

STRAIGHTFORWARD.

CHAPTER IV.

WELL 'Lisbeth, and how are you feeling now?"

"More at home than I have felt since our wedding day, Perran."

"Bravo, Mrs. Proudfoot! I always said you had the making of a heroine in you, and that speech convinces me," broke in Captain Mostyn.

The trio were standing on the deck of a tiny steam launch of a few tons burden, the *Dart*, lent to them by Mr. Hugh Brown, of Sydney, and now bravely making its way across Torres Straits towards the object of their desire, New Guinea.

[Oh, yes, I know a great deal has been missed out in our narrative; this is no diary of any Proudfoot's life. A whole long voyage from London to Sydney has taken place since our last chapter, besides another shorter trip along the coast of Australia to the port of Somerset, in Queensland—the little *Dart* on board the larger steamer; and arrived at Somerset, a wearisome fortnight of preparation for the third and most eventful voyage, across the straits to New Guinea, have been the lot of our friends.]

'Lisbeth speaks the truth about feeling at home now; and it is well she does so, for the bright little *Dart* will be their home for some time, and it will be for ever associated with, probably, the most interesting, and certainly the most wonderful, part of her life. God grant it may not also connect itself with disappointment and failure.

She was standing by her husband, steadying the barrel of a telescope on his strong arm. The engineer, Mr. Crane, with his experienced eye, had already sighted the low shores of New Guinea in the distance.

She smiled and blushed at Captain Mostyn's speech. "Don't praise me too soon, sir," she said; "if what you all say is true, we've got rather a hard time before us."

"I wish you wouldn't call me *sir*, Mrs. Proudfoot," was the next remark. "Remember we are all equal here; and besides, you, as an Australian landowner's wife, ought to—"

"I oughtn't to give up my native country and my English ways, sir, I'm sure," said 'Lisbeth: "excuse me for stopping you, but neither Perran nor I could forget our place."

"Oh, Perran, I do see a line out there, where the sea and the sky meet, indeed I do. That must be New Guinea."

It will be well, before going further, to give a list of the passengers and crew of the steam launch, since with the adventures of this little company we shall chiefly have to do.

To begin with, Captain Mostyn, at young Proudfoot's especial request, was to be considered the head and chief of the expedition, with this understanding, that its whole aim and intention was to be the recovery of the reported living survivor of the ill-fated ship *Medway*. That this survivor would prove to be Jesse Proudfoot, Perran felt more and more certain, the further he inquired into the subject. So the *Dart's* list ran as follows:—

Captain Mostyn, in command generally.

Perran Proudfoot.

'Lisbeth.

George Holt.

Mr. Crane, engineer in command on board the *Dart*.

Sin-sing, the Chinese cook and steward.

Johnny, his assistant, a little Chinese boy.

Sam and Peter; the former a great powerful fellow, selected for his strength; the latter, a gay little Sandwich Islander. The four last constituted the crew of the *Dart*.

The vessel was hardly one fitted to encounter a stormy sea, but as its chief business would lie in the great river, which report said, led to the native settlement in New Guinea, where Jesse Proudfoot was likely to be found, it was a necessity that it should draw little water. It was of much the same size as that vessel in which Sir Humphrey Gilbert, in the days of Queen Elizabeth, voyaged to Newfoundland, encountering in it, without alarm, one of the fiercest of Atlantic gales. "We are as near to heaven by sea as by land," said that brave man, and something of his spirit seemed to animate this little company.

The *Dart* was not decked, but a tiny cabin was contrived behind the engine-room for 'Lisbeth and Molly, while the rest of the party slept, uncomfortably enough, in other parts of the boat.

What with provisions and stores, the vessel was laden to its utmost extent, and at one time there had been an idea of leaving Molly behind from sheer want of space. But the girl so piteously entreated to be used as a stoker, cabin boy, anything, sooner than be parted from her mistress, that the matter was reconsidered, and an unsatisfactory seaman was dismissed to make room for her. Both George Holt and Captain Mostyn were able to supply his place at a pinch, and meantime it was touching to watch poor Molly rubbing up brass engine-fittings, cleaning the ladies' cabin, as the little six-foot-square chamber was politely designated, and making herself as useful as possible in all kinds of odd places.

Her clumsiness was fast vanishing before the ardent desire to become a worthy member of the exploring party.

One other, and, as it was thought, a most valuable addition to the crew, had been rejoiced over at Somerset—no less than a half-tamed