

Bindloss Harold

Kit Musgrave's Luck



Harold Bindloss

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PART I THE WIDE HORIZON

CHAPTER I KIT'S PLUNGE

The morning was hot, and Kit Musgrave, leaning on the African liner's rail, watched the volcanic rocks of Grand Canary grow out of the silver haze. He was conscious of some disappointment, because on the voyage to Las Palmas he had pictured a romantic white city shining against green palms. Its inhabitants were grave Spaniards, who secluded their wives and daughters in old Moorish houses with shady patios where fountains splashed. Now he saw he had got the picture wrong.

Las Palmas was white, but not at all romantic. A sandy isthmus, swept by rolling clouds of dust, connected the town and the frankly ugly port. The houses round the harbor looked like small brown blocks. Behind them rose the Isleta cinder hill; in front, coal-wharfs and limekilns, hidden now and then by dust, occupied the beach. Moreover, the Spaniards on board the boats about the ship were excited, gesticulating ruffians. Bombay peddlers, short, dark-skinned Portuguese, and Canario dealers in wine, tobacco, and singing birds, pushed up the gangway. All disputed noisily in their eagerness to show their goods to the passengers.

Yet Kit was not altogether disappointed. Somehow the industrial ugliness of the port and the crowd's businesslike activity were soothing. Kit had not known much romantic beauty, but he knew the Lancashire mining villages and the mean streets behind the Liverpool docks. Besides, he was persuaded that commerce, particularly British commerce, had a civilizing, uplifting power.

Seeing he would buy nothing, the peddlers left him alone, and he mused about the adventure on which he had embarked. Things had happened rapidly since he went one morning to Don Arturo's office in Liverpool and joined the crowd in the great man's waiting-room. Don Arturo was not Spanish, but at Grand Canary he was generally given the Castilian title and the Spaniards declared the island would soon be his. He was an English merchant of the new Imperialist school and he gave Kit exactly one and a half minutes. Perhaps he approved the embarrassed lad, for half an hour afterwards Kit had engaged to start for the Canaries and take a *sobrecargo's* post on board a Spanish steamer. The secretary admitted the pay was small, but argued that since Don Arturo controlled all the business worth controlling in the Canaries and West Africa, the chances for promotion were remarkably good. In short, Kit could sail in two days and was a fool if he did not go.

Kit agreed and signed the contract. He knew some Castilian, which he had studied at evening classes conducted by the Liverpool Y.M.C.A. Since he thought the association's motto, *Mens sana in corpore sano*, good, he had also trained his muscles at the Y.M.C.A. gymnasium. For a city clerk he was healthy and strong.

The two days before he sailed were marked by new and disturbing thrills. Kit was conservative, and sprang from cautious, puritanical stock. His grandfather was a Cumberland sheep farmer, his father kept a shop and had taught Kit the virtues of parsimonious industry. His mother was kind but dull, and had tried not to indulge her son. Although Kit was honest and something of a prig, he had

the small clerk's respect for successful business. He was raw and his philosophy was Smiles'. In order to make progress one must help oneself.

Yet he had not altogether escaped the touch of romance, and when he agreed to sail his first duty was to explain things to Betty. She kept the books at a merchant's office, and sometimes they went to a tea-shop and sometimes to a cheap concert. Betty did not go to theaters, but now and then took Kit to church. She was high-church and wore a little silver cross. Betty was thin, pale and quiet, and Kit's mother approved her, although nothing had been said about their marrying. Kit saw that in the meantime marriage was not for him. To marry on pay like his was not fair to the girl. Yet he imagined he loved Betty; anyhow, he liked her much.

When she left the office in the evening they went to a tea-shop. Kit found a quiet corner and helped Betty to cakes. He was embarrassed and his careless talk was forced. Betty studied him and did not say much. Her quietness had some charm, and she was marked by a touch of beauty that might have developed had she enjoyed fresh air, good food, and cheerful society. Women had not then won much reward for their labor, and Betty was generally tired. At length Kit, with awkward haste, told her his plans. Betty drained her cup and gave him a level glance. Kit thought her paler than before, but the electric light was puzzling.

"You are going to the Canaries and perhaps to West Africa! Are you going for good?" she said.

"Why, no!" said Kit. "I expect I'll stop for a year or two. Anyhow, if I make much progress, I'll come back then. You see, I'm forced to go. There's no chance for me in Liverpool; you get old while you wait for the men in front to move up the ladder. If I stop until I'm forty, I might get up a few rounds."

"Is it necessary to get up?" Betty asked.

Kit looked at her with surprise. Sometimes Betty's philosophy was puzzling, and he wondered whether she got it at church. Kit had not heard another clergyman preach like the vicar and thought him privately rather a fool. But Betty seldom argued and they did not jar.

"Of course!" he said. "So long as you can get up honestly, you have got to get up. You can't stop in the pushing crowd at the bottom."

Betty was quiet for a few moments. She looked tired and Kit imagined she knew all he knew about the pressure of the crowd. Then she said, "If only we didn't push! Perhaps there's room enough, and we might make things better."

"Oh, well," said Kit, rather comforted by her calm, but vaguely disappointed because she could philosophise. "Anyhow, although it's hard, I must seize my chance. I shall miss you. You have been much to me; now I've got to go, I begin to see how much. Perhaps it's strange I didn't see before. You don't argue, you belong to my lot, but somehow one feels you're finer than other girls one meets – "

He stopped and Betty gave him a curious smile. "Do you know many girls, Kit?"

"I don't," he admitted. "I haven't bothered about girls; I haven't had time. They expect you to tell them they're pretty, to send them things, to josh and make them laugh, and now and then to quarrel about nothing. Rather a bore when you'd sooner be quiet; but you're not like that. We have been pals, and now I wish you were going out with me."

"There's not much use in wishing."

"That is so," Kit agreed and hesitated for a moment or two while his face got red. "You couldn't go now, but I'm coming back. Suppose I get on and my pay is good? Will you marry me when I go out again?"

Betty gave him a long, level glance. For all that, he thought her hand shook when she moved her cup and his heart beat.

"No," she said quietly. "Anyhow, I won't promise. Perhaps, if you do come back, we'll talk about it, but you mustn't feel you're bound to ask."

Kit got a jolt. That Betty liked him was obvious, and the girls he knew were keen for a lover. Betty, of course, was not like them, but she was human. In a sense, however, her refusal was justified.

Perhaps he was a dull fellow; a girl by whom he was once attracted declared he was as gloomy as a funeral. Then, with his rather shabby clothes and small pay, he was certainly not worth bothering about. For all that, Betty's refusal strengthened his resolve.

She was firm, but he got a hint of strain. The thrill of his adventure had gone and he was sorry for Betty. He knew how she lived; the dreary shabby street she left in the morning for her nine hours' work, the pinching to make her pay go round. All was dull and monotonous for her, but he was going to a land of wine and sun. He could not move her, and she left him, puzzled and unhappy, in the street.

The evening before he sailed they went to a concert, and Betty let him come with her to the door of her lodgings. She opened the door and then looked up the street. Nobody was about and when Kit advanced impulsively, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Then she firmly pushed him back.

"Good-bye!" she said, and the door shut.

Kit thought about it while he leaned against the rails on board the African boat. Perhaps it was strange, but he had not kissed Betty before. To hold her in his arms had rather moved him to a curious tenderness than to passion. When he thought about Betty he felt gentle; but he braced himself and forced a smile, for the new governor of an African jail came up with Bones and Blades.

Considine was an old soldier, with a red face and twinkling eyes, who had been long in India, but did not state his rank. Bones and Blades were raw lads from Lancashire going out to a West African factory for the yearly pay of eighty pounds. Their notion of life at the factory was romantically inaccurate.

"The boat stops six hours," Considine remarked. "Long enough to see the town, and they tell me wine is cheap. I'll go ashore with you, Musgrave. Where's my money, Bones?"

"I'll keep t' brass until you come back," Bones rejoined.

Considine was fat and his hair was going white, but he turned with unexpected swiftness and seizing the lad, took his cap.

"No time to get my boots, but your deck-shoes won't go on! Hand out my pocket-book."

Bones gave up the book and went to the gangway with Kit.

"I expect that's your boat. We were pretty good pals on this voyage and I hope we'll meet again. What do you say, Blades?"

"I'd like it," agreed the other and then his friendly grin vanished and his freckled face got grave. "All the same, Africa's a queer country and you can't have adventures without some risk. Well, good luck, Musgrave! I'd better say good-bye!"

Kit gave him his hand and afterwards learned that Blades' dream of romantic adventures was not realized. His job was to count bottles of trade gin, and he and Bones died of fever before they earned their first year's pay.

In the meantime, Considine jumped into the boat. He wore neat white clothes, thin, red slippers, and Bones' cap, which was much too small.

"I ought to have stopped on board," he said with a twinkle. "All the same, when I get to Africa I'll have long enough to play up to my job. At Las Palmas I'm not important. When you want a frolic, go where you're not known."

Kit did not want a frolic. He was thoughtful and rather daunted. All his old landmarks were gone; he was in a new country where people did not use the rules he had known at Liverpool. Besides, he was thinking about Betty. For all that, when the Spanish boatman rowed him across the harbor to a lava mole he roused himself. The *patron* declared that although the fare was fixed in pesetas English passengers paid with shillings. It was, however, not for nothing Kit sprang from sternly frugal stock. He stated in his best Castilian that the peseta was worth ninepence and he would pay with Spanish money or would not pay at all. The *patron's* violent arguments did not move him, but when he heard a laugh he looked up.

Two ladies occupied the pavement at the top of the steps. One was little, dressed in white, with fine lace on her fashionable clothes, and looked dignified. The other was young and wore a dress of corn-yellow. Her eyes were brown and luminous, her hair was nearly black, and her rather olive skin had something of a peach's bloom. Her type of beauty was new to Kit, but when he saw she remarked his glance he turned to the gesticulating boatman.

Mrs. Austin was an important lady at Las Palmas, where her husband, and her father, Don Pancho Brown, carried on a merchant business. People said Jacinta Austin ruled both. Olivia, her sister, had not long returned from an English school.

Señor Don Erminio Martinez, captain of a small Spanish mail steamer, engaged the ladies in talk, because Olivia was beautiful and he waited for his boat. Don Erminio was big, brown-skinned and athletic. He wore shabby English clothes and a small English cap, and looked something like a bullfighter. On the whole, he was a trustful, genial ruffian, although the Barcelona anarchists were his political models. He used a little uncouth French and English.

Mrs. Austin noted her sister's glance at the boat. The tall young man was obviously English, and had come to take a post; he was raw and did not wear the tourist's stamp. Mrs. Austin knew men and there was something honest and thoughtful about him that she approved. All the same, she did not want Olivia to approve.

"Book Castilian; I think the accent's Lancashire," the girl remarked. "I wonder where he's going; African shipping office: bananas, or coal?"

"It's not important," Mrs. Austin rejoined.

"Oh, well, unless he's a hermit, we are bound to meet him, and he's fresh blood anyway. One gets very bored by the banana and coaling men. Still I think he's their type."

"The type's plain, but I doubt if he's for the coaling wharf; the young man looks honest," said Mrs. Austin, and turning to the captain, added: "I expect he will join the *correillo*."

Correillo is not classical Castilian, but the captain knew she meant a small mail steamer and spread out his hands.

"Aha! Another animal. He come to me. All animales the Yngleses of Don Arturo. *Verdad*. People without shame and education –"

"I am English, my friend," Mrs. Austin rejoined.

"One forgets; the thing looks impossible," said Don Erminio, with a bow. "You have a charm and sympathy. But the others! With teeth and neck like the camel, and the air commanding. They come on board my steamer. 'I am Ynglesa. All the ship for me.' But another animal of a *sobrecargo*! Señora, I am your servant. I go and tear my hair."

He went off, and Olivia laughed. "It's strange, but people don't like us, and at the beginning I expect the young man will have some trouble on board *Campeador*. All the same, Don Erminio's really a good sort. Well, it looks as if the dispute about the fare had stopped. He's beaten the *patron*."

She stepped back, for Kit came up the steps behind a boatman who carried his tin box. Considine followed, and at the end of the mole the boatman called a *tartana*. Kit got into the little trap, and Considine, pushing the driver from his seat, seized the reins. The horse kicked, the *tartana* rocked, and they started for Las Palmas in a cloud of dust.

"At home, we're a sober lot," Mrs. Austin remarked. "In the South, we're joyfully irresponsible. How do you account for it?"

"I don't account for it," said Olivia. "There's no use in bothering about things like that. Besides, the young man looks remarkably sober."

CHAPTER II OTHER RULES

After a collision with a steam tram, the *tartana* reached Las Palmas and Considine got down at a wine shop. He refused to pay for the damage to the trap, and wishing Kit good luck, vanished among the barrels in the dark shop. The *tartanero* drove Kit to the steamship office, and sitting on the doorstep declared he would not go away until his just claim was met. Kit, somewhat embarrassed, was shown into the manager's room and received by a little, fastidiously neat Spanish gentleman. The driver's mournful voice pierced the lava walls, and when Kit narrated the grounds for his complaint, Don Ramon shrugged.

"It is not important; when the tourists are about, such disputes are numerous," he said in careful English, and gave a clerk some orders.

The *tartanero's* clamour stopped and Don Ramon resumed: "We will send a note to the purser, and if your countryman does not miss his ship, the thing is finished. Many do miss their ships and there is trouble for us. I have much admiration for the English, but they make disturbances."

"We are not all like that," Kit objected.

"You are not like that in England; I was at the Company's office," Don Ramon agreed. "All was in stern order, but in this country you have other rules. Well, it is not important. To-night you join your steamer; I will tell you your duties."

He did so with kind politeness, and Kit liked the man then and afterwards. By and by Don Ramon sent him to a Spanish hotel, and for a time he wrote letters to his mother and Betty behind a bougainvillea that climbed from the flagged *patio* to a balcony. The creeper's splendid purple shone against the yellow wall and on the opposite balcony old bronze rails twinkled. The shade was cool, and all was quiet but for the rumble of the Atlantic surf. While Kit wrote his frank, boyish letters, he thought about Betty with shy tenderness. In a sense she had refused him, but his normal mood was calm and he had not known passion yet. He wrote to Betty very much as he wrote to his mother.

By and by he put up his writing case and went off to get some stamps at a baker's shop. In Spanish countries one cannot, as a rule, buy stamps at a post office. Then he looked at his watch, and seeing it was two o'clock, walked across the town. Don Ramon had stated that he need not go on board before midnight. The streets were strangely quiet and for the most part nobody was about; Kit understood the citizens went to sleep in the afternoon. He saw nothing romantic. Las Palmas rather looked business-like and modern than picturesque. The houses had straight, square fronts and the roofs were flat. Only the white belt of surf and background of broken volcanic mountains relieved the utilitarian ugliness.

The wine shops had no call for Kit, but he noted the splashed floors, pungent smells, and swarms of flies. A girl on a balcony near the cathedral dropped a red oleander and another smiled, but Kit did not turn his head. He sprang from sober, puritanical stock, and his code was austere; one earned one's pay and studied in order to earn more; one shunned indulgence and trained one's body. Kit had trained his at the gymnasium and a cheap swimming club. In summer he sailed races on board cheap little boats. Although his horizon was not wide, his health and nerve were good.

He followed the *carretera* that runs south from the town. In Spain, a road is often a bridle-track a mule can hardly climb, but the government *carretera* is wide and level. In the distance was Telde, where oranges grow, and Kit set off in the dust and scorching heat. The Trade-breeze blew behind him; on his left hand the Atlantic broke in shining foam against black lava reefs; on his right, across the thin belt of cultivation, dark rocks, melted by volcanic fire, rose like a giant wall.

A few palms and fields of feathery sugar cane bordered the road. Then Kit saw vines, tied to sticks and growing in hot dust, and by and by a thread of water in a deep *barranco*. Washerwomen knelt by the channel, beating wet clothes with stones, and Kit understood afterwards why his shirts

wore out. Some of the women were young, but when he stopped for a moment at the bridge they did not look up. To beat the clothes was their job, and maize flour and goat's milk cheese are dear. Farther on, Kit saw others, carrying big earthen jars on their heads. They looked like Moorish women, for their feet and arms were very brown, and long black shawls half hid their faces. In the fields, barefooted men laboured among the tomatoes and vines. It was obvious the *peons* did not sleep in the afternoon; but for the most part their white clothes were good and they looked happy.

Soon after he passed a lava village, Kit got tired. This was strange, but the sun was hot; and there was a wall about which lizards ran. Behind, grew fleshy green bananas, with big flowers like bleeding-hearts; and he sat down in the shade. He had meant to walk to Telde; going four miles an hour, one could get back before nine o'clock, but it was cool among the bananas and he had begun to feel the drowsy calm of the islands where nothing is important and the sun always shines.

He mused about Betty. She was thin and often looked tired. If he could bring her out, to feel the sun and balmy wind and see the blaze of colour! He pictured her bending over her account books in a dark office and going home through the dreary streets. She knew no joy and brightness; his horizon was getting wider, but hers was not. Then he remembered Betty's silver cross. Betty went to church; perhaps she found her romance there and saw things beyond his view. She had refused to marry him and perhaps her kiss was meant for good-bye. He did not know, but when he got promotion he was going back to try again. In the meantime, for Betty's sake, he meant to keep his simple rules; to go straight, do what he said, cheat nobody, and by diligence force his way to fortune.

He heard shouts and mocking laughter, and looked up. The governor of the African jail was running along the road, his face red, and wet by sweat; Bones' small cap occupied ridiculously the back of his head. His white jacket had lost some buttons and blew open; his thin, red slippers were trodden down at the heels. He laboured on with stern resolution, looking straight in front. Behind came a swarm of ragged children, pelting him with soil and stones.

"Shilling, *penique*, *puerco* Ynglisman!" they cried.

For a moment or two Kit gazed at Considine with angry impatience. He did not know if the fellow was very drunk, but it was obvious he was not sober, and his breathless panting jarred on the drowsy calm. Don Ramon had said the English made disturbances. Yet the fellow was Kit's countryman; and he got up. Driving off the children, he stopped Considine.

"Where are you going?"

"Must catch my ship. Purser said five o'clock."

Kit looked at his watch. It was four o'clock, and Las Palmas was some distance off. The port was three miles farther, but one could get a *tartana* at the town.

"You're heading the wrong way," he said. "Can you run?"

"Turn me round and see me go," Considine replied. "Beat you, anyway. Loser pays for drinks."

Kit turned him round and they started, but when a piece of lava a boy threw struck his head, it cost Kit something to use control. Now and then Considine's red slippers came off and they were forced to stop. Considine declared that if he stooped he could not get straight again, and Kit resignedly put the slippers on his feet. He felt himself ridiculous and wanted to leave the wastrel, but somehow could not. If Considine lost his ship and got into trouble at Las Palmas, he might lose his post. Kit saw his business was to help him out.

He got very hot. The Trade-breeze blew the dust in his face, and the dust turned to mud on his wet skin; he saw dark patches on his white jacket. Considine's slippers came off oftener, and Kit remarked that not much of his stockings was left, but they made progress, and at length the town was close in front. Kit wondered whether the citizens had finished their afternoon sleep, and did not know if it was a relief or not to find the first street empty and quiet. He did not want people to see him, but he must find a *tartana*, and none was about. Considine, going five miles an hour, was a yard or two in front. When he saw a wine shop he stopped.

"Here we are!" he gasped. "The loser pays."

Kit pushed him across the pavement; Considine turned and knocked off his hat. While Kit picked up his hat the other reeled towards the wine shop and people came out. Kit seized him and drove him on. The market was not far off and he had seen *tartanas* in the square. He was breathless, tired and dusty, and had trodden on his soft grey hat. People were beginning to run after them, but he meant to put Considine on board a *tartana* and send him to the port.

The market was nearly deserted, for in the Canaries one buys food before the sun is high, but a few stalls were occupied and three or four small traps waited for hire. Kit waved to a driver and seized Considine. Then he tried to get his breath, and wiping his hot face, smeared his skin with muddy grit.

"Loser pays," said Considine. "What's good stopping in the sun? Let's get some wine!"

He tried to make off, but Kit shook him angrily and glanced about. A crowd had begun to gather and all the traps were coming. At the end of a neighbouring street, the girl he had noted at the mole talked to a man in English clothes. She was very handsome and looked cool and dignified. Kit was young and got hotter when he saw her eyes were fixed on his dishevelled companion. He felt humiliated and could have borne it better had she looked amused, but she did not. She watched him and Considine with grave curiosity, as if she studied people of another type than hers. Kit got very angry.

Four traps arrived, the drivers gesticulating and cracking whips, and Kit dragged Considine to the nearest. Considine struggled and tried to push him back.

"Not going yet," he shouted. "Beat you easy. Where's my wine? Don't you pay your debts?"

His jacket tore and he almost got away, but Kit got a better hold.

"You're going now! Get in!"

"Won't go with that fellow. Don't like his horse," Considine declared.

The crowd had got thicker and people jeered and laughed.

"*Todos animales. Gente sin verguenza!*" one remarked.

Kit frowned. He knew the Castilian taunt about people who have no shame, but he held on to Considine. The drivers did not help; they disputed noisily who should get the passenger. Then the man Kit had noted with the girl came up.

"Put him on board. I'll lift his legs," he said.

They did so with some effort, for Considine was heavy and kicked.

"To the mole; African steamer's boat," said Kit; Considine occupied the driver's seat.

"Show you how to drive!" he said, and shoving back the *tartanero*, used the whip.

The horse plunged, the wheels jarred the pavement, there was a crash as a stall overturned, and the *tartana* rolled across the square and vanished. Kit heard Considine's hoarse shout and all was quiet. He looked about. The girl who wore the yellow dress was gone, but the man stood close by and gave him a quiet smile. He had a thin, brown face and Kit saw a touch of white in his hair. A mark on his cheek looked like an old deep cut.

"You didn't go with your friend," he remarked.

"I did not; I've had enough," said Kit and added anxiously: "D'you think he'll get the African boat?"

The other looked at his watch. "If he runs over nothing before he makes the port, it's possible. A West-coast trader, I expect?"

"No," said Kit. "He's the governor of a jail. An old soldier, I understand."

His companion smiled. "The British Colonial office uses some curious tools, but if he sweated for you in India, their plan's perhaps as good as handing out a job to a political boss."

"Then, you're not English?"

"I'm an American. I don't know if it's important, but since you'd had enough of the fellow, why did you bother?"

"For one thing, I wanted to get rid of him," Kit said naïvely. "Then, of course, since he is English, I felt I had to see him out."

The other nodded. "A pretty good rule, but if you stick to it at Las Palmas, I reckon you'll be occupied! Which way do you go?"

"To the *Fonda Malagueña*," said Kit.

His companion indicated a shady street and left him at the top, and when Kit loafed in the *patio* after his six o'clock dinner, he pondered. Las Palmas was not at all the romantic city he had thought, and the men he had met going south on board the steamer were a new type. They were business men, holding posts at African factories, but they were not the business men he knew at Liverpool. He could not picture them punctual, careful about small things, or remarkably sober. They had a touch of rashness he distrusted but rather liked. Yet he understood some occupied important posts. In fact, it looked as if the Liverpool small clerk's rules did not apply everywhere; in the south men used others. Although Kit was puzzled his horizon was widening.

CHAPTER III

A MOUNTAIN EXCURSION

Two weeks after Kit joined his ship, she returned to Las Palmas, and on the whole he was satisfied with his occupation. *Campeador* was fast and built on a steam yacht's model, except that her bow was straight. Although she rolled horribly across the combers the Trade-breeze piles up, she shipped no heavy water. Then Kit thought it strange, but she was kept as clear as a British mail-liner.

He had begun to like her crew; the grave bare-legged fishermen who rowed the cargo launches, and the careless officers. All were Spanish but Don Pedro Macallister, the chief engineer, for although the *roll* stated that his birthplace was Portobello, it was not in Spain. The rules require that Spanish mail-boats be manned by Spanish subjects, but government officials are generally poor and English merchant houses sometimes generous.

For two weeks *Campeador* steamed round the islands, stopping at surf-hammered beaches to pick up cattle, camels, sheep and mules. Now the livestock was landed and Kit, waiting for a boat to carry him ashore, mused about his first encounter with the captain. *Campeador* was steaming out from Las Palmas, rolling violently as she breasted the long, foam-crested seas, and Kit staggered in the dark across the lumbered deck where the crew were throwing cargo into the hold. She had, as usual, started late, for in Spain nobody bothers about punctuality.

He reached the captain's room under the bridge. Don Erminio had pulled off his uniform and now wore a ragged white shirt and shabby English clothes. His cap, ridiculously shrunk by spray, was like a schoolboy's. Kit inquired politely what he was to do about some goods not recorded in the ship's manifest, and the blood came to the captain's olive skin.

"Another animal! All *sobrecargos* are animals; people without honour or education!" he shouted. "I am a Spanish gentleman, not a smuggler!"

Kit was half daunted by the other's theatrical fury, but his job was to keep proper cargo lists, and what he undertook he did. It was not for nothing his ancestors were hard sheep-farmers in the bleak North.

"Nevertheless, I want to know about the chemical manure for Palma," he said.

Don Erminio seized the tin dispatch-box and threw it on the floor.

"Look for the documents! Do I count bags of manure? I am not a clerk. When the company doubts my honour I am an anarchist!" He kicked the tumbled papers. "If you find five pesetas short, I throw the manure in the sea. People without education! I go and tear my hair!"

He went, and when the door banged Kit sat down and laughed. He had borne some strain, but the thing was humorous. To begin with, Don Erminio's hair was very short. Then, although his grounds for anger were not plain, Kit thought it possible the cargo belonged to a relation of the captain's. Picking up the papers, he returned to his office, and when *Campeador* reached port the bags of manure were entered on the manifest. Don Erminio, however, bore him no grudge. In the morning he met Kit with a friendly smile and gave him a list of the passengers, for whom landing dues must be paid.

"Sometimes one disputes about the sum. It is human, but not important," he remarked. "You will write three lists for the robbers who collect the dues."

Kit said the list obviously did not give the names of all on board, and Don Erminio grinned.

"It is a custom of the country. If one pays all one ought, there is no use in having official friends. I put down the names of people the collectors know."

When the steamer was ready to leave Palma, Kit and Don Erminio went to the agent's office and were shown a pile of bags of silver. There was a bank at Las Palmas, but for the most part the merchants did not use its cheques, and Kit's duty was to carry the money to their creditors. The agent gave him a list.

"You will count the bags before you sign? It is the English habit!" he said.

Kit saw Don Erminio studied him and imagined the agent's voice was scornful. For a moment or two he thought hard, and then took up a pen.

"I expect all the money is here?"

"I have counted," said the agent and Kit signed the document.

He knew he had broken a sound business rule and perhaps had run some risk, but he had begun to see the rules were different in Spain. When he went out he heard the agent say, "*Muy caballero!*"

"This one is not altogether an animal," the captain agreed.

Kit afterwards counted the silver and found the list accurate. On the morning he waited for his boat at Las Palmas, he mused about it, and admitted that perhaps his philosophy did not cover all the complexities of human nature. By and by Macallister joined him, and he asked: "Who is the American with a scar on his cheek I met before we sailed?"

"I'm thinking ye mean Jefferson. A fine man! He was Austin's partner and they transact some business together noo."

"Then who is Austin?"

"He was *sobrecargo* and held your post, but he didna bother about the freight. Pented pictures, until he and Jefferson salved the *Cumbria* and I married him to Jacinta Brown."

"*You* married him to the lady," Kit remarked.

"Weel, I reckon I had something to do with it. For a' that, Don Pancho Brown is cautious, and although he's anither daughter, I doubt if I could do as much again. Ony way, if ye trust old Peter, ye'll no go far wrang."

Kit was frankly puzzled about his new friend. Macallister's hair was going white, but his eyes twinkled humorously, and Kit often found it hard to determine whether he joked or not. All the same, people did trust Macallister. In the meantime, Kit wanted to know about Austin and Jefferson. Macallister told him.

Jefferson was mate of an American sailing ship, and inheriting a small legacy, undertook to float a wreck on the African coast. His money soon ran out, his men fell sick, and when he fronted disaster Jacinta Brown sent Austin to help. Austin was poor and not ambitious, but he had some talent that Jacinta roused him to use. Macallister said Jacinta could make any man do what she wanted and the girl Jefferson married was her friend. Money was raised, Austin went to Africa, and he and Jefferson salved the stranded ship. Their adventures made a moving tale and when they returned Pancho Brown gave Austin a share in his merchant business. Macallister repeated that he was really accountable for Jacinta's marrying Austin, and when he stopped, studied Kit.

"I dinna ken what I can do for you," he said in a thoughtful voice. "Ye're no like Austin. He was a lad o' parts. Aweel, ye're young and a' the lassies are no' fastidious."

"Anyhow, I'm not an adventurer," Kit rejoined and hesitated. "Besides, if I'm ever rich enough to marry, there's a girl at home –"

"Yin?" remarked Macallister. "Man, when I was young I had the pick o' twelve! Then I'm thinking it was no' for nothing she let ye away. Maybe ye have some talents, but ye're no' amusing."

He turned, for Juan the mate, who wore spectacles, and the captain came on deck. Don Erminio carried an old pinfire gun, hung round his shoulders by a strap; he wore a big cartridge belt and black leggings, and looked like a brigand.

"*Vamos!*" he said. "Me, I am *cazador*. I go shoot the rabbit. If the *patron* is not about, perhaps I shoot the goat."

A boat came to the ladder and Kit, rather doubtfully, got on board. He knew something about his companions and imagined the excursion might be marked by adventures. For one thing, the goats that roamed among the hills were not altogether wild but belonged to somebody. When the party landed he thought his doubts were justified. Two horses, a big white donkey, and a mule were waiting,

and a violent dispute began, for the muleteer declared he went with the animals and must be paid before they started. He called his saint to witness that he knew the captain.

"*Buen!*" Don Erminio remarked at length and turned to Kit. "He is more animal than the mulo, but it is not important. *Vamos!* Now we start."

They set off in a dust cloud, but presently left the road and laboured across a waste of hot sand. When the sand stopped they went by winding paths to the hills, and when they pushed up a dry watercourse Kit's troubles began. The track was rough, and dangerous in places where the sharp lava blocks were piled in heaps, but Don Erminio rode his lean horse like a *gaucho*. The fat mate rode like a sack, but his big, cautious donkey knew the hills, and Macallister had the carriage and balance of a cavalry soldier. He declared he had learned to ride in the Greys, and Kit thought it possible, although Macallister's statements were sometimes not accurate. He carried a sharp stick, with which at awkward spots he pricked Kit's mule.

A Spanish mule is as surefooted as a cat, but riding is not a pastime for small shipping clerks, and Kit had not mounted before. The pack-saddle was very wide and galled his legs, the jolts shook him hard, and when they reached the top of the watercourse his muscles ached intolerably. The muleteer ran beside him, sometimes holding on by the stirrup and sometimes by the animal's tail. At the top the path went obliquely up a precipitous cinder bank and Macallister used his pointed stick. The mule kicked and Kit, falling backwards, rolled for some distance down the pitch. When he got up he was shaken, bruised and very sore, but he saw Macallister's twinkle and heard Don Erminio's hoarse laugh. His mouth went hard. He had engaged to ride to a hill village and he was going to ride there.

The muleteer helped him up and they presently reached a row of square lava houses standing among palms and sugar cane. There was a small, dark wine shop, at which Don Erminio stopped.

"*Buen' caballero!*" he remarked to Kit. "Now we take a drink and then I shoot the goat."

There was no glass in the wine shop windows and the Trade-breeze blew through the room. After the glare outside, to sit in the shade and rest one's aching muscles was soothing, and Kit drank two cups of red wine. The captain drank *caña*, a raw rum, and presently picking up a guitar began to sing. His voice was good and Kit liked the music, although he did not know it was classic opera. He sang on, without embarrassment, when Macallister began, "Gae bring to me a pint o' wine," and the clashing melodies brought a group of *peons* to the door.

"Ave Maria!" one exclaimed. "But they are strange, the men of the sea!"

By and by Kit noted the empty bottles and got up. He had had enough and resolved he would not help Don Erminio to shoot another's goat. Moreover, he imagined his companions had had too much. Starting for the port, he left the village but soon afterwards sat down by a euphorbia bush. Although his head was clear, his legs were a trifle unsteady; the red wine was stronger than he had thought, but perhaps his coming out from the cool, dark shop into the scorching sun accounted for something. He frowned, and resolving he would not again indulge like that, began to look about.

Overhead, a tremendous rampart of broken mountains cut the sky. In places, the rocks, torn by volcanic heat, were black as ink; in places they were red, and some belts shone in the searching light like polished steel. In the hollow of a *barranco* where water ran were tall palms and luminous green cane, dotted by red oleanders and geraniums. The sky was all blue and the Atlantic glimmered like a big turquoise.

Kit felt the landscape's charm, for he had not known much of Nature's beauty. At Liverpool, when one went out with a bicycle on Saturdays, one followed the tram-lines across a flat country stained by smoke and the dust of traffic. He had once stopped for a week with his father's relations in the North and remembered the quiet, green valley where the river ran, but the moors about it were hidden by rain-clouds, and mist rolled down the long wet slopes. Now sea and mountains were touched with splendid colour by the Southern sun.

He mused about his companions. He thought Macallister a good sort, and liked the Mate and Don Erminio. Their irresponsible carelessness had charm, but Kit did not altogether approve; his

friends and relations were frugal, industrious folk. He had a vague notion that their utilitarian virtues were sometimes shabby; for example, in Kit's circle, one was sober because soberness paid. But at the same time, to waste his youth and talents in indulgence was folly.

Yet he was not altogether moved by selfish caution; Kit's unconscious asceticism was his by inheritance. The blood of yeomen flockmasters, who by stern self-denial had held their sheep-walks on the bleak hills, was in his veins. They were hard folk, who fronted bitter gales, took no thought for their bodies, and lived that they might work.

But, since he was not a hermit, it was plain he must go with his new friends as far as his code allowed, but when he had done so he would stop. He thought, for example, he had stopped in time when he left the wine shop after Macallister ordered another bottle. Then, looking at his watch, he got up and started for Las Palmas.

CHAPTER IV KIT'S OBSTINACY

When he had gone some distance Kit climbed down a ravine that promised a short line to the harbour, and stopped as he crossed a field of maize at the bottom. A girl, standing by a horse, was occupied by a strap, and Kit knew her before she looked up. She wore a short linen riding-skirt, a thin yellow jacket, and a big yellow hat that shone against the tall green corn. Her olive skin had a warm tinge; her brown hair looked burnished. She was Mrs. Austin's sister, and Kit admitted he had not in England met a girl like this. He thought her vivid; it was the proper word.

"Have you some bother about the harness?" he asked.

Olivia looked up and noted that he was tall and straight. His colour was fresh, for Kit was not much sunburned yet, and his eyes were frank. In a way, he was rather an attractive fellow, but not altogether her sort. For one thing, he was Don Arturo's man and his white clothes were cheap. All the same, when the winter tourists were gone, young men were not numerous.

"A strap has broken," she replied. "Perhaps one could get a piece of string through the hole. Have you some?"

"I have a leather bootlace," said Kit. "If you'll wait a minute –"

He was going off, but she stopped him. "You had better see how much we need, because if you cut too much, you may have some trouble to reach Las Palmas."

"That is so; you're rather clever," said Kit, who looked at the broken strap. "Well, I'll find a block where I can take off my boot."

Olivia smiled. Lava blocks were all about, but she liked his fastidiousness. In a minute or two he came back with a piece of the lace and began to mend the strap.

"Let me help," said Olivia. "That loop is not very neat; I don't think you are much of a workman."

"In England, I was a shipping clerk," Kit rejoined.

Olivia noted his frankness. As a rule, the young men from the coal wharf and banana stores talked guardedly about their English occupations. Some had come for a warmer climate and some for fresh experience, but none admitted he had come for better pay. She helped Kit to pull the loop straight and he remarked that it did not look very firm.

"It will hold," she said. "In Grand Canary harness is mainly string. You are on board the *correillo*, are you not? I think I saw you land from the African boat."

Kit said he had joined the ship two weeks since, and Olivia wondered whether he was dull. He ought to have seen that her remembering his arrival was flattering, but he obviously did not.

"Well," she resumed, "what do you think about the *correillo*'s officers?"

"I don't know yet. You see, one doesn't meet men like these at Liverpool. For one thing, *Campeador* generally sails an hour or two late. That's significant."

"In Spanish countries, punctuality is not a virtue and nobody is a slave to rules. We do what we like, when we like, and let people wait."

"Sometimes it must make things awkward," Kit remarked. "However, if you're satisfied about the harness, can I help you up?"

Olivia gave him a quick glance; it looked as if he were willing to let her go. He was dull, but his dullness was intriguing. In fact, since Olivia knew her charm, it was something of a challenge. She said she would walk across the maize field and signed Kit to lead the horse.

"I expect you'll make for the *carretera*," he said "Isn't it the easiest way to your side of the town?"

"If you know where I live, you know who I am."

"I do know. You are Mrs. Austin's sister. Macallister told me."

Olivia frowned. She was not jealous, but sometimes she felt as if Jacinta's popularity swamped hers.

"What did Don Pedro tell you about my sister?"

"He said she ruled the English colony and at Las Palmas what she said went."

"Oh, well! Perhaps he did not exaggerate very much. Macallister does exaggerate, you know. But was this all?"

Kit was embarrassed. Macallister had said much more.

"He told me something about Mr. Austin and the wreck on the African coast."

Olivia pondered. She knew Macallister and noted Kit's embarrassment.

He occupied the post Austin had occupied. On the whole, Olivia was amused, but while she thought about it they passed the end of a path that turned off through the corn.

Kit was quiet. He felt the vivid light and colour made a proper background for his companion's exotic beauty, and not long since it was unthinkable that a girl like this should engage him in friendly talk. Yet, although one got a hint of pride and cultivation, she was frank and he thought her kind. The dreariness he had known at Liverpool was gone; walking in the splendid sunshine by Olivia's horse, he felt another man. For all that, Olivia thought they had talked long enough and when they came out from the maize she stopped. Then she saw with some annoyance she had passed the proper path.

They had reached the edge of the narrow tableland, and in front a bank of volcanic cinders ran down steeply and vanished, as if there was a cliff not far below. The smooth surface was broken here and there by the marks of horses' feet, and one saw in the distance a bridle path wind among the rocks. A little cement channel, carrying water from the hills, crossed the steepest pitch, and indicated how the horses had reached an easier gradient. Yet to ride along the channel looked horribly risky, and Kit thought the bank of cinders had recently slipped down and carried away the path.

"Give me the bridle," said Olivia.

"You're not going to get up?"

Olivia smiled. She had pluck and rode like a Spaniard. Moreover, in the Canaries, the hill roads are generally bad. Then perhaps she was willing Kit should see her cross the awkward spot.

"My sister is waiting for me. Can you hold the stirrup?"

"I won't try! You mustn't ride along the channel."

The blood came to Olivia's skin. Jacinta ruled all the men she knew and Olivia thought something of her sister's power was hers. Then she was proud and young, and the fellow had told her she *must not*.

"Do you mean you won't help me up?" she said. "After all, I can get up without you."

Kit went forward a few yards and then turned and fronted her. He blocked the way and his mouth was firm. Olivia looked at him haughtily and her eyes sparkled. His object was plain; he meant to stop and force her to go another way.

"Move back, please!" she said sharply.

"Not yet," said Kit and indicated the watercourse. "You see, for a few yards there's nothing but the channel. You couldn't walk across the cinders and lead the horse. The pitch is very steep."

"One could ride along the channel."

"I think not. The top's rounded and the cement's smooth. The horse would slip."

"Do you know much about horses?" Olivia asked.

Kit coloured, because he imagined he understood her taunt. "I know nothing; until this morning I hadn't mounted a horse. All the same, the risk is obvious."

Olivia looked at her wrist-watch. "My sister has some engagements for the afternoon and needs me. I ought to be at home. This is the shortest line to the town, but since you won't let me use it, perhaps you have another plan."

"I have," said Kit. "I'll ride the horse across."

With an effort he got into the saddle. The saddle was a man's, but he had not long since finished his first riding lesson, and all his muscles ached. Olivia marked his awkwardness and hesitated, although she let him go. The thing was not so risky as he thought and the horse was steady. Still she admitted that the fellow's nerve was good.

Kit's heart beat and his look was strained. He expected to fall and might roll over the cliff. Then he noted that the horse tried the treacherous cinders with its feet as it climbed obliquely to the watercourse. He thought the animal was used to the hill-tracks, and if it knew how to get across, he would let it. One could not go up hill because of the rocks, and on the other side the slope was precipitous. Not far off, the bank of cinders stopped and one saw nothing but a vulture poised against the sky. He left the bridle slack and the horse went on. After a few minutes the animal stepped off the watercourse and headed cautiously down the slope.

To brace himself back hurt horribly, but Kit did so. They had nearly passed the top of the cliff and in front a slump of cactus grew beside a winding path. If he could hold out until they reached the clump, he could get down. In the meantime, his stiff, galled knees had no grip and the animal's cautious movements jarred his aching back. He sat like a sack until the horse stepped on a rolling stone, and then his feet came out of the awkward Spanish stirrups. He struck the ground, and rolled into the cactus. A cloud of dust marked his plunge.

When the dust blew away Kit was rather surprised to find he had stuck to the bridle and the horse had not run off. Then he was conscious of a strange pricking over much of his body, as if he had been stung by nettles. He looked at his clothes and saw they were pierced by small spines like needles. He pulled out a number, but they stuck to his hands and it was plain both ends were sharp. Then he looked at the cactus and understood why it was called prickly pear. The needles grew in tufts on the round fruit and thick, fleshy leaves. He got up and shook his clothes, but could not shake off the tormenting spines. While he was occupied Olivia joined him.

"Since you have got across, I expect you see you're not very logical," she remarked.

"It looks like that," said Kit. "Nevertheless, I was logical as far as I knew."

Olivia studied him quietly and Kit got embarrassed. His clothes and skin were smeared by dust and he felt like a pincushion. The prickling was intolerable and he wanted to rub his leg. Olivia's charm was strong, but he wished she would go. In fact, he imagined she knew this, because her eyes twinkled.

"Your logic's not very sound," she resumed. "For example, I began to ride when I was eight years old, and you admitted you began this morning. Why did you imagine you could ride along the channel when I could not? However, you have kept me for some time and I mustn't stop."

Kit did not know what he ought to do, but he gave her the bridle and held the stirrup.

"Not that way! Keep your hand firm and your arm stiff," she said, and putting her foot on his hand, sprang to the saddle. Then she turned and smiled. "You have pluck, but you had better get back on board and change your clothes."

She started the horse, and leaning back in a strangely graceful pose, let the animal go. The pitch was steep, and the soil was loose, but they plunged down the hill. Kit knew nothing about a horse's paces; he rather thought it skated. When Olivia had gone he tried to pull out the spines, but finding that for the most part they stuck to his hands he gave it up. Then he lighted a cigarette and reflected moodily.

To begin with, it looked as if Miss Brown knew all about prickly pear, and her amused sympathy annoyed him. Then his battling her was obviously not justified, and as he watched her speed down the slopes below he frowned. He had refused to let a girl who rode like that undertake a feat he had tried; and then had fallen into the prickly pear. The thing was ridiculous. In the meantime, his skin was tingling; he must get off his clothes, and he started for Las Palmas.

CHAPTER V

MRS AUSTIN'S VERANDA

Don Erminio and Kit were fishing in the bay behind the Isleta, the hill of volcanic cinders that shelters the Port of Light. Off-shore, the Trade-breeze was fresh, but in the bay the rocks broke the sea. The captain had moored his *barquillo* to a reef and stood in a pool, with the warm, green water washing about his knees. His legs and arms were bare, as were Kit's, but they wore rawhide sandals, because where the sea-urchin grows one protects one's feet. Don Erminio carried a dripping bag, in which something moved, and a pole with a sharp hook like a salmon gaff. Kit carried a short fishing rod and was rather wet. Stepping out on a dry ledge, he looked about.

A quarter of a mile off, the long, white-topped combers rolled across the bay and then broke on the north shore of the island in a belt of foam. Mist had begun to creep down the mountain wall, and in the distance Galdar hill rose against the sunset. Farther off, across a belt of shining sea, Tenerife's snowy peak glimmered upon a background of dull green and red. Some distance from land, a small ketch-rigged vessel steered for the Isleta. It was nearly six o'clock and would soon be dark.

"*Vamos!*" said Don Erminio. "One does not get rich while one looks about, and the salt fish I sent home from San Sebastian is almost gone."

Kit remarked that the captain had sent a large box and asked if Señora Martinez liked salt fish.

"She does not, but it is not important," said Don Erminio. "Children are always hungry and meat costs much. When one is a sportsman, fish costs nothing, and there is more money for me."

He stepped on some wet weed, and staggering across the ledge, declared the man who made his sandals had no shame, but Don Erminio was seldom angry long, and Kit admitted he was a sportsman. They were looking for the big, yellow-striped eel, which in the Canaries is a delicacy, and when the captain got his breath he plunged into the shallow water and began to whistle.

"*Salta, morena!*" he called in a thin, high-pitched note.

The *morena* feeds on pulps, the squid and octopus, which blow out air with a whistling noise when the pools get dry. The Spaniards eat the small pulps, but some are large and *morena*-fishers state they eat men. After a time Don Erminio jumped into a chasm where the surge swung to and fro, and presently stopped in front of a dark cave. Long weed tossed about with the wash, and the light that touched the rock was broken by puzzling reflections, in which the captain's legs shone lividly white. Kit, standing behind him, rather wished he would leave the cave alone. Somehow the dark hole looked forbidding, but Don Erminio declared he had seen a *morena* go in and Kit resigned himself to wait.

By and by he remarked, under water, a dark object stretched across a rock. It was spotted and looked rather like a thick stalk of weed. He thought it wavered, but the movement of the water might account for this, and Don Erminio began to pull about the weed. When Kit looked down again, the object was curved and thicker than he had thought. It obviously moved and its outer end was getting near the captain's leg. Then Kit saw another, and for a moment stood stiff and quiet while something throbbed in his ears. He knew the objects were the arms of an octopus.

He roused himself, and pushing the captain back, lifted his rod and struck. Don Erminio saw and shouted, but turned to the cavern and his pole jarred on Kit's. The weed tossed, the water got disturbed and thick, and Kit saw indistinctly three or four waving arms. It looked as if the thing was coming out, and he struck in savage panic at the spot he thought it occupied. Then Don Erminio leaped on to a dry ledge and pulled Kit up. When they looked back an indistinct, spotted horror writhed about the mouth of the cave. For a few moments Kit fought against a sense of nausea and the throbbing in his ears got worse.

"*Buen mozo!*" said the captain, beating his shoulder. "One has enough; the big pulpo is the devil. *Vamos!* In English, we get out."

While they pulled their boat to the rocks a man some distance off crossed the reef, and waved a white jacket. It looked as if he signalled and Kit saw the ketch he had noted was nearer land, but thought her too far off for the crew to see. The man, however, saw the boat, for he began to scramble across the rocks, shouting to Don Erminio.

"The ketch is Señor Jefferson's and they do not want her to make the port, where she must pay some dues," the captain said to Kit. "She is to go on to Africa, but the fellow says his boat is damaged and he cannot carry the message. Me, I think the wind is too strong for him. However, Señor Jefferson is very much a gentleman and the thing is possible."

Kit looked at the sea and doubted. The wind was fresh and outside the shelter of the rocks the combers were white and big, but Don Erminio could handle a small sailing boat. Kit signed agreement and the captain turned to the fisherman.

"Go home, mackerel-eater, and say two sailors have taken on your job."

They got on board, and while the captain rowed Kit reefed the latine sail. The boat plunged and spray began to blow about. When the sail was hoisted Kit got on the windward gunwale and the captain took the helm. The *barquillo* was small and did not carry much ballast, and the reefed sail pressed her, but in order to reach the ketch she must be driven to windward boldly. The others saw her coming for they hove their vessel to some distance off. Kit knew they durst not run far into the rocky bay.

The long yard began to bend and foam leaped about the gunwale. The *barquillo* was fast, and the latine sail took her well to windward, but a small boat going to windward is generally wet. When she lurched obliquely across the rollers the spray blew in clouds from her weather bow, and now and then their tops broke on board. Kit durst not get down to throw out the water; his weight was needed for a counterbalance on her lifted side, and he presently imagined she could not stand much more. Don Erminio's clothes and face were wet, but he met the big, curling seas with cool confidence, and somehow the boat went across.

When Kit could look ahead he saw the ketch was not far off. Her mainsail was lowered and, with jib and mizzen set, she swung her forefoot out of the foam and sank until her rail was hidden. It was plain the boat could not reach her on one tack, and by and by Don Erminio waved his cap.

"Let them do something. Now they must come to us," he said.

The ketch's helm went up, she swung round before the wind, and when she luffed the boat was close under her lee. Don Erminio and the *patron* shouted, a letter was thrown across, the ketch hoisted her mainsail, and Kit slacked the latine sheet. Going back, the wind was fair and they sped, with bows out of the water, across the long seas, while a wedge of foam stood up above the depressed stern. When they landed behind a reef it was nearly dark and Don Erminio studied Kit with a grin.

"Señor Jefferson is very much a gentleman and the letter is important," he said. "If you go by the *triana* and do not stop near the lights, nobody will see you. I must take the fish to my señora before she buys some meat."

Kit did not want to go. For one thing, his thin, wet clothes stuck to his body, he wore rawhide sandals, and could not find one sock. Yet he would rather like to meet Jefferson, who no doubt expected the letter. He started for the town and after a time stopped at a house in a quiet street. Somebody opened an iron gate in a narrow arch and Kit crossed the *patio*. He saw the stars shine over the court and shadowy bougainvilleas trail from the balconies. A fountain splashed in the gloom, and he smelt flowers. Then Jefferson came from a lighted room and took him in. He gave Kit a quick glance and noted his wet clothes, but did not look surprised. To look surprised was not Jefferson's habit.

"You have saved me some port dues and an awkward delay," he said when he had read the letter. "Will you take a drink?"

Kit refused politely and Jefferson resumed: "My wife can't receive you; she's at Palma, and there's something about which I ought to put Austin wise. Will you come along? I expect you know Mrs. Austin?"

"Perhaps I can claim to know Miss Brown?" Kit replied and then indicated his clothes.

"You're near my height and I can fix you; I didn't mean to let you go off like that," said Jefferson smiling.

Kit wanted to go and when he had put on a white suit of Jefferson's they started. Mrs. Austin's house was modern and occupied a natural terrace on the hill behind the town. A veranda ran along the front, and Kit saw a group of people in basket chairs. When Jefferson presented him Mrs. Austin's smile was kind and Olivia gave him her hand. Presently Kit sat down in a corner and looked about.

The veranda was wide and Mrs. Austin used it for a drawing-room. English and Spaniards owned her influence, she meddled benevolently with other's affairs, and presided over something like a salon of the old French school. At one end of the veranda a lamp stood on a bronze pillar, and bright beams shone out from the rooms behind, but Kit's corner was in the gloom and he was satisfied, since he rather doubted the fit of Jefferson's clothes. In front, one saw the clustered lights of the town and the white belt of surf that ran back to the shadowy Isleta. The sea sparkled in the moon's track, and then melted into the blue dark behind which was the African coast.

Kit studied his hosts. Mrs. Austin was slender and small. Her skin was olive and he noted some white in her hair. She was very graceful, but her glance was rather thoughtful than commanding. Austin loafed in his easy-chair. He was handsome, but looked languid – his hands were white and finely-shaped, his glance was careless. Kit could hardly picture him the hero of Macallister's romantic tale. In fact, Austin and Jacinta rather disappointed Kit.

On the whole, it was easier to picture Jefferson doing something big. He was thin, and although he was quiet, looked resolute and, so to speak, rough-hewn. Kit thought his was the Abraham Lincoln type. The others, however, were not really important when Olivia was about. She wore black and amber; a Spanish dress of diaphanous material and lace. Her olive skin was faintly touched, like a peach, by red. Kit thought her strangely beautiful and got a hint of pride and conscious power. By and by she crossed the floor and joined him.

"Have you gone for another ride?" she asked.

"Not yet," he said. "We have been at sea and one ride is enough for some time."

"Do you mean, you were shaken by your fall? If so, I'm sorry."

"I don't mean the fall. Going up the *barranco* to the hills shook me worse. I think you know it was my first adventure on horseback. Anyhow, you saw its inglorious close."

"But I rather thought you enjoyed adventures," Olivia replied with a twinkle. "Shortly before you arrived I was at a shop in the *triana*, and you crossed the front of the window."

Kit coloured, for he had seen his reflection in Jefferson's dressing glass; he imagined Olivia knew his shoes pinched and the clothes he wore were not his. Her quiet amusement jarred, but he reflected that clothes were not really important.

"My last adventure was on board a boat not long since," he said. "However, I do know a little about a boat."

"Mr. Musgrave certainly does know," Jefferson remarked. "He went off to meet *Cayman* in a fresh breeze that scared the fellow I sent."

"Now you ought to be satisfied!" said Olivia.

"I'm not satisfied. I didn't expect Mr. Jefferson to back my statement."

"Then you didn't want to persuade me you can manage a boat?"

"Not at all," said Kit. "I wanted to state that when you stick to things you know, you're not ridiculous. When I met you at the maize field I was ridiculous, because it was pretty obvious I couldn't manage a horse. In fact, I feel I ought to apologise."

"I wonder. You declared you were logical as far as you knew, and when I thought about it I agreed. You imagined the channel wasn't safe and saw I was obstinate. In consequence, you resolved to ride the horse across. On the whole, I think you were nice!"

"Are you disputing?" Mrs. Austin asked.

"Oh, no," said Olivia. "I am trying to persuade Mr. Musgrave he was rather noble. Not long since he rode my horse across a spot he didn't think safe for me."

"Then I reckon his nerve is pretty good!" Jefferson remarked.

Austin laughed, Mrs. Austin said nothing, but looked interested, and the blood came to Kit's skin. He almost thought Olivia shabby. Anyhow, he had had enough. If he stopped, he might look like a fool again, and he declared he must write out some cargo lists. Mrs. Austin told him he might come back, and after a glance at Olivia he turned to Jefferson.

"Thank you for the clothes," he said in rather a loud voice. "I'll send them home to-morrow."

He went off and Mrs. Austin said: "I don't altogether see –"

"It isn't very obvious," Olivia replied. "However, I imagine Mr. Musgrave has some grounds for thinking I ought to understand." She smiled and resumed: "Well, one gets rather tired of the banana men, and although Mr. Musgrave has some drawbacks I think he's good stuff. What do you think, Jake?"

"I reckon you *know*," said Jefferson, who looked at Mrs. Austin. "You see, I brought the young fellow."

"Oh, well," said Olivia, "we will admit that is something, but perhaps it's not important. Mr. Musgrave has engaged to return your clothes. If you had trusted anybody else on board his ship, I expect you would not have got them back. The *correillers* keep all they get."

CHAPTER VI

THE INJURED PASSENGER

The red sunset shone behind Lanzarote's broken hills, and the Trade-wind had, for an hour or two, dropped to a light breeze. *Campeador's* boat, under jib and spritsail, was beating up the coast. Don Erminio held the tiller; Kit sat on the gunwale and smoked and looked about. Between sea and mountains ran an empty plain, crossed by lava ridges and covered by sand that had blown, for sixty miles, from the Sahara. In the distance, the little whitewashed port of Arrecife glimmered against the dark sea. The landscape was clean-cut and arid. Kit thought it looked like pictures of Palestine.

Rabbits and vividly-coloured fish occupied the bottom of the boat, for Don Erminio was a keen sportsman and made his sport pay. As a rule, his other ventures were not profitable, and he had taken Kit along the coast to look at a new tomato farm, in which he had bought shares. They found a rude wall, enclosing a belt of sand in which Kit imagined nothing could be forced to grow, and the captain stormed about the knavery of the people who had persuaded him to speculate, until he saw a goat. Now, however, he was resigned and philosophical.

"Business is not for sailors, who are honest people," he remarked in English. "You have seen the *finca de tomate. Buen' ejemplo!*"

Kit had seen, and sympathised with the captain.

"Did you invest much money?" he asked.

"Fifty-dollar. Money of my señora, and when I arrive at my house she make *escandolo*. When they start the *finca* there is a feast, mucho talk and drinky. Me I say, '*Viva la industria*. Take my fifty-dollar.' *Hombre*, when I calculate the vermouth fifty-dollar buy!"

Kit said it was hard luck and tried not to smile, for the captain's speculations were something of a joke at Las Palmas.

"Other time I buy the mule cart," Don Erminio resumed. "I say, if the merchant want his cargo, he must use my cart. The plan is good, I buy more cart and get rich quick. *Vaya!* The cart is on the mole, two good mule in front. Comes the *locomotura*, pushing the concrete block. *Mal rayo!* The driver not look, and the mule is in the sea. I am no more *commerciante*; I am anarchist!"

Kit thought he understood the accident, for the mole at Las Palmas is narrow and the concrete blocks, carried on rails to its end, are large. The captain paused and coughed.

"Don Pedro savvy much; he buy whisky," he went on. "Now I have seen the *finca* mi t'roat is like the lime pit."

Kit's throat did not bother him. He had inherited an ascetic vein and, in a country where wine is cheap, he was abstemious. For all that, he was hungry and he looked ahead to see if the little port got nearer. He hoped the breeze would not freshen much before they arrived. Then he heard blocks rattle and looked astern. A schooner had gone about behind them and was overtaking the boat. Her forefoot swung out of the smooth swell, and a thin streak of foam marked her waterline; her high sails were black against the sunset. As she came up she swerved, a jib was hauled aback to stop her, and her after-canvas flapped.

"*La Malagueña*," said Don Erminio. "Now we get a drink!"

When the schooner forged past somebody threw a rope, Kit pulled down the boat's mast, and in a few minutes he and Don Erminio got on board. She was a beautifully-modelled vessel, belonging to the fruit-carrying fleet, but Kit understood an English merchant had recently chartered her. When he jumped down from the bulwarks, Wolf, the merchant, crossed the deck.

"If you'll come below and smoke, we'll tow your boat," he said and addressed Don Erminio in good Castilian. "Hallo, my friend! How do things go?"

"They do not go well," said the other. "I have seen the tomato farm."

Wolf laughed and took them to the small stern cabin, where he got out two or three bottles, some figs, and cigars. Kit took a *copita* of sweet, white muscatel and studied his host. Wolf was dark-skinned and wore white clothes, Canary rawhide slippers and a Spanish sash, but his English was good. Although he was fat, his movements and glance were quick.

"We'll put you on board your steamer when we anchor off the town," he said presently.

"Then, you're not going in?" said Kit.

"I think not. Arrecife is an awkward port to make in the dark. If the wind holds light, we'll anchor and wait for daybreak."

"The wind she freshen," said Don Erminio. "I know the reefs like a fish. I pilot you."

A steward had lighted the swivelled lamp and Kit occupied a locker behind the small swing table. Don Erminio and Wolf were opposite and Kit thought the captain's offer embarrassed the merchant. He, however, smiled and said they would wait. They could not land cargo until the morning, the casino was dull, and to win three or four pesetas was not exciting. Then he turned to Kit.

"Since you sail for Las Palmas soon, I'll give you a passenger. I expect you know we are trying to start a trade with the tribes on the Sahara coast. One of my men got hurt, and if he goes with you, the doctor will look after him to-morrow. I'd like you to send on a note I'll give you as soon as you arrive and keep the man on board until a boat comes. Then perhaps you needn't register him in your passenger lists. He's not a Spanish subject and we don't want the *commandancia* officers to make inquiries about the accident."

"The officers are animals. Me, I know them!" Don Erminio remarked.

"Sometimes they bother one," Wolf agreed. "However, I'll pay the *sobrecargo* for a first-class berth."

Don Erminio spread out his hands indignantly. "No, señor! A friend of yours is a friend of mine. There is no use in being captain if one's friends must pay."

"Oh, well," Wolf said, smiling. "I expect the *sobrecargo* is accountable for the passengers."

He put down an envelope and some money. Kit counted the coins and pushed back three or four.

"You have given me too much."

Wolf looked at Don Erminio, and Kit thought he slightly lifted his brows. Don Erminio shrugged, and Wolf leaned forward to pick up the money. Kit did not know if he got it, for the schooner lurched and the floor slanted. One heard the water rush along her side and a noise on deck. Loose canvas banged, ropes and blocks rattled, and it was plain the breeze had not kept light. As a rule, the boisterous north-easter freshens after dark.

Don Erminio jumped for the ladder and a few moments afterwards Kit got on deck. All was dark and showers of spray blew about, but he saw the schooner was now lying-to, and the crew had partly lowered the big mainsail. The indistinct figures hanging on to the long boom were trying down a reef. Presently they rehoisted the sail and when the schooner started, foam boiled about her lee bulwarks and all forward was lost in a cloud of spray. Kit looked aft and saw *Campeador's* boat, lifted half her length out of water, at the end of the towrope.

They made two tacks and then hove the schooner to with the lights of the little town abeam. The crew pulled up *Campeador's* boat, and Kit, balancing on the schooner's rail, waited for a minute before he jumped. Long, white-topped combers ran in the dark, the schooner rolled, lifting her wet side out of the foam. Sometimes the boat bumped her planks and sometimes swung away on the backwash. At length Kit jumped, and held her off while Don Erminio, rather unsteadily, came down a rope. Then two men appeared at the gangway, carrying another. The boat swung towards the vessel, Kit, bracing himself to bear a load, reached up, and next moment the man fell upon him.

A rope splashed, he stepped the little mast and hoisted the jib. Don Erminio seized the tiller, the schooner vanished, and the boat headed for Arrecife. The passenger lay in her bottom and did not move. By and by *Campeador's* lights tossed in the dark ahead, for there was no moon and the gloom was thickened by spray and blowing sand. The steamer rolled savagely and Kit knew if they missed

her, it would be awkward to make the shallow, surf-swept port. One could not trust the captain's pilotage; Wolf had been generous with his liquor.

Riding on a comber's crest, they sped past *Campeador's* stern and Kit saw her side, pierced by lights, lengthen out. He jumped for the mast and dropped sail while Don Erminio shoved down the helm. The boat ran on towards the illuminated square of the gangway under the saloon-deck, and a rope came down. Then Kit, pulling out the mast, held her off with the hook and the steamer rolled her bilge out of the water. Gangway and ladder went up, her side looked like a high, slanted wall; and then she rolled back and buried the ladder in swirling foam.

Indistinct figures cut against the light and scrambled down the ladder. Kit let the boat swing in, and somebody seized the passenger and dragged him out of the boat. Next moment Kit was on the platform at the bottom of the ladder with the water about his knees, helping the others, who pulled their load through the gangway. The officers' mess-room was opposite, and carrying in the man they put him on the locker cushions. He looked young, but his eyes were shut, he breathed heavily, and a dirty bandage covered the lower part of his face. When they entered Macallister got up.

"Wha's this? Where did ye get him?"

"His name's Scot and we brought him from Wolf's schooner. He's hurt."

"Maybe; the bandage indicates it," said Macallister, who studied the man. "For a' that, I alloo he's drunk."

Kit was surprised and rather indignant, but Macallister grinned.

"I'm telling ye, and I ought to ken."

"*Verdad!*" said the captain. "Don Pedro savvy much. Me, I savvy something too. *Es cierto*. The animal is drunk."

The ship was crowded by emigrants for Cuba and when they had put a pillow under Scot's head, Kit went for his dispatch box and got to work. At midnight he returned to the mess-room and found Scot sitting up with his back against the bulkhead. His eyes were dull and his pose was slack, but he awkwardly sucked up some liquor through a maize stalk. Macallister sat opposite, looking sympathetic.

"Is that stuff good for him?" Kit asked.

"D'ye ken what the stuff is?" Macallister rejoined.

Kit admitted that he did not and remembered that the other sometimes doctored the captain from the ship's medicine-chest. When Don Erminio had friends on board his throat was generally bad.

"Anyhow," Kit added, "I only see one glass."

"He can hear ye, although he canna talk," Macallister resumed.

"Where were you when you got hurt?" Kit asked.

Scot moved his hand over his shoulder and Kit thought he meant to indicate the African coast.

"How did you get hurt?"

The other felt in his pocket and taking out a piece of lead dropped it on the table. Kit saw it was a bullet and the end was flattened.

"Hit a bone," Macallister remarked.

"But how did they get the bullet out? Wolf has not a doctor on board."

Macallister smiled scornfully. "When ye have gone to sea langer ye'll ken a sailor's talents. For a' that, ye'll no trust the captain if the boat carries an engineer. But I'm modest and will not boast."

Campeador, steaming before the big rollers, plunged violently. One heard the measured beat of engines and roar of broken seas. The mess-table slanted and Kit picked up the bullet, which rolled about and struck the ledge. He wanted to ask Scot something, but Macallister waved his hand.

"Dinna bother the puir fellow. Away and count your tickets!"

Kit went and got a bath, and was afterwards occupied until *Campeador* steamed into the Port of Light, when he sent off Wolf's note. Some time afterwards a boat with a Portuguese runner from a big hotel came alongside and they put Scot on board. In the evening Kit went to ask for him, but

the clerk declared Scot had not arrived, and he doubted if their runner had gone to meet the *correillo*. Muleteers and camel-drivers from Arrecife did not stop at fashionable hotels. Kit was forced to be satisfied, but he thought the thing was strange.

CHAPTER VII

THE BULLET

All the basket chairs on Mrs. Austin's veranda were occupied and two or three young men leaned against the posts. Mrs. Austin used no formality. People came and went when they liked. Jacinta had a smile for all; to some she talked in a low voice and with some she joked. She knew things her guests hid from everybody else, and held a clue to numerous intrigues. The others revolved about her; Jacinta, so to speak, occupied the middle of the stage.

Austin, as usual, was satisfied to leave his wife alone. The evening reception was her business, and if she needed his help he would know. In the meantime, he talked to Jefferson and Kit. Kit was half conscious that he owed his hostess much. His clothes were better and the colours did not clash. He had dropped one or two mannerisms Mrs. Austin quietly discouraged, and had begun to take for models her husband and Jefferson. Jefferson was thin and hard and often quiet, although his smile was friendly. Austin was urbane and looked languid, but Kit now imagined he was not. In fact, both had a calm and balance Kit admired. They had risked and done much, but they did not talk down to him; to feel they weighed his remarks was flattering.

Notwithstanding this, he was rather annoyed by the young man who talked to Olivia. The fellow had returned from England and was telling her about cricket and tennis matches and London restaurants. Olivia looked interested, and Kit was jealous. His cricket was elementary and he knew nothing about tennis, but he thought Olivia ought to see Nasmyth was a fool. For one thing, he wore Spanish alpaca clothes, a black Spanish hat and a red sash, and looked like a brigand from the opera. Kit instinctively hated a theatrical pose, and wished Olivia had seen the fellow crumple up after a few minutes' dispute with Macallister about some coal.

He was not in love with Olivia; this was, of course, ridiculous. She did not move him, as Betty had moved him, to a shy tenderness that was mainly protective. When he was with Olivia he was romantic and ambitious; she inspired him with vague resolves to make his mark and use his talents. Her charm was strong, but Kit knew his drawbacks.

By and by Jefferson asked: "Did you see Wolf's schooner when you were on the Lanzarote coast?"

"Why, yes," said Kit. "We went on board one evening and brought back a hurt man."

He stopped for a moment. Wolf had asked him not to enter Scot on the list of passengers, but then he had not asked him not to talk about it. Besides, the thing was puzzling, and Kit was curious. He narrated their getting Scot on board and sending him off with the hotel runner at Las Palmas. When he stopped he thought Austin looked thoughtful.

"Do you know Wolf?" Austin asked.

"I do not," said Kit. "I hadn't met him before. He was polite, but, of course, he knew my post."

"You mean, he reckoned you were not worth cultivating?" Jefferson remarked. "Sometimes a mail-boat's *sobrecargo* is a useful friend."

"I don't expect Wolf has much use for me. He's trading in North-west Africa, is he not? What does he get?"

"The Sahara's not all desert. There are oases, and *wadys* where water runs. The Berber tribes have goods to trade and some of the stuff that comes out of the hinterland is valuable. In fact, the caravan roads may presently go west to the Atlantic and not north to Algiers."

"What sort of fellows are the tribesmen?"

"Physically, they're magnificent; I reckon it's the proper word. Six feet tall, muscular and hard as rawhide. We don't know much about their morals, but they're fearless, proud, and distrust strangers. Anyhow, they're a pretty tough crowd to get up against."

"Have you got up against them?" Kit asked.

Jefferson smiled. "We have had disputes. I reckon you know Austin and I send the *Cayman* across now and then. Sometimes she brings back sheep and barley and sometimes other goods. The trouble is the Spanish crew are not keen about anchoring on the Sahara coast; they know the *Moros*. But the fellows are not Moors, but Berbers of a sort. The true Berber is rather short and light; these folk are big and dark."

"Whose is the country?"

"The Berbers'?" Austin replied with some dryness. "Nominally, the Rio de Oro belt belongs to Spain. France claims the hinterland, the coast south of Rio de Oro and some territory north. However, did you look up the fellow Scot?"

"I tried. He was not at the hotel, and when I went to the house where Wolf's note was sent, the old Spaniard I saw knew nothing about him."

"Where is the house?" Austin asked.

Kit told him and he looked at Jefferson, who knitted his brows.

"Oh, well," said Austin. "Do you know how Scot got hurt?"

Kit took out the bullet. "He couldn't talk, but when we asked about his injury he put this on the table. The boat was rolling and I thought the thing would jump off."

Jefferson examined the bullet and gave it to Austin, who said nothing for a few moments and then lighted a cigarette.

"Strange and perhaps significant!" Austin remarked.

"Why is it strange? We know the man was shot," said Kit.

"The Berbers use long, smooth-bore, muzzle-loading guns; beautiful guns, with inlaid stocks, probably made long since in Persia and India. I don't know how they get them, but these people are not savages. They have a pretty good trading system and caravan roads. This bullet was fired from a modern rifle; a Mauser, I think. Do you want it?"

Kit said he did not and Austin glanced at Mrs. Austin, who presently beckoned Jefferson. He went off, and Kit pondered. On the surface, the others had been frank, but he doubted if they had told him all they knew. Then it was perhaps strange Mrs. Austin had signed to Jefferson.

"Looks as if the bullet interested you," Kit ventured.

"That is so," Austin admitted with a smile. "We imagined we knew the range of the Berbers' smooth guns. Since they make very good shooting, we found this useful; but a modern rifle is another thing. In fact, I begin to see –"

Kit was intrigued by the hint of romantic adventure, but Austin stopped and got up, for Olivia advanced. Sitting down by Kit, she opened her fan.

"Since you come to see us, I expect you're not bored," she said.

"Not at all," said Kit. "I feel I owe Mrs. Austin much for leave to come. All's so new to me."

"The people? Well, I suppose we're rather a mixed lot."

"I didn't altogether mean the people, although they are new. At Liverpool, my friends were of a type; the industrious clerk's type. We had our rules; you must be sober and punctual, you must look important, and your aim was to get on. At Las Palmas, you're not a type but individuals, doing what you like. Still I think the new surroundings count for more. After the shabby streets, the rows of little mean houses, to come to this –"

He indicated the dark volcanic mountains whose broken tops cut the serene sky, the Atlantic sparkling in the moon's track, and the twinkling lights along the belt of surf. When he stopped he heard the sea and the *Cazadores'* band playing in the *alameda*. The smell of heliotrope came from the dusty garden.

"All is really beautiful, anyhow at night, when you can't see the port," Olivia agreed. "It looks as if you felt its charm, but I think you resist. Some people don't trust beauty!"

"In a sense, to come South was like coming out of a dark room when the sun is bright. I'm, so to speak, dazzled and can't see which way to go."

"You're not emancipated yet," Olivia rejoined. "In Spain, we don't bother where we go, so long as the road is easy and the sun does shine. However, we won't philosophise. You did look bored not long since."

Kit had not imagined Olivia had noted his annoyance when she talked to the young man in the theatrical clothes, but he was beginning to know her.

"Don't you think I was justified?" he asked.

She laughed. "The charm of the South's insidious. When you arrived you were a Puritan; something of Jefferson's stamp. Well, he doesn't flatter one, but one trusts him."

"I think him and Austin fine," Kit declared. "They're quiet and Austin's humorous, but you feel what they say goes. Then you know their politeness is sincere. But since Jefferson's American, why does he live at Las Palmas?"

"I'll tell you his story. He was mate of an American sailing ship, some time since when sailing ships were numerous. She was wrecked and when she was sinking the crew got at some liquor and tried to kill their officers. I believe they did kill one or two, and then Jefferson got control."

"You can picture his getting control," Kit remarked. "But this doesn't account for –"

"The survivors' story was tragic and Jefferson lost his post. He came to Las Palmas and went to the coaling wharf. In the meantime, he had met on board a steamer the girl he married."

"Ah!" said Kit. "Calm nights in the tropics, with the moon on the sea! The girl was romantic and liked adventure?"

"Not at all! Muriel Gascoyne was conventional; the daughter of a remarkably disagreeable clergyman, who came out to stop the marriage, but arrived too late. Macallister had something to do with that. He delayed the *correillo* when Gascoyne was crossing from Teneriffe. Then Jefferson got a small legacy and bought the wreck of the *Cumbria*. Austin went to help him and when they floated the ship, married my sister. The doctors said Mrs. Jefferson could not stand a northern climate and Jefferson stopped at Las Palmas; he and Austin had earned rather a large sum by their salvage undertaking. I think that's all, but the story's romantic. Doesn't it fire your ambition?"

"To begin with, I don't expect a legacy," Kit remarked. "Then I'm not like Austin."

Olivia smiled and shut her fan. "No, you are something like Jefferson. He married a clergyman's daughter! Well, I imagine Jacinta wants me."

She went off and Kit's heart beat. Olivia thrilled him, but he was not a fool. For one thing, he knew she knew he was not her sort; then wrecks that poor adventurers could float were not numerous. All the same, when he talked to Olivia he was carried away, and wondered whether he could not by some bold exploit mend his fortune. He frowned and lighted a fresh cigarette.

Soon afterwards Wolf came up the steps. With his dark skin, soft black sombrero and black silk belt, he looked like a Spaniard; his urbanity was rather Spanish than English. When he stopped by Mrs. Austin, Kit somehow imagined she was not pleased, but she laughed and they talked for a few minutes. Then Wolf joined another group and afterwards pulled a chair opposite Kit's.

"I must thank you for landing Scot. Looks as if you used some tact. Your getting him quietly was an advantage."

"A hotel runner brought his boat, but when I went to look him up the clerk knew nothing about him," Kit replied.

Wolf smiled. "A dollar carries some weight with a hotel tout, and I didn't want to put the Port captain's men on the track. Since Scot landed in the hotel boat, they'd take it for granted he was a sick English tourist, and unless we're engaged in business, the Spanish officials don't bother us."

Kit rather doubted if Wolf was English, as his remark implied, and reflected that he had not much grounds for trusting him. For one thing, when he paid Scot's passage he put down a larger sum than was required, and Kit, thinking about it afterwards, imagined the fellow expected him to keep the money. Then Macallister declared Scot was drunk, and Kit had noted that he was strangely dull. To some extent, however, Wolf's frankness banished his doubts.

"Is Scot getting better?" he asked.

"He's not making much progress. In fact, since the town is hot just now, we have sent him away."

Kit noted that he did not state where Scot had gone, but perhaps this was not important, and he wanted to be just.

"Are you satisfied with your post on board the *correillo*?" Wolf resumed.

"In a way," said Kit "I like my job, but the pay is small."

Wolf looked thoughtful. "Perhaps you ought to stop until you know the country and the Spanish merchants, but I might help you by and by. We'll talk about it again."

He crossed the floor and by and by Kit got up. Mrs. Austin gave him her hand and Olivia went with him to the steps.

"Is Mr. Wolf a friend of yours?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Kit. "I think he's friendly."

Olivia knitted her brows. "Jacinta receives him, but sometimes I wonder – Anyhow, I imagine she approves you and you might find her a useful friend. People come to her when they can't see their way."

She let him go, and Kit returned to his ship, wondering whether her remarks indicated that he ought to consult Mrs. Austin before he made friends with Wolf.

CHAPTER VIII

A SWIMMING MATCH

A light breeze touched the long swell that splashed about the coaling mole, for the range that runs down the middle of Teneriffe cut off the Trade-wind. The sun was near the mountain tops and cool shadow touched Santa Cruz. The houses on the hillside had faded to grey, but the lower town shone dazzlingly white, and the sea was like wrinkled silver. At the end of another mole, across the flatly-curving bay, a beach of black sand and a green house with balconies marked the citizens' bathing place. The *correillo* rode at anchor near the mole's seaward end, and an African mail boat rolled upon the sparkling swell between her and the coaling station.

Kit, standing in the shade of a truck, pulled off his clothes and glanced at the water. The strong light pierced the smooth undulations and he saw the stones three or four fathoms down. A young clerk from a merchant house, half undressed, sat upon a lava block, and three or four others were stripping in the shadow of a neighbouring truck. One bantered Macallister, who wore a towel and talked at large.

"I was a swimmer before ye were born," the engineer rejoined. "Weel, I alloo ye're soople and a bonny pink, but ye're saft. When I get in the water, I'll let ye see!"

"You're not really going in?" remarked another, and a lad seized Macallister's arm.

"Put on your clothes, Mac. We'll let you off your bet."

"Ye're generous, but it's possible ye canna pay. Though I'd feel shame to rob ye, I never made a bet I didna try to win," Macallister replied and, stretching his arms above his head, balanced on his toes. "Thirty years sin' ye would not have seen me go, but the cares o' the world have worn me, no' to talk about keeping steam wi' short-weight coal."

Kit turned to his companion. "Perhaps it's curious, but I haven't seen Macallister in the water. Since he started the match, I suppose he can swim?"

"You can't argue like that about Don Pedro," said the other. "Anyhow, I think Nelson doubts; he tried to stop him."

Kit glanced with some curiosity at the young man who had meddled. Crossing the plaza on the evening before, he stopped in front of a hotel and heard somebody singing. Perhaps it was because the song was English and, heard among the tall, white Spanish houses, had an extra charm, but Kit was moved by the music and thought the voice very fine. Entering the hotel, he found Macallister in the group about the piano, and when the engineer admitted that Nelson's song was good, but declared he, himself, could beat any Englishman, singing, riding, or swimming, the match was arranged.

"Nelson's at the coaling sheds, I think?" Kit remarked.

"That is so," agreed the other. "Don Arturo heard him sing in a church choir at home and gave him the coaling job."

"Because he can sing?"

The other laughed. "Doesn't look very logical, but Don Arturo's reasoning isn't always obvious. You don't know why he likes you and this has some advantages."

Kit threw off his shirt, and when he walked to the edge of the mole in his thin swimming suit, the other gave him an approving glance. His head was well poised on his sunburned neck, his figure was tall, finely-lined, and muscular. He looked hard and athletic but he was tired, for it was not long since he had laboured with Don Erminio across the high rocks of Gomera to look for suppositious wild goats.

"The sun's hot and I wish they'd send us off, but I don't see the launch to take our clothes across," he said.

"That's Nelson's job and Nelson forgets. They tell you in the sheds he sometimes forgets how many bags of coal go to a ton, which leads to complications, since they don't fix the weight by scale and beam. But Don Juan is coming. Get ready to start."

A man carrying a watch jumped on a truck, shouted a warning, and began to count. White figures leaped from the wall, and for a moment Kit turned his head. He saw Macallister advance to the edge of the mole and the *Campeador's* mate seize him from behind. There was a struggle and the mate and Macallister fell, but next moment Kit heard his number and threw himself forward in a long flat plunge. He came up on top of a roller, and shaking the water from his eyes, saw the African boat and *Campeador* cut the dazzling sky. Then a long green slope rose in front.

He swung out his left arm and dropped his hand in front of his head. His head went under with the impetus he got, and when he came up he saw Santa Cruz glimmer pearly-grey. The shadow had crept across the town and was moving out to sea. Kit did not see the others; when one uses the overhand stroke one does not see much, and for the most part he was down in the hollow of the trough. He made the best possible speed he could, but after a time found the effort hard. Kit was not a mountaineer, and climbing across broken lava for eight or nine hours is strenuous work. Besides, the water was colder than he had thought, and when he swung up on a long undulation he stopped and looked about.

The sun had gone and the sea was dark. Between him and the beach a small white object broke the surface and vanished; farther back, he saw a dot like a swimmer's head. He was too far out: the bathing house looked a long way off, he could not see the launch. Then he sank into the hollow and the view was lost.

Kit changed his stroke and swam on his chest. He must economise his strength, because he doubted if he could reach the sandy beach, and to land on the reefs would be awkward. In fact, it began to look as if he was not altogether swimming for sport. Perhaps he ought to steer for the *correillo*, but she was some distance off. By and by he heard a faint shout and paddled easily until a man overtook him.

"Hallo, Nelson!" he said. "Are you trying to get past?"

"Not at all," gasped the other. "I've had enough. Saw you were going away and made a spurt."

Kit, swimming slowly, could talk without much effort, and asked: "Where's Macallister?"

"On the mole; wish I was! Where are you heading?"

"I thought about the *correillo*."

Nelson blew the water from his sinking lips. "Too far. I'm going to the African boat."

"We have got no clothes."

"It's not important. Let's get out of the water."

"Clothes are important," Kit rejoined. "I expect she has a crowd of tourists on board and don't see myself walking about the saloon-deck in a bathing suit."

"Get on and stop talking," Nelson spluttered.

"Now I'm going easy, I can talk all right."

"*Don't!*" growled Nelson. "You'll have to help me before long."

Kit got level with him. "Brace up, go slow, and keep stroke with me."

They went on; sometimes seeing for a few moments the slanted hull and white deck-houses of the African boat, sometimes nothing but sky and heaving water. Still the ship was getting near, and by and by her whistle shrieked.

"Wants the water-barge," said Nelson. "She can't start yet."

Kit was relieved to know this. The steamer had finished coaling, and if she started before they reached her, it would be awkward. After a few minutes he lifted his head and looked about. The liner, rolling on the long swell, was now close in front. He saw her wet plates shine as she lifted them from the sea and the groups of passengers about her rail. Some had glasses and he thought they were watching him and his companion. The vessel was obviously taking home the last of the winter

tourists, and Kit frowned when he noted women's dresses. It did not look as if he could get on board quietly. All the same, he must get on board, because he could go no farther.

He encouraged Nelson, and passing her high bow, they swam along her side. The ladder was aft and all the passengers on the saloon-deck came to the rail. Kit seized the ladder and when he had pulled Nelson on to the platform hesitated. No shore boats were about and he could not swim to the beach.

"Embarrassing, but let's get up," gasped Nelson.

Kit set his mouth and went up. A steward who wore neat uniform met him at the top.

"Have you got a ticket, sir?"

"I have not," said Kit; "do I look like a passenger?"

"Ship's cleared, sir. All visitors sent off. We're only waiting for the water-boat."

Kit made an effort for control. To get savage would not help and the fellow had no doubt been ordered to let nobody come on board. For all that a number of amused passengers were watching the dispute. The thing was ridiculous, and he was cold. He thought he knew one of the passengers and tried to signal, but the fellow went behind a boat. Although an iron ladder a few yards off led to the well-deck, the steward resolutely blocked the way. Then a very smart mate crossed the deck.

"Why have you come on board? What do you want?" he asked.

"Clothes, to begin with," said Kit. "Anyhow, we have got on board and we're going to stop until we get a boat."

The whistle shrieked and drowned the other's reply. He turned, Nelson pushed Kit, and they ran for the ladder. Plunging down, they reached an alleyway and Nelson laughed.

"I don't expect the fellow will come after us; a liner's mate has got to be dignified. If you want help when things are awkward, try the engineer."

They went up the alleyway and met a short, thin man, wearing a stained blue jacket and greasy trousers. He stopped and studied them, without surprise.

"Weel?" he said. "Are ye going to a fancy ball?"

"We want to borrow some clothes; dungarees, overalls, anything you've got," said Kit. "We had to give up a swimming match and couldn't reach my ship, astern of you."

"The little Spanish mailboat? Ye're with Macallister?"

"Of course. He got up the match, although I think he didn't start."

"It's verra possible," said the other dryly. "Mack canna swim. But if ye are friends o' his, I must get ye clothes."

Kit thanked him, and then, looking at the man thoughtfully, added that he doubted if the things would fit.

"I wasna meaning to lend ye my clothes," the engineer replied. "If ye're no fastidious, the second's about your size. Since he's occupied below, I dinna think he'll mind."

He took them into the mess-room, gave them some white clothes, and went off, remarking: "Ye'll be ready to go ashore with the water-boat. When they've filled my tanks we start."

"He won't start for some time," said Nelson. "You see, until we were on the mole, I forgot to tell Felix they wanted water. Jardine sent the coal, but the water's my job."

"You seem to forget rather easily," Kit remarked.

"Oh, well," said Nelson, "Don Arturo gave me the post because I can sing." He paused and added apologetically: "I really can sing, you know."

Kit laughed. He thought he liked Nelson. "Where do you think the others went?"

"There's a sandy spot near the *barranco* and I expect they crawled out. Of course, the distance was too long, but Macallister insisted we should go right across."

"Yet the engineer declared he can't swim."

"He can't swim; I have gone in with him at the bathing beach. All the same, I don't think this would bother Mack. If your mate had not meddled, he'd have started."

"But the thing's ridiculous!" Kit exclaimed. "If you can't swim and jump into deep water, you drown."

"Unless somebody pulls you out. Anyhow, Mack is like that, and I forget things; Don Arturo's men are a fantastic lot. A number of us have talents that might be useful somewhere else, and, so far as I can see, a number have none, but we keep the business going and beat Spaniards, French and Germans at jobs they've studied. I don't know if it's good luck or unconscious ability. However, we'll go on deck and look for the water-boat."

They went up the ladder and saw a tug steaming for the ship with a barge in tow. A few minutes afterwards the passenger Kit thought he knew crossed the deck.

"Mr. Scot?" said Kit, looking at him hard.

"I am Scot," said the other. "Met you on board the *correillo*. Come to the smoking-room and let's get a drink."

The smoking-room was unoccupied and they sat down in a corner. Kit thought Scot had not wanted to meet him, and was curious. The fellow talked awkwardly and the side of his face was marked by a red scar.

"You picked up my bullet," he said.

"I did," Kit admitted. "Meant to give it you back, but I forgot. Do you want the thing?"

"I'd like to know what you did with it."

"Austin got the bullet. I gave it him one evening when we were talking about Africa."

"You gave it Austin!" Scot exclaimed. "After all, perhaps, it doesn't matter. I have had enough and am not going back."

"How did you get hurt?"

"For one thing, I'd put on a cloth jacket – the evenings are pretty cold – and dark serge doesn't melt into a background of stones and sand. I imagined the tribe knew me."

"Perhaps a stranger fired the shot."

"There are no strangers about the Wady Azar. I carried an automatic pistol, but I reckoned the other fellows knew it wouldn't pay to shoot. In fact, I don't yet see why I was shot."

"The bullet was not from a smooth-bore, but a rifle," said Kit.

Scot gave him a keen glance and smiled. "Oh, well, I've had enough of Africa. Suppose we talk about something else."

Nelson and Scot talked about London until the tug's whistle blew and they ran to the gangway. The ladder was hauled up, but Kit and Nelson went down a rope to the water-boat, and as she sheered off the engineer came to the steamer's rail.

"Ye'll mind aboot the clothes when we come back," he shouted.

CHAPTER IX

KIT GIVES HIS CONFIDENCE

Campeador, bound for Teneriffe, rolled with a languid swing across the shining swell. Her slanted masts and yellow funnel flashed; her boats and deck were dazzling white, and Kit, coming out of his dark office, looked about him with half-shut eyes. When he joined the *correillo* he had not expected to find the Spanish crew kept her clean, but she was as smart as an English mail-boat, and Kit admitted that some of his British prejudices were not altogether justified. Now, however, she was not steaming at her proper speed. The throb of engines harmonised in a measured rhythm with the roar at the bows, but the beat was slow. Kit turned and saw Macallister watching him with a grin.

"Ye look glum," said the engineer.

"It's possible. We are late again, and I don't see how I'm to finish my business at Santa Cruz before we start for Orotava. Have your muleteer firemen got too much rum? Or did you forget to chalk the clock?"

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