

Then the door opened suddenly ; and a tall soldierly-looking man, grey-haired and clean-shaven, in an officer's dress, stood there, with the order in his hand, as the two in the window-seat rose to meet him.

" Master Torridon," he said abruptly.

Sir James stepped froward.

" Yes, sir."

" You have come to see Mr. Ralph Torridon whom we have here ? "

" Yes, sir—my son."

Nicholas stepped forward, and the Lieutenant nodded at him.

" Yes, sir," said the officer to him, " I could not admit you before—" he stopped, as if embarrassed, and turned to Beatrice.

" And this lady too ? "

" Yes, Master Lieutenant," said the old man.

" But—but—I do not understand—"

He looked at the radiant faces before him, and then dropped his eyes.

" I suppose—you have not heard then ? "

Chris felt his heart leap, and then begin to throb furiously and insistently. What had happened ? Why did the man look like that ? Why did he not speak ?

The Lieutenant came a step forward and put his hand on the table. He was looking strangely from face to face.

Outside the court was very still. The footstep that had passed on the flagstones a minute before had ceased ; and there was no sound but the chirp of a bird under the eaves.

" You have not heard then ? " said the Lieutenant again.

" Oh ! for God's sake—" cried the old man suddenly.

" I have just come from your son," said the other steadily. " You are only just in time. He is at the point of death."