

**JOSEPH CONRAD, FORD FORD
MADOX**

ROMANCE

Джозеф Конрад

Romance

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Joseph Conrad Romance

TO

ELSIE AND JESSIE

“C’est toi qui dors dans Vombre, O sacré Souvenir.”

If we could have remembrance now
And see, as in the days to come
We shall, what’s venturous in these hours:
The swift, intangible romance of fields at home,
The gleams of sun, the showers,
Our workaday contentments, or our powers
To fare still forward through the uncharted haze
Of present days..
For, looking back when years shall flow
Upon this olden day that’s now,
We’ll see, romantic in dimm’d hours,
These memories of ours.

PART FIRST – THE QUARRY AND THE BEACH

CHAPTER ONE

To yesterday and to to-day I say my polite “vaya usted con Dios.” What are these days to me? But that far-off day of my romance, when from between the blue and white bales in Don Ramon’s darkened storeroom, at Kingston, I saw the door open before the figure of an old man with the tired, long, white face, that day I am not likely to forget. I remember the chilly smell of the typical West Indian store, the indescribable smell of damp gloom, of locos, of pimento, of olive oil, of new sugar, of new rum; the glassy double sheen of Ramon’s great spectacles, the piercing eyes in the mahogany face, while the tap, tap, tap of a cane on the flags went on behind the inner door; the click of the latch; the stream of light. The door, petulantly thrust inwards, struck against some barrels. I remember the rattling of the bolts on that door, and the tall figure that appeared there, snuffbox in hand. In that land of white clothes, that precise, ancient, Castilian in black was something to remember. The black cane that had made the tap, tap, tap dangled by a silken cord from the hand whose delicate blue-veined, wrinkled wrist ran back into a foam of lawn ruffles. The other hand paused in the act of conveying a pinch of snuff to the nostrils of the hooked nose that had, on the skin stretched tight over the bridge, the polish of old ivory; the elbow pressing the black cocked-hat against the side; the legs, one bent, the other bowing a little back – this was the attitude of Seraphina’s father.

Having imperiously thrust the door of the inner room open, he remained immovable, with no intention of entering, and called in a harsh, aged voice: “Señor Ramon! Señor Ramon!” and then twice: “Sera-phina – Seraphina!” turning his head back.

Then for the first time I saw Seraphina, looking over her father’s shoulder. I remember her face on that day; her eyes were gray – the gray of black, not of blue. For a moment they looked me straight in the face, reflectively, unconcerned, and then travelled to the spectacles of old Ramon.

This glance – remember I was young on that day – had been enough to set me wondering what they were thinking of me; what they could have seen of me.

“But there he is – your Señor Ramon,” she said to her father, as if she were chiding him for a petulance in calling; “your sight is not very good, my poor little father – there he is, your Ramon.”

The warm reflection of the light behind her, gilding the curve of her face from ear to chin, lost itself in the shadows of black lace falling from dark hair that was not quite black. She spoke as if the words clung to her lips; as if she had to put them forth delicately for fear of damaging the frail things. She raised her long hand to a white flower that clung above her ear like the pen of a clerk, and disappeared. Ramon hurried with a stiffness of immense respect towards the ancient grandee. The door swung to.

I remained alone. The blue bales and the white, and the great red oil jars loomed in the dim light filtering through the jalousies out of the blinding sunlight of Jamaica. A moment after, the door opened once more and a young man came out to me; tall, slim, with very bright, very large black eyes aglow in an absolute pallor of face. That was Carlos Riego.

Well, that is my yesterday of romance, for the many things that have passed between those times and now have become dim or have gone out of my mind. And my day before yesterday was the day on which I, at twenty-two, stood looking at myself in the tall glass, the day on which I left my home in Kent and went, as chance willed it, out to sea with Carlos Riego.

That day my cousin Rooksby had become engaged to my sister Veronica, and I had a fit of jealous misery. I was rawboned, with fair hair, I had a good skin, tanned by the weather, good teeth, and brown eyes. I had not had a very happy life, and I had lived shut in on myself, thinking of the wide world beyond my reach, that seemed to hold out infinite possibilities of romance, of adventure,

of love, perhaps, and stores of gold. In the family my mother counted; my father did not. She was the daughter of a Scottish earl who had ruined himself again and again. He had been an inventor, a projector, and my mother had been a poor beauty, brought up on the farm we still lived on – the last rag of land that had remained to her father. Then she had married a good man in his way; a good enough catch; moderately well off, very amiable, easily influenced, a dilettante, and a bit of a dreamer, too. He had taken her into the swim of the Regency, and his purse had not held out. So my mother, asserting herself, had insisted upon a return to our farm, which had been her dowry. The alternative would have been a shabby, ignominious life at Calais, in the shadow of Brummel and such.

My father used to sit all day by the fire, inscribing “ideas” every now and then in a pocket-book. I think he was writing an epic poem, and I think he was happy in an ineffectual way. He had thin red hair, untidy for want of a valet, a shining, delicate, hooked nose, narrow-lidded blue eyes, and a face with the colour and texture of a white-heart cherry. He used to spend his days in a hooded chair. My mother managed everything, leading an out-of-door life which gave her face the colour of a wrinkled pippin. It was the face of a Roman mother, tight-lipped, brown-eyed, and fierce. You may understand the kind of woman she was from the hands she employed on the farm. They were smugglers and night-malefactors to a man – and she liked that. The decent, slow-witted, gently devious type of rustic could not live under her. The neighbours round declared that the Lady Mary Kemp’s farm was a hotbed of disorder. I expect it was, too; three of our men were hung up at Canterbury on one day – for horse-stealing and arson... Anyhow, that was my mother. As for me, I was under her, and, since I had my aspirations, I had a rather bitter childhood. And I had others to contrast myself with. First there was Rooksby: a pleasant, well-spoken, amiable young squire of the immediate neighbourhood; young Sir Ralph, a man popular with all sorts, and in love with my sister Veronica from early days. Veronica was very beautiful, and very gentle, and very kind; tall, slim, with sloping white shoulders and long white arms, hair the colour of amber, and startled blue eyes – a good mate for Rooksby. Rooksby had foreign relations, too. The uncle from whom he inherited the Priory had married a Riego, a Castilian, during the Peninsular war. He had been a prisoner at the time – he had died in Spain, I think. When Ralph made the grand tour, he had made the acquaintance of his Spanish relations; he used to talk about them, the Riegos, and Veronica used to talk of what he said of them until they came to stand for Romance, the romance of the outer world, to me. One day, a little before Ralph and Veronica became engaged, these Spaniards descended out of the blue. It was Romance suddenly dangled right before my eyes. It was Romance; you have no idea what it meant to me to talk to Carlos Riego.

Rooksby was kind enough. He had me over to the Priory, where I made the acquaintance of the two maiden ladies, his second cousins, who kept house for him. Yes, Ralph was kind; but I rather hated him for it, and was a little glad when he, too, had to suffer some of the pangs of jealousy – jealousy of Carlos Riego.

Carlos was dark, and of a grace to set Ralph as much in the shade as Ralph himself set me; and Carlos had seen a deal more of the world than Ralph. He had a foreign sense of humour that made him forever ready to sacrifice his personal dignity. It made Veronica laugh, and even drew a grim smile from my mother; but it gave Ralph bad moments. How he came into these parts was a little of a mystery. When Ralph was displeased with this Spanish connection he used to swear that Carlos had cut a throat or taken a purse. At other times he used to say that it was a political matter. In fine, Carlos had the hospitality of the Priory, and the title of Count when he chose to use it. He brought with him a short, pursy, bearded companion, half friend, half servant, who said he had served in Napoleon’s Spanish contingent, and had a way of striking his breast with a wooden hand (his arm had suffered in a cavalry charge), and exclaiming, “I, Tomas Castro!” He was an Andalusian.

For myself, the first shock of his strangeness over-come, I adored Carlos, and Veronica liked him, and laughed at him, till one day he said good-by and rode off along the London road, followed by his Tomas Castro. I had an intense longing to go with him out into the great world that brooded all round our foothills.

You are to remember that I knew nothing whatever of that great world. I had never been further away from our farm than just to Canterbury school, to Hythe market, to Romney market. Our farm nestled down under the steep, brown downs, just beside the Roman road to Canterbury; Stone Street – the Street – we called it. Ralph's land was just on the other side of the Street, and the shepherds on the downs used to see of nights a dead-and-gone Rooksby, Sir Peter that was, ride upon it past the quarry with his head under his arm. I don't think I believed in him, but I believed in the smugglers who shared the highway with that horrible ghost. It is impossible for any one nowadays to conceive the effect these smugglers had upon life thereabouts and then. They were the power to which everything else deferred. They used to overrun the country in great bands, and brooked no interference with their business. Not long before they had defeated regular troops in a pitched battle on the Marsh, and on the very day I went away I remember we couldn't do our carting because the smugglers had given us notice they would need our horses in the evening. They were a power in the land where there was violence enough without them, God knows! Our position on that Street put us in the midst of it all. At dusk we shut our doors, pulled down our blinds, sat round the fire, and knew pretty well what was going on outside. There would be long whistles in the dark, and when we found men lurking in our barns we feigned not to see them – it was safer so. The smugglers – the Free Traders, they called themselves – were as well organized for helping malefactors out of the country as for running goods in; so it came about that we used to have comers and forgers, murderers and French spies – all sorts of malefactors – hiding in our straw throughout the day, wait-for the whistle to blow from the Street at dusk. I, born with my century, was familiar with these things; but my mother forbade my meddling with them. I expect she knew enough herself – all the resident gentry did. But Ralph – though he was to some extent of the new school, and used to boast that, if applied to, he “would grant a warrant against any Free Trader” – never did, as a matter of fact, or not for many years.

Carlos, then, Rooksby's Spanish kinsman, had come and gone, and I envied him his going, with his air of mystery, to some far-off lawless adventures – perhaps over there in Spain, where there were war and rebellion. Shortly afterwards Rooksby proposed for the hand of Veronica and was accepted – by my mother. Veronica went about looking happy. That upset me, too. It seemed unjust that she should go out into the great world – to Bath, to Brighton, should see the Prince Regent and the great fights on Hounslow Heath – whilst I was to remain forever a farmer's boy. That afternoon I was upstairs, looking at the reflection of myself in the tall glass, wondering miserably why I seemed to be such an oaf.

The voice of Rooksby hailed me suddenly from downstairs. “Hey, John – John Kemp; come down, I say!”

I started away from the glass as if I had been taken in an act of folly. Rooksby was flicking his leg with his switch in the doorway, at the bottom of the narrow flight of stairs.

He wanted to talk to me, he said, and I followed him out through the yard on to the soft road that climbs the hill to westward. The evening was falling slowly and mournfully; it was dark already in the folds of the sombre downs.

We passed the corner of the orchard. “I know what you've got to tell me,” I said. “You're going to marry Veronica. Well, you've no need of my blessing. Some people have all the luck. Here am I.. look at me!”

Ralph walked with his head bent down.

“Confound it,” I said, “I shall run away to sea! I tell you, I'm rotting, rotting! There! I say, Ralph, give me Carlos' direction...” I caught hold of his arm. “I'll go after him. He'd show me a little life. He said he would.”

Ralph remained lost in a kind of gloomy abstraction, while I went on worrying him for Carlos' address.

“Carlos is the only soul I know outside five miles from here. Besides, he's friends in the Indies. That's where I want to go, and he could give me a cast. You remember what Tomas Castro said..”

Rooksby came to a sudden halt, and began furiously to switch his corded legs.

“Curse Carlos, and his Castro, too. They’ll have me in jail betwixt them. They’re both in my red barn, if you want their direction..”

He hurried on suddenly up the hill, leaving me gazing upwards at him. When I caught him up he was swearing – as one did in those days – and stamping his foot in the middle of the road.

“I tell you,” he said violently, “it’s the most accursed business! That Castro, with his Cuba, is nothing but a blasted buccaneer... and Carlos is no better. They go to Liverpool for a passage to Jamaica, and see what comes of it!”

It seems that on Liverpool docks, in the owl-light, they fell in with an elderly hunk just returned from West Indies, who asks the time at the door of a shipping agent. Castro pulls out a watch, and the old fellow jumps on it, vows it’s his own, taken from him years before by some picaroons on his outward voyage. Out from the agent’s comes another, and swears that Castro is one of the self-same crew. He himself purported to be the master of the very ship. Afterwards – in the solitary dusk among the ropes and bales – there had evidently been some play with knives, and it ended with a flight to London, and then down to Rooksby’s red barn, with the runners in full cry after them.

“Think of it,” Rooksby said, “and me a justice, and... oh, it drives me wild, this hole-and-corner work! There’s a filthy muddle with the Free Traders – a whistle to blow after dark at the quarry. To-night of all nights, and me a justice... and as good as a married man!”

I looked at him wonderingly in the dusk; his high coat collar almost hid his face, and his hat was pressed down over his eyes. The thing seemed incredible to me. Here was an adventure, and I was shocked to see that Rooksby was in a pitiable state about it.

“But, Ralph,” I said, “I would help Carlos.”

“Oh, you,” he said fretfully. “You want to run your head into a noose; that’s what it comes to. Why, I may have to flee the country. There’s the red-breasts poking their noses into every cottage on the Ashford road.” He strode on again. A wisp of mist came stealing down the hill. “I can’t give my cousin up. He could be smuggled out, right enough. But then I should have to get across salt water, too, for at least a year. Why – ”

He seemed ready to tear his hair, and then I put in my say. He needed a little persuasion, though, in spite of Veronica.

I should have to meet Carlos Riego and Castro in a little fir-wood above the quarry, in half an hour’s time. All I had to do was to whistle three bars of “Lillibulero,” as a signal. A connection had been already arranged with the Free Traders on the road beside the quarry, and they were coming down that night, as we knew well enough, both of us. They were coming in force from Canterbury way down to the Marsh. It had cost Ralph a pretty penny; but, once in the hands of the smugglers, his cousin and Castro would be safe enough from the runners; it would have needed a troop of horse to take them. The difficulty was that of late the smugglers themselves had become demoralized. There were ugly rumours of it; and there was a danger that Castro and Carlos, if not looked after, might end their days in some marsh-dyke. It was desirable that someone well known in our parts should see them to the seashore. A boat, there, was to take them out into the bay, where an outward-bound West Indiaman would pick them up. But for Ralph’s fear for his neck, which had increased in value since its devotion to Veronica, he would have squired his cousin. As it was, he fluttered round the idea of letting me take his place. Finally he settled it; and I embarked on a long adventure.

CHAPTER TWO

Between moonrise and sunset I was stumbling through the bracken of the little copse that was like a tuft of hair on the brow of the great white quarry. It was quite dark, in among the trees. I made the circuit of the copse, whistling softly my three bars of "Lillibulero." Then I plunged into it. The bracken underfoot rustled and rustled. I came to a halt. A little bar of light lay on the horizon in front of me, almost colourless. It was crossed again and again by the small fir-trunks that were little more than wands. A woodpigeon rose with a sudden crash of sound, flapping away against the branches. My pulse was dancing with delight – my heart, too. It was like a game of hide-and-seek, and yet it was life at last. Everything grew silent again and I began to think I had missed my time. Down below in the plain, a great way off, a dog was barking continuously. I moved forward a few paces and whistled. The glow of adventure began to die away. There was nothing at all – a little mystery of light on the tree-trunks.

I moved forward again, getting back towards the road. Against the glimmer of dead light I thought I caught the outlines of a man's hat down among the tossing lines of the bracken. I whispered loudly:

"Carlos! Carlos!"

There was a moment of hoarse whispering; a sudden gruff sound. A shaft of blazing yellow light darted from the level of the ground into my dazed eyes. A man sprang at me and thrust something cold and knobby into my neckcloth. The light continued to blaze into my eyes; it moved upwards and shone on a red waistcoat dashed with gilt buttons. I was being arrested... "In the King's name..." It was a most sudden catastrophe. A hand was clutching my windpipe.

"Don't you so much as squeak, Mr. Castro," a voice whispered in my ear.

The lanthorn light suddenly died out, and I heard whispers.

"Get him out on to the road... I'll tackle the other.. Darbies... Mind his knife."

I was like a confounded rabbit in their hands. One of them had his fist on my collar and jerked me out upon the hard road. We rolled down the embankment, but he was on the top. It seemed an abominable episode, a piece of bad faith on the part of fate. I ought to have been exempt from these sordid haps, but the man's hot leathery hand on my throat was like a foretaste of the other collar. And I was horribly afraid – horribly – of the sort of mysterious potency of the laws that these men represented, and I could think of nothing to do.

We stood in a little slanting cutting in the shadow. A watery light before the moon's rising slanted downwards from the hilltop along the opposite bank. We stood in utter silence.

"If you stir a hair," my captor said coolly, "I'll squeeze the blood out of your throat, like a rotten orange."

He had the calmness of one dealing with an everyday incident; yet the incident was – it should have been – tremendous. We stood waiting silently for an eternity, as one waits for a hare to break covert before the beaters. From down the long hill came a small sound of horses' hoofs – a sound like the beating of the heart, intermittent – a muffled thud on turf, and a faint clink of iron. It seemed to die away unheard by the runner beside me. Presently there was a crackling of the short pine branches, a rustle, and a hoarse whisper said from above:

"Other's cleared, Thorns. Got that one safe?"

"All serene."

The man from above dropped down into the road, a clumsy, cloaked figure. He turned his lanthorn upon me, in a painful yellow glare.

"What! 'Tis the young 'un," he grunted, after a moment. "Read the warrant, Thorns."

My captor began to fumble in his pocket, pulled out a paper, and bent down into the light. Suddenly he paused and looked up at me.

“This ain’t – Mr. Lilly white, I don’t believe this ain’t a Jack Spaniard.”

The clinks of bits and stirrup-irons came down in a waft again.

“That be hanged for a tale, Thorns,” the man with the lanthorn said sharply. “If this here ain’t Riego – or the other – I’ll.”

I began to come out of my stupor.

“My name’s John Kemp,” I said.

The other grunted. “Hurry up, Thorns.”

“But, Mr. Lillywhite,” Thorns reasoned, “he don’t speak like a Dago. Split me if he do! And we ain’t in a friendly country either, you know that. We can’t afford to rile the gentry!”

I plucked up courage.

“You’ll get your heads broke,” I said, “if you wait much longer. Hark to that!”

The approaching horses had turned off the turf on to the hard road; the steps of first one and then another sounded out down the silent hill. I knew it was the Free Traders from that; for except between banks they kept to the soft roadsides as if it were an article of faith. The noise of hoofs became that of an army.

The runners began to consult. The shadow called Thorns was for bolting across country; but Lilly white was not built for speed. Besides he did not know the lie of the land, and believed the Free Traders were mere bogeys.

“They’ll never touch us,” Lillywhite grumbled. “We’ve a warrant... King’s name...” He was flashing his lanthorn aimlessly up the hill.

“Besides,” he began again, “we’ve got this gallus bird. If he’s not a Spaniard, he knows all about them. I heard him. Kemp he may be, but he spoke Spanish up there... and we’ve got something for our trouble. He’ll swing, I’ll lay you a –”

From far above us came a shout, then a confused noise of voices. The moon began to get up; above the cutting the clouds had a fringe of sudden silver. A horseman, cloaked and muffled to the ears, trotted warily towards us.

“What’s up?” he hailed from a matter of ten yards. “What are you showing that glim for? Anything wrong below?”

The runners kept silence; we heard the click of a pistol lock.

“In the King’s name,” Lillywhite shouted, “get off that nag and lend a hand! We’ve a prisoner.”

The horseman gave an incredulous whistle, and then began to shout, his voice winding mournfully uphill, “Hallo! Hallo – o – o.” An echo stole back, “Hallo! Hallo – o – o”; then a number of voices. The horse stood, drooping its head, and the man turned in his saddle. “Runners,” he shouted, “Bow Street runners! Come along, come along, boys! We’ll roast ‘em... Runners! Runners!”

The sound of heavy horses at a jolting trot came to our ears.

“We’re in for it,” Lillywhite grunted. “D – n this county of Kent.”

Thorns never loosed his hold of my collar. At the steep of the hill the men and horses came into sight against the white sky, a confused crowd of ominous things.

“Turn that lanthorn off’n me,” the horseman said. “Don’t you see you frighten my horse? Now, boys, get round them..”

The great horses formed an irregular half-circle round us; men descended clumsily, like sacks of corn. The lanthorn was seized and flashed upon us; there was a confused hubbub. I caught my own name.

“Yes, I’m Kemp... John Kemp,” I called. “I’m true blue.”

“Blue be hanged!” a voice shouted back. “What be you a-doing with runners?”

The riot went on – forty or fifty voices. The runners were seized; several hands caught at me. It was impossible to make myself heard; a fist struck me on the cheek.

“Gibbet ‘em,” somebody shrieked; “they hung my nephew! Gibbet ‘em all the three. Young Kemp’s mother’s a bad ‘un. An informer he is. Up with ‘em!”

I was pulled down on my knees, then thrust forward, and then left to myself while they rushed to bonnet Lillywhite. I stumbled against a great, quiet farm horse.

A continuous scuffling went on; an imperious voice cried: "Hold your tongues, you fools! Hold your tongues!.." Someone else called: "Hear to Jack Rangley. Hear to him!"

There was a silence. I saw a hand light a torch at the lanthorn, and the crowd of faces, the muddle of limbs, the horses' heads, and the quiet trees above, flickered into sight.

"Don't let them hang me, Jack Rangley," I sobbed. "You know I'm no spy. Don't let 'em hang me, Jack."

He rode his horse up to me, and caught me by the collar.

"Hold your tongue," he said roughly. He began to make a set speech, anathematizing runners. He moved to tie our feet, and hang us by our finger-nails over the quarry edge.

A hubbub of assent and dissent went up; then the crowd became unanimous. Rangley slipped from his horse.

"Blindfold 'em, lads," he cried, and turned me sharply round.

"Don't struggle," he whispered in my ear; his silk handkerchief came cool across my eyelids. I felt hands fumbling with a knot at the back of my head. "You're all right," he said again. The hubbub of voices ceased suddenly. "Now, lads, bring 'em along."

A voice I knew said their watchword, "Snuff and enough," loudly, and then, "What's agate?"

Someone else answered, "It's Rooksby, it's Sir Ralph."

The voice interrupted sharply, "No names, now. I don't want hanging." The hand left my arm; there was a pause in the motion of the procession. I caught a moment's sound of whispering. Then a new voice cried, "Strip the runners to the shirt. Strip 'em. That's it." I heard some groans and a cry, "You won't murder us." Then a nasal drawl, "We will sure —ly." Someone else, Rangley, I think, called, "Bring 'em along – this way now."

After a period of turmoil we seemed to come out of the crowd upon a very rough, descending path; Rangley had called out, "Now, then, the rest of you be off; we've got enough here"; and the hoofs of heavy horses sounded again. Then we came to a halt, and Rangley called sharply from close to me:

"Now, you runners – and you, John Kemp – here you be on the brink of eternity, above the old quarry. There's a sheer drop of a hundred feet. We'll tie your legs and hang you by your fingers. If you hang long enough, you'll have time to say your prayers. Look alive, lads!"

The voice of one of the runners began to shout, "You'll swing for this – you –"

As for me I was in a dream. "Jack," I said, "Jack, you won't –"

"Oh, that's all right," the voice said in a whisper. "Mum, now! It's all *right*."

It withdrew itself a little from my ear and called, "Now then, ready with them. When I say three..."

I heard groans and curses, and began to shout for help. My voice came back in an echo, despairingly. Suddenly I was dragged backward, and the bandage pulled from my eyes,

"Come along," Rangley said, leading me gently enough to the road, which was five steps behind. "It's all a joke," he snarled. "A pretty bad one for those catchpolls. Hear 'em groan. The drop's not two feet."

We made a few paces down the road; the pitiful voices of the runners crying for help came plainly to my ears.

"You – they – aren't murdering them?" I asked.

"No, no," he answered. "Can't afford to. Wish we could; but they'd make it too hot for us."

We began to descend the hill. From the quarry a voice shrieked:

"Help – help – for the love of God – I can't.."

There was a grunt and the sound of a fall; then a precisely similar sequence of sounds.

“That’ll teach ‘em,” Rangsley said ferociously. “Come along – they’ve only rolled down a bank. They weren’t over the quarry. It’s all right. I swear it is.”

And, as a matter of fact, that was the smugglers’ ferocious idea of humour. They would hang any undesirable man, like these runners, whom it would make too great a stir to murder outright, over the edge of a low bank, and swear to him that he was clawing the brink of Shakespeare’s Cliff or any other hundred-foot drop. The wretched creatures suffered all the tortures of death before they let go, and, as a rule, they never returned to our parts.

CHAPTER THREE

The spirit of the age has changed; everything has changed so utterly that one can hardly believe in the existence of one's earlier self. But I can still remember how, at that moment, I made the acquaintance of my heart – a thing that bounded and leapt within my chest, a little sickeningly. The other details I forget.

Jack Rangsley was a tall, big-boned, thin man, with something sinister in the lines of his horseman's cloak, and something reckless in the way he set his spurred heel on the ground. He was the son of an old Marsh squire. Old Rangsley had been head of the last of the Owlars – the aristocracy of export smugglers – and Jack had sunk a little in becoming the head of the Old Bourne Tap importers. But he was hard enough, tyrannical enough, and had nerve enough to keep Free-trading alive in our parts until long after it had become an anachronism. He ended his days on the gallows, of course, but that was long afterwards.

"I'd give a dollar to know what's going on in those runners' heads," Rangsley said, pointing back with his crop. He laughed gayly. The great white face of the quarry rose up pale in the moonlight; the dusky red fires of the limekilns glowed at the base, sending up a blood-red dust of sullen smoke. "I'll swear they think they've dropped straight into hell.

"You'll have to cut the country, John," he added suddenly, "they'll have got your name uncommon pat. I did my best for you." He had had me tied up like that before the runners' eyes in order to take their suspicions off me. He had made a pretence to murder me with the same idea. But he didn't believe they were taken in. "There'll be warrants out before morning, if they ain't too shaken. But what were you doing in the business? The two Spaniards were lying in the fern looking on when you come blundering your clumsy nose in. If it hadn't been for Rooksby you might have – Hullo, there!" he broke off.

An answer came from the black shadow of a clump of roadside elms. I made out the forms of three or four horses standing with their heads together.

"Come along," Rangsley said; "up with you. We'll talk as we go."

Someone helped me into a saddle; my legs trembled in the stirrups as if I had ridden a thousand miles on end already. I imagine I must have fallen into a stupor; for I have only a vague impression of somebody's exculpating himself to me. As a matter of fact, Ralph, after having egged me on, in the intention of staying at home, had had qualms of conscience, and had come to the quarry. It was he who had cried the watchword, "Snuff and enough," and who had held the whispered consultation. Carlos and Castro had waited in their hiding-place, having been spectators of the arrival of the runners and of my capture. I gathered this long afterwards. At that moment I was conscious only of the motion of the horse beneath me, of intense weariness, and of the voice of Ralph, who was lamenting his own cowardice.

"If it had come at any other time!" he kept on repeating. "But now, with Veronica to think of! – You take me, Johnny, don't you?"

My companions rode silently. After we had passed the houses of a little village a heavy mist fell upon us, white, damp, and clogging. Ralph reined his horse beside mine.

"I'm sorry," he began again, "I'm miserably sorry I got you into this scrape. I swear I wouldn't have had it happen, not for a thousand pounds – not for ten."

"It doesn't matter," I said cheerfully.

"Ah, but," Rooksby said, "you'll have to leave the country for a time. Until I can arrange. I will. You can trust me."

"Oh, he'll have to leave the country, for sure," Rangsley said jovially, "if he wants to live it down. There's five-and-forty warrants out against me – but they dursent serve 'em. But he's not me."

"It's a miserable business," Ralph said. He had an air of the profoundest dejection. In the misty light he looked like a man mortally wounded, riding from a battle-field.

"Let him come with us," the musical voice of Carlos came through the mist in front of us. "He shall see the world a little."

"For God's sake hold your tongue!" Ralph answered him. "There's mischief enough. He shall go to France."

"Oh, let the young blade rip about the world for a year or two, squire," Rangsley's voice said from behind us.

In the end Ralph let me go with Carlos – actually across the sea, and to the West Indies. I begged and implored him; it seemed that now there was a chance for me to find my world of romance. And Ralph, who, though one of the most law-respecting of men, was not for the moment one of the most valorous, was wild to wash his hands of the whole business. He did his best for me; he borrowed a goodly number of guineas from Rangsley, who travelled with a bag of them at his saddle-bow, ready to pay his men their seven shillings a head for the run.

Ralph remembered, too – or I remembered for him – that he had estates and an agent in Jamaica, and he turned into the big inn at the junction of the London road to write a letter to his agent bidding him house me and employ me as an improver. For fear of compromising him we waited in the shadow of trees a furlong or two down the road. He came at a trot, gave me the letter, drew me aside, and began upbraiding himself again. The others rode onwards.

"Oh, it's all right," I said. "It's fine – it's fine. I'd have given fifty guineas for this chance this morning – and, Ralph, I say, you may tell Veronica why I'm going, but keep a shut mouth to my mother. Let her think I've run away – eh? Don't spoil your chance."

He was in such a state of repentance and flutter that he could not let me take a decent farewell. The sound of the others' horses had long died away down the hill when he began to tell me what he ought to have done.

"I knew it at once after I'd let you go. I ought to have kept you out of it. You came near being murdered. And to think of it – you, her brother – to be –"

"Oh, it's all right," I said gayly, "it's all right. You've to stand by Veronica. I've no one to my back. Good-night, good-by."

I pulled my horse's head round and galloped down the hill. The main body had halted before setting out over the shingle to the shore. Rangsley was waiting to conduct us into the town, where we should find a man to take us three fugitives out to the expected ship. We rode clattering aggressively through the silence of the long, narrow main street. Every now and then Carlos Riego coughed lamentably, but Tomas Castro rode in gloomy silence. There was a light here and there in a window, but not a soul stirring abroad. On the blind of an inn the shadow of a bearded man held the shadow of a rummer to its mouth.

"That'll be my uncle," Rangsley said. "He'll be the man to do your errand." He called to one of the men behind. "Here, Joe Pilcher, do you go into the White Hart and drag my Uncle Tom out. Bring 'un up to me – to the nest."

Three doors further on we came to a halt, and got down from our horses.

Rangsley knocked on a shutter-panel, two hard knocks with the crop and three with the naked fist. Then a lock clicked, heavy bars rumbled, and a chain rattled. Rangsley pushed me through the doorway. A side door opened, and I saw into a lighted room filled with wreaths of smoke. A paunchy man in a bob wig, with a blue coat and Windsor buttons, holding a churchwarden pipe in his right hand and a pewter quart in his left, came towards us.

"Hullo, captain," he said, "you'll be too late with the lights, won't you?" He had a deprecatory air.

"Your watch is fast, Mr. Mayor," Rangsley answered surlily; "the tide won't serve for half an hour yet."

“Cht, cht,” the other wheezed. “No offence. We respect you. But still, when one has a stake, one likes to know.”

“My stake’s all I have, and my neck,” Rangsley said impatiently; “what’s yours? A matter of fifty pun ten?.. Why don’t you make them bring they lanterns?”

A couple of dark lanterns were passed to Rangsley, who half-uncovered one, and lit the way up steep wooden stairs. We climbed up to a tiny cock-loft, of which the side towards the sea was all glazed.

“Now you sit there, on the floor,” Rangsley commanded; “can’t leave you below; the runners will be coming to the mayor for new warrants to-morrow, and he’d not like to have spent the night in your company.”

He threw a casement open. The moon was hidden from us by clouds, but, a long way off, over the distant sea, there was an irregular patch of silver light, against which the chimneys of the opposite houses were silhouetted. The church clock began muffledly to chime the quarters behind us; then the hour struck – ten strokes.

Rangsley set one of his lanterns on the window and twisted the top. He sent beams of yellow light shooting out to seawards. His hands quivered, and he was mumbling to himself under the influence of ungovernable excitement. His stakes were very large, and all depended on the flicker of those lanterns out towards the men on the luggers that were hidden in the black expanse of the sea. Then he waited, and against the light of the window I could see him mopping his forehead with the sleeve of his coat; my heart began to beat softly and insistently – out of sympathy.

Suddenly, from the deep shadow of the cloud above the sea, a yellow light flashed silently cut – very small, very distant, very short-lived. Rangsley heaved a deep sigh and slapped me heavily on the shoulder.

“All serene, my buck,” he said; “now let’s see after you. I’ve half an hour. What’s the ship?”

I was at a loss, but Carlos said out of the darkness, “The ship the *Thames*. My friend Señor Ortiz, of the Minorities, said you would know.”

“Oh, I know, I know,” Rangsley said softly; and, indeed, he did know all that was to be known about smuggling out of the southern counties of people who could no longer inhabit them. The trade was a survival of the days of Jacobite plots. “And it’s a hanging job, too. But it’s no affair of mine.” He stopped and reflected for an instant.

I could feel Carlos’ eyes upon us, looking out of the thick darkness. A slight rustling came from the corner that hid Castro.

“She passes down channel to-night, then?” Rangsley said. “With this wind you’ll want to be well out in the Bay at a quarter after eleven.”

An abnormal scuffling, intermingled with snatches of jovial remonstrance, made itself heard from the bottom of the ladder. A voice called up through the hatch, “Here’s your uncle, Squahre Jack,” and a husky murmur corroborated.

“Be you drunk again, you old sinner?” Rangsley asked. “Listen to me... Here’s three men to be set aboard the *Thames* at a quarter after eleven.”

A grunt came in reply.

Rangsley repeated slowly.

The grunt answered again.

“Here’s three men to be set aboard the *Thames* at a quarter after eleven..” Rangsley said again.

“Here’s... a-cop... three men to be set aboard *Thames* at quarter after eleven,” a voice hiccupped back to us.

“Well, see you do it,” Rangsley said. “He’s as drunk as a king,” he commented to us; “but when you’ve said a thing three times, he remembers – hark to him.”

The drunken voice from below kept up a constant babble of, “Three men to be set aboard *Thames*... three men to be set.”

“He’ll not stop saying that till he has you safe aboard,” Rangsley said. He showed a glimmer of light down the ladder – Carlos and Castro descended. I caught sight below me of the silver head and the deep red ears of the drunken uncle of Rangsley. He had been one of the most redoubtable of the family, a man of immense strength and cunning, but a confirmed habit of consuming a pint and a half of gin a night had made him disinclined for the more arduous tasks of the trade. He limited his energies to working the underground passage, to the success of which his fox-like cunning, and intimate knowledge of the passing shipping, were indispensable. I was preparing to follow the others down the ladder when Rangsley touched my arm.

“I don’t like your company,” he said close behind my ear. “I know who they are. There were bills out for them this morning. I’d blow them, and take the reward, but for you and Squahre Rooksby. They’re handy with their knives, too, I fancy. You mind me, and look to yourself with them. There’s something unnatural.”

His words had a certain effect upon me, and his manner perhaps more. A thing that was “unnatural” to Jack Rangsley – the man of darkness, who lived forever as if in the shadow of the gallows – was a thing to be avoided. He was for me nearly as romantic a figure as Carlos himself, but for his forbidding darkness, and he was a person of immense power. The silent flittings of lights that I had just seen, the answering signals from the luggers far out to sea, the enforced sleep of the towns and countryside whilst his plans were working out at night, had impressed me with a sense of awe. And his words sank into my spirit, and made me afraid for my future.

We followed the others downwards into a ground-floor room that was fitted up as a barber’s shop. A rushlight was burning on a table. Rangsley took hold of a piece of wainscotting, part of the frame of a panel; he pulled it towards him, and, at the same moment, a glazed show-case full of razors and brushes swung noiselessly forward with an effect of the supernatural. A small opening, just big enough to take a man’s body, revealed itself. We passed through it and up a sort of tunnel. The door at the other end, which was formed of panels, had a manger and straw crib attached to it on the outside, and let us into a horse’s stall. We found ourselves in the stable of the inn.

“We don’t use this passage for ourselves,” Rangsley said. “Only the most looked up to need to – the justices and such like. But gallus birds like you and your company, it’s best for us not to be seen in company with. Follow my uncle now. Good-night.”

We went into the yard, under the pillars of the town hall, across the silent street, through a narrow passage, and down to the sea. Old Rangsley reeled ahead of us swiftly, muttering, “Three men to be set aboard the *Thames*... quarter past eleven. Three men to be set aboard...” and in a few minutes we stood upon the shingle beside the idle sea, that was nearly at the full.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was, I suppose, what I demanded of Fate – to be gently wafted into the position of a hero of romance, without rough hands at my throat. It is what we all ask, I suppose; and we get it sometimes in ten-minute snatches. I didn't know where I was going. It was enough for me to sail in and out of the patches of shadow that fell from the moon right above our heads.

We embarked, and, as we drew further out, the land turned to a shadow, spotted here and there with little lights. Behind us a cock crowed. The shingle crashed at intervals beneath the feet of a large body of men. I remembered the smugglers; but it was as if I had remembered them only to forget them forever. Old Rangsley, who steered with the sheet in his hand, kept up an unintelligible babble. Carlos and Castro talked under their breaths. Along the gunwale there was a constant ripple and gurgle. Suddenly old Rangsley began to sing; his voice was hoarse and drunken.

“When Harol’ war in va – a – ded,
An’ fallin’, lost his crownd,
An’ Normun Willium wa – a – ded.”

The water murmured without a pause, as if it had a million tiny facts to communicate in very little time. And then old Rangsley hove to, to wait for the ship, and sat half asleep, lurching over the tiller. He was a very, unreliable scoundrel. The boat leaked like a sieve. The wind freshened, and we three began to ask ourselves how it was going to end. There were no lights upon the sea.

At last, well out, a blue gleam caught our eyes; but by this time old Rangsley was helpless, and it fell to me to manage the boat. Carlos was of no use – he knew it, and, without saying a word, busied himself in bailing the water out. But Castro, I was surprised to notice, knew more than I did about a boat, and, maimed as he was, made himself useful.

“To me it looks as if we should drown,” Carlos said at one point, very quietly. “I am sorry for you, Juan.”

“And for yourself, too,” I answered, feeling very hopeless, and with a dogged grimness.

“Just now, my young cousin, I feel as if I should not mind dying under the water,” he remarked with a sigh, but without ceasing to bail for a moment.

“Ah, you are sorry to be leaving home, and your friends, and Spain, and your fine adventures,” I answered.

The blue flare showed a very little nearer. There was nothing to be done but talk and wait.

“No; England,” he answered in a tone full of meaning – “things in England – people there. One person at least.”

To me his words and his smile seemed to imply a bitter irony; but they were said very earnestly.

Castro had hauled the helpless form of old Rangsley forward. I caught him muttering savagely:

“I could kill that old man!”

He did not want to be drowned; neither assuredly did I. But it was not fear so much as a feeling of dreariness and disappointment that had come over me, the sudden feeling that I was going not to adventure, but to death; that here was not romance, but an end – a disenchanting surprise that it should soon be all over.

We kept a grim silence. Further out in the bay, we were caught in a heavy squall. Sitting by the tiller, I got as much out of her as I knew how. We would go as far as we could before the run was over. Carlos bailed unceasingly, and without a word of complaint, sticking to his self-appointed task as if in very truth he were careless of life. A feeling came over me that this, indeed, was the elevated and the romantic. Perhaps he was tired of his life; perhaps he really regretted what he left behind him in England, or somewhere else – some association, some woman. But he, at least, if we

went down together, would go gallantly, and without complaint, at the end of a life with associations, movements, having lived and regretted. I should disappear in-gloriously on the very threshold.

Castro, standing up unsteadily, growled, "We may do it yet! See, señor!"

The blue gleam was much larger – it flared smokily up towards the sky. I made out ghastly parallelograms of a ship's sails high above us, and at last many faces peering unseeingly over the rail in our direction. We all shouted together.

I may say that it was thanks to me that we reached the ship. Our boat went down under us whilst I was tying a rope under Carlos' arms. He was standing up with the baler still in his hand. On board, the women passengers were screaming, and as I clung desperately to the rope that was thrown me, it struck me oddly that I had never before heard so many women's voices at the same time. Afterwards, when I stood on the deck, they began laughing at old Rangley, who held forth in a thunderous voice, punctuated by hiccoughs:

"They carried I aboard – a cop – theer lugger and sinks I in the cold, co – old sea."

It mortified me excessively that I should be tacked to his tail and exhibited to a number of people, and I had a sudden conviction of my small importance. I had expected something altogether different – an audience sympathetically interested in my desire for a passage to the West Indies; instead of which people laughed while I spoke in panting jerks, and the water dripped out of my clothes. After I had made it clear that I wanted to go with Carlos, and could pay for my passage, I was handed down into the steerage, where a tallow candle burnt in a thick, blue atmosphere. I was stripped and filled with some fiery liquid, and fell asleep. Old Rangley was sent ashore with the pilot.

It was a new and strange life to me, opening there suddenly enough. The *Thames* was one of the usual West Indiamen; but to me even the very ropes and spars, the sea, and the unbroken dome of the sky, had a rich strangeness. Time passed lazily and gliding. I made more fully the acquaintance of my companions, but seemed to know them no better. I lived with Carlos in the cabin – Castro in the half-deck; but we were all three pretty constantly together, and they being the only Spaniards on board, we were more or less isolated from the other passengers.

Looking at my companions at times, I had vague misgivings. It was as if these two had fascinated me to the verge of some danger. Sometimes Castro, looking up, uttered vague ejaculations. Carlos pushed his hat back and sighed. They had preoccupations, cares, interests in which they let me have no part.

Castro struck me as absolutely ruffianly. His head was knotted in a red, white-spotted handkerchief; his grizzled beard was tangled; he wore a black and rusty cloak, ragged at the edges, and his feet were often bare; at his side would lie his wooden right hand. As a rule, the place of his forearm was taken by a long, thin, steel blade, that he was forever sharpening.

Carlos talked with me, telling me about his former life and his adventures. The other passengers he discountenanced by a certain coldness of manner that made me ashamed of talking to them. I respected him so; he was so wonderful to me then. Castro I detested; but I accepted their relationship without in the least understanding how Carlos, with his fine grain, his high soul – I gave him credit for a high soul – could put up with the squalid ferocity with which I credited Castro. It seemed to hang in the air round the grotesque ragged-ness of the saturnine brown man.

Carlos had made Spain too hot to hold him in those tortuous intrigues of the Army of the Faith and Bourbon troops and Italian legions. From what I could understand, he must have played fast and loose in an insolent manner. And there was some woman offended. There was a gayness and gallantry in that part of it. He had known the very spirit of romance, and now he was sailing gallantly out to take up his inheritance from an uncle who was a great noble, owning the greater part of one of the Intendencias of Cuba.

"He is a very old man, I hear," Carlos said – "a little doting, and having need of me."

There were all the elements of romance about Carlos' story – except the actual discomforts of the ship in which we were sailing. He himself had never been in Cuba or seen his uncle; but he had,

as I have indicated, ruined himself in one way or another in Spain, and it had come as a God-send to him when his uncle had sent Tomas Castro to bring him to Cuba, to the town of Rio Medio.

"The town belongs to my uncle. He is very rich; a Grand d'Espagne.. everything; but he is now very old, and has left Havana to die in his palace in his own town. He has an only daughter, a Dona Seraphina, and I suppose that if I find favour in his eyes I shall marry her, and inherit my uncle's great riches; I am the only one that is left of the family to inherit." He waved his hand and smiled a little. "*Vaya*; a little of that great wealth would be welcome. If I had had a few pence more there would have been none of this worry, and I should not have been on this dirty ship in these rags." He looked down good-humouredly at his clothes.

"But," I said, "how do you come to be in a scrape at all?"

He laughed a little proudly.

"In a scrape?" he said. "I... I am in none. It is Tomas Castro there." He laughed affectionately. "He is as faithful as he is ugly," he said; "but I fear he has been a villain, too... What do I know? Over there in my uncle's town, there are some villains – you know what I mean, one must not speak too loudly on this ship. There is a man called O'Brien, who mismanages my uncle's affairs. What do I know? The good Tomas has been in some villainy that is no affair of mine. He is a good friend and a faithful dependent of my family's. He certainly had that man's watch – the man we met by evil chance at Liverpool, a man who came from Jamaica. He had bought it – of a bad man, perhaps, I do not ask. It was Castro your police wished to take. But I, *bon Dieu*, do you think I would take watches?"

I certainly did not think he had taken a watch; but I did not relinquish the idea that he, in a glamorous, romantic way, had been a pirate. Rooksby had certainly hinted as much in his irritation.

He lost none of his romantic charm in my eyes. The fact that he was sailing in uncomfortable circumstances detracted little; nor did his clothes, which, at the worst, were better than any I had ever had. And he wore them with an air and a grace. He had probably been in worse circumstances when campaigning with the Army of the Faith in Spain. And there was certainly the uncle with the romantic title and the great inheritance, and the cousin – the Miss Seraphina, whom he would probably marry. I imagined him an aristocratic scapegrace, a corsair – it was the Byronic period then – sailing out to marry a sort of shimmering princess with hair like Veronica's, bright golden, and a face like that of a certain keeper's daughter. Carlos, however, knew nothing about his cousin; he cared little more, as far as I could tell. "What can she be to me since I have seen your...?" he said once, and then stopped, looking at me with a certain tender irony. He insisted, though, that his aged uncle was in need of him. As for Castro – he and his rags came out of a life of sturt and strife, and I hoped he might die by treachery. He had undoubtedly been sent by the uncle across the seas to find Carlos and bring him out of Europe; there was something romantic in that mission. He was now a dependent of the Riego family, but there were unfathomable depths in that tubby little man's past. That he had gone to Russia at the tail of the Grande Armée, one could not help believing. He had been most likely in the grand army of sutlers and camp-followers. He could talk convincingly of the cold, and of the snows and his escape. And from his allusions one could get glimpses of what he had been before and afterwards – apparently everything that was questionable in a secularly disturbed Europe; no doubt somewhat of a bandit; a guerrillero in the sixes and sevens; with the Army of the Faith near the French border, later on.

There had been room and to spare for that sort of pike, in the muddy waters, during the first years of the century. But the waters were clearing, and now the good Castro had been dodging the gallows in the Antilles or in Mexico. In his heroic moods he would swear that his arm had been cut off at Somo Sierra; swear it with a great deal of asseveration, making one see the Polish lancers charging the gunners, being cut down, and his own sword arm falling suddenly.

Carlos, however, used to declare with affectionate cynicism that the arm had been broken by the cudgel of a Polish peasant while Castro was trying to filch a pig from a stable... "I cut his throat out, though," Castro would grumble darkly; "so, like that, and it matters very little – it is even an

improvement. See, I put on my blade. See, I transfix you that fly there... See how astonished he was. He did never expect that." He had actually impaled a crawling cockroach. He spent his days cooking extraordinary messes, crouching for hours over a little charcoal brazier that he lit surreptitiously in the back of his bunk, making substitutes for eternal *gaspachos*.

All these things, if they deepened the romance of Carlos' career, enhanced, also, the mystery. I asked him one day, "But why do you go to Jamaica at all if you are bound for Cuba?"

He looked at me, smiling a little mournfully.

"Ah, Juan mio," he said, "Spain is not like your England, unchanging and stable. The party who reign to-day do not love me, and they are masters in Cuba as in Spain. But in his province my uncle rules alone. There I shall be safe." He was condescending to roll some cigarettes for Tomas, whose wooden hand incommoded him, and he tossed a fragment of tobacco to the wind with a laugh. "In Jamaica there is a merchant, a Señor Ramon; I have letters to him, and he shall find me a conveyance to Rio Medio, my uncle's town. He is an *quliado*."

He laughed again. "It is not easy to enter that place, Juanino."

There was certainly some mystery about that town of his uncle's. One night I overheard him say to Castro:

"Tell me, O my Tomas, would it be safe to take this *caballero*, my cousin, to Rio Medio?"

Castro paused, and then murmured gruffly:

"Señor, unless that Irishman is consulted beforehand, or the English lord would undertake to join with the picaroons, it is very assuredly not safe."

Carlos made a little exclamation of mild astonishment.

"*Pero?* Is it so bad as that in my uncle's own town?"

Tomas muttered something that I did not catch, and then:

"If the English *caballero* committed indiscretions, or quarrelled – and all these people quarrel, why, God knows – that Irish devil could hang many persons, even myself, or take vengeance on your worship."

Carlos was silent as if in a reverie. At last he said:

"But if affairs are like this, it would be well to have one more with us. The *caballero*, my cousin, is very strong and of great courage."

Castro grunted, "Oh, of a courage! But as the proverb says, 'If you set an Englishman by a hornets' nest they shall not remain long within.'":

After that I avoided any allusion to Cuba, because the thing, think as I would about it, would not grow clear. It was plain that something illegal was going on there, or how could "that Irish devil," whoever he was, have power to hang Tomas and be revenged on Carlos? It did not affect my love for Carlos, though, in the weariness of this mystery, the passage seemed to drag a little. And it was obvious enough that Carlos was unwilling or unable to tell anything about what pre-, occupied him.

I had noticed an intimacy spring up between the ship's second mate and Tomas, who was, it seemed to me, forever engaged in long confabulations in the man's cabin, and, as much to make talk as for any other reason, I asked Carlos if he had noticed his dependent's familiarity. It was noticeable because Castro held aloof from every other soul on board. Carlos answered me with one of his nervous and angry smiles.

"Ah, Juan mine, do not ask too many questions! I wish you could come with me all the way, but I cannot tell you all I know. I do not even myself know all. It seems that the man is going to leave the ship in Jamaica, and has letters for that Señor Ramon, the merchant, even as I have. *Vaya*; more I cannot tell you."

This struck me as curious, and a little of the whole mystery seemed from that time to attach to the second mate, who before had been no more to me than a long, sallow Nova Scotian, with a disagreeable intonation and rather offensive manners. I began to watch him, desultorily, and was rather startled by something more than a suspicion that he himself was watching me. On one occasion

in particular I seemed to observe this. The second mate was lankily stalking the deck, his hands in his pockets. As he paused in his walk to spit into the sea beside me, Carlos said:

“And you, my Juan, what will you do in this Jamaica?”

The sense that we were approaching land was already all over the ship. The second mate leered at me enigmatically, and moved slowly away. I said that I was going to the Horton Estates, Rooksby’s, to learn planting under a Mr. Macdonald, the agent. Carlos shrugged his shoulders. I suppose I had spoken with some animation.

“Ah,” he said, with his air of great wisdom and varied experience, of disillusionment, “it will be much the same as it has been at your home – after the first days. Hard work and a great sameness.” He began to cough violently.

I said bitterly enough, “Yes. It will be always the same with me. I shall never see life. You’ve seen all that there is to see, so I suppose you do not mind settling down with an old uncle in a palace.”

He answered suddenly, with a certain darkness of manner, “That is as God wills. Who knows? Perhaps life, even in my uncle’s palace, will not be so safe.”

The second mate was bearing down on us again.

I said jocularly, “Why, when I get very tired of life at Horton Pen, I shall come to see you in your uncle’s town.”

Carlos had another of his fits of coughing.

“After all, we are kinsmen. I dare say you would give me a bed,” I went on.

The second mate was quite close to us then.

Carlos looked at me with an expression of affection that a little shamed my lightness of tone:

“I love you much more than a kinsman, Juan,” he said. “I wish you could come with me. I try to arrange it. Later, perhaps, I may be dead. I am very ill.”

He was undoubtedly ill. Campaigning in Spain, exposure in England in a rainy time, and then the ducking when we came on board, had done him no good. He looked moodily at the sea.

“I wish you could come. I will try – ”

The mate had paused, and was listening quite unaffectedly, behind Carlos’ back.

A moment after Carlos half turned and regarded him with a haughty stare.

He whistled and walked away.

Carlos muttered something that I did not catch about “spies of that pestilent Irishman.” Then:

“I will not selfishly take you into any more dangers,” he said. “But life on a sugar plantation is not fit for you.”

I felt glad and flattered that a personage so romantic should deem me a fit companion for himself. He went forward as if with some purpose.

Some days afterwards the second mate sent for me to his cabin. He had been on the sick list, and he was lying in his bunk, stripped to the waist, one arm and one leg touching the floor. He raised himself slowly when I came in, and spat. He had in a pronounced degree the Nova Scotian peculiarities and accent, and after he had shaved, his face shone like polished leather.

“Hallo!” he said. “See heeyur, young Kemp, does your neck just *itch* to be stretched?”

I looked at him with mouth and eyes agape.

He spat again, and waved a claw towards the forward bulkhead.

“They’ll do it for yeh,” he said. “You’re such a green goose, it makes me sick a bit. You hev’n’t reckoned out the chances, not quite. It’s a kind of dead reckoning yeh hev’n’t had call to make. Eh?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, bewildered.

He looked at me, grinning, half naked, with amused contempt, for quite a long time, and at last offered sardonically to open my eyes for me.

I said nothing.

“Do you know what will happen to you,” he asked, “ef yeh don’t get quit of that Carlos of yours?”

I was surprised into muttering that I didn't know.

"I can tell yeh," he continued. "Yeh will get hanged."

By that time I was too amazed to get angry. I simply suspected the Blue Nose of being drunk. But he glared at me so soberly that next moment I felt frightened.

"Hanged by the neck," he repeated; and then added, "Young fellow, you scoot. Take a fool's advice, and *scoot*. That Castro is a blame fool, anyhow. Yeh want men for that job. Men, I tell you." He slapped his bony breast.

I had no idea that he could look so ferocious. His eyes fascinated me, and he opened his cavernous mouth as if to swallow me. His lantern jaws snapped without a sound. He seemed to change his mind.

"I am done with yeh," he said, with a sort of sinister restraint. He rose to his feet, and, turning his back to me, began to shave, squinting into a broken looking-glass.

I had not the slightest inkling of his meaning. I only knew that going out of his berth was like escaping from the dark lair of a beast into a sunlit world. There is no denying that his words, and still more his manner, had awakened in me a sense of insecurity that had no precise object, for it was manifestly absurd and impossible to suspect my friend Carlos. Moreover, hanging was a danger so recondite, and an eventuality so extravagant, as to make the whole thing ridiculous. And yet I remembered how unhappy I felt, how inexplicably unhappy. Presently the reason was made clear. I was homesick. I gave no further thought to the second mate. I looked at the harbour we were entering, and thought of the home I had left so eagerly. After all, I was no more than a boy, and even younger in mind than in body.

Queer-looking boats crawled between the shores like tiny water beetles. One headed out towards us, then another. I did not want them to reach us. It was as if I did not wish my solitude to be disturbed, and I was not pleased with the idea of going ashore. A great ship, floating high on the water, black and girt with the two broad yellow streaks of her double tier of guns, glided out slowly from beyond a cluster of shipping in the bay. She passed without a hail, going out under her topsails with a flag at the fore. Her lofty spars overtopped our masts immensely, and I saw the men in her rigging looking down on our decks. The only sounds that came out of her were the piping of boatswain's calls and the tramping of feet. Imagining her to be going home, I felt a great desire to be on board. Ultimately, as it turned out, I went home in that very ship, but then it was too late. I was another man by that time, with much queer knowledge and other desires. Whilst I was looking and longing I heard Carlos' voice behind me asking one of our sailors what ship it was.

"Don't you know a flagship when you see it?" a voice grumbled surlily. "Admiral Rowley's," it continued. Then it rumbled out some remarks about "pirates, vermin, coast of Cuba."

Carlos came to the side, and looked after the man-of-war in the distance.

"*You* could help us," I heard him mutter.

CHAPTER FIVE

There was a lad called Barnes, a steerage passenger of about my own age, a raw, red-headed Northumbrian yokel, going out as a recruit to one of the West Indian regiments. He was a serious, strenuous youth, and I had talked a little with him at odd moments. In my great loneliness I went to say good-by to him after I had definitely parted with Carlos.

I had been in our cabin. A great bustle of shore-going, of leave-taking had sprung up all over the ship. Carlos and Castro had entered with a tall, immobile, gold-spectacled Spaniard, dressed all in white, and with a certain air of noticing and attentive deference, bowing a little as he entered the cabin in earnest conference with Tomas Castro. Carlos had preceded them with a certain nonchalance, and the Spaniard – it was the Señor Ramon, the merchant I had heard of – regarded him as if with interested curiosity. With Tomas he seemed already familiar. He stood in the doorway, against the strong light, bowing a little.

With a certain courtesy, touched with indifference, Carlos made him acquainted with me. Ramon turned his searching, quietly analytic gaze upon me.

“But is the *caballero* going over, too?” he asked.

Carlos said, “No. I think not, now.”

And at that moment the second mate, shouldering his way through a white-clothed crowd of shore people, made up behind Señor Ramon. He held a letter in his hand.

“I am going over,” he said, in his high nasal voice, and with a certain ferocity.

Ramon looked round apprehensively.

Carlos said, “The señor, my cousin, wishes for a Mr. Macdonald. You know him, señor?”

Ramon made a dry gesture of perfect acquaintance. “I think I have seen him just now,” he said. “I will make inquiries.”

All three of them had followed him, and became lost in the crowd. It was then, not knowing whether I should ever see Carlos again, and with a desperate, unhappy feeling of loneliness, that I had sought out Barnes in the dim immensity of the steerage.

In the square of wan light that came down the scuttle he was cording his hair-trunk – unemotional and very matter-of-fact. He began to talk in an everyday voice about his plans. An uncle was going to meet him, and to house him for a day or two before he went to the barracks.

“Mebbe we’ll meet again,” he said. “I’ll be here many years, I think.”

He shouldered his trunk and climbed unromantically up the ladder. He said he would look for Macdonald for me.

It was absurd to suppose that the strange ravings of the second mate had had an effect on me. “Hanged! Pirates!” Was Carlos really a pirate, or Castro, his humble friend? It was vile of me to suspect Carlos. A couple of men, meeting by the scuttle, began to talk loudly, every word coming plainly to my ears in the stillness of my misery, and the large deserted steerage. One of them, new from home, was asking questions. Another answered:

“Oh, I lost half a seroon the last voyage – the old thing.”

“Haven’t they routed out the scoundrels yet?” the other asked.

The first man lowered his voice. I caught only that “the admiral was an old fool – no good for this job. He’s found out the name of the place the pirates come from – Rio Medio. That’s the place, only he can’t get in at it with his three-deckers. You saw his flagship?”

Rio Medio was the name of the town to which Carlos was going – which his uncle owned. They moved away from above.

What was I to believe? What could this mean? But the second mate’s, “Scoot, young man,” seemed to come to my ears like the blast of a trumpet. I became suddenly intensely anxious to find Macdonald – to see no more of Carlos.

From above came suddenly a gruff voice in Spanish. "Señor, it would be a great folly."

Tomas Castro was descending the ladder gingerly. He was coming to fetch his bundle. I went hastily into the distance of the vast, dim cavern of spare room that served for the steerage.

"I want him very much," Carlos said. "I like him. He would be of help to us."

"It's as your worship wills," Castro said gruffly. They were both at the bottom of the ladder. "But an Englishman there would work great mischief. And this youth – "

"I will take him, Tomas," Carlos said, laying a hand on his arm.

"Those others will think he is a spy. I know them," Castro muttered. "They will hang him, or work some devil's mischief. You do not know that Irish judge – the *canaille*, the friend of priests."

"He is very brave. He will not fear," Carlos said.

I came suddenly forward. "I will not go with you," I said, before I had reached them even.

Castro started back as if he had been stung, and caught at the wooden hand that sheathed his steel blade.

"Ah, it is you, Señor," he said, with an air of relief and dislike. Carlos, softly and very affectionately, began inviting me to go to his uncle's town. His uncle, he was sure, would welcome me. Jamaica and a planter's life were not fit for me.

I had not then spoken very loudly, or had not made my meaning very clear. I felt a great desire to find Macdonald, and a simple life that I could understand.

"I am not going with you," I said, very loudly this time.

He stopped at once. Through the scuttle of the half-deck we heard a hubbub of voices, of people exchanging greetings, of Christian names called out joyously. A tumultuous shuffling of feet went on continuously over our heads. The ship was crowded with people from the shore. Perhaps Macdonald was amongst them, even looking for me.

"Ah, *amigo mio*, but you *must* now," said Carlos gently – "you must – " And, looking me straight in the face with a still, penetrating glance of his big, romantic eyes, "It is a good life," he whispered seductively, "and I like you, John Kemp. You are young-very young yet. But I love you very much for your own sake, and for the sake of one I shall never see again."

He fascinated me. He was all eyes in the dusk, standing in a languid pose just clear of the shaft of light that fell through the scuttle in a square patch.

I lowered my voice, too. "What life?" I asked.

"Life in my uncle's palace," he said, so sweetly and persuasively that the suggestiveness of it caused a thrill in me.

His uncle could nominate me to posts of honour fit for a *caballero*.

I seemed to wake up. "Your uncle the pirate!" I cried, and was amazed at my own words.

Tomas Castro sprang up, and placed his rough, hot hand over my lips.

"Be quiet, John Kemp, you fool!" he hissed with sudden energy.

He had spruced himself, but I seemed to see the rags still nutter about him. He had combed out his beard, but I could not forget the knots that had been in it.

"I told your worship how foolish and wrong-headed these English are," he said sardonically to Carlos. And then to me, "If the senor speaks loudly again, I shall kill him."

He was evidently very frightened of something.

Carlos, silent as an apparition at the foot of the ladder, put a finger to his lips and glanced upwards.

Castro writhed his whole body, and I stepped backwards. "I know what Rio Medio is," I said, not very loudly. "It is a nest of pirates."

Castro crept towards me again on the points of his toes. "Señor Don Juan Kemp, child of the devil," he hissed, looking very much frightened, "you must die!"

I smiled. He was trembling all over. I could hear the talking and laughing that went on under the break of the poop. Two women were kissing, with little cries, near the hatchway. I could hear them distinctly.

Tomas Castro dropped his ragged cloak with a grandiose gesture.

“By my hand!” he added with difficulty.

He was really very much alarmed. Carlos was gazing up the hatch. I was ready to laugh at the idea of dying by Tomas Castro’s hand while, within five feet of me, people were laughing and kissing. I should have laughed had I not suddenly felt his hand on my throat. I kicked his shins hard, and fell backwards over a chest. He went back a step or two, flourished his arm, beat his chest, and turned furiously upon Carlos.

“He will get us murdered,” he said. “Do you think we are safe here? If these people here heard that name they wouldn’t wait to ask who your worship is. They would tear us to pieces in an instant. I tell you —*moi*, Tomas Castro – he will ruin us, this white fool – ”

Carlos began to cough, shaken speechless as if by an invisible devil. Castro’s eyes ran furtively all round him, then he looked at me. He made an extraordinary swift motion with his right hand, and I saw that he was facing me with a long steel blade displayed. Carlos continued to cough. The thing seemed odd, laughable still. Castro began to parade round me: it was as if he were a cock performing its saltatory rites before attacking. There was the same tenseness of muscle. He stepped with extraordinary care on the points of his toes, and came to a stop about four feet from me. I began to wonder what Rooksby would have thought of this sort of thing, to wonder why Castro himself found it necessary to crouch for such a long time. Up above, the hum of many people, still laughing, still talking, faded a little out of mind. I understood, horribly, how possible it would be to die within those few feet of them. Castro’s eyes were dusky yellow, the pupils a great deal inflated, the lines of his mouth very hard and drawn immensely tight. It seemed extraordinary that he should put so much emotion into such a very easy killing. I had my back against the bulkhead, it felt very hard against my shoulder-blades. I had no dread, only a sort of shrinking from the actual contact of the point, as one shrinks from being tickled. I opened my mouth. I was going to shriek a last, despairing call, to the light and laughter of meetings above when Carlos, still shaken, with one white hand pressed very hard upon his chest, started forward and gripped his hand round Castro’s steel. He began to whisper in the other’s hairy ear. I caught:

“You are a fool. He will not make us to be molested, he is my kinsman.”

Castro made a reluctant gesture towards Barnes’ chest that lay between us.

“We could cram him into that,” he said.

“Oh, bloodthirsty fool,” Carlos answered, recovering his breath; “is it always necessary to wash your hands in blood? Are we not in enough danger? Up – up! Go see if the boat is yet there. We must go quickly; up – up – ” He waved his hand towards the scuttle.

“But still,” Castro said. He was reluctantly fitting his wooden hand upon the blue steel. He sent a baleful yellow glare into my eyes, and stooped to pick up his ragged cloak.

“Up – mount!” Carlos commanded.

Castro muttered, “*Vamos*,” and began clumsily to climb the ladder, like a bale of rags being hauled from above. Carlos placed his foot on the steps, preparing to follow him. He turned his head round towards me, his hand extended, a smile upon his lips.

“Juan,” he said, “let us not quarrel. You are very young; you cannot understand these things; you cannot weigh them; you have a foolish idea in your head. I wished you to come with us because I love you, Juan. Do you think I wish you evil? You are true and brave, and our families are united.” He sighed suddenly.

“I do not want to quarrel!” I said. “I don’t.”

I did not want to quarrel; I wanted more to cry. I was very lonely, and he was going away. Romance was going out of my life.

He added musically, "You even do not understand. There is someone else who speaks for you to me, always – someone else. But one day you will. I shall come back for you – one day." He looked at me and smiled. It stirred unknown depths of emotion in me. I would have gone with him, then, had he asked me. "One day," he repeated, with an extraordinary cadence of tone.

His hand was grasping mine; it thrilled me like a woman's; he stood shaking it very gently.

"One day," he said, "I shall repay what I owe you. I wished you with me, because I go into some danger. I wanted you. Good-by. *Hasta mas ver.*"

He leaned over and kissed me lightly on the cheek, then climbed away. I felt that the light of Romance was going out of my life. As we reached the top of the ladder, somebody began to call harshly, startlingly. I heard my own name and the words, "mahn ye were speerin' after."

The light was obscured, the voice began clamouring insistently.

"John Kemp, Johnnie Kemp, noo. Here's the mahn ye were speerin' after. Here's Macdonald."

It was the voice of Barnes, and the voice of the every day. I discovered that I had been tremendously upset. The pulses in my temples were throbbing, and I wanted to shut my eyes – to sleep! I was tired; Romance had departed. Barnes and the Macdonald he had found for me represented all the laborious insects of the world; all the ants who are forever hauling immensely heavy and immensely unimportant burdens up weary hillocks, down steep places, getting nowhere and doing nothing.

Nevertheless I hurried up, stumbling at the hatchway against a man who was looking down. He said nothing at all, and I was dazed by the light. Barnes remarked hurriedly, "This 'll be your Mr. Macdonald"; and, turning his back on me, forgot my existence. I felt more alone than ever. The man in front of me held his head low, as if he wished to butt me.

I began breathlessly to tell him I had a letter from "my – my – Rooksby – brother-in-law – Ralph Rooks-by" – I was panting as if I had run a long way. He said nothing at all. I fumbled for the letter in an inner pocket of my waistcoat, and felt very shy. Macdonald maintained a portentous silence; his enormous body was enveloped rather than clothed in a great volume of ill-fitting white stuff; he held in his hand a great umbrella with a vivid green lining. His face was very pale, and had the leaden transparency of a boiled artichoke; it was fringed by a red beard streaked with gray, as brown flood-water is with foam. I noticed at last that the reason for his presenting his forehead to me was an incredible squint – a squint that gave the idea that he was performing some tortuous and defiant feat with the muscles of his neck.

He maintained an air of distrustful inscrutability. The hand which took my letter was very large, very white, and looked as if it would feel horribly flabby. With the other he put on his nose a pair of enormous mother-of-pearl-framed spectacles – things exactly like those of a cobra's – and began to read. He had said precisely nothing at all. It was for him and what he represented that I had thrown over Carlos and what *he* represented. I felt that I deserved to be received with acclamation. I was not. He read the letter very deliberately, swaying, umbrella and all, with the slow movement of a dozing elephant. Once he crossed his eyes at me, meditatively, above the mother-of-pearl rims. He was so slow, so deliberate, that I own I began to wonder whether Carlos and Castro were still on board. It seemed to be at least half an hour before Macdonald cleared his throat, with a sound resembling the coughing of a defective pump, and a mere trickle of a voice asked:

"Hwhat evidence have ye of identitee?"

I hadn't any at all, and began to finger my buttonholes as shamefaced as a pauper before a Board. The certitude dawned upon me suddenly that Carlos, even if he would consent to swear to me, would prejudice my chances.

I cannot help thinking that I came very near to being cast adrift upon the streets of Kingston. To my asseverations Macdonald returned nothing but a series of minute "humphs." I don't know what overcame his scruples; he had shown no signs of yielding, but suddenly turning on his heel made a motion with one of his flabby white hands. I understood it to mean that I was to follow him aft.

The decks were covered with a jabbering turmoil of negroes with muscular arms and brawny shoulders. All their shining black faces seem to be momentarily gashed open to show rows of white teeth, and were spotted with inlaid eyeballs. The sounds coming from them were a bewildering noise. They were hauling baggage about aimlessly. A large soft bundle of bedding nearly took me off my legs. There wasn't room for emotion. Macdonald laid about him with the handle of the umbrella a few inches from the deck; but the passage that he made for himself closed behind him.

Suddenly, in the pushing and hurrying, I came upon a little clear space beside a pile of boxes. Stooping over them was the angular figure of Nichols, the second mate. He looked up at me, screwing his yellow eyes together.

“Going ashore,” he asked, “long of that Puffing Billy?”

“What business is it of yours?” I mumbled sulkily.

Sudden and intense threatening came into his yellow eyes:

“Don't you ever come to you know where,” he said; “I don't want no spies on what I do. There's a man there'll crack your little backbone if he catches you. Don't yeh come now. Never.”

PART SECOND – THE GIRL WITH THE LIZARD

CHAPTER ONE

“Rio Medio?” Señor Ramon said to me nearly two years afterwards. “The *caballero* is pleased to give me credit for a very great knowledge. What should I know of that town? There are doubtless good men there and very wicked, as in other towns. Who knows? Your worship must ask the boats’ crews that the admiral has sent to burn the town. They will be back very soon now.”

He looked at me, inscrutably and attentively, through his gold spectacles.

It was on the arcade before his store in Spanish Town. Long sunblinds flapped slightly. Before the next door a large sign proclaimed “Office of the *Buchatoro Journal*” It was, as I have said, after two years – years which, as Carlos had predicted, I had found to be of hard work, and long, hot sameness. I had come down from Horton Pen to Spanish Town, expecting a letter from Veronica, and, the stage not being in, had dropped in to chat with Ramon over a consignment of Yankee notions, which he was prepared to sell at an extravagantly cheap price. It was just at the time when Admiral Rowley was understood to be going to make an energetic attempt upon the pirates who still infested the Gulf of Mexico and nearly ruined the Jamaica trade of those days. Naturally enough, we had talked of the mysterious town in which the pirates were supposed to have their headquarters.

“I know no more than others,” Ramon said, “save, señor, that I lose much more because my dealings are much greater. But I do not even know whether those who take my goods are pirates, as you English say, or Mexican privateers, as the Havana authorities say. I do not very much care. *Basta*, what I know is that every week some ship with a letter of marque steals one of my consignments, and I lose many hundreds of dollars.”

Ramon was, indeed, one of the most frequented merchants in Jamaica; he had stores in both Kingston and Spanish Town; his cargoes came from all the seas. All the planters and all the official class in the island had dealings with him.

“It was most natural that the hidalgo, your respected cousin, should consult me if he wished to go to any town in Cuba. Whom else should he go to? You yourself, señor, or the excellent Mr. Topnambo, if you desired to know what ships in a month’s time are likely to be sailing for Havana, for New Orleans, or any Gulf port, you would ask me. What more natural? It is my business, my trade, to know these things. In that way I make my bread. But as for Rio Medio, I do not know the place.” He had a touch of irony in his composed voice. “But it is very certain,” he went on, “that if your Government had not recognized the belligerent rights of the rebellious colony of Mexico, there would be now no letters of marque, no accursed Mexican privateers, and I and everyone else in the island should not now be losing thousands of dollars every year.”

That was the eternal grievance of every Spaniard in the island – and of not a few of the English and Scotch planters. Spain was still in the throes of losing the Mexican colonies when Great Britain had acknowledged the existence of a state of war and a Mexican Government. Mexican letters of marque had immediately filled the Gulf. No kind of shipping was safe from them, and Spain was quite honestly powerless to prevent their swarming on the coast of Cuba – the Ever Faithful Island, itself.

“What can Spain do,” said Ramon bitterly, “when even your Admiral Rowley, with his great ships, cannot rid the sea of them?” He lowered his voice. “I tell you, young señor, that England will lose this Island of Jamaica over this business. You yourself are a Separationist, are you not?.. No? You live with Separationists. How could I tell? Many people say you are.”

His words gave me a distinctly disagreeable sensation. I hadn’t any idea of being a Separationist; I was loyal enough. But I understood suddenly, and for the first time, how very much like one I might look.

"I myself am nothing," Ramon went on impassively; "I am content that the island should remain English. It will never again be Spanish, nor do I wish that it should. But our little, waspish friend there" – he lifted one thin, brown hand to the sign of the *Buckatoro Journal* – "his paper is doing much mischief. I think the admiral or the governor will commit him to jail. He is going to run away and take his paper to Kingston; I myself have bought his office furniture."

I looked at him and wondered, for all his impassivity, what he knew – what, in the depths of his inscrutable Spanish brain, his dark eyes concealed.

He bowed to me a little. "There will come a very great trouble," he said.

Jamaica was in those days – and remained for many years after – in the throes of a question. The question was, of course, that of the abolition of slavery. The planters as a rule were immensely rich and overbearing. They said, "If the Home Government tries to abolish our slavery system, we will abolish the Home Government, and go to the United States for protection." That was treason, of course; but there was so much of it that the governor, the Duke of Manchester, had to close his ears and pretend not to hear. The planters had another grievance – the pirates in the Gulf of Mexico. There was one in particular, a certain El Demonio or Diablero, who practically sealed the Florida passage; it was hardly possible to get a cargo underwritten, and the planters' pockets felt it a good deal. Practically, El Demonio had, during the last two years, gutted a ship once a week, as if he wanted to help the Kingston Separationist papers. The planters said, "If the Home Government wishes to meddle with our internal affairs, our slaves, let it first clear our seas... Let it hang El Demonio.."

The Government had sent out one of Nelson's old captains, Admiral Rowley, a good fighting man; but when it came to clearing the Gulf of Mexico, he was about as useless as a prize-fighter trying to clear a stable of rats. I don't suppose El Demonio really did more than a tithe of the mischief attributed to him, but in the peculiar circumstances he found himself elevated to the rank of an important factor in colonial politics. The Ministerialist papers used to kill him once a month; the Separationists made him capture one of old Rowley's sloops five times a year. They both lied, of course. But obviously Rowley and his frigates weren't much use against a pirate whom they could not catch at sea, and who lived at the bottom of a bottle-necked creek with tooth rocks all over the entrance – that was the sort of place Rio Medio was reported to be..

I didn't much care about either party – I was looking out for romance – but I inclined a little to the Separationists, because Macdonald, with whom I lived for two years at Horton Pen, was himself a Separationist, in a cool Scotch sort of way. He was an Argyleshire man, who had come out to the island as a lad in 1786, and had worked his way up to the position of agent to the Rooksby estate at Horton Pen. He had a little estate of his own, too, at the mouth of the River Minho, where he grew rice very profitably. He had been the first man to plant it on the island.

Horton Pen nestled down at the foot of the tall white scars that end the Vale of St. Thomas and are not much unlike Dover Cliffs, hanging over a sea of squares of the green cane, alternating with masses of pimento foliage. Macdonald's wife was an immensely stout, raven-haired, sloe-eyed, talkative body, the most motherly woman I have ever known – I suppose because she was childless.

What was anomalous in my position had passed away with the next outward mail. Veronica wrote to me; Ralph to his attorney and the Macdonalds. But by that time Mrs. Mac. had darned my socks ten times.

The surrounding gentry, the large resident landowners, of whom there remained a sprinkling in the Vale, were at first inclined to make much of me. There was Mrs. Topnambo, a withered, very dried-up personage, who affected pink trimmings; she gave the *ton* to the countryside as far as ton could be given to a society that rioted with hospitality. She made efforts to draw me out of the Macdonald environment, to make me differentiate myself, because I was the grandson of an earl. But the Topnambos were the great Loyalists of the place, and the Macdonalds the principal Separationists, and I stuck to the Macdonalds. I was searching for romance, you see, and could find none in Mrs. Topnambo's white figure, with its dryish, gray skin, and pink patches round the neck, that lay forever

in dark or darkened rooms, and talked querulously of “Your uncle, the earl,” whom I had never seen. I didn’t get on with the men any better. They were either very dried up and querulous, too, or else very liquorish or boisterous in an incomprehensible way. Their evenings seemed to be a constant succession of shouts of laughter, merging into undignified staggers of white trousers through blue nights – round the corners of ragged huts. I never understood the hidden sources of their humour, and I had not money enough to mix well with their lavishness. I was too proud to be indebted to them, too. They didn’t even acknowledge me on the road at last; they called me poor-spirited, a thin-blooded nobleman’s cub – a Separationist traitor – and left me to superintend niggers and save money. Mrs. Mac, good Separationist though she was, as became the wife of her husband, had the word “home” forever on her lips. She had once visited the Rooksbys at Horton; she had treasured up a host of tiny things, parts of my forgotten boyhood, and she talked of them and talked of them until that past seemed a wholly desirable time, and the present a dull thing!

Journeying in search of romance – and that, after all, is our business in this world – is much like trying to eaten the horizon. It lies a little distance before us, and a little *distance behind* – *about as far as the eye can carry*. One, discovers that one has passed through it just as one passed what is to-day our horizon – One looks back and says. “Why there it is.” One looks forward and says the same. It lies either in the old days when we used to, or in *the new days when we shall*. I look back upon those days of mine, and little things remain, come back to me, assume an atmosphere, take significance, go to the making of a *temps jadis*. Probably, when I look back upon what is the dull, arid waste of to-day, it will be much the same.

I could almost wish to take again one of the long, uninteresting night rides from the Vale to Spanish Town, or to listen once more to one of old Macdonald’s interminable harangues on the folly of Mr. Canning’s policy, or the virtues of Scotch thrift. “Jack, lad,” he used to bellow in his curious squeak of a voice, “a gentleman you may be of guid Scots blood. But ye’re a puir body’s son for a’ that.” He was set on my making money and turning honest pennies. I think he really liked me.

It was with that idea that he introduced me to Ramon, “an esteemed Spanish merchant of Kingston and Spanish Town.” Ramon had seemed mysterious when I had seen him in company with Carlos and Castro but re-introduced in the homely atmosphere of the Macdonalds, he had become merely a saturnine, tall, dusky-featured, gold-spectacled Spaniard, and very good company. I learnt nearly all my Spanish from him. The only mystery about him was the extravagantly cheap rate at which he sold his things under the flagstaff in front of Admiral Rowley’s house, the King’s House, as it was called. The admiral himself was said to have extensive dealings with Ramon; he had at least the reputation of desiring to turn an honest penny, like myself. At any rate, everyone, from the proudest planters to the editor of the *Buckatoro Journal* next door, was glad of a chat with Ramon, whose knowledge of an immense variety of things was as deep as a draw-well – and as placid.

I used to buy island produce through him, ship it to New Orleans, have it sold, and re-import parcels of “notions,” making a double profit. He was always ready to help me, and as ready to talk, saying that he had an immense respect for my relations, the Riegos.

That was how, at the end of my second year in the island, I had come to talking to him. The stage should have brought a letter from Veronica, who was to have presented Rooksby with a son and heir, but it was unaccountably late. I had been twice to the coach office, and was making my way desultorily back to Ramon’s. He was talking to the editor of the *Buckatoro Journal* – the man from next door – and to another who had, whilst I walked lazily across the blazing square, ridden furiously up to the steps of the arcade. The rider was talking to both of them with exaggerated gestures of his arms. He had ridden off, spurring, and the editor, a little, gleaming-eyed hunchback, had remained in the sunshine, talking excitedly to Ramon.

I knew him well, an amusing, queer, warped, Satanic member of society, who was a sort of nephew to the Macdonalds, and hand in glove with all the Scotch Separationists of the island. He had

started an extraordinary, scandalous paper that, to avoid sequestration, changed its name and offices every few issues, and was said by Loyalists, like the Topnambos, to have an extremely bad influence.

He subsisted a good deal on the charity of people like the Macdonalds, and I used sometimes to catch sight of him at evenfall listening to Mrs. Macdonald; he would be sitting beside her hammock on the veranda, his head very much down on his breast, very much on one side, and his great hump portending over his little white face, and ruffling up his ragged black hair. Mrs. Macdonald clacked all the scandal of the Vale, and the *Buckatoro Journal* got the benefit of it all, with adornments.

For the last month or so the Journal had been more than usually effective, and it was only because Rowley was preparing to confound his traducers by the boat attack on Rio Medio, that a warrant had not come against David. When I saw him talking to Ramon, I imagined that the rider must have brought news of a warrant, and that David was preparing for flight. He hopped nimbly from Ramon's steps into the obscurity of his own door. Ramon turned his spectacles softly upon me.

"There you have it," he said. "The folly; the folly! To send only little boats to attack such a nest of villains. It is inconceivable."

The horseman had brought news that the boats of Rowley's squadron had been beaten off with great loss, in their attack on Rio Medio.

Ramon went on with an air of immense superiority, "And all the while we merchants are losing thousands."

His dark eyes searched my face, and it came disagreeably into my head that he was playing some part; that his talk was delusive, his anger feigned; that, perhaps, he still suspected me of being a Separationist. He went on talking about the failure of the boat attack. All Jamaica had been talking of it, speculating about it, congratulating itself on it. British valour was going to tell; four boats' crews would do the trick. And now the boats had been beaten off, the crews captured, half the men killed! Already there was panic on the island. I could see men coming together in little knots, talking eagerly. I didn't like to listen to Ramon, to a Spaniard talking in that way about the defeat of my countrymen by his. I walked across the King's Square, and the stage driving up just then, I went to the office, and got my correspondence.

Veronica's letter came like a faint echo, like the sound of very distant surf, heard at night; it seemed impossible that any one could be as interested as she in the things that were happening over there. She had had a son; one of Ralph's aunts was its godmother. She and Ralph had been to Bath last spring; the country wanted water very badly. Ralph had used his influence, had explained matters to a very great personage, had spent a little money on the injured runners. In the meanwhile I had nearly forgotten the whole matter; it seemed to be extraordinary that they should still be interested in it.

I was to come back; as soon as it was safe I was to come back; that was the main tenor of the letter.

I read it in a little house of call, in a whitewashed room that contained a cardboard cat labelled "The Best," for sole ornament. Four swarthy fellows, Mexican patriots, were talking noisily about their War of Independence, and the exploits of a General Trapelascis, who had been defeating the Spanish troops over there. It was almost impossible to connect them with a world that included Veronica's delicate handwriting with the pencil lines erased at the base of each line of ink. They seemed to be infinitely more real. Even Veronica's interest in me seemed a little strange; her desire for my return irritated me. It was as if she had asked me to return to a state of bondage, after having found myself. Thinking of it made me suddenly aware that I had become a man, with a man's aims, and a disillusionized view of life. It suddenly appeared very wonderful that I could sit calmly there, surveying, for instance, those four sinister fellows with daggers, as if they were nothing at all. When I had been at home the matter would have caused me extraordinary emotions, as many as if I had seen an elephant in a travelling show. As for going back to my old life, it didn't seem to be possible.

CHAPTER TWO

One night I was riding alone towards Horton Pen. A large moon hung itself up above me like an enormous white plate. Finally the sloping roof of the Ferry Inn, with one dishevelled palm tree drooping over it, rose into the disk. The window lights were reflected like shaken torches in the river. A mass of objects, picked out with white globes, loomed in the high shadow of the inn, standing motionless. They resolved themselves into a barouche, with four horses steaming a great deal, and an army of negresses with bandboxes on their heads. A great lady was on the road; her querulous voice was calling to someone within the open door that let down a soft yellow light from the top of the precipitous steps. A nondescript object, with apparently two horns and a wheel, rested inert at the foot of the sign-post; two negroes were wiping their foreheads beside it. That resolved itself into a man slumbering in a wheelbarrow, his white face turned up to the moon. A sort of buzz of voices came from above; then a man in European clothes was silhouetted against the light in the doorway. He held a full glass very carefully and started to descend. Suddenly he stopped emotionally. Then he turned half-right and called back, "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Here's the very man! I protest, the very man!" There was an interrogative roar from within. It was like being outside a lion's cage.

People appeared and disappeared in front of the lighted door; windows stood open, with heads craning out all along the inn face. I was hurrying off the back of my horse when the admiral came out on to the steps. Someone lit a torch, and the admiral became a dark, solid figure, with the flash of the gold lace on his coat. He stood very high in the leg; had small white whiskers, and a large nose that threw a vast shadow on to his forehead in the upward light; his high collar was open, and a mass of white appeared under his chin; his head was uncovered. A third male face, very white, bobbed up and down beside his shining left shoulder. He kept on saying:

"What? what? what? Hey, what?.. That man?" He appeared to be halfway between supreme content and violent anger. At last he delivered himself. "Let's duck him... hey?.. Let's duck him!" He spoke with a sort of benevolent chuckle, then raised his voice and called, "Tinsley! Tinsley! Where the deuce is Tinsley?"

A high nasal sound came from the carriage window. "Sir Charles! Sir Charles! Let there be no scene in my presence, I beg."

I suddenly saw, halfway up, laboriously ascending the steps, a black figure, indistinguishable at first on account of deformities. It was David Macdonald. Since his last, really terrible comments on the failure of the boat-attack, he had been lying hidden somewhere. It came upon me in a flash that he was making his way from one hiding place to another. In making his escape from Spanish Town, either to Kingston or the Vale, he had run against the admiral and his party returning from the Topnambos' ball. It was hardly a coincidence: everyone on the road met at the Ferry Inn. But that hardly made the thing more pleasant.

Sir Charles continued to clamour for Tinsley, his flag lieutenant, who, as a matter of fact, was the man drunk in the wheelbarrow. When this was explained by the shouts of the negroes, he grunted, "Umph!" turned on the man at his side, and said, "Here, Oldham; you lend a hand to duck the little toad." It was the sort of thing that the thirsty climate of Jamaica rendered frequent enough. Oldham dropped his glass and protested. Macdonald continued silently and enigmatically to climb the steps; now he was in for it he showed plenty of pluck. No doubt he recognized that, if the admiral made a fool of himself, he would be afraid to issue warrants in soberness. I could not stand by and see them bully the wretched little creature. At the same time I didn't, most decidedly, want to identify myself with him.

I called out impulsively, "Sir Charles, surely you would not use violence to a cripple."

Then, very suddenly, they all got to action, David Macdonald reaching the top of the steps. Shrieks came from the interior of the carriage, and from the waiting *négresses*. I saw three men were falling upon a little thing like a damaged cat. I couldn't stand that, come what might of it.

I ran hastily up the steps, hoping to be able to make them recover their senses, a force of purely conventional emotion impelling me. It was no business of mine; I didn't want to interfere, and I felt like a man hastening to separate half a dozen fighting dogs too large to be pleasant.

When I reached the top, there was a sort of undignified scuffle, and in the end I found myself standing above a ghastly white gentleman who, from a sitting posture, was gasping out, "I'll commit you!.. I swear I'll commit you!.." I helped him to his feet rather apologetically, while the admiral behind me was asking insistently who the deuce I was. The man I had picked up retreated a little, and then turned back to look at me. The light was shining on my face, and he began to call out, "I know him. I know him perfectly well. He's John Kemp. I'll commit him at once. The papers are in the barouche." After that he seemed to take it into his head that I was going to assault him again. He bolted out of sight, and I was left facing the admiral. He stared at me contemptuously. I was streaming with perspiration and upbraiding him for assaulting a cripple.

The admiral said, "Oh, that's what you think? I will settle with you presently. This is rank mutiny." I looked at Oldham, who was the admiral's secretary. He was extremely dishevelled about his neck, much as if a monkey had been clawing him thereabouts. Half of his roll collar flapped on his heaving chest; his stock hung down behind like a cue. I had seen him kneeling on the ground with his head pinned down by the hunchback. I said loftily:

"What did you set him on a little beggar like that for? You were three to one. What did you expect?"

The admiral swore. Oldham began to mop with a lace handkerchief at a damaged upper lip from which a stream of blood was running; he even seemed to be weeping a little. Finally, he vanished in at the door, very much bent together. The undaunted David hopped in after him coolly.

The admiral said, "I know your kind. You're a treasonous dog, sir. This is mutiny. You shall be made an example of."

All the same he must have been ashamed of himself, for presently he and the two others went down the steps without even looking at me, and their carriage rolled away.

Inside the inn I found a couple of merchant captains, one asleep with his head on the table and little rings shining in his great red ears; the other very spick and span – of what they called the new school then. His name was Williams – Captain Williams of the *Lion*, which he part owned; a man of some note for the dinners he gave on board his ship. His eyes sparkled blue and very round in a round rosy face, and he clawed effusively at my arm.

"Well done!" he bubbled over. "You gave it them; strike me, you did! It did me good to see and hear. I wasn't going to poke my nose in, not I. But I admire you, my boy."

He was a quite guileless man with a strong dislike for the admiral's blundering – a dislike that all the seamen shared – and for people of the Topnambo kidney who affected to be above his dinners. He assured me that I had burst upon those gentry roaring... "like the Bull of Bashan. You should have seen!" and he drank my health in a glass of punch.

David Macdonald joined us, looming through wreaths of tobacco smoke. He was always very nice in his dress, and had washed himself into a state of enviable coolness.

"They won't touch me now," he said. "I wanted that assault and battery..." He suddenly turned vivid, sarcastic black eyes upon me. "But you," he said – "my dear Kemp! You're in a devil of a scrape! They'll have a warrant out against you under the Black Act. I know the gentry."

"Oh, he won't mind," Williams struck in, "I know him; he's a trump. Afraid of nothing."

David Macdonald made a movement of his head that did duty for an ominous shake:

“It’s a devil of a mess,” he said. “But I’ll touch them up. Why did you hit Topnambo? He’s the spitefullest beast in the island. They’ll make it out high treason. They are capable of sending you home on this charge.”

“Oh, never say die.” Williams turned to me, “Come and dine with me on board at Kingston to-morrow night. If there’s any fuss I’ll see what I can do. Or you can take a trip with me to Havana till it blows over. My old woman’s on board.” His face fell. “But there, you’ll get round her. I’ll see you through.”

They drank some sangaree and became noisy. I wasn’t very happy; there was much truth in what David Macdonald had said. Topnambo would certainly do his best to have me in jail – to make an example of me as a Separationist to please the admiral and the Duke of Manchester. Under the spell of his liquor Williams became more and more pressing with his offers of help.

“It’s the devil that my missus should be on board, just this trip. But hang it! come and dine with me. I’ll get some of the Kingston men – the regular hot men – to stand up for you. They will when they hear the tale.”

There was a certain amount of sense in what he said. If warrants were out against me, he or some of the Kingston merchants whom he knew, and who had no cause to love the admiral, might help me a good deal.

Accordingly, I did go down to Kingston. It happened to be the day when the seven pirates were hanged at Port Royal Point. I had never seen a hanging, and a man who hadn’t was rare in those days. I wanted to keep out of the way, but it was impossible to get a boatman to row me off to the *Lion*. They were all dying to see the show, and, half curious, half reluctant, I let myself drift with the crowd.

The gallows themselves stood high enough to be seen – a long very stout beam supported by posts at each end. There was a blazing sun, and the crowd pushed and shouted and craned its thousands of heads every time one heard the cry of “Here they come,” for an hour or so. There was a very limpid sky, a very limpid sea, a scattering of shipping gliding up and down, and the very silent hills a long way away. There was a large flavour of Spaniards among the crowd. I got into the middle of a knot of them, jammed against the wheels of one of the carriages, standing, hands down, on tiptoe, staring at the long scaffold. There were a great many false alarms, sudden outcries, hushing again rather slowly. In between I could hear someone behind me talk Spanish to the occupants of the carriage. I thought the voice was Ramon’s, but I could not turn, and the people in the carriage answered in French, I thought. A man was shouting “Cool Drinks” on the other side of them.

Finally, there was a roar, an irresistible swaying, a rattle of musket ramrods, a rhythm of marching feet, and the grating of heavy iron-bound wheels. Seven men appeared in sight above the heads, clinging to each other for support, and being drawn slowly along. The little worsted balls on the infantry shakos bobbed all round their feet. They were a sorry-looking group, those pirates; very wild-eyed, very ragged, dust-stained, weather-beaten, begrimed till they had the colour of unpolished mahogany. Clinging still to each other as they stood beneath the dangling ropes of the long beam, they had the appearance of a group of statuary to forlorn misery. Festoons of chains completed the “composition.”

One was a very old man with long yellow-white hair, one a negro whose skin had no lustre at all. The rest were very dark-skinned, peak-bearded, and had long hair falling round their necks. A soldier with a hammer and a small anvil climbed into the cart, and bent down out of sight. There was a ring of iron on iron, and the man next the very old man raised his arms and began to speak very slowly, very distinctly, and very mournfully. It was quite easy to understand him; he declared his perfect innocence. No one listened to him; his name was Pedro Nones. He ceased speaking, and someone on a horse, the High Sheriff, I think, galloped impatiently past the cart and shouted. Two men got into the cart, one pulled the rope, the other caught the pirate by the elbows. He jerked himself loose, and began to cry out; he seemed to be lost in amazement, and shrieked:

“*Adonde está el padre?.. Adonde está el padre?*” No one answered; there wasn’t a priest of any denomination; I don’t know whether the omission was purposed. The man’s face grew convulsed with agony, his eyeballs stared out very white and vivid, as he struggled with the two men. He began to curse us epileptically for compassing his damnation. A hoarse patter of Spanish imprecations came from the crowd immediately round me. The man with the voice like Ramon’s groaned in a lamentable way; someone else said, “What infamy.. what infamy!”

An aged voice said tremulously in the carriage, “This shall be a matter of official remonstrance.” Another said, “Ah, these English heretics!”

There was a forward rush of the crowd, which carried me away. Someone in front began to shout orders, and the crowd swayed back again. The infantry muskets rattled. The commotion lasted some time. When it ceased, I saw that the man about to die had been kissing the very old man; tears were streaming down the gray, parchment-coloured cheeks. Pedro Nones had the rope round his neck; it curved upwards loosely towards the beam, growing taut as the cart jolted away. He shouted:

“*Adiós, viejo, para siempre adi —*”

My whole body seemed to go dead all over. I happened to look downwards at my hands; they were extraordinarily white, with the veins standing out all over them. They felt as if they had been sodden in water, and it was quite a long time before they recovered their natural colour. The rest of the men were hung after that, the cart jolting a little way backwards and forwards and growing less crowded after every journey. One man, who was very large framed and stout, had to go through it twice because the rope broke. He made a good deal of fuss. My head ached, and after the involuntary straining and craning to miss no details was over, I felt sick and dazed. The people talked a great deal as they streamed back, loosening over the broader stretch of pebbles; they seemed to wish to remind each other of details. I have an idea that one or two, in the sheer largeness of heart that seizes one after occasions of popular emotions, asked me in exulting voices if I had seen the nigger’s tongue sticking out.

Others thought that there wasn’t very much to be exultant over. We had not really captured the pirates; they had been handed over to the admiral by the Havana authorities – as an international courtesy I suppose, or else because they were pirates of no account and short in funds, or because the admiral had been making a fuss in front of the Morro. It was even asserted by the anti-admiral faction that the seven weren’t pirates at all, but merely Cuban *mauvais sujets*, hawkers of derogatory *coplas*, and known freethinkers. In any case, excited people cheered the High Sheriff and the returning infantry, because it was pleasant to hang any kind of Spaniard. I got nearly knocked down by the kettle-drummers, who came through the scattering crowd at a swinging quick-step. As I cannoned off the drums, a hand caught at my arm, and someone else began to speak to me. It was old Ramon, who was telling me that he had a special kind of Manchester goods at his store. He explained that they had arrived very lately, and that he had come from Spanish Town solely on their account. One made the eighth of a penny a yard more on them than on any other kind. If I would deign to have some of it offered to my inspection, he had his little curricule just off the road. He was drawing me gently towards it all the time, and I had not any idea of resisting. He had been behind in the crowd, he said, beside the carriage of the commissioner and the judge of the Marine Court sent by the Havana authorities to deliver the pirates.

It was after that, that in Ramon’s dusky store, I had my first sight of Seraphina and of her father, and then came my meeting with Carlos. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him come out with extended hand. It was an extraordinary sensation, that of talking to Carlos again. He seemed to have worn badly. His face had lost its moist bloom, its hardly distinguishable subcutaneous flush. It had grown very, very pale. Dark blue circles took away from the blackness and sparkle of his eyes. And he coughed, and coughed.

He put his arm affectionately round my shoulders and said, “How splendid to see you again, my Juan.” His eyes had affection in them, there was no doubt about that, but I felt vaguely suspicious of

him. I remembered how we had parted on board the *Thames*. “We can talk here,” he added; “it is very pleasant. You shall see my uncle, that great man, the star of Cuban law, and my cousin Seraphina, your kinsfolk. They love you; I have spoken well of you.” He smiled gayly, and went on, “This is not a place befitting his greatness, nor my cousin’s, nor, indeed, my own.” He smiled again. “But I shall be very soon dead, and to me it matters little.” He frowned a little, and then laughed. “But you should have seen the faces of your officers when my uncle refused to go to their governor’s palace; there was to have been a *fiesta*, a ‘reception’; is it not the word? It will cause a great scandal.”

He smiled with a good deal of fine malice, and looked as if he expected me to be pleased. I said that I did not quite understand what had offended his uncle.

“Oh, it was because there was no priest,” Carlos answered, “when those poor devils were hung. They were *canaille*. Yes; but one gives that much even to such. And my uncle was there in his official capacity as a plenipotentiary. He was very much distressed: we were all. You heard, my uncle himself had advised their being surrendered to your English. And when there was no priest he repented very bitterly. Why, after all, it was an infamy.”

He paused again, and leant back against the counter. When his eyes were upon the ground and his face not animated by talking, there became lamentably insistent his pallor, the deep shadows under his eyes, and infinite sadness in the droop of his features, as if he were preoccupied by an all-pervading and hopeless grief. When he looked at me, he smiled, however.

“Well, at worst it is over, and my uncle is here in this dirty place instead of at your palace. We sail back to Cuba this very evening.” He looked round him at Ramon’s calicos and sugar tubs in the dim light, as if he accepted almost incredulously the fact that they could be in such a place, and the manner of his voice indicated that he thought our governor’s palace would have been hardly less barbarous. “But I am sorry,” he said suddenly, “because I wanted you – you and all your countrymen – to make a good impression on him. You must do it yourself alone. And you will. You are not like these others. You are our kinsman, and I have praised you very much. You saved my life.”

I began to say that I had done nothing at all, but he waved his hand with a little smile.

“You are very brave,” he said, as if to silence me. “I am not ungrateful.”

He began again to ask for news from home – from my home. I told him that Veronica had a baby, and he sighed.

“She married the excellent Rooksby?” he asked. “Ah, what a waste.” He relapsed into silence again. “There was no woman in your land like her. She might have – And to marry that – that excellent personage, my good cousin. It is a tragedy.”

“It was a very good match,” I answered.

He sighed again. “My uncle is asleep in there, now,” he said, after a pause, pointing at the inner door. “We must not wake him; he is a very old man. You do not mind talking to me? You will wait to see them? Dona Seraphina is here, too.”

“You have not married your cousin?” I asked.

I wanted very much to see the young girl who had looked at me for a moment, and I certainly should have been distressed if Carlos had said she was married.

He answered, “What would you have?” and shrugged his shoulders gently. A smile came into his face. “She is very willful. I did not please her, I do not know why. Perhaps she has seen too many men like me.”

He told me that, when he reached Cuba, after parting with me on the *Thames*, his uncle, “in spite of certain influences,” had received him quite naturally as his heir, and the future head of the family. But Seraphina, whom by the laws of convenience he ought to have married, had quite calmly refused him.

“I did not impress her; she is romantic. She wanted a very bold man, a Cid, something that it is not easy to have.”

He paused again, and looked at me with some sort of challenge in his eyes.

“She could have met no one better than you,” I said.

He waved his hand a little. “Oh, for that – ” he said deprecatingly. “Besides, I am dying. I have never been well since I went into your cold sea, over there, after we left your sister. You remember how I coughed on board that miserable ship.”

I did remember it very well.

He went to the inner door, looked in, and then came back to me.

“Seraphina needs a guide – a controller – someone very strong and gentle, and kind and brave. My uncle will never ask her to marry against her wish; he is too old and has too little will. And for any man who would marry her – except one – there would be great dangers, for her and for him. It would need a cool man, and a brave man, and a good one, too, to hazard, perhaps even life, for her sake. She will be very rich. All our lands, all our towns, all our gold.” There was a suggestion of fabulousness in his dreamy voice. “They shall never be mine,” he added. “*Vaya*.”

He looked at me with his piercing eyes set to an expression that might have been gentle mockery. At any rate, it also contained intense scrutiny, and, perhaps, a little of appeal. I sighed myself.

“There is a man called O’Brien in there,” he said. “He does us the honour to pretend to my cousin’s hand.”

I felt singularly angry. “Well, he’s not a Spaniard,” I said.

Carlos answered mockingly, “Oh, for Spaniard, no. He is a descendant of the Irish kings.”

“He’s an adventurer,” I said. “You ought to be on your guard. You don’t know these bog-trotting fortune-hunters. They’re the laughter of Europe, kings and all.”

Carlos smiled again. “He’s a very dangerous man for all that,” he said. “I should not advise any one to come to Rio Medio, my uncle’s town, without making a friend of the Señor O’Brien.”

He went once more to the inner door, and, after a moment’s whispering with someone within, returned to me.

“My uncle still sleeps,” he said. “I must keep you a little longer. Ah, yes, the Señor O’Brien. He shall marry my cousin, I think, when I am dead.”

“You don’t know these fellows,” I said.

“Oh, I know them very well,” Carlos smiled, “there are many of them at Havana. They came there after what they call the ‘98, when there was great rebellion in Ireland, and many good Catholics were killed and ruined.”

“Then he’s a rebel, and ought to be hung,” I said.

Carlos laughed as of old. “It may be, but, my good Juan, we Christians do not see eye to eye with you. This man rebelled against your government, but, also, he suffered for the true faith. He is a good Catholic; he has suffered for it; and in the Ever Faithful Island, that is a passport. He has climbed very high; he is a judge of the Marine Court at Havana. That is why he is here to-day, attending my uncle in this affair of delivering up the pirates. My uncle loves him very much. O’Brien was at first my uncle’s clerk, and my uncle made him a *juez*, and he is also the intendant of my uncle’s estates, and he has a great influence in my uncle’s town of Rio Medio. I tell you, if you come to visit us, it will be as well to be on good terms with the Señor Juez O’Brien. My uncle is a very old man, and if I die before him, this O’Brien, I think, will end by marrying my cousin, because my poor uncle is very much in his hands. There are other pretenders, but they have little chance, because it is so very dangerous to come to my uncle’s town of Rio Medio, on account of this man’s intrigues and of his power with the populace.”

I looked at Carlos intently. The name of the town had seemed to be familiar to me. Now I suddenly remembered that it was where Nicolas el Demonio, the pirate who was so famous as to be almost mythical, had beaten off Admiral Rowley’s boats.

“Come, you had better see this Irish hidalgo who wants to do us so much honour,” – he gave an inscrutable glance at me, – “but do not talk loudly till my uncle wakes.”

He threw the door open. I followed him into the room, where the vision of the ancient Don and the charming apparition of the young girl had retreated only a few moments before.

CHAPTER THREE

The room was very lofty and coldly dim; there were great bars in front of the begrimed windows. It was very bare, containing only a long black table, some packing cases, and half a dozen rocking chairs. Of these, five were very new and one very old, black and heavy, with a green leather seat and a coat of arms worked on its back cushions. There were little heaps of mahogany sawdust here and there on the dirty tiled floor, and a pile of sacking in one corner. Beneath a window the flap of an open trap-door half hid a large green damp-stain; a deep recess in the wall yawned like a cavern, and had two or three tubs in the right corner; a man with a blond head, slightly bald as if he had been tonsured, was rocking gently in one of the new chairs.

Opposite him, with his aged face towards us, sat the old Don asleep in the high chair. His delicate white hands lay along the arms, one of them holding a gold vinaigrette; his black, silver-headed cane was between his silk-stockinged legs. The diamond buckles of his shoes shot out little vivid rays, even in that gloomy place. The young girl was sitting with her hands to her temples and her elbows on the long table, minutely examining the motionlessness of a baby lizard, a tiny thing with golden eyes, whom fear seemed to have turned into stone.

We entered quietly, and after a moment she looked up candidly into my eyes, and placed her finger on her lips, motioning her head towards her father. She placed her hand in mine, and whispered very clearly:

“Be welcome, my English cousin,” and then dropped her eyes again to the lizard.

She knew all about me from Carlos. The man of whom I had seen only the top of his head, turned his chair suddenly and glinted at me with little blue eyes. He was rather small and round, with very firm flesh, and very white, plump hands. He was dressed in the black clothes of a Spanish judge. On his round face there was always a smile like that which hangs around the jaws of a pike – only more humorous. He bowed a little exaggeratedly to me and said:

“Ah, ye are that famous Mr. Kemp.”

I said that I imagined him the more famous Señor Juez O’Brien.

“It’s little use saying ye arren’t famous,” he said. His voice had the faint, infinitely sweet twang of certain Irishry; a thing as delicate and intangible as the scent of lime flowers. “Our noble friend” – he indicated Carlos with a little flutter of one white hand – “has told me what make of a dare-devil gallant ye are; breaking the skulls of half the Bow Street runners for the sake of a friend in distress. Well, I honour ye for it; I’ve done as much myself.” He added, “In the old days,” and sighed.

“You mean in the ‘98,” I said, a little insolently.

O’Brien’s eyes twinkled. He had, as a matter of fact, nearly lost his neck in the Irish fiasco, either in Clonmel or Sligo, bolting violently from the English dragoons, in the mist, to a French man-of-war’s boats in the bay. To him, even though he was now a judge in Cuba, it was an episode of heroism of youth – of romance, in fact. So that, probably, he did not resent my mention of it. I certainly wanted to resent something that was slighting in his voice, and patronizing in his manner.

The old Don slumbered placidly, his face turned up to the distant begrimed ceiling.

“Now, I’ll make you a fair offer,” O’Brien said suddenly, after an intent study of the insolent glance that I gave him. I disliked him because I knew nothing about the sort of man he was. He was, as a matter of fact, more alien to me than Carlos. And he gave me the impression that, if perhaps he were not absolutely the better man, he could still make a fool of me, or at least make me look like a fool.

“I’m told you are a Separationist,” he said. “Well, it’s like me. I am an Irishman; there has been a price on my head in another island. And there are warrants out against you here for assaulting the admiral. We can work together, and there’s nothing low in what I have in mind for you.”

He had heard frequently from Carlos that I was a desperate and aristocratically lawless young man, who had lived in a district entirely given up to desperate and murderous smugglers. But this was

the first I had heard definitely of warrants against me in Jamaica. That, no doubt, he had heard from Ramon, who knew everything. In all this little sardonic Irishman said to me, it seemed the only thing worth attention. It stuck in my mind while, in persuasive tones, and with airy fluency, he discoursed of the profits that could be made, nowadays, in arming privateers under the Mexican flag. He told me I needn't be surprised at their being fitted out in a Spanish colony. "There's more than one aspect to disloyalty like this," said he dispassionately, but with a quick wink contrasting with his tone.

Spain resented our recognition of their rebellious colonies. And with the same cool persuasiveness, relieved by humorous smiles, he explained that the loyal Spaniards of the Ever Faithful Island thought there was no sin in doing harm to the English, even under the Mexican flag, whose legal existence they did not recognize.

"Mind ye, it's an organized thing, I have something to say in it. It hurts Mr. Canning's Government at home, the curse of Cromwell on him and them. They will be dropping some of their own colonies directly. And as you are a Separationist, small blame to you, and I am an Irishman, we shan't cry our eyes out over it. Come, Mr. Kemp, 'tis all for the good of the Cause... And there's nothing *low*. You are a gentleman, and I wouldn't propose anything that was. The very best people in Havana are interested in the matter. Our schooners lie in Rio Medio, but I can't be there all the time myself."

Surprise deprived me of speech. I glanced at Carlos. He was watching us inscrutably. The young girl touched the lizard gently, but it was too frightened to move. O'Brien, with shrewd glances, rocked his chair... What did I want? he inquired. To see life? What he proposed was the life for a fine young fellow like me. Moreover, I was half Scotch. Had I forgotten the wrongs of my own country? Had I forgotten the '45?

"You'll have heard tell of a Scotch Chief Justice whose son spent in Amsterdam the money his father earned on the justice seat in Edinb'ro' – money paid for rum and run silks."

Of course I had heard of it; everybody had; but it had been some years before.

"We're backwards hereabouts," O'Brien jeered. "But over there they winked and chuckled at the judge, and they do the same in Havana at us."

Suddenly from behind us the voice of the young girl said, "Of what do you discourse, my English cousin?"

O'Brien interposed deferentially. "Señorita, I ask him to come to Rio," he said.

She turned her large dark eyes scrutinizingly upon me, then dropped them again. She was arranging some melon seeds in a rayed circle round the lizard that looked motionlessly at her.

"Do not speak very loudly, lest you awaken my father," she warned us.

The old Don's face was still turned to the ceiling. Carlos, standing behind his chair, opened his mouth a little in a half smile. I was really angry with O'Brien by that time, with his air of omniscience, superiority, and self-content, as if he were talking to a child or someone very credulous and weak-minded.

"What right have you to speak for me, Señor Juez?" I said in the best Spanish I could.

The young girl looked at me once more, and then again looked down.

"Oh, I can speak for you," he answered in English, "because I know. Your position's this." He sat down in his rocking chair, crossed his legs, and looked at me as if he expected me to show signs of astonishment at his knowing so much. "You're in a hole. You must leave this island of Jamaica – surely it's as distressful as my own dear land – and you can't go home, because the runners would be after you. You're 'wanted' here as well as there, and you've nowhere to go."

I looked at him, quite startled by this view of my case. He extended one plump hand towards me, and still further lowered his voice.

"Now, I offer you a good berth, a snug berth. And 'tis a pretty spot." He got a sort of languorous honey into his voice, and drawled out, "The – the Señorita's." He took an air of businesslike candour. "You can help us, and we you; we could do without you better than you without us. Our undertaking

– there’s big names in it, just as in the Free Trading you know so well, don’t be saying you don’t – is worked from Havana. What we need is a man we can trust. We had one – Nichols. You remember the mate of the ship you came over in. He was Nicola el Demonio; he won’t be any longer – I can’t tell you why, it’s too long a story.”

I did remember very vividly that cadaverous Nova Scotian mate of the *Thames*, who had warned me with truculent menaces against showing my face in Rio Medio. I remembered his sallow, shiny cheeks, and the exaggerated gestures of his claw-like hands.

O’Brien smiled. “Nichols is alive right enough, but no more good than if he were dead. And that’s the truth. He pretends his nerve’s gone; he was a devil among tailors for a time, but he’s taken to crying now. It was when your blundering old admiral’s boats had to be beaten off that his zeal cooled. He thinks the British Government will rise in its strength.” There was a bitter contempt in his voice, but he regained his calm business tone. “It will do nothing of the sort. I’ve given them those seven poor devils that had to die to-day without absolution. So Nichols is done for, as far as we are concerned. I’ve got him put away to keep him from blabbing. You can have his place – and better than his place. He was only a sailor, which you are not. However, you know enough of ships, and what we want is a man with courage, of course, but also a man we can trust. Any of the Creoles would bolt into the bush the moment they’d five dollars in hand. We’ll pay you well; a large share of all you take.”

I laughed outright. “You’re quite mistaken in your man,” I said. “You are, really.”

He shook his head gently, and brushed an invisible speck from his plump black knees.

“You *must* go somewhere,” he said. “Why not go with us?”

I looked at him, puzzled by his tenacity and assurance.

“Ramon here has told us you battered the admiral last night; and there’s a warrant out already against you for attempted murder. You’re hand and glove with the best of the Separationists in this island, I know, but they won’t save you from being committed – for rebellion, perhaps. You know it as well as I do. You were down here to take a passage to-day, weren’t you, now?”

I remembered that the Island Loyalists said that the pirates and Separationists worked together to bother the admiral and raise discontent. Living in the centre of Separationist discontent with the Macdonalds, I knew it was not true. But nothing was too bad to say against the planters who clamoured for union with the United States.

O’Brien leaned forward. His voice had a note of disdain, and then took one of deeper earnestness; it sank into his chest. He extended his hand; his eyebrows twitched. He looked – he was – a conspirator.

“I tell you I do it for the sake of Ireland,” he said passionately. “Every ship we take, every clamour they raise here, is a stroke and is disgrace for them over there that have murdered us and ruined my own dear land.” His face worked convulsively; I was in the presence of one of the primeval passions. But he grew calm immediately after. “*You* want Separation for reasons of your own. I don’t ask what they are. No doubt you and your crony Macdonald and the rest of them will feather your own nests; I don’t ask. But help me to be a thorn in their sides – just a little – just a little longer. What do I put in your way? Just what you want. Have your Jamaica joined to the United States. You’ll be able to come back with your pockets full, and I’ll be joyful – for the sake of my own dear land.”

I said suddenly and recklessly – if I had to face one race-passion, he had to look at another; we were cat and dog – Celt and Saxon, as it was in the beginning: “I am not a traitor to my country.” Then I realized with sudden concern that I had probably awakened the old Don. He stirred uneasily in his chair, and lifted one hand.

“The moment I go out from here I’ll denounce you,” I said very low; “I swear I will. You’re here; you can’t get away; you’ll swing.”

O’Brien started. His eyes blazed at me. Then he frowned. “I’ve been misled,” he muttered, with a dark glance at Carlos. And recovering his jocular serenity, “Ye mean it?” he asked; “it’s not British heroics?”

The old Don stirred again and sighed. The young girl glided swiftly to his side. "Señor O'Brien," she said, "you have so irritated my English cousin that he has awakened my father."

O'Brien grinned gently. "'Tis ever the way," he said sardonically. "The English fools do the harm and the Irish fool gets the kicking." He rose to his feet, quite collected, a spick-and-span little man. "I suppose I've said too much. Well, well! You are going to denounce the senior judge of the Marine Court of Havana as a pirate. I wonder who will believe you!" He went behind the old Don's chair with the gliding motion of a Spanish lawyer, and slipped down the open trap-hatch near the window.

It was the disappearance of a shadow. I heard some guttural mutterings come up through the hatch, a rustling, then silence. If he was afraid of me at all he carried it off very well. I apologized to the young girl for having awakened her father. Her colour was very high, and her eyes sparkled. If she had not been so very beautiful I should have gone away at once. She said angrily:

"He is odious to me, the Señor Juez. Too long my father has suffered his insolence." She was very small, but she had an extraordinary dignity of command. "I could see, Señor, that he was annoying you. Why should you consider such a creature?" Her head drooped. "But my father is very old."

I turned upon Carlos, who stood all black in the light of the window.

"Why did you make me meet him? He may be a judge of your Marine Court, but he's nothing but a scoundrelly bog-trotter."

Carlos said a little haughtily, "You must not denounce him. You should not leave this place if I feared you would try thus to bring dishonour on this gray head, and involve this young girl in a public scandal." His manner became soft. "For the honour of the house you shall say nothing. And you shall come with us. I need you."

I was full of mistrust now. If he did countenance this unlawful enterprise, whose headquarters were in Rio Medio, he was not the man for me. Though it was big enough to be made, by the papers at home, of political importance, it was, after all, neither more nor less than piracy. The idea of my turning a sort of Irish traitor was so extravagantly outrageous that now I could smile at the imbecility of that fellow O'Brien. As to turning into a sea-thief for lucre – my blood boiled.

No. There was something else there. Something deep; something dangerous; some intrigue, that I could not conceive even the first notion of. But that Carlos wanted anxiously to make use of me for some purpose was clear. I was mystified to the point of forgetting how heavily I was compromised even in Jamaica, though it was worth remembering, because at that time an indictment for rebellion – under the Black Act – was no joking matter. I might be sent home under arrest; and even then, there was my affair with the runners.

"It is coming to pay a visit," he was saying persuasively, "while your affair here blows over, my Juan – and – and – making my last hours easy, perhaps."

I looked at him; he was worn to a shadow – a shadow with dark wistful eyes. "I don't understand you," I faltered.

The old man stirred, opened his lids, and put a gold vinaigrette to his nostrils.

"Of course I shall not denounce O'Brien," I said. "I, too, respect the honour of your house."

"You are even better than I thought you. And if I entreat you, for the love of your mother – of your sister? Juan, it is not for myself, it is –"

The young girl was pouring some drops from a green phial into a silver goblet; she passed close to us, and handed it to her father, who had leant a little forward in his chair. Every movement of hers affected me with an intimate joy; it was as if I had been waiting to see just that carriage of the neck, just that proud glance from the eyes, just that droop of eyelashes upon the cheeks, for years and years.

"No, I shall hold my tongue, and that's enough," I said.

At that moment the old Don sat up and cleared his throat. Carlos sprang towards him with an infinite grace of tender obsequiousness. He mentioned my name and the relationship, then rehearsed the innumerable titles of his uncle, ending "and patron of the Bishopric of Pinar del Rio."

I stood stiffly in front of the old man. He bowed his head at intervals, holding the silver cup carefully whilst his chair rocked a little. When Carlos' mellow voice had finished the rehearsing of the sonorous styles, I mumbled something about "transcendent honour."

He stopped me with a little, deferentially peremptory gesture of one hand, and began to speak, smiling with a contraction of the lips and a trembling of the head. His voice was very low, and quavered slightly, but every syllable was enunciated with the same beauty of clearness that there was in his features, in his hands, in his ancient gestures.

"The honour is to me," he said, "and the pleasure. I behold my kinsman, who, with great heroism, I am told, rescued my dearly loved nephew from great dangers; it is an honour to me to be able to give him thanks. My beloved and lamented sister contracted a union with an English *hidalgo*, through whose house your own very honourable family is allied to my own; it is a pleasure to me to meet after many years with one who has seen the places where her later life was passed."

He paused, and breathed with some difficulty, as if the speech had exhausted him. Afterwards he began to ask me questions about Rooksby's aunt – the lamented sister of his speech. He had loved her greatly, he said. I knew next to nothing about her, and his fine smile and courtly, aged, deferential manners made me very nervous. I felt as if I had been taken to pay a ceremonial visit to a supreme pontiff in his dotage. He spoke about Horton Priory with some animation for a little while, and then faltered, and forgot what he was speaking of. Suddenly he said:

"But where is O'Brien? Did he write to the Governor here? I should like you to know the Señor O'Brien. He is a spiritual man."

I forbore to say that I had already seen O'Brien, and the old man sank into complete silence. It was beginning to grow dark, and the noise of suppressed voices came from the open trap-door. Nobody said anything.

I felt a sort of uneasiness; I could by no means understand the connection between the old Don and what had gone before, and I did not, in a purely conventional sense, know how long I ought to stop. The sky through the barred windows had grown pallid.

The old Don said suddenly, "You must visit my poor town of Rio Medio," but he gave no specific invitation and said nothing more.

Afterwards he asked, rather querulously, "But where is O'Brien? He must write those letters for me."

The young girl said, "He has preceded us to the ship; he will write there."

She had gone back to her seat. Don Balthasar shrugged his shoulders to his ears, and moved his hands from his knees.

"Without doubt, he knows best," he said, "but he should ask me."

It grew darker still; the old Don seemed to have fallen asleep again. Save for the gleam of the silver buckle of his hat, he had disappeared into the gloom of the place. I remembered my engagement to dine with Williams on board the *Lion*, and I rose to my feet. There did not seem to be any chance of my talking to the young girl. She was once more leaning nonchalantly over the lizard, and her hair drooped right across her face like clusters of grapes. There was a gleam on a little piece of white forehead, and all around and about her there were shadows deepening. Carlos came concernedly towards me as I looked at the door.

"But you must not go yet," he said a little suavely; "I have many things to say. Tell me –"

His manner heightened my uneasiness to a fear. The expression of his eyes changed, and they became fixed over my shoulder, while on his lips the words "You must come, you must come," trembled, hardly audible. I could only shake my head. At once he stepped back as if resigning. He was giving me up – and it occurred to me that if the danger of his seduction was over, there remained the danger of arrest just outside the door.

Some one behind me said peremptorily, "It is time," and there was a flickering diminution of the light. I had a faint instantaneous view of the old Don dozing, with his head back – of the tall

windows, cut up into squares by the black bars. Something hairily coarse ran harshly down my face; I grew blind; my mouth, my eyes, my nostrils were filled with dust; my breath shut in upon me became a flood of warm air. I had no time to resist. I kicked my legs convulsively; my elbows were drawn tight against my sides. Someone grunted under my weight; then I was carried – down, along, up, down again; my feet were knocking along a wall, and the top of my head rubbed occasionally against what must have been the roof of a low stone passage, issuing from under the back room of Ramon's store. Finally, I was dropped upon something that felt like a heap of wood-shavings. My surprise, rage, and horror had been so great that, after the first stifled cry, I had made no sound. I heard the footsteps of several men going away.

CHAPTER FOUR

I remained lying there, bound hand and foot, for a long time; for quite long enough to allow me to collect my senses and see that I had been a fool to threaten O'Brien. I had been nobly indignant, and behold! I had a sack thrown over my head for my pains, and was put away safely somewhere or other. It seemed to be a cellar.

I was in search of romance, and here were all the elements; Spaniards, a conspirator, and a kidnapping; but I couldn't feel a fool and romantic as well. True romance, I suppose, needs a whirl of emotions to extinguish all the senses except that of sight, which it dims. Except for sight, which I hadn't at all, I had the use of them all, and all reported unpleasant things.

I ached and smarted with my head in a sack, with my mouth full of flour that had gone mouldy and offended my nostrils; I had a sense of ignominy, and I was extremely angry; I could see that the old Don was in his dotage – but Carlos I was bitter against.

I was not really afraid; I could not suppose that the Riegos would allow me to be murdered or seriously maltreated. But I was incensed against Fate or Chance or whatever it is – on account of the ignominious details, the coarse sack, the mouldy flour, the stones of the tunnel that had barked my shins, the tightness of the ropes that bound my ankles together, and seemed to cut into my wrists behind my back.

I waited, and my fury grew in a dead silence. How would it end – with what outrage? I would show my contempt and preserve my dignity by submitting without a struggle – I despised this odious plot. At last there were voices, footsteps; I found it very hard to carry out my resolution and refrain from stifled cries and kicks. I was lifted up and carried, like a corpse, with many stumbles, by men who sometimes growled as they hastened along. From time to time somebody murmured, "Take care." Then I was deposited into a boat. The world seemed to be swaying, splashing, jarring – and it became obvious to me that I was being taken to some ship. The Spanish ship, of course. Suddenly I broke into cold perspiration at the thought that, after all, their purpose might be to drop me quickly overboard. "Carlos!" I cried. I felt the point of a knife on my breast. "Silence, Señor!" said a gruff voice.

This fear vanished when we came alongside a ship evidently already under way; but I was handled so roughly and clumsily that I was thoroughly exhausted and out of breath, by the time I was got on board. All was still around me; I was left alone on a settee in the main cabin, as I imagined. For a long time I made no movement; then a door opened and shut. There was a murmured conversation between two voices. This went on in animated whispers for a time. At last I felt as if someone were trying, rather ineffectually, to remove the sack itself. Finally, that actually did rub its way over my head, and something soft and silken began to wipe my eyes with a surprising care, and even tenderness. "This was stupidly done," came a discontented remark; "you do not handle a *caballero* like this."

"And how else was it to be done, to that kind of *caballero*?" was the curt retort.

By that time I had blinked my eyes into a condition for remaining open for minute stretches. Two men were bending over me – Carlos and O'Brien himself. The latter said:

"Believe me, your mistake made this necessary. This young gentleman was about to become singularly inconvenient, and he is in no way harmed."

He spoke in a velvety voice, and walked away gently through the darkness. Carlos followed with the lanthorn dangling at arm's length; strangely enough he had not even looked at me. I suppose he was ashamed, and I was too proud to speak to him, with my hands and feet tied fast. The door closed, and I remained sitting in the darkness. Long small windows grew into light at one end of the place, curved into an outline that suggested a deep recess. The figure of a crowned woman, that moved rigidly up and down, was silhouetted over my body. Groaning creaks of wood and the faint swish of water made themselves heard continuously.

I turned my head to a click, I saw a door open a little way, and the small blue flame of a taper floated into the room. Then the door closed with a definite sound of shutting in. The light shone redly through protecting fingers, and upwards on to a small face. It came to a halt, and I made out the figure of a girl leaning across a table and looking upwards. There was a click of glass, and then a great blaze of light created a host of shining things; a glitter of gilded carvings, red velvet couches, a shining table, a low ceiling, painted white, on carved rafters. A large silver lamp she had lighted kept on swinging to the gentle motion of the ship.

She stood just in front of me; the girl that I had seen through the door; the girl I had seen play with the melon seeds. She was breathing fast – it agitated me to be alone with her – and she had a little shining dagger in her hand.

She cut the rope round my ankles, and motioned me imperiously to turn round. “Your hands – your hands!”

I turned my back awkwardly to her, and felt the grip of small, cool, very firm fingers upon my wrists. My arms fell apart, numb and perfectly useless; I was half aware of pain in them, but it passed unnoticed among a cloud of other emotions. I didn’t feel my finger-tips because I had the agitation, the flutter, the tantalization of looking at her.

I was all the while conscious of the – say, the irregularity of my position, but I felt very little fear. There were the old Don, an ineffectual, silver-haired old gentleman, who obviously was not a pirate; the sleek O’Brien, and Carlos, who seemed to cough on the edge of a grave – and this young girl. There was not any future that I could conceive, and the past seemed to be cut off from me by a narrow, very dark tunnel through which I could see nothing at all.

The young girl was, for the moment, what counted most on the whole, the only thing the eye could rest on. She affected me as an apparition familiar, yet absolutely new in her charm. I had seen her gray eyes; I had seen her red lips; her dark hair, her lithe gestures; the carriage of her head; her throat, her hands. I knew her; I seemed to have known her for years. A rush of strange, sweet feeling made me dumb. She was looking at me, her lips set, her eyes wide and still; and suddenly she said:

“Ask nothing. The land is not far yet. You can escape, Carlos thought... But no! You would only perish for nothing. Go with God.” She pointed imperiously towards the square stern-ports of the cabin.

Following the direction of her hand, my eyes fell upon the image of a Madonna; rather large – perhaps a third life-size; with a gilt crown, a pink serious face bent a little forward over a pink naked child that perched on her left arm and raised one hand. It stood on a bracket, against the rudder casing, with fat cherubs’ heads carved on the supports. The young girl crossed herself with a swift motion of the hand. The stern-ports, glazed in small panes, were black, and gleaming in a white frame-work.

“Go – go – go with God,” the girl whispered urgently. “There is a boat – ”

I made a motion to rise; I wanted to go. The idea of having my liberty, of its being again a possibility, made her seem of less importance; other things began to have their share. But I could not stand, though the blood was returning, warm and tingling, in my legs and hands. She looked at me with a sharp frown puckering her brows a little; beat a hasty tattoo with one of her feet, and cast a startled glance towards the forward door that led on deck. Then she walked to the other side of the table, and sat looking at me in the glow of the lamp.

“Your life hangs on a thread,” she murmured.

I answered, “You have given it to me. Shall I never – ?” I was acutely conscious of the imperfection of my language.

She looked at me sharply; then lowered her lids. Afterwards she raised them again. “Think of yourself. Every moment is – ”

“I will be as quick as I can,” I said.

I was chafing my ankles and looking up at her. I wanted, very badly, to thank her for taking an interest in me, only I found it very difficult to speak to her. Suddenly she sprang to her feet:

“That man thinks he can destroy you. I hate him – I detest him! You have seen how he treats my father.”

It struck me, like a blow, that she was merely avenging O’Brien’s insolence to her father. I had been kidnapped against Don Balthasar Riego’s will. It gave me very well the measure of the old man’s powerlessness in face of his intendant – who was obviously confident of afterwards soothing the resentment.

I was glad I had not thanked her for taking an interest in me. I was distressed, too, because once more I had missed Romance by an inch.

Someone kicked at the locked door. A voice cried – I could not help thinking – warningly, “Seraphina, Seraphina,” and another voice said with excessive softness, “*Senorita! Voyons! quelle folie.*”

She sprang at me. Her hand hurt my wrist as she dragged me aft. I scrambled clumsily into the recess of the counter, and put my head out. The night air was very chilly and full of brine; a little boat towing by a long painter was sheering about in the phosphorescent wake of the ship. The sea itself was pallid in the light of the moon, invisible to me. A little astern of us, on our port quarter, a vessel under a press of canvas seemed to stand still; looming up like an immense pale ghost. She might have been coming up with us, or else we had just passed her – I couldn’t tell. I had no time to find out, and I didn’t care. The great thing was to get hold of the painter. The whispers of the girl urged me, but the thing was not easy; the rope, fastened higher up, streamed away out of reach of my hand. At last, by watching the moment when it slacked, and throwing myself half out of the stern window, I managed to hook it with my finger-tips. Next moment it was nearly jerked away from me, but I didn’t lose it, and the boat taking a run just then under the counter, I got a good hold. The sound of another kick at the door made me swing myself out, head first, without reflection. I got soused to the waist before I had reached the bows of the boat. With a frantic effort I clambered up and rolled in. When I got on my legs, the jerky motion of tossing had ceased, the boat was floating still, and the light of the stern windows was far away already. The girl had managed to cut the painter.

The other vessel was heading straight for me, rather high on the water, broad-beamed, squat, and making her way quietly, like a shadow. The land might have been four or five miles away – I had no means of knowing exactly. It looked like a high black cloud, and purple-gray mists here and there among the peaks hung like scarves.

I got an oar over the stern to scull, but I was not fit for much exertion. I stared at the ship I had left. Her stern windows glimmered with a slight up-and-down motion; her sails seemed to fall into black confusion against the blaze of the moon; faint cries came to me out of her, and by the alteration of her shape I understood that she was being brought to, preparatory to lowering a boat. She might have been half a mile distant when the gleam of her stern windows swung slowly round and went out. I had no mind to be recaptured, and began to scull frantically towards the other vessel. By that time she was quite near – near enough for me to hear the lazy sound of the water at her bows, and the occasional flutter of a sail. The land breeze was dying away, and in the wake of the moon I perceived the boat of my pursuers coming over, black and distinct; but the other vessel was nearly upon me. I sheered under her starboard bow and yelled, “Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!”

There was a lot of noise on board, and no one seemed to hear my shouts. Several voices yelled. “That cursed Spanish ship ahead is heaving-to athwart our hawse.” The crew and the officers seemed all to be forward shouting abuse at the “lubberly Dago,” and it looked as though I were abandoned to my fate. The ship forged ahead in the light air; I failed in my grab at her fore chains, and my boat slipped astern, bumping against the side. I missed the main chain, too, and yelled all the time with desperation, “For God’s sake! Ship ahoy! For God’s sake throw me a rope, some-, body, before it’s too late!”

I was giving up all hope when a heavy coil – of a brace, I suppose – fell upon my head, nearly knocking me over. Half stunned as I was, desperation lent me strength to scramble up her side hand

over hand, while the boat floated away from under my feet. I was done up when I got on the poop. A yell came from forward, "Hard aport." Then the same voice addressed itself to abusing the Spanish ship very close to us now. "What do you mean by coming-to right across my bows like this?" it yelled in a fury.

I stood still in the shadows on the poop. We were drawing slowly past the stern of the Spaniard, and O'Brien's voice answered in English:

"We are picking up a boat of ours that's gone adrift with a man. Have you seen anything of her?" "No – confound you and your boat." Of course those forward knew nothing of my being on board. The man who had thrown me the rope – a passenger, a certain Major Cowper, going home with his wife and child – had walked away proudly, without deigning as much as to look at me twice, as if to see a man clamber on board a ship ten miles from the land was the most usual occurrence. He was, I found afterwards, an absurd, pompous person, as stiff as a ramrod, and so full of his own importance that he imagined he had almost demeaned himself by his condescension in throwing down the rope in answer to my despairing cries. On the other hand, the helmsman, the only other person aft, was so astounded as to become quite speechless. I could see, in the light of the binnacle thrown upon his face, his staring eyes and his open mouth.

The voice forward had subsided by then, and as the stern of the Spanish ship came abreast of the poop, I stepped out of the shadow of the sails, and going close to the rail I said, not very loud – there was no need to shout – but very distinctly:

"I am out of your clutches, Mr. O'Brien, after all. I promise you that you shall hear of me yet."

Meanwhile, another man had come up from forward on the poop, growling like a bear, a short, rotund little man, the captain of the ship. The Spanish vessel was dropping astern, silent, with her sails all black, hiding the low moon. Suddenly a hurried hail came out of her.

"What ship is this?"

"What's that to you, blank your eyes? The *Breeze*, if you want to know. What are you going to do about it?" the little skipper shouted fiercely. In the light wind the ships were separating slowly.

"Where are you bound to?" hailed O'Brien's voice again.

The little skipper laughed with exasperation. "Dash your blanked impudence. To Havana, and be hanged to you. Anything more you want to know? And my name's Lumsden, and I am sixty years old, and if I had you here, I would put a head on you for getting in my way, you – "

He stopped, out of breath. Then, addressing himself to his passenger:

"That's the Spanish chartered ship that brought these sanguinary pirates that were hanged this morning, major. She's taking the Spanish commissioner back. I suppose they had no man-of-war handy for the service in Cuba. Did you ever – "

He had caught sight of me for the first time, and positively jumped a foot high with astonishment.

"Who on earth's that there?"

His astonishment was comprehensible. The major, Without deigning to enlighten him, walked proudly away. He was too dignified a person to explain.

It was left to me. Frequenting, as I had been doing, Ramon's store, which was a great gossiping centre of the maritime world in Kingston, I knew the faces and the names of most of the merchant captains who used to gather there to drink and swap yarns. I was not myself quite unknown to little Lumsden. I told him all my story, and all the time he kept on scratching his bald head, full of incredulous perplexity. Old Señor Ramon! Such a respectable man. And I had been kidnapped? From his store!

"If I didn't see you here in my cuddy before my eyes, I wouldn't believe a word you say," he declared absurdly.

But he was ready enough to take me to Havana. However, he insisted upon calling down his mate, a gingery fellow, short, too, but wizened, and as stupid as himself.

“Here’s that Kemp, you know. The young fellow that Macdonald of the Horton Pen picked up somewhere two years ago. The Spaniards in that ship kidnapped him – so he says. He says they are pirates. But that’s a government chartered ship, and all the pirates that have ever been in her were hanged this morning in Kingston. But here he is, anyhow. And he says that at home he had throttled a Bow Street runner before he went off with the smugglers. Did you ever hear the likes of it, Mercer? I shouldn’t think he was telling us a parcel of lies; hey, Mercer?”

And the two grotesque little chaps stood nodding their heads at me sagaciously.

“He’s a desperate character, then,” said Mercer at last, cautiously. “This morning, the very last thing I heard ashore, as I went to fetch the fresh beef off, is that he had been assaulting a justice of the peace on the highroad, and had been trying to knock down the admiral, who was coming down to town in a chaise with Mr. Topnambo. There’s a warrant out against him under the Black Act, sir.”

Then he brightened up considerably. “So he must have been kidnapped or something after all, sir, or he would be in chokey now.”

It was true, after all. Romance reserved me for another fate, for another sort of captivity, for more than one sort. And my imagination had been captured, enslaved already by the image of that young girl who had called me her English cousin, the girl with the lizard, the girl with the dagger! And with every word she uttered romance itself, if I had only known it, the romance of persecuted lovers, spoke to me through her lips.

That night the Spanish ship had the advantage of us in a freshening wind, and overtook the *Breeze*. Before morning dawned she passed us, and before the close of the next day she was gone out of sight ahead, steering, apparently, the same course with ourselves.

Her superior sailing had an enormous influence upon my fortunes; and I was more adrift in the world than ever before, more in the dark as to what awaited me than when I was lugged along with my head in a sack. I gave her but little thought. A sort of numbness had come over me. I could think of the girl who had cut me free, and for all my resentment at the indignity of my treatment, I had hardly a thought to spare for the man who had me bound. I was pleased to remember that she hated him; that she had said so herself. For the rest, I had a vague notion of going to the English Consul in Havana. After all, I was not a complete nobody. I was John Kemp, a gentleman, well connected; I could prove it. The Bow Street runner had not been dead as I had thought. The last letter from Veronica informed me that the man had given up thief-catching, and was keeping, now, a little inn in the neighbourhood. Ralph, my brother-in-law, had helped him to it, no doubt. I could come home safely now.

And I had discovered I was no longer anxious to return home.

CHAPTER FIVE

There wasn't any weirdness about the ship when I woke in the sunlight. She was old and slow and rather small. She carried Lumsden (master), Mercer (mate), a crew that seemed no better and no worse than any other crew, and the old gentleman who had thrown me the rope the night before, and who seemed to think that he had derogated from his dignity in doing it. He was a Major Cowper, retiring from a West Indian regiment, and had with him his wife and a disagreeable little girl, with a yellow pigtail and a bony little chest and arms.

On the whole, they weren't the sort of people that one would have chosen for companions on a pleasure-trip. Major Cowper's wife lay all day in a deck chair, alternately drawing to her and repulsing the whining little girl. The major talked to me about the scandals with which the world was filled, and kept a suspicious eye upon his wife. He spent the morning in shaving what part of his face his white whiskers did not cover, the afternoon in enumerating to me the subjects on which he intended to write to the Horse Guards. He had grown entirely amiable, perhaps for the reason that his wife ignored my existence.

Meantime I let the days slip by idly, only wondering how I could manage to remain in Havana and breathe the air of the same island with the girl who had delivered me. Perhaps some day we might meet – who knows? I was not afraid of that Irishman.

It never occurred to me to bother about the course we were taking, till one day we sighted the Cuban coast, and I heard Lumsden and Mercer pronounce the name of Rio Medio. The two ridiculous old chaps talked of Mexican privateers, which seemed to rendezvous off that place. They pointed out to me the headland near the bay. There was no sign of privateer or pirate, as far as the eye could reach. In the course of beating up to windward we closed in with the coast, and then the wind fell.

I remained motionless against the rail for half the night, looking at the land. Not a single light was visible. A wistful, dreamy longing, a quiet longing pervaded me, as though I had been drugged. I dreamed, as young men dream, of a girl's face. She was sleeping there within this dim vision of land. Perhaps this was as near as I should ever be able to approach her. I felt a sorrow without much suffering. A great stillness reigned around the ship, over the whole earth. At last I went below and fell asleep.

I was awakened by the idea that I had heard an extraordinary row – shouting and stamping. But there was a dead silence, to which I was listening with all my ears. Suddenly there was a little pop, as if someone had spat rather vigorously; then a succession of shouts, then another little pop, and more shouts, and the stamping overhead. A woman began to shriek on the other side of the bulkhead, then another woman somewhere else, then the little girl. I hurried on deck, but it was some minutes before I could make things fit together. I saw Major Cowper on the poop; he was brandishing a little pistol and apostrophizing Lumsden, who was waving ineffectual arms towards the sky; and there was a great deal of shouting, forward and overhead. Cowper rushed at me, and explained that something was an abominable scandal, and that there were women on board. He waved his pistol towards the side; I noticed that the butt was inlaid with mother-of-pearl Lumsden rushed at him and clawed at his clothes, imploring him not to be rash.

We were so close in with the coast that the surf along the shore gleamed and sparkled in full view.

Someone shouted aloft, "Look out! They are firing again."

Then only I noticed, a quarter of a mile astern and between the land and us, a little schooner, rather low in the water, curtseying under a cloud of white canvas – a wonderful thing to look at. It was as if I had never seen anything so instinct with life and the joy of it. A snowy streak spattered away from her bows at each plunge. She came at a great speed, and a row of faces looking our way became plain, like a beady decoration above her bulwarks. She swerved a little out of her course,

and a sort of mushroom of smoke grew out of her side; there was a little gleam of smouldering light hidden in its heart. The spitting bang followed again, and something skipped along the wave-tops beside us, raising little pillars of spray that drifted away on the wind. The schooner came back on her course, heading straight for us; a shout like groaned applause went up from on board us. Lumsden hid his face in his hands.

I could hear little Mercer shrieking out orders forwards. We were shortening sail. The schooner, luffing a little, ranged abreast. A hail like a metal blare came out of her.

“If you donn’d heef-to we seenk you! We seenk you! By God!”

Major Cowper was using abominable language beside me. Suddenly he began to call out to someone:

“Go down... go down, I say.”

A woman’s face disappeared into the hood of the companion like a rabbit’s tail into its burrow. There was a great volley of cracks from the loose sails, and the ship came to. At the same time the schooner, now on our beam and stripped of her light kites, put in stays and remained on the other tack, with her foresheet to windward.

Major Cowper said it was a scandal. The country was going to the dogs because merchantmen were not compelled by law to carry guns. He spluttered into my ears that there wasn’t so much as a twopenny signal mortar on board, and no more powder than enough to load one of his duelling pistols. He was going to write to the Horse Guards.

A blue-and-white ensign fluttered up to the main gaff of the schooner; a boat dropped into the water. It all went breathlessly – I hadn’t time to think. I saw old Cowper run to the side and aim his pistol overboard; there was an ineffectual click; he made a gesture of disgust, and tossed it on deck. His head hung dejectedly down upon his chest.

Lumsden said, “Thank God, oh, thank God!” and the old man turned on him like a snarling dog.

“You infernal coward,” he said. “Haven’t you got a spark of courage?”

A moment after, our decks were invaded by men, brown and ragged, leaping down from the bulwarks one after the other.

They had come out at break of day (we must have been observed the evening before), a big schooner – full of as ill-favoured, ragged rascals as the most vivid imagination could conceive. Of course, there had been no resistance on our part. We were outsailed, and at the first ferocious hail the halyards had been let go by the run, and all our crew had bolted aloft. A few bronzed bandits posted abreast of each mast kept them there by the menace of bell-mouthed blunderbusses pointed upwards. Lumsden and Mercer had been each tied flat down to a spare spar. They presented an appearance too ridiculous to awaken genuine compassion. Major Cowper was made to sit on a hen-coop, and a bearded pirate, with a red handkerchief tied round his head and a cutlass in his hand, stood guard over him. The major looked angry and crestfallen. The rest of that infamous crew, without losing a moment, rushed into the cuddy to loot the cabins for wearing apparel, jewellery, and money. They squabbled amongst themselves, throwing the things on deck into a great heap of booty.

The schooner flying the Mexican flag remained hove to abeam. But in the man in command of the boarding party I recognized Tomas Castro!

He *was* a pirate. My surmises were correct. He looked the part to the life, in a plumed hat, cloaked to the chin, and standing apart in a saturnine dignity.

“Are you going to have us all murdered, Castro?” I asked, with indignation. To my surprise he did not seem to recognize me; indeed, he pretended not to see me at all. I might have been thin air for any sign he gave of being aware of my presence; but, turning his back on me, he addressed himself to the ignobly captive Lumsden, telling him that he, Castro, was the commander of that Mexican schooner, and menacing him with dreadful threats of vengeance for what he called the resistance we had offered to a privateer of the Republic. I suppose he was pleased to qualify with the name

of armed resistance the miserable little pop of the major's pocket pistol. To punish that audacity he announced that no private property would be respected.

"You shall have to give up all the money on board," he yelled at the wretched man lying there like a sheep ready for slaughter. The other could only gasp and blink. Castro's ferocity was so remarkable that for a moment it struck me as put on. There was no necessity for it. We were meek and silent enough, only poor Major Cowper muttered:

"My wife and child.."

The ragged brown men were pouring on deck from below; their arms full of bundles. Half a dozen of them started to pull off the main hatch tarpaulin. Up aloft the crew looked down with scared eyes. I began to say excitedly, in my indignation, almost into his very ear:

"I know you, Tomas Castro – I know you – Tomas Castro."

Even then he seemed not to hear; but at last he looked into my face balefully, as if he wished to convey the plague to me.

"Hold your tongue," he said very quickly in Spanish. "This is folly!" His little hawk's beak of a nose nestled in his moustache. He waved his arm and declared forcibly, "I don't know you. I am Nicola el Demonio, the Mexican."

Poor old Cowper groaned. The reputation of Nicola el Demonio, if rumours were to be trusted, was a horrible thing for a man with women depending on him.

Five or six of these bandits were standing about Lumsden, the major, and myself, fingering the locks of their guns. Poor old Cowper, breaking away from his guard, was raging up and down the poop; and the big pirate kept him off the companion truculently. The major wanted to get below; the little girl was screaming in the cuddy, and we could hear her very plainly. It was rather horrible. Castro had gone forward into the crowd of scoundrels round the hatchway. It was only then that I realized that Major Cowper was in a state of delirious apprehension and fury; I seemed to remember at last that for a long time he had been groaning somewhere near me. He kept on saying:

"Oh, for God's sake – for God's sake – my poor wife."

I understood that he must have been asking me to do something.

It came as a shock to me. I had a vague sensation of his fears. Up till then I hadn't realized that any one could be much interested in Mrs. Cowper.

He caught hold of my arm, as if he wanted support, and stuttered:

"Couldn't you – couldn't you speak to – " He nodded in the direction of Tomas Castro, who was bent and shouting down the hatch. "Try to – " the old man gasped. "Didn't you hear the child scream?" His face was pallid and wrinkled, like a piece of crumpled paper; his mouth was drawn on one side, and his lips quivered one against the other.

I went to Castro and caught him by the arm. He spun round and smiled discreetly.

"We shall be using force upon you directly. Pray resist, Señor; but not too much. What? His wife? Tell that stupid Inglez with whispers that she is safe." He whispered with an air of profound intelligence, "We shall be ready to go as soon as these foul swine have finished their stealing. I cannot stop them," he added.

I could not pause to think what he might mean. The child's shrieks resounding louder and louder, I ran below. There were a couple of men in the cabin with the women. Mrs. Cowper was lying back upon a sofa, her face very white and drawn, her eyes wide open. Her useless hands twitched at her dress; otherwise she was absolutely motionless, like a frozen woman. The black nurse was panting convulsively in a corner – a palpitating bundle of orange and purple and white clothes. The child was rushing round and round, shrieking. The two men did nothing at all. One of them kept saying in Spanish:

"But – we only want your rings. But – we only want your rings."

The other made feeble efforts to catch the child as it rushed past him. He wanted its earrings – they were contraband of war, I suppose.

Mrs. Cowper was petrified with terror. Explaining the desires of the two men was like shouting things into the ear of a very deaf woman. She kept on saying:

“Will they go away then? Will they go away then?” All the while she was drawing the rings off her thin fingers, and handing them to me. I gave them to the ruffians whose presence seemed to terrify her out of her senses. I had no option. I could do nothing else. Then I asked her whether she wished me to remain with her and the child. She said:

“Yes. No. Go away. Yes. No – let me think.”

Finally it came into my head that in the captain’s cabin she would be able to talk to her husband through the deck ventilator, and, after a time, the idea filtered through to her brain. She could hardly walk at all. The child and the nurse ran in front of us, and, practically, I carried her there in my arms. Once in the stateroom she struggled loose from me, and, rushing in, slammed the door violently in my face. She seemed to hate me.

CHAPTER SIX

I went on deck again. On the poop about twenty men had surrounded Major Cowper; his white head was being jerked backwards and forwards above their bending backs; they had got his old uniform coat off, and were fighting for the buttons. I had just time to shout to him, "Your wife's down there, she's all right!" when very suddenly I became aware that Tomas Castro was swearing horribly at these thieves. He drove them away, and we were left quite alone on the poop, I holding the major's coat over my arm. Major Cowper stooped down to call through the skylight. I could hear faint answers coming up to him.

Meantime, some of the rascals left on board the schooner had filled on her in a light wind, and, sailing round our stern, had brought their vessel alongside. Ropes were thrown on board and we lay close together, but the schooner with her dirty decks looked to me, now, very sinister and very sordid.

Then I remembered Castro's extraordinary words; they suggested infinite possibilities of a disastrous nature, I could not tell just what. The explanation seemed to be struggling to bring itself to light, like a name that one has had for hours on the tip of a tongue without being able to formulate it. Major Cowper rose stiffly, and limped to my side. He looked at me askance, then shifted his eyes away. Afterwards, he took his coat from my arm. I tried to help him, but he refused my aid, and jerked himself painfully into it. It was too tight for him. Suddenly, he said:

"You seem to be deuced intimate with that man – deuced intimate."

His tone caused me more misgiving than I should have thought possible. He took a turn on the deserted deck; went to the skylight; called down, "All well, still?" waited, listening with his head on one side, and then came back to me.

"You drop into the ship," he said, "out of the clouds. Out of the clouds, I say. You tell us some sort of cock-and-bull story. I say it looks deuced suspicious." He took another turn and came back. "My wife says that you took her rings and – and – gave them to –"

He had an ashamed air. It came into my head that that hateful woman had been egging him on to this through the skylight, instead of saying her prayers.

"Your wife!" I said. "Why, she might have been murdered – if I hadn't made her give them up. I believe I saved her life."

He said suddenly, "Tut, tut!" and shrugged his shoulders. He hung his head for a minute, then he added, "Mind, I don't say – I don't say that it mayn't be as you say. You're a very nice young fellow... But what I say is – I am a public man – you ought to clear yourself." He was beginning to recover his military bearing.

"Oh! don't be absurd," I said.

One of the Spaniards came up to me and whispered, "You must come now. We are going to cast off." At the same time Tomas Castro prowled to the other side of the ship, within five yards of us. I called out, "Tomas Castro! Tomas Castro! I will not go with you." The man beside me said, "Come, señor! *Vamos!*"

Suddenly Castro, stretching his arm out at me, cried, "Come, *hombres*. This is the *caballero*; seize him." And to me in his broken English he shouted, "You may resist, if you like."

This was what I meant to do with all my might. The ragged crowd surrounded me; they chattered like monkeys. One man irritated me beyond conception. He looked like an inn-keeper in knee-breeches, had a broken nose that pointed to the left, and a double chin. More of them came running up every minute. I made a sort of blind rush at the fellow with the broken nose; my elbow caught him on the soft folds of flesh and he skipped backwards; the rest scattered in all directions, and then stood at a distance, chattering and waving their hands. And beyond them I saw old Cowper gesticulating approval. The man with the double chin drew a knife from his sleeve, crouched instantly, and sprang at me. I hadn't fought anybody since I had been at school; raising my fists was like trying a dubious

experiment in an emergency. I caught him rather hard on the end of his broken nose; I felt the contact on my right, and a small pain in my left hand. His arms went up to the sky; his face, too. But I had started forward to meet him, and half a dozen of them flung their arms round me from behind.

I seemed to have an exaggerated clearness of vision; I saw each brown dirty paw reach out to clutch some part of me. I was not angry any more; it wasn't any good being angry, but I made a fight for it. There were dozens of them; they clutched my wrists, my elbows, and in between my wrists and my elbows, and my shoulders. One pair of arms was round my neck, another round my waist, and they kept on trying to catch my legs with ropes. We seemed to stagger all over the deck; I expect they got in each other's way; they would have made a better job of it if they hadn't been such a multitude. I must then have got a crack on the head, for everything grew dark; the night seemed to fall on us, as we fought.

Afterwards I found myself lying gasping on my back on the deck of the schooner; four or five men were holding me down. Castro was putting a pistol into his belt. He stamped his foot violently, and then went and shouted in Spanish:

"Come you all on board. You have done mischief enough, fools of *Lugarenos*. Now we go."

I saw, as in a dream of stress and violence, some men making ready to cast off the schooner, and then, in a supreme effort, an effort of lusty youth and strength, which I remember to this day, I scattered men like chaff, and stood free.

For the fraction of a second I stood, ready to fall myself, and looking at prostrate men. It was a flash of vision, and then I made a bolt for the rail. I clambered furiously; I saw the deck of the old barque; I had just one exulting sight of it, and then Major Cowper uprose before my eyes and knocked me back on board the schooner, tumbling after me himself.

Twenty men flung themselves upon my body. I made no movement. The end had come. I hadn't the strength to shake off a fly, my heart was bursting my ribs. I lay on my back and managed to say, "Give me air." I thought I should die.

Castro, draped in his cloak, stood over me, but Major Cowper fell on his knees near my head, almost sobbing: "My papers! My papers! I tell you I shall starve. Make them give me back my papers. They ain't any use to them – my pension – mortgages – not worth a penny piece to you."

He crouched over my face, and the Spaniards stood around, wondering. He begged me to intercede, to save him those papers of the greatest importance.

Castro preserved his attitude of a conspirator. I was touched by the major's distress, and at last I condescended to address Castro on his behalf, though it cost me an effort, for I was angry, indignant, and humiliated.

"Whart – whart? What do I know of his papers? Let him find them." He waved his hand loftily.

The deck was hillocked with heaps of clothing, of bedding, casks of rum, old hats, and tarpaulins. Cowper ran in and out among the plunder, like a pointer in a turnip field. He was groaning.

Beside one of the pumps was a small pile of shiny cases; ship's instruments, a chronometer in its case, a medicine chest.

Cowper tottered at a black dispatch-box. "There, there!" he said; "I tell you I shall starve if I don't have it. Ask him – ask him – " He was clutching me like a drowning man.

Castro raised the inevitable arm towards heaven, letting his round black cloak fall into folds like those of an umbrella. Cowper gathered that he might take his japanned dispatch-box; he seized the brass handles and rushed towards the side, but at the last moment he had the good impulse to return to me, holding out his hand, and spluttering distractedly, "God bless you, God bless you." After a time he remembered that I had rescued his wife and child, and he asked God to bless me for that too. "If it is ever necessary," he said, "on my honour, if you escape, I will come a thousand miles to testify. On my honour – remember." He said he was going to live in Clapham. That is as much as I remember. I was held pinned down to the deck, and he disappeared from my sight. Before the ships had separated, I was carried below in the cabin of the schooner.

They left me alone there, and I sat with my head on my arms for a long time, I did not think of anything at all; I was too utterly done up with my struggles, and there was nothing to be thought about. I had grown to accept the meanness of things as if I had aged a great deal. I had seen men scratch each other's faces over coat buttons, old shoes – over Mercer's trousers. My own future did not interest me at this stage. I sat up and looked round me.

I was in a small, bare cabin, roughly wainscotted and exceedingly filthy. There were the grease-marks from the backs of heads all along a bulkhead above a wooden bench; the rough table, on which my arms rested, was covered with layers of tallow spots. Bright light shone through a porthole. Two or three ill-assorted muskets slanted about round the foot of the mast – a long old piece, of the time of Pizarro, all red velvet and silver' chasing, on a swivelled stand, three English fowling-pieces, and a coachman's blunderbuss. A man was rising from a mattress stretched on the floor; he placed a mandolin, decorated with red favours, on the greasy table. He was shockingly thin, and so tall that his head disturbed the candle-soot on the ceiling. He said: "Ah, I was waiting for the cavalier to awake."

He stalked round the end of the table, slid between it and the side, and grasped my arm with wrapt earnestness as he settled himself slowly beside me. He wore a red shirt that had become rather black where his long brown ringlets fell on his shoulders; it had tarnished gilt buttons ciphered "G. R.," stolen, I suppose, from some English ship.

"I beg the Señor Caballero to listen to what I have to record," he said, with intense gravity. "I cannot bear this much longer – no, I cannot bear my sufferings much longer."

His face was of a large, classical type; a close-featured, rather long face, with an immense nose that from the front resembled the section of a bell; eyebrows like horseshoes, and very large-pupilled eyes that had the purplish-brown lustre of a horse's. His air was mournful in the extreme, and he began to speak resonantly as if his chest were a sounding-board. He used immensely long sentences, of which I only understood one-half.

"What, then, is the difference between me, Manuel-del-Popolo Isturiz, and this Tomas Castro? The Señor Caballero can tell at once. Look at me. I am the finer man. I would have you ask the ladies of Rio Medio, and leave the verdict to them. This Castro is an Andalou – a foreigner. And we, the braves of Rio Medio, will suffer no foreigner to make headway with our ladies. Yet this Andalusian is preferred because he is a humble friend of the great Don, and because he is for a few days given the command. I ask you, Señor, what is the radical difference between me, the sailing captain of this vessel, and him, the fighting captain for a few days? Is it not I that am, as it were, the brains of it, and he only its knife? I ask the Señor Caballero."

I didn't in the least know what to answer. His great eyes wistfully explored my face. I expect I looked bewildered.

"I lay my case at your feet," he continued. "You are to be our chief leader, and, on account of your illustrious birth and renowned intelligence, will occupy a superior position in the council of the notables. Is it not so? Has not the Señor Juez O'Brien so ordained? You will give ear to me, you will alleviate my indignant sufferings?" He implored me with his eyes for a long time.

Manuel-del-Popolo, as he called himself, pushed the hair back from his forehead. I had noticed that the love-locks were plaited with black braid, and that he wore large dirty silk ruffles.

"The *caballero*" he continued, marking his words with a long, white finger a-tap on the table, "will represent my views to the notables. My position at present, as I have had the honour to observe, is become unbearable. Consider, too, how your worship and I would work together. What lightness for you and me. You will find this Castro unbearably gross. But I – I assure you I am a man of taste – an *improvisador* – an artist. My songs are celebrated. And yet!.."

He folded his arms again, and waited; then he said, employing his most impressive voice:

"I have influence with the men of Rio. I could raise a riot. We Cubans are a jealous people; we do not love that foreigners should take our best from us. We do not love it; we will not suffer it.

Let this Castro bethink himself and go in peace, leaving us and our ladies. As the proverb says, 'It is well to build a bridge for a departing enemy.'"

He began to peer at me more wistfully, and his eyes grew more luminous than ever. This man, in spite of his grotesqueness, was quite in earnest, there was no doubting that.

"I have a gentle spirit," he began again, "a gentle spirit. I am submissive to the legitimate authorities. What the Señor Juez O'Brien asks me to do, I do. I would put a knife into any one who inconvenienced the Señor Juez O'Brien, who is a good Catholic; we would all do that, as is right and fitting. But this Castro – this Andalou, who is nearly as bad as a heretic! When my day comes, I will have his arms flayed and the soles of his feet, and I will rub red pepper into them; and all the men of Rio who do not love foreigners will applaud. And I will stick little thorns under his tongue, and I will cut off his eyelids with little scissors, and set him facing the sun. *Caballero*, you would love me; I have a gentle spirit. I am a pleasant companion." He rose and squeezed round the table. "Listen" – his eyes lit up with rapture – "you shall hear me. It is divine – ah, it is very pleasant, you will say."

He seized his mandolin, slung it round his neck, and leant against the bulkhead. The bright light from the port-hole gilded the outlines of his body, as he swayed about and moved his long fingers across the strings; they tinkled metallically. He sang in a nasal voice:

"Listen!" the young girls say as they hasten to the barred window.
'Listen! Ah, surely that is the guitar of Man – u – el – del-Popolo,
As he glides along the wall in the twilight."

It was a very long song. He gesticulated freely with his hand in between the scratching of the strings, which seemed to be a matter of luck. His eyes gazed distantly at the wall above my head. The performance bewildered and impressed me; I wondered if this was what they had carried me off for. It was like being mad. He made a decrescendo tinkling, and his lofty features lapsed into their normal mournfulness.

At that moment Castro put his face round the door, then entered altogether. He sighed in a satisfied manner, and had an air of having finished a laborious undertaking.

"We have arranged the confusion up above," he said to Manuel-del-Popolo; "you may go and see to the sailing... Hurry; it is growing late."

Manuel blazed silently, and stalked out of the door as if he had an electric cloud round his head. Tomas Castro turned towards me.

"You are better?" he asked benevolently. "You exerted yourself too much... But still, if you liked – " He picked up the mandolin, and began negligently scratching the strings. I noticed an alteration in him; he had grown softer in the flesh in the past years; there were little threads of gray in the knotted curls of his beard. It was as if he had lived well, on the whole. He bent his head over the strings, plucked one, tightened a peg, plucked it again, then set the instrument on the table, and dropped on to the mattress. "Will you have some rum?" he said. "You have grown broad and strong, like a bull... You made those men fly, *sacré nom d'une pipe*... One would have thought you were in earnest... Ah, well!" He stretched himself at length on the mattress, and closed his eyes.

I looked at him to discover traces of irony. There weren't any. He was talking quietly; he even reproved me for having carried the pretence of resistance beyond a joke.

"You fought too much; you struck many men – and hard. You will have made enemies. The *pícaros* of this dirty little town are as conceited as pigs. You must take care, or you will have a knife in your back."

He lay with his hands crossed on his stomach, which was round like a pudding. After a time he opened his eyes, and looked at the dancing white reflection of the water on the grimy ceiling.

"To think of seeing you again, after all these years," he said. "I did not believe my ears when Don Carlos asked me to fetch you like this. Who would have believed it? But, as they say," he added

philosophically, “The water flows to the sea, and the little stones find their places.” He paused to listen to the sounds that came from above. “That Manuel is a fool,” he said without rancour; “he is mad with jealousy because for this day I have command here. But, all the same, they are dangerous pigs, these slaves of the Señor O’Brien. I wish the town were rid of them. One day there will be a riot – a function – with their jealousies and madness.”

I sat and said nothing, and things fitted themselves together, little patches of information going in here and there like the pieces of a puzzle map. O’Brien had gone on to Havana in the ship from which I had escaped, to render an account of the pirates that had been hung at Kingston; the Riegos had been landed in boats at Rio Medio, of course.

“That poor Don Carlos!” Castro moaned lamentably. “They had the barbarity to take him out in the night, in that raw fog. He coughed and coughed; it made me faint to hear him. He could not even speak to me – his Tomas; it was pitiful. He could not speak when we got to the Casa.”

I could not really understand why I had been a second time kidnapped. Castro said that O’Brien had not been unwilling that I should reach Havana. It was Carlos that had ordered Tomas to take me out of the *Breeze*. He had come down in the raw morning, before the schooner had put out from behind the point, to impress very elaborate directions upon Tomas Castro; indeed, it was whilst talking to Tomas that he had burst a blood-vessel.

“He said to me: ‘Have a care now. Listen. He is my dear friend, that Señor Juan. I love him as if he were my only brother. Be very careful, Tomas Castro. Make it appear that he comes to us much against his will. Let him be dragged on board by many men. You are to understand, Tomas, that he is a youth of noble family, and that you are to be as careful of compromising him as you are of the honour of Our Lady.’”!

Tomas Castro looked across at me. “You will be able to report well of me,” he said; “I did my best. If you are compromised, it was you who did it by talking to me as if you knew me.”

I remembered, then, that Tomas certainly had resented my seeming to recognize him before Cowper and Lumsden. He closed his eyes again. After a time he added:

“*Vaya!* After all, it is foolishness to fear being compromised. You would never believe that his Excellency Don Balthasar had led a riotous life – to look at him with his silver head. It is said he had three friars killed once in Seville, a very, very long time ago. It was dangerous in those days to come against our Mother, the Church.” He paused, and undid his shirt, laying bare an incredibly hairy chest; then slowly kicked off his shoes. “One stifles here,” he said. “Ah! in the old days – ”

Suddenly he turned to me and said, with an air of indescribable interest, as if he were gloating over an obscene idea:

“So they would hang a gentleman like you, if they caught you? What savages you English people are! – what savages! Like cannibals! You did well to make that comedy of resisting. *Quel pays!*... What a people... I dream of them still... The eyes; the teeth! Ah, well! in an hour we shall be in Rio. I must sleep...”

CHAPTER SEVEN

By two of the afternoon we were running into the inlet of Rio Medio. I had come on deck when Tomas Castro had started out of his doze. I wanted to see. We went round violently as I emerged, and, clinging to the side, I saw, in a whirl, tall, baked, brown hills dropping sheer down to a strip of flat land and a belt of dark-green scrub at the water's edge; little pink squares of house-walls dropped here and there, mounting the hillside among palms, like men standing in tall grass, running back, hiding in a steep valley; silver-gray huts with ragged dun roofs, like dishevelled shocks of hair; a great pink church-face, very tall and narrow, pyramidal towards the top, and pierced for seven bells, but having only three. It looked as if it had been hidden for centuries in the folds of an ancient land, as it lay there asleep in the blighting sunlight.

When we anchored, Tomas, beside me in saturnine silence, grunted and spat into the water.

"Look here," I said. "What is the meaning of it all? What is it? What is at the bottom?"

He shrugged his shoulders gloomily. "If your worship does not know, who should?" he said. "It is not for me to say why people should wish to come here."

"Then take me to Carlos," I said. "I must get this settled."

Castro looked at me suspiciously. "You will not excite him?" he said. "I have known people die right out when they were like that."

"Oh, I won't excite him," I said.

As we were rowed ashore, he began to point out the houses of the notables. Rio Medio had been one of the principal ports of the Antilles in the seventeenth century, but it had failed before the rivalry of Havana because its harbour would not take the large vessels of modern draft. Now it had no trade, no life, no anything except a bishop and a great monastery, a few retired officials from Havana. A large settlement of ragged thatched huts and clay hovels lay to the west of the cathedral. The Casa Riego was an enormous palace, with windows like loopholes, facing the shore. Don Balthasar practically owned the whole town and all the surrounding country, and, except for his age and feebleness, might have been an absolute monarch.

He had lived in Havana with great splendour, but now, in his failing years, had retired to his palace, from which he had since only twice set foot. This had only been when official ceremonies of extreme importance, such as the international execution of pirates that I had witnessed, demanded the presence of someone of his eminence and lustre. Otherwise he had lived shut up in his palace. There was nowhere in Rio Medio for him to go to.

He was said to regard his intendente O'Brien as the apple of his eye, and had used his influence to get him made one of the judges of the Marine Court. The old Don himself probably knew nothing about the pirates. The inlet had been used by buccaneers ever since the days of Columbus; but they were below his serious consideration, even if he had ever seen them, which Tomas Castro doubted.

There was no doubting the sincerity of his tone.

"Oh, you thought *I* was a pirate!" he muttered. "For a day – yes – to oblige a Riego, my friend – yes! Moreover, I hate that familiar of the priests, that soft-spoken Juez, intendente, intriguer – that O'Brien. A sufferer for the faith! *Que picardia!* Have I, too, not suffered for the faith? I am the trusted humble friend of the Riegos. But, perhaps, you think Don Balthasar is himself a pirate! He who has in his veins the blood of the Cid Campeador; whose ancestors have owned half this island since the days of Christopher himself.."

"Has he nothing whatever to do with it?" I asked. "After all, it goes on in his own town."

"Oh, you English," he muttered; "you are all mad! Would one of your great nobles be a pirate? Perhaps they would – God knows. Alas, alas!" he suddenly broke off, "when I think that my Carlos shall leave his bones in this ungodly place.."

I gave up questioning Tomas Castro; he was too much for me.

We entered the grim palace by the shore through an imposing archway, and mounted a broad staircase. In a lofty room, giving off the upper gallery round the central court of the Casa Riego, Carlos lay in a great bed. I stood before him, having pushed aside Tomas Castro, who had been cautiously scratching the great brilliant mahogany panels with a dirty finger-nail.

"Damnation, Carlos!" I said. "This is the third of your treacheries. What do you want with me?"

You might well have imagined he was a descendant of the Cid Campeador, only to look at him lying there without a quiver of a feature, his face stainlessly white, a little bluish in extreme lack of blood, with all the nobility of death upon it, like an alabaster effigy of an old knight in a cathedral. On the red-velvet hangings of the bed was an immense coat-of-arms, worked in silk and surrounded by a collar, with the golden sheep hanging from the ring. The shield was patched in with an immense number of quarterings – lions rampant, leopards courant, fleurs de lis, castles, eagles, hands, and arms. His eyes opened slowly, and his face assumed an easy, languorous smile of immense pleasure.

"Ah, Juan," he said, "*se bienvenido*, be welcome, be welcome."

Castro caught me roughly by the shoulder, and gazed at me with blazing, yellow eyes.

"You should not speak roughly to him," he said. "English beast! He is dying."

"No, I won't speak roughly to him," I answered. "I see."

I did see. At first I had been suspicious; it might have been put on to mollify me. But one could not put on that blueness of tinge, that extra – nearly final – touch of the chisel to the lines round the nose, that air of restfulness that nothing any more could very much disturb. There was no doubt that Carlos was dying.

"Treacheries – no. You had to come," he said suddenly. "I need you. I am glad, dear Juan." He waved a thin long hand a little towards mine. "You shall not long be angry. It had to be done – you must forgive the means."

His air was so gay, so uncomplaining, that it was hard to believe it came from him.

"You could not have acted worse if you had owed me a grudge, Carlos," I said. "I want an explanation. But I don't want to kill you.."

"Oh, no, oh, no," he said; "in a minute I will tell."

He dropped a gold ball into a silver basin that was by the bedside, and it sounded like a great bell. A nun in a sort of coif that took the lines of a buffalo's horns glided to him with a gold cup, from which he drank, raising himself a little. Then the religious went out with Tomas Castro, who gave me a last ferocious glower from his yellow eyes. Carlos smiled.

"They try to make my going easy," he said. "*Vamos!* The pillow is smooth for him who is well loved." He shut his eyes. Suddenly he said, "Why do you, alone, hate me, John Kemp? What have I done?"

"God knows I don't hate you, Carlos," I answered.

"You have always mistrusted me," he said. "And yet I am, perhaps, nearer to you than many of your countrymen, and I have always wished you well, and you have always hated and mistrusted me. From the very first you mistrusted me. Why?"

It was useless denying it; he had the extraordinary incredulity of his kind. I remembered how I had idolized him as a boy at home.

"Your brother-in-law, my cousin Rooksby, was the very first to believe that I was a pirate. I, a vulgar pirate! I, Carlos Riego! Did he not believe it – and you?" He glanced a little ironically, and lifted a thin white finger towards the great coat-of-arms. "That sort of thing," he said, "*amigo mio*, does not allow one to pick pockets." He suddenly turned a little to one side, and fixed me with his clear eyes. "My friend," he said, "if I told you that Rooksby and your greatest Kent earls carried smugglers' tubs, you would say I was an ignorant fool. Yet they, too, are magistrates. The only use I have ever made of these ruffians was to-day, to bring you here. It was a necessity. That O'Brien had gone on to take you when you arrived. You would never have come alive out of Havana. I was saving your life. Once there, you could never have escaped from that man."

I saw suddenly that this might be the truth. There had been something friendly in Tomas Castro's desire not to compromise me before the people on board the ship. Obviously he had been acting a part, with a visible contempt for the pilfering that he could not prevent. He *had* been sent merely to bring me to Rio Medio.

"I never disliked you," I protested. "I do not understand what you mean. All I know is, that you have used me ill – outrageously ill. You have saved my life now, you say. That may be true; but why did you ever make me meet with that man O'Brien?"

"And even for that you should not hate me," he said, shaking his head on the silk pillows. "I never wished you anything but well, Juan, because you were honest and young, of noble blood, good to look upon; you had done me and my friend good service, to your own peril, when my own cousin had deserted me. And I loved you for the sake of another. I loved your sister. We have a proverb: 'A man is always good to the eyes in which the sister hath found favour.'"

I looked at him in amazement. "You loved Veronica!" I said. "But Veronica is nothing at all. There was the Señorita."

He smiled wearily. "Ah, the Señorita; she is very well; a man could love her, too. But we do not command love, my friend."

I interrupted him. "I want to know why you brought me here. Why did you ask me to come here when we were on board the *Thames*?"

He answered sadly, "Ah, then! Because I loved your sister, and you reminded me always of her. But that is all over now – done with for good... I have to address myself to dying as it becomes one of my race to die." He smiled at me. "One must die in peace to die like a Christian. Life has treated me rather scurvily, only the gentleman must not repine like a poor man of low birth. I would like to do a good turn to the friend who is the brother of his sister, to the girl-cousin whom I do not love with love, but whom I understand with affection – to the great inheritance that is not for my wasted hands."

I looked out of the open door of the room. There was the absolutely quiet inner court of the palace, a colonnade of tall square pillars, in the centre the little thread of a fountain. Round the fountain were tangled bushes of flowers – enormous geraniums, enormous hollyhocks, a riot of orange marigolds.

"How like our flowers at home!" I said mechanically.

"I brought the seeds from there – from your sister's garden," he said.

I felt horribly hipped. "But all these things tell me nothing," I said, with an attempt towards briskness.

"I have to husband my voice." He closed his eyes.

There is no saying that I did not believe him; I did, every word. I had simply been influenced by Rooksby's suspicions. I had made an ass of myself over that business on board the *Thames*. The passage of Carles and his faithful Tomas had been arranged for by some agent of O'Brien in London, who was in communication with Ramon and Rio Medio. The same man had engaged Nichols, that Nova Scotian mate, an unscrupulous sailor, for O'Brien's service. He was to leave the ship in Kingston, and report himself to Ramon, who furnished him with the means to go to Cuba. That man, seeing me intimate with two persons going to Rio Medio, had got it into his head that I was going there, too. And, very naturally, he did not want an Englishman for a witness of his doings.

But Rooksby's behaviour, his veiled accusations, his innuendoes against Carlos, had influenced me more than anything else. I remembered a hundred little things now that I knew that Carlos loved Veronica. I understood Rooksby's jealous impatience, Veronica's friendly glances at Carlos, the fact that Rooksby had proposed to Veronica on the very day that Carlos had come again into the neighbourhood with the runners after him. I saw very well that there was no more connection between the Casa Riego and the rascality of Rio Medio than there was between Ralph himself and old drunken Rangsley on Hythe beach. There was less, perhaps.

"Ah, you have had a sad life, my Carlos," I said, after a long time.

He opened his eyes, and smiled his brave smile. “Ah, as to that,” he said, “one kept on. One has to husband one’s voice, though, and not waste it over lamentations. I have to tell you – ah, yes...” He paused and fixed his eyes upon me. “Figure to yourself that this house, this town, an immense part of this island, much even yet in Castile itself, much gold, many slaves, a great name – a very great name – are what I shall leave behind me. Now think that there is a very noble old man, one who has been very great in the world, who shall die very soon; then all these things shall go to a young girl. That old man is very old, is a little foolish with age; that young girl knows very little of the world, and is very passionate, very proud, very helpless.

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