with furious fingers. "Did you hear me say I'm the curtal of Alsatia?" he demanded. "The word is out for ye, John Ward. Speak gently or you'll find yourself in the queer-ken. Ye're not on your own quarter-deck now, to strut and give orders. We rule this roost."

"Robin Humperly knows I'm to see him," declared John, controlling himself with an effort. "You've done your strutting, Chirp. Now take us in."

Chirp glanced back over his shoulder to see if this byplay had been observed. The gamblers were intent over their games, and the fear-ridden Culleton had gone back to his nervous pacing. Convinced that he had lost no face, the curtal of Alsatia led the way down the hall to a metal door at the far end. He rapped three times, and it swung back to admit us into a room with a high ceiling and a stone fireplace in which a log was blazing.

I judged we were now in the tall building against which the smaller house had backed. There was a suggestion of faded magnificence about the place. The wainscoting was elaborately carved, and the walls were covered with tapestries. Clearly, it had once been the home of someone of importance.

There were three men in the room. Two of them were playing backgammon on an antique board with red ochre squares on black leather. The third was writing in a corner. All three looked furtively at Chirp and then settled back to their occupations.

"There's something you must bear in mind, John," said Chirp, motioning us to sit down. "The man you're going to see has no gift for patience. An ill-timed word, and you might find yourself with half a blade sticking into the least convenient part of your handsome body, my friend. I pass that advice on for old time's sake."

"Thanks for the word," said John cheerfully. "But you need have no worries about me. I'll get along fine with Rich-arrayed Robin. Let's get to business. It will mean some hours to talk to go over everything in detail."

“Roger can stay here,” ordered Chirp. He had never had any liking for me, and I could see that our visit had not resulted in any diminution of his ill-will.

He took John back through a door which opened on a small apartment. As far as I could see it was empty, but there was a table with ink and paper and a flagon of wine. The door swung shut, and I sat down and watched the backgammon players. It was a game I had often played with Mother. I had developed some skill at it, and I could see that neither of them knew anything about the finer points. They grumbled and swore and seemed more interested in me than in the clumsy moves they were making. The man in the corner, who had a suggestion of holy orders about him, although I couldn't tell why, went on with his scribbling.

Chirp came back in a very few minutes. I could see that he was discomfited because he had not been bidden to stay and take his part in the talk between his superior and John Ward. His pale eyes darted at each of the three men in turn and then settled on me.

“Will ye have a drink, Roger?” he asked. “Or would a dish of flummery with Adam's-ale be more to your taste?”

Flummery was a porridge and Adam's-ale was the cant word for water, but I refused to let the question nettle me. I replied that I desired nothing. Chirp then seated himself and crossed one lank knee over the other with an air that was meant to prove his acquaintance with the manners of fine gentlemen.

“Did you understand what it meant when I said I was curtal here?” he demanded. “I'm next to the Upright Man. He leaves most matters in my hands. Isn't that so, Clem?” One of the backgammon players nodded with surly assent. “I control the sacking-law. The woman traffic, Roger. When pretty Ann Turner opens her shop, she will come to me for protection. I see that interests you, Roger. You always did make sheep's-eyes at our willing Ann, didn't you? She had such a fine waggle in her backside, eh, Roger? She had no use for me then, but things will be different now. She is going to run a shop here in London, I hear, and sell pleated chemises and silk petticoats to the ladies of the court. That's all very proper and fine, but she's likely to sell love potions and charms and philters too. That will bring her under our control. No one can dabble in the black-law without the consent of the Upright Man. When our pretty Ann finds that out, she will come here to pay the bill. And she'll have to make a deal with me. I'm looking forward to that.”

My fingers were itching to get at his skinny neck, but I controlled myself and said nothing.

“Did ye ever climb through her window, Roger?” he asked, with an eager smirk. “John did, many’s the time. I used to watch, and I wondered what good it would do me if I climbed in after him and offered to blow the show. But I never did. I bided my time. And now things are coming my way, I won’t have to climb through her window. She’ll have to walk in through my door.”

He took a goldpiece from the pocket of his scarlet breeches and tossed it in the air.

“Shall we match, Roger? But I was forgetting. You’re not likely to have gold, are you? You’re poor. You belong to the gentry. The outer fringe of the gentry. But you’re poor, nevertheless.”

“I’m poor,” I said shortly. “Leave it at that.”

Chirp stretched out his spindling shanks. “I have gold to spend every day of the week,” he exulted. “Plenty of gold. And how I spend it! On the very best of everything. And on women, Roger. I supped tonight with two handsome little sparrows. We had mutton with gallandine sauce and all the best muscadel wine we could drink. Do you ever have wine, or do you still drink such poor stuff as hippocras?”

“I still drink poor stuff,” I answered.

“I thought so.” He patted the velvet of his doublet with a gloating hand. “Twenty shillings the yard, Roger. The best to be had in all London. Quite handsome, don’t you think? What did your jacket cost?”

“It cost nothing. It was made from old clothes of my father’s.”

Chirp began to laugh. He laughed until there were tears in his watery eyes. It fed his pride to lord it over me in this way, but I did not care. I could see the cheap soul of him under his flashy clothes, and it did not matter a whit to me if he stuffed himself every day on mutton with gallandine sauce and cased his bony frame in the best velvet in all London. Chirp Bird would never be anything to me but the cadging son of a thieving oysterman.

“So you’re going to be a pirate,” he went on.

“No!” I declared, my pride on fire at last. “I’m going to fight the Spaniards. John is carrying on the work where Sir Francis Drake and Sir Richard Grenville and Sir Walter Raleigh left off. I’m going to help, as all true Englishmen should.”

Chirp’s long nose quivered at its sharp end. “That’s all bambury-chat and swish-swash!” he cried. “Your great John Ward is making a deal now with

Rich-arrayed Robin Humperty to clear the stuff you lift from Spanish ships. You're one of us, Roger. The grandson of Sir Ludar Pirie has come down to my level. No, not to my level. You'll be a cabin-boy on a stinking pirate ship. And I—I am the curtal of Alsatia!"

There was enough truth in what he said to make me cringe inside. I had been carrying a deep feeling of hurt ever since John had talked so frankly to me at Appleby Court. Sailing under the colors of John Ward was not going to be all that I had hoped for and dreamed about. He would finance himself out of the cargoes he captured, and that meant an association with the Upright Man and his spaniels like Chirp Bird.

I could think of no suitable answer, and so it was fortunate that John put his head through the door at this moment. I could see that a plump individual was seated at the desk and that two burly fellows were standing back of him. The Upright Man kept himself well guarded, it seemed.

"We're in for a full night of talk," said John. "Better go to bed, Roger. Chirp is to see that you're comfortably settled. And, Chirp, your master is not too well pleased at the ease with which we cracked our way in here tonight. He says you're to put a flea in the ears of those two scrippets in the street. No one is to be allowed in tonight, not even if it were King Jamie himself."

Chirp's face went white with anger. He did not like to be given orders, it was clear, nor did he relish John's tone. He clamped his slack lips tight, however, and said nothing. He motioned me to follow him.

We went up a stairway, with carved oak bannister and an ancient lantern on the newel post, to a noble bedroom with a huge four-poster bed. The curtains at the window were old and fine and almost served to conceal the fact that there were metal shutters under them.

"The best bed *you* have ever slept in," said Chirp, with a return to his former mood of sly malice. "A proper libbege for the grandson of Sir Ludar Pirie. But don't let yourself dream, Roger. You might fancy yourself in prison or swinging on the gallows they keep for pirates at Wapping Stairs."

He walked back to the door but then paused for a final gibe. "How did you leave Katie Ladland?" he asked. "Was she blooming like a rose? Did you ever climb in her window, Roger?"

This was too much. I sprang across the room and drove my fist into his grinning face. His head cracked so sharply against the edge of the door that a dazed look came into his eyes. He tried to reach his sword, but I clamped his wrist tight with one hand while I threatened to repeat the medicine with the other.

“Keep your foul tongue from her!” I warned. “You may be the curtal of Alsatia, Chirp, but to me you’re nothing but a cheap coward and a crook. Call up your crew from downstairs, and I’ll repeat every word I’ve said. I wouldn’t be afraid of you if you had every cutthroat in London at your back.”

I let him go then. He left without a word. I remembered that he had always been a physical coward. His sudden rise to power in the world of crime had done nothing to change that.

I tried to open the metal shutters but found they were too tightly cramped. Then I drew back the curtains of the imposing bed. It was spread with the finest linen and pillow-beres of satin, but I knew from the damp smell that it had lacked airing for a long time. I touched the pillow lightly, and my fist went right through the linen cover.

I dropped the curtain and went to sleep in a corner of the room, with my cloak wrapped around me.

## 8

THE BARRED SHUTTERS of my room kept out the sun, and I would have overslept next morning if a fight in the street below had not wakened me. Two passers-by had fallen foul of each other and had progressed from bandying words to an exchange of blows, a proceeding which seemed to delight the whole neighborhood. I could hear enthusiastic shouts of “crack ’is nab, Squire,” and “rip his weazand, the gawping old huffsnuff!” and such like, a chorus made up at least in half of feminine voices.

The rooms below were deserted of all but the guards, who pinned suspicious eyes on me from every hall and doorway, and Chirp Bird, who was eating breakfast in a black mood. He looked at me and scowled. There was a red mark on one side of his jaw, which, I suspected, was the result of contact with my fist the night before.

“John’s gone,” he said shortly. “He brangled with the Upright Man all night and then started back at daylight to see the—the fine gentleman who

supplies the mint. He left word for you to go to an inn and wait until he comes back.”

I was well pleased at this news, for it meant I would have at least one day free in London. For as long as I could remember I had been looking forward to the time when I would see the wonders of the great city. Now the chance had come.

“How’s the weather?” I asked. The windows were still shuttered, and the atmosphere of the room suggested that all of Hobson’s horses had been stabled there.

“A fine day,” answered Chirp. His hand strayed gingerly to his bruised chin and then dropped, as though he did not want to acknowledge that he carried a souvenir of our encounter. He looked at me with elaborate scorn. “I’ll see you to an inn. You would be lost if I turned you loose.” He made quite a ceremony of wiping his hands and face and then shambled to his feet. “Come along. I’ll see you safe.”

I had no desire to see London for the first time in the company of a cadet of Alsatia, and so I told him. Chirp swept my objection aside magnanimously.

“Do ye think I want to be seen with you?” he demanded. “All you need is a cloth cap and a belly-cheat to pass for a draper’s apprentice. But I promised John Ward to see you safe, and I’ll do it.”

So I did not argue the point any further and followed him outside. The air was cool and bracing, and between the housetops I caught glimpses of a speckless blue sky. It was a lovely day, but when I looked about me I realized that the boon of fine weather did nothing to ameliorate the ugliness of the slums. The houses hung so closely together that I was afraid at first glance they might fall. They were dark and forbidding and in both respects no different from the people who lived in them. No one seemed to work. Men stood about in whispering groups on the streets, and frowsy women leaned from doorways and windows to shrill abuse at one another. Sooty faces looked up at us from cellars, and leering faces popped out of every opening in the walls.

There were taverns everywhere, but even so the public thirst seemed to require the service of bowse-boys, who were running back and forth with piping soprano cries: “Ole nappy ile! Bowse, my marsters, bowse!”

A chimney sweep, already so drunk that I was sure he would come to grief if any employment were offered him, was sounding his trade cry in a mournful singsong:

“Sweep, chimney sweep, Mistress!  
Hey, dery sweep.  
From the bottom to the top,  
Sweep, chimney sweep!  
Then shall no soot fall in your porridge pot,  
With a hoop-dery, dery, dery, sweep!”

I could not help thinking that to clean the chimneys of these filthy slums would be a superfluous operation, but when I said this to my companion he treated me to another scornful glance.

“Do ye suppose sweeping is their real trade?” he demanded. “There’s no better way to spy a ken. That fellow takes his orders from us, and he isn’t as drunk as he seems. Every lilywhite in London is stalled to his Upright Man. It’s the same with most of the food vendors and the potboys in the inns.”

“Is there more than one Upright Man?” I asked in surprise.

“Three in London,” replied Chirp. “We’ve divided the town into districts, but it doesn’t work very well, I can tell you. The Wapping lot and the gentlemen from across the river poach on us all the time. And do we cut in on them! Some day they’ll all come in under one head. All that’s needed is a strong hand to guild the town.” It was clear from his tone that he did not consider Rich-arrayed Robin Humperry the man for the task. Perhaps it was in his mind that the one to rule as the overlord of Rome-ville (the cant name for London) was none other than Chirp Bird himself.

We cut through a tangle of slime-encrusted alleys and came out at Whitefriar’s Stairs, and here caught my first glimpse of the Thames by daylight. The grand old river was running strong with quite a showing of whitecaps. It was dotted with barges and looked so clean and brisk and gay in the strong sunshine that I began to feel better at once.

We turned eastward to the City and for half an hour were never completely out of sight of the river. This was a different London, a busy and cheerful town of solid streets with fine shops and substantial homes. St. Paul’s enthralled me, and I stopped a dozen times on Cheapside to stare in the open booths of the goldsmiths and drapers. I enjoyed everything so much that I was not concerned when apprentices laughed at my country garb and bawled “apple-squire!” at me. Chirp kept a few paces in the rear as though unwilling to be seen in the company of a goggling visitor from rural parts.

We came finally to a tavern with a faded sign. I was delighted to recognize it as the Draw the Pudding, a rather famous inn of which I had heard often.



“You’re to stay under cover until ye get word from John,” he admonished. He regarded me with an unfriendly scowl. “Better stay close, bumpkin. And keep your fives in your gallyslops. If you use ’em here, some cuffin will sink a blade in your ribs. They won’t be as easy on you as I’ve been.”

He had meant to leave at once, but the tavern was buzzing with excitement, and he decided to see what it was all about. His sharp eyes darted about the crowded common room. “There’s going to be trouble,” he said.

The common room was three stories high, with an oak-studded balcony around it on two sides and a cavernous fireplace. The balcony railings were hung with souvenirs which caught my eye instantly, as it was clear they came from foreign parts. There were curious heathen masks and the shrunk heads of cannibals, Mayan cloaks of intricate color design, ostrich plumes from the headpieces of caciques, and the long tobacco pipes of American Indians. I recognized most of them, for I had heard long descriptions of such things from sailors at home. The floor was crowded with tables which in turn were crowded with customers, drinking, dicing, and quarreling.

As we stood there, a tall fellow got suddenly to his feet and began a heated oration. He was a seaman, for he had a chain of shark’s teeth about his bronzed neck, and the dialect of Devonshire dripped from his tongue. All other talk in the room ceased.

“The King’s come back to Greenwich today,” he declaimed. “He’ll be able to see his fine ships rotting at their moorings and with barnacles on their bottoms, the ships which ought to be out protecting our merchantmen. Tell me this: what good is a king who refuses to fight for his subjects? Our pious old fraud of a king says we must let the thrice-cursed Dons drive us off the seas. He swears he’ll hang bold John Ward. Are we going to sit by and let him sell us into slavery?”

There was a clamor of approval from all parts of the room. The Spanish question was not the only bone his subjects had to pick with royal James, however. His return to the city had stirred up other grievances in the minds of the townsmen. A sober-appearing merchant stood up and protested against the imposts which were being levied. “No sovereign may tax the people without the consent of the Commons,” he declared. “It was that way before the Normans came over. Have we brought a king from Scotland to set our liberties at naught?” The King’s choice of ministers was another point which came in for open discussion, and it was made abundantly clear that the Cecils and the Howards found little favor with the hard-headed men of

the capital. "They're all in the pay of Don Sarmiento," called out one man, Don Sarmiento being the London nickname for Gondomar, the much-hated Spanish ambassador. A suggestion came from somewhere that His Majesty should make Archie Armstrong his Secretary of State and be done with it, a sally which brought a general laugh. "Good for Archie!" called a loud voice. "He's a wise 'un which makes him different from the other fools."

I stood in the doorway and drank in everything that was being said, amazed at the boldness of the talk and finding that it did a great deal to bolster my own resolution. This was what right-minded Englishmen were saying.

My eyes rested on a table in a corner when I saw that Chirp was watching it intently. One man sat there alone, a massive individual with small darting eyes in a squashed-pudding face. He had arrayed himself in the manner of a court gallant and resembled a suckling pig which had been decorated with hollyberries and apples for Christmas consumption. It was clear that he was of some importance, for none had dared to occupy the other chairs at his table. I observed, moreover, that furtive-looking fellows were seated near by who watched every move made in that part of the room. I concluded they were acting as bodyguards.

"Chirp," I whispered, "that bloated meal sack who thinks himself the Emperor of India, who is he?"

My companion looked at me as though I had been guilty of sacrilege.

"That's Barnaby Cloud," he answered cautiously. "The Upright Man of Wapping. He's a tough cove, and one of these days we shall have to fight it out with him. Keep an eye on him, Roger. He's going to put in his say."

Chirp was right. The Upright Man of Wapping got to his feet, and almost immediately a silence fell on the room. Every eye was turned in his direction. I was surprised to find, when he spoke, that the voice issuing from that gross mass of flesh was cultivated and clear.

"Good men of London," he began, "the time has come to let the councillors of His Majesty know that we find serious fault with the policies they are following. Impositions have been placed on merchants and other men of business—"

"Who have nothing left to pay taxes with when you get through with them, Barnaby," called a voice from the back of the room. A loud laugh followed.

"I protest," said the Wapping leader in an aggrieved tone. "I am a man of business myself. I provide protection from evil-doers for the merchants of London."

A chorus of indignant denial arose from all parts of the room. "And you also protect Simon Forman, the magician, and poisoners, and doxies, and cutpurses, and pickpockets!"—"Barnaby Cloud, the prince of prancer-priggers!"—"A fine state of affairs when the king of the crooks raises his voice against the King of England!"

"The royal poltroon—" went on the Upright Man, raising his voice over the hubbub.

The first speaker got to his feet again. It was clear that he had no stomach for support in this quarter. "These are grievances for honest men," he thundered. "Since when have thieves and doxie-masters set themselves up as makers of public opinion? What, my lively lads from Devonshire, are ye going to sit on your haunches or are ye going to flay the impudence out of this evil-faced city dog?"

"I told ye there would be trouble," said Chirp. I saw that he had gone pale and remembered again that he had always been a physical coward, ready to run like a jack rabbit when fists began to fly.

The appeal of the seaman met with an instant response. Brawny sailors converged on the Upright Man from every corner of the room. His bodyguards placed themselves around him, tugging at their dirks with nervous hands. I looked for Chirp, to observe the effect of this on him. He was nowhere to be seen.

The fracas was a short one. The rush of seamen split the criminal squad wide open. Barnaby Cloud and his henchmen went down under the wreckage of the table. Daggers flashed. After several moments of frantic tussling on the floor, the Upright Man was yanked to his feet again, pinioned in the grasp of two lusty sea dogs. He was rushed from the room and propelled into the street while his lieutenants were disarmed and mauled unmercifully. I would have enjoyed a hand in the affair myself, for I had seen enough since coming to London to know it was high time these lordly masters of crime were taught a lesson.

When it was all over and some kind of order had been restored, I sought out the landlord and asked for a room. He had a harried look in his eyes and was sweating profusely, and at first he paid no attention to my demand. I finally got it through his addled head that I was a customer with the price of a room in my pocket. This being clear, he turned me over to a fat servingwoman, who led me up two flights of stairs to a large bedroom with windows looking out over the roofs of the city.

"Ye're a country boy," she said in friendly tones. "If ye could just see now down three squares and then two to the right and a sharp jog to the left,

ye would put eyes on the very spot where the King sits with his parlyment. Yes, m'lad, and wouldn't ye like to see the Marshalsea and the Clink, and the place where they hang them and cut out their innards, and burn them afore their very faces? There's a lots of rare sights to see in Lunnon. Would ye be anxious for a little fun, now?"

I assured her I was not anxious for a little fun and that all I required was paper and a pen. She brought these, and I settled down to my delayed task of writing to Mother and Aunt Gadilda.

I found it hard to tell them what I had done and what I proposed to do about my future. My gentle mother, I felt sure, would understand me well enough, and perhaps even have a little sympathy for the course I had elected to follow; but it would be different with Aunt Gaddy. She was so set in her ideas, so sure that the plan for which she had slaved and scrimped and starved was the only proper one. It was going to break her heart. Her poor pinched face would go white with misunderstanding and grief when she read what I was putting down. I owed it to her to break the news as kindly as I could. But the right words would not come.

I chewed the quill desperately and struggled for ways to make my message less unfeeling, but only the shabbiest of phrases got themselves down on the paper in front of me. My fingers were well inked by the time I was through, and I was well aware that the two who loved me best in the world would find no reason for comfort in what I had written. Still, it could not be helped. There was man's work to be done these bitter days, and nothing could be more right than that a son of Mark Blease should take his place beside stout John Ward. I finished the letter, sealed it, and took it down to the post. Then, with my mind torn between regret over the thing I had been compelled to do and high anticipation of what the rest of the day held for me, I sallied out to see London on my own.

I dined heavily on slices of hot roast beef and a steamed roll pudding in a near-by bakeshop. As I emptied my platter, I watched through a steamy window the barbershop opposite where the proprietor was using a hot iron to curl the long hair of a gentleman of fashion. In front of the place was a tall pole, painted red and white, and a long coil of twine on which were strung the teeth which had been extracted from customers. There were many hundreds of them, and I suppose they proved that tooth-pulling was a fine art with the worthy barber.

The pangs of hunger fully satisfied, I inquired the way to Parliament Place and wended my way there first of all. I spent some time in Westminster Abbey, thinking with proper awe of the noble dust that lay under its imposing monuments. I looked at the outside of the old chapel

where the Commons sat and at the royal palace where the king no longer lived, but which contained the House of Lords. All the time, however, I was conscious of an urge to follow the other sightseers who gave no more than a passing glance at these institutions and then hurried down a narrow lane leading toward Queen's Bridge. I gave in to my curiosity and joined the procession, finding myself in due course in front of a stone house.

I knew without asking anyone that this was Vinegar House. It was mean and unpretentious, built against a wing of the Lords, and it seemed to me not only well named but well suited to the dark purpose of the gloomy men who had used it. In this cold and bitter tenement the most famous conspiracy of history had been hatched, the Gunpowder Plot. It was now some years old, but it was still England's most grateful topic of conversation. It seemed as though people would never stop talking about it, and I was not surprised that the feet of visitors turned to this spot first of all.

I found myself in a crowd of considerable size. For the most part, the people gazed at the awesome house with gaping jaws and said nothing. Such comments as were made showed how ignorant they were of the real facts.

"It were so full o' poother ye could see the barrels from the bedroom winders," declared one man in a shivery voice. I knew this was wrong. None of the powder had been stored in Vinegar House. The plotters had found they could not cut through the walls of the palace and had boldly carted the barrels away and stored them in the coal cellars of the palace.

Hawkers were plying the usual wares among the credulous onlookers: pieces of the rope with which Guy Fawkes had been hanged, odd scraps of things which had been found in the cellars, even twists of paper containing (or so they said) quantities of the actual powder itself. Shillings were changing hands briskly, and guides were organizing parties to go up to Butcher Row and see the house where Guy Fawkes had lived. "He were four inches longer when they took 'im off the rack," announced one of them cheerfully. "Come now, only a twelver to see and hear *everything*. Things to make your flesh creep, good people; even the beads they took offen 'im when they cut out 'is bowels. Something to talk about the rest o' yer nateral lives."

The house was empty and had a haunted look about it, as though all the hates and fears which had resulted in the Gunpowder Plot had remained after the plotters themselves had gone to their deaths, to lie stagnant here; a more dangerous brew than all the gunpowder in the world. I found myself reciting under my breath the words of an inscription which had been cut on a panel after the event, from copy prepared by the King himself:

*“Jacobus Magnus, Magnae Britanniae, Rex, pietate, justitia, prudentia, doctrina, fortitudine, elementia, ceterisq—”*

It sounded highly ironical to me. “James the Great, King of Great Britain, illustrious for piety, justice, learning, hardihood, clemency and other regal virtues—” Had Guy Fawkes actually been four inches longer when they removed his tortured frame from the Tower rack?

I decided not to invest one of my few shillings in the satisfaction of curiosity, although I confess it was hard to resist doing so, and struck off eastward on foot. I did not stop until I came to the foot of the wharf which surrounds the Tower of London on the water side. I was hoping to walk out on the wharf and see the Traitor’s Gate and, if I were lucky enough, catch a glimpse of Sir Walter Raleigh walking on the terrace of the Bloody Tower. To my intense disappointment, however, I found that barriers had been set up so that no one could get any farther than the street. I pressed tightly against the bars and craned my neck over them, hoping that I might still be rewarded by a fugitive glance of the noble prisoner, but a guard came along and poked the blunt end of his pike in the direction of my stomach, causing me to retreat to a safer distance.

It was no consolation when a dark-skinned fellow pressed against my shoulder and whispered that for a shilling he would sell me the recipe of Sir Walter Raleigh’s Great Cordial, about which the whole world was talking, believing it to be a cure for every human ailment. At first I was sure he must be one of the natives of Guiana, who had been brought to England by Raleigh and who were supposed to be living in lodgings near the Tower in order to be close to their white god, but then I detected a smack of Alsatia in his voice. I concluded that the darkness of his skin might very well be due to an application of walnut stain. I decided against this investment also.

Then I crossed London Bridge, stopping to count the heads of the so-called traitors which decorated the pikes over the central span. Thirty-two! Many of them had been up there so long that they retained no human suggestion at all, but I marveled that the people of London, milling back and forth across the bridge, paid no more heed to this ghastly display than to the flocks of gulls which perched on the tops of the houses.

Descending the ramp on the far side, I passed the inns of Tooley Street and gave a few curious glances to the stewhouses and the Cardinal’s Hats which infested the neighborhood. I paused in front of the Globe Theatre and read a notice to the effect that “Volpone, a recent Play by B. Jonson” would be presented there the following day. I visited a bear-baiting pit and found the stench rising from it intolerable. Nevertheless, houses had been built

close around it, and I had heard that the residents did very well by renting out their upper windows.

Retracing my steps over London Bridge, I looked up and counted thirty-three heads on the pikes. Had I been in error before or had another trophy been added to this exhibition of royal clemency while I was sightseeing on the other side of the river? There was one head I did not recall seeing on my way over, that of a young man with long golden locks which tossed in the lively breeze. I shuddered as I thought that, if James had his way, still another might soon be added to the lot, that of my friend John Ward. *Jacobus Magnus, Rex, pietate, clementia!*

Of the many things which London had always meant to me, the most important of all remained to be seen. I paced with weary footsteps back to the heart of the city until I reached the busy spot where Bread and Blowbladder streets came together near West Cheap. Here stood a tall inn with nothing to make it stand out from the hundreds of other inns of the great city. Certainly there was nothing about it from the outside to excite the feelings of passers-by, and yet I found my heart thumping as I looked up at its plain façade. This was the Mermaid Tavern, the very heart and soul of England!

I made no move to go inside. At best I would see groups of well-dressed men at supper; and none of them, perhaps, would bear the great names with which the Mermaid was associated in my mind. It was much more satisfying to stand outside and tell myself that an illustrious company was within: Will Shakespeare and Ben Jonson; Fletcher with his towering brow and Chapman with his merry round beard; Dekker and Drayton; and Will Sly the actor; and even some of the brave spirits who had sailed the seas with Raleigh and had first come here as members of his Bread Street Club. I told myself that the conversation within would be serene and sparkling and elevated. There would be no gossip of gunpowder plots, no talk of court intrigues, no idle speculation about the latest royal favorite. They would be concerned only with great truths, universal truths, with the world of letters, which was so much finer than the real world, with what the future would bring, and of England's part in that future.

Yes, here was the real heart of England. No one, I thought to myself, could look at the Mermaid Tavern, where so many great projects had been born, and go away content with the royal dictum that Englishmen must forswear their heritage on the high seas. London had disappointed me up to this point. The filth of the slums had been worse than I had expected, the Tower had seemed much smaller than I had conceived it to be and not especially awe-inspiring, the wonder of London Bridge had been spoiled by

the rotting row of heads which looked with sightless eyes up the broad river. But the Mermaid Tavern made up for all this. No city could harbor so magnificent a shrine without being truly great. I turned, with spirits which had soared again to the heights, and decided that I had seen enough.

It had grown dark by this time, and I was not sure I knew the way back to my inn. I was pondering what I had better do when a beggar sidled by, intoning his dismal chorus of “alms, good people, alms!” As he passed, he gave me an upward squint from downcast eyes and said in a sharp whisper, “If ye’re Roger Blease, go on to the next left turn. I’ll speak to ye there.”

I was too startled to make any immediate response; and the beggar, hobbling painfully on his weak legs, was well beyond me before I recovered my self-possession. I paused irresolutely; and then, in response to an impatient glance that he threw back at me over his shoulder, I began to walk slowly toward the designated corner. He was already there when I arrived.

“Turn to the left,” he admonished me. “Walk slowly. Gawp around and whistle if ye can. Free and easy, mind ye.”

I did as he bade me, turning down one of the darkest and narrowest lanes in all London. I was not at all free in my mind about following such instructions, and yet the man knew me by name and very clearly had some message for my ears. There did not seem to be anyone about, and yet I was sure I could hear rustling in the darkness on each side. I began to feel decidedly nervous about all this and was on the point of turning and retracing my steps when a whisper came out of the gloom.

“Nah, then, my gentry-cove. Do ye want to be picked up by the King’s men? Keep on walking.”

I resumed my course. It was ridiculous to suppose that I could be in any danger from the King’s men, and yet I had been traveling with John Ward and had spent a night at the headquarters of the Upright Man of Alsatia. Did such circumstances make me a law-breaker? I was trying to figure this out when there was a sound of sudden footsteps behind me. My arms were clasped from the rear with such vicious strength that I felt as though a steel trap had closed on me. At the same second a hand grasped me by the mouth and yanked my head backward. A gag was slipped into my mouth so effectively that I was not able to utter a sound.

“Come on, Master Blease,” said the voice I had heard before. “Do as ye’re bid and ye’ll keep a whole skin.”



I WAKENED NEXT MORNING in a soft bed with light filtering dimly through rich curtains. My jaw was sore; and, as I rubbed it with a careful thumb, I began to cast back over the events of the night.

I remembered being half carried and half propelled for a distance of several hundred yards. At intervals my abductors had halted; and at these times I had sensed, from the tensity with which they gripped me, that they were under a strain. Once I had heard many footsteps passing us and a creaking sound which I thought might be made by the swinging of lanterns in the hands of the city watch. Finally we had entered a house; and, after stumbling up a long flight of stairs, I had been thrust into this room. The gag had been removed, and I had been told in a fierce whisper to keep my jaw closed if I valued my life. I must have gone to sleep almost immediately after.

I sat up in bed and realized at once that I had been sleeping in the bedroom of a lady of quality. It was enormous, and neither at Appleby Court nor at Theobalds had I seen anything to compare with its appointments. When I dropped my stiffened legs over the side, my feet sank into soft carpet. There was a lingering trace of perfume in the air. I walked to one of the windows and pulled back the curtain a cautious inch. A blind wall of ivy-covered brick faced me.

I did not dare touch a thing. The room was done graciously in the softest tones. There was a dressing table with a tall mirror framed in gold and a great variety of bottles and other toilet articles, the uses of which I could no more than guess at. I recognized a red leather box with an embossed likeness of the old queen as a sweet coffer, a container of perfume. A pomander on a gold chain lay carelessly beside it, and I got the impression that the lady who occupied the room had departed in a hurry.

A door beside the dressing table was half-open, and I peered through into a small marble-tiled room. It contained nothing but a stone bathtub, shaped like a tulip with drooping petals, its four dragon-clawed feet bolted to the floor. I closed the door with an intensified conviction of intrusion.

Silence gripped the place. I could be sure of one thing only: my abduction had been ordered from Alsatia. The beggar in front of the Mermaid Tavern had addressed me by name, and it was only through Chirp

Bird that he could have known it. I had been spirited away for some reason which had to do with John Ward's business in London, and in due course I would learn what it was all about. In the meantime I would have to make the best of it.

The only other door opening into the room was tightly closed. It was a full hour later that I heard steps coming cautiously toward it and the turning of a key in the lock. It swung open, and a thickset fellow in a gray jerkin looked in. He had watery eyes in a face which resembled that of an ill-tempered badger.

"Breakfast," he announced in a grudging tone.

He came slowly into the room and set down a bowl of food and a whiskin filled with ale, saying in a hoarse voice: "No use cagging at me. Curtal's coming. Save yer gab for him."

The bowl contained some slices of cold meat and a sizable hunk of excellent bread. I had disposed of everything by the time Chirp Bird put in an appearance. He came into the room and sniffed. His greedy eyes took in the richness of the furnishings with a kind of reluctant envy.

"If my advice had been taken, you wouldn't be here," he said, after a moment.

"Why am I here? I don't understand this at all."

"Of course you don't, you totty-headed country lob," said Chirp venomously. "If I had my way, you would be feeding the fishes this very minute, Master Roger Blease! It's a mistake to let you live, and we're all going to suffer for it." The hostility in his eyes deepened. "A pretty mess, this is. They'll lag us all."

"You might tell me what it's about," I suggested, with a feeling of growing apprehension.

He seated himself in front of the dressing table and drew his thin knees together. "John Ward was seen at Cheshunt," he said, with a trace of a quaver in his voice. "That's what it's about."

"They haven't caught him?" I asked, with sudden alarm.

"Gog's Nownes, no!" cried Chirp. "If they had, you wouldn't be here. Listen, Roger, John Ward was recognized. The word got to the King, and the peery old gander was sure it was another plot on his life. He's been squeaking like a pig-widgeon ever since they tried to plant that gunpowder under him. He got the jumbles, and nothing would do but the court must be moved. They've moved back to Greenwich Palace already. A double row of guards has been set around the walls, and a dozen armed men were in the royal chamber last night. Do ye see what it's all about now?"

I was beginning to see, and I was sharing Chirp's fears. I did not need to be told what would happen if either John or I were caught.

"By four o'clock yesterday every inn in London had been searched for John Ward and *a thin, dark boy dressed in gray!*" said Chirp. "We heard about it and tried to find you. But you, you nick-ninny, had gone out to see the sights! Didn't I tell ye to lie low?" The thought of the consequences if I had been caught was so upsetting still that he wiped perspiration from his brow with a shaking hand. "If we hadn't lagged you when we had, they'd be stretching you now on the Duke of Exeter's Daughter where they racked Guy Fawkes, and you'd be bleating out everything you know and a lot you don't know. And you ask me what it's all about!"

"But there was no plot!" I exclaimed. "John went to Theobalds to see—"

"No names!" cried Chirp with a white face. "Not even here. That's what they would get out of you. Names! Everyone you had seen and spoken to. This king has men around him who make it their business to tell him his life is in constant danger. If they laid hands on you, my fine kinchin coe, they wouldn't let you off the rack until you had sworn that Raleigh and every man in the anti-Spain party was back of you." His face was a greenish white with the fear that gripped him. "Think of me. I was seen all over London with you! I can feel the dirty fingers of the topping-cove on my neck right now!"

He was in a pitiable state of fright; and, if the truth must be told, I was little better myself. I was seeing crowds of goggling natives, and hawkers selling them bits of the rope with which Roger Blease had been hanged at Tyburn.

The door opened again to admit my first visitor. The man jerked a thumb over his shoulder and said: "There's another one of them. What's to be done?"

Chirp was as puzzled by this piece of information as I was. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "Another who? Speak up!"

"Another one of them," repeated the man. "Outside. Clem the Cuckold just brought him in."

"Is he a sailor?" asked Chirp.

The man shook his head. "I think he's a lob. Says his name is Snode."

If our situation had been less critical, I would have enjoyed the look of consternation which showed on Chirp's face at this news.

"Snode!" he cried. "Jore Snode here? That brattle-mouthed fool in London?" It was too much. He looked at me as though I were to blame for this addition to his problems. "Where did Clem find him?"

Joralemon Snode was to have met us in London and gone on with us to the *Royal Bess*. All yesterday I had been expecting to hear of his arrival at the Draw the Pudding, and I had been worrying about him while Chirp had been explaining the dangers of our situation.

“Clem saw him as he set foot on Lunnon Bridge,” explained the man. “He cut with him, thinking he might have a glag or two in his pocket. When he let out he were looking for a Roger Blease, Clem brought him here. By water, straight to the stairs.”

Chirp said grimly: “Bring him up, then. Bring him up. I want a few words with Joralemon Snode.” He looked at me and glowered. “Well, Roger, we’ll be thinking we’re back on Shrubsole High if this keeps up. Jore Snode in London!” Suddenly he began to laugh. “All we need is Ann Turner and Katie Ladland to keep us company while we wait for them to come and take us. It would help a little. You needn’t look at me like that. I can have your throat slit from ear to ear any time I give the word!”

Joralemon Snode appeared in the door and peered at us uncertainly. I looked at him more closely than the first day and saw that he had a thin and shriveled appearance.

Chirp took him by the arm and jerked him into the room.

Snode looked at both of us and said: “Chirp! And Roger! This is a surprise.”

Chirp began to ply him with questions in an almost breathless haste. “Did you come alone? Did you speak to anyone before Clem got his hands on you? Did you mention Roger’s name to anyone else?”

“No. I spoke to no one else.”

“Are ye sure? You said nothing to man, woman, or child? Did you pass the time of day or throw a word to a beggar? Are ye ready to swear it?”

“It will not be necessary to take the name of the Lord in vain,” said Jore stiffly. “I spoke to no one save that evil-tongued son of Belial who brought me here.”

“How did you get to London?”

“I walked every foot of it.”

Chirp’s face took on a tortured look. “And spread the word of what was bringing you all the way from Shrubsole High to London Bridge! I know you, Jore, so you needn’t deny it. Did you name John Ward? Or Roger Blease? I must have the truth. How often did you tell?”

“Never once,” answered Jore, drawing himself up with offended dignity. “John warned me about it, and I spoke to no one.”

“Don’t try to lie out of it!” exclaimed Chirp. “You’ve been clacking about sailing with John Ward and what a great man you are. I know that loose tongue of yours, Jore. Didn’t you tell Clem the Cuckold you were seeking Roger Blease?”

Joralemon nodded slowly. “Ay, that much is so. I did speak to him the once. But London was so large, and I didn’t know where to begin looking. I asked him the way to the Draw the Pudding, and then he asked who I expected to see there. The name slipped out.”

I was as anxious as Chirp and not yet sure that Jore had told us everything. “This is most important,” I said to him. “Did your tongue slip any other time? Think hard, Jore. Our lives may depend on it.”

He raised his hand. “On my hope of salvation, I spoke to no one else. And it seems I was right to do so then, for it has brought me here to you, Roger.”

This satisfied me, and I could see that Chirp was relieved also. He began to ask more questions, however.

“What orders did John give you?”

“John’s orders were given to *me*.”

I interposed then, to avoid an explosion, and told Jore how necessary it was for us to know everything. He finally accepted my word for it and explained that he had left the night before on orders from John. He was to go to London and look for me at the inn. The two of us were then to get out of the city and make our way to the *Royal Bess*, where John himself would join us as soon as possible.

“Where is the *Royal Bess*?” demanded Chirp.

Snode shut his mouth tight. The whereabouts of the ship was a secret and nothing would induce him to tell it, not even threats to cut his throat if he refused to give in. Chirp raved and swore but got no satisfaction. Finally he gave up the effort.

“That brain-sick ox of a Ward should have known better than to send anyone to London!” he declared. “What would have happened if Clem hadn’t seen Jore when he did? Every inn is being watched. Ward should have known the danger. That’s how close he’s come to giving the thing away. Our great hero hasn’t the brains of a bantling!”

He began to pace about the room, his legs bent at the knees and his face puckered with uneasy thoughts. Finally he stopped in front of me. “Is it necessary to warn you not to shove your nose out of here? Either of you?”

“No,” I said. “You may depend on us now, Chirp. We want nothing better than to stay right here.”

“Then I’ll leave you,” he said. He added with a bitter scowl: “I hope you realize it’s almost as dangerous for me to show myself as you. But, worse luck, it’s got to be risked.”

As soon as it seemed safe to indulge in confidences, I told Joralemon the whole story. He looked a little frightened for the first time.

“God is watching over us, Roger,” he affirmed after a moment. “It was no accident that led me to speak with that evil man who brought me here. He suffereth not the sparrow to fall, and He stayeth the hand of the ungodly. He will guide us to safety in His own good way.”

“I trust you’re right,” I said fervently. I dropped my voice to a whisper, although it was highly unlikely that we were being spied upon. Whatever guards had been set would avoid this part of the house. “We can’t stay here, Jore. Chirp is itching for an excuse to put us out of the way. Dead, we would no longer be a menace to him and the rest of his crew. As I see it, our only chance is to get out of here as soon as it’s dark and take our chances on reaching the ship.”

Snode nodded in agreement. He had taken to breathing lightly also and seemed more afraid of the air of the place than of the dangers which lurked outside. He found it difficult to give me any information when I asked him about the location of our hiding place.

“It’s on the river,” he said. “An old house but quite handsome. There are deep grounds and a high wall around them. They brought me in through a rear door, and I saw very little.”

It was cold in the house, but no one did anything about it. For my part, I was not disposed to hunt for wood to make a fire and, as for poor Joralemon, he had allowed himself to sink into a mood of speechless apprehension, in spite of the consolation he sought from the leaves of his Bible. He had produced it from his doublet and was turning the pages in search of reassuring passages. More food was brought at noon, but neither of us was able to muster any appetite.

At four o’clock or thereabouts Chirp paid us another visit. He looked more frightened than before and reported that the city was being turned upside down. The King’s councillors had whipped up the royal fears to a fine frenzy, and even Sir Walter Raleigh had been questioned in the Tower.

“They’ve been all over Alsatia,” he said. “A few likely lads for Paddington Fair were picked up.” By this he meant execution day. “That

fellow Culleton, for one. He'll have you to thank for it when the rope tightens around his neck."

"Have they found out who we saw at Theobalds?" I asked. All day I had been worried for the safety of Sir Everard Clement and Archie Armstrong. The jester, in particular, had been continually in my thoughts.

Chirp shook his head. The royal council was so set on proving our visit part of a deep-laid conspiracy that they had overlooked the obvious lines of investigation, and had been winding up in a series of dead ends. I felt enormously relieved at this.

But there was nothing to raise my spirits in the attitude of our frightened ex-townsmen. Chirp's nerves were close to the breaking point, and I could read in the looks he gave me that he would know no relief as long as Jore and I were alive. His eyes were saying: Dead men tell no tales. We would not see the light of day again if we remained within his reach. I knew how dangerous it would be to sally out, but certain death waited for us here.

Chirp left, and a dead silence settled down over the empty house. Darkness fell outside. It proved quite easy to get away after all. When the time seemed ripe, I motioned to my companion, and we stole out of the room with what turned out to be an unnecessary excess of caution. The door had been left unlocked, so certain were our guards that nothing could persuade us to venture forth. We avoided the front of the mansion and made our way cautiously to a steep flight of steps in the rear.

We heard no sounds other than what we made ourselves, and there was no one about when we reached the grounds. There was no one stationed at the stone gate opening on the wharf. We heard nothing but the vigorous swish of water against the stone base of the wall as we detached the lock from the heavy inside chain.

The river was as black as the overcast sky, but pinpoints of light showed on passing boats. "A proper night for us, Master Roger," said Jore. He stepped to the end of the pier and called in a voice which quavered in spite of his effort to make it bold, "Eastward Ho!"

There was an immediate answer from the river of, "Right y' are, Guv'nor. Eastward Ho, it is."

I saw a light close to shore dip as the wherry which carried it came sharply about. I watched and listened anxiously, but no sounds came from the grounds of the deserted mansion. The wherry came in, and we sprang aboard. It was not until the boatman had sent his craft out into the current again with a stiff thrust of an oar against the side of the mooring that I heard sounds of running feet in the gardens.

“Let them come now,” I whispered to Snode. “We’re out of danger as far as honest Chirp Bird is concerned.”

“Ay,” said Jore, with a sigh of relief. “This air is good, Roger.”

I was drawing in great draughts of the salt-laden breeze myself, happy to be free of the dank atmosphere of the house. I could have shouted with sheer relief when the bargeman brought the wherry from under the lee of the sheltering stone walls. Then he heeled her about and she caught the breeze. Her sails bellied, and I could feel the pull of the current as we swung off down the river.

## 10

I SHALL NEVER FORGET my first sight of the Royal Bess, anchored well off the coast and shining against the blue of early morning like a ship of magic from a sailor’s Land of Cockayne. Her masts were almost bare, but even without a spread of canvas she was a blaze of color. The hull was green with bands of white to outline the carvings, and there were paintings on the taffrails. No Spanish shipmaster would have selected the Tudor colors, so I knew the choice was John’s, a gesture of defiance to a Stuart king who was tearing down what his predecessors had raised.

We had put in at Southend and had traveled overland to Felixstowe. Most of the time we had had to depend on shanks-his-mare; and, as we had come along hell-bent, my bones were aching with a degree of fatigue I had never known before. Still, when Joralemon Snode pointed over the top of a knoll standing between us and the sea, and I perceived masts tightly wrapped with tawny sails, I scrambled to the top of the obstructing land with no consciousness of effort.

“She’s a beauty!” I called down to John. John had given me some details, and so I had known she was a four-master; but I had not been prepared for such a display of carrying power. The foremast was stepped far forward, and the bowsprit was steeved at an unusual angle. I drank in the details, realizing in how many respects this leviathan differed from the greatest of the Elizabethan ships-of-war. Both fore and main masts were



square-rigged, and the mizzen carried a lateen sail. "She'll show her heels to anything on the high seas!" I boasted to my weary companion.

"Ay," answered Jore, with no enthusiasm. "I've been told she's fast, but I know nothing of nautical matters. Could she hold her own with the mighty ships which set out from Tyre in the days when Solomon was building his temple? I think not, Roger. Let not pride get the better of you."

It was six o'clock in the morning when we climbed over the rail of the ship, but howls of drunken merriment reached our ears from below decks. The tall man in discolored kersey smalls who greeted us was finding it hard to maintain an air of tipsy dignity. He had an enormous spread of shoulders, and his eyes, which darted at us from under narrowed lids, were sharp and cruel. In spite of his condition, there was a suggestion of authority about him. Could this, I wondered, be Hale Harry Gard, John's much-vaunted first mate?

"Well, if it isn't Joralemon Snode!" said this individual, planting himself so squarely in front of us that we could not advance a step. "My holy Jore, you're a day late, and I'm of a mind to lay the salt-cel over your shoulders. Where have ye been, my sanctimonious Snode, rollicking in vaulting-schools or playing knave-noddy with city sharps? Joralemon Snode, Joralemon Snode, there's a bawdy look about ye, and I know ye've been up to no good." He turned his narrow slits of eyes on me with an almost feral appraisal. "Who's this, in God's good name? Another joskin for me to lick into shape? Can ye handle yerself on the shrouds, boy? Look at him, doing a cuddy-jig and the ship hove to! How will ye keep yer legs in a blow, you shag-bag of bones!"

"You're drunk," declared Jore, standing up to him like a man. "Is this the way you go on when Captain Ward's ashore? This is Roger Blease, a friend of the Captain's who's shipping with us. He's gentry, what's more, and he'll want no more talk from you."

The mate's angry eyes shifted back to me. "So, this is Roger Blease, and he's a friend of John Ward's! And he's gentry, is he? What am I supposed to do, kiss his blind-cheeks? I'll kiss his skinny ribs with the bimster!" He gave a drunken stagger and had to grasp the rail for support. He began to laugh in a high-pitched cackle. "My holy Jore, I have a story for your ears. Have ye heard about the sailor who wanted to marry the landlady of a tidy little inn down Islington way? But it seems—"

"I'll have none of your filthy stories, Harry Gard!" said Jore sternly. "Stand aside, so we can find our quarters below."

He laid a hand on my shoulder and led the way down the waist of the ship. I saw almost with awe that there were jeers to hoist the yards (I had never seen them used, but they were the latest thing in shipbuilding) and that the sails were as shiny new as James shillings. The decks were clean, and every inch of wood was freshly painted. Poor John, I thought; he had seen to it that his ship was spick and span for the grand reception he had hoped to receive. He had come home like a bridegroom but would set sail again like a thief in the night!

“I’ll speak to the Captain about that fellow,” said Jore in my ear. “He’s a good enough sailor, but the devil is in his heart. Do you hear the voices of women? It’s hard to believe that even Gard would allow them on board here.”

There could be no doubt on that score, however, for the shrill note of feminine laughter could be distinguished in the din. I had been conscious of it from the moment we set foot on deck.

“It’s always this way when we lay over in port,” said Jore sadly. “I’ve fought with the Captain about it, but he’s blind to the evil. He says it’s necessary for the men to have their go. But I had hoped we would be free of it here. They are English women down there, Roger.”

I was much more interested in the splendid appointments of the ship. Ahead of us the superstructure loomed up like the high towers of Appleby Court. The *Royal Bess* was of Spanish build, and it had always been the way of the Dons to sail the seas in state. I had seen ships like this from the docks at home sailing majestically up the Thames but had never set foot on one before. I held my breath in wonder.

“Come,” said Jore. “I’ll show you your quarters. Then we must see to getting you rigged out properly. You would freeze to death in that thin jerkin.”

I followed him below. The Spanish idea was to provide stately quarters for the officers and such passengers as might be carried, and to herd the men in filthy congestion on the orlop-deck where the air was foul and the floors damp from the bilge. In renovating the *Royal Bess*, John had done what he could to correct this fault. What had once been the chapel, a magnificent chamber occupying a large part of the two top decks, fitted with mahogany and roofed like a cathedral with high-arching timbers, was now an ordnance room. The crew were using it for a different purpose, however, as we learned when Jore swung open its carved and copper-studded door. A blast of sound assailed our ears. The men were there in full force, squatted on powder kegs or sprawling on the floor. Jore slammed the door shut so fast

that I caught no more than a glimpse of naked fattish figures seated on the knees of the sailors or flitting with tipsy efforts at grace among those on the floor.

My companion's face was set in grim lines. "God forgive me for saying it," he declared, "but I would rather see that fine chamber used for popish mummary than turned into a drinking den for sailors and harlots. Roger, my boy, I hope you'll be wise enough to leave women alone. I say it with grief, but John must not be your model in such matters. It's his one flaw, and I pray the good Lord every night to forgive him for it."

My cabin was on the top-deck, with a porthole and a netting already slung. I could stand in the center and touch all four walls with my outstretched fingers; but there was a chair strapped to the floor, a chest for clothes under the hammock, and even a silver-backed mirror on one wall, a souvenir no doubt of the days when the ship had been the *Madalina* and had sailed proudly under the flag of Castile.

"I'm next to you," explained Jore. "John's cabin is beyond mine. It's large and handsome, but I'll leave it to him to invite you there. We're friends ashore, but here he's the captain, and he never lets you forget it. You must always address him as Captain Ward." He slipped his hand into his doublet and produced a testament in limp leather. "Will you take this, my boy? I brought it for you when I heard you were joining us. You'll find it a great comfort, times without number. Roger, I must warn you that things will happen on this ship which cause the angels in Heaven to hide their heads in shame. I'm not blaming John, mind you. It's not his fault. It's the way of the sea."

John did not arrive that day, nor the next. The men had been refused shore leave, and they became more unmanageable all the time. They began to grumble openly. The drinking increased, and boats plied back and forth from shore, bringing supplies of all kinds and, of course, more women. The chief mate, who seemed to me the drunkest of them all, looked on the antics of the crew with a tolerant eye, although sometimes he would yank his bimster (a rope's end waxed to a steellike hardness) from his belt with a savage gesture and lay it across the shoulders of a sailor for no apparent reason at all. Once he lashed a poor silly fellow into insensibility for stumbling as he passed. A pail of salt water was thrown over the victim, and he was left to recuperate as best he could in the scuppers. No one paid any attention to him.

I am sure the mate would have been less tolerant if he had not found more satisfying targets for persecution in Joralemon and me. He would back Jore into a corner and compel him to listen to obscene narratives, fixing him

the while with a belligerent and zestful eye. He sang foul songs at the top of his lungs or gave imitations of a parson whenever Jore hove in sight. For my part, I had to listen to dire predictions as to what would happen to me when we got under way; and, as a foretaste, he set me to all manner of impossible tasks from which I emerged with bleeding hands and broken fingernails, my tormentor laughing uproariously as he watched me. He seemed to realize instinctively that I was sensitive about my thinness and called me nothing but Spindleshanks.

“When he’s sober there’s no better sailor afloat,” Jore said to me several times. That was no extenuation in my eyes, for I was beginning to hate the man and to feel the first faint regret for the comfortable life I had left.

I was sick with worry over John’s failure to appear. Had he been caught? All through that second day I had visions of him in the Tower with sly interrogators picking his brains and the King writing another Latin tablet. It was only a matter of time, I was sure, before boats filled with soldiers would be putting off to take possession of the *Royal Bess*. The identity of the ship must be well known to people ashore, and the only reason that some action had not already been taken was that news traveled slowly. Word of the hue and cry for John Ward and his unidentified companion had not yet reached the coast towns. I made up my mind to jump overboard before I would let myself be taken.

Jore and I were discussing the situation in my cabin on the second evening. We were certain by this time that John was in prison. We were so depressed that our talk was fitful and filled with long pauses. It did not help any to hear the drunken roaring of the crew, proof that the revelry had reached a still wilder level. They were in a fighting mood, and sounds of bitter altercation frequently drowned out the tipsy screaming of the Madame Vans.

“I must see if I can do anything to stop it,” said Jore finally, getting to his feet. “Throats will be cut if this keeps up.”

“If you go down there, your own throat will be the first to be cut.”

Suddenly all sound ceased. It was uncanny how quickly and completely the rioting subsided. We could hear feet scurrying in the passageways, and once or twice a sharp command from Hale Harry Gard. I knew at once what it meant.

“They’re coming for us,” I said. I clasped in my hand the testament that Jore had given me. “This is the end. I’m not going to be taken alive, Jore.”

He shook his head. I was surprised to see that the tense look on his face had been replaced by a smile of confidence. “John’s coming,” he declared.

“Let’s go up on deck. You will see I am right, Roger.”

I was sure he was wrong, but I followed him to the waist. The whole ship was alive with activity. I saw the mate striding up and down and could sense a new note in his hoarse voice as he barked commands right and left. The women were being bundled unceremoniously down the ladders, where an inadequate number of small boats were waiting for them. Many of them were still naked and were carrying their clothes in bundles over their shoulders, squealing curses the while. Gard’s handy bimster was leaving its mark on their flabby backs.

I began to take heart. Perhaps Jore was right after all. The preparations did not suggest an impending visit from officers of the law.

“Get to your stations, you sham-abrams!” roared the mate, when the last of the women had gone over the rail. “I’ll have ye all in the garters if the Captain finds anything amiss!”

My relief was so great I could have shouted. So John was coming after all! I leaned over the rail and saw a boat breasting the waves. It carried a lantern on the prow which heaved and dipped with the motion of the water. Jore stood beside me and chattered excitedly in my ear.

“He gave them the slip,” he exulted. “Trust the Captain for that. The sheriff has never been born to lay a hand on the shoulder of John Ward. I think I can see him, Roger. You’ll find things different now. No more drinking or wenching. They’ll be up in the shrouds and ready to set the tops’ls when the Captain gives the word. Look at Hale Harry! I believe he has sobered up already.”

The boat reached the side, and I saw John Ward coming up the ladder. He was giving orders before a first heel had been cast over the rail.

“Gard!” he cried. “Break out the anchor! Are the tops’ls set? Let fall your mains’ls and on with the bonnet and drabbles.”

He saw Jore and me and ran over to us. His heavy hand fell on my shoulder.

“Thank God, you made it, Roger!” he said. “I was afraid they had lagged you. Now I can get away with a free mind. I’ve a lot of news for you, but it will have to wait. There isn’t a second to lose. Well, Joralemon, my doughty old soul-driver. I wouldn’t have given a win for your chances either, and here you are with your peak braided and ready to go. No Paddington Fair for you this time, my old hell-raking Jore!”

He climbed to the poop-deck, three steps to the stride, bellowing orders at the top of his lungs. I did not dare follow him, but stood and watched in an immense upsurge of happiness. Jore was sniffing with relief.

“Gard, there’s going to be weather,” called John. “We’ve got to chance it. Get us away, man, get us away! Tallow the parrels! See that the ordinaries are lashed. Strike your top masts to the cap. Make them jump to it, Gard.”

We got under way in what I was sure was record time. Joralemon called to me to go below, but nothing could have dragged me away from the rail. I was violently seasick already.

## *BOOK TWO*

“LOOK!” EXCLAIMED JORALEMON SNODE, pointing to the east where the sun was lighting up the blue waters of the Inner Sea. “So must the Ark of the Covenant have looked to the children of Israel when the Lord sent it back to them. There is a promise of help from on high in that mighty light. The Lord will be with us today.”

“The Spaniards will be seeing the same sunrise,” I pointed out, although nothing would have been more comforting than an assurance that He would be fighting on our side.

I had never before failed to respond to the glory of a sunrise over the Mediterranean, but this morning I had no eyes for it. A full hour earlier I had been roused by Gard’s booming command, “Clear for action!” I had stumbled through the gun-deck, where sweating squads were loading and opening the gun-ports, to take my station in the waist. Now the deck of the *Royal Bess* was black with squatting men, the stillness of the morning disturbed by the low mutter of talk and the thump of pike butts on the planking. As soon as John Ward gave the order, we would issue out from behind the tall hills of the island where we now lay, and a Spanish ship-of-war from Barcelona would have an unpleasant surprise. If the Dons stood up to us, as we expected them to, I would have my baptism of fire. A nervous tapping against my side was proof that one vital organ at least was still functioning. Otherwise I felt as though a clumsy surgeon had removed everything from inside the basket formed by my ribs.

Joralemon moved along, his eyes fixed on the rising sun, seeing no doubt the dread mien of Jehovah in the wisps of vapor which drifted on the horizon. I stayed where I was, one of a glum group of four in the scuppers. My mind could not detach itself from what lay ahead. I wondered how it would feel if the end of a pike were driven through my ribs. Would I die at once, or would there be a long period of agony? How would it feel to run my own weapon between the ribs of a Spaniard? I really believe this second conjecture gave me the most concern. What kind of sound would it make? Would his eyes lay a curse on me before he died?

The other three were members of my watch, but I did not know the real names of any of them. They came out of the same pod, and sometimes I found it hard to tell them apart. There were, however, slight deviations of



type between them, and on these differences nicknames had been tagged. One was called Maltworm because his absorption in the delights of drunkenness excelled that of his fellows in some small degree. The second carried the sobriquet of Dandyprat, due to his being somewhat less untidy in dress and habit. Clim the Cod's-head was the third. There was an especially naïve quality to his ignorance which made him stand out from the rest, dull clods though they were.

In all the dreaming I had done of the day when I would fight for the glory of Old England, it had never occurred to me that I would do so finally in the company of three such men as Maltworm, Dandyprat and Clim the Cod's-head.

"Clim," demanded Maltworm, breaking a long silence, "would ye rather fight a Spanisher or a Portugall?"

Clim thought this over with ponderous absorption. "A Portugall," he decided finally.

"Clim would rather fight a Portugall," announced Maltworm. He began to laugh. Why this should be funny I did not know, but apparently there was a humorous side to Clim's preference. The word passed down the deck, and everyone began to laugh. Clim joined in himself, proud of his accomplishment in stirring amusement among his mates. "Ay, a Portugall," he repeated.

The cook came along, carrying a bucket of brandy from which he ladled out drinks in a tin cup. The bite of the liquor on the well-gogged tongue of Maltworm stirred him to fresh loquacity.

"Shanks," he said to me, "mayhap ye're a-going to die today. Would ye rather have a pike head turned full around inside yer guts or a musket ball in yer belly?"

I had proof instantly that the sensation of emptiness inside me was a false one. My stomach turned completely over.

"If I'm going to die," I said, "I would rather die by a musket ball. In the head."

This remark had some strange capacity also to rouse the risibilities of my mates. "Shanks wants to 'ave 'is nab shot off," declared Maltworm, laughing uproariously. Everyone joined in. I could hear my words being repeated all along the deck, to the accompaniment of loud guffaws and much slapping of muscular thighs.

"There's a gentry-cove for ye!" commented Dandyprat. "'E doesn't want to be all messed up. 'E wants to die easy and clean."

I was not surprised at the level of the talk. John had abandoned me completely to the not at all tender mercies of Hale Harry Gard, and I had been assigned to a watch which included my three present companions. For four months I had been listening to this kind of thing and wondering if in time I would come to be like the rest of them. Everything about the life had been hard; but this, I think, had been the hardest.

I had lived and worked as the others did, but with the one privilege of having a berth to myself. The meals were coarse and monotonous, salt pork and sea biscuit being the backbone of every meal. The stench of the galley from which this food was brought to us in iron kettles never left my nostrils. The crew were a rough lot, suspicious, vindictive, foul-mouthed, but peculiarly childlike in certain respects. They talked of nothing but fighting, drinking, and the sex habits of native women. There was no fire of patriotic spirit in them, no deep feeling for self-sacrifice in a glorious cause. When I spoke of England's destiny on the seas, they looked at me with dull eyes and jeered obscenely. They had all joined up for a chance to pocket Spanish gold.

In spite of the doubts John had expressed that night when we walked to Appleby Court, he had done nothing to smooth my path. He believed, no doubt, that Gard's methods would harden me quickly to the ways of the sea. But, as I sat on the deck this morning and waited for what lay ahead of us, I knew that the method had failed. Each day had found me withdrawing inside myself more and more. The mate had exceeded whatever orders he had received. When I was not on duty with the watch, he had kept me busy with menial tasks. I had washed dishes in the stinking galley and had scrubbed decks until my back was ready to break in two. I had even been set to cleaning out the croppinken, a malodorous corner of the orlop-deck with crude sketches on the walls and proofs everywhere of the carelessness of sailors. I had said to myself on this occasion: You may not like it, Roger Blease, but never forget that this is the one and only path to glory. They've all been through it—John himself and, in their day, Drake and Cavendish and perhaps even Christopher Columbus. Why should your stomach rebel at doing what these great men had to do? But, unfortunately, my stomach did rebel. Try as I might, I could not overcome my squeamishness.

John's words of warning had been amply borne out. If I had been asked how I liked it at sea, I would have declared as stoutly as I could manage that it was the only life for a man. But down in my heart there was a different answer. I knew now that I was not cut to the measure of a sailor. Perhaps it was the soft Pirie strain in me which made me shrink from the work I had to do under the gimlet eyes of the mate and from the contacts with my

messmates. My hands were calloused and covered with jagged cuts. My shoulders were black and blue from the impact of the bimster. The purely physical effects were not the worst, however. I could take the hardships, although there were times when, through sheer weariness, I could have wept. It was what these four months had done inside me which had convinced me of the truth.

There had been two sources of consolation for me: the company and friendly guidance of Joralemon and an intense interest in gunnery. I had a knack for mechanical things, and I had spent every spare moment on the gun-deck, studying the great iron monsters and learning what I could about the handling of them. The Master was always glad to have me there, for I helped him in many ways. I soon learned to set a true dispart on the muzzle-rings, and I could figure the degrees of randon in my head while he was chalking them out painfully on the side of a gun carriage.

My spirits had gone up the night before when the word had passed around that a Spanish ship-of-war was due our way. At last I should see some action. On the two previous occasions when the *Royal Bess* had come within sight of Castilian sails I had been in hospital, but I had shared in the general disappointment of the crew when the Dons had shown clean heels.

There was sudden commotion. Gard came down the ladder from the poop deck. "We're off!" said Maltworm. "The mate's got his orders from Captain Rufflecoat."

Gard began to bawl at us, and the crew scrambled to their stations. We were putting out to sea. The feeling at the pit of my stomach tightened. I thought of what Maltworm had said: "Maybe ye're a-going to die today." Suddenly I was sure of it. A musket ball would find its mark, and I would not be there to see the Spaniard strike his colors.

The mate had changed in some unaccountable way. I had never seen him completely sober before, but now I would have sworn he had not touched a drop. His eyes had lighted up, and there was a clear and exultant note in his voice. Had the prospect of battle done this to him?

"The great day at last, Shanks," he said, dropping a heavy hand on my shoulder. He actually smiled. "I'm expecting to see ye show yer mettle today. The Captain said to send ye up to him."

I could have shouted with relief. John had sent for me at last. He had not spoken to me for a month at least, and I had been more than half afraid that I was condemned for all time to the company of Maltworm, Dandyprat, and Clim the Cod's-head. Perhaps the days of my apprenticeship were over.

John was in the steering room, making some calculations on the traverse board. He had arrayed himself in smoke-colored velvet with touches of pink in the folds of his sleeves and breeches. Only the fact that he was wearing breastplates and a steel helmet gave any hint of the business in hand. He looked up and nodded.

“You’re looking fit, Roger,” he said. “How much weight have you put on?”

“Half a stone, Captain Ward,” I answered.

“I would have guessed more. There isn’t a single wrinkle in your hose. I’ve done that much for you, at any rate.” He laid down the dividers and smiled at me. “Has it been hard, Roger?”

“Hard enough.”

“The worst is over now, I think. Gard tells me you can climb the shrouds like a yonker, and that you know a sprits’l from a clew-garnet. All that’s left is to make a fighting man of you, and I judge that won’t be difficult. How do you feel about this little venture we’re trying today?”

I managed to smile. “I’ll be right enough if I can control my stomach.”

John laughed. “Don’t let that worry you. I spewed all over the deck when we caught the first glimpse of the sails of the Armada. It’s the usual thing, Roger. You’ll get over it fast enough when we come to grips with the sallow-faced devils. I have just one word of advice for you if it comes to hand-to-hand fighting today. They’re shifty, the Dons. When you square up to your man, watch his eyes. He’ll always look where he’s going to thrust. Remember that, and you’ll have better than an even chance of coming through with a whole skin.”

“Will they fight us this time?”

“Yes. They won’t dog it today.” His eyes began to glow with an almost fanatical light. “We’re going to match strength with one of their largest ships, the *Santa Caterina*. Does that name mean anything to you? It should. The *Santa Caterina* it was that captured the *Trial*. She’s setting out for the Cape Verde Islands, according to the reports I received. And mark this, Roger: Don Pedro Alonzo Maria de Vente is still in command, the gallant gentleman who strung our poor fellows up by the wrists, and put them to the rack, and then hanged what was left of them at the yardarm. We have a score to settle with Don Pedro. I’m not going to be content until I’ve seen his well-shod heels dancing on thin air.”

I began to share his eagerness. It was the tragedy of the *Trial* which had convinced me I should go to sea with John Ward. My stomach seemed to have settled down.

“Are they carrying any gold?” I asked.

John shook his head. “Not likely. The Spaniards never take gold to the West. They bring it back from there. It’s revenge we’re looking for this time, not booty. Satisfaction in the name of all England for a great wrong done to us.”

He picked up his instruments again and continued with his work. “Roger,” he said, after a moment, “I don’t want anything to happen to you today. Mistress Blease would never forgive me. And there is Katie to think of as well.”

“I want to take my chances with the rest of you.”

“You’ll get your share of the fighting, of course. But I meant what I said, Roger. I promised Katie to look after you.”

This put me on my mettle. I did not like to think that Katie had confided my safety to his care. I could look after myself. “It was kind of her to think of me,” I said stiffly. “I don’t believe it would matter much to her now.”

John glanced up from his work. “You can never tell about women,” he said. “Katie is young. Just turned sixteen, isn’t she?”

“Her birthday was ten days ago.”

“I was a romantic figure in her eyes,” said John. “Time may make quite a difference. When you go back to England and they build bonfires for you, who can tell what may happen? You’ll be handsomely toggled out, and you’ll have an ostrich plume in your hat, and everyone will think you a great hero. Perhaps Katie may decide then that she preferred you all the time. She must have her chance to decide, you know. And then there’s the possibility that I may never be able to return to England.” His eyes went back to the traverse board. “We must stick together today, Roger. If I get in trouble, you’ll help me out. I’ll do the same for you. What do you say?”

“I joined for the chance to fight with you, John!” I said fervently.

He overlooked my lapse. “That’s the talk I like. Between us we’ll strike a few shrewd blows for England. We’ll even the score for those poor fellows on the *Trial*.”

He walked out to the quarter-deck, and I followed, full of pride and with eagerness for what lay ahead. My stomach felt better. The *Royal Bess* had maneuvered out from under the shelter of the island and had taken a northern course. A brisk datoo, blowing in from the Straits, had filled our sails. John shaded his eyes and scanned the horizon.

“There she is!” he exclaimed, pointing straight ahead. “The *Santa Caterina*! Just as I figured. Don Pedro is coming on with a full head of sail.

Coming like a bridegroom in his finest attire and with a heart full of arrogance and pride.”

All trace of fear had left me. I strained my eyes at the spread of orange sails in the distance. I thought of the *Trial* and could hardly wait for the fighting to begin. It was a bracing day, and the air was like wine. I drank it in with gusty eagerness.

“We have him!” exulted John. “He’s hooked like a Yarmouth capon. This is the first of March, and Don Pedro is offering us a fine Taffy Day prize.”

He was staring at our prospective foe, his feet spread wide apart, his blue eyes dancing with excitement. Every minute seemed to diminish the distance between the two ships. Don Pedro had no fear of us, for he had clapped on more canvas. I could now make out the red and yellow standard flapping proudly at his peak. The *Santa Caterina* looked enormous, standing high out of the water and with the most majestic spread of sail I had ever seen. Her decks and rigging were alive with men.

“What do you think of our chances, my kinchin coe?” asked John, turning to me with a grin.

“These tall ships are all crank-sided,” I declared, drawing on the nautical lore I had been picking up in the fo’c’s’le. “We can sail all around her. If we can get in close enough, she’ll fire right over us.”

“Right!” cried John. “When you look at the *Royal Bess* by herself, she stands up like the Tower of Babel; but against this top-heavy specimen of Spanish pride she seems trim and low. They never learn anything, the Dons. They seem to think the art of shipbuilding is to get as near as they can to the cruel God they worship. We’ll teach them a few things today. We’ll rip her guts with lead and get no worse in return than a few holes in our tops’ls. And there may be a few yellow boys rolling around in her coffers after all. You may find your pockets heavy with Spanish ribbin before the day’s out.”

The Spaniard came on, a perfect picture of confidence. We were ready for him. Our gun crews were at their posts, and the yonkers aloft had their muskets loaded and set. The boarding party lined the sides, swishing their cutlasses or beating an eager tattoo with the butts of their pikes. Hale Harry Gard seemed to be in a dozen places at once, bellowing orders, bulldozing, cautioning. I began to feel an unwilling admiration for him.

The Dons fired first, and jets of water spouted up a full hundred yards ahead of us. John snorted in disgust at such waste and shouted an order to the mate. I had expected we would race in to close quarters, but instead we clewed up and waited.

“If they want to spend themselves shooting at an impossible target, I am ready to give them a chance,” said John.

The guns of the enemy continued to roar. They were doing us no harm, but it takes both fortitude and patience to play target, and I could see our men were growing impatient. The voices of the yonkers demanded that we “give it back to the bloody Faggoters.” We were now at closer range, and a single shot crashed into the side of our pilot-house, filling the air with splinters. The cutlass which John had given me suddenly became too heavy to hold. My arm felt limp. The feeling of nausea returned. Now that the supreme test was ahead, I doubted if I would be able to meet it. Could I muster up the strength and the heart to follow John up the side of that towering wall of wood, and face the slash and cut of steel which would greet us at the top? I was far from sure of myself. I realized how little I wanted to die.

What followed will always remain in my mind as a mad and utterly fantastic dream. The *Santa Caterina* had swung in close, cutting off the wind. Our guns roared for the first time, tearing holes in the proud hull. We were so near that I could hear the screams of the wounded on the gun-deck of the enemy. The Spanish guns were useless now, but they continued to vomit shot which tore through our rigging.

“Don Pedro will dance a lively lavolta at the yardarm!” exulted John. “My foot must be the first to touch his deck. Follow right along, Roger. Jump when I give the word.”

I looked up and shuddered. The Spanish guns seemed right above us, sticking out like the heads of angry black serpents, spitting venom. My ears throbbed with the pressure of the sound. I realized that the real danger now came from the small-arm men in the enemy rigging who were raining lead on us. One of our tops’l-men crashed down from above, striking full on the rail of the poop-deck and straightening out like a bow before plunging into the water. His blood splattered over me.

“Truss up your bullions!” cried John in a high and unnatural voice.

“We’re going over! There’ll be a hemp-widow in Spain this night, or I’ll be a dead man myself!”

The grappling irons had shackled the two great swaying hulls together. The waist of the Spaniard was six feet above the rail of our own poop-deck. I saw John grasp a carved projection and swing himself up. His feet dangled for a moment above my head, and then he was over.

I knew that I must follow him, but not a muscle could I move. It was as though a paralysis had gripped me. The agonizing thought took possession

of my mind: I'm a coward. I haven't the courage to face death. Now the terrible truth is out. I had always turned giddy when facing any kind of a climb, and I knew that what I feared most was the danger of falling. I looked up, and it seemed as though the canvas of the two ships had merged, forming a solid sheet of orange shot through with the flash of musket fire like forks of lightning. The ships jarred apart and then came together again with a grinding crash. Without any knowledge of how it had happened, I found myself clinging to a raised beam, my feet dangling in space. My cutlass was in my teeth. My fingers gripped the wood desperately, and I knew that if they failed me I would be crushed between the hulls or fall into the churning waves below.

The stimulus of mortal fear caused me to heave my body up. I caught the rail with one hand and hung on desperately. The end would come soon, for I had no power to climb further and I knew that I could not cling here much longer. The strain on my arms was almost unbearable.

I felt the ship sway and feared the motion would dislodge me from my desperate position. Instinctively I heaved myself forward again. The motion of the vessel aided my effort to climb. I found myself astride the rail.

I could see John ahead of me, cutting and slashing with his long sword, a ring of Spaniards pressing in on him. As my feet touched the slippery deck, I had a momentary flash of the inevitable end. I saw myself lying in the scuppers, and in agonized imagination I could feel the rip of steel in my throat.

A face loomed up in front of me, a yellow face with wildly distended eyes. I lunged with my blade, and the face disappeared. Others took its place. I lunged and cut and thrust, without any conscious thought of direction or control. What had John said about their eyes? I could not remember. There were eyes all about me, mad, furious, frightening eyes. There was nothing to be done about them but to strike when they came close enough. My arm became weak with the effort, and I was sure after each stroke that I would be unable to go on. But I knew that I had to go on fighting if I wanted to live, if I wanted to keep those hostile eyes away from me. I was gasping like a gaffed fish, sick with the effort; but my arm continued its nerveless work.

Suddenly the pressure about me eased. The ring of eyes fell back. I was conscious that I no longer stood alone, that other blades had joined mine. I slumped back against the railing and clung there weakly, gasping for breath. My cutlass point touched the deck.



Our men were all over the place now. I could hear them cursing bitterly as they drove against the line of defenders. One man was chanting, "Death to the dogs of the Inquisition!" Another man was singing the words of "Bold Francis Drake." They moved ahead steadily. I began to feel better. Strength came into my arm, and I raised my cutlass again. A fighting rage took possession of me. I shouted the first line of the Drake song and rushed in to help.

The solid front of the enemy had broken by this time, and the nature of the fighting had changed. Individual duels had become the order, and I could see that we were getting the better of it. The rain of bullets from above had ceased, for the Spanish marksmen could no longer distinguish friend from foe.

I saw the towering figure of our captain a few paces ahead of me and knew a feeling of relief that he had come through so far. He was engaging a thickset Spanish officer. When a second antagonist came at him from one side, I ran in to lend what aid I could. John glanced over his shoulder when the second man turned to meet me.

"Thanks, Roger," he called.

My man seemed to have little heart left for the struggle. He gave ground before my wild thrusts and finally dropped his sword, raising his arms in token of surrender. It did him no good, however, for a pike lunged over my shoulder, catching him squarely between the eyes. His face seemed to split open like a ripe apple and when the point was withdrawn he crumpled up. He fell forward, his head squashing against my knee. I glanced back and saw that the blow had been struck by Clim the Cod's-head. Clim was blubbing in a furious fighting rage. "They got Dandyprat!" he muttered. "A splinter in his belly. They'll pay for it, Shanks. A dozen of them to pay for Dandyprat!"

A gap had opened in front of me, and I saw the black muzzle of a portable gun pointed in my direction. A Spanish soldier was behind it with a lighted fuze, while another was shoving it forward on a long iron pintle. In a moment the gun would vomit lead through our ranks.

I closed my eyes, expecting the next moment to be my last. Then I heard a shout and opened my eyes to see the pike in Clim's hands cut down the gunner. The ship gave a heave, and the gun slid across the deck, crushing the body of the fallen Spaniard against the bulwarks. Clim had saved my life, but I had no chance to thank him then. His berserk rage had already carried him farther along the deck, his pike flailing in lethal sweeps.

I learned later that this first phase of the struggle, which decided the day, was a short one. It had lasted a very few minutes, although it stayed in my mind as an almost endless fury of stroke and counterstroke. I saw now that the Spanish soldiers were giving in with what appeared to be suspicious haste. They wanted no more of it. All over the place they were dropping their arms and pleading for mercy.

The second phase, which consisted of putting down sporadic resistance, took considerably longer. It was waged below deck, for the most part, where small squads were hunted down and disarmed. Hale Harry Gard was in charge of this operation, while John took on himself the task of clearing the Spaniards from the rigging.

My share of the fighting was over. John gave me an approving pat on the back and told me to stay with him. The order came just in time. Now that the excitement had subsided, my stomach was beginning to assert itself again at the sight of dead bodies wherever we went. Blood was running in the scuppers like filth in a London sewer. I followed our captain from bow to stern, keeping my eyes averted as much as possible but seeing nevertheless many strange and disturbing things. I saw a tall Spanish officer, whose sword had been broken, scorn the summons to surrender and defend himself bravely with a belaying pin, only to go down as I passed from a ferocious stroke of Clim's pike. Clim, it seemed, had not yet wiped off the score and was fighting on in a blind rage. I saw the bodies of a dozen or more of our men which had been hastily collected in one heap with an English flag spread over them. I saw a score of brown-skinned slaves break loose from below and come gibbering at us for mercy. They were as thin as scarecrows and covered with sores. A water cask at the foot of the mainmast had been punctured by many bullets and was spouting thin streams of water like the fountain on Shrubsole High on the Queen's birthday. I saw a priest with one side of his head broken by a musket ball administering the sacrament to dying men. Finally, I saw a family of kittens in a basket outside the cook's galley. They had slept peacefully through it all.

The Spanish captain had surrendered his sword early and was being held on the poop-deck. John waited until Gard reported that all resistance below was over and then went up. A curious tableau greeted us there. Don Pedro Alonzo Maria de Vente was seated in an X chair with his feet on a velvet cushion. This seemed a strange affectation for a captain who had struck his colors and whose ship was running with the blood of his men. He was most handsomely attired in plum-colored satin. A group of his officers stood back of his chair and watched us with haughty but uneasy eyes. Behind the officers were several women, one a young and beautiful girl. I judged the

girl to be of gentle birth, for she also was seated and she had a plump servingwoman at her elbow. She was the only one in the group whose eyes reflected defiance without a trace of fear.

In spite of my upset condition, I found myself watching this girl with active curiosity. She was small and slim, with a proud arch to her nose and the longest of lashes to shade her dark eyes. Little as I liked the Spanish race, I had to concede that she was the loveliest woman I had ever seen. Her servant was young and in a swarthy way attractive also.

The vanquished commander rose and bowed when John appeared on the deck. To do so he had first to detach a small monkey which had been perched on his shoulder. The little animal felt the tension, for it whimpered and curled its tail around the arm of the chair.

“You are Don Pedro Alonzo Maria de Vente,” said John, acknowledging the bow with a curt nod. I was glad now that Aunt Gadilda had insisted on my Spanish studies, for I was able to follow what was said. John had picked up his knowledge of the tongue in the course of his continuous sea campaigning. He spoke it with an accent all his own.

“I am,” answered the Grandee. “I have the honor of serving as admiral in the navy of His Serene Majesty. And you are John Ward.”

“Captain Ward, if you please. Sir Admiral, it has come to my ears that you captured an English merchantman some months back. It was named the *Trial*.”

I detected a shade of anxiety on the swarthy face of the Spaniard as he bowed in affirmation.

John’s voice boomed out in stern accusation. “The *Trial* was engaged in honest trade, and she was manned by a crew of sixteen. Where are those men, Don Pedro?”

The admiral wet his lips nervously. “The vessel in question had been preying on Spanish shipping, a fact established by the depositions of several members of her crew. They were dealt with as befitted their crime.”

“You lie, Don Pedro!” cried John. “Those depositions were wrung from my unfortunate countrymen by torture, and the few survivors were then hanged in defiance of all the laws of God and man. I should balance this grievous wrong by hanging sixteen of the subjects of His Serene Majesty. But would it be fair to punish your men, who acted in obedience to orders? I’ve no desire to mete out Spanish justice. The guilt rests on your shoulders, Don Pedro Alonzo Maria de Vente, and I’ve decided that you alone shall pay the penalty for this crime.”

I had always heard that the noblemen of Spain were as brave as they were cruel. Don Pedro apparently was cast in a less heroic mold. He became a sickly white at John's words.

"Captain Ward," he stuttered, "I acted in accordance with my instructions. I am a prisoner of war, and I demand honorable treatment as befits my rank."

"You're a murderer with the blood of innocent men on your hands!" declared John. "It's my intention to treat you as such. A few minutes will be allowed you to make your peace with your God."

The group about the Admiral stirred. Don Pedro's lieutenants were brave men but, lacking arms, there was nothing they could do in his defense. The girl sprang to her feet and advanced several yards in our direction.

"You will not dare lay a hand on an admiral of Spain!" she cried. "Even an English pirate would not be guilty of such a crime!"

John seemed to be aware of her for the first time. He looked at her intently. Her eyes had become larger and darker with the intensify of her emotion. A black lace shawl, which she had worn on her hair, had slipped to her shoulders.

"Madame," said John, bowing to her gravely, "I'm not at all happy in this duty which has devolved on me. I'm a sailor, not a hangman. And I am being most lenient, I think. One life for sixteen? Surely that is fair enough." He looked scornfully at Don Pedro, who seemed on the point of collapse. "A poor life at that, Madame. The men who were butchered by his orders were stanch and honest sailors with wives and children at home. He showed no pity for them."

"I have been taught to hate the English," declared the girl. "Now that I have seen you, I understand why. In spite of your fine clothes, Sir Pirate, you are nothing but a blaspheming heretic and a butcher."

"I'm sorry you think so badly of me. Particularly as the only course open to me will increase your antipathy."

"Would it do any good if I begged you for my uncle's life?"

"Madame, my duty is clear."

The servingwoman, her black eyes as full of blazing defiance as those of her mistress, ran up to him and shook her fists in his face, pouring out a torrent of abuse. John gave a few feet and smiled tolerantly.

"Well," he said, "I'm gaining a high opinion of the spirit of the women of Spain. It might be better for His Serene Majesty if he were to entrust his fine ships to them. Still, I can't allow justice to be delayed any longer." He

turned to the cringing Don Pedro. "Sir Admiral, I shall be as gentle with you as I can. In your last moments your feet will rest on a softer cushion than that dainty piece of velvet. Perhaps they will dance as lively a measure as the ignoble feet of those poor fellows on the *Trial*."

"You cannot hang me!" cried Don Pedro. "I am of noble birth. I demand a hearing!"

John laughed at this and turned to Harry Gard. I saw for the first time that the mate had brought a ram on deck and was holding it on a tight rein. The animal was huge, and Gard was having his troubles with it.

"He demands a hearing," said John. "Very well, he shall have it. The same kind of hearing he gave the poor purser of the *Trial*. The evidence you got from my countrymen, Don Pedro, was forced evidence. It was extracted from them when they could no longer endure the agonies of a Spanish hearing. The position now is somewhat different, I'm glad to say. I aim to extract the truth from you, not lies. Since you have demanded it, we will now string you up by the wrists and permit this mute assistant of your judicial proceedings to refresh your memory by the points of his horns. Tie cannon balls to his ankles first, Gard. We must follow his practice on all points. I think, Don Pedro, you'll not delay long in acknowledging that the evidence you wrung from those poor sailors was false and that you had no other proofs on which to hang them. Then I shall have every right to hang you in turn. I am very glad you raised the point. It will be more regular this way."

"No, no!" cried the Admiral. "For the love of God, not that! You must give me time to explain. My officers will bear me out."

"He's changed his mind," said John. "Never mind the weights, Gard. He doesn't want a hearing, after all. Not the kind of hearing he thought fit for others. He doesn't seem to think well of Spanish justice."

"Sir," said the girl, wringing her hands, "grant him a chance to explain. He will convince you, I am sure. I fear the harsh things I said have hardened your resolution. If that is true, I beg you to forget them. I humbly crave your pardon."

"I'm influenced only by the known facts of his crime," declared John, in solemn tones. "Truss him up, Gard. We have no more time to waste."

I kept my eyes on the deck for the next fifteen minutes, not daring to watch the proceedings. I heard the scuffling of feet as Gard and several members of the crew pinioned the wildly protesting nobleman, the bitter protestations of the other prisoners, the screams of the women. I noticed that the purple cap of the monkey had fallen off, and I tried desperately to rivet

my attention on the frightened animal. However, I knew when the victim had been propelled to the yardarm by the silence which fell suddenly. The wind had freshened, I decided, for the deck began to heave. I felt much sicker now than I had before scaling the hull of the *Santa Caterina*.

A priest was saying a prayer in Latin. I heard the Spanish officers whispering among themselves. I could see out of one corner of my eye that John was standing rigidly to attention.

I looked up once and regretted it instantly. I caught a glimpse of Don Pedro's squat figure twisting and turning at the end of the rope. His movements, as John had predicted, were grotesquely similar to the sudden hops of the lavolta. I felt a sense of shame that I could think of such a thing while a man was dying.

I am sure there can be nothing harder to watch than a hanging, for it is so apparent that the victim is dying painfully. A reedy whistling was the only sound to be heard, and I knew it came from the throat of the strangling grandee. My own throat felt so constricted that I clutched it with one hand. Someone collapsed on the deck, and my first thought was that it must be the Spanish girl. Out of the tail of my eye, however, I saw that the prostrate figure was that of her servingwoman. Her many colored petticoats were spread out in all directions. The sensation of nausea in my stomach became so acute that I gulped deeply in an effort to keep my windpipe full of fresh air. Someone near me was sobbing.

It seemed an interminable time before I heard John say in a relieved voice, "Well, it seems to be over. Cut him down, Gard."

I looked up then and could see nothing but the eyes of the Spanish girl. They were filled with the deepest horror, but there was still no trace of fear in them. John began to speak.

"I want to express again my great regret that this ugly duty fell to my lot. The man who has just died was guilty of a great wrong and richly deserved his fate. What I have done is the answer of Englishmen to the policy of the King of Spain, who has declared that death waits any of our sailors who fall into his hands. The murder of a whole crew has been avenged. Now, Gard, get the men to their posts. A hard day's work is ahead of us."

The voice of the mate exploded in a series of orders. There was a rush of feet. It seemed to me that Gard had reverted already to the tyrant of the main deck, and I would not have been surprised to feel the cut of his ready bimster when I failed to jump at his bidding. I paid no attention, however. I had one thought only, an overwhelming desire to be back in my quiet home off Shrubsole High, training myself for a gentler manner of life than this.

I HAD BEEN SURE that relaxation would follow victory, but I soon discovered my mistake. For the rest of the day every man left alive labored incessantly. Part of the crew, under Mate Gard, returned aboard the *Royal Bess*. Brandy was passed around to the rest of us, and then we were divided into two squads, one to work on repairs to the ship, the other to dispose of the bodies and scrub the decks free of blood. I was assigned to the second.

I was still feeling too sick to do more than wield a careless mop, and I paid little attention to the rumors which spread among my companions. The stories they passed back and forth were made out of whole cloth for the most part.

"I hear the Don's pockets was stuffed full of diamonts," declared Maltworm, pausing from his work to straighten his back. "What good will they be at the bottom of the sea? I could make good use of some of them myself."

"There's plenty to be had from the rest of them," contributed another man. "The Cap'n should have the lot of them searched."

Maltworm snickered. "Shanks," he asked, "how would ye like to search that Spanish gel?"

Someone volunteered the information that the girl was a niece of the hanged man and a very great lady. That interested me, and I raised the question as to what Captain Ward would do with her. My question met with a chorus of guffaws. "What will he do with 'er?" said Maltworm. "That's a good one, that is. Was ye thinking he might pass 'er around after he's through with 'er? Not our Captain Rufflecoat!"

The report that aroused the most discussion had to do with the finding of some instruments of torture in the hold. My companions went after this one in full hue and cry and before long had convinced themselves that the ship was filled with thumbscrews and racks to be set up in England. From that they drew the belief that a new Armada was being organized and that the King of Spain had sworn to stretch English bones until every man, woman, and child was six feet tall.

Clim joined us while they were still engaged in these speculations, and I took advantage of the chance to thank him for saving my life. It took him a

full minute to recall what had happened. Then he grinned and said: "It were nothing, Shanks. I couldn't lose two friends on one day, now could I?"

The big, slow-thinking fellow regarded me as a friend! I looked at him with new interest and realized for the first time that there was a steady light in his eyes which made me think of a faithful dog. The resemblance went further, for he had the lumbering frame of a mastiff, and his heavy jaw was not unlike the muzzle of that sturdy animal. I found myself liking him very much.

The talk had veered to the possibility of finding gold on board. Maltworm was sure there was plenty of it.

"I know what I'll do with my share of the yellow boys," he declared. "I'll set me up in a tidy little pub outside Rome-ville on the Turkish side of the river. I'm going to drink up the best of the stock myself. What will ye do with yours, Clim?"

Clim was still too concerned over the death of Dandyprat to think in terms of booty. He did not answer for a moment.

"I can't get the sight of him out of my head," he said finally. "He were such a jolly one, and there I see him with his belly tore wide open. I rather have Dandyprat alive than all the gold in Chiny."

The talk came back to the women on the ship, and then Clim brightened up. He had definite ideas on the woman question. He liked them big and fat and "not too peery." In fact, he already had his eye on one of the captives. Under questioning, he divulged that it was the buxom maidservant.

Around noon orders reached me to report at once in the captain's cabin, and I straightened up with a sigh of relief. My companions were sure this meant that the discussion of rewards was to begin.

"Put in a word for me, Shanks," said Clim. "None o' these little monkeys for me. I want a long-meg."

"I want my share of the yellow boys," decided Maltworm. "And a bottle of the best wine. You can have the women, Clim."

I gave a gasp of astonishment when I set foot in the main cabin. It was almost as grand as the great hall at Appleby Court. It was a long, high-ceilinged apartment with magnificently carved wainscoting and majestic beams, lighted by three bronze lamps and innumerable candle sconces along the walls. I had little time to take in details, but I saw on the far wall a clock with a face of solid gold to represent the sun. A sideboard glittered with gold plate. I recognized a somber painting as a portrait of Philip of Spain. Even the bell pulls were made of cloth of gold and embroidered with what I



believed were real pearls. In the center of the room was a table heaped up with letters and documents.

John was seated at the far end, and to my great surprise I saw that the Spanish girl was with him. Her women hovered near them, keeping a look of black hostility on our tall captain. The girl was speaking when I entered, and it was clear from the tone of her voice that she was subjecting him to a bitter indictment. John was watching her closely, and there was a hint of a smile around the lines of his mouth. He got up at once and joined me at the door.

“Roger, I think you read Spanish well enough,” he said in a whisper. “I’ve some work for you. These papers are to be looked over.”

I nodded, finding myself disinclined to raise my voice in this cathedral-like room. I was watching the girl, who had turned her head away from us. Her hair was black with the faintest hint of red, and she had made no effort to dress it high on her head in the prevailing mode. It hung low about her ears in the most charming disorder.

“Every scrap of paper on board has been collected,” went on John, nodding in the direction of the table. “There will be plenty of information in the lot, and I want it sifted through. There isn’t much time for it. Three other ships-of-war are within striking distance, and I may have to scuttle the *Caterina* and run for it. Get right at it, my fine scholar, and see what gold you can cull from all this dross.”

I followed him into the room, looking about me with growing wonder.

“Dona Cristina,” said John, in a tone which seemed to me to carry a hint of amusement, “you think so badly of all Englishmen that I hesitate to introduce one of them to you. However, this is Roger Blease, who belongs to one of the best families of Kent—the least barbarous part of our island—and who’s a scholar as well as a gentleman. This interruption to our pleasant conversation is necessary because Mr. Blease is to examine these papers.”

The girl turned her head in my direction but made no other response to the introduction. Her eyes were cold and hard.

“You have letters of mine there,” she said. “They are personal and of no possible value to you. Is it in your power to understand that I would rather not have them read and passed around?”

“Even an Englishman can appreciate your desire,” answered John, with a wink for my benefit. “They shall be kept from the scrutiny of our rude and unlettered eyes. When you find Dona Cristina’s letters, Roger, lay them aside in a separate pile. They’re to be returned to her unread.”

“You treat me as though I were a child!” protested the girl. “I find this condescension as hard to bear as the proofs you have given us of your barbarity.”

“On the contrary, I’m only too well aware that you’re a beautiful woman. I have at the moment no thought save a most sincere desire to do everything in my power for your comfort and your ease of mind.” He seated himself and smiled encouragingly. “And now, Dona Cristina, if you care to proceed with the recital of all my iniquities, I’m prepared to listen.”

“I have nothing further to say,” she asserted haughtily. “I came to make a plea on behalf of my fellow prisoners. They know you are sailing to Tunis, and they fear you will turn them over to the Turks. That I beseech you not to do.”

“I have no such intention.”

The conversation between them went on for a long time. Seated at the far end of the table and busy at my task, I made no effort to follow what was being said. Her tones ran the scale from stormy protest to a restrained form of feminine pleading. John’s responses never seemed to vary and conveyed a hint of mockery. Once, as I skimmed through a sheaf of orders for naval supplies with a casual eye, I heard him remark: “I can’t believe you despise me as much as you say. I’ve been fighting for many years, and in that time I’ve learned one lesson. Individuals can maintain normal relationships even when their countries are at war. You’re Spanish, Dona Cristina, and so represent a race which has done my country and my people great harm. I’ve been raised to hate Spain and everything she represents, and yet the only feeling I have for you is one of the greatest admiration. In fact, I find the light in your eyes quite devastating. If we had met under different circumstances, I would be eager to prove my devotion.”

What would Katie Ladland think of that speech? I said to myself.

It was apparent from the first that in the mass of material there would be much of value to us. There were orders from the Escorial which proved the hostile intentions of Spain and the unalterable determination of Philip to bar the English and Dutch from the seas. I found extracts from the reports of Gondomar, Spanish ambassador to England, in which the peace between the two countries was treated lightly as a means to an end, and from which Spain was to reap all the benefit. There were specific references to the pensions paid by Philip to the ministers of James. These I laid carefully aside. I found also that Madrid was following closely the affairs of the English trading concerns, the companies formed to operate in Muscovy, Virginia, and the Levant and the newly formed East India Company in

particular. There was full information on the size and number of their ships, one memorandum giving details of the new leviathan of the sea, the *Trade's Increase*, which had recently been launched by the East India Company, with King James officiating. I found references to the prisoner in the Tower and the possibility of hardening the heart of James so that he would send Raleigh to the block.

I became so absorbed in my work that I did not hear when the others left the room. Becoming aware finally that all talk had ceased, I looked up and saw that I had the room to myself. I indulged for a moment in speculation about John and the Spanish girl. She likes him, I said to myself. In spite of everything, she was as much taken with him as my poor Katie was.

Piles of valuable documents kept accumulating while the floor around me became white with discarded notes and letters. I located Dona Cristina's personal mail and laid it aside. I found many official references to her as well. Her name was Cristina Isabella de Vente. Her mother being dead and her father continuously abroad in the colonial service, she had been educated in a convent at Seville. She had reached the decision a few months before that duty prompted her to join her father at Trinidad. This had created much discussion in court circles and been the cause of an interminable number of royal orders. The King had been opposed at first, having had it in his mind to select a husband for her from among the grandees of his court. Only the insistence of the girl herself had won a grudging consent from Philip. I located a memorandum on the jewelry she was taking with her and whistled aloud at the value of it.

The afternoon wore away, and I worked on alone, finding constant matters for speculation in the mass of documents; and increasingly glad in my mind that a knowledge of the language had been forced on me. By four o'clock it was dark in the cabin, and I found it necessary to detach a candle from its sconce and place it on the table. The candle was shaped like the Mexican serpent god, and I examined it closely. I decided it belonged in this setting, for it seemed to me cruel, strange, and sinister, all of which qualities belonged certainly to the conquerors of America. But my interest in the tallow god vanished when I chose from the dwindling pile a yellowish sheet covered with the scrawling penmanship of the defunct Don Pedro, and my eye chanced to focus on the word *Trial*. It turned out to be a copy of the report the Admiral had made on the capture of that ship and the disposition of the crew. My excitement mounted as I read it, for Don Pedro had told the story with complete candor. His guilt was abundantly established.

With this discovery in hand, I hurried out in search of John. The sound of axes and hammers came from all directions. I saw that some of the

prisoners had been pressed into service. Our head carpenter, a gaunt North Country man known as Shaves, was directing the work.

“Where is Captain Ward?”

Shaves opened an almost toothless mouth in a broad grin. “He wur cagging wi’ Spanish gel,” he said, “but noo he be below wi’ nim-gimmer.”

I entered the cockpit with hesitation, realizing from the appalling sight which greeted me that my stomach would be put to a severe test. There were still at least a score of men waiting their turns, all of them stripped naked and rolling in agony on hard benches. I saw bodies which had been torn by cannon shot or lacerated by flying splinters; faces which had been reduced to bloody masks by the slash of cutlass or the impact of pike; the bleeding stumps of legs and arms. All this seemed more horrible than the mutilated corpses I had helped to throw overboard, for inside these mangled husks the spark of life still stirred. The stench of the place was unbelievable.

The screams and groans of the unfortunate men mingled with the almost frenzied orders of the two harried chirurgeons. John was there in the middle of things, stripped to the waist, his muscular arms covered with blood and his face gleaming with perspiration. To my surprise, I saw that Joralemon Snode was also assisting. He was wearing nothing but a loincloth, and was doing all the menial and revolting tasks for which the others had no time. He had not gone over with the boarding party, not being a fighting man, but he was showing his mettle now in a role which called for a higher degree of courage. He stopped beside me for a moment to say: “We should all have a dozen hands here, Roger. Most of these poor fellows will die before we can get around to them. We can’t attend to their bodies, let alone their souls. May the Lord forgive us all!”

The Spanish chirurgeon, looking like a gorilla in his seminudity, was preparing to amputate the leg of a fellow countryman. Joralemon ran at his nod to the far end of the gallery, where he plied the bellows on a small fire. Flames sprang up, giving the place an even closer resemblance to pictures of Purgatory. He then plunged the cauterizing irons into the blaze. The Spaniard studied the blade of a long dudgeon knife with a doubtful frown, and I heard him mutter to himself, “The edge is gone. It is well that this fellow is only a thief.”

The victim was small, but it took all of John’s strength to hold him when the chirurgeon went to work. He had been given a stiff drink of brandy, but he screamed like a gutted stallion when the knife cut into his thigh, and he writhed so viciously that John called for help. I seized one of his arms and bore down with all my weight. I could not see what the chirurgeon was

doing, but apparently his doubts about the instrument proved groundless. It seemed no more than a few seconds before he reached for his saw and began to cut the bone. There is nothing terrifying about the rasping bite of a saw until you know that it is ripping its way through a human frame; then the sound becomes the most horrible that the mind can conceive. Drops of sweat from the surgeon's brow fell on my arm, and I heard him say, "Thank God, his bones are small."

I knew when he applied the white-hot iron to the stump by the smell of searing flesh. Fortunately the victim fainted at this stage, for my arms were no longer capable of anything. I ran to an open porthole. In a moment John joined me there.

"This is much worse than fighting!" he gasped. It was a relief to my pride to see that he had been affected as much as I had. After a moment he said in a thin voice: "It's good there are few of our fellows here. We got off light today."

Joralemon went right on with his work. He was wrapping bandages about the stump, his skinny arms moving with skill and dispatch. John looked at him and shook his head in puzzled admiration. "He's a better man than either of us, Roger," he said.

As soon as I was able to catch my breath, I told him what I had found. His eyes lighted up, and he motioned me to follow him outside. He frowned as he placed a foot on the rope ladder leading from the cockpit to the deck and said to me: "The poor devils were carried down *that!* I've never given the matter a thought, but now I see it's high time something was done about this. There should be proper hospitals on all ships. I must see to it, Roger."

He read the admiral's report as soon as we reached the deck, and I could see that it afforded him great satisfaction. He smacked me on the shoulder with his blood-reddened hand.

"This takes a load off my mind," he declared. "I had to hang that fellow. But now the whole world will get the facts, and no one will be able to blame me. Even—" He broke off for a moment and then smiled broadly. "What will old King Rumbleguts say to this? He has already pronounced the Spaniards within their rights in seizing the *Trial*. Now the addled old swillbelly will have to eat his words. Come along, Roger, I must break this news to our high-stomached prisoners who have been looking down their long noses at me as though I were a common topping-cove."

My mind was still so filled with the agonized, "*Madre! Madre mia!*" of the suffering thief that I paid no attention to the fact that my captain had not waited to remove any of the traces of the charnel house. I followed him to a

sumptuous cabin where we found all our prisoners sitting in a grim-lipped circle. They were attired in their best and were trying hard to maintain an air of haughty superiority. I could see that fear sat on the shoulders of most of them nevertheless.

John stalked in, looking like a butcher with his disheveled hair and blood-streaked torso. He paused for a moment and then held up the report, smacking it emphatically with his other hand.

“Here we have it, my fine ladies and gentlemen,” he declared. “The proofs of the late Don Pedro’s perfidy. It’s here in black and white, set down in his own hand. I owe you no explanation or apology, but I’ve so much regard for my own reputation that I shall report what your commander has written.” He read the note aloud and then handed it back to me. “I now dare any of you to say that the fate which overtook Don Pedro this morning was not a just one.”

“I say so,” declared Dona Cristina calmly. “That ship was sailing in forbidden waters.”

“Forbidden?” repeated John, without looking in her direction. “Forbidden by whom? Since when has Spain owned the Inner Seas?”

The rest of the company sat in tense gravity, fearing no doubt that the uncovering of this proof would lead to further reprisals. One of the women fell into a fit of hysterical weeping, and I saw Dona Cristina lean over to whisper reassuringly in her ear. John sensed what was in their minds and proceeded to allay their fears.

“The episode is closed,” he said. “One life only has been taken for the many who died on the *Trial*. The rest of you are in no danger.” He paused and frowned. “It’s an easy thing for a beautiful woman to speak her mind boldly. All women, beautiful or not, are safe in the hands of Englishmen.” He seemed to be conscious for the first time of his condition. “I apologize to the ladies for my appearance. Perhaps they will forgive me when I say that I’ve been doing what I could to assist in saving the lives of the wounded Spaniards of low degree who fill the cockpit below us.”

No one ventured any comment, so he went on to explain the situation which had developed. “It may prove necessary to sink the *Santa Caterina*,” he said. “There is still a chance that I’ll be able to make a southern port. In any event, your safety will be seen to and, as far as possible, your comfort. You’ll be held as prisoners for exchange or ransom. If the fear of the galleys has been in the minds of any of you, you have my word that you may banish it at once. No Christian, no matter how richly he may deserve it, will ever go to pull an oar on heathen benches because of John Ward. All I ask is that you

obey orders and do nothing to add to the difficulties under which my crew and I are laboring.”

All through this scene I had been aware that Dona Cristina’s eyes had never wandered from him. John had not looked in her direction, and he did not do so even when he added a final word which concerned her particularly.

“It is not my intention to hold the niece of your late commander. What has happened has been especially painful for her, and I should like to make what amends are in my power. If at all possible, she will be landed where other ships for the West will call. One formality now remains. You haven’t yet been subjected to search, and it is my duty to see that this is attended to at once. Again this order does not apply to Dona Cristina. She is at liberty to leave if she desires, but the rest of you must remain here.”

I wondered if he had any idea of the value of the jewelry she was carrying, but of course I said nothing. I intended to keep my knowledge on the subject to myself.

“I prefer to remain,” said Dona Cristina.

Their eyes met for the first time, and I could not help thinking what a contrast they presented, the Spanish girl with her grave and lovely eyes, and the enormous Englishman, naked to the waist, with his golden hair straggling over the grimy muscles of his great shoulders.

“That shall be as you wish, Señorita,” he said.

A new note pervaded the decks when we arrived there, a cheerfulness due to the arrival of the supper kettles. I became aware for the first time that I had not had a morsel of food all day. The odor of stewed lamb made me hungry. We sat down immediately, John taking a seat on the planking with us. We supped enormously on the lamb and some loaves of crusty Spanish bread which had been found in the galley. Quantities of fresh fruit then appeared and a single cask of wine. The order had gone out that there was to be no heavy drinking until the end of our labors was in sight and the first glimpse had been had of an African port on the horizon. We were to take no manner of chances.

I saw John in a new light during this meal. The disciplinarian had vanished. He joked with the men while he dipped his huge hands in the kettle for lamb bones and munched great segments of the fine fresh bread. He praised every one of us in turn for the parts we had played in the fight. Surely, I thought, he must have eyes in the back of his head as well as a capacity for seeing through wood and metal to have observed all the individual instances of stanch conduct to which he now alluded. The men were thrown into a happy state of pride by the lavishness of his praise. Even

Clim the Cod's-head threw out his chest and grinned all over his rather foolish face when the Captain spoke of the swathe he had cut with his avenging pike. I could judge of the sentiments of the rest of them by the gratification I felt when he mentioned the help I had given him.

And yet through it all I had a curious sense of unreality. I, Roger Blease, had no place in this company of rough-living, hard-fighting men. Even though I had managed somehow to play a part with reasonable credit, I did not belong. I would never belong. I was realizing this more surely all the time.

John's mood changed to one of sly anticipation. He smiled around the squatting circle and said: "Well, my bingo-boys, I now have a morsel of good news for your greedy ears. There is gold on board, after all, and, I think, a rather pretty supply of gauds. You've been on short rations, and there hasn't been one stroke of good luck to make up to you for the work you've done and for the reasty foods you've packed into your hungry bellies. Now I can make you all a promise. When we get back to Rome-ville, there will be yellow boys in your pockets. Enough to get you the best of everything. You'll be weighed down with mint, and there will be trinkets for all your women. There has been no time yet to cast a reckoning but—well, I'm making a guess that we shall all do rather well."

The men cheered him lustily as he got to his feet. He winked at me and said in my ear: "And now, Roger, I'm going to struggle with those damned points again and buckle a very fine ruff around my neck. There are some differences of opinion between me and a certain haughty lady which must be talked over at once. I'll see you later. Do you think you can finish the papers before you turn in?"

I nodded in assent as I got to my feet, painfully conscious of the stiffness of my muscles and of a sense of complete fatigue which weighed me down. I walked slowly to the captain's cabin and settled myself to my task. John had vanished with suspicious alacrity.

I did not expect to find anything much of value in what was left, and I'm afraid that my work was performed in a perfunctory way. Weary from the day's excitement, and filled with food and wine, I drowsed over the dull and often illegible documents, blinking my eyes to keep them open. Several times I found myself with my drooping head in dangerous proximity to the lighted end of the candle.

It was by the greatest of luck, therefore, that I stumbled on an important discovery. Hours had passed, I believe, for silence had settled over the ship and the documents in front of me had dwindled to a mere handful. I found



myself with a creased note in my hand which was no different from scores of similar ones which had already joined the pile on the floor. I glanced with tired eyes at the opening sentence without grasping what it meant. Then a sixth sense came to my assistance and warned me that here was something which required my attention. I read it again, and a tingle of excitement ran through my veins. I found myself wide awake instantly.

SIR ADMIRAL:

This is to inform you that within a very short time it is our belief a truce will be concluded with the government of the Low Countries. You will receive advance information and in the meantime you are to govern your activities—

My eyes raced across the closely written page. This was certain to prove a serious matter for John Ward, for me, for every English sailor now on the high seas. My heart was thumping as I deciphered the stilted phraseology of the instructions.

In brief, Don Pedro was ordered to assist in a drive against the English rovers in the Mediterranean as soon as the truce had been signed. He was, therefore, to change his plans and not continue to America with the *Santa Caterina*, which had apparently been the original plan. Instead, he was to drop his passengers at the Cape Verde Islands, where another vessel would pick them up, and to put back at once to Cadiz. It was the intention of the Spanish Government to use the entire strength of the Navy in a sweeping operation from Gibraltar to the Levant, a dragnet in which every English ship would be caught inevitably, thus putting a stop to free roving for all time. It was anticipated that the truce would be concluded within six weeks of the date on which the letter had been dispatched. I glanced at the date: February 18.

There would be another month, then, before the might of Spain would be unleashed for our destruction. This was reassuring, for I knew it would allow time for a warning to be broadcast and for all Englishmen to get safely away. I sensed another difficulty which would face us once hostilities ceased between the Low Countries and Spain. We were sailing under Dutch letters of marque, and these would be canceled. We would be left with no flag to fly. We would become pirates in the eyes of the world.

I went out on deck in search of John. It was a beautiful night, with a moon close to the full and a sharp breeze blowing from the west. We were sailing under as heavy a head of canvas as was possible in view of the damage the ship had suffered, and I could see that our course was set for the southeast. For Tunis, I concluded, where safe anchorage would be found.

The *Royal Bess* was a good half-mile in advance of us, with lanterns in her rigging to guide us in following her. I paused to watch, thinking of the difficult days which stretched ahead for all such craft. In spite of my growing disinclination to life at sea, I was proud of the *Royal Bess*, proud that I had played a part in the most spectacular of her victories. It would be a sad blow if she were recaptured and sailed once more under the flag of Spain.

The lookout men were at their posts, but the decks otherwise were deserted. I concluded that John would be in the pilot-house if he had not already turned in, and I made my way there. He was standing near the wheel, staring straight ahead at the lights of the *Royal Bess* with an air of complete concentration. I told him my news.

To my surprise, he did not seem seriously concerned. He had been expecting this for some time, he said. The refusal of King James to assist the Low Countries had made it inevitable. The Dutch apparently had decided to make as good terms as they could.

“What will you do?” I asked.

“What will I do?” He looked at me with eyes that glowed fiercely. “I will not give up the fight! Did Sir Richard Grenville quit when he found himself pitted against the full might of Spain? I’ve sworn to keep at this as long as I have a sound hull under me and a single gun to man.” He began to pace up and down the narrow space, his long arms swinging in pace with his thoughts. “It’s very lucky, Roger, that you found this letter. Now we know what time we have and can prepare. I must get word at once to all Englishmen in the Inner Sea. In one sense I’m glad it is happening this way, for now they can no longer hold out against the course I’ve been advising. We must combine! We must operate as a single fleet and from the same base. When the Dons come out to catch us, they’ll get an unpleasant surprise. They’ll find themselves pitted against a fleet of the greatest fighting ships ever gathered together. I think it will be rather amusing, my brave Roger!” He stopped in front of me, and I was surprised to see how excited and happy he had become at the prospect. “Perhaps the admiral of that surprise fleet will be none other than your old friend and townsman, John Ward himself!”

I had been confident that his reaction to the news would be the opposite of this, that he would have set himself to plans for a quick exit from these dangerous waters, but I began to catch fire from his enthusiasm. This was the great chance for which I had enlisted under his colors, the opportunity to fight the enemy of our country, not as a single ship skulking in hidden roadsteads, dodging in and out for stray prizes, but as a mighty fleet with the

power to strike smashing blows for the freedom of the seas. Every other consideration left my mind. I forgot the hardships of my daily lot, my shrinking from the cruelty and greed of my companions. I found myself meeting his enthusiasm with equal zeal, as eager as he for the struggle which loomed ahead.

We talked it over at full length, going over every detail of the campaign. It was getting on into the small hours when John sat down with an air of sudden weariness.

“Time to turn in, Roger,” he said. “The ache in my bones has reached my head at last. What a day this has been!”

I got painfully to my feet. Tired as I was, I had one more question to ask.

“How did you succeed with Dona Cristina? Did the—the differences resolve themselves?”

John managed a rather poor attempt at a smile. “I didn’t succeed at all,” he confessed. “The lady is very proud, and she has a sharp tongue in her head. She found all the loose joints in my moral armor. If we had more time, it would be a great satisfaction to me to set her right.”

## 13

FOR TWO DAYS the westerly wind blew strongly, carrying us beyond all danger of pursuit. Then it died down, and the two ships lay motionless on a glassy sea under the blistering sun. The heat was so great that there were times when I found it difficult to breathe. The men sulked and had to be driven to work. John paced the decks like a caged animal, knowing that every inactive hour was bringing closer the day when Spain and the Netherlands would come to terms. His temper grew short. I was kept so continuously busy with clerical work and in seeing that all the valuables on board were baled up that I had no time to share in other worries.

In spite of my activities, however, I was constantly conscious of the atmosphere of hate and strain which gripped the ship. On the second day a Spanish prisoner broke loose from detention and seriously injured one of our men. An hour later he was swinging from the yardarm while the rest of the

prisoners watched in glowering silence. Every few hours, it seemed, one of the poor devils in the hospital would be sewn up in canvas and thrown overboard. Don Pedro's pet monkey, which had taken to the rigging and had refused to come down for food, was kicked into the sea by the irritable foot of one of our men. Floggings were administered constantly. I began to feel as though life had changed into a long and hideous nightmare.

Then Clim the Cod's-head got himself into trouble. He had found his long-meg, a Spanish servingwoman with a face as forbidding as a thundercloud. He was proud of his conquest, and when a Dutchman who had signed on with us at Marseilles vied with him for her favor, he evened the score by sinking his knife between his rival's ribs. There were some infractions of discipline that John would wink at, but I knew this could not be condoned.

The crew were lined up in the waist, and Clim was brought forward for sentence, his arms trussed behind him. He looked puzzled at the sudden change in status from hero to prisoner, and his dull eyes were filled with savage resentment. I was so concerned over what might happen to him that I could not watch the proceedings. I let my eyes wander to the towering superstructure of the ship back of me and was surprised to see Dona Cristina standing in one of the upper galleries. John had sought her company continually during the days which had elapsed but, so far as I could tell, with indifferent success. Once, however, I had stumbled on them in the same gallery where she now stood. It had been late in the evening, and for the first time her maid had not been with her. They were conversing in low tones, and it had seemed to me that her attitude had been less resentful.

Several other prisoners were standing at the railing, but I noticed they kept their distance from her. Did they resent her intimacy with the English captain? If so, she did not seem to be concerned about it. She was holding her head high, and her eyes were fixed intently on the tall figure of John Ward.

"Clement Duvver," declared John, "you have been guilty of a murderous assault on one of your fellows. The offense calls for the most severe punishment. I know that quarrels can't be avoided, but I expect the men of my crew to settle them with their fists in the English way."

He went on to describe the fault of the unfortunate Clim in scathing terms. I found myself wondering about the name Duvver, which I had not heard before, and speculating as to whether it could be a corruption of De Vere. There was a suggestion in the straight nose and broad skull of the sailor of good blood gone to seed generations back. I knew that the best Norman names often turned up in curiously Anglicized form. Clim, who had

been born and raised in Wapping, and whose mind at best was a flame which flickered fitfully, might perhaps be able to trace his descent back to one of the proudest of those great families which had broken Saxon England to the yoke of feudalism. The possibility made me feel still more sorry for him.

“It’s lucky the man is not going to die,” concluded John. “I’m going to consider also the bold part you took in the capture of this ship. Your punishment, therefore, will be light. Your share in the pool will be cut in half, and you will be kept in the garters for two days. That will give you plenty of time to think, and I hope you’ll decide to keep a hold on your temper in future. The next time you’re guilty of an infraction of the rules, I shall be much less lenient.”

Clim was led away, and I went back to my work, relieved that the punishment had not been more severe. I decided that later in the day I would pay Clim a visit and try to talk him into a better frame of mind.

About midafternoon broken clouds gathered on the horizon, and a puff of wind stirred our dead sails. In an hour our hull was rising and falling gently with a promise that sent the watch scrambling up the shrouds while John shouted orders to them in a brisk and cheerful voice. I went out on deck to watch and was gratified to see that our luck was in again. We were under way.

John took my arm and led me back to the pilot-house. He put a finger on the map that was spread out on the table. “Observe, Roger,” he said happily. “This is Tunis, where the Dey gives us harborage and his blessing in fighting the Dons. Here is Sicily. Did you ever blow up a pig’s bladder and tie it in the middle? Well, that’s the Mediterranean for you. It’s divided off into two parts, and this narrow bit of water between Tunis and Sicily is all that joins them. If we can control this stretch, we cut Spain off from the East and the trade of the Levant.” He laughed with an exultant catch in his voice. “This is my plan, Roger. I’m going to assemble all the English and Dutch privateers in the port of Tunis, like spiders with a web reaching over to Sicily. Once that is managed, no ship with the Spanish flag at its peak will dare to sail between the two points. Give me twenty ships, and the trick is done.”

“They will send their whole fleet against us,” I warned.

“Let them. I would not mind a raffle with all the admirals of Spain. But even if they’re too strong to meet in the open, we can always drop back to our bases. And wait. They can’t keep the royal fleet out there permanently.” He chuckled. “I’ve a notion to proclaim the Inner Seas closed to Spanish shipping. That would get Philip’s dander up. But, of course, I must get my fleet together first. I promise you it won’t be hard. When these hard-headed

English captains hear what's in the wind, they'll come tailing into Tunis with every inch of canvas on. They know the side of the stream where the jack barrel run. They'll throw in with me—Harris from Bristol, and those two tough Cornishmen, Halsey and Longcastle; and Giffard and Glanville and Jennings and the rest of them. They're stout fighters, Roger, and they did the cuddy-jig in their cradles. I must get word to all of them."

"Sir Bartlemy mentioned a man named Macherie," I reminded him.

He frowned. "Sir Nevil Macherie, our one aristocrat," he said. "Yes, I suppose I must invite him to join us, much as I dislike the fellow. And then there's Basil Sleath, the wild Irishman. I'll need him more than Sir Bartlemy's fine friend. Did it occur to you that Sir Bartlemy was one of Macherie's backers? He seemed concerned over my hint that there would be no profits."

"I doubt it," I answered.

"Well, we haven't any time to lose. I've lost three days as it is."

"I've finished the inventory," I said, drawing a paper from my doublet. "Their purser helped me when I gave him your promise of an early release. There are thirty-two tapestries, four of them large and quite old. The purser says they're worth three thousand pounds."

"They'll sell easily enough in London. Rich-arrayed Robin will attend to that. But I'm sure our greedy gentleman from Alsatia will see to it that we get no better than seven or eight hundred for our share."

I nodded. "Then here are a score of fine paintings. Another thousand pounds for the lot. Four clocks and eight crucifixes of solid gold, seven mirrors with gold frames, eighty candle sconces of silver, a solid-gold dinner service of ninety pieces, sixteen swords with jeweled hilts. Eight thousand worth, in the opinion of the purser. The bullion you already have under lock and key. There are enough uncut gems to fill a temperade basin, and the jewels we collected from the passengers are easily worth two thousand. There are four hundred books and eight illuminated missals heavy with gold leaf. There are eight thousand yards of the richest materials and a chest of ostrich plumes. Twenty-one thousand pounds is a safe estimate of the value of everything, apart from the gold."

John did not seem particularly interested. "Pleasant news for our fine gentlemen at home," he said. "It can be put ashore at Marseilles with our agent there. Some of it may be disposed of in France, but the bulk of it will go to Rome-ville. If you feel disposed to take pride in the fact, we English have the best fencing kens in the world. The old queen saw to that. No one ever got a sice the better of her." He grinned at me. "We'll keep the bullion

ourselves. The men prefer to take their shares out in Old-Mr.-Gory. You'll be having a heavy purse of your own, Roger, if the matter interests you."

I handed him the paper and was preparing to leave when he laid a detaining hand on my shoulder. I could see that he had something important to say and that he did not know just how to go about it.

"I've never told you what happened when I was detained at Appleby Court," he declared, clearing his throat. "Sir Bartlemy was in a panic over the trouble at London, and he didn't think it safe for me to venture out until the hue and cry died down. He kept me cooped up in a snug little cell in the gatehouse, but I saw the members of his family on two or three occasions." He paused unhappily. "I give you my word, Roger, it was not my fault; but I fell in love with Katie so completely that I'll never get over it. There has never been her equal. I don't have to tell you that, I know. One evening I stole out for a breath of fresh air in Wayland Spinney and she—she joined me there. I'm telling you this because I want to be honest with you. You've a right to know everything. We talked for a few minutes; on my word of honor it was not more than a quarter of an hour. She promised me she would wait until the *Royal Bess* came back. I asked her about you, and she said things that would have made your ears burn with pride had you heard them. But, Roger, the truth of the matter is, she's in love with me."

I had been expecting this, but to hear it put into words left me with the feeling that my whole world was toppling. The stark realities of life at sea had been stripping me of my illusions one by one; and now I found that Katie's regard for me had been as unstable as everything else. For a moment I felt sick at heart, but this was followed by anger. John had known that I loved Katie and that she had reciprocated in some degree at least. He should not have allowed any romantic notions touching her to become lodged in his mind. If he had not permitted her to see that he had been so much taken with her on that first meeting in the gatehouse chamber, she would soon have recovered from the impression he had made on her.

Almost immediately, however, this feeling of anger passed. I realized that John had not been able to help himself. He had fallen in love with her, and that was all there was to it. Nor could Katie be blamed. He was a national hero, a romantic figure, who had suddenly appeared in her life and swept her off her feet. Her girlish preference for me had not been strong enough to stand against the attraction of John Ward. What had happened was inevitable.

"Does Sir Bartlemy know?" I asked.

“God forbid!” exclaimed John. “He has other plans for Katie, as he made clear. And that, Roger, is the only thing that gives me any peace of mind in this matter. You have no place in his plans either. He wants a fine match for his little Katie. A penniless cadet of Great Lunnington wouldn’t do.”

I nodded in agreement. Even when I had allowed myself to indulge in daydreams, I had always known somewhere in the back of my mind that the ambitious plans of Katie’s father would stand in the way.

“I was careful not to make any trouble for her,” explained John. “There was a fall of snow the evening she met me in Wayland Spinney, and I was afraid our footprints would show. I carried her back, taking care to plant a foot in every track she had made.” He indulged in a reminiscent smile. “That was what brought matters to a head, I’m afraid. I give you my word, I had intended to keep my feeling for her a secret. But—well, I leave it to you, Roger. She was all bundled up in an ermine wrap, and her eyes were sparkling, and she looked like a little snow fairy, if there is such a thing. My good resolutions melted away. I told her then that I loved her, that a lifetime at sea would not be long enough to banish the image of her from my heart. On my honor, Roger, I couldn’t help it.”

“I’m glad,” I said, “that you took such pains to protect her. But don’t you think you ought to continue in the same course?”

He looked at me with a puzzled frown, not perceiving at first what I meant. Then he nodded and began to laugh.

“You refer to the Señorita? My stanch old sobersides, there’s nothing to that. The lady had conceived a very bad opinion of me. I couldn’t bear to have her continue in so grievous an error, and so I’ve set out to show her she’s wrong. I owe it to my country to teach her that Englishmen are not all crude and bloody-handed barbarians. That, Roger, is the only reason for the pains I’ve taken to cultivate her better acquaintance. I give you my solemn word on it.”

“That she’s lovely has played no part in it, of course,” I said. “I feel sure of one thing: if Katie knew of Dona Cristina, she would prefer to have her continue in her erroneous opinion of Englishmen rather than have her educated to the truth in this way.”

John opened the leather pouch at his belt and drew out a pipe and a handful of tobacco. The pipe was the handsomest thing of the kind I had ever seen, with a long curved stem and a diamond-studded bowl. He began to fill it, eyeing me the while with a look that was compounded of amusement and annoyance.



“So, I’m to have two guides to my conscience now!” he commented. “It’s not enough to have Snode preaching at me all the time. You must begin as well.” He pressed down the tobacco with an impatient thumb. “Get this into your head once and for all: Everything changes when you lose sight of shore. The pretty little set of pink morals that the parsons set up for our guidance are nothing but bambury-chat to sailors, my boy. Why do you suppose I let the brims on my ship whenever we touch port? Men must have their mutton-in-long-sleeves. Don’t be too hard on me, Roger. I can run after a dozen women, even a fine lady like the lovely Dona Cristina, and still remain true in my heart to the one girl I love at home.”

I did not believe this, and said so. John brushed aside my arguments with increasing impatience.

“You’ll find out for yourself,” he declared. “Wait until you’ve been at sea for the better part of a year. The first thick-beamed callot you set eyes on will look to you like Venus rising from the foam. You don’t think so now, but you’ll find I know what I am talking about.”

He sprawled himself out in a chair and puffed vigorously at his pipe. As a concession to the heat he had discarded his ruff and was wearing a wide lace collar which lay flat on his shoulders and left his neck free. His doublet was of thin green silk, covered with designs in gold thread of ships under full sail. I was certain, however, that underneath he was as tightly trussed up as ever, for the green hose he was wearing fitted his legs like the bark of a tree. I had been amazed at the way he blossomed out each day in a fresh set. His supply of hosiery seemed inexhaustible.

“I warned you of this,” he said. “Leave my morals to the tender care of Joralemon Snode and we’ll remain good friends. Don’t try to make Nature over, Roger.”

I had been hearing this all my life. The sailors I had talked with on the water front at home had said the same thing in even grosser terms. I had caught similar phrases in the talk of the captains that father had brought home. The boys I had run with at school had been equally sure of masculine privileges. I was still not convinced. I was sure that the words “honor” and “chivalry” meant something. King Arthur’s knights, who had spent their lives seeking adventure, had remained true to plighted troths. Was the wind at sea corrupting, instead of clean and strong, so that a sailor could not keep his ideals untarnished?

John got to his feet and mopped his face with a handkerchief of fine linen. He was too thorough an Englishman to enjoy such intense heat.

"In a few days," he remarked, "we should round Cape Blanc and see the white roofs of Gouletta ahead of us. These infidels have built their hovels on stones that knew the tread of Hannibal's feet. A classical scholar like you will find that interesting, I suppose. I dislike the whole country intensely myself. I think I would lose my mind if I had to see much of it. Give me the chalk cliffs of Kent or the low green hills back of a Cornish port."

"Or Wayland Spinney when the snow is on the ground," I suggested.

He looked at me closely, as though trying to judge how much bitterness lay back of my remark.

"I'm all English in my preferences," he said. "I like cold brisk winds and the green of the country after rain. I like solid food and heady drinks. I prefer gray eyes to black."

"The Señorita's eyes are the blackest I've ever seen."

"Then don't let yourself look too deeply into them," he advised lightly. "You might find it easy to lose yourself in eyes like that."

Early in the evening I paid my visit to Clim in the ship's prison. It was so dark on the orlop-deck that I had to hold a torch close to the bars before I could make him out. He was sitting in a corner with his head in his hands and so sunk in spirits that he was making no effort to shift his feet when the motion of the boat flooded his side of the deck with bilge water. The stench of the place was almost unbearable.

"Clim!" I called.

He looked up. I could see now that he was chained by both arms to the wall. He was sitting on a low bench covered lightly with damp straw.

"It's Roger Blease," I said.

A flicker of interest showed on his swollen face. "Shanks," he said in a hoarse whisper, "get me out o' here. Tell Cap'n I done nothing wrong. He were on'y a Hogen-mogen. A Hogen-mogen, Shanks." Clim, I realized, had his full share of the racial pride which counts no law valid where foreigners are concerned. It had been a great blow to his pride to have a Dutchman, a "Hogen-mogen," take his woman away from him; and now he could not understand why he was being punished for what he had done.

"You shouldn't have used a knife on him, Clim," I said.

"But, Shanks, he were on'y a Hogen-mogen." That quite apparently was the only point his mind was capable of retaining.

I held the torch up and inspected the place. There were several other prisoners, chained to the wall at intervals of six feet, all of them broken

specimens of mankind with wildly staring eyes. One began to jabber at me in frenzied tones.

"I oughtn't be here wi' Spanishers and Portugalls," protested Clim. "I killed a dozen Spanishers. A dozen, Shanks. You see me do it yourself. I oughtn't be here."

It was clear that the praise he had received since the capture of the *Santa Caterina* had gone to his head. In his dim and slow-moving mind he had been dramatizing himself as a hero. It seemed to me likely that he would not have been so offended otherwise over the loss of the woman.

All the prisoners now were clamoring at me, and the din suddenly seemed to drive Clim berserk. He poured out a stream of oaths and tried frantically to free himself from his chains.

"Take it easy, man," I shouted, finding it difficult to make myself heard. "I'm going to speak to Captain Ward. He won't do anything for you if you carry on like this."

"I won't be treated like a Hogen-mogen or a Portugall! You tell that to Cap'n, Shanks. You tell him that."

Finding that John had already turned in, I went to his cabin and knocked on the door. There was no sound from within for several moments and then John called, "Who's there?"

"It's Roger Blease, Captain Ward."

"Oh." A moment later he opened the door a few inches and peered out at me. The cabin was in darkness.

I explained the situation I had found below and urged him with all the earnestness I could summon to release Clim from serving out his sentence.

"That fellow has been getting above himself," grumbled John. "Still, he's a good man, and he fought like a demon the other day. It's a mistake, I'm afraid; but I'll give in to you this time, Roger. Get him out. I suppose that chicken heart of yours would keep you from sleeping tonight if you couldn't get him free at once. I'll have a talk with this Clim the Cod's-head tomorrow and put some proper ideas of discipline into his head."

The door closed with suspicious haste. I stood outside for a moment or two, trying to convince myself that there had not been a faint trace of perfume on the air. Then I went below to see that Clim was released.

WE OVERHAULED the *Royal Bess* in the lee of the island of Zimbira, and John issued orders for a number of us to transfer back to her with him. I was included in the order. Most of the wounded had died, and there was nothing more to be done for the survivors, so Mickle, our chirurgeon, and Joralemon Snode were also named.

I was glad of the change. I had been sleeping on a hard couch in the main cabin. The meals had been irregular and the work unremitting. And yet I had some regrets. A feeling of mystery pervaded the stately upper decks of the great ship. My daily quests into the contents of cabinets and chests had been spiced with anticipation of curious discoveries.

I needed to make no preparations for the transfer. All I had brought on board was a cutlass and a palpitating heart, and all I would take back were a few trinkets and old papers which I had found in the secret drawers of the high cabinets of cypress and tulip wood.

Maltworm was returning with us, and very glad of it. Clim was being left behind, however, with the squad to man the *Santa Caterina*. I think that the decision to leave him was a deliberate one on John's part. Clim, after all, was entitled to some punishment.

He took it hard. The order had made it clear that the prize crew would be on continuous duty. They would be allowed no chance to go ashore, no opportunity to traffic with the mysterious women of Tunis about whom they had been speculating so avidly, Clim seemed particularly disturbed over the fact that Mickle, the chirurgeon, was transferring with us. He had respect for none but fighting men.

"He be nought but a nim-gimmer," he growled when I tried to comfort him. "Let him stay wi' the poor fellows below decks and not go ashore. Tell Cap'n to let me change wi' him, Shanks."

I saw that the gold in his purse was what made his selection for duty on the prize ship so irksome, and I was assuring him that he would have plenty of opportunities later to spend it when my attention was attracted by a curious tableau on deck. John was standing in the waist, giving some last-minute orders, when Dona Cristina's maid approached him with her arms full of bundles. She said something to him in a whisper. John's face took on immediately a shade of the deepest chagrin. He said something in reply

which caused the buxom maid to shake her head in emphatic dissent. I was trying to figure out what it was all about when Dona Cristina herself appeared.

I understood the situation then and, in spite of a certain feeling of sympathy for my friend, I found it hard not to laugh at the difficulty in which he had involved himself. The Spanish girl had a white lace wrap around her head and a crucifix clasped in her hand. She glided over to him with such grace that she seemed to move without physical effort. Her flaring white skirt neither rippled nor swayed. Even at a distance I could see that her face was serious and intent.

I heard John say in a tone of remonstrance: "Dear lady, this is rank folly. It is impossible. I—I cannot allow it!"

They talked for several minutes in low tones, the helpless chagrin on my captain's face growing deeper all the time. Then he motioned me to come over.

"Roger," he said, in English, with a gesture which indicated he had reached the end of his verbal rope, "our lovely prisoner has made up her mind to go with us. I've already planned it so that she will be taken to Cadiz where she can go aboard the first ship for Trinidad. She refuses to consider it. You're a better talker than I am. Take the minx in hand and see if you can batter some common sense into her."

The girl indulged in a brief and unhappy smile. "I speak some English," she said. "I do not understand the word minx, but it is clear you are very angry with me. It will do you no good, Don John. I go ashore with you. Nothing can change my mind."

John reverted to Spanish with a somewhat sheepish air. He was not very fluent in that tongue, and he chose his words with some difficulty. "My sweet child," he said, "I'm alarmed over what this would mean." He turned to me, his face a study in earnest bafflement. "Roger, think of some reasons to make her change her mind. We must protect her, you know. Tunis is a vile and corrupt hole, the center of all the wickedness in the world. She couldn't live there."

Dona Cristina shook her head. "I know all that. I have no illusions. But I must go with you. There is no other way."

Sensing what John had wanted me to explain to her, I said: "Captain Ward has plans which will keep him at sea continuously. It is impossible to tell you why, Señorita. There would be no one in Tunis to protect you. You might fall into heathen hands."

"I'm an excellent sailor," she asserted. "You are his friend, and so I appeal to you. Make him see my position please, Don Roger. I cannot go to America now. My father would disown me. Little as I may find it to my liking, I have no alternative but to go with you. I am prepared for whatever it may mean. Stay in Tunis or sail with you, it is all the same."

John's face was a study. He had arrayed himself in a festive suit of bright yellow satin with slashings of blue, and I could not help feeling some amusement over the contrast between the gaiety of his clothes and the unhappiness mirrored on his face. He turned a mute look of appeal in my direction.

"We're English and you are Spanish," I urged. "Have you thought how difficult it would be for you with the enemies of your race?"

"I am not expecting happiness," she answered. "Nor peace of mind."

There was a moment's silence, and then she said in low and intense tones: "In spite of everything, I cannot stay here. Look back of us. There you will see my reason. They are all watching us, I am sure. They haven't spoken to me for many days. The women draw their skirts aside when I pass them, and I can read scorn in the eyes of the men. They *know*. Time does not soften hatred with my people, John. It grows deeper all the time. Now do you understand?"

It did not require more than one glance at the faces of our prisoners, who lined the railing of one of the upper decks, to realize she was right. They were so still they looked like images; a grim and forbidding group with tight-lipped mouths and black smoldering eyes. There was something unnatural about their silence, but I could feel more hatred in their passive attitude than if they had spat it out with torrents of abuse.

John lifted his hat from his head with such a sweep that its enormous blue ostrich plume touched the deck. "I shall be very happy to take you with me," he said.

We left immediately. John went first, followed by the girl, who managed to negotiate the swaying ladder with ease and still keep her skirts tightly wrapped about her. I glanced up as I began the descent and was surprised to see that the group of prisoners had not yet moved. Then a single voice was raised, sounding almost like a sob from the intensity of feeling which prompted it, "*English dogs!*" This broke the spell. Immediately they were all gesticulating and shouting at the top of their voices, a flood of curses which enveloped us as we made our way down the ladder. Some of the invective was directed at us, but most of it at the girl, for I heard constant repetition of

a term which convinced me I had not been mistaken that night at the door of John's cabin.

John grinned at me as we took our seats in the boat. "They couldn't hold it in any longer," he said.

He sat in the rear with Dona Cristina, and without looking back I knew that he was holding her hand. Joralemon Snode sat with me, and his long, pinched features expressed a degree of disapproval which almost equaled that of the prisoners we had left behind.

"He must be mad!" he whispered to me. "Is he going to marry her? Great harm will come of this, Roger, mark my words. She's put a spell on him with her wicked black eyes!"

"If anyone has been guilty of placing spells, it's John," I answered shortly.

The next morning I was up at dawn, happy to feel the planking of the *Royal Bess* under my feet again. John was pacing the poop-deck with a preoccupied air. He had donned his helmet and breastplates, and his sword clanked against his calves at each step.

"Roger," he said, "I feel unhappy and even a little unclean when it's necessary to make use of this heathen port. He's a sly fellow, the Dey. He tells me he's my friend, but there's always a calculating look in his eyes. He's driving a hard bargain with me. I may operate out of Tunis and make war on the Spaniards, but I must show his Tunizeens how to handle square sails and tall ships like these. I must teach the dogs how to fight against Christian fleets. It goes bitterly against the grain, but what else can I do? All civilized ports are closed to me. I can't go home. And, after all, we can't cruise forever. Do you feel how badly we're rolling? We must lay up long enough to get our hull well scraped—cleaned and ready, Roger, for the fight ahead of us. That's all that counts."

"I've heard that Tunis is full of renegados," I commented. "If you refused, the Dey could get some of them to teach his sailors."

"That's true," said John. "And it eases my conscience a little. It goes further than that, of course. This little scorpion of a Dey has cut a great many throats in his time, and he believes he's buying security by having English sailors about him. Perhaps ambition is eating at his mean soul. He wants Tunis to be the most important port on the African coast. One way and another, he needs us badly; and so we must play our game with him. We need him just as badly."

He stopped his pacing and pointed straight ahead to where a single white column showed above the green of the shore line. "Gouletta," he said. "Keep

your eyes open today, Roger. There's going to be much to see. The hill of Sidi-bou-Said has looked down on the making of history. Old Khair-ed-Din, the greatest of the Barbarossa, crossed these waters many times. He used Tunis, as we're doing, in his war against the Spaniards. His men needed no other flag when he stood on the prow with his red beard waving in the breeze. There wasn't an ounce of honesty in his whole body nor a drop of compassion in his veins; but, God of Battles, the scoundrel was a fighter! He could teach us all something."

"Even Drake?" I asked.

He looked at me impatiently. "Barbarossa scoured the seas for twenty-five years, but there was not one second in all that time when he was worthy to stand on the same quarter-deck with Sir Francis Drake. You should know by this time, Roger, that our great English captain was so far above all other men that he couldn't be judged by the same standards. He would have crumpled up the fleets of Barbarossa like so many toy boats on Hampstead Pond and then nailed that old Turk's beard to his mast as a gesture of contempt."

Dona Cristina joined us as we watched the white roofs of Gouletta rising slowly above the hot blue of the sea. John drew her arm through his and led her to the rail. I heard him explaining that this was the port only, that the city of Tunis lay some miles back on a lake into which only the smallest of boats could ply. I could not help thinking what a handsome pair they made.

A Moorish galley was gliding in to anchorage just ahead of us. The sweep of its oar-banks was regular and easy. Colors floated from the masts. The shouting crew had manned the rigging, and a gun at the prow was firing a triumphant salvo. John called me over.

"Do you know what that means?" he asked. "The dogs have sunk a Christian ship! I get a sick feeling at the pit of my stomach every time I see this. Listen to the din the blackamoors are making! Its partly for our benefit. They hate us, and it's all the Dey can do to give us protection in port. Can you imagine how this sounds to the poor cringing devils of prisoners down in the hold? That's where they'll have them, chained together, men and women alike. The women will be sold into harems. Some of the men will go to the galleys; the rest will be put up at auction in the Souk-el-Barka."

"Do you suppose it was an English ship?"

"If they're English, I can make a deal with the Dey," answered John "It would be expensive. I would probably have to turn over our haul from the *Santa Caterina*. A sore blow to our lords and gentlemen at home, but I would make the deal without a moment's hesitation." He turned and looked



at the girl. "The grandfather of your present king cleaned this nest out once most thoroughly. It's high time someone did it again. I would like to undertake that little task myself. With six ships like the *Royal Bess* I could pound Gouletta to pieces in a few hours. It would be a pleasure. But, to speak of more immediate concerns, you can't go ashore like this. Your maid must find native clothes for you. A veil is most necessary. I couldn't answer for your safety without one."

Excitement had gripped the port. The water front was packed with screaming mobs. "It always happens this way," said John. "When one of their galleys captures a Christian ship, they get a religious fever. Listen to the drums! The dogs pound away at them with as much relish as though they were the soles of Christian feet."

The ship was warped in skillfully to the foot of a steep stretch of green-stained stone steps. A group awaited us at the top, made up of officials of some sort, and I was surprised to see a tall Englishman in sober gray among them. He called out a greeting to us in the cultivated tones of Oxford. "Welcome, Captain Ward! I've been waiting two weeks for you."

"Mundy Hill!" boomed John. "You old gray fox, I'm delighted to see you." Over his shoulder he explained. "Sir Sigismund Hill. What a stroke of luck! He carries the shrewdest head in all Christendom on that long neck of his. His advice will be most helpful."

I had heard much talk of Sir Sigismund Hill, one of the founders of the Levant Company. He had never commanded a ship, but for many years had been the eyes and ears of that courageous band of English merchants who had set themselves the task of opening up trade with the East. He had spent years in Turkey and Persia and had even gone overland as far as India. He could speak half a dozen Eastern languages, and I had heard that he talked of some fantastic scheme to connect the Mediterranean with the Red Sea by means of a canal and so make a quick route to the magic Orient. He was often called the English Ulysses. I was surprised to see that this famous rover was mild and almost bookish in appearance, with a thin frame and a twinkling gray eye.

A turbaned official stood at Hill's elbow, a gaunt individual who glared down at us with open hostility. The group was surrounded by a guard with drawn swords.

Dona Cristina had retired to her cabin to don a more suitable costume, and while we waited for her John looked the crowded water front over with an anxious eye. A blast of music from a native band now reached our ears. It

was strangely like the unearthly shriek of an instrument used by the Scots, called, I believe, the bagpipe.

“The reitas,” explained John. “They’ll play away at them until they fall down in a frenzy. I don’t like the look of things at all.”

I had been surprised to see that many of the natives were wearing green turbans. When I asked about them, John shook his head soberly. “That’s what worries me most,” he said. “A green turban can be worn only by the Shorfa. They’re a special lot, descendants of Mohammed, no less. Whenever they appear it means trouble. Listen to them! I know a little of their vile tongue. Enough to tell that they’re screaming for the death of all *koffers*. That’s us. Whenever you hear that chant of *Hagi Baba! Hagi Baba!* look to yourself.”

The two Spanish women rejoined us in native costume. Dona Cristina’s eyes looked enormous over the top of her veil. John motioned to me to take care of them and then made his way down the rope ladder, followed by half a dozen of the men.

“Are these infidels all mad, Don Roger?” whispered the girl. “They have froth on their lips. I have confidence in your captain, but still I do not feel very comfortable about this.”

“No more do I,” I replied. I was able to reassure her on one point, however. “There’s a lot of sham about it. They get that froth from the mouths of camels. They’re not as mad as they seem.”

The maid liked the looks of the jeering, milling mob even less than her mistress. She clung to the railing and refused to budge until one of the sailors urged her down with a sharp prod from his pike. I followed her, extending a hand to Dona Cristina. I could tell from the intensity with which she grasped my fingers that her fears had not been allayed. I wondered if she had begun to regret her decision.

I looked upward when my feet touched the bottom step and saw John shake hands cordially with Sir Sigismund Hill. Then he turned to greet the turbaned official. The latter shuffled forward and extended his left hand. To my amazement, I saw John strike the proffered hand aside with an angry gesture. Then I remembered that he had told me it was an insult for a Tunizeen to offer the left hand in greeting.

The din subsided instantly. The calm before the storm, I said to myself, being sure that John’s brusqueness would bring the natives down on us. Dona Cristina sensed that something was wrong, and her dark eyes asked me a silent question.

“Be ready to get back up that ladder as fast as you can,” I warned. “There’s going to be trouble.”

She began to climb the steps instead. I reached for her arm to hold her back, but she shook my hand off. I hurried after her, doubly surprised to find that the maid had also begun the climb.

The crowd above us remained strangely silent. Then I heard the native officer say in whining Spanish, “Sidi, I crave your forgiveness.” He cringed and bowed profusely. His attitude had an effect on the mob, for they continued to hold back. When the din was renewed, the belligerent note was missing.

John had taken the only course under the circumstances. I realized that the native temper would have risen if he had failed to cap the insult with an even greater one. Now the danger was over for the time being.

John presented me to Sir Sigismund with a complimentary reference to the part I had played in the capture of the *Santa Caterina*. The great traveler smiled warmly and said he had known my father. When Dona Cristina was presented, he lifted his shaggy gray brows. “You haven’t chosen the best day to come ashore, Señorita,” he said. “Gouletta is generally as calm as the streets of Seville in the heat of noon. Today the spell of the Prophet is on them. But have no fear. The Dey thinks too well of Captain Ward for anything to happen to him or to any member of his train.”

He turned back to John. “I crossed France and took ship from Marseilles three weeks ago,” he explained. “I made the journey to bring you news. Important news, John. Something that will give you a great deal of pleasure, I think. And I have a packet of letters.”

“You have me at a loss, then,” said John. “I can conceive of no form of news from England which would give me pleasure now. I’ve news for you, Mundy, and I am sure that mine will give you no pleasure at all. The Dutchmen are giving in. A truce for twelve years will be concluded with Spain in a few weeks. Have you heard any word of it?”

Hill looked grave. “No word of this had reached London when I left,” he said. “Nor did I hear any rumors of it in France. This is indeed the blackest of news, John, although I must say I have been expecting it for a long time. The Low Countries couldn’t be counted upon to fight alone forever. Have you decided on any course?”

“I have,” declared John. “We’ll have to carry on the fight ourselves. My plans are all made. I think we had better get on to Tunis at once, for I must get the ear of the Dey as soon as possible. Fortunately that sly little heathen

has as much reason to fear the truce as we have. The news and the letters you bring will have to wait, Mundy. Where are your quarters?"

"In Tunis. A partly dismantled palace has been put at my disposal. I eat and sleep in a hammock which I've swung high enough to keep me free of the rats and lizards. Such as it is, you and your men may share it with me." He glanced at the two women and then added: "There's room for everyone, in fact. We can go by boat through the canal, although it's the slowest way."

"Let's start at once," said John.

## 15

I ESCORTED DONA CRISTINA about Sir Sigismund's domain while we waited for John to return from his audience with the Dey. Her eyes, taking in the crumbling walls and the gardens choked with weeds, were not happy.

It had, however, been a great palace once. It stood high above the white-roofed expanse of Tunis, and its walls were of marble. It was clear that it had been in Christian hands at some time, for one of the rooms on the ground floor had been used as a chapel, and from the tangle in the outer court protruded the mutilated heads of sculptured saints. I would have liked to investigate this, but my companion was too tired to show any interest. The trip through the city had been a nerve-racking business for her. Hundreds of natives had followed us, keeping up their shrill chorus of "*Hagi Baba!*" and pressing in as close as they dared. I had ridden in the rear, and one green-turbaned scarecrow had clung to the tail of my horse, pelting me with offal from the streets which he scooped up with his free hand. We could still hear them milling about outside, and at intervals rocks came hurtling over the walls. It was not surprising that her nerves were slightly jangled.

"Don Roger," she said, when the noise outside the walls reached an especially high note, "I do not think I like this."

Sir Sigismund Hill joined us at this point. "There's nothing to fear," he said. "I don't mean that those howling dervishes out there wouldn't enjoy tearing us limb from limb. They're in one of their religious fevers today. But

they'll take it out in noise. As long as Captain Ward is useful to the Dey, we're as safe here as on West Cheape."

"We passed a slave market on our way," I said. "I saw white men chained to pillars. It wasn't a reassuring thing to see. I don't like this either."

"Don't judge hastily. In its normal moods, Tunis is a city of enchantment. I've been here many times, and I'm always glad to come back. It has life and color and mystery. You can find anything you seek here. Even peace. Time means nothing. I think I am reasonably hard of head, and yet I tell you that on hot still nights I've fancied I could see the ghosts of Hannibal's men marching out to Zama." He paused and smiled. "I'm going to make a confession. I prefer Tunis to most Christian cities. Even to London."

"London!" There was the deepest contempt in Dona Cristina's voice. "I hear it is a dismal city. Cold and foggy and very dirty. They treated our Queen Catherine badly in London. I think you are comparing one form of barbarism with another. Have you seen any of the cities of Spain?"

"Yes, dear lady, I've seen them all. They make me think of beasts of the jungle sleeping in high grass through the heat of midday. They seem peaceful and lovely; but you know that they might at any moment be roused to blood-lust." He smiled apologetically. "I'm speaking my mind frankly, Señorita. As for London, it is clear you don't know it's the richest city in the world. Even the merchants of mighty Rome-ville live in homes as fine as the palaces of your noblemen in Seville. I mention the fact with pride, although you'll think perhaps I'm giving further proof of the barbarity of the place."

"I do indeed," she said.

"It's a great city, Señorita. I know nothing more inspiring than to sail up the Thames and watch the life of London unfolding and multiplying on each bank. But I'm never happy there. I confess it. To me London is the personification of human energy and the determination of man to make over God's good earth to suit himself." He paused and shook his head. "Strange talk, this, from me. I've spent my life in finding ways to increase the number of ships on the Thames."

We had climbed a narrow stone stairway, slippery from the moisture which dripped through leaks in the roof, and now stood on a long gallery overlooking the main hall of the palace. It had been imposing once, but now there were wide cracks in the colored tiling of the walls, and the inlaid marble floor was warped and split.

"The knights of Charles V of Spain dined here once," said Sir Sigismund, reflectively. "And the place has been shunned like a pest-house

ever since. Even the beggars of the city refuse to seek shelter inside these polluted walls. Please don't think I say this as a reflection on your people, Señorita. The heathen hate us all equally. And, as it happens, I'm half Spanish myself."

He was so completely English in appearance, with his mild gray eyes and thin, high-bridged nose, that I was as much taken aback at this statement as our companion.

"My mother was Spanish," he explained. "I don't remember her, but I believe she was quite a beauty. I think she must have looked somewhat like you, Señorita. My father, who was an astronomer of some small repute, went to Portugal with George Buchanan when that great Scotsman was invited to lecture at the University of Coimbra. There my father met the daughter of an obscure Spanish poet and married her."

The Señorita had forgotten her fears and was listening to him with absorbed interest. I watched her with more interest than I had for Sigismund's explanation, noting the stamp of pride in her fine features and the sensitive curve of her lips.

"I was born the very day that the officers of the Inquisition came for my father and other foreign lecturers. He was kept in prison for a year. My mother carried me in her arms when she met him at the prison gates with the welcome news that he was free to leave the country. The pardon came too late. He was reduced to skin and bone, and a rat had gnawed away one ear while he lay unconscious in prison."

"He was a heretic—" began the Señorita.

"There is a choice of terms," said Hill. "My father had imbibed his religious beliefs under a truly great man. His name, Señorita, was John Knox, though I doubt if it can mean anything to you. He didn't survive the voyage home, and my mother died a few months after we landed. I was brought up by an uncle, a wool merchant in London. He taught me to believe that the devil had put his mark on every Spaniard. When quite a young man I spent several months on a walking tour of your country, and I realized then how wrong he had been. I wasn't able to locate any of my mother's people, but I made many friends. Some of them continue friends to this day."

He regaled us with anecdotes of his travels in Spain as we completed our inspection of the place. In the chapel we found a crucifix of solid gold attached to the wall. Sir Sigismund regarded it with thoughtful eyes.

"My mother was treated coldly in England because she was a Catholic," he said. "Years later a young cousin of mine, a girl and quite lovely, was

burned at the stake by Queen Mary's orders because she was a Protestant. And now observe this crucifix, the symbol of the Christian faith. It's hated so intensely by the Mohammedans that it has been left untouched all these years. It would have made a rich man out of any beggar who carried it away. I vow, my young friends, that this would be a peaceful world, and a pleasanter one to live in, if men could only learn to take their religion with less intensity."

I called attention to the fact that the servingwoman had been following us at a respectful distance from the moment we began our inspection.

"Poor Luisa!" said the Señorita. "She is afraid to be left alone. At home she would run and hide herself at the sight of a brown face. You may judge of her loyalty when she insisted on coming with me."

Sounds of conflict reached us from the street. I could make out English voices above the treble clamor of the natives. "John has arrived with a squad," I said. "They'll soon get the streets cleared."

It took a very few minutes, and then John entered through the front gate. He was grinning happily. "That will teach the beggars a lesson," he said. He swept a low bow to the Spanish girl. "If the Señorita will excuse us for a few minutes, I have important news for you, gentlemen."

He led the way to a corner of the weed-infested courtyard where we seated ourselves on the rim of what had once been a marble fountain. A bronze fawn stood in the center and afforded us a little shade from the heat of the sun.

"The Dey is a badly frightened little man," said John. "He has agreed to everything."

Hill nodded. "I expected as much. The Dons have a heavy score to settle with him. He needs your help badly."

"He went limp with apprehension when I told him about the truce. I didn't need to explain what I planned to do. He began by begging me to organize all the Free Rovers into a fleet to operate from this port. If we agree to engage any Spanish squadron which rounds Cape Blanc, he will give us certain supplies free of charge and forego his percentage of the spoils. His fears got the better of his bargaining instinct. He sat there biting his nails and making concessions so fast that I found it hard to keep up with him. If I had held off, I believe the little heathen would have offered me the half of his kingdom and the run of his harem."

"He's a great promiser," commented Hill, "but he'll bear watching. When he thinks he has no more need for you, he'll throw you to the dogs,

Ward. And now, perhaps, you'll condescend to hear the news I bring you. I think you'll find it a great surprise."

John laughed. "I'm all ears. Does good King Jamie offer me the half of *his* kingdom?"

"Not exactly. But you've made a shrewd guess. His Majesty has changed his mind. He wants you back."

I could hardly believe my ears, although I realized from the serious expression on the lean face of the great traveler that he was speaking the truth. I felt like jumping up and shouting for joy. This meant we would return to England at once, with the profits of a successful cruise in our pockets and the plaudits of the whole nation in our ears. I glanced at John to see how he was taking it and was surprised to see that he was frowning.

"I can accept a joke in good grace, Mundy," he said. "But you're letting your fancy stray too far. What, in God's name, are you trying to tell me?"

The girl had retired to a shaded corner of the courtyard. Here she had seated herself on a stone bench and was watching us with an intensity which under the circumstances I found pathetic. It was clear she knew her own fate was bound up in what we were discussing. I wondered what John would do with her now, for it was certain he could not take her back to England with us. Poor lady! This great news, which had set my blood racing with exultation, would be nothing short of tragic for her.

Luisa was standing behind her mistress and had placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. Apparently the maid also had sensed that a crisis was at hand.

"It's official, John," said Hill. "I had my instructions in the matter direct from my Lord of Nottingham. He requested me to tell you how great is his own pleasure in the decision. I'm sure His Lordship has important plans for you."

John got slowly to his feet. Taking his plumed hat from his head, he tossed it solemnly in the air.

"I'm so happy I can hardly speak," he said. I was not surprised to see that his eyes were filled with tears. "I've never desired anything better than to fight for my country under the flag of my King. I promise you that His Majesty will find me a loyal servant." His voice suddenly boomed out with a rush of enthusiasm. "Tremble, Philip of Spain! Your filthy beard is ripe for singeing! The might of England is to be unleashed at last. And, glory to God, John Ward is to have his share in it!"

I was puzzled by the expression on Hill's face. Was he withholding something? Were there strings to the offer from London which he had not



yet mentioned? My spirits took a sharp decline.

John began to pace about, his hands sunk deep in the pockets of his yellow breeches. We all watched him, Hill with a growing air of apprehension, the Spanish girl with an agitation that outstripped my own. I was sure now that matters were not as perfect as they had seemed.

"I'm convinced, Mundy," boomed John, "that His Majesty knows the negotiations between Spain and the Low Countries are ending in this truce. He has a wise head on his shoulders, after all. He may endeavor to block it by throwing in actively with the Dutch. Or it may be that he realizes England will soon face a fight single-handed against Spain. Thank God, he's facing the issue at last."

Hill shook his head in dissent. "You're leaping far ahead of the royal purpose," he said. "His Majesty is not thinking in terms of war with Spain. On the contrary, he's as strongly persuaded to peace as ever."

John stopped his excited pacing. "He doesn't intend to fight? I don't understand this. What does he propose to do with me, then?"

Hill smiled bleakly. "There's plenty of work for you. Have you any idea how much real piracy there is about our own shores? Lundy Island is still a menace to shipping in the Severn. It's high time something was done to clean out that foul nest. Things are bad in the northern reaches of the Irish Sea. Grace O'Malley and Fineen of the Ships are dead, but there are a dozen or more taking their places. That's the task His Majesty has for you, John."

"I see. Hire a pirate to catch other pirates. So that's the King's plan! I might have known."

John sat down again. I knew what his answer was going to be, and somewhere down deep within myself I found a spark of agreement. But it was not strong enough to take the edge off my disappointment.

The rosy dreams in which I had been indulging disappeared. We would not be returning to England after all. I felt so bad that I did not dare raise my eyes. Instead I kept them fixed on a green lizard which was creeping around the base of the fountain. It was the largest and gaudiest specimen I had ever seen.

"I can't make any sense out of this at all," went on John. I could tell from his voice how sick he was feeling. "Gondomar must be clamoring for my head. Has the King found new courage to resist Spanish demands?"

"You would find it easier to understand if you knew what happened after you sailed," explained Hill. "All London started to laugh when the word got out that the King had suspected you of a plot against his royal person. The country took it up. The laughter became so general and so boisterous that

echoes of it finally reached the royal ears. He had enough common sense to see he had made a fool of himself, particularly when a paquin of Archie Armstrong's got about. It began like this:

“King Jamie peered beneath his bed,  
But John Ward wasna there. . . .”

“I could supply the rest of the lines myself,” said John glumly.

“His Majesty realized at last that the people of the country were for you and against him in this matter. He made up his mind, grudgingly I am sure, to grant you a pardon and get you back in his service before more harm was done to his kingly popularity. I'm assuming that he has another purpose. Relations with Spain will remain unsatisfactory as long as you continue to give them cause for complaint. His Majesty sees that, the sooner you are called off, the easier it will be for him to get the peace he desires. And there you have the whole story.”

“Not quite all. His Majesty didn't know then that I would add to my long list of crimes by hanging Don Pedro Alonzo Maria de Vente. Wait until he hears about that!” He began to laugh bitterly. “This, then, is the situation: I will be taken back to do the King's dirty work and spend my life chasing the owling brotherhood of the Irish Sea. In the meantime Spain will conclude her truce with the Dutch and will be free to concentrate her fleets in the Mediterranean and on the lanes to the Americas. There will be no one to organize any resistance to them, and English shipping will be driven from the seas.”

Hill made no comment, and after a moment John asked him what the effect would be on the Levant Company. “We're in a dilemma,” was the answer. “Our ships may be put into coastal service or sold to the East India Company. The route around Africa will remain open.”

“Don't be too sure of that!” declared John. “Once we're driven out of here, the Spaniards will be in a position to close off the Middle Course. Be honest with me, Mundy. Are you happy over this situation?”

Hill hesitated and then said gruffly, “No.” They sat in silence for several moments before he added: “I'm not happy about it. I refrained from expressing myself one way or the other because I didn't want to influence your decision. It would be to your own best interest to take the offer, my boy. If you don't—” He left the sentence unfinished.

John crossed his knees and stared straight ahead with the deepest gloom. I glanced in the direction of the Señorita, and she raised her hand in a gesture which I construed as an invitation to join her. I walked over, and she drew her skirts aside to make room for me on the bench.

“What is it all about?” she whispered. “I have been watching your faces and have seen that you are all very unhappy.”

“Captain Ward has been offered a pardon and reinstatement in the Royal Navy.”

Her face clouded over, and at first she made no comment. “But that is what he wants, is it not?” she asked finally.

“Yes. But there are conditions attached which he doesn’t like.”

There was another pause. “He will accept?” she ventured.

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. If he doesn’t, it will probably mean that we will never see England again. Certainly not for many years.”

“Would he not be wise, then, to accept the conditions?”

All my doubts suddenly dissolved. “No, Señorita. He would be untrue to everything he believes if he returned to England now. I’m sure he has already made up his mind to refuse. And that’s what you want, isn’t it?”

She gave me a steady glance from under her long black eyelashes. “Yes, it is what I want,” she said. “But I am sorry for you, Don Roger. John has told me a great deal about you, and sometimes I have watched you when you did not know it. You do not like this life. You are very young, and it does not seem right that you should be an exile all your life.”

This put me on the defensive. “It may not last forever. The King’s son will change things when he comes to the throne. He’s a brave prince and sees the need for fighting Spanish pretensions as much as most Englishmen do.”

She sighed. “You all hate my country. I think you do not like me either.”

I had been keeping my eyes on John and Sir Sigismund, but this was a challenge which forced me to turn and face her. Her face was a perfect oval of delicate ivory against the soft fold of her lace rebatoe. The dress into which she had changed was white except for a few touches of black in the embroidery of her sleeves and on the barred petticoat which showed under her divided skirt. I could not help contrasting her slim grace with the artificial effect of the farthingale, to which English women still clung. She was wearing no jewelry, with the exception of a large emerald set in a ring of curiously carved gold.

“You’re wrong about that,” I said. “I like you very much.”

She began to speak in low and hurried tones. “We have interests in common, Don Roger. You must know that I would not be here if I had not been so foolish as to fall in love with your tall captain. One day we had a very bitter quarrel, and he told me then about the girl in England and about

you. See, Don Roger, we will make a bargain between us. You will go home and marry this girl. And I, I will see that John does not care.” She went on in a tense whisper, “I could not bear it if a memory stood between us. The memory will fade quicker if you marry her. Do you think me immodest to say this? I cannot afford to be modest now.”

“Roger!” called John.

“Remember,” she whispered, as I got to my feet. “We are partners. We must stand together.”

“We’re partners,” I said. “But I’m afraid things won’t happen the way we want them. I’ve no chance at all. Katie’s in love with John.”

John looked at me curiously when I rejoined them. “You’re learning fast, my kinchin coe,” he said. “What were you and the Señorita talking about with your heads so close together?”

“You, for the most part.”

He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. “I’m not so sure of that. You’ve a guilty look about you. But come now, we’ve a decision to make.” He seemed to have regained his spirits, which to me was an indication that the decision had already been made in his mind. “Mundy, what is your final thought?”

“There’s one point I haven’t mentioned yet,” said Hill. “With the offer from His Majesty goes a promise of knighthood within as brief a space of time as may seem necessary to the maintenance of the royal dignity. Sir John Ward—it has a round ring to it. Perhaps that is the argument you need to decide the matter for you.”

John drew his sword from its scabbard. The hilt was made of gold and elaborately chased. He held the blade out in front of him.

“I’m proud of this sword,” he said. “The steel was forged by a smith of Damascus several centuries ago. I won the hilt in fair combat with a subject of His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain. I’m not ashamed of any use to which it has been put since it has belonged to me. I prefer to keep my record as clean as this fine blade.” He thrust it back. His voice rose. “You may inform the Earl of Nottingham that I refuse the King’s offer! I would rather be plain John Ward, a pirate if you like and a man without country or flag, fighting by myself to keep the sea lanes open, than Sir John Ward, tame piglet in His Sowship’s sty. That is my decision.”

“John,” said Hill, “you’re a great fool. But as an Englishman I am proud of such folly.”

They shook hands on it. John turned his head in my direction. “What about you, Roger? I think you would be well advised to return with Sir

Sigismund. Anyone who stays with me will find himself forever under the royal ban. I don't want to have that happen to you."

"I'm going to stay," I answered. "I signed up for the duration of the cruise. Would you have me back out now when there is rough water ahead?"

"Bravely spoken," said John. "I knew you would want to stay. And now, Mundy, what have you provided for our dinner? All this talk has made me hungry."

When Sir Sigismund left to see what could be done about refreshments, John took me by the arm and said in a low tone, "I suppose you're wondering what my plans are for the fair captive?"

I assured him that I was very much interested, and that I was sure the Señorita herself would like to learn what was in his mind as soon as possible.

"I've thought of an excellent plan." He spoke with assurance, but I was certain that he was suffering from inward misgivings. "There's an Englishman living with his wife in Sicily, Sir Ninian Pippins from up Ipswich way. His health was so bad that he was given up for dead, and he then conceived the completely mad scheme of leaving England and living on this island. Ten years ago it was, and by some curious chance he's still alive. Lady Pippins is a motherly soul, and they have no chick of their own. I hear they are lonely, and they have a large stone house with a garden looking out over the sea. Well, I shall send the Señorita to them. I'll give her as much as I can, and she can make her home with them; and in time, no doubt, she'll marry some fine young fellow. Don't you think it is a perfect solution?"

"No," I answered. "It's far from a perfect solution."

"In God's name, why not?" His manner showed irritation, and yet I knew he had expected no other answer.

"She'll tell you herself when you propose this plan to her. Why not do it at once? The poor lady is consumed with anxiety."

I left the courtyard, observing out of a corner of my eye that he had made a bad start. Tapping the servingwoman familiarly, he said, "Run along, Fubbs, I've something to say to your mistress."

The Señorita frowned. "Disrespect for the maid is disrespect for the mistress. Perhaps you do not know that in England."

I went into the inner court, and from there could hear their voices distinctly enough to know that John's plan was not receiving a favorable hearing. The talk went on for the better part of an hour, at the end of which time Sir Sigismund announced that food was ready for us. The discussion

stopped, and I saw Dona Cristina walk into the house, her head held high and a trace of color in her cheeks. John followed with a slightly chap-fallen air and, as I fell into step with him, he said, "The lady has a temper."

## 16

THE MEAL WAS SERVED in the high-ceilinged chamber which we had observed from the gallery earlier in the afternoon. Some pretense at furnishings had been managed in the meantime. A long table had been set up on the uneven floor, and half a dozen oddly assorted chairs had been placed about it. In one corner was a tabouret with a set of tall ivory chessmen.

"Do either of you play?" asked Hill. "I always carry these men with me. I'm reasonably expert. No one in England has ever beaten me, and once I achieved a draw with the great Ruy Lopez de Segura in Spain. But that means little, for I've been beaten by many players in the East. There is one dried-up little mummy of a man in Damascus, a rug merchant, who can give me the queen—he calls it the *farzi*—and defeat me with the greatest ease."

I owned to a slight acquaintance with the game, and it was arranged that we would play after dinner. He would give me a rook to begin with; or did I think I might need both?

The Señorita joined us, and Sir Sigismund took the head of the table, placing her on his right while I sat on her other side. She looked across the table at John with stormy eyes but said nothing.

A single dish was placed before us, a huge platter heaped high with food. "Couscousou, the great dish of the East," explained Sir Sigismund. "I'm afraid we must help ourselves with our hands. It's the custom." The Señorita and I looked at each other with considerable doubt, but our two companions began to eat with appetite, assuring us it was capital food. Accordingly I dipped a hand into the platter and was rewarded with a tender piece of mutton. It was so good that I threw my scruples to the wind and proceeded to make a hearty meal. Dona Cristina could not be persuaded to participate, however.

“The base of this dish,” said Hill, tossing a bone over his shoulder, “is a wheaten substance called seminola. They put into it everything they can find—meat, eggs, vegetables, butter, spices. Then it’s steamed slowly for hours. You’re making a great mistake, Señorita. It’s the best food in the world.”

“I can’t go that far,” protested John. “This is excellent in its way, but give me the food at home. Roast beef and marrow puddings, collops and hotch-potch; goose at Christmas and pancotto and fruit suckets. There’s nothing better.”

Sir Sigismund protested vigorously. Had John any acquaintance with the curried foods of India, for instance? He considered French cookery overestimated but, even at that, much superior to anything found in England. A ragout, now, a turbot in wine sauce, or a mess of lampreys—these were royal dishes. They argued with some heat, tossing the names of favorite foods back and forth: Jack-of-Dover, quaking puddings, goodicakes, syllabub, temperade, hartshorn jellies. My silent neighbor looked at me once and smiled to show how dull she found the topic.

The platter was removed, and water bowls with linen towels were placed in front of us. I used mine with alacrity, being sure that I had achieved as greasy an appearance as the two disputants. Then a tall dish of fruit was brought in. There were strawberries, the largest grapes I had ever seen, some early peaches, and pomegranates. As a Bible student I was much interested in the latter and bit into one eagerly. John laughed when he saw how disappointing I found it.

“If the children of Israel had known the taste of an English apple,” he declared, “their prophets would have devoted less time to singing the praises of this bitter fruit. A Cornish codlin or a red biffin, for my taste. Still, we must manage somehow to like these desert fruits. We’re going to have a long acquaintance with them, I’m afraid. All of us.” He nodded at the Señorita, who had looked up in surprise. “A very long acquaintance. You in particular, Roger. I’ve decided you’re the man to act as our agent in port.”

My pride took immediate alarm. “That’s landsmen’s work!” I protested.

“Don’t judge too soon. You’ve acquitted yourself like a veritable David, but you’ve also shown a turn for the details of management. That’s a quality I lack most completely.” Seeing that I was going to protest, he went into an explanation. “You have no idea of the importance of this work I want to shift onto your shoulders. If we get all the Free Rovers with us, you’ll be busier than any captain in the fleet.”

“I’ve served in that capacity in my time,” said Hill. “It’s hard work, I assure you.”

“There’s always a shortage of water in Africa, but you will have to be ready on the shortest notice to fill the casks of any number of ships I may bring in. I’m hoping to have as many as thirty. You must keep us supplied with food and powder and medicines. And canvas and silk and rope. The petty tally alone is enough to keep a man busy.”

Hill nodded. “Many a night did I sweat over my books. I’ve stood between captain and owner and taken abuse from both. Thirty captains to suit? You’ll need a cool head on your shoulders.”

The girl whispered to me, “It will be better for you ashore.”

The magnitude of the work had begun to frighten me. When I said this, John declared emphatically: “You can do it, Roger. I’ve been watching you, and I’m sure of it. I’m also sure,” he added with a smile, “that you’ll find it much more to your liking than playing joskin under Hale Harry Gard.”

It did not take me long to make up my mind. The scope of the work was terrifying, but I knew I was better fitted for it than for life aboard ship. I felt easier about the prospect when John explained that I would have the assistance of a wily old Turk named Abadad, who knew the household of the Dey inside out and could be relied on to match official guile with a degree of cunning at least as great.

“Abadad,” said John, “has been with me since my first visit to Tunis. He’s as ugly as the Prince of Sin, and he’d cut his grandfather’s throat if I ordered it. He steals less than any Christian agent I’ve ever known. He works twenty hours a day and devotes half of his leisure time to prayers. I’m fond of the old rascal.”

“Where will I live?” I asked.

“At Gouletta. We have an old stone building which Queen Dido must have built, for it’s at least a thousand years old. You’ll have a room to yourself, and the walls are so thick that you’ll be reasonably cool. You’ll live on the fat of the land while the rest of us are starving at sea on wormy biscuit and rancid salt meat. And, of course, you’ll be entitled to the share of a mate. That’s something to consider.”

I nodded my final acceptance, and the talk turned to details of supply. Naturally we fell back into English, for it was impossible to speak of such matters as the drawing and hand-hackling of hemp in foreign terms. Sir Sigismund was particularly concerned about the manufacture of cloth for sails, which had been started in England for the first time some ten or twelve years before.

“They’re not sailors, the French, and the mildernex we bought from them to rig out our ships could not be trusted,” he declared. “There is a



shoddiness to the French which comes out in what they do. Now that we're making our own, we have sail cloth to stand the bitter threshing of an Arctic gale. Unfortunately, Roger, you'll have to take what you can get here."

I saw that John was keeping an uneasy eye on the Señorita as the talk flowed monotonously along. He seemed ill at ease and fidgeted in his chair. It was a flimsy thing and creaked alarmingly under his weight. He consumed an immense quantity of fruit, throwing the rinds through a fissure in the marble floor. Knowing little of English, Dona Cristina sat with bowed head, turning and returning the emerald ring on her finger.

"That's a fine stone," John said finally, addressing her directly for the first time.

"My father sent it to me from America," she answered, without raising her head. "It is an Inca ring and is supposed to have the power to bring fulfillment of wishes to anyone who wears it. I believed in it at first, but now I am afraid I am losing faith."

Sir Sigismund leaned over the table to study it. "It's of great value," he said. "I'm very much interested in what you say about its power because I've seen many magic stones in the East. I've heard of Yogis bringing fine crops to arid soil by touching the first furrow turned with a piece of jasper. Generally the stones of the East are used for harmful purposes. I saw a large toadstone on the dirty finger of a Persian magician, and it was said he could cast a spell on anyone who crossed him by rubbing it with his thumb."

"Did you see any proofs?" I asked.

"Many strange things happened. I must confess that I took great care not to arouse the man's enmity, I see there's an inscription on the band, Señorita. Do you know what it says?"

She shook her head. "No one has been able to read it. Not even the natives of the country where it came from. It is a very old ring."

"I've never seen a lovelier one," said Hill. "I'm disposed to believe the story. The cool deep green of the emerald has a suggestion of beneficence as well as mystery about it. Ask nothing but good of it, Señorita, and I'm sure it will fulfill your wishes. It's meant to bring love and happiness."

John cleared his throat. "Perhaps you've lost faith too soon," he said.

The girl raised her eyes and looked at him steadily. I sensed that a crisis in their relationship had been reached and wondered what John would say next. He turned toward Sir Sigismund. "I've arranged with the Dey to take over this place when you leave, Mundy. He gives it to me outright as part of the bargain."

"What do you plan to do with it?"

"I'm going to restore it to its former glory. The Dey promises me all the workmen I'll need. I'm going to raise the wall to twenty feet and broaden it so watchmen can stand on it. The chapel will be restored. Water will be piped in from the city reservoir. The fountains will run again, and I'm going to install baths. I'll station half a dozen men of the crew here to act as a guard." He paused. "I'm hoping, Señorita, that you'll accept it as your home. You'll be able to live here as comfortably as you did in Castile. There will be security for you, and peace. I hope some happiness also."

She sat for a moment without answering. Then she rose and said, "You are very kind," and left the room. John gazed after her with a hurt and puzzled look.

"I thought she would be pleased," he said.

"You great dolt," said Sir Sigismund. "She's so happy about it, she couldn't trust herself to say anything more." He winked at me. "And now, Sir Agent, we may get to our game of chess."

I joined him at the tabouret, and we matched for the first move. I lost. John got to his feet with careful nonchalance and strolled from the room.

Sir Sigismund swept both his rooks from the board and advanced his king's pawn. "I think the ring has power after all," he said, with a broad smile. "The lady has won. We won't see either of them now for a time. That's just as well, for now we'll have an uninterrupted game. She's quite beautiful, don't you think?"

"Yes, very beautiful."

"What a contrast to our apple-cheeked girls at home." He pounced triumphantly on a knight which I had advanced carelessly. "The last time I was in Spain was just before war was declared. They were assembling the Armada, and they were very sure of victory. Governors were being appointed for all our cities. Philip was going over the lists himself, and he was having medals struck to reward his captains. Feeling was running high, and I had to get out of the country fast. There was a song I heard being sung everywhere. It dealt with the faults of Englishmen and was so amusing that I went to the trouble of translating it. One verse had to do with love.

"A Spanish maid in love might fall,  
Mayhap with reasty Portugall,  
With an Irish kern, a Paris clown,  
A Moorish thief with skin of brown,  
A scurvy knave of roynish clan;  
*But never! No, never, an Englishman!"*

He advanced a bishop and said, "Check!" I was in a difficult position, and while I studied what to do he went on: "I'm afraid our lovely Señorita had never heard that particular verse. It would have been better for her if she had. When things go wrong between them—as they will, of course—she will either put a knife between his ribs or go quietly away and die of a broken heart. In my judgment, the poor lady will take the second course. Well, there's nothing to be done about it. She's fallen in love, and with an Englishman. By the way, Captain Ward will be in port a great deal from now on. Don't be surprised if he decides you are too crowded at Gouletta to accommodate him."

## 17

A BREEZE BLEW IN from the sea during the evening, giving us a welcome respite from the drugging heat of the day. John and I adjourned to an upper balcony to take advantage of it, and there went into a discussion of supplies. After a short nap, Sir Sigismund joined us with a packet of letters in his hand. Three of them were for me, the rest for John.

I did not open mine for several minutes. Looking at the familiar handwriting on two of them and at the slanting girlish scrawl of the third, I had become desperately homesick. I did not need to read them to get the feel of happier things: the bustle and chatter of Shrubsole High; the pleasant calm of an evening in front of the fire at home with Mother smiling at me over her embroidery and Aunt Gadilda grimly absorbed in some more practical task; the sway of light breezes in the sorb groves; and the unmusical voices of brisk dredgermen at the wharves. I found myself longing to be back in that easy and secure life. The sounds of heathen gabble, reaching us faintly from the rooftops in the town below, intensified my desire for the sweet tedium of home.

John, whose interest in our talk of powdered pork and ammunition had been limited by the fact that, from where we sat, we could see the slim figure of the Spanish girl pacing slowly up and down in the outer courtyard, was already deep in his mail. I was undutiful enough to read Katie's note

ahead of the others. It was the first I had ever received from her, and my eyes skimmed eagerly over the closely written pages.

DERE ROGGER; [Katie was never much of a scholar]

Father has sede Sir Sigismund Hill will carry latters for me and so I am writing you and Captane Warde [she had set down 'John' first and then crossed it out] to tell you how happie I am you are soone to return home. Father does not agrie and says Captane Warde is needed wear he is. I am sure he wud be angrie with me for feeling diffrunt—

It was a chatty note, filled with details which I absorbed eagerly. She was in a jubilant mood because she was to become maid of honor in the household of Queen Anne in the fall and had written down ecstatic descriptions of the dresses she was going to take with her to London. There was a whole page about tippets of sarsenet, pickadells, rebatoes, purles, fulles and frislets, buskpoints and whalebone wheels. She had seen my mother in town one day, and they had talked about me for a long time. Her old dog Walter had died, and she did not think she would get another because it was said the Queen did not like dogs and would not want one at court. Did I remember a forward minx named Ann Turner? Of course I did; all the men of the town had been interested in the girl. She had opened a frippery shop in London, and all the ladies of the court were going to it. So she, Katie, would probably go too, if only out of curiosity. She wondered what presents I would be bringing her.

I was much feared [she concluded] when there was so grate a trubble in London and Captane Warde was hideing with us. We thought you had been taken to the Tower and so I was most happie when Father heard that the Royal Bess had sailed. You are much in my thoughts, Rogger, and I will not fele easy until you and Captane Warde have returned safely. I have missed you gratefully.

I read it over several times, picturing her in my mind in each episode she described. I told myself it was exactly the kind of letter she would have written me if she had never set eyes on John Ward, and that I had no reason for disappointment. Nevertheless I found myself watching him and wondering if his letter from Katie was longer than mine, and if it had been couched in more intimate terms.

He was a long time in reading it. Then he fell into a brown study, his eyes fixed on the sky to the north. Finally he said to Hill: "I want you to know, Mundy, that it's not ambition which keeps me here. I've no desire to

add to my reputation. I would be the happiest man alive if I could sail home this very night.”

I knew then that what he had told me was true. Katie had made her choice.

I turned to the rest of my mail with a sinking heart. There was much news of the town in the letters from Mother and Aunt Gadilda. They both indulged in a few mild expressions of reproach, but it was easy to see they were secretly proud of what I had done. Each referred to the rumor that we were returning soon and were very happy about it, although Aunt Gadilda added a phrase which puzzled me. “Your mother,” she wrote, “does not explain how she heard this welcome news, fearing my disapproval, and rightly.”

I was so much at a loss over this that I read what she had said to John. “Sir Bartlemy, no doubt,” he said, with a grin. “He’s a great gossip and quite a bit of a beau as well. It was said all over town he had a soft spot for your pretty mother. No doubt he stopped in to tell her the news, and your righteous aunt didn’t approve.”

I knew at once that he was right. Thinking back, I recalled many occasions when the owner of Appleby Court had called at our house on one pretext or another. It had never occurred to me then to connect his calls with the fact that afterward Aunt Gadilda was always in what Mother called her mood. One afternoon I had been in my bedroom and, hearing voices below, had opened my door with the intention of going down. Aunt Gadilda was standing at the head of the stairs, her head bent forward to catch what was being said in the drawing room. This had seemed strange, and I had changed my mind and returned to my room. Later I saw Sir Bartlemy ride away, looking very gallant in his velvet cloak and plumed hat.

John saw at once that I was bothered over what he had said, for he added hastily: “Come now, I meant no offense. Sir Bartlemy is a giddy old fool, and he never misses a chance to talk to a pretty woman.”

I let the matter drop without any comment, and John went back to his mail, throwing an occasional word over his shoulder about the contents of the letters. There was one from the Upright Man of Alsatia to confirm arrangements for the shipment of goods by the overland route from Marseilles. He read it aloud, chuckling over its stilted phrases. There was a brief note from Richard Hakluyt, raising the point of publication of any manuscript which John might have in preparation. This interested me so much that I forgot my dismal speculations over the probable contents of the letter he had received from Katie. I had read most of the *Divers Voyages*

which Hakluyt had published, getting the loan of them from Appleby Court; and the stirring tales they contained had done more than anything else to keep me resolute in my intention to become a sailor. John let the sheet flutter over the railing. He had never heard of Richard Hakluyt.

The most interesting letter of all was a brief scrawl from Archie Armstrong which John read aloud:

The mental acrobatics of our great noddie of a King have amazed everyone. He has turned a neat cat in a pan and now has nothing but the fondest things to say about you, my good Sir Pirate. But a word to the wise. Our doughty monarch changes his mind more often than he does his shirt. Given his own gait, he would rather see you swinging at Wapping Stairs than strutting it on the poop-deck of a royal ship-of-war. Think it over well, John Ward.

“Archie is right,” said John. “I put no trust in pious Master James and his half-promises. I would as soon find myself in the power of this web-spinner at the Bardo. The Dey, at least, knows how best his own interests can be served.”

Hill nodded in agreement. “The King’s mind,” he said, “is a quick one, but it is a small one. A dangerous combination.”

The sun went down, and darkness fell over the city almost immediately. I could never get accustomed to this curious trick of Nature. Twilight at home was gradual and pleasant: I always felt we were in a different world when night came down like a black curtain. Silence fell over the city. My two companions got to their feet, Hill with a deep yawn, John with a rueful reminder of letters he must write as a result of his talk with the Dey.

I descended a stone stair and made my way through a passage to the inner court. A dozen lanterns had been brought ashore and had already been hung in different parts of the palace. One was suspended on the wall of the court, but the light it cast was so small that I did not see the Señorita until she came forward from the corner where she had been sitting alone.

“I thought you would never be through talking,” she said. “It must have been a matter of great importance to keep you all so long.”

I nodded. “John has letters to write now. He’s summoning all the Free Rovers to Tunis.”

Her face showed mixed emotions at this piece of news—fear mostly, but a trace of pride as well. “It will do him no good,” she declared. “How can he

hope to face the navy of Spain? He and his Free Rovers will be swept off the sea. What will happen to all of us then, Don Roger?"

"It will not be as easy as you think," I answered. "Have you forgotten the fate of your Armada?"

She had a black shawl over her shoulders although the breeze had died down again. I noticed that her eyes were a little red.

"We must not quarrel," she said. "I have been in trouble with Luisa. She is sure I should go home and enter a convent. She is very religious and thinks only of saving my soul. More than I do myself, I am afraid. Just now she made a discovery which shocked her very much. She has prostrated herself in prayer, and I cannot get her to speak to me. She found that part of this building had been used as a harem. The thought of remaining in such un-Christian surroundings is too much for her."

Our tour of the afternoon had not included the quarters of the women, and my interest was aroused at once. "Where is it?" I asked.

She motioned toward a small door in the wall farthest from us. "In here," she whispered. She looked up at me and smiled doubtfully. "I—I am almost ashamed to say it, Don Roger, but I am very curious to see what it is like. Would it be too unseemly for us to go in?"

I detached the lantern from the wall and led the way to the door. It was of copper, and there was a huge key still in the lock. The hinges screeched a protest when I threw it open. My companion caught her breath as she followed me in.

I held the lantern high above my head. We were standing in a long room with a green marble floor and a sunken bath in the center. The walls were high, and there were latticed windows at least ten feet above the level of the floor. "This must have been the common room," I said in a whisper. "Their lord and master saw to it they were kept closely. No outside eye ever saw them here."

"Poor creatures!" said Dona Cristina. After a brief pause, she added: "Still, they had something precious here. They had peace."

"Peace? A dozen women living together in quarters like this! Anything but peace, I would say."

We found, on climbing a flight of steps to a corridor back of the common room, that at least twenty doors opened off it. I held the lantern in front of one of them and we looked inside. The room was just large enough for a bed and a few small articles of furniture. There was a window high up on the wall with colored glass.

My companion had been speaking in English, choosing her words slowly and with some difficulty. Now she reverted to her own tongue. "It's just like a prison. No, Don Roger, the poor women couldn't know peace in such surroundings. Luisa was right. There's something very wicked about this. I shall ask to have this wing closed up."

She spoke such perfect Spanish that my book learning enabled me to follow her with little difficulty. From that time on she never spoke anything else with me.

At the end of each corridor were narrow embrasures with tall windows which had served to give the inmate a view of the outside world. Vines grew thickly over the glass now. At the end of the long row of small rooms was a dark cell with a barred iron door. Holding the candle through the bars, I saw there were iron bracelets sunk into the masonry.

"What is it?"

"A punishment room, I think. Oriental husbands see to it that wives who disobey them are brought to their senses quickly."

She indulged in a shudder. "I think we had better go back now. What a cruel and senseless life! I'll never be able to get this picture out of my mind."

I pointed out the handsome decorations on the walls. The tiles were hexagonal in shape and carried yellow inscriptions on a dark-blue background. The cornices were loaded with gilding which had stood the ravages of time and neglect remarkably well. My companion was not impressed. When I called attention to a dark stairway leading underground, and made the suggestion that it led to the quarters of the eunuchs, she shuddered again.

"We'll leave that part unvisited, if you please. I'm sure we would find bastinado boards and whipping posts. I've seen enough."

When we descended again to the common room, we found John standing in the doorway. He was holding a lantern above his head and scowling doubtfully.

"Well," he said, his voice echoing through the bare room. "This is where you are. I've been looking everywhere and more than half suspecting an elopement." He made the suggestion lightly, but I could see he was not pleased.

"We've been looking over the harem," I said.

"What do you think of it?"

"It's wicked, and unfair and unclean!" said the girl. "I'm sorry I came."



John laughed. "I'm not so sure the idea is entirely wrong. Why should the women be unhappy? They live an easy life with no cares or responsibilities."

"Can any woman be happy who shares a husband with twenty others?"

"Perhaps not. But my sympathies are with the husbands."

She answered scornfully. "I was sure they would be. You boasted to me that you had a roving eye—"

"I didn't boast about it. I stated it in a properly penitent mood."

"You would be completely happy here, I'm sure. Your eye could rove along that row of doors—"

"Come now, we'll be quarreling in a minute. Roger has had more than his fair share of your company. I claim the rest."

I realized that I was tired, and so decided I would go to bed. I said good night to my companions and went in search of the room where the nettings from the ship had been hung. It proved to be close and airless, and I found it impossible to sleep there. After a time it occurred to me that it would be more comfortable on the roof. Unhooking the netting, I gathered it up in my arms and started out.

I reached the roof after a quarter-hour of stumbling along dark corridors and up stairs which ended in blank walls. It was hot even here, but the beauty of the sky was enough to compensate for any physical discomfort. The stars were out, and my first impression was that I could pluck any of them by extending an arm.

There was no possibility of swinging my netting from the stone parapet, so I rolled it up to serve as a pillow and stretched myself out on the stone roof. Sleep continued to evade me, for voices rose with surprising clearness from the garden below. I tried not to listen when I realized that it was John and the Señorita, but only by covering my ears could I have avoided hearing something of the conversation. She was calling him "Beau Brimstone," which surprised me because it was the least-used of the many nicknames the crew had coined for their captain. Once she began to sing in a pleasant throaty voice, and I recognized the air and words of the song to which Sir Sigismund had referred that afternoon. She had known it after all. John laughed at the finish and asked, "And is that the way you feel about Englishmen?" If she made any answer it was in too low a voice to reach as far as the rooftop.

Their voices went on and on, and finally I began to get drowsy. I heard John say, "You wouldn't be content, then, with one share in twenty?" I caught the answer this time: "I would not be content with nineteen shares." I

became fully awake again when John said, "You need have no worries on that score, my sweet. It will not be difficult for you to command my entire devotion."

He was carrying Katie's letter in his pocket. I did not know which I felt sorrier for, Katie or Dona Cristina.

## 18

A MONTH LATER the roadstead was filled with English sails, and the Free Rovers assembled in the stone house at Gouletta to discuss John Ward's plan. They were a nondescript lot, some of them handsome enough and with traces of good breeding, others as rough as the trade they followed. I kept an eye on Sir Nevil Macherie, remembering the idea that Katie's father had once entertained. He was tall and sleek and very dandified in his manners.

Macherie was strongly in favor of the plan until he found that John would be selected as commander. He then began to hedge, to find objections and to question every suggestion with a supercilious air. It was clear that he regarded himself as of superior clay to the rest of them. He would sit by himself, cool and immaculate in spite of the stifling heat, and look around him with the utmost insolence. I took so great a dislike to him that I sometimes chimed in on the other side during the debates.

John disliked him fully as much as I did. Once he whispered in my ear: "This superior young gentleman needs a lesson. I wish I could afford to give him it."

Sir Nevil acquired a small following, but in the end he was outvoted. The impending truce between Spain and the Low Countries made it necessary for the Free Rovers to do something in self-defense, and John's plan was the only feasible one. They had to come to it finally. It was settled after two acrimonious days that they would join forces and take their orders from John Ward. Macherie was named second in command, perhaps because of the blue blood in his veins, perhaps to win his assent to the plan.

It was agreed also that I was to take charge ashore. This was done in spite of vigorous protests from Sir Nevil. He contended that I was “a raw gilpie, and an insolent one to boot.” He wanted the Irishman Sleath to have the post but received practically no support on that. It had been decided that the cargoes of captured ships would be stored in port until an even division could be made, and the other captains were too well aware of Sleath’s propensities to trust him with the fruits of their combined operations.

I had been watching Macherie closely during these stormy meetings. He was sparely built, with lathlike shanks and a habit of carrying his head well forward when he walked. This, combined with the fact that his skin was unusually white, made me think he resembled a high churchman of earlier days. There was nothing in his record to confirm this suggestion, however.

John stopped him, after the final meeting, to say that he had seen Sir Bartlemy Ladland recently and that he, Sir Bartlemy, had expressed the hope that they would meet. Macherie seemed to find the matter of small interest.

“Ah, yes,” he said, rubbing his long nose. “Sir Bartlemy Ladland. Yes.”

John turned away abruptly, but Sir Nevil reached an arm to detain him.

“Ward! What do you think of this venture? Do you see success in it for us?”

“Of course.” John’s manner was short. “We’ll make it so hot for the Spaniards that they’ll elect to leave our shipping alone.”

“You do beat the drum of patriotism loudly, Ward. Fid’s florins! I was thinking of something quite different. I was thinking of gold, man, gold for you and me and the rest of them. I need all I can get. My patrimony”—he paused to flick a speck of dust from the padded sleeve of his black doublet—“is somewhat depleted.”

This was an understatement. I did not know what the Macherie estate had been earlier, but I had seen where Sir Nevil now lived: a few acres on a wooded scaur, without water or pasture land, the house an unpretentious block of green stone named Hodleyhaw, although the people of the neighborhood insisted on calling it Old Rattle-slates.

“I must get the family land back,” went on Macherie. “You can’t keep up a name in England without land. You probably don’t follow me in that, Ward. You’ve never had land.”

“No.” John twisted his neck around to wink at me. “Like all the rest of the old and illustrious family of Ward, I’ve had to put my roots down in the deck of a ship.”

Later he said to me, “The fellow is a perfect woolly-crown.” I did not agree with that. In spite of his foppish ways, Macherie impressed me as

dangerous.

I had been fighting against a sense of impending trouble for days. It had started when I realized that the three captains now taking their turn at a layover in port were, by some mischance, the only open adherents of Sir Nevil Macherie in our group of thirty. My apprehensions had grown as I watched the trio with their heads together in long serious talks. Something was afoot; and, whatever it might be, it boded our enterprise no good.

The table I used for a desk was piled high with papers, but I was in no mood for work. I had moved it so far forward that I sat almost in the open, and beneath me the ships at anchorage were massed so closely together that they made me think of an immense floral border in full bloom, even though I was close enough to see tarry patches and badly mended rents in the sails of blue, green, and orange. Over this barricade of color I could gaze clear across the bay. The surface of the water was almost glasslike, but gray clouds were banking over the horizon with a promise of coolness later.

I doubt if any tavern in Wapping had ever harbored a more villainous-looking lot than the assorted group which filled the room back of me. A file of natives squatted along the wall, waiting their turns with the utmost patience. I knew that any one of them would slit a throat for a handful of copper aspers. Their business was the transport of slaves through the inferno of sand country which lay to the south. I had refused to deal with them a dozen times, but they still came back with insectlike persistence, buzzing in my ear the latest quotations on healthy white men and comely white women. They filled the room with a heavy musky odor.

Two of the captains sat at a table in the corner. They were a little tipsy and were playing a bitter game of snogo. I could hear Black Jack Blunt from up Newcastle way expostulating with Basil Sleath as he slapped down his greasy cards: "The devil take yer luck! I won't have a single king's picture left." Sleath, who was dark and Irish, was saying nothing as he raked in his winnings, although once or twice he winked in my direction. Out of a corner of my eye I saw Captain Pooley join them and rest his great weight on the rickety table. His knee-high boots had been slit down the front to accommodate his enormous calves; and, although it was but ten in the morning, he was so drunk he could hardly stand. Bristol Bill Pooley was closer to Sir Nevil Macherie than either of the others.

I was thinking how the bold scheme hatched in the brain of John Ward had brought golden rewards. English sails had swept the narrow stretch of water between Tunis and Sicily, and as a result Spain's trade with the Levant had been completely disrupted. Prizes had been brought back with such regularity that up in the Bardo the Dey was beginning to regret his bargain

and to demand his full percentage. I had been to see him twice about the matter, and now settlement of the dispute waited on John's next visit. In the meantime our warehouses bulged with spoils, and I had found it necessary to rent two state bagnios for the care of our prisoners.

The broad back of Captain Pooley interposed itself between me and the tiny breeze blowing in from the bay, and immediately I felt perspiration beading out on my head and neck. He moved aside, and I felt relief. His one good eye, sunk deep in layers of tallowy fat, turned in my direction.

"When is Ward coming in?" he demanded in a reedy voice. "Slit my windpipe, if I like the looks of things here. We have more gold than the Pope of Rome, and that old malkin sits up there on his hill like a cat watching a lot of fat mice. One of these days he'll turn his sally men loose on us. Wouldn't you like to get away while there's still time, Master Blease?"

"Not so loud," I cautioned. "Where could we go, Captain Pooley, if we pulled out from here?"

"The world is large." He spread out his enormous arms. "There's the Far East, and there's the south part of Africa, which some say is the real Land of Cockayne at last, and there's the Americas. We might even go home. Macherie says it would be safe—for some of us. He has influence."

The man was so drunk that I thought it possible to squeeze some information out of him. I decided on a bold course. "If we depended on Sir Nevil Macherie," I said, "there would be nothing left for the Dey to covet. He hasn't brought in a single prize. And now it seems he wants to run away with his share of this gold he's done nothing to earn. How many prizes have you brought in, Captain Pooley?"

He rose to the bait. His solitary eye gleamed sullenly. "You speak boldly for a mere rum-bob," he growled.

"Where would you expect Captain Ward to be? He has taken on himself the hardest task of all. He has the western patrol, to watch for the coming of the Spanish fleet."

"Ay," said Pooley. "And who's watching for the Flat-caps?"

"The Venetians?"

"Ay, the Venetians. They're planning to take us in the rear. Does Captain Ward know that?"

"Does Sir Nevil Macherie know it?"

Pooley laid a heavy hand on my shoulder. "Not yet. While our great men are at sea, it's left to plain William Pooley to get at the truth. The word was brought direct to me, and what do you think of that, my fine young cock?"

It was working. Drink had broken down his caution, and he was in a boastful mood, which gave me the chance I had been looking for. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that the card players were still absorbed in their game. In another corner, Abadad was arguing monotonously with a port officer on the ever-pressing problem of water, each of them stripped down to soiled drawers and caftan. It was reassuring to find him there, for I knew I was going to need him. An ugly white slash across his coffee-colored cheek gave him a villainous appearance, but I had grown to accept John's estimate of him during the six stifling weeks we had worked together.

"We have no quarrel with Venice," I said. "I think you've been listening to bambury tales, Captain Pooley. And that surprises me, because I've always believed you to have a shrewd head on your shoulders."

"I've been listening to no bambury tales. It's the truth I'm telling you. You'll believe me when you find yourself pulling an oar in a Venetian galley."

I got to my feet and motioned him to follow me out on the stone balcony. He shambled after me, nodding his head in tipsy triumph.

"Captain Pooley," I said in a whisper, "I'm convinced you've heard something of importance. You're too wise to be taken in by idle rumors, but what I can't understand is how you get this important information here in port."

"Well, my rum-bob, so you believe me now, do you? One of the Dey's galleys came in a few nights ago and tied up board-and-board with my pinnace, the *Cornish Lass*. They had an English prisoner, a tough little Tynsider named Gormish. He cut through his chains with a file and climbed the side of the *Cornish Lass* during the night. He brought me the word."

"And how would a prisoner on a Tunizeen galley know anything about the plans of the Doges? Do you expect me to believe that?"

This put him on the defensive, and he proceeded to tell me the story in full detail. The sailor had been a prisoner in Venice as a result of a stabbing scrape over a Livornese girl. All the prisoners had been offered their freedom if they would enlist for a campaign which was being planned by Spain, with the assistance of the Venetian government, to clean up privateering in the Mediterranean. He had agreed to sign but had managed to make his escape when the recruits were marched in a body from the prison. He had seen that the harbor was full of Spanish and Venetian ships-of-war and had heard the talk in the tavern of what was afoot. Warehouses were bulging with stores, and he had seen with his own eyes the loading of hundreds of barrels of powder and shot. He crossed Italy on foot and had the

good fortune to get away from Genoa on a small French trading vessel. There his luck had ceased, but the boat was picked up by the Tunizeens and he had found himself chained to a heathen bench.

“It’s a lucky thing he managed to get away,” concluded Pooley, with a wag of his oversized head. “I for one have no wish to rot in a Spanish nask or swing in a nubbing party under the Lion of St. Mark’s.”

“Has the fleet put out from Venice yet?”

“Gormish thinks so. The taverns were buzzing with a neat plan they intend to work on us. They’ll send *La Solderina*, their largest carrack, on ahead. As a decoy.” I nodded, having heard John speak admiringly of *La Solderina* as the finest ship in the Levant trade. “They expect us to pounce on her. While we’re busy with the decoy, their fighting ships will come up on us from two directions.”

“We can take care of that. The Flat-caps have never stood up to us yet.”

“Ay,” affirmed the captain. “We can blow them off the seas like foam from a whiskin. But, remember, part of the fleet will be Spanish. And they’re playing with tatts this time. If they catch us in force, they’ll run for it, drawing us after them. When that happens, the full Spanish fleet will come in behind us. First, they’ll attack here and burn every ship they find. Then they’ll follow us up, and we’ll be caught between them with no port to make and no base of supplies.”

“How can you be sure this man Gormish is telling the truth?”

Pooley waxed indignant at the suggestion that he could be taken in by falsehoods. “What good would come to him of lying to me? He knows well enough that he would die in the Basket if he tried it. No, Master Blease, the fellow is telling the truth. You can be sure of it.”

“It’s a neat plan,” I said. “But now that we know what’s in their minds, we can catch them easily. We can play with loaded dice ourselves. All we have to do is get word to Captain Ward, and he’ll bait a trap of his own.”

The information for which I had been fishing came out then. “Ay, all we have to do is get word to Captain Ward, and he will play Peter Lug with them. But where is the mighty, the sagacious, the all-seeing Captain Ward? Cruising boldly in open water and thumbing his nose in all directions! We must lose precious time catching up with him while the net closes on us!”

“I have the course the *Royal Bess* is following. One of you could reach him in two days.”

Pooley’s great bulk began to shake with mirth. “We’ve no intention of finding Captain Ward, my young vaulting squire. I may tell you we’ve lost confidence in your great Captain Rufflecoat. By dawn tomorrow we’ll be on

our way. We'll pick up Sir Nevil and such others as may care to join us, and we'll sail for new seas where the picking will be easier, with no need to stomach more of the whiddled nonsense your great man is always preaching."

My mind seemed incapable of clear thinking: and yet, with John away, there was no one else to cope with the situation. What should I do? It was beyond my power to change the minds of these tough-willed seamen. They would save their own skins and leave the rest of our fleet to be crushed between the converging battle squadrons.

The problem was mine, and somehow I must find a way of solving it. In an effort to gain time, I walked to the railing and looked down over the crowded wharves. Pooley's pinnacle was directly below, one of the smallest ships of the fleet, with dirty white sails and a brown hull from which the paint was peeling. Two sailors with raised morglays were keeping a free space on the landing for a crew of loaders. Pooley had not been indulging in idle talk, then. He was getting ready to sail.

As I watched the busy scene below, I found it easier to put two and two together. It was clear they would not cast their anchors and get away without an effort to raid our well-filled warehouses. If Pooley had been honest in saying they would sail at dawn, the attempt would be made during the hours of the night. Well, they would not succeed in that. The Dey was keeping a close eye on the warehouses and could be depended on to nip their plan in the bud. My problem boiled down to finding some way of getting word to John without the help of the Dey. He must not know that we were in grave danger, for I was sure his first thought would be to profit from our difficulties by seizing everything. I thanked my lucky stars that I had caught Bristol Bill Pooley in a drunken moment.

I had picked up a little of the native tongue. In as casual a tone as I could command, I spoke over my shoulder to Abadad. His face did not change expression, and he went on talking with the port official, scratching his fleas indolently with one hand. The official looked surprised at some remark he made and replied in a sharp tone. In an instant they were at it, hammer and tongs, bandying insults like a pair of camel drivers. The altercation exploded so suddenly that Captain Blunt looked up from the game with a vigorous, "Stubble it, ye lousy sons of Satan!" I walked back to my table, and Pooley followed. I judged from the expression on his face that he was beginning to regret his looseness of tongue.

Abadad got to his feet and reached down a snowy linen robe from a peg on the wall. He draped it over his shoulders with one expert contortion, and smiled at me with a suggestion of resignation.



“Sidi,” he said, in halting English, “may Allah make of him an infidel dog. He sees fit to refuse my most humble requests. Now I go to speak with those who will compel him to a better frame of mind.”

With a curt nod to the unhappy port officer, who seemed completely taken aback by the sudden shift of the wind, and a servile bow to the captains, Abadad backed out of the room. I felt an immense surge of relief. So far, so good, I said to myself. I spoke sharply to the row of slave-dealers, ordering them to leave at once. They shuffled reluctantly to their feet and departed, followed by the crestfallen official.

“And now, Captain Pooley,” I said, resuming my seat, “we can talk this matter over at our leisure.”

The card players looked up with sudden uneasiness. Blunt dropped his hand and glared at Pooley.

“What matter?” he demanded. “What have you been telling him, Pooley?”

I began to shuffle some of the papers in front of me. For a moment nothing was said. Then I faced around, holding a letter toward them. “Here is a report from London which I am sure all of you will find very interesting. It tells of the interview Gondomar had with King James immediately after the truce had been signed between Spain and the Low Countries. It seems the good Don Sarmiento was quite sharp with the King and laid down the law in no uncertain tones. England, he said, must watch her step. The King made him plenty of promises, among them an assurance that all English Free Rovers would be hanged as pirates as fast as he could lay his hands on them. The situation at home is worth a thought, gentlemen. It doesn’t seem the best time to think of returning. Even with the influence back of you that Sir Nevil claims to have.”

“Who said anything about returning to England?” Blunt got to his feet and advanced close to where I sat.

“Where do you plan to go, then, if not to England? I understood Captain Pooley to say you were planning to leave at once. Tonight, in fact. Things are getting too hot for you here, apparently.”

“Have you no brains in that empty costard, Pooley?” roared Blunt, turning on his companion.

Basil Sleath looked at me with his pale gray eyes. I knew him to be the most dangerous of the trio, a quiet Irishman who had learned his trade under a great master, Sir Fineen O’Driscoll, the now almost legendary Fineen of the Ships.

“Under the circumstances,” said Sleath, “it seems fortunate the room has been cleared. But most unfortunate, I’m thinking, for Master Blease himself.”

Pooley’s enormous hand fell on my shoulder, forcing me down hard into my chair. He was breathing heavily.

“There’s only one way to repair your error, Pooley,” went on the Irishman, in a tone little above a whisper. “There’s a court back of here filled with rubbish. It will be easy to hide the body there.”

I was not seriously disturbed at the threat and made no effort to free myself from Pooley’s iron grip. I even managed a smile.

“What do you suppose I said to Abadad just now?” I asked.

Silence fell on the room. Pooley dropped his hand from my shoulder and looked at his companions in slack-jawed contrition. Basil Sleath moved his chair nearer to me without letting his eyes stray from my face.

“And *what* did ye say to the dirty heathen, my brave Roger?” he asked.

I answered in easy tones, “He has had plenty of time to set a guard about the building. No doubt he’s seeing now to the other precautions I suggested.”

“And what might they be?”

“They might include a message to the Dey, requesting that no ships be allowed to leave harbor until further notice. They might also have to do with the placing of native guards on all our warehouses. I’m sure you would have thought of these things if you had been in my place, Captain Sleath.”

The Irishman turned his unblinking gaze on Bristol Bill Pooley. “Do ye hear that? The boy knew what to do with the high cards ye shoved into his hands. What do ye suggest now?”

“Slit his throat for him!” declared Pooley. “And take a chance on getting away before the Dey can act.”

Sleath shook his head. “And sail with our holds as empty as our pockets? Na, na, Pooley. I have a weakness for the yellow boys. We must think of something better.”

I waited for them to make the next move. As a matter of fact, my instructions to Abadad had been confined to the placing of guards about the building, as I saw the danger of letting the Dey know that dissensions had risen among us. I was still clinging to the hope that a way would be found to send one of the three ships with warning of the enemy plans. The trio withdrew to a corner and began to argue with bitter intensity. Sleath said little, but I was sure he would dictate whatever decision they reached. They

made no move to stop me when I walked out on the balcony again. Glancing down into the street, I saw that Abadad had already followed out my orders. Tunizeen soldiers were grouped about the door, and Abadad himself was there, talking to an officer in a red turban. Sleath joined me at the railing in a few moments, and I drew his attention to the guards and also to the presence of a dozen war galleys in the basin.

“You have less than five hundred men between the three of you,” I said. “Captain Ward figured we would need no more than that to protect our interests ashore. But—it’s not nearly enough to carry out what you have in mind, Captain Sleath.”

“Four hundred and eighty of us against a cityful of heathen? I don’t dislike the odds.”

“But you need the advantage of surprise. Now that has been lost, and you would be well advised to give it up. If I care to give the signal, I can have you all lodged in the Bardo.” In an earnest effort to win him over, I went on: “I would rather arrange things some other way, Captain Sleath. We’re here on sufferance as it is. It will be dangerous if the people find we’re divided among ourselves. There would be no holding them if the Dey had to step in.”

“We could cut our way out of here with the greatest ease. But then we would have to leave those hard-earned yellow boys for the heathen. I’m concerned about that and nothing else, Master Blease.”

He spat reflectively over the rail. “It’s indeed a devil of a mess, and I see no profit in it at all. The Spaniards and the Venetians have made up their minds to be rid of us once and for all. They’ll do for us this time.”

“They’ll run us down one by one if we split up again as Macherie suggests,” I argued. “But they can’t beat us if we stick together.”

Sleath pointed along the teeming water front. “We have enough wealth stored down there to make us all easy for life. But Ward and the rest of them will never make this port again. They’ll be caught in the trap. Those of us here can break through. That much is clear enough; but can we get our hands on the loot first? I tell you again, boy, I’m interested in nothing else.”

“There’s only one way it can be done,” I argued. “We must beat the Spanish and come back here in force to claim it. Even then we’ll have to divide with the Dey. Did you seriously believe that he would have let the three of you loot the warehouses tonight and show him your heels? I tell you, Captain Sleath, it’s only as victors that we can hope to collect what we have down there.”

The voices of Pooley and Blunt reached us from inside in angry disagreement. Sleath paid no attention. He was regarding me with a thoughtful frown.

“It’s a shrewd head ye have on yer shoulders,” he said finally. “I’m half convinced ye’re right. I don’t like the great John Ward, and I wouldn’t raise my good Irish blade to help him beat the Dons. Still and all, my share is worth protecting.” His pale eyes studied me closely. “Perhaps there’ll be a way of getting at this. A way to make it worth my while if I throw in with ye.”

I waited for him to continue. After taking a glance at the quarreling pair in the room behind us, he winked slyly and said: “It’s in full charge of things ye’ve been. All the fine jewels we’ve taken off the Dons, and the gauds and the little bits of stones; ye have them stored away, I take it, and could put yer hands on a parcel of them if ye had a mind to it. What would ye say, Master Blease, to a little agreement like, just between the two of us?”

I still maintained silence. “Just supposing I give these two noddies the slip and took ye out with me. Supposing that I took ye straight to John Ward. When ye set foot on the ladder of the *Royal Bess*, perhaps ye might slip into my hand a bag containing a little something for myself alone. As fair return for services rendered, eh, Master Blease?”

“I have everything of the kind hidden safely away,” I answered. “Against the time when a fair and open division can be made. What makes you think I would steal from the common pot to pay you?”

Sleath chuckled. “Because it’s the only way open to ye. Make it worth my while or sit here and do nothing while the Dons gobble up yer friends. Ye’re a smart lad and can cover it up.”

He had me. I had known it as soon as he broached the matter. It was the only way out, and I was sure that John would approve if I fell in with the scheme.

“Take me to the *Royal Bess*,” I said. “It’s a bargain, Captain Sleath. The minute I set foot on the ladder, I’ll place in your hand a leather bag containing twenty uncut diamonds.”

“And not a word said about it? Ye swear to that?” His eyes had lighted up with excitement. “Twenty, ye say? Are they of good size? It’s no deal if they’re not white.”

“They’ll make a rich man of you. And make both of us thieves at the same time. I don’t suppose that will weigh heavily on your conscience.”

“I’ll lose no sleep over it.” He seized my arm with a vicious pressure. “How can I be sure of ye? How can I tell ye won’t show me a clean pair of

heels up the ladder and give me nothing but a laugh for my pains?"

"How can I be sure you won't lift the stones as soon as I go aboard with you? I'll be taking a longer chance than you, Captain Sleath."

He shook his head. "Ye'll be safe with me, and well ye know it. I want my full share as well. Ye have me there."

"We'll have to trust each other."

He seated himself on the railing and thought it over. I could see it went against the grain to repose trust in anyone on a deal of such importance. Finally he got back to his feet and said with a deep sigh: "There's no other way. I must take your word for it, little though I'm liking it. And remember this, nipperkin: a whisper to anyone afterward, and I'll run my sword through that belly of yours as quickly as I'd gut a herring."

"No one will ever hear of it," I said. "I can juggle the lists so that the loss won't show. I'm robbing the rest, but I see no other way of saving their lives. No honest way."

"Honesty is a word much used by fools," declared Sleath.

He fell into a deep study. After several moments he announced that we would sail with the turn of the tide in the evening. In the meantime it would be necessary to pull the wool over the eyes of the two fuddle-cups inside. He would tell them that a deal would have to be made with the Dey, and he would see to it that they became thoroughly drunk.

## 19

I WENT TO SEE Cristina in the new white and blue palace, and told her what happened that morning. I did so with some hesitation. She was Spanish; and, in spite of her love for John, her sympathies would be with the red and yellow fleet. She listened silently and did not interrupt until I came to the matter of my deal with Captain Sleath. I did not go into details, but she must have sensed that a bribe figured in his change of heart, for she shook her head furiously. "We know how to deal with such men in Spain," she said.

She remained silent for some time after I finished. "I am afraid I shall never see any of you again," she said finally.

I hastened to assure her that the prospects were not as black as that. "We can win," I said, "if John can manage it so that we fight them separately. His plan, I think, will be to throw back the ships from Venice first and then turn to meet the Spaniards. Together they would crush us easily enough, just as the Armada would have beaten us in the Sleeve if we hadn't been able to break it up. If there's a way, John will find it."

We said nothing more for several moments. There was an ivory-topped tabouret between us and a tray with coffee in small gold cups. She took a cup and began to sip it. I had never tasted coffee, but the odor was most appetizing.

"John's ship will be in the middle of it," she said.

"You mustn't worry about him. Destiny has put a mark on John Ward. He can't die yet; not in a busking foray. He'll come back, never fear." I reached over and touched her hand, which lay tightly clenched at her side. "He'll come back, and then we'll have a wedding. With a beautiful bride, and music to make it complete."

She replaced the cup on the yellowed table top. Her hand was none too steady. "No, Roger. There won't be a wedding. No priest would marry us, and to me any other ceremony would not be binding. No more binding than the—the tie between us now." She paused. "John has no thoughts of marriage. You see, I have no illusions about my situation at all."

I took another sip of the coffee and found it slightly less distasteful. What she had said about her relationship with John had set me thinking. He had stayed at the palace during the visits he had paid ashore in the three months since the meeting of the Free Rovers. He had a good excuse at first, the need to supervise the renovations; but when the last whisk of mortar had been removed, he just continued on without making any explanation. I had many occasions to be with them and had tried to keep my eyes shut to what was going on. Their relationship was not as one-sided as I had feared it might be. There was passionate tenderness on her part, but something not too far short of that on his. Their tastes were similar enough to make companionship a pleasure. They were fond of music, and many times I heard John's deep baritone trolling sea songs to the twanging of her bandore. They shared a lively humor; in fact, their laughter helped to carry them over the quarrels which were inevitable. They bickered frequently and violently but always about the small things, mostly his lack of care in matters of deportment and the vulgar edge to his tongue. The real issues between them

were never mentioned. They seemed to be keeping them in abeyance, as though afraid to let the uncertainties of the future dim the pleasure they were finding in the present.

She asked suddenly, "Is she very beautiful?"

"Katie Ladland?"

"Yes."

"It's hard to tell you about her. She has a sweetness I can't describe. I think she's beautiful."

"Does John think so too?"

"Yes, I suppose he does. But I've heard him say you're the most lovely woman he has ever seen."

"Thank you. I'm sure John is a competent judge of beauty in women, so I should be proud of his praise." She changed the subject abruptly. "He ought to be very glad of what you've done today."

"It was lucky I found out in time. We'll have a chance now."

"Can you depend on this Captain Sleath? I don't trust him; he has evil eyes."

"I think he'll go through with his bargain. I don't trust him any more than you do, but he has everything to gain by it."

She said with sudden vehemence: "I'm hoping you win this battle. It's a terrible thing for me to want! I'm Spanish. I love my country. I'm proud of everything she stands for. And yet I can wish to see her beaten so that no harm may come to John Ward, her worst enemy!"

"I'll tell John you said that. It might help him."

She shook her head. "No. I shouldn't have said it. It is bad enough for me to think that way. Please don't tell him. I'm afraid I have humbled myself in his eyes too much as it is."

Sleath came out on the balcony behind us. His pale eyes took in the beauty of my companion with a hungry look.

"Time to be off, my brave Roger," he said. "It's sorry I am to be taking you away from such fine company."

I stood up. Cristina took my hand in both of hers and pressed it hard. "You must come back," she whispered. "You and John. My prayers will follow you."

Sleath and I made our way to the street through a side gate so that our departure would not be observed. The sun struck against the white walls of the palace with greater intensity than ever. I found it hard to breathe. I

loosened my collar with a damp finger and reflected dismally on the long tramp ahead of us through the steaming alleys of the city.

“A dozen picked men have gone on ahead,” said Sleath. “I must have a talk with Pooley and Blunt and spin a yarn for their benefit.” He looked at me and winked. “A dainty chick. What a light in her eyes, what a delicate curve to her little breasts! I was thinking back there I might prefer to take her from Ward than the diamonds.”

“It’s an easier matter to steal the diamonds, Captain Sleath,” I said.

## 20

WE WENT OUT on a leeward tide. Sleath drove his skeleton crew into feverish activity as soon as his foot touched the deck of the *Grace O'Malley*. I watched the skyline recede, and then, with a sigh of relief, turned into the pilot-house.

The redheaded steersman winked at me and remarked that it was a pleasant evening. Would it be nice to take a girl down the Beaux Walk and into Stephen’s Green? Or didn’t I think so? I winked back to express agreement and turned to study the sand in the roning glasses. I knew the hour already, but time had become a matter of such supreme importance that I could think of nothing else. I was desperately afraid that we would be too late. There was no way of telling when the hostile fleets had sailed nor how long the Tunizeen galley had taken to make port. If it had dawdled up the coast in quest of stray prizes, the scattered Free Rovers might already be caught in the pincers. I tried to put this thought out of my mind, but it persisted. I could see the *Royal Bess* surrounded by Spanish ships-of-war, raked by their broadsides, her hull battered, her rigging cut to shreds, fighting on to the inevitable end as the *Revenge* had done.

I knew the *Grace O'Malley* was scudding along at a good rate, but I wanted to go out on the quarter-deck and demand of Sleath that he tack on every square inch of canvas that the ship could carry.

He saved me from this error by coming into the pilot-house. “Hola, bar!” he shouted. “Keep full and by!” The steersman threw his weight against the



whipstaff, and I could hear a rattle of chains below. The captain looked at me and scowled. "If it's speed ye're wanting, ye'll be getting more than yer stomach can stand. And do ye happen to know that looby-clown of yours is on board?"

Clim on the *Grace O'Malley*? I did not believe it at first.

"Someone told him what was afoot, and here he is," declared Sleath impatiently. He led the way to the gun-deck; and there, sure enough, was Clim. His arms were bound with rope and he was grinning foolishly.

"He's drunk," said the captain. "He's your man, so I leave him to ye. My advice would be to have some sense lashed into him. Luke here will oblige."

When he had gone, I said to the tall sailor on guard: "Cut him loose, Luke. We'll give him a chance to sleep it off first."

I decided to spend the night on deck. The odors which assailed my nostrils from every hatch had warned me of what I might expect below. Some of the beer casks had burst, saturating the ballast and giving a sour edge to the atmosphere. But that was not all of it. The *Grace O'Malley* was a slattern ship. When a captain is slack, conditions below become indescribable in hot weather.

I stretched my netting in a corner of the quarter-deck and fell into a heavy sleep almost immediately. It must have been several hours later when a tug at the hammock forced me into wakefulness. The stars were out in full, and the moon was well overhead. The wind had fallen off.

"Shanks," said a cautious voice which I recognized as Clim's. "I had to come, Shanks. When there's fighting, I'm the man for it. I'm no cheap-jack landsman."

I sat up and dropped my feet to the deck. Then I rubbed my eyes and looked about me. Clim was crouched down under the rail where the lookout could not see him. From his voice I judged him to be sober.

"I had to come," he repeated. "You see that, don't ye, Shanks?"

"I don't see it. You were stationed ashore by Captain Ward's orders. He considered it necessary to have men as guards at the palace. You were one of them, and here you've run away. What's he going to say about that?"

Clim was still filled with a sense of his importance. "He'll say 'good man' when he sees me. He's going to need me. There's fighting ahead."

"He's more likely to stick you in the bilboes or have you keel-raked. And I won't be able to do anything for you this time. I got you out of the garters, but the Captain won't listen to me again." My impatience grew as I

considered what his leave-taking might mean. “Who told you there was fighting in prospect? You didn’t get it from me.”

“I heard it from one of Sleath’s men. I made up my mind as soon as I heard it. I want my share of the dibs, Shanks.”

“You heard it from one of Sleath’s men? Did everyone know about it?”

He nodded his head. “I expect so. Blunt’s men and Pooley’s were angry when they found out. They didn’t relish being left ashore.”

“Blunt and Pooley are both dead drunk. Suppose their men take it into their heads to follow us?”

His voice took on a sulky note. “All the better if they do. When there’s fighting, we need every pike.”

“And who would be left to protect our interests ashore? Would you like to lose your share of what we have in those warehouses?”

That shook his confidence a little. “I didn’t think of that.”

“No, I’m sure you didn’t. Why didn’t you come and tell me what was being whispered around instead of sneaking off by yourself? What will happen to Dona Cristina if trouble starts ashore and none of us there to protect her? You didn’t think of that either.”

His tone had become thoroughly humble. “No, Shanks.”

“Captain Ward left you with her because he thought he could depend on you. Do you see what you’ve done now?”

“Yes, Shanks, I do.”

I got to my feet and scanned the horizon. A small point of light showed on the horizon back of us. I pointed this out to Clim.

“A ship’s lantern,” he said.

“It’s either the *Cornish Lass* or the *Albicore*. They’re following us. We’ll find, Clim, that every man sober enough to climb a ladder is on board. Sleath’s men as well. It may go hard with those left behind. And Dona Cristina.”

He slumped down in his corner and said in a penitent voice: “’Fore God, I wouldn’t want harm coming to the lady. She was kind to me, Shanks. I wanted to tell ye, but I knew ye would keep me ashore if I did.”

I began to feel sorry for him and dropped a hand on his shoulder. “Well, the wind’s coming from the wrong quarter, but we may weather it still. There’s this to be said: John is going to need every ship. Perhaps we’ll be able to get back before things go wrong ashore. If only we had Dona Cristina with us! That is what worries me most.”

By dawn it was certain that my surmise was correct. There were two ships plowing along in our wake. Standing on the quarter-deck with Captain Sleath, I recognized them as the *Cornish Lass* and the *Albicore*.

Sleath was in a savage mood. He paced up and down the tiny deck, pausing at each turn to gaze with bleak face at the oncoming pinnaces. Finally he stopped in front of me to say that both Blunt and Pooley deserved “a touch of cold steel in their innards.” Drunk they might have been, he went on, but they should have been able to control their men. He was ready to wager an Old Harry against a win that both of them were snoring in their bunks and not yet aware that everything was “up in the boughs.” It had not occurred to me that the two captains would be with the ships, but when I put my doubt into words he brushed it aside impatiently.

“Do ye think the mates would put off without them?” he demanded. “That would be mutiny, and they want none of that dish. Na, Master Blease, ye can be sure the two swill-bellies were carried aboard before a single robin was loosed.”

I saw the sense of that at once. “Do you suppose,” I asked, “that either of the mates had sense enough to leave a force ashore?”

He gave me a curiously intent look before answering. “A great deal depends on that point, my fine gentry-cove. I was coming to that very point myself. You see, I gave Hughie Haight his orders to stay ashore for the purpose. Do ye know Hughie? He’s my first mate, a black Irishman from up Antrim way. I assigned a hundred of my men to stay with him. Enough to hold the warehouses until we can finish up and get back. But how can I be sure he stuck to his post when the rest of them decided to come along?” He squinted over the rail at the unwelcome sails behind us and shook his head. “I must find out what Hughie did, Master Blease.”

I realized from the tone of his voice that my life was hanging in the balance. If the mate had stayed at his post, Sleath would still carry out our plan, counting on a victorious return to port. But if Haight had followed with the other ships, he would reckon our stores of plunder lost and act accordingly. That would mean death for me and Clim, who blundered his head into the same noose. Sleath would take the diamonds and then get rid of us before changing his course due westward in the hope of slipping through the Spanish dragnet. I was so sure of this that I trembled when he turned his fish-gray eyes in my direction.

“I’ll haul to and let them come up,” he said. “I must know about Hughie Haight.”

That settled it. I could read death in the look he gave me. I wanted to run in search of Clim, so great was my desire for the sight and support of a friend, the only one within a hundred miles. But in spite of this feeling of panic, I was able to realize the danger of any delay now.

“We’ll lose several hours if we wait for them, Captain Sleath,” I said. “Every minute counts. We may be too late as it is.”

“That’s important only if Hughie is following my orders. I’m going to wait.” He smiled, but I was not able to gain any comfort from that. It was a cold smile and did not disturb in any degree the calculating expression in his eyes. “I’m thinking, my young friend, you had better be turning over those baubles now.”

“That was not the agreement,” I protested, although I knew there was no profit in contesting the point. “You were not to be paid until I put a foot on the ladder of the *Royal Bess*.”

“That’s true.” He treated me to another smile, colder and less comforting if possible than the first. “But it doesn’t seem likely now that you will live long enough to set a foot on that ladder. I’m not taking any chances.” When I still made no move, he suddenly blazed at me: “D’ye hear me? Hand them over! If I’m to be mumped out of my full share, I’ll have the diamonds at least.”

“But supposing you find the mate has stayed ashore—”

He reached out and pinioned my arms. “In that case we go through with our bargain. With this little difference—I’ll have the stones a few hours earlier than we agreed.”

He released one arm, and I fumbled inside my doublet. I had donned my new finery, and the belt under my coat was full of points. A bag was attached to the belt, and my fingers fumbled so long with the knot that Sleath shook me with exasperation. Then, with a sudden change of mind, he freed my arm.

“It’s best no one sees us,” he said. “Come into the cabin.”

Inside he emptied the contents of the bag on a small table attached to the wall. His hands trembled with eagerness, and he had to count the stones twice.

“Many of them are small,” he grumbled. He picked up one and shoved it accusingly under my nose. “What would a fencing-cove give me for that? Little enough, perhaps no more than a single Job. Ye’re cheating me, Master Blease, and I swear I’ll take it out of your hide.”

“You have a fortune in your hand, Captain Sleath.”

He lifted one of the larger stones and nodded unwillingly. "This one is handsome enough. It might keep the black ox off my feet for a spell. A few are not bad, my yarrumsop, not bad at all." He looked up at me and winked. "I'll be doing better than the rest of them, and that's something."

"If we delay now," I said, "most of them will have death as their only share."

"That's no concern of mine." He looked me over closely and winked again. "It's a fine caster ye're wearing. Do ye think it might fit me?"

My control was beginning to slip. "It's cut to a full man's size, and so might be a little ample for you, Captain Sleath. But no one else will want it, for it is full of the stench of your ship already."

He scooped up the stones and poured them into a leather bag at his belt. The round shape that the bag assumed seemed to please him, for he patted it affectionately. Then he looked at me, and his face darkened. "So ye think poorly of my ship. She's a trig little lady, and I happen to be fond of her. If what ye say is true, then I have need of a swabber. The idea would not appeal to ye, belike? I thought not. Still, I must give it some consideration, Master Blease. There might be some satisfaction in keeping ye here under my thumb. More perhaps than in throwing ye overboard as I have had it in mind to do."

We hove to and drifted aimlessly for a matter of two hours while the other ships came up. Clim had been ordered aloft to repair ratlines. In his purple doublet and yellow-striped hose he looked like an enormous insect perched at the top of the shrouds. I was left to my own devices, and my first thought was to write letters. There were messages I wanted to send before I died, if it should come to that. I wanted to tell Katie how much I loved her and all the things I had never dared say to her face. I wanted to tell Mother and Aunt Gadilda how sorry I was for the grief I had caused them. Also, I wanted to let John know the things Cristina had told me, in the hope that it might bring them to a better understanding.

I knew that nothing I wrote stood any chance of being delivered. There would have been some comfort, however, in spending those slow hours in the company of the people I loved. As it happened, there was not a single sheet of paper on board, which surprised me for, the skipper showed some traces of education. I made one discovery in my search for writing materials which I knew would be useful, a Spanish bagonet. Its leather sheath was covered with mold, but the blade was in good condition. I slipped the dagger inside my doublet.

The vessel was in shocking condition. The sails were dirty and patched. The bull ropes had never been properly tarred, and the types were old and frayed. It was clear enough that Sleath's yonkers took their lives in their hands every time they went aloft. The upper structure of the ship had been without paint for a long time, and some of the wood was rotten. Even the captain's cabin stank like a butcher's jetty on the Thames.

The *Cornish Lass* was the first to come up, and I saw Sleath climb the ladder to the quarter-deck as the two vessels drew close together. Clim had worked his way down by this time, and I called to him to join me in the waist. His face was streaked with perspiration, for he had been working in the full glare of the sun. His doublet was torn and smeared with tar.

I told him of Sleath's purpose. His face showed no sign of fear as he listened. Stout Clim! He patted me reassuringly on the shoulder and with his other hand tugged at the dagger in his belt.

"We'll give 'em a tussle," he said confidently. "Are ye armed, Shanks?"

I showed him the Spanish knife, and he nodded briskly. "We'll make for the lookout," he said. "They'll have to come up there for us, and we'll show them a thing or two." He seemed almost happy at the prospect. "The dirty teagues! I hope that Sleath is the first to show a head. I've a score to settle with him."

I heard Sleath bellowing across the water from his post on the quarter-deck and a voice answering from the *Cornish Lass*. It sounded to me like the deep rumble of Captain Pooley. I strained my ears to hear what was being said but could not make out a single word. Well, we would know soon enough. If Haight had joined them, it would mean a quick climb and death eventually for both of us high up in the air. I shuddered, sure in my mind that the worst had happened. I could feel my heart beating wildly with the strain. I tried to drag the dagger from inside my doublet in readiness, but my hands seemed numb. I was not sure I would be capable of a mad scramble up the swaying shrouds and told Clim he had better start while there was time.

Clim shook his head and chuckled. "Here we are, Shanks, the both of us all dressed up like Essex when he bussed the old virgin. And nothing but a bloody fight on our hands. It's just as well. I allus wanted to go out in the best, like a strutting gentry-cove." He gripped my shoulder. "Here he comes, Shanks. Get set for it!"

Sleath was climbing down to the main deck. He turned and began to walk toward us.

“Easy,” said Clim. “You go first. I’ll stay back and break his ugly head for him.”

I was watching the captain, trying to read our fate in his expression. He was smiling, but I took no comfort from that.

“Well, Master Blease,” he said, “Not planning any mischief between ye, I trust? Not that it would matter, things being as they are. Hughie Haight has a wise head on his shoulder. He stuck to his orders and stayed behind. Ye owe the black Irishman something, I’m thinking. He saved yer life.”

My lungs seemed to explode in the intensity of my relief. Clim, however, did not seem to be convinced. He said in a whisper: “He may be lying.”

“I don’t think so,” I whispered back. “He means it.”

Sleath turned away from us. He cupped his hands over his mouth and shouted: “Step into it, men! Set the tops’ls. Let fall the mains’l. Lively does it, my lads! We have two hours to make up.”

The men scrambled up the shrouds. Sleath then turned to me and said in even tones: “It’s God’s truth, Master Blease, although I’m not blaming ye for holding back. Hughie Haight is looking after our interests ashore.” He motioned me to step closer, and I obeyed without hesitation. “We’ll go on with our bargain. I have the pay, and I’ll take ye to Ward as I promised. All Ward is to know is that we got wind of things and came out to have our share of the fighting.” He sunk his voice to a whisper. “Any hint from ye to the contrary, and it will go hard with ye. I’m a man of my word, Master Blease. If ye don’t want the Ten Commandments carved on yer back, keep a still tongue in yer head.”

## 21

JOHN WARD’S LUCK, always good, was holding. He had summoned his captains for a conference off Cape Passer, and when we arrived with our news they were all there.

I was back on the *Royal Bess* and the “bloody colors” were suspended from the main shrouds. We could see skiffs and shallops coming from every

direction in answer to the summons. The sea was dotted with sails in all quarters, and I found it an inspiring sight. Many of the ships were famous for exploits about which all England had talked with pride: the *Fair Rosamonde*, which had captured three Spaniards single-handed off San Lucar; the *Alcibiades*, which had been as far east as China; the *Prester John*, which had come closer than any other ship to finding the Northeast Passage. My confidence in the outcome rose as I watched this mighty fleet. It would take more than the Latins to beat us.

I stood in the waist with Joralemon Snode and watched the captains come over the side. John was there to greet them with a jovial word for each. "You're ratsbane to the Flat-caps, Harris. I'm glad you're here because they seem disposed to pick a quarrel with us."—"Now I can be easy in my mind, Dick Longcastle."—"Halsey, wait until I tell you the news. You've been looking for a fight, and now you'll have a real one."

But pious Joralemon saw it in a different light. He told me in whispers about each arrival. They were without exception roaring bullies, with no respect for God or man, and all of them ripe for hell-fire.

Joralemon was in what John called his "weeping Jeremiah" mood. I knew the reason for it. When I arrived the night before and went to John's cabin, I had found him stretched out in a chair with a girl reclining on the arm. He had looked a little crestfallen and had explained hurriedly that she was a German girl who had been taken off an Italian ship. She was to be sent home as soon as an opportunity arose. The girl, who was redheaded and ample-bosomed, had pinched his ear as she rose from her position. John had grinned and said, "She's very grateful to us for rescuing her." I could not look at her without thinking of the one visit I had paid to the Souk-el-Barka, the slave market of Tunis. There I had seen naked women for the first time, chained to black pillars for the inspection of buyers. I could not look at this grateful German girl without picturing her in my mind rid of her trailing blue dress and wide ruff. No other woman had ever had this effect on me, and I had felt so guilty about it that I kept my eyes away from her during the whole of my talk with John.

Joralemon had told me about her later, scoffing at her claims to gentility and berating John because of the weakness he had shown for the "foreign Jezebel."

I pricked up my ears when Macherie came over the side to be welcomed by John with a friendly, "Hail, Sir Nevil." His manner had its usual edge of condescension, and I found it a great temptation to blurt out what I knew about him. He said, "Well, Ward, what's all this about?" and John answered, "The devils are loose, Macherie, and we have a fight on our hands."



Sir Nevil strolled over to talk to his three henchmen, who were standing in a group by the rail. When the last of the captains arrived, John led the way to the main cabin, and the rest trailed after him. I took advantage of the chance to pay a visit to Clim, who was sitting out his sentence of six hours in the bilboes. I could see that his wrists were already pinched and red in the sharp iron stocks.

“Take it easy, Clim,” I said. “Just an hour more.”

The pain must have been great, but he was accepting his punishment cheerfully. “I don’t mind,” he said. “It’s what I deserved. I disobeyed my orders and left the lady when I shouldn’t of. I’m getting off light enough.”

I helped him to a drink of water, which was against the rules. Joralemon had followed me, and as we walked off together he said: “It’s a good thing Gard didn’t see you, Roger. He would have planted you beside Clim for a spell of it yourself.” His mind was still running on the German girl, for after a pause he asked darkly: “Will there be another establishment set up on shore? Another scarlet whore of Babylon for honest sailors to guard? How can he expect the Lord to prosper him?”

He left me, muttering mournfully to himself. I wandered aimlessly about the deck, speculating as to what course of action would be settled upon in the council of war. The girl came out on the quarter-deck. The wind blew her skirts tightly around her, but she did not seem disturbed about it. She smiled down at me.

The meeting broke up in an hour’s time. John came out on deck with an arm over the shoulder of Sir Nevil, saying in a confident voice: “That will do it for the Dons, Macherie. You have a great opportunity.”

Sir Nevil answered with dry confidence, “I think I shall be equal to it, Ward.”

I was not to know what had been decided until several hours later. In the meantime the assembled captains drank a noisy toast and departed for their ships. The supper kettles were brought on deck. Two of the men got into an argument. The rest took sides, and for a quarter of an hour the air was thick with ugly profanity. Released from the iron grip of the bilboes, Clim made a hearty meal, although it was difficult for him to lift his arms.

Early in the evening I was summoned to the coach, as the men called the captain’s cabin. I found John with a map spread out in front of him, a candle at one elbow and a flagon of white wine at the other. The German girl, whose name I had learned was Aurora, was curled up in a chair beside him. He was in an exuberant mood.

“We have them in the hollow of our hands!” he predicted. “Thanks to your promptness in getting the news to me, I’m in a position to lay a neat trap for them. I’ve just had a talk with Gormish, and he has given me a lot of valuable information about the strength of the fleet coming from the east.” He paused and, sensing that I was disturbed by the presence of the girl, added: “Don’t worry about her, my old Sobersides. She doesn’t know a word of English, so we can talk freely.”

“That wasn’t what I was worried about. I was thinking of Katie.”

His face lost its happy expression. “’Od’s bones, Roger, I call you in to praise you, and all you’re concerned about is a trifling matter like this! How many times must I tell you not to attach any importance to these little passing fancies of mine?”

“Is Cristina a passing fancy? I’ve become very much attached to her and don’t want to see her hurt.”

“You needn’t preach at me, Roger.” His face had taken on a sulky look. “You can leave that to Parson Snode. He never gives me any peace. It would be good for both of you if you would get yourselves native women. It might make you more human. As for this willing bit of fluff, I’m pretty well convinced she comes right out of a vaulting school. Macherie took a fancy to her today, so perhaps I’ll ease myself of your disapproval by transferring her to his ship. Will that satisfy you, in God’s name?”

The girl said something in a soft, slurring voice. John listened with a frown, apparently finding it hard to follow her. He answered in a few halting words, the only one familiar to me being the usual “Fubbs.” Then he grinned at me and winked. “She says she knows we’re talking about her and wants to know what we’re saying. I said you had taken a fancy to her and were threatening to steal her from me. You’ll have to watch yourself now. She’s a forward minx.”

He straightened up in his chair with an air that dismissed the matter and laid a finger on the map in front of him. “Now let’s get to work. First, I want to thank you for the way you handled things. You’ve done nobly. I suspect you haven’t told me everything because I know what precious scoundrels you had to deal with. But that story can wait. I want to explain what was decided today. The Spaniards think they’ll catch me with a divided fleet. It’s clearly in their minds that the appearance of the ships from the east will draw away a good part of ours, and that we can be disposed of piecemeal. Well, I am going to leave all but six here so they will find us in strength when they come sweeping in. That will prove a most unpleasant surprise for the Dons. In the meantime, the six will keep the Venetians in play.”

“Six against a whole fleet!”

He indulged in a confident laugh. “And why not? The *Revenge* stood out for a whole day against the might of Spain. Surely with six ships I can hold them for as long as may be necessary. I’m taking that part of the operation on my own shoulders.”

“And who will command against the Spaniards?”

“Sir Nevil Macherie.”

“Macherie!” I launched into a heated protest. “You can’t trust him. He was planning to run away and leave you in the lurch. Sleath, Blunt, and Pooley were in it with him. They were going to steal everything we had in port. I found out about it in time.” I had promised Sleath not to talk, but I considered myself absolved when the fate of the fleet was at stake.

John nodded soberly. “I can believe it. Do you suppose I would adopt such a course if any other were possible? I have nothing but contempt for Macherie and would as soon lose the sight of both eyes as give him the chance for all the glory of a big victory. But personal feelings can’t be considered at a time like this. Macherie has been second in command, and if I had tried to pass him over there would have been bad blood at once. I couldn’t risk that. In any event, I’m assuming the main responsibility because everything will depend on my ability to hold them in the east while the main fleet engages the Dons.”

“But suppose he gets himself beaten?”

John rose to his feet and led me over to a porthole, from which we could see the lanterns at the mastheads of the waiting ships. He dropped his voice to a cautious whisper. “I can play a deep game as well as our wily Sir Nevil. I’ve a private understanding with the wisest heads among the captains—Harris and Jennings and Longcastle. Macherie has agreed to consult them on all decisions. If things don’t go to their liking, they’ll step in and relieve him of the command. He won’t be allowed much rope.

“Halsey and Glanville have agreed to go with me. Two of the stoutest fighters England has ever seen.” He paused and winked. “Who do you suppose I’ve selected to make up the balance? Your three friends, Sleath, Blunt, and Pooley.”

“Can you trust them?”

“When it comes to a scrap, they’re as good as any. Sleath particularly I rank high. Their own skins will be at stake, so I’m not concerned on that score. The advantage I see is that Macherie won’t have them to back him up if there’s any trouble. In fact, I think I’ve managed it so that their hands are securely tied.” He pointed to one of the nearest of the ships. “That’s the

*Grace O'Malley*. As you know, Sleath is badly undermanned, and I've promised to find him some men to make up his full complement. His master gunner got left behind in Tunis by mistake. You've been very much interested in gunnery, Roger, and I'd like you to fill in for him."

There was nothing I wanted to do less than renew my acquaintance with Captain Sleath or set foot again on the greasy deck of the *Grace O'Malley*. In addition, I was not at all confident of my ability to handle a gun crew. It was clear, however, that John was counting on me and that personal inclinations could not be considered. I nodded reluctantly.

"That's my stout Roger! There's no one else available, or I wouldn't have asked it of you. There's this to be said for Sleath: you couldn't serve under a better man when the decks are stripped for action. I'm sending your friend Clim with you. Don't let him get into any more trouble. He has two black marks on his record now, and the penalties are rigorous for third offenders. Keep an eye on the fellow. He's too good a man to swing at the yardarm."

Joralemon was sitting in the waist when I went out, mending a rent in his trunk hose by the light of a lantern. He continued to ply his needle but invited me with a nod to sit down with him.

"I'm being transferred to the *Grace O'Malley*. Did you know?"

He shook his head with a doubtful frown. "You know more of petty tallies and cockets than you do of gunnery," he said. "I wish you were staying on the *Bess*."

"I've wondered why you stay on. You're less of a seaman than I am, Jore. Is it because you've always followed John?"

"That's it." He studied his handiwork with a critical eye. "We lived in the same end of town, as you probably remember. John was always a god in my eyes. I looked up to him and took his word for everything. I was not very strong as a boy, and he fought my battles for me."

"I remember the day he tore the coat off Chirp Bird because he laughed at you."

"You must have been a little fellow then. Yes, John and I were always very close. I don't know why he tolerated me, for no two boys were ever less alike. Perhaps it was because of my father. John would spend hours in the hut at the foot of our yard where the old man worked, listening to his stories." There was a touch of pride in his voice. "John's father had never been much out of sight of land, but mine saw the ramparts of Nombre de Dios and the brown waters of the Platta before he settled down to sail-making ashore. I'm afraid he often drew a long bow when he had us to listen

to him. He would tell stories to make your blood run cold. About the dread kraken, and renora monsters which sucked ships down from below. He swore by St. Erasmus, not being of the true faith then, that he had seen the ghosts of dead Spaniards haunting the tops of the shrouds in southern waters, and that lights played about them like the fires of hell. John would sit there and take it all in. Everything the old man said made him keener than ever for the sea. It had the opposite effect on me. But when John went it never occurred to me to do anything but follow him.” He sighed profoundly.

“We’ve had twelve years of it. Twelve years of misery for me. I always meant to study Latin and become a minister of God, but instead I’ve been a self-appointed parson to crews of bloodthirsty rovers. It’s been so different from everything I had counted on, and hoped for, that sometimes I think it must be a dream and that I’ll waken to hear the church bells ringing on Shrubsole High.” He had fallen into a reflective strain, and I let him go along without any interruptions. “Our first important cruise was in Arctic waters. The Muscovy Company sent a ship to find the Northeast Passage, and we signed on. John was a full mate by the time we put back. There was trouble on board because the captain was slack. It came to mutiny, and two of the men were hanged finally. I’ll never forget that voyage!

“You won’t be surprised,” he went on, “when I tell you there was a tall Norwegian girl on the dock to see us leave. She looked so sad that I took John to task for the first time. A handsome lass, much like John’s mother. Do you recall Mistress Ward?”

“Dimly. I remember her as a tall woman with yellow hair and the kindest eyes. I was quite young when she died.”

“A fine woman. She was much too good for Enoch Ward. John took after her in looks, and he got all his best qualities from her as well. Certainly he got his worst from his father. I was outside the Bull and Stump when the husband of that redheaded woman stuck a knife between Enoch Ward’s ribs. A little, swaggering fellow, he was, with an eye for the wenches all the time. It’s hard to believe our great yellow John could beget of his. But Mistress Ward was always like a mother to me. My own was dead, you know. I would go home with John after my father had filled us with his tales and she would always have something good for us. Humble pie or collops perhaps. Food to put muscle on your bones.” He paused and looked at me as though begging understanding. “You mustn’t take me seriously, Roger, when I speak harshly about John. I’ve two things only against him: his lack of interest in the Word and his ways with women. I’ve said much harder things to his face than behind his back. I always try to remember that he couldn’t be a great captain

if he were any different. His virtues and faults are all of one piece. You must believe that also, Roger.”

With the thought of Katie and Cristina in my mind, I found it hard to condone his ways with women, and I said so.

“It’s not all his fault,” Joralemon protested earnestly. “They run after him. All the time. Look at this woman.” He jerked his head back in the direction of the cabin. “When she came aboard, with her wicked ways and wanton eyes, I knew at once what would happen. She took one look at John and—well, you’ve seen for yourself.”

“I have his word he’s going to send her away.”

“But after she goes there will be many more. I’ve seen them come and go all these years.”

“I hoped he would feel differently about the Señorita. She’s good as well as beautiful, and she loves him. Her whole life has been wrecked because of this.”

“She is popish!” It was the one unforgivable sin in his eyes. “It was the likes of her that burned our martyrs by the thousands! I can’t look at her without smelling the faggots. If I had to choose between them, I would rather he took this brazen light-o’-love. She’s of the true faith, at any rate.”

“Do you think it possible for him to love one woman in spite of everything? He says he loves Katie Ladland, and yet it seems to make no difference. It’s become a sore point with me because—well, I love Katie myself.”

“I know.” He leaned over and patted my knee. “Yes, I believe it’s possible. John might love one woman all his life and still not alter his ways.”

“But what will it mean to Katie?”

“She’s young. She saw John a few times only. She goes to court soon, you say? I think she may soon forget him; and you as well, if you stay away too long. No, I’m not sure she’s in need of much sympathy, nor you, for that matter. I think in the long run it will be John we should feel sorry for.”

He got to his feet and walked to the rail. I joined him there, and we studied the ring of motionless ships about us. We could see little but the light of their lanterns.

“A beautiful night.” He sighed again. “The dawn will be even lovelier, but it will see us on our way. Off on an errand of death, Roger. Have you that testament I gave you? Never let it be far from you. You’ll need the comfort you can find only between its covers.”

“IT’S NONE TOO PLEASED ye are to be back on the *Grace O’Malley*,” said Captain Sleath, squinting at me out of one corner of his narrow eyes. “Ye’ll be wise to remember ye’re under my orders. One wrong move, and it’s over the side with ye to feed the sea-apes.”

We had been watching a full week for the enemy fleet, our little squadron of six spread thinly across the water south of Cape Passer. The captain had ridden me with spurs the whole time, and I had come to hate him intensely. I was not alone in this. The members of my gun crew would mutter, whenever he passed. They were a fine lot of fellows, answering to such names as Jamesey Dowcra, Felim McSwyne, and Con O’Relye. I liked them all and had come to rely strictly on one of them, a black lath from Belfast who called himself Henry Oge O’Neal, son of Brian, son of Manus. This was almost like a ritual with him, and he rattled it off with the greatest pride at every opportunity. He knew more about guns than anyone else and had names for each of our black-snouted monsters. One was Ree Shamus, after King James, a cranky specimen which gave us a lot of trouble. Another was the Great Boar of Thomond; a third, Old-Bear-a-Bob, which means “friend in need.” He talked to them during gunnery practice as though they were alive. “Na, na, Ree Shamus,” he would mutter, “ye’re a full ten bundles off yer mark.” Or, “If ye’ve a mind to it, *ma bouchal*, ye can split his binding-strakes for him.” It was Henry Oge who ran the gun crew, and I considered myself lucky to have him.

“I’ll have ye know, my gentry-cove, that at home I’m called Basil of the Tops,” went on Sleath. We were standing at the head of the after-ladder, and he had placed himself sideways in order to watch the skyline full ahead. “My mother, bless her, was a Bourke of Tirawly, the Lower Bourkes, and so I’ve no taste for the high nose ye give me, Master Blease. In fact, I like ye not at all.”

I made no answer, for my eyes had fixed on what seemed to me a faint streak of light on the horizon. When I became sure of it, I told the captain, and he studied it for a long time under a cupped hand.

“I’m thinking it’s *La Solderina*,” he said finally. His manner changed as completely as Harry Gard’s had on the morning we set out to engage the *Santa Caterina*. He grinned with sheer delight, and one of his feet tapped

out the first steps of a dance. "Ye call us dirty teagues behind our backs, and now ye'll see how the dirty teagues can fight. Tell me this: would the great John Ward have ventured out with no more than six of us if one of the six hadn't been Irish? I think not."

"He told me you were a fine fighting man, Captain Sleath."

"Did he now?" His pale eyes showed how pleased he was at this praise from John Ward. "For once he's right. I'll say this for him: he's fair at it himself." Suddenly he burst into action and began to bawl orders at the top of his voice. The watch came tumbling out, and almost instantly the shrouds were full of straining figures. "Furl the mainy'rd! Out with the waistcloths and top-armings, ye abbey-lubbers!"

For frenzied activity there's nothing to compare with a ship in the process of stripping for action. As I slid down the after-ladder, forgetting that only officers were allowed to use it, I could see the cooper lashing fast the halfbutts and hogsheads while his helpers soaked blankets and sheets in the water and then spread them about the deck where they would be handy if fire broke out in any part. The red cloth of the top-armings was already stretched over the cubbridge-heads and would soon encircle our whole upper works, thus creating a screen through which the enemy would not be able to see our deck, and very little but the tops of our rigging. I knew the carpenter and his men would be down in the hold, clearing everything away from the sides so that any damage could be quickly reached and repaired.

I found the gun-deck filled with men. They had stripped the tomkins and fids from the guns and were now rubbing tallow into the trunnions under the busy eye of Henry Oge. It was dark, and glancing up I saw that the scuttles, which serve the double purpose of letting air in and smoke out, had not yet been opened. I shouted to Jamesey Dowcra to remove the canvas covers. Several of the others I set to work on the black clay powder pots and the stink-balls which later would be tossed on enemy decks. The air became filled with the smell of saltpeter and asafetida.

In half an hour we were ready, and I went up on deck to report the fact to the captain. He was pacing the quarter-deck, stripped to the waist and with his head bound in a red handkerchief instead of the tarry blue caubeen he usually wore. He was muttering angrily, and the reason for his ill-temper was not hard to find. The ship we had sighted had grown from a half-inch of white sail into a full-rigger under a heavy head of canvas, and was almost certainly the long-expected *La Solderina*; but off to our right the *Royal Bess* was a good mile or more nearer the prey than we were. Sleath came to the rail and scowled down at me.



“Captain Rufflecoat is ahead of us!” he called. “He’ll have her kidneyed before we can get close enough to have a hand in it. He has all the luck, and I am of a mind to haul to and let him have the whole bloody mess to himself.”

He did not mean it, for almost with the same breath he was issuing orders to clap on more sail. This did us small good, for the *Royal Bess* had behind her what little wind there was. *La Solderina* had come about in the meantime and was preparing to run for it. Even to my inexperienced eye, it was clear she handled clumsily. I wondered if her slowness was part of the plan to lure us into the trap.

I missed the first act in the play because the captain suddenly ordered me back to my post. Nothing could be seen from the portholes on the gun-deck, so I sat about with the men and speculated as to what was happening. None of them had any fear as to the outcome. They shared their captain’s opinion that all the Latin ships in the world were no match for the Irish-manned *Grace O’Malley*. Henry Oge O’Neal straddled Old-Bear-a-Bob and boasted that he would blow the colors off the flagship with a single shot.

We changed our course several times, which made it clear that Captain Sleath was trying frantically to be in at the death. I knew that he had failed in this when Clim peered down through one of the scuttles with a broad grin on his face.

“She’s took, Shanks,” he called. “It wur a sight for English eyes. Cap’n Ward had the wind of ’er, and so he tacked about and give them a taste of iron from his bow pieces. Then he lay alongside, louse-and-louse, and give ’em a broadside what took all the fight out of the Flat-caps. Twenty minutes it took, Shanks, and not a second more. Down came the colors. They could hardly wait to be through with it.”

I looked at the faces about me and saw no trace of jubilation over the news. Henry Oge scowled up at the triumphant Clim and swore that the *Grace O’Malley* would have done it in half the time, and he damned to Captain Ward and his whole crew for a lot of caudge-pawed loiterers. There was a loud chorus of assent at this. I was afraid Clim would let himself down through the scuttle to settle the point with them, so I interposed hastily with a question as to what had happened to the carrack. Clim answered that a prize crew had already been installed, and that *La Solderina* was running due west. The rest of the enemy fleet was closing in from north and south, and by noon the battle would be on.

We spent two stifling hours waiting for the action to begin. The little air which reached us through the narrow scuttles did nothing to alleviate the

heat of midday. The men grumbled and drank deeply of the green-scummed water in a corner cask. Finally Henry Oge motioned me to join him at one of the portholes. The view it allowed us was due north, and I caught my breath with surprise and involuntary admiration. What had been before a bare expanse of hazy blue water was now alive with ships—great four-masters with gaudy-colored sails and long rows of black muzzles sticking out from their sides. I realized how the Great Armada must have looked, sailing majestically up the Sleeve to conquer England. It was a terrifying spectacle, and yet at the same time beautiful.

Henry Oge said in envious tones: “Will ye look at those guns! If we had them, we could blow the whole bloody lot of them out of the water. The Flat-caps don’t know how to use them. They’re a peery lot, and they’ll start popping at us when they’re still a quarter-mile off. What are the orders, Master Shanks?”

“We’re not to fire until the word is given us. I’m inclined to think we won’t loose a round until we’re right under them. We can’t afford to waste a single ball.”

He nodded his head approvingly. The men were too excited to return to their posts. In sheer exuberance of spirits they began to play a new game called leap-frog. They played it with gusto, shouting, “Shule!” while waiting their turns and trying to kick the under man as they vaulted over him.

I let this go on for a few minutes and then whistled them to their places. “When we fire, it will be at point-blank range,” I said. “No need to think about elevations. All we have to do is give it back to them faster than they can give it to us.”

The roar of guns soon reached us from all sides. The enemy was firing at long range, as O’Neal had predicted. I shook with excitement, longing for the moment when we could pay them back in the same coin. I watched from the nearest porthole and could see that a towering carrack was coming up to engage us. Jets of smoke spouted from her bow as she maneuvered about to get at closer range. She seemed twice as large as the *Grace O’Malley*.

When a broadside from the enemy struck us full on, I knew that the two ships had drawn into line. They had fired high, but a sound of splintering wood reached us from the deck and the screams of wounded men. I could feel the eyes of every man in the line fixed on me, waiting for the word. I ran directly under the first scuttle and looked up, one arm raised to relay the order when it reached me. Nothing happened. Had I mistaken my orders? Or had Captain Sleath forgotten to send them? Then I saw a blood-stained hand in the opening, and my arm dropped.

A roar filled the low galley, greater than any thunderclap I had ever heard. I thought my ears would burst. Through the thick smoke which filled the air I could barely see the recoil of the gun carriages and the torsos of the men as they raced with the reloading. I returned to my porthole and saw that our fire had torn great jagged rents in the enemy hull. I wanted to shout the good news, but the acrid fumes had filled my throat and I was capable of nothing more than an exultant croak. What amazed me more than the havoc we had caused was the closeness with which the scarlet and brown hull of the enemy had drifted. It filled my whole range of vision. I was on the point of signaling for another round when the two ships came together with a grinding crash. Waving both arms to the gunners to withhold their fire, I stumbled through the smoke to Henry Oge.

“They’re boarding us!” I shouted.

He shook his head. “Na, na,” he said. “They won’t be boarding us. They have no stomach for fighting it out at close range. We’re boarding them. None of us must leave here until we get our orders.”

We had come through without a single injury to any member of the squad. Such luck could not last. Out of the corner of one eye, I saw that the canvas over the farthest scuttle had caught fire. A piece of the burning material fell through the opening, below which was an open budge-barrel of powder. I was too far away to do anything about it, but my frantic shout of warning brought Henry Oge into action. He leaped over a gun which stood in his way and threw himself headlong in the direction of the keg. He was too late to prevent an explosion, but his body fell across the top and muffled it. Even at that, the shock of it threw me off my feet and I tumbled against a gun barrel. The air was full of smoke again and I could see nothing. From the cries of pain around me, I knew that some of the men had been hurt.

When the air cleared, we found there was nothing left of poor Henry Oge. He had been blown to pieces. The deck, the rough ceiling, and all the nearest guns were splattered with his blood. My head was aching, and I was too dazed to do anything but stumble blindly to my feet.

Then I saw something which caused a feeling of horror to creep up my spine. A strange black ball was lodged on the carriage of Old-Bear-a-Bob, a good twenty feet from the spot where the explosion had occurred. I had never seen anything like it before. Then, with growing agitation, I noticed that one side of it was not as black as the other, and that it bore a faint resemblance in shape to a human head. Old-Bear-a-Bob had been the favorite gun of Henry Oge O’Neal, son of Brian, son of Manus, so there seemed something fitting in the spot that chance had found as a resting place for all that was left of him.

I could not restrain my tears and, not wanting the others to see me, crept into a corner behind one of the guns. The ache in my head had become a violent, throbbing pain, and I leaned my forehead against the black barrel. All around I heard excited talk of what was happening above us and speculation on the possibility of spoils. Nothing was said about the dead gunner until one voice observed, "It's little use poor Henry Oge will be having for his share." Another added, "He's a wife and childer at home."

I went on deck just as the enemy struck his colors. It had taken no longer than the capture of *La Solderina*, but my head was aching unbearably, and I was unable to feel any sense of triumph when our men came back over the side with Captain Sleath at their head.

Clim was right on the captain's heels. The men who walked beside the big fellow were thumping him on the back approvingly, so it was clear he had distinguished himself again. His doublet had been cut to shreds, nothing being left of it but a few slashes of velvet over his chest and the remains of a puffed sleeve on one arm. He waved at me and grinned in triumph.

"Cut the grappling irons!" cried Sleath. "There's no time to lose. She'll blow up in a few minutes."

The shrouds were full instantly. I asked the man nearest me what had been done with the prisoners. He answered impatiently that they had been driven below and the hatches battened down. I stared at him, refusing to believe what I had heard.

"Do you mean," I asked, after a moment, "that they'll be blown up with the ship?"

"Of course. What else can we do with them?"

I glanced around me, expecting to find in some of the others a reflection of the horror I was feeling. No one seemed to be concerned in the slightest degree. I tried to figure out how many prisoners there would be. Several hundred, without a doubt. The pain in my head became worse. Was it possible that these men, with whom I had lived and fought on the best of terms, and most of whom I had come to like and respect, could acquiesce in the killing of hundreds of helpless human beings?

"This is murder!" I shouted desperately. "Captain Sleath, there's still time to get them off in the boats."

No one paid any attention. The stretch of water between the two ships began to widen, but I could still hear the voice of Sleath urging the men on to greater exertions. When we were well under way, he came over to where I was standing and looked at me with a kindling eye.

“Did I tell ye right?” he demanded. “What would John Ward have done this day without Basil Sleath and his fighting Irish?”

“It was magnificent,” I said. “But, Captain, you can’t mean to let those poor devils die? If you’ll order a boat lowered, I’ll go back and open the hatches for them. They must have a chance to get away.”

The smile he turned on me had a puzzled note in it. “And get blown to hell with the rest of them? I thought ye had more sense.” He suddenly became very angry. “Ye’re more of a looby fool than I thought. What would they’ve done to us if the tables had been turned? Set us down to meat and drink and asked kindly about our health? They would have strung us up as fast as they could slip the nooses around our necks.”

“But they can’t be left to die like rats in a trap!”

He laughed. “Would your Captain Ward do any different? I think not.” He paused and looked at me with professional interest. “That’s a handsome slash in the head ye got for yerself.”

It had not occurred to me that I had been wounded. Ever since the explosion on the gun-deck, I had been conscious of dampness on my cheeks, but had thought it due to the intense heat. Now I passed a hand over my face and found on inspection it was covered with blood.

“More of them will be down on us,” said Sleath. “Get that little cut attended to and then back to yer post, ye soft-hearted fool.”

Clim tore the shirt off the back of a dead man on the deck to wipe the end of his pike, and then came over to where I stood. He examined my head with a worried look. “A splinter,” he said. “It’s cut in pretty deep, Shanks. I’ll bind it for ye.”

Nothing else being available, he ripped the velvet off his arm and used it as a bandage. His fingers were clumsy, and it took some time. I watched the enemy ship through a rent in the top-armings and saw when it blew up. Even at that, I started so violently that the knot came loose. I looked at Sleath and saw him cross himself.

“Peace to them,” he said, adding almost immediately: “A poor lot they were. They had us three to one. We deserve more than glory for what we’ve done, but I’m afraid it’s nothing more we’ll be getting.”

Clim whispered in my ear: “Let him go on thinking that. I’ve something to tell you later, Shanks.”

The red felt of the top-armings closed us in like the dome of a cathedral, and I found it necessary to go to the rail in order to see anything of the battle. It was raging on all sides. Three ships were in flames, two of the enemy and one of ours. It was Pooley’s *Cornish Lass*, and I could see that

the little pinnace was in bad shape. All of our ships, however, were too closely engaged to give any help.

A hurried count brought one reassuring fact to light: the enemy fleet did not number more than a score. They were tall and powerful ships with great batteries of guns; but, with the odds not much worse than three to one, we might have a chance after all. A number of them were already in such plight that they had dropped out of the battle line. The *Royal Bess* was engaged with their flagship, and I felt a surge of pride when I saw what a heavy time the Venetian was having. Her mainmast was down, and a fire had broken out on her deck. There was something about the way she handled which made me sure she had little stomach left for fighting. As I watched, the *Bess* came about and rocked the towering flagship with a blast from her port pieces.

That duel will soon be over, I said to myself.

Feeling the eye of Sleath on me, I went below to my post. The men were all there, some of them wearing bandages. The better part of an hour passed, and then I saw that the tack we were on would bring us under the guns of a high-pooed monster with a band playing martial airs on her deck. They were already firing at us, and I could see jets of water spouting up at a sufficient distance from us to prove the pooriness of their marksmanship. They continued to riddle the seas without doing us any manner of harm at all, but their guns went silent when we slung in beside them. The reason, I concluded, was that the barrels had become too heated for use. It was hard to believe they could have been guilty of such a miscalculation; but there it was. My order to fire was delivered with an exultant shout.

There was not enough draft to carry the smoke up through the scuttles, and so for ten minutes we worked in a haze which our burning eyes could not pierce. Only by the sounds could I tell when the carriages had been driven back into position after each recoil. The figures of the crew, seen through the fumes, seemed gigantic. They moved with frenzied haste, and it would not have been hard to believe I had been translated to the Lower Regions where spirits skipped over the flames.

We fired half a dozen rounds. Then a hand tugged at my shoulder, and the voice of Jamesey Dowcra reported that we would have to stop until the guns cooled. I glanced through the porthole and saw that it did not matter. No further medicine was necessary to complete the cure. The enemy was veering off, her hull as full of holes as a fish-leek, her band silent, and smoke issuing from every port. She had had more than enough, and her one thought clearly was to get as far away as possible from the sting of our little Irish hornet.

I went up on deck, and Sleath called down to me from the rail of the quarter-deck, "Not bad, Master Blease, not bad at all."

I had arrived in time to witness the end of the unfortunate *Cornish Lass*. The blazing hulk, lacking power to strike back, had been caught between two of the enemy. They proceeded to pour volley after volley into her with almost fiendish glee, as though paying back in this coinage for the punishment they had received from the rest of us. There was no trace of life on the doomed ship, but I winced every time a shell struck her. Finally they opened a hole in her well below the water line, and she then settled fast. She went down by the stern. One moment we saw her standing straight up in the air as though held by some force other than human; the next she was gone. It looked as though one of old Jore Snode's renora monsters had gripped her by the keel and dragged her down beneath the waves.

"Every last mother's son of them gone," said a sailor beside me, in a lugubrious voice. "That's how we'll all end up. And very soon, I'm thinking. They're all around us. It's nothing but a bull-baiting from now on."

I was not convinced that our position was as desperate as that. They had closed around us, but on signals from the *Royal Bess* we had pulled in together and were in a position to fight on almost equal terms. The enemy seemed to have little desire left for the task of breaking up our compact squadron. They tacked about and fired at us from a safe range. The guns on all our ships were silent. We could afford to wait and conserve our supplies.

The afternoon was wearing away, and I felt I could now take the time to have my wound properly dressed. Forgetting that there was no surgeon on board the *Grace O'Malley*, I made my way to the cockpit. The wounded had been carried there, and some of the worst cases had been given what little attention their mates were capable of supplying. The stumps of legs and arms had been rudely bandaged, but little else had been done for the unfortunate fellows who rolled on the decks and screamed with their pain. The planking was slippery with blood, and I fell on my back, rolling with the pitch of the ship to the far end and encountering two dead bodies on the way.

The hopelessness of the situation made things seem worse than the horrors I had encountered on the *Santa Caterina*. Nothing could be done for the sufferers. They must lie here until they died or until the battle ended and help could be secured from the other ships. I struggled to my feet, cursing Basil Sleath for his carelessness and penury.

When I told him of the conditions below, he did not seem very much concerned. "We all take chances," he said. "They staked their lives against a

share of the loot. They've lost. The rest of us so far have won." He crossed himself. "What can we do for them?"

"They must have brandy. You haven't seen fit to provide a surgeon and a proper medicine chest for the poor devils, but at least you can make it easier for them."

"Ye can't cure them with brandy. We're short of it; but break out some bottles if ye must." He glowered at me. "It's glad I'll be when I've seen the last of ye, Master Blease."

I think the wounded men gained some relief from the drinks which I served with a lavish hand. I knew, however, that few of them would survive if help did not reach us soon; and that seemed impossible.

Night fell, and the five battered survivors drew closer together. The enemy maintained a patrol around us, but at such a distance that their lanterns seemed no larger than fireflies against the blackness of the sky. Dawn might bring them a renewal of fighting spirit, but in the meantime we could rest satisfied with the results of the day's struggle.

Too weary to find any other resting place, I sank down in the scuppers and propped my pain-racked head against the rail. I was not alone, for men were sleeping all over the deck, with musket and pikes beside them, their vigorous snores sounding louder in my ears than the "All's well!" which came at intervals from the lookout. Clim found me there, picking his way cautiously among the sleepers with a candle in his hand. He snuffed it out with a satisfied chuckle and sank down on the deck.

"Is it hurting ye much?" he asked in a whisper. "When ye get a splinter in the nab, it's like the devil was driving nails in ye with a red-hot hammer. I've had 'em many's the time. But in a few day's ye're as good as new. It was lucky ye didn't get it in the belly like poor Dandyprat. There's no cure for *that*." He dropped his voice so low that I found it hard to hear what he was saying. "Shanks, there was gold on the ship we took. They had it hidden on the orlop-deck, and a couple of us found it. On the orlop-deck, Shanks. Do ye see what that means?"

I shook my head with weary lack of interest. Clim, who seemed on the point of bursting with excitement, went on to explain. "One of the lads with me was Danny Boy O'Donnell, and he says anything found on the orlop-deck belongs to the men. It's in the Lotman Code, Shanks. Danny Boy O'Donnell says we divide it up, and no one else can lay a finger on a single win of it. Cap'n Sleath will spit blood when he hears, but it'll do him no good. It was in small bars, and we brought them over in our trunk hose."



My mind was wandering, and I found it impossible to follow what he was saying. It was as though I had moved away from my body and was floating above where we sat. I could look down at the pair of us there in the scuppers, and I could catch scraps of his talk. "We'll be rich, Shanks"—and "Danny Boy O'Donnell says—" Then my mind went far afield. I was back on Shrubsole High, watching the huge bonfire built for John's homecoming and hearing him say, "No law beyond the Line!" Everything became very confused after that. I thought we were in the inn near Theobalds, and a gigantic figure with a face like Archie Armstrong's was laughing loudly and quoting bits of verse that made no manner of sense. I saw Chirp Bird sprawling in a cushioned chair, with his skinny legs cased in crimson silk, saying, "I'm the Upright Man of all London." I knew there was something wrong about that, for Chirp was only the curtal of Alsatia.

Finally I seemed to be in Wayland Spinney. There had been a light fall of snow, and the rabbits came out and frisked around as though I were not there, and then Katie came running to meet me. She was wearing an ermine coat, and there was a glad light in her eyes. Now I was sure that everything was wrong. It was John that Katie had met in Wayland Spinney, and the glad look had been for him and not for me. Still, it was wonderful to see her, and I hoped she would stay a long time, even though I was pretty certain it was not real. I was on the point of saying, "You're a gay little spark, Katie," but checked myself when I realized that John had used those same words. She went away almost at once, and I became aware again of Clim's voice: "The Cap'n can do nothing about it, Shanks. Danny Boy O'Donnell knows the Code from beginning to end, and he says we'll fight for our rights."

The rim of the sun was over the horizon when I wakened. I was so stiff that I had to reach up to the rail with both arms in order to get on my feet. I nearly fell in turning to look out over the water.

Not an enemy ship was in sight.

## 23

I WAS GLAD to get away from the celebration which followed on the *Grace O'Malley*. Instead of breaking out a cask of brandy, which was the

customary thing after a victory, Captain Sleath compromised by having kettles of hot-pot prepared, a mixture of ale and brandy boiled together. There was more ale than brandy in the concoction, but even so it possessed a diabolical potency. In no time at all most of the crew had a touch of the jumbles. They seemed determined to submit the less drunken members to physical indignities and so, when the captain announced the wounded were to be taken to the *Royal Bess* for treatment, I was quickly over the side.

The sea was choppy and the trip in a cranky skiff did not prove pleasant. We were not crowded, for half of the poor fellows I had seen in the cockpit had died during the night. Most of the survivors were delirious. One of them kept singing over and over the first lines of an old Irish battle song in a voice as reedy as a bird call. Another was determined to jump overboard; and, as the few sound men with us were busy with the oars, it fell to my lot to restrain him. He was a great hairy fellow whose jaw had been broken by a musket ball, and it was like wrestling with a demented bear. The pain in my own head had not abated, and every move I was compelled to make sent waves of nausea over me. The singer changed to a gentler song as we swung in beside the *Royal Bess*:

“I’ll trade my plate, I’ll give my bowl,  
I’ll sell my everlasting soul—”

Joralemon Snode was waiting for me at the top of the ladder with a warm smile. He was stripped to the waist and smeared with blood, so I knew he had spent the night with the wounded. When he saw the condition of the men we had brought, he shook his head.

“We’ll do what we can for them, with the Lord’s help,” he said. “But, Roger boy, we’re at our wit’s end as it is. We were in the thick of it from the beginning, and our best fellows went down like the sons of Israel before the slingshots of Midian.” He ran over the list of those who had been killed, and it sounded like a roll-call in the Cinque Ports. I listened with a sinking heart, for I had been fond of most of them. “Nearly everyone has some hurt. John got a musket ball in the neck, but it did no more than crease the skin of the great lucky zany. It’s been a costly victory.”

“But a great one.”

I tried to sound jubilant but did not succeed entirely, I am afraid. This was not altogether due to the condition of my head. Ever since I had wakened up, a sense of impending disaster had been filling my mind. I was sure that Clim was headed for trouble. All my efforts to talk sense into him had been without result. During the drinking he had stood with one arm over the scrawny shoulders of a redheaded fellow with the look of a fox about

him—Danny Boy O'Donnell, no doubt. They were in a state of tipsy self-congratulation, chuckling and winking at each other. Clim's guileless face had been more than ever like that of a big schoolboy playing truant. The pair were very sure of themselves and laughed uproariously when I tried to warn them.

"First, I'll have a look at that head of yours," said Joralemon. He pulled off the velvet bandage, clucking anxiously at the condition of it. "Might as well have used a swabber's rag. The head of the splinter's in there still. You'll think the thumbscrews are on you when I go after it. Come below and I'll get to work on you."

It took a few minutes only, but he had been right about the pain. When a clean bandage had been bound over the wound, I was only too glad to gulp down a noggin of brandy and stretch myself out on a wooden bench. I lost consciousness immediately. Whether I swooned or fell asleep, I don't know; but it was hours later when I wakened.

Mickle, the surgeon, and Joralemon were still hard at work. The latter came over to me as soon as I sat up.

"Take things easy and you'll be all right," he said. "I wish I could say as much for the rest of them." His face lighted with righteous anger. "The fires of everlasting hell are not punishment enough for a captain who doesn't look after his men! I was glad when I heard there was trouble on the *Grace O'Malley*."

Trouble on the *Grace O'Malley*! I felt sick at this confirmation of my fears. What had Clim and his new friend been up to? I remembered what John had said about the penalties for third and fourth offenders. If Clim had been concerned in the trouble, it would be his third offense.

"First, they signaled for help," went on Joralemon. "We came about and boats were being manned when they strung up another message. They were sending a boat to us." He shook his head soberly. "There's a skiff-full of them now on the way over. I don't like the looks of it."

"Jore," I said, "the penalty for mutiny is death, isn't it?"

He nodded. "I've seen plenty hanged for less than that. I didn't mean it when I said I was glad. I'm sick at the thought of what may be ahead of us."

I heard the word "mutiny" as soon as I placed a foot on deck. The watch were standing about in whispering groups, and I knew they were speculating as to what had happened on Sleath's ship. Mutiny is an ugly word when you hear it spoken at sea. It means the breaking down of authority, the coming of violence and bestiality and sudden death. A grim and terrifying word. The watch were talking in low tones as though they shared my dread of it.

Sleath himself was the first over the side. He was followed by several members of the crew, all of them fully armed. There was a short delay, and then I saw Clim come up the ladder. He was chained to Danny Boy O'Donnell and another man whose name I knew was Flynn.

There had been an attempted mutiny and it had failed—that much was certain. Clim looked sullen and defiant, but his two companions were chalky with fear. I heard one of the newcomers say to a member of the watch: “A bloody mess, it was. They did for Mat Byrnes.” I knew then it would go hard with Clim. Mat Byrnes was second mate of the *Grace O'Malley*; and the killing of an officer is gallows-business.

I was edging over to get a word with Clim when John came out of the pilot-house. He walked slowly to the rail. I wanted to go to him and say, “Have the courage to be merciful.” With that in mind I had reached the foot of the ladder when Joralemon came up behind and held me back.

“You’ll only make matters worse,” he whispered. “He wouldn’t relish interference now.”

John looked down at the crowded deck. “Good day, Captain Sleath,” he said. “It would seem you have been having some trouble.”

Sleath found the greeting not entirely to his liking. “It’s not help I’m needing in the handling of my own men. I can attend to my affairs, and it’s swinging they would be from the yardarm this very minute if I had the settling of it. But the worst offender is one of yours, and so we must handle it between us. That’s why I’m here.”

I heard tense breathing over my shoulder and turned to find a solid row of the men behind me. Many others had climbed into the shrouds and were staring down with sober faces. Jackes, the cook, was standing outside his galley, and his face had the same pasty look to it as the dough in a pan he was gripping under his arm. Hale Harry Gard appeared from somewhere and took his place at John’s side.

“What’s happened?” asked John.

“Mutiny,” answered Sleath. “Theft, first. And then resistance to orders. Four men were killed.”

John climbed slowly down the ladder, followed by the mate. The two captains faced each other on the deck with no effort on the part of either to conceal their dislike.

“Mutiny?” said John. “Give me the details, if you please, Captain Sleath.”

The Irishman answered in an aggrieved tone, “My word on that should be enough. But since you ask, Captain Ward, I’ll tell you. It came to my ears

this morning that some of my men had found a considerable store of bullion on the ship we captured yesterday. They were keeping it for themselves.” His voice began to rise. “When I summoned them before me and demanded that they hand the gold over, they told me to my face, these filthy gallows-birds, that it belonged to them. They proposed to divide it up there and then.” He looked at the three men in chains and spat furiously.

“And you refused.”

“I refused. What do I care for their code? I told them I had a code of my own, and I would have the lot of them keel-raked for their insolence.” He paused and then went on in more moderate tones, “It was on your suggestion, Captain Ward, that we agreed to lump all our takings and have an even division at the end. Everything has been turned in since that time.”

“Had you explained it to your crew?”

“That I had. It went sorely against the grain to talk to the canats at all, but I explained it again. It made no difference. They defied me and stood by their code.”

“How many men were concerned?”

“A score of them finally. But most of them were misled by the lying tongue of O’Donnell. I am holding none but the three leaders responsible. Two of them are mine, O’Donnell and Flynn. The third is yours, Clement Duvver.”

John looked at the prisoners for the first time. “You again,” he said to Clim. “I swear you’ve caused me more trouble than any dozen of the crew.”

A voice called from behind me, “And he’s the best man ye’ve got, Captain Ward!” This drew a loud chorus of assent.

“We didn’t think to make trouble, Cap’n Ward,” said Clim. “But we knew our rights. Danny Boy O’Donnell said it was ours, and he ought to know. He was with O’Driscoll. He said what was found on the orlop-deck always went to the men.”

The prisoner Flynn broke in with sudden fury: “And a fine division it’s been! What’s found in the cabins goes to the officers. The jewels and the fine clothing and the gold clocks and the feather beds. What did us ever find on the lower decks? Old clothes and bilge water!”

It was apparent from the torrent of sound which broke loose at this point that all the men were thoroughly in accord with this view of things. A voice from the rear shouted: “It’s the same in everything, mates. They drive us off the land to starve in the cities. We get tired of begging and dodging the harman-becks and we go to sea. What do we get then? Wormy food and the bimster on our backs, and what little’s left over after our betters are

through!" I recognized this as coming from Jackes, the cook, who was always preaching about men's rights and how to get them by revolution.

Danny Boy O'Donnell, forgetting his fears in the face of such open support, stuck his red head out from behind his two tall companions and said in a high-pitched voice: "The only time we ever find something rich, what happens? Black looks and threats from the captain and orders to hand it over. Is that fair play, Cap'n Ward?"

"Enough of this!" thundered John. He looked around him at the angry faces of the crew. "I want every one of you to give me an honest answer before we go any further. Did you understand that the old code had been set aside and that the men on all ships were to share equally at the finish?"

The cook was the first to respond, elbowing his way to the front rank with his pan of dough still under his arm. "We knew it, but we were given no word in the making of the agreement. And we didn't like it. It's always Hobson's choice for common men. First the owners gets half of everything. Then the cap'n takes ten shares and the mates two, and some of us gets one share but most a half. And it's all drunk up and wenched before we get home."

"I want an answer from all of you."

There was an unwilling murmur of "aye" from the men in the circle behind me. John turned to Clim. "Did you understand it?"

Clim had a puzzled look in his eyes. "I heard what you told us, Cap'n Ward, like the rest," he said. "But I didn't think much about it. I knew you would look out for us, and that's all I needed. But Danny Boy said the gold was ours anyway."

"It's becoming clear that your man O'Donnell was responsible for this trouble," declared John. "Unfortunately it may not prove enough excuse for the rest of them. Will you oblige me, Captain Sleath, by telling now what happened when the men refused to hand over the gold?"

"I ordered the three leaders put in the bracelets. Mat Byrnes, my second mate, put a hand on the shoulder of your fellow and was pitched into the scuppers for his pains. Twenty of them lined up against my authority. It was open mutiny, Captain Ward, and you'll be needing no further proofs. Before we got the better of them, we had a harder fight for it than the Flat-caps give us yesterday. Four men were killed, two on each side. Mat Byrnes had his skull cracked."

"Who killed the mate?"

Clim spoke up. "I killed him, Cap'n Ward. I didn't mean to, but he came at me with a pike, and it was him or me. I'm sorry it happened that way. I

liked the mate.”

My mind had been casting about frantically to find grounds on which leniency could be claimed, but I knew how damaging this admission was. I could see that John dreaded the making of a decision, and I tried to catch his eye. He carefully avoided looking in my direction.

“You’re right, Captain Sleath,” he said slowly. “It was mutiny, and we must deal with the offenders in the manner prescribed. The fact that at least one of the men concerned has a splendid record in action cannot, I’m sorry to say, be taken into consideration.”

The three of them would be hanged. I had known it would come to this, but with the pronouncement made I was swept away with a furious determination to prevent it. I looked around me and could see the same feelings reflected in every face—pity and anger and baffled desire to do something. I called out in a strained voice that no one could have recognized as mine: “His record must be considered, Captain Ward. I demand it on behalf of the crew!”

A roar of approval followed my words. It was what they had been waiting for, apparently. Vehement voices joined in my protest from all quarters. “We don’t want Clim to die!”—“He don’t deserve it!”—“Good for you, Shanks!” Approving hands clapped me vigorously on the back.

John shook his head gravely. “I feel this as keenly as the rest of you,” he said. “Clim is a good man, a fine fighter. But no other course is open to me. If the trouble had occurred here, it would have been in my power to consider your feeling for the prisoner. I don’t mean,” he added hastily, “that I would have spared the offender, unless there had been the very best of reasons for doing so. Discipline must be maintained at any cost. In this case, the trouble occurred on Captain Sleath’s ship, and I can’t extend leniency without his consent.”

“And that ye’ll never get,” declared Sleath. “I propose to hang both O’Donnell and Flynn as soon as I get them back aboard the *Grace O’Malley*. I expect ye to give this fellow what he’s entitled to.”

His eye was fixed on me, and I wondered if he was striking at me through Clim. His nod of sly triumph was as much for my benefit as for John when the latter said, “If that’s your final word, there’s nothing else for me to do.”

The mood of the men was growing sharply belligerent, but this had no effect on Sleath. He looked at John and said: “It’s not my final word. There was more than mutiny to it. They stole the gold first. That makes two offenses, Captain Ward. That’s to be taken into consideration.”

Gard, standing beside John, nodded in agreement. "He's right about that," he said.

"What difference can it make?" John was growing impatient. "The penalty for mutiny is death."

"Aye," said Sleath. "But it makes a difference in the manner of death prescribed."

A cold chill of apprehension took possession of me. What did he mean by that? Was he striving to fix something more painful for poor Clim than death at the yardarm? The men seemed to understand what he meant, for their mutters of protest grew in volume. Jackes, at my elbow, was cursing furiously.

"How many offenses does this make for your man?" persisted Sleath, his eye still singling me out.

Gard took it on himself to answer. "Four."

"Four?" Sleath's tone was openly triumphant now. "There you have it, Ward. Death in the Basket!"

Death in the Basket? I recalled that Captain Pooley had made mention of it that morning in Gouletta. I did not know what it meant, but I was sure it would prove something unspeakably cruel, the epitome of all the horrors of the code under which seamen lived. I glanced at the cook and saw that his face had gone a tallowy white. It was apparent that this possibility had not occurred to John, for he looked almost as dismayed as the rest of us. I did not dare look at Clim.

"It's a clear case," said Sleath. "Well, we'll now return to the *Grace O'Malley*, as I prefer to hang these mutinous dogs from my own yardarm."

From the start I had known there was something I could say as a last resort, but I had held back, being well aware of the consequences. Even now I hesitated. If I told what I knew, the vengeance of Sleath would find me out sooner or later. I prayed for courage, and something inside me responded. I heard myself say: "It's not a clear case. So far we've heard nothing but Captain Sleath's version of what happened."

He turned a furious eye on me. "And are ye doubting it, Master Blease?"

I could not back out now. "Yes," I said.

His hand closed on the hilt of the short demihag in his belt, and he made a move in my direction. John stepped between us and motioned him back.

"You've done it now, Roger. As you've expressed a doubt of the captain's veracity, there's nothing for it but to hear what you have to say. You'll accept the consequences, whatever they may be."



“I’m prepared to accept them.”

Complete silence had settled over the ship. The men were watching me with set faces. Sleath drew the dagger from its horn sheath and began to edge closer.

“No man can give me the lie,” he said.

“We’ll hear this thing through first,” declared John, laying a hand on his arm. “Out with it, Roger. What do you know?”

“I know nothing about what occurred today. But I know a great deal about Captain Sleath.” I was well aware that I might pay with my life for what I was going to say, but it was too late to turn back. Fear had left me. “He ordered these men put in irons. That was what started all the trouble. Was he right in doing so? No! They were refusing to live up to an agreement they had no hand in making. An agreement, moreover, that he had already broken himself.”

All along I had felt Joralemon tugging at my elbow in a frantic effort to keep me quiet. To my amazement, I now heard him chime in with shrill agreement. “That makes a difference, Captain Ward! We want to hear both sides!”

“You’ve made a bold charge,” said John. “But I can’t see that it has much bearing on the case.”

“It has a bearing,” I declared. “Can you condemn men to death on the word of a thief?”

Pandemonium broke loose then. The men began to cheer wildly. The head of Danny Boy O’Donnell popped out again like that of a turtle, new hope showing in his beady eyes.

“We’re with ye, Shanks!” cried the cook. “Tell them what ye know.”

“Yes, we’re with you,” echoed Joralemon, jumping with excitement.

The crew moved in front of me by way of protection from any move that Sleath might make. I found myself so hemmed in that I could see neither of the captains.

“You’ll have a chance to justify what you’ve said.” I heard John’s voice. “As soon as we’ve settled this case, you’ll come to my cabin. I want Captain Sleath there at the same time. We’ll hear what you have to say.”

“Very well!” I shouted. “I can make good my charge, never fear. See that he isn’t allowed out of sight with that bag at his belt. The proof of what I have to say is in it.”

The noise redoubled in volume at that. I caught a glimpse of Sleath’s face, purple with fury, as he fought to break through the file in front of me.

Two of the men were holding him by the arms. Then, to my complete surprise, I saw the head of Clim appear behind them.

Later I was given the story in full by those in a position to see what happened. Clim had been standing at one side, his wrists clamped in the chain which bound him to his two fellow prisoners. As he was much taller than either of them, he had been bending over to ease the strain on their arms. When Sleath sprang in my direction, he straightened up suddenly and dragged them across the deck after him. Sensing danger, Sleath broke loose from the men who were holding him and turned face about.

I was able to see what followed. The chained arms of the infuriated Clim were raised in the air. "I'll do for him myself, Shanks!" he cried. He brought the chain down on top of the captain's head. There was a sharp cracking sound, and Sleath disappeared from view. I did not need to be told that he was dead when I saw his body stretched out on the deck a moment later. Both legs were crumpled up under him, and his broken head was twisted to one side.

"Every man to his post!" shouted John. They scurried to obey without a word. The body of the murdered captain lay there in full view for the better part of a minute. Then John walked over and took the leather bag from his belt.

"What will I find?"

"Diamonds," I said, finding difficulty with my voice. "There should be twenty of them."

He motioned Gard to join him, and they examined the contents together. "Twenty there are," he said. I could see that he was relieved. "You knew what you were talking about, it seems. I'll hear your story later. Gard, signal the captains to come aboard. They must all have a voice in this. Select witnesses to give them the story of what happened both here and on the *Grace O'Malley*." He hesitated and then added in solemn tones: "As for Clim, we have no way out now. Have the carpenter build the Basket."

Clim was relieved of his chains and allowed to sit in the scuppers while the carpenter went to work. Tears were streaming down his cheeks, but I knew this was due to the fighting rage with which he had finished off Basil Sleath and not because he was sorry for himself. He wiped them off with his sleeve and called a good-by to O'Donnell and Flynn when they were helped over the side to the waiting skiff. I sat down beside him while he drank a glass of wine and finished a bone of powdered beef which the cook had brought him. He had a good appetite.

"I'll speak to the Captain," I managed to get out in spite of the lump in my throat. "I'll get around him somehow. You're too good a man to lose, Clim."

He shook his head. "It's the end for me. There's nothing can be done now. Not after I killed him. I'm not sorry about that, Shanks. I'm glad."

I was finding it hard to hold back my own tears. "You did it to save me, Clim. Twice you've done it. And they're going to make you pay for it."

The carpenter was building a wooden cage in full view of us. It was about four feet square with a solid base. He wielded his ax with a reluctant arm as though conscious of the bitter eyes which watched him from every quarter. Once he looked directly at us and shook his head. "Don't hold this against me," he said. "I'm only following orders."

"It's all right, Shaves," said Clim. "Make a snug little home for me. And be sure it's strong. I don't want to drown."

John had disappeared into his cabin, but Gard stood by and watched the carpenter complete his work. Joralemon joined us and began to talk to Clim of the eternal life into which he was soon to enter.

"The Lord will forgive you all your sins if you go to Him with a penitent heart," he said, turning the leaves of his Bible with unsteady fingers.

Genuine tears came into the unfortunate man's eyes at this. "I been a pretty bad lot," he said. "I don't see what use the Lord can have for me. Make the prayers strong, Parson Snode. I'm going to need them."

He brightened up almost immediately and finished his drink. "Shanks, will ye find my hat with the pink feathers? It's all that's left of my fine clothes. I want to wear it."

I found the hat in the fo'c's'le, where it had been left when we transferred to the other ship. Clim indulged in a rueful inspection when I brought it to him. One of the plumes was missing. "Someone stole the biggest feather," he said. "I won't look right."

The cage was finished, and Gard tied a twenty-foot rope to one of the top bars. "Ready, Clim," he said.

A look of fear showed in the victim's eyes for the first time. He glanced about him as though calculating his chances of resistance. Then he pulled himself together and got to his feet. He straightened his hat and laid a hand on my arm. "Tell the lady I'm sorry I ran away," he said. "She was good to me. You too, Shanks."

I followed them at a distance to the stern. I saw Clim take his place in the cage and the carpenter nail down the last of the bars. A bottle of wine

and a loaf of bread were handed in to the prisoner. Then Gard tested the edge of a knife he had carried in his belt and handed it to Clim. The Basket was lowered from the spanker-boom. I looked about me and did not see a member of the crew.

I stopped Gard on his way back and asked him the purpose of the knife. For the first time in my knowledge of him, the mate answered in an almost kindly tone.

“Ye’re feeling pretty bad about this, Shanks. It’s no use, for it can’t be helped now. The knife? He’ll use it to cut the rope. When he’s had as much of it down there as he can stand.”

## 24

BLUNT HAD BEEN too drunk to answer the summons, so I told my story to a group of three composed of John and the two remaining captains, Halsey and Glanville. There was a moment’s silence at the finish. I knew that I had told the story badly, my mind being too full of what had happened for lucid narration. Then Halsey, who had the darkest and most expressive eyes I had ever seen in an English face, asked what course I would have followed if the dead captain had not forced me to let the cat out of the bag.

“I was going to tell Captain Ward and leave the matter in his hands,” I replied.

Glanville said, between puffs on a long-stemmed ivory pipe: “If it had not been so contrived that we got the word in time, most of us would have been picked up by the enemy. I am strongly of the opinion that our young friend did the only thing possible and that he acted with admirable decision. We owe him a heavy debt of gratitude.”

Halsey chimed in with a hearty, “I agree to that,” and John smiled at me across the table and said, “Roger, you may consider that we approve what you did.”

Glanville then rubbed his long nose with a puzzled air and asked: “What are we going to do about Blunt? I’ve always considered him a hulvering

fellow.”

It was decided that Blunt would be forced to withdraw from the Free Rovers after the return to Tunis. Glanville asked, “And Macherie? There’s something rancid about him also.” John pointed out that Sir Nevil’s participation in the scheme had not been proved, and that we would have to look into the matter first. Halsey did not seem entirely convinced of the wisdom of this, saying that we would soon find ourselves with an Upright Man of the Inner Seas if we didn’t watch the rascal closely.

I rose to withdraw. John looked at his fellow captains for their concurrence, and then remarked that the question of doing something handsome for me would be discussed later. This was the opportunity I had been waiting for, and I walked back to the table eagerly.

“There’s only one thing I want. You know what it is, Captain Ward. A pardon for Clim.”

Dissent registered on all three faces instantly. John shook his head. “And that is the one thing we can’t grant,” he said. “It shouldn’t be necessary to tell you the reasons.”

“You give me credit for saving our ships from capture, so perhaps you’ll agree that I saved also a great many lives. I’m asking only one in return.”

John frowned. “You saw how the men acted out there today. There’s never more than the thinnest margin between obedience and mutiny. If we gave in to you, there would be no holding them. Discipline would dissolve into thin air. Where would we be then?”

“Can you compel obedience by injustice?”

“Injustice?” Halsey took up the argument. “Your man killed a captain on the open deck!”

“But the captain had been at fault in his treatment of the men.”

“The evidence does not prove it,” declared Halsey.

“You know that Sleath’s word couldn’t be depended on. He goaded them into open resistance.”

“That has no bearing on the case. He represented authority.”

Glanville’s sympathetic attitude had made me hope for support from him, but he now said, in a not too happy tone: “Discipline is as necessary as a sound hull. I’ve sent many men to the yardarm in my time and slept badly of nights because of it. It’s an evil thing, but it stands in the way of things that would be still more evil. You’ve heard, I’m sure, that Sir Francis Drake had to hang his best friend on the voyage around the world?”

I had heard the story many times, and it had seemed to me the one blot on the reputation of our great sea hero. Before I could voice this opinion, John broke in: "I feel badly about this, Roger. I would spare the poor fellow if I dared. *But it can't be done!* Do you want us to succeed? We face every handicap as it is, and we need that fine edge of discipline if we're to have a chance at all." He looked at me earnestly as though trying to compel my understanding. "I've seen leniency tried. It was on my first long voyage, in the northern seas. A man should have been hanged, but the captain let his heart get the better of him. Five men died finally because of it, three of them innocent members of the crew, in a full day of fighting. The trouble-maker was hanged *then*."

"Captain Ward is right," said Glanville. "The code of the sea may not seem important to one as young as you, but we have to live by it. And die by it sometimes."

"Roger," said John earnestly, "consider that there have been five offenses in a row, ending with mutiny and the murder of a captain! I might as well turn the command over to that loud-mouthed cook if I let your man go now."

I argued the case bitterly but futilely. They had closed their minds, Clim would have to die a lingering death, swinging behind the ship in a frail wooden cage, without food or water under the blistering rays of the sun. He would die in torment, but the crew would have the lesson of obedience driven home to them in a way they were never supposed to forget. I bowed and left.

A member of the watch stopped me when I set foot on the main deck. He was a simple-looking country fellow with lank hair and frightened eyes.

"Any luck?" he asked.

"None."

The sailor fell into step beside me. "Will they leave him there until he starves to death?" he asked in a horrified whisper.

"Yes. Unless he goes mad with the heat first."

His lower jaw was trembling, and he found it hard to speak. "My brother and I signed up together. He was killed yesterday." He gulped back his tears. "He went overboard when they shot away our sprits'l. I saw him in the water, hanging onto the spar. We were fighting one of the Flat-caps, and it was a full hour before we left the spot. I wanted to go after him, to do something! But the mate kept me at my post. I saw the look in his eyes when we sailed away and left him there to drown. My stout little Will!" The tears

were streaming down his face now. “I can’t stand this bloody, beastly life, Shanks, I can’t stand it!”

I answered in a whisper, “Neither can I!”

I walked the deck for hours, taking care to avoid the stern. The stars came out and a breeze sprang up. We began to make good headway. I thought of the cage swaying at the end of the rope, knowing the added discomfort this would bring the unhappy occupant. A dozen times I made up my mind to go back to the cabin and repeat my demand, but each time I drew back. It would do no good.

Joralemon joined me finally. For a time we walked along in silence. Then I pointed to the stars above us. “It’s a beautiful night. How can there be so much cruelty under a sky like that?”

My companion answered quietly: “There are thousands of men dying tonight. In fine beds as well as in filthy spital-houses and in the cockpits of ships. Some are dying in great pain. Some are dying because of the wickedness of other men. It goes on all the time, Roger. Perhaps you and I will go to our Maker in His good time with more suffering than Clim will know in the next few days. There has always been pain and shame in the world as well as beauty and peace.”

I knew that what he said was true, but it did nothing to ease my mind. Could I stand by and see a friend die under my very eyes? I must do something, anything, not walk the deck like a coward. There must be some way out of this. Something I had not been able to think of. The things the three captains had said kept revolving in my mind. There must have been an answer I could have given to convince them.

“You haven’t eaten anything all day,” said Joralemon. “Come below now and we’ll see what the cook can do for us. Then you’ll be able to sleep.”

Jackes dipped down into a barrel and hauled out a slab of salt pork. “It’s well powdered,” he said, cutting a slice and handing it to me on a biscuit. “Cap’n didn’t eat any supper either. Can’t be feeling good.” His thick lips, under a small waxed moustache, quivered with the questions he hesitated to ask while Joralemon was there. I took a mouthful but found I couldn’t swallow.

“I can’t eat,” I said.

The cook proceeded to dispose of the food himself. Between mouthfuls he said: “He’s been very quiet. Not a sound out of him. He’s a game one, Clim is.”

“Yes. He’s game.”

“You were talking with the Captain?” Jackes kept looking back and forth from one of us to the other.

“I talked with Captain Ward. Nothing can be done.”

He ejected a mouthful of the food with furious energy, as though he were casting out privilege and all its manifestations. On the boards behind him was a figure chalked with crude originality, a caricature of a gentleman with a pleated ruff and tall feathers in his hat. Seizing a piece of chalk, the cook inscribed a noose around the neck and then sketched in a gallows.

“Some day it will be like that,” he said, grinning furiously. “You’re a scholar, Shanks. Did ye ever read of a man named John Ball? They hanged him and cut out his innards before he was dead. Because he was a great man and had a message for the world. There was another man named Jack Cade. They hanged him too.”

I could not sleep at all. I tossed in my netting for several hours, then dressed and went out on deck. The breeze had died down. I walked to the stern. I went with stealthy steps as one might in approaching a haunted chamber, and it took all the power of will I possessed to look over the side. The Basket was swaying gently on the end of the rope.

“Clim!” I called.

There was no answer. I called again but received no response. Apparently he was sleeping. Feeling slightly relieved, I returned to my cabin and stretched out in the netting, hoping that sleep would come to me also. It was a vain hope.

I was out at dawn. The watch was being changed, and each man up from the fo’c’s’le wore a sullen look. The air was filled with the threat of a hot day.

I paid another visit to the stern. Clim was awake, for I could see the pink plumes move. The loaf of bread and the bottle of wine were gone. The knife had been stuck in one of the wooden bars above his head.

“Clim, are you all right?”

He changed his position so suddenly that the cage tilted, and he slid down against the bars on the lower side. He stuck out a hand and waved at me.

“I’m fine, Shanks. A snug little place to have all to myself. But I’m hungry. I’m fair starved.”

I nodded to him by way of promise. Gard was not in sight, so I ran to the galley and begged Jackes to let me have some food. He was only too glad to



tie up some meat in a red handkerchief. To this he attached a length of fish-line.

“Keep casting until it lands on the top,” he said.

I tucked it under one arm, hoping that the folds of my sleeve would conceal it. By the worst of luck, however, I ran into the mate as soon as I set a foot outside. He gave me one look and then wrenched the parcel away from me with an impatient oath.

“You looby fool!” he exclaimed. “Didn’t ye hear the orders? No one goes near him. Do ye think it a kindness to keep him alive down there? The sooner he uses the knife, the better it’ll be for him. Try this little trick again, and you’ll earn a spell in the bilboes for yerself.”

With one angry motion of his arm, he hurled the food far out over the side, fish-line and all. The eyes of the cook, watching us from inside the galley, were blazing; and I half expected to see him hurl the dudgeon knife in his hand. If he had any such intention, he thought better of it.

It grew so hot by midday that the pitch boiled out between the seams in the deck. It must be unbearable in the Basket! The bars would provide no shade from the blazing rays of the sun. I tried to tear my mind away to other subjects but found it impossible. How long did it take for a man’s tongue to become black and swollen when he lacked water? What could Clim do if the sun heated up the wood on which he sat as much as it did the deck?

Toward the end of the afternoon, one of the men said out of a corner of his mouth as he passed me, “He’s calling for ye.” I scrambled to my feet and started back, trying to find a path where the deck was in shade. I had discarded my shoes and in my disturbed state of mind could not remember where I had left them; with the result that my feet found the warmth of the exposed planking unbearable. As I drew near, I heard a voice which I did not recognize calling at regular intervals like the ticking of a clock, “Shanks! Shanks! Shanks!”

Mate Gard loomed up in my path and demanded to know where in the name of Almighty God I thought I was going. I said impatiently, “Can’t you hear?” and tried to brush by him. He took me roughly by the arm.

“Won’t you ever learn? Don’t you know what orders mean? Listen, no one is allowed to speak to him, and that means gentry-coves as well as common seamen! It’s water he wants anyway. Supposing I was soft enough to let you get him some, how would ye get it down to him? Now then, get some sense into your head.”

“I’m going to speak to him, orders or no orders.”

When I tried to dodge by him, he reached out with sudden fury and seized me by both shoulders. I was unable to move a muscle. He held me for several moments and then gave a shove which sent me sprawling on my back. “Ye’re nothing but a joskin to me, Master Blease, and I’ll treat ye as such,” he said.

I got slowly to my feet. My trunk hose had been ripped in the fall, completing the ruin of my once wonderful clothes. My blue velvet doublet was blackened with powder burns, and my black silk hose were full of holes and bagging at the knees in the old familiar way. I had been allowed a few hours only to strut in magnificence, and I might never be able to afford anything so fine again. Well, it did not matter.

I borrowed a needle from the cook, but my fingers refused the task. Joralemon came along and took over the work of repair, sewing up the rent with a skillful hand. “You’ll be seeing the tailor again when we get back to port,” he suggested.

I shook my head. Rags and tatters were good enough for those who lived this unclean and Godless life. I would never try to deck myself out like a gentleman again.

“You preach to us of God!” I said bitterly. “How can you expect anyone to believe in Him when He lets this go on?”

“You must not blame God for the ways of men.”

“You’ll lose your chance with the crew, Parson Snode, if you do nothing about this. Why don’t you go to John? He might listen to you.”

“I have. I was with him an hour ago. He—he says there’s nothing to be done.”

“The men must be taught a lesson: that’s what he said, I suppose. Well, it’s having the opposite effect. Have you noticed how quiet and grim they all are?”

He shook his head. “But they jump to the word of command on the second, Roger. I—I’m afraid that John is right. I’ve been through similar things. The killing of a captain can be punished in no other way.”

I turned and stared at him. “Are *you* in favor of this kind of a lesson, then?”

He did not reply for a moment. Then in a quiet voice he said: “When Christ was on the cross, Roger, there was a little group which watched, knowing that he was the Saviour. They suffered as much in spirit as He did in the body. ‘They stood afar off, beholding these things.’ They did nothing, because there was nothing they could do.” He laid a hand on my shoulder. “I’m not drawing a parallel between that sublime scene and this sordid case

of human justice. I'm trying to show you there are things which must be endured. You must do as those humble followers of Jesus did. You must stand afar off."

"You needn't preach to me of Christian meekness," I said. "I've been playing the coward as it is. First I let John and the other captains talk me down instead of standing up to them and fighting it out. Then I let the mate keep me from going to Clim when he called."

Joralemon finished his task and broke the thread with an expert finger. "Did this little accident happen in a scuffle with the mate? You got off light."

"Clim will think I've deserted him."

"You've done everything possible. Nothing you could have said would have made any impression on the captains. And what else could you have done with the mate? He could break your back with one twist of his wrist."

"I should have had the courage to stand up to him, at any rate. Instead I came skulking back here with the crew laughing at me because my trunk hose had been torn."

"They are not laughing at you, Roger. You've made a friend of every man in the fo'c's'le, if that is any consolation."

It was no consolation at all. I could think of nothing but Clim, suffering out there in the blazing heat. After several moments' silence, I asked, "Is it going to be very hard for him?"

My companion sighed. "It's not an easy death. I'm afraid the Leveche is due. He'll have a bad time of it then."

The supper kettles were brought up, but my stomach still refused food. The cook whispered that he had a pudding for me, but I thanked him and shook my head.

The hot wind that Joralemon had predicted began to blow over the water from Africa. It became unbearably hot, and the men slept on deck. Joralemon took his place beside me and fell asleep almost immediately. I envied him the oblivion he was enjoying. My own eyes refused to close, and all through the night I believed I could hear Clim's voice calling me, "Shanks! Shanks!" Just at dawn I dozed off, but it was worse than the wakefulness, for I dreamed of Clim stretched on the rack with John turning the crank. John was wearing a red jerkin and a mask, and he kept saying, "There's nothing I can do; discipline must be maintained."

A thought occurred to me suddenly. If we got back in time to help in the engagement with the Spanish fleet, it would mean a reprieve for Clim. We would not go into action with one of our best men swinging in the Basket

behind us. John would order him taken out and, of course, he would not be sent back after that. Here was the chance I had been trying to find.

I sprang to my feet and ran to the rail. The sky ahead of us was still dark. I gazed hopefully in every direction. There was no trace of a ship's lantern to be seen.

I tried to reckon distances. We had been sailing due west for two days and two nights, and the winds had been favorable. Surely we would make contact with the rest of our fleet very soon. I murmured a double prayer: that the Spaniards would be coming up on schedule, that Clim would have the strength to hold out until then.

The wind from the south was freighted with the choking breath of the desert. An order from John set me to the task of copying documents in the comparative coolness of the ordnance room. Although I suspected he had sent the order in the hope it would keep my mind occupied, I tried my best to concentrate. My mind was incapable of it. After an hour, I looked at the paper in front of me and discovered I had been setting down letters at random. I gave it up then.

I went out on deck and the sudden impact of the heat made me catch my breath. God, what must it be like in the Basket! Could any human being stand it? I walked with determination to the stern. Gard was not in sight, but it would not have made any difference if he had been there. I had made up my mind that nothing would stop me this time. I leaned over the rail and looked down.

Clim was sitting without moving, his head a bare inch from the edge of the knife. He had lost his hat, and his head and neck were mottled and fiery red.

"Clim!" I called. "They wouldn't let me come before."

He answered without moving. "Is that you, Shanks? I feared ye had given me up."

"No, no! I'll never stop trying to get you out. Listen to me, Clim: if I can't persuade the captain, I'm going to talk the crew into action. He'll have to do something if we go to him in a body."

There was a moment's silence and then, speaking with great difficulty, he said: "No, Shanks. That's how mutiny starts. We mustn't have any more of that. See what come to me of going against orders. They'll put ye down here with me if ye try it."

I found it equally difficult to speak. "When you saved my life, you said you couldn't let me die because I was a friend. You're a friend of mine, Clim, and I can't let you die."

“There’s nothing now ye can do.” His voice was so low and husky I could hardly make out what he was saying. “I don’t want you to go through anything like this. But can ye get me water? That’s all I want. Water, in God’s name!”

I became aware that Gard was standing at my elbow. I faced around and saw that he was favoring me with an intent smile. He made no move to interfere, however.

“I’ll see what can be done,” I called. “Don’t give up hope, Clim. I’m going to the Captain.”

When I turned away, the mate fell into step beside me. I saw that he was fingering the bimester in his belt. “So ye went against my orders, Master Blease,” he said. “And now ye’re going to the Captain, are ye? Well, my fine young gentleman, ye’re not going to the Captain. He’s feeling this nigh as much as you are, and I’ll not have ye making it any harder for him. I’m giving you an order. No going to the Captain, understand? If you do, I’ll tie ye up to a grating and beat some of the flesh off your ribs!”

Joralemon heard what had happened, and after that I could not shake him off. When I started to climb the ladder to the quarter-deck, he seized one of my arms and hung on with all his strength.

“He means it! You’ll have to take the consequences if you go against orders again. You mustn’t play the fool, Roger.”

When I insisted on tramping the hot decks, he pattered after me, entreating me to be sensible and stay in the shade.

“Is Clim in the shade?” I demanded. “I can’t sit in comfort when I think what he’s going through.”

“It will do him no good if the both of us get a touch of the sun,” argued Joralemon.

I asked every man we met how far he thought we had gone, and how soon we would be off Marsa Ali, where the rest of the fleet was stationed. All they could do was guess, and even their guesses were wide apart. Clim became slightly delirious during the latter half of the afternoon. He sang patches of sea songs until his swollen throat gave out. After that he gabbled continuously in a throaty voice which suggested Bedlam. The sound of it carried all over the deck, and I saw it was having an effect on the men. A few who were Catholics crossed themselves. When I could bear it no longer, I went below to my cabin. The heat was stifling there, and the wound in my head began to bother me again. Joralemon looked in at me once but withdrew hastily when I screeched at him to leave me alone.

Night closed in. Unable to bear the confinement of the cabin any longer, I went out on deck. The Leveche was blowing steadily, and on the port side it was like standing in the door of a baker's oven. I joined a group of the men sitting to starboard and was given an almost affectionate welcome. They disagreed widely when I asked how far we had gone during the day. They were sure of one thing, however: the only sails sighted since we headed westward were those of our four sister ships.

Was the luck of wind and tide running against us? Would Clim lose this last thin chance?

I was amazed to find that my companions were in a mood bordering on cheerfulness. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the voice from the Basket could no longer be heard. They fell into a boastful train of talk, each man dilating on the part he had played in the great victory. When any mention was made of John, they spoke in terms of pride, calling him in turn Captain Rufflecoat, Beau Brimstone, and Gaffer Johnny. For the moment all resentment had been laid aside.

"That *Solderina* were a rich prize," said one man, smacking his lips. "Ye'll be having that snug little tavern on London River after all, Maltworm."

I had not known until then that the third member of the unlucky trio was in the group. He had said nothing, which was natural if he shared my feelings in any degree. When he spoke up now, however, his voice seemed to reflect the same curious forgetfulness.

"Aye," he said. "I've been thinking about it. I'm going to call it the Free Rover. How do ye like that for a name, mates?"

"Why not call it the Basket?" I demanded. "It's the only way you'll have of remembering poor Clim. He won't be dropping in for a mug of ale or to talk over old times."

In the silence that fell we found that the suffering prisoner had begun to babble again. It was clear that his strength was failing him. Although it was too dark to read anything in the faces around me, I sensed that their mood had changed. I seized the opportunity thus offered.

"We could save him yet," I said. "The Captain likes this no better than the rest of us. If we went to him in a body, he might give in to us."

I could see that some of the heads were shaking dubiously. "We'll all end up in the bracelets if we try it," said one man. "Gard won't like it. He'll take it out on all of us."

"Suppose he does take it out on us," I argued. "Are you content to sit here and let a friend die without raising a hand to help him? Are we all

cowards? I'm going, if I have to go alone."

I talked with furious haste. Wouldn't we need Clim when we faced the whole Spanish fleet? Wasn't he the best fighting man we had when it came to going over the side? What would we tell his friends when we went back home? They began to come around. Finally, Maltworm swung over to my view.

"No harm in trying, mates," he said. "Clim's one of us, ain't he? We've a right to speak to the Cap'n."

"That's man's talk!" Jackes the cook had joined us. He was carrying something in his hand which resembled a butcher's knife. "We've rights, ain't we? We're men, ain't we? Let's do as Shanks says. The Cap'n will have to listen to the fo'c's'le."

There was a sound of scuffling as the men got to their feet. They were full of fight now. "We'll all go," shouted one man. "Shanks and the cook will do the talking for us."

A square figure loomed up suddenly in the dark, and I heard Gard say: "So Shanks and the cook are to do the talking for ye! I'll do all the talking right now—with my fists. See if ye like what they have to say."

He was facing me as he spoke. I saw his arm draw back. I could not get out of the way of the blow because the men behind me were pressing against my shoulders. I raised my arm to ward it off.

I came to in my own cabin. I knew where I was because the first object my eye lighted on was a Spanish sword I had selected from the loot of the *Santa Caterina*. It was hanging from a peg on the wall facing me.

I felt so weak I couldn't raise my head. Everything began to whirl about me, and I saw a score of Spanish swords with tasseled hilts. I heard Joralemon say, "He's coming to," and then the voice of the surgeon, Mickle, "I'm very glad of that."

"Were you getting worried?" asked Joralemon.

"I was. When we picked him up off the deck, I was sure his neck was broken. I think I would rather be hit by an iron pintle than Gard's fist."

"I'm all right," I said. It surprised me that speech could involve such physical effort. The throbbing in my head was as hard to bear as in the first hours after I received my wound. I managed to add, "What's happened?"

"Well," said Joralemon, "you've had a narrow escape, for one thing. Gard turned on the cook after knocking you down. He broke his nose for him. He's feeling bad, the cook is."

"Have any ships been sighted?"

“Never a one. Why?”

“We’ve got to reach the others,” I said. “Tonight. It might be too late tomorrow. What time is it?”

“Near midnight. It’s been over two hours since you went down, Roger. I was beginning to fear you were done for.”

The surgeon gave me something to drink. It must have been potent, for I felt a little better at once. They left me then, and I must have fallen asleep soon after. Daylight was showing through the porthole when they returned. I tried unsuccessfully to sit up. Still, I knew that I was better, for the sword was stationary in its usual place on the wall. My head was throbbing.

“The Leveche is still blowing,” said Joralemon. Mickle felt my jaw with a gentle hand. I noticed that both their faces had a taut appearance as though they had been scorched. How must Clim look by this time?

“The bone’s not broken. You have an exceptionally strong jaw, young man.”

“Have we sighted the fleet?”

“No.”

“How far are we off Marsa Ali?”

“No one can be sure. There’s no sign of land yet.”

My hopes went down. We should be in sight of the end of Sicily, which had been set as the rendezvous. Had our ships sailed farther west in search of the enemy? If that had happened, the last hope of saving Clim would be gone. In a faint voice I asked, “How is he?”

Joralemon did not answer for a moment. “Clim was in his right mind for a few minutes after dawn,” he said then. “I spoke to him. I hope the Lord will forgive me, but I—I urged him to cut the rope. It isn’t right for him to go on suffering this way. But he said no, he wouldn’t kill himself. He even managed to smile.”

I was incapable of comment for several moments. Then I managed to ask, “Can it last very much longer?”

The surgeon answered: “The heat will be worse today, I’m afraid. I’ve been through this several times, and they’ve never lasted out the third day in weather like this. But you can’t tell about Clim. He’s such a fine physical specimen.”

I turned my aching head in Joralemon’s direction. “Is anything going to be done?”



“Nothing more. The men are in a submissive mood since last night. Captain Ward hasn’t appeared yet. I reported what had happened to him last night and told him how we all felt. His dinner was on a table beside him. He hadn’t touched it. He had been drinking and he roared at me to get out.”

They left me then. I must have been out of my mind for a while, what with the heat and the lack of food and sleep. At any rate, I believed that I was in the Basket myself. It was much more vivid than any dream I had ever had. I was sitting with my knees drawn up close and my head bent over them, for in no other position could I accommodate myself to the cramped space. The cage was so flimsy that I had the sensation of hanging over a tall cliff with the terror of illimitable space under me. Every time we swayed with the wind, I held my breath. At the same time the sun was beating down on me with searing intensity. The boards were hot to the touch, and I could feel my flesh shrink from the heat striking at me through the bars. I tried to draw myself in still closer to escape it. My throat felt as though live coals had been sprayed through my lips.

When I dared a glance beneath me, the sea had the appearance of a mass of molten flame. Was it the sea? Or was I suspended over the lake of everlasting fire?

I would come back to full consciousness at intervals but then almost immediately would relapse into my illusion. Once I saw Hubert, the Captain’s swabber, come in with a flagon of wine under one arm and heard him say, “The Captain’s compliments, sir.”

I managed to get up on my elbow. “Has the fleet been sighted yet?”

“No, sir. Will I pour a glass for you?”

“Take it back to the Captain with my compliments.”

He looked at me with reproach and said, “It’s muscadine.” I drifted back to my nightmare and did not see him leave.

It was a long time after this when Joralemon returned. He was looking grave.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“It’s getting dark.”

I tried to sit up. “Have I been here all day? I should be out. What has happened, Jore?”

“You’ve been here two days. We’ve been in to see you half a dozen times. You’ve been in a high fever.”

“We must have come up with the fleet. Have they met the Spanish?”

“No signs of them yet. John is getting worried.” He paused and then said in solemn tones, “Roger, Clim is dead.”

I could feel my hands trembling. There is nothing more terrible than the irrevocability of death. Clim had gone. I had let him die. For two days I had allowed myself to lie here while nothing was done to save him. And now it was too late.

“He didn’t use the knife. I was sure he would come to it in the end. But I didn’t know how stanch his spirit was.” He laid a hand on my arm as though to give me what comfort he could. “Ten minutes ago I noticed he had fallen over on the floor, and I had one of the men climb down the rope. He reported it was all over. I’m going to hold a funeral service now.”

“I must go.”

He frowned doubtfully. “Are you strong enough?”

By way of answer, I threw one leg over the side. I felt so dizzy that I needed his help in getting to a standing position. My knees displayed an uncomfortable tendency to buckle under me. The swabber had left the flagon after all, and Joralemon poured me a full glass. Muscadine is a rich and heady wine, and I could feel some of my strength coming back as I swallowed it. When I attempted a step, however, I found it hard to locate the floor. “A strong potion to take on an empty stomach,” said Joralemon, clamping an arm through mine.

He was carrying a Bible in his hand. The members of the crew not on duty fell in behind us as we walked down the deck. Instinctively we adopted a slow pace, and the men behind kept step. Tramp. Tramp. Tramp. There was something of the finality of doom about it.

When we took up our positions near the ensign staff, Joralemon said, “Ready, Jones,” and I was surprised to see that it was Maltworm who responded. With a knife between his teeth, he climbed out on the boom until he was directly over the rope on which the Basket was suspended. I remembered then that the real name of this tough-fibered seaman was Edwin Jones.

I did not turn, but I could tell that the deck back of us was filled with men. Joralemon opened his Bible and began to read. His voice, becoming full and resonant as he intoned the service, seemed to fill the space about me. When he came to the words, “We therefore commit his body to the deep,” he raised his hand, and I saw Maltworm’s knife flash in the evening sun. A moment later there was a thud as the Basket struck the surface of the water. The tragedy of Clim the Cod’s-head had come to an end.

When I turned to go back, I saw that John had been standing back of the last file of men. His hat was in his hand, and he was looking grave and unhappy. He faced about at once and descended to the waist.

Back of me I heard Maltworm saying, "He were the only one ever put in the Basket what didn't cut the rope." There was deep pride in his voice. Clim had died bravely, and his comrades would take a great deal of satisfaction out of it.

Suddenly I found myself struggling with a desire to laugh. "Edwin Jones!" I said, stifling the hysterical impulse with the greatest effort. "Edwin Jones is a name for a haberdasher of nouns. Not for a man like Maltworm!"

Joralemon drew an arm through mine. "Easy, Roger," he whispered. "Don't let yourself get out of hand."

He led me over to the rail to let the rest of them pass. I looked straight ahead into the west, and suddenly my heart seemed to stop. I counted seven sails on the horizon.

## 25

JORALEMON INSISTED I should be in bed, but I brushed the suggestion aside when I heard John say to Gard, as they watched the main section of our fleet on the skyline: "No more order than a stinking pout fleet! I tell you, they haven't done well. There's a hangdog suggestion in the set of their sails."

There was still enough light to see the low thumb of land where Marsa Ali lay. I examined it carefully in the hope of finding the remains of the walls and fortifications which Charles V of Spain had destroyed seventy years before. The harbor had been a pirate nest then, and the doughty king had hoped to stamp out the trade by robbing the corsairs of their base. All pirates had brown skins in those days. It had remained for a watery-eyed king of our own to put that label on Englishmen who refused to let Spain rule them off the seas. However, we were too far off to see anything, and I turned my attention to matters which concerned us more immediately.

The talk which reached my ears from the groups seated around the supper kettles indicated that the men were in a dissatisfied mood. They were discussing the old code, and I heard envious references to the value of what they would have divided under it, the loot found on the lower decks of our prizes. It was clear that the death of Clim had set them thinking. Joralemon heard the talk also. He looked at me and shook his head soberly. "John values the good will of his men above everything," he said. "This will make him very unhappy. Will he blame you, Roger, for the way they're talking?"

"He's brought it on himself," I asserted.

The cook, with little but his eyes showing through bandages, had squatted on the deck and was holding forth on the rights of common men. "They hang us at the yardarm and starve us to death in the Basket," he declared in a loud voice. "But have patience, mates. Some day it will be the spawn of the spital-houses who wear ermine on their jackets and the gentle-born who jumped from the gallows-tree."

John heard something of what was being said, for he crossed the upper deck and looked down into the waist. Jackes saw him but went right on. "Clim is dead. Who will get his share?" he demanded. "Will it be divided up among us? Not a sice of it will we see. It will go to the owners. They're glad to see us run foul of the code. It means gold in their purses when Shaves builds the Basket."

"That's a lie, Jackes!" declared the Captain, in a voice which could have been heard at the top of the shrouds. "Clim's share will be divided among his mates. That is in the agreement, and well you know it. Keep that tongue of yours under control, you scullery cank!" He turned and walked back toward the pilot-house, but not until he had looked in my direction as though to say, "You've stirred all this up."

I did not care how he felt about it. My bitterness over the death of Clim blinded me to all other considerations.

In spite of my condition, I remained on deck long enough to watch the arrival of Sir Nevil and the captains of the main fleet. Night had settled down, and the bobbing of lanterns on the bows of their skiffs reminded me of the will-o'-the-wisp on Haverstraw Marsh at home. It was easy to read dissatisfaction in their faces as they came over the side, but Macherie himself was as arrogant as ever. He slapped John on the back with a patronizing hand.

"Well, Captain Rufflecoat!" he said. "Or is it John Lacklatin your men call you? It's apparent you have seen some action. I count only five ships. Where is the sixth?"

“At the bottom of the sea. Four of the enemy are with it, I’m proud to say. We sent them about their business with plenty of good English lead in their bellies. *La Solderina* is safely in Tunis by this time. The richest prize I’ve ever taken, Sir Nevil. And now what report have you to make? Haven’t the Jew-roasters put in an appearance yet?”

“Oh, yes. They came up in accordance with their plan. I think they cared little for the reception we had prepared for them. At any rate, they put about at once and showed us their heels.”

“You are much too modest, Sir Nevil. I am sure they didn’t get away as easily as that. You warmed their heels for them, of course.”

Captain Harris from Bristol took it on himself to reply. “They gave us the slip. Don’t ask me how it happened, Ward.”

“They got clean away? I can’t believe it.”

The Bristol man exploded with pent-up indignation. “Not a shot was fired on either side. A pretty farce it was! We should have cut off a round half-dozen of the stragglers, but instead we scurried around like a flock of cackling-cheats!”

Macherie’s hand went to his sword, and John interposed hastily with the suggestion that all discussion be postponed until the full council assembled. The baronet agreed in sulky tones; and, when the last of the captains had arrived, they went in a body to the ordnance room. By this time I was barely able to stay on my feet, and I did not demur when Joralemon insisted that I go below. He helped me to my cabin, and I crawled into my netting without removing any clothing. When he returned an hour later to report on what had occurred, I was nearly asleep, but I pulled my drifting faculties together sufficiently to hear the news. Macherie’s handling of the fleet had been bitterly criticized by every captain. Joralemon had picked up one story, which was later confirmed, that Sir Nevil had been more interested in the German wench than in the control of operations, and that he had not put in an appearance for a good half-hour after the Spanish fleet was sighted. “He’s been put most thoroughly in his place,” said Joralemon gleefully. “They refuse to serve under him any longer. He’s sailing back to Tunis with us, and then he’s going to take himself off. Blunt’s going with him. Good riddance to the pair of them!”

“Are we heading for port?”

“At once. The Spaniards have broken up. Half are on their way back to Barcelona, the rest for Malaga. The danger is over.”

John’s plan had worked, then! He had won on every point. The plans of the enemy had been foiled, and all the credit for this belonged to him. He

had scored a complete victory over a force more than three times the size of his own, while Macherie's efforts had ended in a sorry fiasco. The dissension in our ranks was at an end. I forgot everything else in my feeling of satisfaction over this result, and I drifted off to sleep in a glow of elation.

I slept until noon of the following day and then went on deck with an appetite which overrode every other feeling. The Leveche had blown itself out, and we had a favorable wind for the return to port. The cook plied me lavishly with food and news.

"There'll be a split after the division," he said. "Some of the mighty captains think we've given the Dons such a beating they'll leave us alone now. A few of them have a desire to try their luck on the lanes to America."

"Let them go, then," I said. "We won't be needing them now. They couldn't all pick up a living in these waters."

"Some are for going home." He looked at me closely. "How are you feeling about all this cheering and hullabaloo?"

"I could be thoroughly happy," I answered, "if Clim were here to share it."

"I see." He spat disgustedly. "You let all this talk of victory blind you to injustice. Well, you're gentry, after all."

I found that most of the men were still in a sulky mood. John must have sensed this, for he never stepped off the upper deck. I did not have a word with him until we caught the first glimpse of land. He sent for me then.

"Roger," he said, "we haven't been seeing eye to eye, have we? You've shown courage through the last few days, and I admire you for it. But this sort of thing is very bad for discipline. The men seem to be accepting your belief that I should have spared Clim. No other course than what I took was open to me; but we'll say no more about that. I called you here to point out that I love most of these poor fellows and don't want to be forced to harsh measures again. It comes down to this: we must forget this Clim incident."

"That will be hard."

"I know it. Perhaps it will be harder for me to forget than for you. I see you don't believe that. But—his voice reached my ears as well as yours. It's over and done with now, and I'm still sure I acted for the best." He looked at me intently. "We don't want any more trouble. I've no wish to see my yards turned into gallows-trees."

A lump had come into my throat. "I didn't think you cared about what happened."

“It was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do. It was hard because I could have ended it with a word. It’s sometimes the hardest of all things to have authority.”

“You told me something like this might happen that night when we walked to Appleby Court. I see now I shouldn’t have come.”

“I’m glad you did,” he said quickly. “Put that out of your head. If it hadn’t been for you, where would we be now?”

“I knew you had reason on your side, but—there was no malice in poor Clim. He killed Sleath to protect me.”

“You may find this hard to believe.” He smiled and dropped a hand on my shoulder. “The truth of the matter is, Roger, I would gladly have changed places with you during the last few days.”

We had been talking in a corner of the pilot-house. John looked out and then called a sharp order to the man at the wheel. “Gouletta ahead. We’ll know soon now what the Dey has been up to in our absence. The fighting you’ve seen so far, Roger, may be child’s play compared to what faces us here.” He smiled again. “No more hard feelings? Good! That’s a great load off my mind.”

The first clue to what had happened ashore was apparent when we stepped out on the quarter-deck. *La Solderina* was anchored in the roadstead ahead of us and our flag floated from her masthead. “If he hasn’t laid a hand on that handsome prize,” said John, “it is likely he has lived up to his bargain all around. I can’t understand it. He has a covetous soul, and it must irk him to think of all those warehouses of ours. Of course, he doesn’t know yet how we have fared. He’ll have something up his sleeve.”

It had been arranged the night before that three of the ships would put into the docks while the rest anchored in the roadstead. Most of the captains were going ashore, however, and several of them were now with us. They were as puzzled as John over the peaceful appearance of the port. Every pair of eyes was filled with the same query as we drew closer in, and the white and red frieze of the water front began to break up into recognizable details.

“There are two flags above one of our warehouses,” said John, gazing intently ahead. “It looks as though we’re in luck. One is English, the other Dutch. I think we’ll find Haight and his men have had no trouble at all. It surprises me, but there it is.”

The first man up the ladder when we docked was a little fellow with a dark face and the talking eyes that are found most often among the Irish and the gypsies—moon men, I had heard Sleath call the latter, and a good name for them it is.

“It’s glad I am to see ye, Cap’n Ward,” said Haight. “Never an eye have I closed for weeks, and when I have it’s been to dream of the dirty heathen climbing over the walls to get at us.”

“You’ve had no trouble, then?”

“None but what I’m telling ye. It’s all safe and sound, Sir. Not a length of rope or a bolt of cloth missing.”

When he was told of the death of Sleath, he crossed himself and said, “Peace to his soul,” adding immediately, “It’s captain I’ll be then.”

“Yes. And a good captain, I’m sure.”

“I’ll try to be that. I’m telling ye they’re a fine crew, Irish to a man, and honest as the day is long; now that Danny Boy is gone, I’m meaning.”

Outwardly our offices looked the same. A few slave traders squatted along the walls, and there were other natives waiting who stank of villainy but whose purpose in being there was not clear. Abadad greeted me with a profound obeisance, his ugly features reassembling themselves into a smile which lighted up his face. Plucking at my sleeve, he led me out on the balcony.

“Sidi,” he whispered, “they have been through everything. The place has been searched several times by order of the Alcayde.”

I looked at him with dismay, knowing the endless work I would be put to if all my records had been lost. Abadad bobbed his head reassuringly. “I had taken it on my unworthy shoulders, Sidi, to remove all papers of value to the house in Tunis. They are safe. I have letters here.”

Letters from home! Nothing was ever so welcome. It was a miracle that any reached us at all, for they had to pass through many hands, progressing slowly along one of the three overland routes with a chancey trip across the Inner Sea as the final stage. Most were lost on the way.

There was one letter only for me. It was in Aunt Gadilda’s hand, and I knew before I broke the seal that the news it contained was not good. I read it through in a daze and then let the sheets fall to the ground.

Mother was dying. Aunt Gadilda had tried to break it to me gently, but the truth was clear to me almost from the first line. Mother had been unwell for several months, and the town doctor had finally become convinced that she could not recover. He was still in the dark as to the nature of the sickness but was disposed to think it some form of malignant fever. She had a continual pain in her head and at times was delirious. Bleedings and clysters brought her ease for a short while, but it was seldom that she could take any nourishment. It was, wrote my aunt, in every way similar to the trouble



which had carried my grandmother off at Great Lunnington in that terrible year when two of the maidservants had died and the gardener's boy as well.

The stilted sentences in the cramped hand gave me a picture of my poor mother, lying so patiently in the big bed in the front chamber, a bare room with no carpet and the cheapest kind of curtains, her face flushed with the fever, her eyes, usually so smiling, dimmed with the pain. I had always thought her the prettiest of women, so dainty and trim in spite of the cheapness of the materials in which she dressed. A poor kind of a life she had lived, and now it was coming to an end; if, indeed, it had not already ended.

I picked up the sheets and went through them again, weighing every phrase, trying to find in each sentence some gleam of hope, some comfort, however small. She was most patient, wrote Aunt Gadilda, and resigned to her fate. At first she had kept a good face about it and had said she was going to get well in spite of the doctor and his Latin words; nothing could prevent her from staying to see her sailor son come home with his face bronzed with the winds, and full of honor and glory. She had insisted each day that she was better and would be up and about tomorrow. But, alas, each day found her weaker, until finally even she had been convinced that there was no hope. She had one desire only now, to see me before she died.

There was a final paragraph which puzzled me, even though I conned it carefully many times. Aunt Gadilda had always been one to read great meanings into things. No casual word of greeting, no chance expression was ever as simple as that to her. She would search everything said or written for hidden meanings or implications. On that account I was inclined at first to put little stock in what she had written, believing that she was at her old tricks. This mystifying paragraph read:

You must not take any blame on yourself, dear boy, for your poor mother's condition. She has worried much about you but there has been both pride and satisfaction for her in the thought of what you are doing. Her illness is due entirely to another trouble which has been visited on us but which I must not explain here. We will tell you about it when you return home, Roger, your mother and I, if she is still alive to greet you, which I am forced to doubt. Come as soon as you can, dear Roger, and may God grant that she will be here to give you her blessing. She asks me to tell you that you are never out of her thoughts and how proud she has been of her fine big son.

Another trouble? What could it be? I thought of all the possibilities, my mind as leaden as my heart. It could not have to do with money. They had a small income to live on as well as the savings of years. Could they have been subjected to some form of persecution because I was serving with John Ward? This was an infinitely remote possibility because everyone in our town was openly proud of John and of all the men who had sailed with him. English law does not pass on punishment directly to the kin of offenders. I decided it could have nothing to do with that. Finally, I remembered what Aunt Gadilda has said in her previous letter about Sir Bartlemy Ladland. Was he connected in any way with this new trouble, this tragic circumstance which was costing my pretty young mother her life?

I got to my feet and paced about the room, conscious of the rows of dark eyes which fixed themselves on every move I made. I struggled to bring my mind into some kind of order, to think and plan sanely. Mother was dying, and here I was, a thousand miles away and with no earthly means of getting to her in time. There was nothing I could do about it. The same maddening sense of irrevocability which I had felt at the death of Clim took possession of me.

If only I could start back without a moment's delay! There would have been some relief in physical motion, even if it were confined to fruitless tramping under the hot African sun. I could have felt that each step brought me that much nearer home.

John had been talking in the next room with several of the captains, going over the points to be threshed out with the Dey. He put his head through the door with a question. When I did not answer, not being conscious that it had been addressed to me, he looked at me closely and then came into the room.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "You look as doleful as a galley slave with salt-water boils."

He sobered when he heard the news. "I'm damnably sorry to learn of this. I can hardly credit it. Your mother is so young. Isn't it possible your aunt is exaggerating the danger? Women have a way of doing that, you know."

I shook my head. It was only too true, I said. Everyone had given up hope, even my mother. That was what convinced me, for she had always looked on the bright side.

"Then you must start for home at once," he said briskly. "We will be sending several of the ships to Marseilles as soon as we can get them loaded.

You can go along and then strike across France. A month or six weeks will do it.”

I pointed to the date on the letter. It was already two months old. “She’s gone by this time. I’m sure of it, John. I think I knew it before I opened the letter.”

“No sense in looking on the black side.” He laid a hand on my shoulder and pressed it hard. “I was at sea when my mother died. We were off Norway when the letter reached me that she was ill. Mother had been buried a year when I got back. You can imagine how I felt. I thought I was to blame in some way. But there was nothing I could have done, just as there’s nothing you can do.” He paused. “Abadad tells me things are in excellent shape. Go over the figures with him again today so that you can get away when the ships sail.”

“You had no thought of returning when the word reached you about your mother?”

“There was no way of getting back.”

“If there had been, would you have gone?”

He gave some thought to that. “I had signed on for the whole cruise. No, I suppose not.”

“And I’ve signed on for this one. I’m not a deserter, John.”

He looked at me steadily and then returned to the other room without saying anything more. I went out on the balcony and sat there for the better part of an hour, looking north across the water and thinking of home. My fear grew into a certainty as I sat there. Mother was dead. She could not have survived two months in the condition Aunt Gadilda had described. There was no reason for me to go home, much as I longed to do so.

John came back into the room with a serious look on his face. He was carrying an open letter.

“Roger,” he exclaimed, “you must get back to England after all as fast as you can. There’s work for you there. This king of ours, this boggling looby of a king, is proving himself more knave than fool. He has set all England by the ears. I find it hard to believe, and yet here is the proof of it. This is from Mundy Hill, although that’s a secret we must keep between us. The King’s Council would say it smacked of treason.”

He began to stride up and down, declaiming loudly. “He has invented a new phrase, this mitching mooncalf. ‘The divine right of kings!’ Think what that means, Roger. He believes his selection to rule comes from God and not from the people of England! He’s answerable to no one but God, and he’s already made it clear that he thinks the Almighty inclines an ear downward

to learn what James of England thinks about the problems of the Universe. Never until this slobbering coward came down from the land of mists have we had a king who professed to rule by any right save the will of the people. The things he has been doing make my blood boil. I tell you, Englishmen will become no better than slaves if King James has his way.”

I had no idea what work he had in mind for me, but I was ready to undertake any mission—anything to get back to England, to the land of soft rains and green woods, where I could see my mother’s grave, where in time I might again enjoy a normal life in which bloodshed and cruelty had no part.

“He’s determined to rule in his own sweet way,” went on John. “He’s making laws and imposing taxes as he sees fit.”

“Surely the Parliament will see to that,” I said.

John snorted. “He disregards Parliament. He’s making laws by proclamation and raising money by impositions more sweeping and unfair than anything the Tudors dreamed of. He’s creating new courts of law. He declares that men must worship God in the manner he decrees. He’s refused to permit the erection of new buildings in London because he fears the growing power of the city.”

I began to share his excitement. “No king can do that.”

“This king can. He has. He has more guile, more stubbornness, in that oversized head of his than any tyrant the world has ever seen.” He sat down at the table and spread the closely written sheets in front of him. “He found England one of the three great powers of the world. In seven years he has brought us down to the third rank. He has lost us the fear and respect of the world. I thought no king could do worse than that. But what he is setting out to do at home is far more dangerous.”

We had the room to ourselves, for I had dismissed the natives when he came in. “What do you want me to do?” I asked.

“All right-minded men are seeing the danger. A strong opposition has developed already. According to this letter, they’re getting together to discuss means of checking the royal program. We’re in a position to help them by supplying proofs of the weakness of his naval policy and the veniality of his ministers. I want you to take these proofs back to England.”

This was a mission I would gladly undertake. I forgot the personal reasons for returning which had filled my mind up to this point. I nodded my willingness.

“There is Don Pedro’s report on the case of the *Trial* and the other papers you found on the *Santa Caterina* which prove Spain’s determination

to bar us from world trade by every foul means. They will show also that pensions are paid by Spain to the ministers the King keeps about him. These proofs are to be placed in the hands of men who will know how best to use them. They are too important to be entrusted to any messenger."

"I'm ready to go," I declared.

"It's a dangerous errand." He looked at me with sudden gravity. "If the King's ministers get wind of what you are about, they'll stop at nothing. If they get their hands on you with these papers in your possession, they'll hang you. Think it over well, Roger. You will be in graver danger in England than here with me."

"I'll go," I repeated.

"Very well," said John. "I'll tell you the names of the men you are to see. You must commit them to memory; it would be dangerous to put such a list down on paper. I'll see that the ships sail before nightfall tomorrow. Every day counts now."

He got to his feet. "I must go to see the Dey and learn what is in his mind. You had better take Abadad to Tunis and get to work with him on the records. I'll join you there in a few hours." He looked at me in a half-shamefaced way and added: "I hope your passion for truth is less active than usual today. I would esteem it a favor if you made no mention of those few hours the German flounce spent with me."

Those few hours! According to Joralemon, she had been on the *Royal Bess* ten days before her transfer to Macherie's ship was arranged. I grinned and promised.

Abadad and I took a boat across the lake and then traversed the city on foot. I looked about me with more interest than I had ever felt before. Tunis has many open squares, all of them ringed tightly with tiny booths. I looked longingly at the six-foot store of my little grasshopper of a tailor in the square where the "cucumbers" plied their patient needles. I saw the dark hole in the wall where the father of Clim's widow squatted amid his bales of cloth. We passed the Souk-el-Barka, and I saw that there were many women on sale. All of them, fortunately, were black, stout wenches from the interior of Africa with fuzzy hair and wide hips. One little fellow, with a caved-in chest and flushed cheeks, struggled at his chains when we passed and cried in a desperate voice, "White fellas, please save Italia man!"

When we reached the palace under the city walls, I had to chase a beggar away from the entrance, a shrunken beanpole with skin the color of a decayed tooth. One of the guards came running along the top of the twenty-foot masonry, shouting eagerly, "What news? What news?"

“The best,” I answered, making my way into the garden. It had suffered from the summer heat but was still a vision of beauty and peace to eyes surfeited with the glaring blue of sea and sky. “We gave them a sound beating. Our whole fleet is lying out there in the roadstead.”

A figure in black came racing through the iron grating of the inner court. It was Cristina, and she was in such a state of agitation that at first she could not speak.

“He’s safe,” I said.

She sank down on the rim of the fountain and let her arms fall limply by her sides. She was breathing quickly. It was several moments before she could achieve a smile.

“When I saw you standing there,” she said finally, “I didn’t believe you were real at first. I had been thinking the very blackest of thoughts, and I was sure you were all dead.” She was still a little breathless.

“John is really safe? You’re sure? When is he returning?”

“He’s here now. As soon as he’s through with the Dey, he’s coming to see you.”

She sighed with intense relief. Linking an arm in mine, she led the way back to the cool greenness of the inner court. We found a seat in the shade of a small palm tree.

“I’m still afraid it’s too good to be true. I’ve thought of nothing else. You look like the Angel Gabriel to me, Roger, even if you are more ragged than ever.”

I spread out my arms. “My fine new clothes! One day’s fighting did it all. I wonder if you’ll ever see me in respectable attire?”

“You’ve been in my mind a great deal.”

“I’m glad I had a small share of your thoughts.”

She favored me with an affectionate smile. “It could be called small only because the other is so very large. And now you must tell me everything.”

She seemed relieved to hear that the main Spanish fleet had not been engaged. When I told her of Clim’s death, omitting any mention of the manner of it, her eyes filled with tears. “My poor Clim! I had become so fond of him. Will John be ashore much now?”

“I’m sure he’ll be a full month in port this time. The ships will all need refitting.”

I told her then what my letter had contained, and she gave me a compassionate look. “It must be hard to face the loss of someone you love,” she said. “I never saw my mother. I was so young when Father sailed to

America that I can't be sure what he looked like. He's never been back. I seem to remember he had a long yellow beard and very dark eyes." After a moment she asked, "Is she very much like you, your mother?"

"They say I resemble her a little. Not very much, though. She's quite young. Much too young for this to happen."

Abadad put his head through the grating at this point, his arms crammed with documents.

"Work? So soon? You ought to have at least one free day to celebrate your safe return. I suppose it will be the same with John when he gets here."

Abadad and I began at once on the task of setting our records straight. We labored over them for many hours. I heard John's voice in the outer court, but he did not join us, having matters of greater importance to engage him. More time passed, and the sun fell so low that the walls around us were completely in shadow. The air became a little cooler, and John put his head through the grating, winking at me to get rid of Abadad.

"We've had a time of it with that old cross-biter in the Bardo," he said when Abadad had pattered away with the finished work. "His eyes went completely blank when he heard we had beaten them. He was profuse enough in his praise, but I knew he was regretting the bargain he struck with us at the start. He soon came around to demanding his full share of the spoils."

"He made it clear to me that he would."

"He mentioned you. He said you were shrewd for so young a man. Well, we refused to consider any change from the original terms, and the little heathen got almost hysterical. He talked about the reluctance of his people to harbor *koffers* in the city. I could feel trouble in the air when we left. I don't know what he'll try, but he has something in mind. We'll soon find out what it is."

"Wouldn't it be wiser to give in?"

"Most of our captains are too close-fisted for that. They say that with all of them in port we can snap our fingers at him. If it were my decision alone, I would be inclined to let the little spider have what he wants. It would save us trouble in the end." He frowned and ran his fingers impatiently through his golden beard. "I wish I knew what he's planning."

He dined alone with Cristina, as I thought it tactful to leave them to themselves. A dish of couscousou was sent out to me in the garden, rich with meats and savory with spices, a small pyramid as mysterious as the great peaks of Egypt, for each venture into it yielded something quite new and unexpected. With it was a flagon of Spanish wine, a warm amber

sparkling as though the sunlight which had ripened the grapes had been caught in the presses and distilled into the liquid, where it flashed like golden fins in a stream. I drank quite a little of the wine, for both at home and aboard ship I had been accustomed to the heavy red kinds, sweetly musty in taste. My spirits improved in consequence. After dinner Abada returned and we worked for several hours longer.

It was verging on midnight when we scanned the last of the petty tallies. I stretched and suggested that it was time for us to be going. The old man smiled, a trick which he seemed to manage with a twist of his down-curving nose, and said, "Sidi, we must hurry before the last of the city gates are closed."

I did not want to leave without saying good-by to Cristina, but I was sure she was asleep by this time. I walked slowly to the gates, wondering if I should have her wakened. She solved the problem by running out after me.

"Roger!" Her tone was both hurt and indignant. "Were you going to leave without seeing me?"

"I didn't want to. But I was afraid you had gone to bed long ago."

"You didn't tell me you were returning home," she said accusingly.

"I thought John should do that."

"I cried when he told me. Things will be so different without you. I've always wanted you to go home, but I feel very sad about it now that it's happening. Why must it be so soon? Can't you have even one day's rest?"

"The ship sails tomorrow. I must go then or wait indefinitely."

"Of course. There's a chance you may still see your mother." She unfolded a silk handkerchief she had been holding tightly and placed what it contained in my hand. "Keep it, please," she whispered. "It may bring you good fortune. In love, and perhaps in other things as well."

It was the emerald ring. The diamonds which encircled the large green stone sparkled as it rested in my hand.

"I can't take this," I said. "You must never part with it."

"But it's not mine. No one ever owns it. When it has accomplished for you what you want most, you must pass it on."

There were no paths and she found it necessary to hold her skirts up as she walked beside me. I saw that she had slipped bare feet into white satin slippers.

"I'm very happy tonight, Roger. That's why you must have the ring. It can't go to John because he's concerned in what it has brought me.



Remember that its power will be lost if it isn't passed on after your wishes are granted."

I looked at the fortune I held in my hand. "I can't find words to thank you for this."

We had reached the gate. "I'll never see you again," she said. "You've been so kind to me, Roger. I'm not sure what I could have done without you. I'll be very lonely when John leaves again. But I've nothing else to worry about now. John and I—"

When she did not go on, I said, "I'm very glad to know that."

"Poor Roger! You've been having such a bad time! John told me everything that happened. And about Clim's death. I'm sure you're happy to be going."

"Yes, I'm happy about it. I have just one regret—I don't like to think of you here. It will never be safe."

"Oh, we've made wonderful plans. As soon as we can, were going to Italy. Or perhaps to France."

"Then I'll certainly see you again."

"Perhaps. Let's hope so, Roger."

The moon had climbed high, and the noise of the city had dwindled to the faint cries of the watchmen at the gates. Abadad was anxious to make a start, as I could see.

"I mustn't keep you any longer." She held out both her hands. "Good-by, Roger. I'll always think of you."

"Good-by, Cristina. I hope everything will come out well for you."

The gate swung to behind us, and the watchman on the wall called a cheery "Good night, mates." I followed Abadad through the narrow alleys of the city. The only sound we heard was that of our own footsteps. The light of the moon, touching the white tops of the buildings like the fire I had seen on our mastheads at night, had a disquieting effect. I found it hard to believe it was the same moon which looked down so benignly on the green hedges and peaceful fields of England. It had set the level head of Sir Sigismund Hill to seeing the soldiers of Hannibal on the march. I thought of the turbulent history of the city: Dido, mounting the funeral pyre at Byrsa; Regulus returning while copper-hued mobs screamed for his blood; Scipio grinding out the life of Carthage under his iron heel; Barbarossa dragging white captives after him in chains. History of a kind to set the imagination flaming had been made here; and now John Ward and the Free Rovers were adding a new chapter. I did not feel entirely happy that my part in that

chapter was drawing to a close. It was impossible to escape the feeling that I was running away.

## 26

I WAS WAKENED AT DAWN by the sound of voices along the water front. Standing on my toes to look out of the high latticed window, I saw that scores of our men were beginning work on the loading of the ships.

It was a wonderful morning. No artist would have dared to lay on canvas the streaks of flaming red which radiated from the east. Certainly day was never ushered in at home with such flamboyance. There were some things about life here, I told myself, that I would miss.

John was in the next room, and I could hear him cursing over his points. I looked in the door as he engulfed his arms in a honey-colored doublet. This did not mean that he had spent the night here, however. He never wore the same clothes two days in succession if he could help it.

“Good morning,” he said. “Would you be kind enough to fasten this thing for me?”

My adventure with him had begun when I helped him to dress that evening in the apothecary’s house at home, and so it was fitting that it should end the same way. I proceeded with my task while John used a pair of scissors to trim his beard. It took him quite a time, for he was most meticulous about it, studying himself in a mirror from every angle as he snipped.

“There’ll be trouble today,” he said. “I don’t like the look of things, Roger. It was still dark when I rode through the city, but the squares were already full of people. They screamed ‘*Arfi!*’ at me, and several times I thought they were going to pull me off my horse.”

“Perhaps it’s a holy day.”

“There’s more to it than that.” He shook his head. “I begin to suspect the Dey has given orders for a demonstration. He may want to convince us that it’s difficult for him to keep the people in hand. An argument to make us break the agreement in his favor. If that’s the reason for this, it may not

prove too troublesome; provided, of course, the beggars don't get out of hand."

The noise in the streets below was growing all the time. I went to a window and looked out.

"There are plenty of green turbans down there," I reported.

"They'll be out in full force. Well, we'll see what develops. I have another audience with the Dey this afternoon."

John made a careful selection among the half-dozen hats he had brought ashore. Then he turned to me with a serious face.

"A final word with you, young fellow. There's something I want you to din into the ears of every man you meet on your mission. This is going to be a different world from now on, a smaller world. Our islands are tiny; and if we want to be a great people we must see to it that the seas are made free. Make them realize that, Roger! Everything depends on it. The English flag must be found in every port in the world."

He began to pace up and down the room. "No Spanish king, with underslung jaw and greedy claws, can gobble up this great world on the nod of a Pope of Rome! What right have these skulking sons of shore-huggers to put a ban on the bold rovers of the north? It was Norsemen who found America. I heard them talking of it when I was in Norway. It was centuries before this mewling Italian went pattiecaking over the easy waters of the Middle Course. As for the world's being round, Roger Bacon knew that long ago. Not Bacon? Well, it must have been some other Englishman."

He dragged a map out from a corner and spread it on the floor. He crouched on his knees and pointed out places in unexplored parts with an eager finger. "We must have colonies here," he said. "And here. And here. All long the coast of America. Raleigh had the right idea. We must have trading stations in Africa and factories in the Indies. We must bring spices from the East, ivory from Africa, gold from the Americas. These Jew-roasters can't corner the wealth of this world. It is England's duty to see that they don't. The Dutch are too busy with their religious troubles to lend a hand, and none of the others count in this. We must do it ourselves. That's what all Englishmen must be made to see."

The increasing tumult below drew us both to the window. The work of loading was being hampered by the screeching natives in the streets. We could hear the sound of the *reitas* over the shouts of the mob.

"It begins to look like the real thing," said John. He turned around suddenly with a look of deep concern. "Cristina! 'Fore God, Roger, I must get her out of there! If this keeps up, it will be dangerous for her in the city."

He paused for a moment to consider the best course. "I'm going to take a dozen men with me and we'll ride out by the Taenia Road and from there around the lake. Will you ask Halsey to take things in hand here while I'm away? We should land more men and place a cordon around the water front. They must be told not to fire unless the situation becomes desperate. We must avoid bloodshed if at all possible."

Halsey came in at that moment, stretching himself to get the sleep out of his bones and complaining about the noise. He became wide awake in a moment when John explained what was afoot.

"I'll take things in hand here," he said briskly. "Get on your way, Ward. Nothing must happen to your lady."

John vanished before anything more could be said. Halsey took charge with decision, and in no time at all the rioters had been shoved back from the paved road which skirted the water front into the narrow alleys leading from it. We could still hear the shrill cries of "*Arfi!*" and "*Hagi, Baba!*" but no move was being made to rush our lines and so I concluded that the worst was over. I retired to my room and proceeded to study the list John had given me of the men on whom I would call when I reached England. There were at least fifty of them, and I decided that I could best commit them to memory by the rhyming method Temperance Handy had taught me. It became easier immediately, and soon I was chanting to myself:

Mark Beston, Hugh Weston, and eke my Lord Harley,  
Squire Robson, Squire Dobson, Sir Ninian Varley.

When I was sure that I could jingle off the whole list without referring to the notes, I destroyed the paper, as John had advised. It had taken me a couple of hours. From my window I could see that the work of loading was going ahead briskly. I estimated that they would be through with it on time, which meant that we would weigh anchor before the end of the afternoon. I proceeded to pack my few belongings.

I had not been seriously concerned about the situation in the city, but as hour after hour passed without any sign of John I began to worry in real earnest. His audience with the Dey would consume considerable time, but even allowing for that it was clear that something had happened to delay him. I thought of many possibilities, all of them disturbing. Had he been too late? Had they been trapped in the city by the fanatical mobs? Was the Dey holding him at the Bardo as a hostage to compel acceptance of his terms?

The time for our departure drew close, and still no sign of John and his party. I joined Captain Longcastle, who was to be in charge of the ships for Marseilles, and found him in an impatient mood.

"We'll sail on the hour, Ward or no Ward," he said.

"I can't leave until he returns," I answered. "Something has gone wrong, or he would be here by this time."

"Do as you wish about that. I must be well out into the Gulf by nightfall."

I was certain now that something had gone seriously wrong, and in a fever of apprehension I paced up and down the roughly cobbled road in front of the slip where Longcastle's ship lay. The captain squinted at the sun and said, "I give you fifteen minutes more, Blease."

Before the quarter-hour was up John and his men arrived. I saw him dismount from his mustard-colored horse and walk slowly over to where we were standing. He did not raise his head.

"I was too late," he said.

Too late! Had Cristina—I could not finish the sentence even in my mind.

"I should have turned back at once when I found how things were this morning in the city," John went on bitterly. "I should have realized what would happen. How could I have been so blind!"

"But Cristina! What about her?"

"She was carried off." He was finding speech difficult. "The other women were taken with her. The men—I knew what had happened as soon as we reached the foot of the street. The gates had been broken in. All of the guards had been killed. Their skins were nailed to the outside of the wall." He paused. "They had been flayed alive!"

"If Clim had stayed—" I began.

"He would have died with the rest of them. That may be some consolation for you, Roger. Do you want to hear the rest of it? It isn't pleasant telling."

"What has been done about it?" demanded Longcastle.

"Done?" cried John. "I've been for two hours with the Dey. I practically took him by the throat and demanded he get her back or see his palace pulled down around him! I told him six thousand of the best fighting men that ever sailed the seas would exact a price for their butchered fellows. He has been sending men out in frantic haste, I promise you. The women will be found and returned. He's agreed to hang the leaders."

"We'll back you up, Ward," said Halsey, who had joined us in time to hear the story.

"I'm sure of that. This doesn't concern me alone. The safety of every man in the fleet depends on what we do about this now. I'm sure of one

thing: the demonstration started on orders from the Dey. He tried to force our hand, and the devils got out of control. He must be made to pay!"

"I'm ready to sail; but if you need us, Ward, we'll stay and see it through," said Longcastle.

John shook his head. "There will be enough of us left to bring him to his senses. It's important for you to leave at once. By sending off the stuff, we let him see we mean what we say. I want a word with you, Roger, before you leave."

We walked to one side. "You can go with an easy mind. Cristina will be found, or I'll raze this place as thoroughly as the Romans did!"

"Last night she insisted on giving me her ring," I whispered. "Do you suppose she had some idea this might happen?"

He brushed the suggestion aside. "I put no stock in such things. I would drop the ring in forty fathoms of water if I were you."

He stood for several moments in deep thought. "This may be a long farewell, my kinchin coe. I wouldn't wager a single sice now against a purse full of Old Harrys on my chance of getting back. I may never ruffle a cloak down Shrubsole High again. Of course the royal swillbelly may drink himself to death, but that's a remote possibility."

"I'll do the work you've set me with a real will."

"Do nothing until you see Mundy Hill. You mustn't get yourself in trouble over this." He held out a hand. "When you think of me, think of the day we went together over the side of the *Santa Caterina*. Try to forget the flinty-hearted captain who sent Clim to the Basket. As for Katie, go in and win. You have my best wishes, Roger. Well, I shall spoon my sails and run before the wind. God in Heaven alone knows where it will take me."

"Time to be off," called Longcastle.

# *BOOK THREE*

SIR NEVIL MACHERIE accompanied us to Marseilles and, to my surprise, came ashore there. He was followed by the girl Aurora and two sailors to carry his handsome sea chests. His ship was to risk a dash later through the Straits of Gibraltar, but he had decided to make an overland trip to Calais, business in Paris being the reason he gave. Apparently he had not known I was going to England, for he began to ply me with questions.

“You go on some mission, I take it.”

“I’m returning for personal reasons. It’s my hope to rejoin the *Royal Bess* later.”

“Personal reasons?”

“My mother is dying.”

“A convenient excuse, Master Blease. I still believe you’re going on some errand for your rascal of a Captain Rufflecoat.”

I knew he was not trying to pick a quarrel with me. He considered it his right to say anything he desired. He was much younger, I now saw, than I had believed; and rather handsome in spite of his blackness and his vulpine nose.

“There’s no reason for me to explain my movements to you,” I said.

“I could force the truth from you.” His fingers were tapping impatiently on the lid of the shell-backed agenda he carried at his belt. It gave out a hollow sound, and so I knew it was a sham. In all probability he used it, being such a great dandy, to carry white cypress powder for his face. I had heard that he always kept with him a gold toothpick and a pair of ivory head-rubbers. In the fleet he had been given credit for a wardrobe exceeded in point of size and costliness only by that of John Ward. He seemed to run to black, however, while John’s fancy was for every color in the rainbow.

“You’re lying, of course,” he added in a languid voice.

I retorted angrily: “I don’t permit you, or anyone, to question my word!”

Macherie began to laugh. “So! Our young fire-eater assumes the privileges of a gentleman.” His hand fell carelessly on the hilt of his sword. “I could spit you with one pass, my bold cockerel. But I don’t propose to be accused of murder, so I’ll let your bad manners pass without correction.” He had the reputation of being one of the best swordsmen in England and



considered it his right, apparently, to treat such matters lightly. “On the whole, I hope you’re telling the truth. If you do go back, you’ll have something to tell your blackguard captain and the other ruffians associated with him.”

“Whose number is now less by one.”

“Keep a guard on that tongue of yours. I’m no more disposed to bandy words with you than to cross swords; but there’s a limit to my patience. This is what I want Ward to know.” His manner of saying John’s name was an insult in itself. “I’ve been done a great injustice by that pack of rogues and cutthroats, and I’m making it my purpose in life to see that all of them pay for it. That’s my chief reason for returning to England. I expect to see every one of them hanged in chains as they richly deserve. I shall have a hand in bringing them to that most fitting end.”

“Why didn’t you tell Captain Ward of your purpose before you left?”

“Ward,” he said easily, “is beneath notice. I’ve never considered it fitting to quarrel with him.”

“Or was it the same lack of courage you showed when the Spanish fleet came up?”

He laughed again but on a different note. “I think it highly likely, Master Blease, that you’ll be the first of the lot to hang.”

He was dressed for travel when he emerged next morning from the water front inn where he had put up with his party for the night. His finery had been replaced by a shamoy doublet of flowered design and trunk hose of the same material. Five horses, one a stout-backed palfrey and one a pack horse, were standing in the tavern yard. The girl followed on his heels, elaborately swathed in trailing blue, and was with some difficulty hoisted into her saddle. They cantered off without a word, although Aurora fluttered a surreptitious hand in my direction. She jounced ungracefully and fell at once into the rear.

It took four days to complete arrangements with our Marseilles agent, a talkative fellow with no appreciation at all of the value of time. I chafed at the delay, but it served one purpose in allowing me an opportunity to acquire some suitable clothes. When I set out alone on the fifth day, there was a fine outfit packed away in my saddle bags, and I was wearing a rather handsome brown cloak and a tall beaver hat with plume and gold buckle. The hat alone had cost me five sovereigns.

Saladin was the name of my horse, a completely misleading one, for he was an easy-going gray. His steadiness of gait, however, made him a treasure for a novice like me. I allowed him his head for the first two days,

with the result that my saddle burns had ceased to bother me by that time. From then on I made good time, so good, in fact that I was surprised to reach Paris without overtaking Sir Nevil and his companions.

My mind was so full of my many troubles that I had little thought for the beauty of the country. There was scarcely a moment that I did not think of Cristina and wonder if she had been rescued or of my mother's condition. I was aware that the land through which I rode was gentle and sunny, that the air of Provence had a languorous softness which was like heaven after the fierce heat of Africa; but this seemed of little moment when a spark of hope inside me was urging that no second should be lost in getting home. I could not fail to notice, however, that the people were prosperous and happy and most voluble in praise of their great king. Henry IV was a god in their eyes; they loved his bluntness, his human qualities, his earthly tastes, even his way with women. How different it was in England!

I acquired a great liking for French food. At first I hesitated over omelettes sprinkled with brandy and strange fishes smothered in bilious-looking yellow sauces. Once tried, I found everything surprisingly good. The white wines they brought in cool stone bottles were infinitely satisfying after a day in the saddle. King Henry had once said his chief aim was to see a fowl in the Sunday pot of every peasant; I was sure, from what I observed, that no one ever lacked a pair.

Paris nevertheless was disappointing. It was an effeminate city, as John had said, and not at all like robust Rome-ville. The men were coxcombs, foppish in dress and simpering in manner. Voices were brittle, conversation volcanic, tempers short. I stayed just long enough to read *Le Mercure Français* over a wonderful dinner and to buy for ten testons (a matter of three shillings) a thumbled copy of Bayard's *Histoire* with plenty of woodcuts. This acquisition compensated me for every lack I found in the great city.

I arrived in Calais early one afternoon. In spite of my many anxieties, I felt exhilarated at being so near the end of my long journey. It was one of those magnificent days when the late summer sun carries the first hint of autumn sharpness. A smudge on the horizon was England, faintly to be seen over the whitecapped waters of the Straits. My spirits continued to rise as I cantered through St. Pierre and crossed the canal to the old town. Calais was not a cheering spectacle for an Englishman, but it was easy to forget our loss of this last strip of continental soil. By nightfall my feet would be planted on good English earth!

I put up at an inn which seemed old enough to have been there when King Ned first planted the English standard over Calais. While the landlord

prepared a capon for my dinner, I sallied out with the intention of seeing something of the town, but I got no farther than the yard where a dusty carriage was being sloshed with water by a slow-moving groom. It occurred to me that any travelers arriving in such haste must be headed across the Sleeve, and I dropped a *teston* in the man's hand.

"English," he grumbled, in answer to a question. "One gentleman, one lady. Gentleman, very grand. Lady— Ah, M'sieur should see lady!"

This description made me sure that I had at last overtaken Sir Nevil, and I turned back with an instinctive feeling that the papers in my battered old capcase should not be left unguarded. The landlord confirmed my suspicions. The gentleman, he told me, was in a great hurry, so great that he was using his rooms only to change clothes and have a bath before catching the boat for Dover. Conceive, M'sieur, a bath and the gentleman about to go on the water anyway! Two maids had been kept busy carrying up pails of hot water; were Englishmen like fish, that they must cover themselves with water to take a bath? Convinced that it was Macherie, I gave orders to have my dinner served upstairs and walked to the stairs.

A resplendent vision was on the way down, pointed pink shoes showing under rustling blue skirts at every step. It was the German girl, with a frothy rebatoe around her neck, and above it a warm smile of welcome for an old friend. Quite apparently she had been picking up a slight acquaintance with the language of her most recent lovers, for she remarked in slurring accents on the excellence of the weather.

"Are you continuing on to England?" I asked.

This proved an unfortunate query. She immediately assumed an air of deep distress and engulfed me in a torrent of fervid German. I tried to get away, but her eyes beseeched me to stay. Using an occasional English word and lapsing oftener into French, which she spoke badly, she made it clear that she was very much in need of help. Without knowing quite how it came about, I found myself ensconced with her in a window embrasure. I had given no orders, but the landlord appeared at my elbow with a bottle of very fine and expensive wine which he proceeded to serve.

My companion talked incessantly, rolling her round blue eyes in a way that most men would have found seductive. My only desire was to get away as soon as I could, but at the same time I could not help feeling sorry for her. The few stray sheaves of meaning that I was able to glean from the harvest of her words made it clear that what I had expected was true. Macherie was planning to leave her here, with his best wishes and a purse that she considered to be nothing short of niggardly. She was far away from her

native land and did not know what to do. Strange countries frightened her—I swallowed that one with a grain of salt—and she spoke so little of the French! Would I intercede with Sir Nevil in her behalf? I said that Sir Nevil and I were hardly on speaking terms. She laid a plump white hand on my arm and begged me to do what I could. Would I help her to reach England? Her eyes were promising rewards, but I argued strongly against the idea of crossing the water, pointing out that in England she would be farther away from home than ever. That did not prove to be a real objection after all. She had heard that all Englishmen were kind to ladies in distress and, with one mean exception, generous. She was sure she would be happier in London than in any part of France. She asserted vehemently that she did not like Frenchmen.

I squirmed in my seat for a good ten minutes before I had the inspiration to lay several fat gold pieces between the dimpled elbows she had rested on the table. She smiled and scooped them up without pretense of reluctance, making no further effort to detain me. “See?” she remarked, squeezing my arm. “The Englishmen *are* generous.”

I hurried to my room. There was nothing to indicate that it had been visited in my absence. My cloak and hat were on the bed where I had tossed them, my capcase on the floor beside it. I sighed with relief. As a final reassurance, I opened the capcase; and found, to my intense dismay, that the worst had happened. The documents were gone!

Macherie had visited the room while the girl engaged my attention below and had stolen them. This was the only possible explanation. I was filled with panic, for among the papers was a letter to Sir Bartlemy Ladland which almost certainly would contain some references to his connection with John Ward. I loosened the dagger in my belt, pondering my chances if it came to a struggle. Small enough, I decided, particularly if the landlord were in league with them, as seemed likely.

Hearing the grind of wheels on the stones of the courtyard, I rushed to the window in time to see a swirl of blue skirts in the door of the carriage and the driver curling his whip over the heads of the horses. It was an antiquated type of coach with leather side blinds which had been rolled down, making it impossible to see inside.

I went down the steps three at a time, nearly upsetting the landlord, who stood at the foot.

“I’ve been robbed!” I shouted.

“Robbed?” I heard him say as I made for the door. “But impossible, M’sieur!”

“Bring my horse around!” I ordered.

The groom, who was watching with slack-jawed interest, made no move to obey. I gave him an impatient shove, but it was clear that he could not get Saladin ready in time. I raced out into the street and started on foot after the rapidly disappearing coach. I ran at the top of my speed, shouting to them to stop and interjecting indignant cries of “Thieves! Robbers!” Curious heads bobbed out of windows as I passed and men came pouring out of taverns to see what all the excitement was about, some of them running along after me.

It was no use. The driver of the carriage whipped up his horses and plunged into a maze of narrow streets, and I was left hopelessly behind in short order.

I returned to the inn, almost ready to weep over my failure and my realization of what this would mean. I found my horse saddled and ready at last, and the landlord standing beside it with an apologetic air and his bill. I took him by the throat and shook him until his teeth rattled and his precious bill fell out of his hand.

“How much did he pay you to keep me below?” I demanded.

He swallowed painfully and protested his innocence. He was devastated, he declared, but what could he have done? The gentleman was well-mannered and prosperous; how could he be expected to know he was a thief?

I sprang into the saddle. “I’m off now to lodge a complaint. I’ll see you lodged in jail for this as you deserve.”

“The gentleman was English,” said the innkeeper, rolling a crafty eye. “M’sieur also is English. How could I decide between you?”

“Where is he going?”

“As God is my judge, I don’t know.”

“You may take what I owe you out of what you got from him,” I said.

He made no response, which, in a French innkeeper, was a confession of guilt. I let my whip flick across his shoulders as I rode out of the yard.

As I turned Saladin’s head in the direction of the water front, I wondered why Macherie had gone to such pains to search my belongings. He had acted on suspicion only, for he had no way of knowing what I carried. He would realize the value of his find as soon as he examined the papers. I was sure he was looking them over already, his eyes slanting greedily down his long nose as the carriage bumped over the rough paving of the streets. It would be clear to him that he held a bargaining weapon of great value, a certain lever for the King’s pardon and favor.

I knew he would drive to another port and delay his departure until he was sure I had gone. I might ride up and down the coast in the hope of finding him, but it would be waste of time. Even if I did locate him, what steps could I take to recover the papers? I had no way of proving they belonged to me. There was only one course open: to sail at once for Dover. It would be dangerous to attempt an entry after the documents had reached official hands in England. The only real hope I had was that Macherie might be foolish enough to sail from Calais as he had first intended.

Needless to state, he did not do this. At the appointed hour, the French captain climbed over the side and bawled an order to cast off. With a heavy heart I considered how serious the consequences of my carelessness might prove. I would have given anything to undo the events of the last few hours.

"In London I'll find a way to even the score," I said to myself.

## 28

DURING THE YEAR I had been away, my home town had remained in my mind as the one bright landmark in a grim world. I had thought of it always as a place of pleasant thatched houses in a setting of gentle green, its garden walls lined with the inquiring faces of marsh mallows, the sun (not the fierce sun of the South, but a thing of friendly warmth) slanting down Shrubsole High to the square at the end where our old gray church reared its spire like a symbol of peace and security against the sky. I had hoped that there would be a welcome for me, perhaps even a bonfire. I had expected congratulations and much hearty slapping on the back and drinking of toasts.

Never was homecoming more depressing than mine. In the first place, I arrived in a despondent frame of mind. I knew that I had been a failure as a sailor, in spite of the part I had managed to play in John's success. I had been placed in a shore post (what would my bluff father have said to that?) and I had been responsible for creating a mutinous spirit among the men. To cap everything, I had been careless enough to lose the papers which John had entrusted to me, and so had laid the train for troubles the magnitude of which I could not yet foretell. I felt so completely out of conceit with myself

that I was glad the danger of my position made it necessary for me to arrive at night. I could not have met my old friends with a bold face.

It was quite late when I rode up Strawberry Hill, from which ordinarily one could see the whole town; and it was so damp and gray with fog that I shivered, partly from cold but more from disappointment. I was glad a fire had been built in the brazier standing on high iron legs above the square. The light from it showed clearly enough through the mist to guide me home. To my great relief I met no one on the way.

The row of quicken trees in front of our house looked ghostly instead of warm and welcoming. I tied my horse to one of them and looked up at the front gable where I hoped to find a light still burning in Mother's bedroom. The whole house was dark and still.

I rapped gently on the front door; then, receiving no response, with more vigor. Several moments passed before I heard a cautious step on the stair within. More moments passed and then Aunt Gadilda's voice asked, "Who's there?"

"It's Roger," I said in a low tone. Apparently my voice did not carry, for there was no response. I had to repeat, in a bolder tone: "It's Roger, Aunt, I'm back."

I heard excited hands drawing the bars, and then the door swung back from the pressure of my hand. A voice, so wrought up with emotion that I did not recognize it, said in the blackness ahead of me: "Roger! Is it really you? Oh, Roger, you've come home at last!"

I closed the door. "Have you no candles? I thought I could find my way all over this house in the dark, but a year seems to make a lot of difference. I've gained twenty pounds, Aunt Gaddy. Wait till you see the things I've brought you!" I had little idea what I was saying. I knew I was leaving unasked the one question that filled my mind because I dreaded the answer. Then I heard her trying to light a candle, and I did not hesitate any longer. If Mother were dead, I wanted to hear of it in the dark. "Aunt, what has happened? Is—is Mother—"

There was a long silence, and then the candle flared. Aunt Gadilda was holding it in front of her face, a meager inch of tallow which she cupped in one hand. I was amazed at her appearance. She seemed to have shrunk, to have turned into an old woman, with bent back and trembling arms. Her eyes, looking out of hollowed sockets, told of long suffering.

"Roger," she said in a whisper, "your poor mother is dead. We buried her eight weeks ago come Wednesday."

All I could say was, "Then I couldn't possibly have returned in time."

Aunt Gadilda led the way into the drawing room, holding the candle above her head. The house was in deepest mourning, as I had expected, knowing how zealously she clung to all forms and rules. The floors were spread with black felt, and there were funereal hangings on all the ceilings. There were even black bows on the sideboard and the sturdy old bunk (which had come to us from Great Lunnington when my grandfather died and was said to date back to the time of Richard II), from the open shelves of which all the silver and pewter pieces had been removed. I suspected she had borrowed these trappings of death from Great Lunnington, for no household in town could boast the like.

She held the candle in front of my face and studied me closely.

“Oh, Roger,” she said, in a pitiful whisper. “If Meggy had only lived to see you like this!”

I placed a chair for her and insisted that she sit down. Then I found a pair of full-length candles and lighted them in spite of her involuntary gasp of protest, placing one on the table and one on the bunk.

“Where are Fanny and Albert?” I demanded.

“I had to part with them.” She smiled defensively. “How foolish it would have been to keep them, two husky servants to wait on one old woman!”

“So you’re saving their wages, are you? Two pounds a year apiece!”

“And their food,” she protested. “How that Albert could eat! And the quantities of ale!”

“Is there any food in the house?”

“Very little, I’m afraid. Are you hungry, dear boy? I’ll see what I can get you right away.”

“Never mind about that now.” As a matter of fact, I had eaten nothing since morning, having taken the back roads from Dover to escape notice. I studied her lined face. “You’ve been starving yourself. If I hadn’t come back, there would have been another funeral in this house soon. What are you saving for now? Has it become habit?”

“You must know, sonny, that Meggy’s income was for her life only. We had the same from Father’s will, thirty pounds a year. That isn’t much.”

“You had saved plenty.” I unstrapped a belt under my doublet and opened the catch. A stream of gold pieces cascaded on to the top of the table. Her eyes fixed themselves on the yellow pyramid with fascinated intentness.

“Roger! The window! Someone will see.”



“The windows are all shuttered. What would it matter anyway? I’m going to take you away from this miserable house. We’ll live in London. On the fat of the land, Aunt Gaddy. Things are going to be different from now on. No more starving and freezing. If Mother had only lived to share in it!”

She began to cry. “Poor Meggy! She wanted so badly to live until you came back. We talked so often of how you would look.”

To keep myself from crying also, I asked: “Have you any brandy in the house? I think we both need a stimulant.”

“Aren’t you feeling well?” I could see the look come back into her face with which she always met my ailments, an eagerness to apply her homemade simples and remedies. To escape any suggestion now of flowers of sulphur or *hickery-pickery*, or her most extreme cure, snail-water. I said that all I wanted was a swallow of brandy to warm me after my ride. She took one of the candles and went back into the blackness of the household offices. While I waited, I looked about the room, noticing that one window had been broken and that the glass had been replaced by a sheet of linen steeped in oil. I thought to myself that Mother had perhaps been willing enough to leave the kind of life they lived here—starving, scrimping, saving, for an ungrateful son who ran away to sea.

When I had swallowed a small glass of the brandy, and had seen to it that she did the same, I faced her with the question I had been wanting to ask since I entered the house.

“What was this mysterious trouble?”

She dropped her eyes. “Trouble? Mystery? I’m sure I don’t understand what you mean, Rogerkins.”

“Then what did you mean in your letter? You said Mother’s illness was due to something you couldn’t explain in writing.”

She kept her eyes averted. “I think perhaps I shouldn’t say anything more about it.”

“Aunt Gaddy, I must know!” I said. “I’m not a boy any longer. What was it? I’ve been racking my brain ever since without finding any rhyme or reason in what you hinted. I can’t wait another minute. I must know what it was.”

She gave in reluctantly. “It was Lady Ladland. She—she thought her husband came here too often. She was jealous of poor Meggy. One day she followed him here. They were sitting where you and I are now; talking quietly, about you, I think. She came in and charged them with dreadful things. In a loud voice. It was a warm spring day and all the windows were open. The whole neighborhood heard what she said.” She shook her head

with sudden asperity. "She never was a lady, Fanny Plumptre! Her father made his money as a victualler to the Navy, and everyone said the poor sailors starved on the wormy food he supplied. She was handsome enough, but I'm sure Sir Bartlemy married her for her money. He bought Appleby Court with it."

"What happened then?" I had been prepared for something like this but, now that it was out, I felt very hollow and miserable inside. I might never be able to see Katie again.

"She went out to her carriage, still talking in that high, ill-bred voice of hers. I've never seen anyone in such a temper. Sir Bartlemy said something to Meggy and then rode after her. He never came back, of course. Lady Ladland took Catherine to London with her and opened their town house. Appleby Court has been closed ever since." She was folding and unfolding her hands nervously. "The whole town heard about it. There was a great deal of talk because—well, it seems Sir Bartlemy has a bad reputation. Your poor mother never set foot outside the house after that. She was too shamed to face anyone. I could see her pining away before my very eyes. When this sickness took hold of her, she had no strength at all to resist it."

I began to stride about the room, my mind full of a ventless rage. My mother's death, then, could be laid at the door of the Ladlands, husband and wife; but I could think of no way to make them pay. The memory of Katie faded out of my mind, driven away by my bitter resentment over what had occurred. My sweet, unselfish mother! It was unbearable that such a thing could have happened to her; and on top of the disappointment I had caused her. I stopped beside my ink-stained old scriptine and saw that my pen was still in the place where I had left it. The Spanish book lay beside it.

"Don't let's talk about it any more," I said. "I don't know what to think or what to do. There ought to be some punishment for a woman who would act like that; who could think that way about Mother." I picked up the Spanish book and then let it drop with a listless hand. To bridge the uncomfortable silence, I said: "Some day I'll tell you how fortunate it was for me that I could speak some Spanish. You did me a good turn in that, Aunt Gaddy."

After a long and unhappy interval, during which neither of us spoke, I returned to my chair. "We'll have to try to forget the past," I said. "I won't be able to take you to London right away, Aunt. I must make sure that I'm not wanted for piracy first. Don't look startled; I have plenty of friends, and I won't be in any danger in any event. I'll get the situation straightened out soon. I'm afraid I must leave tonight, but in a very short time I'll write you with instructions. You'll have to be careful, Aunt, and follow them to the

letter. It will be necessary, I'm afraid, for you to leave town quietly. I don't want anyone to know when you go or where you're going. In the meantime I want you to be comfortable here." I scooped up a handful of the coins and poured them into her lap. "Get the servants back. One of them, at any rate. Keep the house stocked with food! I want you to have some flesh on your bones when I see you next. Keep fires going. You must be warm and comfortable." I paused. "Some day, Aunt Gadilda, I want to hear everything, but I don't think I can talk about it now."

I began to pack the gold back into my belt. My fingers must have been cold, for I fumbled at the task. Aunt Gadilda watched me with anxious eyes.

"Are you thinking this has made a difference with Katie?" she asked.

I put away the last of the coins and clasped the belt about my waist. "I don't believe she would let it change her feelings," I answered. "Not that it would make any difference. Can you conceive of Sir Bartlemy accepting me as a son-in-law?"

Aunt Gadilda became indignant at once. "And why not? You have better blood in your veins than Katie Ladland! Never forget you're a grandson of Sir Ludar Pirie. The Piries have been one of the best families of Kent since long before the Wars of the Roses. Your grandfather was knighted by old King Harry himself. Can the Ladlands show anything like that? I think not! Fanny Plumptre, indeed!"

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter much now." I sat down to figure out what I should do. I was tired and the thought of a night's sleep in my comfortable old bed upstairs appealed to me strongly. Could I take the risk? I decided that it would be unwise, however, as we had no stabling for the horse. I got to my feet again and took one of the candles. "I may never set foot in this house again," I said. "I think I'll take a look around. Could you get me a bite of supper? I should be away in another hour."

Nothing was changed upstairs except that there were black pillow-beres and drooping bows of black silk on the testers of the beds. Aunt Gadilda was thorough in such matters!

I looked with a feeling of deep regret at the small room where I had spent so many happy hours. For a keepsake, I slipped under my doublet a tiny galleon carved out of black wood which an old sailor had given me when I was a small boy. I knew it was an odd choice, considering what a poor sailor I had turned out to be. After a few minutes in Mother's room, looking at the familiar furnishings with a sense of compassion and shame, I went below to find that a supper of bread and stringy ram-mutton had been set out.

“You’re indeed a man now,” said Aunt Gadilda, watching me as I struggled with the meager fare. “You’ll find someone to your taste, never fear. Someone prettier than Katie Ladland.”

“No one in the world is prettier than Katie. And I don’t want to find anyone else.”

She shook her head solemnly. “Then you’re sure to have trouble and sorrow, Roger. I wish you could put her out of your mind.”

An hour later, I rode away. The fog was lifting a little, but forks of flame were still shooting up from the brazier on the square. I turned my reluctant Saladin, who showed what he thought of night-riding by refusing to stir out of a slow trot, off the main road. We came finally to the soft gravel path through Wayland Spinney. I swept all other thoughts from my mind by speculating as to the exact spot where Katie had met John Ward, looking “like a little snow fairy.” My spirits did not improve as a result. Katie might keep other trysts in Wayland Spinney, but if she did they would not be with me.

The towers and chimneys of Appleby Court rose dark and majestic over the thinning fog. It was not yet midnight, but there was no sign of a light in the huge pile; apparently Lady Ladland was still nursing her spleen in London. I skirted the moat until I came to the rear, where there was a cluster of outbuildings like a small village. It was clear enough now to make out most of them, the mill-house, the squillery, the scalding-house, the malting and brewhouse, the saw-pit, the root-chamber. No lights showed here either.

A squat figure, coming out of the mist on the other side of the moat, halted at sight of me.

“Off with ye!” called a rough voice. “No hoskers here! I’ve a loaded gun with me.”

I recognized the voice. “Firk Besson!” I called. “I want a word with you. I’m Roger Blease.”

Besson walked forward until he faced me across the water. “So, our bold pirate’s back, is he? It wur said as how you and John Ward wur coming home. But that wur a good two months back. If ye’d come then, ye wud ’a seen yer poor mother afore she died.”

“I didn’t know in time. I was a long way off when I heard; nearly a thousand miles, Firk. I came as soon as I could.”

“And little good ye’ll get of it now. They’ll be after ye, Master Blease. I think ye’ll be wise to turn around and go back where ye came from.”

“Is the Court empty?”

“It won’t be tomorrow. They’re coming back. But not Mistress Katie, if that’s what ye want to know. *She’s* not coming. She’s a great lady at court now. Maid to the Queen, no less. What do ye think o’ that, Master Blease?”

“I’m glad to hear it, Firk. She always wanted to go to court.”

“And a great little beauty she’s become, if that’s of interest to ye. It needn’t be; ye’ll never be seeing Mistress Katie again, Master Blease.”

John’s instructions had been to see Sir Bartlemy as soon as possible so I decided to stay and get a word with him the following day. A coin changed hands, with the result that Besson took my horse in hand while I crossed the moat at the rear bridge. I spent the night on a cot in the Squillery, unable to sleep because of all that I had heard, my nose full of the curious scents of drying herbs.

## 29

MY TALK WITH SIR BARTLEMY proved as difficult as I had feared. It was late afternoon when he came out to the Squillery to see me, ostentatiously consulting the watch he wore around his neck. It was an unusually small one, no larger, in fact, than a saucer and presumably most expensive on that account. He made it clear he was not glad to see me, fidgeting about and keeping an eye on the door as though fearful someone would break in on us. He brightened up, however, when I told him of the great victory and of the spoils to be shared.

“John Ward is a great fellow,” he said. “A great fellow, indeed.”

The note of approval dropped instantly when I told him of Macherie’s theft. He went as white as chalk when I explained that one of the letters had been addressed to him.

“This may be the finish of me,” he said, staring around with a panicky eye. “His Majesty is set against the Free Rovers and all who have dealings with them. If that letter falls into his hands, it may cost me everything I possess. I might even lose my head.”

He refused to listen to any explanations. "I must see Macherie as soon as he arrives," he went on, shaking his head despondently. "Perhaps I can make a bargain with him. Why did I ever listen to that smooth-tongued scoundrel of a Ward? It was an ill day for me when I decided to take a part in his ventures!"

I thought it wise not to point out that he had profited enormously thereby, although I was tempted to do so. He paced up and down the narrow space of the Squillery, brushing his head against the bundles of herbs hanging from the ceiling and muttering to himself in agitated undertones.

"What was said in the letter?" he demanded finally.

"I don't know. It was sealed, of course."

"It gave everything away I'm sure. Ward is a rash and heedless person. As for you, Roger, I can't find words to tell you what I think of such criminal lack of care. I knew something evil would come of it when Ward said you were to sail with him. The best thing you can do is to leave now and never let me see your face again."

He was too sunk in his fears to say anything of my mother's death—though I considered it likely that he would not have mentioned it in any event. I left immediately and spent the rest of the day and the night following in a dirty inn on the river.

I went to London by water the next day and got off at Wapping Stairs. Saladin had been left in the care of Firk Besson, where his identity would be lost among the scores of horses in the Ladland stables. Observing with an uneasy eye the dirty, lumber-strewn court where so many seamen had gazed their last on the sun, I hoped that I would be able to lose myself as successfully here in London.

The streets were humming with talk of a recent murder. Pausing on the skirts of one gabbling group, I learned to my great surprise that the victim had been none other than our unwelcome confederate, the Upright Man of Alsatia. There was considerable mystery about the affair, it appeared; and the avid gossips in the street were retelling the details with almost drooling delight.

"He wur cut up like a griskin," I heard one man say in exultant tones. "Twenty holes in his bleeding hide, and the body propped up in a tall chair with a paper crown on his nab. He wur getting a notch above himself, wur Master Humpery, and some 'un saw to it he wur brought down proper."

"He'll make hisself the dimber-damber in hell," declared another. "Even the Old Rogue won't be able to hold *him* down. He's always top man."

"Better there than here," said a third.

I made some discreet inquiries and learned that the body had been found the previous day, exactly as described, in a house on the edge of Alsatia. It seemed to be accepted that there would be no investigation. Anyone of the thousands who had suffered at the hands of Robin Humpéry might have been responsible, and after all it was a case of good riddance as far as the city authorities were concerned. He had been on my list, and I felt a sense of relief that now I would not have to see him. Then it occurred to me that another Upright Man would take his place immediately.

“Who will be the new one?” I asked.

Everyone seemed to know the answer to that—Chirp Bird. One man volunteered the information that he had seen Chirp on West Cheape late the previous evening. “He wur dressed to the nines and there wur a dozen ugly customers with him. He’s a right bad ’un, Chirp Bird.”

I said to myself: I know who planned the murder.

I found my way with some difficulty, the streets of mighty Rome-ville being as many and as crooked as a maze, to a tall house which stood just off the Poultry. It was a pretentious place with colored glass in its casement windows and a mounting-post of marble in front of the door. I went through a high-arched door and into a waiting room, where I asked for Sir Sigismund Hill. A clerk waved me to a seat along the wall, already partly occupied by two men of curiously different stamp.

I watched them while I waited. One I knew to be a sea captain, for his skin was as brown as a Tunizeen’s and there was about him an air of bluff authority. The other was city-bred, a pursy fellow in murrey jacket and hose, who kept uneasy fingers laced over his swelling paunch. They whispered continually, and I got the impression that they were sharing some reason for chagrin.

All I had told the clerk was that I was from the south. He returned shortly and motioned me to follow him. We proceeded into a handsome apartment with a high oriel window looking out on an inner court. Sir Sigismund came from behind his long desk to welcome me, holding an opened letter in his hand.

“I’ve been expecting you, my boy,” he said, “for exactly ten minutes. I’ve just finished reading the letter which announced your coming. What grand news! What a magnificent victory! I could hardly believe my eyes.”

I was rather taken aback that any letter could have reached London before me, but I made no comment, as Sir Sigismund was too full of the news it had contained to think of anything else. His eyes were shining.

“We’ve been sorely in need of something like this!” he exclaimed. “Six against twenty! It’s like old times again. You must tell me all about it.”

He listened eagerly to the details I supplied. “Marvelous!” he cried at the finish. “As fine a thing in its way as the defeat of the Armada. The Inner Sea wide open again—that’s news for our shipping companies! John Ward, John Ward, you’ve done more for us than you promised!” He thumped me on the back with enthusiasm. “I must spread the news at once. The Privy Council meets this morning to discuss naval matters. It will sit ill on their stomachs when all London begins to roar over our victory.”

“I don’t understand how you received the word,” I said, when his excitement had subsided sufficiently.

“Ward sent me the letter on the ship that took you to Marseilles, my boy,” he explained. “It came right through while you waited over to attend to your affairs there. Even at that you almost caught up with it.”

I was still unsatisfied. “But who brought it?”

He let his voice fall into a confidential pitch. “Did you ever hear of the Stranger’s Post?” he asked. “It was set up by foreign merchants here to attend to their mail and keep them informed quickly of affairs on the Continent. About thirty years ago it was abolished. It has always been my belief that the real reason was the old queen’s men didn’t like letters delivered which they couldn’t read first. Everything which went into the mails then passed under the eyes of Walsingham, as you probably know. The merchants didn’t relish having their privilege withdrawn, and they’ve succeeded in keeping the service in operation without the government’s knowing it. Couriers ride for them regularly from Brussels and the south, and the letters are smuggled across the Channel in ways that I prefer not to disclose. I’ve been making use of this clandestine post for many years. You must, of course, consider this as confidential.”

I proceeded then to give him the rest of my news. He shook his head gravely when I told him of the abduction of Cristina.

“John must have taken it hard,” he said. “The lady will hardly be returned in the best of condition. I know the Tunizeens too well to expect anything else. I wonder if the Dey wanted her for himself? He has a great liking for white women. He had the effrontery once to ask me what I could do for him in that way.”

“The city was being turned upside down when I left,” I said.

He shook his head. “Let’s hope for the best. I won’t rest easy about it until we’ve had further word.”

“I came home,” I said then, “because of the letter you wrote to John.”



He smiled broadly. “Ah, yes. You might as well know the truth about that right away. John felt you had done your share, that you should come home while there was still a chance for you. He tells me he tried to persuade you, and that you refused. He decided then to—well, to beguile you into coming.”

I looked at him blankly. “I don’t understand, sir.”

“He invented a reason for getting you back. That’s what it amounts to.”

“You mean there was no need for me to come? That there’s nothing for me to do, now that I’m here?”

“I’ll find plenty for you to do, never fear. There’s important work for you, my boy. But it was not John’s intention to have you make a tour of the country on an errand that would be very close to treason. He spoke of that because he was sure you would still refuse to come unless you were convinced the danger here would be the equal of what you were leaving. Don’t look so disturbed about it. I assure you he was thinking of your best interests.”

I was completely dumfounded. I could not be sure that the reason he was giving for John’s action was the true one. Had I been sent back because of the dissension I had caused in the crew? I had a very sick feeling that this was closer to the truth.

“Then there’s no discontent in the country over the King’s policy? Was it all made up for my benefit?”

“There’s plenty of discontent,” declared Sir Sigismund. “Everything he said was true enough. I had given him a faithful picture of how things were at home here. But, of course, he had no intention of sending you out to risk your neck on any such errand. And, if he had, I would soon have put a stop to it myself.”

“It’s clear, then,” I said, “that he wanted to be rid of me.”

He looked up sharply. “Why do you think that?”

I found the explanation hard. “Things happened that you don’t know about, Sir Sigismund. I very nearly caused a mutiny. John forgave me but—I’m sure he thought it best for me to return.”

“I know everything about it. The whole story is in this letter. That, and many other things. You don’t seem to realize how much affection he has for you. He had no other reason than his desire to save you from the fate he sees for himself.”

“I know I was a great disappointment to him.”

“Roger, if you knew what he said about you in his letter, you would rid yourself quickly of that idea. He gives you credit for saving the fleet and for showing great courage under the most difficult circumstances. He praises you to the skies.”

I was still in somewhat of a fog. “Then I must disregard the instructions he gave me?”

“Just that. It was certainly not his idea to have you sent to prison on a charge of treason. That’s what would happen to you if you went around the country preaching discontent.”

“But if the country feels the way you say it does, why shouldn’t I do it?”

My companion smiled grimly. “Have you ever seen a man executed for high treason? It’s not a pleasant spectacle, I assure you. First, he’s hanged, but not long enough to kill him. He’s cut down before he loses consciousness, and then the executioners proceed to carve him with knives heated to a white edge. The process has been planned to give the victim the most terrible suffering. He is castrated, then his bowels are cut out and burned before his eyes—if he’s still alive, as many of the poor wretches are—and finally he’s cut into quarters, and the pieces are sent to various cities to be hung up as an object lesson. No, it’s not a pretty thing to watch, and I leave it to you what kind of a death it is to die.

“I think, Roger,” he went on, “you had better dismiss from your mind the notion of offering yourself as a candidate for that kind of a ceremony.”

In spite of what he had described, I managed to say: “I’ve no desire to die that way, or any way. But can we permit fear of the consequences to keep us from doing our duty?”

“There are times when we should not. But what is your duty under the circumstances? I can’t see that you would help the cause by placing your head in the noose. You can be more valuable to us alive. We can make good use,” he added, “of the papers you brought over with you. They can, with perfect safety as far as we’re concerned, be placed in the hands of certain public men who’ll know what use to make of them.”

The humiliating truth had to come out now. “They were stolen from me,” I said.

A look of consternation spread over his face. “Stolen! In God’s name, how did that happen?”

I told the story, not sparing myself at all in doing so. He sat for a few moments deep in thought after I had finished. “It’s fortunate in a way that Macherie is the thief. I know him well enough to be sure that he’ll follow whatever course he believes will bring him the most profit.”

“Is it likely,” I suggested, “that he has already arrived and that the meeting of the Privy Council was called to discuss the matter?”

“That’s exactly what I’ve been wondering myself.” He sat up with an air of decision. “Well, this makes it doubly clear that you must do nothing rash. Orders will be out for your arrest as soon as our worthy ministers have had an opportunity to examine the documents he turns over to them. That won’t mean all, by any means. I’m sure Macherie will keep some of them for his own purposes.”

“Do you think he’ll keep the letter to Sir Bartlemy Ladland?”

“Yes. He’s not likely to turn that over. Not at first, at any rate. He may find a use for that, and any other letters of the same kind.” After further reflection, he added: “They’ll have to move cautiously. They would hardly dare to charge you with piracy while the whole country is ringing with the news of Ward’s great victory. His Majesty is getting too sensitive to public disesteem to be guilty of anything as grossly stupid as that. I’m inclined to think they’ll wait for a few days. Then, if they can get their hands on you, they’ll charge you with some less serious offense. Your case will be disposed of very quietly; but very effectively, I assure you. The public might never hear a whisper about it. Well, we must see that they don’t get their hands on you.”

“I must leave London at once, then.”

“On the contrary, you must stay here. You can go into hiding more easily in London than anywhere. This city is like a morass; you can sink into it and never leave a trace. You mustn’t venture out until I can make arrangements for you. If need arises quickly, there’s always a safe sanctuary ready for you.” He nodded in the direction of the tall stone fireplace. “There’s a room back of that, the secret of which rests exclusively with me. I haven’t looked in there for many years, and my memory is that it’s limited in point of bodily comfort. Still, it would serve nicely.”

He added after a moment: “There’s no need for any great haste. The King’s ministers move slowly and ponderously to a decision. We certainly have many hours of complete security, perhaps even a day or two. In the meantime, you are a young friend of mine from the country. The name, shall we say, Richard Strange?”

The clerk put his head into the room to report that the Beadle had returned and that none of the shareholders had fulfilled their extra assessments. Hill seemed more annoyed at this piece of news than he had been over the complications in which I had involved him.

"I declare, my name should be Job," he said. "These merchants and greedy gentlemen subscribe for shares in a venture at sea. They think only of the profits they hope to make and never of the responsibilities. When we find a need for additional funds, they refuse to pay their share. I think we shall have to send some of them to jail as an example."

"Surely they can't be imprisoned for that!"

"And why not? Can you think of a more serious offense than jeopardizing the success of a great business venture? It must not be allowed. I could go to the Privy Council and get orders for their bodies or chattels to make good our claim. I could indeed." He shook his head in exasperation. "But that's only one of the things with which we have to contend. Did you notice those two sly individuals outside? One is a captain in our service, the other a rather large shareholder. I've caught them in a very old trick. The captain accepted money from our honest partner and delivered a part of the cargo to him instead of to the company. A precious pair of thieves!"

"They seemed uneasy."

"And well they might. I have all the evidence I need. I'm letting them cool their heels out there before bringing them in. I think it will come to dismissal for the captain and a very heavy fine for the shareholder; although they deserve prison, the rascals. Let me show you something else."

He led the way to a small dark room opening off a corridor in the rear. Scores of uniforms made of the stiffest and coarsest of cloth were hanging on the walls.

"Observe," he said, taking one down from its peg. "No pockets. We have to dress our workmen in these when we unload a ship. If we trusted them, they would come to work with secret pockets under their jerkins and fill them with the most costly spices. I had these clothes made after catching one fellow with a fortune hidden on him—four pounds of pepper, a quart of ginger, and even some galangal. They used to wear shoes with hollow heels and fill them with cloves. I sometimes wonder if there are any honest people in the world."

Further down the hall was a large room from which a rumble of noise had reached us as soon as we left the office. Sir Sigismund said it would be safe for me to go as far as the door; everyone inside would be too busy to notice me. I saw that elaborate efforts had been made to give it a suggestion of the East. The walls were of imitation marble, and the arched doorways had fretted frames. Two dark-faced attendants, their foreheads triangled in snowy turbans, stood at the entrance. The effort went no further, however. At one end of the room an English clerk was standing behind a table, his

face blond-bearded and beefy, his voice nasal with the twang of the docks. He was wielding a wooden mallet with an impatience which had no effect at all on the large group of men seated in front of him.

They were all Londoners, quite obviously. They were handsomely dressed without exception, but in colors much more sober than the gentlemen of the court. Each man had the crest of his guild embroidered on his sleeves. I noticed another point of difference: the fashion among the gentry ran to a lathlike thinness, but these busy merchants were heavy in build, with comfortable stomachs and bulging thighs. There was a keen quality about them; their eyes were cool and hard, the line of their mouths shrewd. The noise they were making was the only note out of character; they were all shouting and gesticulating in a frenzy of competitive excitement.

Back of the table were piles of fine fabrics: velvets, velours, and brocades of great weight and value; and silks so fine and rare that the hot gold sunlight of the Orient seemed to have been spun into them. The air was laden with unfamiliar scents, tantalizing and exotic.

“It’s an important roup today,” explained Sir Sigismund, who seemed to have become infected with some of the excitement. “We’re selling off a great variety of goods. The spices are up now. I question if there’s a spice to be found anywhere which we haven’t got. Things you may never have heard of, my boy—spikenard, peppermint, cubeb, nutmeg, galangal. That red-grained stuff is the galangal. It’s too hot and acrid for me, but it brings a beautiful price. This will be worth watching for a few minutes. Stand close behind one of these fellows, and no one will notice you.”

I could see that the noise was not all due to the excitement of the roup. Turbaned attendants were handing around wine and ale, and there was a well-laden table of food at one side. Here was a noble roast of prime beef, sliced down to the pink-and-brown stage; a great pile of mutton slices, richly rimmed with fat; a tall Dorset cheese, blue-veined and old; a meat pie crammed with richness under its arch of buttery yellow coffin crust; a mountain of sugar-iced marchpane and huge bowls of fruit. The merchants kept going back and forth between their chairs and this table, and munching enormously while they followed the progress of the sale.

Sir Sigismund left me to investigate the figures on a slip at the front table. He shook his head and frowned. The clerk promptly announced in an awed tone: “Gentlemen, Sir Sigismund Hill is not satisfied with the prices we’re getting today. I’m not surprised. Gentlemen, we must do better. We really must do better.”

Coming back to the doorway, Hill whispered: "As a matter of fact, the prices are not bad. Still, we must brisk things up. Give them the chance, and they'll sit here all day and chaffer. We're going to try a candle roup now. Watch this closely; it can be quite exciting."

A plump fellow who had been sitting in a corner got up now. I had already identified him as the Beadle; he carried a tall staff and wore an expression of official severity as though ready at a moment's notice to take charge of delinquents. He carried in a candle on a board, a mere coating of tallow with a short wick. The candle was lighted and then shoved well forward on the table.

The commodity now offered was a quintal of one of the rarest spices. Perhaps I should explain that a quintal is an Oriental measure, a little in excess of one hundred pounds. As the light flickered, the voices of the bidders began to acquire a new stridency. The price mounted rapidly. Sir Sigismund said to me with a chuckle: "The bidding stops when the light goes out, and the last offer heard is accepted. They can never be sure how long it will run."

As the last of the tallow burned away, the price mounted rapidly. Seven! Seven and a half! Eight! Eight and a quarter! The Beadle raised his staff. Eight and a half!

The light was gone.

The Beadle pointed his staff at the lucky bidder. "Eight and a half," he intoned. "Sold to Guy Casterby for eight and a half; Guy Casterby will kindly come to the table and pay his deposit."

My companion whispered in my ear: "Eight and a half shillings a pound. A good price, better than we'd have had after a half-hour of leisurely bidding. It's like a game this way; they get excited and forget their caution. Still, the stuff is rare."

The rest of the day I spent in seclusion in a small room under the leads, which had been given me for temporary sanctuary. I had for company my copy of *Bayard* and for sustenance a rib of cold beef, a loaf of wheaten bread, and a stone bottle of ale. It was dark outside when Sir Sigismund joined me. He was smiling triumphantly.

"London has gone stark roaring mad over the word of the victory," he announced. "They're toasting John Ward in every tavern in town, and in every fine house as well. Cheapside is so crowded you can't get from one

end to the other. The word I get from court is that our King has gone into a fit of sulks. Archie is drunk and in disgrace.”

I opened the window and looked down. Crowds were milling in the street below, and I could see torches waving above the heads of the people.

“They’ll be burning effigies tonight,” said my host. “The King of Spain. Guy Fawkes, of course. Perhaps some of the King’s Privy Council.”

“Not the King himself?”

“They’re not likely to go that far. But talk runs high against the old zany. They’re clamoring for war with Spain.”

“I wish John were here to see this.”

Sir Sigismund seated himself in a chair with an air of weariness. “It’s been a full day. We held a council at five, and I swear I’ve never seen our worthy shareholders in a more gabby mood. Even Percentage Tuttle laid his shilling on the board five times on one question alone. That’s a rule we have: no member may speak oftener than twice on any matter without paying a shilling fine. Usually it puts a damper on their loquacity. There were more than a dozen of them paid their two-and-six for interrupting other speakers. The coins rattled on the wood like dice. And would you believe that the point in question was whether our ships should expend gunpowder in answering salutes at sea? The decision was for the frugal course; no guns to be fired but the members of the crews to have instructions to cheer.”

“Who gets the fines?”

“They’re turned into a fund to provide Bibles for our ships and stations.” He turned his attention to more serious matters. “I’ve made all arrangements for you, Roger. You’re to have the top floor in the house of a respectable widow. Her husband was in hides; and now that he’s dead, she ekes things out by letting rooms on occasion. Remember, your name is Richard Strange, and you’re a student. What you’re studying for is a matter I leave to you—the law, the church, whatever seems best. A load of books is being sent in for you. Immerse yourself in them and never go out except at night; and as little as possible then. The hue and cry will be on soon. Dame Witchie is discreet enough, and I vouch for her honesty. But she’s a woman and has a lively curiosity. You’ll move in tonight.”

I tried to express my gratitude, but he waved that aside. “I’ve a selfish interest in your safety, Roger,” he said. “Every merchant in England has, for that matter.” He nodded his head gravely. “Have you any idea of the importance of the Eastern trade today? It comes to this: London does six times as much trade as all the rest of the country put together, and a very large part of it is with the Eastern countries. It’s become so vital that I used

to go each year to the Barbary Coast and pay tribute to protect our ships from the Corsairs. Two thousand pounds a year! It cut into the profits, I tell you. That's over with, now that John Ward and the rest of them are keeping the control of the seas. Did you know we pay something to the Free Rovers? Much less, of course, but a goodly sum. That will give you an idea of where the interests of the merchants of England lie."

This explained many things about which I had wondered. I had never understood his reason for being in Tunis and the freedom allowed him there.

"I'm going to say something now that you may not agree with, because it's so contrary to the general belief," he went on. "Get this into your head, Roger: Those men you saw downstairs today are more necessary to England than all the courtiers and the soldiers and the fine gentry. Trade is what counts in the long run. People must be kept employed, they must eat and clothe themselves, and it takes your merchant for that. Kings make wars, but there's always some necessity of trade behind it. We pull the strings, and we provide the money for wars. Your merchant is looked down on; his wife isn't allowed to dress in silk; he's given the worst of it in any legal disputes with a noble. But he runs the country in all things that deal with money; and some day his importance will be recognized."

After a moment he added: "There, I've done enough preaching for one night. Here's what you're to do: Two porters are going to Denmark House. We make it a rule to send Her Majesty a few presents each time a ship comes in—some of the best spices, perhaps a bolt of fine silk, sometimes even a piece of jade. I've instructed them to take a special route tonight. Follow them as far as the Boar's Head, and you'll be within a few squares of the house. It's on Gracechurch Street, not far from Old Swan Stairs. You can't miss it; a doctor had it once, and his lantern is still suspended from the second story, though its color has been changed from red to blue. Dame Witchie will be waiting for you."

I followed the porters at a safe distance. They dawdled along, stopping at every square where effigies were being burned and making one protracted stay at a mean little inn. It was called the Great Can, but I was sure it was intended for "Khan," as the sign outside depicted a potentate of swarthy hue on an anemic elephant. The streets were still thronged, and I took a keen pleasure in the merrymaking spirit which gripped the city, feeling that I had had a share in bringing it about. I realized, however, that the temper of the people was beginning to change. A day of drinking had engendered an uglier mood. Before the night was over, Catholic glass would be splintered all over London, and blood would be spilled. This did not apply to all who were celebrating the victory. Once the door of a humble home opened as I



passed, and I caught the notes of a hymn sung by many voices. I recognized the fine roll of "We Light This Day a Candle" and knew that the singers were Puritans, or even Brownists, and that they also were offering humble thanks for what had happened.

I did not stop at the Boar's Head, as Sir Sigismund had directed, but continued to dog the footsteps of the porters at a discreet distance. I had decided to follow them as far as Denmark House and treat myself to a glimpse of the palace where Katie lived. I was sure it was the closest I would come to seeing her for a very long time.

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DENMARK HOUSE made me think of Paris, for it had a completely foreign look about it. Its tall circular chimneys stuck up in the air like slender fingers, and there were fanciful touches to the brick façade which were not English in any sense.

Two guards, the very picture of dismal vacancy, stood at each side of the gatehouse entrance; but it was not difficult to get in. All manner of people were passing in and out, and I decided that I might as well have a look at the interior of the place now that I had come this far. Nothing was said to me as I stepped with assumed briskness through the squared portal. I found myself in a crowded anteroom. Most of the visitors, I suspected, had no more right to be there than I had; some of them, in fact, had dropped in to use the privy room. In one corner an elderly fellow with a pack on his back was making some repairs on a sleeve of dingy shagg; two eager bargainers were looking over samples of velvet of the very finest kind, worth, I judged, at least three pounds a yard; a group of servants in the palace livery surrounded a chirurgeon who was extracting a tooth from one of them.

No one paid any attention to me, and I walked to the rear of the gatehouse where I could see the main block of buildings on the other side of the quadrangle. Katie was somewhere in this imposing pile, probably in attendance on Her Majesty and trying to look very grown up and proper; or perhaps she had already been dismissed for the night and had gone to her own room. I picked out one small light which winked at me from the top

story and pretended to myself that it was hers. She was sitting at her work table and was writing a letter (but not to me); her hair was piled high on her head in that new way she liked so much, and her sweet brow was puckered with the effort involved in composition (I have explained that Katie was no scholar). I could see how stiffly she held the quill, and that the tip of her tongue had been caught between her lips, and that her eyes were happy with thoughts of the lucky one to whom the note was addressed. Or perhaps she was ready for bed, one arm free from her night-rail and reaching to snuff out the candle. I decided it was still too early for this last picture, especially as the light I had picked as hers continued to burn steadily.

I saw a gentleman, with an ill-tempered pucker to his features, take charge of the goods the porters had brought. He was someone of importance, for he was wearing the George; but he was of careless habit, and the symbol of his rank dangled over a stained doublet of black velvet. A lady with powdered hair, looking almost doll-like in her exaggerated farthingale, spoke to him about the presents, and they whispered together for several moments. I got the impression that they were sharing some anxiety, but I was not aware that they had become interested in me until the gentleman plucked at my sleeve with officious fingers.

“Young man, did you come about these presents for Her Majesty?” he asked.

“No, my lord.” I judged he was of the peerage from his possession of the George.

“You came in with the porters,” he grumbled. “And I can tell you’re a sailor. Come now, you’re just back from the East.”

“I’m just back from sea, my lord.”

The lady, who had come up behind him, said: “It’s worth trying, Gerald. Her Majesty is finding things very dull this evening.”

This seemed to increase his irritability. “It’s always the way! Keeping a pack of women amused who haven’t a thought in their heads beyond—” He broke off and studied me with angry intentness. Finally he made up his mind and addressed me again in tones of brisk authority. “I don’t know why you deny your connection with the Company. What would you be doing here otherwise? I shall take you to Her Majesty, young man. It may cheer her up to hear some stories of adventure in the East.”

I realized then how foolish I had been in coming here. “My lord,” I protested, “I must crave your indulgence. I’m a plain sailor. I—”

“You’re of gentle blood.” He waved my objections aside. “I’ll risk it. Come with me, young man.”

“But, sir—”

“You don’t understand. It’s a command.”

I should not have stood on ceremony. I should have left there and then; but something inside me was urging that I see this through. What the impulse was, I have never been able to figure out. I hoped to see Katie, of course; but, great as the pleasure might be from that, it was hardly in proportion to the risk I was taking. Whatever the reason, it kept me on his heels until I found myself at one end of a long and lofty apartment. There was a hush about it which warned me that I stood in the presence of royalty. I saw that a bevy of women were clustered about a high-backed chair in which the Queen was sitting. There was no backing out now. I followed my guide down the long stretch of floor, our heels making an unseemly din on the marble. I was dimly aware that we passed a long series of tapestries which told some story from the Bible.

“May it please Your Majesty,” I heard my guide say, bowing so low that the George swung out a full foot in front of his chest, “this is a young sailor from Eastern waters. I thought Your Majesty might find some interest in the stories he has to tell. His name—speak up, sir, what is your name?”

“Roger Blease, Your Majesty,” I said, gulping with nervousness.

The Queen’s chair had been placed at an angle so she could enjoy the heat from a log flaming on the immense hearth. Now that I saw her at close range, I realized she was much handsomer than reports gave her credit for being. Her features were good, her hair, once flaxen, was still attractive, her eyes a warm and lively brown. She smiled at me encouragingly and said with the slightest suggestion of foreign accent:

“An excellent idea, my lord. It has been a tedious evening. Are you with the Gentlemen of the Levant, young sir?”

“No, Your Majesty.”

I had not dared look at the group of ladies, but now I gave a hurried glance about me. I saw Katie at once. She was sitting cross-legged on a cushion beside the Queen’s chair, which made me sure that she was in high favor. She was lovelier even than I had expected. I glanced away at once and let my eyes rove quickly over the rest of the attendants. Some of them were young and many were pretty; all were richly attired, with wide ruffs and flowers in their hair; but none of them, I said to myself, was capable of holding a candle to the newest and youngest member of the circle. From that moment I was always conscious of Katie’s eyes fixed on me with an expression both of amazement and alarm. She had given no sign of recognition.

“But you came in on the latest ship from the East, no doubt?”

“No, Your Majesty. I’ve just arrived from the south. But I’ve sailed in Oriental waters.”

The officer frowned at me and said in sulky tones: “He told me, Your Majesty, that he was from the East. He said it, most positively.”

The Queen smiled at me again and said: “It doesn’t matter, my lord. No doubt the young man has some stories to tell which will relieve our tedium.”

There was an awkward pause. Then something happened inside me which I can no more explain than the impulse which had brought me into this difficult situation. My mind cleared, and I was no longer conscious of either nervousness or fear. I knew that a rare opportunity had been thrown my way by chance. Everything I said here would be reported and talked about; in time it would reach all parts of the country.

“If I might have Your Majesty’s indulgence,” I said, “I would like to depart from the usual custom. There’s a story I could tell of a very brave man. But he wasn’t a captain or a man of gentle blood. He was a common sailor.”

The Queen drew her wide skirts tightly about her ankles with a gesture which I learned later was characteristic of her. It permitted the tips of her shoes to show above the needlepoint footstool. “Proceed, then,” she said. “It will be a novelty. We’ve never heard stories of common sailors.”

“He was called Clim the Cod’s-head,” I said. It proved an easy story to tell. I began with the day we captured the *Santa Caterina*, being careful not to give myself away by the use of names. I told it without sparing a single detail of Clim’s share in the struggle. Everyone was listening, I could see. I stole another glance at Katie; she was sitting up straight now and watching me with wide-open eyes. Her Majesty followed the recital with as much attention as her ladies were giving, taking an occasional sip from a goblet of wine with a jeweled edge. Out of the corner of one eye, I saw that a curious activity was being carried on by a manservant in front of the blazing fire. Five bottles of wine were kept there in a row, and at regular intervals one was removed and a new one placed at the other end of the file. When the Queen made a gesture toward her goblet, one of the ladies would empty it and then see that it was filled from the first bottle. This puzzled me until I realized that it was done to make sure the wine she sipped was heated always of the right degree for her taste.

I went on with the saga of my unfortunate friend, telling of his involvement in Danny Boy O’Donnell’s tragic error, and of his lingering death in the Basket. When I reached the point where the rope was cut and

the cage fell into the sea, I was aware that most of the ladies, including Her Majesty, had tears in their eyes.

“Poor fellow!” said the Queen. “We were hoping to the very end of your story that something would happen to save him. He was a brave man, your—what was the name you gave him?”

“Clim the Cod’s-head, Your Majesty.”

She smiled and blew her nose on a pearl-edged handkerchief, “Clim the Cod’s-head,” she repeated, as though not quite sure of the meaning. “He should have been called Clim the Stout-heart. But now, perhaps, you have other stories to tell us. Something a shade more cheerful. We have had enough of tragedy for one evening.”

“Yes, Your Majesty, I might tell you of a sea battle in which I played a very modest part but which was won by the greatest bravery.” She nodded permission, and I began to describe our great victory off Cape Passer. Again I held back no detail, no matter how grim, telling of the battle as I had seen it myself, first from my porthole on the gun-deck and later from under the red swathe of the top-armings. I related everything: the death of poor Henry Oge and my finding of his powder-blackened head; the blowing up of the ship captured by Sleath with all on board; the horror of the conditions I found below; the masterly maneuver by which our ships were drawn into close formation; and, finally, of the glorious sunrise when we roused to find no enemy sail on the horizon. Although telling it from my own standpoint, I kept John Ward, unnamed, in the front of the picture at all times. I think I succeeded in making them see him as he was that day, a great leader and a gallant gentleman. I was sure that I had done so when the Queen said: “You are too modest, both on your own account and for these brave men you fought beside. You give us no names. Who was this daring young man who commanded your ships?”

“His name, Your Majesty, was John Ward.”

A spark passed through the company. The Queen straightened up in her chair with such suddenness that the footstool toppled over. It was serving the double purpose of foot-warmer, and the pan under the needlepoint rolled out of its frame, spilling the water on the floor. There was a rush of servants to repair the damage and bring another rest for the royal feet. By the time this was done, the shock of my announcement had spent its force.

“Well,” said Her Majesty, “you have given us a surprise. Are you telling us, young sir, that you belong to that lawless band who disregard their King’s commands?”

“I’ve served a year with John Ward, Your Majesty.”

"It's hard to believe." She turned to an elderly lady who sat on her right. "Susan, does this young man look like a pirate to you?"

"I'm no judge of such matters, Your Majesty. It's true he lacks the villainous aspect one usually expects in pirates."

Another voice chimed in with an opinion. "I can't imagine a pirate without a beard, Your Majesty." The Queen paid assiduous attention to her goblet while a discussion developed among the ladies. They talked me over as freely as though I were an inanimate object, but they were all kind enough to express the belief that I was too young and innocent in appearance to have been involved, except indirectly, in any proceedings which might be defined as piratical. Katie took no part in the debate.

"Ladies, you are probably right," said Her Majesty, when they were through. "But we remember clearly what happened once when we were a small girl at our father's court in Denmark. A band of pirates had been caught. They had been operating in the Baltic and had caused many complaints from the cities of the Hanseatic League. We saw them being led away after their trial, and one was a very young man with a gentle face and golden hair which fell over his shoulders. We went to the King and begged him to save the life of the young man. The King refused. He was a kindhearted man, but the band had been a thorn in his flesh for several years, and he said no exceptions could be made. We wept bitterly for hours about it. But"—her eye lighted on the series of tapestries; I saw now that they told the story of Esther and that the final one showed the execution—"they were all hanged, including the handsome young man, as high as the gallows of Haman!"

"Your Majesty," I asked, "may I say a word in my own defense?"

She nodded a somewhat unsteady head. "By all means. We remember too well what occurred that time to want—Proceed, young sir."

"Your Majesty, the winds and the seas have always been the heritage of the men of the north—the English, the Norse, the Danes. Now that we know the world is round—and Norsemen found the proof of that long before Columbus—we can be sure there are new continents and strange seas still to be explored. Must we let our ships rot in port because a Spanish king has drawn lines across the globe and decreed that no vessels but his own may venture into these new oceans? Are we to sit by while he monopolizes the trade of both East and West? Is it piracy to contest the right to sail the seas with the Spanish?"

A voice issued from somewhere in the group in frightened and perhaps involuntary agreement, "No, no!" I paused. The results of such outspoken

criticism of the royal policy might be serious, but I had set my feet in the furrow and might as well continue to the end.

“John Ward is warring on Spanish shipping because they war on ours. He keeps them so busy that now our merchantmen are coming through from the East again without interference. He is carrying on the work that Drake and Cavendish and Frobisher began. He’s not a pirate, Your Majesty; he’s a patriot; and his one aim is to make the land His Majesty rules over the greatest in the world.”

The Queen leaned forward and studied me with such intentness that I expected to hear her order me taken in charge. Instead she laughed. “You’re very bold, young sir. That’s to be expected, perhaps, and we don’t say we dislike it. It’s unfortunate His King’s Grace was not here to listen to your story.”

“Your Majesty, I think it’s fortunate for me he isn’t here.”

She laughed again. “Perhaps you’re right. The King has little liking for such troublesome subjects as your John Ward. We confess to some curiosity about the man. Is he as handsome as they say?”

“What has been said about him is no exaggeration.”

“We hear he has mistresses in every port.”

“I’m sure that can’t be true, Your Majesty. I know he’s a most chivalrous gentleman.”

“Then what of yourself? You must have seen many beautiful ladies on your travels. The women of the East are fascinating, are they not?”

“I didn’t find them so.”

“But you are in love, surely. All young men are in love.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. I’m in love with an English girl.”

I kept my eyes fixed on the row of tapestries, not daring to look in Katie’s direction. The Queen smiled at me approvingly.

“Was it to see this English girl that you returned?”

“That was one reason, Your Majesty.”

“But how does it happen that you’re here tonight?”

“I throw myself on Your Majesty’s indulgence. It was curiosity. I wanted to see the home of the Queen of England. My lord saw me and became convinced I had some concern with presents which had been delivered for Your Majesty.”

She smiled indulgently. “We have no quarrel with your curiosity, Sir Pirate. Many hundreds come here every day for the same reason.” She held a

jeweled hand to her mouth to stifle a yawn, and I felt the court officer tug at my arm. I bowed and began to back away.

“Accept our thanks for a most diverting evening,” said the Queen, rising with a careful arm on each side of her chair. She was still smiling, and I felt that, no matter what might happen to me, I could count on her support. “We were finding things very dull this evening. There was even some talk of filling in time by playing a child’s game that was a great favorite when we were young. It’s called ‘Rise, Pig, and Go,’ and it would have been a poor substitute for the stirring stories you’ve told us.”

“I’m happy to have been useful, Your Majesty.”

“You were very bold to come here with such stories. We hope His King’s Grace will be disposed to regard you with as much indulgence as we do. You have our permission to retire.” She laughed unsteadily. “Rise, Pirate, and go.”

## 31

IN THE ANTEROOM the court officer, who had been striding angrily ahead of me, turned about and said in vicious tones: “Bold indeed! Your presumption will get us all in trouble; perhaps even Her Majesty. Gog’s Nownes, what did you mean by it? If I’d known you were one of Ward’s men, I would have turned you over to the watch!”

I could tell that he wanted to do that now and was holding back because he was not safe in taking any action after the cordial reception I had received from the Queen. He muttered: “I hope it won’t be necessary to face you at a questioning before the Council. It will probably come to that. What a tight spot you’ve placed me in!”

He had no intention of being seen further in my company, so I crossed the dark quadrangle alone. This was most fortunate, for a voice said out of the darkness behind me, “If you please, sir, I have a message for you.”

I stopped. A servingmaid approached and dropped a hurried curtsy. “From Mistress Ladland, sir. She wants a word with you. Will you follow me, sir?”



She led me back to the wing overlooking the river. We entered a dark doorway at the extreme east end, and I found myself in a mean room with no fire and a tall screen cutting off one corner. It was used by the palace watchmen, I judged; a horn lantern was hanging on one end of the screen, and a pair of high boots, caked with mud, had been carelessly deposited under the table.

The servingmaid left, after lighting another candle, and in a few minutes Katie came breathlessly in. We stood and looked at each other for several moments without saying a word.

She had grown in the past year, in height as well as in beauty. I have made no serious effort to describe her before, fearing that in any such attempt I would run to superlatives; but now it must be done. I will give the necessary details first: Her brow was broad and white under her dark hair, so broad that it gave her face the shape of a heart; her eyes were wide-spaced and a deep gray; her nose was straight and of a pleasing lack of length (pleasing to me, as I don't like long noses, my own quite as little as Macherie's); her mouth was a perfect index always to the mood of the moment. Much more important than these particulars was the continual aliveness of her—the fact that her eyes never failed to sparkle, that her voice had a lilt, that she seemed always a little excited and delighted with life. Animation of this kind is so rare that it lifts up those who possess it; and it turned her sweetness and charm of feature into real beauty. There is something cold and detached about beauty of figure, and I hasten to report that Katie did not have it. In this particular she remained no more than pretty; pretty in every line, in every movement; the prettiness of youthful roundness, of dimpled elbow, of slender ankle. It was always a delight to watch her.

If I have not succeeded in giving as accurate a picture as a painter could achieve with his brushes, I am sure I have made it clear why all my share of coolness and detachment deserted me the instant I saw her.

"Roger," she said, "I was so proud of you! But I was frightened. You must go in a very few minutes."

"More than a few, surely."

"But you're in great danger. You shouldn't have come here. The Queen enjoyed the stories you told, and I'm sure she likes you. But the word you were here will get around so fast! I tremble to think what might happen! One of the ladies told me the King was very angry when he heard about the battle. He drank too much and had to be put to bed."

"Is he here?"

“No, of course not. He and the Queen keep separate courts. Didn’t you know? They see each other seldom. I’m glad of it because the King’s household isn’t a very nice one. If you should want to send me a message at any time, you can have it delivered at the east wicket. Address it on the outside to Elsie Windiyard, my maid. I can trust her. I heard Her Majesty whisper to one of the ladies, Roger, that she thought you handsome. I think so too. You’re so tall now; almost as tall as Captain Ward. You won’t stay in London, of course.”

“Yes, I must for a time. It’s the safest place I can find. I’m going into hiding.”

“Why did you come, Roger? I couldn’t believe my eyes when I looked up and saw you.” She noticed the small scar on my forehead. “Were you wounded? You didn’t tell us about that.”

“It wasn’t much. A splinter. But it hurt enough at the time. John’s neck was creased by a bullet, but it was slight too. We were lucky, both of us. Eight of the men from town were killed.”

There was a moment’s silence. “Captain Ward is well, then?”

“Yes. We talked about you a great deal. We got your letters at Tunis.”

“But you never wrote me.” Her tone was reproachful. “I got no letters at all. I was very hurt about it.”

“Then they must have been lost. I wrote you three letters.”

We were standing close together, and she was looking straight up into my eyes. “Roger,” she asked, “did you mean me?”

“When I said I was in love with an English girl? Of course I meant you. But I shouldn’t have said it; I was taking an unfair advantage.”

She looked puzzled. “An unfair advantage? I don’t understand.”

“John isn’t here. I wouldn’t have said it, but I knew you realized how—how I feel about you.”

She sighed. “I shouldn’t have asked. Things are different now.”

I made no comment on that, knowing only too well what she meant. “*You* are different, Katie,” I said. “You’re much lovelier even than when I went away. I shouldn’t say things like that either. It’s unfair to John.”

“It isn’t unfair to pay me compliments. Lots of men do that, if you want to know.”

“I was sure you would have plenty of admiration. Do you remember telling me that you would have suitors when you came to court?”

She looked up again and smiled. “I haven’t been—well, unnoticed exactly. Men do pay me compliments. I have one suitor.” She hastened to

add, as though compelled to be honest about it: “He isn’t a very exciting suitor. He’s a year younger than I am, and he doesn’t talk about anything but horses. He seems to think horses are the most interesting things in the world. Sometimes he talks about dogs. He sent me poetry once. It didn’t seem to me that it was very good poetry. He got someone to write it for him. I found out.”

“Are you happy here?”

She nodded in almost ecstatic agreement. “Oh, it’s wonderful! I’ve never been so happy. Her Majesty seems to like me. Sometimes she sends for me and talks for the longest time. She tells me about the days when she was a girl at her father’s court in Denmark, and sometimes about the awful life they had in Scotland. Witches were always trying to put spells on the King. Or at least he thought so; he’s terribly afraid of witches. When her children were born they were taken away from her and given to the wives of noblemen to raise. She never saw them for months at a time. She and the King quarreled about it. They hardly spoke for a year.”

“Then you’re fond of Her Majesty?”

“I love her, Roger. Didn’t you like her?”

I agreed enthusiastically on that point. “She was very kind to me just now. She must have been lovely once.”

“Beautiful! No one should believe the silly stories they tell about her. She likes wine but she never gets—what is that funny new word?”

“Topsy?”

“That’s what I meant. She never gets topsy, although people say she does. You’ve no idea how graceful she is and how well she can dance. There’s no one so wonderful as she is.”

“I’m glad you’re happy. I’m afraid I should go now. If you ever want to get in touch with me, you can send a note in care of Sir Sigismund Hill. But be careful about it. It mustn’t get out that he’s helping me. Be very sure of the messenger you use.” I paused. There was one matter that should be mentioned between us, but I hesitated to open it up. “Did you know my mother died?”

She had not known; that was clear, for she looked at me with instant and horrified compassion. “Mother writes me sometimes, but she never mentioned it. They haven’t been at Appleby Court, so perhaps they didn’t hear. Oh, Roger, I’m sorry! Your mother was so young. It’s hard to believe. When did it happen?”

“Eight weeks ago.”

“And that was why you returned?”

“It was another of the reasons.” After a moment’s hesitation, I went on. “You know what happened before, of course?”

She nodded unhappily. “I was so sorry about it! Roger, I don’t think Mother behaved very well. I didn’t speak to her for days afterward. I wanted her to go back and talk to your mother; but she wouldn’t. That’s what I meant when I said—” She left the sentence unfinished.

“That things were different?”

“Yes. Mother’s very hard. I’m afraid she hasn’t changed; that she still believes what she said.”

“Things are different in many ways. There’s John too.”

We had no chance to say anything more. Footsteps were heard coming down a stair behind the room. Katie looked frightened and motioned me urgently to leave. I whispered to her as she left the room on tiptoe: “I brought something for you, but it will have to wait.”

The maid was outside and led the way to the eastern postern. The watchman looked us over and grinned evilly. “It’s late for cosseting, my girl. How would ye like it, now, if I stuck to orders and refused to let him out?”

I slipped a coin in his hand as he swung back the iron-studded door. “She’s a lively ’un, my fine buck,” he whispered.

The street was clear, but I lost no time in getting away from the neighborhood. I dodged into dark corners whenever I heard sounds which suggested the approach of the watch. I had plenty to think about, but my mind never veered from the subject of Katie. I found myself dwelling lingeringly on the way she had looked up at me with her fine gray eyes, on the white roundness of her neck, on the sudden coming and going of the dimple (she had one only) in her right cheek. Although I had talked to her calmly enough, it had taken every ounce of resolution I possessed to keep from seizing her in my arms and telling her that nothing mattered in life but the hope that some day my devotion might be returned.

This was completely wrong and futile as well; I knew that well enough. Katie was in love with John. Even had things been different in that respect, the situation would still have been hopeless. Her parents would never consider me as a suitor for her hand. I was the cadet of a once-wealthy family, and I had no prospects. On top of everything there was the rift which had led to my mother’s death and to Lady Ladland’s unbending hostility.

I knew all this, but logical thought has no chance to survive in the face of youthful optimism. Something would happen to change everything; her parents would relent finally, she would come to prefer me after all; it was

unthinkable that things could end in any other way. By the time I reached the house with the blue lantern near Old Swan Stairs, I was no longer aware of the blackness of the streets. The white light of my hopes had cast a rosy glow even over the slums of London.

## 32

I HAD A WINDOW in the front of the house from which I could look over the river. The prospect was pleasant enough, but the rooms themselves were dingy, being immediately under the roof, and so small that I could go from one end to the other in ten strides. As Sir Sigismund had promised, there was a fine supply of books. As I glanced at the titles I realized that my term of confinement would have its compensations. There were several volumes of Hakluyt that I had never seen before, and I decided to begin on these. Now that I was safely back from sea, and not likely to leave dry land again, I had a consuming desire to read of other voyages.

My landlady seemed glad to have someone in the house, for she visited me twice during the morning on slender pretexts. Later she brought up my dinner herself, although there were two servants in the house, a middle-aged maid and a poor clod who answered to the name of Stevecon and whose activities were confined to the cellar and the high-fenced plot of ground at the rear. He was afflicted with the falling-sickness, I learned later, and Dame Witchie did not like him on the streets. It was a meal fit for a king, and she urged me to do my very best, at the same time jabbing with a parsimonious poker at the few bits of green wood in the fireplace. She was a study in contradictions, and I never did get to understand the workings of her mind.

Late in the afternoon she came up the stairs again with a singularly light step for one so generously endowed with flesh. She laid a parcel on my table. "From Sir Sigismund Hill," she said. He was an important figure in her eyes, quite clearly, and she was deeply curious about the parcel. A note had come with it which said nothing more than: "A payre of cards you may like to use. H."

"Playing cards," I said, watching to see what her reaction would be.

“Cards!” She drew in her lips primly. “I’m surprised at Sir Sigismund. I am indeed! Cards are the devil’s tools, Master Strange. What would the Reverend Humility Brown think if he knew I allowed playing cards to be brought into my house!” Her ample bosom heaved with indignation, but her breath was proof that she had found occasion during the day for frequent visits to her brandy stock. I wondered how the Reverend Humility Brown viewed such generous indulgence in strong liquor.

When she had gone I broke the seal of the parcel. The cards were of French make and very fine; not at all like our limp homemade kind. They were stiff and glossy, Beniere’s no less, with boldly printed figures in gay colors. I noted that the king of clubs, the only one of the four monarchs allowed a crown, was made in the likeness of the King of France; while the four vulgar and shifty-looking knaves were labeled with names of Kings of England.

There was a note immediately under the king of clubs, without a signature.

The hounds are out in full cry. If the fox is sensible, he will stay close to his lair. The Master of the Hunt is in a determined mood and swears to be in at the kill. N.M. is back and is said to be in high favor.

P.S. There is much talk around of a very foolhardy thing that happened last night. Have you taken leave of your senses completely?

I was disturbed by the reference to Macherie. If he became powerful at court, it would mean trouble for all of us. I remembered his vow to even the score with his fellow Free Rovers. I had put the weapons he needed for the purpose into his hands by my carelessness at Calais.

I was reminded continually during the next few days that it might devolve on me to take steps against him. My side window looked on the courtyard of a down-at-heels inn which had once catered to a better trade than the low city custom with which it had now to be content. No carriages stopped at its door; the mounting-post in front was used only by urchins playing leap-frog; and the mews at the rear had been converted to other use than the stabling of horses. It was easy to decide what that use was, for men in fine clothes went in and out at all hours of the day, and I could hear the clanging and rasping of steel and breathless cries of: “On Guard.”—“Ha, octave!”—“A neat riposte!”—“Faugh, flanconnade!”

If I ever dared to confront Sir Nevil Macherie with charges of ill-faith and theft, I must be prepared to enforce my complaint at the point of steel. Knowing nothing of swordsmanship, I decided that here was an unexpected opportunity to acquire some skill in the handling of the weapon with which gentlemen arbitrated their differences. If it had not been for the urgent note of warning from Sir Sigismund, I would have visited the converted stables at once. As it was, I waited until the third night. The place had not had any visitors for a matter of two hours, and only a dim light showed through the circular window above the entrance. I made my way downstairs cautiously, not wanting to arouse the curiosity of Dame Witchie. Her voice reached me, however, as I gained the front door.

“You’re going out, Master Strange? There’s a nip in the air at night now. Are you warmly dressed?”

She came down the hall, holding a candle above her head and carrying a handsome cloak over her other arm. She had brought it for me to wear, I concluded; but some inner sense of caution held her back from offering me its use. Instead she cautioned me to make my walk a brief one and to keep myself warm by moving briskly. I promised to obey both injunctions.

When I put my head into the fencing school, I thought at first it was deserted. It was lighted by a single lantern hanging on the wall, and my feet resounded as hollowly on the paved floor as though I had entered a church. My eyes becoming accustomed to the dim light, I saw a man sitting behind a table at the far end, with his head hunched down over a bowl of food. He appeared enormous, and he was eating with a great appetite.

“What do you want?” he demanded truculently.

I walked over to the table. “I’ve urgent need for some degree of skill with the sword,” I said.

His appearance was not reassuring. Under a thatch of tousled hair, he had a set of rough-hewn features, contorted for my benefit into a heavy scowl. He said scornfully: “I’m the best swordsman in the world, but what could I hope to make out of the likes of you?”

“My money will be good, at any rate.”

He got to his feet grumblingly, and I was amazed at the size of him. He was well over six feet, and his stomach was as round as a washtub. He must have weighed well over twenty stone. Seizing my arm, he flexed it roughly.

“Well, not bad,” he conceded. “You’re tall enough, though I’ve got three inches on you. About nineteen and a half? I thought so. As a matter of fact, I never make a mistake in the age, height, and weight of any man. Gentry, too. Why haven’t you done something in this line before?”

“I’ve been at sea. It’s a different kind of fighting there.”

“I knew it from the tan of your cheeks. Can you handle a pike?”

I admitted to some acquaintance with the use of a pike. He scowled and said he could take on three of me at that game. Once he had beaten a whole watch with nothing but a blunt morglay in his hands. The recollection seemed to put him into a better mood, for he asked me in an almost friendly tone why my need for instruction was so urgent.

“I expect to fight a duel.”

He snorted. A fine fist I would make of a duel! My antagonist would carve me to a cow’s thumb. He did not fancy having any pupil of his in a brangle where he would get daylight through him at the first pass. Suddenly he threw back his massive head and called in a high-pitched voice: “Dirk! Dirk, you lazy bastard, where are you?”

A skinny fellow with surprisingly long legs and arms came in from the rear. He had been indulging in a nap, for he blinked at the light and rubbed his lids with the back of one hand.

“Can we do anything with this one?” demanded the big man.

“We’ve had worse looking ’uns, Dom Bass,” answered the newcomer, looking me over as though I were a horse up for sale. “He’s got length to him. His legs has spring. I don’t care much for the set of his shoulders. He’s been a scholar.”

“He’s a rum-bob at this.”

“We all has to start once, Dom Bass.”

“Take him in hand, then.” The big man waved an arm carelessly and returned to his meal. Dirk proceeded to set up a target. Then he drew a line on the floor seven feet in front of it and handed me a sword with a blunted point.

Under his instructions I stood on the line and practiced lunging at the center of the target. Dom Bass watched me over the rim of his bowl with a scornfully critical eye. My right foot had to touch the floor at the same time that the point touched the target; a fraction of a second off either way, and he would roar as though suffering actual pain. I was supposed also to strike the exact center and with no more force than the whisk of a fairy’s wing. If I failed either way, his reaction was immediate and bitter.

“You caudge-pawed monkey!” he would shout. “You’ve no feel for it. Get it through your head that skill with the sword is all a matter of physical precision. Everything must work together—your legs, your arm, your back,



your eye—and your brain if you have one. You'll never do; you've got about as much skill and touch as a suffolk-punch."

I did not enjoy being compared to a draught horse, but after each outburst Dirk would whisper: "Let it go, sir, he's the best fencing master in all Lunnon, and it's worth the abuse to have him." So I swallowed my pride and went on with the first lesson. The weapon I was using was heavy, and in a short time I began to feel the strain of the continual lunge and recover, lunge and recover. My arm felt like lead, my breath came in gasps. My mentor watched me with an unfeeling eye while he discoursed over his food on the art of fencing.

"They say the French and the Italians are the best swordsmen," he grumbled. "Let me tell you, I come from a country which has produced better men than any spindly Frenchman or the smartest Roman that ever lived. Portugal!" I was surprised, for he spoke with no trace of an accent. "You thought I was English, did you? That shows what twenty years in your miserable fogs can do to a man's throat! I've never seen such poor hands with a blade as your damned Englishmen. Attack, attack, slash and cut, blood and thunder! No finesse, no sense of balance or time. You stay with me, my fine rum-bob, and I'll make you the best fencer among Englishmen; I'll promise you that much. You'll learn to stand on guard, to play the other man like a lunging pout, to watch your chance. Not that I don't believe in attack at the right time. When I go into action, I blow them all in front of me."

I came in twice a day after that. Early each morning, before any of the other patrons put in an appearance, I would exercise on a wooden horse with sharp ears which caught me neatly if I failed to achieve enough height in my vaults. Dirk would see to it that I went over it at least a hundred times. The routine varied, however. The first time I was supposed to arrest all motion on landing, remaining poised on the tips of my toes. The next time I would spring to the right, the third to the left. He kept making the horse higher until finally it took all my strength and agility to get over it. Each morning also he set me to running around the room, twenty, thirty, then forty times; and he would bend over to watch me, shouting, "Faugh!" if I as much as touched a heel to the ground. This was "to put spring into me" and improve my wind. At regular intervals he would make me stand against the wall, touching the stone with every part of my body. "Head, shoulders, buttocks, thigh, shank, and heels," he would intone. "That'll teach ye to stand straight."

Dom Bass, whose name I found was Sebastian de Vagez, never appeared in the mornings. He liked to sleep late. I never did find out when poor Dirk was supposed to sleep; he was always hard at it until they closed at night

and it seemed that he was still going when I arrived in the mornings. He did everything—sweeping out the place, cooking the meals, fetching and carrying, and jumping like a jack-in-the-box whenever Dom Bass shouted from his easy chair, “Dirk, you lazy bastard!”

In the evenings I practiced at the target. Nothing else was given me for a full week, but Dirk kept moving the shield back an inch or two until finally it took a full spread to reach my mark. If I failed to recover in perfect order even then, the huge Portugall would roar at me with his favorite metaphor, that I had no more control over my miserable body than a waddling walking mort.

I was happy when they allowed me to attempt some of the preliminary steps to engagement at arms. I was taught the position of the guard, the advance, the retreat, the lunge. I began to think that I had some aptitude after all, for I was quicker on the recovery than Dirk. This became more apparent when we went on to parries, counter-parries, single ripostes, and the more elementary feints.

I smiled happily once when I had managed a rather neat invitation in tierce, which is an inside thrust delivered after a parry in quarte. Unfortunately Dom Bass observed my satisfaction. He got to his feet.

“I’ll take a hand in this myself,” he said, selecting his own pet weapon from the rack on the wall.

I was delighted. At last I was to engage a swordsman of recognized merit. I was so content with the progress I had been making that I felt reasonably sure of giving a good account of myself.

My satisfaction lasted no longer than a moment. Dom Bass attacked at once, and it was as though I stood in the teeth of a great blast from the north, a blistering, raging storm which nearly swept me off my feet, a head of flashing steel on every roaring gust. I had no more chance of defending myself against this breathtaking onslaught than King Canute had to stem the incoming tide. I stood with my sword in front of me like the rankest of beginners, which I was, knowing that he could have penetrated my guard with each stroke. Finally I felt a tug on my wrist and my sword left my hand. It described a slow circle in the air and landed on the floor an ignominious ten feet away.

Dom Bass gave vent to a high-pitched cackle and handed his blade to Dirk to be replaced in the rack. He sank back into his chair and called to Dirk to fetch a light for his pipe.

“That’ll teach you not to be so damned sure of yourself,” he said. After a few puffs on his pipe, he added: “You were getting too smug. Why, I could

take on three like you with my left arm and both eyes shut!”

My days were spent in reading. The weather had turned warm again, and I found it very irksome to stay indoors. Whenever I tired of my books, I would ensconce myself in the front window and watch the busy life of the city below. Once I saw a dismal procession pass our door, an apprentice boy tied on the back of a bony horse, his face to the tail. Armed men marched both front and rear to keep the crowds back. Dame Witchie told me later that he had been caught throwing paving stones through the windows of the Spanish Embassy on the night of the victory celebration, and that he was to be publicly whipped at Charing Cross. What a fine king we had, who would order a subject whipped to placate an arrogant, scheming Spaniard!

Dame Witchie came pattering up the stairs one day, holding her skirts high enough to show that her ankles had remained slim in spite of the heaviness of the rest of her. I had observed on other occasions that she took pride in the fact, but nothing was further from her thoughts now. I could see that she was thoroughly frightened.

The Death had broken out! The return of warm weather had started the trouble again in the slums, and a score of cases had been reported. Her chin twitched as she dilated on the danger. On no account must one of us put a foot outside. If it became necessary to let any fresh air in, we must first stuff our ears with rue and our nostrils with wormwood. Fortunately there was plenty of rosemary in the house; there wasn't anything surer than rosemary, and she would see that I had a full bowl of it to keep under my nose and beside my pillow at night. I had heard too many stories of what happened when the Plague clutched London with its deadly fingers, and the death carts began to rumble through the streets at night, to balk at any precautions. I assured her that I would go nowhere but to the academy next door, and that I would use the rue and wormwood as she prescribed.

I was very much surprised, therefore, when Sir Sigismund Hill paid us a visit that evening. His nostrils were free of wormwood, and he pooh-poohed the protestations of the widow over his rashness. It was nothing, he said. There was always the Death around, and always would be. It could not be helped, and it was as much a part of London as the Tower and Bow Bells. My landlady became a little easier in her mind then and even responded with a faintly coquettish smile when he pinched her cheek in dismissal.

“As a matter of fact, Roger,” he said, when we were alone, “this is all most fortunate. It's too late in the season for the Plague to get under way, but the King has gone already to Theobalds, and the whole court is following

pell-mell. His Majesty has no stomach for the Death. In truth, he's a great coward, as everyone knows. He can't bear the sight of a bare blade, and he nearly put out the eye of a courtier the other day when he was knighting Millard Lucas. Well, his officers will be too concerned with keeping free of the disease to pay any attention to locating a certain Roger Blease. You'll be perfectly safe as long as this lasts."

He had brought me a letter which had been delivered to him that morning by "a trim little slut with a nice brown eye"—I recognized Elsie Windiyard at once—and he was sure I would find it an antidote to the weariness of spirit I must be feeling after so long a confinement. I was eager to open it at once, but decided to wait until after his departure. I tucked the note into my doublet with as casual an air as I could manage.

"Macherie has not gone with the court. He's staying behind to attend to personal concerns which promise to improve his financial position considerably. Manasseh Griggs came to see me this morning and told me something in strict confidence which made my blood run cold." He paused. "Griggs is the wealthiest man in the Mistery of Feltmakers, and a solid, sober fellow. He helped back Macherie, advancing a large sum to fit out his ship. As your personal safety is concerned in the matter, Roger, I'm going to tell you the story; but you must give me your solemn promise that it won't be repeated."

I nodded, and he went on: "Macherie told Griggs that the King was desperately in need of funds—everyone knows that, of course—and that he, Macherie, was going to suggest that the royal treasury be filled by the simple expedient of levying fines on all who have invested with the Free Rovers."

I could hardly believe my ears. Could any man be guilty of such a breach of faith? Sir Sigismund waited to let the full ignominy of the plan strike home before proceeding: "Every nobleman in England, more or less, and a great many London merchants, have had a finger in the pie. It's a shrewd scheme. Macherie came out with it boldly, according to Griggs; no sly beating about the bush, but a straight statement of his villainous purpose. He let Griggs see the danger in which he stood."

"You mean that he threatened to inform on his own backer?"

"He made it quite clear that such was his intention. He was aware that Griggs hopes to be elected Lord Mayor of London and to become Sir Manasseh. Our worthy feltmaker could accept the terms he offered or see his chance for these high honors vanish. Well, the risk was too great; Griggs gave in, which means that he promised to wipe the transaction off the books.

Macherie now owns most of the ship, and no claim will be made for a share of the very handsome profits. The man is absolutely without honor!"

"Will he stop at that?"

Sir Sigismund shook his head in gloomy denial. "You can judge for yourself. This morning he paid a visit to Sir Bartlemy Ladland. I'm having him followed, and the report I received was that he stayed a matter of two hours. It was given out later that Sir Bartlemy was ill and had taken to his bed."

"You think, then, that he'll go the rounds?"

"It looks like it. Sir Bartlemy won't be the only other victim. Macherie has his chance to make himself a wealthy man, and he'll take advantage of it without a doubt."

My sense of guilt over the episode at Calais had been growing with each word said, but my companion did not agree when I pointed out that my lack of care was responsible for the situation. "The papers he stole have been useful to him in getting his own pardon, but that's all. You can be sure of this: all the time he was with the Free Rovers, the rogue kept his long ears open. I'll warrant he found out the names of every man who had invested with his fellow captains. He had this in mind from the first. I'm quite sure of that."

"What can be done?"

"Nothing at all at this stage." He regarded me with a serious frown. "I hope you realize that this makes it all the more necessary for you to keep under cover. If they get their hands on you, they'll squeeze out of you everything you know. Perhaps more than you know; the Iron Maiden is a persuasive questioner. No more visits to Denmark House, if you please. It was a bold stroke, I grant you. No one talked of anything else for days." The severity of his expression relaxed. "You did us a lot of good that time, Roger. But it won't bear repeating. There's too much at stake now."

He got to his feet and slipped his cloak over his shoulders. "There have been no letters from Ward," he said. "I wish we had some word. Not a day passes that I don't think about our poor Cristina."

Not an hour passed that I did not think of her and hope that she had been rescued. I begged him to let me know instantly when he received any reports from the south. He promised, and on his way to the door he paused to warn me against the coddling of Dame Witchie.

"She's a fine woman, and it wasn't so long ago that she was considered the best-looking burgher's wife in London. But she gets very jumbly, and

she'll salt you down in mithraditum and grease you with wormwood if you give her the chance."

Katie's letter was long and chatty and so fearfully and wonderfully original in point of spelling that it took me a long time to master its contents.

There had been, she informed me, a great disagreement between His Majesty and the Queen over my visit. The King had come to Denmark House, looking most stern and forbidding, and had rated his spouse roundly. Queen Anne had shown her usual spirit and had refused to accept his chiding. She had said that, if His King's Grace thought she would refuse to hear a stout tale of adventure told by a "pursable yung pirut," he misunderstood her character completely. The argument had been a long and stormy one, and all the ladies of the court had enjoyed it.

Still, the King was very angry, and I had better stay in hiding wherever I was, much as she would like to see me again. She would not have taken the risk of writing me except that she knew I ought to be warned of my great danger.

She then proceeded to deal with more personal matters. I had been better dressed than she had ever seen me. Brown was my color, and I ought to wear it always. I must have found a good tailor, for all the ladies had remarked on how well my hose had fitted. What present had I brought her? She knew she would have to wait, but she was consumed with curiosity about it. One of the other maids of honor was down with the measles, but no one was wasting any sympathy on her. She, Katie, had been to Ann Turner's shop on Oldcastle Street. The Mistress of the Sweet Coffers had gone with her. They had both worn dark-blue bongraces and velvet masks of a lighter blue, and they had found the shop fascinating. The brazen baggage was very pretty, and it was no wonder all the men of the court went there to buy presents for their wives—and other ladies. She had bought some fine silk and a string of beads that Mistress Ann said had come from the Americas. Did I know that love philters could be bought which would cause any man to fall into the deepest state of love?

Dere Rogger [the letter concluded], you half seldome ben out of my minde sith I hearde you speke up so welle and so boldlie. Her Majestie lerned that we come frum the same towne and she sed I must be the English girle you loved but I sed Noe. She did not belief me and she smiles nowinglie everie time she sees me. It is pleasunt to share a secrut with the Queene of England.

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING I received a note from Sir Sigismund which raised my spirits considerably. Macherie had not gone with the court to Theobalds, having been stricken with some malady; not the Death, unfortunately, but something sufficiently serious to keep him on his back for a time. The unpleasant circumstances we had been discussing would, therefore, progress no further until the amiable knight was on his feet again.

I was delighted with the news and decided to take advantage of it in spite of Sir Sigismund's warning. I was determined to see Chirp Bird, it having occurred to me that the new Upright Man was involved in this as much as we were. He might be in a position to put pressure on Macherie. At any rate, he should know what was happening; and I had thought of a way of seeing him without incurring the danger of a visit to Alsatia.

I asked Dame Witchie for directions to Oldcastle Street. It was evident at once that she disapproved of my interest in that neighborhood.

"It's but two squares away, more's the pity," she said. "I'm surprised at you for asking, Master Strange; and disappointed, I must say. It's not a proper street at all. It has shops for the sale of gauds and even worse things, charms and spells and blackest witchcraft. There are even places where ladies, so-called—" She checked herself hastily and concluded by saying that it was a wicked place and that no young gentleman could be seen there and retain his self-respect.

To placate her, I said that I had no purpose beyond a visit to the fencing school, and that I would take every precaution. I found the place deserted and Dom Bass in a disgruntled mood in consequence.

"The timid bantlings!" he said. "The peery-gutted mammals! A lousy beggar dies of the Spanish-pox and everyone says it must be the Death. So all my fine gentlemen run to the country!"

When I said that I was glad of it because he could now give me all of his time, he scowled and asked if I could make it worth his while. He demanded a *portague* each fortnight, and I agreed, although it was a heavy fee, nearly four pounds in English money. With that settled, and the equivalent of the first *portague* jingling in his pocket, he condescended to give me a lesson himself. I must have handled myself reasonably well, for he grumbled very

little and even declared at the end that I was coming along; that I might become expert enough in time, for an Englishman.

It was late in the afternoon when I set out to find my way to Oldcastle Street. I encountered very few people. The fear of the Plague had become general, apparently; for those I met were scurrying along with furtive haste and all of them gave me a wide berth. For a penny in hand, a ragged urchin escorted me to the street and identified the house for me. It was quite tiny and wedged in between two of much greater height.

It was Ann Turner herself who answered my rap. Her eyes opened wide when she recognized me, and she took me by the wrist and almost dragged me across the threshold without opening the door any wider.

“Roger!” she said. “You shouldn’t be out on the streets in daylight. Did anyone see you?”

“No one recognized me, at any rate.”

We were standing in a narrow hall. She took my arm and squeezed it tightly. “I’m glad to see you, even if you have become a dangerous character. But I don’t want them to catch you. If you ever do me the honor of another visit, you must make it at night.”

We entered a large room which managed to be cheerful and bright in spite of the small share of daylight permitted by its one window. This was due to the bright yellow of its walls and ceiling and the white tile of the fireplace. It was filled with articles of clothing, many of an embarrassingly intimate nature, hanging on frames or displayed under sheets of glass. Ann waved her hand lightly about the room.

“I’m doing quite well,” she said. “So well that I’m proud to have you see.”

I was amazed at the costliness of everything displayed there. I saw handsome ruffs with loops of pearls on the edges; superb cloaks of plush (“Fifty pounds for that one, my Roger,” she said, when my eye lighted on one very fine specimen); ruffled buntlings; gloves embroidered in gold thread; dainty shoes with the tops turned back to show the fineness of the satin linings. It was clear her customers were people of wealth.

“All the ladies of the court come to me.” She had kept hold of my arm, and now she twined her fingers in mine. “Fanny Howard runs in and out all the time. She’s the Countess of Essex, you know; though I doubt if my Lord of Essex is sure of it yet. Oh, I’m quite the rage. It’s Mistress Ann this and Mistress Ann that. Some of the gentlemen visit me too, and I always ask them higher prices.” She tilted her head back to look up at me. “Katie Ladland has been here. She’s prettier than ever, I thought; but I don’t need to



tell you that. She talked of you and John Ward, but I didn't say I knew either of you."

"I saw Katie one night at court."

"I heard all about it. You were very brave to do it, Roger. I was proud of you." She came right back to her own concerns. "Would you like to know how I managed to get such a fine trade? I wrote to Fanny Howard and said I wanted to show her some things I had for sale. When I went to see her I was wearing a yellow ruff. You see, I've found a starch which makes linen yellow, and I don't mind saying it's very effective. She noticed it at once, and I explained how it was done. Nothing would suit her but she must know the recipe, and I agreed to show her laundress. When the laundress came, the mistress was with her, as I had expected she would be. She fell in love with my shop, oh-ing, and ah-ing about everything I had. I gave her some things, so of course she came back. Soon all the ladies were coming too. It was lucky for me, wasn't it?"

"It was very clever of you, I think."

"Well, I did plan everything. Now I must show you the rest. You seem a little embarrassed at all these intimate little things. My other stocks won't bother you, I promise."

The apartment to which we repaired was quite different from the bright front room. It had no windows and was lighted by a cluster of candles in one corner. The walls were covered with heavy hangings of black velvet, and the only articles of furniture were a small table and two chairs. The table had a sable drape which swept the floor. When my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I noticed that this cover as well as the wall hangings were marked with curious insignia. The place smacked of magic. Temperance Handy had always scoffed at such things, but I am free to confess that I did not feel entirely comfortable.

"You look quite impressed." She indulged in a giggle. "It's good, isn't it? But it's all for effect. I bring only my very special patrons here, and it never fails to put them in the right mood. I went to see a very famous magician named Simon Forman. Have you heard of him? I copied some of his things. That parchment on the wall is a very powerful charm; or so he said. And look at that black scarf with all the white crosses. It means something quite sinister. All my patrons are impressed when they look at it. I have phials and philters and curious little bottles full of liquids in strange colors. Do you need anything of the kind, good sir? A charm to create the proper degree of passion in the heart of—shall we say, Katie Ladland?"

"No thanks," I answered hastily.

“Are you so sure of yourself, then? As a matter of fact, Roger, you’re quite right. My charms wouldn’t advance your cause, if you wanted it advanced. I sell my ladies and gentlemen nothing more potent than scented water with a little *hickery-pickery* to give it a taste. But don’t ever tell. I don’t want my trade spoiled.”

She left the room and returned with two goblets filled with an amber-colored wine. “This at any rate is real, and I can recommend it as likely to have more effect on the senses than my silly charms,” she said, seating herself in one chair and motioning me to the other. I had been getting nothing but good small beer at Dame Witchie’s, and so I found the wine most agreeable. Ann sipped hers and smiled at me over the top of the goblet. She had a curious way of smiling, crinkling up her brows as though prepared to frown instead; but the effect was pleasing.

“I’ve often thought it would be pleasant to share a glass of wine with Roger Blease,” she said. “Perhaps other things too. Now, don’t be alarmed. I’m actually very well behaved. I’m most prim and proper with my grand ladies and gentlemen. But now that you *have* paid me a visit, I want to make the most of it.”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t have come. It might get you in trouble if it became known I’d been here.”

She put down her goblet. “I’m not afraid of that. I’m glad to have you at any price; and I’m going to feel badly if you don’t come again. I can’t tell you how proud I am of you—and of John too. The night we heard of the victory, I wanted to go out on the streets with a torch and shout myself hoarse.” She filled my glass, giving me a pat on the arm as she handed it back. “Because I’ve been married, I’m sure you think I’m much older than you are. It’s just under a year, really. You must grow a beard now, Roger. I’ve a very handsome gold comb out there that I’ve been hoping to sell to some rich dandy. I’ll give it to you when you have a nice little black beard curling just under your chin.”

Her hands were always busy, gesturing lightly, fluttering over her goblet, or patting me on the hand. “Roger,” she said, “this is a great occasion for me. I always wanted to know nice people at home, but they never cared to know me. You represented everything I wanted then. Did you know I used to run to the window to watch you go down the street? Well, I did.” She sighed. “I didn’t have a very good time, and I’m afraid I was very foolish. I’m trying to make my life over now, and that’s the reason for all this. I’m going to make as much money as I can here so that I can live afterward as I’ve always wanted to. Not in London, of course, nor at home either. I’ll go

some place where I'm not known and where I can pretend I'm a lady. Perhaps they won't find me out."

"I always liked you, Ann."

"I thought you did." She sighed again. "Others did too, and they weren't as backward as you. Do you know how important that beast of a Chirp Bird has become?"

"I hear he's the new ruler of Alsatia. King Nicholas the First. He'll end up on the gallows."

She shuddered. "He comes here all the time. I have to make payments to him. If I sold nothing but silks to the ladies and fucus for their faces, I wouldn't have to deal with him. But having this"—she waved her hand to indicate the macabre trappings of the room—"puts me in a class with the soothsayers and magicians, and I have to pay for protection. It's called 'paying the pill.' I hate everything about it—but mostly I hate Chirp Bird. He makes it clear he wants payment in a different coinage—a kind that real ladies wouldn't mention." She made a wry face. "He will never collect from me that way. I would die first. I can't tell you how much I fear and hate him. Some day, I'm sure, he's going to do me a great injury."

"I've heard about paying the pill," I said. "There's another term that goes with it that you must know, 'fencing-cove.' Well, Chirp is our fencing-cove, and I have dealings with him because of that. I should have seen him before this, but I haven't dared show my face on the streets. It's too dangerous for me to go to Alsatia. I would be in his power there, and he wouldn't hesitate to turn me over. He could get a good price for me; his own immunity, perhaps."

She showed real concern at once. "You must never trust him, Roger. Why couldn't you meet him here? It would be the safest way."

I had hoped she would suggest this. "Are you sure you wouldn't mind? I don't want to involve you in my troubles."

"How could we arrange it?"

"I'm living a few squares away. Could you send me word when he arrives?"

"Of course." She got up and removed my empty goblet, her sleeve brushing across my cheek. She was using a most unusual perfume; not penetrating and sweet, but subtle and provocative and suggestive of the East. "Does it occur to you, however, that there's another way? You could come here often enough to be sure of seeing him when he pays his next visit. No, I'm a designing woman, Roger, so I know you would prefer it the other way. Don't think you must dissemble. I can read what you've been thinking. But

I'm not as bad as I make myself out to be. I want people to believe I know Father Forman's secrets. Spells and charms and incantations, even poisons. I can talk mysteriously about white arsenics and powder of diamonds and all other kinds of mystic drafts. It's good for my trade. But, Roger, I don't know a thing about it, not a thing. I don't believe in it at all, and that's the solemn truth." She drew her brows together again in that characteristic half-frown, half-smile. "I want you to tell the truth now. Will you come back only because you want to meet Chirp Bird?"

"Of course not."

"I know how you feel about Katie Ladland; or how you did. But I don't care; I'll take what I can get. You must have a great deal of time on your hands. Spare me a little of it. It would be perfectly safe to come here after dark."

As we walked toward the front rooms, arms linked tightly (Ann saw to that), she drew aside the hangings near the door and revealed a row of shelves covered with curious objects. I could not identify any of them, although it was clear they belonged to the practice of white magic in which my companion was dabbling. She picked up something with her free hand and held it up for my inspection. It was an ivory cube, inscribed in a strange script.

"The dread name!" she said in a deep whisper. Then she laughed. "It's all very silly, Roger. Father Forman is a clever old man, but he has no more power to do good or evil than my stupid maid Betsy."

I had heard strange stories of Simon Forman, and I was not at all sure she was right. Certainly Merlin and Michael Scott, and perhaps Roger Bacon, had possessed mysterious powers. I had read about the greatest magician of them all, Simon Magus, and the amazing things he had done at Samaria in the days of Christ.

"I'll send Betsy to you when the great man of Alsatia arrives next. It won't be long, my most honorable young friend."

"My name now is Richard Strange," I reminded her.

"Richard Strange. It suits you rather well. If you continue to give all your devotion to one lady, one you can't see, moreover, you're indeed well named. Constancy of that kind is a strange thing nowadays. Well, good-by, Richard Strange. I may work some magic on you before you come again." Her brows drew together without any suggestion of a smile. "When I think of Chirp Bird, I wish there was such a thing as black magic. I would practice some of it on him!"

MY SUMMONS CAME LATE in the afternoon of the second day. Dame Witchie handed a note to me, her face acid with disapproval, reproof in the rustle of her green and black kirtle. "A girl brought it," she said. "A forward, smirking minx. I'm wondering what kind of company you've been getting into, Master Strange."

"I've got to go out," I said, after reading the note hurriedly. Her mouth drew into such a stubborn line that I hastened to add: "It's a very important matter in which Sir Sigismund Hill is concerned. I'll return as soon as possible."

Ann Turner greeted me again at the door of the Oldcastle Street house. She was dressed in braided black with artificial yellow flowers at the point of her wide collar. She smiled at me, but I noticed that her cheeks had an unusually high color, and that her hand trembled as she touched mine.

"He's here, the beast!" she whispered. Then she said in normal tones: "This is indeed a surprise. Come in. There's an old friend of yours here."

Chirp was straddling the one chair in the bright showroom, looking like a large and ugly spider in the petals of a yellow rose. He was wearing his hat, a much taller beaver than mine, with a jeweled buckle and a cascade of rich plumes on one side. He scowled when he saw me.

"Well, the returned hero!" he exclaimed. His face had broadened since I had last seen him, and even his skimpy legs had a suggestion of bloat about them. "'Od's bowels, where have you been? I've had my whole sacklaw ging on the look for you."

"Is it necessary to explain that I've been in hiding? This is a lucky chance, Chirp. I've wanted to see you."

"You knew where to find me." He threw out his chest as he said it.

"Indeed yes!" exclaimed Ann. "Everyone should know where to find Chirp Bird. The great Chirp Bird!"

"The Upright Man of Alsatia," I added.

"Of London!" His eyes devoured mine with a savage triumph. "Have you heard what happened to Barnaby Cloud?"

The name did not mean anything to me at first. Then I remembered Barnaby Cloud as the unpleasant individual who had been manhandled at

the Draw the Pudding. He was the Upright Man of Wapping, and therefore the rival of Alsatia.

Chirp grinned at us slyly. "He can't be found. Two nights ago he had his late bite as usual. A conger eel in oil and a slice of cold beef on the side. He went out for some air, a scrippet on each side of him. They didn't come back. None of them." He snapped his fingers. "They vanished, just like that. Odd, wasn't it?"

"Very odd," I said.

There was a pause. "With Barnaby gone, I'll soon make myself the Upright Man of all London," declared Chirp. He crossed one leg over the other and regarded Ann with a gloating look. "I'll have this city in my fambles then. I'll have as much power as the King himself. What do ye think of that, Ann?"

We had been standing in front of him, as he was occupying the only chair in the room. Ann looked at me sideways as though to ask: Must we put up with him? Then she said: "What do I think about it? I think it's quite remarkable how important all of us have become. John and Roger and Chirp and Ann; and all from the one small town."

"And Joralemon Snode," I said. "We mustn't forget Jore."

"Nor Katie Ladland," said Chirp. "Maid of Honor to the Queen. That's something. We mustn't forget Katie." He spoke with a snicker, but there was no hint of amusement in his eyes. They were watchful and unfriendly. I noticed that he had ear muffs attached to his hat and a handkerchief knotted above his ruff; he had used them apparently to keep out the plaguy air of the streets.

"Katie's out of your reach now, my proud cock robin," he said. "Are you turning to Ann for consolation? Well, I'm giving you warning: I'll not have you cloy Ann away from me." He drew an enormous pipe from the leather pouch at his belt and filled it with tobacco, spilling careless shreds of it on the yellow carpet. "A light!" he demanded.

Ann glared. Nevertheless she walked slowly across the room to the small white fireplace in one corner. There was no fire in it, but the ashes were piled high at one side. I followed her and knelt down to brush the ash away.

"The filthy beast!" she whispered.

The juniper fire was glowing under the ashes. I lighted a spill from the smoldering wood and then packed the ashes back again; with proper care, a fire could be kept alive thus for weeks. Ann took the blazing spill from me and carried it to the Upright Man. He started the tobacco burning, puffing clouds of smoke from his mouth and his splayed nostrils with gusty

enjoyment. It was apparent from the odor that he had soaked the stuff in sacklees, a custom that all good smokers condemned. The charred spill dropped to the floor.

“Please!” exclaimed Ann tartly. “You’ll ruin the carpet.”

“What of it? I’ll buy you a dozen carpets. You know how generous I’d like to be where you’re concerned, my sweet Ann.”

She flashed him an angry look and left the room. Chirp squared around in his chair at once. His manner changed; the half-smirk he had worn while Ann was with us vanished completely.

“Now then, where have you been?” he demanded. “Why haven’t you come to see me? I’m beginning to wonder. Have you been coming here a lot? Trying your fine gentleman wiles on Ann?”

“Where I’ve been is no concern of yours,” I retorted. “We’ve plenty of matters to settle between us, so let’s take advantage of this chance and go into them now. We’ve no time to waste.”

“Big talk for a green country cank,” he said. His pale, lashless eyes studied me with open dislike. “Waste no more time, eh? I’m getting surer *you* haven’t been wasting any time. If I find I’m right—well, we’ll settle that between us later. Now you’ll tell me one thing: where’s your stalling ken?”

“That’s the one thing I won’t tell you. I don’t trust you, Chirp. You’d think nothing of turning me over if it suited your purpose.”

He grinned savagely. “That’s what you think, is it? Perhaps you’re right, my flash gentry-cove. Some day I may have the pleasure of looking in at you through the visitor’s door at the Clink. I’d like to see you strapped up in Little Ease.”

“What makes you think you’d be on the right side of the bars in that case?”

He indulged in another mirthless grin but made no rejoinder. Without further altercation we settled down to the various matters of business between us, which had to do for the most part with the disposal of the plunder from the *Santa Caterina*. A great deal of it had reached England: the finer tapestries, the paintings, the armor, the jewelry, even the gold crucifixes, for which there was a profitable clandestine demand. Very little money had been received from Alsatia from the sale.

“Do you expect looby miracles from me?” he demanded. “The King’s dipped his hand into every well-filled kick in the country. I’ll sell your shag-bag loot when things get better.”

“You’ve already sold everything,” I said. “We happen to know all about it. Why hasn’t our full percentage been paid over?”

“So, you think I’ve been cloying from you.” He took his pipe out of his mouth and thrust his head forward at a belligerent angle. “What if I say you’re right? What is there you can do, my gentle cock robin?”

“You’ve no idea how much valuable stuff was taken in after the capture of the *Santa Caterina*,” I said. “We took a great fortune off *La Solderina* alone. The best of it is being held at Marseilles. It will be disposed of there if it becomes evident that we can’t trust our agents in this country. You must make up your mind quickly. If you don’t make a full accounting for the first lot, you’ll have no chance at the greatest store of stuff ever thrown on the market. Think it over, Chirp. It doesn’t matter to us one way or the other.”

Indecision was written all over his greedy face. He had to decide between returning what was due us on the first lot and losing a future profit on all the rest. It was a difficult choice for him to reach, and I could see he was suffering from the effort to make up his mind. Finally he said in a grumbling voice, “I’ll think it over.” I knew then that he would give in, but that he did not want me to have the satisfaction of hearing him say so.

I changed the subject at once. His face went the color of dissolving tallow when I spoke of the danger we might all be in if Macherie told everything he knew. “That’s why I haven’t been to see you,” I said. “I was afraid you might use me to buy your own immunity.”

“My immunity!” He wet his lips with a nervous tongue. “What do you mean by that? What have I got to do with it?”

“That ought to be plain enough. The gentlemen and the rich merchants would get off with fines, but there would be need for a sharper example. Some of the little fellows would be hanged. The agents and the go-betweens probably; certainly the fencing-coves.”

Suspicion struggled with fear in his eyes. “Why are you telling me this?” he demanded.

“It’s only fair to warn you of the danger, but I’ve a selfish purpose as well. I know that I’d get short shrift myself, and I want to make sure that you realize the full risk there would be in turning me over to them. They might make you promises, Chirp, but they would hang you in the end. If they needed an excuse, they could look into the murders of Robin Humpery and Barnaby Cloud. There’s only one thing for you to do: lie low for the time being; say nothing and do nothing to attract attention to yourself. If I hang, there will be a rope ready for you also.”



He was beginning to shiver. "It's cold here," he muttered. Then he bawled out in sudden anger: "A fire, in God's name! This place is like a tomb."

The maid answered his demand, carrying in an armful of wood. She used the juniper fire to light it and then threw in a little nard. A pleasant odor filled the room.

Ann returned and looked at us curiously. "What's the matter, Chirp?" she asked. "Have you and Roger been quarreling?"

I took it on myself to answer. "We've been getting along famously. In fact, I think we've come to a complete understanding on several important points. Chirp is leaving now."

He got to his feet in an almost humble mood and proceeded to knot the handkerchief over his mouth. He hardly looked at her as he went out the door.

"Well! What did you do to our great man?"

"I frightened him with a picture of what might happen to him under certain circumstances. I'm inclined to think he'll leave me alone now."

"I've never seen him like this before. He even looked pale."

She insisted that I take the one chair and then perched herself on the arm. "I'm glad he's gone," she said. "He makes me feel creepy. He must have been terribly frightened to go away and leave you here."

"He has a purpose in that. By going first, he can have a watch set on me. There will be one of his men outside when I leave with orders to trail me home. Chirp's in a chastened mood, but he'll feel safer if he knows where he can put his hands on me."

She looked down at me anxiously. "Won't that put you in great danger?"

"No. I'll manage to give his man the slip."

This did not reassure her. "Supposing you don't?"

"I'll have to chance that."

"Roger," she said, "I won't let you go. The man may have orders to kill you. I know Chirp Bird. It's too dangerous to leave now."

"He'll have his orders to hang around until I do. There will be less danger in leaving now than if I wait until it's dark."

"Then you mustn't leave at all. I'll keep you here until you can go safely. I don't care how long it takes." Her hand had been resting lightly on my shoulder. It tightened perceptibly.

I hurried to point out the inadvisability of a long stay. "Chirp is jealous enough as it is. Do you want to stir him up further? No, it won't do. I'm not

going to endanger you, Ann. There's no telling what he might do to you."

"I don't care."

"But I do. I didn't come here to cause you trouble like this. Think what it might do to your reputation."

"I don't care what happens to my reputation." She laughed. "I don't care at all. I'm willing to have it smashed into a million pieces. And what do you think of that, Roger Blease?"

"I think it would ruin your trade. You have to be very careful."

"It might help my trade. But, either way, I'm not concerned about it. Let people talk as much as they like."

I was beginning to flounder. "Come, Ann. It's nice of you to be concerned about me this way. But we've got to be sensible. I'm not afraid of this fellow outside. I'm sure I can give him the slip."

"Must we be sensible?"

"Yes. The sooner I get away, the safer I'll be, now that Chirp knows I'm here."

"But, Roger, I'm *sure* Chirp has given orders to have you killed. You threatened him, didn't you? The streets are so narrow here. You'll be stabbed in the back before you get a square away. I know it; and I won't let you take the risk."

"But, Ann, I can't stay here indefinitely." I tried to speak in a lighter tone. "Do you want a permanent lodger? Your house is very small, too small to hide away anyone as big as I am. Think of the inconvenience of it for you."

She said softly: "It would be no inconvenience at all to keep you here. None at all, my Roger. It's true that my house is small but"—she began to run her cheek up and down against the edge of my ruff—"but my bed isn't."

I must have shown how startled I was, for after a moment she laughed again. "This is the very first time anyone has said that to you."

"No, not exactly."

"I'm sure it is. And you didn't like it, did you?"

I did not know what to say. I would have been less than human if I had not realized how tempting she was. She was so close that I could feel the softness of her shoulder and arm. The strange perfume she used was having an exciting effect on me. While I was struggling for words, she gave my shoulder a pat and slipped down from the arm of the chair.

"Don't look so worried, my dear," she said lightly. "I didn't mean it, of course. I like to make you blush. It's so rare to find a man today who can."

Your face went positively scarlet, Roger. You poor innocent!"

The situation was solved by the sound of a carriage stopping in the street and a loud rapping at the door. Ann went to the window and peered through a corner of the curtain. She turned back and frowned.

"It's Fanny Howard," she said. "I thought she had gone with the court. It must be something important to bring her back. I'll have to see her at once. It's a great nuisance, but the lovely Fanny is my chief sponsor." She ran back and laid an urgent hand on my arm. Her face was flushed. "And now you'll go and you won't come back. I know you, Roger. I may never see you again."

"I'll go. I intended to from the first. But I'll see you again after all these troubles blow over."

"No." She shook her head. "You won't come back. Not when you've thought it over. You're a regular Puritan at heart."

We faced each other silently for a moment. "What a silly sense of humor I have," she said. "I must cure myself of it. Good-by, Roger."

The back door of the house opened on an alleyway. It was getting quite dark already. I glanced carefully in both directions before venturing out; no one was in sight. I had reached the street into which it led and was congratulating myself on having eluded the watcher when I noticed a tall man emerge from the doorway of a corner house. He sauntered along in the direction I was taking.

I quickened my pace, keeping a watchful eye over my shoulder. He fell back a little. Perhaps his presence was a coincidence after all. I turned down another street, going in the opposite direction from Dame Witchie's house. I walked with considerable briskness and did not look back for several minutes. When I ventured another glance, the tall man was still in sight. He was striking as vigorous a stride as my own.

I knew now it was not a coincidence. There were few people out, and I confess that I did not like the look of things. Ann might be right about Chirp's intentions. It was not a pleasant speculation, and my hand sought the dagger at my belt. I was glad of the lessons I had been taking in self-defense.

When the streets I chose were empty, the man fell back, but he shortened the distance between us when there were people to pass. He was taking no chance on losing sight of me. I wondered what I could do to elude him. I did not dare enter any of the taverns we passed. Once in a particularly narrow thoroughfare I heard a voice from above intone the customary word of warning, "Ware, below!" and deliberately hurried my steps so that my

pursuer had to increase his gait also. I was delighted to see that he arrived just in time to receive the full benefit of the pail of slops emptied from above. He shook himself with an oath and came on.

A wind had sprung up. It whistled through the streets, carrying the first leaves of autumn with it. I don't know where they came from—there were no trees in sight; but they whirled by me like swifts on a warm summer night, twisting and swooping and vanishing over the tops of houses and in the darkness of lanes and enclosures. The sound added to my sense of fear. It was the right kind of night for violence.

My first chance to give him the slip came when I saw that people had gathered at an intersection to watch a street show. A torch flared on the top of a pole which had been set up beside a low platform. A saltimbanco was going through his tricks and giving a poor performance. I wedged into the crowd and watched him flutter an English flag in front of him, causing it to change suddenly into the red and yellow bars of Spain. The spectators did not respond to this as they should, and the juggler's work became more limp and discouraged as a result. He produced a rabbit from his hat, the commonest trick of all, then kept three knives in the air, finally adding a tin maser bowl for good measure.

I realized that the chance to escape had been thrown my way. The torch would have to be extinguished first, so I let myself sag against the back of the onlooker standing directly in front of me, emitting a groan at the same time. I could feel him cringe away from me while his voice gave vent to a startled cry, "The Death!" The cry was taken up instantaneously. People began to rush about blindly, crashing into each other and shouting in panic. I had calculated the distance carefully, and with one bound I reached the side of the stage. I tore up the pole and doused out the light on the ground. The confusion became worse, and a splintering sound told me that the platform had been upset. I took sanctuary in the porch of a house well in the rear where there was plenty of shadow in which to hide.

In a few minutes the turmoil had subsided completely, and the street had emptied. I looked out cautiously. Becoming sure that my man had gone on with the rest, I was preparing to make my way back along the route by which I had come when a disturbing sound reached me. It came, I decided, from the juggler, who was sitting among the ruins of his platform and his few poor bits of magic property.

He was crying, I found; a slow, hopeless show of grief over his misfortune; his head sunk between his shoulders and his body heaving with each sob. I knew that I should be on my way, but I also knew myself as the instrument of his bad luck. I stopped beside him.

“How much is your loss?” I asked.

He did not bother to look up. “I’m done for,” he muttered. “I may as well go and throw myself in the river. I’ll starve if I don’t.”

“Come, now. It can’t be as bad as that.”

He said with sudden passion: “I’ve taken in five sice in two days! Can I get together another outfit with that? It’s all I’ve got. And Ralph Roister-Doister was killed.”

“Who?”

“My rabbit. The best little fellow I’ve ever had. I was training him. He could sit up on his haunches and beg, and wiggle his ears when I told him to. He’d have been a draw for me in time, a real win-pincher.” He gulped miserably. “They trampled on him, my poor little Ralph. His back was broken.”

I handed him a sovereign. He took it mechanically and then, with a gasp of surprise, squinted down at it to make sure his sense of touch had not played him a trick. He exclaimed with rapture: “An Old Harry! St. Simon and the Turk, a real Old Harry!”

“Will it make up your loss?”

He licked one hand and slapped it down smartly on the palm of the other where the coin was cupped. “I’m set up again!” he cried. “Young gentleman, do you know how long it would take me to save a whole pound from the earnings of a miserable trade like mine? A lifetime, sir; and I mightn’t get to do it then. Some days I don’t take in more than I’ve done today, a few sice. I carry my traps on my back, and half the time when I reach a new town the harman-becks make me move on. Save? It can’t be done! I never expected to see the day when I’d have an Old Harry in my hand, and know it was all clear and my own.”

“Don’t drink it up, then.”

“God, sir, I won’t buy as much as a mug of hum-cap. I’ll get myself new props, that’s what I’ll do with it. I’ll learn the bagonet trick and the ‘vanishing hodman.’ Perhaps even the ‘seven cackling-cheats.’ I may get off the high-pad, after all.” He paused, and some of the enthusiasm oozed out of his voice. “If only they hadn’t killed Ralph Roister-Doister!”

“Good luck,” I said, starting on my way.

THE RIGOROUS TRAINING which I had been through under the scornful eye and blistering tongue of Dom Bass was having its effect. I had never felt better in my life. There was a new spring to my step, and my arms were hard and strong. My doublet pinched me over the shoulders, and I no longer had to adjust the points to make my hose fit me snugly. I was growing a beard, a thin stubble of black under my chin. It was a feeble start, I am afraid, although Dame Witchie praised it every morning when she brought up my breakfast. Manhood and a beard were synonymous terms with her.

The morning after my encounter with Chirp Bird, I was honored by a special lesson from Dom Bass himself. He stripped himself to the waist, exposing a mountainous and hairy stomach; and the attack he unleashed was as furious as on the first occasion when we crossed steel. I found to my delight that I could defend myself now against his devastating onslaught. Remembering the advice which he had barked at me so often from his comfortable chair on the side, I kept my sword well forward, refusing to be trapped into side parries or lunges and avoiding contact with his devious blade as much as possible.

“Not bad, not bad,” he said once, puffing a little from his exertions. “Keep your point down, Mooncalf! It must be lower than your hand. Always advance on a steady guard. Work straight ahead. Glide along my blade, but keep your own free. Give me one little opening, and I’ll poach you. One careless second, and I’ll gut you like a wriggling pout! And watch my eye, you stupid cank, watch my eye!”

He began to show me a variation of the *flanconnade*, a favorite stroke of his own. It consisted of seizing forcibly the feeble of your opponent’s blade, then dropping the point under his wrist and thrusting home suddenly and savagely with the movement of the octave. For the first time I was able to execute it, and I even succeeded in making him skip backward with the agility which so amazed me in a man of his gargantuan bulk.

“Dom Bass,” I said, disengaging and stepping a pace to the rear, “will you teach me that favorite trick of yours?”

I referred to his ability to disarm me any time he cared to. The request seemed to stagger him. He looked at me blankly for a moment and then

indulged in one of his short angry laughs.

“No one in the world knows that one but me,” he said. “I worked it out myself. I’ve never told anyone how to do it, not even Dirk. Why, Master Cock Robin, should I tell you how it’s done?”

“I told you at the start,” I answered, “that some day I might have to fight a duel. I think it will be soon now. The man I’m going to fight is older and stronger than I am, and I hear he’s a remarkably good swordsman.”

“The way to stay alive,” declared Dom Bass, “is not to fight anyone better than yourself. All I can give you is advice; and that’s it.”

“But I have to fight him. And it’s terribly important for me to win, Dom Bass. He was with John Ward, but now he’s gone over to the other side. Don Gondomar should pay him a pension because he’s proving himself the most active help to Spanish policy.”

I introduced this reference to Spain deliberately because the Portuguese hate that country even more than the English do. He pondered the point, frowning at me dubiously.

“What do you know about John Ward?” he demanded.

“That,” I said, “is my secret.”

He began to laugh. “And I never guessed it. You mealy-mouthed young sprat, I believe you’re this elusive boy pirate they’ve been looking for. Well, Roger Blease, if that’s who you are, I’ll have to consider your request after all. This puts a different face on it.” His laugh rose to a high-pitched cackle. “You’ve given them the slip nicely. But who would take you for a pirate, you bread-and-butter bantling?”

“You’re right. I’m Roger Blease.”

“And you’re a gentleman,” he said. “That ought to mean your word is worth something. Will you swear to keep it to yourself? To use it only when you need it; to save your own life or to give this Spanish agent the finishing stroke?” He glowered at me. “Can I depend on you? I would cut your miserable throat from ear to ear if you ever let anyone else know how it’s done!”

I assured him earnestly that he could depend on my discretion. He raised one hand in a gesture of reluctant consent and ordered me sharply to set myself on guard. For a brisk half-hour we went through the motions. I had to catch him off balance; that was the first essential and, with so adroit a master of the game, it was no simple task. The opportunity created, it was a matter of a quick stroke to drive his blade downward, then an equally fast reversal of the wrist, a twist with all the strength of the arm and—there it was! I had

to try it fifty times before I did everything exactly right and has the intense satisfaction of seeing a flash above my head as his sword spiraled upward.

“Remember this,” he said, recovering his blade in a bad humor, for it went against the grain with him to be caught, even though it was by a master stroke he had himself invented. “His arm must stiffen before it’s safe to try it. Wait for it. The stiffness will show if he gets the least bit off balance. I can make the chance myself; you’ll have to wait for it.”

I returned to my room in a jubilant frame of mind. I felt as safe as though a master magician had put the secret of life and death in my keeping. If the chance came to fight Macherie, I should be equal to it. I was sure that I had enough skill to stand up to him and keep him in play until the golden moment showed itself. Stevecorn was standing in the back hall, and I rumbled up his hair as I passed. I called a cheerful good morning to Dame Witchie, who was peering down over the balustrade. She thought I had been drinking, for I could feel her sharp black eyes on my back, vibrant with suspicion, as I climbed the top flight of stairs.

Late in the afternoon, as I drowsed over my books, I heard male voices in the lower hall. Dame Witchie’s excitement was evident in the treble note of her responses, so I knew it must be Sir Sigismund Hill. I was greatly surprised, however, to find that he had brought Archie Armstrong with him.

The jester wore a glum look, but he thumped me on the back and said: “Weel, if it isna’ the leetle pirutical rum-bob himsel’. The weel-o’-the-wisp that Jamie’s men ha’ been poorsuing wi’ sich seengular lack o’ success! The puckfeesting blower wa’ filled the fair ears o’ oor ain Queen wi’ tales o’ bludy fighting! It wur shrewdly done, Maister Pirut.”

Sir Sigismund winked at me cautiously. “I suppose you’re surprised at having guests, Roger. You need have no fear. Archie is the soul of discretion; and, as it happens, he finds himself at the moment in the same position as a great many other men who allowed themselves to take more than a casual interest in the Free Rovers.”

“Ay,” muttered the jester. “I’m in a sair pickle.”

“In other words,” said Sir Sigismund, “he risked a little siller with the other backers of John Ward.”

“Verra leetle!” protested Archie in agonized tones. “Verra leetle. Nae mair than a tooken o’ ma faith in the long loon.”

“And now the King has found out about it. Some ill-wisher filled the royal ears with the story.”

“It wur Macherie. The lee’ing, treacherous dog!”



"I suspect it was. Well, the upshot is that Archie at the moment is under a cloud. His Majesty has banished him from court and has ordered his pension stopped. I hope he'll be able to escape the attentions of Derrick."

This reference to the London hangman had no effect on Archie. He even managed a rather dismal imitation of a grin. "Ye maun hae yer leetle joke, Sir Seegismund," he said. "I'm no afeered o' Derrick. But I'd be in a fair dither if ye told me o' threats to ma purse."

"What did the King say when he banished you into outer darkness?"

Archie grinned again. "Ye've struck it perfectly. It wur lak Jee-hovah thrawing Satan oot frae Paradeese. King Tiddy wur in rare foorm. But, mark ma woords, he'll no be happy wi 'oot Airchie. He canna get along wi 'oot me."

"There's this to be said for His Majesty," pointed out Sir Sigismund. "He heard the news of your rash venture at the wrong time. You had been bearing down hard on him, Archie. Your tongue has a sharp edge; and I'm told you have been pointing out his faults in no friendly way. He heard of your association with John Ward at a moment when his pride had been touched on the raw. But perhaps you would like to hear some details of the fighting. It might take your mind off your troubles."

Archie assented to this and proceeded to shower me with questions. In the role of backer, he was particularly interested in the rewards of our victory. Had there been much siller in the hold of *La Solderina*? Had we found plenty of rich, yellow, clanking Spanish ribbin? Were there fine paintings and rich jewels? I told him that we had done very well indeed in this respect, and that those who had thrown in with John Ward would reap an abundant harvest. His spirits became better immediately. He listened to me avidly, sitting in a low chair which projected his square knees to a level with his chin, his eyes gleaming with interest.

"If Archie will excuse us now, I've something to tell you," said Sir Sigismund. He motioned me to follow him to the window. Archie said he would pick a little at a morsel of food while we talked, and I waved him cordially to the table where the remains of my dinner still stood. There was a round of mutton, a rich suet pudding speckled with raisins-of-the-sun, and a half-full tankard of ale. His eyes lighted up, and when I saw him attack the mutton, I wondered how Dame Witchie would regard such lusty picking.

"I've had a letter from Ward," said Sir Sigismund in a grave tone. "His news is good in one respect. The Dons have made no hostile move. They haven't interfered with any English merchant ships, and John is sure they've learned a lesson. The Free Rovers are breaking up. Some of the captains

have elected to try other fields, and some will risk a return to England. I don't like that part of it. They won't get the reception they hope for. It's the worst kind of folly because the King isn't in a forgiving mood."

Archie's sharp ears had caught what was said. He lowered the ale tankard long enough to remark: "They'll hangit in chains, the puir loons. Naething less will do frae Jamie. Is Waird coming back?"

Sir Sigismund shook his head. "He's remaining in Tunis. A number of them will stay with him. Enough of them, he thinks, to keep the Dons in their present chastened mood."

"He musna put hissel' in Jamie's poo'er," said Archie, wiping his lips with a doubled-up fist. "Gude Keeng Jamie! What a roaring, de'il-may-care auld sea-dog he is!"

"The rest of the news is not good," declared Hill. He seemed reluctant to go on. "Roger, the Señorita is dead. Ward said little about it; I'm sure he felt it too deeply to indulge in any details. They traced her to a town on the edge of the desert, but the rescue came too late. Ward didn't see her alive." He swallowed noisily. "I know how you must feel. She was a splendid little person; I had quite a soft spot in my heart for her myself. Well, it was in God's hands. Perhaps the poor child was spared much disappointment and suffering."

I could not say a word. I had been prepared for bad news, but it had never occurred to me that this could have happened. She had been so sure of the future, so confident of happiness. My hand touched the squared surface of the emerald ring which I carried in a pouch under my doublet. I had almost forgotten I had it. I wondered now if her parting with it had been the cause of her death. She had been carried off the day after she gave it to me. A picture of her as she had looked that last night came into my mind: her lovely face, lighted by the tenderness in her eyes, the eloquence of her expression as she spoke of the future, the soft mist of her dark hair. She was dead, and all that beauty and fineness of spirit lost!

Sir Sigismund added: "Ward wrote that he had sent you a letter also. But only the one came through."

"John must have suffered," was all I could manage to say.

"Yes. I'm afraid your friend Ward will have many occasions for feeling badly from now on." He shook his head gravely. "His affairs won't prosper. I don't like the look of things at all."

Archie was now eating his way through the pudding. As we had finished our talk, he began to speak of affairs at court, referring to the sharp things he had said to the King, with the purpose no doubt of justifying himself in our

eyes for his forthrightness. I found it hard to follow, not only because of the thick coating of his Lowland accent, but also on account of the nicknames with which he larded each sentence. My mind was so full of the tragic news I had heard that it took me a long time to get these names straightened out. His Majesty was King Tiddy; Master Carr, now Lord Rochester, was my Lord Gleek. I knew these were card-playing terms, but I could not understand their exact application. When he referred to the very lovely and voluptuous Countess of Essex as Madame Tup-tup, the reason was much easier to find. He spoke of these three so continuously that the names began to run through my head like a monotonous refrain: *Tup-tup, Tiddy and Gleek, Tup-tup, Tiddy and Gleek*. For a long time, that was all I made out of it.

My Lord Gleek, he explained finally, was feeling called upon to rule. Soon he would be Master of the Horse, and Secretary, and Treasurer. All offices in the kingdom would have to be rolled into one to create a post fit for the supreme talents of my Lord Gleek; and the long-legged loon had no more aptness for it than a two-year-old bairn. He had said this to King Tiddy, not once but many times. As for little Madame Tup-tup, always making sheep's-eyes at my Lord Gleek, and with a fine young husband of her own, what would she think if she knew that Towser (a new one, referring, I concluded, to Sir Thomas Overbury, Can's special crony and confidant) had written all those passionate notes which she received from Gleek and which made her little heart go pitty-pat? She must always be the white ewe, this lively Madame Tup-tup, but he was sure—and he had said it to the King—that a Cardinal's Hat on Turnbull Street was the proper sphere for *her* talents.

Just the other day he had said he asked King Tiddy what he proposed to do if the Dons sent another Armada against him. He had no ships ready, and he had outlawed all his best captains. Would he fight them with texts? Or would he send out my Lord Gleek with a fleet of bumboats to drive them back? He had told the King there was biblical sanction for turning the other cheek; but the trouble with his doughty Tiddy was that he made the proffer by bending, not turning.

His Majesty couldn't get enough of this ungodly game of cards called Maw. Time and again he had told him such worldliness in a ruler would be frowned on by the Great King in Heaven. Would we believe that he was too indolent to hold up the cards for himself? Archie must hold them for him; and whisper the right plays in his ear; and then throw the proper card on the table. But who collected the winnings? Not Archie; they were swept up and handed to my Lord Gleek. But he, Archie, had managed to get his revenge.

There had been one occasion when the stakes on the table were heavy, and both King Tiddy and my Lord Gleek were smacking their lips because the winning cards were in the King's hand. The cards were of French make; and he, Archie, had called attention to the fact that the knave was marked the King of England. They were wrong, these French cardmakers, he had remarked, for truly the King of England was less knave than fool. King Tiddy had thrown down his hand in a rage and so had failed to win the stakes. There had been quite a scene as a result.

"And he's surprised the King is angry with him," said Sir Sigismund. "However, I think it will blow over in time. For some curious reason, His Majesty will take more from this gentle critic in motley than from any other living soul, not excepting my Lord Rochester."

"Is there any news of Macherie?" I asked.

"He's showing his hand at last. He's been in to see me; in fact, I think he's making the rounds. He's very suave about it; but he makes himself abundantly clear. It's Dane-geld he has in mind. If they will do something for him, something in the nature of gold in hand or the deeds to a few tidy manor houses, he'll keep a discreet tongue in his head. Otherwise, he seems to think it will be impossible for him to retain his secrets any longer."

Archie had finished everything by this time and was disposed to go. He paused on his way to the door, however, to remark that paying Dane-geld was a very bad thing. Your money never came back in any form, but the Danes always did, clamoring for more. King Tiddy, who was as timid as a bowdled hen, tried to run the kingdom by paying Dane-geld; and he had become as a result little better than a vassal of Spain.

"There's to be a meeting of gentlemen in the North in a fortnight or so," said Sir Sigismund, rising to join his companion. "We may want you to go, Roger. It will depend on whether it seems safe for you to leave the city."

They left then, and I spent a long and cheerless evening pondering the tragic news they had brought.

I HAD OBSERVED that Dame Witchie never left the house, and that both of the servants followed her example; but I did not know until much later that they were acting on instructions from Sir Sigismund. He had told them that I was the stepson of a Catholic peer who wanted to be rid of me and was determined to send me to Spain; and that I, having no stomach for exile, was hiding from him. My supposed stepfather was very powerful, in spite of his faith, and the only chance I had was to keep out of his clutches. The story had had the desired effect, all three being deeply religious and anxious on that account to help me. This was fortunate; for, as it developed later, the authorities were sure I was still in the city and a thorough search was being made. If any of the neighbors had learned there was a new lodger in the house, it would have been searched promptly.

I gave up all outside visiting myself when I heard from Dirk that a deputation from Alsatia had appeared at the fencing academy. This made me sure that Chirp Bird was having a search made of the neighborhood, and that it was doubly necessary for me to remain in strict seclusion.

On the morning of the third day I had unexpected visitors. I could tell from Dame Witchie's face that something out of the ordinary had happened when she came to announce them.

"There are ladies to see you, Master Strange," she said. "One of them's a lady, and I think the other's her maid. I'm sure they're from the court."

It must be Katie. I wondered what had happened. Sir Sigismund would not have risked telling her where I was if the matter had not been urgent. In spite of my uncertainty, I went into the small back room where my bed was set up and found the present I had brought back for her.

I was so pleased with it that I had been looking forward eagerly to the time when I could place it in her hands. It was an ivory fan. When my eye had first lighted on it in a Marseilles shop, I had known at once that it was the perfect thing, and I had decided to get it in place of the leather purse I had brought from Tunis. The fan was ripped with ostrich plumes and elaborately inlaid with opals, a beautiful stone very little known in England. It was the finest thing I had ever seen. I showed it to my landlady. Her eyes opened wide. "Master Strange!" she exclaimed. "It's fit for a queen! I declare, I've never seen anything so wonderful."

Her enthusiasm delighted me. "Look at this," I said. I spread the fan open, revealing a tiny mirror set in the handle. This was a clever device; the holder could inspect her face without anyone knowing or watch over her shoulder during a dance. The French merchant had made much of both points.

"I declare," said my landlady. "I really don't see how they can make such things. Is some lucky lady to get it, Master Strange?"

I could hardly wait now to see Katie's face when I placed the fan in her hands. I slipped it eagerly under my doublet and followed Dame Witchie to the ground floor. She stopped in the door and said in flurried tones, "Master Strange, my lady."

Katie was wearing a complexion mask. She removed it and said to her companion, "Run along, Elsie. The good woman will show you where." When the maid had disappeared in the wake of Dame Witchie's voluminous skirts, she said to me, "So, I've found you at last!"

"I can't tell you how happy I am to see you."

"You're a regular man of mystery, Roger. Why haven't you written me? I've waited and waited."

"I didn't write because I was afraid it might get into the wrong hands." She was so lovely in her blue tammil wrap and white ruff that I found it hard to keep my thoughts in order. "I didn't want to get you into any trouble."

"I've been worried about you. And I've had so much to tell you."

"I'm surprised Sir Sigismund let you come."

"Oh, I didn't go to him. I found out where you were all by myself." She looked up at me and smiled. "Well, I suppose I might as well confess. I was at Mistress Ann Turner's, and she told me."

"But, Katie," I said. "How does it happen you're in the city? Isn't the court at Theobalds still?"

"Yes." Her mood sobered. "Father wrote me that he wanted to see me. He seemed very much concerned about something, so I asked Her Majesty for leave to come. She didn't want me to. She was afraid I might get the Plague."

"It's pretty well over now. There were only a few cases this time."

"She was very much disturbed about it. Roger, she's *so* good to me. I'm beginning to love her very much."

She motioned me to follow her to the front of the room and then said in lowered tones: "There's something going on that I don't understand. Is Father in any kind of trouble?"

"Of course not. Sir Sigismund told me he hadn't been feeling well. That's all there is to it, I'm sure."

"No. It's not that. It's something much more serious. I'm sure it has something to do with Captain Ward."

"You mustn't worry, Katie. I'm certain there's nothing wrong."

“Roger.” There was a hint of impatience in her voice. “You must tell me what you know. I *won’t* be put off. There was something in Father’s note—Roger, the King knows that many gentlemen have been helping the Rovers. The court talks of nothing else. Captain Ward was at our place twice before he sailed. How could that happen if Father hadn’t been concerned with him?”

“If there’s anything to tell, your father will have to tell you himself.”

“Then it’s true.”

“I haven’t said so. Even if it were true, there would be no cause for worry. So many prominent men are concerned that the King wouldn’t dare do anything about it.”

She was very close to tears. “You don’t know the King, or you wouldn’t say that. He swears he’s going to stop all this trafficking in piracy. He even sent Archie away.”

“I know. Archie was here one evening. Katie, the whole country is against the King. The Queen differs with him, and Prince Henry and the Princess Elizabeth. You ought to hear the talk in the city.”

“Nothing can make the King change his mind. Roger, I *know*. I’m afraid to think what might happen if Father’s involved.” She dabbed at her eyes with a small handkerchief. “Sir Nevil Macherie has been back at court the last few days. I’m sure he knows something about it. He tries to talk to me and follows me about. Roger, I’m afraid of him. I don’t know why.”

“Macherie will be taken care of when the time comes,” I declared.

“It’s all very well to say that. But I’m sure he knows about Father and Captain Ward. If he hasn’t told the King already, he intends to.”

“Macherie is a liar and a thief!” I declared. “I’m going to call him to account myself.”

This added to her fears at once. “It’s dangerous to even say such things. They say at court he’s fought a great many duels. What chance would you have against him?”

“Do you think I’m too young? I’m nearly twenty, you know. Please don’t think I’m boasting when I tell you I’m not afraid of Macherie at all. I’ve been taking lessons from the best fencer in the world. You ought to see him, Katie. He’s an enormous fellow. It’s like standing up to Hercules when you cross swords with him. He’s been teaching me everything he knows. I’ll be able to take care of Macherie when the time comes.”

“Haven’t we enough trouble as it is?” She was weeping now. “He would kill you. I know he would. He’s a cruel man; I can see it in his eyes. I don’t

want you killed, Roger. Please, you must promise to give up this foolish idea. I won't go until you do."

"I can't promise that. You see, I'm responsible for his being in a position to make trouble. Your father will probably tell you why. If there's any way to make amends, I must take it."

She turned away to repair the effect of her tears. She looked so small and helpless that I experienced a still more bitter sense of regret over my carelessness that day at Calais, and I made a mental vow that no risk would be too great to take.

"Then there's nothing more to be said now." She turned back and smiled. "Perhaps we're taking too gloomy a view of things."

"I'm sure we are."

"It may have nothing to do with this at all. Father may have something entirely different to tell me. Perhaps"—she smiled again—"he's going to say that he's arranging a marriage for me. He and Mother have been talking about it, you know."

There was a pause at that. "I'm afraid I prefer it the other way," I said finally.

She had regained her usual animation. "I'm of marriageable age. Do you want me to be left on the shelf? And perhaps you'll condescend to tell me what you've been doing all this time. Besides paying visits to Mistress Ann Turner."

"I've been right here. Reading all manner of books and catching up on some studies I had neglected. I'm working hard at Spanish again, and I'm even trying my hand at Arabic."

"And do you expect me to believe that, sir? It was a different report I had from Mistress Ann."

"I've seen her twice only. I went there for a special reason. I wanted to see Chirp Bird. Do you remember him? He came from home, you know."

Her brows drew into a frown of concentration. "Wasn't he the bad boy of the town?"

"Yes. And he hasn't changed. He's the Upright Man of Alsatia now."

"Is he *that* Chirp Bird!" Katie showed her astonishment at the news. "I hadn't any idea. There's been a lot of talk about him at court. Everyone says the King should do something about him."

"We had some business to talk over. I heard he was paying regular visits to her, so I arranged to meet him there."



She nodded her head and smiled. "I knew it all the time. At least, I knew you went there to meet someone. She didn't tell me who it was. Is your friend Chirp Bird in love with her?"

"I wouldn't besmirch such a beautiful word by applying it to the feelings of Chirp Bird."

"Roger." She hesitated as though uncertain how to express what she had in mind. "It's wonderful having a post at court. I like the Queen and it's a great honor and privilege to serve her. But—there are things about it I don't like. I'm sure many of the men are no better than your Chirp Bird. I hear the most dreadful stories of things that go on."

"I'm sure all of them are true. I hear stories too. From Archie Armstrong."

"Oh, Archie." She smiled. "He's very funny, isn't he? I like him. He annoys the King by holding his nose when he comes into the royal reception room. His Majesty says that some day he will order the hangman to cut his nose off. I'm afraid I must go now. The carriage is waiting for us at Mistress Turner's shop. It's been so nice seeing you again. You promised me to be very careful, didn't you, Roger?"

"No," I answered. "I made no promises. But I do promise now that I'll be as discreet as possible. Will you make me one in return? That you won't worry?"

"I'll try not to." She sighed. "I seem to be all mixed up in my mind. I can't be sure of things any more. Everything has changed. I can't even feel sure about my father."

"You're sure of one thing. That you love John Ward."

She gave me a quick and searching look. "Do I? Did he tell you? Or are you just guessing? Why are you so sure I love anyone? I'll have you remember, Roger Blease, that I belong to Her Majesty's household. I meet all the best men in the country. Some of them may fall in love with me; you said once yourself that they would. I'm going to wait for a man who is very handsome and rich and who has a title—a great title, mind you—and who loves me very much. I'm going to be sensible, you see." She gave another sigh. "I'm not sure I mean that; and yet I'm not at all certain that I don't. I tell you, I'm all mixed up inside. As for you, sir, I advise you to stop your visits to Mistress Turner. She's very attractive. Much too attractive, I think. Let your friend the Upright Man have a clear field."

"That's a promise I *can* make." I fumbled under my doublet. "May I give you the present I brought back?"

“Yes, please! I’ve been so curious about it. What do pirates bring back to their—to friends at home? A charm from the East, perhaps?”

I produced the fan. She held out a hand for it and said: “Roger, it’s beautiful. How sweet of you to bring me such a lovely gift.”

Her voice had the right note of enthusiasm, but I was not deceived. I was watching her eyes; and I realized, with a sinking of the heart, that she did not like it. I was so disappointed that I could say nothing. What was wrong with it? Was it gaudy? I looked at the inlaid edges of the thing, and somehow it did not look nearly as fine as I had thought it. It was gaudy; I could see that now, and I wondered why I had fallen into such a display of poor taste. To cover up my embarrassment, I demonstrated the working of the mirror.

That pleased her, for she laughed with a spontaneous note which could not be misread. She opened and reopened the fan and studied her face in the glass. “That’s very clever,” she said. “How their eyes will open when I carry it at court! I’m sure no one has a fan with a mirror like that.” She began to wave it languidly in imitation of the airs of a lady of fashion. Sensing perhaps that I was disappointed, she hurried into more praise of it. “It’s beautiful, Roger.”

I loved her more than ever for the effort she was making to appear happy over it. I wanted to take her in my arms and tell her how sorry I was that I had been taken in by a tawdry article because a high price had been set on it that I would try hard to acquire better taste. All I could manage to say was that, if she didn’t really like it, I would give her instead a leather purse I had picked up in Tunis. It was very old and quite handsome in its way.

“Give up my lovely fan for an old purse! I wouldn’t think of it. But I suppose now you’ll give the purse to some other girl. To Ann Turner, perhaps?”

I shook my head. “I’ll save it for you. I’ll give it to you as a wedding present. When you marry that rich man with the big title.”

“Then I may have to wait a long time for it. There’s no telling how long it will be before he appears. Perhaps never, Roger, and I’ll have to go on the shelf. Well, I really must run on. Will you summon my maid for me?”

When I returned to the room, she placed an urgent hand on my arm and looked up at me with eyes full of almost tragic alarm. “There’s real trouble ahead for all of us,” she whispered. “I *know*. I didn’t tell you at first because it seemed that you had enough to worry about as it was. A meeting was held at Theobalds yesterday. All the King’s councillors were there, and they had long faces. I heard they were discussing naval matters and piracy. And,

Roger, one of the captains has been caught! He landed at Bristol, and the Warden put him in prison and seized the ship.”

“Did you hear his name?”

She shook her head. “I heard it, but I can’t remember it now. He’s to be brought to London for trial. They say the King is determined to have him hanged. And any others he can get his hands on. You must be very careful, my dear.”

## 37

I DID NOT LEAVE my room for three days. It was a trying ordeal, for I knew that things were happening outside which concerned me vitally, and also everyone in whom I had an interest. No word came from Katie. Had she found, then, that the summons from Sir Bartlemy had no bearing on the situation in which we were all involved? This was too much to hope for, and yet the lack of any message gave me some ground for relief. I wondered which one of the Rover captains had been taken. Harris was a Bristol man, but he was a shrewd fellow and not likely to be caught in a trap so easily. I hoped it was not Harris; he was able and brave, and the time was coming when the country would need men of his stamp.

The time passed slowly. I dared not show myself openly, but when my eyes grew weary of reading I would sit well back in the front window and stare out over the roofs of London. Beneath me the old doctor’s lantern swung and creaked on its rusty bar. A small iron shield covered the joint, and under its peeling blue paint I could see it was stamped with the Caduceus, the serpent-twined wand of Mercury; I wondered if this meant that medical aid moved on winged feet, and laughed at its inaptness. Across the street the houses were much lower, and I was able to see above them as far as the river.

It was not an inspiring view. London is speckled with slums, and the district immediately south of us was one of the very poorest regions of all. The houses were small and dirty, of crazy design for the most part, with latticed upper stories leaning out over the streets and closing off the sky. They made me think of drunken men with dropsical stomachs teetering in

unsteady files. The roofs broke away from convention in fantastic angles which had no sense or reason; and under them, I knew, unhappy people lived in filthy squalor.

There was one church in view, its austere spire standing up high over the brawling roofs, as completely and coldly detached from this display of architectural horror as the faith it served was from the dreary problems of common people. I caught glimpses of chains at the intersections which could be drawn across the streets in case of emergency, to confine the teeming denizens of dinginess to their own particular share of this inferno of darkness and disease. The streets themselves were unbelievably narrow, but not too narrow to make place for pillories and harmans at the corners: punishment would be futile if not carried out in full view of everyone.

The people rose at four o'clock in the morning. At this hour, with much clack of canting tongues and clatter of pails, the men poured out to their work, their faces sullen under cloth caps, their bodies huddled into greasy jerkins. There seemed no limit to the capacity of the tatterdemalion houses, for the workers kept emptying out like ants from a hill. The district boiled and fought and raged with coarse invective all day, but silence closed down quickly at night; perhaps because early bedding was a necessity; more likely, I thought, it was a deep-placed memory of curfew which drove them indoors as soon as the tiny shafts of light, percolating through the converging roofs, turned dark and the piping winds beat about the eaves with threat of cold and rain.

Many hours I spent watching the sick life of the slums; and I was no longer sure that the world had attained the flavor of perfection. Something would have to be done to give relief to these children of gloom before we achieved an earthly millennium.

Things had been moving while I watched and fumed in idleness. On the morning of the third day a note was handed in to me from Ann Turner. I knew who the sender was before I broke the seal, for the paper carried a trace of her curious perfume. It was a brief note.

MY DERE ROGER [she was not much of a scholar either]:

I have had a customere todaye and am likelie to sell menney artickles for an earlie wiving. I must not give the name of the faire bride but I thoughte you shoulde knowe what is in the winde.

ANN

I realized at once what had happened. Sir Bartlemy and Lady Ladland had lost no time in finding a husband for Katie—a wealthy one, no doubt; an alliance which would relieve the strain of any financial losses rising out of

Sir Bartlemy's rash ventures with John Ward. Perhaps the King had a hand in it; for Katie, being a member of the Queen's household, was subject to royal direction in the matter of a husband. I was sure that some deal had been made which would free her father of all complications and; perhaps, enrich the kingly purse. The fears aroused by this communication from the frippery shop were confirmed that afternoon when my landlady informed me that "the same pretty lady was in the parlor and desired a word with me." Dame Witchie was all smiles.

Katie had removed her complexion mask when I joined her in the parlor. She smiled and said: "Well, Richard Strange, here I am again. Isn't it shameful of me to pursue you in this way? I'm a forward minx, am I not?"

She was looking grave in spite of the lightness of her greeting. I studied her face carefully. Her eyes were tired and listless, her cheeks pale. It was the first time I had seen her with no trace whatever of her usual animation.

"What has happened?" I asked.

She did not answer but walked to the front of the room where an embroidery frame had been set up. Dame Witchie had been working on it and had left in too great a hurry to put away the ball of fine silk. Her striped cat, Winkle, had taken charge of it and had succeeded in getting the silk prettily tangled around the legs of the frame. I seized Winkle while Katie set to work to untangle the thread. My hand touched hers in the operation, and I was not surprised to find it cold and limp.

Katie studied the pattern my landlady was developing in the taut square of white linen and nodded her head with apathetic approval. "We all do Black Work at court," she said. "I suppose this is going to be a portrait of Queen Elizabeth. It's quite good, isn't it? But why Elizabeth? Why not our present queen?"

"People still think a great deal of the Old Queen," I said. "Haven't you seen the Memoriam that Francis Bacon has written? I hear King James didn't like it." I might have added that it was significant how little impression the new royal family had made on the feelings of the country. Prince Henry and the young Princess Elizabeth were popular with the people, but a glum silence was all that the King drew on his rare appearances on London streets.

"It's not fair!" There was a hint of real heat in her voice. "You've no idea how fine my mistress is! If people only knew, they would soon forget about the Old Queen. Instead they listen to silly stories. She does not drink too much. She is *not* in love with my Lord Pembroke."

"Both stories are generally believed."

"They're not true! They're not!" Her voice had risen to a note almost of passion. I was amazed to find that her eyes were filled with tears. She returned to her chair. "I'm being very silly. I'm upset today. Please forgive me."

"Katie, what's the trouble?"

"There's really no trouble at all. I just— Well, I'm in a mood, as Mother says." She dabbed her eyes with a pearl-edged handkerchief. "It's just as well I didn't bring my fan, Roger. I don't want to see how dreadful I look. Your fan made a very fine impression. When she heard I had received a present from you, Mother wasn't going to let me keep it. But she fell completely in love with the fan and changed her mind. I think she would like to have it herself."

"Let her have it then. I have something else for you. I think I told you about it. I'm sure you'll like it better."

"But you said you were keeping it for—another purpose."

"Yes. As a wedding gift. I'm afraid it will be useful soon."

There was a long silence. "How did you know?" she asked finally.

"I was sure something had happened. Something tragic. Nothing could be more tragic than that. So it's true?"

She nodded. "Yes. It's very sudden, isn't it? I had no idea of it when I saw you. And that was—just three days ago."

"Who are you going to marry?"

She looked away before she answered. "I'm almost afraid to tell you, Roger, after the way I spoke the other day. I even said I didn't like him. It's Sir Nevil Macherie."

Macherie! I could hardly credit it. Since receiving the note from Ann, I had been indulging in glum speculations; but this incredible selection had never occurred to me. My face must have shown how I felt, for she hurried into explanations.

"You've every reason to be surprised, I know. But—I've changed my mind about him. He's really very handsome and amusing, and he's being most kind and thoughtful in every way. Everyone thinks it a most suitable match. Father and Mother are pleased. Her Majesty doesn't know about it yet, but the King has given his consent. You see, Sir Nevil has properties near ours."

"A hundred acres of sand and stone," I said bitterly. "And a tumbledown stone house."

“He’s in high favor at court,” she went on. “Father says he’s to be made a peer.”

“A reward for his treachery.” I was trying to keep my feelings in check, to spare her as much as possible, for her part in it was clear enough; but I could not control my tongue entirely. “I’m sure your father is pleased. Why shouldn’t he be? He arranged it. That is the only possible explanation for this—this terrible thing you’re telling me.”

Somehow we were standing, facing each other. Her face, looking up into mine, was completely drained of expression.

“You must try to understand, Roger.”

“Oh, I understand. You’re marrying him, Katie, as the price of his silence. That’s clear enough. You’re being forced into it. Don’t deny it. I know it’s the truth.”

“I won’t let you say such things. If it were true, it would be Father’s work. You have no right to say such things about him. Do you understand that, Roger Blease?”

My mind was incapable of further thought. Katie married to Nevil Macherie! It was preposterous, unbelievable; it was wrong, unthinkable, obscene; but it was going to happen. Macherie had demanded a different kind of price from Sir Bartlemy; not gold or land, as he had from the others. And Sir Bartlemy, to save himself from the consequences of exposure, was willing to sacrifice her. Katie, always loyal, would go through with it.

There was nothing to be done about it; nothing, at least, short of convincing the country that the King’s foreign policy was wrong and by force of concerted opinion compel a change. Relieved of the danger of prosecution, Sir Bartlemy would soon send Macherie about his business. I said to myself grimly that I would begin at once on the work I should have been doing, that I would no longer skulk in London to save my own skin. But would there be time?

I realized that I must spare her feelings. She was entitled to every consideration on my part; certainly I had no right to reproach her.

“Please forget what I said. I—I was overwrought. Any step you are ready to take must be right, Katie. But let’s be entirely honest with each other.”

She continued to look up at me with sober eyes.

“Yes. I think it would be better.”

“I want to know one thing. Are you sure, Katie, that this is the only way? Can’t some other solution be found?”

She shook her head. "It's the only way, Roger. I'm quite sure. I've thought and thought about it—and there's nothing else to be done." She walked to the front of the room and stood for several moments at the window. Then she turned suddenly, and I saw that there were tears in her eyes. She said, with a catch in her voice, "Oh, Roger!"

"Katie, you can't do it! Surely your father—"

She dried her eyes slowly. "I'm to keep my post. His Majesty has promised that. He knows the Queen likes me; but I don't think he would let me stay if he knew why. He would probably send me packing if he ever found out. It's because of the Gowrie Plot."

"The Gowrie Plot!"

She nodded. "Yes. You remember about it, don't you? It was when they were in Scotland. The Queen was very lonely, and she became fond of one of her maids of honor, Beatrice Gowrie. The Gowrie family was involved in a conspiracy against the King—or the King thought they were—and her two brothers were killed. Beatrice was sent away. The Queen never got over it. She's never had anyone she's been able to like since. That is, until I came. She likes me because she says I look like Beatrice Gowrie. She speaks of it all the time."

"Beatrice Gowrie must have been very lovely."

"It's nice of you to think so." She smiled faintly. "The wedding will be at Appleby Court, but I'm to return to court at once. I'm very much afraid that Mother won't be content with anything but a large wedding. She's making arrangements already." She added with sudden vehemence: "I can't be honest about it! Don't let's try. Let's pretend that—everything is as it should be. That's what I intended to do when I came. You might even wish me happiness. It's customary, you know."

"I can't do that. I'm not very good at pretending."

"You might try."

"I'm the cause of all this. Can you imagine how I feel about it? If I hadn't—"

"There's no use talking about it, Roger, I'm to be Lady Macherie, and you—what will happen to you? I'm more worried about you than I am about myself. I hear what's being said at court."

Dame Witchie interrupted us at this point by bustling in with a tray in her hands. It contained a long-necked amber bottle and two small glasses. She smiled at Katie with excessive cordiality.



“You must taste my dew-of-the-sun, my lady,” she said. “I make it myself. It will be good for you on a raw day like this. Try it; do, my lady.”

“Thank you,” said Katie. When the landlady had left, she looked at me with a wan smile. “I suppose we must drink it.”

“I suppose so.”

“It’s very silly of us. One might think we were celebrating. We haven’t anything to celebrate, have we? We’re both in a terrible plight, and there’s nothing we can do. Not a toast, please. I don’t think I could stand that.” She sipped the warm liqueur. “Are you thinking terrible things about me?”

“You know what I think about you. I’m drinking a toast, Katie; a silent one.”

We replaced our glasses on the tray, and Katie tied the neck of her wrap, with an unsteady hand.

“The wedding may be very soon,” she said.

After dark I made my way to Sir Sigismund’s tall house near the Poultry. By the greatest of luck he answered my knock himself. “The servants are out,” he said, hurrying me in and closing the door.

He was careful to snuff out all but one candle before we seated ourselves at the big desk. Then he proceeded to fill his pipe, lighting it from juniper fire, which he kept well packed with ash in a metal box. He was studying me with a shrewd eye.

“What is it?” he demanded. “I can see by your manner that the whole universe has gone awry.”

“Katie Ladland is to marry Macherie.”

His eyebrows raised in surprise. “Indeed! I thought perhaps the King had been blown up in another Gunpowder Plot or the moon had neglected to come out. I had no idea of the real gravity of your news.”

I told him the circumstances back of the coming wedding, although I was sure he had guessed already.

“There’s nothing you can do about it, my boy.” He paused and then added: “Sir Bartlemy is a sorry specimen, but I didn’t think him capable of this. The little lady has more courage than her father.”

For a few moments nothing more was said. Then I nodded in the direction of my capcase, which I had deposited just inside the door.

“I’m not going to play the coward any longer. I must start on the work John set me. He expected me to do it anyway; I’m sure of that, and I’m

going ahead with it. At once; tonight, in fact. I think I would go crazy if I stayed cooped up in that room another hour.”

“Perhaps you’re right. Some good is bound to come of it. Ward had a shrewd idea; the country should be wakened to the danger of our present policy. But you’ll have to be extremely cautious. Have you thought of the consequences?”

I answered bitterly: “I’ve thought about them too much. I’ve hesitated and hung back because of thinking of them. I’ve been a rank coward. Now I’m going to make up for it.”

“It’s a courageous thing to do. As you feel so strongly about it, I’ll withdraw my objections. We must figure things out carefully first.” He fell into reflection, puffing on his fat-bowled pipe. “You must go first to some of the safer men. I’ll go over the list with you now. They’ll pass you along, and perhaps save you from falling in with those who lack real resolution; the Sir Bartlemys, of whom unfortunately there are many.”

We discussed names and routes for an hour or more. Then Sir Sigismund went to a cupboard beside the fireplace and drew out a bottle of wine.

“Madeira,” he said, smacking his lips. “The very best of all wines, though few people in this country know much about it yet. Some day they’ll want nothing else, mark my words. The Portuguese make it in a peculiar way, keeping the grapes under high temperature for a long time. It gives body and flavor to it.” He savored his glass with relish. “Well, my boy, success to your venture. And the best of luck in it yourself.”

He began to speak of other matters. “We had another Council tonight and, my, how the shillings rattled! Our shareholders want the basis of investment changed. You see, they now put their money into a single voyage. If the ship comes back, they make as much as one hundred per cent profit; if it goes down, they lose everything. Now they’re suggesting that they should invest in the company and take a share of all ventures. They figure they would have a sure profit that way, though smaller, of course. There’s something in it; but it’s a radical idea. One can’t be sure where such innovations might lead. Frankly, I’m afraid of it. I know the Privy Council will forbid it; they have no stomach for radical change.”

He was talking, I could see, to take my mind off more serious matters. After a third glass of the warm wine, he got to his feet and said: “You must be off before dawn. I’ll have a good horse for you and a warm cloak. You’re going to need both. In the meantime, you must have some sleep. A clear head will be needed for what you’re setting out to do.”

IT WAS LATE OCTOBER when I began my journey and late March when it ended. Fear sat on my shoulder every minute of the time; and every man I spied on the road was a King's officer until he passed. I changed horses three times, for it proved a bitter winter and very hard on the poor beasts. Snow fell continuously, and the roads were frequently so icy that we struck sparks at every stride. The winds, sweeping down from the north, made me intensely grateful for the fur-lined castor Sir Sigismund had given me. I did most of my riding by night, as it was not safe to show myself in public inns.

I think I must have been in every county in the kingdom in the course of those bleak months, going from one great house to another, with letters from my last host to commend me to the next. It was a hole-in-corner business and almost as hazardous for them as for me. None of them seemed to take that part of it seriously.

I attended the meeting of which Sir Sigismund had spoken, and it may be described as typical of many others. The reports I had received on my host were so favorable that I was rather taken aback by my first glimpse of his house. It did not appear large, and there was something almost furtive about its location. I came upon it suddenly, a huddle of gray chimneys at the mouth of a valley. A storm was blowing, and I rode through heavy drifts to a glumly silent entrance. The snow, sometimes falling sullenly and sometimes swirling on the wind, had lodged in the eaves and gable ends, making me think of enchanted houses I had read about as a boy. It sifted down on my face as I lifted the huge iron knocker. I would not have been surprised if a witch or a magician had answered my summons.

This impression vanished as soon as I set foot inside. It was warm and cheerful and much larger than it had looked from the outside; quite impressive, in fact, with high ceilings and sculptured stone stairways on each side of the entrance hall. The master welcomed me warmly. His wife was there to second him, a pretty woman much younger than her lord, with a kind smile and a white hand for me to kiss. We went at once to the Great Hall through brown-paneled passages decorated with an amazing number of inscriptions in Latin; the work, I judged, of a long line of scholarly owners, for many of them were in the oldest of script. The company had assembled

in the Great Hall, half a dozen gentlemen with their backs to the fire and an expression of watchfulness on their faces. They were friendly enough, although there were no introductions and no naming of names. The rules which govern seating before the fire were abandoned, and I was ensconced at once in a chair quite close to the blazing logs, a foot-warmer and a glass of hot brandy provided for my immediate comfort.

“Well, Sir Pirate,” said my host, in a booming voice. “I must say you carry no outward signs of your sinful trade.”

The others laughed; and one of them, who had all the earmarks of a parson, remarked that fighting the Spaniards was doing the work of our Heavenly Master.

They were a sober lot as compared with the fine gentlemen of London. None of them sported the gay colors, the doublets of pease-porridge tawney, or the popinjay blues which were so popular at court. Most of them wore gray or brown, with collars lying flat on their shoulders, and there was not a single stitch of gold thread among the lot of them. They might lack the subtlety and sparkle of court gallants, but there was something very reassuring in the fine gravity of their eyes and in the serious note of their conversation. I had heard that the Puritan influence was beginning to show itself among the smaller gentry, and here was the proof of it.

The first scraps of talk made it clear that they were religious men and bitterly opposed to the copes and wafer-cakes of the new English Church. They were even more concerned over the way things were going in the political world. They returned continuously to the imposts the King was applying and his refusal to listen to Parliament. Most of them, I judged, sat in the House, if it could be called sitting when His Majesty summoned it so seldom and dissolved it on the first sign of opposition.

It was clear they understood the necessity for the work John Ward and his captains had been doing. I knew that all of them had taken some hand in the fitting out of the ships, and on that account I dwelt chiefly on the documents which we had located on the *Santa Caterina*: the proofs of Madrid’s determination to drive us off the seas, the cold-blooded treatment of captured crews, and the payment of pensions to ministers of the Crown. They listened quietly enough until I came to the matter of the pensions, and then an indignant rumble arose. Dishonesty was more than a political sin in their eyes; it was an offense against God and not to be borne in silence.

“Where are the proofs of all this?” asked my host.

I am sure I looked as crestfallen as I felt when I explained that they had been stolen from me and turned over to the King’s ministers.

“And the name of the thief?”

“It was an English gentleman, one of the Free Rovers, I’m ashamed to say. Sir Nevil Macherie. He’s in high favor at court as a result.”

Someone laughed. “I know Macherie. And I have no hesitation in believing this. He’s quite capable of it.”

On a nod from my host, I launched into a circumstantial story of everything that had occurred, beginning with the assembling of the fleet. I could see a gleam in every eye when I came to the fight with the Latin ships. Our host slapped his thigh and laughed loudly. “You’ve told this story at least once before. To the Queen.”

“Yes, sir. I told exactly the same story to her Majesty at Denmark House.”

“You may not know it, my boy,” said one of them, “but you were speaking to more than the Queen that night. You were speaking to the whole of England. Everyone has heard it since. I don’t mind saying it was the boldness you displayed on that occasion which persuaded me to come here today.” He paused and let his eye flit from one to another. “Well, gentlemen, I for one am disposed to believe every word of it, proofs or no proofs.”

The talk became general after that. I waited my chance and threw in a word about John’s belief that a great empire could be built if once the grip of Spain were loosened on the trade routes. This set them to much eager speculation about the Americas. They did not seem to understand the East. There was something unreal, and almost ungodly, about India and China in the eyes of these quiet gentlemen. But the continent to the west was different; there, they agreed, was land fallow for Anglo-Saxon hands.

While we talked, I became aware that we had an uninvited visitor. I could see a pair of eyes and a flounce of scarlet skirt around the edge of the screens at the far end of the Hall. At first I thought it was a child. She became bolder, however, and ventured a little way into the open, and I realized she was in her middle teens; a daughter of the house, for she had all of her mother’s comeliness and the same lively eyes. She watched us with interest, but apparently she knew that she had no right to be there; she scurried back when her father, suddenly becoming aware of her, waved her impatiently to leave. I saw, however, that she lingered long enough to scratch something with her finger on a pane in the oriel window at the side.

The glass was thickly frosted, and what she had written was still legible when I found an opportunity to stroll in that direction. She had added one more inscription to the many; but she had not employed the stately Latin of the rest.

*Who's afraid of a pirate?*

"The baggage!" said her father, over my shoulder. "She heard you had sailed with Captain Ward, and so nothing would do but she must have a look at you. I think she expected someone more on the bearded and ruffianly order. I trust you're not offended."

She was not seen again. I thought to myself: Suppose John Ward had been in my place?

The debate lasted for several hours, and then dinner was served. So far I had not glimpsed a single servant, and I was not surprised when our host led the way to a small room where we found a table laden with an assortment of dishes. We helped ourselves; it was noble fare, a chine of beef, a roast of mutton, a large fish curled head to tail and covered with a rich sauce, a brace of ducks, and plenty of kickshaws on the order of pastries and marchpane. There was no fruit and no vegetables, as such things become almost nonexistent in England when winter sets in. I was hungry and did full justice to everything.

When the dishes had been emptied, we returned to the Great Hall and found on a low stool in front of the fire the largest bowl I had ever seen, filled with a hot punch. Our host saw that all glasses were filled and then raised his own in front of him with a solemn air.

"The King!" he intoned.

"The King!" echoed the rest of the company with a fervor that I found hard to understand after the tone of the conversation. The expression on each face was one of complete loyalty to the head of the state, and it was only after a long silence that one voice added: "May it never be necessary for us to honor that toast with less than our whole hearts."

One episode of the visit remains to be told. After an hour's relaxation in front of the fire, by which time the bottom of the bowl was in clear view, the owner turned to me with a serious expression.

"No one knows of our meeting today. The servants have been kept from this part of the house, and I'm sure that none of them could name you. It's only because of your youth that I point out the danger of a careless word or an unthinking reference to what has been said or done."

"My own life depends on my discretion," I pointed out.

"They had an easier way of imposing silence once." Our host walked to the side of the fireplace and fumbled along the paneling. There was a grating sound, and I saw that a portion of the floor had dropped in an alcove to the right of the screens. Going over, I found myself looking down into a shaft twenty feet or more deep, at the bottom of which water swirled. The water

came from the moat, I concluded, for snow and broken ice churned about on the surface. It was an *oubliette*; I had never seen one before and it was not pleasant to look at, nor was it pleasant to think of the enemies of the house who had made their exits here in bygone days.

“It hasn’t been used for a century at least,” said the owner with a chuckle. “I keep the spring oiled, however. You can never tell. My Lord Rochester might pay us a visit; or the honorable gentleman who stole those papers from our young friend.”

I spent Christmas Day in a very small town on the edge of the fen country. It was a dismal place with nothing to give it distinction but the fact that a year before one of its citizens had been burned alive. He had been too outspoken in his refusal to conform to the King’s ideas of how his subjects should worship God. I do not know the extent of his heresy; perhaps he did not acknowledge the Godhead of Christ, or he may have voiced the common comparison between the sacrament and a jack-in-the-box. Whatever it was, he had been placed in a tarred barrel on the town square and a fire had been lighted around it; the barrel and the unfortunate man and his nonconformity all vanishing together in short order.

Christmas is always a merry day in England, even in glum towns such as this. The purpose of my visit was to speak with some of the leading dissenters, all of them humble folk without spare beds, and so I had been put to the necessity, and the danger, of staying at an inn. From my high window, I saw the holiday procession start early in the morning with the elected Lord of Misrule in the lead. He was not a very impressive-looking master of revels, but he wore a scarlet cloak of camlet thrum, held up by a chorus of mummers, chanting:

“Wassail, wassail,  
In snow, frost and hail.”

He had a good-natured face, and he managed to cut a few amusing capers before the procession wove out of sight. Later he would lead the way back to the inn and there would be a feast, with the boar’s head carried in to the table in full state; and the worthy gaffers of the town would do some substantial holiday drinking.

I thought of the Christmas we had spent at Appleby Court, when the Yule log had been twenty feet long and the boar’s head had been brought in by four huntsmen with green scarves and drawn faucions; and I had stepped a measure with Katie in the dancing which followed, and she had allowed

me to squeeze her hand. Had the marriage already taken place? It seemed certain that it had, for she had said it was to occur soon. That was a dismal thought with which to begin a Christmas celebration, but it stayed with me throughout the day. Would the world ever be right again, with my mother dead, John Ward in exile, and Katie married to Sir Nevil Macherie?

I took dinner at the home of a humble Puritan family on the outskirts of the town. The solemnity of the occasion was deepened by the fact that the martyr of the previous year had been a brother of the head of the household. There was, however, a quiet air of thankfulness in the little circle which I found more agreeable than the usual extremes of Yuletide gayety. They had a roast of braun, served with hot mustard, and a fine pudding with holly on top, and the children had received small gifts which they carried about with them all day in a high state of pride. I felt sorry for the children because I knew they would not be allowed to play any of the games which make up Christmas night: shoe-the-mare, hot-cockles, or hodman-blind. But they did not seem to mind the omission, and were quite happy with their Yule cakes (but without the customary imprint of the figure of Jesus, which the Puritans considered sacrilegious) and their thin rations of sugared candy.

The talk was all of leaving England and finding a new home in Leyden where a colony of English dissenters had already been established. There they were worshipping God in their own way under a great preacher named Robinson, who could “ding the pulpit to blads” as soundly as John Knox himself. There were pamphlets in the house which had been printed in the Low Countries for distribution in England. King James had banned all printed matter of the kind, but they showed me copies without any trace of fear, even though they knew a barrel of blazing pitch might be their reward. For the first time I heard talk of America as a possible sanctuary for those who took their religion in the spirit of Calvin and abhorred a bishop’s rochet as the mark of the beast.

They were men of peace, but they exulted in what the Free Rovers had done, believing that we had struck hammer blows against the power of the papacy. They drank no toasts to royal James. They had none of the class loyalty of gentlemen to a weak head of the state, and I felt a reluctant admiration for them on that account. They were forthright men, and there was only one thing they asked of life. I said to myself that, if the overweening pretensions of the King were to be haltered, it would be these humble citizens who would fasten the checkreins; and many years later I knew that I had been right in that.



Five months were consumed in my travels, and I expected that each day would be my last of liberty. I knew that the King was aware of what I was doing, and that he was urging his officers on to lay me by the heels. It was proof of the deep feeling pervading the country that anyone was ready to receive me under these circumstances. We took every precaution, naturally. I was passed from house to house, traveling by night and taking back roads wherever possible. I skirted all towns of any size and did not show myself in inns or taverns.

Everything I heard in that time convinced me the country was bitterly opposed to the policies of the King. All men felt baffled at the incongruity of a monarch chosen by the people of the country, laying claim to divine sanction and assuming powers that verged on the despotic; and they felt a great sickness of the soul because our once-great country had fallen in less than ten years of his rule to the rank of a third-rate power.

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I CAME TO THE END of my travels in a mood of deep dejection. Had I accomplished anything besides putting my head in jeopardy? I doubted if I had. Every time that I fell into talk about the policy of the King, I would hear the incisive voice of the master of Gorhambury saying, "We must consider the irks of our present situation as the price we are paying for our great chance." If he were right, and I did not doubt it, we could not hope to accomplish any improvement in the conduct of national affairs. All that we could look forward to was a great convulsion which would shake England at some time in the future, and from which we would hope to emerge with a new freedom.

I was to make my last call next day. My man, Sir Ninian Varley, had guests at his home; and so it was impossible for me to spend the night with him. I decided it would be safer to select an inn where the poorest class of travelers put up, but I was not prepared for the dinginess of the room to which I was escorted by a bulging landlady in a frowsy coif. It had the smell of a flinch-gut about it, and I made up my mind to sit the night through on a bench downstairs. Late in the evening, however, my resolution weakened.

The company consisted of a half-dozen townsmen who persisted in bawling the chorus of "Labandola Shott" until the discord drove me out into the peril of the town.

I paced the muddy streets and dark alleys, my thoughts busy with a letter I had received that morning from Sir Sigismund Hill. It had been handed to me by a ruddy-faced squire with whom I had spent the night, after having passed through numerous careful hands, and it was the first communication of any kind that had reached me. It was completely unsatisfactory in one respect, for it contained not one lone bit of information about the Ladland family; but it had outlined a plan for my future.

"We must appoint a new agent at Damascus," he had written, "and I have talked so much of the merits of one Richard Strange that my partners are disposed to leave the matter entirely in my hands." Three years' residence would be entailed, at the end of which time it might be safe for me to return, "it being reasonable that the odor of piracy will by then have deserted the royal nostrils." As he had reported me in France at the moment, I would join the ship at Brest or Marseilles, and I could take my Aunt Gadilda with me. She had been ailing (how kind of him to have found this out), and the warm sun of the East would be the very thing for her. A comfortable house on a palm-shaded hillside went with the post.

The prospect appealed to me very much. I could not remain in hiding forever, and John did not want me back, out of regard for my well-being. The East, then, was the place for me. I could live there in security, and the work should not be beyond my capacity; my experience in Tunis would stand me in good stead there. There was one drawback: a whole continent would lie between me and Katie. The prospect of never being able to see her robbed me of any real content with the plan.

There had been disturbing news in the letter as well. More of the Free Rovers had returned and had been taken in charge. Sir Sigismund feared that the King's purpose was to see them "hangit in chains," as Archie had predicted. The letter had been written more than a fortnight before it reached my hands, and I wondered with a sinking heart what had happened in the meantime to our stout captains.

A warm sun had shone during the day, melting the last of the snow and bringing the townspeople out from their winter-chinked homes to welcome the arrival of spring. They were still about, hobnobbing at the corners or in the doors of taverns. I remembered Temperance Handy's saying once that the weakest feature of English life was that the social activities of the common people centered in the streets; but that, unfortunately, if any attempt were made to drive them indoors, they would only go to the taverns. After

what I had seen of their homes from my window at Dame Witchie's, I felt that they could not be blamed for seeking diversion and comfort elsewhere.

Suddenly, to my intense surprise and alarm, I heard my assumed name pronounced in a high-pitched voice. My first impulse was to turn and run, but a wise second thought held me back; by doing so, I would attract attention to myself, and that was the one thing I could not afford to do. I looked about me. All the people in the immediate neighborhood had been drawn into a tight group farther down the block, and I decided the cry had come from there. While I hesitated, not knowing what to do, the call was repeated. There was something unreal about it, a ghostly cachinnation which sent a shiver of fear down my spine. "*Richard Strange! Richard Strange!*"

I was now sure that it issued from somewhere within the crowd, and that I would have to find out what it meant. I could not leave with the mystery of that summons unsolved.

It was a Motion that had drawn the people together. By the light of an elevated torch the puppet-master was giving an elaborate performance of the most recent and most popular of all marionette shows, *Luke Hutton, the Rhyming Highwayman*; or, *Hemp Passeth Green Holly*. The bystanders were enjoying it very much and cheering loudly when the bouncing and declamatory figure of the footpad held up the fine gentleman; and shouting, "Buss 'er, Luke!" in his scenes with the heroine, a strapping spital-house trull. They were enjoying it so much they accepted an innovation of the puppet-master as a new piece of comedy. Hutton would accuse the woman of being unfaithful to him and demand the name of the other man, whereupon she would answer in that high voice which had so nearly scared me out of my wits, "Richard Strange!" The audience guffawed every time it happened. I understood now that it was a summons to me to remain, and I stayed on the edge of the crowd.

It was a sociable gathering. Bowse-boys threaded their way through the pack, doing a brisk business with their trays of ale mugs. A pastry vendor was selling tiny pork pies at a rag (a farthing) apiece, and the crunching of jaws almost drowned out some of the lines. No one paid any attention to me, for the drama of the Motion was reaching a high pitch of intensity. The Rhyming Highwayman had been captured and was trussed up in Little Ease, waiting for the inevitable ride to the chats. He was intoning the words of his famous lament:

“My name is Hutton, yea, Luke of bad life;  
Oh, woe is me, woe is me, for my great folly;  
Who on the highway did rob man and wife;  
Take warning, young wantons, hemp passeth green holly!”

The puppet-master issued from behind the boxlike stage at the end of the piece, accepted the applause of the good-natured audience with a slightly derisive bow, and proceeded to pass through them with his extended hat. He seemed to do rather well, much better than the poor saltimbanco had done; the cap, with its greasy cock-feather, was soon weighted down with rags, and even the more desirable wins. I waited until the people had melted away and the master was busy packing up the figures, and then went back of the theater.

“Well, my man,” I said.

He was a surly fellow. “Well, yourself,” he grumbled, going on with his task.

I spun a coin in his direction and said in a whisper, “Richard Strange.”

He looked up then and grinned. “Ye’re to come along of me.” He finished the packing, collapsing the walls of the theater into so small a space that the whole thing could be slung over his shoulder. Putting out the torch, he struck briskly toward the center of the town, not giving a glance to see whether I followed or not. I did so with great misgivings.

He stopped in front of a house standing on a side street in complete darkness and said gruffly: “A double part for Brose Totten tonight. Pimp as well as Motion-master. Well, it pays good, I must say. She wur a likely looking baggage. Give me another of the same, my gentry-cove, and I’ll drink to yer success with her.”

My cautious knock was answered at once, and I found myself admitted into a dark hall. A familiar voice said: “Roger! At last! Praise God, I’ve found you!”

It was Ann Turner. Even if I had not recognized her voice, I could not have mistaken the perfume which pervaded the air. She found my arm and pressed it with passionate relief. “You were in great danger, Roger. But now let’s hope it’s over. We had better go back before I light a candle. No sense in taking chances, my dear.”

The candle lighted up a long room which served many purposes, being parlor, dining-room, kitchen, and pantry all in one. There were hams and bunches of aromatic herbs hanging from the rafters at one end, and at the other there was a refectory table set out with the cheapest kind of knives and

plates on a scarlet rush cover. I looked at Ann and saw that her eyes were a trifle red, as though she had been crying.

“Don’t dare look at me,” she said. “I’m a sight.”

“Were the King’s men on my trail?”

She achieved one of her nicest brow-knitting smiles. “Yes,” she answered, almost breathlessly. “You were to see a Sir Ninian Varley tomorrow, weren’t you?” I nodded. “He gave you away. They’ll be at his place to take you. What a narrow escape, Roger! I didn’t hear of it until this morning, and I came right down. The driver of the coach must have thought I was starting alone on an elopement, for I called ‘faster!’ every time he let his horses slow down. He wished me happiness when we got here. Fortunately I have an uncle in this town. This is his house. I packed the family off on a visit and took possession. That part of it was easy enough. But I’ve been almost frantic ever since, trying to locate you.”

“How did you find out about this?”

“Fanny Howard told me. *She* heard about it from Lord Rochester. She visited the shop early and as usual gave me all the gossip. She was selecting some—I won’t tell you what, Roger, you’re so modest—and I’m afraid I hurried her rudely. I could hardly wait to get her out of the place.”

“Thank God for your Fanny Howard.”

“I didn’t know what to do when I got here, except to send a man around to all the inns in search of a Richard Strange. There was no Richard Strange to be found.”

“I use a different name in each place I visit. And I never go to inns unless it’s absolutely necessary. As it happened, I did go to one tonight, but I gave my name as Ludar Blayne.”

She was still overwrought from the anxiety she had suffered. “I couldn’t think of anything else to do about it,” she said. “I almost cried my eyes out. Then I thought of using a Motion to get your name cried on the streets. It was smart, wasn’t it? How lucky you heard!”

“Lucky, indeed!” I said fervently. I wondered how I could ever repay these brave efforts on my behalf. She was dressed in black, which became her immensely, and her ruff was white; a sensible precaution, for I knew that her use of yellow had become very well known and might have identified her. “You *were* clever, Ann. But you were taking a desperate chance. The officers may be in town tonight; I think it’s almost certain they are. Supposing they had wondered what all this calling of Richard Strange was about? They might have followed the man here.”

“What if they had?” She was studying me closely by the small light of the one candle. “Just as long as they didn’t find *you*! As far as I’m concerned, it would have been easy enough to explain; I’d have fobbed them off with hints of a tryst. They would have believed it. They might have thought that this mysterious Richard Strange was a lucky man; what do you think, Roger?”

“They couldn’t very well help it.”

“You’ve grown a beard! I love it.” She came over and took both of my ears in her hands and rocked my head from side to side. “You rascal, you’re positively handsome. Does it curl up that way naturally? It’s the latest thing, you know. The men at court use irons to make their beards curl in exactly that way. I sell plenty of them. Some men even use curlers in bed.”

“It must be natural with me. I haven’t time for curlers, and I don’t often have a bed to sleep in. I leave that sort of thing to Sir Nevil Macherie.”

She backed away, still shaking her head admiringly. “Have you supped? I’m so glad you haven’t; we can have supper together. That will be nice, won’t it?”

I was struck with a disturbing thought. “Do you think we’re safe? They might pick up the master and make him bring them here.”

She said triumphantly: “I thought of that! I paid him to leave town at once. He’s on his way to London now. My, Roger Blease, you’ve been costing me a lot of money!” She stopped and looked at me with sudden gravity. “I’ve bad news for you. Perhaps I should tell you now.”

“I’m getting used to bad news. Yes, I’d rather hear it at once.”

“Mistress Ladland was being married today. It was to be a very elaborate wedding. Many of the court were going down for it. Fanny Howard told me all about it. She wasn’t going herself; she doesn’t seem to care much for Mistress Ladland.”

I should have been prepared, but this confirmation of my worst fears made me feel as though the end of the world had come. There should have been tremors of the earth and chasms yawning around us. Nothing now was left, nothing worth-while to be fought for, nothing left to fill the mind any longer with hope. I could not say a word. Ann looked at me with sympathy and proceeded to elaborate on her information.

“It isn’t strange that Fanny doesn’t like Mistress Katie. I’m sure she dislikes every woman at court. I knew a lot about the marriage myself because I supplied some of the clothes. The finest laced day cornets and coifs, half a dozen dresses, and a stomacher on which I sewed her mother’s pearls. It’s going to be a lovely wedding, Roger; you’ll be glad of *that*, for

her sake, I'm sure. I hear the presents are wonderful. The Queen gave her a ruby ring." She paused and smiled. "You must think I'm weak-minded, talking this way. I'm doing it to help you get over the shock, my dear. I know how badly you're feeling."

"I've been expecting it, Ann. I was sure, in fact, that it took place long ago. I've had no news of things."

"It's hard when you can't have the one you want." She began to set some dishes on the table. "I haven't been too happy myself lately. I've had to do things I don't like."

Remembering that strange room back of her shop, I took alarm at once. "What kind of things?"

"For Fanny Howard. That innocent-looking little beauty; you wouldn't think she would say *boo* to a goose. But she's a—a determined *fiend*! I mean it, a fiend. She doesn't want her husband, and she does want my Lord Rochester. She demands charms to chill love in the one and stimulate it in the other. I've taken her to Father Forman. But, Roger, his silly charms won't do anything."

"Why are you so sure of that?" I was not at all sure myself.

She shook her head decidedly. "It's all nonsense. She won't get her lover that way. Nor get rid of her husband either. What then? I'm afraid she'll stop at nothing. First—poison!"

Poison! Just one whisper of that sort of thing around, and my companion would find herself in prison with the threat of the rope or the stake hanging over her. King James was desperately afraid of witches—"cummers," he called them. "Ann," I said, "have nothing more to do with the woman! Give it all up, in God's name!"

"I know. I must stop. But it isn't as easy as you think. Fanny Howard's my best customer. She brought the whole court to my door, and I mustn't offend her. I know what she's capable of if she's crossed in anything."

"We both seem to have plenty of troubles, Ann."

"Yes. Let's mingle our tears together, shall we?" Her animation left her. "Sometimes I hate her. She frightens me. And then there's Sir Thomas Overbury. You must have heard about *him*. The great friend of Lord Rochester. Watching, watching, all the time. He doesn't like Fanny; he doesn't want his friend to become involved. He wants to run the King and the country through Lord Rochester, and Fanny is getting in his way. He knows everything that's going on. I'm afraid of him too. There may be trouble for all of us before we're through."

She finished laying out the supper, and we took our places at the table. I tried to eat but found that my appetite had deserted me. I laid down my knife and saw that she had done likewise.

“I’m not hungry after all.” She smiled at me across the table. “Well, let’s have some wine. Perhaps it will make us both feel better.”

We each had a glass of very good wine, and it accomplished its purpose in part. After a second glass I felt very much better. I looked at my companion and saw that her spirits had improved also.

“Let’s forget our troubles,” she said. “You know there are always compensations in life, my Roger. I may find myself involved in a court scandal; but I *am* accomplishing what I set out to do. I’m making a great deal of money, and before very long I may be able to move away from London. I’ll find some respectable young man to marry. He’ll have to be tall and dark—I’ve decided that much—and I think I’d like him to have a beard that curls naturally. Of course, I mustn’t expect everything! And then I’ll settle down to a quiet life. Do you think it will be hard for me to do that?”

“Not as far as finding the husband is concerned. That will be very easy for you. They’ll fight over you, Ann. Tall and short, dark and fair alike.”

“Thank you, Roger. You think I’m pretty, then? But not as pretty as Katie Ladland.” She added immediately: “There, I’ve gone and reminded you, and just when we were beginning to forget all about it. It was stupid of me, wasn’t it? Especially when I knew you wouldn’t give the answer I wanted. Well, another glass may help you to forget again.”

It helped considerably. We settled down to talk about the old days at home, about John Ward and Chirp Bird and the rest. Her eyes began to sparkle, and I realized that, with one exception, she was prettier than anyone I knew. I told her so. She was wearing a new kind of bodice which had the ruff only in the back and opened in a low V. I noticed that her throat was slender and white, and I began to like the curious perfume she used.

Once she reached out suddenly and took hold of my right hand. “I must see,” she said. “I’ve been afraid to ask for fear of what I might find. The wine has given me courage, I guess.” She spread my fingers open and examined the palm. Her eyes lighted up almost immediately. “It’s not here! You’re safe, Roger. They won’t catch you. Oh, what a relief!”

“What isn’t there?”

“The sign. The fatal sign, my dear. Everyone who is going to die on the scaffold has it. It’s always in a certain place, and it can’t be mistaken for anything else. Father Forman told me. He said it was infallible, and for once I believed him. I can’t tell you how relieved I am.”



I was very much relieved myself, for I believed, as everyone did, in palmistry; even Temperance Handy had once said that the Bible warned us of the signposts of destiny on our hands. She curled my fingers back slowly.

“Roger.”

“Yes, Ann.”

“I’m sensible enough not to expect the impossible. I know what can be and what can’t be. But life always has its compensations. I said that before, didn’t I? Some day all your difficulties will clear up, and you’ll settle down to the life of a gentleman. You’ll marry someone of your own class. I hope you’ll have every happiness when you do. What will happen to me is much less certain. But—there’s a meantime, my dear. For both of us.”

I nodded in agreement. All my own expectations had been shattered; but, as she said, there was a meantime.

“Come over and sit beside me.”

I carried my glass around the table and drew a chair up beside hers. She twined her arm through mine.

“I frightened you that day at my shop. Poor Roger! I’ve never seen such a startled look on any face. Well, I may be going to frighten you again. Prepare for a shock, young fellow!” She pressed my arm against her. “You’re going to stay quite a while with me this time. What do you think of that? All tonight and all tomorrow. Are you properly startled? I can’t see your face.” It was clear that she could not, for her head was against my shoulder; and, in any event, the one candle provided little light.

“It wouldn’t be safe to venture out tonight,” I said. “I won’t dare go for my horse at the inn. It’s too bad; he was a steady fellow and I liked him.”

“You and your horse! I’m not concerned about your horse at all. Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes, I heard. I agree that I can’t leave tonight. But it’s a different matter about tomorrow. Why should I continue to make you share my danger?”

“It’s the only safe way. You must travel back to London with me. I’ve arranged everything. A coach is coming at daybreak. You’ll go with me as my servant.” She squeezed my arm again and laughed. “You’ll make a very handsome servant. I even have a livery for you, a rich maroon with silver trimmings. I can hardly wait to see how you look in it. You ought to see the ruff; I’m sure you’ll need my help with it. You’ll have to be very dignified to play the part; very stern and stiff. And I have a warm beaver hat for you which can be drawn down over the ears. If it’s cold you can wear a muffler around your face, so you’ll be most completely disguised.”

I shook my head. "There's a limit to the risks I'll let you take. It won't do, Ann. I'll leave before you do. Before daylight. I must strike out on my own."

"And travel on foot? What chance would you have that way? No, my dear, my plan is the only possible one."

"You've been too good to me as it is. I don't know how I'll ever repay you."

"I've been too good to you?" She laughed softly. "You have no idea how good I'd like to be. No, my most chivalrous Roger, you won't add to my perils by traveling with me. It will be still dark when we start, and we'll strike south to avoid the main roads. It will take us all day, and then it will be dark again when we reach London. It will be cold again tomorrow, I'm sure, and I won't have the heart to keep a servant out in the cold, much as I would like to travel with a fine big footman on the box. No riding outside for you, my Roger. Are you blushing again? I can't see in this light. Now, it's all settled."

## 40

I RODE ON THE BOX during the greater part of the next day after all, for the weather proved too mild to provide any excuse for a servant to share the carriage with his mistress. I pulled the beaver hat down over my brows and looked straight ahead when we passed people on the road. Fortunately my fine maroon livery stamped me undeniably, and no one paid me any attention at all. The driver was surly, and we talked very little.

Late in the afternoon it began to rain, and Ann rapped sharply on the panel back of us. It was clearly a summons to me to get under cover. When I seated myself opposite her, she leaned forward and smiled delightedly. "Roger, Roger, Roger! My, what a fine-looking servant you make. So tall and straight and dignified. Can't I persuade you to stay in my service?" Her smile became arch. "You would be very useful around the house."

"I wouldn't pass muster long. I'm afraid the driver has his suspicions about me as it is. My way of speaking doesn't strike him as just right. I

dragged in a few cant words to throw him off, but he knows I'm new to this kind of thing."

"Silly! Of course he does. He thinks this is an elopement and that you're wearing livery as a disguise. I was careful to plant that idea in his mind before we started."

"You seem to think of everything."

She sobered at that. "Yes. I try to think of everything. And that prevents me from harboring foolish fancies, even when I want to believe them possible. About us, for instance. It would be wonderful to believe we might go on like this. But I know it can't be. I can even see that we must separate as soon as we reach London. You'll be safer in the streets there than riding in a carriage with Mistress Ann Turner. Chirp will know I left town, and he's certain to have men watching for me."

The coach crawled through the back roads of Surrey, splashing through the mud. The rain lashed down, getting through the side hangings and dampening the seats. We talked about the future. Ann dropped her coquettish airs and discussed plans with complete seriousness.

"You must get to the Continent at the earliest possible moment," she urged. "Why not go to France? You speak French, and I hear the King is very wise; he could find some use for you. He must need men with experience at sea."

"Hale Harry Gard would enjoy a laugh if he heard you say that. As far as the sea is concerned, I'm still a green joskin. But it's already arranged, Ann, that I'm to leave for the East. I'll be gone three years."

"Three years!" There was so much real dismay in her voice that I began to feel still more guilty about what had happened. "Then it's likely, Roger, that I'll never see you again. Three years seem like all eternity. Before you come back, I'll be away from London; if all goes according to plan, that is. You may not be able to find me." She looked at me with somber eyes. "What's still more awful about it, you won't want to find me."

I tried to speak in a light tone. "Are you imagining that I'll return with a wife? I can promise you *that* won't happen. I don't care for women with brown skins."

"It's not that. You'll forget me in three years. I'm afraid you'll want to forget me." She raised the side curtain to inspect the weather but dropped it at once. It was still raining hard, and her sleeve had become wet. Her eyes were wet also, but I was sure it was not from the rain. "Perhaps it's the best way. I think you'll remember me pleasantly if we part now. I want you to remember me that way."

She became practical then and plied me with questions. Did I have enough money for my needs? Did I have a safe sanctuary in London for the time I must stay there? It must be safer than Dame Witchie's; she was sure Chirp Bird had uncovered that address by this time. Had all the details of my leaving been arranged? She had enough influence in high quarters to be of help to me if anything were needed.

"You must leave London as soon as possible," she said finally. "Tonight if possible. Promise me you won't stay a moment longer than is necessary! It's terribly important, Roger. I *know*. Have you heard that several of your captains have been caught and brought to London?"

It was news to me that they had been taken to the city. The King, then, was taking justice into his own hands and not trusting to the magistrates in the ports where they had landed. This augured badly for their chances. I asked her if she knew the names of any of the prisoners.

"I heard them, but they meant nothing to me and I can't recall them now. The gibbets have been set up at Wapping Stairs already. Roger, there will be one for you if you're not careful! Oh, I know you haven't the sign on your hand; but I don't put complete faith in that."

"I've a safe place to go." I felt so sick over the news about the captains that it was difficult to speak. "You mustn't worry about me, Ann. They won't catch me in London. And I'm sure my friends will get me safely away. All arrangements have been made."

We were in the outskirts of the city by this time, for the wheels of the carriage were grinding on wet paving stones. She motioned me to sit beside her and then laid her head against my shoulder.

"We must say good-by in a few minutes," she whispered. "A long good-by, my dear. You can't keep a woman like me in your life. I've no illusions, you see. Certainly I've none about the future. I let myself dream about the things I want to do, but—I'm afraid they won't work out as I want them to. I haven't told you everything. Some day I may be in as much danger as you are now. Don't ask me about it; I don't want to talk now. Well, we've had these twenty-four hours. That's something, isn't it? I don't want to say anything more. Let's just sit like this until you have to leave."

I left the carriage as soon as we had crossed the river. Ann leaned out of the door and waved her hand. She looked white and tired, but she managed to smile. "I'm afraid you'll catch cold," she said.

The rain had mounted until now it was a regular March gale. It swirled down between the houses and nearly swept me off my feet at the street corners. I was soon soaked to the skin. I was glad of the storm, however, for

the few people who had to brave it took no interest in a bedraggled pedestrian in a once-handsome maroon livery. I gained Sir Sigismund's house without mishap.

I wondered if he would still feel disposed to take me in; I would be doubly troublesome now to one in his position. His first words reassured me.

"I had almost given you up. You've been treating the hounds to a real run, but I'm thinking they are close on your heels now. Did anyone see you come in?"

"No," I answered, still a little out of breath. "The storm has driven everyone indoors. I was afraid you might not want to see me."

He smiled. "I can think of safer guests to have in one's house. But don't give that a thought. I'm in this now as deep as I can get. It's as necessary to me to get you out of the country as it is for you to go."

We went to the small room where the unloading uniforms were kept; and, on a suggestion from him, I stripped off my wet clothing and donned one of the pocketless suits. My host smiled dryly and said it made me look like a prisoner, but he was sure there was nothing prophetic about it. The room was without windows and on that account the safest place to talk. We sat down on stools, and I proceeded to tell him briefly what had happened since I started on my travels.

"I'll say this for you," he commented at the finish: "you've been energetic. I had no idea you would get to so many of them. And you've succeeded in keeping His Majesty in a tantrum. Archie has advised me of what's going on at court."

"Then he's been restored to favor?"

"Oh, yes. He was right about it. The King can't get along without him. He's managed to get his stipend restored, which shows how His Majesty feels about him. To be honest, I never expected to see you again. Archie told me they have been trying to spread a net for you the last six weeks. You've been lucky."

"I've been lucky in my friends."

"We must see to it that your luck holds." He fumbled with his amber pipe but, because of the impossibility of lighting it where we were, tucked it back again under his belt. "Some of the others haven't done as well as you. Have you heard about it?"

I nodded unhappily. "I heard that several captains have been caught."

"They're being held here. For some reason, they've been scattered among all the jails. Harris is in the Marshalsea."

“Harris! I hoped he wasn’t one of them. He’s the best of the lot, a gentleman and a stout fighter. Can’t anything be done? Surely the people of England won’t stand by and see a man like Harris hanged!”

Sir Sigismund made a despairing gesture. “What can they do? Harris is from Bristol, and his friends there have offered the King eight hundred pounds to buy him free. That’s a big sum to raise in small amounts. James needs the money badly, but refuses it nevertheless. He has been fairly drooling for vengeance, and now he has his chance. They’ll swing, all of them.”

“Who else?”

“Halsey. He’s being held at the Fleet.”

Halsey! I think I had liked him best of all, in spite of his refusal to help poor Clim. And now he was to die himself, a felon’s death, as a reward for his brave work at sea!

“Longcastle is in the Clink. I’ve a great regard for Longcastle. There’s a fine and gentle strain in him. He’ll go with the rest. His Cornish friends are moving heaven and earth to save him, but they’ll get nothing but trouble for their pains.”

I got to my feet and began to pace about the room. I was finding it hard to breathe. It was almost as bad as during those terrible days when Clim was dying in the Basket. Three gallant men were to hang because of the passionate resentment of an unkingly ruler! Was England, the green and happy home for which I had longed so passionately, no better after all than heathen lands where all men were slaves?

“There are nineteen of them,” said Sir Sigismund. “The rest of them are humbler victims, mates and a few common sailors. Every one of the nineteen fought in the battle off Cape Passer.”

“When is it to happen?”

He hesitated. “No date has been set. The gibbets are up. Some of the gentlemen of the court paid a visit to Wapping Stairs yesterday to inspect them. Will you believe it that there were ladies in the party? I think the King is waiting in the hope of making it an even twenty.” His expression suddenly took fire. “Don’t let that frighten you, Roger. We’ll see to it that he never has that satisfaction! You can stay here in perfect safety. I swear they’ll never find you in that dark room of mine.”

“Two close acquaintances of yours,” he went on after a moment, “have been very helpful to His Majesty in this—this epic of injustice. The Upright Man ran down all of the common sailors who had taken refuge in the city. He did it for a price. There had been a restive feeling about the boldness of

his operations, and something might have been done about it. Now he can rest easy; the law will continue to wink at what goes on.”

“Don’t they know,” I demanded, “that Chirp Bird is in it as much as any of the prisoners? That he’s been fencing for the Free Rovers?”

“Everyone knows it, of course. I suppose there’s been a deal made. Your friend Chirp will turn all the profits over to the big men at court. You ought to hear what Archie has to say on *that* point! But you needn’t think that Bird’s immunity will last long. He’s useful to them now, but some day soon the King’s ministers will realize how dangerous he is. He’ll be brought to book, never fear. I went to see him when I first got wind of all this and advised him to have no hand in it. But it was too late. Eight of the arrests had already been made as a result of information he had given.”

“You took a great risk in going to him.”

“None whatever.” The cool face of Ulysses of the Trades broke into a smile. “I know too much about our Upright Man. All I had to do was to mention a certain circumstance in connection with the death of Barnaby Cloud which had come to my ears in a curious way. The Upright Man became anything but upright; he fairly groveled at my feet. But it was too late for him to draw back.”

“I’ll never forget that visit,” he went on. “Master Bird has moved from Alsatia. He wants to be a gentleman, and he’s taken quite a large place fronting on the river. Right in the middle of the finest homes in London. There was an uproar about it, but nothing could be done; he had the deed in his pocket before anyone knew what was happening.” He shook his head and smiled with sardonic satisfaction. “You should see the place now! The King, you know, has a collection of wild animals at Theobalds; and so nothing would do but Master Bird must have the same. There are iron pens in his front garden, and he keeps a toothless lion and a mangy old camel in them. The creatures are so poorly kept that the stench annoys his noble neighbors.”

In spite of my upset state of mind, I managed to laugh at the thought of Chirp Bird living in a London palace with lords and ladies on each side of him. He had always been full of big ideas; and now he was living up to them.

“The inside of the place is beyond description. He’s picked out for himself all the gaudiest stuff you sent from the South. The top of his dining table is made of stained glass! His favorite chair—incredible as this may sound, I swear it’s the truth—is on a dais, and he wears a purple suit whenever he sits in it. He has the largest bed in England, with crowns carved

on the headboard. He says twenty men could sleep in it with their heads together in the center and their bodies stretched out fanwise. Yes, we have a second king now, the Monarch of Mummery, the Sovereign of the Spital-spawn!”

“You spoke of two men who had assisted the King,” I reminded him.

“Macherie, of course, is the other. I understand most of the arrests started from information he gave. It’s certain, at any rate, that he told where Halsey and Longcastle were to be found. I’m convinced he came back with the idea of avenging himself. They played right into his hands by returning.”

“You know that he’s married to Katie Ladland?”

He nodded. “I heard the marriage was taking place. Poor child! Macherie set a high price on his silence; but not too high, apparently, for our stanch Sir Bartlemy.”

I think he saw that I was tired, for he got to his feet and said he would see me to my quarters. It would be uncomfortable, he warned, but I must be prepared to put up with it. The house might be searched at any time.

It developed that there was another entrance to the secret room which he considered safer to use. We climbed to the bedroom under the roof which I had used on my first visit. My host opened the closet and pressed down heavily on the floor with his feet. A trap door opened slowly and with much creaking, and I looked down into a black shaft not more than three feet square. I confess that the thought of descending into this narrow aperture gave me an empty feeling at the pit of the stomach.

“It’s the only safe way,” said Sir Sigismund, noting my reluctance. “The lower entrance hasn’t been used in a generation, and it wouldn’t be wise to disturb it now. You see, there’s a ladder sunk into the bricks. Go down carefully; a mistake would mean a long fall! I’ll visit you in the morning.”

It seemed to me that I would never reach the bottom. The rungs of the ladder protruded an inch only from the brick surface, and so I had to exercise the greatest care. I doubt if I could have managed it if the shaft had not been so narrow that I could brace my back against the other side and so relieve my arms of much of the strain. My sword kept getting in the way. I heard rats scuttling about between floors, and once a bat struck against my face with a blood-chilling squeak. I decided that the bricking was part of the chimney and there was an open hole somewhere in the shaft, for I heard other bats both above and below me.

I kept going down until I thought my arms would give out. I counted the steps: thirty, forty, fifty, sixty. I would never make it! My legs were shaking with the strain, but I did not dare to stop, even if relief could have been



secured that way. When I came to the seventieth step, my foot, to my intense relief, touched solid bottom.

I had no candle. Feeling cautiously about me I discovered that my new home was a hole not more than twelve feet by six and so low that I could touch the top with my hands. A couch, covered with blankets damp to the touch and moldy with age, filled nearly half of the space. It was so cold that my teeth chattered; a reaction not entirely due, perhaps, to the atmospheric conditions. I heard rodent claws scratching on the floor.

All manner of terrifying thoughts filled my mind. What would happen to me if Sir Sigismund took sick, if he were arrested, if an accident overtook him? No one else knew of the existence of this foul and noisome hole. Here I would be, in a dark pit at the bottom of a narrow fifty-foot shaft. No one would hear my cries for help. Could I raise the trap at the top by myself? For that matter, could I ever manage to climb up it to the top? If none of these things came about, how could he manage to get food to me? What if the house caught fire?

Underneath these speculations was a curious kind of fear I had never experienced before. I felt as though the building had closed in on me, that I could not move my arms, that very soon I would not be able to breathe. The sensation was so horrible that I had to press my face against the brick wall of the chimney to prevent myself from screaming. What did it mean. Was I going mad?

Finally I managed to rid myself of this hallucination, and I dropped on the couch, shaking with exhaustion. I tried to force my mind into normal channels but found it impossible to get away from one fact: here I would have to stay as long as I remained in London, alone, with nothing to occupy myself, days, weeks even. I was sure I was doomed to starve, if nothing worse happened to me.

I shivered with the cold, which struck into the very marrow of my bones, and tried to get some degree of warmth by clasping my arms about my chest. Nothing could have induced me to wrap myself in the soggy bed coverings. How could I tell what ghastly living things were under them?

This went on for a long time, an hour at least, I was sure; and then I found, to my surprise, that a certain warmth had begun to manifest itself. I reached out a hand and discovered that the wall in front of me was warm. I knew then that a fire had been lighted in the fireplace, and that the heat was coming through. This was the only comforting thing about my situation; I would not suffer continuously from the cold.

I overcame my repugnance sufficiently to throw the coverings off the bed, and then stretched out on the wooden slats. Here I stayed for endless hours, twisting continually to transfer the strain to new muscles, my peace of mind not helped at all by the sound of rats parading and convening and fighting beneath me.

I did not sleep, but once I fell into a sort of coma which came to an end when I sat up suddenly, trying to decide if my eyes were deceiving me or if a gray shape hovered in the blackness above me. Was it a ghost? Men undoubtedly had died in this foul hole; did their spirits still haunt it? I sat in terror, my heart seeming not to beat, for I don't know how long; I am sure it was many minutes before I was able to convince myself that it was nothing more than an optical illusion.

I knew it was morning when I heard a scuffling noise in the shaft above. It must be Sir Sigismund coming down; but the thought of company, comforting though it was, had one terrifying aspect. I was not sure he would be able to make it; and if he were to fall, what chance would I have of getting out?

He succeeded in reaching the bottom, but I could hear him puffing and gasping long before his feet touched the floor.

"Are you all right?" he asked, in an exhausted whisper.

"Yes."

I heard him strike a flint against the wall, and then a tiny light showed in the intense darkness of the place. He lighted a candle and set it in a niche in the wall. He had strapped a bundle on his back, but before getting rid of it, he looked about the narrow cell and shook his head.

"No one has been here in years," he said, clucking apologetically. "I had no idea it was as bad as this! Whew! It smells like the animal pens of our Upright Man. The ventilator in the shaft must be closed. I *am* sorry. But I didn't expect you, Roger, and there was no chance to do anything about it."

"I would be a lot worse off in prison, sir."

He had brought several dozen candles which he placed in another niche where they would be out of reach of the rats. "Better keep one going all the time," he advised. "There's too much danger in striking lights down here. If a fire started, the flames would shoot right up the shaft, and you would never be able to get out in time. I brought long enough candles to last many days."

He had brought also a bundle of food, a bottle of wine, and a heavy blanket. I discovered that I was ravenously hungry and bit at once into a loaf of bread.

“At any rate,” he said, “they’ll never find you here. That’s some consolation for you. No one else knows of the existence of this princely apartment.” He sat down on the end of the couch, making a wry face at the odor rising from it. “Well, Roger, I have news for you.”

“Bad news?”

“On the contrary. The best possible. The wedding didn’t take place after all.”

I found it hard not to shout at this unexpected information. Katie was not married! What could have occurred to prevent it? I was not capable of clear thinking, but I was sure that, whatever the reason, it meant she would never marry Macherie.

“I can’t believe it! Are you sure, sir? It was to take place two days ago.”

He smiled at my eagerness. “I thought that would do you some good. Perhaps this miserable kennel won’t seem so bad now. Yes, I’m quite sure. The guests who went down to Appleby Court were received with the word that the bride had changed her mind. No reason was given, but the story everyone believes is that your stanch little lady refused to marry Macherie when she found he had informed on his friends.”

He was right; I no longer found the discomforts of my cell unsupportable. The cold walls and the darkness overhead seemed to have vanished; I felt as though a dazzling light filled the place.

“What about her father?”

“Sir Bartlemy,” said my host, “seems to have been completely in accord with her. There was a limit, apparently, to what he could demand from the girl. I hear he behaved with firmness and dignity. There are all manner of rumors in the city about it. It’s said the King was furious, and I can believe that he was. Sir Bartlemy is now certain to face unpleasant consequences. At the least reckoning, he will be stripped of everything he possesses.”

“Then it’s come out that he was backing John Ward?”

He nodded. “Yes, the whole story is out now. Macherie created a scene and threatened Sir Bartlemy openly.”

My regret over the plight in which Katie’s father now found himself was tempered by another thought. Katie would no longer be an heiress, certain on that account to be forced into a good marriage. She was no longer, wonderful thought, out of my reach. If I could escape from my present difficulties and stay away from England long enough for everything to blow over, it was not inconceivable that I might in time secure a pardon; in which event I might have a chance after all to win her. I made a silent vow that I would devote my life to regaining for her something of what she had lost.

With this happy and exciting chain of thought went one reflection which left me with a deep sense of regret and shame. If I could only blot out the last two days from my life!

“Some friends are supping with me tonight,” went on Sir Sigismund. “Archie will be with us, and I’m sure he’ll have the whole story for me.”

“Where are they now?”

“The Ladlands? At Appleby Court, I’m sure. Sir Bartlemy will be wise enough to stay as far away from the King as he can manage. Not that it will do him much good now.” He smiled. “The only overt action the King has taken so far has been a sharp demand that the present sent by Her Majesty be returned.”

“None of this would have happened if I had been more careful that day at Calais,” I said, beginning to realize how serious the situation had become for Katie’s father.

“You mustn’t think that. Macherie had plenty to go on before he stole those papers.” He got wearily to his feet. “It’s going to be a hard pull to get up there again. I hope I can manage it. One thing’s certain: I won’t try it again. I’m afraid you’ll have to do whatever climbing’s necessary from now on.”

We arranged that I would make the trip each night at eleven o’clock when the servants would be in bed and sound asleep, and he left his watch with me so that I could keep track of the time. Once a day he would lower food and other supplies to me on a rope. This settled, he began the ascent with obvious misgivings. It took him a long time to reach the top; but, to my intense relief, he finally accomplished it.

The day passed more easily than I would have thought possible; entirely due, of course, to the turn of events which had switched my thoughts into pleasanter channels. I dipped into a book he had brought for me but found reading hard in the small light available. I remained most of the day on the couch with my new blanket wrapped around me. Even then the cold was hard to stand.

I made all manner of plans. I would save every penny during the three years in the East. Aunt Gadilda would help me in that, for no nip-cheese could excel her in making one shilling do the work of half a dozen. Some chance to distinguish myself would present itself, and my reward would be a pardon from the King. My fancy mounted to dizzy heights. I would become rich and famous: I would win a title, a great title, not a mere knighthood or baronetcy; I would be one of the foremost builders of the empire which John Ward talked so much about; I would buy Appleby Court, if it passed out of

Sir Bartlemy's hands; and, of course, I would marry Katie. The time passed quickly with such rosy speculations trooping through my mind.

At eleven o'clock to the minute I began the ascent. I had taken off my shoes, and the climb proved not as difficult as I had feared. I tapped cautiously on the trap door and felt a great relief when I saw it open above me. I blinked hard when the light struck my eyes. The room was warm and cheerful, with a splendid fire crackling in the fireplace. Sir Sigismund had a plate of hot food ready for me and a glass of brandy, and very little was said while I consumed both. Then he motioned me to a mirror on the wall, under which were a basin of hot water and a towel. My face, I discovered, was as black as a chimney sweep's.

"With a hoop-dery, dery, sweep," I said cheerfully, as I proceeded to give myself a thorough scrubbing.

"The house was searched today," announced Sir Sigismund when I had completed my ablutions. "I've been under suspicion for some time, of course. Luckily they can prove nothing. I haven't a shilling in any other venture than our own. They seemed to have hopes of finding you, and they made a very thorough job of it. Did you hear them thumping around the fireplace? It was just as well we left the panel undisturbed. The officer in charge said he was sure you were using this as your 'stalling ken' and that he would be back."

"Then I must continue to use the shaft. Or do you think it would be safer to get away?"

"Where would you go? No, the hunt is on in real earnest now. They're sure you are in London, and they're very much puzzled over how you managed to get to the city. They picked up your scent hot thirty miles away." I hoped they would never find the answer to that! "The only thing to do is to stay right where you are."

The sense of that was so apparent that I nodded. "Did Archie have any news?"

"Some odds and ends of gossip. It seems the King and Queen have been brangling over you. Her Majesty is reported to have said that she didn't want to see 'her nice young pirate' in any kind of trouble. You seem to have made a very favorable impression on her that night. But her advocacy only makes the King more set against you. They don't agree either on what is to be done to Sir Bartlemy. The Queen favors leniency, having such a soft spot in her heart for Mistress Katie."

"Then nothing has been decided?"

“Nothing yet. I’m afraid the King’s greed will prevail in the end. He needs money too badly to let an erring subject escape without a thorough unrigging. It’s certain Appleby Court will be confiscated. Archie says the court gossips have begun to chew on one juicy morsel of rumor: that Sir Bartlemy backed Macherie also.”

This was hard to believe in the face of the course Macherie was taking; but, remembering what Sir Bartlemy had told us, I was sure it was true. I explained the circumstances to my host, and he shook his head with a puzzled frown.

“The dishonesty of the man passes all understanding,” he said. “Well, this should give that acute conscience of yours a rest. If Macherie was backed by Sir Bartlemy, he knew all about the Ward matter as well. That stands to reason.”

“What about the prisoners?”

“The whole country’s in an uproar. The King’s under heavy pressure to pardon them. There’s a chance now that he’ll yield, but I’m not counting on it. They say he still falls into a rage when one of the captains is mentioned. Of course, my Lord Rochester and the Howards are bolstering him in his desire to stand firm. They stay in favor by backing every royal whim.”

He proceeded to tell me that plans had been completed for my own departure. The ship on which Richard Strange was to sail was leaving in two weeks. I would depart from London at night and sail down the river in a flory to a point near the city of Reading. There I would be met by a trusted servant of Sir Sigismund’s, who would escort me to the home of a retired sea captain near Plymouth; and from there I would sail across the Sleeve on a fishing smack. The ship would put in at Brest for me, and my Aunt Gadilda would be aboard.

I returned to my dark cell in a mood far different from the exalted one which had carried me through the day. I could think of nothing but the gibbets erected at Wapping Stairs. Nineteen gallant seamen would die there within a few days if a miracle did not happen to save them. My own prospect for a safe departure lost its savor in the face of that grim picture.

I managed to exist through two more days of confinement. On the evening of the second, I found my host in a depressed mood. He said nothing at all by way of greeting.

“What is it?” I asked.

He shook his head soberly. “The warrants have been signed. They die tomorrow morning unless something happens tonight to change the King’s mind. I’m sure there’s little chance of that.”

I had no appetite for the food he had provided for me. “Then there’s no hope?”

“Frankly, I see none. The court’s at Greenwich, and I went there this evening in the hope of an audience. It was refused. Curtly. The city is seething, and there’s a lot of wild talk about a rescue. Nothing will come of it. Gondomar was with the King this evening, and you can guess what *that* means. Nothing will satisfy Spain but the death of these men.” He paused as though reluctant to go on. “There’s worse to it than that. I saw Archie, and he whispered a disturbing bit of news in my ear. John Ward is on his way back.”

This amazing news left me completely tongue-tied. If John returned, he could expect no better fate than the nineteen unfortunate men who would die in the morning. I could not believe he would be guilty of such folly. He knew the vindictive streak in the King too well to put himself in the royal power.

“I can’t credit it,” I said finally. “John is too wise for that.”

“All I know is what Archie told me. He said orders have been given for a hasty refitting of the *Rainbow*. The old flagship has been rotting in port for the last ten years. As Archie puts it, ‘Why should she be scraped and painted and provided wi’ new laces and stays lak an auld strumpe’ if some extraordinary need hasn’t risen for her services?’ He’s quite sure a warm reception is being prepared for John Ward.”

“If it’s true,” I said, “we must find some way of warning him.”

“And how would we set about it?”

I knew how it could be done, but I did not go into that, being sure that he would raise objections.

“The bad news comes all at once,” he said. “Appleby Court has been confiscated by royal order and a fine imposed as well which will strip Sir Bartlemy of many of his other possessions. His town house will have to go, certainly. I understand he’ll have enough left to live comfortably on one of his farms. The disposition of the estate is what amazes me most.” He shook his head slowly as though unwilling to speak of such things. “Appleby Court passes into the hands of Sir Nevil Macherie! Yes, to the most treacherous dog this country has produced in my lifetime. A deal has been made, of course. I suspect that Macherie will divide with Rochester in the matter. Some substantial sum may find its way into the royal treasury, which is completely bare at the moment. It’s a pretty business all around! Well, my boy, there it is. Macherie lost the heiress, but he made sure of the estate.”

At various stages of my adventures I had been forced to act with some boldness. When I had risen to the need, it had always been with inward misgivings and with no stomach at all for the course forced on me by circumstances. I was not cut to heroic measure by any means, as must be apparent by this time. But now I was conscious of an anger so deep that no considerations of caution entered my mind at all. Macherie must be made to pay! I had been preparing myself for the time when he could be called to account, and now that time had come. I wanted nothing on earth so much as a chance to try conclusions with him. I knew that I would have no peace of mind until I had done so.

“Sir Sigismund,” I said, “this makes a change of plan necessary. I must go to Appleby Court first.”

He dissented strongly. “Why, in God’s name? You’re in enough danger as it is. Don’t you suppose they’ve set a watch for you at home? You’ll walk straight into a trap.”

“I’ve no intention of going near my own home. Nor to the Court directly. I’ve a matter to settle with Macherie, and I’m sure that I’ll find him there now.”

“There’s no sense to it. No sense at all.”

“There may be no sense to it, but I’ve got to go. Even if it means losing the chance of getting out of the country.”

He studied me intently. “I’m afraid you mean it. Well, it’s your own decision. I can’t stop you if you want to drop the noose around your own neck. But let me say this much: Mistress Ladland doesn’t need any such rash proof of your devotion.”

“I hope she doesn’t. But this is a matter between Macherie and me. Sir Sigismund, I’ll find my own way to Plymouth after—I’m through with Macherie. Can the rest of the arrangements stand?”

He pondered the matter. “I suppose so. But it adds to the chanciness of it. Is there anything else you need?”

“Yes.” My voice raised above the cautious level we had always used. “Suitable clothes. A horse. At once! Tonight!”



APPLEBY COURT lies west of the town, and I sighted it at daybreak. I reined in my horse and studied its tall chimneys, from which no smoke was issuing, with a feeling of complete bafflement. Nineteen brave men who had fought for England's rights at sea were dying in London this morning. John Ward had been proscribed and would meet the same death if the King's law ever reached him. Sir Walter Raleigh, the last of the titans of the old queen, was a prisoner in the Tower and would die when the King nerved himself to take the step. But a traitor and a coward was receiving this lordly domain as a reward for betraying his comrades. Things had reached a strange pass since James came to the throne!

I tethered my horse in a thick copse in Wayland Spinney and then took my station near the edge of the wood, where I could watch the road from town. I could make out from where I stood the square bulk of Temperance Handy's shop, and I found my thoughts turning longingly to the peaceful times I had spent under his tutelage. The future had been full of rosy dreams then. I had been sure that bravery and self-sacrifice led to a fair reward, that right always triumphed in the end. It had taken little more than a year to destroy all these beliefs and illusions.

I saw someone emerge reluctantly and carry a bucket to the well at the foot of the garden. It would be one of the apprentices; I thought I recognized Tod Tarsty, and I knew how he would be groaning and muttering over the necessity of rising so early. He had one prospect which I lacked—a substantial breakfast would be preparing to which he would soon sit down. One of Dame Handy's hams would be warming in front of the fire, from which thick slices would be cut for each apprentice. There would be hot and crusty bread and foaming mugs of ale. In spite of my troubled state of mind, I was ravenously hungry.

At nine o'clock I spied a small party of horsemen riding out from town. When they came closer I saw that the man in front had a long nose and a black beard curling under his chin. I had been right in my calculations, then; Macherie had not waited in the city for the executions but had ridden out at once to claim his prize. I wondered if any thoughts of the tragedy being enacted in London disturbed his satisfaction.

Some people of the town were following behind Macherie and his party. I could not make out who they were, and I could only guess at their reasons for coming out so early; curiosity, I decided, was the most likely motive. I was glad to see them; I needed an audience for the challenge I proposed to deliver.

I untethered my horse and rode out to meet Macherie. His eyes narrowed when he saw me.

“Well!” he said, reining in. “Ward’s jackal! I didn’t expect to meet you today. You were wanted badly for a little ceremony which took place in London this morning.” He smiled. “It seems I can be of assistance to His Majesty in arranging a repeat performance.”

I rode up alongside. There were three men with him. One was an official of some kind, a court bailiff perhaps; the other two were servants. None of the trio showed any inclination to come any closer.

“This isn’t chance,” I said. “I came here this morning to meet you. I was sure you wouldn’t stay in the city while your old comrades were paying the price of your treachery.” I saw that some of the townsmen were now within hearing. I recognized many of them and felt sure that I could count on support. “I came to tell you that you’re a traitor, a liar, and a thief! You stole papers from me and then used them to make trouble for many honorable gentlemen. The confiscation of Sir Bartlemy’s property is one result of your thievery.”

He had dropped one hand to the hilt of his sword, but otherwise he made no move. I went on: “Nineteen men have been hanged because of your treacherous tongue. All nineteen served in the same cause as you, and served much more bravely than you did, Sir Judas Macherie. Will you fight me now, or must I add the word coward to the others?”

He went into action then. Seizing my bridle reins, he shouted: “Hugh! Frank! Take this gallows-bird in charge! One on each side of him. He’s wanted in London, and I’ll see you get your share of the reward.”

“Will you, now!” said a voice in the crowd. The horse of one of the servants began to balk, and I saw Brose Bettenham take it by the bridle and lead it to the side of the road. Another townsman named Welch, who had been employed a great deal on the Ladland estate and so had reason to resent the change, edged close to the other servant and seemed prepared to interfere if the man made a move. I heard someone say, “Judas is the right name for him, the lying dog!” Boys who had trailed along in the wake of the procession took it up and began to shout, “Judas! Judas!” This, together with the nervous pawing of the horses, created quite a din.

“I warn you all!” cried Macherie in a rage. “This fellow is a criminal. You’ll put your own heads in the noose if you help him get away.”

“Are nineteen not enough for you?” demanded the voice which had spoken first. I saw now that it was Widdigate of the Cygnet’s Head.

We were sitting our horses thigh to thigh. Macherie’s face was white with anger, and I could see small purple spots on his long nose. I removed

one glove and slapped it across his cheek, demanding, "Now will you fight me?"

This move was so unexpected that all noise ceased at once. Macherie glared at me with incredulity turning quickly to white fury. We both dismounted.

"You've brought it on yourself!" he declared. "Apparently you prefer to die by the sword of a gentleman rather than at the end of a rope. There's nothing for me to do but oblige you."

He tugged at his weapon, bringing it out from the scabbard with such furious energy that those nearest him had to skip lively to avoid the blade. "Move back, all of you!" he ordered, glaring at the growing circle of townsmen. I wondered where they were all coming from. "I call to your attention that this has been forced on me. The hangman would have attended to this lying cub in due course, and it's by no wish of mine that I take over the task. He has insulted me publicly, and there's only one answer to that. Stand back!"

"You're right, there's only one answer to that," I said, drawing my sword. "I came here for the sole purpose of forcing you to fight. I've declared you openly a thief, a liar, a traitor, and a coward. The responsibility is mine."

"I'm going to kill you!" He looked around the circle of faces and frowned. "There's not a gentleman here. What can we do about seconds?"

"I'm willing to dispense with all formality."

A more cautious mood was taking hold with him. "It's true you're of man's size," he said, looking me up and down. "But I'm not anxious to lay myself open to criticism. What do you know about swordsmanship? I can spit you like a collared braun."

I felt a tug at my arm and looked around into the worried face of Mine Host Widdigate. "You'll not have a chance," he whispered. "Better make a run for it while there's time."

I shook him off and turned to Macherie. "At your service," I said.

We moved to a flat space on Fritchett's Meadow on the other side of the road. One of the townsmen used a dagger to trace two lines on the ground ten yards apart. By the code we must fight it out inside the lines and under no circumstances step beyond them.

Macherie proceeded to make himself ready by removing first the watch from around his neck and handing it to one of his servants; it was an oval-shaped Nuremberg Egg and as large as a platter. Then he stripped off his rich blue doublet without caring that under it he was wearing tight-laced

whalebone stays. These went next, revealing a lawn shirt elaborately embroidered in colored satin. Finally he removed his shoes and took his station in the center.

Being unsure of the condition of my shirt, I contented myself with removing my shoes.

“On guard!” said my opponent.

I knew as soon as our blades touched that this was going to be different from any other encounter in which I had figured. After his first attack, a lightning thrust which I turned aside with no more than a fraction of an inch to spare, he went steadily to work, an amused smile on his dark features. He had learned his trade in a better school than any of the gentlemen I had practiced with in the course of my travels that winter. It was not “slash and cut, blood and thunder” with him. He did not rush it; his thrusts were straight and deadly, his timing perfect; although sometimes he would deliver an attack with a savage energy which made me think of Dom Bass. I was kept strictly on the defensive and, with a tightening feeling at the heart, I realized that I would be lucky if I came out of this with my life.

I fought as warily as I knew how, keeping the point of my blade a shade lower than my hand and engaging his steel as lightly as possible. I shifted ground frequently, for I saw that his one weakness was his footwork. His legs were spare and a trifle clumsy; each shift threw him a little off balance and so gained me time.

There was no sun, and therefore no advantage in position. I stood with my back to Appleby Court and facing the town. I could see more people streaming down the road, some on horseback, some on foot. Clearly the word of what was afoot had been carried back. Carriages had stopped on the road. I realized that Sheriff Cropper could not fail to hear as well and that my chances of getting away would be slim even if I managed to emerge unscathed.

The only comfort I had was Macherie’s obvious discomfiture over the steadiness of my defense. He had not expected to find me so well prepared. Once he stepped back and said, “Well, Sir Jackal, you seem to know something of it after all.” The smile had not left his face, however, and it was clear he entertained no doubts of the final outcome. He began to exercise a still greater degree of guile, shifting his tactics with such suddenness that I never knew what to expect next. At each pause he would toss remarks at me calculated to keep me uneasy in mind. “Would you have danced as lively at Wapping Stairs as you do here?” or “Pray your Maker for mercy now; my blade will be through your ribs in a moment.”

My arms began to grow weary with the strain. I blamed myself bitterly for not having practiced more regularly. Was he feeling the strain also? I doubted it, for his smile was confident as ever, and his blade wove around mine with unabated vigor. I continued to shift ground, hoping to tire him in that way. My only chance, I knew, was to catch him with the master stroke Dom Bass had taught me. As the minutes passed, it became increasingly unlikely that I could take him in that trap. His touch was always feather-light, and he avoided my approaches to it with ease.

Once I caught a glimpse of Temperance Handy's face back of the front rank of watchers. He had come in a great hurry, for he wore no hat and he was panting. I saw that he was as white as chalk, and that his lips began to move, perhaps with prayers for my benefit. I thought desperately that I was going to need them!

My chance came so unexpectedly that I was never able afterward to understand how I managed to take advantage of it. I think Macherie had decided to finish me off; perhaps he was feeling the strain as much as I was. At any rate, he shifted to the right and lunged with more fierceness than he had yet displayed. I parried, and the weary muscles of my arm conveyed the welcome message that he had put too much effort into his stroke. At last his grip had stiffened! I drove his blade downward in the manner I had been taught, reversed my wrist, and gave his steel a twist. O blessed and omnipotent Dom Bass! It worked perfectly! Macherie gave a grunt of surprise, and I saw the first glint of fear in his eyes. His sword was twisting slowly in the air above me.

I had been vaguely aware of comments from the watchers before this, mutters of, "Hold him, Roger, hold him." Now the air was full of deafening noise. A shout went up from the packed circle. Hats were thrown in the air; some of them indulged in gestures and dance steps of delight. "Go in and finish him!" shrieked the townsmen, knowing that the code now compelled him to defend himself against me with his dagger. His face showing desperation and fear, Macherie backed over the line until the solid bank of spectators made further retreat impossible.

I dropped the point of my sword. "My opponent," I said, "has supplied proof of one of my charges. He has shown himself a coward."

The crowd shouted their agreement, forcing him forward until he stood inside the line again. He had drawn his bagonet, and his face had the look of a cornered animal.

It was my privilege to go in and finish him. I knew that I should act quickly; my own life depended on it. I took a step in his direction and then

stopped. Could I run a helpless man through in cold blood? My arm refused the task. If our positions had been reversed, he would have shown me no mercy. I knew that well enough. But I stepped back.

“Pick up your sword,” I said. Something inside me clamored that I was acting like a fool, that I would lose my own life because of this. I wanted to kill him and end it; but my arm still refused the butcher’s task.

Macherie gave me the look of a man who has won a reprieve on the gallows. At first it was one of incredulity, then of intense relief. He ran for his sword. The crowd howled their disapproval, and I thought for a moment they would break the circle and prevent a renewal of the conflict. I caught another glimpse of Temperance Handy’s face. He was smiling in anxious agreement. I was glad then. I remembered something more that Dom Bass had taught me, a variation of the disarming stroke. If I could catch my antagonist off guard again, I would do things differently.

We were facing each other again, Macherie’s face wreathed with malignant purpose. I was facing the other way, and I saw that another carriage had stopped where the road curved off toward Appleby Court. A feminine figure was standing on the steps. It looked like Katie, but I could not be sure.

“You’ve indulged yourself in a very fine gesture,” said Macherie, advancing to the attack. “I suppose I should thank you. But in matters which concern my own safety I’m always willing to take advantage of such weakness. You won’t have another chance. On guard, Sir Jackal! This time I intend to finish you quickly.”

I could hear murmurs from the spectators as our blades crossed. He meant what he had said; there was the deadliest of menace now in the feel of his questing, darting sword. I kept myself completely on the defensive, hoping that another chance would come. I had no illusions, however; my squeamishness had probably cost me my life.

His attack had more subtlety of design than before, his own fear back of it. I fended him off with the greatest difficulty. Sweat poured down my face, almost blinding me. I was barely conscious of the excitement of the watchers, who were imploring me to disarm him again. My only thought was to wait, wait, for the chance which might come a second time. I never let my gaze wander for as much as a second from his confidently smiling eyes.

I decided after an eternity of this that I must resort to a subterfuge. The muscles of my arms were giving warning that I could not maintain my defense much longer. I must do what I could to end it, and do it at once. An

idea flashed through my head. I knew from the comments of the crowd that Cropper had arrived; and so, taking care to keep a watch on my opponent from the corner of one eye, I pretended to be disturbed over his presence and looked back in his direction. Macherie saw his chance and lunged. It was a vicious, all-out thrust, delivered with a forward step. As his blade slashed along mine, my arm conveyed the same message: he was off balance, and he had stiffened his grip to drive the steel home. I was able to parry in time and to force his blade down. This time I did not reverse my wrist; instead I followed the lethal instructions of my great Dom Bass and thrust forward with an inward twist of the shaft. The steel encountered solid resistance.

Desperately I drove it home.

My opponent's face wore a bewildered look which turned in the merest trace of time to one of intense agony. Then it lost all expression, as though a hand had smoothed out the lines. He dropped forward with unnatural slowness. His sword, which had stuck in the ground, impeded his descent; and it seemed as though his body would never reach the earth.

For the first time the spectators were completely silent, stunned by the suddenness of it. Nothing was said as the men nearest the body rushed in to examine it. Knowing how deeply my sword had penetrated, I was not surprised when Widdigate said, "It's all up with him, Roger."

Someone shouted, "He's gone to Pegtantrums!" There was no cheering, which surprised me in view of the clamor they had created at every other stage. Perhaps the presence of Cropper had something to do with it. I sensed a new reeling of apprehension around me. I caught a momentary glimpse of my old tutor's face in the swerving wall of tense watchers: tears were streaming down it. Immediately I was caught up in such a whirl of movement that I had no chance to think of anything. I saw Cropper's predatory face forcing its way through the press, but only for a moment. A mounted man swung his horse directly across the sheriff's path. He applied his spurs, and the poor animal reared and whinnied with pain, forcing Cropper and his aides to drop back. Before I knew how it happened, I had been dragged up into my own saddle and found myself riding off the field with mounted companions on each side of me. The spectators gave full vent to their feelings at last, and a wild chorus of cheers sounded on the heels of our galloping horses.

My two companions were young men. I had never seen either of them before, but they were regarding me with a friendliness which I found most reassuring.

"A beautiful stroke!" one of them threw at me over his shoulder.

I gasped in reply, "The greatest fencer in the world taught me that one."

We thundered down the road and then turned off to the right. I had forgotten everything but the great need to get away, and I would have ridden past the coach there without a glance if the lady on the steps had not waved at me as I went by. I looked back then. It was Katie! Her face was white and tense, but her eyes told me how happy she was that I had come through safely. I drew in sharply on my bridle and would have stopped if one of my companions had not kicked my mount on the flank to set him back into full stride. "Danger!" he cried. All I could do was to wave back. She would understand, of course.

Apparently, however, no serious effort was made at pursuit. We rode due south for several miles and then came to a fork in the road with an arrow marked west and under it the name Newnham. We pulled up, and one of my new friends said in an apologetic tone: "I must turn back here. My good lady's having her yearly visit from the midwife, and nothing short of a duel or a witch-burning would have brought me out. It's going to be a boy this time. Will you go on with him a piece, Fitz?"

The other, who seemed very little older than myself, said: "That I will. Get back to your Sophie, Jack. I'll see him safely on his way. It's certain to be a boy. One in four, surely."

"I'd advise turning off before you come into Newnham and striking down Godersham way. No sense in being seen any more than you can help. Good luck to you, Blease. You struck a shrewd blow for the right cause today. Going to name him Luke."

I rode with my remaining companion for several more miles, encountering a lone farmer's wagon on the way and nothing else. My mind was blank of all emotion in spite of the fact that I had just killed a man. Perhaps it was the fatigue which was now manifesting itself in the aching muscles of my back and arms. Perhaps also the fact that I had dreamed so long of fighting Macherie, and had hated him so violently, made his death seem right and just. At any rate, I was conscious of no sense of regret. My mind was filled instead with the picture of Katie as she stood on the steps of the carriage and waved me good-by. Would I ever see her again? In my jaded condition of mind and body, I was ready to believe that this brief glimpse of her would be my last.

My new friend had the reddest hair I had ever seen and the friendliest eyes. When we reached an intersection in the middle of a thick blanket of woods, he reined up and pointed to the right. "Now I must leave, I'm afraid.



Keep riding west, and you'll be well beyond London by dark. What are your plans?"

"To get out of the country as soon as I can. I want to keep my head on my shoulders. I'm going to the East."

"The East? Do you mean China? And India?" He was very much excited at once. "I want to go to those countries more than anything else on earth. But my mother and sisters depend on me. We've three farms, and there's work to keep me busy all the time." He looked at me enviously. "What I'd give to be in your shoes! All England will hear about what you did today, and approve. A first payment for those poor fellows hanged in London. It's a beastly shame the way things are going in this country; and I don't care who hears me say it. Some day we'll meet again. I hope so; and I hope it'll be somewhere in the East."

He insisted on changing mounts when he realized that I had ridden down from London the night before. "Take good care of old Jeremy," he said. "He's a stout fellow and my favorite. If you'll leave him with an uncle of mine, Sir Anthony Basing, near Tunbridge Wells, he'll give you another in exchange and put you up for the night as well. He's a capital fellow, but a bit garrulous in his cups. Give the old boy some cock-and-bull story; anything but the truth."

"Thanks," I said. It was amazing to me how willing people were to help, knowing as they did that my life was forfeit to the government. "I don't know why you do all this for me, but I must say it's wonderfully kind of you."

"You saved my life." He laughed loudly at the puzzled look on my face. "Sooner or later I'd have found it impossible to stand that beast of a Macherie as a neighbor, and I'd have challenged him myself. After what I saw today, I know I wouldn't have stood a dotterel's chance against him. So, by doing it first, you unquestionably saved my life."

"Where will the Ladland family live?"

"At one of their farms, I think. Burchall's East Farm, a fine bit of land." I knew the place, a hundred acres or so with a stone house ringed on three sides by a small stream. It was a long step down from Appleby Court, but they would be comfortable enough there. I hoped the Queen's influence would ease matters for them in time.

My new friend mounted my weary nag and said cheerfully: "Spare me a thought, Blease, when you get to China. I'll be at home with the horses and the cows and the chickens. I haven't even got a sweetheart. Do'ye suppose Katie Ladland would look at me?"

CAPTAIN AMOS STARKLE, to whom I carried a note from Sir Sigismund Hill, lived far out from Plymouth on the Penlee Road. I knew he had commanded ships in the Eastern trade, and that later he had lived for many years in Persia, becoming rather handsomely opulent in the process, and so I expected to find in his household the rigid discipline which seems to govern the lives of all retired captains. To my surprise I discovered that he lived in an atmosphere of indolence and bodily comfort; a reflection, I realized later, of his luxurious life in the Orient.

The Hoe, where Francis Drake bowled while the sails of the Armada hove in sight, was visible across the Sound when I arrived, so it seemed fitting that Captain Starkle should be enjoying a game back of his house with a friend. Still, I was surprised; for, although the season was well advanced and the almond and cornelian trees were already in bloom, the grass was tender and the ground soft. They were hard at it in spite of this, shouting, "The bias isn't working, man!" and, "There's a Mary for ye, straight to the Block!" He came out at once to greet me, carrying a muddy bowl in one hand; a thickset man rolling sailorwise on the balls of his feet, his eyes like lighted garnets and his hair so completely gone that his long beak of a nose made him resemble a parrot.

"Hill wrote me to expect ye," he said, in a high-pitched voice, "but ye're a day or two ahead of time. Ye're younger than he led me to believe. Well, now, I see ye're surprised to find us at the game so soon. We're bowlers here, sir; we can hardly wait for the frost to get out of the ground." He looked back over his shoulder at his opponent. "Be off home, Syl. Game's over."

The house was broad and low, and covered with a yellow Italian material called stucco which had been introduced into England a very short time before. I did not care much for it, I must confess; it looked too unsubstantial and gibe-crakey for a rugged English landscape. There were surprises in every room; lovely rugs from the East on the floors and hangings on all the walls in the gayest color combinations I had ever seen; cool tiled partitions in place of the usual dark oak screens, and ivory tables; and, most unusual of all, a pair of salaaming servants in snow-white turbans and trousers as broad as a lady's farthingale. The room to which I was escorted had a bathtub

made of tile instead of wood and high enough to bring the water right up to the armpits. I was into it as soon as I could untie my points, not having had an opportunity to wash properly for many days. The water was hot, and there was an oval of soap which smelled of rose-water and lavender. There was even a fine linen cloth for the teeth and a special soap to aid in scrubbing them clean.

Over a supper of curry, which he explained was an Eastern dish of meat smothered with crushed herbs, and which was very tasty, although I thought the first mouthful would take the roof off my mouth, my host talked incessantly. His favorite habit was the quoting of verse, by preference in English, although he could roll out Latin as well. Everything said reminded him of something from Spenser or Donne or “that new fellow. William Shaxbird,” and he would then recite flawlessly and at great length, fixing me the while with his avid eyes. It was not until we were at our wine that he began to ply me with questions.

“Why has the *Rainbow* been fitted out for action?” he asked, twisting his head in the direction of Plymouth. “She lies over there, and I hear no shore leave’s being allowed.”

“It was rumored in London,” I answered cautiously, “that Captain Ward was returning and that His Majesty planned a reception for him.”

“Ay, I heard the same. But what manner of reception? Will the captain of the *Rainbow* read the great Ward an address of welcome, or will he use a round of langrel-shot instead?”

“I don’t think they plan to have masques and fireworks,” I answered. “Has the news reached you that nineteen of the Free Rovers were hanged in London a few days ago?”

“Ay, and the whole town’s gone into mourning over it. We hear the ballad makers of Paul’s Walk have turned out songs on the hangings that will send some of them to the chats if the King can find who wrote them. Can it be that ye know John Ward?”

“I was raised in the same town with him.”

“And sailed with him, belike?”

Sir Sigismund had said that I could trust him completely. “Yes, I sailed with Captain Ward. I was in the battle off Cape Passer. I consider him a great man, and I’m proud to say that I’ve been making myself troublesome to the King. He would have made it twenty if he had got his hands on me.”

“I judged ye right, then, although our old Ulysses didn’t tell me much about ye.”

“Now that you know that much, I might as well give you my whole record. I killed Macherie in a duel on the morning of the hangings.”

He whistled. “Ye killed Macherie! I didn’t know about that. It’s extraordinary, quite extraordinary! Ye must be a rare hand with the blade, my young cock.”

“You’re harboring a dangerous guest, Captain Starkle. If you say so, I’ll leave at once, and no hard feelings. I don’t want to see you in any trouble.”

He clapped his hands, and one of the servants came into the room, bowing so low that he seemed to double up like a spring knife. I wondered if my host would give orders for my capcase to be delivered to me at once. Instead he ordered more wine. When the blackamoor was gone, he laid a reassuring hand on my knee. “Don’t ye like the ways of the East, Master Pirate, that ye talk of leaving so soon? Ye made a friend of every salt in England when ye let daylight into that lying bully-huff. I tell ye I have no love for the King, and the more trouble ye make for him, the better I’ll like ye. No, no, we’ll get along fine together.”

I sighted the *Royal Bess* on the morning of the third day. I believed it was Ward as soon as my magic cylinder picked up her sails on the horizon, and it did not take long to be sure. I felt an intense relief; for now I could save John from the fate waiting for him ashore and still get to Brest in time.

We fought our way out through a powerful sea-gate. The *Royal Bess* paid no attention to my first hail, and so my skipper had to lay the sloop alongside the hull of the plunging monster while I repeated it. Finally I heard the voice of Mate Gard bawling orders from the quarter-deck. The great ship heaved and lay to.

Gard had recognized me, for I heard him say, “It’s Blease, or I’m a culpung sea-ape!” A line was thrown me, and I managed to climb up the side, getting myself thoroughly soaked to the waist; a final proof that I would never make a sailor. The rail was crowded, and I heard jubilant shouts as I pulled myself over. “Shanks! Good for you, Shanks!”

I was given a hearty welcome. They had been feasting their eyes since dawn on the hilly coastline of England, and I suppose my arrival seemed to them a confirmation that things were right ashore. At any rate, they slapped me on the back as though I were bringing them the news they wanted and indulged in all manner of delighted capers. One man danced a hornpipe. I looked about me and was struck with the fact that many of the faces were new.

They felt no better than I did. The shadow of the rope, which had hung over me from the moment I landed, had vanished at last. I had escaped; I

was free; the chance to begin a new life in the East stretched ahead. I was so happy I would have joined in the hornpipe if I had known the steps. For the moment everything else was forgotten.

Maltworm, his face tanned to the color almost of charred wood, was one of the first to shake hands. “Shanks, we’re proud of ye,” he boomed. “We heard about ye. Pouring bambury-chat into the ears o’ the Queen!”

The cook, looking out from the galley, called to me: “Greetings to ye! Will ye take us all to the palace to see the old lady?”

“She isn’t old,” I said. “She’s young and pretty.”

“All the better! Nownes, to see a pretty face again!”

“Ye’ll make the rounds in Rome-ville with us, Shanks,” said Maltworm. “If only Clim and Dandyprat could go with us too! We’ll have a girl on each arm, and we’ll drink all the ale in England, and the gorbellied old King will wave at us from his window.”

“And our pockets full of ribbin!” shouted someone else.

One of the men in the shrouds took that up and started to sing the ribbin song: “Ribbin, ribbin, rolling Spanish ribbin!”

The whole crew joined in, shouting the words and slapping their breeches pockets in anticipation of the easy times ahead:

*“Ribbin, ribbin, rolling Spanish ribbin!  
Angel, noble, yellow boy,  
Darby, rhino, dust o’ Troy.*

*Ribbin, ribbin, ruddy Spanish ribbin!  
Setting busk and making law,  
Waxing in a nip-cheese claw.*

*Ribbin, ribbin, richest Spanish ribbin!  
When the sailors go ashore,  
Hear the callots call for more  
Ribbin, ribbin—”*

It was one of those continuous things, and they would have sung it through if John Ward had not appeared on deck. He came down the ladder on the run and shook hands with me.

“Roger, boy! I’m delighted to see you!” The white plumes in his hat trembled with the eager pumping of his arm. With a sinking of the heart, I realized he had dressed himself up like a bridegroom in anticipation of a triumphal visit ashore. His doublet was of white velvet, and his trunk hose

slashed and embroidered in gold, tapering down to below the knee. He even wore low shoes with white Tudor roses. I wondered dismally how I could break the news.

“Why, you swaggering lob, you’ve grown a beard!” exclaimed John. “I hoped you would get wind of our coming. How are things ashore?”

I hesitated. “I’m afraid, Captain Ward, you won’t find things as you expected. The fact is, you musn’t risk it.”

The smile on his face died. “No?” he said. “Just what do you mean, Roger?”

“I came out to warn you.”

I was conscious that complete silence had fallen over the ship. The seamen were edging up as close as they dared, to hear what was being said. Their faces had become sullen.

“Nineteen men were hanged at Wapping Stairs a week ago,” I went on. “I’d have been with them if they had caught me.”

John reached forward and gripped me by the shoulders. His eyes seemed to have shrunk to pinpoints.

“Nineteen! Were they Free Rovers? Did they belong to the ships that came home ahead of us?”

I nodded unhappily. “Four of the captains. Halsey—”

“Halsey!” cried John. “Halsey hanged! This passes belief. Halsey was one of the finest fighting men this country ever bred.” He paused and breathed deeply. “Who else? In God’s name, who else?”

“Harris, Longcastle, and Jennings.”

John’s arms dropped to his sides. He walked to the rail and stood there in silence for several minutes. When he turned back, his face was stern and set.

“Did Macherie have a hand in it?” he demanded.

“Yes. But there’s nothing left to be done about him. I killed him in a duel the morning of the executions.”

He looked at me incredulously. “You killed Macherie in a duel? I would like to believe it, but—”

The men were stirring again. The news of the hangings had struck them dumb, but it was apparent they were getting some consolation out of the killing of Macherie.

“A fencing master had taught me a special trick,” I explained. “I was able to use it before he wore me down. We fought on one of the meadows near Appleby Court.”

John took me by the arm and led me back to the quarter-deck ladder. “Roger,” he said, “it’s clear now they had set a trap for me. Two months ago I received word that the old offer held; I could return home and take a post with the Navy. It didn’t come from my Lord of Nottingham, but—well, I’ll name no names here. It seemed official enough, and I was sure I could trust my man. Several of the captains had received promises of pardon and had already sailed for home. I decided I could take it this time. The Dons had left the Inner Sea wide open since we whipped them. English ships were putting through without interference. We’d done what we set out to do.”

“Macherie was back of it, I’m sure.”

“His hand didn’t show, but I think you’re right. I was foolish enough to believe there had been a change of heart. I’m a weak-headed dolt; and you’ve saved me again. Well, I don’t need a soothsayer to read the future for me now!”

He walked back and faced the crew. “Men,” he said, “this is bad news for all of us. We’ve been chasing a wild goose. We can’t land; it would be the rope for all of us if we did. There’s nothing to it but to put back to where we came from. Heathen ports are the only ones open to us still. Any man inclined to risk it has my permission to leave and go ashore. But I advise against it.”

No one spoke. The faces of the men were glum with the final dashing of all their hopes.

“The *Rainbow* is in Plymouth Harbor,” I said. “She’s been fitted out for action. She’s fully manned, Captain Ward. The word ashore is that she’s been ordered to capture the *Royal Bess*.”

He threw back his head and laughed. “The *Rainbow* is a stout old lady, but we’ve nothing to fear from any ship manned by King’s officers. We could blow the abbey-lubbers out of the water!” He paused. “But I see what you meant. We’ll have to get away. We can’t fight an English ship.”

“We need fresh supplies, Cap’n Ward,” put in Gard. “Two more down with the scurvy today. That makes six. They’ll all have it if we put back with nothing but powdered pork and sea biscuit.”

“I don’t intend to run like a fox at the first sound of the horn. We’ll put in at some port west of here and pick up what we can. Bring her about, Gard. We’ve no time to spare.”

He took me back to his cabin and there heard the whole story. At first he listened with complete apathy, his eyes full of the disappointment he had suffered. When I began to relate the details of Macherie’s course, however, his interest became bitterly active.

"I hated the man from the first time I saw him," he said. "Well, you wiped that score off neatly. You'll have to show me that trick, Roger; there must be a touch of black magic about it, for I've seen Macherie in action, and he was a dimber hand with the blade."

"I'm under promise not to describe it. Dom Bass made me take an oath before he taught me."

After a moment he sighed deeply and said: "I wish it had been a little further on into spring. There's so little green out! I've been looking forward to seeing apple blossoms and cowslips. Things won't be at their best for a month or more."

"We may never see England again."

He sat up at that and said with an attempt at briskness, "Well, no use repining, my stout Roger. We're being turned away, but it could be worse; by this time Macherie has been driven from the gates of heaven and is on his way south to a warmer clime than Tunis. I wouldn't trade places with him. As a matter of fact, I'm free of all strings now. I'll carve out some kind of life for myself; and, by all the angels above, I'll have a good time doing it. I'm free now, I tell you."

"Things may right themselves in time, John. The Queen is for us, and young Prince Henry. There's a powerful party against the King, as I found when I made my rounds."

"Yes. But he's the king, and what the rest of them think and want doesn't matter." He managed a smile. "Your audience with the Queen was a bold stroke, Roger. But I didn't expect you to risk your neck that way. I was sure Mundy Hill would put a check-rein on you."

"I take no credit. I didn't do anything until my conscience drove me to it."

"Well, you did it. You laid the train; let's pray something will set it off!" His hands slipped listlessly to his knees, and all the animation left him. I could see he was thinking again about the bleak future stretching ahead of him. There was a suggestion of moisture in his eyes when he said in hopeless tones: "I'm no longer an Englishman. I'm a man without a flag or country. Must I keep going now like the Wandering Jew? God, Roger, was ever mortal in such a plight before?"

He had told me that Joralemon was down with the scurvy, so I slipped away to pay a visit to the hospital. It was on the orlop-deck, a dark corner with one porthole and a latticed opening through the inner partition to give some circulation of air. The atmosphere was foul beyond description. Joralemon essayed a smile when he saw me, but it was a feeble effort.



“What’s being done for you?” I demanded, for the place reeked of neglect. “I’m afraid John is falling into lax ways.”

He rose at once to the defense of his hero. “Nothing more can be done. We’ll be right again as soon as we can have a bite of fresh food and some milk to drink. It’s always amazing how quickly a man can get over this trouble. This is my third spell of it, and right now my teeth are so loose I could pull them all out like raisins from a cake. But I’ll be right in a day or two.”

I examined the medicine cabinet which stood in one corner. It was almost completely bare. There was a bottle of *hickery-pickery* and another containing a colorless powder, and that was all. The handles of two knives were visible above the surgeon’s table, and on top of it there was a large mazer-bowl in which some nauseous ingredients had been mixed. The bowl had been handsome once, but the silver was tarnished yellow now, and I had difficulty in reading the inscription on the rim, “Forget not thy beginning, Think of thine End”; a cheerful sentiment for a sick room!

“We’ll have fresh food in a few hours,” I said, returning and seating myself on a joint-stool beside his hammock. “How have things been going, Jore?”

He whispered cautiously so that none of the other patients could hear: “Badly, Roger. So many of our English crew have been killed that we’ve had to take on anyone we could get. A lot of Dutchmen and Italians and a few French. They’re a wicked lot! Terrible things happen on board now. Beastly things; I can’t put a name to them. I can’t do a thing with these new men. They jeer at me all the time. Gard tries to beat it out of them; but that’s no good either. The *Royal Bess* is a hell, a sink of the foulest iniquity. Well, it will be over soon. Didn’t I hear that the coast has been sighted? It will be wonderful to be home in England!”

I hesitated about telling him the truth and then decided he would be sure to get the news immediately anyway. “The ship can’t go in, Jore. The King is hanging the Rovers as fast as he can lay his hands on them. John is going to lay in fresh stores and then sail back to Tunis.”

His face went even whiter than it had been before. His eyes closed. “Then it’s better if I die,” he muttered. “Lord, if it be Thy will, take me from this scene of wickedness!”

WE DROPPED DOWN THE COAST and anchored off the mouth of a small river where the thatched roofs of a village showed through the trees. A boat was sent ashore and returned in a few hours, well laden with everything obtainable in the line of food—tall crocks of milk, some bags of vegetables which had managed to survive the winter in root-cellars, quarters of beef, and whole carcasses of hogs, and, most enticing of all to the starved nostrils of the sailors, dozens of loaves of bread, hot from the ovens. The men seized the loaves tossed to them by Gard and tore them apart with their fingers, then devoured them with ravenous smacking of lips.

They had no more than a few minutes to eat, for the sails of the *Rainbow* had been sighted. The old flagship was coming up with the obvious purpose of cutting us off. John Ward held all officers of the Royal Navy in the utmost contempt, but he was anxious to avoid a clash, knowing that lives inevitably would be lost; so he signaled Gard to up anchors and away as soon as the boat had been raised.

I stood beside him on the quarter-deck, and I could see that the *Rainbow* was being handled well enough. At any rate she came up fast, and it was apparent that we could not get away without a brush. Realizing this, John frowned and cursed King James under his breath.

Some years later a song was written about what happened that day.<sup>[1]</sup> It became a great favorite, and I heard it sung wherever sailors congregated. It was a poor bit of doggerel, as far from the truth as could be imagined, and full of bombastic messages exchanged between the King and John Ward. John was said to have offered “full thirty ton of gold” for a pardon. There was a brisk fight, according to the ballad writer, with the piratical craft getting all the better of it, for “they were brass on the outside but Ward was steel within.”

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[1] “John Ward and the *Rainbow*” (1620).

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It did not happen that way at all. It is true that the new guns in the bow of the *Rainbow* spat at us angrily when we proved that we had the heels of

them. The shots were pitifully wild, causing spouts of water to kick up a hundred yards in front of us. John shook his head sorrowfully when he saw how bad their marksmanship was.

“They’re no better now than the Jew-roasters,” he said. “Can you believe that’s all we have left of the stout navy which pounded the Armada to pieces? Still, bad as it is, this must be stopped. I can’t risk an injury to the *Bess*.”

I followed him below to the gun-deck, where Master Gunner Gracey had his men lined for immediate action.

“One shot only, Gracey. We’ll give him a scare, but I don’t want any of the poor fellows hurt. Do you suppose now that you could damage his rigging for him?”

It was a stiff order. While Gracey and I argued about the degrees of randon, John himself got to work and had one of the guns trained on the flagship. He sighted it himself, carelessly it seemed to me, and without doing any figuring at all. “That should be about right,” he said.

Miracles will happen for men like John Ward. To my amazement, and the delight of the whole gunnery crew, the shot struck the mainmast of the *Rainbow* squarely, sheering it off as neatly as a cocoanut at a fair. The billowing head of white sail collapsed at once. I can think of no simile to describe it except that the same effect might have been gained if a giant hand were to reach up and drag from the sky a bank of fleecy clouds.

John rubbed his hands and grinned at me. “What’s all this talk about degrees of randon and setting a true dispart?” he demanded.

That was all there was to the epic fight between John Ward and the *Rainbow*. The flagship was soon nothing more than a stationary speck on a darkening ocean. It was cock-shut time, and the swabber put his head out of the coach to say that the Captain’s dinner was ready. The Captain paid no attention. He had walked to the rail and was watching the receding shoreline. I went over and stood beside him.

“It’s so green!” he said, after a few moments of silence. “When I try to find a reason for the way I feel, it comes back to that. France and Spain get a baked and parched look when the summer wears on, but England is always green. Green and fresh and peaceful. You know, Roger, my mother had a little of the poet in her, and she used to say that the streams and brooks all murmured, ‘Slowly I flow, sadly I go.’ They wanted to linger as long as they could before leaving England and joining the sea. I think she was right.”

“This time I’ve had no chance to listen to brooks,” I said, “but I’m sorry to see that shore fading away.”

"I can't believe yet," he said, "that I'll never again walk the streets of our grand, noisy, fighting Rome-ville. I love it! You know that song, 'The grave I choose at last to fill must lie where I may hear them still, Bow Bells, rapt, in Rome-ville.' It keeps running through my head."

He gave a short laugh. "Why should I keep repeating those words? The grave I'll fill will be under desert sands; and, if there's any sound of bells to be heard, they'll belong to stinking camel trains!"

We were interrupted by a loud cry of pain. I had already noticed that one of the crew was a Moor, a huge fellow with coarse features under a dirty turban. He had passed behind us on shuffling feet and about twenty paces on had encountered a knife dropped from the shrouds. It struck him squarely in the shoulder, and he fell to the deck, calling loudly on Allah and the One Prophet.

"God in Heaven," cried John, "what's come over this ship! Gard, Card, find out who did it! Find the murdering dog and bring him here! I'll put a stop to this business of dropping knives if I have to hang half the crew!"

The mate, who was already bending over the wounded Moor, straightened up. "I'll find who did it, Cap'n. But think that matter of hanging over carefully before stringing any of them up. I'm shorthanded, Cap'n Ward; I haven't two full watches as it is. And remember this: none of them wanted us to take on the heathen dog. Just think it over, Cap'n."

"All right, all right," said John, throwing up his arms. "Have it your way, Gard. I must wink at murder so long as the ship keeps under way!" He stopped and then went on in his normal tones. "Gard, there must be some punishment for this. Find who did it and have him keel-raked. See that he gets a good one. I want him scraped down one side and up the other; and when he comes to the surface I want to see that he's close to drowned and has half the skin raked off his filthy hide."

"Keel-raked it is, Cap'n," said Gard. "If ye say so. But I'm against it. They're close to mutiny now, Cap'n Ward. They don't take kindly to this business of being shut out of England. They're not praising Cap'n Rufflecoat down in the fo'c's'le tonight, and I might as well tell ye the truth."

"See that he's roped and thrown over at once," said John sharply. "I want the whole crew on hand when it's done. We must get back to proper discipline, Gard. This malingering's got to stop. I won't have a crew of mine fed out of pap-boats! They'll step lively from now on. I want the ship scraped and painted, from top to bottom. Work's what they need, the dirty abbey-lubbers!" His eyes roved about the ship, frowning at the evidences of

laxness which he saw. His face became red with rage when he detected the head of a seaman over the forward rail. "Get him off that seat! Are they too dainty to go below any more?"

I could not help laughing at that. Many times I had seen Captain Ward himself on the side seat, and I had been caught there often and been well drenched when the sea was running high. John looked at me sternly for a moment, but then broke down and began to grin himself.

"Let that go, Gard," he said. "But don't misunderstand me about the main issue. Have evening prayers as usual at Compline. See that every man's on hand. Then truss your man up while they're there. He'll need prayers afterward, I trust."

Before going in to dinner, he visited the pilot-house and exploded into new rage when he saw that the sand in the roning glass had been allowed to run out. He scowled at the man on the wheel. "I'll have another talk with Gard. Holy Olaf, we're falling into slack ways!"

We had dinner together in his cabin. The cook had celebrated the securing of new supplies by providing a roast of beef. John helped me liberally and then cut off a full rib for himself. It had been done as a matter of habit, however, for he picked at the meat in an abstracted mood. He said nothing. I tried to talk about various matters, but he did not seem to hear. Sometimes I thought that I detected a glint of tears in his eyes.

"The roast beef of Old England," he muttered once. "Will I ever taste it again?"

He drank steadily, and in time this had its effect. His mood lifted. He sunk his knife in the red meat, and his elbows began to work with their accustomed heartiness. He finished the beef and then proceeded to devour half a dozen thick slabs of new cheese. He wound up the meal by cracking walnuts with the hilt of his fine sword.

The sea was rough. The lantern, suspended from the ceiling by a chain of Castilian brass, swayed so much with the pitching of the ship that we were in semidarkness half of the time.

John fell into an oratorical mood. "I've given the trade of the world back to my country," he said. "I've handed the Levant on a platter to our merchants, with dressings of olives and cloves of garlic. And this is my reward! I'll die under an African sun with heathen gabble in my ears. Or perhaps the Dons will get me finally, and I'll appear before my Maker with a red welt around my neck. Well, my brave Roger, I propose now to make the best of it. If I must cast in my lot with the heathen, I'll take what ease and pleasure I may out of heathen ways. Have you any quarrel with that, my

strait-laced friend?" After a moment he added: "Did you know that most of the people ashore refused to take money for the supplies we picked up today? It's a fact; and it shows that their hearts are staunchly in the right place. *They* think well of John Ward. That will be something for me to remember under the stinking hot walls of Tunis!"

The creak of the swaying lantern was the only sound heard for several minutes. John had lighted his pipe but it refused to draw.

"I suppose you want to hear about Cristina," he said finally. "I don't like to talk about it yet and, after all, there's so dismally little to tell. I went to the place where they had taken her, but she was dead before I arrived. I saw her, poor child. That was some consolation, for I could be sure they hadn't made up the story of her death to throw me off. She—she was very thin. She left a letter for me. It was a brave note, and I'll always treasure it." He puffed furiously at his unwilling pipe. "My son died with her. If you don't mind, that's all I want to say about it."

We came to the subject of Katie shortly after. "Well, we've both lost her now," he said. "She'll be married when you come back from the East; if they ever let you, that is." As though I did not know it! I thought about it continually. "The state of the family purse will make it doubly necessary for her to take a rich husband. Did she tell you I wrote her?"

I shook my head.

"She wouldn't, of course. What I said was that she ought to marry you. Oh, it was no magnanimous gesture, like a hero in a play at the Globe. I had no chance myself, and I wanted you to have her in preference to anyone else. That was all, so don't be thanking me. It might have worked out that way if you had walked on eggs like a sensible man. The King would have pardoned you. I think Mundy Hill could have seen to that."

I shook my head again. "I doubt it. Pardons were to be had, but at a stiff price. A stiffer price than I wanted to pay."

"I'm not so sure. The old gander might have done handsomely by you. But no, you looby fool, you had to preen yourself before the Queen and then spread sedition up and down the land." He smiled at me. "It was well done, Roger. I'm proud of you. But you probably lost our Katie by it."

When I said nothing, being deep in recollection of her as I had last seen her on the edge of Fritchett's Meadow, he went on: "She's the only one I've ever had any real love for. Not even my poor Cristina. You may not want to believe it, Roger, after seeing the way I live; but I remember every word she said on the few occasions that I saw her. I can recall every expression on her face and every little move she made. Well, there it is. She'll marry some

sober landowner and will raise a flock of proper little ladies and gentlemen; and we'll both rot under tropic suns."

"John," I said, "you've done what you set out to do. Why not drop it now? Come on with me to Damascus. There are independent traders in the East, and they do well for themselves. The King might pardon both of us in time."

He shook his head. "And what about my men? There are still fifty or more of them who signed on with me at home. I couldn't take them with me. What then? Leave them to fend for themselves? The poor devils would all wind up in Spanish nasks. No, I must see it through. I got them into this, and I must do the best I can for them."

He continued to fill his wine cup, and his spirits rose as the wine went down. Finally he insisted on a demonstration of the stroke that had won for me against Macherie.

"I'm not asking to know how it's done," he said. "I'm just curious to see if it can be played on me. I'm a dimber-damber with the blade myself, you know."

Anyone who had ever seen him in action could believe that. When we boarded the decks of the *Santa Caterina*, his sword had cut a swathe about him like the mighty brand of Roland at Roncesvalles. He had been the equal of six ordinary men, a slashing, raging human torrent; the greatest fighter, I am sure, in the world. I had no faith whatever in my ability to disarm him.

As soon as our blades crossed, however, I realized that, in spite of his prowess in combat, he was not in the technical sense a good fencer. He had most of the faults that Dom Bass had ascribed to Englishmen: a tendency to attack with ill-considered fury, a looseness of stroking which left him open to the ripostes of an opponent, and little sense of economy in the strength of his thrusts. Because of the fitful light, we fought warily, but I knew from the start that I could disarm him at any moment I saw fit. Out of regard for his pride, I delayed the culminating twist.

"I guess you find me different from Macherie," he declared, beaming over the flash of his busy blade. "When does it come, this magic trick? My sword's still in my hand, oh, my doughty Roger. I begin to think you were drawing a long bow; or perhaps I'm too good to be caught by the trick of a mere fencing master."

I knew then that I must let him off. His pride was too closely engaged, and he needed whatever satisfaction he could win after what he had been through this day. Finally I stepped back and lowered my point.

“You must know it after all,” I said. “I can’t catch you, John. You would have run Macherie through in short order if the privilege of meeting him had been yours instead of mine.”

He smiled at me with great satisfaction. The outcome of our little brush had restored his spirits.

“I thought so,” he exulted, sheathing his sword with a bang of triumph. “Well, it’s getting late. You’ll be seeing old Kochab over the left shoulder soon. Better turn in, my kinchin coe.” He dropped a huge hand on my shoulder and began to propel me toward the door. “Look in on Jore, will you? My poor old heaven-beck needs cheering up. Perhaps you could work your trick on *him*.”

There was a rap on the other door of the cabin which led to a smaller one adjoining it. His face, already red from the exertion, became even more ruddy. He shrugged his shoulders and gave a somewhat shamefaced grin.

“I didn’t want you to know,” he said. “Well, it doesn’t matter now. You know well enough already that I’ve always had a roving eye. She’s French and as lively as a young wildcat. I saw her when we touched a small Sicilian port, and she swore she needed a protector. I declare, Roger, that if things had gone right I would have shipped her home to France so quietly that no one would ever have known.”

Who was I to judge him?

As I stepped out the door, I heard him call, “Come in, Fubbs.”

## 44

I WAS THREE DAYS in Brest, waiting for the ship to put in, and I was glad of the delay, for it afforded me a chance to get some suitable clothes. The paunchy little French cucumber to whom I went insisted on the use of light silks when he found I was to live in the East, where velvets and kersey cloths would be uncomfortable. That was most sensible, as I discovered later, but he took his own head about other matters, with the result that I was never very happy with my new wardrobe. He made everything the French way in spite of my earnest instructions to the contrary.



The trunk hose were shorter than we were accustomed to in England—so short, in fact, that they made me feel like a pumpkin on top of long props. The doublets had all manner of little Gallic surprises, such as yellow ruffles around the armpits and lace on the sleeves which drooped down over my hands. In time, of course, I became accustomed to the gibe-crakey look of everything, but I never did get used to the lack of points to hold my doublet and breeches together. The tailor had spliced them in the new French way, with curved pins welded together in pairs. He called them “sure-pinnés” and was voluble in declaring that I would soon get to prefer them. I never did, however; they never gave me the fine sense of security that only points can supply.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day when the *Empress* arrived. I went out to her at once, uncomfortably aware of my new clothes. The captain, a North Englishman from his accent, welcomed me as I climbed over the side and said that the ladies were waiting for me in their cabins.

Ladies? I expected Aunt Gadilda, of course, but I could not understand his use of the plural. It seemed highly improbable that prudent Aunt Gadilda had brought a maid with her.

The explanation proved the greatest and most wonderful surprise of my life. The captain led the way to a door facing his own cabin, knocked, and then quickly faded away. A voice said, “Come in.” When I obeyed the summons, I found myself face to face with Katie.

“Here I am, Roger,” she said. She was trying to make her tone sound casual, but there was a breathless catch in her voice. “Don’t you think you had better close the door?”

I obeyed mechanically. The surprise was so great that I could not find a word to say. I just stood there, looking at her, wondering if it would turn out to be a dream. She had been on deck, apparently, for she was still wearing a bongrace, and the wind had put a glow in her cheeks. As I watched her, I saw a change in her manner. She seemed suddenly to become unsure, even a little frightened.

“Roger! I don’t believe you’re glad to see me!”

“Glad to see you! Katie, I—I don’t know what to say. It’s too good to be true!”

“Then you *did* mean it?”

“Mean what?”

“If you don’t know, I can’t tell you.”

“If it had anything to do with my feeling for you, I meant it.”

“That’s a little better. But—must I go on? You’re being very stupid, Roger. Do you remember when you appeared before the Queen and you told her you were in love with an English girl? And right afterward you said you meant me?”

“I’ll never forget it as long as I live. Yes, I meant what I said that night. I wish I could tell you how much I meant it.” I took both her hands in mine and pressed them tight. I still could not be sure that her presence meant what I wanted it to mean.

“That’s very much better. It’s almost what I wanted you to say.” She closed her eyes. “Well, then, I think you had better kiss me. It’s quite proper for you to kiss me. The captain is going to marry us right away.”

I did not kiss her at once. I held her in my arms lightly, trying to convince myself that everything had turned out right after all. She was not going to marry a wealthy landowner in order to mend the Ladland fortunes. She was going to marry me. She was going to marry me right away and live with me at my post in the East. She was here, in my arms, and the world had suddenly become a wonderful place again.

I kissed her once only. The first kiss is a milestone in life, the most important of all, something to remain clearly in the mind for all time, and so not to be confused with other kisses. She seemed to understand and to want it that way too.

“I was afraid you were in love with John,” I said, when speech became possible again.

She looked up at me intently. “I know you thought that. I’m beginning to understand you pretty thoroughly, my Roger, and so I think we had better settle this once and for all. I don’t want any doubts or reservations between us. There *was* a time when I thought I was in love with him. But it was such a long time ago.”

“All of a year.”

“But I was very young then.”

“It’s still no more than a year.”

She protested indignantly. “A year makes the greatest difference. I’ve lived at court since. I’ve learned a great deal. It seems so long ago that I can hardly remember how I felt about it. Roger, you’ve got to believe me. I only *thought* I was in love with John. I suppos’e I was swept off my feet. I was impressed by the great things he was doing. How am I going to convince you of that?”

The fact that she was here with me proved it. I did not need anything else to convince me; but I said nothing because I wanted her to go on. She

stood for several moments in the circle of my arms, and I saw that her eyes were closed. Suddenly they popped wide open. "I can't see him any more!" she cried. "I've been trying to but I can't! I know he had long golden hair and a large nose and blue eyes. I can remember each feature separately, but when I try to put them together I don't see anyone at all. Roger, I can't be sure now what he looks like." She began to laugh. "Does that convince you? Are you going to believe me and never have any other thoughts about it as long as you live?"

I did not answer with words, but I think she found my response entirely satisfactory. After a long interval, I asked her when she had made up her mind about me.

"Must you know now?" she demanded. "I don't think I'll tell you yet. We're going to be together a long time—have you any idea how long it's going to be? Years and years, forever and ever, and it can't be too long for me—and if I don't tell you everything now, perhaps I'll be able to keep you really interested in me. There will always be something for you to find out. A wife has to think about such things, you know. I've been at court, and so I know a great deal about husbands. No, you'll have to be content with what I've told you already. It ought to be enough, my lord." After another long interval, she said: "I'm going to tell you after all. I want to. It was when you came to court. I fell in love with you as soon as you walked into the room. Roger, it—it almost frightened me! It was so different from the way I had thought about John Ward. You looked so handsome and brave, and you talked right up to the Queen. I was so proud of you I wanted to cry."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Is it weak of me to tell you such things? I'm doing all the talking, all the confessing. But I've been weak about everything, writing you notes and running in to see you on any little pretext. Didn't you see that I was pursuing you?"

"You don't expect me to believe that."

"You're much too humble. That's all right as far as being my husband is concerned. But you've been humble about things, and *that* has got to stop. Do you understand?"

"I'm sure I'll never be humble after what has happened to me today. I'm fairly bursting with pride. I feel as though I could go out now and conquer the whole world."

"That's what I want. I want you to bring me the world. Not that I would know what to do with it, but because I'm going to need some such proof of your devotion."

"You'll never need proofs of that, darling. I fell in love with you the first time I saw you. No, the second time."

"And why not the first time, pray?"

I took her in my arms and held her close, laughing with the sense of happiness which filled me. "Because, my sweet and beautiful and adorable one, the first time you were just a little bit greedy about the marchpane. You took all the cakes I had picked out for myself."

"Did I really?" She joined in my laughter. "I always was greedy about marchpane. I still am. Are you going to see that I always have plenty? And are you going to be sensible enough now to claim your share?"

"You're all the marchpane I'll ever want now. Sweet and tempting and beautifully iced. And good enough to eat. Would you be afraid if you knew how much in danger you are of being devoured right now?"

"That's very much better. I'm beginning to think you're really glad I came. I was so frightened when you walked in and looked at me so queerly. You looked cold and *stony*. I didn't know what to think."

"There's one thing more I *must* know. How was it arranged, this great miracle which has happened to me?"

"Must I make another confession? I arranged it myself. I was ill after the duel—are you surprised at that?—and it was decided I must be taken back to London to see a doctor. But when I got there, I went at once to that nice old man at the shipping offices. I told him I was determined to follow you, and that he might as well help me because I knew he had been looking after you. He said he thought it could be managed and that he was entirely in favor of having me go, but that I would have to obey his instructions closely. He sent me to Dover in a coach, and I went aboard there. I went under the name of Mistress Deborah Willis—it was his choice, not mine—and I was supposed to come from Newcastle. I wore a bonnet which came down over my face, and I was going to France to visit relatives. Do English people ever have relatives in France? It seemed an improbable story, but we couldn't think of a better one."

"Had word of the duel reached London?" I asked.

Her eyes began to sparkle. "I should say it had! Everyone was talking of it. You were the hero of London. They were even selling a ballad about you on the streets, *The English David and Sir Goliath*. If I hadn't thought of it before, I would certainly have followed you after all the things I heard there. You were fully as popular with the people as John Ward."

"What did the King think about it?"

"I didn't hear because, of course, I didn't dare go near the court. I'm sure he was more furious than ever. Sir Sigismund Hill told me that Archie Armstrong said to His Majesty it was a good thing his name wasn't King Saul, or the new David would be sure to get his throne. The King didn't like *that* very much." Her expression changed suddenly to one of contrition. "I'm being very selfish, Roger. You must go in and see your aunt now."

"Where is she?"

"In the next cabin. I'm afraid I must make still another confession. I wasn't glad at all when I heard she was coming with us. She's always been such a grim old thing. It shows how determined I was to have you that I didn't change my mind. I came, and now I'm sure I'm going to like her. I think she's going to like me, though I don't think she cared for the idea at first either. You see, we have an interest in common, and that was a very great help. I'm really glad we're going to have her with us."

I had two more surprises when I visited the next cabin. The first was Aunt Gadilda herself. She was well, quite amazingly well, in fact. The sea had done something for her in the few days since they sailed. She looked rested, better fed, almost happy. Many times later I thought how ironic it was that things should work out this way. Aunt Gadilda, who had thought so scornfully of Mother's marriage to a sailor and who had hated the sea because she knew I had an urge to follow it, was in reality a natural sailor, never seasick for a moment, never so content as when she could sit on deck and watch the great waves following in the wake of the ship; while I, who longed to be a sailor, who wanted to carry on the tradition of my father's family, had no more aptitude for it than a dancing master.

The other surprise was the state of the cabin. It was small enough to begin with, but she had crammed it full to overflowing with an amazing variety of things. She had even brought my scriptine and the old corner bunk, neither of which had she been able to think of leaving behind. I heard later that they had been taken aboard by block and tackle, to the intense annoyance of the mate, who objected anyway to having women passengers. There was a portrait of Grandfather Pirie and miniatures of Mother and herself as girls. There was a gold mazer-bowl from Great Lunnington and a dozen pewter tankards with the crest of York (we never knew how they came into the family, but I suspected they were loot from the Wars of the Roses). All my books were piled up in a corner and all my old clothing; which, of course, I had completely outgrown. She had apparently lacked the heart to leave anything behind. How she managed to live in the space that was left remained a mystery to the end of the voyage.

"I never expected to see you alive," she said, hugging me tightly with her thin old arms. "Sonny, sonny, I'm so happy! The Lord has had you in his keeping and has brought you safely through."

"I have a great deal to be thankful for," I answered. "Much more than I ever expected."

She knew what I meant by that, and nodded her head with the least suggestion of hesitation. "I never thought to like a daughter of Fanny Plumptre," she whispered. "But I do, Roger, I do indeed. She's a sweet child, and I'm so glad you're to marry her. I think she'll make you a fine wife, Roger."

"Richard, Aunt Gadilda. You must get used to calling me by my new name. I'm to be Richard Strange for the next three years. Perhaps for much longer. There's no telling."

"I'll do my best. But I'm afraid I'll make many a slip."

"I'm glad to see you looking so well. You seem to be the real sailor of the family."

She made no reply to that. Taking me by the arm, she drew my head down close to hers and whispered: "If anything should happen to me, sonny, remember it's in the secret drawer of the bink. I packed it in with sawdust. It's all there."

"What's all there?"

"The gold, Roger. All that we own between us. No one will ever be able to find it. There's—there's much more than you might think. Your poor mother and I were saving to set you up well in life." She drew back her head with a look of pride. "We're doing better for you than Fanny Plumptre will ever be able to do for her daughter."

"I don't want Lady Ladland to do anything for Katie. I'll be quite capable of looking after my wife, I think."

"Of course you will. She's going to be a lucky girl."

I shook my head. "I'm the lucky one. I can hardly believe it's true yet."

I had further evidence of my luck when I returned to my cabin, *our* cabin, I should say. Katie, her cheeks flushed with pleasure, had brought out her whole wedding wardrobe for me to admire. The place blazed with color. There was so much to be seen that the only place left for me to sit on was the floor. I squatted there while my bride-to-be held up each article for my comment and approval. I struggled to appear suitably impressed, but all I could see was Katie herself.

I realized, however, that it was an astonishing outfit. There were at least a dozen dresses, flounced and gored and embroidered, of the softest and finest materials, silk and satin and velvet, all of them rich with gold braid and jeweled buckles and loops of pearls. They had pleats and tassets and ruffs, bodices of old lace, cuffs like spun gold. I lost count of the caps and coifs, lacey affairs all of them, worked through with pearls and sparkling with buckles and buttons of gold and silver. There seemed a never-ending succession of more intimate garments: petticoats (I almost wrote “main buntlings”) of silk and stammil, as foamy as the surf off a sandy shore; silk stockings, a dozen or more, and worth (so Katie told me pridefully) five pounds the pair; slippers and boots and shoes, with rose buckles and gold-leaf tracery, some of them the richest polonian with furred tops. I was astounded at the number of pearls, in strings or loops or set singly in rosettes of colored lace. My head buzzed with the names which tripped from her tongue: falles and buskes and puffs, rebatoes and pickadells and palisadoes, pendulets and fillets. Never, I decided, had there been such a harvest for the costumers in the whole long history of marriage-making.

Katie came and sat beside me on the floor when the last delicate morsel of frippery lace had been displayed and put away. She rested her head against my shoulder. “I’m not bringing you a dowry, Roger,” she said. “I’m a very poor bride. But I don’t believe it can ever be said that I came to you naked.”

“I’m still dizzy with it all. I’m sure Queen Anne Boleyn and Gabrielle D’Estree and the Queen of Sheba are turning in their graves this very minute. But is it sensible for the bride of a poor man to have such royal clothes?”

“Now you’re talking like Mother. She was against my bringing the whole wardrobe. I think she was of the opinion that it would be wise to sell as much of it as we could. But Father put his foot down. He insisted that I should have everything they had bought for—well, the *other* wedding. You can hardly believe how changed he is. He’s so sweet and understanding now. It’s true he wanted me to marry Sir Nevil at first, but he was afraid then that a charge of treason was to be brought against him. When we found out what Sir Nevil had done about the other captains, he was ready to support me when I said I could never marry him. He was different at once; he didn’t seem to care what happened to him. He even put on a cheerful face when the word came that he was losing Appleby Court.”

“I’m surprised you dared tell them you were coming away with me. Did your parents object?”

“Father was glad. He had been singing your praises ever since the duel. It was his idea that I should go to you with everything, my dear. To do anything else would be an insult, he said. Mother—well, Mother is different. I can’t seem to remember any time in all my life when Mother and I have agreed about anything. Father and I had our way; and so here I am without a shilling to my name and a wardrobe fit for a queen. Does that seem silly to you?”

“I can’t begin to say how proud I am that your father thought enough of me to do this. He didn’t think well of me at all before.”

“Do you know,” she said thoughtfully, “I believe he’s happier now than he’s ever been before. He talks of improving his land, and he reads all the time about cattle and sheep and crops. He has an idea he can grow the things Sir Walter Raleigh brought from America.”

“Maize and potatoes?”

“Yes, and even tobacco. He says he intends to be a rich man again. Mother will never be happy until they have Appleby Court back. You see, it was bought with the fortune she brought him. She’ll never let him forget it. Poor Father!”

She had cuddled into the shelter of my arms. After a short silence, she said:

“Roger.”

“Yes, Katie.”

“Wouldn’t it have been awful if you hadn’t meant it! What would you have done? Packed me off to John Ward like a bad load of flour or wheat or something of the kind?”

“I don’t think I would have had the courage to fight Macherie if I hadn’t been in love with you; and if I hadn’t fought him, your father would never have let you come. So the speculation is a completely idle one. But one thing’s certain: I would never let you go to Tunis. It’s no place for a white woman.”

There was another silence, and then she asked: “Was the Spanish girl in love with John?”

“Yes. So much in love with him that she gave up everything. How did you know about her?”

“He wrote me a letter, you know. He mentioned her, and I put two and two together. Did you know about the letter?”

“Not until a few days ago. He told me about it then. His purpose was to convince you that you should marry me. That’s the way he has always



been.”

“As it happened,” she said, “I didn’t need convincing. He said he wasn’t worthy of a good woman’s love. What did he mean? Do you think he was in love with the Spanish girl?”

I shook my head. “You happen to be the only woman he has ever loved. I owe it to him to say that much, after all he’s done for me. Especially when I think how much of a failure I was.”

“Now you’re being humble again. He said in the letter you had been wonderful; that you saved the fleet and that you fought like a lion.”

“I made trouble for him. About Clim. Sir Francis Drake would have hanged me for it if he had been my captain. You see, Katie, I was a failure as a sailor. All my life I dreamed of going to sea; and then I discovered I wasn’t meant to be a sailor. Finding out about the Spanish plans was luck.”

“What about the things you’ve done since you returned?”

“It took me weeks to get up my courage to it. I’ve no illusions at all about the part I’ve played.”

“Well, Sir David, I saw you fight the duel. That’s all I ever need to know about you.”

“*That* was different. I was fighting for you.”

To change the subject, I produced the emerald ring and placed it in her hand. She gasped over the beauty of it.

“Roger, where did you get it? I’ve never seen anything so lovely. The Queen herself has nothing finer.”

I explained about it. She listened intently, turning it over and over and admiring it from every angle.

“What wish did you make?”

“None. There was only one thing in life that I wanted, and it would have been unfair to wish for that—as long as John Ward was my rival.”

“And your wish came true after all? Or am I assuming too much?”

When I had assured her on that point, and I took plenty of time in doing so, she said: “I think she gave it to you with this in mind. She must have been very fine, Roger. And now you must leave me and send your aunt in. I must get dressed. For your wedding. You haven’t condescended to ask when it’s to take place. Hasn’t it occurred to you that the necessary words haven’t been spoken over us yet to give you the right to sit with me alone in a ship’s cabin?” She laid her cheek against mine. “I’ll hurry, Roger. The captain will marry us here as soon as I’m ready. It has to be done that way because you

must marry me with your real name. Captain Thomson knows who you are, but no one else does, of course. Run along now, darling.”

It was a good half-hour before I was admitted again, but I understood when I saw her in her wedding gown. She looked radiantly beautiful. At the time I was incapable of observing details, and all I knew about the gown was that it was white and that there was for me a suggestion of the angelic about it. Later Katie explained it to me in earnestly enthusiastic detail, and so I am setting down for those who may be interested.

I shall begin with the collar, which was of lace and more than one hundred years old. It was cut low in front, but grew into a ruff in the back to provide a white frame for her head. It was edged with looped pearls and at each point a larger pearl dangled on silver thread. The bodice molded her slender breasts in close-fitting simplicity, and it was only on the most careful inspection that one could detect the embroidery in white satin which covered it, a design of hymeneal suggestion with hearts and cupids and angels playing raptly on harps. Contrary to the usual custom, it was laced in the back, and so continued severely plain to the slim waist, where it cascaded over the narrow farthingale in frothy tucks and rosettes. There were plain puffs of satin at the shoulders, and the sleeves consisted of white velvet ribbons attached only at top and bottom; so many of them that they allowed no more than an occasional glimpse of the silk base beneath, although they rippled with each movement of the arm. The cuffs were of the same ancient lace, falling so low over her hands that I could barely see the prayerbook she carried. The skirt was full and sweeping, opening in an inverted V in front to reveal an underskirt crossed with corded velvet; its lines gracious and gay and even voluptuous; a little demure also, never allowing so much as the toe of a satin slipper to show.

The wedding veil, fastened in front with a diamond brooch, was what I remembered best. It was drawn back from her brow, covering her lovely dark hair and descending around her shoulders like mist above a waterfall.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the hearty voice of Captain Thomson, intoning the wedding service with puritanical unction, was no more to me than an indistinguishable rumble. I suppose I made the right responses, for the ceremony proceeded without delay or hitch. I heard Katie say, “I do” and that was all I needed to know about it. The miracle, for which I had been hoping all my life, had come to pass. Katie Ladland had become my wife.

“And now, *Richard Strange*,” said the captain, closing the book and putting special emphasis on the name, “I must give you a word of warning. It’s for your good lady as well, and for Mistress Pine. You must be

continually on your guard. I want no slips of the tongue. I would not like to place a bridegroom in irons, but that is what I shall have to do if the name of Roger Blease is so much as whispered. My crew are very curious about you as it is."

We had a light supper and a single glass of wine. The captain toasted our healths in a speech larded with biblical quotation and then, seeming reluctant to go, launched into talk about Damascus.

"You're going to the oldest city in the world, my young friends," he said with pulpit emphasis. "Older than Jerusalem, older than the wicked cities which perished under the wrath of God. It is now a ranting, lying, thieving, heathenish city. But it has played its part in the building of God's glory on earth. You will see the Street called Straight and the road on which Paul walked when the great white light blinded him and he heard the mighty voice of Jehovah; and the place on the wall where he was lowered to safety from the persecution of his enemies. You will find much to study and ponder to the good of your immortal souls." He looked at me with solemn earnestness. "The old city is given over to trading now, and you will find little use for that sword at your belt. From all that I hear, you have an uncanny knack with it. Keep it in its scabbard, my young friend. Let your ways henceforth be the ways of godliness and peace. Not," he added, "that I find any fault with the use to which it has already been put."

He got to his feet and shook hands with all of us. "I must return to my duties. A blow is coming up across the bay, and you may find it a trifle uncomfortable tonight. Be easy in your minds; we are in the Lord's hands, and Isaiah Thomson is worthy of your confidence. Good night, my young friends. I am sure you have things to talk about more interesting than anything I have to say."

He was entirely right about that.

## *BOOK FOUR*

IT WAS EXACTLY three years and a half later when we returned to England, on a warm day in September, when the medlars were loaded with fruit and the bullaces and hollyoaks were at their best, and the feeling of harvest was in the air. There were still three of us, but Aunt Gadilda did not make the third. After more than two years in our white-walled Eastern home, broken by an ecstatic journey to Jerusalem which included a progress around the Sea of Galilee and up the River Jordan, she had passed away peacefully; her greatest regret, I am sure, the necessity of leaving my fine little son, John. It still seemed absurd to me for Katie to be a mother; she had not changed a particle; but it was the pleasantest kind of absurdity. I had made the discovery that there is nothing in life to equal the sight of the girl you love sitting with your first-born in her lap, counting over his fat toes with the usual ritual: “Harry Whistle, Tommy Thistle, Harry Whible, Tommy Thible,” and, coming to the small toe, “Little Oker Bell”; or jouncing him on her knee to the jolly air of the old nursery rhyme: “No one’s at home but Jumping Joan, Father, Mother, and I.”

It had not been easy to raise him, which was not strange when you consider how few babies manage to survive the perils of infancy. Katie had not been able to nurse him for the full two years, and, needless to state, we had not considered the hiring of a brown-skinned wet nurse. Goat’s milk was out of the question; we could not be sure of its purity, in addition to which Aunt Gadilda had clung zealously to the belief that babies fed on it develop beards or, at the very best, dewlaps. It had been necessary, therefore, to raise him on gruels and soups and, a little later, on vegetables and morsels of meat. He had thrived on it, particularly after I insisted on his release from the confinement of the swaddling board. I had stood as long as I could seeing him bound up each night in rollers, stays, swathes, fillets, clouts and bands, until he could not move a leg, to be left there until the following night. Aunt Gadilda had been stubborn on the point—children had always been kept that way, so it must be right—but I had won Katie around; and after that my son was left as free as the native babies, to kick his heels and grow straight and strong.

We were returning with the King’s pardon and a fair fortune to show for our years of exile. I had acted on the hints of Sir Sigismund and Captain Starkle, dealing in currency exchange and picking up fine rugs and bits of

ivory on my own, which had later been sold at a neat and legitimate personal profit. We had received letters, of course, and so had kept ourselves informed on the main currents of the news at home. We had heard of the success of the Countess of Essex in getting her divorce—a shady business, it had seemed—and her subsequent marriage to Master Carr, now Earl of Somerset. We had heard whispers that the star of the favorite was beginning to wane, and that a certain gay and handsome young man named George Villiers was rather more in the royal eye these days. Also we had learned of the death of Prince Henry, a sad blow to the hopes of the whole nation; although Baby Charles, the second son, had now recovered from the lameness his nurses had afflicted him with and was turning into a fine young man with legs capable of doing their part in the masques Queen Anne loved to arrange. There had been compensation in the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth (a beautiful and high-spirited girl like her grandmother, Mary of Scots) to the Elector of the German Palatinate, a Protestant prince and therefore more suited than the Spanish husband King James had wanted for her. The King had persisted in his stubborn course, refusing to summon Parliament, except for brief and stormy interludes, and ruling by imposition and royal decree. He still prated of divine right in the face of the growing exasperation of the people. More and more of the Puritans were slipping over to Holland to live, and some of them were talking openly of going to America to find homes where men could worship God as they pleased.

It was late at night when we dropped anchor, and so we decided to postpone going ashore until the morning. Katie was tired and said she was going to take herself and Jack Thumbkin to bed at once, but I elected to sit up and talk with Percentage Tuttle, who had come aboard as usual; which proved how avid I was for talk.

Percentage Tuttle was a shrewd member of the Mistery of Feltnakers, who had decided years before that the way to make money in the shipping trade was to place small sums on all the vessels we sent out instead of large amounts on a few, thereby assuring himself, on the principle of averages, of a fair and sure return. He was not thought well of in the city, as he had adopted curious ways of doing business. Instead of keeping his apprentices at work in his own home, he had taken several tumbledown hovels in the worst of the slums and had turned them into a large and dismal shop where his men made hats and caps in amazing quantities. He preferred, he said, to sell inexpensive headpieces to thousands of common men instead of a few handsome bonnets to men of the court. Perhaps there was some sense in it, for Percentage Tuttle had become a wealthy man. He was unbelievably

greedy, and it was his custom to visit our ships as soon as they warped into dock, as though unable to wait for word as to the value of the cargo.

He had been, as usual, the first man over the side, and for the past hour had been prying and rummaging in the hold. He came on deck now, his tight little mouth pursed up with the satisfaction of certain profits.

“A fine cargo, sir, a bounteous cargo, I may even say a satisfactory cargo, sir,” he wheezed, rubbing his hands. “You have done well, sir. If there is talk of a small compensation for you, I shall throw my shillings on the board for the opportunity to speak in favor of it. Ah, such fine silks, such desirable cloths and leathers! Such delicious spices! Secured, I trust, at fine, low costs.” He peered at me anxiously as though seeking confirmation on that important point. “I see you have been careful and zealous in your trust, young sir. There will be nice round profits, there will indeed!”

“Would you care for a glass of wine?” I asked.

There was nothing he wanted more. We settled down in the captain’s cabin, the master having taken himself ashore for a full night in a Cardinal’s Hat, and my companion supped up a first mouthful of wine. “Company stuff?” he asked suspiciously. His thirst increased when I assured him it was private stock which I had purchased for my own use. He was easily led then into talk of what had been happening in my absence.

Trade, he averred cautiously, had been fair, better than fair for those who had been canny enough. The new Council Chamber had been finished at the Guildhall; a shocking extravagance, which would feed nothing but the pride of purse-proud fools. The King, and here he shook his head spitefully, had been making more forced loans, which, of course, would never be repaid. He had been forced to make such a loan himself—but he could not go on with the details of an outrage which, clearly enough, had shocked him to the very core of his being. Yes, the Spaniards were leaving English ships alone, thanks to the work of my friend (a grin and a bob of the head went with that) John Ward. He did not know much about Ward’s present activities, except that he was holding out alone.

“I heard it said the other day,” said my companion with a chuckle, “that our ambassador in Venice, Sir Henry Wotton—who owes me a bill I won’t collect until he returns home, if then—made a demand on the Doges and backed it up by saying England could loose a dozen Wards on them if they did not come to their senses. It brought the Flat-caps around, that did.”

“But it was an exaggeration,” I declared. “There’s only one John Ward.”

“More’s the pity,” said Percentage Tuttle. “He’s the friend of honest merchants, he is indeed.”

He went on to talk about the course of royal policy with a grumbling and uneasy candor. "Tongues can be slit for what I'm saying, but I'm a free Englishman and a man of some substance, and I've a right to speak my mind. Have you heard the latest? Men can't dress as they please any more. The King has issued an order that apprentices must not wear this and that. I tell you, it's the truth. No facing on their hats wider than three inches—and what profit is there in the making of such tawty things as that?—no lace at all, no fine material for their breeches, no Spanish shoes. Well, I've never held with men getting too far above their station in life, but soon he'll be telling all honest men how they're to dress. No feathers or gewgaws in hats, perhaps? What would that do to the trade of Joshua Tuttle? It's not to be borne. Soon he may be telling us what we may eat and drink and who we may take to wife!" He paused and then gave vent to a wheezing and unwilling laugh. "It took Archie to tell the King what men thought of all this. He told him to his face that he had better concern himself with the shortness of his courtiers' morals instead of the length of apprentices' cloaks."

"Archie is the boldest man in England."

"He is indeed. And the sad part of it is that he's not only a fool but a Scotsman as well."

It was growing late so he was able to give me no more than a hint of a great scandal which had been uncovered recently. "Somerset is in prison," he said, smacking his lips with relish. "He went too far, and even King James could not stand by such wickedness. I hope he pays for it with his neck. And his lady too."

"A conspiracy?"

"You might call it such. Well, I must be off, for it's incumbent on me to rise early. My lazy sprats would never do an honest stroke of work if I wasn't there to drive them to it. I'll be wishing you good night."

Katie brought our son out on deck early the next morning. They were dressed to go ashore, and both very much excited about it. My wife's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were sparkling.

"Oh, how good it is to be back!" she cried. "England is so lovely. You can fairly drink the air. I must see the Queen as soon as possible and thank her for what she did. And, Roger, we must see to it at once that Jack Thumbkin is christened, now that we can get it done. I'm going to ask Sir Sigismund to stand as his godfather."

I looked at Master John and realized that Katie was right in saying there should be special clothes for children instead of dressing them up like little



men and women. The native nurse we had brought back with us had not paid proper attention to his points, and as a result his hose had the sag to them that I knew so well. He was wearing his Black Pudding cap, well padded to protect his head in case of a fall. It had a fine feather in it, but he looked like an odd little sobersides in spite of that.

“Yes,” I agreed, “he must be christened right away. And I think we’ll send that heathen woman back and get him a real English nurse.”

“Well, we’ll have to think about that,” said my wife. She added in an almost breathless tone: “I can hardly wait to get an apple. A big red one. Will you buy me one at the first fruit stall?”

Despite the early hour the streets were full of people, and they seemed in a jolly and excited mood. The bouse-boys were doing a fine trade everywhere, and the taverns were overflowing. There were no carriages in sight, so we had to walk, with Master John perched upon my shoulder and cooing with delight at the noise and strange sights.

“I *love* London,” exclaimed Katie. I believe she would have stopped to buy a pint of ale for herself if we had not been in such a hurry. “I think there must be a Fair today. Everyone is in such good spirits.”

“It’s either that,” I answered, “or a hanging. They take both the same way.”

“I’m afraid, my lord and master, that the East has soured you.”

Sir Sigismund was delighted to see us and properly amazed at the size of our son. “My fine kinchin coe,” he said. “We’ll make a sailor of you in no time at all. But I’m very much afraid you’re not going to look like your mother.”

He sat us down to a real English breakfast of roast ham and apple sauce and a broiled fish. His face showed fresh surprise when Katie requested a dish of wheaten flummery for John. “Really?” he said. “He *is* growing up fast. Don’t you think it might stir up something inside him?” The dispatch with which my son attended to the dish when it arrived kept him so interested that it was not until the meal was over that he began to ask questions.

“You must tell me about your life out there,” he said then. “I know you enjoyed it from what you wrote me.”

“It was lovely in some ways,” answered Katie. “We had a white house on the side of a hill with a deep garden and a fountain, and servants to do everything. I slept every morning until six o’clock and loved it so much that I’m afraid I’ll always be lazy now. Since my Jack Thumbkin couldn’t be born in England, it was much the nicest place we could have found for him.

It was so cool and shady, and I could watch the caravans winding by on their way to the city. I loved having flowers and fruits all the year around. Yes, it was nice; but I can't tell you, Sir Sigismund, how happy I was when the word came that Her Majesty had talked the King into a pardon for Roger. I've been counting the hours ever since."

"It took a lot of talking," said Hill with a smile. "The Queen never forgot her little Mistress Katie, and she gave the King no peace."

"She's wonderful!" exclaimed my wife. "I love her. I think I would be willing to die for her."

"I would have something to say about that," I interposed hastily.

"His Majesty gave in with very bad grace," went on our host. "And only because he needed a favor in return. Something about the wedding of the Princess, I think. Or perhaps it had to do with Master Carr; but I won't go into that possibility."

"I'm an old married woman now," Katie reminded him.

"Still," said Sir Sigismund with a smile. "Of course, I didn't let it be known where you were until the papers were signed. I was taking no chances on the flighty whims of His Sowship. I thought, Roger, when he found you had been working for us all the time, it would be necessary for someone to beg a pardon for me. He's very grumpy about it still." He looked at Katie with an air of deep sympathy. "I hoped you would get home in time. I knew your father had been ailing but, as it happened, he died less than a week after the pardon was signed."

Katie nodded silently. The fact that Sir Bartlemy had died while we were away was the one sad thing about our return. He had worked hard, and not too successfully, to make his land pay. I suspected that this lack of results had played a part in his sudden demise. Lady Ladland had gone to live with a married sister in the North. To change the subject, I asked for information about the trouble in which Carr had become involved.

"I don't like to spoil your first visit ashore with such a sordid tale," he said. "You knew about the divorce and the marriage later of Somerset—he's an earl now, you know—to the Howard woman? It seems that Overbury, his closest friend, was against the marriage. The woman knew it, and contrived to have Overbury put into the Tower for some trivial offense. Well, they were married then. It was a brilliant affair, and the bride looked very lovely, they say. Quite innocent and fresh and dewy-eyed. Everything went well for a time. Somerset was running the Privy Council without his friend's help. Of course, the Howards were behind him, and they were gobbling up all public offices and favors for themselves."

My son created a diversion at this moment. He had been set down from the table and had decided to show how well he could walk by himself. Our host, his lined face beaming with pleasure, promptly squatted on the floor and held out his arms.

“Come, my stout little kincher!” he exclaimed. “Come to your Uncle Mundy. I tell you, Roger, you’ve got a fine boy here. Look at the gait of him, will you? He rolls as though he were walking the deck of a ship. He’s a born sailor.”

“Then he doesn’t take after his father!” I said.

Katie took her son up in her arms, saying with indignation: “He’s not going to be a sailor! Not my precious little Handy-spandy-Jack-a-dandy. He’s not going to sea; he’s going to stay at home with his mother, and ride a horse, and be a fine little gentleman.”

“I withdraw the suggestion,” said our host, getting to his feet. “And I think you’re right, my dear. There are better trades than that of the sea. But, whatever you do with my godson, don’t plan on sending him to court.”

“You were telling us about the Earl of Somerset,” I reminded him.

“Yes. I’m always glad of interruptions when speaking of such matters.” He lighted his pipe with slow care. “Well, it happened that in the Tower this unfortunate fellow Overbury was given something to eat that didn’t agree with him. He died. Soon after the marriage it became known that he had been poisoned. A good friend of yours, Roger, had something to do with the working out of the case.”

“A friend of mine?”

“The Upright Man. It seems he had been disappointed in his pursuit of a pretty woman named Turner”—with a sinking of the heart, I realized now where the story was leading—“and he took advantage of something he heard from her to delve into it. He uncovered some facts and put them into hands that were far from friendly to the Howard faction. A shrewd fellow, your Chirp Bird. But, as it happens, too shrewd for his own good. He should not have acted on his desire to make trouble for the Turner woman.”

I could see that Katie was distressed also. “What has happened?” I asked.

“There was no difficulty in getting at the truth, once suspicions were aroused. Some confessions were secured, and the lot of them were clapped into prison, Somerset and his beautiful bride as well as their accomplices. The Upright Man was taken in charge as well.” He paused and gave us a wry smile. “I had something to do with that. I saw to it that certain facts about the murder of his predecessor came to the ears of the Council. They

got out of him everything he knew about the Somerset case and then held him for murder. I'm afraid he's been having a bad time of it."

"Has he been tried yet?"

"Our honest Chirp has been duly tried, convicted, and sentenced. In the meantime the whole country has gone stark mad over the case. The favorite has always been unpopular, and all that was needed to set the people by the ears was a story like this. There's a great clamor for the Somersets to be punished. Two of the men they hired have been hanged already. Did you notice how crowded the streets are this morning? That's because the woman hangs today."

Katie looked horror-stricken. "The Countess of Somerset!"

He shook his head. "Neither of the principals have been tried yet. It's the Turner woman who dies this morning."

I felt too sick to speak. Katie and I looked at each other, and I wondered if my face were as white as hers.

I had been expecting this from the first moment he mentioned Ann's name. I remembered how reluctant she had been to share in the activities of the determined Fanny Howard; that she had been strangely obsessed with fear of the future. Had she foreseen this? I recalled that, when studying my palm, she had said nothing about her own. Had she found the sign there already?

"This is dreadful!" cried Katie. "Can't something be done to save her?"

Hill shook his head. "I doubt if anything could have been done for her, but certainly it's too late now. Public opinion is too inflamed for mercy to be shown. Not that any of them deserve it on the evidence. It's a clear case."

"I'm sure she had no part in the poisoning," I said. "I know her, Sir Sigismund. I swear she isn't guilty."

"I'll go to Denmark House and speak to the Queen," declared Katie. "She might be willing to do something about it."

"The court's not in London." Our host shook his head. "You mustn't concern yourself about this, my dear. The woman is guilty enough. She took the Countess to Simon Forman, who first gave them the poison. She acknowledged that on the stand. Fortunately for him, Forman died before it was used. No, your Ann Turner was in it deep enough, and there isn't a thing that can be done for her. I believe there would be a revolution if any of them were let off. The King won't want to see Somerset die, and he'll try to appease the country first by hanging everyone else. That's the situation."

"I can't believe it," said Katie. She had begun to cry.

I got to my feet. "I must go and see her," I said. "She can't be left alone today. If I can't do anything else, I can do that."

Katie also got up. "I'll go with you."

"The idea does you both credit," declared Sir Sigismund, "but you mustn't try it. It will do the poor woman little good, and it might do you a lot of harm. After all, Roger, you're back in England under sufferance. It would be unwise to attract the King's attention again. I'm serious about this. It would be a great mistake."

"I must go," I said. "Which prison is she in?"

"She's being held in the house of the sheriff. I don't think you'll succeed in getting in. And that is the only reason I won't try to stop you."

I persuaded Katie that she should stay at home and then started out on my errand with a heavy heart.

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THE STREETS WERE PACKED with people now, all hurrying in one direction. A woman was to be hanged by the neck until she was dead, a young and pretty woman and an innocent one, if they had only known. They were glad of it. I knew that they thought her a witch and a poisoner and that their desire for her death was part of the public resentment against the abuse of power in the hands of unworthy favorites, and yet I felt a bitter anger at their attitude.

I heard someone ask, "Will they hang her in her yellow ruff?"

"The ruff she wears today should be as black as her dirty soul!" cried an old woman who was hobbling along frantically in the fear that she would be too late for the spectacle.

If I had not felt the need for haste I would have stopped and shouted at them that Ann Turner was innocent, that she was the unhappy victim of circumstances. It would have done no good, of course; I might even have been mobbed for my pains. I took my resentment of them out in angry jostling as I hurried through the narrow and muddy thoroughfares.

The house of the sheriff, where Ann had been held since her trial, was an ugly structure of mortar and frame, with a high towerlike wing which rose more than a dozen feet above the main structure. This curious addition had one window only, a narrow cusped slit about half-way up; and its roof was so grotesquely slanted that it gave the house a crazy, tipsy air. I shuddered as I thought that the wing resembled a coffin.

I forced my way through the masses swarming in the neighborhood to a door opening on a side alley. I knocked, conscious of the fact that all eyes were on me. They thought, no doubt, that I had come on some official errand.

A red-faced fellow opened the door and demanded to know what, in the name of the Old Rogue and all his foul fiends, I thought I wanted here at a time like this.

“I want to see Mistress Turner,” I said.

He laughed at that. “So you want to see Mistress Turner, do ye? Well, ye’ll see her soon enough, but ye’ll have to go to Tyburn to do it. And ye’d better hurry, my young gentry-cove, if ye expect to get within a half-mile of the spot.”

I dropped a coin in his palm. “I must see her now. There may be some small service I can do her.”

“Are ye a friend of hers?”

“Yes,” I said, although I knew the danger of such an admission. “Here, I’ll double that. Get me in to her, man.”

He closed his fist hurriedly over the second coin and frowned uneasily. “I don’t want no trouble. Orders is to let no one see her. What kind of thing might ye have in mind?”

“I don’t know,” I answered desperately. “She’s all alone in there. We came from the same town and we grew up together. I’m sure she would like to see one friendly face before she dies.”

“Is that all?” He slipped the money into a pocket of his galligaskins and motioned me to come in, slamming the door after me. We stood then in a narrow passage, smelling strongly of soapsuds, from which a few steps led up to an inner door.

“Now here’s how it is, young fellow,” he said. “Ye can’t see the woman. That’s plain. That’s orders, and I don’t break ’em, not if ye was a Lord of the Council hisself or the Beeshop o’ Cantyberry. It ud be no use anyhow; she’s gone into the jumbles, and Dame Cripps can hardly keep her up with brandy and smelling powder. But I can do one thing: I can fetch Derrick to see ye.

Perhaps ye can do something for the poor lass that way. Another one of the same and I'll do that much for ye."

Derrick was the hangman. He had been so long the custodian of his terrible office that already men were calling after him any device for hoisting heavy objects. I certainly did not relish the idea of speaking with this grim functionary; but there was nothing else apparently that I could do for Ann; so I waited.

Master Derrick proved to be a morose individual with sparse red hair and a curious way of speaking in a slow and expressionless voice.

"What might it be that you want?" he asked. It sounded as though he were a new scholar reading lines from a grammar.

"I came to see if I could do anything for—for the prisoner. I'm not allowed to see her, so I thought there might be—well, ways of making it easier for her."

"There is something can be done for her," he said, after staring at me for several moments with his cold eye. "Yes, something can be done. Have you an idea of paying me?"

I dropped three sovereigns in his hand, the last of the gold I had brought out with me. He clinked the coins with the first sign of animation I had been able to detect on his face.

"It is this way," he said. "I know my trade, young man. If I get the knot exactly under the left ear and see that she stands in the proper position on the car, her neck will crack with the fall. It is easy enough to die that way and as quick as scat. But not nearly as easy, my master, if it does not happen just that way."

"In God's name, then, take every care!" I exclaimed. "There'll be as much again for you, if you do." Talking to him on such a grim matter made me feel as though I had been translated out of the realm of decent things into some bestial kind of world. "I'll have you watched. You won't get the gold if you make any slip."

"I will make no slip," he assured me in his horrible and monotonous voice. "I know my trade, my master. If anything should happen—but nothing will, nothing—I will have Gregory attend to her. Gregory is my assistant. He will hang onto her legs and his weight will do it. That will always do the trick just as well."

I realized that I would be ill if I talked to him any longer. I muttered, "You'll get the money, then," and rushed out. I think the crowd noticed my paleness and concluded it had something to do with the condition of the

prisoner. At any rate they watched me with avid interest as I struggled through them.

“Are ye ill?” asked the keeper of the first tavern I could find.

“Brandy!” I ordered.

He set the brandy in front of me. “It’ll be a fine nubbing party,” he said pleasantly. “A real sight, eh? It’s not been my luck to get anywhere near the chats for many’s the year. Paddington Fair days are always the very best for trade, so here I has to stay. I’d give a shilling or two to see this little yellow-haired vixen kicking on the end of a rope, that I would.”

I had taken one swallow only. I let him have the rest of the brandy full in his grinning face. He was still gasping and spluttering curses when I went out the door.

I had made up my mind not to go to Tyburn; the thought of watching Ann die was more than I could bear. At the same time it seemed that I would be deserting her if I left now. I wandered from place to place along the route to the gallows. I saw that all the windows were filled, and the rooftops crowded with people. Finally I came to Snow Hill, and here I managed to wedge myself into the expectant throng. A wait of an hour or more followed. I tried not to hear the talk going on around me.

Two sober citizens were standing immediately in front. I knew they were vintners from the three *tuns argent* embroidered conspicuously on their sleeves. They were talking soberly enough of the business ahead and expressing the doubt that seemed to be in every mind: would the wicked countess and her perhaps equally guilty husband be brought to punishment as well as the minor actors in the crime? I detected in their tones a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the way justice was being administered.

At last someone shouted, “They’re coming!” and the crowd pressed forward and fought feverishly for better positions. First came a carriage containing the sheriff, a corpulent individual carrying the staff of his office with an air of proper solemnity. It was seldom that the sheriff accompanied a prisoner to the place of execution, so his presence could be taken as evidence of the importance attached to this last act in the tragedy of Ann Turner. His coach was piled high with flowers, but this curious fact, I knew, had no relation to the matter in hand; it was merely an indication of his fear of the Plague, flowers being regarded as a preventative. Some guards followed on horseback and then came a creaking, jolting cart with more guards riding on each side. There were no flowers in this grim conveyance.

Ann was sitting on a bale of moldy straw, her back to the horses and her arms strapped behind her. In accordance with one of the many cruel customs



which had grown up around English justice, the rope with which she was to be hanged was coiled around her neck and breast, one end of it dangling over the side of the cart. All along the line, jeering spectators were reaching out in vain efforts to pull at the rope.

Ann was pale and incredibly thin. She was staring up at the sky and she seemed, happily, to be completely oblivious to the wild shouting and the horseplay of the mob.

“The poor lamb!” I heard a woman say near me.

“Poor lamb, indeed!” cried another savagely. “Witch, poisoner, bawd, thief! That’s what the judge said she was. She ought to be burned alive, that’s what she should!”

Suddenly I felt that I could not let her be carried away without making an effort to save her. She had risked her life to rescue me from the fate which was now overtaking her; could I do any less? Shouting, “Ann! Ann!” I threw my weight against the solid mass of people in front of me. It was so closely packed that I did not progress more than a foot. The two respectable vintners turned around in mild expostulation. Common sense returned, and I drew back again. Ann had not heard me. Even if it had been possible for her to hear over the din in the street, she was too far sunk in the emotion which had gripped her to pay heed. I stayed where I was until the cart had jolted out of sight.

For an hour or more I wandered about the streets, recoiling from the holiday-making which went on around me but not feeling capable yet of returning to the house near the Poultry. Finally I stopped at a dilapidated tavern and bought myself a much-needed drink.

The place was crowded, and the talk was all of the execution. The customers were discussing every phase of it with a relish which seemed hardly human. My eyes turned to an old man sitting silently alone at a small table in a corner. Perhaps it was the fact that he had nothing to say which attracted my attention. He had a purple-veined nose and was dressed in shag-bag woollens, but I thought I could detect evidences of better days about him.

“They’ll be tuning up the kits in hell this very minute to give her a proper reception,” exulted a loud voice from the far end of the room.

The old man sat up in his chair suddenly. “Are you sure it isn’t harps that are being tuned?” he asked.

Apparently he was known in the place, and respected. The gabble of talk ceased. The old man rubbed his eyes with a weary gesture and went on: “Although I have little use for my time these days, I don’t spend it all here

as you may think. I was interested once in the law; it's nothing to you why or when that interest came to an end; but sometimes still I return to—to the scene of former crimes, shall I say? It happened I was in court when this unfortunate woman was tried. I did not get the impression she was guilty. She had erred clearly enough, but the degree of her wrongdoing did not seem to warrant what has just occurred." He shoved his tankard away from him. "Well, they hanged the poor creature. I might feel a little less badly about it if I knew the answer to this: What of my Lord Somerset and his wife?"

Someone said, "Everyone's asking that one, Old Fuddle-cup."

"I'm afraid I can guess. They will be tried, and the ax will be carried with the sharp edge toward them when they leave the court. Yes, they will be found guilty. I'm sure of that. But will they die? I am afraid they will be held in prison for a time and then pardoned by the King."

"The people of England will have something to say about that!" shouted one of the listeners.

"The people of England will have nothing to say about it. There's a different law for gentlemen than for the Ann Turners." The old man got to his feet and walked to the door, pausing to say over his shoulder in a completely passionless voice, "This is a great country for hanging."

## 47

SIR SIGISMUND INSISTED that we must remain with him until permanent arrangements could be made. We took possession of the top floor, with the coffee-colored nurse and a personal maid Katie hired, a feeble-spirited girl with a perpetual snuffle. I was very busy, having reports to prepare on trading conditions in the East and consultations to endure with all the profit-hungry shareholders.

Two weeks after our arrival, Chirp Bird had his turn with Derrick. I heard that he died badly, screaming for mercy and clutching at the knees of the executioner. He was the last of the Upright Men, for his arrest had thrown the organization into complete confusion, and no effort was made to

set up anyone in his place. The house on the river was confiscated by the Crown, and so a highly disgraceful episode in the life of the great city came to an end. I had no reason to feel sympathy for Chirp, but I made a point of being out of London the day he journeyed to Paddington Fair.

The next day a full meeting of the Council was held to consider my recommendations and, as it developed, to settle my future with the Company. It was a brisk session and, although most of my ideas were adopted finally, it was not without heated debate. Each shareholder had plenty to say, and as a result the shillings, and the less frequent contributions of two-and-six, rolled on the board continuously. Even Percentage Tuttle paid an occasional coin for the privilege of additional participation in the arguments.

I emerged at the conclusion with my head in the clouds. It had been decided that I was to remain in London as assistant to Sir Sigismund, and when the time came for him to retire I was to be in charge of the operations of the Company. I was to be allowed to buy a full share for five hundred pounds, and my salary was to be based on a percentage of the profits. On these terms I could not fail to become a wealthy man in the course of time.

I was completely happy. I loved the work, the planning and managing of voyages, the inspection of vessels back from the East laden with rich cargoes and aromatic with spices, the control of the rouns and the striking of deals, even the laborious detail of the petty tallies. I was born for the shipping trade.

Katie was out when I reached our apartments after the meeting. I could hear my son and his nurse in the little room where he slept, and I said to myself: "Master John Ward Blease, I'm going to see to it that you come into something rather substantial. There will be a fine property for you, and perhaps even a title. You're a lucky kincher, my fine John. And now I must do some figuring on a home for you."

I got out a large sheet of paper and began to make a sketch. I planned the details with care and concentration.

Katie came in while I was still at work. She was wearing one of the wraps from her wedding outfit—there had been few opportunities to wear her fine clothes in the East—and I gloated over the certainty that now I could provide a suitable setting for my lovely wife. I noticed that she had an anxious air, but I was too full of my news to give it any thought.

"We must have a special dinner tonight," I said, trying to keep my spirits under restraint. "Herb pie, and nightingales' tongues, and the finest wines we can find. We have something to celebrate tonight."

“Have we?” she said, failing to catch my mood.

I launched into an account of the meeting. “It’s exactly what I wanted, darling,” I exulted. “I’ll be a rich man some day, almost as rich as the husband you deserve. You won’t have to leave England again. I’m already planning a house for us. But that’s not all of it. Think of the opportunity I’ll have. We’re going to build a great empire, just as John and Sir Sigismund have planned, and I’m going to have a hand in it.”

“Yes, Roger,” was the only comment she made.

I brought out my sketch. Burchall’s East Farm had been left to her by her father’s will, and I had taken the stone house standing on it and added wings. The additions brought the ends of the house close to the curve of the stream and gave the suggestion of a moat. Katie’s eyes lighted up when she looked at it.

“Why, it’s lovely!” she exclaimed. “I had no idea the place could be made so fine. It’s positively imposing.”

“Could you be happy in such a home?”

She made no answer for a moment. Then she said: “Put away the plans for a while, please. I’ve something important to tell you. The royal family have returned to London, and I saw the Queen this afternoon.”

So that was what made her so preoccupied! I asked, “Was she glad to see you?”

“She seemed to be. She talked to me for more than an hour. She asked me lots of questions. About our life in the East, and about you, and the baby.”

“You told her how grateful we are to her, I’m sure.”

“Of course. She laughed about it and said His Majesty was still far from reconciled to the idea, but that you needn’t worry. She and her Good Dog would look after us.”

“Her Good Dog?” I was puzzled, needless to state. “What does that mean?”

“I’ll explain later.” She seemed unwilling to say anything further. After a short space, she asked me if I remembered the boy who had fallen in love with her when she was at court. I nodded. “He’s married now. I met his wife, and she said she saw you years ago when you visited her father’s place. She wrote something about you on a pane of glass, but she didn’t think you saw it.”

“Of course I saw it. She wrote, ‘Who’s Afraid of a Pirate?’ and, as I recall it, her spelling was very bad.”

"Then she was interested in you, and she had no right to tell me about it. I'm sure I won't like her."

"You won't have to like her, darling, because you may never see her again. We're not going to court, you know. In any case, I didn't get as much as a good look at her, and I couldn't tell her now from Dame Witchie. I got the impression she was rather lively, and that makes me sure she'll lead your tame ex-suitor a merry dance."

"Roger."

"Yes, darling."

"I met someone else. Her Majesty's Good Dog. Sir George Villiers. He came for an audience, and the Queen made me stay while she talked with him."

"A great honor, I'm sure. Is that why you're acting so strange?"

"He's very handsome and amusing. He's much nicer in every way than the Earl of Somerset."

"Then I hope he doesn't end up in prison too." I looked at her closely. "Katie, I'm afraid you like this new favorite."

She answered thoughtfully: "No, not exactly. But he has a way of making people feel cheerful and happy. You never heard so much laughing! The Queen likes him, Roger. They say she got him his start at court to get rid of the other one. Her Majesty told me he was to become Master of the Horse at once."

"Another rapid rise to eminence through sheer merit." I was feeling very superior because of my own advance, and on that account contemptuous of court affairs. "Still, if we must have these handsome boys at the head of the state, I'll take your word for it that Master Villiers is an improvement over Master Carr."

She seemed reluctant to go on. Instead she changed the subject by asking me about the secret passage. I had told her all about my incarceration, and it was natural that she should be curious about it. I decided there would be no harm in showing her the upper exit, particularly as I was to be head of the house some day. I walked to the alcove and pressed my foot on the concealed trap door. It swung open slowly.

Katie looked down into the dark hole and shuddered. "How far does it go?" she asked.

"To the ground Boor. At the bottom there's a chamber just high enough for a man to stand up in. If the King changes his mind about us, you and I and Jack Thumbkin might have to live down there for a while."

I said it in a joking tone, but her eyes became distended with real terror. "Just to think about it makes me want to scream!" she exclaimed. "Close it, please. It frightens me." After a moment she managed to smile and say, "I suppose it wasn't brave of you to live down there alone for a whole week!"

"It wasn't courage sent me down that ladder. It was fear. I knew it was the only place in London where I would be safe."

"We needn't ever argue about your courage again because I watched you fighting that duel. I hated every man there because they were standing back and letting you risk your life. I was sure you were going to be killed." She smiled again. "If you had stopped when it was over, I was going to ask you to take me with you. I waved at you to make you stop, but you galloped right past. I wasn't even sure you had seen me."

I took both her hands in mine and pressed them tight. "I wanted to stop and swing you up in front of me. But it wouldn't have done, darling. I had to travel fast. And I couldn't involve you in my danger. The arrangements made later—"

"Which *I* made."

"Which you made, darling, worked out much better. No man ever had a more wonderful surprise, or felt half as happy as I did, when I walked into the cabin and found you there."

"I was almost mad before you came. I kept thinking, 'Suppose he doesn't love me after all?' and 'Suppose he doesn't want me here?' The ship was a day late, and I suffered agonies every minute. I almost decided to slip ashore before you could see me."

The memory of that day was still so fresh and green for both of us that we sat there and smiled happily at each other without saying anything more. I was thinking how well it had worked out now that my future was comfortably assured. I would build towers at both ends of the new house and throw the whole central part into a Great Hall. The present building provided enough height for the purpose. A new entrance would have to be planned to allow for screens and a stairway at the side. An oriel window could be placed in the rear, and there would be room on one wall for a gallery.

"Roger."

"Yes, darling."

"There's something I must tell you. I'm almost afraid to say it. I want so much to go on just as we are."

"You're being very mysterious. What is all this?"

“Roger, what would you rather have happen, apart, that is, from all the wonderful things that have happened to us? And will happen.”

“That’s easy to answer. I want to see John receive a pardon so he can come home too.”

She nodded her head eagerly. “I was sure of it. That makes it easier for me to say what I have to now. The Queen has thought of a way. It would mean a great sacrifice on your part, my dear. A great sacrifice for all of us.”

I had no idea what she meant. “Isn’t it a case of Her Majesty’s asking him until he gives in, as he did with me?”

“No, it isn’t going to be as easy as that. She says the King is still set in his mind against John, and nothing she could say or do would ever have any effect. It will depend on Sir George Villiers.”

“Villiers!” I was beginning to feel alarm. “What has he to do with it?”

“Everything, I’m afraid. The Queen says he’s the only one who could ever make the King change his mind. He must be persuaded to do the asking; and you’ll have to persuade him.”

I began to laugh. “Katie, I have as much chance of getting your Sir George Villiers to do that as I have of reading Persian cuneiform. I don’t know him, and it’s most unlikely I ever shall.”

Sounds from the other room distracted my wife’s attention at this point. She rushed out and did not return for quite a long time. When she did, it was apparent that another worry had taken possession of her mind.

“Our son isn’t well,” she said. “I’m sure it’s that roast mutton he had this morning. I knew it would be too strong for him.”

“But, Katie,” I protested, “he can’t be fed on milk all the time. We don’t want him growing up into a weakling.”

She shook her head in violent dissent. “He’s not as strong as you think. After all, he isn’t two years old yet. I’m sure he shouldn’t have so much meat. Beef and mutton all the time! Well, fortunately it doesn’t seem to be anything serious. I think he’s got a touch of the thrush in his throat. I gave him some medicine and he’s gone off to sleep, the little lamb.”

I objected to the medicines given our son as strongly as Katie did to his diet. Powder of crab’s-eyes and chalk! I said nothing on that score, however, as I could see she was upset enough as it was. “We were talking about Sir George Villiers,” I reminded her.

“Oh, yes.” She seemed reluctant to resume the discussion. “The Queen says you’ll have to cultivate him, Roger. Nothing but that will ever bring him to the point of asking the King for the pardon.”

“Darling, your Sir George Villiers is going to be Master of the Horse. Very soon, no doubt, he’ll be an earl or even a duke. I’m going to be a humble and very busy shipping merchant. And so the idea of a close acquaintance between us is impossible, not to say completely absurd.”

“Not—not as absurd as you think. Her Majesty can arrange it. In fact, darling, she *has* arranged it.”

I began to feel serious alarm for the first time. What did she mean? What had the Queen arranged?

“The Queen sent for him on purpose while I was there. She took things right into her own hands, and nothing I could say would stop her. Darling, when he becomes Master of the Horse, you will be appointed one of his equerries. He agreed as soon as the Queen suggested it. It’s a fine post, Roger, and you’ll probably be knighted at the same time.”

I still did not perceive the full extent of the tragedy which threatened me. “But, Katie, an equerry must be at court all the time. It’s not an honorary position. I couldn’t possibly take it and still do my work here.”

“Roger,” she said, with a catch in her voice, “you don’t seem to understand. You would have to give up your work.”

That possibility had not occurred to me seriously. I tried to make light of it. “You’re joking,” I said. “I couldn’t consider it. This is too important.”

“The Queen’s idea is that when you’re an equerry you’ll see Sir George continually and become such good friends that he’ll be willing to help you about John. He admires John very much. He told her so.”

I began to think of objections with almost frantic haste. “Her Majesty is very kind to take such an interest in the matter, I’m sure. Please don’t think I’m not appreciative. But how can we be certain anything would come of it? After all, Villiers is a new man at court. He may lose favor as Carr did.”

“The Queen says that by the time you know Villiers well enough to persuade him to do this, he’ll stand so high with His Majesty that he’ll be able to get anything he wants. She has no doubts about it at all.” She looked at me with understanding eyes. “I don’t want it any more than you do, Roger. But I—I’m afraid it’s the only way.”

I got up and began to pace about the room. I was very much afraid the Queen was right. There might be a chance this way. If Villiers grew in favor, the time would come soon when the fatuous monarch would refuse him nothing. If Villiers admired John Ward sufficiently, it might be possible to win his interest in a pardon. But it would mean relinquishing my career, my chance for honorable advancement. It would mean living at court and giving up the idea of building a home. The pay of an equerry would do no more



than keep us living on a respectable scale; most officers of the court were continuously in debt with no prospect of ever getting out. If a title went with it, the honor would be unearned and, as far as my feelings were concerned, a thoroughly empty one.

“Katie,” I said, stopping in front of her, “do you realize what this would mean? For both of us? For our son?”

“Yes,” she answered, “I think I do. I prefer the other kind of life. I don’t want to go back to court.”

“Is Her Majesty doing this to get you back?”

“Partly, I think. But she’s really interested in John’s case and would like to help him. I was going to add that I don’t want to return unless you would be unhappy about it the other way. I know you, my dear. I’m afraid your conscience would hurt you if you didn’t do what you could for John Ward.”

I was sure of that too. John had done so much for me that I could never repay him.

“I thought at first,” went on my wife, “that I wouldn’t tell you about it at all. I could have persuaded the Queen not to do anything more.”

I put my arm around her and pressed her close. “I’m glad you thought of that. But, of course, you couldn’t have done it, not even to protect me from my sense of duty. *Your* conscience is too active for that.”

I resumed my pacing. There was a stir in the other room, and Katie ran in to see what it was. By the time she returned, I had my thoughts more clearly organized.

“It would mean living the life of a courtier,” I said. “Consorting with panders and standing every day in the anteroom of a man who himself would be courting the favor of the King. An idle, empty, filthy life. We would be involved in intrigues and, if we didn’t watch out, in scandals. We would have to drag along wherever the King went and have a couple of small hot rooms assigned to us up under the leads. Men would make love to you, and I wouldn’t be able to do anything about it. Not if they were placed high enough.”

“But you would do something about it,” she said with a smile.

“I suppose I would. And then all our sacrifice would go for nothing. We would have to act lies and make flattering speeches and wink at deceit and treachery. It would mean our fine little John would be raised in that kind of an atmosphere. And our other children; if we have more.”

“I know, Roger. I thought of all that. I almost didn’t tell you about it.”

I began to laugh. "It's exactly what my mother and Aunt Gadilda wanted for me. A post at court. It meant magnificence and comfort and honor in their eyes. I went to sea to escape it, and now the great honor has caught up with me after all. There's something ironic about it, isn't there? I wonder if they'll be happy about it, if they know?"

"I don't think they would be any happier about it than I am. Is it too high a price to pay, Roger? After all, we have our own lives to live, haven't we?"

"I used to think we were living in the perfect age," I said. "Well, my eyes have been opened. There's nothing fine about it. It's an ugly, treacherous, cruel age. I realize more all the time that we're living in a world as filthy as a cow byre."

Katie spoke up sharply at that. "You're wrong, Roger. It is a lovely world. We have each other, and Jack Thumbkin. Isn't that enough?"

"Perhaps we ought to go to America. We would be far enough away from people then." I patted her cheek. "I'm going to accept the post. We would be unhappy, both of us, if I didn't. I suppose I intended to from the first. I owe John that much at least. Well, it may not take so very long after all. This new longshanks may accomplish our purpose sooner than we think, and then we can go back to the kind of life we want. I guess we've been looking too much on the dark side. Forgive me if I've made the decision too difficult for you."

I picked up the sketch and tore it into small pieces.

## 48

AS THINGS TURNED OUT, I did not have to go to court after all. Several days later a visitor came to Sir Sigismund's house, a bluff and untidy individual who stamped into the anteroom and demanded in a loud voice to see "a certain Roger Blease." I drew him into a corner and said that I was Roger Blease, that I was in a great hurry, and what did he want with me?

"I'm Captain John Smith," he said. "You've heard of me, I'm sure. I'm the greatest traveler in the world. I've been all over the East, and I've been

in Virginia. I'm sorry I left the primeval forests of that great new land to come back to this stinking sinkhole of crime and fraud." He always talked like that, I found, a combination of erudition and sea-going bombast. "If you're Roger Blease, I have a message for you. From John Ward."

"Then," I said eagerly, "you're the most welcome visitor I could have. I take it you've seen him."

"Yes, I've seen him. A matter of two months ago. In Tunis."

"I want to hear everything. Let's find a quiet spot where we can talk at our leisure over a bottle of wine."

That suited Captain John Smith, and when we were comfortably ensconced in a near-by inn he launched into a long story.

"A remarkable man, John Ward, Terror of the Seas," he said. "He made me think of many things: a god with more than a touch of the whipjack as well; a Noah, forbidden to build his ark, sailing around Ararat on a raft; a hearty Jove, in velvets and laces, lording it in a noisy Cardinal's Hat—"

"But how is he faring? Is he well?"

Captain John Smith looked at me soberly. "To the best of my knowledge," he said, "John Ward is dead."

He told his story with so many long diversions and so much obscure metaphor that it will be better for me to restate it in my own words.

John Ward was on the wharves at Gouletta when a man with a white skin stepped off the plank of a slattern coaster from Tripoli. He forced his way through the screaming natives and was by the side of the newcomer in a matter of seconds, saying in an eager voice: "You're an Englishman. It's lucky I'm here, or they might tear you to pieces. I'm Captain Ward."

The man looked at the hostile mob. "I was in two minds about coming ashore," he said. "I hope you're right about the luck. At this particular moment it seems to me uncertain. I guessed you were Ward." It was not a difficult guess, for the one-time commander of Free Rovers was arrayed in all his old magnificence, and a huge diamond sparkled in his hat.

"We had better get out of here. I don't like the look of things," said Ward.

As they struggled toward the rear, the newcomer asked: "How did you pick me for English? My cloak is Venetian, my shoes are Spanish, and I stole this molting nab-cheat in Turkey."

“Holy Olaf, man, I could see roast beef and Jack-of-Dover sticking right out of your ears. What’s your name?”

“Captain John Smith.”

“I’ve heard of you. You’re a traveler and you write books.”

Smith grinned. “The greatest traveler in the world. I don’t claim as much as that for my writing.”

“You had better come along with me. It’s fine to see an English face again. And you’ll be safer. The whole yellow coast is nipping with hate for the whites. It happens often, but this time there seems to be a more fanatical edge to it than usual.”

They sailed across the lake and then took horse through the scattered outskirts of the city, coming finally to the palace under the city walls. Smith asked many questions on the way.

“Are you privileged here?”

“Yes. I’m useful to the Dey. At the moment my immunity seems to have worn thin.”

“Do you sail any more?”

“No. I’m a retired pirate.” John smiled at his companion without any suggestion of mirth. “A great anomaly. Can a pirate retire without his sins’ catching up with him? My retreat was forced on me, Smith. My original crew dwindled, and I had no stomach for training foreigners to take their places; although I tried it at first. I traded the *Royal Bess* to the Dey, who wanted it for his personal use.”

“May I ask what you got in exchange?”

“Something much less tangible. The right to live in Tunis without embracing their beastly faith.” He shook his head bitterly. “The poor old lady is carmined to the teeth now like an aging callot. I never show myself when she’s in port. It goes against the grain to see her covered with heathen flags.”

When they turned in at the palace gates, Smith looked about him with wonder. “Don’t tell me this is yours, Ward.”

“It’s mine,” answered John indifferently. “Some years ago a great tragedy happened here, and I swore then to use it no more. But many pleasant things had happened here too. So I made it my permanent home after all.” He smiled at his companion. “Spanish gold paid for this place; rolling Spanish ribbin. I’m a rather rich man.”

Smith was a shrewd fellow, and he kept an eye open when they reached the outer courtyard, where dusky servants took their horses. The place was

imposing, but there were signs of carelessness everywhere. Smith saw under the rim of the fountain the heel of a yellow shoe, the frayed end of a sky-blue baldrick, and a broken wineglass. The grass was long. The scum of neglect was on the walls and, inside, the rooms had a faintly moldy smell. He looked closer at his host and saw that Ward himself was not in the best of condition. He had grown stout, his face was flaccid, and there were purple pouches under his eyes.

“What goes with all this?” asked the guest.

“A certain amount of power. The Dey consults me about many things. I have luxury and ease; more of both than the King of England. I decided years ago to make the best of things. If I had to live with the heathen, I would get all I could out of it. I even have a harem.”

“I heard whispers of that,” said Smith eagerly. He had seen something of harems in his day, but not enough to take the edge off his curiosity.

Joralemon Snode joined them then. Jore quite apparently had been keeping up his wardrobe with his own efforts. The gray homespun doublet he wore had been mended so often that on close inspection it appeared to be covered with hit-and-miss embroidery. His cheeks were hollow and his nose so thin that it had a razor sharpness. He looked, according to Smith, like an unhappy anchorite.

It was growing dark, and a meal was served at once. The three of them sat down together on the balcony over the inner court where I had often dined with Cristina. I wondered, while listening to the story, if her spirit had hovered over them. The air was so close and moist that the visitor found it difficult to breathe. Joralemon said a long grace, ending with: “And, O Lord, continue to let the rain fall gently in England so that the land will always be green and cool, and grateful to those happy enough to live there. And let the winds blow lightly and not as here with the sting of the hot desert, and let the crops be plentiful. And, more than anything, O Lord, put it into the mind of the King to rule England better so there will be peace and prosperity in the land. And let them sometimes give a passing thought to those less fortunate who live far away.”

At the close he and John looked at each other silently for a long moment and then John said, “Amen!”

The food was strange but good. First there was a thick brown soup with flecks of white on top, into which John spilled grated ginger with a lavish hand. Smith, great traveler though he was, tried it with mental reservations, finding it, however, savory and satisfying.

“My cook is a villainous Spaniard who turned renegado,” explained the host. “But the fellow can cook. He can cook anything but English dishes.”

A whole baby lamb followed, roasted until the skin was crisp and brown while the inner meat remained tender and succulent. Then there was an immense Carthage hen. Both had a pungent taste which John identified for his guest as garlic used with the greatest care. Finally there was a rich pastry and clove-scented chocolate to drink with it. Throughout the meal there was plenty to drink, the finest wines that Smith had ever tasted.

The atmosphere seemed to be getting more oppressive all the time. Smith, drenched with perspiration, had very little appetite. Joralemon Snode, saying nothing, did little more than peck at the food. John Ward partook enormously of everything, emptying his wineglass with an amazing regularity. “He’s eating himself to death,” thought Smith, noting the unhealthy color of his skin and the thickness of his waist. He felt a little sad about it, for John Ward was still a great hero to all Englishmen.

The conversation was desultory. At first the host brushed aside any talk of affairs at home, protesting that he had lost interest in matters so far removed. Instead, he discussed the situation in the Mediterranean, explaining with some detail a plan he had evolved to maintain a peaceful balance of power among the Christian nations. His idea was to detach Venice from Spain and set up a coalition which would accomplish what the Free Rovers had fought to secure—the freedom of the Inner Sea to all commerce. It was plausible enough, but Smith wondered if his heart was as much in it as he pretended.

Finally John tossed the last scrap of pastry over the balcony railing with a gesture of satiety and settled back in his chair, a high-backed affair of gilded wood and stamped leather which he had taken off a Spanish prize. It creaked alarmingly with each move of his massive frame. The stars had come out, and the servants had hung ship’s lanterns on the walls of the court beneath them. How well I knew the effect thus created, the light shining faintly among the branches of the bigarade trees! John reached down for one of the yellow globes of fruit on a limb beneath him.

“It’s bitter,” he said. “As bitter as the land where it grows.”

“Now he’s being honest about his feelings,” thought the guest.

John smiled in a shamefaced way. “I haven’t been deceiving you, Smith. You must know how hungry I am for news of home. Start talking, man. Tell us about England.”

So Smith talked. He spoke first of national affairs and the dissension over the policy of the King. He told of the pardon granted to the Earl of

Somerset and his wicked wife, and how the pair of them were living in unhappy seclusion in the country, hating each other but forbidden any other company. The rise of Villiers and the greediness for power of the new favorite came in for long discussion. Then he turned to gossip: the quips of Archie, the quarrels between Bacon and Coke, what the King had said about this and the Queen about that. He talked for an hour or more, and when he seemed to flag John prodded him into more recollections with eager questions. Joralemon Snode said little. Finally the leader of the Free Rovers asked the question which had been on the tip of his tongue from the first.

“Does King James show any signs of a change of heart in matters which concern me?”

Smith shook his head. “On the contrary,” he said, “the old sourbelly grows more set in his ideas all the time. Gondomar has him completely under his thumb. One of these days he’ll send Raleigh to the block to please the Dons. He’s hankering now to marry Baby Charles to the Spanish Infanta. She’s a milky-cheeked, redheaded wench, so Baby Charles himself is in favor of it. No, I’m afraid there will never be a stand made against Spain as long as he’s alive.”

“Well,” declared John, “it doesn’t matter as much now. I pared Philip’s pretensions to a cow’s thumb. English ships are safe again. I take it that England won’t be in need of the services of men like me.”

He asked one more question only. “Have you heard anything of a Roger Blease? He’s a friend of mine and sailed with me for a time. He married a girl that I knew, the daughter of Sir Bartlemy Ladland.”

Smith had never heard of Roger Blease and knew nothing about Sir Bartlemy except that he had been in disgrace and had died soon after.

John said: “I’m going to ask a favor of you, Smith. When you get back to England, find Roger Blease and give him and his lady a word of greeting from old Captain Rufflecoat. Tell them—tell them the seas are free again, and so he’s well enough content with the way things have fallen out. I’m very fond of both of them, Smith.”

The latter made a request in turn. He would like to have a look at the harem if such were not too strictly taboo. John grunted and said he was no damned Mohammedan to keep his wives locked away, but that the visit would be a great disappointment; the place was small and the women for the most part a lot of chattering margery-praters. Smith was insistent. He considered the women of the East most attractive in their mysterious way. Did he indeed, said John; he himself thought their beauty very much overrated, even the much-praised Circassian girls. It was clear, he pointed

out, that Nature had designed their hips to relieve the discomforts of travel on camel back.

“Still, I’m a collector of impressions,” said Smith. “I may never have such a chance again.”

John pondered for a moment. “There’s something I haven’t told you about our situation here. I’m saving it for your ears later. Because of it, I don’t see why you shouldn’t have a glimpse of my happy little household. Come, Captain Smith, I’ll initiate you into the sacred rites of Eastern conjugality.”

Jore had disappeared, and the pair of them made their way down to the inner court. The copper door in the wall was opened by a native servant whose oxlike eyes rolled sluggishly under a turban as large almost as those silly rainbreakers which had been seen for the first time in London a few years before, called umbrellas. Smith followed his host on tiptoe.

The scene that greeted them was quite different from what Cristina and I saw the night we inspected the women’s wing. The pool was filled with water, and a dozen women were squatting about it on cushions, drinking chocolate from silver mugs. The front wall had been opened to give a view of the city over the top of the palace walls. Little could be seen at the moment, however, but the star-specked sky. Candle-dips in wall sconces threw a faint light over the long apartment. The air was thick with perfume.

The weather being so oppressive, the women had thrown off much of their clothing, and the sudden appearance of the lord of their small creation, with a male guest at his heels, brought about a frenzied ducking under cushions and much hurried donning of garments and veils. They chattered and giggled in excitement. One, too far away from her clothes, turned and ran into the shadows at the far end, treating the intruders to a view of large brown limbs and a broad rear elevation.

“Is that Faussie?” asked John, shaking with laughter.

There was a chorus of assent, and the master of the household remarked that it was clear some of them, Faussie particularly, had been indulging themselves too liberally when the couscousou was on the table. Something would have to be done about it; he did not value his wives according to weight.

Smith’s eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, and he looked about him with retentive care. Most of the women were native, and their eyes glowed above the hastily donned veils with a promise of great beauty. Some were European, and he noticed they seemed less upset by the incident than their heathen sisters. Feeling an almost imperceptible touch on his



ankle, he looked down and was a little startled to find an enormous pair of blue eyes looking up at him, framed in an oval face of olive tint. The woman was young and lovely and, quite obviously, enjoying a sly interest in his presence. The little vixen! said the traveler to himself. I would like to steal this one.

Another, small and vivacious in appearance, said something which the visitor did not catch, although he knew she had spoken in French. John frowned.

“Our guest, Francine,” he said, “is an Englishman and a famous traveler. He has been in America and fought with savages who would think nothing of tearing all the hair off your pretty head. I sometimes think some such treatment is what you need.”

The French girl also was pretty. The great John Ward has an eye for women, thought Smith. He was finding everything quite up to expectations. The languorous air, the perfume of the women, inflamed his senses. To end one’s days in this way, he thought, had its compensations after all.

John had stopped beside a plump little woman with bright dark eyes in a round face, who smiled up at him. He dropped a hand on her shoulder and said, “Well, Fubbs.”

He did not say anything more as they made their rounds of the long room. The lattices in the row of small private rooms were all closed. Smith stared through one but could make nothing out. He was wondering how things were managed. Did the master visit his wives in these tiny bowers, or did he have them sent to his own quarters? He had heard of both methods in his travels farther east.

“Now you’ve seen it,” said John, not too cordially, when they had returned through the creaking copper door. “Would you trade your freedom for this sort of thing?”

Smith did not care to go that far, but he expressed himself with enthusiasm about the beauty of the women. John made no answer. He was looking up at the patches of sky through the branches of the trees. “Even the stars are different here,” he muttered. “Does it seem to you that they are unfriendly?”

“I’ve seen the stars all over the world,” said Smith. “They always look the same to me except when it comes to a matter of navigation.”

John seated himself on a bench and motioned to his guest to join him. Feeling under the seat with a careful hand, he uncovered a small glow of juniper fire and lighted a spill. Both men started their pipes going.

“The natives say I keep a devil under this bench,” remarked John with a short chuckle. “They won’t come within ten feet of it. If I had valuables to hide, this would be a perfect place for it.”

“You live in great comfort, Ward,” said Smith, when their pipes were burning well.

John puffed loudly. “Comfort, yes. Too much, I fear. It might be an effort for me to climb the side of an enemy ship now.”

Smith thought to himself, It would kill him if he tried it.

“This isn’t always the paradise it seems. Some years ago the heathen came screeching over these walls. They skinned four of my men and nailed their bleeding hides to the wall outside. They also killed someone I thought a great deal of. It will happen again, Smith.”

“By the Great Kochab, why do you stay, then? Don’t you set any value on your life?”

John did not answer immediately. “Not a great deal. Would you have me go back to England and be hanged like my comrades?”

“There’s France, Italy, Germany. You could live in any of them.”

“Isn’t one place of exile as good as another? The life here is easy and comfortable—for as long as it may last. I sometimes wonder if I could get away. The Dey has an exaggerated idea of what I have. He would strip me clean if I tried it.” He said after a pause, with one of the bitter laughs which punctuated all his talk: “So you think my wives beautiful. Take their veils away and scrub the paint off their faces, and you would be surprised to find that some of them are as homely as little monkeys. Native women aren’t completely human, you know. They fight and scratch and spit until the servants have to whip them apart. Sometimes they go fey, and then they sit up through the night and howl like dogs at the full of the moon.”

“But they aren’t all native.”

“I saw you studying the white ones. Did they pass muster with such a discerning judge? One, Francine, is French.”

“I thought she was.”

“She comes from Marseilles. She’s lively. But she has a venomous tongue in her head. All the rest are afraid of her. Did you notice a young one with lovely eyes? But of course you did; you couldn’t overlook Maria.”

“She’s Italian, isn’t she?”

“Sicilian. She’s quite beautiful. I send for her often.” So that point is settled! thought Smith. “She looks almost saintly, but she doesn’t like being kept here. She would give herself gladly to any man who managed to break

in. The only one who has any real regard for me is the little Greek. If I were ill, I wouldn't be afraid to lay my head on her shoulder."

"I heard you lived in state, Ward. But I had no conception of all this."

John said, with sudden fervor, "Even if security went with this, I would trade it gladly for a small thatched house on a green lane in Kent."

Smith then asked about Joralemon. In what capacity did he act?

"My good old Jore! He's everything—butler, secretary, friend. Most of all, he's my conscience. Not that I heed him much. He gives me no peace about these women whose charms have made such an impression on you. You may find it hard to believe, but he refuses to go inside that door. Perhaps that answers a question you didn't care to ask. Jore is a real saint, caught by circumstances in a sinful corner from which he can't escape."

"I couldn't fail to notice," commented the visitor, "that there wasn't an English woman. It surprised me, I must confess."

Then, for a moment, he saw the real John Ward. The massive form drew up straight. John spoke in a voice pitched low with the intensity of his feeling.

"I would count myself lacking in every quality that makes a man," he declared, "if I brought a woman of my own race inside the walls of this sepulcher. I'm not proud of the way I'm living, Captain John Smith. The women are waifs; they've been better off here, I suppose, than they'd have been anywhere else. But I wouldn't ask a woman I could respect to share my dishonor."

There was a long silence after that. Finally John, with considerable effort, heaved his great bulk around on the bench and looked intently at his companion. "You must leave tomorrow, Smith," he said.

"Has my company wearied you so soon?"

"I can't tell you what a pleasure it's been to hear an English voice. Your talk has been as welcome as water to a man dying of thirst on the desert. But—as I told you before, I don't like the look of things. I'm at serious odds with the Dey. He threatens to withdraw his protection. It will come to that, my friend. There's a ship sailing for France in the morning. They don't know it yet; but tonight my European wives are being sent aboard. I still have enough influence to manage a thing like that. You must go too."

"Then you must come with us," exclaimed Smith. "Great God, you mustn't throw your life away!"

John Ward said quietly: "I've never run away from my fate. Perhaps I've unconsciously accepted some of the philosophy of the East; it seems to me

that a quick death is a welcome one. I'm not well, Smith; I seem to lack resolution these days. And even if I wanted it, I doubt if I could get away."

Smith knew that further urging would be useless. He contented himself with asking, "What about your man, Snode?"

John's face lighted up with the first genuine smile of their encounter. "My brave old Jore!" he said. "He's a splendid fool, Smith. He refuses to leave me. I've tried to talk sense into him, but he won't have it. I'm afraid he'll be here to the end." He tamped out his pipe. "It won't be long now before the heathen come over the walls again."

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *For My Great Folly* by Thomas B. Costain]