

CHAPTER III

AT nine o'clock next morning Captain Lathom was breakfasting alone, Mrs. Lathom seldom rising until between ten and eleven o'clock. Russ sat beside his master's chair, patiently waiting for him to finish, when he knew he could accompany him on his usual round of inspection.

The captain's face wore a somewhat troubled expression, and as soon as the meal was over he rose wearily, and went on the verandah, where he paced to and fro for a quarter of an hour. Then catching sight of Helen, who was at work in the garden, he walked over to her.

"Good morning, Helen," he said ; "what are those plants you are covering over with bushes ?"

"Young passion fruit, sir. There are only eight or nine, and I always shade them as soon as the sun begins to get too strong. I promised old Tim six of them to plant round the stables, where the soil is very rich and deep. When they grow up in a few years, they will cover the whole roof, and make the stables very cool."

"A few years is a long time to look forward to," said Lathom, with a good-natured smile. "By the way, Helen, you have not been at all well-lately, I hear."

She looked up astonished. "I am very well, sir, thank you. I am never ill."

"Oh, Mrs. Latham told me last night that she was sure you were far from well, but did not like to say so."