

CLAIM OF LIFE AND TOLL OF DEATH 413

the confession I have to make." She advanced, laid her hand on Lingard's shoulder, and spoke earnestly. "I shuddered at the thought of meeting you again. And now you must listen to my confession."

"Don't say a word," said Lingard in an untroubled voice and never taking his eyes from her face. "I know already."

"You can't," she cried. Her hand slipped off his shoulder. "Then why don't you throw me into the sea?" she asked passionately. "Am I to live on hating myself?"

"You mustn't!" he said in an accent of fear. "Haven't you understood long ago that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same?"

"Am I to believe this? No, no! You are too generous to a mere sham. You are the most magnanimous of men but you are throwing it away on me. Do you think it is remorse that I feel? No. If it is anything it is despair. But you must have known that—and yet, you wanted to look at me again."

"I told you I never had a chance before," said Lingard in an unmoved voice. "It was only after I heard they gave you the ring that I felt the hold you have got on me. How could I tell before? What has hate or love to do with you and me? Hate. Love. What can touch you? For me you stand above death itself; for I see now that as long as I live you will never die."

They confronted each other at the southern edge of the sands as if afloat on the open sea. The central ridge heaped up by the winds masked from them the very mast heads of the two ships and the growing brightness of the light only augmented the sense of their invincible solitude in the awful serenity of the world. Mrs. Travers suddenly put her arm across her eyes and averted her face.

Then he added: "That's all."

Mrs. Travers let fall her arm and began to retrace her steps, unsupported and alone. Lingard followed her on the edge of the sand uncovered by the ebbing tide. A