

BRET HARTE

THE CRUSADE
OF THE
EXCELSIOR

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Bret Harte

The Crusade of the Excelsior

PART I. IN BONDS

CHAPTER I

A CRUSADER AND A SIGN

It was the 4th of August, 1854, off Cape Corrientes. Morning was breaking over a heavy sea, and the closely-reefed topsails of a barque that ran before it bearing down upon the faint outline of the Mexican coast. Already the white peak of Colima showed, ghost-like, in the east; already the long sweep of the Pacific was gathering strength and volume as it swept uninterruptedly into the opening Gulf of California.

As the cold light increased, it could be seen that the vessel showed evidence of a long voyage and stress of weather. She had lost one of her spars, and her starboard davits rolled empty. Nevertheless, her rigging was taut and ship-shape, and her decks scrupulously clean. Indeed, in that uncertain light, the only moving figure besides the two motionless shadows at the wheel was engaged in scrubbing the quarter-deck—which, with its

grated settees and stacked camp-chairs, seemed to indicate the presence of cabin passengers. For the barque *Excelsior*, from New York to San Francisco, had discharged the bulk of her cargo at Callao, and had extended her liberal cabin accommodation to swell the feverish Californian immigration, still in its height.

Suddenly there was a slight commotion on deck. An order, issued from some invisible depth of the cabin, was so unexpected that it had to be repeated sternly and peremptorily. A bustle forward ensued, two or three other shadows sprang up by the bulwarks, then the two men bent over the wheel, the *Excelsior* slowly swung round on her heel, and, with a parting salutation to the coast, bore away to the northwest and the open sea again.

"What's up now?" growled one of the men at the wheel to his companion, as they slowly eased up on the helm.

"Tain't the skipper's, for he's drunk as a biled owl, and ain't stirred out of his bunk since eight bells," said the other. "It's the first mate's orders; but, I reckon, it's the Senor's idea."

"Then we ain't goin' on to Mazatlan?"

"Not this trip, I reckon," said the third mate, joining them.

"Why?"

The third mate turned and pointed to leeward. The line of coast had already sunk enough to permit the faint silhouette of a trail of smoke to define the horizon line of sky.

"Steamer goin' in, eh?"

"Yes. D'ye see—it might be too hot, in there!"

"Then the jig's up?"

"No. Suthin's to be done—north of St. Lucas. Hush!"

He made a gesture of silence, although the conversation, since he had joined them, had been carried on in a continuous whisper. A figure, evidently a passenger, had appeared on deck. One or two of the foreign-looking crew who had drawn near the group, with a certain undue and irregular familiarity, now slunk away again.

The passenger was a shrewd, exact, rectangular-looking man, who had evidently never entirely succumbed to the freedom of the sea either in his appearance or habits. He had not even his sea legs yet; and as the barque, with the full swell of the Pacific now on her weather bow, was plunging uncomfortably, he was fain to cling to the stanchions. This did not, however, prevent him from noticing the change in her position, and captiously resenting it.

"Look here—you; I say! What have we turned round for? We're going away from the land! Ain't we going on to Mazatlan?"

The two men at the wheel looked silently forward, with that exasperating unconcern of any landsman's interest peculiar to marine officials. The passenger turned impatiently to the third mate.

"But this ain't right, you know. It was understood that we were going into Mazatlan. I've got business there."

"My orders, sir," said the mate curtly, turning away.

The practical passenger had been observant enough of sea-going rules to recognize that this reason was final, and that it was equally futile to demand an interview with the captain when that

gentleman was not visibly on duty. He turned angrily to the cabin again.

"You look disturbed, my dear Banks. I trust you haven't slept badly," said a very gentle voice from the quarter-rail near him; "or, perhaps, the ship's going about has upset you. It's a little rougher on this tack."

"That's just it," returned Banks sharply. "We HAVE gone about, and we're not going into Mazatlan at all. It's scandalous! I'll speak to the captain—I'll complain to the consignees—I've got business at Mazatlan—I expect letters—I"—

"Business, my dear fellow?" continued the voice, in gentle protest. "You'll have time for business when you get to San Francisco. And as for letters—they'll follow you there soon enough. Come over here, my boy, and say hail and farewell to the Mexican coast—to the land of Montezuma and Pizarro. Come here and see the mountain range from which Balboa feasted his eyes on the broad Pacific. Come!"

The speaker, though apparently more at his ease at sea, was in dress and appearance fully as unnautical as Banks. As he leaned over the railing, his white, close-fitting trousers and small patent-leather boots gave him a jaunty, half-military air, which continued up to the second button of his black frock-coat, and then so utterly changed its character that it was doubtful if a greater contrast could be conceived than that offered by the widely spread lapels of his coat, his low turned-down collar, loosely knotted silk handkerchief, and the round, smooth-shaven,

gentle, pacific face above them. His straight long black hair, shining as if from recent immersion, was tucked carefully behind his ears, and hung in a heavy, even, semicircular fringe around the back of his neck where his tall hat usually rested, as if to leave his forehead meekly exposed to celestial criticism. When he had joined the ship at Callao, his fellow-passengers, rashly trusting to the momentary suggestion of his legs on the gang-plank, had pronounced him military; meeting him later at dinner, they had regarded the mild Methodistic contour of his breast and shoulders above the table, and entertained the wild idea of asking him to evoke a blessing. To complete the confusion of his appearance, he was called "Senor" Perkins, for no other reason, apparently, than his occasional, but masterful, use of the Spanish vernacular.

Steadying himself by one of the quarter stanchions, he waved his right hand oratorically towards the sinking coast.

"Look at it, sir. One of the finest countries that ever came from the hand of the Creator; a land overflowing with milk and honey; containing, sir, in that one mountain range, the products of the three zones—and yet the abode of the oppressed and down-trodden; the land of faction, superstition, tyranny, and political revolution."

"That's all very well," said Banks irritably, "but Mazatlan is a well-known commercial port, and has English and American correspondents. There's a branch of that Boston firm—Potter, Potts & Potter—there. The new line of steamers is going to stop

there regularly."

Senor Perkins' soft black eyes fell for an instant, as if accidentally, on the third mate, but the next moment he laughed, and, throwing back his head, inhaled, with evident relish, a long breath of the sharp, salt air.

"Ah!" he said enthusiastically, "THAT'S better than all the business you can pick up along a malarious coast. Open your mouth and try to take in the free breath of the glorious North Pacific. Ah! isn't it glorious?"

"Where's the captain?" said Banks, with despairing irritation. "I want to see him."

"The captain," said Senor Perkins, with a bland, forgiving smile and a slight lowering of his voice, "is, I fear, suffering from an accident of hospitality, and keeps his state-room. The captain is a good fellow," continued Perkins, with gentle enthusiasm; "a good sailor and careful navigator, and exceedingly attentive to his passengers. I shall certainly propose getting up some testimonial for him."

"But if he's shut up in his state-room, who's giving the orders?" began Banks angrily.

Senor Perkins put up a small, well-kept hand deprecatingly.

"Really, my dear boy, I suppose the captain cannot be omnipresent. Some discretion must be left to the other officers. They probably know his ideas and what is to be done better than we do. You business men trouble yourselves too much about these things. You should take them more philosophically. For

my part I always confide myself trustingly to these people. I enter a ship or railroad car with perfect faith. I say to myself, 'This captain, or this conductor, is a responsible man, selected with a view to my safety and comfort; he understands how to procure that safety and that comfort better than I do. He worries himself; he spends hours and nights of vigil to look after me and carry me to my destination. Why should I worry myself, who can only assist him by passive obedience? Why'—" But here he was interrupted by a headlong plunge of the *Excelsior*, a feminine shriek that was half a laugh, the rapid patter of small feet and sweep of flying skirts down the slanting deck, and the sudden and violent contact of a pretty figure.

The next moment he had forgotten his philosophy, and his companion his business. Both flew to the assistance of the fair intruder, who, albeit the least injured of the trio, clung breathlessly to the bulwarks.

"Miss Keene!" ejaculated both gentlemen.

"Oh dear! I beg your pardon," said the young lady, reddening, with a naive mingling of hilarity and embarrassment. "But it seemed so stuffy in the cabin, and it seemed so easy to get out on deck and pull myself up by the railings; and just as I got up here, I suddenly seemed to be sliding down the roof of a house."

"And now that you're here, your courage should be rewarded," said the Senor, gallantly assisting her to a settee, which he lashed securely. "You are perfectly safe now," he added, holding the end of the rope in his hand to allow a slight sliding movement of the

seat as the vessel rolled. "And here is a glorious spectacle for you. Look! the sun is just rising."

The young girl glanced over the vast expanse before her with sparkling eyes and a suddenly awakened fancy that checked her embarrassed smile, and fixed her pretty, parted lips with wonder. The level rays of the rising sun striking the white crests of the lifted waves had suffused the whole ocean with a pinkish opal color: the darker parts of each wave seemed broken into facets instead of curves, and glittered sharply. The sea seemed to have lost its fluidity, and become vitreous; so much so, that it was difficult to believe that the waves which splintered across the Excelsior's bow did not fall upon her deck with the ring of shattered glass.

"Sindbad's Valley of Diamonds!" said the young girl, in an awed whisper.

"It's a cross sea in the Gulf of California, so the mate says," said Banks practically; "but I don't see why we" . . .

"The Gulf of California?" repeated the young girl, while a slight shade of disappointment passed over her bright face; "are we then so near"—

"Not the California you mean, my dear young lady," broke in Senor Perkins, "but the old peninsula of California, which is still a part of Mexico. It terminates in Cape St. Lucas, a hundred miles from here, but it's still a far cry to San Francisco, which is in Upper California. But I fancy you don't seem as anxious as our friend Mr. Banks to get to your journey's end," he added,

with paternal blandness.

The look of relief which had passed over Miss Keene's truthful face gave way to one of slight embarrassment.

"It hasn't seemed long," she said hastily; and then added, as if to turn the conversation, "What is this peninsula? I remember it on our map at school."

"It's not of much account," interrupted Banks positively. "There ain't a place on it you ever heard of. It's a kind of wilderness."

"I differ from you," said Senor Perkins gravely. "There are, I have been told, some old Mexican settlements along the coast, and there is no reason why the country shouldn't be fruitful. But you may have a chance to judge for yourself," he continued beamingly. "Since we are not going into Mazatlan, we may drop in at some of those places for water. It's all on our way, and we shall save the three days we would have lost had we touched Mazatlan. That," he added, answering an impatient interrogation in Banks' eye, "at least, is the captain's idea, I reckon." He laughed, and went on still gayly,— "But what's the use of anticipating? Why should we spoil any little surprise that our gallant captain may have in store for us? I've been trying to convert this business man to my easy philosophy, Miss Keene, but he is incorrigible; he is actually lamenting his lost chance of hearing the latest news at Mazatlan, and getting the latest market quotations, instead of offering a thanksgiving for another uninterrupted day of freedom in this glorious air."

With a half humorous extravagance he unloosed his already loose necktie, turned his Byron collar still lower, and squared his shoulders ostentatiously to the sea breeze. Accustomed as his two companions were to his habitually extravagant speech, it did not at that moment seem inconsistent with the intoxicating morning air and the exhilaration of sky and wave. A breath of awakening and resurrection moved over the face of the waters; recreation and new-born life sparkled everywhere; the past night seemed forever buried in the vast and exundating sea. The reefs had been shaken out, and every sail set to catch the steadier breeze of the day; and as the quickening sun shone upon the dazzling canvas that seemed to envelop them, they felt as if wrapped in the purity of a baptismal robe.

Nevertheless, Miss Keene's eyes occasionally wandered from the charming prospect towards the companion-ladder. Presently she became ominously and ostentatiously interested in the view again, and at the same moment a young man's head and shoulders appeared above the companionway. With a bound he was on the slanting deck, moving with the agility and adaptability of youth, and approached the group. He was quite surprised to find Miss Keene there so early, and Miss Keene was equally surprised at his appearance, notwithstanding the phenomenon had occurred with singular regularity for the last three weeks. The two spectators of this gentle comedy received it as they had often received it before, with a mixture of apparent astonishment and patronizing unconsciousness, and, after a decent interval,

moved away together, leaving the young people alone.

The hesitancy and awkwardness which usually followed the first moments of their charming isolation were this morning more than usually prolonged.

"It seems we are not going into Mazatlan, after all," said Miss Keene at last, without lifting her conscious eyes from the sea.

"No," returned the young fellow quickly. "I heard all about it down below, and we had quite an indignation meeting over it. I believe Mrs. Markham wanted to head a deputation to wait upon the captain in his berth. It seems that the first officer, or whosoever is running the ship, has concluded we've lost too much time already, and we're going to strike a bee-line for Cape St. Lucas, and give Mazatlan the go-by. We'll save four days by it. I suppose it don't make any difference to you, Miss Keene, does it?"

"I? Oh, no!" said the girl hastily.

"I'M rather sorry," he said hesitatingly.

"Indeed. Are you tired of the ship?" she asked saucily.

"No," he replied bluntly; "but it would have given us four more days together—four more days before we separated."

He stopped, with a heightened color. There was a moment of silence, and the voices of Senor Perkins and Mr. Banks in political discussion on the other side of the deck came faintly. Miss Keene laughed.

"We are a long way from San Francisco yet, and you may think differently."

"Never!" he said, impulsively.

He had drawn closer to her, as if to emphasize his speech. She cast a quick glance across the deck towards the two disputants, and drew herself gently away.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, with a charming smile which robbed the act of its sting, "I sometimes wonder if I am REALLY going to San Francisco. I don't know how it is; but, somehow, I never can SEE myself there."

"I wish you did, for I'M going there," he replied boldly.

Without appearing to notice the significance of his speech, she continued gravely:

"I have been so strongly impressed with this feeling at times that it makes me quite superstitious. When we had that terrible storm after we left Callao, I thought it meant that—that we were all going down, and we should never be heard of again."

"As long as we all went together," he said, "I don't know that it would be the worst thing that could happen. I remember that storm, Miss Keene. And I remember"—He stopped timidly.

"What?" she replied, raising her smiling eyes for the first time to his earnest face.

"I remember sitting up all night near your state-room, with a cork jacket and lots of things I'd fixed up for you, and thinking I'd die before I trusted you alone in the boat to those rascally Lascars of the crew."

"But how would you have prevented it?" asked Miss Keene, with a compassionate and half-maternal amusement.

"I don't know exactly," he said, coloring; "but I'd have lashed you to some spar, or made a raft, and got you ashore on some island."

"And poor Mrs. Markham and Mrs. Brimmer—you'd have left them to the boats and the Lascars, I suppose?" smiled Miss Keene.

"Oh, somebody would have looked after Mrs. Markham; and Mrs. Brimmer wouldn't have gone with anybody that wasn't well connected. But what's the use of talking?" he added ruefully. "Nothing has happened, and nothing is going to happen. You will see yourself in San Francisco, even if you don't see ME there. You're going to a rich brother, Miss Keene, who has friends of his own, and who won't care to know a poor fellow whom you tolerated on the passage, but who don't move in Mrs. Brimmer's set, and whom Mr. Banks wouldn't indorse commercially."

"Ah, you don't know my brother, Mr. Brace."

"Nor do you, very well, Miss Keene. You were saying, only last night, you hardly remembered him."

The young girl sighed.

"I was very young when he went West," she said explanatorily; "but I dare say I shall recall him. What I meant is, that he will be very glad to know that I have been so happy here, and he will like all those who have made me so."

"Then you have been happy?"

"Yes; very." She had withdrawn her eyes, and was looking vaguely towards the companion-way. "Everybody has been so

kind to me."

"And you are grateful to all?"

"Yes."

"Equally?"

The ship gave a sudden forward plunge. Miss Keene involuntarily clutched the air with her little hand, that had been resting on the settee between them, and the young man caught it in his own.

"Equally?" he repeated, with an assumed playfulness that half veiled his anxiety. "Equally—from the beaming Senor Perkins, who smiles on all, to the gloomy Mr. Hurlstone, who smiles on no one?"

She quickly withdrew her hand, and rose. "I smell the breakfast," she said laughingly. "Don't be horrified, Mr. Brace, but I'm very hungry." She laid the hand she had withdrawn lightly on his arm. "Now help me down to the cabin."

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER PORTENT

The saloon of the Excelsior was spacious for the size of the vessel, and was furnished in a style superior to most passenger-ships of that epoch. The sun was shining through the sliding windows upon the fresh and neatly arranged breakfast-table, but the presence of the ominous "storm-racks," and partitions for glass and china, and the absence of the more delicate passengers, still testified to the potency of the Gulf of California. Even those present wore an air of fatigued discontent, and the conversation had that jerky interjectional quality which belonged to people with a common grievance, but a different individual experience. Mr. Winslow had been unable to shave. Mrs. Markham, incautiously and surreptitiously opening a port-hole in her state-room for a whiff of fresh air while dressing, had been shocked by the intrusion of the Pacific Ocean, and was obliged to summon assistance and change her dress. Jack Crosby, who had attired himself for tropical shore-going in white ducks and patent leathers, shivered in the keen northwest Trades, and bewailed the cheap cigars he had expected to buy at Mazatlan. The entrance of Miss Keene, who seemed to bring with her the freshness and purity of the dazzling outer air, stirred the younger men into some gallant attention, embarrassed, however, by a sense of self-reproach.

Senor Perkins alone retained his normal serenity. Already seated at the table between the two fair-headed children of Mrs. Brimmer, he was benevolently performing parental duties in her absence, and gently supervising and preparing their victuals even while he carried on an ethnological and political discussion with Mrs. Markham.

"Ah, my dear lady," continued the Senor, as he spread a hot biscuit with butter and currant jelly for the youngest Miss Brimmer, "I am afraid that, with the fastidiousness of your sex, you allow your refined instincts against a race who only mix with ours in a menial capacity to prejudice your views of their ability for enlightened self-government. That may be true of the aborigines of the Old World—like our friends the Lascars among the crew"—

"They're so snaky, dark, and deceitful-looking," interrupted Mrs. Markham.

"I might differ from you there, and say that the higher blonde types like the Anglo-Saxon—to say nothing of the wily Greeks—were the deceitful races: it might be difficult for any of us to say what a sly and deceitful man should be like"—

"Oor not detheitful—oor a dood man," interpolated the youngest Miss Brimmer, fondly regarding the biscuit.

"Thank you, Missie," beamed the Senor; "but to return: our Lascar friends, Mrs. Markham, belong to an earlier Asiatic type of civilization already decayed or relapsed to barbarism, while the aborigines of the New World now existing have never known

it—or, like the Aztecs, have perished with it. The modern North American aborigine has not yet got beyond the tribal condition; mingled with Caucasian blood as he is in Mexico and Central America, he is perfectly capable of self-government."

"Then why has he never obtained it?" asked Mrs. Markham.

"He has always been oppressed and kept down by colonists of the Latin races; he has been little better than a slave to his oppressor for the last two centuries," said Senor Perkins, with a slight darkening of his soft eyes.

"Injins is pizen," whispered Mr. Winslow to Miss Keene.

"Who would be free, you know, the poet says, ought themselves to light out from the shoulder, and all that sort of thing," suggested Crosby, with cheerful vagueness.

"True; but a little assistance and encouragement from mankind generally would help them," continued the Senor. "Ah! my dear Mrs. Markham, if they could even count on the intelligent sympathy of women like yourself, their independence would be assured. And think what a proud privilege to have contributed to such a result, to have assisted at the birth of the ideal American Republic, for such it would be—a Republic of one blood, one faith, one history."

"What on earth, or sea, ever set the old man off again?" inquired Crosby, in an aggrieved whisper. "It's two weeks since he's given us any Central American independent flapdoodle—long enough for those nigger injins to have had half a dozen revolutions. You know that the vessels that put into San Juan have

saluted one flag in the morning, and have been fired at under another in the afternoon."

"Hush!" said Miss Keene. "He's so kind! Look at him now, taking off the pinafores of those children and tidying them. He is kinder to them than their nurse, and more judicious than their mother. And half his talk with Mrs. Markham now is only to please her, because she thinks she knows politics. He's always trying to do good to somebody."

"That's so," exclaimed Brace, eager to share Miss Keene's sentiments; "and he's so good to those outlandish niggers in the crew. I don't see how the captain could get on with the crew without him; he's the only one who can talk their gibberish and keep them quiet. I've seen him myself quietly drop down among them when they were wrangling. In my opinion," continued the young fellow, lowering his voice somewhat ostentatiously, "you'll find out when we get to port that he's stopped the beginning of many a mutiny among them."

"I reckon they'd make short work of a man like him," said Winslow, whose superciliousness was by no means lessened by the community of sentiment between Miss Keene and Brace. "I reckon, his political reforms, and his poetical high-falutin' wouldn't go as far in the forecastle among live men as it does in the cabin with a lot of women. You'll more likely find that he's been some sort of steward on a steamer, and he's working his passage with us. That's where he gets that smooth, equally-attentive-to-anybody sort of style. The way he skirmished around

Mrs. Brimmer and Mrs. Markham with a basin the other day when it was so rough convinced ME. It was a little too professional to suit my style."

"I suppose that was the reason why you went below so suddenly," rejoined Brace, whose too sensitive blood was beginning to burn in his cheeks and eyes.

"It's a shame to stay below this morning," said Miss Keene, instinctively recognizing the cause of the discord and its remedy. "I'm going on deck again—if I can manage to get there."

The three gentlemen sprang to accompany her; and, in their efforts to keep their physical balance and hers equally, the social equilibrium was restored.

By noon, however, the heavy cross-sea had abated, and the Excelsior bore west. When she once more rose and fell regularly on the long rhythmical swell of the Pacific, most of the passengers regained the deck. Even Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb ventured from their staterooms, and were conveyed to and installed in some state on a temporary divan of cushions and shawls on the lee side. For even in this small republic of equal cabin passengers the undemocratic and distinction-loving sex had managed to create a sham exclusiveness. Mrs. Brimmer, as the daughter of a rich Bostonian, the sister of a prominent lawyer, and the wife of a successful San Francisco merchant, who was popularly supposed to be part-owner of the Excelsior, was recognized, and alternately caressed and hated as their superior. A majority of the male passengers, owning no

actual or prospective matrimonial subjection to those charming toad-eaters, I am afraid continued to enjoy a mild and debasing equality among themselves, mitigated only by the concessions of occasional gallantry. To them, Mrs. Brimmer was a rather pretty, refined, well-dressed woman, whose languid pallor, aristocratic spareness, and utter fastidiousness did not, however, preclude a certain nervous intensity which occasionally lit up her weary eyes with a dangerous phosphorescence, under their brown fringes. Equally acceptable was Miss Chubb, her friend and traveling companion; a tall, well-bred girl, with faint salmon-pink hair and complexion, that darkened to a fiery brown in her shortsighted eyes.

Between these ladies and Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene existed an enthusiastic tolerance, which, however, could never be mistaken for a generous rivalry. Of the greater popularity of Miss Keene as the recognized belle of the Excelsior there could be no question; nor was there any from Mrs. Brimmer and her friend. The intellectual preeminence of Mrs. Markham was equally, and no less ostentatiously, granted. "Mrs. Markham is so clever; I delight to hear you converse together," Mrs. Brimmer would say to Senor Perkins, "though I'm sure I hardly dare talk to her myself. She might easily go into the lecture-field—perhaps she expects to do so in California. My dear Clarissa"—to Miss Chubb—"don't she remind you a little of Aunt Jane Winthrop's governess, whom we came so near taking to Paris with us, but couldn't on account of her defective French?"

When "The Excelsior Banner and South Sea Bubble" was published in lat. 15 N. and long. 105 W., to which Mrs. Markham contributed the editorials and essays, and Senor Perkins three columns of sentimental poetry, Mrs. Brimmer did not withhold her praise of the fair editor. When the Excelsior "Recrossed the Line," with a suitable tableau vivant and pageant, and Miss Keene as California, in white and blue, welcomed from the hands of Neptune (Senor Perkins) and Amphitrite (Mrs. Markham) her fair sister, Massachusetts (Mrs. Brimmer), and New York (Miss Chubb), Mrs. Brimmer was most enthusiastic of the beauty of Miss Keene.

On the present morning Mr. Banks found his disappointment at not going into Mazatlan languidly shared by Mrs. Brimmer. That lady even made a place for him on the cushions beside her, as she pensively expressed her belief that her husband would be still more disappointed.

"Mr. Brimmer, you know, has correspondents at Mazatlan, and no doubt he has made particular arrangements for our reception and entertainment while there. I should not wonder if he was very indignant. And if, as I fear, the officials of the place, knowing Mr. Brimmer's position—and my own connections—have prepared to show us social courtesies, it may be a graver affair. I shouldn't be surprised if our Government were obliged to take notice of it. There is a Captain-General of port—isn't there? I think my husband spoke of him."

"Oh, he's probably been shot long ago," broke in Mr. Crosby

cheerfully. "They put in a new man every revolution. If the wrong party's got in, they've likely shipped your husband's correspondent too, and might be waiting to get a reception for you with nigger soldiers and ball cartridges. Shouldn't wonder if the skipper got wind of something of the kind, and that's why he didn't put in. If your husband hadn't been so well known, you see, we might have slipped in all right."

Mrs. Brimmer received this speech with the languid obliviousness of perception she usually meted out to this chartered jester.

"Do you really think so, Mr. Crosby? And would you have been afraid to leave your cabin—or are you joking? You know I never know when you are. It is very dreadful, either way."

But here Miss Chubb, with ready tact, interrupted any possible retort from Mr. Crosby.

"Look," she said, pointing to some of the other passengers, who, at a little distance, had grouped about the first mate in animated discussion. "I wonder what those gentlemen are so interested about. Do go and see."

Before he could reply, Mr. Winslow, detaching himself from the group, hurried towards them.

"Here's a row: Hurlstone is missing! Can't be found anywhere! They think he's fallen overboard!"

The two frightened exclamations from Miss Chubb and Mrs. Brimmer diverted attention from the sudden paleness of Miss Keene, who had impulsively approached them.

"Impossible!" she said hurriedly.

"I fear it is so," said Brace, who had followed Winslow; "although," he added in a lower tone, with an angry glance at the latter, "that brute need not have blustered it out to frighten everybody. They're searching the ship again, but there seems no hope. He hasn't been seen since last night. He was supposed to be in his state-room—but as nobody missed him—you know how odd and reserved he was—it was only when the steward couldn't find him, and began to inquire, that everybody remembered they hadn't seen him all day. You are frightened, Miss Keene; pray sit down. That fellow Winslow ought to have had more sense."

"It seems so horrible that nobody knew it," said the young girl, shuddering; "that we sat here laughing and talking, while perhaps he was—Good heavens! what's that?"

A gruff order had been given: in the bustle that ensued the ship began to fall off to leeward; a number of the crew had sprung to the davits of the quarter boat.

"We're going about, and they're lowering a boat, that's all; but it's as good as hopeless," said Brace. "The accident must have happened before daylight, or it would have been seen by the watch. It was probably long before we came on deck," he added gently; "so comfort yourself, Miss Keene, you could have seen nothing."

"It seems so dreadful," murmured the young girl, "that he wasn't even missed. Why," she said, suddenly raising her soft eyes to Brace, "YOU must have noticed his absence; why, even

I"—She stopped with a slight confusion, that was, however, luckily diverted by the irrepressible Winslow.

"The skipper's been routed out at last, and is giving orders. He don't look as if his hat fitted him any too comfortably this morning, does he?" he laughed, as a stout, grizzled man, with congested face and eyes, and a peremptory voice husky with alcoholic irritation, suddenly appeared among the group by the wheel. "I reckon he's cursing his luck at having to heave-to and lose this wind."

"But for a human creature's life!" exclaimed Mrs. Markham in horror.

"That's just it. Laying-to now ain't going to save anybody's life, and he knows it. He's doin' it for show, just for a clean record in the log, and to satisfy you people here, who'd kick up a row if he didn't."

"Then you believe he's lost?" said Miss Keene, with glistening eyes.

"There ain't a doubt of it," returned Winslow shortly.

"I don't agree with you," said a gentle voice.

They turned quickly towards the benevolent face of Senor Perkins, who had just joined them.

"I differ from my young friend," continued the Senor courteously, "because the accident must have happened at about daybreak, when we were close inshore. It would not be impossible for a good swimmer to reach the land, or even," continued Senor Perkins, in answer to the ray of hope that

gleamed in Miss Keene's soft eyes, "for him to have been picked up by some passing vessel. The smoke of a large steamer was sighted between us and the land at about that time."

"A steamer!" ejaculated Banks eagerly; "that was one of the new line with the mails. How provoking!"

He was thinking of his lost letters. Miss Keene turned, heart-sick, away. Worse than the ghastly interruption to their easy idyllic life was this grim revelation of selfishness. She began to doubt if even the hysterical excitement of her sister passengers was not merely a pleasant titillation of their bored and inactive nerves.

"I believe the Senor is right, Miss Keene," said Brace, taking her aside, "and I'll tell you why." He stopped, looked around him, and went on in a lower voice, "There are some circumstances about the affair which look more like deliberation than an accident. He has left nothing behind him of any value or that gives any clue. If it was a suicide he would have left some letter behind for somebody—people always do, you know, at such times—and he would have chosen the open sea. It seems more probable that he threw himself overboard with the intention of reaching the shore."

"But why should he want to leave the ship?" echoed the young girl simply.

"Perhaps he found out that we were NOT going to Mazatlan, and this was his only chance; it must have happened just as the ship went about and stood off from shore again."

"But I don't understand," continued Miss Keene, with a pretty knitting of her brows, "why he should be so dreadfully anxious to get ashore now."

The young fellow looked at her with the superior smile of youthful sagacity.

"Suppose he had particular reasons for not going to San Francisco, where our laws could reach him! Suppose he had committed some offense! Suppose he was afraid of being questioned or recognized!"

The young girl rose indignantly.

"This is really too shameful! Who dare talk like that?"

Brace colored quickly.

"Who? Why, everybody," he stammered, for a moment abandoning his attitude of individual acumen; "it's the talk of the ship."

"Is it? And before they know whether he's alive or dead—perhaps even while he is still struggling with death—all they can do is to take his character away!" she repeated, with flashing eyes.

"And I'm even worse than they are," he returned, his temper rising with his color. "I ought to have known I was talking to one of HIS friends, instead of one whom I thought was MINE. I beg your pardon."

He turned away as Miss Keene, apparently not heeding his pique, crossed the deck, and entered into conversation with Mrs. Markham.

It is to be feared that she found little consolation among the other passengers, or even those of her own sex, whom this profound event had united in a certain freemasonry of sympathy and interest—to the exclusion of their former cliques. She soon learned, as the return of the boats to the ship and the ship to her course might have clearly told her, that there was no chance of recovering the missing passenger. She learned that the theory advanced by Brace was the one generally held by them; but with an added romance of detail, that excited at once their commiseration and admiration. Mrs. Brimmer remembered to have heard him, the second or third night out from Callao, groaning in his state-room; but having mistakenly referred the emotion to ordinary seasickness, she had no doubt lost an opportunity for confidential disclosure. "I am sure," she added, "that had somebody as resolute and practical as you, dear Mrs. Markham, approached him the next day, he would have revealed his sorrow." Miss Chubb was quite certain that she had seen him one night, in tears, by the quarter railing. "I saw his eyes glistening under his slouched hat as I passed. I remember thinking, at the time, that he oughtn't to have been left alone with such a dreadful temptation before him to slip overboard and end his sorrow or his crime." Mrs. Markham also remembered that it was about five o'clock—or was it six?—that morning when she distinctly thought she had heard a splash, and she was almost impelled to get up and look out of the bull's-eye. She should never forgive herself for resisting that impulse, for she was positive

now that she would have seen his ghastly face in the water. Some indignation was felt that the captain, after a cursory survey of his stateroom, had ordered it to be locked until his fate was more positively known, and the usual seals placed on his effects for their delivery to the authorities at San Francisco. It was believed that some clue to his secret would be found among his personal chattels, if only in the form of a keepsake, a locket, or a bit of jewelry. Miss Chubb had noticed that he wore a seal ring, but not on the engagement-finger. In some vague feminine way it was admitted without discussion that one of their own sex was mixed up in the affair, and, with the exception of Miss Keene, general credence was given to the theory that Mazatlan contained his loadstar—the fatal partner and accomplice of his crime, the siren that allured him to his watery grave. I regret to say that the facts gathered by the gentlemen were equally ineffective. The steward who had attended the missing man was obliged to confess that their most protracted and confidential conversation had been on the comparative efficiency of ship biscuits and soda crackers. Mr. Banks, who was known to have spoken to him, could only remember that one warm evening, in reply to a casual remark about the weather, the missing man, burying his ears further in the turned-up collar of his pea-jacket, had stated, "It was cold enough to freeze the ears off a brass monkey,"—a remark, no doubt, sir, intended to convey a reason for his hiding his own." Only Senor Perkins retained his serene optimism unimpaired.

"Take my word for it, we shall yet hear good news of our

missing friend. Let us at least believe it until we know otherwise. Ah! my dear Mrs. Markham, why should the Unknown always fill us with apprehension? Its surprises are equally often agreeable."

"But we have all been so happy before this; and this seems such an unnecessary and cruel awakening," said Miss Keene, lifting her sad eyes to the speaker, "that I can't help thinking it's the beginning of the end. Good heavens! what's that?"

She had started at the dark figure of one of the foreign-looking sailors, who seemed to have suddenly risen out of the deck beside them.

"The Senor Perkins," he said, with an apologetic gesture of his hand to his hatless head.

"You want ME, my good man?" asked Senor Perkins paternally.

"Si, Senor; the mate wishes to see the Patrono," he said in Spanish.

"I will come presently."

The sailor hesitated. Senor Perkins took a step nearer to him benignantly. The man raised his eyes to Senor Perkins, and said,

"Vigilancia."

"Bueno!" returned the Senor gently. "Excuse me, ladies, for a moment."

"Perhaps it is some news of poor Mr. Hurlstone?" said Miss Keene, with an instinctive girlish movement of hope.

"Who knows?" returned Senor Perkins, waving his hand as he gayly tripped after his guide. "Let us believe in the best, dear young lady, the best!"

CHAPTER III

"VIGILANCIA."

Without exchanging another word with his escort, Senor Perkins followed him to the main hatch, where they descended and groped their way through the half obscurity of the lower deck. Here they passed one or two shadows, that, recognizing the Senor, seemed to draw aside in a half awed, half suppressed shyness, as of caged animals in the presence of their trainer. At the fore-hatch they again descended, passing a figure that appeared to be keeping watch at the foot of the ladder, and almost instantly came upon a group lit up by the glare of a bull's-eye lantern. It was composed of the first and second mate, a vicious-looking Peruvian sailor with a bandaged head, and, to the Senor's astonishment, the missing passenger Hurlstone, seated on the deck, heavily ironed.

"Tell him what you know, Pedro," said the first mate to the Peruvian sailor curtly.

"It was just daybreak, Patrono, before we put about," began the man in Spanish, "that I thought I saw some one gliding along towards the fore-hatch; but I lost sight of him. After we had tumbled up to go on the other tack, I heard a noise in the fore-hold. I went down and found HIM," pointing to Hurlstone, "hiding there. He had some provisions stowed away beside him, and that package. I grabbed him, Patrono. He broke away and

struck me here"—he pointed to his still wet bandage—"and would have got out overboard through the port, but the second mate heard the row and came down just in time to stop him."

"When was this?" asked Senor Perkins.

"Guardia di Diana."

"You were chattering, you fellows."

"Quien sabe?" said the Peruvian, lifting his shoulders.

"How does he explain himself?"

"He refuses to speak."

"Take off his irons," said Senor Perkins, in English.

"But"—expostulated the first mate, with a warning gesture.

"I said—take off his irons," repeated Senor Perkins in a dry and unfamiliar voice.

The two mates released the shackles. The prisoner raised his eyes to Senor Perkins. He was a slightly built man of about thirty, fair-haired and hollow-cheeked. His short upper lip was lifted over his teeth, as if from hurried or labored breathing; but his features were regular and determined, and his large blue eyes shone with a strange abstraction of courage and fatuity.

"That will do," continued the Senor, in the same tone. "Now leave him with me."

The two mates looked at each other, and hesitated; but at a glance from Perkins, turned, and ascended the ladder again. The Peruvian alone remained.

"Go!" said the Senor sharply.

The man cast a vindictive look at the prisoner and retreated

sullenly.

"Did HE tell you," said the prisoner, looking after the sailor grimly, "that I tried to bribe him to let me go, but that I couldn't reach his figure? He wanted too much. He thought I had some stolen money or valuables here," he added, with a bitter laugh, pointing to the package that lay beside him.

"And you hadn't?" said Perkins shortly.

"No."

"I believe you. And now, my young friend," said Perkins, with a singular return of his beaming gentleness, "since those two efficient and competent officers and this energetic but discourteous seaman are gone, would you mind telling me WHAT you were hiding for?"

The prisoner raised his eyes on his questioner. For the last three weeks he had lived in the small community of which the Senor was a prominent member, but he scarcely recognized him now.

"What if I refuse?" he said.

The Senor shrugged his shoulders.

"Those two excellent men would feel it their duty to bring the Peruvian to the captain, and I should be called to interpret to him."

"And I should throw myself overboard the first chance I got. I would have done so ten minutes ago, but the mate stopped me."

His eye glistened with the same fatuous determination he had shown at first. There was no doubt he would do as he said.

"I believe you would," said the Senor benevolently; "but I see no present necessity for that, nor for any trouble whatever, if you will kindly tell me WHAT I am to say."

The young man's eyes fell.

"I DID try to conceal myself in the hold," he said bluntly. "I intended to remain there hidden while the ship was at Mazatlan. I did not know until now that the vessel had changed her course."

"And how did you believe your absence would be accounted for?" asked the Senor blandly.

"I thought it would be supposed that I had fallen overboard before we entered Mazatlan."

"So that anybody seeking you there would not find you, and you would be believed to be dead?"

"Yes." He raised his eyes quickly to Senor Perkins again. "I am neither a thief nor a murderer," he said almost savagely, "but I do not choose to be recognized by any one who knows me on this side of the grave."

Senor Perkins' eyes sought his, and for an instant seemed to burn through the singular, fatuous mist that veiled them.

"My friend," he said cheerfully, after a moment's pause, "you have just had a providential escape. I repeat it—a most providential escape. Indeed, if I were inclined to prophesy, I would say you were a man reserved for some special good fortune."

The prisoner stared at him with angry amazement.

"You are a confirmed somnambulist. Excuse me," continued

the Senor, with a soft, deprecating gesture; "you are, of course, unaware of it—most victims of that singular complaint are, or at least fail to recognize the extent of their aberration. In your case it has only been indicated by a profound melancholy and natural shunning of society. In a paroxysm of your disorder, you rise in the night, fully dress yourself, and glide as unconsciously along the deck in pursuance of some vague fancy. You pass the honest but energetic sailor who has just left us, who thinks you are a phantom, and fails to give the alarm; you are precipitated by a lurch of the ship through an open hatchway: the shock renders you insensible until you are discovered and restored."

"And who will believe this pretty story?" said the young man scornfully.

"The honest sailor who picked you up, who has related it in his own picturesque tongue to ME, who will in turn interpret it to the captain and the other passengers," replied Senor Perkins blandly.

"And what of the two mates who were here?" said the prisoner hesitatingly.

"They are two competent officers, who are quite content to carry out the orders of their superiors, and who understand their duty too well to interfere with the reports of their subordinates, on which these orders are based. Mr. Brooks, the first officer, though fairly intelligent and a good reader of history, is only imperfectly acquainted with the languages, and Mr. M'Carthy's knowledge of Spanish is confined to a few objurgations which generally preclude extended conversation."

"And who are you," said Hurlstone, more calmly, "who are willing to do this for a stranger?"

"A friend—equally of yours, the captain's, and the other passengers'," replied Senor Perkins pleasantly. "A man who believes you, my dear sir, and, even if he did not, sees no reason to interrupt the harmony that has obtained in our little community during our delightful passage. Were any scandal to occur, were you to carry out your idea of throwing yourself overboard, it would, to say nothing of my personal regret, produce a discord for which there is no necessity, and from which no personal good can be derived. Here at least your secret is secure, for even I do not ask what it is; we meet here on an equality, based on our own conduct and courtesy to each other, limited by no antecedent prejudice, and restrained by no thought of the future. In a little while we shall be separated—why should it not be as friends? Why should we not look back upon our little world of this ship as a happy one?"

Hurlstone gazed at the speaker with a troubled air. It was once more the quaint benevolent figure whom he had vaguely noted among the other passengers, and as vaguely despised. He hesitated a moment, and then, half timidly, half reservedly, extended his hand.

"I thank you," he said, "at least for not asking my secret. Perhaps, if it was only"—

"Your own—you might tell it," interrupted the Senor, gayly. "I understand. I see you recognize my principle. There is no

necessity of your putting yourself to that pain, or another to that risk. And now, my young friend, time presses. I must say a word to our friends above, who are waiting, and I shall see that you are taken privately to your state-room while most of the other passengers are still on deck. If you would permit yourself the weakness of allowing the steward to carry or assist you it would be better. Let me advise you that the excitement of the last three hours has not left you in your full strength. You must really give ME the pleasure of spreading the glad tidings of your safety among the passengers, who have been so terribly alarmed."

"They will undoubtedly be relieved," said Hurlstone, with ironical bitterness.

"You wrong them," returned the Senor, with gentle reproach; "especially the ladies."

The voice of the first mate from above here checked his further speech, and, perhaps, prevented him, as he quickly reascended the upper deck, from noticing the slight embarrassment of his prisoner.

The Senor's explanations to the mate were evidently explicit and brief. In a few moments he reappeared with the steward and his assistant.

"Lean on these men," he said to Hurlstone significantly, "and do not overestimate your strength. Thank Heaven, no bones are broken, and you are only bruised by the fall. With a little rest, I think we can get along without laying the captain's medicine-chest under contribution. Our kind friend Mr. Brooks has had

the lower deck cleared, so that you may gain your state-room without alarming the passengers or fatiguing yourself."

He pressed Hurlstone's hand as the latter resigned himself to the steward, and was half led, half supported, through the gloom of the lower deck. Senor Perkins remained for an instant gazing after him with even more than his usual benevolence. Suddenly his arm was touched almost rudely. He turned, and encountered the lowering eyes of the Peruvian sailor.

"And what is to be done for me?" said the man roughly, in Spanish.

"You?"

"Yes. Who's to pay for this?" he pointed to his bandaged head.

Without changing his bland expression, Senor Perkins apparently allowed his soft black eyes to rest, as if fondly, on the angry pupils of the Peruvian. The eyes of the latter presently sought the ground.

"My dear Yoto," said Senor Perkins softly, "I scarcely think that this question of personal damage can be referred to the State. I will, however, look into it. Meantime, let me advise you to control your enthusiasm. Too much zeal in a subordinate is even more fatal than laxity. For the rest, son, be vigilant—and peaceful. Thou hast meant well, much shall be—forgiven thee. For the present, vamos!"

He turned on his heel, and ascended to the upper deck. Here he found the passengers thrilling with a vague excitement. A few brief orders, a few briefer explanations, dropped by the officers,

had already whetted curiosity to the keenest point. The Senor was instantly beset with interrogations. Gentle, compassionate, with well-rounded periods, he related the singular accident that had befallen Mr. Hurlstone, and his providential escape from almost certain death. "At the most, he has now only the exhaustion of the shock, from which a day of perfect rest will recover him; but," he added deprecatingly, "at present he ought not to be disturbed or excited."

The story was received by those fellow-passengers who had been strongest in their suspicions of Hurlstone's suicide or flight, with a keen sense of discomfiture, only mitigated by a humorous perception of the cause of the accident. It was agreed that a man whose ludicrous infirmity had been the cause of putting the ship out of her course, and the passengers out of their comfortable security, could not be wronged by attributing to him manlier and more criminal motives. A somnambulist on shipboard was clearly a humorous object, who might, however, become a bore. "It all accounts for his being so deuced quiet and reserved in the daytime," said Crosby facetiously; "he couldn't keep it up the whole twenty-four hours. If he'd only given us a little more of his company when he was awake, he wouldn't have gallivanted round at night, and we'd have been thirty miles nearer port." Equal amusement was created by the humorous suggestion that the unfortunate man had never been entirely awake during the voyage, and that he would now, probably for the first time, really make the acquaintance of his fellow-voyagers. Listening

to this badinage with bland tolerance, Senor Perkins no doubt felt that, for the maintenance of that perfect amity he so ardently apostrophized, it was just as well that Hurlstone was in his state-room, and out of hearing.

He would have been more satisfied, however, had he been permitted to hear the feminine comments on this incident. In the eyes of the lady passengers Mr. Hurlstone was more a hero than ever; his mysterious malady invested him with a vague and spiritual interest; his escape from the awful fate reserved to him, in their excited fancy, gave him the eclat of having ACTUALLY survived it; while the supposed real incident of his fall through the hatchway lent him the additional lustre of a wounded and crippled man. That prostrate condition of active humanity, which so irresistibly appeals to the feminine imagination as segregating their victim from the distractions of his own sex, and, as it were, delivering him helpless into their hands, was at once their opportunity, and his. All the ladies volunteered to nurse him; it was with difficulty that Mrs. Brimmer and Mrs. Markham, reinforced with bandages, flannels, and liniments, and supported by different theories, could be kept from the door of his state-room. Jellies, potted meats, and delicacies from their private stores appeared on trays at his bedside, to be courteously declined by the Senor Perkins, in his new functions of a benevolent type of Sancho Panza physician. To say that this pleased the gentle optimism of the Senor is unnecessary. Even while his companion writhed under the sting of this enforced compassion, the good

man beamed philosophically upon him.

"Take care, or I shall end this cursed farce in my own way," said Hurlstone ominously, his eyes again filming with a vague desperation.

"My dear boy," returned the Senor gently, "reflect upon the situation. Your suffering, real or implied, produces in the hearts of these gentle creatures a sympathy which not only exalts and sustains their higher natures, but, I conscientiously believe, gratifies and pleases their lower ones. Why should you deny them this opportunity of indulging their twofold organisms, and beguiling the tedium of the voyage, merely because of some erroneous exhibition of fact?"

Later, Senor Perkins might have added to this exposition the singularly stimulating effect which Hurlstone's supposed peculiarity had upon the feminine imagination. But there were some secrets which were not imparted even to him, and it was only to each other that the ladies confided certain details and reminiscences. For it now appeared that they had all heard strange noises and stealthy steps at night; and Mrs. Brimmer was quite sure that on one occasion the handle of her state-room door was softly turned. Mrs. Markham also remembered distinctly that only a week before, being unable to sleep, she had ventured out into the saloon in a dressing-gown to get her diary, which she had left with a portfolio on a chair; that she had a sudden consciousness of another presence in the saloon, although she could distinguish nothing by the dim light of the

swinging lantern; and that, after quickly returning to her room, she was quite positive she heard a door close. But the most surprising reminiscence developed by the late incident was from Mrs. Brimmer's nurse, Susan. As it, apparently, demonstrated the fact that Mr. Hurlstone not only walked but TALKED in his sleep, it possessed a more mysterious significance. It seemed that Susan was awakened one night by the sound of voices, and, opening her door softly, saw a figure which she at first supposed to be the Senor Perkins, but which she now was satisfied was poor Mr. Hurlstone. As there was no one else to be seen, the voices must have proceeded from that single figure; and being in a strange and unknown tongue, were inexpressibly weird and awful. When pressed to remember what was said, she could only distinguish one word—a woman's name—Virgil—Vigil—no: Virginescia!

"It must have been one of those creatures at Callao, whose pictures you can buy for ten cents," said Mrs. Brimmer.

"If it is one of them, Susan must have made a mistake in the first two syllables of the name," said Mrs. Markham grimly.

"But surely, Miss Keene," said Miss Chubb, turning to that young lady, who had taken only the part of a passive listener to this colloquy, and was gazing over the railing at the sinking sun, "surely YOU can tell us something about this poor young man. If I don't mistake, you are the only person he ever honored with his conversation."

"And only once, I think," said the young girl, slightly coloring.

"He happened to be sitting next to me on deck, and I believe he spoke only out of politeness. At least, he seemed very quiet and reserved, and talked on general topics, and I thought very intelligently. I—should have thought—I mean," she continued hesitatingly—"I thought he was an educated gentleman."

"That isn't at all inconsistent with photographs or sleep-walking," said Mrs. Brimmer, with one of her vague simplicities. "Uncle Quincey brought home a whole sheaf of those women whom he said he'd met; and one of my cousins, who was educated at Heidelberg, used to walk in his sleep, as it were, all over Europe."

"Did you notice anything queer in his eyes, Miss Keene?" asked Miss Chubb vivaciously.

Miss Keene had noticed that his eyes were his best feature, albeit somewhat abstracted and melancholy; but, for some vague reason she could not explain herself, she answered hurriedly that she had seen nothing very particular in them.

"Well," said Mrs. Markham positively, "when he's able to be out again, I shall consider it my duty to look him up, and try to keep him sufficiently awake in the daytime to ensure his resting better at night."

"No one can do it, dear Mrs. Markham, better than you; and no one would think of misunderstanding your motives," said Mrs. Brimmer sweetly. "But it's getting late, and the air seems to be ever so much colder. Captain Bunker says it's because we are really nearing the Californian coast. It seems so odd! Mr.

Brimmer wrote to me that it was so hot in Sacramento that you could do something with eggs in the sun—I forget what."

"Hatch them?" suggested Miss Chubb.

"I think so," returned Mrs. Brimmer, rising. "Let us go below."

The three ladies rustled away, but Miss Keene, throwing a wrap around her shoulders, lingered by the railing. With one little hand supporting her round chin, she leaned over the darkly heaving water. She was thinking of her brief and only interview with that lonely man whose name was now in everybody's mouth, but who, until to-day, had been passed over by them with an unconcern equal to his own. And yet to her refined and delicately feminine taste there appeared no reason why he should not have mingled with his fellows, and have accepted the homage from them that SHE was instinctively ready to give. He seemed to her like a gentleman—and something more. In her limited but joyous knowledge of the world—a knowledge gathered in the happy school-life of an orphan who but faintly remembered and never missed a parent's care—she knew nothing of the mysterious dominance of passion, suffering, or experience in fashioning the outward expression of men, and saw only that Mr. Hurlstone was unlike any other. That unlikeness was fascinating. He had said very little to her in that very brief period. He had not talked to her with the general gallantry which she already knew her prettiness elicited. Without knowing why, she felt there was a subtle flattery in his tacit recognition of that other self of which she, as yet,

knew so little. She could not remember what they had talked about—nor why. Nor was she offended that he had never spoken to her since, nor gone beyond a grave lifting of his hat to her when he passed.

CHAPTER IV IN THE FOG

By noon of the following day the coast of the Peninsula of California had been sighted to leeward. The lower temperature of the northwest Trades had driven Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb into their state-rooms to consult their wardrobes in view of an impending change from the light muslins and easy languid toilets of the Tropics. That momentous question for the moment held all other topics in abeyance; and even Mrs. Markham and Miss Keene, though they still kept the deck, in shawls and wraps, sighed over this feminine evidence of the gentle passing of their summer holiday. The gentlemen had already mounted their pea-jackets and overcoats, with the single exception of Senor Perkins, who, in chivalrous compliment to the elements, still bared his unfettered throat and forehead to the breeze. The aspect of the coast, as seen from the Excelsior's deck, seemed to bear out Mr. Banks' sweeping indictment of the day before. A few low, dome-like hills, yellow and treeless as sand dunes, scarcely raised themselves above the horizon. The air, too, appeared to have taken upon itself a dry asperity; the sun shone with a hard, practical brilliancy. Miss Keene raised her eyes to Senor Perkins with a pretty impatience that she sometimes indulged in, as one of the privileges of accepted beauty and petted youth.

"I don't think much of your peninsula," she said poutingly. "It

looks dreadfully flat and uninteresting. It was a great deal nicer on the other coast, or even at sea."

"Perhaps you are judging hastily, my dear young friend," said Senor Perkins, with habitual tolerance. "I have heard that behind those hills, and hidden from sight in some of the canyons, are perfect little Edens of beauty and fruitfulness. They are like some ardent natures that cover their approaches with the ashes of their burnt-up fires, but only do it the better to keep intact their glowing, vivifying, central heat."

"How very poetical, Mr. Perkins!" said Mrs. Markham, with blunt admiration. "You ought to put that into verse."

"I have," returned Senor Perkins modestly. "They are some reflections on—I hardly dare call them an apostrophe to—the crater of Colima. If you will permit me to read them to you this evening, I shall be charmed. I hope also to take that opportunity of showing you the verses of a gifted woman, not yet known to fame, Mrs. Euphemia M'Corkle, of Peoria, Illinois."

Mrs. Markham coughed slightly. The gifted M'Corkle was already known to her through certain lines quoted by the Senor; and the entire cabin had one evening fled before a larger and more ambitious manuscript of the fair Illinoisian. Miss Keene, who dreaded the reappearance of this poetical phantom that seemed to haunt the Senor's fancy, could not, however, forget that she had been touched on that occasion by a kindly moisture of eye and tremulousness of voice in the reader; and, in spite of the hopeless bathos of the composition, she had forgiven him.

Though she did not always understand Senor Perkins, she liked him too well to allow him to become ridiculous to others; and at the present moment she promptly interposed with a charming assumption of coquetry.

"You forget that you promised to let ME read the manuscript first, and in private, and that you engaged to give me my revenge at chess this evening. But do as you like. You are all fast becoming faithless. I suppose it is because our holiday is drawing to a close, and we shall soon forget we ever had any, or be ashamed we ever played so long. Everybody seems to be getting nervous and fidgety and preparing for civilization again. Mr. Banks, for the last few days, has dressed himself regularly as if he were going down town to his office, and writes letters in the corner of the saloon as if it were a counting-house. Mr. Crosby and Mr. Winslow do nothing but talk of their prospects, and I believe they are drawing up articles of partnership together. Here is Mr. Brace frightening me by telling me that my brother will lock me up, to keep the rich miners from laying their bags of gold dust at my feet; and Mrs. Brimmer and Miss Chubb assure me that I haven't a decent gown to go ashore in."

"You forget Mr. Hurlstone," said Brace, with ill-concealed bitterness; "he seems to have time enough on his hands, and I dare say would sympathize with you. You women like idle men."

"If we do, it's because only the idle men have the time to amuse us," retorted Miss Keene. "But," she added, with a laugh, "I suppose I'm getting nervous and fidgety myself; for I find

myself every now and then watching the officers and men, and listening to the orders as if something were going to happen again. I never felt so before; I never used to have the least concern in what you call 'the working of the ship,' and now"—her voice, which had been half playful, half pettish, suddenly became grave,—"and now—look at the mate and those men forward. There certainly is something going on, or is going to happen. What ARE they looking at?"

The mate had clambered halfway up the main ratlines, and was looking earnestly to windward. Two or three of the crew on the forecastle were gazing in the same direction. The group of cabin-passengers on the quarterdeck, following their eyes, saw what appeared to be another low shore on the opposite bow.

"Why, there's another coast there!" said Mrs. Markham.

"It's a fog-bank," said Senor Perkins gravely. He quickly crossed the deck, exchanged a few words with the officer, and returned. Miss Keene, who had felt a sense of relief, nevertheless questioned his face as he again stood beside her. But he had recovered his beaming cheerfulness. "It's nothing to alarm you," he said, answering her glance, "but it may mean delay if we can't get out of it. You don't mind that, I know."

"No," replied the young girl, smiling. "Besides, it would be a new experience. We've had winds and calms—we only want fog now to complete our adventures. Unless it's going to make everybody cross," she continued, with a mischievous glance at Brace.

"You'll find it won't improve the temper of the officers," said Crosby, who had joined the group. "There's nothing sailors hate more than a fog. They can go to sleep in a hurricane between the rolls of a ship, but a fog keeps them awake. It's the one thing they can't shirk. There's the skipper tumbled up, too! The old man looks wrathful, don't he? But it's no use now; we're going slap into it, and the wind's failing!"

It was true. In the last few moments all that vast glistening surface of metallic blue which stretched so far to windward appeared to be slowly eaten away as if by some dull, corroding acid; the distant horizon line of sea and sky was still distinct and sharply cut, but the whole water between them had grown gray, as if some invisible shadow had passed in mid-air across it. The actual fog bank had suddenly lost its resemblance to the shore, had lifted as a curtain, and now seemed suspended over the ship. Gradually it descended; the top-gallant and top-sails were lost in this mysterious vapor, yet the horizon line still glimmered faintly. Then another mist seemed to rise from the sea and meet it; in another instant the deck whereon they stood shrank to the appearance of a raft adrift in a faint gray sea. With the complete obliteration of all circumambient space, the wind fell. Their isolation was complete.

It was notable that the first and most peculiar effect of this misty environment was the absolute silence. The empty, invisible sails above did not flap; the sheets and halyards hung limp; even the faint creaking of an unseen block overhead was so startling

as to draw every eye upwards. Muffled orders from viewless figures forward were obeyed by phantoms that moved noiselessly through the gray sea that seemed to have invaded the deck. Even the passengers spoke in whispers, or held their breath, in passive groups, as if fearing to break a silence so replete with awe and anticipation. It was next noticed that the vessel was subjected to some vague motion; the resistance of the water had ceased, the waves no longer hissed under her bows, or nestled and lapped under her counter; a dreamy, irregular, and listless rocking had taken the place of the regular undulations; at times, a faint and half delicious vertigo seemed to overcome their senses; the ship was drifting.

Captain Bunker stood near the bits, where his brief orders were transmitted to the man at the almost useless wheel. At his side Senor Perkins beamed with unshaken serenity, and hopefully replied to the captain's half surly, half anxious queries.

"By the chart we should be well east of Los Lobos island, d'ye see?" he said impatiently. "You don't happen to remember the direction of the current off shore when you were running up here?"

"It's five years ago," said the Senor modestly; "but I remember we kept well to the west to weather Cape St. Eugenio. My impression is that there was a strong northwesterly current setting north of Ballenos Bay."

"And we're in it now," said Captain Bunker shortly. "How near St. Roque does it set?"

"Within a mile or two. I should keep away more to the west," said Senor Perkins, "and clear"—

"I ain't asking you to run the ship," interrupted Captain Bunker sharply. "How's her head now, Mr. Brooks?"

The seamen standing near cast a rapid glance at Senor Perkins, but not a muscle of his bland face moved or betrayed a consciousness of the insult. Whatever might have been the feeling towards him, at that moment the sailors—after their fashion—admired their captain; strong, masterful, and imperious. The danger that had cleared his eye, throat, and brain, and left him once more the daring and skillful navigator they knew, wiped out of their shallow minds the vicious habit that had sunk him below their level.

It had now become perceptible to even the inexperienced eyes of the passengers that the *Excelsior* was obeying some new and profound impulse. The vague drifting had ceased, and in its place had come a mysterious but regular movement, in which the surrounding mist seemed to participate, until fog and vessel moved together towards some unseen but well-defined bourne. In vain had the boats of the *Excelsior*, manned by her crew, endeavored with a towing-line to check or direct the inexplicable movement; in vain had Captain Bunker struggled, with all the skilled weapons of seamanship, against his invincible foe; wrapped in the impenetrable fog, the ship moved ghost-like to what seemed to be her doom.

The anxiety of the officers had not as yet communicated

itself to the passengers; those who had been most nervous in the ordinary onset of wind and wave looked upon the fog as a phenomenon whose only disturbance might be delay. To Miss Keene this conveyed no annoyance; rather that placid envelopment of cloud soothed her fancy; she submitted herself to its soft embraces, and to the mysterious onward movement of the ship, as if it were part of a youthful dream. Once she thought of the ship of Sindbad, and that fatal loadstone mountain, with an awe that was, however, half a pleasure.

"You are not frightened, Miss Keene?" said a voice near her.

She started slightly. It was the voice of Mr. Hurlstone. So thick was the fog that his face and figure appeared to come dimly out of it, like a part of her dreaming fancy. Without replying to his question, she said quickly,—

"You are better then, Mr. Hurlstone? We—we were all so frightened for you."

An angry shadow crossed his thin face, and he hesitated. After a pause he recovered himself, and said,—

"I was saying you were taking all this very quietly. I don't think there's much danger myself. And if we should go ashore here"—

"Well?" suggested Miss Keene, ignoring this first intimation of danger in her surprise at the man's manner.

"Well, we should all be separated only a few days earlier, that's all!"

More frightened at the strange bitterness of his voice than by the sense of physical peril, she was vaguely moving away

towards the dimly outlined figures of her companions when she was arrested by a voice forward. There was a slight murmur among the passengers.

"What did he say?" asked Miss Keene, "What are 'Breakers ahead'?"

Hurlstone did not reply.

"Where away?" asked a second voice.

The murmur still continuing, Captain Bunker's hoarse voice pierced the gloom,— "Silence fore and aft!"

The first voice repeated faintly,—

"On the larboard bow."

There was another silence. Again the voice repeated, as if mechanically,—

"Breakers!"

"Where away?"

"On the starboard beam."

"We are in some passage or channel," said Hurlstone quietly.

The young girl glanced round her and saw for the first time that, in one of those inexplicable movements she had not understood, the other passengers had been withdrawn into a limited space of the deck, as if through some authoritative orders, while she and her companion had been evidently overlooked. A couple of sailors, who had suddenly taken their positions by the quarter-boats, strengthened the accidental separation.

"Is there some one taking care of you?" he asked, half hesitatingly; "Mr. Brace—Perkins—or"—

"No," she replied quickly. "Why?"

"Well, we are very near the boat in an emergency, and you might allow me to stay here and see you safe in it."

"But the other ladies? Mrs. Markham, and"—

"They'll take their turn after YOU," he said grimly, picking up a wrap from the railing and throwing it over her shoulders.

"But—I don't understand!" she stammered, more embarrassed by the situation than by any impending peril.

"There is very little danger, I think," he added impatiently. "There is scarcely any sea; the ship has very little way on; and these breakers are not over rocks. Listen."

She tried to listen. At first she heard nothing but the occasional low voice of command near the wheel. Then she became conscious of a gentle, soothing murmur through the fog to the right. She had heard such a murmuring accompaniment to her girlish dreams at Newport on a still summer night. There was nothing to frighten her, but it increased her embarrassment.

"And you?" she said awkwardly, raising her soft eyes.

"Oh, if you are all going off in the boats, by Jove, I think I'll stick to the ship!" he returned, with a frankness that would have been rude but for its utter abstraction.

Miss Keene was silent. The ship moved gently onward. The monotonous cry of the leadsman in the chains was the only sound audible. The soundings were indicating shoaler water, although the murmuring of the surf had been left far astern. The almost imperceptible darkening of the mist on either beam seemed to

show that the Excelsior was entering some land-locked passage. The movement of the vessel slackened, the tide was beginning to ebb. Suddenly a wave of far-off clamor, faint but sonorous, broke across the ship. There was an interval of breathless silence, and then it broke again, and more distinctly. It was the sound of bells.

The thrill of awe which passed through passengers and crew at this spiritual challenge from the vast and intangible void around them had scarcely subsided when the captain turned to Senor Perkins with a look of surly interrogation. The Senor brushed his hat further back on his head, wiped his brow, and became thoughtful.

"It's too far south for Rosario," he said deprecatingly; "and the only other mission I know of is San Carlos, and that's far inland. But that is the Angelus, and those are mission bells, surely."

The captain turned to Mr. Brooks. The voice of invisible command again passed along the deck, and, with a splash in the water and the rattling of chains, the Excelsior swung slowly round on her anchor on the bosom of what seemed a placid bay.

Miss Keene, who, in her complete absorption, had listened to the phantom bells with an almost superstitious exaltation, had forgotten the presence of her companion, and now turned towards him. But he was gone. The imminent danger he had spoken of, half slightly, he evidently considered as past. He had taken the opportunity offered by the slight bustle made by the lowering of the quarter-boat and the departure of the mate on a voyage of discovery to mingle with the crowd, and regain

his state-room. With the anchoring of the vessel, the momentary restraint was relaxed, the passengers were allowed to pervade the deck, and Mrs. Markham and Mr. Brace simultaneously rushed to Miss Keene's side.

"We were awfully alarmed for you, my dear," said Mrs. Markham, "until we saw you had a protector. Do tell me—what DID he say? He must have thought the danger great to have broken the Senor's orders and come upon deck? What did he talk about?"

With a vivid recollection in her mind of Mr. Hurlstone's contemptuous ignoring of the other ladies, Miss Keene became slightly embarrassed. Her confusion was not removed by the consciousness that the jealous eyes of Brace were fixed upon her.

"Perhaps he thought it was night, and walked upon deck in his sleep," remarked Brace sarcastically. "He's probably gone back to bed."

"He offered me his protection very politely, and begged to remain to put me in the boat in case of danger," said Miss Keene, recovering herself, and directing her reply to Mrs. Markham. "I think that others have made me the same kind of offer—who were wide awake," she added mischievously to Brace.

"I wouldn't be too sure that they were not foolishly dreaming too," returned Brace, in a lower voice.

"I should think we all were asleep or dreaming here," said Mrs. Markham briskly. "Nobody seems to know where we are, and the only man who might guess it—Senor Perkins—has gone off

in the boat with the mate."

"We're not a mile from shore and a Catholic church," said Crosby, who had joined them. "I just left Mrs. Brimmer, who is very High Church, you know, quite overcome by these Angelus bells. She's been entreating the captain to let her go ashore for vespers. It wouldn't be a bad idea, if we could only see what sort of a place we've got to. It wouldn't do to go feeling round the settlement in the dark—would it? Hallo! what's that? Oh, by Jove, that'll finish Mrs. Brimmer, sure!"

"Hush!" said Miss Keene impulsively.

He stopped. The long-drawn cadence of a chant in thin clear soprano voices swept through the fog from the invisible shore, rose high above the ship, and then fell, dying away with immeasurable sweetness and melancholy. Even when it had passed, a lingering melody seemed to fill the deck. Two or three of the foreign sailors crossed themselves devoutly; the other passengers withheld their speech, and looked at each other. Afraid to break the charm by speech, they listened again, but in vain an infinite repose followed that seemed to pervade everything.

It was broken, at last, by the sound of oars in their rowlocks; the boat was returning. But it was noticed that the fog had slightly lifted from the surface of the water, for the boat was distinctly visible two cables' length from the ship as she approached; and it was seen that besides the first officer and Senor Perkins there were two strangers in the boat. Everybody rushed to the side for

a nearer view of those strange inhabitants of the unknown shore; but the boat's crew suddenly ceased rowing, and lay on their oars until an indistinct hail and reply passed between the boat and ship. There was a bustle forward, an unexpected thunder from the Excelsior's eight-pounder at the bow port; Captain Bunker and the second mate ranged themselves at the companionway, and the passengers for the first time became aware that they were participating at the reception of visitors of distinction, as two strange and bizarre figures stepped upon the deck.

CHAPTER V

TODOS SANTOS

It was evident that the two strangers represented some exalted military and ecclesiastical authority. This was shown in their dress—a long-forgotten, half mediaeval costume, that to the imaginative spectator was perfectly in keeping with their mysterious advent, and to the more practical as startling as a masquerade. The foremost figure wore a broad-brimmed hat of soft felt, with tarnished gold lace, and a dark feather tucked in its recurved flap; a short cloak of fine black cloth thrown over one shoulder left a buff leathern jacket and breeches, ornamented with large round silver buttons, exposed until they were met by high boots of untanned yellow buckskin that reached halfway up the thigh. A broad baldric of green silk hung from his shoulder across his breast, and supported at his side a long sword with an enormous basket hilt, through which somewhat coquettishly peeped a white lace handkerchief. Tall and erect, in spite of the grizzled hair and iron-gray moustaches and wrinkled face of a man of sixty, he suddenly halted on the deck with a military precision that made the jingling chains and bits of silver on his enormous spurs ring again. He was followed by an ecclesiastic of apparently his own age, but smoothly shaven, clad in a black silk sotana and sash, and wearing the old-fashioned oblong, curl-brimmed hat sacred to "Don Basilo," of the modern opera.

Behind him appeared the genial face of Senor Perkins, shining with the benignant courtesy of a master of ceremonies.

"If this is a fair sample of the circus ashore, I'll take two tickets," whispered Crosby, who had recovered his audacity.

"I have the inexpressible honor," said Senor Perkins to Captain Bunker, with a gracious wave of his hand towards the extraordinary figures, "to present you to the illustrious Don Miguel Briones, Comandante of the Presidio of Todos Santos, at present hidden in the fog, and the very reverend and pious Padre Esteban, of the Mission of Todos Santos, likewise invisible. When I state to you," he continued, with a slight lifting of his voice, so as to include the curious passengers in his explanation, "that, with very few exceptions, this is the usual condition of the atmosphere at the entrance to the Mission and Presidio of Todos Santos, and that the last exception took place thirty-five years ago, when a ship entered the harbor, you will understand why these distinguished gentlemen have been willing to waive the formality of your waiting upon them first, and have taken the initiative. The illustrious Comandante has been generous to exempt you from the usual port regulations, and to permit you to wood and to water"—

"What port regulation is he talking of?" asked Captain Bunker testily.

"The Mexican regulations forbidding any foreign vessel to communicate with the shore," returned Senor Perkins deprecatingly.

"Never heard of 'em. When were they given?"

The Senor turned and addressed a few words to the commander, who stood apart in silent dignity.

"In 1792."

"In what?—Is he mad?" said Bunker. "Does he know what year this is?"

"The illustrious commander believes it to be the year of grace 1854," answered Senor Perkins quietly. "In the case of the only two vessels who have touched here since 1792 the order was not carried out because they were Mexican coasters. The illustrious Comandante explains that the order he speaks of as on record distinctly referred to the ship 'Columbia, which belonged to the General Washington.'"

"General Washington!" echoed Bunker, angrily staring at the Senor. "What's this stuff? Do you mean to say they don't know any history later than our old Revolutionary War? Haven't they heard of the United States among them? Nor California—that we took from them during the late war?"

"Nor how we licked 'em out of their boots, and that's saying a good deal," whispered Crosby, glancing at the Comandante's feet.

Senor Perkins raised a gentle, deprecating hand.

"For fifty years the Presidio and the Mission of Todos Santos have had but this communication with the outer world," he said blandly. "Hidden by impenetrable fogs from the ocean pathway at their door, cut off by burning and sterile deserts

from the surrounding country, they have preserved a trust and propagated a faith in enforced but not unhappy seclusion. The wars that have shaken mankind, the dissensions that have even disturbed the serenity of their own nation on the mainland, have never reached them here. Left to themselves, they have created a blameless Arcadia and an ideal community within an extent of twenty square leagues. Why should we disturb their innocent complacency and tranquil enjoyment by information which cannot increase and might impair their present felicity? Why should we dwell upon a late political and international episode which, while it has been a benefit to us, has been a humiliation to them as a nation, and which might not only imperil our position as guests, but interrupt our practical relations to the wood and water, with which the country abounds?"

He paused, and before the captain could speak, turned to the silent Commander, addressed him in a dozen phrases of fluent and courteous Spanish, and once more turned to Captain Bunker.

"I have told him you are touched to the heart with his courtesy, which you recognize as coming from the fit representative of the great Mexican nation. He reciprocates your fraternal emotion, and begs you to consider the Presidio and all that it contains, at your disposition and the disposition of your friends—the passengers, particularly those fair ladies," said Senor Perkins, turning with graceful promptitude towards the group of lady passengers, and slightly elevating himself on the tips of his neat boots, "whose white hands he kisses, and at whose feet he lays

the devotion of a Mexican caballero and officer."

He waved his hand towards the Comandante, who, stepping forward, swept the deck with his plumed hat before each of the ladies in solemn succession. Recovering himself, he bowed more stiffly to the male passengers, picked his handkerchief out of the hilt of his sword, gracefully wiped his lips, pulled the end of his long gray moustache, and became again rigid.

"The reverend father," continued Senor Perkins, turning towards the priest, "regrets that the rules of his order prevent his extending the same courtesy to these ladies at the Mission. But he hopes to meet them at the Presidio, and they will avail themselves of his aid and counsel there and everywhere."

Father Esteban, following the speaker's words with a gracious and ready smile, at once moved forward among the passengers, offering an antique snuff-box to the gentlemen, or passing before the ladies with slightly uplifted benedictory palms and a caressing paternal gesture. Mrs. Brimmer, having essayed a French sentence, was delighted and half frightened to receive a response from the ecclesiastic, and speedily monopolized him until he was summoned by the Commander to the returning boat.

"A most accomplished man, my dear," said Mrs. Brimmer, as the Excelsior's cannon again thundered after the retiring oars, "like all of his order. He says, although Don Miguel does not speak French, that his secretary does; and we shall have no difficulty in making ourselves understood."

"Then you really intend to go ashore?" said Miss Keene

timidly.

"Decidedly," returned Mrs. Brimmer potentially. "It would be most unpolite, not to say insulting, if we did not accept the invitation. You have no idea of the strictness of Spanish etiquette. Besides, he may have heard of Mr. Brimmer."

"As his last information was only up to 1792, he might have forgotten it," said Crosby gravely. "So perhaps it would be safer to go on the general invitation."

"As Mr. Brimmer's ancestors came over on the Mayflower, long before 1792, it doesn't seem so very impossible, if it comes to that," said Mrs. Brimmer, with her usual unanswerable naivete; "provided always that you are not joking, Mr. Crosby. One never knows when you are serious."

"Mrs. Brimmer is quite right; we must all go. This is no mere formality," said Senor Perkins, who had returned to the ladies. "Indeed, I have myself promised the Comandante to bring YOU," he turned towards Miss Keene, "if you will permit Mrs. Markham and myself to act as your escort. It was Don Miguel's express request."

A slight flush of pride suffused the cheek of the young girl, but the next moment she turned diffidently towards Mrs. Brimmer.

"We must all go together," she said; "shall we not?"

"You see your triumphs have begun already," said Brace, with a nervous smile. "You need no longer laugh at me for predicting your fate in San Francisco."

Miss Keene cast a hurried glance around her, in the faint hope

—she scarcely knew why—that Mr. Hurlstone had overheard the Senor's invitation; nor could she tell why she was disappointed at not seeing him. But he had not appeared on deck during the presence of their strange visitors; nor was he in the boat which half an hour later conveyed her to the shore. He must have either gone in one of the other boats, or fulfilled his strange threat of remaining on the ship.

The boats pulled away together towards the invisible shore, piloted by Captain Bunker, the first officer, and Senor Perkins in the foremost boat. It had grown warmer, and the fog that stole softly over them touched their faces with the tenderness of caressing fingers. Miss Keene, wrapped up in the stern sheets of the boat, gave way to the dreamy influence of this weird procession through the water, retaining only perception enough to be conscious of the singular illusions of the mist that alternately thickened and lightened before their bow. At times it seemed as if they were driving full upon a vast pier or breakwater of cold gray granite, that, opening to let the foremost boat pass, closed again before them; at times it seemed as if they had diverged from their course, and were once more upon the open sea, the horizon a far-off line of vanishing color; at times, faint lights seemed to pierce the gathering darkness, or to move like will-o'-wisps across the smooth surface, when suddenly the keel grated on the sand. A narrow but perfectly well defined strip of palpable strand appeared before them; they could faintly discern the moving lower limbs of figures whose bodies were still hidden

in the mist; then they were lifted from the boats; the first few steps on dry land carried them out of the fog that seemed to rise like a sloping roof from the water's edge, leaving them under its canopy in the full light of actual torches held by a group of picturesquely dressed people before the vista of a faintly lit, narrow, ascending street. The dim twilight of the closing day lingered under this roof of fog, which seemed to hang scarcely a hundred feet above them, and showed a wall or rampart of brown adobe on their right that extended nearly to the water; to the left, at the distance of a few hundred yards, another low brown wall appeared; above it rose a fringe of foliage, and, more distant and indistinct, two white towers, that were lost in the nebulous gray.

One of the figures dressed in green jackets, who seemed to be in authority, now advanced, and, after a moment's parley with Senor Perkins while the Excelsior's passengers were being collected from the different boats, courteously led the way along the wall of the fortification. Presently a low opening or gateway appeared, followed by the challenge of a green-jacketed sentry, and the sentence, "Dios y Libertad" It was repeated in the interior of a dusky courtyard, surrounded by a low corridor, where a dozen green-jacketed men of aboriginal type and complexion, carrying antique flintlocks, were drawn up as a guard of honor.

"The Comandante," said Senor Perkins, "directs me to extend his apologies to the Senor Capitano Bunker for withholding the salute which is due alike to his country, himself, and his fair company; but fifty years of uninterrupted peace and fog have left

his cannon inadequate to polite emergencies, and firmly fixed the tampion of his saluting gun. But he places the Presidio at your disposition; you will be pleased to make its acquaintance while it is still light; and he will await you in the guard-room."

Left to themselves, the party dispersed like dismissed school-children through the courtyard and corridors, and in the enjoyment of their release from a month's confinement on shipboard stretched their cramped limbs over the ditches, walls, and parapets, to the edge of the glacis.

Everywhere a ruin that was picturesque, a decay that was refined and gentle, a neglect that was graceful, met the eye; the sharp exterior and reentering angles were softly rounded and obliterated by overgrowths of semitropical creepers; the abatis was filled by a natural brake of scrub-oak and manzanita; the clematis flung its long scaling ladders over the escarpment, until Nature, slowly but securely investing the doomed fortress, had lifted a victorious banner of palm from the conquered summit of the citadel! Some strange convulsions of the earth had completed the victory; the barbette guns of carved and antique bronze commemorating fruitless and long-forgotten triumphs were dismounted; one turned in the cheeks of its carriage had a trunnion raised piteously in the air like an amputated stump; another, sinking through its rotting chassis, had buried itself to its chase in the crumbling adobe wall. But above and beyond this gentle chaos of defense stretched the real ramparts and escarpments of Todos Santos—the impenetrable

and unassailable fog! Corroding its brass and iron with saline breath, rotting its wood with unending shadow, sapping its adobe walls with perpetual moisture, and nourishing the obliterating vegetation with its quickening blood, as if laughing to scorn the puny embattlements of men—it still bent around the crumbling ruins the tender grace of an invisible but all-encompassing arm.

Senor Perkins, who had acted as cicerone to the party, pointed out these various mutations with no change from his usual optimism.

"Protected by their peculiar isolation during the late war, there was no necessity for any real fortification of the place. Nevertheless, it affords some occupation and position for our kind friend, Don Miguel, and so serves a beneficial purpose. This little gun," he continued, stopping to attentively examine a small but beautifully carved bronze six-pounder, which showed indications of better care than the others, "seems to be the saluting-gun Don Miguel spoke of. For the last fifty years it has spoken only the language of politeness and courtesy, and yet through want of care the tampion, as you see, has become swollen and choked in its mouth."

"How true in a larger sense," murmured Mrs. Markham, "the habit of courtesy alone preserves the fluency of the heart."

"I know you two are saying something very clever," said Mrs. Brimmer, whose small French slippers and silk stockings were beginning to show their inadequacy to a twilight ramble in the fog; "but I am so slow, and I never catch the point. Do repeat

it slowly."

"The Senor was only showing us how they managed to shut up a smooth bore in this country," said Crosby gravely. "I wonder when we're going to have dinner. I suppose old Don Quixote will trot out some of his Senoritas. I want to see those choir girls that sang so stunningly a while ago."

"I suppose you mean the boys—for they're all boys in the Catholic choirs—but then, perhaps you are joking again. Do tell me if you are, for this is really amusing. I may laugh—mayn't I?" As the discomfited humorist fell again to the rear amidst the laughter of the others, Mrs. Brimmer continued naively to Senor Perkins,—“Of course, as Don Miguel is a widower, there must be daughters or sisters-in-law who will meet us. Why, the priest, you know—even he—must have nieces. Really, it's a serious question—if we are to accept his hospitality in a social way. Why don't you ask HIM?” she said, pointing to the green-jacketed subaltern who was accompanying them.

Senor Perkins looked half embarrassed.

"Repeat your question, my dear lady, and I will translate it."

"Ask him if there are any women at the Presidio."

Senor Perkins drew the subaltern aside. Presently he turned to Mrs. Brimmer.

"He says there are four: the wife of the baker, the wife of the saddler, the daughter of the trumpeter, and the niece of the cook."

"Good heavens! we can't meet THEM," said Mrs. Brimmer.

Senor Perkins hesitated.

"Perhaps I ought to have told you," he said blandly, "that the old Spanish notions of etiquette are very strict. The wives of the officials and higher classes do not meet strangers on a first visit, unless they are well known."

"That isn't it," said Winslow, joining them excitedly. "I've heard the whole story. It's a good joke. Banks has been bragging about us all, and saying that these ladies had husbands who were great merchants, and, as these chaps consider that all trade is vulgar, you know, they believe we are not fit to associate with their women, don't you see? All, except one—Miss Keene. She's considered all right. She's to be introduced to the Commander's women, and to the sister of the Alcalde."

"She will do nothing of the kind," said Miss Keene indignantly. "If these ladies are not to be received with me, we'll all go back to the ship together."

She spoke with a quick and perfectly unexpected resolution and independence, so foreign to her usual childlike half dependent character, that her hearers were astounded. Senor Perkins gazed at her thoughtfully; Brace, Crosby, and Winslow admiringly; her sister passengers with doubt and apprehension.

"There must be some mistake," said Senor Perkins gently. "I will inquire."

He was absent but a few moments. When he returned, his face was beaming.

"It's a ridiculous misapprehension. Our practical friend Banks,

in his zealous attempts to impress the Comandante's secretary, who knows a little English, with the importance of Mr. Brimmer's position as a large commission merchant, has, I fear, conveyed only the idea that he was a kind of pawnbroker; while Mr. Markham's trade in hides has established him as a tanner; and Mr. Banks' own flour speculations, of which he is justly proud, have been misinterpreted by him as the work of a successful baker!"

"And what idea did he convey about YOU?" asked Crosby audaciously; "it might be interesting to us to know, for our own satisfaction."

"I fear they did not do me the honor to inquire," replied Senor Perkins, with imperturbable good-humor; "there are some persons, you know, who carry all their worldly possessions palpably about with them. I am one of them. Call me a citizen of the world, with a strong leniency towards young and struggling nationalities; a traveler, at home anywhere; a delighted observer of all things, an admirer of brave men, the devoted slave of charming women—and you have, in one word, a passenger of the good ship Excelsior."

For the first time, Miss Keene noticed a slight irony in Senor Perkins' superabundant fluency, and that he did not conceal his preoccupation over the silent saluting gun he was still admiring. The approach of Don Miguel and Padre Esteban with a small bevy of ladies, however, quickly changed her thoughts, and detached the Senor from her side. Her first

swift feminine impression of the fair strangers was that they were plain and dowdy, an impression fully shared by the other lady passengers. But her second observation, that they were more gentle, fascinating, child-like, and feminine than her own countrywomen, was purely her own. Their loose, undulating figures, guiltless of stays; their extravagance of short, white, heavily flounced skirt, which looked like a petticoat; their lightly wrapped, formless, and hooded shoulders and heads, lent a suggestion of dishabille that Mrs. Brimmer at once resented.

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