

Bindloss Harold

# For Jacinta



Harold Bindloss

**For Jacinta**

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# Bindloss Harold For Jacinta

## CHAPTER I JACINTA BROWN

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when sobrecargo Austin boarded the little mail-boat *Estremadura* as she lay rolling at anchor on the long, moon-lit heave that worked into the roadstead of Santa Cruz, Palma. Sobrecargo means much the same thing as purser, and Austin was an Englishman, though the *Estremadura* was to all intents and purposes a Spanish steamer. She traded round the islands of the Canary archipelago with mules and camels, tomatoes, bananas, onions, and seasick English tourists, as fortune favoured her. Now, as the heavily sealed document Austin carried in his pocket declared, she was to sail for Las Palmas, Grand Canary, with the Cuban mail, by the gracious permission of the young King of Spain.

He had trouble on getting on board of her, for there were a good many bullocks swimming about her side waiting until the red-capped crew should heave them on board beneath the derrick-boom by means of a rope twisted round their horns. It probably hurt the bullocks, and now and then one succumbed to a broken neck during the operation; but the Castilian, who can face his losses placidly, is not, as a rule, particularly merciful to his beast. There were also stray sheep, goats, and donkeys, as well as olive-faced peasants with blankets strapped about their shoulders, wandering about the after portion of the main deck, which was supposed to be reserved for the second-class passengers, when Austin stopped a moment by the covered hatch. A big electric light hung from the spar-deck beams above his head, and he looked about him with a little ironical smile.

He was a young man of average stature, and there was nothing especially distinguished in his appearance, though he had good grey eyes, and a pleasant bronzed face. He was somewhat lightly made, though he looked wiry, and held himself well, and there was a certain languidness in his smile which seemed to suggest that he was not addicted to troubling greatly about anything. Because the Scotchman who ran the *Estremadura's* engines had sold his white uniform jacket with the resplendent buttons a day or two before, he was just then attired somewhat incongruously in a white cap with the very large and imposing badge of the Spanish mail service clasped into the front of it, a brown alpaca jacket, white duck trousers, and pipe-clayed shoes. The latter two items were, however, by no means immaculate, since he had, as a special favour to the mate, brought off certain sheep and goats in his despatch-boat, as well as a camel tied astern of it. Spaniards and Englishmen do not invariably agree, but they lived like brothers on board the *Estremadura*, which, however, had its disadvantages. Austin objected in particular to the community of property.

That evening the steamer hummed with life, and the clatter of polyglot tongues. Parsee dealers in silver-thread embroideries, German commercial travellers, Madeiran Portuguese, Canario hillmen, and Peninsular Spaniards, moved amidst the straying livestock, while a little group of Anglo-Saxons naturally sat apart upon the hatch. There were, as is usual when Englishmen foregather in a country where wine is cheap, empty bottles scattered about. The engineer from the sister ship and an athletic tourist, stripped, at least as far as was permissible, were wrestling in Cumberland fashion on the hatch, with much delicate manœuvring of their feet and futile clutches at each other's waists. Macallister, who, when he felt inclined, superintended the *Estremadura's* machinery, alternately encouraged them sardonically and solaced himself with one of the bottles. He was a big, gaunt man, and just then extremely dirty, and when he saw Austin he looked up with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"I have been waiting for ye anxiously," he said. "Ye may now have the pleasure of lending me five dollars."

"I'm afraid not!" said Austin decisively. "For one thing, I haven't got them. I very seldom have – as you ought to know."

Macallister made a little gesture of resignation. "Well," he said, "ye have always your clothes, and if ye had known us better ye would not have brought so many of them on board the *Estremadura*. I'm half expecting yon Jackson o' Las Palmas, who gave us two dollars for the last white suit, to come round for some more o' them when we get in."

Austin tried the door of his room close by, and was consoled to find it locked, as he had left it.

"They cost me five, and I naturally never saw a peseta of the money. I suppose you kept the Correo buttons?"

"I did not," said Macallister, unabashed. "Ye may observe Miguel, the quartermaster, walking round in them. It was no a bad bargain – a basket o' big grapes an' a watermelon."

Austin bore it patiently. There was, in fact, nothing to be gained by protesting, and he knew that it was useless to expostulate with Macallister when he spoke his own tongue, which was not an invariable custom with him. Then the engineer turned and glanced at the wrestlers, who were still stamping up and down the hatch with feet spread well apart, compassionately.

"They've been at it the whole o' a half hour, an' no a fall to cheer a body yet. One would think it was dancing they were," he said. "It wasn't to see that I wasted a tumblerful o' anisow on them."

Now, anisado is a preparation of spirit and extract of anise seed, which is esteemed in that country, and Austin looked hard at his comrade, because he had a jar of it, intended for a Spanish friend, in his room. He was a trifle uneasy, since a lock is not an insuperable obstacle to an engineer. The latter, however, changed the subject.

"It's a kind o' pity about your clothes," he said. "Miss Jacinta Brown is going across with us to-night, an' she was enquiring kindly after ye."

Austin had a good deal of composure, and he often needed it, but the shrewd Scottish eyes saw the momentary pleasure in his face. Then, because he did not appreciate Macallister's badinage on that subject, he went into his room and bolted the door behind him before he switched on the light and examined the anisado jar. It seemed quite full when he shook it, and the seal was intact, but on looking closer he saw that the impression on the latter was not what it had been when he left it. He was aware that a certain proportion of sea-water may be added to rum without the average consumer noticing any great difference, but he had suspicions that a blend of brine and anise was not likely to be appreciated by its recipient, and he was for a moment or two consumed with righteous indignation. This, however, passed, for he realised that his expostulations would be heard with laughter. It was all a part of the happy-go-lucky life he led, and nobody concerns himself unduly about anything under the flag of Spain. The Castilian, as a rule, bears his troubles patiently, which is, perhaps, just as well, since he rarely sees them coming or makes any attempt to get out of the way of them.

Austin accordingly busied himself with his papers, and it was an hour later when he went on deck. The *Estremadura* had gone to sea by then, and the lights of the little Spanish town blinked above the broad fringe of surf astern. High above her the great black cordillera cut hard and sharp against the luminous blueness of the night, and the long heave of the Atlantic flashed, white-topped, beneath the moon ahead. She swung over it with slanted spars and swaying funnel, while the keen trade-breeze sang in her rigging, and now and then a flying-fish ricocheted, gleaming, from sea-top to sea-top beneath her side. She was very well kept above decks, a trim, yacht-like vessel, and for a while Austin leaned over her quarter-rails, smoking a cigarette, and wondering when Miss Jacinta Brown would come up on deck. There was a very deaf Englishman, who insisted on conversing with him in stentorian tones in the saloon, and he had no desire for his company. In the meanwhile, it was pleasant to lounge there and watch the moonlight gleam upon the tumbling seas.

There were, he admitted, a good many compensations in the life he led. The warmth and colour of the South appealed to him, and, though they are not particularly numerous, there are men like him who retain a somewhat chastened affection for the sea they earn their bread upon. It is true that he earned very little more than that on board the *Estremadura*, and he had once had his aspirations like other men, as well as a prospect of realising them; but when financial disaster overtook the family firm nobody seemed anxious to secure the services of a young man without specialised training, who had artistic and somewhat expensive tastes, which was, perhaps, not altogether astonishing. That was how Austin eventually came on board the *Estremadura*, and stayed there, though there were odd hours when he took himself to task for doing so. Still, he did not exactly know where he could go if he left her, and the indifference of the Latins was already infecting him. Men in Spain believe that the future is quite able to take care of itself.

By and by, however, a slim, white-clad figure appeared in the entrance to the saloon companion, and he moved in that direction with evident alacrity. As one result of being the *Estremadura's* sobrecargo, he was acquainted with everybody of importance in the archipelago, and among them all there was nobody who figured more prominently than Miss Jacinta Brown. She was English on both sides, though she had lived in those islands most of her twenty-five years, and understood the Spaniards, probably better than they understood themselves, for they are rather an impulsive than an introspective people. She also understood her countrymen, and ruled over them, as well as Spanish artillery officers and Commandantes. It was not very evident how she did it, for there were a good many Spanish women, at least, almost as pretty, and of much better birth than she, and she apparently received no great assistance from her father, for Pancho Brown was a merchant of an unusually solid and unimaginative description. The wives of the English visitors, however, did not, as a rule, like Jacinta. They said she was forward, and it was a pity she had no mother; but when any of them received an invitation from her it was immediately proclaimed all over the hotel.

She smiled at Austin graciously, and allowed him to place her a deck chair beneath a big lifeboat, where it was out of the wind, after which he procured himself another, and sat down and looked at her. Jacinta did not seem to mind it, and most men would probably have found it difficult to keep their eyes off her. She was little, shapely, and very dainty, though she could, as Austin knew, on occasion be essentially dignified. She had brown hair and eyes, with a little scintillating gleam in them, and her face was slightly tinted with the warm Andalusian olive, though there was only English blood in her. She was dressed in white, as usual, with a simplicity that suggested perfect taste, while, as he watched her, Austin wondered again exactly where her compelling attractiveness lay. He had met women with more delicate complexions, finer features, softer voices, and more imposing carriage; that is, women who possessed one or two of these advantages, but he had not as yet met any one to be compared to Jacinta, as he expressed it, in the aggregate. Then it seemed that she read his thoughts, which was, as he had noticed, a habit of hers.

"Yes, the dress is a new one. I am rather pleased with it, too," she said.

Austin laughed. "If I hadn't had the pleasure of making your acquaintance some time ago, you would have astonished me. As it is –"

"Never mind," said Jacinta. "After all, there is no great credit in telling people of your kind what they are thinking, though I can't help it now and then. You were wondering what anybody saw in me."

Now Austin was too wise to fancy for a moment that Jacinta was fishing for compliments. She knew her own value too well to appreciate them unless they were particularly artistic, and he surmised that she had merely desired to amuse herself by his embarrassment.

"If I was, it was very unwise of me," he said. "You are Jacinta – and one has to be content with that. You can't be analysed."

"And you?"

"I am the *Estremadura's* sobrecargo, which is, perhaps, a significant admission."

Jacinta nodded comprehension. "I think it is," she said. "Still, since you considered yourself warranted in approving of my dress, what are you doing in that jacket on a mail run?"

"As usual, there is a reason. When I was across at Arucas my comrades laid hands upon my garments, and disposed of them at a bargain. They had naturally squandered the money by the time I came back. I am now longing for a few words with the man who, I understand, is coming down to purchase some more at an equally alarming sacrifice."

Jacinta laughed, but she also looked at him with a little gleam in her eyes. "Don't you think it's rather a pity you – are – the *Estremadura's* sobrecargo?"

"Well," said Austin, reflectively, "I won't pretend to misunderstand you, but the trouble is that I don't quite see what else I could be. I cannot dig, and I'm not sure that it would be very pleasant to go round borrowing odd dollars from my friends, even if they were disposed to lend them to me, which is scarcely probable. Most of them would, naturally, tell me to look at them, and see what I might have been if I'd had their diligence and probity. Besides, I have time to paint little pictures which rash tourists buy occasionally, and the life one leads here has its compensations."

The *Estremadura's* whistle hooted just then, and as Jacinta looked round a lordly four-masted ship, carrying everything to her royals, swept up out of the night. She was driving down the trade-breeze a good twelve knots an hour, and the foam flew up in cascades as her bows went down, swirled in a broad, snowy smother along the slender streak of rushing hull. Above it four tapered spires of sailcloth swung back against the moonlight at every stately roll, and she showed as an exquisite cameo cut in ebony on a ground of silver and blue. Still, it was not the colour that formed the strength of that picture, but the suggestion of effort and irresistible force that was stamped on it. She drove by majestically, showing a breadth of wet plates that flashed in a leeward roll, and Jacinta's eyes rested on the bent figure high on the lifted poop grappling with her wheel.

"Ah!" she said. "I suppose it's sometimes brutal, but that is man's work, isn't it?"

Austin laughed again, though there was a faint warmth in his cheek. "Of course, I see the inference," he said. "Still, it really isn't necessary for everybody to hold a big vessel's wheel, and I would a good deal sooner you said something nice to me. Nobody likes to be told the truth about themselves, you know, and I understand now why folks threw big stones at the goat-skinned prophets long ago."

"Well," said Jacinta, "we will talk of somebody else. I wonder if you know that Jefferson has been left a fortune, or, at least, part of one?"

"I didn't. Still, I'm glad to hear it. I like the man. In fact, he's the straightest one I've come across in his occupation, which, by the way, is, perhaps, somewhat of an admission, considering that he's an American."

"I like most Americans. For one thing, they're usually in earnest."

"And you like Spaniards, who certainly aren't."

"We will waive the question. It's rather a coincidence that Jefferson should have fallen in love about the same time."

"Do I know the lady, who is, presumably, in earnest, too? I don't like women who have a purpose openly, though that does not apply to you. You have usually a good many, but nobody knows anything about them until you have accomplished them."

Jacinta ignored the compliment. "I don't think you know her, but she is a friend of mine. I went to school with her for two years in England."

"Then, of course, she's nice."

"That," said Jacinta, "is naturally a matter of opinion. She is, however, not in the least like me."

"In that case it's difficult to see how she can be nice at all."

Jacinta smiled somewhat sardonically. "Well," she said, "Muriel is bigger than I am, and more solid – in every way – as well as quiet and precise. Being the daughter of the clergyman of a forlorn little place in England, she has, of course, had advantages which have been denied to me. There are

people who have to undertake their own training, or do without any, you know. She very seldom says anything she does not mean, and always knows exactly what she is going to do."

"I'm not sure that sounds particularly attractive."

Jacinta lifted her head and looked at him. "Still, she is worth – oh, ever so much more – than a good many such frivolous people as you or I. You will see her yourself to-morrow. She is coming across with us to Las Palmas, and, of course, if you would like to please me – "

"That goes without saying. To-morrow we will endeavour to turn this ship upside down. It usually has to be done when we have the honour of carrying a lady from any part of provincial England."

"I really don't want very much," and Jacinta smiled, at him. "Just the big forward room for her, and the seat next me at the top of your table. The nicest things have a way of getting there. Then she is fond of fruit – and if you could get any of the very big Moscatel, and some of that membrillo jelly. A few bunches of roses would look nice at our end of the table, too."

"Well," said Austin, with a little whimsical gesture of resignation, "there is, as you know, a Spanish Commandante and his wife in that forward room, but I suppose we shall have to turn them out. The other things will naturally follow, but I'm afraid Major-domo Antonio will call us dreadful names to-morrow."

Jacinta rose. "You are as nice as I expected you would be," she said. "Now it is getting chilly, and I have a letter to write."

She smiled at him and went forward, walking, though she was English, with a curious buoyant gracefulness as Spanish women do, while Austin sat still and considered the position. He was quite aware that he would have trouble with the Spanish Commandante as well as his Major-domo on the morrow, but that was, after all, of no great importance. When Jacinta wanted anything she usually obtained it, and it was not a little to be counted among her friends, since she frequently contrived to do a good deal for them. There were men as well as women in those islands who owed more than they were aware of to Jacinta Brown.

Austin sighed as he remembered it, for he was a penniless sobrecargo, and she, in those islands, at least, a lady of station. It must be sufficient for him to do what little he could to please her, and he had, in fact, once or twice done a good deal. He took life easily, but there was in him a vein of chivalry, which for the most part, however, found somewhat whimsical expression. Then he recollected that he had still certain documents to attend to, and going down again locked himself into his room.

## CHAPTER II

### AN OVERHEATED JOURNAL

The *Estremadura* lay rolling gently off the quaint old Spanish city of Santa Cruz, Teneriffe, most of the following day. It was, indeed, late in the afternoon when she went to sea, and while the jumble of white walls and red-tiled roofs faded astern Austin sat in a deck-chair under a lifeboat, while Jacinta, Mrs. Hatherly, and Miss Muriel Gascoyne, to whom he had been duly presented, occupied a seat close by. He was not particularly charmed with the latter's company, and decided that she was certainly as unlike Jacinta as she very well could be.

Miss Gascoyne was a clear-complexioned, blue-eyed young Englishwoman, solidly put together, and endued with a certain attractiveness; but she was quiet, and had a disconcerting way of looking at him in a fashion which vaguely suggested disapproval. There was also what he felt to be a slightly irritating air of authority about her, which seemed to suggest that she recognised the responsibility of her station, as one who was looked up to in a remote corner of rural England. Mrs. Hatherly, her aunt, was a little, withered old lady, with ruddy cheeks and the stamp of vigorous health upon her, though she had apparently been ordered south for the winter. She became visibly interested when Jacinta contrived to mention that Austin was in charge of the *Estremadura's* medicine chest.

"It really isn't my fault, and I don't do more harm with it than I can help," he said.

"Then you have a knowledge of medicine?" asked the red-cheeked lady.

"No," said Austin, "not in the least. I had to get a sixpenny book from England to tell me the difference between a scruple and a drachm, and I'm not sure about some of the measures yet. You see, I entered the profession quite by accident. The manual in the drug chest was, naturally, in English, as it was sent on board a Spanish ship, and the skipper, who couldn't read it, passed it on to me. My first case was a great success, unfortunately. We were loading pine, and one of the men contrived to get a splinter into the inner side of his eyelid. I suppose it was a weakness, but I really couldn't watch him going about in agony."

"Is the desire to relieve a fellow creature's suffering a weakness?" asked Miss Gascoyne.

Austin appeared to reflect. "I almost think it is when the chances are tolerably even that you're going to blind him. Still, I got the thing out, and that man never quite knew the risks he ran. The next week another of them dropped a hogshead on to his foot, and smashed it badly – they don't wear boots, you know. He seemed quite convinced that I could cure him, and, as the risk was his, I undertook the thing. You can see him on the fore-castle yonder, and he isn't limping. After that my fame went abroad, and they send their cripples off to me at several of the desolate places we call at. I always give them something, but whatever quantity of water the manual recommends I put in twice as much."

Miss Gascoyne looked at him curiously. She had not met a young man of this type before, and was not sure that she approved of him. She also fancied that he was a trifle egotistical, which he certainly was not, and it never occurred to her that he was merely rambling on for her entertainment because he felt it his duty.

"Don't you think that one should always have faith in one's prescriptions and act upon it?" said her aunt. "I endeavour to do so when I dose the village people who come to me."

Austin laughed. "Well," he said, "you see, I haven't any, and, perhaps if I had, it would be a little rough on others. Still, as a matter of fact, they do get better – that is, most of them."

Miss Gascoyne looked startled. "Is it right to abuse the ignorant people's credulity like that?" she said, and stopped a trifle awkwardly, while a little twinkle crept into Jacinta's eyes.

"Mr. Austin hasn't really killed anybody yet," she said. "You haven't told us what you think of Teneriffe, Muriel."

Miss Gascoyne turned her face astern, and there was appreciation, and something deeper than that, in her blue eyes, which had seen very little of the glory of this world as yet. High overhead the great black wall of the Cañadas cut, a tremendous ebony rampart, against the luminous blue, and beyond it the peak's white cone gleamed ethereally above its wrappings of fleecy mist. Beneath, the Atlantic lay a sheet of glimmering turquoise in the lee of the island, and outside of that there was a blinding blaze of sunlight on the white-topped sea.

"It is beautiful – wonderfully beautiful," she said, with a little tremble in her voice. "Isn't it sad that such a country should be steeped in superstition?"

Austin felt the last observation jar upon him, for he knew that the inhabitants of that land would, in respect of sobriety and morality, compare very favourably with those of several more enlightened places he was acquainted with at home, and that was going far enough for him. Still, he could defer to another's convictions when they were evidently sincere, and it seemed to him that Jacinta's warning glance was a trifle unnecessary. There was, however, an interruption just then, for a steward appeared with a laden tray at the door of the captain's room.

"Doesn't Don Erminio take his comida in the saloon?" asked Jacinta.

"No," said Austin. "Not when we have English ladies on board. He's a different man, you know, and some of them will insist on talking Spanish to him. It's a little trying to have to admit you don't understand your own language."

"Vaya!" said a deep voice beyond the open door. "Eso no me gusta," and while the steward backed out in haste, a couple of plates went flying over the rail.

"Don Erminio," said Jacinta, "evidently doesn't approve of his dinner."

Miss Gascoyne appeared astonished, and looked at Austin gravely.

"Does he often lose his temper in that fashion?" she asked. "Isn't it very childish to throw – good food into the sea?"

"The captain is, when you come to know him, really a very good-natured man," said Austin. Then he stopped, and stood up suddenly as two figures came towards them along the deck, and another from the opposite direction. "It's Monsignor – I wonder what Macallister wants with him."

A little, portly priest moved forward with a smile of good-humoured pride, and an ecclesiastic of a very different stamp walked at his side. The latter was a great man, indeed, a very great man, though he had once toiled in comparative obscurity. Even Miss Gascoyne had apparently heard of him.

"If one could venture, I should like to speak to him," she said.

Neither Jacinta nor Austin seemed to hear her. They were both watching Macallister, and he, at least, clearly intended to accost the clerics. He was now dressed immaculately in blue uniform, and in that condition he was a big, handsome man, but he was also a North British Calvinist, so far as he had any religious views at all, and accordingly not one who could reasonably be expected to do homage to a dignitary of Rome. Still, the little fleshy priest was a friend of his, and when the latter presented him he bent one knee a trifle and gravely took off his uniform cap. The ecclesiastic raised two fingers and spoke in Latin. Macallister smiled at him reassuringly.

"That isn't exactly what I meant, but it can't do me any harm coming from a man like you, while if it does me any good I daresay I need it. You see, I'm one of the goats," he said.

The great man glanced at his companion, who translated as literally as he could, though he also explained that the Señor Macallister not infrequently made things easier for some of the peasants who travelled third class on board the *Estremadura*. Then a whimsical but very kindly twinkle crept into the great man's eyes, and he laid a beautiful, olive-tinted hand on the shoulder of the mechanic who had graciously approved of him.

"If he is kind to these poor hill men he is a friend of mine. The charity it covers many – differences," he said.

Then, as they came aft together, Austin also took off his cap, and touched Miss Gascoyne's arm as he turned to the cleric. The girl rose gravely, with a tinge of heightened colour in her face and a little inclination, and, though nobody remembered exactly what was said, unless it was the eminent cleric, who was, as usual with his kind, a polished man of the world as well, he moved on with the girl on one side of him and Macallister talking volubly in a most barbarous jargon on the other. Mrs. Hatherly and the little priest took their places behind them, and Austin gathered that as a special favour Macallister was going to show them all his engines. Jacinta leaned back in her seat and laughed musically.

"Macallister," she said, "is always unique, and he will probably finish the entertainment by offering Monsignor a glass of whiskey. It is to be hoped he doesn't apostrophise his firemen with his usual fluency. Still, do you know, I am rather pleased with you? You have made Muriel happy."

"If I have pleased you it is rather more to the purpose," said Austin, reflectively. "I have, however, noticed that when you express your approbation there is usually something else to be done."

Jacinta smiled. "It is very little, after all, but perhaps I had better explain. Muriel met Jefferson, who had been to London to see somebody, on board the *Dahomey*, and – I'm telling you this in confidence – there are reasons for believing the usual thing happened. She is really good, you know, while Jefferson is a somewhat serious man himself, as well as an American. They treat women rather well in his country – in fact, they seem to idealise them now and then. Besides, I understand it was remarkably fine weather."

"Yes," said Austin, who glanced suggestively across the sunlit heave towards the dim, blue heights of Grand Canary, "it is, one would believe, quite easy to fall in love with any one pretty and clever during fine weather at sea. That is, of course, on sufficient provocation. There are also, I think, Englishmen with some capacity for idealisation – but hadn't you better go on?"

Jacinta pursed her lips as she looked at him with an assumption of severity, but she proceeded. "Now, I had arranged for Mrs. Hatherly and Muriel to spend the winter in Grand Canary, but she has heard of a doctor in one of the hotels at Madeira, and is bent on going there. There is, of course, nothing the matter with her; but if she approves of the doctor in question it is very probable that she will stay in that hotel until the spring. Still, she is changeable, and if she doesn't go at once it is possible that she will not go at all. The Madeira boat leaves Las Palmas about half an hour after we get there, and I don't want Mrs. Hatherly and Muriel to catch her. Muriel doesn't want to, either."

Austin shook his head. "Don't you know that it is rather a serious thing to delay a Spanish mailboat?" he said. "Still, I suppose you have decided that it must be done?"

"I think so," said Jacinta sweetly. "I also fancy you and Macallister could manage it between you. You have my permission to tell him anything you think necessary."

She rose and left him, with this, and Austin, who was not altogether pleased with his commission, waited until after the four o'clock comida, when, flinging himself down on a settee in the engineer's room, cigar in hand, he put the case to Macallister, who grinned. The latter, as a rule, appeared to find his native idiom more expressive in the evening.

"I'm no saying Jacinta's no fascinating, an' I've seen ye looking at her like a laddie eyeing a butterscotch," he said. "Still, it can no be done. Neither o' our reputations would stand it, for one thing."

"We have nothing to do with the Madeira boat, and the Lopez boat for Cuba doesn't sail until an hour after her," said Austin. "Besides, Jacinta wants it done."

Macallister looked thoughtful. "Weel," he said, "that is a reason. Jacinta thinks a good deal of me, an' if I was no married already I would show ye how to make up to her. I would not sit down, a long way off, an' look at her. She's no liking ye any the better for that way of it."

"Hadn't you better leave that out?" said Austin stiffly. "I'm the *Estremadura's* sobrecargo, which is quite sufficient. Can't you have a burst tube or something of the kind?"

"A burst tube is apt to result in somebody getting scalded, an' stepping into boiling water is sore on a Primera Maquinista's feet. Ye'll just have to make excuses to Jacinta, I'm thinking."

Austin, who knew he could do nothing without Macallister's co-operation, was wondering what persuasion he could use, when he was joined by an unexpected ally. A big, aggressive Englishman in tourist apparel approached the mess-room door and signed to him.

"You were not in your room," he said, as though this was a grievance.

Austin looked at him quietly. "I'm afraid I really haven't the faculty of being in two places at once. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"There is. I particularly want to catch the Liverpool boat *via* Madeira to-night, and the time you get in cuts it rather fine. It occurred to me that you might be able to hurry her up a little."

"I'm sorry that's out of the question," said Austin, languidly. "You see, I'm not expected to interfere with this steamer's engines."

He was wondering how he could best favour the Englishman with a delicate left-handed compliment, when Macallister, who was once more very dirty, and wore only a dungaree jacket over his singlet, broke in:

"I would," he said, "like to see him try."

"May I ask who you are?" said the passenger, who regarded him superciliously.

"Ye may," and there was a portentous gleam in Macallister's eyes. "I'm only her chief engineer."

"Ah!" said the other, who did not consider it advisable to mention that he had supposed him to be a fireman. "Well, there are, I believe, means of obtaining a favour from a chief engineer. You naturally don't get many pickings in this kind of boat."

Austin laughed softly, for he knew his man. It is now and then permissible to bestow an honorarium upon a chief engineer over a deal in coals, but it requires to be done tactfully, and when the stranger suggestively thrust his hand into his pocket, Macallister hove his six feet of length upright, and looked down on him, with a big hand clenched and blazing eyes.

"Out o' this before I shake some manners intil ye, ye fifteen-pound-the-round-trip scum!" he said.

The stranger backed away from him, and then bolted incontinently as Macallister made for the door. Austin laughed softly when he heard him falling over things in the dark alleyway, and Macallister sat down fuming.

"A bit doosoor on the coal trade is one thing, but yon was – insultin'," he said, and then looked up with a sudden grin. "I'll fix the waster. Can ye no smell a crank-pin burning?"

"I can't," said Austin. "Still, under the circumstances, I'm quite willing to take your word for it."

He went up on deck. It was dark now, but the moon was shining, and he was not surprised to see a sooty fireman clambering in haste up the bridge ladder. Then the throb of the propeller slackened, and when the *Estremadura* lay rolling wildly athwart the long, moonlit heave, an uproar broke out in the engine room below. The Castilian is excitable, and apt to lose his head when orders which he cannot understand are hurled at him, while Macallister, when especially diligent, did not trust to words alone, but used lumps of coal and heavy steel spanners. He was just then apparently chasing his greasers and firemen up and down the engine room. There was a rush of apprehensive passengers towards the open skylights, from which steam as well as bad language ascended, and Austin, who went with them, found Jacinta by his side.

"I suppose it's nothing dangerous?" she said.

Austin laughed. "If it were Macallister would not be making so much noise. In fact, I don't think you need worry at all. When Miss Jacinta Brown expresses her wishes, things are not infrequently apt to happen."

Jacinta smiled at him. "I have," she said, "one or two faithful servants. Shall we move a little nearer and see what he is doing?"

"I'm afraid the conversation of one of them is not likely to be of a kind that Miss Gascoyne, for example, would approve of."

"Pshaw!" said Jacinta, and followed when Austin made way for her to one of the skylights' lifted frames.

The *Estremadura* was rolling wickedly, and very scantily attired men were scrambling, apparently without any definite purpose, beneath the reeling lights which flashed upon the idle machinery. They, however, seemed to be in bodily fear of Macallister, who held a spouting hose, while a foamy, soapy lather splashed up from the crank-pit on the big, shining connecting-rod. Austin could see him dimly through a cloud of steam, though he could think of no reason why any of the latter should be drifting about the engine room. There were several English passengers about the skylights, and the one with the aggressive manner was explaining his views to the rest.

"The man is either drunk or totally incapable. He is doing nothing but shout," he said. "You will notice that he spends half the time washing the connecting-rods, which, as everybody knows, cannot get hot. If we miss the Madeira boat I shall certainly call upon the company's manager."

Perhaps he spoke too loudly, or it may have been an accident, though Austin, who saw Macallister flounder on the slippery floor-plates as the steamer rolled, did not think it was. In any case, he drew Jacinta back, and a moment later a jet from the spouting hose struck with a great splashing upon the glass. The aggressive passenger, who was looking down just then, got most of it in his face, and he staggered back, dripping, and gasping with anger. When he once more became vociferous, Austin led Jacinta away.

"I'm afraid we will not catch that boat, but I really don't think you ought to hear Mack's retort," he said.

It was not quite half an hour later when the *Estremadura* moved on again, and Macallister informed Austin that he could not allow two journals to become overheated in the same voyage. It would, he said, be too much of a coincidence, and some of his subordinates did know a little about machinery. They had accordingly some few minutes yet in hand when they swung round the high Isleta cinder heap into sight of Las Palmas. It gleamed above the surf fringe, a cluster of twinkling lights at the black hills' feet, and there were other lights, higher up, on ships' forestays, behind the dusky line of mole. In between, the long Atlantic heave flashed beneath the moon, and there was scarcely two miles of it left. Austin, standing forward with a pair of night-glasses, and Jacinta beside him, watched the lights close on one another dejectedly.

"We'll be in inside ten minutes, and I think the Madeira boat has still her anchor down," he said. "I had to give the quartermaster orders to have our lancha ready, and he'll take any passengers straight across to her."

"I believe you did what you could," said Jacinta. "Still, you see –"

"Oh, yes," said Austin. "You like success?"

Jacinta looked at him with a little enigmatical smile. "When any of my friends are concerned, I believe I do."

Austin went aft, and a little while later found Macallister standing by the poop, which was piled with banana baskets, among which seasick Canary peasants lay. The big crane on the end of the mole was now on the *Estremadura's* quarter, and they were sliding into the mouth of the harbour. Close ahead, with white steam drifting about her fore-castle, lay the Madeira boat.

"They're heaving up," said the engineer. "Jacinta will no' be pleased with ye, I'm thinking."

"There's only one thing left," said Austin. "One of us must fall in."

Macallister grinned. "Then I know which it will be. It was not me who swam across the harbour last trip. But wait a moment. There's a dozen or two Spaniards among the baskets, an' I'm thinking nobody would miss one of them."

Austin, who knew what his comrade was capable of, seized hold of him, but Macallister shook his grasp off and disappeared among the baskets. Then there was a splash in the shadow beneath the

ship, a shout, and a clamour broke out from the crowded deck. A gong clanged below, the captain shouted confused orders from his bridge, and the *Estremadura* slid forward, with engines stopped, past a British warship with her boats at the booms. Then in the midst of the confusion, Austin, who was leaning on the rail, wondering what had really happened, felt himself gripped by the waist. They had slid into the shadow of the *Isleta*, which lay black upon the water just there.

"Noo's your chance," said a voice he knew. "It's a hero she'll think ye. In ye go to the rescue!"

Austin, who was by no means certain that there was a man in the water at all, had no intention of going if he could help it, but, as it happened, he had no option. The *Estremadura* rolled just then, he felt himself lifted, and went out, head foremost, over the rail. The steamer had gone on and left him when he rose to the surface, but there was nobody either swimming or shouting in the water behind him. He knew it would be a minute or two yet before they got the big passenger lancha over, but the *Estremadura's* propeller was thrashing astern, and when she came back towards him he seized the boat-warp already lowered along her side. Nobody appeared to notice him, for one of the British warship's boats was then approaching. She flashed by as he crawled in through the opened gangway, and a man stood up in her.

"Spanish mail ahoy!" he cried. "Anybody speaking English aboard of you? If so, tell your skipper to go ahead. We have got the banana basket he dropped over. He can send for it to-morrow."

Austin slipped, unnoticed, into his room, but he laughed as he heard the roar of a whistle, and saw a long, black hull ringed with lights slide by. It was the *Madeira* boat, steaming down the harbour.

## CHAPTER III ON THE VERANDA

It was a clear, moonlight night when Pancho Brown, Mrs. Hatherly, and Erminio Oliviera, the *Estremadura's* captain, sat in big cane chairs on the veranda of the Hotel Catalina, Las Palmas. The Catalina is long and low, and fronted with a broad veranda, a rather more sightly building than tourist hotels usually are, and its row of windows blazed that night. They were, most of them, wide open, and the seductive strains of a soft Spanish waltz drifted out with the rhythmic patter of feet and swish of light draperies, for the winter visitors had organised a concert and informal dance. A similar entertainment was apparently going on in the aggressively English Metropole, which cut, a huge, square block of building, against the shining sea a little further up the straight white road, while the artillery band was playing in the alameda of the town, a mile or two away. The deep murmur of the Atlantic surf broke through the music in a drowsy undertone.

Pancho Brown was essentially English, a little, portly gentleman with a heavy, good-humoured face. He was precise in dress, a little slow in speech, and nobody at first sight would have supposed him to be brilliant, commercially or otherwise. Still, he had made money, which is, perhaps, the most eloquent testimony to anybody's business ability. He was then meditatively contemplating his daughter, who was strolling in the garden with a young English officer from the big white warship in the harbour. A broad blaze of silver stretched back across the sea towards the hazy blueness in the east beyond which lay Africa, and it was almost as light as day. Mrs. Hatherly followed his gaze.

"An only daughter must be a responsibility now and then," she said. "I have never had one of my own, but for the last few months my niece has been living with me, and I have had my moments of anxiety."

Pancho Brown, who fancied she was leading up to something, smiled in a fashion which suggested good-humoured indifference, though he was quite aware that his daughter was then talking very confidentially to the young naval officer.

"I am afraid I do not deserve your sympathy," he said. "Jacinta's mother died when she was eight years old, but ever since she came home from school in England Jacinta has taken care of me. In fact, I almost think it is Jacinta who feels the responsibility. I am getting a little old, and now and then my business enterprises worry me."

"And does that young girl know anything about them?"

"Jacinta," said Brown, "knows a good deal about everything, and it really doesn't seem to do her any harm. In fact, I sometimes feel that she knows considerably more than I do. I make mistakes now and then, but if Jacinta ever does I am not aware of them."

"Still, a girl with Miss Brown's appearance – and advantages – must naturally attract a good deal of attention, and, of course, one has –"

Brown smiled at her indulgently. "When Jacinta chooses her husband I shall, no doubt, approve of him. I am not sure," he added, with an air of reflection, "that it would make any great difference if I didn't."

"You are to be envied," said his companion, with a little sigh. "I feel the responsibility circumstances have placed on me is unpleasantly heavy, and I am almost sorry I missed the Madeira boat two or three weeks ago. If we had gone in her we should not, of course, have been in Las Palmas now."

"It is almost as evident that I should have been left forlorn to-night," said Brown, with cumbrous gallantry.

Mrs. Hatherly appeared to reflect. "It is a curious thing that Miss Brown assured me we should not catch the steamer that night, though we had apparently half an hour to spare; but in one respect

it was perhaps fortunate, after all. If we had gone to Madeira I should not have consulted Dr. Lane, who seems to understand my case so thoroughly; but, on the other hand, we should have seen no more of Mr. Jefferson."

"It is not such a long way to Madeira, and there is a steamer every week or so. From what I know of Mr. Jefferson, I think it is possible he would have gone there, too."

"You are well acquainted with him?"

Brown glanced at her with a faint twinkle in his eyes. "I know a little about everybody in these islands, madam. Mr. Jefferson is considered a straight man, and I may mention that he meets with Jacinta's approval. I almost think I could vouch for his character. I wonder," and he smiled genially, "if it would be as much to the purpose if I said that he had just been left eight thousand pounds?"

"Eight thousand pounds is not very much," and Mrs. Hatherly turned to him as if for guidance. "Mr. Jefferson called on me this afternoon, and it would be almost three weeks before I could get a letter from Muriel's father, who trusted her to me. Of course, a good deal would depend upon what I said about him; but, after all, Muriel has not a penny of her own."

"The sum in question is apt to go a long way when the man who has it is an American, and I really think you could leave him and Miss Gascoyne to settle the affair between them." Brown stopped a moment, and then added, as if by an afterthought: "It is, of course, quite possible that they have done so already; and, in any case, I am not sure, my dear madam, that Jefferson would be very greatly discouraged by your opposition. He is – as has been said – an American."

The little, red-cheeked lady made a gesture of resignation, but just then Captain Oliviera, who spoke a little English, and appeared to feel himself neglected, broke in:

"You come here for your healt, señora?" he said. "Bueno! My sobrecargo go by the step, and he is savvy much the medsin. Me, he cure, frecuentemente, by the morning. Ola, I call him!"

"Otra vez," said Brown, restrainingly, and Mrs. Hatherly favoured the captain, who was big and lean and bronzed, with a glance of interested scrutiny.

"You are an invalid, too?" she said. "One would scarcely fancy it. In fact, you seem very robust to me. What do you suffer from?"

Brown made this a trifle plainer, and Don Erminio smiled. He had no great sense of fitness, and was slightly reckless in his conversation.

"Mi t'roat, and the head of me – by the morning," he said, and made a curious gurgling to give point to the explanation. "El sobrecargo he laugh and say, 'Aha, mi captain, you want a peek-a-up again.' It is of mucho efecto. I go call him. He make some for you."

"Peek-a-up!" said Mrs. Hatherly, and Brown laid his hand restrainingly upon the gallant skipper's arm.

"It is a preparation they find beneficial at sea, though I do not think it would suit your case," he said, and Oliviera roused himself to a further effort.

"Good man, mi sobrecargo. Much education. Also friend of me. I say him often: 'Carramba! In Spain is no dollar. Why you stay here?' Aha, Señor Austin savvy. By and by he marry a rich English señorita."

It occurred to Mrs. Hatherly that Brown's face lost a trifle of its usual placidity as his eyes rested on his daughter, who was, however, still apparently talking to the naval officer. The Catalina did not possess a particularly attractive garden then, but there were a few dusty palms in it, and any one strolling in their shadow that moonlight night could see the filmy mists drifting athwart the great black cordillera, and the wisp of lights that twinkled above the hissing surf along the sweep of bay until they ended in a cluster where the white-walled city rose above the tossing spray. There were several pairs of young men and women who apparently found the prospect attractive, but Brown did not notice Austin among them. He and Mrs. Hatherly sat in the shadow, but Oliviera was in the moonlight, which was probably how it happened that a man who appeared in the lighted doorway close by turned towards him, evidently without noticing the others.

"That you, Don Erminio? Then come right along," he said. "I've got to give somebody a good time, and you have so much human nature it's easy pleasing you. Get up on your hind feet, and have some champagne – enough to make your throat bad for a month, if you feel like it."

Oliviera rose with alacrity. "Aha!" he said. "I come."

He wasted no time in doing it, though he reluctantly spared a moment to make his companions a little grave inclination, for Don Erminio was, after all, a Castilian, and when he had gone the two who were left looked at one another. The joyous satisfaction in the voice and attitude of the man at the door had its significance for both of them. Mrs. Hatherly looked troubled, but there was a faint twinkle in her companion's eyes.

"I wonder if Mr. Jefferson often gives his friends invitations of that kind?" she said.

Brown smiled reassuringly. "I almost think I could answer for his general abstemiousness. Still, there are occasions upon which even the most sedate of us are apt to relax a little, and wish to share our satisfaction with our friends."

"Then," said Mrs. Hatherly, with evident anxiety, "you fancy –"

"I should almost fancy this is one of the occasions in question."

The little, red-cheeked lady rose with a sigh. "I have tried to do my duty," she said. "Now, I think I must find Muriel, if you will excuse me."

She left him, and when Brown also sauntered into the hotel the veranda remained empty until Jacinta came up the broad stairway just as it happened that Austin came out of the door. She was attired diaphanously in pale-tinted draperies, and seemed to Austin, almost ethereal as she stopped a moment at the head of the stairway with the moonlight upon her. He was, however, quite aware that material things had their value to Jacinta Brown, and that few young women had a more useful stock of worldly wisdom. In another moment she saw him, and made him a little sign with her fan. He drew forward a chair, and then leaned against the balustrade, looking down on her, for it was evident that Jacinta had something to say to him.

"As I haven't seen you since that night on board the *Estremadura*, I naturally haven't had an opportunity of complimenting you," she said.

"May I ask upon what?" and Austin looked a trifle uneasy.

"Your discretion. It would, perhaps, have been a little cold for a moonlight swim, and one's clothing would also be apt to suffer. After all, there was, of course, no reason why it should afford you any pleasure to display your gallantry."

Austin's face flushed. "There have been other occasions when it would have pleased me to twist Macallister's neck," he said. "No doubt you overheard what he said to me?"

"I did," said Jacinta, who looked at him quietly over her fan. "It is a little astonishing that neither of you noticed me. Still, of course, your attitude was, at least, sensible. What I do not understand is why you saw fit to change it a minute or two later. I had, I may mention, left the poop then."

"I'm not sure I understand."

Jacinta laughed musically. "Now," she said, "I really believe you do."

"Well," said Austin, with a doubtful smile, "if you think I went overboard of my own will to win your approbation, you are mistaken. I did not go at all. I was, in fact, thrown in. Macallister is, as you know, a somewhat persistent person."

"Ah!" said Jacinta. "That explains a good deal. Well, I feel almost tempted to be grateful to him for doing it, though you were, of course, sensible. There was really no reason why you should wish me to credit you with courage and humanity – especially when you didn't possess them."

Austin hoped she did not see that he winced, for although he had borne a good deal of her badinage, he felt his face grow hot. He was quite aware that this girl was not for him, and he had, he believed, succeeded in preventing himself falling in love with her. It seemed quite fitting that she should regard him as one of her servants, and since he could look for nothing more, he was content with that. He had, however, a spice of temper, and sometimes she drove him a trifle too hard.

"Still," he said, "if I ever did anything really worth while, I think I should insist upon your recognising it, though it is scarcely likely that I shall have the opportunity."

"No," said Jacinta, reflectively, "I scarcely think it is; but, after all, I have a little to thank you for. You see, you did delay the *Estremadura*. I suppose you have not seen Mr. Jefferson during the last half hour?"

"No," said Austin, with a little start of interest. "Has he – "

"He has. Muriel, at least, has evidently arrived at an understanding with him. I am not sure they saw me, but I came across them a little while ago – and they looked supremely happy."

There was satisfaction in her voice, but it was with a mildly ironical and yet faintly wistful expression she gazed at the shining sea. It somewhat astonished Austin, though there was so much about Jacinta that was incomprehensible to him.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad; but I should scarcely have fancied Miss Gascoyne would have attracted Jefferson. After all, one would hardly consider her a young woman who had very much in her. Indeed, I have wondered why you were so fond of her."

Jacinta smiled curiously as she looked at him. "She is wonderful to Jefferson. There is no grace or goodness that she is not endued with in his estimation."

"But if she doesn't possess them?"

"Then," said Jacinta, decisively, "because he believes she does, she will acquire them. There are women like that, you know, and I am not sure that sensible people like you and I don't lose the best of life occasionally. If a man believes a girl of Muriel's kind angelic she is very apt to unfold shining wings, though nobody else ever fancied that she had anything of the kind about her."

"Ah!" said Austin, who was a little stirred, though he would not admit it. "No doubt you know. A good many men must have thought that of you."

Jacinta laughed again. "No, my friend," she said. "I have met men who thought me amusing, and two or three who thought me clever – but that is a very different thing – while it is possible that the others remembered I was Pancho Brown's daughter. So, you see, my wings have not unfolded. In fact, I sometimes think they are in danger of shrivelling away."

There was nothing that Austin could say, for he was the *Estremadura's* sobrecargo, and had never forgotten that Pancho Brown was reputed to be making several thousand a year. Still, he found silence difficult, and changed the subject.

"Well," he said, "you haven't told me yet why you are so fond of Miss Gascoyne."

"She – is – good, and, after all, goodness really does appeal to some of us. Besides, when I went to an English school, a stranger, more Spanish than English in thought and sentiment, and most of the others held aloof from me, she saw I was lonely, and came and made friends with me. I was glad to cling to her then, and you see I haven't forgotten it."

There was a tone in the girl's voice which sent a little thrill through the man. It was very clear that Jacinta did not forget a kindness, and he had once or twice already had glimpses of her deeper nature. While he stood silent, and, as it happened, in the shadow, Miss Gascoyne came out of the door and approached Jacinta with the moonlight on her face. Austin was almost startled as he glanced at her.

When he had last seen Muriel Gascoyne he had considered her a comely English girl without imagination or sensibility. She had, in fact, appeared to him narrow in her views, totally unemotional, and more than a little dull, certainly not the kind of young woman to inspire or reciprocate passionate admiration in any discerning man. Now, as she came towards him with her eyes shining and the soft colour in her face, which was very gentle, she seemed transfigured and almost radiant. She stooped and kissed Jacinta impulsively.

"I am so happy, my dear," she said. "We owe ever so much to you."

Austin had the grace to wish himself somewhere else, though he did not see how he could get away, but Jacinta, with her usual boldness, turned in his direction.

"Well," she said, "I almost think you owe Mr. Austin a little, too. If he hadn't stopped the *Estremadura* you would probably have been in Madeira now."

Again Muriel Gascoyne astonished Austin, for though it was evident she had not been aware of his presence, she showed no embarrassment, and smiled at him with a simplicity which, though he had not expected it from her, had in it the essence of all womanly dignity.

"Yes," she said, "I realise that. Mr. Austin, Harry has been looking for you everywhere."

Austin made her a little grave inclination, and then, because she seemed to expect it, shook hands with her.

"I am glad that the man you have promised to marry is one of my friends," he said. "There is not a better one in these islands."

He did not remember what Miss Gascoyne said, and perhaps it was not of any particular consequence, but when she left them it happened that he and Jacinta did not look at one another. There was, in fact, an almost embarrassing silence, and through it they heard the rhythmic swing of a soft Spanish waltz, and the deep-toned murmur of the sea. Then Jacinta laughed.

"I wonder what you are thinking?" she said.

Austin smiled, somewhat drily. "I was endeavouring to remember that there are a good many things the *Estremadura's* sobrecargo must dispense with. It is exceedingly unlikely that anybody will ever leave me eight thousand pounds."

"I fancy there are a good many of us who would like to have a good deal more than we will probably ever get," said Jacinta. "It can only be a very few who ever hear the celestial music at all, and to them it comes but once in their life."

Austin looked at her quietly. "A little while ago I should not have considered Miss Gascoyne capable of hearing it; but now, and because I know the man she has promised to marry, I almost think she will, at least occasionally, be able to catch an echo of it. It must be difficult to hear that orchestra once and forget it."

Jacinta turned to him with a curious little smile in her eyes. "You and I are, of course, sensible people, and fancies of that kind have nothing to do with us. In the meanwhile, it is really necessary that I should appear in one or two of the dances."

Austin made a little gesture that might have expressed anything, and she rose and left him standing on the veranda.

## CHAPTER IV

### A BIG CONTRACT

It was the day after the dance at the Catalina, and Austin was running into Las Palmas harbour in a powerful steam launch which had been lent him to convey certain documents to a Spanish steamer. The trade-breeze had veered a little further east that day, as it sometimes did, and the full drift of the long Atlantic sea came rolling inshore. The launch was wet with spray, which flew up in clouds as she lurched over the white-topped combers that burst in a chaotic spouting on a black volcanic reef not far away from her. It also happened that the coaling company's new tug had broken down a few minutes earlier, and when the launch drove past the long mole the first thing Austin saw was a forty-ton coal lighter, loaded to the water's edge, drifting towards the reef. There was a boat astern of her, out of which a couple of Spanish peons seemed to be flinging the water, preparatory to abandoning the lighter to her fate, but Austin could see very little of the latter. The sea washed clean across her, and she showed no more than a strip of sluicing side amidst the spray.

What became of her was no business of his, but when the whistle of a big grain tramp rolling across the mouth of the harbour, and apparently waiting for her coal, roared out a warning, it occurred to Austin that the Spaniards in the boat might have considerable difficulty in pulling her clear of the reef against the sea. Accordingly, he unloosed the launch's whistle, and while it screeched dolefully, put his helm over and ran down upon the lighter. She was wallowing sideways towards the reef when he rounded up close alongside and saw, somewhat to his astonishment, that there was a man still on board. He was very black, though the spray was dripping from his face, and the seas that swept over the lighter's deck wet him to the knees. Austin shouted to him:

"I'll run round to leeward, Jefferson, so you can jump!" he said.

The wet man swung an arm up. "Stand by to take our rope. I'm not going to jump."

Austin considered. He was by no means sure that the launch had power enough to tow the lighter clear, and the long white seething on the jagged lava astern of her suggested what would happen if she failed to do it.

"Come on board. I haven't steam to pull her off," he said.

Jefferson made an impatient gesture. "If you want me, you have got to try."

Austin wasted no more time. It was evidently valuable then, and he knew his man. He signed to the Spanish fireman to back the launch astern, and clutched the rope Jefferson flung him as she drove across the lighter's bows.

"I can tow her just as well with you on board here," he roared.

"I guess you can," and a sea wet Jefferson to the waist as he floundered aft towards the lighter's stern. "Still, you're going to find it awkward to steer her, too."

This was plain enough, and Austin decided that if Jefferson meant to stay on board it was his affair, while he was far from sure that he would gain anything by attempting to dissuade him, even had there been time available. As it was, he realised that the lighter would probably go ashore while they discussed the question, and he signed to the Spanish fireman, who started the little engine full speed ahead, and then opened the furnace door. There was a gush of flame from the funnel, and the tow-rope tightened with a bang that jerked the launch's stern under. Then, while she was held down by the wallowing lighter a big, white-topped sea burst across her forward, and for a few seconds Austin, drenched and battered by the flying spray, could see nothing at all. When it blew astern he made out Jefferson standing knee deep in water at the lighter's helm, though there was very little else visible through the rush of white-streaked brine. Austin shouted to the fireman, who once more opened the furnace door, for that cold douche had suddenly made a different man of him.

He did, for the most part, very little on board the *Estremadura*, and took life as easily as he could, but there was another side of his nature which, though it had been little stirred as yet, came uppermost then, as it did occasionally when he brought his despatches off at night in an open roadstead through the trade-wind surf. It was also known to the *Estremadura's* skipper that he had once swum off to the steamer from the roaring beach at Orotava when no fishermen in the little port would launch a barquillo out. Thus he felt himself in entire sympathy with Jefferson as every big comber hove the launch up and the spray lashed his tingling skin, while for five anxious minutes the issue hung in the balance. Launch and lighter went astern with the heavier seas, and barely recovered the lost ground in the smooths when a roller failed to break quite so fiercely as its predecessors.

Then the Spanish fireman either raised more steam, or the heavy weight of coal astern at last acquired momentum, for they commenced to forge ahead, the launch plunging and rolling, with red flame at her funnel, and the smoke and spray and sparks blowing aft on Austin, who stood, dripping to the skin, at the tiller. Ahead, the long seas that hove themselves up steeply in shoal water came foaming down on him, but there was a little grim smile in his eyes, and he felt his blood tingle as he watched them. When he glanced over his shoulder, which it was not advisable to do unguardedly, he could see Jefferson swung up above him on the lighter's lifted stern, and the long white smoother that ran seething up the reef.

It, however, fell further behind them, until he could put the helm over and run the lighter into smoother water behind the mole, when Jefferson flung up his arm again.

"Swing her alongside the grain boat, and then hold on a minute. I'll come ashore with you," he said.

Austin stopped the launch and cast the tow-rope off, and the lighter, driving forward, slid in under the big grain tramp's side. A few minutes later Jefferson appeared at her gangway, and when Austin ran in jumped on board. He was a tall man, and was just then very wet, and as black as any coal heaver. This, however, rather added to the suggestion of forcefulness that usually characterised him.

"That fellow has been waiting several hours for his coal, and as I couldn't get a man worth anything on to the crane, I ran the thing myself," he said. "The way the wind was it blew the grit all over me, and I'm coming across for a wash with you. I'm 'most afraid to walk through the port as I am just now."

He laughed happily, and Austin fancied that he understood him, since he felt that if he had held Miss Gascoyne's promise he would not have liked to run any risk of meeting her in the state in which Jefferson was just then. As it happened, it did not occur to either of them that they had done anything unusual, which had, perhaps, its significance.

Austin took him on board the *Estremadura*, and when he had removed most of the coal-dust from his person they sat down with a bottle of thin wine before them in the sobrecargo's room. Jefferson was lean in face and person, though he was largely made, and had dark eyes that could smile and yet retain a certain intentness and gravity. His voice had a little ring in it, and, big as he was, he was seldom altogether still. When he filled his glass his long fingers tightened on it curiously.

"I owe you a little for pulling us off just now, but that's by no means all," he said. "Miss Gascoyne told me how you stopped the boat that night three weeks ago. Now – "

Austin laughed. "We'll take it item by item. When you get started you're just a little overwhelming. In the first place, what are you coaling grain tramps for when somebody has left you a fortune?"

"It's not quite that," said Jefferson. "Forty thousand dollars. They're busy at the coal wharf, and wanted me to stay on until the month was up, any way."

"I don't think you owe them very much," said Austin. "In fact, I'm not sure that if I'd been you I'd have saved that coal for them; but we'll get on. I want to congratulate you on another thing, and I really think you are a lucky man."

The smile sank out of Jefferson's eyes. "I'm quite sure of it," he said gravely. "I get wondering sometimes how she ever came to listen to such a man as I am, who isn't fit to look at her."

Austin made a little gesture of sympathy. This was not what he would have said himself, but he was an insular Englishman, and the reticence which usually characterises the species is less highly thought of across the Atlantic. The average American is more or less addicted to saying just what he means, which is, after all, usually a convenience to everybody. Before he could speak Jefferson went on:

"I've been wanting to thank you for stopping that steamer," he said. "It's the best turn anybody ever did me, and I'm not going to forget it. Now –"

"If you're pleased, I am," said Austin, who did not care for protestations of gratitude, a trifle hastily. "Any way, you have got her, and though it's not my business, the question is what you're going to do. Eight thousand pounds isn't very much, after all, and English girls are apt to want a good deal, you know."

Jefferson laughed. "Forty thousand dollars is quite a nice little sum to start with; but I've got to double it before I'm married."

"There are people who would spend most of their life doing it," said Austin, reflectively. "How long do you propose to allow yourself?"

"Six months," and there was a snap in Jefferson's voice and eyes. "If I haven't got eighty thousand dollars in that time I'm going to have no use for them."

"When you come to think of it, that isn't very long to make forty thousand dollars in," said Austin.

He said nothing further, for he had met other Americans in his time, and knew the cheerful optimism that not infrequently characterises them.

Jefferson looked at him steadily with the little glow still in his eyes. "You stopped the *Estremadura*, and, in one respect, you're not quite the same as most Englishmen. They're hide-bound. It takes a month to find out what they're thinking, and then, quite often, it isn't worth while. Any way, I'm going to talk. I feel I've got to. Wouldn't you consider Miss Gascoyne was worth taking a big risk for?"

"Yes," said Austin, remembering what he had seen in the girl's face. "I should almost think she was."

"You would almost think!" and Jefferson gazed at him a moment in astonishment. "Well, I guess you were made that way, and you can't help it. Now, I'm open to tell anybody who cares to listen that that girl was a revelation to me. She's good all through, there's not a thought in her that isn't clean and wholesome. After all, that's what a man wants to fall back upon. Then she's dainty, clever, and refined, with sweetness and graciousness just oozing out of her. It's all round her like an atmosphere."

Austin was slightly amused, though he would not for his life have shown it. It occurred to him that an excess of the qualities his companion admired in Miss Gascoyne might prove monotonous, especially if they were, as in her case, a little too obtrusive. He also fancied that this was the first time anybody had called her clever. Still, Jefferson's supreme belief in the woman he loved appealed to him in spite of its somewhat too vehement expression, and he reflected that there was probably some truth in Jacinta's observation that the woman whose lover credited her with all the graces might, at least, acquire some of them. It seemed that a simple and somewhat narrow-minded English girl, without imagination, such as Miss Gascoyne was in reality, might still hear what Jacinta called the celestial music, and, listening, become transformed. After all, it was not mere passion which vibrated in Jefferson's voice and had shone in Muriel Gascoyne's eyes, and Austin vaguely realised that the faith that can believe in the apparently impossible and the charity that sees no shortcomings are not altogether of this earth. Then he brushed these thoughts aside and turned to his companion with a little smile.

"How did you ever come to be here, Jefferson?" he asked, irrelevantly. "It's rather a long way from the land of progress and liberty."

Jefferson laughed in a somewhat curious fashion. "Well," he said, "others have asked me, but I'll tell you, and I've told Miss Gascoyne. I had a good education, and I'm thankful for it now. There is money in the family, but it was born in most of us to go to sea. I went because I had to, and it made trouble. The man who had the money had plotted out quite a different course for me. Still, I did well enough until the night the *Sachem*— there are several of them, but I guess you know the one I mean — went down. I was mate, but it wasn't in my watch the Dutchman struck her."

"Ah!" said Austin softly, "that explains a good deal! It wasn't exactly a pleasant story."

He eat looking at his companion with grave sympathy as the details of a certain grim tragedy in which the brutally handled crew had turned upon their persecutors when the ship was sinking under them came back to him. Knowing tolerably well what usually happens when official enquiry follows upon a disaster at sea, he had a suspicion that the truth had never become altogether apparent, though the affair had made a sensation two or three years earlier. Still, while Jefferson had not mentioned his part in it, he had already exonerated him.

"It was so unpleasant that I couldn't find a shipping company on our side who had any use for the *Sachem's* mate," he said, and his voice sank a little. "Of course, it never all came out, but there were more than two of the men who went down that night who weren't drowned. Well, what could you expect of a man with a pistol when the one friend he had in that floating hell dropped at his feet with his head adzed open. That left me and Nolan aft. He was a brute — a murdering, pitiless devil; but there were he and I with our backs to the jigger-mast, and a few of the rest left who meant that we should never get into the quarter-boat."

Austin was a trifle startled. "You told Miss Gascoyne that?" he said. "How did she take it?"

Jefferson made a curious little gesture. "Of course," he said simply. "I had to. She believed in me; but do you think I'm going to tell — you — how it hurt her?"

It was borne in upon Austin that, after all, he understood very little about women. A few days earlier it would have seemed impossible to him that a girl with Muriel Gascoyne's straitened views should ever have linked her life with one who had played a leading part in that revolting tragedy. Now, however, it was evident that there was very little she would not do for the man who loved her.

"I'm sorry! You'll excuse it," he said. "Still, that scarcely explains how you came to Las Palmas."

"I came as deck-hand on board a barque bringing tomato boxes over. They were busy at the coaling wharf just then, and I got put on. You know the rest of it. I was left forty thousand dollars."

"You haven't told me yet how you're going to turn them into eighty thousand."

"I'm coming to it. You know we coaled the *Cumbria* before she went out to West Africa. A nearly new 1,500-ton tramp she was, light draught at that, or she'd never have gone where she did. You could put her down at £15,000 sterling. She went up into the half-charted creeks behind the shoals and islands south of Senegal, and was lost there. Among other things, it was a new gum she went for. It appears the niggers find gums worth up to £5 the hundredweight in the bush behind that country. A Frenchman chartered her, but he's dead now, as is almost everybody connected with the *Cumbria*. They've fevers that will wipe you out in a week or two yonder — more fever, in fact, than anywhere else in Africa. Well, as everybody knows, they got oil and sundries and a little gum, and went down with fever while they crawled about those creeks loading her. She got hard in the mud up one of them, and half of the boys were buried before they pulled her out at all, and then she hit something that started a plate or two in her. They couldn't keep the water down, and they rammed her into a mangrove forest to save her. More of them died there, and the salvage expedition lost three or four men before they turned up their contract."

"That," said Austin, "is what might be termed the official version."

Jefferson nodded. "What everybody doesn't know is that the skipper played the Frenchman a crooked game," he said. "There was more gum put into her than was ever shown in her papers;

while they had got at the trade gin before she went ashore. In fact, I have a notion that it wasn't very unlike the *Sachem* affair. I can't quite figure how they came to start those plates in the soft mud of a mangrove creek. Any way, the carpenter, who died there, was a countryman of mine. You may remember I did a few things for him, and the man was grateful. Well, the result is I know there's a good deal more than £20,000 sterling in the *Cumbria*."

Austin surmised that this was possible. It was not, he knew, seafarers of unexceptional character who usually ventured into the still little known creeks of Western Africa, which the coast mailboats' skippers left alone. He was also aware that more or less responsible white men are apt to go a trifle off their balance and give their passions free rein when under the influence of cheap spirits in that land of pestilence.

"Well?" he said.

"I've bought her, as she lies, for £6,000."

Austin gasped. "You will probably die off in two or three weeks after you put your foot in her."

"I'm not quite sure. I was at Panama, and never had a touch of fever. Any way, I'm going, and if you'll stand in with me, I'll put you down a quarter-share for a dollar."

It was in one respect a generous offer, but Austin shook his head. "No," he said decisively. "Have you forgotten that Miss Gascoyne expects you to marry her?"

Jefferson's eyes glowed. "I'm remembering it all the time. That's why I'm going. Would you take a refined and cultured girl and drag her through all the hard places men of my kind make money in up and down the world? Has she to give up everything and come down to me? No, sir! It seems to me, the man who wants to marry a girl of that kind has got to do something to show he knows her value before he gets her, and it would be way better for both of us that she should be sorry for me dead than that I should live to drag her down."

It seemed to Austin that there was a good deal to be said for this point of view, and it also occurred to him that there was in this latter-day American, who had still the grime of the coaling wharf upon him, something of the spirit which had sent the knight-errant out in the days of chivalry. Still, he naturally did not say so, for he was, after all, what Jefferson called a hide-bound Englishman.

"Well," he said, "you're taking a big risk, but perhaps you are right."

Jefferson rose with the abruptness which usually characterised his movements.

"You're not coming?"

"No. I haven't your inducement, and I'm afraid the contract's too big for me."

"You have a week to consider it in," said Jefferson, who opened the door. "In the meanwhile there's another fellow ready for his coal, and I'm going along."

## CHAPTER V

### THE TOMATO FINCA

Three weeks had passed since his interview with Austin before Jefferson was ready to sail, and he spent most of the time in strenuous activity. He had cabled to England for a big centrifugal pump and a second-hand locomotive-type boiler, while, when they arrived, Macallister said that five hundred pounds would not tempt him to raise full steam on the latter. He also purchased a broken-down launch, and, though she was cheap, the cost of her and the pump, with other necessaries, made a considerable hole in his remaining £2,000. It was for this reason he undertook to make the needful repairs himself, with the help of a steamer's donkey-man who had somehow got left behind, while Austin and Macallister spent most of the week during which the *Estremadura* lay at Las Palmas in the workshop he had extemporised. He appeared to know a little about machinery, and could, at least, handle hack-saw and file in a fashion which moved Macallister to approbation, while Austin noticed that the latter's sardonic smile became less frequent as he and the American worked together.

Jefferson was grimly in earnest, and it was evident that his thoroughness, which overlooked nothing, compelled the engineer's admiration. It also occurred to Austin that, while there are many ways in which a lover may prove his devotion, few other men would probably have cared for the one Jefferson had undertaken. He was not a very knightly figure when he emerged, smeared with rust and scale, from the second-hand boiler, or crawled about the launch's engines with blackened face and hands; but Austin, who remembered it was for Muriel Gascoyne he had staked all his little capital in that desperate venture, forebore to smile. He knew rather better than Jefferson did that it was a very forlorn hope indeed the latter was venturing on. One cannot heave a stranded steamer off without strenuous physical exertion, and the white man who attempts the latter in a good many parts of Western Africa incontinently dies.

At last all was ready, and one night Jefferson steamed off to the African liner from Las Palmas mole, taking with him the steamboat donkey-man and another English seafarer, who were at the time disgracefully drunk, as well as six Spaniards from the coasting schooners. He said that when he reached the *Cumbria* he would hire niggers, who would be quite as reliable, and considerably cheaper. As it happened, the *Estremadura* was going to sea that night, bound for the eastern islands, and Mrs. Hatherly, who was never seasick, and had heard that the climate of one of them where it scarcely ever rained was good for rheumatic affections, had determined to visit it in her. Jacinta, for no very apparent reason, decided to go with her, and it accordingly came about that most of her few acquaintances were with Muriel Gascoyne when she said good-bye to Jefferson at the head of the mole. She kissed him unblushingly, and then, when the launch panted away across the harbour, turned, a little pale in face, but with a firm step, towards the *Estremadura*, and an hour later stood with Jacinta on the saloon deck, watching the liner's black hull slide down the harbour. Then as the steamer lurched out past the mole, with a blast of her whistle throbbing across the dusky heave, Muriel shivered a little.

"I don't know whether we shall ever meet here again, but I think I could bear that now, and it really couldn't be so very hard, after all," she said. "It would have been horrible if he had gone and had not told me."

Jacinta looked thoughtful, as in fact she was. She was of a more complex, and, in some respects, more refined nature than her companion, while her knowledge of the world was almost startlingly extensive; but wisdom carries one no further than simplicity when one approaches the barriers that divide man's little life from the hereafter. Indeed, there is warrant for believing that when at last they are rolled away, it is not the wise who will see with clearest vision.

"I am not – quite – sure I understand," she said.

There was a trace of moisture on Muriel Gascoyne's cheek, but she held herself erect, and she was tall and large of frame, as well as a reposeful young woman. Though she probably did not know it, there was a suggestion of steadfast unchangeableness in her unconscious pose.

"Now," she said, very simply, "he belongs to me and I to him. If he dies out there – and I know that is possible – it can only be a question of waiting."

Jacinta was a little astonished. She felt that there had been a great and almost incomprehensible change in Muriel Gascoyne since she fell very simply and naturally in love with Jefferson. It was also very evident that she was not consoling herself with empty phrases, or repeating commendable sentiments just because they appealed to her fancy, as some women will. She seemed to be stating what she felt and knew.

"Ah!" said Jacinta, "you knew he might die there, and you could let him go?"

Muriel smiled. "My dear, I could not have stopped him, and now he is gone I think I am in one way glad that it was so. I do not want money – I have always had very little – but, feeling as he did, it was best that he should go. He would not have blamed me afterwards – of that I am certain – but I think I know what he would have felt if hardship came, and I wanted to spare it him." Then, with a faint smile, which seemed to show that she recognised the anti-climax, she became prosaic again. "One has to think of such things. Eight thousand pounds will not go so very far, you know."

Jacinta left her presently, and, as it happened, came upon Austin soon after the *Estremadura* steamed out to sea. He was leaning on the forward rails while the little, yacht-like vessel – she was only some 600 tons or so – swung over the long, smooth-backed undulations with slanted spars and funnel. There was an azure vault above them, strewn with the lights of heaven, and a sea of deeper blue which heaved oilily below, for, that night, at least, the trade breeze was almost still.

"The liner will be clear of the land by now," she said. "I suppose you are glad you did not go with Jefferson? You never told me that he had asked you to!"

Austin, who ignored the last remark, laughed in a somewhat curious fashion.

"Well," he said, reflectively, "in one respect Jefferson is, perhaps, to be envied. He is, at least, attempting a big thing, and if he gets wiped out over it, which I think is quite likely, he will be beyond further trouble, and Miss Gascoyne will be proud of him. In fact, it is she I should be sorry for. She seems really fond of him."

"Is that, under the circumstances, very astonishing?"

"Jefferson is really a very good fellow," said Austin, with a smile. "In fact, whatever it may be worth, he has my sincere approbation."

Jacinta made a little gesture of impatience. "Pshaw!" she said. "You know exactly what I mean. I wonder if there is one among all the men I have ever met who would – under any circumstances – do as much for me?"

She glanced at him for a moment in a fashion which sent a thrill through him; but Austin seldom forgot that he was the *Estremadura's* purser. He had also a horror of cheap protestations, and he avoided the question.

"You could scarcely expect – me – to know," he said. "Suppose there was such a man, what would you do for him?"

There was just a trace of heightened colour in Jacinta's face. "I think, if it was necessary, and he could make me believe in him as Muriel believes in Jefferson, I would die for him."

Austin said nothing for a space, and looked eastwards towards Africa, across the long, smooth heave of sea, while he listened to the throbbing of the screw and the swash of the water beneath the steamer's side. He was quite aware that while Jacinta, on rare occasions, favoured her more intimate masculine friends with a glimpse of her inner nature, she never permitted them to presume upon the fact. He had, he felt, made some little progress in her confidence and favour, but it was quite clear that it would be inadvisable to venture further without a sign from her. Jacinta was able to make her

servants and admirers understand exactly what line of conduct it was convenient they should assume. If they failed to do so, she got rid of them.

"Whatever is Mrs. Hatherly going to Fuerteventura for?" he asked.

"Dry weather," said Jacinta, with a little smile.

Austin laughed. "One would fancy that Las Palmas was dry and dusty enough for most people. I suppose you told her there is nowhere she can stay? They haven't a hotel of any kind in the island."

"That," said Jacinta, sweetly, "will be your business. You are a friend of Don Fernando, and he has really a comfortable house. Still, I expect three days of it will be quite enough for Mrs. Hatherly. You can pick us up, you know, when you come back from Lanzarote."

Austin made a little whimsical gesture of resignation. "There is, presumably, no use in my saying anything. After all, she will be company for Confidencia."

"Who is, by the way, a friend of yours, too."

"I have artistic tastes, as you know. Confidencia is – barring one or two – the prettiest girl in these islands."

He moved away, but he turned at the top of the ladder, and Jacinta smiled.

"It is almost a pity a taste of that kind does not invariably accompany an artistic talent," she said.

Austin went down to his little room, which was almost as hot as an oven, and strove to occupy himself with his papers. The attempt, however, was not a success, for his thoughts would follow Jefferson, who was on his way to Africa with a big centrifugal pump, a rickety steam launch, and a second-hand boiler of the locomotive type. In view of his ulterior purpose, there was, it seemed to Austin, something ludicrously incongruous about this equipment, though he realised that the gaunt American possessed in full degree the useful practical point of view in which he himself fell short. Jefferson was, in some respects, primitive, but that was, after all, probably fortunate for him. He knew what he desired, and set about the obtaining of it by the first means available. Then he dismissed the subject, and climbing into his bunk went to sleep.

Next morning he took Jacinta, Mrs. Hatherly, and Muriel Gascoyne ashore, and afterwards went on with the *Estremadura* to the adjoining island. It was three days later, and the steamer had come back again, when he and her captain rode with the three ladies towards the coast, after a visit to the black volcanic hills. Mrs. Hatherly and Muriel sat in a crate-like affair upon the back of a camel, with distress in their faces, for there is probably no more unpleasant form of locomotion to anyone not used to it than camel-riding. The beast possesses a gait peculiarly its own, and at every lurch of its shoulders the two women jolted violently in the crate. The camel, however, proceeded unconcerned, with long neck moving backwards and forwards like a piston-rod. The rest rode horses, and a gun and several ensanguined rabbits lay across the Captain's saddle. He rode like a Castilian, and not a sailor, and Jacinta had noticed already that Austin was equally at home in the saddle. The fact had, naturally, its significance for her.

It was then about two o'clock in the afternoon, and very hot, though the fresh trade breeze blew long wisps of dust away from under the horses' feet. Nobody could have called that part of Fuerteventura a beautiful country, but it had its interest to two of the party, who had never seen anything quite like it before. Behind them rose low hills, black with streams of lava, red with calcined rock, and every stone on them was outlined in harsh colouring in that crystalline atmosphere. In front lay a desolation of ashes and scorix, with tracts of yellow sand, blown there presumably from Africa, which swirled in little spirals before the breeze. It was chequered with clumps of euphorbia and thorn, but they, too, matched the prevailing tones of grey and brown and chrome, and there was not in all the waste a speck of green. Further still in front of them the sea flamed like a mirror, and a vault of dazzling blue hung over all.

They wound down into a hollow, through which, as one could see by the tortuous belt of stones, a little water now and then flowed, and dismounted in the scanty shadow of a ruined wall. It had been built high and solid of blocks of lava centuries ago, perhaps by the first of the Spanish, or by dusky

invaders from Morocco. As it was not quite so hot there, Austin and the Captain made preparations for a meal when a bare-legged peon led the beasts away. Then the Captain frowned darkly at the prospect.

"Ah, mala gente. Que el infierno los come!" he said, with blazing eyes, and swung a brown hand up, as though appealing to stones and sky before he indulged in another burst of eloquence.

"What is he saying?" asked Muriel Gascoyne. "He seems very angry."

Austin smiled. "I scarcely think it would be altogether advisable to enquire, but it is not very astonishing if he is angry," he said. "Don Erminio is not, as a rule, a success as a business man, and this is a farm he once invested all his savings in. I am particularly sorry to say that I did much the same."

Miss Gascoyne appeared astonished, which was, perhaps, not altogether unnatural, as she gazed at the wilderness in front of her. There were, she could now see, signs that somebody had made a desultory attempt at building a wall which was nearly buried again. A few odd heaps of lava blocks had also been piled up here and there, but the hollow was strewn with dust and ashes, and looked as though nothing had ever grown there since that island was hurled, incandescent, out of the sea. It was very difficult to discover the least evidence of fertility.

"Ah!" said Jacinta, "so this is the famous Finca de La Empresa Financiera?"

Oliviera overheard her, and once more made a gesture with arms flung wide.

"Mira!" he said. "The cemetery where I bury the hopes of me. O much tomate, mucho profit. I buy more finca and the cow for me. Aha! There is also other time I make the commercial venture. I buy two mulo. Very good mulo. I charge mucho dollar for the steamboat cargo cart. Comes the locomotora weet the concrete block down Las Palmas mole. The mole is narrow, the block is big, the man drives the locomotora behind it, he not can look. Vaya, my two mulo, and the cart, she is in the sea. That is also ruin me. I say, 'Vaya. In fifty year she is oll the same,' but when I see the Finca de tomate I have the temper. Alors, weet permission, me vais chasser the conejo."

"The unfortunate man!" said Jacinta, when he strode away in search of a rabbit. "Still, the last of it wasn't quite unexceptional Castilian."

Austin laughed. "Don Erminio speaks French almost as well as he does English. In fact, he's a linguist in his way. Still, I'm not sorry he didn't insist upon me going shooting with him. It's risky, and I would sooner he'd borrowed somebody else's gun."

They made a tolerable lunch, for the *Estremadura's* cook knew his business, and, though it very seldom rains there, some of the finest grapes to be found anywhere grow in the neighbouring island of Lanzarote. Then Mrs. Hatherly apparently went to sleep with her back against the wall, while Muriel sat silent in the shadow, close beside her. Perhaps the camel ride had shaken her, and perhaps she was thinking of Jefferson, for she was gazing east towards Africa, across the flaming sea. Jacinta, as usual, appeared delightfully fresh and cool, as she sat with her long white dress tucked about her on a block of lava, while Austin lay, contented, not far from her feet.

"You never told me you had a share in the Finca," she said.

"Well," said Austin, "I certainly had. I also made a speech at the inaugural dinner, and Don Erminio almost wept with pride while I did it. I had, though he did not mention it, a share in his mule cart, too, and once or twice bought a schooner load of onions to ship to Havana at his suggestion. You see, I had then a notion that it was my duty to make a little money. Somehow, the onions never got to Cuba, and our other ventures ended – like the Finca."

"Then you have given up all idea of making money now?"

"It really didn't seem much use continuing, and, after all, a little money wouldn't be very much good to me. A chance of making twenty thousand pounds might, perhaps, rouse me to temporary activity."

"Ah," said Jacinta, looking at him with thoughtful eyes, "you want too much, my friend. You are not likely to make it by painting little pictures on board the *Estremadura*."

A faint trace of darker colour showed through the bronze in Austin's cheek. "Yes," he said, "that is exactly what is the matter with me. Still, as I shall never get it, I am tolerably content with what I have. Fortunately, I am fond of it – I mean the sea."

"Of course," said Jacinta, with a curious little sparkle in her eyes, "contentment is commendable, though there is something that appeals to one's fancy in the thought of a man struggling against everything to acquire the unattainable."

"So long as it is unattainable, what would be the good? Besides, I am almost afraid I am not that kind of man."

Jacinta said nothing further, and half an hour slipped by, until a trail of smoke with a smear of something beneath it, crept up out of the glittering sea.

"The *Andalusia*," said Austin. "She takes up our western run here under the new time-table. I hope she's bringing no English folks from Las Palmas to worry us."

As it happened, there was a man on board the *Andalusia* who was to bring one of the party increased anxiety and distress of mind, but they did not know that then, and in the meanwhile the peon with the horses and Don Erminio came back again. He brought no rabbits, but he had succeeded in badly scratching one of the Damascene barrels of Austin's gun.

"The conejo he no can eat the stone, and here there is nothing else," he explained. "Otra vez – the other time, comes here a señor Engleesman, and we have the gun, but there is no conejo. Me I say, 'Mira. Conejo into his hole he go!' Bueno! The Engleesman he put the white rat into that hole, and wait, oh, he wait mucho tiempo. Me, away I go. I come back, the Engleesman has bag the Captain of puerto."

Then he turned with a dramatic gesture to the camel, which stretched out its little head towards his leg. "Bur-r-r. Hijo de diablo. Aughr-r-r. Focha camello! Me, I also spick the Avar-r-ack. The condemn camello he comprehend."

The long-necked beast at least knelt down as though it did, and Mrs. Hatherly climbed into the crate with a somewhat apprehensive glance at the gallant captain.

## CHAPTER VI

### AUSTIN'S POINT OF VIEW

Mrs. Hatherly decided during the ride to the beach that she had seen quite enough of that island in the three days she had spent there, and she had already gone off to the *Estremadura* with Muriel and Jacinta when Austin stood smoking on the little mole. Long undulations of translucent brine seethed close past his feet to break with a drowsy roar upon the lava reefs, and the *Estremadura* lay rolling wildly a quarter of a mile away. A cluster of barefooted men were with difficulty loading her big lancha beneath the mole with the barley-straw the row of camels, kneeling in the one straggling street behind him, had brought down. The men were evidently tired, for they had toiled waist-deep in the surf since early morning, and Austin decided to spare them the journey for his despatch gig.

Accordingly, when the lancha was loaded high with the warm yellow bales he clambered up on them and bade the crew get under way. The long sweeps dipped, and the craft went stern first towards the reef for a moment or two before she crawled out to sea, looking very like a cornstack set adrift as she lurched over the shining swell. Austin lay upon the straw, smoking tranquilly, for everybody leaves a good deal to chance in Spain, and now and then flung a little Castilian badinage at the gasping men who pulled the big sweeps below. As it happened, they could not see him because the straw rose behind them in a yellow wall. They were cheerful, inconsequent fishermen, who would have done a good deal for him, and not altogether because of the bottle of caña he occasionally gave them.

They had traversed half the distance, when, opening up a point, they met a steeper heave, and when the dripping bows went up after the plunge there was a movement of the barley-straw. Austin felt for a better hold, but two or three bales fetched away as he did so, and in another moment he plunged down headforemost into the sea. When he came up he found a straw bale floating close beside him, and held on by it while he looked about him. The lancha was apparently going on, and it was evident that although the men must have heard the straw fall, they were not aware that he had gone with it. There was, he surmised, no room for the lost bales, and the men could not have heaved them up on top of the load. It therefore appeared probable that they purposed unloading the lancha before they came back for them, and he decided to climb up on the bale.

He found it unexpectedly difficult, for when he had almost dragged himself up the bale rolled over and dropped him in again; while, when he tried to wriggle up the front of it, it stood upright and then fell upon him. After several attempts he gave it up, and set out for the steamer with little pieces of barley-straw and spiky ears sticking all over him. He could swim tolerably well, and swung along comfortably enough over the smooth-backed swell, for his light clothing did not greatly cumber him. Still, he did not desire that any one beyond the *Estremadura's* crew should witness his arrival.

He was, accordingly, by no means pleased to see Jacinta and Miss Gascoyne stroll out from the deck-house as he drew in under the *Estremadura's* side, especially as there were no apparent means of getting on board quietly. The lancha had vanished round the stern, the ladder was triced up, and the open cargo gangway several feet above the brine. The steamer also hove up another four or five feet of streaming plates every time she rolled. Still, it was evident that he could not stay where he was on the chance of the ladies not noticing him indefinitely, and as he swam on again Miss Gascoyne broke into a startled scream.

"Oh!" she said, "there's somebody drowning!"

The cry brought Macallister to the gangway, and he was very grimy in engine-room disarray. Austin, in the water, saw the wicked twinkle in his eyes, and was not pleased to hear Jacinta laugh musically.

"I really don't think he is in any danger," she said.

Austin set his lips, and swam for the gangway as the *Estremadura* rolled down. His flung up hand came within a foot of the opening, and then he sank back a fathom or more below it as the *Estremadura* hove that side of her out of the water. When he swung up again Macallister was standing above him with a portentously sharp boat hook, while two or three grinning seamen clustered round. The girls were also leaning out from the saloon-deck rails.

"Will ye no keep still while I hook ye!" said the engineer.

"If you stick that confounded thing into my clothes I'll endeavour to make you sorry," said Austin savagely.

Macallister made a sweep at him, and Austin went down, while one of the seamen, leaning down, grabbed him by the shoulder, when he rose.

"Let go!" he sputtered furiously. "Give me your hand instead!"

He evidently forgot that the seaman, who held on, was not an Englishman, and next moment he was hove high above the water. Then there was a ripping and tearing, and while the seaman reeled back with a long strip of alpaca in his hand, Austin splashed into the water. He came up in time to see Macallister smiling in Jacinta's direction reassuringly.

"There's no need to be afraid," he said. "Though I'm no sure he's worth it, I'll save him for ye."

Now, Jacinta was usually quite capable of making any man who offended her feel sorry for himself, but the sight of Austin's savage red face as he gazed at Macallister, with the torn jacket flapping about him in the water and the barley-straw sticking all over him, was too much for her, and she broke into a peal of laughter.

In another moment Macallister contrived to get his boat hook into the slack of Austin's garments, and when two seamen seized the haft they hove him out, wrong side uppermost, and incoherent with wrath. When they dropped him, a tattered, dripping heap, on the deck, Miss Gascoyne leaned her face upon her hands, and laughed almost hysterically, until Jacinta touched her shoulder.

"Mr. Austin evidently believes he has a good deal to thank his comrade for. I think you had better come away," she said.

Austin put himself to some trouble in endeavouring to make Macallister understand what he thought of him, when they had gone, but the engineer only grinned.

"Well," he said, "I'll forgive ye. If I had looked like ye do with two ladies watching me, I might have been a bit short in temper myself, but come away to your room. The *Andalusia's* boat came across a while ago, and there's business waiting ye."

Austin went with him, but stopped a moment when he approached his room. The door was open, as usual, and a stranger, in grey tourist tweed, upon whom Englishman and clergyman was stamped unmistakably, sat inside the room. Austin felt that he knew who the man must be.

"Does he know Miss Gascoyne is on board?" he asked.

"No," said Macallister. "The boat came round under our quarter, and we landed him through the lower gangway. He said he'd stay here and wait for ye. He's no sociable, anyway. I've offered him cigars and anisow, besides some of my special whisky, but he did not seem willing to talk to me."

Austin fancied he could understand it. Macallister, who had discarded his jacket, was very grimy, and his unbuttoned uniform vest failed to conceal the grease stains on his shirt. Then he remembered that his own jacket was torn to rags, and he was very wet; but Macallister raised his voice:

"Here's Mr. Austin, sir," he said.

The clergyman, who said nothing, gazed at him, and Austin, who realised that his appearance was against him, understood his astonishment. He also fancied that the stranger was one with whom appearances usually counted a good deal.

"If you will wait a minute or two while I change my clothes, I will be at your service, sir," he said. "As you may observe, I have been in the sea."

"Swum off to the steamer," said Macallister, with a wicked smile. "It saves washing. He comes off yon way now and then."

Austin said nothing, but stepped into the room, and, gathering up an armful of clothing, departed, leaving a pool of water behind him. The clergyman, it was evident, did not know what to make of either of them. A few minutes later Austin, who came back and closed the door, sat down opposite him.

"My name is Gascoyne," said the stranger, handing him an open note. "Mr. Brown of Las Palmas, who gave me this introduction, assured me that I could speak to you confidentially, and that you would be able to tell me where my daughter and Mrs. Hatherly are staying."

Austin glanced at him with misgivings. He was a little man, with pale blue eyes, and hair just streaked with grey. His face was white and fleshy, without animation or any suggestion of ability in it, but there had been something in the tone which seemed to indicate that he had, at least, been accustomed to petty authority. Austin at once set him down as a man of essentially conventional views, who was deferred to in some remote English parish; in fact, just the man he would have expected Muriel Gascoyne's father to be; that is, before she had revealed her inner self. It was a type he was by no means fond of, and he was quite aware that circumstances were scarcely likely to prepossess a man of that description in his favour. Still, Austin was a friend of Jefferson's, and meant to do what he could for him.

"I know where Miss Gascoyne is, but you suggested that you had something to ask me, and I shall be busy by and by," he said.

Gascoyne appeared anxious, but evidently very uncertain whether it would be advisable to take him into his confidence.

"I understand that you are a friend of Mr. Jefferson's?" he said.

"I am. I may add that I am glad to admit it, and I almost fancy I know what you mean to ask me."

Gascoyne, who appeared grateful for this lead, looked at him steadily. "Perhaps I had better be quite frank. Indeed, Mr. Brown, who informed me that you could tell more about Jefferson than any one in the islands, recommended it," he said. "I am, Mr. Austin, a clergyman who has never been outside his own country before, and I think it is advisable that I should tell you this, because there may be points upon which our views will not coincide. It was not easy for me to get away now, but the future of my motherless daughter is a matter of the greatest concern to me, and I understand that Mr. Jefferson is in Africa. I want you to tell me candidly – as a gentleman – what kind of man he is."

Austin felt a little better disposed towards Gascoyne after this. His anxiety concerning his daughter was evident, and he had, at least, not adopted quite the attitude Austin had expected. But as Austin was not by any means brilliant himself, he felt the difficulty of making Gascoyne understand the character of such a man as Jefferson, while his task was complicated by the fact that he recognised his responsibility to both of them. Gascoyne had put him on his honour, and he could not paint Jefferson as he was not. In the meanwhile he greatly wished to think.

"I wonder if I might offer you a glass of wine, sir, or perhaps you smoke?" he said.

"No, thanks," said Gascoyne, with uncompromising decision. "I am aware that many of my brethren indulge in these luxuries. I do not."

"Well," said Austin, "if you will tell me what you have already heard about Jefferson it might make the way a little plainer."

"I have been told that he is an American seafarer, it seems of the usual careless type. Seafarers are, perhaps, liable to special temptations, and it is generally understood that the lives most of them lead are not altogether – "

Austin smiled a little when Gascoyne stopped abruptly. "I'm afraid that must be admitted, sir. I can, however, assure you that Jefferson is an abstemious man – Americans are, as a rule, you see – and, though there are occasions when his conversation might not commend itself to you, he has had an excellent education. Since we are to be perfectly candid, has it ever occurred to you that it was scarcely likely a dissolute sailor would meet with Miss Gascoyne's approbation?"

Gascoyne flushed a trifle. "It did not – though, of course, it should have. Still, he told her that he was mate of the *Sachem*, which was a painful shock to me. I, of course, remember the revolting story."

He stopped a moment, and his voice was a trifle strained when he went on again. "I left England, Mr. Austin, within three days of getting my daughter's letter, and have ever since been in a state of distressing uncertainty. Mr. Jefferson is in Africa – I cannot even write him. I do not know where my duty lies."

Had the man's intense anxiety been less evident, Austin would have been almost amused. The Reverend Gascoyne appeared to believe that his affairs were of paramount importance to everybody, as, perhaps, they were in the little rural parish he came from; but there was something in his somewhat egotistical simplicity that appealed to the younger man.

"One has to face unpleasant facts now and then, sir," he said. "There are times when homicide is warranted at sea, and man's primitive passions are very apt to show themselves naked in the face of imminent peril. It is in one respect unfortunate that you have probably never seen anything of the kind, but one could not expect too much from a man whose comrade's head had just been shorn open by a drink-frenzied mutineer. Can you imagine the little handful of officers, driven aft away from the boats while the ship settled under them, standing still to be cut down with adze and axe? You must remember, too, that they were seafarers and Americans who had few of the advantages you and your friends enjoy in England."

He could not help the last piece of irony, but Gascoyne, who did not seem to notice it, groaned.

"To think of a man who appears to hold my daughter's confidence being concerned in such an affair at all is horribly unpleasant to me."

"I have no doubt it was almost as distressing to Jefferson at the time. Still, as you have probably never gone in fear of your life for weeks together, you may not be capable of understanding what he felt, and we had perhaps better get on a little further."

Gascoyne seemed to pull himself together. "Mr. Jefferson has, I understand, no means beyond a certain legacy. It is not, after all, a large one."

"If he is alive in six months I feel almost sure he will have twice as much, which would mean an income of close upon £600 a year from sound English stock, and that, one would fancy, would not be considered abject poverty in a good many English rural parishes."

Gascoyne sighed. "That is true – it is certainly true. You said – if he were alive?"

"As he is now on his way to one of the most deadly belts of swamp and jungle in Western Africa, I think I was warranted. Knowing him as I do, it is, I fancy, certain that if he does not come back with £16,000 in six months he will be dead."

"Ah," said Gascoyne, with what was suspiciously like a sigh of relief. "One understands that it is a particularly unhealthy climate. Still, when one considers that all is arranged for the best –"

Austin, who could not help it, smiled sardonically, though he felt he had an almost hopeless task. It appeared impossible that Gascoyne should ever understand the character of a man like Jefferson. But he meant to do what he could.

"It is naturally easier to believe that when circumstances coincide with our wishes, sir," he said. "Now, I do not exactly charge you with wishing Jefferson dead, though your face shows that you would not be sorry. I am, of course, another careless seafarer, a friend of his, and I can understand that what you have seen of me has not prepossessed you in my favour. Still, if I can, I am going to show you Jefferson as he is. To begin with, he believes, as you do, that Miss Gascoyne is far above him – and in this he is altogether wrong. Miss Gascoyne is doubtless a good woman, but Jefferson is that harder thing to be, a good man. His point of view is not yours, it is, perhaps, a wider one; but he has, what concerns you most directly now, a vague, reverential respect for all that is best in womanhood, which, I think, is sufficient to place Miss Gascoyne under a heavy responsibility."

He stopped a moment, looking steadily at Gascoyne, who appeared blankly astonished.

"Because it was evident to him that a woman of Miss Gascoyne's conventional upbringing must suffer if brought into contact with the unpleasant realities of the outside world, he has staked his life willingly – not recklessly – on the winning of enough to place her beyond the reach of adversity. He realised that it was, at least, even chances he never came back from Africa; but it seemed to him better that she should be proud of him dead than have to pity him and herself living. I know this, because he told me he would never drag the woman who loved him down. He fell in love with her without reflection, instinctively – or, perhaps, because it was arranged so – I do not understand these things. As surely – conventionalities don't always count – she fell in love with him, and then he had to grapple with the position. Your daughter could not live, as some women do, unshocked and cheerfully among rude and primitive peoples whose morality is not your morality, in the wilder regions of the earth. It was also evident that she could not live sumptuously in England on the interest of £8,000. You see what he made of it. If he died, Miss Gascoyne would be free. If he lived, she could avoid all that would be unpleasant. Isn't that sufficient? Could there be anything base or mean in a nature capable of devotion of that description?"

Gascoyne sat silent almost a minute. Then he said very quietly: "I have to thank you, Mr. Austin – the more so because I admit I was a little prejudiced against you. Perhaps men living as I do acquire too narrow a view. I am glad you told me. And now where is my daughter and Mrs. Hatherly?"

"Wait another minute! Jefferson is, as you will recognise, a man of exceptional courage, but he is also a man of excellent education, and, so far as that goes, of attractive presence; such a one, in fact, as I think a girl of Miss Gascoyne's station is by no means certain to come across again in England. Now, if I have said anything to offend you, it has not been with that object, and you will excuse it. Your daughter and Mrs. Hatherly are on board this ship. It seemed better that you should hear me out before I told you."

"Ah," said Gascoyne. "Well, I think you were right, and again I am much obliged to you. Will you take me to Mrs. Hatherly?"

Austin did so, and coming back flung himself down on the settee in Macallister's room.

"Give me a drink – a long one. I don't know that I ever talked so much at once in my life, and I only hope I didn't make a consummate ass of myself," he said.

"It's no that difficult," said Macallister, reflectively, as he took out a syphon and a bottle of wine. "Ye made excuses for yourself and Jefferson?"

Austin laughed. "No," he said. "I made none for Jefferson. I think I rubbed a few not particularly pleasant impressions into the other man. I felt I had to. It was, of course, a piece of abominable presumption."

Macallister leaned against the bulkhead and regarded him with a sardonic grin.

"I would have liked to have heard ye," he said.

## CHAPTER VII AT THE BULL FIGHT

Austin was writing in the saloon, which was a little cooler than his room, at about eight o'clock that night, while Jacinta and Mrs. Hatherly made ineffectual attempts to read in the ladies' cabin, for the *Estremadura* was on her way south again, with the trade-wind combers tumbling after her. She rolled with a long, rhythmic swing, and now and then shook and trembled with the jar of her lifted propeller. Muriel Gascoyne was accordingly alone with her father on the deck above. She sat in a canvas chair, while Gascoyne leaned upon the rails in front of her. There was a full moon overhead, and a fantastic panorama of fire-blackened hills, wastes of ash and lava, whirling clouds of sand, black rocks lapped by spouting surf, and bays of deepest indigo, unrolled itself upon one hand. It is, however, probable that neither of the pair saw much of it, for their thoughts were not concerned with the volcanic desolation.

"It is a pity I did not come a few weeks earlier," said Gascoyne with a sigh.

Muriel's eyes were a trifle hazy, but her voice was even. "If you had come then, and insisted upon it, I might have given him up," she said.

"That means it is irrevocable now? I want you to make quite sure, my dear. This man does not belong to our world. Even his thoughts must be different from ours. You cannot know anything of his past life – I scarcely think he could explain it to you. He would regard nothing from the same standpoint as we do."

"Still, it cannot have been a bad one. I can't tell you why I am sure of that, but I know."

Gascoyne made a little, hopeless gesture. "Muriel," he said, a trifle hoarsely, "it is a terrible risk – and if you marry him you must inevitably drift away from me. You are all I have, and I am getting old and lonely, but that is not of the greatest moment. It would be horrible to think of you drifting away from all you have been taught to believe in and hold sacred."

It was a strong appeal, perhaps the strongest he could have made, for the girl had been without breadth of view when she left home, and the boundaries of her outlook had coincided with those of the little rural parish. Still, in some strange fashion she had gained enlightenment, and she was resolute, though her blue eyes slowly brimmed with moisture. It was true that he would be very lonely.

"Ah," she said, and it was a significant sign that she questioned the comprehension of the man whom she had regarded as almost infallible a few weeks earlier, "how can I make you understand? There are, perhaps, many worlds, and we know there are many kinds of men. They must think differently, but does that matter so very much, after all? There is the same humanity in all of us."

"Undoubtedly! In Turks, idolaters, and unbelievers. Humanity in itself is fallen and evil."

Muriel smiled. "Father," she said, "you don't believe that there is no good in all those who have not been taught to believe as we do."

Gascoyne did not answer her, though it is possible that there were circumstances under which he would have returned a very slightly qualified affirmative.

"There is a perilous optimism abroad," he said.

"Still," said Muriel, unconscious of the irony of her deprecatory answer, "Mr. Jefferson is neither a Turk nor an idolater. He is only an American sailor."

Gascoyne sighed dejectedly, for there was, it seemed, nothing left for him to appeal to. The girl's beliefs had gone. The simple, iron-fast rules of life she had once acknowledged were now apparently discredited; but even in his concern he was vaguely sensible that an indefinite something which he did not recognise as the charity that love teaches was growing up in place of them. Still, he felt its presence as he watched her, and knew that it could not be altogether born of evil.

"My dear," he said, "how shall I implore you to consider?"

Muriel smiled out of hazy eyes. "It is too late. He has my promise, and I belong to him. Nothing that you could say would change that now. He has gone out – to Africa – believing in me, and I know that he may never come back again."

Gascoyne appeared a trifle startled, and remembered a curious remark that Austin had made to the effect that there was a heavy responsibility upon his daughter. He could not altogether understand why this should be, but he almost fancied that she recognised it now. There was also a finality and decision in the girl's tone which was new to him.

"I think you know how hard it was for me to get away, but it seemed necessary. I came out to implore you to give this stranger up," he said.

The girl rose, and stood looking at him gravely, with one hand on the chair arm to steady herself as the steamer rolled, and the moonlight upon her face. It was almost reposeful in its resolution.

"Father," she said, "you must try to understand. Perhaps I did wrong when I gave him my promise without consulting you, but it is given, and irrevocable. He has gone out to Africa – and may die there – believing in me. I don't think I could make you realise how he believes in me, but, though, of course, he is wrong, I grow frightened now and then, and almost hope he may never see me as I really am. That is why I – daren't – fail him. If there was no other reason I must keep faith with him."

"Then," said Gascoyne, very slowly, "I must, at least, try to resign myself – and perhaps, my apprehensions may turn out to be not quite warranted, after all. I was horribly afraid a little while ago, but this man seems to have the faculty of inspiring confidence in those who know him. They cannot all be mistaken, and the man who is purser on this steamer seems to believe in him firmly. His views are peculiar, but there was sense in what he said, and he made me think a little less hardly of Mr. Jefferson."

Muriel only smiled. She realised what this admission, insufficient and grudging as it was, must have cost her father, and – for she had regarded everything from his point of view until a few weeks ago – she could sympathise with him. Still, she was glad when she saw Jacinta and Mrs. Hatherly coming towards them along the deck.

It was an hour later when Jacinta met Austin at the head of the ladder, and stopped him with a sign.

"I have had a long talk with Mr. Gascoyne, and found him a little less disturbed in mind than I had expected," she said. "I want to know what you said to him."

"Well," said Austin, reflectively, "I really can't remember, and if I could it wouldn't be worth while. Of course, I knew what I wanted to say, but I'm almost afraid I made as great a mess of it as I usually do."

"Still, I think Miss Gascoyne is grateful to you."

"That," said Austin, "affords me very little satisfaction, after all. You see, I didn't exactly do it to please Miss Gascoyne."

"Then I wonder what motive really influenced you?"

Austin pursed his lips, as if thinking hard. "I don't quite know. For one thing, very orthodox people of the Reverend Gascoyne's description occasionally have an irritating effect upon me. I feel impelled to readjust their point of view, or, at least to allow them an opportunity of recognising the advantages of mine, which, however, isn't necessarily the correct one. I hope this explanation contents you."

Jacinta smiled. "I think I shall remember it," she said. "I believe I generally do when anybody does a thing to please me. Still, Miss Gascoyne's gratitude will not hurt you."

Then she swept away, and left him standing meditatively at the head of the ladder. He saw no more of her that night, and he was busy when the *Estremadura* steamed into Las Palmas early next morning, while it was nearly three weeks later when he met her again at a corrida de toros in the bull ring at Santa Cruz, Teneriffe, which was, perhaps, the last place where one would have expected to find an English lady.

The spacious amphitheatre was open to the sky, and all its tiers of stone benches packed with excited humanity, for half the inhabitants of the island had apparently gathered to enjoy the sanguinary spectacle. Black is the colour affected by men who can afford it on a Spanish holiday, but the white cotton the bare-legged hillmen wore, and the pink and chrome of their wives' and daughters' dresses, flecked with luminous colour the sombre ranks of the close-packed multitude. Blazing sunlight beat down upon them, for it is only the richer citizens who sit in the shadow, and the topmost row was projected, a filagree of black and motley, against the hard glaring blue. Below, the arena shone dazzlingly yellow, and the smell of blood and fresh sawdust came up from it through the many-toned murmur of the crowd. When this sank a little one could hear the deep boom of the Atlantic swell crumbling on the lava beach.

The revolting picador scene was over. Two or three worn-out and blindfolded horses had been gored or trampled to death, and one picador's arm had been broken. The tawny, long-horned bull, which had shown unusual courage, stood panting in the middle of the arena, with a crimson smear on one shoulder where a lance had scored it deep, and while the bugles rang, the vast assembly waited for the banderillero scene in high good humour. Just then a little party descended one of the avenues on the shady side, and Austin, who had a note from Pancho Brown in his pocket, with some difficulty made his way to meet them. He was quite aware that Brown was probably the only Englishman in those islands who would have been able to reserve desirable places at a *corrida de toros*.

Jacinta, who accompanied him, was attended by his Spanish housekeeper and two sunburnt English naval officers, but she made room for Austin on one side of her, and appeared in no way displeased by his indifferently veiled approbation. Miss Brown had been dressed by a Castilian modeste, mostly in black lace, that day, and her clustering brown hair was ornamented by a little mantilla of the same material. It was not a dress which would have suited every Englishwoman, especially of substantial type, but Jacinta was slight, and delicately round, and altogether sylph-like.

"You venture to approve of this get-up?" she said. "The tourists were a little horrified at the hotel."

Austin, who wore white duck, noticed that she smiled at the Governor, who sat above them amidst his glittering staff, and that almost sufficed to spoil his satisfaction, though it was only one of the many little things that emphasised the difference between them. Still, he contrived to laugh.

"I expect they were envious. It's bewilderingly effective, and I am a bit of an artist, as you know," he said. "I was wondering whether you would have the courage to come."

"Jacinta," said Pancho Brown, "has courage enough for anything. Still, she came because I asked her. I make my living out of these people, and, perhaps, a little more. It was policy."

Jacinta laughed. "Well," she said, "I rather like it, and I have been before. Of course, I mean after they have killed the horses and smashed the picadores. That part is not only cruel, but ineffective. It's not inspiring to see a man padded with leather sit quite still to be knocked over. They should either wipe it out or give them stuffed horses. By the way, you don't know my companions."

The two naval officers acknowledged the introduction with characteristic brevity. Their eyes were fixed on the arena, and the scene was probably worth their attention, for there are parts of a bull fight which cannot be termed revolting, at least, by those who have actually witnessed them.

A lithe, well-favoured man, picturesquely attired, skipped into the ring, holding a crimson cape in one hand, and a couple of little decorated darts in the other. It was his business to strike them into the neck or shoulder of the bull, but nowhere else, while their points were calculated to do no more than exasperate it. The beast watched him savagely, pawing up the sand, and the chances appeared somewhat against the man, since to reach its neck he must approach his silk-covered breast within an inch or two of the gleaming horns, one of which was suspiciously reddened.

Austin could not quite see how he did it, for his motions were bewilderingly rapid, but he saw the wave of the gaudy cloak and heard its crisp rustle that was lost in the roar. Then the man was running round the ring for his life, and the bull thundering along with lowered head and a dart bristling

in its neck, a yard or two behind him. He had no time to swing himself over the barricade, as hard pressed banderilleros now and then did, for the deadly horns were almost in the small of his back. It was a frantic test of speed, highly trained human agility and endurance against the strength of the beast, and there was dead silence while they went round the arena once, the man running desperately, with tense, set face, while Austin fancied he could hear his gasping breath through the roar of the hoofs. Then, with a splendid bound, he drew a yard ahead, and another man with a green cape hurled himself through the opening. Somehow he escaped destruction, and the bull slid onward with hoofs ploughing up the sand, and the gaudy silk fluttering about its head. There was a roar of plaudits that could have been heard miles away at sea, and while from tiers of benches the hats came sailing down, the bull, which shook the cape off, tore the coloured rags to fragments.

"That fellow has good nerves," said one of the navy men. "I don't see anything very brutal in it, after all. They both start level, and take their chances, you know."

Jacinta looked at Austin over her fan, and there was a faint flush in as much of her face as he could see, as well as a little gleam in her eyes.

"I'm afraid it – is – a little barbarous," she said. "Everybody says so. Still, wasn't that banderillero splendid! You see, I have put on Castilian notions with my clothes. Of course, as an Englishwoman, I could never venture here."

Austin was a little annoyed to feel that he was smiling sardonically. "Well," he said, "I should almost have fancied that you were too super-refined and ethereal to admire that kind of thing, but I really believe you do."

Jacinta waved her fan. "Do not be deceived, my friend. There is a good deal of the primitive in us all, and it shows up now and then." Then she laughed. "I wonder how they all get their right hats back again."

Austin could not tell her, for it was a thing he could never understand; but while the attendants were still flinging the black sombreros into the air another banderillero approached the bull. He planted one dart and then dashed across the ring, but either his nerve failed him, or he could not trust his speed, for he grasped the top of the barricade and swung himself over. In another moment the bull struck it with a crash, and then stood still, half stunned, apparently endeavouring to make out where the man had gone. There was a storm of hisses and opprobrious cries.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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