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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
"The Sea Queen"

Pember Street, E., is never very cheerful in appearance, not even in mid-spring, when the dingy lilacs in the forecourts of those grimy houses bourgeon and blossom. The shrubs assimilate soon the general air of depression common to the neighbourhood. The smoke catches and turns them; they wilt or wither; and the bunches of flowers are sicklied over with the smuts and blacks of the roaring chimneys. The one open space within reach is the river, and thither I frequently repaired during the three years I practised in the East End. At least it was something to have that wide flood before one, the channel of great winds and the haunt of strange craft. The tide grew turbid under the Tower Bridge and rolled desolately about the barren wilderness of the Isle of Dogs; but it was for all that a breach in the continuity of ugly streets and houses, a wide road itself, on which tramped unknown and curious lives, passing to and fro between London and foreign parts.

Unless a man be in deadly earnest or very young, I cannot conceive a career more distressing to the imagination and crushing to the ambition than the practice of medicine in the East End. The bulk of my cases were club cases which enabled me to be sure of a living, and the rest were for the most part sordid and unpleasant subjects, springing out of the vile life of the district. Alien sailors abounded and quarrelled fiercely. Often and often have I been awakened in the dead hours to find drunken and foreign-speaking men at my door, with one or more among them suffering from a dangerous knife-wound. And the point of it that came nearly home to me was that this career would not only lead to nothing, but was unprofitable in itself. I had taken the position in the hope that I might make something of it, but I found that it was all I could do to maintain my place. I made no charge for advice in my consultations, but took a little money on the medicine which I made up. Is any position to be conceived more degrading to a professional man? The one bright time in my week was of a Saturday, when I donned my best coat and gloves, took down my silkiest hat, and, discarding the fumes and flavours of the East, set out for Piccadilly. I still remained a member of a decent club, and here I lunched in my glory, talked with some human creatures, exchanged views on the affairs of the world, smoked and lolled in comfortable chairs—in short, took my enjoyment like a man-about-town, and then went back to earn my next week's holiday.

Punctually to a minute I must be in the surgery in Pember Street at six o'clock, and the horrid round must begin to circle again. I will confess that there was a time when I could have loved that career as a saunterer in West End streets. It appealed to me at five-and-twenty almost as a romantic profession. Other young men whom I had known, at school and college, had entered it, and some were, or appeared to be, signal stars in that galaxy of wealth and beauty. My means, however, denied me access, and at thirty I would have been content, after my experience of hardships and poverty, to settle in some comfortable suburb, not too distant from the sphere of radiance. As it was, I was in chains in the slums of Wapping, and re-visited the glimpses of Piccadilly once a week.

When I rose on an evening in November to go down to the river almost for the last time, it was not a Saturday, but a Thursday, and the West End seemed still a long way off. I had finished my round of cases, and had sat waiting in my dingy surgery for patients. But none had come, and in the enforced meditation that ensued, as I reviewed my past and my prospects, my soul sickened in me. I wanted to breathe more freely—I wanted more air and something more cheerful than the low surgery lamp and the dismal lights that wagged in the street. I put on my hat and passed down to the river.

It was quite dark, and the easterly drift had obscured and dirtied the sky, so that when I came out by a landing which I knew now familiarly, I could see only the lights across the water, and some tall spars and funnels in the foreground. But the river at full tide champed audibly against the wharves, and the various sounds of that restless port assailed my ears—the roar of the unseen traffic behind me, the fluting and screaming of whistles, the mingled shouts, oaths, and orders in the distance, and the drone of that profound water under all.

I had stood for some minutes, drinking in the better air, when there were voices near, suddenly risen out of the flood, and I perceived two men had landed. They paused by me for one to relight his pipe, and in the flash of the match I gathered from the dresses that they were stevedores, newly come, no doubt, from unloading some vessel. But my attention was taken off them unexpectedly by a great flare that went up into the sky apparently in mid-channel. It made a big bright flame, quite unusual in that resort of silent lights, and one of the stevedores commented on it.

"That'll be her," he said; "she was coming up round the Dogs in a la-di-da fashion. Maybe she'll fly rockets in another minute."

"Them steam-yachts are the jockeys to blue the money," responded his companion. "Nothink's good enough for them."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Only a Geordie brig straight from winning the America Cup, sir," said the first man with a facetious smile. "What did they make her out, Bill?"

Bill hesitated. "I think it was the *Sea Queen*," he said doubtfully, and added, in harmony with his companion's mood:

"They don't want to make themselves known, not by a long chalk."

With which, the flare having died down, they tramped away into the night with a civil leave-taking.

I followed them presently, moving along the road in the direction of the docks. When I reached the entrance I paused, and the gatekeeper addressed me.

"Going in, doctor? Got a call?"

I recognised him in the dimness of his lamp as a man whom I had attended for an accident, and I gave him good evening.

"No," said I, "but I want some air. I think I will, if you don't mind."

"Welcome, sir," said he cheerily, and I found myself on the other side of the gateway.

I walked along the vacant stretch of ground, lit only by dull gas-lamps, and, passing the low office buildings and storing sheds, came out by the water-basins. Here was a scene of some bustle and disorder, but it was farther on that the spectators were engaged in a knot, for the caisson was drifting round, and a handsome vessel was floating in, her funnel backed against the grey darkness and her spars in a ghostly silhouette. The name I heard on several sides roused in me a faint curiosity. It was the stranger I had observed, the *Sea Queen*, the subject of the stevedores' pleasantries.

"A pretty boat," said I to my neighbour. "What is she?"

He shook his head. "*Sea Queen* out of Hamburg," he said, "and a pleasure yacht from the look of her. But what she does here beats me."

The caisson closed, and the steam-yacht warped up slowly to the pier. There was little or no noise on her, only a voice raised occasionally in an authoritative command, and the rattling of chains that paid out through the donkey-engine. Idly I moved to the stone quay when the gangway was let down, but only one man descended. The passengers, if there had been any, had long since reached town from Tilbury, saving themselves that uninteresting trudge up the winding river-lane.

I moved on to where a steamer was being loaded under the electric lights, and watched the same for some time with interest; then, taking out my watch, I examined it, and came to the conclusion that if I was to see any patients that evening at all I must at once get back to my unpalatable rooms. I began to go along the pier, and passed into the shadow of the *Sea Queen*, now sunk in quiet, and drab and dark. As I went, a port-hole in the stern almost on the level of my eyes gleamed like a moon, and of a sudden there was an outbreak of angry voices, one threatening volubly and the other deeper and slower, but equally hostile. It was not that the altercation was anything astonishing in human life, but I think it was the instantaneous flash of that light and those voices in a dead ship that pulled me up. I stared into the port-hole, and as I did so the face of a man passed across it 'twixt the light and me; it passed and vanished; and I walked on. As I turned to go down to the gates I was aware of the approaching fog. I had seen it scores of times in that abominable low-lying part of the town, and I knew the symptoms. There was a faint smell in the air, an odour that bit the nostrils, carrying the reek of that changeless wilderness of factories and houses. The opaque grey sky lost its greyness and was struck to a lurid yellow. Banks of high fog rolled up the east and moved menacingly, almost imperceptibly, upon the town. For a moment there were dim shadows of the wharves and the riverside houses, with a church tower dimmer still behind them, and then the billows of the fog descended and swallowed up all.

I moved now in a blackness, but bore to the right, in which direction I knew were the dock sheds and safety. I seemed to have been feeling my way for a long time—quite ten minutes—and yet I did not come upon anything. I began to be seized with the fear of a blind man who is helpless in vacancy. Had I left the basin in my rear, or had I somehow wandered back towards it, and would another step take me over into the water? I shrank from the thought of that cold plunge, and, putting out my stick on all sides, tapped and tapped, and went on foot by foot. I was still upon the stone, when I should have reached the sheds, or at least have got upon the earth again, with the roadway running to the gates. Angry at my own folly for lingering so long about the ships, I continued cautiously forward, trying each step of the way. Presently I heard a sound of footsteps before me, and then a voice raised in a stave of song. There followed a loud oath and the splash of a heavy body in water.

Plainly the basin was, then, in front of me, and some one had fallen in. The poor wretch was doomed to drown in that horrid and impenetrable darkness. I shuddered at the thought of that fate, and moved faster under the whip of impulse. The next moment I brought sharply up against a stone post by which ships were warped in and fastened. Below was the water, and now I could hear the sound of splashing, and a voice raised in a cry of terror. Round the post was coiled a heavy rope which I loosened as rapidly as was possible and began to lower over the edge of the basin.

"This way," I called; "make this way. Here is the pier," but the splashing continued, and a smother of sound came to me, as if the swimmer were under water, and his voice stifled. Almost without thinking, I gripped the thick, tarry rope and let myself over the basin, until I had reached the surface of the water.

"This way," I called; "if you can get here, I can save you."

The noise seemed to come from some little distance out, and now I was in the water myself, with the cable in my hand, striking out feverishly and awkwardly in the direction of the struggling man. I came upon him in a dozen strokes, and the first news I had of him was a kick in the shoulder that almost tore me from my rope. The next moment I had him by the collar and without more ado was retracing my way, towing a violent mass of humanity behind me. It was only by dint of hard work and by propping him in my arms that I at last landed him on the pier, and then I succeeded in following myself, very sore and stiff and cold.

The first words that sprang from the prostrate figure on the quay were some incoherent oaths, which ultimately took form. "Curse Legrand, curse him!"

"Come," said I; "if you are well enough to swear you are well enough to travel, and we are both of us in a case for treatment."

"I can't see you," said a voice, in a grumbling way, "but you saved me. Pull along, and I'll do my best to follow. Where the dickens are we?"

I groped and helped him to his feet. "Give me your arm," said I; "we can't afford to go in again, either of us."

"Were you in too?" he asked stupidly.

"Well, what do *you* think?" I replied with a little laugh, and began to walk, this time, determinately at right angles from the basin.

He said nothing more, but hung on my arm pretty limp, as we struggled through the darkness, and presently we both fell over a bale of goods.

"So far so good," I said, picking him up; "we must be in the neighbourhood of the sheds. Now to find them, and creep along in their protection."

We struck the buildings immediately after, and I had no difficulty in working my way to the end. That took us to dry ground, or, at least, to the sloppy ground at the bottom of the docks. By good fortune we now hit upon the roadway, and it was to me a delight to hear the ring of the hard macadam under our squelching boots. I was now almost cheerful, for I was sure that I could not wander from the road, and, sure enough, we were advertised of our position and heralded all the way by the meagre lamps at intervals. Soon after we reached the gates, which were opened by my friend.

He peered into our faces. "It was a call, sure enough," said I, laughing. "And here's my patient."

When we got into the road the fog had slightly lifted, and I had less difficulty in picking my way home than I had anticipated. Once in the surgery, I turned up the lamp and poked the fire into a blaze, after which I looked at my companion. It was with a sense of familiarity that I recognised his face as that which I had seen flitting across the port-hole of the *Sea Queen*. He sat back in the chair in which I had placed him and stared weakly about the room. The steam went up from both of us.

"Look here," said I, "if we stay so, we are dead or rheumatic men"; and I went into my bedroom, changed myself, and brought him some garments of my own. These he put on, talking now in the garrulous voice I had heard on the yacht, but somewhat disconnectedly.

"It's awfully good of you … a Good Samaritan," and here a vacant laugh. "I wonder if these things.... How did I go over? I thought I was going straight. It must have been that infernal fog.... Where the dickens are we?"

"You are in my house," said I, "but you might be at the bottom of the basin."

"Good heavens!" he said, with a laugh. "I feel mighty shivery. Don't you think a drop of something–"

I looked at him closely. "I think it wouldn't be a bad idea in the circumstances," I said.

"Oh, I know I had too much to carry!" he said recklessly. "It made me quarrel with that wretched Legrand, too—a fat-headed fool!"

I rang for water, and mixed two hot jorums of whisky, one of which he sipped contentedly.

"You see, we had a rousing time coming over," he observed, as if in apology. I looked my question, and he answered it. "Hamburg, in the *Sea Queen*. The old man skipped at Tilbury, and Barraclough's a real blazer."

"Which accounts for the blaze I saw," I remarked drily.

"Oh, you saw that. Yes, it was that that made Legrand mad. He's particular. But what's the odds? The boss has to pay."

His eyes roamed about the shabby room—shabby from the wretched pictures on the walls to the threadbare carpet underfoot, and, though he was not a gentleman, I felt some feeling of irritation. Perhaps if he had been a gentleman I should not have been put out at this scrutiny of my poverty.

"You saved me, and that's certain," he began again. "Say, are you a doctor?"

I admitted it.

"Well, can you recommend another glass of toddy?" he asked, smiling, and his smile was pleasant.

"In the circumstances again—perhaps," I said.

"Oh, I know I played the fool," he conceded. "But it isn't often I do. I must have gone off in the fog. How did you get at me?"

I told him.

"That was plucky," he said admiringly. "I don't know two folks I'd risk the same for."

"There wasn't much risk," I answered. "It was only a question of taking a cold bath out of season."

"Well!" he said, and whistled. "There's white people everywhere, I guess. Business good?"

The question was abrupt, and I could not avoid it. "You have your answer," I replied, with a gesture at the room, and taking out my cigar-case I offered him one.

He accepted it, bit off the end, and spat it on the floor, as if preoccupied. His brow wrinkled, as if the mental exercise were unusual and difficult.

"The *Sea Queen* is a rum bird," he said presently, "but there's plenty of money behind. And she wants a doctor."

"Well," said I, smiling at him.

"We left a Scotch chap sick at Hamburg," he continued. "The boss is a secret beggar, with pots of money, they say. We chartered out of the Clyde, and picked him up at Hamburg—him and others."

"A pleasure yacht?" I inquired.

"You may call it that. If it ain't that I don't know what it is, and I ought to know, seeing I am purser. We've all signed on for twelve months, anyway. Now, doctor, we want a doctor."

He laughed, as if this had been a joke, and I stared at him. "You mean," said I slowly, "that I might apply."

"If it's worth your while," said he. "You know best."

"Well, I don't know about that," I replied. "It depends on a good many things."

All the same I knew that I did know best. The whole of my discontent, latent and seething for years, surged up in me. Here was the wretched practice by which I earned a miserable pittance, bad food, and low company. On the pleasure yacht I should at least walk among equals, and feel myself a civilised being. I could dispose of my goodwill for a small sum, and after twelve months—well, something might turn up. At any rate, I should have a year's respite, a year's holiday.

I looked across at the purser of the *Sea Queen*, with his good-looking, easy-natured face, his sleek black hair, and his rather flabby white face, and still I hesitated.

"I can make it a dead bird," he said, wagging his head, "and you'll find it pretty comfortable."

"Where are you going? The Mediterranean?" I asked.

"I haven't the least idea," he said with a frank yawn. "But if your tickets are all right you can bet on the place."

"I'm agreeable," I said, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Good man!" said he, with some of his former sparkle of interest. "And now we'll have another to toast it, and then I must be off."

"Don't you think you'd better stay here the night?" I asked. "I can put you up. And the fog's thicker."

"Thanks, old man," he replied with easy familiarity, "I would like a roost, only I've got an engagement. I wired to some one, you know." And he winked at me wickedly.

"Very well," said I. "If you have an appointment, I would suggest that we leave over the toast."

"You're right," he said ingenuously. "But it was a nasty bath. All serene. I'll fix that up. By the way," he paused on his road to the door, "I haven't your name."

"Nor I yours," I answered. "Mine's Richard Phillimore."

"Mine's Lane," he said. "Qualified?"

"M.B. London," I replied.

"Good for you. That'll make it easier. I suppose I can go in your togs."

"You're welcome," I said, "though they don't fit you very well."

"Oh, I'm a bit smaller than you, I know, but all cats are grey in the dark, and it's infernally dark to-night! Well, so long, and I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure."

He swung out of the door with his free gait, and I stopped him.

"One word more. Who's your owner?"

"The boss? Oh, Morland—Morland, a regular millionaire."

With that he was gone.

CHAPTER II
In the "Three Tuns"

The next day I had a full round of visits to make, so that I had little time to think over the adventure of the previous evening. On Saturday I made my way, as usual, to the West End, and spent the afternoon in luxury, basking in the renewal of my self-respect. I had leisure then to reflect, and, although the more I considered the less appeared the likelihood of any advantage to myself derivable out of Lane's promise, yet I allowed myself the satisfaction of certain inquiries. No one in the club had heard of Morland, the millionaire, and the *Sea Queen* was unknown to my yachting friends. Moreover, no Morland appeared in the "Court Guide." Still, it was quite possible, even probable, that he was an American; so that omission did not abash me. It was only when I rehearsed the circumstances in bald terms that I doubted to the point of incredulity. I had fished up a tipsy fellow, of a loose good-nature, who, under the stimulus of more whisky, had probably at the best offered more than he was entitled to do, and who, at the worst, had long since forgotten all about his Good Samaritan. The situation seemed easy of interpretation, and in the warmth of my pleasant intercourse with my companions I presently ceased to ponder it.

Yet, when I arrived at my house and opened the letter that awaited me, I will confess that I experienced a thrill of hope. It was from Hills, a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and, premising that I was a candidate for the post of doctor in the SS. *Sea Queen*, requested me to call on Monday at three o'clock. This looked, so to speak, like business, and I attended at the address with my mind made up and clear. If I was offered the position I would take it, and so cut my cable.

I had to wait some time in an ante-room, but presently was ushered into the presence of one of the partners, an amiable, business-like man, with the air of a country squire.

"Dr. Phillimore?" he queried introductively, and I assented.

"Please sit down, will you. You are anxious to take position of doctor on the *Sea Queen.*" He consulted some note before him. "I see. Your name has been mentioned to my client in this connection. I assume you are fully qualified?"

I told him the facts and referred him to the "Medical Year-Book." "Moreover," I added, "I have no doubt, if a recommendation were necessary, Sir John Wemyss, of Harley Street, would be willing to write to you."

"Sir John Wemyss," he echoed reflectively. "Oh, yes, the cancer man. Let me see, he was President, wasn't he, of the College of Surgeons?"

"Yes, some years ago," I answered.

"A good man," he declared with a friendly air of patronage. "Well, I don't suppose there would be any difficulty on that score if Sir John will write. My client is a prudent man, and would naturally like to have the best advice available. Moreover, he is quite willing to pay for it. There is, of course, that question," and he looked at me as if inviting my suggestion.

I laughed. "Really I have no views, only that naturally I should like as large a salary as is compatible with the circumstances."

"Very well, Dr. Phillimore," said he, nodding. "I daresay we can arrange that too. You are young yet, and the position might lead–" He broke off, as the baize door on his left opened noiselessly. "What is it, Pye?"

The clerk bent down and whispered to him. "Oh, very well! It's opportune in a way. Will you ask Mr. Morland to be good enough to come in?"

The little clerk went out with his neat walk, and the solicitor rose. "I shall be able to introduce you to my client, who is the owner of the *Sea Queen*," he said, with a certain change of voice, and quickly went forward to the outer door.

"How do you do, Mr. Morland?" he exclaimed, with a cheerful deference, such as was due to the presence of wealth. "I was just engaged on a little matter of yours. I hope you came right up. These dull offices go so much by routine. It was the question of a doctor, sir."

As he spoke he indicated me, and for the first time I saw Mr. Morland.

He was a man of thirty-five, of middle height, slightly disposed to stoutness, but with a fine carriage, and with a bronzed, good-looking face, rendered heavier for the dull expression of his blue eyes. His hair, which was short and worn *en brosse*, after a foreign fashion, was straw-yellow.

"Is it the doctor?" he asked, after a glance at me, and though he spoke excellent English, there was also something a little foreign in his accent.

"Well, sir, we haven't reached that point yet," said the lawyer, smiling. "This is Dr. Phillimore, whom you wished me to–"

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Morland, and he put out a hand mechanically. "You will arrange it," he said to the other, with an air of command.

"Most certainly, sir, but I thought you would like to see, being on the spot–"

"No, there is only one thing. You know anything of throats?" he asked suddenly.

I told him I had studied under a specialist at the hospital, as it happened. In these days we doctors are compelled to take special courses in order to keep march with the times.

"That is right," he said, nodding, and the smile that came upon his face turned the eyes bluer. He looked quite handsome. "We must all keep step with the times. I will look to you to arrange it," he added again to the lawyer, and seemed to wait for my dismissal. The solicitor bowed me sharply from the room, for was not his millionaire client in waiting? And I went down the stairs.

It was now past four, and as I came out into the Square I saw before me the little lawyer's clerk who had entered the room and had been called Pye. He was talking amiably to another man, and as I passed smiled at me through his pince-nez.

"You saw Mr. Morland?" he asked in a friendly way.

"Yes," I said, and looked at the stranger. There seemed no necessity to say more.

"It is odd that you should encounter here, gentlemen," said Pye, adjusting his glasses, "and yet I suppose it isn't. Mr. Holgate, this gentleman is the future doctor of the *Sea Queen*."

"Oh, dear me, it isn't settled," said I, with a laugh.

Pye beamed at me. "I think I know my chief's face," he said. "It's my business to interpret him, particularly when he can't interpret himself."

The other man laughed lazily. He was a man with a big body, and a face round and gross in proportion, heavy-lidded eyes, and an imperturbable expression.

"This is Mr. Holgate, the third officer," said Pye, by way of introduction, and somehow or other we began to walk in the direction of Holborn. When we had threaded the Great Turnstile the little clerk hesitated and swung round. "I was going to drink a glass of wine with Mr. Holgate. Perhaps you would join us, sir?"

"Gladly," said I, for I had made up my mind to take tea before returning to Wapping, and somehow my interview had inspirited me. I took a sanguine view of my chances, for all my words to Pye. Moreover, I have always been interested in my fellow-creatures, and, finally, I was in the mood for a glass of something. Enters this trio, then, into the "Three Tuns" presently, and sits to a table in comfortable chairs, with the clatter of the street falling, like rain, on the senses, and the bright flare of gas among the dark barrels. There was about the place an odour of good-fellowship and of peace that pleased me who had not visited these haunts for years.

Little Pye turned his pince-nez on me as the attendant advanced.

"What'll you have, doctor?" he asked.

I hesitated.

"I suppose it must be port," said I; "port is more palatable and no more noxious in such places than any other wine."

"Any port in a storm, in fact," said the little man, looking at me quizzically.

"For my part–" said Holgate, in his stuffy, fat voice.

"Port, you should say," interposed Pye with brisk wit. He smiled at his smartness and his eyes seemed to challenge me to respond.

"There's nothing to beat spirits—and sound rum for choice, but as they won't have it here, I'll take brandy," continued the third officer.

He lighted a cigar and began to smoke, examining everything within eyeshot attentively but with indifference. I think, except for the first glance he had bestowed upon me, that he had completely ignored my presence.

Little Pye put up his glass. "I drink," said he, "to a prosperous voyage, Mr. Holgate, and to pleasant companions."

"Prosperous voyage," said the third officer wheezily, and I murmured something to the same effect.

"You say the old man's velvet," said Holgate, resuming his puffing.

"Well," said Pye, beaming through his glasses, "I wouldn't go so far as to say it, but he looks it. He looks kid-glove."

"I hate 'em," growled Holgate. "I've seen that kind on the ferry—all airs and aitches, and frosty as a berg."

"Well, of course, it would be much more satisfactory to be sailing under a real Tartar," remarked the little man with mild pleasantry.

Holgate cast him a glance which inquired, but was indifferent. "What's your idea, doctor?" he asked.

"I have none," said I, smiling. "I am much more interested in third officers."

His masklike face relaxed, and he stroked his black moustaches, and took a long pull of his cigar.

"That was very nice of you, doctor," he said, nodding with more cordiality.

Pye drew an apple from his pocket, and carefully bit into it. I don't know why, but it struck me as comical to see him at this schoolboy business, his ears alert, his glasses shining, and his white teeth going to and fro. He reminded me of a squirrel, a fancy to which the little tufts of whiskers by his ears lent themselves. He eyed both of us brightly.

"After all," said the third officer heavily, "it's more important in the end to know your owner, let alone his travelling with you.

I wouldn't give two straws for the old man, velvet or iron, so long as I could get the lug of my owner."

"You'll find them both all right," said Pye reassuringly. "Captain Day I have seen and Mr. Morland I know."

"He is very rich?" I asked.

"I'll trouble you for a two and a half commission on it," said the clerk cheerfully, "and then I'd live like a fighting-cock. At least, that's what we all believe. There's no knowing."

The shadows of the November afternoon had gathered in the streets without, and a thin scant rain was flying. Into the area of warmth and brightness entered more customers, and shook the water from the umbrellas. They stood at the bar and drank and talked noisily. Round about us in the loom of the great barrels the shadows lurched from the wagging gas-flames. The clerk had finished his apple.

"We will have another," said Holgate.

"This is mine," I said. He shook his head. I protested.

"Doctor, you confess you live in doubt," he said, "whereas I have my appointment in my pocket. Plainly it is my right."

"I think that's a fair argument, doctor," said Pye.

"I am in both your debt," said I lightly. "For company and wine."

"I'm sure we shall owe you both many a time yet," said the third officer civilly.

At the table near us two men had sat and were talking even as we, but one had a half-penny paper, and turned the flimsy thing about, I fancy in search of racing news.

"You see there is no doubt about you–," began Pye amiably, and suddenly dropped his sentence.

In the unexpected silence I caught some words from the other table.

"Well, it's good pluck of him if he wants to marry her. What's the odds if he is a Prince? Live and let live, I say."

Pye's little squirrel head turned round and he stared for a moment at the speaker, then it came back again.

"You are uncommonly polite," said Holgate irritably.

"I'm sorry. I thought I recognised that voice," said the little man sweetly. "One gets echoes everywhere. I was going to say we took you for granted, doctor."

"It's good of you," said I. "But will Mr. Morland?"

"I can practically answer for my employer; I can't say anything about Mr. Morland, who has, however, authorised us to appoint."

"The yacht is from Hamburg?" said I.

"I believe so," said he.

"And its destination?"

"That knowledge is quite out of my province," said the squirrel briefly.

When one came to think of it, it was almost a snub, and I had never any patience for these legal silences. As he shut his jaws he looked a man who could keep a secret, and knew his own mind. Yet he had been so easily familiar that I flushed with resentment. Confound these little professional tricks and solemnities! We were meeting on another ground than lawyer and client.

"I dare say it will be within the cabin-boy's province to-morrow," said I, somewhat sharply.

"Very likely," he assented, and Holgate, who had turned at my tone, exchanged a glance with him.

"Mr. Pye is fond of keeping his own counsel," said the third officer in his slow voice, "and I'm not sure he isn't right, being a lawyer."

"But he isn't a lawyer here," I protested.

Pye smiled. "No; I'm not," he said, "and please don't remind me of it"; at which we all laughed and grew friendly again. "Well, this is a funny sort of tea for me," said the clerk presently. "I generally patronise the A.B.C.," and he rose to go.

Holgate did not move, but sat staring at the fire, which shone on his broad placid face. "I knew a man once," he observed, "who kept his own counsel."

"I hope he was a lawyer," said Pye humourously.

"No; he was a steward—the steward of an estate in the North. In the hills was the wealth of a millionaire; coal, doctor," Holgate looked at me. "And he kept his counsel and held his tongue."

"With what object?" I asked.

"Oh, a little syndicate succeeded in buying it from the owner, and now it's a seven-figure affair."

His face had no expression of inquiry or of inviting comment. He had simply stated history, but I was moved to say flippantly,

"What luck!"

"The steward got it?" asked Pye.

"He romped in," said the third officer.

"And will presently be a baronet," said I lightly.

"Stranger things have happened," he remarked, and began to smile. I fancy we all smiled, though it was not, of course, altogether humourous.

"Is that called robbery?" asked Holgate.

"I doubt if the law covers it," said Pye. "No; it's quite an innocent transaction."

"What is robbery?" I asked cynically. "Lawyers may feel their way amid the intricacies, but no one else can hope to. I'm stealing now when I take these matches."

"I will follow your example," said Holgate, and did so.

"I'm not sure that that's not perks," said little Pye with his quizzical glance.

"Well, is it perks if I buy a picture from you for ten bob which I know to be worth £1,000?" inquired Holgate.

Pye considered. "I give it up," he said.

"Which only proves," said I, continuing my mood, "that it takes a good capercutter to move in and out moral sanctions."

"I don't believe I know what that means quite," said Holgate, giving me the full charge of his steady eyes.

I stooped and warmed my fingers, for the cold blast of the streets was forbidding. "Well, the most famous people have been those who have successfully performed the egg dance between commandments," I remarked.

"I suppose they have," said Holgate thoughtfully.

I rose abruptly, and in the glass above the mantelpiece the two figures behind me came into vision. The little clerk's eyebrows were elevated in a question, and the men faced each other. Holgate's lips were pursed and he nodded. I saw this in the flash of rising, and then I turned about.

"I shall get a wigging," said Pye, seizing his umbrella.

We walked out and I bade them good-bye after a civil exchange of amenities; then I took an omnibus down Chancery Lane and made for the Underground. As I travelled back, my thoughts circled about the situation; I was glad to have made the acquaintance of one or more of my shipmates, if, of course, I was to join the company. Holgate puzzled me for a third officer, until I reflected that in these days every officer had a master's licence. Yet that this man should not by the force of his evident individuality take higher rank in life surprised me. What, however, was of most immediate concern to me was the extreme friendliness of my two companions. Lane was well enough in his way, and certainly had shown his goodwill; but Holgate was more than this to a lonely man with an appetite for society. Holgate was intelligent.

I found a few patients waiting, and disposed of them by eight o'clock, after which I strolled down to the docks, in spite of the drizzle. I have said that I am interested in my fellows, and, in addition, I confess to a certain forethought. I walked down to the docks with the deliberate intention of acquiring some information about the *Sea Queen*, if that were possible. I knew the name of the owner, or at least of the man who had chartered her; I had the name and acquaintance of one or two of the company; but I knew nothing as to her destination, her properties as a boat, or her time of sailing. Some of this ignorance I hoped to remedy by my visit. And it seemed that I was in the way to do so from the start. For no sooner was I on the quay in the neighbourhood of the yacht than I came upon a handsome young man in the dress of a superior sailor, with whom I fell into talk. He was outspoken as a child, but volunteered nothing of his own initiative—an amiable, sluggish, respectful fellow who was, as he stated, quartermaster on the *Sea Queen*.

I confessed my interest in her, at which he indulgently supplied me with information.

"I signed on at Glasgow, sir—and most of us too—and we picked up Mr. Morland at Hamburg—him and the ladies."

"The ladies!" I echoed, for here was a surprise.

"Yes; two ladies what came with him—Miss Morland and another lady, a dark one," said my friend.

"Oh!" said I. "Then you're off for a pleasure cruise."

"I hardly know, sir," said he. "They do say New York, but I haven't heard definite."

That looked in favour of my theory of Mr. Morland as an American. He was perhaps a Trust King, and Miss Morland a vivacious "beauty" from Chicago.

Here my companion suggested that I might care to have a look at the yacht.

"My friend," said I, "you mustn't let me take you on false pretences. I may be your doctor, and I may be not."

"Oh, that's all right, sir," said he easily. "It can't do no harm. We're only loading up with provisions, and there's no mess about."

We ascended the gangway, and entered the dark ship, which was singularly silent. He had already the sailor's affection for his floating home, and pointed me out one or two points for admiration which I understood but ill, as they were technical. As we were peeping into the saloon, a man passed us and stopped sharply.

"That you, Ellison?" he asked in a harsh voice. "Who's that?"

"Only a gentleman having a look round. He's to be doctor," said the quartermaster.

The man made no reply, but stared at me, and then went on swiftly.

"Rather abrupt," I commented, smiling.

"Oh, that's nothing. It is only his way," said the good-natured fellow. "He's the boatswain."

"Is Mr. Morland an American?" I asked.

"I don't know, sir. I've hardly seen him. We signed on at Glasgow with a little slip of a fellow representing Mr. Morland—glasses and side-whiskers."

"That would be Mr. Pye," I said.

"Very likely. Would you like to take a squint at the engines?

Mr. McCrae is on board."

He led me, without waiting for answer, towards the engine-room, and called out, "Mr. McCrae!" which brought presently a little, red-faced, bearded man from the depths. "This gentleman wants to know what you can do," said my friend, by way of introduction. The engineer nodded towards me. "We can make eighteen," he said, wiping his hands on a greasy piece of rag. "Eighteen at a pinch, but I keep her going steady at fourteen."

"A good boat!" said I.

"Aye, tolerable," he said, and pulled out a sheet of paper, which he began to peruse under the slender light. "This now's another slap in the eye for the Emperor," said McCrae, "this business of the Prince."

"What is it?" I asked. "I haven't seen the papers to-night."

He rapped his knuckles on the newspaper. "This Prince Frederic of Hochburg kicking over the traces. I tell ye I'm real sorry for the old man. I pity him, Emperor though he be. He's had his sup of troubles."

"But I don't understand what this new one is," I said.

McCrae was not above explaining. "Well, y'see, this Prince Frederic is the heir to the Duchy of Hochburg, and he has taken up with some singer, and swears he'll resign his inheritance and marry her. That's where the mischief is. Not that the man's not right," proceeded the Scotchman, warming, evidently, to his opinions. "For why should Princes be exempt from the disposition of Providence. Let him come forward like a man, and, ye'll see, he'll gain the univairsal sympathy of Europe for his honesty."

"It certainly increases the Emperor's difficulties," I said. "For with a vacancy at Hochburg, and the Pan-German movement in full swing–"

"Aye, ye're a student of political affairs," broke in the engineer in his broad Glasgow accent. "And I'll not say there isn't something to be said at the present juncture of European politics. But, man, the principle's all wrong. Why is a man, no better than you or me, to ride over us, whether it be riches, or kings, or emperors? It's the accident of birth, and the accident of riches, that dictates to us, and I'm thinking it ought to be set right by legislation."

"Well, we are getting along to the Millennium famously," said I, jestingly.

"The Millennium!" he said, with a contemptuous snort.

I think Ellison was pleased to see us getting on so pleasantly in argument, as he was responsible for the introduction, and he now ventured on a statement in the hopes, no doubt, of cementing the acquaintanceship.

"This gentleman's coming along with us, Mr. McCrae," he said.

The engineer looked at me.

"I have put in for doctor, but it's by no means certain," I explained.

"Oh, well, we'll hope it is," he said affably, and to the quartermaster: "Ellison, this gentleman'll, maybe, take a finger of whisky to his own health—and ours," he added, with a relaxation of his grim face at his jest. "Ye'll find a bottle in my cabin."

So when the quartermaster had returned, once more I had to drink to the success of my application. It appeared that the *Sea Queen* was peopled with amiable spirits, if I excepted the boatswain; and as I went over the side I congratulated myself on having already made the acquaintance of two more of my shipmates on a friendly footing—if I were destined to the appointment.

On my way home it struck me that I had already heard of the affair of Prince Frederic. The remark of the man at the next table in the "Three Tuns" must have referred to the scandal, and as I reflected on that, I could see in my mind's eye the little clerk's head go round in a stare at our neighbours.

CHAPTER III
Mademoiselle Trebizond

Pye had interpreted his employer's face correctly, and Lane had not boasted unduly. On Wednesday evening I received a letter appointing me to the position of doctor, and at the same time informing me of my remuneration. This was well enough, as it chanced; though not on too liberal a scale, it was yet sufficient to meet my wants, and mentally I cast myself adrift from Wapping with a psalm of thankfulness. The *Sea Queen* was to sail on Friday, and so I had little time left; yet by a lucky chance I was enabled to dispose of my practice "on the nail," to use a convenient colloquialism, and, with that adventitious sum of money, equipped and fortified myself for my voyage. I paid two preliminary visits to the yacht, but found no one of importance on board, and it was not until the actual afternoon of our departure that I made the acquaintance of any more of my shipmates.

We warped out of the docks, and dropped down the river unexpectedly, the captain on his bridge at intervals, and the pilot all the time, and at ten o'clock we reached Gravesend, where we anchored in the stream. It was blowing hard of a cold night, and the wind was peppered with sleet; a depressing proem to our unknown voyage. We swung at anchor there until Mr. Morland came aboard with his friends, and we left on the turn of the tide about midnight. I did not see Mr. Morland arrive, as I was busy in the forecastle with a man who had met with a trivial accident. It was Lane who informed me that the "butterflies were come" and we might spread our wings. Lane I had encountered for a few minutes in the afternoon, when he smilingly saluted me.

"Well, what price me?" and hurried off ere I could answer him or thank him, as this form of salutation seemed to require. But he had more leisure at supper, to which he invited me in his cabin.

"We chaps have the benefit of a pleasure yacht, doctor," said he, winking, "and you bet I'm not purser for nothing. Blame me if I sup with that crew until they shake down a bit. Barraclough's all right, and a gentleman, but I can't stand Legrand or Holgate."

"I've met Mr. Holgate, and thought him intelligent," I ventured.

Lane emitted scorn. "Intelligent! He's a bladder of peas, and thinks himself a monarch. Precious little swank about him, if he can help it. He's fly enough there. Well, a tot won't hurt us now. I can tell you I've been hustled." He had recourse to a decanter of whisky. "This is the real stuff. I took care of that. Legrand can do on two-bob vitriol for all I care. He don't know the difference. Well, the boss's aboard and his crowd, and we're off, and here's fortune, doctor."

The toast was irreproachable, and I put down my glass and reverted to his phrase. "His crowd?"

"Yes, his sister and the other lady—rippers both. I saw them when they came aboard at Hamburg."

"And now can you tell me where we're going?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Lane carelessly. "I hope we're running out of this beastly weather—that's all."

"I merely engaged for twelve months," I put in.

"Same here, and that's good enough," said Lane. "I'll ask the old man to-morrow if his prickles don't stand up too thick. Here she goes, doctor."

When I left the purser I turned in, for the night was shrewd and discomfortable enough to bar romantic thoughts on leaving the English coast. Besides, we were bound down channel, and should keep company with our native cliffs the whole of the next day. It would be time to wave a farewell when we passed the Lizard.

The quarters in the *Sea Queen* were roomy. I was berthed aft with the other officers, and Mr. Morland's rooms and the cabins of the two ladies were on the upper deck, ample in appearance from the outside, and no doubt furnished luxuriously. The guests had the run of a fine saloon also, on the lower deck, as well as a music-gallery which ran round it, and there was a boudoir, as I heard, attached to the ladies' compartments, as well as a private room to Mr. Morland's. Breakfast was mainly interesting as introducing me practically for the first time to my companions. We were then abreast of the Isle of Wight, and were keeping well away towards France. The chief officer I now, to my astonishment, discovered to be a man of title. Sir John Barraclough was a tall, loose-limbed, good-looking man of thirty something, with a blue eye, and a casual manner. He nodded at me amiably and continued his talk with Legrand, the second officer, who was dark and high-coloured, with a restless expression of face. Lane threw a jocular greeting across the table to me, and I shook hands cordially with Holgate, whom I now saw for the first time since I had come aboard. Presently Barraclough turned to me.

"Glad to see you, doctor," he said in an indifferent manner. "Hope it's goin' to be a fine cruise."

I had just echoed his wish formally when the captain made his appearance from the deck. Captain Day was a most fastidious-looking man, with a brown Vandyke beard and a flow of good manners. Seeing me and Holgate there as the only strangers, he singled us out at once with quite the right degree of friendliness.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Dr. Phillimore. This your first voyage? I hope we'll make a happy family."

But having thus condescended briefly, he relapsed into silence and shortly afterwards left us.

"There's too much condemned R.N.R. about the old man," confided Lane as we went on deck, "but he's all right."

It was on deck that I met with my surprise, for the first person my eyes fell on was no other than Pye, the little lawyer's clerk.

"I never expected to see you here," I told him.

"Well, you see, I did expect to see you," he replied in his self-satisfied little way. "I'm here to represent Mr. Morland for the time being."

"Oh," said I, "then you can tell us all where we are bound for,

for no one seems to know."

He considered a little. "I shall be able to tell you shortly, I have no doubt," he said at last. "At present Mr. Morland alone knows. Perhaps even he doesn't," he added with his smile.

"I don't like that little buffer," declared Lane grumpily as we walked on. "He is too fussy and by-your-leave-please for me. Made me get out all my books yesterday, as if I were an office-boy."

"He feels responsible, I suppose," I ventured.

"Well, who's responsible if I'm not?" demanded the purser hotly. "I've been at sea fifteen years, and this brat hasn't so much as been sick in the *Marguerite*, I'll lay. Let him look after his own books. I'm all right."

It was quite manifest that Lane was decided in his likes and dislikes, as his unreasonable objection to the second officer had already discovered to me. The passengers were not visible during the morning, but in the afternoon I received a message calling me to Mr. Morland's cabin. I found him seated before a bureau with a docket of papers before him, and he was civil and abrupt.

"Is there anything you can recommend for sea-sickness, Dr. Phillimore?" he asked bluntly.

I told him of several remedies which had been tried, and mentioned cocaine as probably the best, adding that I had little faith in any of them. He thought a moment.

"Prepare me some cocaine," he said, and with a bow intimated that he had done with me.

It was civil as I have said, but it was also abrupt. He had the air of a martinet and the expression of a schoolmaster who set his pupil a task. But I made up the doses forthwith and let him have them.

Later I saw two figures walking upon the hurricane promenade, one of which I easily made out as Mr. Morland, and the other was a woman heavily cloaked in fur. A strong breeze was beating up channel, and as they stood and faced it the woman put her hand to her hat. But for the most part they walked to and fro, sometimes in conversation, but often in silence. Once, at eight bells, I noticed, from my point of observation, the woman stop, lean across the railing, and point towards the coast of France, which was fast fading into the gathering mists. She seemed to speak, her face turned level with her shoulders towards the man. He put out a hand and snapped his fingers, and they presently resumed their promenade. The sun had gone down, and darkness was settling on us; the *Sea Queen* ploughed steadily westward, her lights springing out one by one, and the figures on the hurricane deck were presently merged in shadow. As I leaned over the stern, reflecting, and contemplating now the dull wash of the water about the screw, I was conscious of some one's approach.

"Well, doctor," said the cheerful voice of Pye, "have you had a good look at our passengers?"

"Mr. Pye," said I, pleasantly enough, "I am a man of moods. And I have lived long in silence and routine as no doubt you yourself also. I find occupation even in my own thoughts."

"You are well equipped for the sea," he rejoined. "I'm not sure about myself. You see, I'm a Londoner, and I shall miss those peopled spaces. Here there's nothing but–" he waved his hand.

"At all events. I see you're a respectable sailor," I said, "which, apparently, others are not." His silence seemed to inquire of me. "I gave Mr. Morland a prescription for sea-sickness this afternoon."

"That would be for one of the ladies," he made answer; "he is evidently firm on his legs, and—and his companion. I suppose I may tell you that his companion is his sister," he said after a pause.

"Well, yes," I replied drily, for his precautions jarred on me. "For I suppose we shall discover the mystery in the course of the next twelve months."

"Mystery!" he repeated musingly. "I suppose I am by training somewhat circumspect. It's difficult to get out of it. But there's no mystery. Mr. and Miss Morland have brought a friend with them."

"If there's no mystery," I said, "the friend?"

"I have not heard her name," he replied, "or at least, if I have, I have forgotten. It is a friend of Miss Morland's. I believe she is a French lady."

The dusk had enclosed us, but through it I perceived some one hurriedly approaching. "Is it the doctor?" said the steward's voice, and I answered in the affirmative.

"You're wanted at once, sir. Mr. Morland has sent for you."

I moved off quickly, and had got half-way down the deck when a woman came forward noiselessly through the gloom.

"Dr. Phillimore," she said, "I want you to see to Mlle. Châteray at once. She is very ill."

I entered the state rooms without further question, hurried down the handsome corridor, and under Miss Morland's guidance found the cabin. Certain constitutions are peculiarly affected by the sea, and it is even undertaking a risk for some people to travel on that element. Clearly it was, as Pye hinted, for the French lady that my prescription had been required. Outside the cabin in the corridor I encountered Mr. Morland, who exhibited a troubled face unusual to one of such apparent equanimity. But he said nothing, only looked at his sister and turned away.

Inside I found a blue chamber, roomy and well lighted by electricity, an elegant broad bed affixed to the one wall, and upon it, stretched in the most wonderful *déshabille*, my patient. Mlle. Châteray was of middle height, of a pleasant fulness, and dark of feature. She had large eyes that, as I entered, were roaming in a restless way about the room, and her voice was lifted sharply abusive of her maid, a mild Frenchwoman who stood by her.

"She is in a state of collapse, Dr. Phillimore," said my guide's voice in my ear.

I knew better than that. It was hysteria, or I had never seen hysteria, and the *mal-de-mer* had been merely provocative. I took her hand without ceremony, and, wheeling on me her lustrous eyes, she broke out in torrential French.

She would die if she remained there. They were beasts to keep her there. Why was she not put ashore at Havre? Havre was a port, as every one knew, and there were ports not only in England. I had a kind face and would do as she bade me.... Very well, then, let her be put ashore. She began to tear at her elaborate dressing-gown, and I was afraid of one of those outbreaks which are known as *crises des nerfs.* I took her hands firmly.

"You shall be put ashore as you wish," I said, "and in the meantime, while the yacht is going about, you will drink what I give you. It will comfort you."

She gazed into my eyes, ceasing to struggle, and then said more quietly: "Yes—yes, give it me quick."

It was a case for bromide, and I turned away at once to go to my surgery.

"You will lie exactly as you are, mademoiselle," I said peremptorily, "until I return."

I left the cabin and descended, and I think I was not gone more than ten minutes. When Mlle. Châteray had taken the draught, I turned to her maid: "She will be quieter now," I said. "Let me know if anything further develops," and I moved towards the door. Miss Morland stood in my way.

For the first time I observed her. Her cloak had fallen from her, leaving her fine figure in the full illumination of the light. Her head was set well back above the eloquent lines of a strong throat and the square shoulders underneath. The lace over her bosom stirred with her breathing, and to my fancy at the moment she was as a statue into which life was flowing suddenly. I saw this before I met her gaze, and the calm beauty of that confirmed my fancy. She moved then and opened the door for me.

"You have promised she shall be landed?" she said in a low voice.

"Madam, I would promise anything in such a case," I answered.

A faint smile passed over her face, for we were now outside the cabin and in the ladies' boudoir.

"You can promise relief, then, I understand?" she queried.

"She will probably be all right to-night, though I cannot say the hysteria will not recur," I replied.

An expression flitted over her face, but whether it was of pity or annoyance I could not have said.

"My brother will not put the yacht about," she said.

"I'm not going to ask him," I rejoined.

"I thank you, doctor," said she simply, "and so will he."

"It is my business," I responded indifferently.

She had spoken with distance, even coldly, and with the air of condescension. There was no necessity to thank me at all, and certainly not in that way.

Bidding her good evening, I went down again, and as I went a problem which had vaguely bothered me during my administrations recurred, now more insistently. There was something familiar in Mlle. Châteray's face. What was it?

I spent some time in the surgery, and later joined the officers at dinner. Captain Day wore a short dinner-jacket like my own, but the others had made no attempt to dress. Perhaps that was the reason why the captain devoted his attention to me. His voice was that of a cultivated man, and he seemed to converse on the same level of cultivation. He made a figure apart from the rest of the company, to which little Pye was now joined, and as I looked down and across the table (from which only Holgate was absent on duty) their marvellous unlikeness to him struck me. Even Sir John Barraclough and Lane seemed by comparison more or less of a piece, though the first officer ignored the purser quite markedly. Captain Day, I discovered, had some taste in letters, and as that also had been my consolation in my exile in Wapping, I think we drew nearer on a common hobby. I visited my patient about nine o'clock, and found her sleeping. As she lay asleep, I was again haunted by the likeness to some one I had seen before; but I was unable to trace it to its source nor did I trouble my head in the matter, since resemblances are so frequently accidental and baffling.

Pye had invited me to his room earlier in the day, and I went straight to him from the deck cabin. To find Holgate there was not unpleasing, as it seemed in a way to recall what I almost began to consider old times—the time that was in the "Three Tuns." Pye mixed the toddy, and we smoked more or less at our ease. I spoke of my patient, in answer to a question, as one suffering from sea-sickness.

"What's she like?" inquired Holgate.

"I should say handsome," I rejoined. "I understood from Mr. Pye that she is French."

"I think I heard so," said Pye, "but you could tell."

"Well, she spoke French," I said with a smile.

Pye's smile seemed to commend my reticence, but Holgate, ignoring the obvious retort on me, pursued a different subject.

"Upon my soul, I envy people like those millionaires. Here am I working like a navvy for a bare living, never been able to marry; Pye probably in the same case; and you, doctor?"

"No; I'm a bachelor," I answered.

"Well, take us three—no doubt in our different walks every bit as capable as Mr. Morland on his Wall Street, or wherever it is. It isn't a righteous distribution of this world's goods."

"It is odd," said I, speaking my thoughts, "how you came to take up this life."

"The sort of blunder," said Holgate, "that is made in three cases out of four. I hankered after it in my teens, and once out of them it was too late. Who is going to adapt a youth of twenty-one, without capital, to a commercial life, or a legal life, or a medical life? There is no changing the dice. When the hands are dealt you must abide by them."

"Yes, we are all waifs," said I sententiously, not being greatly interested in the argument.

"When I came back from my last voyage," pursued Holgate, "I was in Paris for a bit, and went into the Comédie one night, and–"

I never heard the rest of Holgate's reminiscence, for the word regarding the theatre suddenly sent a message to my memory and lighted it up instantaneously. I said aloud, and with some excitement,

"Trebizond!"

Holgate ceased talking, and Pye removed his cigarette hastily.

"What, may we venture to ask, is Trebizond?" he said presently.

I smiled foolishly. "Oh, it is only that I have made a discovery," I said, "a small discovery."

Again there was silence.

"Perhaps we are worthy to hear it," suggested Holgate equably.

Pye still held his cigarette between his fingers and looked at me out of his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Oh, nothing much," said I, and glanced at my watch. "I'm sorry, I must see my patient safe for the night. I'll look in again."

I left them and went upstairs, knocking on the boudoir door. Miss Morland opened it.

"Mlle. Châteray is still sleeping," she said formally.

"I will leave a dose with her maid," I replied, "so that if it be necessary it may be given in the night."

"You will, of course, be in attendance if required," she said coldly.

I bowed.

"I am paid for it, madam," I answered, though I must confess to a hostile feeling within my heart.

"I think, then, that is all," she said, and I took my dismissal at the hands of the arrogant beauty with an internal conflict of anger and admiration.

I did not return to Pye, but went to my own cabin in an irritable condition. It ought not to have mattered to me that the sister of a millionaire, my employer, should treat me more or less as a lackey; but it did. I threw myself on my bunk and took down a book at random from my little shelf. Out of its pages tumbled an evening news-sheet which I now remembered to have bought of a screaming boy as I hurried into the dock gates on the previous afternoon. I had not had time to look at it in my various preoccupations, but, after all, it was the last news of my native land I should have for some time, and so I opened it and began the perusal.

It was one of those half-penny journals which seem to combine the maximum of vulgarity with a minimum of news. But I passed over the blatant racing items and murder trials with less than my customary distaste, and was rambling leisurely through the columns when I was arrested by a paragraph and sat up briskly. It was the tail that interested me.

"… It is stated that Prince Frederic is in London. The name of the lady who has so infatuated him is Mlle. Yvonne Trebizond, the well-known prima donna."

I had recalled the name Trebizond during Holgate's talk, and it seemed strange now that this second discovery should fall so coincidently. The face of Mlle. Châteray had taken me back, by a sudden gust of memory, to certain pleasant days in Paris before I was banished to the East End. I had frequented the theatres and the concert-rooms, and I remembered the vivacious singer, a true *comédienne*, with her pack of tricks and her remarkable individuality. Mlle. Châteray, then, was no other than Yvonne Trebizond, and–

I looked down at the paper and read another sentence, which, ere that illumination, had had no significance, but now was pregnant with it.

"The prince has the full support and sympathy of his sister, Princess Alix."

I rose abruptly. I can keep my own counsel as well as a lawyer's clerk, but I saw no reason in the world for it now. I had left my glass untouched and my cigar unlit in Pye's cabin. I went back forthwith to finish both.

The pair were still seated as if expecting me.

"Patient all right, doctor?" inquired Holgate.

I nodded. "Mr. Pye," I said, "I find my discovery has amplified itself. When I was here it was of small dimensions. Now it has grown to the proportions of a—well, a balloon," I ended.

Both men gazed at me steadily.

"Out with it, man," urged the third officer.

"I have your permission?" I asked the lawyer's clerk, smiling.

"When you have told me what it is, I will tell you," said he, gravely jocose.

I put the paper in Holgate's hands, and pointed to the paragraph. He read it slowly aloud and then looked up.

"Well?" he asked.

"I am going to tell you something which you know," I said, addressing Pye. "The lady in the deck cabin is Mlle. Trebizond."

Holgate started. "Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, but Pye was quite silent, only keeping his eyes on me.

"I recognized her, but couldn't name her," I went on. "Now it has come back to me."

"Which means, of course," said Pye unemotionally, "that Mr. Morland is–"

"The Prince," said Holgate with a heavy breath.

Pye resumed his cigarette. "With all these sensations, my dear Holgate," he remarked, "I have forgotten my duty. Perhaps you will help yourself."

Holgate did so. "Good Heavens!" he said again, and then, "I suppose, if you're right, that we carry Cæsar and his fortunes. He has got off with the lady and the plunder."

"The plunder!" I echoed.

He indicated the paragraph, and I read now another sentence which I had overlooked.

"The prince has expressed his intention, according to rumour, of marrying as he chooses, and as he inherits more than a million pounds from his mother, he is in a position to snap his fingers at the Empress. In that case, no doubt, he would follow precedent, and take rank as an ordinary subject."

I looked up at Holgate.

"We carry Cæsar and his fortune," he said with a smiling emphasis on the singular, and then he waved his arm melodramatically. "And to think we are all paupers!" and grinned at me.

"It is inequitable," said I lightly; "it's an unjust distribution of this world's goods," echoing therein his own remark earlier in the evening.

Pye sat still, with an inexpressive face. His admirable silence, however, now ceased.

"So we shall have this gossip all over the ship to-morrow."

"No," said I curtly, for the suggestion annoyed me. "It is nothing to me. I told you because you knew. And I told Mr. Holgate–" I paused.

"Because I'm your chum," said the third officer.

I did not contradict him. I had spoken really out of the excitement of my discovery. Certainly I had not spoken because Holgate was my chum.

CHAPTER IV
An Amazing Proposition

As I had said, it was no business of mine, and, having divulged my news, I was in no haste to go about with it like a common gossip. That Prince Frederic of Hochburg was Mr. Morland, and that Miss Morland was Princess Alix, I was as assured as that I had identified in my patient the well-known Parisian singer Yvonne Trebizond. But, having made the discovery, I promised myself some interest in watching the course of the rumour. It would spread about the ship like fire and would be whispered over taffrails, in galleys, and in stokehole. But, to my surprise, I could observe no signs of this flight of gossip. No one certainly offered me any communication on the subject, and I observed no curiosity and no surprise. The mess conducted itself with equanimity, and nothing was hinted of princes or of emperors, or of mysterious secrets. No facts ever hid themselves so cunningly as these obviously somewhat startling facts, and I wondered at the silence, but still held my tongue.

Mademoiselle continued to give me trouble during the next day, but that was more in the way of unreasonable demands and petulance than through hysteric exhibitions. She did not repeat her request to be landed, which was now quite impracticable, as we were well out in the Atlantic, but she referred to it.

"Where are we, doctor?" she inquired languidly, and I told her; at which she considered. "Well, perhaps it is worth it," she said and smiled at me confidingly.

Of Mr. Morland I saw little, for he was shut in his cabin a great part of the day, reading or writing, and smoking without cessation. And he walked regularly on the hurricane deck with his sister. Once I encountered him in mademoiselle's room, and he nodded.

"She is getting well, doctor; is it not so?" he asked in a pleasant way, and exhibited a tenderness in his words and manner to mademoiselle which I should not have associated with him.

Of his sister I saw even less, except in the distance, but her, too, I met in her friend's room. Mademoiselle was talkative that day, the second of my attendance on her, and spoke of things with a terrifying frankness, sometimes in bad English, but oftener in her own tongue. She rehearsed her sensations during sea-sickness, criticised Miss Morland, and asked me about Barraclough, whom she had seen passing by her window once or twice.

"Sir John," she said, speaking pretty broken English. "Then he is noble. Oh, comme il est gentil, comme il est beau!" and as quickly fell to cross-questioning me on my parentage and history.

It was in the thick of this that Miss Morland made her entrance. I do not know if it be a confession of weak-mindedness, or even of snobbishness (I hope not), but the fact was that since I had discovered Miss Morland's identity I did not judge her coldness and aloofness so hardly. I am disposed to think it was merely a reasonable attitude on my part produced by the knowledge of her circumstances, and what I set down as her trials. She bowed to me, and addressed some words to mademoiselle which, sympathetic in their import, were yet somewhat frigid in tone. Mademoiselle replied laughing:

"You are very good, my dear, but I am progressing. We are sailing into the land of romance and will find what we shall find there."

I lingered beyond what was necessary, and thus it happened that Miss Morland and I left the cabin together. Outside she spoke: "Is there any likelihood of a recurrence of the attack?"

"I don't think so," I answered. "But Mlle. Trebizond is a nervous subject."

It was the look in her eyes that made me suddenly realise my indiscretion. A light flashed in them, almost as if she would have struck me.

"Mlle. Châteray is almost well enough to dispense with a doctor's services," she said with an accent on the name.

"You must allow me to be the judge of that," I replied flushing. She was silent.

"Naturally," she said at last, and turned away.

The newspaper had stated that Princess Alix was sympathetic to her brother's attachment, but was she altogether so? I could not but attribute her coolness and her reticence to some scruple. She walked daily with her brother, and it was evident that she was fond of him, or why was she here? But how much of personal prejudice and of private conviction had she sacrificed on that pious altar?

I was sure that if the news of our passengers were bruited about at all I should hear of it from Lane, who was a gossip at heart; and as he said nothing I knew that Holgate had been silent —why, I could not conceive, unless Pye had gagged him. But in any case it appeared that Holgate also could keep his own counsel and hold his tongue. That he could speak I had yet to realise, as the astonishing narrative I am now approaching demonstrates.

It was the evening of our fifth day out, and the long swell of the Atlantic was washing on our port side, so that the *Sea Queen* heeled over and dipped her snout as she ran. I had misgivings for my late patient, whom I had not seen for the last thirty-six hours, although she had made an appearance on the hurricane deck in a chair.

Holgate asked me to his cabin with his customary urbanity, saying that he wanted a few words with me. Once the door was shut he settled down on his bunk and lit a cigar.

"Help yourself, doctor," he said.

I declined and remained standing, for I was anxious to get away. He looked at me steadily out of his dark eyes.

"Do you know where we're going, doctor?" he asked.

"No," said I, "but I should be glad to."

"I've just discovered," he replied; "Buenos Ayres."

I told him that I was glad to hear it, as we should run into better weather.

"I couldn't just make up my mind," he went on, "till to-day. But it's pretty plain now, though the old man has not said so. Any fool can see it with the way we're shaping." He puffed for a moment or two and then resumed: "I've been thinking over things a bit, and, if your theory is correct, Mr. Morland is to marry the lady at Buenos Ayres and probably make his home there, or, it may be, in some other part of America. A capital place for losing identity is the States."

I said that it was quite probable.

"But as the yacht's chartered for a year," pursued Holgate evenly, "the odds are that there's to be cruising off and on, may be up the west coast of America, may be the South Seas, or may be Japan. There's a goodly cruise before us, doctor."

"Well, it will be tolerable for us," I answered.

"Just so," he replied, "only tolerable—not eighteen carat, which seems a pity."

"Shall we strike for higher wages?" I asked drily.

"I've been thinking over what you said, doctor," said the third officer, taking no heed of this, "and it's gone home pretty deep. Prince Frederic has cut himself adrift from his past—there's no getting behind that. The Emperor has thrown him up, and there's no one outside a penny-a-liner cares two pinches for him or what becomes of him. He's done with. The Chancelleries of Europe won't waste their time on him. He's negligible."

"Well?" said I, for I was not in the mood for a political discussion.

"Well, suppose he never turned up?" said Holgate, and leaned back and stared at me.

"I don't understand," said I. "I don't suppose he will turn up. As you say, he's done for."

"I mean that the ship might founder," said Holgate, still holding me with his eye.

I was perplexed, and seeing it, he laughed.

"Let us make no bones about it," he said, laying down his cigar. "Here's a discarded prince whom no one wants, sailing for no one knows where, with his fortune on board and no one responsible for him. Do you take me now?"

"I'm hanged if I do," I replied testily, for indeed I had no thought of what the man was driving at. But here it came out with a burst.

"Doctor, all this is in our hands. We can do what we will. We're masters of the situation."

I opened my mouth and stared at him. The broad swarthy face loomed like a menace in the uncertain light before us. It was dark; it was inscrutable; a heavy resolution was marked in that thick neck, low brow, and salient chin. We eyed each other in silence.

"But this is monstrous," I said with a little laugh. "You have not brought me here for a silly jest?"

"It's God's truth I haven't, doctor," he replied earnestly. "I mean what I say. See, the prince carries away a million, and if the prince disappears the million belongs to those who can find it. Now, we don't want any truck with dismounted princes. We're playing for our own hand. I know you take sensible views on these matters. I admit it makes one blink a bit at first, but stick on to the idea, turn it round, and you'll get used to it. It spells a good deal to poor devils like you and me."

"You must be mad," I said angrily, "or–" He interrupted me.

"That's not my line. I'm in dead sober earnest. You hold on to the notion, and you'll come round to it. It's a bit steep at first to the eye. But you hang on to it like a sensible man."

"Good Heavens, man," said I, "are you plotting murder?"

"I never mentioned that," he said in another voice. "There are several ways. It don't do to take more risks than you want. A ship can be cast away, and parties can be separated, and one party can make sure of the boodle. See?"

"I only see that you're an infernal ruffian," I replied hotly.

His countenance did not change. "Hang on to it," he said, and I could have laughed in his face at the preposterous suggestion. "You'll warm to it by degrees."

"You are asking me to join in wholesale robbery at the least?" I said, still angrily struggling with my stupor.

"I am," he answered, and he leaned forward. "D'you think I'm entering on this game wildly? Not I. I mean to carry it out. Do you suppose I haven't laid my plans? Why, more than half the men are mine. I saw to that. It was I got 'em." He placed a large hand on my shoulder and his eyes gleamed diabolically in his set face. "They'll do my bidding. I command here, sir, and damn your Captain Day. I'll take 'em to Hell if I want to." I shook off his hand roughly.

"I may tell you," I said in as cool a tone as I could assume, "that I am going straight on deck to the captain to retail this conversation. You have, therefore, probably about ten minutes left you for reflection, which I hope will bring you consolation."

Holgate got up, and without undue haste threw open the large port, through which streamed the clamour of the water.

"I guess I've misunderstood you," said he quietly, "and it isn't often I make a mistake." He lifted his lip in a grin, and I could see a horrid tier of teeth, which seemed to have grown together like concrete in one huge fang. "It is in my power, Dr. Phillimore, to blow your brains out here and now. The noise of the sea would cover the report," and he fingered a pistol that now I perceived in his hand. "Outside yonder is a grave that tells no tales. The dead rise up never from the sea, by thunder! And the port's open. I'm half in the mind–" He threw the weapon carelessly upon the bunk and laughed. "Look you, that's how I value you. You are mighty conscientious, doctor, but you have no value. You're just the ordinary, respectable, out-of-elbows crock that peoples that island over yonder. You are good neither for good nor ill. A crew of you wouldn't put a knot on a boat. So that's how I value you. If you won't do my work one way you shall another. I'll have my value out of you some way, if only to pay back my self-respect. You're safe from pistol and shark. Go, and do what you will. I'll wait for you and lay for you, chummie."

I stood listening to this remarkable tirade, which was offered in a voice by no means angry, but even something contemptuous, and without a word I left him. I went, as I had promised, at once to the captain, whom I found in his cabin with a volume of De Quincey.

"Well, doctor," said he, laying down the book, "anything amiss? Your face is portentous."

"Yes, sir," I answered. He motioned me to a chair, and waited. "I suppose you're aware, sir, that you have on board Prince Frederic of Hochburg and his sister," I began.

"Indeed, I'm nothing of the sort," said he sharply. "What on earth is this nonsense?"

If I had not had such important information to lay before him I might have been abashed. As it was, I proceeded.

"Well, sir, it's a fact. Mr. Morland is the prince. I have known it some days, and would have held my tongue but for imperative necessity. Mr. Pye knows it, and Mr. Holgate."

"This is most astounding," he began, and paced nervously about the cabin.

"I say Mr. Holgate because I come about him," I pursued. "He has just made the most shameless and barefaced proposal, which amounts to a plot to wreck the ship and make off with the prince's property, which is supposed to amount to a great deal."

Captain Day sat down heavily. "Upon my soul, Dr. Phillimore," he said, "I shall begin to ask myself whether it is you or I who is mad."

"That is exactly the sort of question I asked myself a few minutes ago," I replied. "And I've been able to answer it only on the supposition that your third officer is an amazing scoundrel."

There was the pause of some moments, during which he studied my face, and at last he went to the bell.

"Very well," he said more calmly, "we can settle it one way, I suppose." And when the steward appeared, "Ask Mr. Holgate to come to me at once."

He sat down again, fidgeted with his book, opened it, endeavoured to read, and glanced at me in a perplexed fashion, as if he distrusted his eyesight; and so we remained without a word until a knock announced some one at the door, and the next moment Holgate, large, placid and respectful, was in the cabin.

"Mr. Holgate," said Captain Day in his most particular voice, "I have just heard the most remarkable statement by Dr. Phillimore. Perhaps you will be good enough to repeat it, Dr. Phillimore," and he glanced askew at me.

I did so bluntly. "This man," I said, "has proposed to me within the last ten minutes that I should join a plot to cast away the ship and seize the property of—of Mr. Morland."

Day looked at his third officer. "You hear, Mr. Holgate?" he said. "What have you to say?"

A broad smile passed over Holgate's fat face. "Yes, sir," he said coolly, "it is just as Dr. Phillimore says, but the whole thing was a mere spoof."

"I should be glad if you would explain," said Day icily.

"Well, the doctor's not exactly correct," said Holgate, still smiling, and he had the vast impudence to smile at me. "For what I proposed was to seize the property of Prince Frederic of Hochburg, I think it is."

"Ah!" said Day, letting the exclamation escape softly through his lips, and he cast his nervous glance at me.

"You see, sir, the doctor has got some cock-and-bull tale into his head," went on Holgate easily, "about Mr. Morland being Prince Frederic, and the ladies I don't know whom, and so I suggested that, that being so, we should take care of the prince's millions for him, and get a tidy sum all round. I daresay it wasn't a very funny joke; indeed, I thought he would have seen through it all along. But I suppose he didn't. The doctor's rather serious."

I started up. "Captain Day," said I, "this man lies. The proposal was serious enough, and he knows it. Mr. Morland is Prince Frederic. I should advise you to ask Mr. Pye."

"So be it," said Day, with a gesture of helplessness, and thus Pye was summoned to the strange conclave. Day took up his book again. "Pray sit down, Mr. Holgate," he said politely; "this is not the criminal dock yet," which seemed to augur badly for my case.

The little clerk, on entering, fixed his glasses on his nose more firmly with two fingers and cast an inquisitive look at us.

"Mr. Pye," said the captain, in his impeccable distant voice, "I am informed that Mr. Morland is not Mr. Morland, but some one else, and I have been referred to you. Is this so?"

Pye glanced at me. "Mr. Morland is the name of the gentleman for whom my firm is acting," he said suavely.

"And not any one else?" said Day.

"Not according to my knowledge," said the clerk.

"Not according to his instructions, sir," I burst out indignantly. "He knows the facts, I'm certain. And if not, I can prove my point readily enough."

"The point is," said Day drily, "whether Mr. Holgate is guilty of the extraordinary charge you have preferred."

"Well, sir, it is material that I acquainted him with the identity of Mr. Morland in Mr. Pye's presence," I replied hotly, feeling my ground moving from under me.

Day looked at Pye. "That is true, sir," said the clerk. "Dr. Phillimore stated in my presence that he had discovered that Mr. Morland was—I think he said Prince Frederic of Hochburg."

Day was silent. "I think this is pretty much a mare's nest," said he presently, "and I really don't know why I should have been bothered with it."

I was furious with Pye and his idea (as I conceived it) of legal discretion.

"Very well, sir," said I somewhat sullenly, and turned to go, when the door of the cabin opened and there entered Sir John Barraclough with his customary *insouciance*.

"It seems, Sir John," said Day, in his ironic tones, "that not only have I the honour of a distinguished baronet as first officer, but also a prince as cargo."

There was, as I had gathered, little love between the captain and his first officer. Barraclough laughed.

"Oh, you've just tumbled to it," he said. "I wonder how. But it was bound to leak out some time."

I never saw a man more astonished than Day. He leapt to his feet.

"Good God!" he said. "I seem to be the only one who doesn't know what's going on in my ship. Is this part of the jest?"

Barraclough in his turn showed surprise, but it was Holgate spoke.

"Is it true, Sir John? It can't be true," he cried, opening his mouth so that the horrid tooth demonstrated itself.

Barraclough looked at Pye, who was mum. "I suppose this gentleman is responsible for the news," he said.

"No, sir, I have said nothing," retorted Pye.

"I can't pretend to judge other professions than my own," said the captain stormily, "but I'm inclined to think I might have been taken into the confidence. Think where it places me. Heavens, man, what am I in my ship?"

"I think the—Mr. Morland perhaps had better answer that question," suggested Barraclough with a little sneer. Day moved some papers with a hand that trembled.

"That will do then," he said shortly. "Good evening, gentlemen. I've no desire to detain you any longer."

"But–" said I.

"Silence, Dr. Phillimore. I command this ship," he cried angrily, "or at least I'm supposed to. You can settle your differences with Mr. Holgate elsewhere."

I shrugged my shoulders and left the cabin, a very angry man. In his vanity the fool had refused to consider my charge. And, yet, when I looked at this business more deliberately and from a little distance, I could not deny that Day had some excuse. Holgate's story was remarkably natural. The captain would judge of the third officer's incredulity by his own, and would be therefore willing to accept the story of the "spoof." But then he had not seen Holgate's face, and he had not heard Holgate.

Even I was staggered by the turn things had taken, though infuriated by my treatment. And it did me no good to see Holgate's face smiling at me as I went down the gangway.

"Oh, doctor, doctor, are you a Scotchman?" he whispered; at which I would have turned on him savagely, but held myself in and passed on and was silent. I have always found the value of caution.

CHAPTER V
The Wounded Man

Well, the whole affair had been a considerable farce, in which I had played the most humiliating part. Indeed, but for the interposition of Barraclough I must have come out of it the butt of all shafts. As it was, I was sensitive in regard to my position, and more than once was tempted to see myself as I must have appeared to others. But after all they had not gone through the scene with Holgate, and were not witnesses to his astounding perfidy. I was angry with every one, with myself, with the captain, and, above all, with little Pye. In the universal surprise that came of the discovery of Mr. Morland's identity, my shame, so to speak, was covered, but I felt myself the mark of ridicule, from Holgate's cynical smile to the captain's open neglect of me. I turned on the lawyer's clerk in my fury, and gave him some home truths about solicitors and their ways; to which, however, he listened unabashed.

"Doctor," said he, "do you suppose a man in my position is his own master? You are welcome to know what you will about my own affairs, but I have my professional secrets to guard. What would be thought of me had I come aboard blabbing of my firm's clients fore and aft? It would have been a betrayal of confidence."

There was, of course, something in this, but the argument did not allay my irritation; it merely directed it elsewhere, so that I began upon the third mate. He heard me quietly.

"Mr. Holgate can answer for himself," he replied, "but it seems to me, if I may say so without offence, doctor, that you are misinterpreting a somewhat elaborate joke. Mr. Holgate's explanation is reasonable enough, and besides, the only other explanation is monstrous—inconceivable!"

"I agree with you," I said shortly, "and so I say no more."

He cast a shrewd glance at me, but made no comment.

Now, it was quite conceivable that Holgate should have made me a derisive object in the ship, but, on the contrary, he did nothing of the sort. The charge I had made against him did not leak out at the mess-table. Day, Holgate and Pye were aware of it, and so far as I know it went no further. This somewhat astonished me until I had some light thrown upon it later. But in the meantime I wondered, and insensibly that significant silence began to modify my attitude. Had he known me in the fulness of my disposition he would probably have spoken; but as it was he had other plans to follow. One of these seemed to include a reconciliation with myself. His quizzical smile disappeared, and he shook his head at me solemnly at table.

"Doctor," said he, "that Scotchman's head!"

"I am not a Scotchman," I retorted impatiently.

"Well," he breathed heavily, "I will admit it was a very bad joke."

I was on the point of replying that it was not a joke at all, when I recovered my temper. After all, it is trying to the temper to sit opposite to a man whom you know to be a prime ruffian, however impotent his aspirations may be. Since I had unveiled his plot, even though no credence was given it, still Holgate was harmless. But, as I have already said, I am a man of precautions and I held my tongue. I think he had taken me only for a man of impulse.

"I must confess I do not see the joke," I answered.

"Now you come to insist on it, and shed the cold light of reason on it, no more do I," he said with a laugh. "Jokes are very well behind the footlights."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Think what a fool I look!" I said coldly.

His friendliness increased. "My dear fellow," he said, bending over to me, "I give you my word I've held my tongue. I thought of that. I didn't know you'd take it so seriously."

"Your profession should have been the stage," I answered.

He nodded. "Low comedian. I wish I had. They make good salaries, I believe, instead of beggarly–"

"Oh, you have the prince's boodle," I said lightly. He laughed. "So I have."

"And I'll be hanged if I apologise," I said. "I have suffered enough from the mistake."

"Quite right, doctor," said he gravely, "I would not apologise to a bishop, let alone a third officer."

With that apparent advance to an understanding we parted, and I did not set eyes on him again until the abrupt events that brought about the conference in the cabin.

If my personal appearance on the matter did not get out, at least the tale of the prince's identity passed swiftly from mouth to mouth. The whole ship's company was agog with interest, an interest which increased during the next two days. Sir John Barraclough expressed to me his opinion of Day's behaviour very roundly, for the captain had icily withdrawn into himself, and spoke as little as possible to his first officer.

"The man's a fool to take it this way, Phillimore," he said. "Does he suppose it was my doing? I happened to know, but, of course, it was not my secret."

This, too, was Pye's excuse for silence, and it was obviously adequate. But as the baronet's evidence of friendliness was thus betrayed in his confidence to me, I ventured on a question, which was not really inquisitive.

"Oh, well, you see I've known the prince off and on some time. He and I yachted together before I lost my money, and he gave me this chance. He's a good sort." With which bluff and British indifference he terminated the conversation.

I think that the mysterious aloofness of our passengers served to keep the interest warm. Had Mr. Morland and his party descended and been on show, so to say, before the company, it is probable that the bloom of surprise would have worn off with the contact. But they kept to themselves and the hurricane deck. Every morning and afternoon the prince and his sister took a prolonged walk together, and at times they were joined by my patient, who, however, in the better weather we were enjoying, reclined in her chair and took the sun. On these occasions Mr. Morland and his sister ceased their promenade and sat with their guest. Sometimes the full voice of Mlle. Châteray, or Trebizond, would come to us below, and occasionally her light laughter was heard, very musical to the ears.

Speculations, it is not necessary to say, were rife among us. It was known we were set for Buenos Ayres, and it was taken for granted that there the Prince was to effect his morganatic marriage. But what was to happen afterwards? We were chartered for twelve months. That bespoke a cruise, and guesses flew about the ship. Lane, the purser, was the most in evidence in these discussions. He was an excitable man with a passion for talk and company, and he offered to lay me a certain sum that we should pull up in Yokohama.

"As like as not paid off there. We've no contracts against it," he said in a fume.

It was the attitude of McCrae, the chief engineer, that interested me in view of his professed opinions. He unfolded his mind to me one evening when we had been out some ten days.

"It's like this, doctor. The man's sheer sick of courts and barbarisms, and he's in search of a healthy, independent life, which he needs, I'm thinking. That's to his credit altogether. But it's a wonderful thing, when you come to think of it, that one man like that should upset the politics of Europe, and a man that does not achieve it, mind you, but gets it by mere birth and chance. The paper said he had a million of his own. A fool could be independent on that, aye, and live healthy, too, if he weren't too much of a fool. But what right has a man with wealth like that, I ask you? As Mr. Holgate was saying yesterday, it's an insult to decent, hardworking men like you and me."

"So that's Mr. Holgate's idea, is it?" said I, and mused. The engineer was proceeding in the strain when I saw the face of the boatswain jump suddenly into the dimness of the engine-room. It was a thin-lipped, gaunt face, lacking eyebrows, which added to the gauntness, and the general complexion was red to the shade of crimson. When his jaw was in repose it appeared as if the lower part of his face had been sucked up into the upper like a lid into its box. But now his jaw was open, disclosing a plentiful lack of teeth.

"You're wanted, doctor," he said, in his abrupt voice. "There's been an accident forward."

I left at once and followed him, asking some necessary questions.

"I don't know exactly how it occurred," he said in answer.

"One of the men, Adams, fell on something and it's drilled a hole in him."

When we reached the man's berth he was surrounded by a number of the crew, whom I ordered off.

"If I've got anything to do I don't want to be hampered," I said, "so clear out and leave Adams to me and the boatswain."

When the place was clear, I made an examination, and found a wound under the shoulder-blade. It was not dangerous, but might well have been so. I sent for my bag and dressed it, the boatswain looking on. All the time I made no comment, but when I had finished I turned and met the boatswain's eyes.

"That's a knife wound," I said, shortly.

"Is it, sir?" he replied, and stared down at Adams. "How did it come about, Adams?" he inquired authoritatively.

"I was larking along with Gray and ran up agen him," said the man, in a sullen voice. "I didn't see what he 'ad in his 'and."

"More fool you!" said the boatswain angrily. "D'ye think I can go short of men for a lot of horse-play? All right, doctor? Nothing serious?"

"No," said I, deliberating. "If the knife was clean there's not much harm done except that you go short of a man, as you say, for some days."

The boatswain swore as politely as an oath can be managed.

"I'll come in again later," I said. "Meanwhile keep him in bed."

But on my next visit it was manifest that the wound was not such a simple affair, for the man's temperature had risen and he was wandering. He gave tongue to a profusion of oaths, which seemed to be directed, in the main, against Gray, but also included the boatswain, raised himself on his arm, and shook his fist in my face, muttering "my share," and "not a brown less," and something about "blowing the gaff."

It was with difficulty that I completed my ministrations; but I did so, and gave the boatswain a dose to be given to the wounded man at once and another four hours later. It was entirely an involuntary omission on my part that I said nothing of returning.

Nevertheless I did return only two hours later, and just before midnight. I had had the man removed to a disused cabin, and when I got there the door was locked. Angrily I went on deck and found the boatswain.

"Pierce," I said, "the door of the sick-room is locked. What on earth does this mean? I want to see my patient."

"Oh, he's all right, sir. He went to sleep quite easy. I asked one of the hands to keep an eye on him, and I suppose he's shut the door. But it isn't locked."

"But it is," I said angrily.

"The blockhead!" said the boatswain. "I'll get the key for you, sir, if you'll wait a minute."

But I was not going to wait. I was making for the hatchway when I was hailed through the darkness by a voice:

"Dr. Phillimore!"

I turned, and little Pye emerged from the blackness.

"I've been trying to get to sleep, but I've got the most awful neuralgia. I wish you'd give me something for it," said he.

"In a moment," I said. "I've got to see one of the hands, and then–"

"Oh, come, doctor, give us a chance," said Pye. "If you tell me what, I'll get it myself. Look here, would a dose of chloral do any good?"

"My dear sir," said I drily. "Every man in these days seems to be his own doctor. Try it, and if it's only satisfactory enough, we'll have a beautiful post-mortem to-morrow."

"Well," said little Pye, with a return of his native repartee, "it's precisely because I don't want to be my own doctor that I've come to you."

That naturally was unanswerable, and I acknowledged the hit by prescribing for him. Then I went on my way.

The door was open and the boatswain was waiting. He covered a yawn as I approached.

"It was that fool, Reilly, sir," he explained. "He mucked my instructions."

I nodded and proceeded to examine my patient. The boatswain seemed to have spoken the truth, for the man was as quiet as a log, save for the movement of the clothes when he respired. But it was that very respiration that arrested my attention. I felt his pulse, and I took the temperature. As I moved to examine the glass, Pierce's thin crimson face, peeping over my shoulder, almost struck upon me. The jaw was sucked into its socket. The temperature was still high, too high to allow of that placid sleep. I contemplated the thermometer meditatively. The port was shut, and the only sounds that broke the night were the dull beating of the screw and the duller wash of the waves against the side of the *Sea Queen*. The boatswain stood motionless behind me.

"You are right," I said slowly. "He has gone off pretty comfortably, but I should like to see his temperature lower. However, the sleep will do him good, and I've no doubt I'll find him all right in the morning."

As I spoke I turned away with a nod and passed out of the cabin. Once on deck, I paused to consider what I should do. Two things I knew for certain: firstly, that the knife-wound was no accident, for no mere horse-play could have resulted in such a deep cut; secondly, that Adams was under the influence of a narcotic. Who had administered it and why? I recalled the man's delirium and his wandering statements to which at the time I had paid little heed, and I thought I began to get the clue. I looked at my watch and found it half-past twelve. Every one, save those on duty, was abed, and the steamer ploughed steadily through the trough, a column of smoke swept abaft by the wind and black against the starlight. I sought my cabin, poured myself out a stiff glass of grog, and sat down to smoke and think.

At two bells I roused myself and went on deck. How singularly still was the progress of the vessel! I heard the feet of the officer on the bridge, and no other sound in all that floating house. A figure like a statue stood out in the dimness by the chart-house, and I came to a pause. It turned, and I thought I made out my friend the quartermaster.

"That you, Ellison?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I want to look at that man Adams in the forecastle," I said. "Please accompany me, as I may need your assistance."

I descended the ladder and went forward till I reached the cabin which I had used as a hospital, and turned the handle of the door. It opened, but the darkness was profound, and Ellison struck a match and lit the lamp. Adams lay in his bunk groaning faintly. I turned up his sleeve and examined him. The wound was inflamed, as I had expected, and it was not that which arrested me, but a mark on the arm above the elbow. It was the prick of the hypodermic syringe. My doubts were now certainties.

As we stood there Adams opened his eyes, and struggled into a sitting posture.

"No, my man," said I, "you must keep to your back."

He stared at me, but allowed me to force him backwards, and continued to stare.

"Adams, can you understand?" said I firmly. "Gray struck you with a knife?"

"Between the shoulders, damn him," he growled sulkily. "Doctor, my head's bad—give me something to drink."

I had come prepared, and I did so, and he fell back with a sigh, showing more signs of alertness.

"You quarrelled?" I suggested, but he made no answer. "Look you here, my man," I went on sternly, "I know a good deal about this, and what you quarrelled over. It would be wiser, believe me, to be candid. Pierce had a hand in this."

Still he was silent. I pulled from my pocket a syringe, and showed it to him.

"Do you know what that is?" I asked.

He shook his head, staring.

"Well," said I, "it came pretty near finishing you off. You have had a heavy dose. I want to know who did it." I caught up his arm, and thrust the puncture under his nose. He still stared.

"You were talking pretty wildly in your delirium, and had to be silenced. That was how it was done. If they can't silence you one way they will another. How much was your share to be?"

The man's face worked in an ugly fashion, and he was at any time a repulsive creature. The glitter in his eyes spoke of fever.

"The devil's own," he said hoarsely. "They wanted to cheat me of it, and I said I'd split. Damn Pierce, and Gray, and all!"

"So you were going for the prince's cash-box, were you?" I said equably.

"It's more than that," said he. "There's the treasure in the strong-room. That's their game."

"Now I see you are sensible," I said, "and I can undertake to make you well and sound and happy provided you tell the truth."

"Doctor, it burns like fire," he groaned.

"I will see to that," I said. "What is the plot?"

"I have cried off. That's why I got the knife," he said faintly. "But swear to God no harm'll come to me."

"I promise you that," I said, nodding.

"It's the boatswain's plot," he whispered, "and he has more'n half the men. They are going to rise ere ever we get to Buenos Ayres. But I was no party to their plans," he continued feverishly, and as if anxious to convince me, "that's why I've this knife, doctor, because I'm an honest man."

I had more than my doubts of that, but I nodded again.

"You have only done your duty in telling me, Adams," said I, "and I'll keep my promise, provided you hold your tongue about this. They have given you a dose of morphia, and it's lucky it wasn't bigger. If you do what I tell you, we'll have you right in a couple of days."

I made him drink a draught I had brought with me, and, closing the door, left him. A passage led from here to the men's quarters, and as I came out, I signed to Ellison to be noiseless, and put out the light. Then we moved towards the hatchway. When we reached it I happened to glance round at Ellison, and through that brooding darkness, lightened only by a dim swinging lamp, I thought I saw a flitting shadow. But the next swing of the boat threw the light clear into the corner, and there was nothing. We emerged on the lower deck, and thence regained the quarterdeck. There was a bright light in the chart-room, and I led the way thither. I closed the door and turned on the quartermaster. His face was grey, and his hand trembled.

"You heard?" said I.

"Yes, sir," he replied, and hesitated. "But he's wandering, sir, ain't he?"

"My man," said I, "I'm a doctor—leave that much to me. I only want to know if you heard. That is all your part. No, there is one thing more. What about the hands?"

"They're a pretty mixed lot, sir, not exactly what I would call yacht hands, but–"

"Were you engaged with them?" I interrupted sharply.

"No, sir, Sir John he got me on. I've sailed with him before."

"Thank the Lord for that," I said heartily, for I had begun to suspect every one. The voyage was a nightmare, I thought.

"Who is the officer in charge?" I asked.

"Mr. Legrand, sir," said Ellison.

The second mate and I had had few exchanges. He was a reserved man, and devoted to his duty. Besides, as navigating officer he had his full share of responsibility for the safety of the ship. I moved out of the chart-house, leaving the quartermaster in a maze of bewilderment, and, I think, incredulity. The stars illumined the figure of the second officer on the bridge, and I stood in a little gust of doubt which shook me. Should I sleep over the new discovery? I had Ellison, a Didymus, for witness, but I was still sore from the reception of my previous news. I took the length of the deck, and looked over the poop where a faint trail of light spumed in the wake of the ship. Suddenly I was seized from behind, lifted by a powerful arm, and thrown violently upon the taffrail. It struck me heavily upon the thighs, and I plunged with my hands desperately in the air, lost my balance, and pitched over head foremost towards the bubbling water.

As I fell my shoulder struck the bulge of the iron carcase of the vessel, and I cannoned off into the void, but by the merest chance my clutching hands in that instant caught in the hitch of a rope which had strayed overboard. The loop ran out with my wrist in it, and I hit the water. Its roar was in my ears, but nothing else, and when I rose to the surface the ship was thirty yards away. But the rope was still over my arm, and as soon as I recovered breath I began to haul myself slowly and painfully in. As it was, I was being torn through the water at the rate of from twelve to fourteen knots an hour, and in a very few minutes the chill which my immersion had inflicted on me passed away, giving place to a curious warmth that stole throughout my limbs, and enabled me to continue the onward struggle. I drew nearer foot by foot, the sea racing past me, and burying my face constantly in floods of salt water. But I was encouraged to observe the *Sea Queen* was now perceptibly closer, and I clung and hauled and hauled again. My danger now was the screw, and I could hear the thumping of the steel blades below, and see the boiling pit under the stern by the vessel. If I hauled closer should I be dragged into that terrible maelstrom, and be drawn under the deadly and merciless machinery? I could see the open taffrail, through which the stars glimmered away above me. It seemed that safety was so near and yet so far. She rolled, and the lights of the port-holes flashed lanterns on the sea in that uprising. I raised my voice, helplessly, hopelessly, in a cry.

I repeated this shout three times, and then I saw a man come and hang over the taffrail. Was it the unknown murderer, and did he look for his victim to complete his abominable job? As the thought struck me I was silent, and then I saw him stoop and examine the iron stanchions at his feet. Next I felt the rope being pulled slowly in. At this I shouted again, and he ceased.

"The screw!" I called. "The screw!"

He moved away to the port side and once more the rope began to move. Gradually I reached the side of the ship, about a dozen feet to port, and five minutes later I was safe on deck.

"Good Lord, sir, what is it?" asked Ellison's voice in terror.

"My arm is cut through, and one leg is near broken," I gasped. "Don't ask me more, but get me brandy."

He returned in an incredibly short time, for if he was a man of leisurely British mind he was wonderful on his feet. I drank the raw spirit and felt better.

"Now, do you believe?" I asked him.

"You mean–"

"That I was knocked overboard. I knew too much," I said sharply. "Don't stand staring, man. We don't know where we are, or what is afoot. Give me your arm and let us get to the bridge. Stay, have you any weapon?"

"No, sir."

"Any available?"

"No, sir, not without waking the carpenter."

"That is the usual British way," said I. "Believe nothing until it happens. Nothing does happen, does it? Nothing has happened, has it, Ellison? Well, we must chance it. At least we have stout fists. We made our way under the shelter of the saloon and smoking-room, and came to the steps of the bridge. I mounted with great difficulty, and Ellison followed. Legrand turned at our appearance and surveyed us under the gleam of his lamp with astonishment.

"Mr. Legrand," said I, "I need not ask if you have weapons available, for I'm sure you have not. But you will need them."

"What is't you mean?" he said sharply.

"Mutiny and murder," said I.

He went straight to the speaking-tube without a word, and called down to the engineer's room, "Mr. McCrae, will you personally bring me a couple of pistols, or any offensive weapon at hand. Iron bars will do—at once, please."

This was a man after my own heart. I could have embraced him. He came back to me.

"And now, doctor?"

I told him. He was silent, and then brought out a string of expletives. "I mistrusted the filthy pack from the first," he said. "See what they give us to work with, sir—the scum of Glasgow and London; and none of us to have a say in the matter. I'd sooner go to sea with Satan than scum like that," he said fiercely. "As soon as I set eyes on them I knew we were in for it—but not this," he added, "not this by a long chalk."

"There's one thing to be done," said I.

"We'll do it now," he replied, his fury gone as suddenly as it came, and we descended the ladder.

At the foot we met McCrae, very angry and sarcastic, wanting to know since when the deck was allowed to order the engine-room about like pot-boys, but a few words put him in possession of the facts, and I think, if any argument had been needed, my exhausted and dripping body would have sufficed.

"The old man?" said he. Legrand nodded.

CHAPTER VI
The Conference in the Cabin

We opened the captain's door without knocking, but he was awake at once, and turned on the electric light.

"What is this, gentlemen? Is it a raree show?" he inquired in his particular voice.

"It is some information Dr. Phillimore has to impart, sir," said Legrand.

Day's eyes narrowed. "Oh, I see Dr. Phillimore is taking part in some more theatricals," he said grimly. "And his costume seems suited to them."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said I hotly. "If you would only listen instead of passing judgment we might get on."

"I'm learning a lot this voyage," said Day with a sneer; "pray proceed."

Again I told my story. Day got up in his pyjamas, an insignificant figure of a man without his important uniform. He might have been merely a member of Parliament, or a minor poet. But he had, with all his defects, the courage of his position and responsibilities.

"This is a matter I feel unequal to alone. It has gone on too long," he said sharply. "It is time I knew where I stand." He left the cabin abruptly, and returned in a few minutes.

"I have taken the liberty of inviting Mr. Morland's attendance," he said, "and have sent for Sir John Barraclough and Mr. Holgate. I will know once for all where I stand."

"I beg you not Mr. Holgate, captain," said I.

"And why not Mr. Holgate, sir?" he asked peremptorily. "Here is a report of conspiracy and mutiny you bring me, and I will have my officers in attendance to weigh it."

"You will remember my former charge, Captain Day?" I said.

"Well, sir?" he answered.

"If my report to-night is correct, as I have a witness to prove, does it not shed some light on my former charge against Mr. Holgate? And is it, therefore, desirable that he should be here?"

Day considered, and then he looked me up and down.

"If I were a doctor, Dr. Phillimore," he observed with sarcasm, "I should advise you to change your clothes."

"Oh, there is a more important matter than clothes," I replied angrily, "or should I be here? Is it for fun, do you suppose?"

He turned from me without saying anything, but my words had their effect, for when the door opened and Holgate's face appeared Day said civilly enough, "I am sorry to have disturbed you unnecessarily, Mr. Holgate, but I find I shall not need you at present."

The third officer's big face moved slowly on his bull neck and his eyes met mine.

"Very well, sir," said he calmly, and there was nothing legible in his gaze. It was blank and insignificant, destitute even of curiosity.

Barraclough arrived immediately afterwards, and on his heels—Mr. Morland, dressed as when he walked the hurricane deck daily, his somewhat dull face owning and manifesting a certain dignity.

"I have asked you here, Mr. Morland," said Day at once, "because of certain rumours and mysteries and alleged discoveries which are in circulation. It is an untimely hour, but that is not my fault. Dr. Phillimore has brought me a story, which, if he is correct, is of vital importance to us. I should be glad, therefore, if you would answer a question. Are you Prince Frederic of Hochburg?"

Mr. Morland's eyes lighted up. "I have employed you, sir," he began, "to work this ship–"

"Pardon me, it is necessary," said Day with extreme politeness. "I hear a tale of conspiracy to rob my employer, who sails with me and whom I know as Mr. Morland, but who is stated to be Prince Frederic of Hochburg. I am justified, therefore, in asking if Mr. Morland is Prince Frederic; and if he has the money on board which the tale alleges. According to that answer must I shape my conduct."

Mr. Morland drew himself up. "It is reasonable," he said, as if reflecting. "Yes, I am Frederic of Hochburg."

Day's fingers trembled. "And the money?" he asked in a hard voice.

"There is some money on board," said the Prince, looking round on our faces, and now I was surprised that I had not identified long since that guttural German accent. "But I should wish to know what this scene means, sir?" he said in a haughty voice.

Day waved his hand at me.

"I have learned to-night," said I, "by an accident, that there is a plot among the crew to seize the ship and its contents before reaching Buenos Ayres."

For the third time I then told my story, to which my sodden garments were a genuine witness. The Prince listened to me with a frown.

"I do not understand," said he. "I was led to believe that I was chartering a good vessel with a good captain and a crew for my cruise. I do not understand this."

"Nor I," said Day, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I am not responsible for the crew. It was arranged by your agents, Mr. Morland."

"Ah!" said the Prince shortly, and then, "But you tell me they have turned out to be pirates. This is ridiculous."

"I must refer you to Dr. Phillimore, sir," said Day curtly. "As for me, if I had known what I know now, you would have sailed under another captain. I am too old for mysteries."

Ignoring this, if he listened to it, the Prince turned on me.

"Where is your evidence of this?" he asked, and his eyes fell on Ellison, who was plainly uncomfortable.

"Ah! did what the doctor says happen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we must send for this man Adams," concluded his Royal Highness. "Let him be brought."

I had in my hand during all this time the bar of iron which McCrae had brought. I gave it to Barraclough.

"If you are going," said I, "take this. It may be needed."

He looked at me with a lift of his eyebrows.

"All serene," said he with a smile. "This seems a pretty show altogether. Come, quartermaster."

Legrand went back to his bridge with a revolver in his pocket, and I was left with Mr. Morland and the captain. The former scrutinised me closely and deliberately, without regard to my feelings, while Day feigned to be busy at his table.

"I stay here, sir," said I to the Prince with emphasis, "because I seem in a manner to be a prisoner on trial. I have called my evidence, and it will be forthcoming presently. But I must say," I added bitterly, "that I resent the way in which my testimony has been received, and at Buenos Ayres, if we ever reach that port, I shall beg to be relieved of my duties and have my contract cancelled."

"If Mr.—Mr. Morland does not object certainly I shall not, Dr. Phillimore," said Day drily.

"Oh, come, captain," said I impatiently; "we are in a peril together and you stand on ceremonies."

"That has yet to be proved," he said.

Even as he spoke a noise announced the return of the party, and Sir John Barraclough entered.

"Your man's missing," said he.

Day uttered an exclamation, and the Prince's frown deepened.

"There's no one in the cabin," said Barraclough.

At that instant a knock fell on the door. "Is the doctor here?" said a voice which I recognised at once. Barraclough opened the door and Holgate stood on the threshold.

"It has been reported to me as I came on duty," he said, "that Adams is missing, doctor. It seems a bad case. He was delirious, and two of the men say they heard a plunge. The port-hole is open."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.