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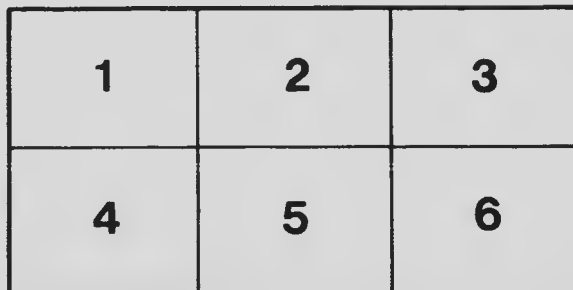
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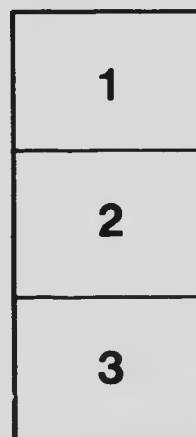
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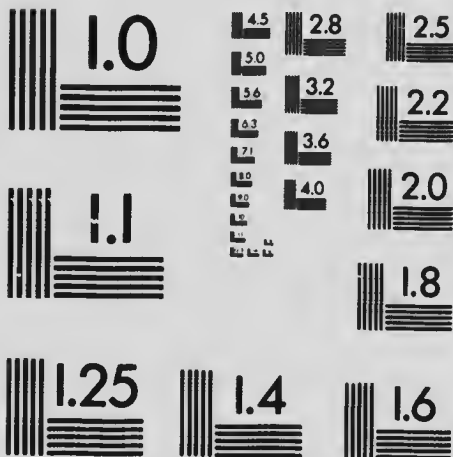
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The LANTERN OF LUCK



BY HUDSON DOUGLAS

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THE LANTERN OF LUCK





THE LANTERN OF LOCK

WILLIAM DOUGLAS

A NOVEL
IN THREE VOLUMES

BY
HUGH DUFFY AND OTHERS



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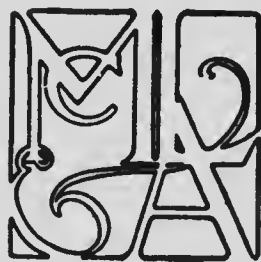


THE LANTERN OF LUCK

BY
HUDSON DOUGLAS

AUTHOR OF
A MILLION A MINUTE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HOWARD CHANDLER CHRISTY



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THE LANTERN OF LUCK

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CHAPTER I

WHY OSWOLD INGERSOLL RESIGNED FROM THE BROOKMERE CLUB

“**H**ERE they come!” said Slyne, in a tone suspiciously like relief, and the other men on the club piazza composed their features into an aspect of chastened sympathy as Oswald Ingersoll and his companion of the afternoon cantered out into the sunshine from among the shadows of the tall pines that border the beach at Brookmere. Few of his less nomadic fellow-members had any great liking for the too cosmopolitan Slyne, and most of them were, or, at any rate, had been, Ingersoll’s very good friends.

The couple approaching the gloom-ridden group regarding them from the piazza reined their impatient ponies in to a walk and Eileen Saxilby leaned forward to pat her restive Arab’s arched neck, as they crossed the hot, white high-road that leads past the ornate avenue entrance of the Brookmere Club. And a very personable couple they made on the spirited mounts they were sitting with such in-

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souciant ease. The girl, faintly flushed after a fast gallop along the sands in the sun, her clear young eyes aglow with the zest of life, not a hair of her heavy amber tresses displaced by the boisterous breeze blowing in from the sea, was wearing a habit and hat which became her amazingly. Her escort, *dégagé* and debonair always, afoot or in saddle, was brave in immaculate breeches and boots, rough tweed coat and cap, his frank, care-free face, showing still more tanned over the snowy texture of his hunting-scarf, a most appropriate foil to the wild-rose fairness of hers.

The two of them were patently on the best of terms with each other. They rode stirrup to girth while they talked together, glancing into each other's eyes. The echo of their light laughter came down the wind to the onlookers' ears.

"What a blow it will be to him!" said Jasper Slyne suddenly. And no one could contradict that depressing assertion.

They drew up before the steps. A dozen assiduous arms were outstretched to Eileen dismounting. But she slipped to the ground unaided and tripped off indoors, a piquant, provocative picture, with a smile and nod of thanks to these laggard squires. The last of her was a trim pair of spurless heels.

Ingersoll, also smiling contentedly, tossed both pairs of reins to a waiting groom, turned into the

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grateful shade of the pillared porch with his tantalized fellows, and settled himself comfortably in a most capacious chair, to while away an hour there among the idle unemployed.

But a prolonged silence ensued. A palpable constraint had supplanted the cheery, casual chit-chat of custom. His pipe alight, he looked about him surprisedly.

Slyne picked up a pink evening paper and proffered it to him. No one else had been willing to break the bad news it contained. The others stayed still, ill at ease and concerned on his account, watching him covertly.

"What's the matter?" he asked, reluctantly taking the sheet in his hands. He would have preferred explanation of their somewhat strange behavior from one of themselves. Slyne had but lately become a member of the Brookmere, and — he did not care for Slyne: who laid a long, slender, womanish finger upon the print. Ingersoll, following that with a puzzled frown, caught sight of the glaring head-lines it pointed out, gave vent to a single, stricken gasp of dismay, and read with horrified haste:

**BIG STOCK-EXCHANGE SCANDAL
AYLWIN-INGERSOLL SMASH
PARTNER TAKES HIS LIFE
SERIOUS DIFFALCATIONS**

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A four-in-hand drag came clattering up the drive and stopped at the porch with a great prancing and jingle. The company it had brought to Brookmere crossed the piazza in a gust of talk and laughter, scent and cigar-smoke, the women's skirts rustling stiffly as they surged through the swing-doors without so much as a glance at the grave-faced group on one side. Two girls with golf-clubs came sauntering out, and played off in turn from the tee on the lawn beyond the gravel sweep in front of the clubhouse. From the dock at the water's edge appeared a party of yachtsmen, in a great hurry for high-balls. As they tramped in, a man and a masculine-looking woman, both carrying guns, emerged and made off toward the coverts across the links.

Oswold Ingersoll noticed none of these, and none of them noticed him where he sat reading through the heavily leaded column in which was plainly set forth the public warrant of ruin and disgrace. The print seemed to stand out in purple relief against the pink of the paper. It hurt his eyes. His lips were compressed and pale. The tan of his face had turned to a sickly gray.

Slyne was observing him closely. The rest kept their heads averted, sat twirling their thumbs, scowling consciously, wishing themselves anywhere else, and yet unwilling to get up and go. For most of

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them were, or, at any rate, had been, Ingersoll's very good friends.

He lay limply back in his chair, and the news-sheet slipped from a nerveless hand. One rose and rang, bidding the prompt waiter bring brandy-and-soda. The silence thus broken, his neighbors in turn found speech, and from here and there came quick, scrappy sentences of encouragement or condolence.

At the sound of their voices Ingersoll sat up again, very straight, shook his head, blinking, to dispel the dizziness which had all but overmastered him, so cruelly sudden and hurtful had the blow been. Then he set his jaw, shakily, and so came to time for the fight fate had thus forced upon him. He was not to be counted out in the first quick round.

"I thank you, no," he said with careful courtesy when they would have pressed upon him the brimming glass the waiter had brought on a silver tray. "I'll need all my wits to find my way through this tangle. If you — if you'll just leave me alone for a little, I'll be better able to think things over."

They drew back, huffed, some of them, by his refusal of such first aid, and presently entered into low-toned conversation among themselves, or wandered away on aimless errands, glad to escape the oppression of that atmosphere. More than one of them stood to lose good money by the bad business, but that did not cost such sufferers much more than

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a passing thought. The members of the Brookmere Club were all wealthy men, and Ingersoll had been no more than a silent partner in the unfortunate firm. There was no need to add to his burden by blaming him. The real culprit had closed his earthly account. A shocking affair! — and best forgotten.

Ingersoll picked up the paper again, got to his feet with an effort, and went unsteadily off to his room in the bachelor wing of the big club-buildings. And there, stunned and confused as he was, he strove with a temptation so dire that he had scarcely strength left to withstand it. But, half an hour later, he reappeared, more composed outwardly, in a suit of serge, with a traveling-bag in one hand.

The piazza seemed to be empty, but he espied Jasper Slyne in a corner, consuming a pint of champagne, and crossed toward him. He had a suggestion to make to Slyne which might mean money in pocket, and he could no longer afford to let his private antipathies interfere with his purse.

"You're leaving us already, eh?" asked that languid sybarite with a great assumption of sorrow. "It's deuced rough luck, I must say, to be left in the lurch by one's partner — as you appear to have been. But these are hard times for us all, aren't they! I'm out a good many thousands myself through that rascal Aylwin."

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Such a speech made it harder still for Ingersoll to say what he had intended, but — he could not well draw back now.

"You asked me not long ago to put a price on my ponies," he answered concisely. "Are you still inclined to buy them?"

Jasper Slyne's eyes showed sudden interest, but he let their lids fall and shrugged his carefully padded, flannel-clad shoulders indifferently.

"These are hard times for us all," he repeated, "but — I shouldn't mind having the bay mare that Eileen Saxilby was riding." His tone was that of one lightly granting a favor asked.

In his own room Ingersoll had been schooling himself to shoulder his heavy burden without showing how much it galled, but the hot blood darkened his brow as he returned stiffly: "The stud is for sale as it stands, not singly. I'll take four thousand for it."

"Shall I write you a cheque — now?" Slyne inquired, with grandiose unconcern, but making no movement, "or . . ."

He paused significantly, and Ingersoll had hard work to keep down his temper. Three times, in as many apparently neutral remarks, had he found cause of offense.

"I'll debit your account in my firm's books with that amount," he replied, "since it seems that we

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owe you money. And you'll get my cheque in a day or two for any balance that may be due you." Wherewith, and no better off than he had been, he turned his back on the other, who looked after him with a coldly contemptuous half-smile as he strode into the hall.

Thence he telephoned to the stables regarding the change of ownership in his renowned polo-string, and, that pang also endured, settled his house-account at the office, wrote out his resignation of membership, and lingered in the lounge, uncomfortably conscious now that he was the object of much low-toned comment on the part of its other inmates, till Eileen Saxilby came downstairs dressed for driving. He knew that she was going to meet her guardian at the station, and had a good deal to say to her before she should see that gentleman.

"Will you give me a lift?" he asked with assumed nonchalance, but she knew instinctively that there was something wrong and nodded quick acquiescence without a word. They went on together, regardless of the inquisitive glances that followed them.

Slyne, in his corner, rose and bowed as they crossed the piazza, but neither noticed his movement. And he was still watching them with enigmatic eyes when they drove off in Eileen's smart dog-cart.

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"I hate that man," said she, looking back on their way down the avenue and so catching sight of him where he stood staring after them, a smart and elegant figure, with a face to match. Jasper Slyne was young enough yet, in spite of the crowsfeet about his eyes, well-favored, reputedly very rich. Not many women would have found him an object of hatred.

"So do I," assented Ingersoll, as she turned her roadster on to the level highway. "But never mind that just now. I've something of much more importance to tell you. My business affairs have all gone to smash — I've just got the news. I'm ruined, Nell. I — I'm a pauper. I must give you back the promise you made me this afternoon."

For a space there was nothing audible save the clickity-click of the horse's hoofs. Oswald Ingersoll had set his teeth, was holding his breath. The girl, bewildered by the abruptness of his strange statement, was striving to understand. When she at length spoke it was in a low and tender tone, with a thrill to it which set his heart thumping wildly.

"That doesn't make any difference, dear," she said, "since it's you I care for — and nothing else."

The good roadster pricked up his ears and slackened his pace, as he felt the reins tighten ever so slightly. His driver also was under constraint, close

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clasped in the arms of the young man who had been sitting so quietly beside her.

"It makes all the difference in the world," Ingersoll was saying, his words ringing strangely hollow in his own ears, "and you must take back your promise, Nell. It's terribly hard to have to say so, but — I can't marry you now. You must let me go my own way, alone, sweetheart. Because that's going to be too rough to take you along."

She stared into his clouded eyes for a breathless moment, and the quick fear faded out of her own. Had it been for his own sake, she would have let him go without more words. But it was for hers he was willing to sacrifice his share in that fair future they had mapped out together, and, though she was little more than a child in years, she had in her shapely head no small share of woman's wisdom.

"You shall go where you choose, dear," she answered swiftly, her face very resolute, "and — if you won't take me with you, I'll follow you. I'll follow you, whether the way be rough or smooth."

He saw then that she was not to be turned from her purpose. He knew that she would not fail him, befall what might. And it would have become him very ill to betray the trust she reposed in him. He clasped her close in his arms again, and she nestled there, satisfied.

The reins fell loose on the roadster's neck while

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she listened to the tragic story there was still to tell. There were tears in her eyes before it was finished; swift tears of pity for the transgressor and in her heart a dumb prayer of intercession for him who needed it most. She had no questions to ask, no comment to offer, no least word of blame to bestow, and Ingersoll, grown old enough in an hour to know that he need judge none but himself, found added comfort in her compassionate silence. The scented peace of the pinewoods and her quiet company made heaven enough for him.

When at last and very reluctantly they stopped at the station, he stayed beside her until the express from town steamed in and through the throng which alighted from it there came toward them a lean, gray-haired, elderly man, of a shuffling gait, who glanced uncertainly about him as he advanced. There were other conveyances waiting their home-comers in the cool, sun-streaked quadrangle beneath the branches. It rang with gay greetings as each of the travelers found his own folks and was volubly welcomed. But the lean, gray-haired man had no word of cheer to exchange with his neighbors. He nodded to none, kept his thin, straight lips closely shut.

"Mr. Gildersleeve's in a grumpy mood," said Ingersoll, easily enough, and got down. He took his bag from the back of the cart, set it aside, and held

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out his hand as the other approached. But that individual did not appear to have seen either it or its owner. He passed at a spurt, clambered awkwardly into the dog-cart, and, opening his mouth as if with an effort, abruptly bade Eileen drive off.

"Good-bye, Oswald," she called back bravely, and, waving adieu with her whip-hand to that discomfited youth, was soon out of sight with her very ungracious guardian.

Ingersoll stood where he was for a moment, his face flushed with anger at the public slight put upon him by the one man with whom, among all his former friends, he was anxious to remain on intimate terms. Then he caught one or two of the onlookers eying him with undue interest, recalled the cause that there was for eschewing acquaintance with him, picked his bag up, and made for the far end of the long platform, where he stayed till his own tardy train came through — by which time, being blessed with abundant philosophy, he had almost, if not quite recovered his temper.

"But I have a pretty poor hand to play," he muttered ruefully to himself, "if that's the sort of game Eustace Gildersleeve's going to put up."

CHAPTER II

WHAT TOMMY JUDSON HAD TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT

THE trip from Brookmere to Long Island City, in a slow train consisting chiefly of freight-cars and on a still, hot summer evening, is not one to be undertaken for pleasure. To Oswald Ingersoll, on that occasion, and in such a frame of mind, it furnished a foretaste of all those petty miseries which the immediate future had no doubt in plentiful store for him.

He had with difficulty found a seat, beside an Italian laborer breathing garlic, in one of the two sweltering, over-crowded passenger-cars at the end of the train, and spent his time throughout the long, jolting, dusty journey with its constant stops and switchings, in penciling endless calculations on the margins of the evening paper he had brought with him. These could do nothing, however, to console him for other discomforts, since they merely went to show how much it would probably cost him to clear himself of complicity in his dead partner's misdoings.

For, that he must clear himself, and at whatever cost, he had made up his mind after a sick struggle

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with the almost overwhelming temptation to stick to his cash and let his credit go hang. But not even the heartrending fear that in beggaring himself for a sentiment he might be held to have forfeited the promise Eileen had made him that afternoon had been sufficient to overcome the very scrupulous sense of honor which had impelled him to a decision so desperate. Happen what might, he would hold out none but clean hands to her.

On the Street, the name of Oswald Kilborne Ingersoll had always been a synonym for honesty unswerving and incorruptible. That name had been his father's and his grandfather's before it had descended to him, and he, the last of the line, lightly esteemed in the hive of business as a mere drone, felt irresistibly called upon now to prove that it was not to be attained in any degree through him.

It might be, too, he told himself, that he was partly to blame because Aylwin, left to his own devices during the recent financial crisis, had gone so far astray. And, in any case, since he himself had been content to accept without question his share of the firm's fat profits in its more prosperous days, he would not shirk his moral responsibility now, not even although there were plenty of legal loopholes through one or another of which he might dodge its creditors.

It was only when he thought of Eileen again that his courage failed him a little. And, trundling nois-

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ily, in the waning light, through the gray, gaunt wilderness of unkempt buildings which creeps out countryward from the city, a sudden dread, bred of that dreary outlook, plucked at his heart.

But the lights and life and bustle of the busy terminus restored in some degree his ebbing self-confidence. And he remembered, most opportunely, how resolutely Eileen had overruled his tentative suggestion that their newly-made understanding should be annulled. He recalled her instant, spontaneous assent to the course of conduct he had, however unwillingly, laid down for himself. For her sake he must — he would — retrieve, and that by dint of his own exertions, all he was giving up now. He shouldered his way through the throng to the ferry, and, looking across the black water at the bright lights on the other shore, took them for an augury, and was no longer afraid of the future.

Arrived in Manhattan, an unaccustomed economy led him to travel to his immediate destination by surface-car instead of taking a cab. The city seemed most unpleasantly close and malodorous after the crisp, clean sea-breezes of Brookmere. But Brookmere and all that membership in its exclusive coterie meant were things of the past in so far as he was concerned. He clung uncomplainingly to his strap in the close-packed trolley, till it stopped before a squat, dingy building in East Twenty-third

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Street, not very far from Madison Square. It was there rather than in any more fashionable locality that he, in his fallen fortunes, was minded to seek out a friend whom he might trust at such a pinch as the present. He would have no more to do in the meantime with the lavish luxury of his old quarters uptown. Nor was he in a mood to accept any favor from a possible good Samaritan of his former set on Fifth Avenue. The slight he had suffered at Eustace Gildersleeve's hands was still rankling in his memory.

With his bag in one hand he toiled up three flights of very steep wooden stairs, stopping at the top before a low door on which was displayed an extremely small card bearing the brief statement: *T. Judson — Studio*. A kick or two on the lower panel brought that individual forth in perspiring displeasure, but, when he saw who his unceremonious caller was, his face first cleared and then fell again.

"This is a bad business, O. K.," he remarked without other greeting, and led the way into a long, littered, untidy room, dimly lit in the dusk by a dusty skylight. "Where are you bound for?" he demanded, catching sight of his visitor's bag.

"No further than here at present," returned Ingersoll, and hung his hat on an easel. "I'd like to put up with you for a day or two, if you'll let me, Tommy?"

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"You know well enough that you're welcome, confound you!" said Tommy Judson with sudden fierceness. "Had supper? You're just in time for some bacon an' beans." And he turned back toward his kitchen, a couple of gas-jets set insecurely on a deal box containing clean linen and dirty boots, with a tattered newspaper in between; an arrangement exactly typical of his temperament.

"There's a lot of solid comfort to be had for next to nothing in this vale of tears," he was wont to observe when he could spare a moment for moralizing, "if you're only content to take things as they come. And it doesn't pay to be too particular about trifles."

His costume also was strictly in keeping with such sentiments. He was lightly clad in pyjamas, sandals, a scarlet guernsey with the name "Fulmar" embroidered across its breast, and a cotton bath-robe. The bluish glow of the gas-jets he was stooping over lit up a face of surpassing ugliness and yet one strangely attractive, strong to audacity, good-humored, whimsical, under a touseled shock of hair, which shone like dark, burnished copper. He was of medium height and stockily built, but lithe and active in all his movements.

"A rotten bad business, O. K.!" he repeated soberly, as he stirred the beans to and fro with a two-pronged fork while the fragrant bacon was sizzling

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beneath them. "What are you going to do about it, hey?"

"I'm going to see things square, Tommy," Ingersoll answered, seating himself very cautiously on the edge of a rickety cot. "I'm not sure yet that I'll have enough right away to go round — the figures the papers give make it rather more than I'm worth altogether — but, if I haven't, I'll get the balance together in time."

Tommy Judson nodded approval of that, to him the most natural course in the circumstances. The magnitude of the sacrifice Ingersoll was willing to make called forth no comment on his part, since his own instincts also told him that it was imperative.

"There's close on a century in the coffee-canister there," he remarked carelessly, indicating with an uplifted elbow his primitive safe-deposit. "Help yourself to what you require if you run short of small change — and pass me one of those plates if you want any beans. Better give it a rub down first, or, here — eat 'em out of the pan, if you're so horrid particular."

He would fain have evaded all acknowledgment of his most generous offer, but Ingersoll had risen and was regarding him with a grave good-will.

"I've a poor enough hand to play, Tommy," he said simply, "but you're certainly a trump, my son!"

"Life ain't in holding a good hand, but in play-

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ing a pore hand well,' " Tommy quoted gravely. "There's beer on ice in that bucket beneath the piano. Help yourself to that, too."

He passed the frying-pan to his friend, perched himself with his own plate upon the ice-box containing his coal-supply, and both partook with solemn appreciation of the homely fare thus provided. Tommy Judson was no mean cook; the bacon and beans were worthy of a French chef. There was also bread in a band-box, and the beer was excellent.

Supper over, they lit their pipes and took deep thought for a time, Ingersoll, the ultra-fastidious society man, as much at his ease in the shabby studio as though it had been some millionaire's picture-gallery, Tommy Judson disreputably content, with no backward longings after his more affluent days.

Ingersoll and he had been college chums before his own family fortunes had suffered eclipse and he had come to New York alone to make his way in the world. They had moved in widely different circles since then, and Tommy, the struggling artist, had always obstinately refused to avail himself of the entrée into those which the other frequented. It had therefore fallen to Ingersoll to keep their old friendship alive, and he had not failed to do so: to such good effect that they had remained on terms of the closest amity. There was no one else in the world, after Eileen herself, to whom Ingersoll would

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so readily have turned for sympathy and encouragement in such a crisis as he was confronting now.

"How did Aylwin get into such deep water?" asked Tommy, puffing at a corn-cob, and Ingersoll sighed.

"South Americans," he answered succinctly. "There's been some sort of a boom on in Nicazuela, and he'd been bulling their bonds till he had a heavier load on his shoulders than he could carry. Then that infernal fellow Casado, the Nicazuelan President, got into another row, with Portugal this time, and, on the head of that, lost the big German loan everyone had been building on. And the slump of course smashed poor old Aylwin. I wish he had told me in time, but — I've never done a day's business in my life, and I suppose he thought I'd be more hindrance than help. So I've got to run the show to a finish myself now."

"You're not going to carry on the business, are you?"

"I couldn't, even if I wanted to. I'd be no use in the Street. No, all I can attempt is to wind it up to the tune of a hundred cents on the dollar. And, after that's done, I must find some other way to earn an income. I'd be no use at all in the Street."

He shook his head, and sighed again. Tommy Judson made no further remark.

"Will you come with me to the Mannering dance

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to-morrow night, Tommy?" Ingersoll asked after an interval during which his own thoughts had reverted to a matter of still more immediate and pressing importance. "I wish you would. I have two cards, and — I wouldn't worry you to go if I hadn't a good reason."

Tommy Judson drummed impatiently with his heels on the door of the ice-box. A shadow flitted across his unhandsome face.

"Will Eileen Saxilby be there?" he demanded, and Ingersoll nodded.

"What's the use of pursuing the subject?" his host inquired with an air of great weariness. "Why can't you let the girl alone, since she's turned you down?"

"I will — when she does," said Ingersoll somewhat surprisedly.

Tommy stared at him for a moment, got down from his perch and possessed himself of the crumpled paper the other had laid upon the piano. He turned a page or two over until he came to a paragraph he had first seen at the free-lunch counter where he had made his mid-day meal.

"What's the meaning of this then?" he questioned abruptly, and pointed to where, in unpleasant juxtaposition with those of a murderer and his victim, two photographs had been reproduced. They were portraits of Eileen Saxilby, the young heiress,

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and Jasper Slyne, the lately unearthed millionaire. A few lines underneath announced their engagement, and added the information that their wedding would take place, privately, at a very early date, to suit the convenience of the prospect bridegroom, whose business interests called him abroad.

Ingersoll snatched the sheet from him, and read the paragraph through with bewildered haste. Then he tossed it aside with a contemptuous laugh, but one which had little of mirth in it, and his color was higher than usual.

"So Slyne had a spare card up his sleeve when he presented me with that paper," he said. "He and Gildersleeve together will make a pretty tough pair to tackle without a penny! You *must* go with me to-morrow night, Tommy. D'ye hear?"

"All right," returned Tommy Judson disconsolately. "I'll go, if I've got to. But tell me one thing, O. K. I know a good deal about that old money-grub Gildersleeve, but — who the devil is Slyne?"

Ingersoll sat down again, and the frown on his face grew darker.

"That's just what everyone has been asking," he said vexedly, "but nobody seems to know."

CHAPTER III

MRS. MANNERING AT HOME

“**M**ISTHER INGERSOLL,” announced a resplendent footman, in his most sonorous voice, and yet one with an inflection of warm sympathy in it, “an’ Misther Judson.”

The last name he spoke with official indifference. Its bearer was quite unknown to him, needed no condolence of his on the score of adversity unexpected and undeserved. But he had been pained to learn from his morning-evening paper that Ingersoll, his most liberal patron, had lately fallen on evil days, had acted with rash improvidence on the spur of the moment. And, although that would probably mean a curtailment of tips, Tim Finucane, the footman aforesaid, would have scorned to give an old acquaintance the go-by because of any temporary financial embarrassment. These Americans had such a habit, too, of promptly remaking lost fortunes that it would no doubt pay a philosophical Irishman handsomely in the end to display a consistent and equable cordiality. And while he was communing thus with

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himself, the two young men he had ushered into the rapidly filling reception-room were bowing before their hostess, a tall, thin, faded woman, of carefully upper-class bearing and blond complexion, well beyond middle age.

Mrs. Mannering was At Home in honor of a European personage who had been so inconsiderate as to arrive in New York during the off-season and could by no means be induced to forsake the lures of the city for the more simple pleasures of country life. Wherefore it had fallen to her, an acknowledged leader in solid New York society, to open up her big town house and bid her friends together there for his entertainment. From far and near, from Newport or Wall Street, they had responded to the trumpet call of duty. A brilliant and representative gathering of wealth and beauty had flocked to her costly standard of cloth-of-gold.

At the sound of Ingersoll's name there occurred a perceptible lull in the babel of conversation that had filled the long antechamber where her guests were greeting each other before passing through to the ball-room beyond, whence the strings were already throbbing invitingly. Nearly all of the men and women present had known Oswald Ingersoll in his prosperity. They were fain to see how he would fare as a pauper, how the worldly-wise Mrs. Mannering would receive a friend in such case, what

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would occur when he should meet Eileen Saxilby, who had so soon consoled herself for the loss of his no longer eligible attentions.

The news of his quixotic self-sacrifice was already in everyone's mouth. Within four-and-twenty hours of Aylwin & Ingersoll's failure he had stripped himself of his private fortune to its last penny in order to settle the liabilities left him by a dead man. A freakish determination to free himself from the taint of commercial crime, with which no one would ever have dreamed of charging him, had left him denuded of all save his honor and self-respect. A man cannot live on either of these intangible assets.

"It was like his cheek to show up here at all," said some of those men who would never have paid any such ridiculous price to keep their names clean. Others had formed no very definite opinion yet, were awaiting the trend of events. Most of the women were sorry for him: since women are apt to be soft of heart. But — they were one and all content to leave it to Mrs. Mannering to decide what stand they must take in the matter. One must take up a stand of some sort when an acquaintance, otherwise quite desirable, is suddenly bereft of his banker's support; and Oswald Ingersoll had been one of her most frequent and favored visitors while Eileen Saxilby had been staying with her.

Mrs. Mannering had already made up her mind

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on that point, or, rather, she thought she had. It had really been made up for her by a long letter she had that morning received from her brother Eustace, who managed all her affairs. It was most unfortunate, she had concluded, that she should have sent Mr. Ingersoll cards for her dance before it was known that he was not financially fit to associate with the others: and still more so, as it now appeared, since he had thought right not only to avail himself of her unsuspecting hospitality but also to intrude on her notice an individual whom she could not, even with the aid of her lorgnette, identify as one of that exclusive set whereof she herself was such an orthodox ornament. She would play her part as she ought.

She acknowledged Ingersoll's bow with a frozen courtesy, treated Tommy Judson to a contemptuous stare, and, these formalities over, turned a sharp shoulder on both.

The two thus grudgingly made free of her establishment, for the time being, passed onward with unreadable faces and brought up together, a little apart from the throng, within an alcove flanked by two massive marble pillars. On their way thither they had not experienced any effusion of welcome from those with whom Ingersoll, at any rate, had recently been on the most familiar terms. Tommy Judson's uncomely countenance wore a genial grin as



HILEEN SAXILEY HAD ENTERED
THE ROOM ON HER GUAR-
DIAN'S ARM

James Earl Ray (1904-1968)



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he turned to his friend and sponsor in that very select assemblage.

"A cold-storage chamber, eh, O. K.!" he remarked, and Ingersoll, catching his eye, also smiled, a little constrainedly.

"I told you what it would be," he replied. "They are a moneyed crowd and afraid of beggars. But hard looks break no bones, as you've often told me, Tommy, and we'll get away just as soon as. . . . Ah! Here she is."

Eileen Saxilby had entered the room, on her guardian's arm. In her silken gown, with her slim, bare arms and daintily molded shoulders of a young girl, she looked still more demurely attractive than when he had last seen her. Her fresh and unaided beauty made Eustace Gildersleeve seem older and meaner in evening dress. Behind them, and wearing an air of prospective ownership that made Ingersoll's blood boil, walked Jasper Slyne, a smart and elegant figure, conspicuous even without the broad crimson sash he wore at his breast, which, it was understood, pertained to some foreign order of merit bestowed on him in the course of his cosmopolitan wanderings. They three had come in from Brookmere together that afternoon, to attend the function now in progress.

Mrs. Mannering made much of them ere they in turn passed on to mingle with their fellow-guests, who were all agog, waiting to overwhelm the efful-

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gent Slyne and his fair fiancée with ecstatic compliments on their romantic engagement. All of these Jasper Slyne answered very suavely, Eileen looking on with inscrutable eyes almost as though she were deaf, while Eustace Gildersleeve, at her other elbow, screwed his keen features into the set smile of the self-satisfied guardian. He had made a good match for his wealthy ward, and must rest content with the fruits of his labors on her behalf, since she had not grace enough to show him the slightest gratitude.

Thus safely escorted, Eileen progressed by degrees toward the ballroom entrance, beyond which a number of youthful and enthusiastic couples were already disporting themselves to the strains of a dreamy waltz. Others also were moving thither. By some curious coincidence the alcove in which Oswald Ingersoll and his companion were standing became in a moment the center of animation. When he stepped forward so as to confront the three with whom only he was concerned, all eyes seemed to be irresistibly drawn in that direction.

He bent before Eileen with all deference, bowed coldly to the other two, and was about to address her when she stepped to one side with her eyes averted and so passed on. A more acute case of the cut direct it would have been difficult to imagine.

Ingersoll drew back instantly and let the stream

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flow past, his face showing no sign of the raging tumult within his breast, outwardly oblivious to the covert looks bestowed upon him. He turned to where he had left Tommy Judson, but only to find that Tommy as well had deserted him. So he stayed there by himself till the bulk of those who had been witnesses of his rebuff had made their way into the ballroom, when he quietly retired, and, having recovered his coat and hat, shook the dust of the Manering mansion from off his shoes for all time. Tim Finucane, watching him till he disappeared, shook his head sapiently, and, "Bad cess to the ould fox and his vixen sister!" said he, "that 'ud rather marry Miss Eileen to a monkey with money than a man without."

Meantime, Tommy Judson was once more mixing, however unwillingly, in smart society. He had seen the danger-signal in Eustace Gildersleeve's eyes when that individual had first espied Ingersoll. He knew Mr. Gildersleeve quite well by sight, although that astute financier did not know him, and, acting with his accustomed promptitude, he had at once taken up a better strategic position. Thus it came about that Eileen Saxilby, at the ballroom entrance, became aware of the ugliest man in Manhattan approaching her in the forefront of the white-shirted battalion which was about to besiege her there. And she was inconsistently pleased in consequence, for

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she knew and trusted Tommy, the struggling artist, who was Oswald Ingersoll's friend, and hers.

He reached her, with programme uplifted, before any of the others. She handed him hers, and he modestly put his name down for the next two consecutive dances. When the rank behind him had filled the rest up to the detriment of those in the rear, a proceeding to which she displayed great indifference, Eustace Gildersleeve reluctantly yielded her arm to the unabashed Tommy and turned to take Slyne to task for not having made more sure of his start. But that gay Lothario had already gone off with a partner, and Mrs. Mannering, with whom he would next have found fault, on the score of Ingersoll's presence there, was just then engaged with the personage for whose entertainment the evening had been set apart. He went away to solace himself with a cigarette in the buffet, and, as soon as he turned his back, Tommy Judson led Eileen off in the opposite direction, into the picture-gallery, adapted for that night to the use of those couples who might desire to sit out a dance. It was empty then.

"Oh, Tommy!" she said, speaking for the first time as she sank into the seat he had set for her in an inconspicuous corner screened by a clump of tall palms, "I'm so distressed about Oswald!"

"So'm I," he answered shortly. "What on

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earth made you snub him the way you did? I can't understand why."

She flushed up, but did not resent the implied reproach.

"Mr. Gildersleeve made me promise I would," she explained with a pretty penitence. "If I had defied him, Tommy, he wouldn't have brought me here at all — and I did so hope that Oswald would find means somehow to make things right with him. It's so important now, you see, that no time should be lost, and, Tommy," — her voice sank to a low whisper, she glanced nervously about her — "I *hate* Jasper Slyne, and — I'm afraid of my guardian. A great deal has happened to-day that I can't understand. Will you tell Oswald he must do something quickly to help me, and — not to forget that I'm only a girl."

Tommy had been regarding her with a faint, dissatisfied frown, which now deepened into a scowl. He was thinking hard, and seriously for once. Her sweet, appealing lips had drooped and quivered as she finished. He had not been very gracious to her, and — she was only a girl.

He knew that she was to a great extent in her guardian's power, and Eustace Gildersleeve's grim face promised little consideration for a girl's feelings. Mrs. Mannering was undoubtedly on Eustace Gildersleeve's side, and therefore against her.

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Slyne's suave smile was no more than a mask. If she was to be saved from the man she hated, there was indeed no time to be lost.

It seemed strange that any man should attempt to coerce an American girl into marriage, but still stranger things had happened in the short course of the present prosaic century. Failing her guardian and his sister, she had no friends who might properly interfere. She could, perhaps, appeal to the courts for protection — but Tommy Judson knew only enough about law to let it severely alone. It was undoubtedly high time that some one should do something to help her. At the moment it was his duty to do — what? Out of his inner consciousness he evolved an heroic remedy for the grave ills that threatened her and his friend.

"O. K.'s sacrificed every cent of his own resources," he said suddenly, raising his eyes, "to square off the debts his partner incurred. By tomorrow he won't have a penny to bless himself with — not a single penny. He'll have to work double shifts now to earn enough to buy his own bread and butter. D'you still want to marry him?"

She drew back, the sparkle of honest anger in her clear eyes, but his did not flinch before that and it died away, as she answered steadily, "Of course I do, Tommy."

"Then, why don't you?" Tommy demanded.

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"It isn't a difficult thing to do, once you set about it."

"But — how?" she questioned quickly, head forward, holding her breath as he answered:

"Leave that to O. K. and me. If you'll meet us to-morrow night — any time between nine and ten — at the Mariners' Gate in Central Park, we'll fix things so that neither your guardian nor this Slyne person will find it worth while to worry you any more."

He had spoken very abruptly, of purpose, but this did not disconcert her. It was her turn now to think, and she did not waste any of the few precious moments left them.

"Would that be the best thing to do, Tommy?" she asked timidly, trusting herself entirely to his sense of right and wrong.

"I can't see any better way out," he said slowly, looking away from her fair, eager face, "and, under the circumstances, I think —"

"Very well," she agreed, in a tremulous voice, but very contentedly. "I'll do just as you say, Tommy. I'd do almost anything to — to make things right. And — thank you, Tommy, with all my heart."

She laid a light hand on his, in gratitude, but he did not seem to notice it.

"That's settled then," he asserted gruffly.

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"Bring just a hand-bag with you, and leave all the rest to us. How long are you under Mr. Gildersleeve's guardianship?"

"Only until I am married."

"That means till to-morrow night then," said Tommy with comforting certainty, and she, too, smiled. "We'll get up and go now. It will be better that he shouldn't catch us conspiring. He doesn't know who I am, as yet."

When Eileen at length caught sight of her guardian again, she was safe under Mrs. Mannering's wing in the ballroom, and Tommy was making his way downstairs unobserved. Twenty minutes later that strategist reached his studio in Twenty-third Street, where he found Ingersoll stretched on a cot, staring up at the dusty skylight. Neither spoke for a moment or two.

Tommy Judson divested himself of his swallow-tail coat, hung it on a purely ornamental gas-bracket, dropped his collar and tie in the wastepaper basket, kicked off his pumps and replaced them with shapeless slippers, brought forth, from a bookcase, bread, cheese and beer, offered his friend some and refreshed himself thirstily.

"God forgive me if I ever butt in among that crowd again!" said he with a wry grimace, and, producing a shabby corncob, filled it with cheap tobacco, which he lit at the single oil-lamp he pos-

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sessed. "They may have money, but as for manners —"

"Did you get any word with Eileen?" asked Ingersoll, interrupting him without ceremony. His tone was by no means hopeful.

"I did," answered Tommy, regaining his usual equable temper without very visible effort. "She'll be waiting to-morrow night between nine and ten, at the Mariners' Gate in Central Park West, for you to marry her."

Ingersoll stared tensely over at him.

"What's that, Tommy?" he questioned, a catch in his voice. There were dark rings under his eyes. He was feeling more keenly now the crushing blow fate had dealt him. "What's that you say? Don't trifle with me. I'm not quite myself to-night. I — I —"

Tommy Judson repeated his statement, word for word.

"It's true," he averred. "I'm not trifling at all. I arranged it with her myself, so I ought to know, oughtn't I?"

Ingersoll got suddenly to his feet. He took a couple of turns up and down the long, littered, ill-lighted studio, head bent, hands clasped behind him, hope and despair at issue within his heart.

"I looked in at my lawyer's apartment on my way here," he said at length, in a level, monotonous

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voice, "and he's got things worked out to the last fraction now. They're even worse than I thought. Poor old Aylwin had been plunging like a sheer madman in his attempt to recover his feet. He even made away with some valuable securities deposited with him by — a client, as cover."

"But I've turned in everything I possessed — every single article, Tommy — and the firm's name will be clear again within eight-and-forty hours. I've signed cheques already for all it owes, but it will take that long to get the assets together.

"What a fool I was to go into business at all! I had far more than sufficient for all my needs till I caught the cursed fever for turning my money over without trouble to myself. And look where that's landed me! — I'm worse than a pauper to-night. I'm short a dollar or two to settle my lawyer's account for his services."

"How much?" asked Tommy, incisively. He had been listening with close attention.

"Nine dollars, sixty, to be exact. But never mind that. What I'm trying to tell you is that your plan is absolutely impossible at the moment. It wouldn't be fair to Eileen. We must wait till —"

"We'll take one fence at a time," said Tommy, and reached for the canister labeled *Coffee*, from which he extracted a ten-dollar bill.

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"That squares the nine-sixty shortage," he stated, and laid it aside. "The plan I've got in my head is perfectly possible, as I'll prove to you presently. And now as to the fairness of it: sit down like a sensible man and quit gaping at me till I tell you the why and the wherefore of everything."

He briefly repeated all Eileen had said to him. And Ingersoll was once more afoot, frowning blackly, before he had finished. But he gave his friend no opportunity to cut in.

"Listen here, O. K.," he continued gravely, turning over his bundle of bills. "There's eighty-eight dollars left in the bank, and on that amount you've got to make everything right for the girl. The scheme, as I see it, is this:

"Bright an' early to-morrow you'll go gadding round and arrange for the nuptial knot being tied at top speed any time between nine and eleven p. m. Then you'll be free for the rest of the day to put the finishing touch to your own affairs while I'm busy loading the *Fulmar* up with a fortnight's stores.

"I know a man who'll hire me a motor for four or five hours at a moderate rate. I'll drive it myself. We'll pick Eileen Saxilby up as arranged, whisk round to the parson's, and then make full speed for the sloop. It's lying up-river. As soon's I've blessed you, my children, you'll slip your moor-

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ings, and, if anyone can tell where you are for the next fortnight or three weeks, it will be your own fault.

"You'd better leave a few lines for me to mail as soon as you've made sail, just mentioning to old Gildersleeve that you're safely married. And that will make his mind as easy as he's any right to have it, till you get back. If he finds out by any chance that I've had a finger in the pie and comes to the studio for details, he'll see a note on the door to say I've been called to Europe on business. And I'll be down at a camp on Long Island, leading the simple life, till I hear that he's forgiven you both — which he'll have to do, because he can't help himself.

"That's the scheme. There's the capital to carry it out — enough for us both, with care. Now state your objections, if any."

Ingersoll paced to and fro for a time, without speaking, and Tommy smoked on imperturbably. The studio was strangely quiet at that hour, when the street outside was empty except for an occasional surface-car. The atmosphere was unpleasantly hot and humid.

Tommy rose, and stretched himself, yawning.

"He who hesitates gets left," said he conversationally. "You're not going back on me — and the promise I made the girl, are you, O. K.?"

Ingersoll stopped short, and glanced very grate-

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fully over at the ugly face which looked so strangely wistful there in the shadow.

"No, Tommy," he answered straightforwardly, accepting without more words and for Eileen's sake what he would at once and finally have refused for himself, "I'm not going back on you — or your promise, either."

And Tommy Judson's eyes, meeting his, spoke a quiet contentment.

CHAPTER IV

MR. GILDERSLEEVE ABROAD

AT eight thirty-five p. m. to a second a motor-car of modestly inconspicuous appearance drew up before a squat and dingy building in East Twenty-third Street not very far from Madison Square. From the doorway there two young men emerged, much muffled in spite of the weather, their features almost unrecognizable behind the mask-like goggles they wore. One climbed into the tonneau. The oily mechanic who had brought the car from the garage gave up his seat to the other, and stood on the pavement watching the tail-lights till these were absorbed in the dark blur of traffic about the base of the Flatiron Building.

“That guy’s a slick driver, all right!” said he with professional acumen, and turned into an adjacent saloon without wasting any more of the time for which his employer paid him.

Among Tommy Judson’s many minor accomplishments was that of being able to do almost anything with an automobile. He took this one tenderly along Twenty-third Street as far as Eighth Avenue,

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turned the corner there and made more speed uptown on the emptier thoroughfare. It was not yet nine by Ingersoll's watch, when they stopped in Central Park West at a little distance from the Mariners' Gate.

There were few people about at that hour in the dark. Tommy Judson got down, and, with the aid of some simple utensils he had brought with him from the studio, proceeded to make some noteworthy alterations in the registered numbers displayed on the car as ordained by law. He turned a one into a four, altered six to eight, and deleted the last of the numerals altogether.

"That will surely fix anyone who may try to identify us through the garage," he remarked as he finished. "Now you'd better stay where you are and keep a look-out for the girl while I reconnoiter the gateway. I take it that she'll come through the Park, and she can't help but notice me in this rakish rig-out of mine. If she slips past me, you're sure to sight her, and the less the general public sees of you in the meantime the better."

He sauntered away, whistling softly, leaving Ingersoll to his own reflections. And these were by no means unpleasant.

For Ingersoll, since he had made up his mind that he had no option but to abide by the plan to which Tommy had pledged him, had resolutely put all

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troubles behind him. He had spent a very busy day in winding up the last broken threads of his former affairs. His firm's creditors had all been informed that they would be paid in full. He was altogether free of them now, might dispose of his own vague future as he should see fit.

He had even been so fortunate as to receive from one acute business man among them, who saw in his uncompromising honesty the promise of such service as is sufficiently scarce nowadays, the offer of prompt and well-paid employment. That meant much more to him now than he would once have thought possible, and his only other immediate ambition would very soon be fulfilled. With Eileen safe at his side he would face the world again gladly. And the minutes passed unheeded while he dreamed of castles in Spain to be built for her.

Half-past nine struck on a distant clock, and another replied on the instant, but he was not unduly impatient. She had a good half hour yet to her credit. The clergyman's residence where the simple ceremony would be performed was quite close at hand, and — she could not be long now.

He got out to pace the pavement, unmindful of Tommy's advice, his eyes on the gateway through which she must soon appear. That she would come he never doubted, but, as ten struck, Tommy Judson returned, alone.

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"She's late," said he uncomfortably. "Must have been detained."

"It's a good long way across the Park," Ingersoll replied. "She'll be here presently. Three minutes will take us to the parson's door. There's time enough till eleven."

Tommy turned back and took up his beat again, staying there in a state of increasing anxiety until eleven o'clock resounded over the city, when he once more appeared at the car.

"I'll just run round the Park," he announced, "in case she's made any mistake as to the particular gate. It won't take me long, and she'll probably be with you by the time I get back."

When he got back with the car, however, he found Ingersoll still pacing perplexedly to and fro by himself.

"She'll surely not fail us," said Tommy. "We'd better wait on for a bit, don't you think?"

"We can't well do anything else," answered Ingersoll, as cheerfully as he could. His own mind was full of forebodings now, and the minutes dragged very drearily until at length midnight chimed.

It seemed useless to stay there longer, but, rather than that Eileen should run any risk of finding them flown, he once more remained where he was while Tommy Judson drove off on a final errand, which

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took him directly and at top speed to the door of that aristocratic apartment-house, on the other side of Fifth Avenue, at which Eustace Gildersleeve and his ward usually stayed when in town. He had been supplied with an intimate description thereof by the other, who had spent not a few happy hours there before he had fallen from fortune.

Tommy's procedure on arriving had the supreme merit of sheer simplicity. He got out of the car and rang the door-bell, demanding of the sumptuously uniformed porter who answered his summons whether Mr. Gildersleeve was at home.

"Mr. Gildersleeve's gone abroad," the man answered curtly.

"And Miss Saxilby?" questioned Tommy, devoutly thankful that his first arrow had missed its mark.

"I don't know nothing about Miss Saxilby," the porter replied. "She went out with another lady before Mr. Gildersleeve left, an' she won't be back. Their apartment's closed. They'll be gone six months or a year."

Certain coins changed hands, and the man became more communicative.

"Mr. Gildersleeve's gone to Europe," he said. "No, he didn't leave no address for letters. He's crossing in his own yacht, an' his movements are very

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uncertain. Seemed to me he was pretty sick about somethin' when he went away. He didn't seem the least bit happy."

That was all he could tell. He closed the door with indifferent politeness on the inquisitive motorist, and so went back to the corner where he was accustomed to pass the night hours in company with a racing-chart.

Tommy climbed into his own seat and laid hands on the wheel, but, on the point of moving away, he looked up at the windows above. What he saw there caused him to postpone his departure for several seconds. Then he made off, almost noiselessly, in a hurry.

Ingersoll stood aghast at the story of Eustace Gildersleeve's sudden retreat. Tommy told it to him while they were returning toward that gentleman's residence, and also explained his purpose in going thither again.

"There's a light in one of the windows I take to be his," said he, "though the porter assured me that the apartment was closed. What we've got to find out first, O. K., is whether His Whiskers is really at home or abroad."

"His windows are on the right of the third floor front," Ingersoll reaffirmed, and Tommy nodded.

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"That's where the light was," he asserted. "I counted twice to make sure."

He stopped at the corner, till Ingersoll, who had gone down the street to prospect, came hastily back.

"There's a light in the library, sure enough," said he in a puzzled tone, "and I caught sight of a man's shadow crossing the blind. But I'll swear it wasn't his."

He pondered, biting his lips, till he reached resolution.

"Whoever it is," he suggested, "we don't want to scare him away till we know what's what. So we won't warn the porter just yet. I'll tell you what, Tommy — I'll take a peep in at the dining-room window. It's round at the rear, and the fire-escape runs past it. I can get there through the tradesmen's entrance, if you'll give me a leg-up at the outer gate."

"It'll be a bad business if you're caught burgling," Tommy Judson objected doubtfully, but followed without other protest.

The street was deserted. It did not take Ingersoll more than a moment to clamber over the futile spikes on the gate at one side of the building, and, leaving Tommy to return to the car in a very comfortable frame of mind, he tiptoed along the flagged passage within.

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All was quiet in the courtyard into which he came; the windows displayed no light. He set foot on the fire-escape and was about to climb cautiously upward when a door behind opened suddenly and some one came forth.

He lay flat on the ladder, repressing the urgent temptation to run for it, praying that he might pass unperceived in the darkness, and heard footsteps crossing the court. He felt quite sure that the thud of his heart on his ribs must be distinctly audible throughout the block. Some one went down the passage by which he had entered. He heard the latch click, the gate closed with a bang, and the footsteps grew fainter. His prayer had been granted. He had so far escaped discovery.

Dumbly thankful for that, he held on, undaunted, and reached the third floor without further hindrance. Through the uncurtained window there he saw that the dining-room was unoccupied, but through the stained glass of the door at its other end came dim colored rays. There was still a light in the library, and an occasional movement.

Fumbling soundlessly at the sash, he found it slightly raised, as if to air the apartment, and, lifting it inch by inch, very carefully, at length gained ingress. A thick Turkey rug on the floor enabled him to go forward more freely. He felt his way, by the

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backs of the chairs set round the table, as far as the half-draped doorway, and peered through the least opaque of its panes with straining eyes.

There was a man standing at the desk in the room beyond. He was stooping over a pile of papers which he had apparently plucked from one of its open drawers. He threw them aside with an angry gesture and picked up another big bundle, held these also to the light, ran rapidly through them, but only to cast them away in turn. Half a dozen times he repeated the operation, and then began to ransack the racks built into the back of the big roll-top desk.

Ingersoll knew quite well that it was not Eustace Gildersleeve who was treating thus cavalierly that scrupulous business man's most private possessions. But he did not take any steps to protect Mr. Gildersleeve's interests. He waited and watched till the daring intruder, his search seemingly completed and unsuccessful, faced about so that the electric lights outlined his profile — which was that of Jasper Slyne.

It seemed now that this intruder was finding it difficult to determine what he should do next. He took a turn or two about the room, biting his nails in evident vexation; turned to the desk again, and then away from it; suddenly came to some decision, snatched up a hat, switched out the light and departed, in haste. Ingersoll heard him cross the hall, close the door quietly, and then silence supervened.

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His own next impulse took him back to the window by which he had obtained entrance, but there he halted, irresolute. Then he closed it almost completely, stood listening for a little longer, and boldly entered the library, where he struck a match, and so looked hurriedly about him.

Everything there was in disorder, which was not remarkable, considering the peculiar occupation of Jasper Slyne. The room had been rifled as though by a professional cracksman. The trespasser had made no attempt to hide the results of his handiwork, for the safe in the wall at one side stood open; the littered desk with its gaping drawers might have served any but a blind man for evidence that there was something very wrong. On the crimson carpet that covered the floor lay a torn envelope addressed to Slyne and a crumpled sheet of white paper. Ingersoll struck a fresh match and read, with ever increasing amazement, the writing thereon.

This, also, was in Eustace Gildersleeve's hand, and had been penned with such haste as to be almost illegible, but what he made of it was this:

"Ingersoll has carried E. off. Hear they have sailed on *Adriatic* for London under assumed name. If you don't see me before then, will you follow by *Lusitania* to-morrow morning, shadow them ashore, and await me at Carlton Hotel? Shall probably cross in yacht. *Olive Branch* left at noon — Porto

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Rico, for orders. Thought it best send her on ahead and join her from England. Have taken all papers with me, for safety."

It was no time to ponder a problem so complicated. He slipped the note into one of his pockets, and, turning toward the desk again, ran his eyes rapidly over the jumble there. Eileen's name on a docketed sheaf of papers instantly arrested his glance, and he picked it out with feverish haste. It was endorsed "Duplicates," dated the day before, and proved to be life-assurance proposal forms for a very large aggregate amount distributed among various companies. Ingersoll pocketed these also, mechanically, without any scruple, as a fourth match burned out in his fingers. He had not thought it advisable to turn on the electric light.

Further swift research discovered no other item of present interest, although, in a situation less agitating, he might have devoted more time to search. As it was, an irresistible impulse urged him to more active measures. He must find Eileen, and that without an instant's delay.

He copied his predecessor's tactics as to the easiest way out of his very unsafe predicament, passed through the hall to the public stairway, descended a flight, and rang for the elevator.

It did not immediately ascend. He could hear a man's voice in the vestibule below, and presently

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the car shot up past him with Slyne inside, Slyne in evening clothes and a light overcoat, an opera-hat on the back of his head, his black moustache almost bristling with fierce impatience. Slyne saw him, and recognized him at once.

As he took to his heels by the stairs, the car stopped with a perceptible jar and came sliding swiftly down again. It beat him by very little. Slyne sprang out at him as he would have dashed past it on the street-floor. And at Slyne's heels came the puzzled porter, bellowing loudly.

Slyne had a hand at his hip. There was murder latent in his malevolent eyes. Ingersoll struck at him, once, with weight in the blow, and then grappled him to prevent his shooting. But the porter intervened, and Slyne broke free, after a brief struggle. He had drawn his gun and was about to pull the trigger when he was struck down from behind, and the weapon exploded, harmlessly except for the noise it made. What with that and the porter's anguished yells and the opening of doors up above and the cries of alarm coming down the shaft, the hallway reverberated.

Through the smoke Ingersoll saw Tommy Judson, already possessed of Slyne's pistol, threatening the porter with instant death if he did not retire to his den and cease howling, which he did at once. But as the friends, having backed out of the hall-way with

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speed, fled hot-foot toward the car, the man renewed his hoarse outcry. A dozen other voices joined his in wild shouts for the police. And, as luck would have it, a uniformed guardian of law and order, patrolling his beat on a bicycle, appeared at the further end of the block at that very moment.

CHAPTER V

A STERN CHASE

“**T**HIS is — going to be — a close call!” panted Tommy Judson, and he put on a last frantic spurt after a swift glance back over his shoulder. “Climb in, O. K., and keep out of sight.”

Ingersoll scrambled into the tonneau as soon as they reached the car, crouching down till he was almost invisible, yet so that he could still observe the rapidly approaching bicycle-policeman, who had only slowed down in passing, to hear the hall-porter's excited statement that the two runaways had left a gentleman dead in the doorway. Tommy was hastily cranking up, but the sparking-plug failed to act for several priceless seconds, and, when he at length sprang to his seat and applied the power, Oswald Ingersoll had all but given himself up for lost.

“Get a move on, for heaven's sake, Tommy!” he adjured his very adept chauffeur, as that daring individual once more looked round to see just how far behind they had left their pursuer and let the speed

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drop perceptibly. The extreme narrowness of the margin by which they had won clear at the very last moment had made the helpless passenger's blood run cold. And the policeman was pedaling doggedly after them, bent on their capture, not more than fifty yards to the rear. Ingersoll was afraid that the car was after all going to fail them at that most critical moment.

"Not just yet," Tommy objected, gently but firmly. "We want to delude our friend in the background a little further away from the scene of the accident before we bid him a fond farewell. It wouldn't be wise to let him set lips to a telephone till we're ready to face the whole force. We'll see if we can't lure him into some more sequestered nook, and lose him there."

In accordance with this policy he proceeded across the park by a succession of feeble spurts, tempting the angry officer onward by slowing down to a dangerous crawl and snatching the car from his eager grasp with a careless ease which was beyond words provoking. It soon became a personal matter with the policeman to capture the man at the wheel. When he encountered a mounted comrade who had let the car pass unquestioned, he merely cursed him and followed his own career.

Tommy knew the park very intimately. He had often found inspiration there for his brush during

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his student days. When he came to the place appointed he left the roadway, taking to the forbidden turf with his lamps all loosely hooded, allowing the chase time to see him commit these additional crimes. In the midst of space he left the policeman still pounding blindly along in what appeared to be the criminals' wake, a path which led to the edge of a clump of bushes — and stopped short there.

By that time the car, its lights uncovered again, had escaped by the south-east gateway, heedless of challenge by other officers met on the passage thither.

Tommy laughed softly to himself as he turned along Fifty-fifth Street, slowed down, and swung into Broadway, heading north.

"Climb over and sit beside me, O. K.," he suggested, and Ingersoll did so. They were crawling quite decorously across the Circle, nor did they increase their speed again for the present, an error of judgment which came near to costing them dear. But they were too busy discussing the strange results of Ingersoll's burglarious visit to Eustace Gildersleeve's library to think of anything else just then.

"What's the next move, Tommy?" Ingersoll inquired. He had been calculating the possible consequences of their recent escapade, and these had somewhat alarmed him. He could not afford to figure in any police-court while the current crisis in his own affairs still endured, and neither could he well see

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how he and his friend were to escape the contingency if they were caught in the car.

"Why, we're going as far as Spuyten Duyvil on this tack," Tommy returned unconcernedly, "and from there we'll telephone the garage about the bad break-down we're certain to have as soon's we get to that stage of our journey. They'll send for the car. We'll dodge back from Kingsbridge by subway, slip on board the old *Fulmar*, and sit tight there till we hear what's what. By then we'll have had time to think what we're going to do next, and — trouble weighs less afloat than on shore."

"But I must do something at once for Eileen," Ingersoll objected. "Heaven only knows what that precious guardian of hers is up to — or where she is now."

"We'll gain nothing much by gadding about any more to-night," replied Tommy. "To-morrow morning we'll be about with the early bird, find out where we stand, and make all Manhattan hum till we find her again. There's no use of . . . Holy Father O'Flynn! Look there! Now, wouldn't that jar you!"

Oswold Ingersoll looked. What he saw was an over-heated bicycle-policeman, mopping his brow and conferring with a sleepily sympathetic patrolman at the next corner. Their pursuer had crossed the park and headed them off by pure chance.

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"Hold fast," said Tommy. "I'm going to tamper with the top-notch."

The assiduous sleuth caught sight of them at that instant. With a whoop of triumph he jumped astride his wheel and bore down upon them. His heavy-eyed ally came lumbering after him.

Honk-honk went the horn, but the enemy did not lack courage. They stood their ground valiantly, ready to die but determined to do justice on the transgressors. It was evident that passage could not be had but over their bodies.

"Hold fast," ordered Tommy again, and the car jumped a foot in the air as the two wheels on which it was running in a quick curve toward the side-walk struck the low curb and surmounted it. A few inches more and it would have been through the front door of the house there, but it slewed round, obedient to a last wrench, skated helplessly for half a block on the flags, and regained the open roadway.

"I'll give the maker a medal — when I get out of Sing-Sing," said Tommy ecstatically. "What's that fat five feet of stickin' plaster about now, O. K.?"

Ingersoll looked back. "He's got a gun out," said he, "and — he's going to shoot."

Upper Broadway was empty at that late hour. Tommy in turn leaned out, looked back. The man on the bicycle was taking aim, and behind him the

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other was making the neighborhood resound with his night-stick. Tommy drew in again before the revolver cracked, almost inaudible in the greater din, but the shot went wide.

"He'll hit *us* if he aims at the tire," he said dolefully, and set a foot on the brake. "We've come to the end of our tether on this trip, O. K. 'Pride goeth before a fall'—but this fellow's coming right after one. Just drop the spare tire in front of his wheel when he's close up behind."

Ingersoll did his bidding without demur, and by means of that ingenious expedient stopped the pursuit temporarily, though the cautious pace at which their pursuer approached, even when they had almost come to a standstill, prevented any great harm befalling him. But before he could recover his perpendicular the car had turned into a dark enclosure several blocks away, Tommy had jumped out and extinguished the lamps, and, with Ingersoll at his heels, was racing across toward Riverside Drive.

There they adopted a less conspicuous pace, and with that reached the dock off which the *Fulmar* was lying. Among the small craft at the boat-house they soon found means of conveyance on board, but scarcely were they well afloat when they saw two figures following the very path by which they had come. They had no recourse but to continue their flight.

"Get hold of the jib-sheets and give them a yank,"

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whispered Tommy, the yacht-owner, scrambling along the deck, and, drawing a clasp-knife from its sheath at the back of his belt, he sawed through the single line that held his ship at her moorings. Ingersoll carried out the order in haste, and, as the stops gave way, "Sheet home," said Tommy, scurrying aft to the tiller.

An ominous breeze from the north was blowing. It caught the sail, canted the sloop's head round, and drove her toward the lower dock while she was slowly gaining steerage-way.

"Let go again," hissed the steersman. Helm hard a-port, and, with sheets thrashing, she thrust out into the river, clearing the pier by a miracle: when Ingersoll once more hauled in and made fast.

It was dark as ink on the water, but, at the upper edge of the bank they were leaving behind them, they could see the chase, outlined by the lights beyond, pause perplexedly. A pleasant sense of security filled their minds.

"We're safe enough for the moment," said Ingersoll in a low voice, "but I fancy we've made Manhattan too hot to hold us."

"We'll find that out in time enough," returned Tommy cheerfully, "and, even if we have — your name need never be mentioned, O. K. I'll stand the racket, and leave you free to look after your own

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affairs. Take that tiller, will you? — while I go below and get out the sailing-lantern."

He dived through the scuttle, in a great hurry, and lit the lamp, with the help of which he contrived a supper of bottled beer with crackers and cheese. After this, with pipes going, they became optimistic as to the future. It was agreed that they should hold on for Gravesend Bay. From there they could learn all they needed to know, and take further steps to find Eileen.

"We'll be in before daylight and no one'll notice us," Tommy averred, consulting his watch. "That's Weehawken over the way, and we're slipping along. She's done us a good turn this time, the poor old *Fulmar*."

He laid an affectionate hand on the well-worn deck-planks. He was very proud of his ship, was Tommy.

With the steerage-way that they had from the following wind, which was always increasing in force, they found no difficulty, even under the single sail they had spread, in threading such traffic as was afloat in the small hours. The Upper Bay was quite clear till they caught sight of the dark hull of a steam vessel following them from the anchorage there, and Ingersoll gripped Tommy's arm with a startled cry.

"That's the *Calixte* — Eustace Gildersleeve's

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yacht!" he exclaimed. "It is. I tell you I know her, Tommy."

"All right. All right," agreed Tommy soothingly. "I'll get up the night-glasses, and perhaps we'll be able to see whether he's on board."

Turn about and with breathless interest they watched the shapely white steamer which had just left its berth and was bearing down on them through the gloom, lights all aglow. But they showed none since hers were sufficient to keep them on a safe course.

"There's Gildersleeve, at the rail," whispered Ingersoll, "and — yes, there are two women on board. I can see her, Tommy! One's Eileen, and — the other is Mrs. Mannering."

He was intensely excited.

"Keep cool," ordered Tommy sternly. "They'll pass quite close."

They passed so close as gravely to endanger the smaller craft, which they had not seen, and an angry voice from the steamer's bridge demanded its reasons for failing to show the sailing-lantern it should. But neither of its two hands paid any attention to that. They were staring fixedly at the three faces clearly outlined under the electric lights, at the quarter-deck rail.

These passed like a flash, and the *Fulmar* was pitching and rolling far in their wake.

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"It's they, sure enough," said Tommy, breaking the silence that had ensued while Ingersoll was still straining his eyes in a vain attempt to catch a last glimpse of Eileen. "It's they, sure enough, and evidently all bound for Europe together. But what the deuce was old Gildersleeve up to when he left Slyne word that you had run off with the girl? — unless he had found out first that she had meant to meet you, and captured her after he wrote Slyne! There's something queer about the whole business anyhow. What do you make of it, O. K.?"

Ingersoll did not immediately answer. That he should thus lose sight of Eileen was torment to him. And who could tell what might happen before he should see her again? How could he hope that she would be able to stand out alone against her grim guardian and that trickster's equally conscienceless sister? Jasper Slyne would without doubt join them in Europe. There would be three of them then to coerce her, and — she was only a girl! He groaned aloud at the thought of his own impotence.

Eustace Gildersleeve was a millionaire, he a pauper. And poverty was not the only trouble he had on his hands. Turn where he would, he was over-heavily handicapped.

"What do you make of it?" Tommy Judson repeated. "My own idea is that you should get after

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them straight away. You can't very well leave Eileen in the lurch now."

"But how?" asked Ingersoll, in a very grieved voice. "I'm more than likely to be locked up as soon's I set foot on shore, and —"

"Why set foot on shore, then?" demanded Tommy. "Why turn back to look for trouble when all your luck lies ahead? We've both left a rotten bad record behind us, and I've no ambition to spend the winter on Blackwell's Island. My motto's this: As well be hanged for a wolf as a sheep! We've handed that scoundrel Slyne a small instalment of what's due him. Let's go right on and soak old Gildersleeve some."

Ingersoll could only gaze at him, blankly.

"The *Fulmar's* a well-found ship," Tommy Judson explained, with all that fond fatuity which so often distinguishes the small-yacht owner. "There's nothing that I can see to hinder us taking a trip to Europe in her. And we won't be any worse off there at the moment than in Manhattan."

Still Ingersoll said no word. His forehead was deeply furrowed.

"You aren't joking, are you, Tommy?" he asked at length, very doubtfully. "I — I'm quite desperate myself, but — I can't ask you to share such a godless risk."

"Shall I head her for Gravesend or for Sandy

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Hook?" Tommy counterquestioned with imperturbable gravity. "It's your shout, of course, but I wish you could get it into your head that I'm standing in with you, win or lose, of my own free will."

Ingersoll looked again at the sea and the shore, which was already creeping in ghostly outline from under the skirts of night. He looked again at the dim, diminishing lights of the distant yacht on which all that was left to him out of the wreck of his past was being carried away by force or fraud. He scanned Tommy's ugly face very closely. His own tense features relaxed. He drew the back of one hand across his lips to hide their trembling. His eyes were glad.

"You're one of a scarce sort, Tommy," he said huskily, "and — it was only on your account I was holding back."

"That's settled then," Tommy Judson asserted with a very gleeful grin. "And now we're going to have the spree of our lives!"

"Look there," said he, pointing straight ahead to where the single star of the morning was shining clearly. "Take that for an omen — the lantern of luck."

CHAPTER VI

THE FATE OF THE FULMAR

THROUGH the Narrows the tide was ebbing. With that and the following wind to help, the *Fulmar* was flying seaward at a fast clip, under headsails only. She rode on an even keel, with a swish at the counter which showed that she needed no more canvas. Fort Wadsworth crept up abeam, fell behind. The first of the new day's sunshine lit up the windows and roofs of Arrochar.

Far away in the distance the white hull of Eustace Gildersleeve's yacht was slipping over the searim. A long string of coal-hulks in tow of a tug drew across its wake diagonally, shutting it out of sight. And over beyond them all lay the open ocean.

Ingersoll looked astern. He saw the Staten Island ferry crossing toward Whitehall, and thought distastefully of 300 Mulberry Street. A vivid picture of Slyne, lying white and motionless, in crumpled evening clothes, on the parquetry of the apartment-house hallway, flashed across his mental vision. He felt very thankful that he himself was free, and

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facing outward, not in. But, at the same time, he was haunted by an insistent suspicion that the enterprise into which he had, however reluctantly, led Tommy Judson savored much more than a little of the foolhardy. He turned to that unconcerned adventurer: "How does the whole thing strike you, by broad daylight?" he demanded.

Tommy Judson removed the pipe from between his teeth, and spat contemplatively over the side, a nautical habit he only assumed at sea.

He, too, had been thinking over the turn of events and studying chances while he sat and smoked at the helm, an expression of placid contentment upon his unhandsome face.

"Strikes me it's a good thing we're here — not there," said he, jerking a thumb over one shoulder in the direction of Manhattan Island. "And I'll tell you why, if you like.

"I'm even more afraid now than I was last night that the police might make trouble for us if we showed up ashore. We seem to have run up a very tidy little account with 'em since we set out from the studio.

"In the first place, I must plead guilty to faking the car number, and that's quite a serious crime when you come to think of it. Then, you're liable to be pulled in on a charge of burglary, which you'd find it infernally hard to disprove. Item three: I

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hit your friend Slyne a hardish whack with my spanner, and, look at it any way you like, that's felonious assault, while, for anything we know, he may be a cold corpse at this moment. We have at least half a dozen minor offenses to answer for. We've made a fierce enemy of our friend, the bicycle-cop, at the cost of an expensive tire, which we can't afford to pay. And, to all intents and purposes, we've stolen an automobile, as well as this dandy little dinghy of ours. We didn't intend to, of course, but we've done it all right. It would take a whole lot of money to white-wash the two of us, and—our capital's strictly limited to the few dollars we've saved on expenses. We've spent nearly all we had. And, in the last place, O. K., we've neither of us any time to spare for explanations at present. We've matters of much more vital importance to occupy us. .

"On the other hand, there's hope on the far horizon. It will do us all the good in the world to get away from New York for a bit. You're leaving all your business affairs in order, and, when you come back, you'll start in clear to make a fresh pile. I'm going along of my own good will and pleasure. I want a holiday: this is the sort that suits me. I've often thought of taking a trot around Europe.

"By broad daylight, the thing strikes me as a cinch for us. The *Fulmar's* a sound old ship. We've tried her out in all sorts of weather. There

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are stores on board sufficient to last us a month with care, and, as for water, we'll speak some ship before the breakers run dry — if the rain isn't heavy enough to help us. The trip across this old puddle's been done in an open boat before now: in a decked one, as stanch and well-found as this, it will be a good deal less difficult than falling off a loose log.

"How would it strike you, O.K., if I got some bacon and eggs for breakfast?"

Ingersoll took the tiller without more words, dumbly thankful that Tommy had not thought better of the audacious course to which they had committed themselves on the spur of the moment. For there was no other way now to help Eileen. In that fact, surely, lay warrant full and simple for any forlorn hope. His last lingering doubt appeased, he cast dull care overside, and found himself lighter of heart than he had been since the first crash of misfortune.

It was pleasantly warm on the water in the fresh morning. From the forecastle presently came the fragrant odor of coffee, the heartsome hiss of a frying-pan. They made the squat little yacht, slipping easily over the long, low swell, seem very homelike to him.

The *Fulmar* was no mere pleasure-craft. Her thirty-foot waterline and generous beam gave her ample stability for deep-sea sailing. 'Aloft and aloft

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she was fitted to face hard weather. Ingersoll had been as far as the Banks on board her, and knew that, though, like her owner, she was no beauty, she would stand up to both wind and water in a way which might well astonish much handsomer vessels.

With the helm in the crook of one arm he ate hungrily the liberal helping of bacon and eggs handed up to him, and when, later on, Tommy came on deck to trail the dirty dishes astern in a net, by which means he might save washing them, he found Ingersoll puffing contentedly at a black pipe.

He looked up at the sky, dark with drifting scud, and composedly took in the foresail ere relieving the man at the helm.

"Glass still falling," said he casually. "Looks like a bit of a blow before long. Better go below, have a change, and get well wrapped up. I've made all snug in the cabin. If you feel like forty winks, now's your time."

He himself had got into a thick overcoat; and his oilskins were lying at hand in the cockpit.

Ingersoll yawned exhaustedly. The hot meal he had devoured was making him still more drowsy. He climbed through the companion-hatch into the cabin. It was very cosy and comfortable. He made a hasty toilet, and stretched himself luxuriously on a level settee. In five minutes he was fast asleep,



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all his troubles forgotten. And Sandy Hook was already over the starboard quarter.

He was awakened by a loud knocking, and sat up, infinitely refreshed, to realize that Tommy was hammering on the deck with a handspike. The sloop was pitching a little. He could hear overhead the spatter of rain. With a quick glance at the clock in the corner, he struggled into his waterproof coat, clapped on a sou'-wester, pulled the scuttle back, and, emerging therefrom, saw that circumstances had changed for the worse.

There were heavier clouds above, traveling faster. The wind was whistling more purposefully through the cordage. A shower was falling, and might have shut the land out. There was none in sight. But, on the port bow, a big ocean-liner was ploughing its way toward the Narrows, the rails of its shelter-deck fringed with white faces whose eyes were all focussed on the small sloop.

"That's a big un!" said Tommy, adrip at the tiller but in no degree disconcerted by such a mere trifle as a shower of rain. He waved graciously to the onlookers, kissed his free hand to a group of girls, and got to his feet, gaping wearily.

"You've had a good snooze, O.K.," said he. "Will you take a trick at the tiller while I close my eyes for an hour, so that we may both be about to-might if need be. There'll soon be a bit of a sea

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on the hop, and it will increase as we leave the land. I'm half afraid to hold closer in to the coast, and we can't in any case — unless we hoist the storm-stay-sail. I think, on the whole, that we're safer to run before it."

He gave place to his companion.

"You'll call me, of course, if there's any occasion," he urged. "All I want's an hour, just to take the sleep out of my eyes."

"Why didn't you wake me sooner?" Ingersoll answered reproachfully. "I was counting on you to do that. It's after three. I've been snoring for over six hours!"

Tommy, closing the scuttle again, grinned up at him from beneath it, and he could not but laugh back at the ugly, honest face that showed through the six-inch opening.

He glanced at the compass from time to time, and anon at the chart exposed under a glazed cover within the cockpit. That was one of Tommy Judson's contrivances toward comfort. But the *Fulmar*, running free, was amost steering herself. There was no fear of her broaching to, while the sea rose no higher. She was riding such swell as there was with a send that kept her on a straight course.

The shower passed, leaving the wet decks shining, but the sun did not come out again. The scud from the north hung low in the sky while the breeze still

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gathered strength under it and the swell grew steeper. The *Fulmar* yawed to a seventh wave, and rolled protestingly as the wind yanked her back to her course by the nose. But Ingersoll paid more heed to his helm after that, and she did not transgress again for perhaps a couple of hours, when a big fellow hunched his shoulder under her keel and once more sent her staggering sideways.

The lurch she gave shook Tommy from his settee. He woke from a sodden sleep to find himself slipping about the matting which covered the floorboards, and just at that moment the crest of a comber bestowed a most thunderous slap on the little ship's side. Pots and pans clattered, crockery rattled, the skylight was suddenly darkened, a miniature waterfall poured in upon him. He scrambled to his knees, slipped his coat on, and, waiting his opportunity, climbed through the scuttle, slipping the washboard into place there as he passed, drawing the hatch more closely over it.

"Movin' about a bit more, eh!" he called to his friend, and, without other comment, cocked careful eyes about him. What he saw did not please him over much, and, looking toward the north, he frowned.

The wind blowing from that quarter, ever more strongly, had banked up a big, lumpy sea. Dusk was coming down. From the sloop to the circular

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horizon rose and sank a restless steel-gray ridge and furrow, doubly desolate in the waning light. Here and there curled a white-cap, flecking the gloom with a ghostly foam, and over the world's edge in the gathering darkness a gale was growing.

"We'll be on high jump before long, or I'm much mistaken," Tommy said to himself, but to Ingersoll he merely remarked, "We'll have something to eat now, and then I'll relieve you. P'raps I might just as well take a reef down first though, and save getting soaked later on."

He looked reflectively at the bellying jib, under which they had been driving all day, then over the stern.

"If that cloth carries away," he communed with himself, "it will be very awkward for us. And, as I'm a sinner, I quite forgot these old backstays are not all they might be. I'd better set the storm-sails at once and so ease the strain."

Ingersoll stuck to his own task, asking no needless questions, and Tommy sank out of sight through the scuttle. The cabin floor was sopping with the sea-water which had got in ere he shipped the washboard, but he crept on hands and knees to the sliding door which shut off the forecastle, fastened that back and wriggled through. There was little light from the bullseye in the manhole-cover clamped into place with a couple of screws, but he could have

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found what he wanted blind. With his back to the bulkhead he steadied himself, and drew from a locker a canvas bag containing two sails, which he tossed through into the cabin. He spent five minutes making everything fast in the forecastle, wriggled out again, and drew the door to, securing it with a dependable latch.

"That's everything all right forward," said Tommy, and scrutinized the sails very carefully. Then he laid them along the floor and, having tied stops about them, passed them on deck, Ingersoll pulling lustily while he pushed.

The *Fulmar* was pitching more than a little by this time, burying her stubby bowsprit in each succeeding slope. The whitecaps had become more numerous. Wisps of spindrift were whipping from crest to crest, like ghosts in the gloom. Tommy had to cling closely to the creaking boom as he carried a staysail forward.

He braced himself against the mast, with one foot on the four-inch gunwale, and thus, with infinite difficulty, hoisted the sail in its stops, made the forefoot fast, set the sheets, and paused to look very dubiously at the straining jib.

He drew back abaft the mast, made himself as secure as he could, cast the jib-halliards free, let them go with a run, and dragged at the staysail-sheets.

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As the halliards thrashed through the blocks and the jib blew out on the bowsprit, the staysail spread to the blast with a tug which set the untrustworthy backstays atwang. But they stood the stretch, and Tommy looked pleased as he sat down carefully to recover the jib.

He had not been able to save himself the soaking he had deprecated, but was quite undaunted when he got back to the cockpit with the saved sail.

"She'll swim like a duck now, O.K.," he informed Ingersoll, who had been anxiously watching his operations, "but I may as well run the other rag up while I'm at it. That can stay in the stops till it's wanted, which won't be till after this zephyr's blown itself out."

When he had got everything done to his satisfaction, the little *Fulmar* was as fit as she might be made to face the trouble in store for her. And he once more turned his attention to supper, leaving Ingersoll alone while he rummaged below for such food and drink as could be consumed without cooking.

The sailing-lantern was still three parts full of oil. He got that lit, set it out of the wind in the well of the cockpit, and brought forth supplies of canned beef and crackers, a pannikin containing water well laced with navy rum.

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"We must keep the cold out," he cried to Ingersoll, his words little more than audible in the roar of the tumbling waters, the shriek of the wind. And, having refreshed himself first, without apology, he took the helm while the other ate and drank.

Night had fallen a good half hour before. All about them was inky blackness, save where here and there, dim gray shadows showed breaking seas. Tommy picked up the lantern and peered at the compass. They were driving to east of south and entirely away from the course they wanted to follow.

"I'll put a drag out," he suggested. "We're on the wrong road and traveling far too fast. If this lasts, we'll break the record to Porto Rico — but that isn't Europe!"

When Ingersoll in turn had finished he took the tiller again while Tommy unearthed his sea-anchor from among the odds and ends in the sternmost locker, and let it go. It checked their speed but made the decks very much wetter. He hove on the tripping-line and hauled it in again.

"Better just let her rip," he opined, "and keep cool. It's too late now to wear ship, and there's no sense in having her pooped all night long. What we lose we'll make back when a southerly breeze gives us half a chance. The *Fulmar's* a fast ship, eh, O.K.!"

He had to speak at the height of his voice to

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make himself heard, but seemed so well satisfied with their by no means agreeable plight that Ingersoll could not help smiling. Tommy Judson grinned back at him.

"Fine, isn't it?" he asked. "How about a smoke? I've got some stogies below that a fire-engine couldn't put out once they're going full blast. Shall I light one for you?"

He did not wait for an answer but crawled away and soon came back with two stumpy cheroots, both aglow. Ingersoll took one and gave him the helm at a sign, snuggling low in the cockpit to smoke in such comfort as he could contrive under the very adverse conditions. But that did not endure long.

They dropped into the trough of a sea and a black wall of water rose high overhead at the stern, spat hissing white spume into space, curled, caved in, and came crashing down on them before they could move.

The sloop's staunch oak timbers all quivered and groaned under the deadly force of the blow. She staggered and struggled, sick, sinking, to shake off the weight that was threatening to drown her, hung reeling for an endless instant between life and death, emerged with a shuddering gasp from the heel of the comber.

The downfall washed Ingersoll out of the cockpit. It lifted him clean off his feet and he floated away, choking, clutching at space. He would most in-

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fallibly have finished overboard had not he caught in the backstay and hung there till the little craft wrenched herself free from that giant grip. As it was he lay doubled up, stunned, head and feet hanging limply beyond the bulwark till Tommy recovered sufficiently to rescue him from his perilous predicament. That alarmed navigator had clung like a leech to the rudder-head, and, but for having imbibed much salt water, was little the worse.

He dragged Ingersoll aft and sprang back to his own post at the tiller, in time and no more to prevent the vessel from broaching to as she slid down the succeeding slope. When Ingersoll opened his eyes again in dismayed bewilderment he was once more safe in the cockpit and Tommy was letting go the drag for a second time.

"How goes it, O.K.?" asked the anxious steersman in a solicitous shout. "Any damage done? Are you feeling all right? Gad! I thought you were gone for good."

Ingersoll raised himself on one elbow. He was suffering pain, but no bones were broken.

"All right," he answered. "Are you?"

Tommy nodded. "But that was a near thing!" he cried. "We mustn't risk it again. I've let the sea-anchor out with some oil in it—the lamp from the lantern. We couldn't have lit it anyhow, and it'll maybe save us from any more breaking seas."

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Ingersoll sat up with an effort. He was wet to the skin and the wind carried a cold sting in it. He shivered, and stared disconsolately about him. There was something beside the spray splashing on the deck. He turned up the brim of his sou'-wester, and felt rain on his face.

The shower came down in a sheet that was almost solid, slanting from north to south with the gale. It shut them into still grosser darkness, through which they dragged, unable to see or hear, at the will of the elements.

Tommy Judson put his lips to the other's ear, and "Bully for us!" he yelled. "This will lay the sea."

Ingersoll turned his head to look back, uttered an agonized cry of warning, and, springing forward, tugged frantically at the slip-knots of the ropes with which they had secured the dinghy on deck.

A shapeless shadow loomed up out of the murk, hung poised for a dreadful moment upon the crest of the ridge which the *Fulmar* was descending, ploughed forward, swooped down upon her, and cut through her staunch oak timbers as though they had been so much pulp.

CHAPTER VII

SALEH

TOMMY JUDSON'S next coherent impression was of soft sunshine. It came to him through half-lifted eyelids. When he tried to open them further he could not.

His head felt strange. He touched it, very cautiously, and found that it was encircled by a stiffening, sticky bandage, which also obscured his vision.

Strange voices fell on his ears, particularly one of a woman. It stirred his pulses singularly. He pushed the blood-stained rag from over his nose, and stared stupidly for a time at the scene before him.

It dawned on his understanding by slow degrees that he was lying stretched on a low settee in the after-cabin of a small steamer. The *thud-thud-thud* of her screw-propeller, almost immediately underneath him, jarred on his jangled nerves much more than it should. He was sore all over. His limbs were quite limp and strengthless.

The cabin was finely furnished, more so, perhaps, than is usual except on a yacht. There were many

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dainty indications of feminine occupancy about it. But it was not a yacht's cabin, Tommy felt sure. And, in any case, he was much more interested in its inmates, the three who stood facing one another, two to one, on either side of it. The two were men, and the third a woman, a girl.

Of the men the more prominent was a squat, white-haired, weak-eyed, unctuous-looking old fellow, clad in an ill-fitting blue uniform with much glaring gold-braid about it. He was unduly short in the legs, long of arm. His smooth, flat, snub-nosed, face was shaven except for a fringe of whiskers, which added to its smugly sanctimonious expression. His conversation was not at all in keeping.

Even the other, a young man, of sallow complexion, tall, thin, with spiked moustache, and foreign of speech as well as appearance, seemed to be scandalized at his language toward the girl. Tommy, listening intently, unnoticed, soon gathered that they two together were at daggers drawn with her — about him. And she . . .

Looking up at her as he lay there, helpless, lost in amazement, he feasted his eyes for a space on the perfect picture she made, standing straight and still, in a shaft of sunshine whose warm caress, like the arm of an ardent lover, outlined very delicately the curves of a slender, virginal figure under its loose robe of clinging silk.

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Her pose, entirely natural and unconscious, was that of one subtly prepared against some dire hazard. In her unconventional garb, with her set, resolute, crimson lips, level eyebrows, eyes with strange, lambent lights in them, like twin rainbows, and, over all, a glory of red-gold hair luridly aglow, she was like . . . she was not in the least like any other girl Tommy Judson had ever seen. She might perhaps have been some old-world pirate's daughter, a princess of the high seas, would surely have seemed most at home among a bodyguard of swart buccaneers on the poop of a picaroon.

But he of the present-day uniform was swearing hoarsely at her. His every sentence was garnished with sulphurous, old-fashioned oaths, which came the worse from one of his pious appearance.

"What new devil's cantrip is this?" he demanded, his voice unsteady, his weak eyes winking with rage. "Are we to risk everything again for the sake of a shiftless swab like that, a dock-rat you'd better have left to drown — as you would if I'd been on deck when you and your bully Yoxall brought him aboard!

"By the seven stars! Saleh Harez, it's time you were taught, once and for all, who's master on the *Olive Branch*."

Her fathomless, inscrutable glance met his, unwavering. But she said no least word in reply, and



"LOOK AT HIS UGLY FACE! HE'S A BLIND HOODOO, I TELL YOU!"

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her silence seemed to incense him the more. His wrath was none the less virulent because he strove to contain it.

"It's high time you were taught who's master here," said he, through set teeth, "and I'm going to teach you now. What I say goes, on the *Olive Branch*. There's no room on board for that — that — that — Look at his ugly face! He's a blind hoodoo, I tell you! He'd have sunk us last night if we hadn't been steaming at half-speed when we struck him. And he's going straight back where he came from."

The girl stepped forward to meet him as he came toward her, shoulders hunched, head protruding, as venomous to look at as a hurt snake. But his companion had clutched at his arm, held him with voluble whispered warnings in a slurred tongue which Tommy took to be Spanish. And, while they two stood wrangling together, the girl watching them, Tommy was surreptitiously stretching his flaccid muscles, collecting his scattered wits to cope with the crisis that promised. They did not seem to have seen that he had recovered consciousness. He had let his eyelids fall again, and was making no visible movement.

"See here, Saleh," said the master of the *Olive Branch* suddenly, in a much more placable tone, "what's the use of you an' me falling out over that

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— that — that sleeping beauty! And you knowing as well as I do that he's got to go! — because it might cost all of us our necks if we kept him. He's less than nothing to you. Just leave him to me and Don Josey, there's a good girl! We'll make it short and sweet for him. He'll never know —"

He paused, to clap a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles on to his nose, and produced from one of his pockets a little blue bottle with a red label.

"The soothing syrup," said he, with a sinister jocular. "We'll give him an easy start. With half a teaspoonful of this inside him, he won't have so long to swim. Just leave him to me an' Don Josey, there's a good girl!"

He held the phial up to the light, between one finger and thumb, with an indescribably horrible, significant leer in the direction of the sallow-faced man, whose saffron features slowly assumed a forced and most ghastly grin. But, as he stepped forward again, a whip-like, resonant crack rang out, and Tommy Judson, about to spring to his feet, ready to make what fight he might for his life, saw something glitter in the girl's hand. A thin and acrid odor assailed his nostrils. He scrambled upright, coughing, and backed giddily toward her.

The master of the *Olive Branch* was wringing one reddening hand, that from which the well-aimed bul-

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let had swept the bottle, and with the other was fumbling wildly behind his back. As he swayed sidewise, knees bent, teeth bare, his red-rimmed eyes, much magnified by their glasses, ablaze with murder, his friend Don José, bespattered, fear-stricken, bolted on deck. And the girl thrust Tommy behind her, held him fast against the bulkhead, shielding him with her own slim body in spite of his utmost efforts to break from that ignominious refuge.

The old man had got his revolver out, was dodging from side to side, seeking some chance to send a shot home without hurting her. Tommy would have snatched from her hand the still smoking pistol it held, but she would neither let it go nor use it again herself. The other had raised his, was drawing nearer, on tiptoe, with stealthy steps.

His hot, hissing breath stirred her hair. He made a jump, to reach over her shoulder. She struck at him, crying "Rube! Rube! Oh, Rube!" and, as he ducked to dodge the blow, but still thrusting forward, a shadow darkened the stairway, a heavy figure leaped, snarling, furious, from the door at its foot, and brought him to the floor with a crash. At that, the girl let Tommy Judson go free.

"Got his gun, Rube?" she asked breathlessly of the big man who had already subdued his struggling captive, and was holding him securely pinned between

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two great knees. He nodded dumbly, and, pocketing the weapon, looked up at her out of anxious, clouded eyes.

"Let him go," she ordered, and signed to Tommy to stand aside. "Let him go now. He won't make any more fuss."

The big man got up, somewhat sheepishly, and drew back a little. He, too, was in blue uniform, shabby and frayed, with gold braid that was almost black. He turned quick, appraising eyes in Tommy's direction, and then faced, calmly enough, the steelly, hate-fed glance with which the master of the *Olive Branch*, once more on his feet, would gladly have withered him.

The old man's face was distorted with passion. Crouching, braced to spring but not daring, hands raised, their fingers working like a tiger's claws, he looked like some fierce wild beast balked of its fair prey. But almost immediately he mastered himself, overcame the insane desire to kill. The blood-lust in his eyes died out. The fit had passed, for the present.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Yoxall," he muttered, with a great effort to speak in a natural tone. "You'd better get back to the bridge, till I come up to relieve you. You won't be wanted here any more at the moment."

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Reuben Yoxall looked across at the girl. She signaled assent.

"Thank you, Rube," she said simply. "You were just in time, and — it's all right now."

He nodded again, most unhappily, and took himself off.

"Send that white-livered Dago down here to me, Mr. Yoxall," the old man called after him, very acidly, "and — you needn't come aft again at his orders. D'ye hear?"

The big man retraced his steps as far as the doorway.

"Ay, ay, sir," said he mechanically, and held up one warning finger. "But — don't you dare to work — her the least little harm, or —"

He paused significantly, and withdrew, obedient to a gesture from the girl. The master of the *Olive Branch*, affecting not to have heard him, was busy winding a shred of linen round his cut finger. When Don José reappeared, faltering, he found the three gravely regarding one another. The old man received him with a contemptuous stare, and silence reigned for a space.

The girl was the first to break it.

"Better have a brush-down, Captain Dove," she observed conversationally. "You don't look any too tidy, all covered with dust. And I'll tie that

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bandage for you if you like. You don't seem to have stopped the bleeding."

Her casual, indifferent dismissal of all unfriendliness, her nonchalant acceptance of a situation so singular, her whole attitude indeed, puzzled Tommy Judson completely. He looked on with unaffected interest while she deftly doctored the old man's cut hand and then removed with a clothes-whisk the other traces of conflict. It seemed to Tommy that Captain Dove received all her attentions too cavalierly, and that Don José, too, thought so.

She turned to the latter and uttered in Spanish some quick words at which he was much confused, and at which Captain Dove looked as black as thunder. But she glanced over her shoulder at him, laughing musically, without any malice, her teeth gleaming very whitely between her ripe, crimson lips.

"And now about you," she observed to Tommy, still standing back to the bulkhead, haggard, unshaven, grotesque and dishevelled in his damp clothes, not quite certain yet whether he was asleep or awake, alive or dead. She crossed the cabin toward him, confronting him, and stood for a time looking into his eyes.

They did not fall before hers, and, presently, she let the long lashes droop on her peach-pink cheeks. The heave and sink of her bosom had quickened perceptibly. He drew a deep breath, squared his

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shoulders, and shook off the glamour in which a second glance, shy and appealing, had almost enmeshed him. She was altogether too dangerously attractive. He must take heed lest she should bewitch him also, as she most assuredly had the others of that strange ship's company.

He was recalled from the clouds by the gruff voice of the old man — whom he had for the moment forgotten entirely. Captain Dove was eying him with extreme disfavor, and Don José's lowering countenance also expressed anything but friendship.

"Quit monkeying there now, Saleh," Captain Dove commanded, "and pay attention to me for a minute. You've got your own way again, and — much good may it do you! But I want to know what you're going to do with that — sleeping beauty, now he's awake."

The girl faced about, stood shoulder to shoulder with Tommy. The least light touch of her body was strangely magnetic. Her own fair face had flushed at the taunt as to his homeliness of feature, and she had to bite her lip to keep back the retort trembling on the tip of her tongue. Captain Dove himself had the grace and beauty of a gorilla.

But, meantime, it suited her purpose best to be politic with him.

"I'm going to take him along," she said easily. "He'll stand in with me — on my own share of the

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plunder. And I'll go bail for him, all the way."

The old man's watery eyes contracted to two narrow slits. His fat face assumed a forced expression of mirth, a dog-toothed, ferocious grin. He rose from his seat without further words, good or bad, signed to Don José to follow him, and so disappeared on deck. His silence was more disconcerting than any speech.

The door swung to, behind Don José, and Tommy Judson turned to the girl with a grievously urgent question.

"What happened to Ing — my friend — the other man? There were two of us on board the boat you ran down. Was — wasn't he picked up, too?"

She did not at once answer him, but his heart sank as he saw a slow sympathy overshadow the gladness of her regard. He sat down, and his head fell forward on his two hands.

She watched him reflectively for a while, a faint frown marring the smoothness of her white forehead. But it was for him that she felt concerned. The missing man had been nothing to her.

He looked up as she laid a light hand on his arm.

"His troubles are all over," she said, very gently. "Ours have only just begun. And you're going to stand by me now, aren't you?"

There was surely some potent magic in the low

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voice with the little elusive lilt in it, or it may have been the appeal in the picture that she made sent the blood tingling through Tommy Judson's veins, and brought him to his feet. He was far too deep in her debt to count the contingencies. She had stood by him, at the gravest risk.

"Of course I'm going to stand by you," he answered swiftly. "But how — what — I don't understand."

He swayed on his feet, dizzily. She put a warm arm about him, pushed him back into his chair.

"Sit still," she ordered. "I'm going to get you some food, and then I'll fix up your head for you. You got a pretty bad knock last night before we got you aboard."

She passed into an adjoining stateroom, came back with a basin and lint, brought bread and meat from the buffet, all in a twinkling. The lissom grace of her every movement was a fresh fascination to Tommy. He sat where he was, contentedly following her with his eyes.

"Eat," she said, laying dishes before him, "and I'll tell you — everything, afterward. Eat all you can, and — here's wine. You must get your strength up quickly. You'll need it all if we get into grips again with that old orang-outang! Rube Yoxall's the only one I can trust to tackle him, and — he's made up his mind to get rid of Rube."

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"Now don't stop to talk," she urged. "Get on with your breakfast while I'm at my doctoring. I'll soon have you sorted up to rights. You must have a good thick head to have stood such a smash! Tell me if I'm hurting you."

Tommy winced a little but went on eating while she worked with sponge and scissors and lint. The food and the wine were putting new life into him. The touch of her delicate finger-tips sent soothing thrills through his nerves.

Her task completed, she stepped back to scrutinize his appearance, and he looked round. She smiled at him, a slow, radiant smile, and his ugly face lit up in response to its sorcery.

"That's better!" she said. "And now you may introduce yourself, if you like. You know my name."

"Mine's Judson," he answered readily. "Tommy Judson. And you're — Sallie Harris."

He had halted lamely over the name, so incongruously plebeian, that he had heard bestowed upon her, and she smiled again.

"Not Sallie Harris," she said, "though I'm English, you know. Sal-eh Har-ez. That's who I am. I'm Captain Dove's —"

A step on the stairway interrupted her confidence. She pulled the loose sleeves down over her bare arms, drew from some pocket the pistol she had dis-

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charged, replaced the spent shell, and signed to Tommy that he should slip into the stateroom adjoining. He would have refused to leave her, but a quick, imploring gesture impelled him to yield to her wish.

"Don't move or make any sound," she whispered, and hooked the door to, behind him, so that it stood a little ajar. From within, he could see her seat herself in his place at the table.

Some one knocked at the cabin entrance, and pushed in, at her invitation.

"Good morning, Miss Saleh," said a voice that Tommy had not heard before, and, peering out, with all due precaution, he saw the girl on her feet again, facing Eustace Gildersleeve.

CHAPTER VIII

A FLIGHT INTO FINANCE

TOMMY JUDSON had almost betrayed himself by the startled exclamation that he choked back with tight lips. For had he not seen Eustace Gildersleeve the morning before, on board the *Calixte*, bound for Europe! And the *Olive Branch* must be at least twelve hours' steaming south of the Great Circle Course. He kneaded his heavy eyelids with his hard knuckles and looked again at the stooping, gray-haired, elderly man who stood glancing uncertainly about him and rubbing his hands, before the girl.

"Good morning, Mr. Gildersleeve," said she, returning his greeting.

"I — I was looking for Captain Dove," he explained in answer to the mute inquiry of her expression.

"Captain Dove's on the bridge by now — it's his watch on deck," she informed him, "and — he has his quarters amidships."

Such response was by no means cordial, and Eustace Gildersleeve, realizing the fact, would have pro-

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pitiated her with apologies for his intrusion; in fact he had started to do so, but she cut him short in these.

"That's all right," she said. "This is my end of the ship, and I wouldn't have let you in if I hadn't wanted to see you. How are — those two women, this morning?"

"Still suffering, I'm afraid, from the shock of our dreadful experience. I — I haven't seen them yet this morning, but I feel sure that they're both bearing up bravely. I must thank you with all my heart, Miss Saleh, for your great kindness to us in our hour of trouble. My sister and Miss Saxilby will do so on their own behalf as soon as they're able. And, meantime, you can understand, no doubt, how terribly they're distressed over the loss of the yacht — and all those poor fellows' lives. It was purely providential for us who were saved that Captain Dove —"

"Captain Dove was below in his bunk, as drunk as an owl, when we sighted you," Saleh interrupted. Her tone was coldly contemptuous. "You owe it entirely to Mr. Yoxall that the arrangement you made in New York for transhipping from the *Calixte* was carried out.

"And let me tell you, Mr. Gildersleeve," she went on, in a low, tense voice before which he shrank as though it had been a whip, "that if either he or

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I had known then that you had scuttled your ship before you deserted her, we'd have stood by to save those poor fellows you speak so feelingly of, and left you to drown — like the rat you are! ”

He clutched at the back of a chair to steady himself, his always colorless face of a ghastly pallor.

“ I — I — ” he began, but she broke in again.

“ You needn't trouble to lie to me. I know all about it, you see, because, — I'm one of the gang. I'm one that you can't do without, too, and, for the future, you'll make no arrangements of that sort without telling me. I could have found you a dozen far better ways to rid yourself of your yacht and the men who wouldn't stand in with us. We'll have no more murder done in cold blood, Mr. Gildersleeve.”

Eustace Gildersleeve lifted a trembling hand, mutely beseeching her to be silent, and Tommy, still staring out at him, horror-stricken, heard someone else knock outside.

“ Sit down,” said the girl disdainfully. “ Pull yourself together — but don't forget what I've said to you.” And, as he sank limply into the chair behind him, she crossed toward the doorway that led to the deck. A whispered conversation ensued there.

Situated as he was, Tommy could see nothing of the newcomer, and had to content himself with a sufficiently clear view of Gildersleeve, sitting with

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head averted, eyes fixed upon the floor, his interlocked fingers twitching nervously. He had undoubtedly been very badly frightened by the girl's abrupt exposure of his foul secret, and Tommy, adjudging him but a cowardly schemer at best, despised him accordingly.

"Good or bad, give me a *man*," said Tommy scornfully to himself, and felt sure that no girl should ever scare him into any such pitiful state of collapse. But when he thought of Eileen, on board this mysterious craft and in such company,—his heart had almost failed him in anticipation of what she might have to say to him, who would so willingly have given his own life to retrieve the irretrievable past.

A sudden half-strangled ejaculation recalled his closer attention to the scene without. Eustace Gildersleeve had got up from his chair, stood cowering, with bent knees, hands hanging impotent, staring like one obsessed by some basilisk, into the faintly amused eyes of a very elegant, smartly dressed man who had come forward behind the girl and stopped with his back toward Tommy.

"You!" said Eustace Gildersleeve, in an explosive whisper, and the man laughed aloud, mockingly. It was seemingly a moment of triumph for him, and he meant to make the most of it. At any rate he did not vouchsafe other reply, and presently

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Gildersleeve straightened up, raised a hand to his dry lips, and spoke from behind it.

"I — I'm glad to see you, Slyne," he said shakily, his tell-tale mouth masked, his eyelids drooping to hide the hate that would show itself in spite of him.

"You look it," returned Jasper Slyne, with less than his usual suavity. And they regarded each other in silence again for a space, Gildersleeve regaining control of himself the while.

"Let's get to an understanding," said Slyne at length, very brusquely. "Saleh, you don't mind if we talk straight business for half an hour here? You like to hear all that's going on!"

"I'm one of the gang," the girl repeated, "and I've told the others already that they'd better not do any more business behind my back. There's been far too much of that lately. If you think you can get on without me, try it again. I've warned you all now."

She had spoken sharply, but Slyne merely smiled. And his smile angered her. He saw that, and his features instantly assumed a more serious expression. Jasper Slyne rather plumed himself on his perspicacity, and especially with women.

He brought forward a basket-chair for her, but she seated herself on the settee so that they should face her, their backs towards the stateroom door whence Tommy Judson was watching them and

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listening attentively without the slightest compunction. Slyne sat down in the chair himself, and Tommy observed that he wore a neat black bandage about his head, almost of a shade with his hair. He lifted a hand to this, and turned on Gildersleeve, frowning.

"I got the note you left for me in your library," he said crisply, "but, by good luck, I met that fellow Ingersoll at the foot of your stair. By bad luck he slipped through my fingers or I'd have laid him up for six months to come. You carried Eileen Saxilby off on the *Calixte* with you. Why did you tell me she had gone with him?"

The elder man glanced very uneasily over at the questioner, with a sidelong motion of his head toward the girl.

"Oh, Saleh's all right," Slyne assured him easily. "And there's no use trying to hide anything from her, for she'll find it all out in time, one way or another. So we may as well speak plainly. Why did you tell me that Eileen had gone off with Ingersoll? What was your object in seeking to start me for Europe on a false scent?"

He spoke politely, as if discussing some quite impersonal matter, but with a quiet insistence that showed that he was not to be put off. "It will pay us both best to be perfectly frank with each other, now," he said, and waited patiently for a reply.

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Eustace Gildersleeve twisted and turned in his seat, biting his thin lips, blinking restless eyes, suspicious and apprehensive. The incidents of the immediate past had sadly unnerved him. The absolute incongruity between his present position and the luxurious, ordered life which had formerly been his, struck him most inopportunately. He had suffered sorely of late. A sudden craving for sympathy, an urgent desire to unburden his mind of the troubles that were too heavy to bear any longer alone, overcame in an instant all his old cunning and caution.

"I'll tell you everything, Slyne," he said, in a spasm of self-pity.

"That's the only way," urged Slyne, encouragingly. "It's the worst possible policy to leave your partner on the outside."

Eustace Gildersleeve opened his mouth again to speak, but seemed to find it extremely difficult to begin what he had to say.

"You know how much we've sunk in this Nica-zuelan business," he gulped at last, with a very visible effort.

"Close on thirty millions," Slyne answered promptly. "Half of it your money, the other half mine."

"I'm not nearly so well off as you are, Slyne," said the gray-haired millionaire with a groan. "The half-share I provided was made up of my sister's

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money as well as my own. And — and I had to put in the greater part of my ward's fortune, too, to make up the amount. I had no option. I — I had lost so much on the market.

"I'm running a terrible risk at present. I've sunk everything — *everything*, in this scheme. I've only a few hundred dollars left to live on till — till the profits come in. And that's why I wanted to keep you and Eileen apart, for the time being.

"You shouldn't have forced me into fixing such an early date for your wedding. I must account to her for her estate on her marriage, and — you know now where it is. But she doesn't. So, you must wait a little for her — till we realize on our investment. You can understand my position, can't you! It — it's not a very pleasant one, but you're going to help me out of it — as you helped me in. I'm trusting to you entirely, Slyne — I have no secrets from you. Our interests are identical. You can see that for yourself!"

While he had been making this sorry confession, Slyne had been regarding him with ever increasing disfavor. It was not often the latter allowed his face to mirror his mind, and Eustace Gildersleeve, knowing this, was the more perturbed by his expression.

"You told me, not three days ago, when I asked you to come in for another million, that the trust

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estate was so tied you couldn't touch it," said Slyne in a vicious snarl. "It was agreed, wasn't it, that I was to get gilt-edged securities with the girl to the tune of four millions? It was by dangling that bait before me that you induced me to let you in on this deal. By God! Gildersleeve, you've gone over the score altogether with me."

"But you'll get it all yet," Eustace Gildersleeve urged desperately. "You'll get it all yet. I'll pay it over to her in cash the moment we lay our hands on the money that's due us. And, after all, four millions is no great matter to you."

His furtive eyes, fixed on Slyne's lowering face, saw something there that gave him pause.

"You're keeping some secret from me, Slyne," he said, in a changed tone. "Tell me what it is. But, as you hope to be saved, don't tell me there's any fear of our failing in — in the object of this voyage."

The other returned no immediate answer, and he went on almost in a whisper.

"I talked it all over with Captain Dove — he seems a capable person — and he's confident of success. The man Moreno who has the plans is also on board. Dove's crew, and those I recruited among mine on the *Calixte*, are the right sort for such work. I don't think there should be any doubt about the result

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"But you're keeping some secret from me, Slyne — and I've been quite open with you!"

Slyne's savage scowl gave place again to a mocking, malevolent smile. What he had just heard meant that all his most cherished plans had miscarried at the last moment, but he was already recovering from the shock of their downfall. This was not the first occasion by many on which that had happened, and he was not wont to waste time in futile repining. Heretofore it had always paid him to begin rebuilding at once, and — there was still some chance of saving the situation. But, meantime, Eustace Gildersleeve, the supposedly astute, prosperous financier who had so very grossly deceived him — him, of all people! — must suffer even as he had suffered at the first shock. He resumed his mask of polished indifference, spoke in a suavely conversational tone.

"It's very good of you, Gildersleeve, to have been so open with me. And I feel glad — most heartily glad, believe me — that I can reciprocate, even at this late date. You have my sincere sympathy in your most unpleasant predicament, and I feel sure you'll be no less sorry for me when I tell you — How much money did you say you had saved from the wreck? — besides those securities you beguiled that fool Aylwin into giving you back. It was

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rather lucky for you, by the way, that he put himself out of evidence when he did! "

Eustace Gildersleeve had leaned forward, was glaring at him without a word, in direst suspense, but Jasper Slyne's half-closed eyes, meeting his most indifferently, seemed to demand a reply to the question. And the weaker will gave way.

"Not more than a thousand dollars at the outside," he answered, halving the real amount, by sheer, mechanical instinct. "And — the securities aren't negotiable now. It wouldn't be — safe. You don't seem to realize in the least how hard-pressed I am and what shifts I've been reduced to. Even my insurance on the *Calixte* must go to meet the mortgage I gave on her. And my sister had to sell her house to help me keep my feet till I can realize. I'm absolutely destitute now."

"But you've got a thousand dollars in hand," said Slyne, with a great air of surprise. "You're well off! Look how I'm left — now that the game's up."

He pulled from a pocket in his immaculate yacht-ing-coat a very thin note-case, and carefully displayed its contents — perhaps a hundred dollars in all.

"If you had only been honest with me," he remarked, "I would have been much less lavish with my hard cash. I got five thousand for those polo-ponies of Ingersoll's, — and paid it away at cards. Now, that's all I'm worth in the world."

CHAPTER IX

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

EUSTACE GILDERSLEEVE tried to rise to his feet, but he could not. A perfect palsy of passion had gripped him. He was trembling from head to foot. His face was strangely distorted. His lips moved, soundlessly. And Jasper Slyne sat watching him, satisfied. For Eustace Gildersleeve had very grossly deceived him.

Saleh Harez had sat perfectly still, listening critically to all that passed, while they had been speaking. In the intensity of their feelings they had forgotten her presence. She rose and set a glass of water before Gildersleeve. He took it up without a word and drank it off, his teeth chattering against the rim. It served to revive him. He lay quietly back in his chair for a time, and seemed to be thinking.

"I don't understand," he muttered exhaustedly, and turned again to Slyne. "You've sunk a fortune in this scheme as well as I," he said, almost distracted, not knowing what to believe, "and I — I — I understood you had still some millions behind your back."

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Slyne smiled again, most unpleasantly.

"In a case of diamond cut diamond," he answered, "the sharper wins. If you feel it will do you any good, you may call me the sharper in this case."

"The fact of the matter is," he went on, affably patronizing now he had scored his point, "that you've always been a good deal out of your depth in my company, Gildersleeve. Up to now you've labored under the pleasing delusion that you're too clever for me, but I don't mind telling you, in return for your own tardy frankness, that you have been much mistaken. I've come out of the game with just about as much as I put into it, while you —" He waved his empty hands in expressive pantomime.

"You mean to infer that you're an impostor — a common swindler?" asked Eustace Gildersleeve in a hopeless monotone.

"Call me a gentleman-adventurer in the realm of finance," Jasper Slyne suggested. "I'm much less common than such unscrupulous rascals as yourself, Gildersleeve, and you know that without my telling you." He was in a complacent humor now, much inclined to make a jest of the past which had cost him nothing.

But his confederate was in no such mirthful mood. Eustace Gildersleeve was recalling, with painful distinctness, how he himself, on the strength of a few

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seemingly satisfactory inquiries, had first stood sponsor, among the financially elect of New York, for this self-confessed wolf in sheep's clothing; how he had been lured, step by step, into that most promising scheme which was to have doubled his sadly shrunken capital, which had culminated — thus; and, worst of all, how his credulous folly, as he called it in his own mind, had carried him far across the border, so narrow in many instances as to be almost invisible, that stands between 'smart business' and — crime.

He had been outwitted at every turn, by one whom he in his heart had despised for a fool! He was willing to believe the worst now, but he still wanted details.

"I hold President Casado's receipts for close on thirty millions," he said, "half of it my money, the other half yours. He cabled me before I sent mine on that you had already paid into the Banco de Nicazuela your share of our joint loan to him. I wired the manager of the bank, a man Waples, and he confirmed that statement. The papers next day reported that a big consignment of specie had just arrived there from New York. How do you account for these facts?"

Slyne smiled, superciliously.

"Casado and I are old friends," he returned. "We've been planning this little coup for some time

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past. He runs the republic pretty well single-handed, and Waples wouldn't be in the Banco de Nicazuela if he weren't under Casado's thumb. You may be sure that Waples had orders not to break the seals of the specie-boxes I sent him. When he does he won't be overwhelmed with surprise at what he finds in them. And he, of course, worked the news-agency.

"If Casado had only kept faith with me, you wouldn't be here — you'd no doubt be under lock and key in New York, awaiting your trial on the charge of having embezzled trust funds — and I wouldn't be telling you these state secrets. But, like yourself, he's been laboring under the pleasing delusion that he's too clever for me, and, having laid hands on the plunder while I delayed a few days in order to marry your ward and so make sure of the extra four millions that should have meant to me, he's made up his mind that he can dispense with me now and annex my share. So that, after all, I must throw in my lot with you.

"You've acted very crookedly with me, Gildersleeve," he said severely, "but I'm willing to forget that if you'll run straight for the future. Our only chance now lies in working together. And I'll wash my hands of the whole business, here and now, unless —"

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"But I have Casado's written promise, endorsed by his Minister of Finance, to pay cent per cent on the money — the whole thirty millions — this month, when he gets the big German loan his agent in Berlin has been negotiating," Eustace Gildersleeve interrupted despairingly. "Crosschild's manager in New York told me he knew for certain it would still go through, as soon as the Portuguese trouble's settled. If the President fails to pay me in person on the due date, and — if we can't frighten him into doing so, I — I'll appeal to Washington."

"Oh, no, you won't," Slyne retorted. "It wouldn't suit any of us — and you least of all — to give the show away to old Uncle Sam. We can't afford, you and I, to send our dirty linen to Washington. Just bear that in mind — will you, Gildersleeve? If you try any such trick, I'll set the courts on the track of those vanished trust funds."

Eustace Gildersleeve squirmed in his seat, and Slyne surveyed him triumphantly. It pleased the scoundrel to prove that he held the whip-hand over his too cunning accomplice.

"You've got all the papers with you?" he demanded, and the elder man nodded sullenly. "And you've got cash enough to go on with. We must keep Dove sweet, you see, till we find out how the land lies. And once Saleh gets the plans of that

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place from Moreno —" He gazed reflectively across at the girl on the couch, and she returned his glance silently.

"You mustn't lose any more time, Saleh," he said in a reproving tone. "Get him on a short string at once — you can, quite easily, if you like — and find out what we want to know. We'll make it well worth your while."

"Leave my part to me," she answered indifferently.

"We'll make it well worth your while," Slyne repeated, and turned toward Gildersleeve again.

"It's a very good thing for you," he said, "that I got on board, in spite of the trick you tried to play me, before the *Olive Branch* sailed. For I'm going to get our money out of Casado. And without me you might just as well have made up your mind to put up with the loss of it. For you must admit that I've supplied the brains in our partnership" — He chuckled reminiscently as Gildersleeve glowered at him — "and it's by brains, not bluff, that we'll circumvent Casado."

"Then, after all expenses are paid," he continued, "we'll set aside sufficient to meet your ward's claim on you. And whatever balance we may have on hand will be equally divided between you and me. We'll go for our thirty millions, of course, but we'll take what we can get — whether it's more or less."

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Then I'll marry Eileen — since you won't have me, Saleh, you foolish girl!" He looked languishingly over at her. "What a pair we'd make, you and I, with my brains and your beauty to bank on!" he sighed soulfully. "There's nothing we couldn't accomplish together — I'd have you on a real throne before you could think, if you'd only say the word. How'd you like to be Queen of Nicazuela, eh, Saleh?"

"I'd rather beg in the gutter, without you," she answered, with the most perfect sang-froid, and Jasper Slyne laughed as though she had paid him a compliment.

"Then I'll marry Eileen Saxilby," he asserted again, "and she shall wear the crown diamonds!"

"You seem to be pretty sure that we'll get — our money back," Gildersleeve broke in, glancing askance at the reckless rascal who had so lightly disposed of the grave issues still to be settled.

"Oh, as to that," answered Slyne, still laughing, "I don't mind telling you, now that we've cleared off old scores — you tricked me very cleverly, Gildersleeve, but you must confess that I'm not the only one who's been hoodwinked — I don't mind telling you that, with a team like ours, it's odds against Fermín Casado. We'll get our good money back from him, though not because of any paper promise of his, believe me! But we'll get it back, and with

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interest,— or I'll give Eileen up. And I wouldn't do that for twice the amount. It's clearly understood that, if we're successful, she marries me, eh? "

"She may marry whom she pleases, once I've recovered my feet," returned Eustace Gildersleeve gloomily, and Slyne, quite satisfied with that assurance, continued, no less cheerfully.

"So that I've got a pretty big stake in the business, you see, and I'll undertake that my side won't come out losers. I think I can promise you that we'll find means to make Casado dole out the doubloons — even although José Maria Moreno's crude little scheme should fall flat. It's really too low-class to suit me — rank robbery, neither more nor less — not the sort of thing that a gentleman would care to be mixed up in. But I've got another string to my bow, and, while we all pull together — Ah! Here's Captain Dove. Morning, Captain! How are you, after last night's symposium? We left a good many dead marines on the field of battle, eh? We must have got through at least a dozen of your champagne! "

Captain Dove eyed him, grimly enough, from the doorway, whence that individual had been regarding the trio within the cabin for some little time, unseen except by the girl.

"You seem pretty conversational!" he growled

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unamiably. "I just hope you haven't been letting your tongue wag too free. Has Saleh told you yet about the Wild Man from Borneo she fished up out of the sea last night? Where've you got him stowed away, Saleh?"

He glanced round the cabin, frowning, and the other two regarded the girl with angry suspicion as she rose and crossed quietly to the stateroom door.

She opened it and looked in. The others also could see Tommy Judson, extremely unkempt and disreputable-looking with his bandaged head, lying stretched on the sofa there, sound asleep. She shook him. He uttered a weary groan, and sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Who's that chap?" demanded Slyne with a puzzled scowl, as she turned and faced them again from the doorway.

"It doesn't much matter who he is," Dove growled, since she did not seem disposed to reply to the question. "Saleh calls him her Sleeping Beauty!"

The girl reddened, but returned no answer to the coarse gibe, and he swung about with a grunt.

"If you two will come along to the chart-room," he said, including Slyne and Gildersleeve in a peremptory nod, "and keep in mind for the future that this end of the ship's private — we'll maybe find something there that'll cool our throats. It's

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gone eight bells this good forty minutes, Slyne. I was waiting for you!"

They followed him, somewhat shamefacedly, without a word, greatly disturbed at the thought that their recent mutual disclosures might all have been overheard. But Slyne paused on the point of departure to throw a kiss to Saleh, and she smiled carelessly back at him.

The moment he had disappeared, however, she turned to Tommy with a troubled face.

"You weren't really asleep, were you?" she asked doubtfully, and he shook his head with a grin. But this almost immediately gave place to an expression as grave as hers. He had been very wide awake to each slightest detail of the strange conference which had just taken place. And he had not augured any good to himself from Captain Dove's contemptuous reference to him.

This would not have cost him more than a passing thought, but for the fact that upon him now depended whatever possibility there might still be of saving Eileen from the clutch of the scoundrelly Slyne. She was very close in his toils already and Tommy Judson was altogether at his wits' end to know how she was to be extricated. He had no illusions as to what her fate would be if he himself failed her now.

It was no time for hesitation, and he could see no recourse but to take Saleh Harez into his confidence. She had already befriended him so effectually

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ally that he thought he might safely trust her not to betray him. And some instinct told him that she would do more for him than for — Slyne, for instance.

So, without wasting a moment, since moments might well be precious, "I say, Miss Saleh," said he, "I haven't had much of a chance yet to thank you for saving my life, and — I want to thank you, with all my heart. I wish I could do something practical to prove that I'm not ungrateful to you — but instead of that I'm going to ask you to do me another good turn. I've no one else to look to, you see, and — I'm in a whole peck of trouble just now."

Her face lighted up and he felt that his instinct had not led him far astray.

"Call me Saleh, then, like everyone else does," she pouted, no more than a young girl for all her mien of a princess, "and tell me what it is you want me to do."

A colored woman, a stunted, misshapen creature, entered the cabin while she was speaking, and spread a white cloth over the table. He would have waited, but the girl told him to go on.

"Ambrizette won't repeat anything," she explained, "because she can't. She's dumb." And presently she motioned him to sit down to the meal that had been set. There were covers laid for two.

He had already plunged into a disconnected account of Eileen Saxilby's most unhappy plight. 'Am-

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brizette waited noiselessly and he talked on while he ate whatever was put before him. He was too much engrossed with his plea to notice that Saleh's eyes had grown cold and hard.

But she heard it out in silence, and, when he had finished, she asked, "What is she to you, this Eileen Saxilby?" And he answered, angrily, "What do you mean! Have I not told you that she was engaged to marry my friend Ingersoll?"

She sat looking straight into his eyes for a time, but they did not fall before hers. He felt that his plea had failed, and had no more to say. The black woman brought him a box of cigars, and he picked one out, but he did not light it. He sipped at his coffee instead, for his head was swimming, felt strangely heavy, although he had drunk nothing stronger than water.

Saleh seemed very far away. . . . She was still looking into his eyes, but from the other side of a mile-wide chasm. . . . She crossed it, instantly, and, leaning over him, her lips moved. . . . A grief-stricken voice cried dimly, and once more from a great distance, "That old devil's done for you, after all!"

The thud-thud-thud of the screw propeller almost immediately underneath him slowed down and stopped. Darkness descended upon him. And then he felt warm rain on his fevered face.

CHAPTER X

THE ANSWER AMBRIZETTE BROUGHT

TOMMY felt warm rain on his fevered face, and moved his head a little, with a low moan. A cool breath fanned his wet forehead.

He looked laboriously up into the darkness through which he had last seen Saleh, weeping. But she was no longer there. A single star, very high overhead, was all he could now discern, though he was still conscious of falling tears.

The ship seemed to be at rest, but that it rose and sank on the swell with a slow, regular swing that was very soothing. He drowsed away again for a time, and woke again, to the certainty that he was neither dead nor dying as he had supposed. On the contrary, his strength was returning rapidly, in the open air. With a sudden effort he raised himself on one elbow. And presently fell back again, struck all of a heap.

He was no longer on board the *Olive Branch*, but lying in the stern-sheets of a small open boat, alone, on an empty ocean. A cold, white moon had

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emerged from behind the loose, low-lying cloud from which a few rain-drops had fallen on him as it traversed the void above. That and the twinkling stars alone were visible, look where he would.

He bit at one of his thumbs to assure himself that he was really awake, and wrung his hand, for the test had hurt. Then he struggled into a sitting posture, and stayed in that for some time, his chin on his chest, his knees clasped tight in both arms, striving after some sane explanation of his most astounding predicament. But he could educe none plausible enough to pass muster.

He turned over on to his knees and peered about him, in search of some clue. Nor had he very far to seek, although that which he found only added to his confusion. It was the name carved, inside, round the elliptical stern — *Calixte s. y. New York*.

He knelt there for a full minute, fixedly studying the letters cut deep into the teak. He traced them with a trembling finger, to make quite sure. But, stare as he might, he could make neither more nor less of them. He shook his head, most forlornly, and, facing about, crept shakily forward to find out what gear there might be on board, and frighten away the dumb, unfriendly ghosts of those men who had foundered with the ill-fated *Calixte*. It was very eerie there alone with them on the face of the waters.

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There were oars and a mast, he could see, and a sail lay huddled under the midship thwarts. He pulled that toward him, and so uncovered a face . . . a girl's face, very fair in the moonlight which looked up into his wide, bewildered eyes with a faint, amused, sleepy smile. For an instant he thought he was dreaming.

And, while his lips were still shaping themselves to pronounce her name, she had brushed the sail aside and sat up, all encased in an oilskin coat, her wealth of hair tucked away under a sou'-wester, no less alluring in that strange guise than she had seemed in her silken robe and the sunshine of yesterday.

"I must have fallen asleep," she said, in a voice most comfortably matter-of-fact, "although I didn't intend to. I lay down just for a little, and—I hadn't closed my eyes since we left New York. How do you feel now, Tommy? More like yourself?"

"My head's in a hopeless muddle," replied Tommy Judson, hoarsely, amazed beyond all expression. "I don't understand. . . ."

"That's not to be wondered at," she assured him soothingly. "The Old Man doctored your food, you know—he's up to all sorts of poisonous dodges—and you've been all but across the line."

"But where's the *Olive Branch*? How do we come to be here?" he demanded, in a husky whis-

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per, looking disconsolately about him. The silver sheen of the sea was hurting his eyes.

"Lie back and make yourself comfortable," Saleh advised. "You don't look any too brisk yet. And I'll tell you how it all happened, to pass the time."

She rose, and, leaning over the thwart between them, thrust him gently backward. He yielded to her, and lay limply down again in the stern-sheets. He felt weak and ill — which was not unnatural, after all he had undergone in addition to the dire effects of the potent drug Captain Dove had administered to him. But he had no time to think of himself: he was consumed by a burning anxiety as to Eileen Saxilby's welfare without him.

"Where's the *Olive Branch*?" he insisted peremptorily. "How in heaven's name do we come to be here — you and I — in this boat, with the *Calixte's* name on it!"

"Listen," Saleh commanded, "and let me talk. It's simple enough, once you hear what happened after you fell to the Old Man's medicine.

"To begin with, Jasper Slyne recognized you. He recollected after he left us, that he had seen you with your friend Ingersoll, and then with that Saxilby girl, at some dance in New York. It's a good thing he did recognize you — or you'd have got a dose strong enough to finish you right away.

"But he and Gildersleeve wanted to find out all you

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could tell them first — seeing you there, they thought that Ingersoll as well might be on their track — and, to do that, they had to get you away from me. So the Old Man mixed enough of some drug in the curry — he knows I never touch that — to stretch you for the time being, and, very soon after you keeled over, he came aft with a couple of deck hands, to carry you off — said you must be slipped overside at once, while the ship was stopped. She had hove to again, with something wrong in the engine-room.

“By that time, though, I had got my wits back, and I thought you mightn’t be quite as dead as you looked — you did really look stone-dead, you know, and you were as cold as a corpse. The Old Man’s an artist with those blue bottles of his!

“Anyhow, I had you lying in state on the cabin table, with the Stars and Stripes spread over you, and I told him there was no such tearing hurry. I told him that I intended to keep you there till next morning — and he’d be welcome to bury you then, if he wanted to.

“He talked pretty big and fierce to me, but I wouldn’t budge. And he didn’t dare to drive me too hard, with Rube Yoxall still close at hand. So, in the end, he went off to tell the others they’d get you all in good time, and what he’d do to you himself after they were through with their inquisition.

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Jasper Slyne and he got soused to the scuppers, drinking a slow death to you — it was you who gave Jasper a sore head with a hammer or something the night we sailed, wasn't it?

"I knew, of course, that when they'd sobered up again they'd be in no temper to stand any more interference from me, and that you'd be feeding the fishes very soon after. And I fetched Rube Yoxall along to help me. He wouldn't, at first, but — I can manage Rube, too.

"He got you to swallow some brandy, which showed that you weren't beyond recall, but, do what we might, you wouldn't open your eyes: and you've kept them shut till now. I had hard work to get him to set us afloat, but he did that, too, in the end — for me. This is the boat that we picked Eustace Gildersleeve and his people up in after they deserted the yacht. Rube took it on board at the time — which was lucky for us! It was my only chance, you see, to get you out of the Old Man's clutches. He's a good sort, Rube! far too good to thrive on the *Olive Branch*.

"She's been out of sight for close on a couple of hours. They got the engines going again very soon after we had lowered you over the stern, and no one noticed that they had left anything behind. But she's at half-speed still — and none so far away. So we'll make sail now, if you feel fit to lend me a

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hand. When Captain Dove finds out that I've deserted there'll be the devil to pay!"

She got to her feet and gazed about her with keen, apprehensive eyes: although it was not for herself that she feared. But the heaving world of water which hemmed them in was empty still. And Tommy Judson could almost have cried aloud as he, too, looked in vain for any sign of that ill-omened craft on board which Eileen Saxilby was in such peril. He would have given ten years of his life to be back on the *Olive Branch*, but as things had fallen out, it would have been futile to board her again even had that been possible, and it would have been base ingratitude to repine over Saleh's precipitate action on his behalf, since to that he undoubtedly owed all the years of life left him. He had no illusions as to what would have happened had not she befriended him so effectually. He had no illusions either as to what would happen to Eileen if he could not find means somehow to save her. But how?

He could have cried aloud in his stress of mind, but restrained himself with a great effort and got up to help Saleh. Together they stepped the mast, set the lugsail, and having made all fast forward, crept aft together. What breeze there was came from east of north, and was colder now. A thin haze had overspread the moon.

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Tommy took the tiller, as a matter of course, and Saleh snuggled close up to him, with a little laugh of contentment. But he sat very quiet in his place, looking straight ahead, at the swelling, sinking hollow and hill of the gray, mysterious sea.

"I wish we had got Eileen Saxilby away with us, Saleh," said he after a long interval, and Saleh stared intently at him for a time.

"Why?" she asked, in a low voice, and he turned toward her.

"I don't think you need ask me that!" said he, in a tone of surprise.

"I couldn't possibly have managed it," she told him. "I'd have tried — perhaps — but for the old woman, Gildersleeve's sister. I sent her a message from you, though, — and I asked Rube Yoxall to do anything he could for her."

"What message?"

"I cut a curl from your hair while you were unconscious, and got Ambrizette to give it to her without the old woman seeing."

"She wouldn't know where it came from or what it meant," Tommy Judson asserted, and the faint, horseshoe-shaped frown on Saleh's forehead was smoothed away.

"Women aren't so clever as men," she returned, mocking him with a low, light laugh, "but — she sent her answer back."

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"What answer?" he urged impatiently, and she drew from within the breast of her coat a long lock of amber hair.

Tommy took it from her, tenderly.

"Poor little girl!" said he, and the words were very compassionate. "That was a kind thought of yours, Saleh. I wish I could thank you better for all you've done."

"You may thank Ambrizette for that anyhow," she answered indifferently, and looked on, somber-eyed, while he tucked the lock of hair carefully away in a pocket. But he did not observe her expression. He was looking straight ahead again, his mind occupied with the almost incredible incidents of that short past which had slipped away since Ingersoll and he had set forth from his studio in Twenty-third Street. And there was also the future, dark, threatening, inchoate, to be faced. With the present, shaping itself, he was not concerned at all.

"What are Slyne and Dove and Gildersleeve going to do down in Nicazuela?" he asked after some reflection, and she drew closer again. She had edged a little away from him.

"You heard what was said in the cabin," she pointed out: "how Jasper Slyne tricked Gildersleeve into lending all he had — and more — to Casado, the President — and got tricked himself in return, by

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both Gildersleeve and Casado. They're going to get that money back now."

"But how? Tell me all about it, Saleh. I'd give a good deal to know exactly what their plans are."

"I will, if you'll promise that all you've heard and all I may tell you shall be a secret between us. You must do that, for I've trusted you, and — you can't go back on me now."

"I won't go back on you, Saleh," said Tommy Judson, and with that simple assurance she was content.

"All about it's a good long story," she began, "and I'd better tell you first how Captain Dove and I and the *Olive Branch* come to be mixed up in it."

She took thought for a moment or two, and then: "Have you ever heard of the *Mousmé*, Tommy? — and Butcher Brown?" she asked in a timid tone.

"I have," he answered, recalling the terrible tale of that sea-tragedy which had made these names infamous throughout the civilized world.

"The *Mousmé*'s the *Olive Branch* now," she said, "and — Butcher Brown's, Captain Dove."

Tommy Judson wriggled uncomfortably in his seat.

"Were you on board then?" he demanded, his voice very harsh in spite of himself, and she shivered.

"I've been on board ever since she was built, and

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on his old ship before. I was only a child then, and — that day — he had me locked below — in my room."

Tommy said nothing more, since he could say nothing that would have helped her, and after a pause she went on again.

"He's changed names two or three times since then, and kept mostly on the other side of the world. But we were on the Carribean coast for a time as the *Reconquista*."

Tommy nodded. He had heard of the *Reconquista*, also, among his sea-faring friends, and nothing at all to her credit. He could scarcely conceive, indeed, that the young girl sitting beside him had lived through such scenes as must have been common on board that notorious craft.

"Anyhow," she continued, "we haven't been in New York for I don't know how many years, and the Old Man's been so unlucky of late that he thought he'd risk trying there for a charter. We tied up in the East River three weeks ago, and he took me ashore with him to prospect.

"He tried about for ten days or so, among all sorts of queer people, till we met the man Moreno you saw in the cabin — José Maria Moreno. We came across him at an Italian eating-house in West Ninth Street. Captain Dove soon discovered that he had some get-rich-quick scheme in his head, and

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turned him over to me, to find out whether there might be anything in it for us. That's my share of the work, Tommy."

She glanced at him in a diffident fashion and saw a shadow come over his face, but his eyes were fixed on the leech of the sail and he made no remark.

"This Moreno's a Nicazuelan, and had been a bosom friend of the President's. He had helped Casado in all sorts of dirty work, and got nothing for his pains. And in the end Casado turned him out of the country, with empty pockets — which of course made him very sore.

"However, he didn't sit down in despair. He made his way to New York, with a plan of the President's seaside house in his pocket — and a private mark at the place where Casado's got all his resources stored till he sees his opportunity to slip off to Europe. He's been plundering the republic for years and must have a good many millions hidden away there. With a fast steamer, Moreno said, and fifty good men for a landing-party, we could loot the lot.

"That was just the sort of chance Captain Dove was on the look-out for, but by then he hadn't cash enough left to buy even oil for his engines. They needed a thorough overhaul, too, and the ship's bunkers were almost empty. When I told him what I had found out he just cursed me.

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"But, by-and-bye, he went off up-town to see if he couldn't find money somehow. He had to have some, anyhow, for the men hadn't been paid for some time and he was afraid they would break ashore — which might have meant ruin to him.

"Late that night he brought Jasper Slyne on board. He had met Slyne on Broadway, got up like a millionaire, and they had known each other in some other part of the world. I got Moreno to tell them his scheme himself, and Slyne said at once that he'd find the money to carry it out.

"He came back next day with Gildersleeve, and, after a lot of argument, the four of them formed a syndicate to plunder Casado. Captain Dove told Gildersleeve that Slyne had already paid in his share of the preliminary expenses, and Gildersleeve gave him a good round sum to go on with. Whatever more he might need they agreed to provide. Moreno's to pay his proportion of the expenses out of his profits.

"The *Olive Branch* isn't a cheap ship to charter — she isn't a cheap ship to keep in commission either, for that matter — but they couldn't have found anywhere one better suited to their purpose. You know the sort of business she's been in ever since she was launched. She was built for that, and fitted either to fight or to run. You know who Dove is, and what sort of crew he carries. They're all his

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own kind but Rube Yoxall, and Rube wouldn't be on board but for me. I got him to sign on at Cape Town, last time we called there, because of some mix-up he had had with the police.

"Well, with Gildersleeve's money we coaled up and took in stores, and the men were paid. There was some tinkering done in the engine-room, too, but it hasn't helped matters much. And we'd have sailed two or three days before we did but that Slyne and Gildersleeve kept us waiting. I suppose Jasper Slyne wanted to marry that Saxilby girl and make sure of her money at least before he went any farther. But Gildersleeve had got rid of it already, and, when Slyne pushed him too hard, he made up his mind to give him the slip altogether.

"He told Captain Dove that the *Olive Branch* was to put to sea without either of them, and that they would both follow on the *Calixte*. Then the *Calixte* was to be fired and scuttled — I found that out too late — and we were to pick them up from their boat along with whatever men of their own crew they could induce to join in. The rest were to sink with the burning ship, and — they actually stove all the other boats in before they came away. Gildersleeve brought his skipper, both mates, two of the engineers, and nine or ten other blackguards on board with him. The rest sank with the ship. It would have been easy to let them off with their lives,

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but — he wanted to make sure of their silence.”

Her voice was low and sorrowful. She looked overside at the oily swirl of the sea as a swell ran past, and shivered again. The moon was sinking. The haze had thickened. The wind was lighter and still more cold.

“But Slyne didn’t sail on the *Calixte*?” said Tommy interrogatively.

“No, he sailed with us after all. He came tearing down to the dock in a coupé, at the last moment. He was hopping mad, what with his broken head and the news that the Old Man gave him, for it was just by luck that he hadn’t found us gone and himself left stranded. By Gildersleeve’s orders we were to have sailed at noon, but Moreno had gone ashore and didn’t come back on board till after three in the morning. So we didn’t get away till nearly four, and the Old Man was almost as mad as Slyne over everything. But after they had cracked a bottle or two they got better tempered, thinking of the scare Gildersleeve would get when they saw him.

“They were both in their bunks, blind, though, by the time we sighted the blue-light Gildersleeve’s boat was burning. I was on the bridge then, with Rube, and saw the whole thing. There was only the one boat, and no other trace left of the *Calixte*. I got Rube to take a turn or two back and forward before we held away on our course again, but it was

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no use. She must have foundered shortly after they left her.

"There was still something wrong in our engine-room, and we'd been steaming dead-slow since noon, so that we were a bit late. They had been adrift for a good many hours, and it was a chance of theirs that we turned up then. The wind and sea had risen enough to scare them out of their wits."

Tommy groaned inwardly as he thought of Eileen in such circumstances.

"That was just after we had struck you — about twenty minutes after. I thought you must be the *Calixte's* people, but, when Rube Yoxall fished you on board, I saw *Fulmar* on your guernsey, and there seemed to be no one else to fish for. So I carried you aft to my own cabin, and left you there, out of Captain Dove's way, till after we had picked them up. You know all that's happened since he found you there when he came along after breakfast next morning, like a bear with a sore head."

She ceased, and turned to him with a tired little smile. She would have nestled up to him, but he was not looking her way. His eyes were still fixed on the leech of the sail, expressionless. He had learned all he needed to know, and was brooding over the almost unbelievable tale she had told him. And she, seeing him so absorbed, drew back again, very proudly.

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It was very dark and desolate there in the midst of space, shut off from the living world. A thin, clammy sea-mist, born of the earliest haze, was whipping across the white sail and threatened to set into a fog. A dull depression, a heavy sense of loss and discouragement, had almost overwhelmed Tommy Judson. The consciousness of his own insignificance, of the poverty of his own resources in such a strange maze of trouble, was weighing him down.

"I'll be hanged if I know what we're going to do, once we get ashore," he said, vexedly giving voice to his thoughts. And Saleh laid a comforting hand on his arm.

"We're going to make our fortunes," she answered gaily, "you and I. We're going to beat the Old Man, and Slyne, and Gildersleeve at their own game. You heard me warn them that they couldn't get on without me? I wasn't bluffing. I've got all Moreno's plans here with me"—She laid a hand on her bosom—"and he's no more use to them, now I've left them in the lurch: as I told them I would if they tried any more tricks behind my back.

"And then"—her voice faltered a little, the glad assurance died out of it—"and then—you'll go back to New York, with that Saxilby girl."

But Tommy did not at once vouchsafe her any reply. He was swiftly considering the possibilities opened up by her most astounding statement. Hope;

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almost dead, had sprung again in his heart. It seemed to him that, with her to help him, he might save Eileen Saxilby yet. He must find the money, somehow, to get down to Nicazuela, by train or steamer, ahead of the *Olive Branch*. And then —

"Is old Dove any relation of yours?" he asked, after a long silence.

"No," said Saleh simply. "I'm only his property."

"His *what*?" Tommy Judson demanded, doubting the evidence of his own ears.

"His property," she repeated patiently. "I belong to him — or at least I did till a little while ago. I belong to nobody now."

Tommy screwed up his face in annoyance. The tone of her last remark had hurt him more than a little.

"How d'you mean his property?" he inquired, having first satisfied himself that she was quite serious.

"Don't you know what property is?" she retorted, faintly amused. "Captain Dove bought me — when I was a little child. He owns me — I'm his. Or at least I was until now."

"Who sold you to him?"

"I don't know. I was too young then to understand. But it was a nigger of some sort. He sold

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me to Captain Dove. And the Old Man s often told me I cost quite a lot."

"But don't you know who you are?—who your parents were?—where you come from? Have you no remembrance of your own father and mother?—or any home?"

She moved uneasily. Her features, very dimly visible through the ever thickening mist, grew suddenly grave. When she spoke again it was with an effort, as one who recalls matters almost faded from memory.

"Sometimes I dream of faces—that seem familiar and of queer scenes that must have been part of my life. White men, with swords, in ragged uniforms, and big brown ones, with wicked eyes and long thin guns, glaring down at us over a high wall; and always smoke and fire—and fighting—and the smell of powder. But never any woman.

"I sometimes dream of moutains—great, dark—and hot sand-hills where the *suddra* grew, and camp-fires, and the smell of food, and camels squealing. Sometimes of a white village on the sea-shore, with narrow, crooked lanes for streets, and little flat-roofed houses, and goats bleating for their kid. And—then comes Captain Dove: but he's no dream!"

Her low voice died away, and she sat staring with unseeing eyes into the night, as vague and nebulous

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as her own past. Tommy said nothing more. The world seemed suddenly to have become unreal and unsubstantial. And they sailed on, speechless, without recourse, the sport of circumstance.

The dark before the dawn was turning to dull gray in the dense fog that had been growing gradually, hour by hour, and they knew day was near. The wind was almost dead, and the damp sail was flapping uselessly against the mast when there came to their hearing, faint and far away, a slow and regular *clack-clack-clack-clack*.

Saleh sat upright, stiffly, and, setting a hand to one cold, pink ear, listened, with bated breath.

"A sailing-ship!" she whispered, "and the morning watch at the pumps. She can't be far."

Tommy Judson let go the halliards, and the sail came down by the run. He had come out of dream-land, to the workaday world. The mast was unstepped in a twinkling. With trembling hands he thrust a couple of pairs of thole-pins home and pulled out a pair of the heavy sweeps stowed under the thwarts.

"I'll take one," said Saleh peremptorily, and, shifting a pair of the pins, sat down in her place.

They could see nothing beyond the dripping blades of their oars, and steered through the smother blind, by the sound, which was growing louder. They had started with a quick, even stroke, of a strength suf-

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ficient to carry them over the long, smooth swell at a steady speed, and their eagerness lent them energy to maintain it. They were almost within hailing distance of the ship from which the sound came, when from far astern resounded a low, hoarse, throbbing bellow, like that of some great sea-creature in sore distress.

Saleh held her hand for a moment. "That's the *Olive Branch*," she asserted fearfully. "I know her call. The Old Man's after us!"

She dipped her oar again, and "Give way!" she said, her eyes very anxious.

They had been pulling their hardest for five minutes more, minutes which seemed like hours, before Tommy Judson, always glancing ahead, gave the welcome word, "Way enough!" and they suddenly surged alongside a vessel which had risen out of the mist in an instant. She was lying stern on to them, and with a stiff list to starboard. From the cant of her poop it appeared that she must also be deep by the head.

"Derelict!" said Saleh, in a most disconsolate voice. "We won't have much of a chance if the *Olive Branch* sights her." But Tommy Judson made no remark at all. He was staring stupidly at a waterlogged dinghy lying afloat at the end of a painter made fast to her rail. They bumped into it, and stopped there.

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No one on board seemed to have observed their approach. The slow *clack-clack clack-clack* of the pumps went endlessly on.

Tommy pulled his oar inboard, and rose from his thwart. He stood silent there for a moment, his knees shaking under him, while Saleh sat looking up at him in helpless surprise. Then he moistened his dry lips with his tongue and gave utterance to a sharp, tense cry: "*Calixte*, ahoy!"

Hoarse shouts of surprise answered him. A grimy figure came staggering down the sloping deck through the fog with a glad, "Ahoy, there!" It made fast the rope he hurriedly threw it, and held out an eager hand to help him up the side. Its eyes were rivetted on him as he turned to assist Saleh. Other figures flocked forward in haste, and the first disappeared up the deck again with a howl of mingled delight and amazement.

"Misther Ingersoll!" it cried, very vehemently. "Misther Ingersoll! Misther Ingersoll! Here's the ghost of your friend Misther Judkins!"

CHAPTER XI

THE DIPLOMACY OF THE IRON HAND

FERMIN CASADO, President of Nicazuela sometimes laughingly referred to, at Washington and among European cabinets, as of the Iron Hand — was pacing up and down the sumptuous library within his palace at Caragua, hands clasped behind him, chin on chest, his brows bent in a calculating frown. A man of rather more than medium height and squarely muscular in build, was this firebrand of the firebrands who are always spreading sparks about the powder-magazine of politics in South America. His face was of an intellectual type. A black beard and moustache concealed his dogged mouth and jaw. His eyes expressed the habit of command, expected prompt obedience.

The sun was setting, and the ripple of the wide inland sea which lapped the terrace-wall beyond the windows was of a blood-red tinge. The room reflected it. Fermín Casado's thoughts were of that tint.

"I wish I could afford to stay — and fight them," he said to himself in a harsh whisper.

"But — that would mean beggary for me — and

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I'm not going to turn back now. I've made my pile — as those accursed Yankees say. It would be idle folly to expend it on a month's excitement — a week's, perhaps — and then pay an indemnity to Portugal.

"No, that would never do. I must stick to my purpose. Paris will make up for it all. I'll go to Berlin, too, and flaunt my millions in the faces of those smug financiers! That will be better policy than rotting here till I die of old age and empty pockets. I've had my day of power — I've made it pay me. I must be diplomatic now. I must restrain myself."

He crossed to his desk, and touched an electric bell. A footman in rich livery appeared at the door.

"My compliments to the Minister of Finance," said His Excellency, "and I wish to see him, at once."

When that individual was shown in, a very dapper young man of the modern South American type, his frock-coat of a rakish cut, his patent-leather shoes scintillant, he found the President at an open window, engaged in light conversation with someone on the terrace below. He coughed, discreetly, and awaited his patron's pleasure. For the Señor Doctor Don Enrique Vidal owed all his advancement in life to Fermín Casado, was one of His Excellency's most servile creatures.

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"Ah, Vidal!" said that great man affably, turning away from the window with a last wave of the hand, a somewhat more human smile on his face than was usually to be seen there, "I wanted to tell you that I'm going down to the coast to-night, to oversee our defenses.

"The Portuguese admiral's ultimatum — but there it is, on my desk. Read it for yourself. He says that, unless we immediately comply with all his demands, he'll blockade us and shell the Port. I have made up my mind to ignore him entirely — send him no answer at all — and in the meantime make ready to meet force with force. We of Nicazuela are bankrupt in all save honor, Vidal. We have no money with which to fight those who so incessantly seek to molest us, but we can at least spend our blood in defense of our hearths and homes. We defy Portugal! We defy both Europe and the United States! We defy the world!"

His voice had risen. He shook his clenched fist at the empty air, stamped on the thick Turkey carpet. He was so much in earnest, indeed, that he almost forgot for the moment his real intention. Recalling that, he became calm and impassive again. His Minister of Finance was regarding him with curious attention.

The Señor Doctor Don Enrique Vidal was no fool. He was, on the contrary, a very artful young

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man. He had modeled his own walk and conduct in life, on a minor scale, by his patron's. And, like his patron, his ambition was unbounded. His present aim and object was to step into his patron's shoes.

Intimate with the President as he had been, he had gauged with sufficient accuracy Casado's immediate intention — which was to leave in the lurch the country he had so successfully plundered, betake himself abroad with his ill-gotten gains, and let who would settle the long legacy of troubles internal, embroilments abroad, the sole bequest it would ever receive from him. And therein the younger man saw his own opportunity. From his present humble and harrassing post he meant to rise, on the wave of popular indignation which such proceedings could not but call up, to the exalted position the other was now about to vacate.

The embarrassed financial affairs of the Republic he had, of course, at his finger-ends. He it was who had almost succeeded in floating the German loan which had been postponed in consequence of the current difficulty with Portugal. Fermín Casado safely removed, an exile for life from Nicazuela because of the peculations from the public purse, he, President Vidal, would very soon settle or shelve the Portuguese question. He would make use of a device Casado had always disdained to employ, hide under a velvet glove a hand to the full as ruthless as his

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predecessor's. He would obtain from the Germans those millions they had so opportunely withheld, and then —

"Our blood at least is our own to spend!" he replied as Casado came to a pause, and his flashing eyes, his heroic tone, were a very fair imitation of the President's.

"I leave Caragua to-night, Vidal," His Excellency continued. "My work for our country's welfare must henceforth be done with the sword. You I count on to toil with the pen for the common good. I — I appoint you my deputy, with full power in my place."

The Señor Doctor Don Enrique Vidal bowed submissively — and resolved that he would not idle away any such golden opportunity. It seemed to him that his own star was already in the ascendant, even as his arrogant patron's would very shortly suffer eclipse.

"I am Your Excellency's most humble servant," he answered, and then passed on to another matter, which, also, he hoped to turn to his own advantage.

"By the by, I've just had a wire from Waples, the bank-manager, at the Port," he said, "to ask what he shall do about those promissory notes you signed for the loan Slyne obtained for you from that Yankee capitalist, Gil — Gil — The name, to me is unpronounceable."

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"Gildersleeve," supplemented His Excellency with urbane assurance. He could speak good French and English as well as his native Spanish, and was not a little proud of his linguistic attainments. "Gildersleeve, my good Vidal,—and Slyne — and Waples. Names execrable as the creatures who bear them! What base parasites and bloodsuckers are those foreigners who fatten on us at every turn, who prey on the very vitals of our poor country!"

His indignation was quite unfeigned, and the Minister of Finance lost no time in heaping fuel on that fire.

"The notes fall due to-morrow, you know," he observed, and Casado scowled. But he finished, undaunted, "what answer shall I send Waples?"

"That all public payments have been suspended in consequence of the unjustifiable attitude a European power has seen fit to adopt toward the Republic of Nicazuela," the President answered grandiloquently, on a sudden inspiration. "Let this Gildersleeve refer the matter to his own government. Over such a sum as the notes represent, on paper, those windbags at Washington might very well pick a quarrel with the Portuguese. But, whether or no, we have neither the means nor the inclination to meet them at present. Make that quite clear. We of Nicazuela are bankrupt in all save honor."

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"You may perhaps see this Waples yourself, when you reach the Port," suggested Vidal.

"Send him word that my life-guards have orders to shoot him at sight," snapped His Excellency. "I have no time to waste on futilities at such a crisis! I must use the strongest measures to overcome it. I shall stamp out any who trouble me inopportunately. Send Waples word to that effect, *amigo* Vidal."

"I am Your Excellency's most humble servant," the Minister of Finance repeated, and the President's face cleared. He felt that he had made smoother the path he had mapped out for himself.

"And now," he said, "you know everything. I can trust you — and you only, Vidal — with the reins of government here in the capital during my absence. There is no more to be said. Let us forget these affairs of state for a brief space, if we can. Will you dine with us, in half an hour, friend Vidal? Just as you are — We shall all be in traveling-dress. My daughter will be delighted, I know, to see you before we start."

He dismissed his shrewd subordinate with a gracious nod, and, turning to the window again, called softly to a tall, slender girl leaning gracefully against the parapet of the terrace that overhung the lake. And she came toward him, smiling, very handsome and dignified.

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He held out a hand to her, helped her in over the low window-sill, led her to the chair at his desk.

"Listen, Carmen," he said, gravely, as she seated herself. "We leave Caragua to-night for the coast, immediately after dinner. And we must travel post-haste, on horseback. We can carry no great amount of baggage, and you must pack all you need in the panniers you'll find in your room. There's a strong-box in one of them which will hold all your diamonds — so don't leave a single stone behind. Not a single stone, remember!

"You've twenty minutes to dress and do everything else in. Don't keep us waiting. Enrique Vidal dines with us, and the two Scarletts. Encourage Vidal to believe you'll be back here soon. Encourage him to confide in you, and — leave the others to me.

"You understand me, don't you, *querida*? Pardon me if I seem abrupt, but — moments are very precious. And now — off you go."

Her eyes, a little dilated, met his interrogatively. But what she saw in his masterful glance caused her to curb all the questions she would have asked. She rose, and, bowing, preceded him from the room.

A little later he reappeared from his dressing-room at the end of the same corridor. He had changed his civilian attire for a smart cavalry uniform, and looked his part as he strode, sword and

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spurs jingling on the uncarpeted flags, toward the apartment in an outer wing of the palace where his dinner-party was awaiting him. An orderly, in advance, carried a pair of mule-panniers, and served to warn the sentries, posted at every corner, of His Excellency's approach.

"Set these down under my chair," the President ordered abruptly as the man paused at the door of the dining-room to let him pass. "Good-evening, Scarlett. Well, Ulick — All ready for the road?"

He shook hands with a tall, grave-faced, soldierly-looking young man in the same uniform as he himself was wearing, but with a colonel's badges of rank on its shoulder-straps, and nodded pleasantly to another, a blushing, boyish subaltern, of fair complexion, straight, slim, square-shouldered, very evidently a brother of Colonel Scarlett's. The Señor Doctor Don Enrique Vidal, in the rear, he greeted with an effusively affectionate glance but had not time to address him before the Doña Carmen appeared in the doorway, booted and spurred as they all were except Vidal, a delight to the eye as she hurried in, skirts held high.

Casado took the head of the table — "State papers, of the most precious importance," said he aside to his colonel of guards, and pulled the panniers under his chair — and the others seated themselves. in haste, at his bidding, Vidal beside the Doña Car-

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men. They two entertained each other during the meal, Casado engaging his officers in earnest conversation. And the Minister of Finance, not too old yet to appreciate a pair of bright eyes, made the utmost of such opportunity, greatly to Ulick Scarlett's disgust.

Nor did that youth regard the Minister of Finance with any increased friendliness when, as soon as coffee was served, he himself was dismissed from table to see the life-guards paraded in the quadrangle below. But he went off none the less alertly, and had not long to wait after all, for Casado's impatience could brook no prolonged leave-takings.

That wing of the palace abutted upon the gardens. The graveled square, built about on three sides, was but dimly lighted. The double squadron of horsemen drawn across its open front, saw three dark figures descending the steps, a fourth at the doorway above, looking down. And almost immediately their colonel came cantering over to take command. He sent his subaltern off at the trot with an advance-guard, saw the President and the Doña Carmen, with their sumpter-horses, safely surrounded, and set forth with them at once on the long march to the coast.

Their way led from the open gate of the palace-gardens, through sundry cobble-paved streets, dark and deserted at that hour, down which they clattered

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without attracting any attention, to a narrow, ill-kept high-road skirting the lake. And they followed that for an hour before they drew bridle, at a point where it turns sharply eastward into a gorge that shuts out all view. There the President called a halt, that he might look back, for the last time, at Caragua.

The moon had risen over that edge of the world where sky meets water on the great inland sea which lies among the mountains of Nicazuela. The fairy-like white city, only a few miles away round a curve in the lake-side, stood out in sharp relief, a miniature in silver picked out with diamond-points that were lamps still burning. A rippling pathway of light led from the moon to the palace-walls.

Casado turned away with a muttered curse.

"It's like a dream," he said to himself in a whisper. "And — I shall no doubt see it often enough again — in such guise. I wish this had been a dark night — a dark night, and pouring rain!"

And throughout the night as it was, dry, clear, star-studded, he rode silently, side by side with the Doña Carmen, in the midst of his life-guards, the sumpter-horses hard at his heels, doing all he could to convince himself that he did not care for what he was leaving behind.

At the last halting-place, on their journey, a wretched roadside village in a cranny of the moun-

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tain-face, dawn came upon them. They stood by their steaming horses in front of a mud-walled hovel falsely entitled *Hotel Bella Vista*, whereat Ulick Scarlett, cantering through ahead of them, had ordered coffee to be prepared in haste for His Excellency the President, and saw the sun climb slowly out of the gray Atlantic so far below them. Their faces were white with fatigue and pinched with the cold of a wind which bit shrewdly at that altitude.

The sun showed a distant township on the sea-shore, and the men of the escort, a little apart, measured in their own minds the miles that remained to be covered. Casado, at the inn-door with the Doña Carmen and Colonel Scarlett, was studying intently the three tiny vessels, at anchor, in line, before the far-off, infinitesimal buildings. These were the Portuguese war-ships. Of a fourth, farther inshore, he took no particular notice then.

Nor did he linger there, with the long descent ahead still to be negotiated. Ten minutes after they set off down-hill on foot, the life-guards leading their weary horses. They had traveled fast and far.

The servants at the Casa Rosada, the President's sea-side villa, a squat, spacious, oblong building, of that rose-marble for which the mountains of Nicazuela are famous, set in the heart of a palm-grove on the brink of a picturesque ravine about a mile from the Port, were sorely exercised when a lieu-

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tenant of life-guards rode in on them just before breakfast-time with word that His Excellency was close at hand. But when, very shortly afterward, His Excellency arrived, there was no sign of haste or disorder. Ulick Scarlett, spick and span as usual, a handsome boy in his blue and gold, had his men drawn on either side of the steps as a guard of honor, and even his elder brother, a very exacting soldier, nodded approval of their appearance after their long night-ride.

The President, having satisfied himself as to the safety of his precious panniers, bestowed a beaming smile on the assiduous subaltern, bade him see his men settled into bivouac, and come indoors to breakfast as soon as might be. Colonel Scarlett he desired to attend him, and Colonel Scarlett did so, though none too willingly. For that grave-faced, unsmiling Scots soldier of fortune was no carpet-warrior, and would have preferred to camp with his squadron now that their present errand was well accomplished.

He sat down, contentedly enough, however, with the Doña Carmen, after he had passed through the President's own dressing-room, and they were very shortly joined by his brother Ulick. His Excellency was elsewhere, but thoughtfully sent word that they should not wait breakfast for him.

His Excellency was, in point of fact, extremely busy at one of the private telephones in his own safely

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secluded apartments. He was engaged in earnest conversation with the harbor-master at the Port, an individual whose services he had quite lately subsidized from his own privy purse, as to the stateroom he had ordered to be booked at the last moment on the mail-steamer due to make its usual fortnightly call that afternoon.

But a most unexpected difficulty had cropped up. The harbor-master had just been notified by the local office of the line that, in view of the blockade to be established at noon by the Portuguese fleet, no steamer of theirs need be expected for another fortnight at least. And all his employer's carefully thought out plans for slipping on board unobserved were thus rendered null and void.

Casado gnashed his teeth at the telephone, and the harbor-master, at the other end of the wire, quaked audibly. He would willingly have offered to repay forthwith the subsidy he had received on account of services he could by no means render now, but that the President was speaking again. In his quick brain Casado had already conceived a scheme still more promising.

"What steamer is that at anchor between those Portuguese tubs and the shore?" he demanded suddenly. "Listen to me — don't talk so much! And carry out my instructions immediately, do you hear?"

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Very well, then — You are to go on board her at once — see the captain, privately — and tell him that I, Don Fermín Casado, President of Nicazuela, desire to see him here, at my villa, without an instant's delay. You are to bring him ashore with you, and — I'll have a carriage waiting at your door to carry him hither as soon as you land. If he needs any further inducement to come, you may tell him that it will pay him handsomely to comply with my wishes. You understand? Very well, then. Why don't you answer my question!"

"Your pardon, Excellency," the harbor-master implored, "but it will not be necessary for me to go on board. The captain is at this moment on his way ashore, to obtain entrance at my office. He reached the roadstead too late last night to get pratique. He will be at the landing-stage in a few minutes — I can see his boat from my window while I am speaking.

"Shall I send him on to you at once, in a hired carriage?"

"Do so," said Casado in a more pacific tone. "Bring him out yourself, and by force if necessary. But you haven't told me yet, although I've asked you three times already, what ship it is."

He listened intently to the harbor-master's anxious reply, repeating to himself the names he heard, names unknown to him.

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"Very well, then," he concluded at length. "You'll carry out my instructions. Tell Captain Dove, of the *Olive Branch*, that I desire to see him here, without a moment's delay."

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN DOVE, OF THE "OLIVE BRANCH"

CAPTAIN DOVE, of the *Olive Branch*, was in a very dangerous temper. His mind, by no means of the best balanced even under auspicious influences, had of late been inflamed to the verge of frenzy by a succession of the most contrary circumstances.

He had been neither to hold nor to bind when he had discovered how Saleh Harez had made her escape from the ship on which she had lived, in comfortable captivity, for so many years that he had never dreamed she would seek to leave it. He had cherished her during all these years as he might have a child of his own, even while he had always looked on her, his chattel by right of purchase, as an easily realizable asset. In more than one dark, curtained corner of the world had he been tempted to part with her, and yet had refrained. And only now he had lost her did he realize what an important factor she had by degrees become in his calculations, how ill he could do without her.

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With his hand always on the whistle-cord and cursing the fog which was blinding him, he had quartered every square mile of the sea-surface between his course and the coast, in the belief that the two fugitives could not make for the nearest land. And it was only when Jasper Slyne had threatened, on behalf of Gildersleeve and himself, to throw up their mutual enterprise altogether unless he should instantly proceed on his voyage, that he had at last abandoned the search, assured that the girl and her protégé must have reached shore and present safety in spite of him.

He and his confederates were, of course, quite in the dark as to what steps Tommy Judson might take against them there, and, for that reason, it was all the more urgent that they should get to their journey's end at the earliest moment possible. But in that connection also they were thrown out of their reckoning, for the hasty repairs in the engine room which had been done at New York proved to have been quite ineffective. They broke down at sea again on four successive occasions before they at last sighted the distant lights of El Puerto — the single sea-port of Nicazuela — on the very eve of the date on which the President's notes fell due. And Captain Dove's disposition became more deadly on each occasion. Eustace Gildersleeve grew to dread the sight of his evil-tongued, malignant-looking accomplice, whom

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only Slyne seemed able to propitiate, at intervals, and then by the most questionable means. The two of them were still suffering from the after-effects of a prolonged drinking-bout when Reuben Yoxall, conning the *Olive Branch* into the anchorage off the Port, sent word to his superior that one of the three men-of-war lying there had signaled him to heave to.

Captain Dove climbed hastily to the bridge and blinked at the flickering lamps a-swing at the cruiser's yard.

"What's he saying now?" he demanded of Yoxall, busy at the binnacle with the International Code.

" 'Heave to, or take the consequences,' " the mate translated surprisedly. "There must be trouble of some sort ashore! What answer shall I run up?"

Captain Dove would dearly have liked to show the insolent stranger his teeth, but some remnant of native prudence restrained him from displaying too soon the force that the *Olive Branch* could bring to bear on any emergency of that nature.

"Stop her," he snapped, "and go slow astern."

The engine room answered the telegraph promptly, and the *Olive Branch* came to a quick halt.

"That'll do," said Captain Dove, and the propeller almost immediately ceased to revolve. He issued a few more short, sharp orders, and the crew were all at quarters below, the guns behind the blind

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ports on the 'tween-deck had been unhooded, set square in their trunnions, and served, before a boat came alongside, a voice hailed him on the bridge.

A Jacob's-ladder was grudgingly let down. A naval officer climbed, none too nimbly, on 'ard the *Olive Branch*, and him Captain Dove confronted, with a very fierce expression, under the dim light of a deck-lamp.

"What the devil d'you mean by threatening an American ship on the high seas!" Captain Dove demanded truculently, and was well pleased by the evident perturbation the words produced in his visitor's mind.

"You are approach too near us," replied that individual with a deprecating gesture. "We are of Portugal, you see. To-morrow we perhaps make war to Nicazuela. And then at noon-time it is needed to blockade this port. We thought you navy of the republic — but you are United States of North America steam vessel. Good! I apologize mistake. My Admiral sends you his compliments of season, and to say — Do not go inside port, but then come out again before noon-time to-morrow — for these blockade. After too late, impossible. You understand. Good! I salute you, *Senhor Capitão*. I kiss the foot to you. Good-nights."

He did not wait for any acknowledgment of his remarks or for any answer, but, climbing over the

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side again, with more haste than dignity, made off at once. Captain Dove's wordless, wrathful, outraged regard had been too much for him, knowing, as he did, how essential it was that the Stars and Stripes in particular should suffer no disrespect during the operations in prospect.

And Captain Dove laughed grimly as he rejoined Reuben Yoxall on the bridge.

"We'll run up the old Gridiron to-morrow at sunrise," he said. "I think we'll find Uncle Sam's flag the most convenient to fly in these waters. Full speed ahead, Mr. Yoxall, and take her in. You know where we're to drop anchor, opposite the Casa Rosada."

He stayed where he was while his mate took the ship round under the sterns of the watching warships. It was his wise habit to leave all such work in his subordinate's hands for a day or two after any carouse; but, as soon as the anchor was let go at the western end of the roadstead, he went back to his own quarters below, where he found Eustace Gildersleeve and Slyne anxiously awaiting him.

They were very much aggrieved by the news he brought them, and the three sat up late discussing its possible effects on their prospects there. But in the end Dove, drinking still, became so quarrelsome that they had to adjourn to their berths without hav-



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ing come to any very clear understanding, except of the fact that he wanted more money from them, and meant to have it before he would do another hand-turn. He seemed to have forgotten that he had lately obtained from them an additional thousand dollars, on the plea that his unpaid men were once more on the point of mutiny.

Eustace Gildersleeve was the first afoot next morning. He had scarcely slept at all. And he had been pacing the deck for an hour, before the other two joined him there. He was staring disconsolately across at the slip-shod South American town planted at haphazard on a narrow strip of shore, between the mountain-face which overhung it and the sea always mumbling at its sandy foundations. He had been wondering what his old associates in Wall Street would say if they could see him there.

The port-doctor's launch came alongside, delivered a letter addressed to Slyne, and steamed off again after a few brief questions and answers. The yellow flag came fluttering down from the fore. One of the ship's boats was lowered, and, immediately after breakfast, the three conspirators went ashore, having finally agreed as to the line of conduct they must pursue. Captain Dove had not renewed his contention of overnight, but was still in a very perverse humor.

The harbor-master received them at the landing-

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stage below his office on the customs' wharf, and him Dove treated with abrupt contempt. But Slyne, acting as interpreter, was very assiduous in promoting peace and good will. And when, the ship's papers displayed and the *Olive Branch* hurriedly admitted to all the rights and privileges of the Port, that anxious official begged him to convey to her captain an urgent message from His Excellency the President of the Republic, he felt that his complaisance had been well-timed.

"Listen here, you two," he commanded, and there was that in his tone which compelled the others' attention. "This chap says Casado wants to see Captain Dove at once, at the Casa Rosada — a mile away. That ramshackle trap at the door's for us. I'll tell him we're going straight out, and we'll stop at the bank in passing."

He said as much to the harbor-master, and the harbor-master waited to hear no more, but made at once for the telephone. Slyne divined his purpose, and, "Come on!" he ordered, in his usual dictatorial way. The other two followed him, Eustace Gildersleeve eagerly, Captain Dove with a slow discontent, meant to show that he did not intend to take any orders from Slyne, who was hurriedly directing one of their boat's crew as to a message which must immediately reach the commandant of the fort on the bluff above.

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"Come on!" Slyne adjured Captain Dove again from within the conveyance outside. "It won't help us in any way to keep the President waiting."

"*Al Banoc de Nicazuela*," he told the driver, "*ymas ligero que el diablo, amigo!*"

"I've told him to drive to the bank like the devil," he explained patronizingly as the rickety vehicle rattled over the cobbles and narrowly shaved a no less decrepit lamp-post at the street-corner. "We must see Waples before we can tackle Casado properly. Luck seems to be looking a little our way at present, and — we may as well make the most of it. Pull yourself together, Dove, damn you! Don't try any of your tantrums on me. We aren't on board the *Olive Branch* now, remember!"

Captain Dove ceased sneering to grin at him, a dog-toothed, ferocious grin.

"I'll remember," said he. "I've got a good memory, Slyne."

Within five minutes they stopped in front of the Banco de Nicazuela, a one-story building of plastered brick with massive pillars of stucco, at a corner of the unkempt Plaza Libertad, the principal square of El Puerto, and they all alighted.

"Yes, *el Señor* Waples is in," said the native clerk at the counter, and Slyne's card served to procure for them almost immediate admission to the bank-manager's sanctum.

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Mr. Waples himself welcomed them at its threshold, a bald-headed, portly personage, in a white linen suit, with a palm-leaf fan in one hand.

"My *deah* Slyne!" said he, hand outstretched, his face one wide, unctuous smile; and his carefully cultivated manner of speech did not prepossess his two other visitors. "This is an unexpected pleashah! What good wind has blown you in heah this mo'ning, eh, what?"

"Better cut all that sort of thing right out, Waples," Slyne returned frigidly. "You're Welsh, you know,—and they don't speak that way in Wales, or in London either, for that matter. We've come here in a great hurry to talk straight business. This is Eustace Gildersleeve, of New York. He wants the money due to-day on those promissory notes of the President's. And he's brought Captain Dove of the *Olive Branch* with him, to see that he gets fair play.

"Gildersleeve, this is my 'deah' friend, Cadwalader Waples."

The banker shook a fat, playful finger at him.

"The same old sixpence!" said he affectionately. "D'you know, Jaspah, that I've ben risking my life heah to help your friends. I wired the President yestahday to ask what I was to do about those demned notes, and he sent back word that he'd shoot me as soon as he saw me! I heah this mo'ning that

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he's just arrived at the Casa Rosada. It's only a mile away. Why don't you take our friend, Mr. Gildahsleeve, out there, and talk it ovah yourselves with His Excellency?

"You know, of course, that we're havin' a sort of a row with that Portuguese fellah outside. I've had ordahs to stop all payments till that's set smooth. But, at the same time, I'd be very glad indeed to oblige our mutual friend Mr. Gildahsleeve, and — if you'll bring me a note from His Excellency authorizing me to broach that consignment of gold you shipped to his ordah from New York, I'll be delighted to redeem the notes in part with that."

His voice had sunk to a mysterious whisper, and he favored his three visitors with an ineffably impudent wink.

Slyne had sat down. He rose again, with an impatient scowl.

"You're wasting our time, Waples," he remarked, "and — we haven't come here to have our time wasted. Is the safe empty?"

"Apart from the consignment of gold you shipped from New York to His Excellency's ordah, we haven't a hundred pounds in the shop," replied Mr. Waples, somewhat more dryly than he had yet spoken. He seemed to find Jaspar Slyne's demeanor toward him irritating.

"Then let me tell you, sir, that I consider you a

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most unmitigated scoundrel!" cried Eustace Gildersleeve suddenly, in a white rage. He knew precisely how much Slyne's consignment of gold was worth.

"Steady on!" Captain Dove counseled thickly, as the Welshman started up. "Don't lose your wool, none of you.

"Sit down, you!" said he, confronting the irate banker squarely, "or —"

Mr. Cadwallader Waples sank back into his managerial chair. He saw that, in this squat, venomous-looking seaman, he had a man of very different caliber from Gildersleeve to deal with. And Eustace Gildersleeve was no less prompt in obedience — he edged toward the door at a word.

"What's the use of arguing here?" Captain Dove demanded of them, "if there's no money to be made out of it. Our business is with Casado himself. What we're working with is his promise to pay. If it hadn't been for our smart friend there" — he jerked a derisive thumb at Slyne — "we'd be talking sense to him by this time, instead of — Come on, both of you! and I'll take charge of the entertainment now."

He swaggered out after them, banging the door behind him, and left Mr. Cadwallader Waples, limp and perspiring freely in spite of his fan, without so much as a backward glance. And for a moment or two the bank-manager was exceedingly wroth. But

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he very soon recovered his wonted equanimity, and a glistening, oleaginous smile enwreathed his visage again.

"The little blightah!" said he to himself disparagingly, and then fell to chuckling, in gleeful anticipation. "The little blightah! He was positively rude to me! But I'll pay him out for that presently, and Slyne — and that fella Gildahsleeve too, the demned boundah! I think they'll all be sorry for their behaviah to me before they leave Nicazuela. If Fermín Casado weren't quite so infernally apt to forget what a good friend I've been to him, I'd ride out to his place after them, just for the pleashah of seeing them all marched off to the *calabozo*! But — I'll go and pay them a call there, in the afternoon. It's too deuced hot just now to do anything but sit heah and drip! I'd give a good deal to be back on the shady side of Pall Mall for a bit."

It was, in fact, unpleasantly warm, and the dusty road that leads from the Port to the president's sea-side villa was baking under the sun. Captain Dove was exceedingly thirsty by the time that the rickety carriage had clattered across the bridge spanning the ravine and turned into the grateful shade of the palms. It drew up before the porch of the Casa Rosada, and at a call from the sentry there a servant came forward, who looked somewhat doubtfully at the party. But Slyne whispered a word or

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two in his ear, and he ushered them all into a cool, darkened room, opening off the arched and paved passageway that led to the patio, with a single and very heavily grated window through the slats of whose sun-shutter there was visible a wide vista seaward. Captain Dove crossed to this and gazed fixedly out at the *Olive Branch* in the offing.

The servant brought in a tray with refreshments, and he turned in haste to help himself from the brandy-decanter. Scarcely had he swallowed a brimming glassful of the raw spirit when President Casado himself appeared.

"Captain Dove?" inquired His Excellency, in mellifluous accents, peering about him in the half-light. But it was Slyne who stepped forward, while Captain Dove moved round behind him and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIII

CHECK — AND CHECKMATE

THE President peered for a moment longer at the figure before him, and the smile faded from his face, left it rigidly expressionless.

"You Slyne!" he said at length, in a very different voice. "How came you here,—*amigo?*"

But Jasper Slyne met his glance of cold menace with a calm assurance that made him pause. He looked round and caught sight of Captain Dove, at the closed door; saw Gildersleeve, a stooping shadow, in a dark corner. As Slyne crossed to the window, and set the sun-shutters wide enough apart to flood the room with light, His Excellency's hand slipped to a hip-pocket, and fell to his side again with a revolver underneath the sleeve of his smart uniform, its muzzle nestling in his fingers. He was not unaccustomed to cope with contingencies of the sort.

Slyne turned toward him again, and answered his question.

"I came here with Captain Dove, of the *Olive Branch* — *amigo*," said he, a tinge of mockery in his tone. "That's Captain Dove, there, behind you.

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This gentleman is Eustace Gildersleeve, of New York, my partner in our financial transactions. We've come to get payment of those promissory notes of yours that fall due to-day.

"And if you'll kindly put that pistol of yours away," he went on more affably, well pleased with the impression he had produced, "we'll all sit down. Captain Dove has you covered, you see, and —"

He carried a chair to the door for Dove, who stayed there on guard but followed Casado's example in pocketing the weapon he had produced. The President moved toward the table, and, before seating himself, poured out a glass of wine, which he held up with a perfectly steady hand.

"I drink to your health, gentlemen," he declared with a composure invincible. "May you find the climate of Nicazuela entirely salubrious while you continue to honor my poor country with your presence!"

"Thank you, President," Eustace Gildersleeve put in, precipitately, on tenterhooks till the object of their incursion should be assured. "Thank you, President, but — we don't mean to remain any longer than need be. If you can make it convenient now to let us have settlement — even of the principal sum —"

He stopped, with a sinking heart, and looked piteously over at Slyne, whose only response was a glare

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of indignant contempt, as Casado held up a hand in plaintive appeal, slowly shaking his head. And it was to Slyne that the President spoke again presently, in reflection, taking for granted that he was already conversant with the situation in Nicazuela.

"It's very unfortunate for us all," he said feelingly, "this disagreement with Portugal! You are, of course, aware, my dear Slyne, that my Minister of Finance has been in treaty with Berlin for a new issue of cédulas? — out of the proceeds of which he intended to set aside a sum sufficient to meet your claim on the Treasury.

"But now, alas! you can see for yourself how we stand. The Germans seem to be making common cause against us with Portugal. At the last moment they have canceled the almost completed negotiations. The Treasury is without resources of any sort, and the Banco de Nicazuela has had to suspend payment."

Again he held up his hand, as if to bespeak their sufferance for a moment longer.

"My Minister of Finance," he said, "would have returned to you intact, under such circumstances, the last consignment of specie you shipped to us from New York. But our war-chest also was empty, our army unpaid. And we are about to fight for our life as a nation. Can you find it in your heart to

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blame him for making use of it in such a sacred purpose! "

"Waples tells me he's still got it stowed away in the vaults at the bank," Slyne countered mischievously. He had merely been amused by His Excellency's initial tricks of defense, for, knowing the South American mind as he did, he felt himself master of the situation.

A latent devil looked from Casado's eyes for an instant, and disappeared again as the President smiled urbanely.

"Our good Waples," he remarked, "is not well advised. But let that pass — since you know the facts of the case now."

"The only fact I am concerned with," said Slyne inexorably, "is that your notes for thirty million American dollars, plus interest, are due to-day and hereby presented for payment." He drew from a pocket two very elaborately stamped and sealed documents on official blue paper, held these up that all might see them, and thrust them away again. "The only fact that you're concerned with at the present is — that payment must be made, here and now! "

"That's the way to talk! " grunted Captain Dove in the background. His patience had been sorely tried by the futile preliminaries to this direct declaration

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of their set purpose. And he felt hastily for his revolver-butt as President Casado sprang from his chair.

"Must!" cried President Casado, his teeth gleaming whitely between his moustache and beard. "Payment 'must' be made! Mr. Slyne. You are strangely insolent—or can it be that you really think you can dictate to me in such terms!"

"Don't waste any of your black looks on me," Slyne returned, in no way perturbed by the presence towering above him, glad rather, since he held the whip-hand, to be done with unmeaning politeness. For the recollection of Fermín Casado's treachery to himself was still rankling sorely. "I'm talking straight to you now. You do the same by me, if you can. There's no use in being melodramatic about a plain business proposition.

"I said payment must be made, here and now. You know as well as I do that you have the means here to make it. Better not force me to employ the means I have to compel you."

Casado's furious face had become suddenly calm again. His anger had given place to a quick curiosity. Slyne seemed to know much more than he should. He must find out exactly how much Slyne knew, and what these mysterious threats meant. He sat down again, shrugging his shoulders.

"I had forgotten," he said loftily, "the man-

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ners of you American men of business. It's perhaps as well for you, friend Slyne, that I am not quite so abrupt as yourself — or you might have been standing face to a wall in the courtyard by now, with a firing-party behind you! But you and your friends may not be aware that my life-guards are camped within call of us here!"

Slyne smiled, indifferently.

"Colonel Scarlett wouldn't take that idea as a compliment," he responded. "I've heard him tell you before now that he isn't a hired butcher. And in any case you'd die first, you know. Captain Dove uses soft-nosed bullets — and I'm told they hurt a good deal!"

"But — what's the use of trying to bluff me as you've been doing. We surely know each other well enough not to waste time in that way!"

Casado rolled and lighted a cigarette, very deliberately.

"Touching these notes of yours," he remarked from behind a thin blue curtain of smoke, "you tell me that I have the means to redeem them. Perhaps you can tell me also where those means are? I should be glad to lay hands on them."

The cigarette between his lips shook a little. His narrowed eyes were very intent, expectant.

"They're here, in this house," Slyne answered without hesitation, and the curt words told Casado

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that his most cherished secret was his no longer. In his nimble mind he cast about for the identity of his betrayer.

"You know one José Maria Moreno?" he asked, and, although Slyne shook his head and looked very blank, felt sure that he had not erred in his surmise.

"José Maria Moreno," he mentioned casually, "is a traitor to his country — a renegade — a veritable Judas! But credit me, friend Slyne, with so much intelligence at least as to have rendered worthless any information he might impart to my enemies. Here, in this house, there are the barest necessities of existence — and nothing more."

The quiet simplicity of his demeanor might have deceived anyone who knew him less intimately than did Slyne. But Slyne did not deem it worth while to contradict him.

"You tell me also that you have means to compel me," said the President with an impatient smile. "It isn't a very wise policy to use empty threats to me, Slyne!"

Jasper Slyne delayed answering to help himself to a glass of brandy, as a nerve-tonic, and, at a signal from Dove, carried a dram over to him. They exchanged a quick glance of agreement, while Eustace Gildersleeve, looking on, groaned impotently. His Excellency the President. composed and placid in spite of the urgent issues that hung on the hour,

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continued to smoke, as if all time were at his disposal. An iron hand depends upon nerves of iron, and needs no artificial stimulant.

Slyne did not sit down again but crossed over to the window and looked out between the heavy bars of its ornamental grille.

"Have you ever heard of the *Reconquista*, Casado?" he asked suddenly, and Casado started. For he had very often heard of the *Reconquista*. And, although years had elapsed since she and her cut-throat crew had acquired the ill-fame that still clung to her memory, had harried a whole republic, and had helped at the killing of three of his colleagues in quick succession, it startled him disproportionately to hear her thus casually referred to, at such an inconvenient juncture.

Slyne beckoned him over. He rose and went to the window, a supercilious sneer disguising his uneasy consciousness of the others' close regard.

"That's the *Reconquista*," said Slyne, pointing to the solitary steamer at anchor within that arc of the roadstead enclosed by the Portuguese war-ships. "She's called the *Olive Branch* now. And Captain Dove will no doubt explain to you, if you haven't already heard of her, what sort of ship she is."

"She's a twin-screw steamer of twenty-eight hundred tons," Captain Dove volunteered, in jocular vein, from the background. "Quadruple-expansion

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engines, giving a steady fifteen knots on a coal-bill of — but, bless me! What am I talking about! That's not what you want to know, is it?

"She's lying broadside on to this house, and she's moored stem and stern, to keep her just so. There are four quick-firing guns on that broadside, and more of the same sort elsewhere on board. My gunners can give points to the pick out of any navy you like, and they've got their range to an inch. There's a whole regiment of men — same's I had on her when she was the *Reconquista* — waiting below under arms, till —

"If we aren't back on board, with that money you owe us, by one o'clock to a second, she'll open fire on you here while their boats are racing each other ashore, and — then, perhaps, you'll be sorry you didn't pay us. You won't find my lambs so easy to deal with as the Portuguese!"

He threw up his chin and chuckled discordantly. Eustace Gildersleeve looked askance at him, moving uneasily at the harsh sound of this mirth.

President Casado, however, showed no particular sign of concern in the information afforded him. He exhaled through his aquiline nose two spirals of smoke, glanced again and without any evident increase of interest, at the ugly little gray steamship which had once wrought such havoc among his near neighbors, and turned listlessly back toward the table.

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But for all his outward indifference he was very ill at ease inwardly. He knew only too well of what the *Reconquista* — the *Olive Branch* — was capable. The Red Cross Flag, by means of which he had meant to save the villa from being shelled by the Portuguese war-ships, would, he knew, avail nothing against her, and — to have the house sacked and looted would mean total ruin to him. Neither could he hope that his trusted life-guards might long withstand the desperadoes who would swarm ashore under cover of the ship's guns. It would be sheer madness to seek reinforcements among the unpaid, disaffected troops of the line in garrison at the Port. There was assuredly nothing for it but to temporize. He had realized at that moment the perilous predicament in which he now stood, and was now desperately seeking some safe way out of it.

"It's a great pity, Slyne," he suggested slowly, "that you've thought fit to adopt such a dictatorial attitude toward me. You ought to know me better than that, *amigo*! You ought to know that no man living can drive me as you've been trying to do. I care not a snap of the fingers for your foolishly conceived attempt at coercion — I have but to telephone the fort and it will blow the *Olive Branch* out of the water for me —"

"Oh, no, it won't," Slyne broke in eagerly, understanding the drift of this preface. "The fort's on

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our side, Casado. I've been in touch with the commandant for some time past, and — I spiked all his guns this morning with a few fifty-dollar bills."

Eustace Gildersleeve groaned again. He it was who had provided, under the direst pressure on Slyne's part and from an all but empty purse, the cash to carry out this piece of strategy. It hurt him to hear his sorely grudged money thus grandiosely referred to.

"And since you don't seem disposed to talk sense," Slyne went on, with another angry glance at his wretched partner, "we needn't stop to argue. You won't be led, and we're going to call your bluff that no man living can drive you. Off you go, Dove — and you too, Gildersleeve. We'll blow this building to blazes, and see whether we can find what we're after somewhere among its foundations."

Casado swallowed down a lump in his throat. Dove was already on his feet, at the door, fumbling with the key, Eustace Gildersleeve, almost whimpering, at his heels. Slyne turned swiftly to the President and their lips moved.

"Wait a minute, Dove," he commanded, and that captious seaman swung about with a scowl.

"D'ye take me for a damned deck-hand, curse you!" he snarled, "with your 'off you go,' and your 'wait a minute!' I'll trouble you for a good deal less of your infernal familiarity, *Mister Slyne!*"

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"Don't get hot, now," urged Slyne soothingly, "or you'll spoil everything. This is no time to stand on ceremony. His Excellency has a proposal to make, and — you know quite well what will happen if we don't get our business done and show up on board again in good time."

He carried another drink to Dove, still swelling and snorting before the door, and Dove accepted it grudgingly.

"We're going to deal with each other as friends now," said Slyne, and looked encouragingly at Casado, who nodded a condescending assent to that statement.

"Had you come here as friends in the first place," His Excellency observed, in a tone of mild rebuke, "there need have been no such regrettable misunderstanding between us. I sent for Captain Dove, indeed, to ask whether he would charter the *Olive Branch* to me, for a trip to Europe."

He saw that his sudden change of front had surprised them all beyond measure, and went on impassively, dovetailing together in his quick mind while he spoke all the details of a new and desperate resolution.

"If we can come to terms for that charter and get my cargo safely on board, I think I can promise you that the principal sum due on Mr. Gildersleeve's notes will be paid in full on the passage. I don't

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suppose Mr. Gildersleeve will object to accompany us on that understanding? ”

Eustace Gildersleeve's eyes were glistening, and he almost choked as he strove to signify his entire acquiescence. Captain Dove would at once have undertaken, free of all charge, the charter proposed — not one of them was in the least doubt as to the object of the voyage suggested or what the cargo would be — but Slyne, who had been watching His Excellency very narrowly, once more interposed.

“Where have you got it all stowed away, Casado? We're ready to deal straight with you, but — you must give us some guarantee of good faith.”

The President met his gaze with a frankness that might have disarmed mistrust.

“You're very suspicious, friend Slyne,” he remarked with a shrug, “but — come with me, if you will, and I'll show you the cargo I want to ship on the *Olive Branch* — before the Portuguese come ashore and take possession of it.”

“All right,” said Slyne sharply, with a return to his former manner. “Go ahead — and you know what'll happen to you if you try any tricks on us!”

“I understood you to say that we're going to deal with each other as friends!” Casado returned, correcting him for his tone with a serious dignity meant



A YOUNG MAN IN
UNIFORM IN EARNEST
CONVERSATION WITH A HAND-
SOME GIRL LYING LITHE AND
GRACEFUL IN A HAMMOCK

Wm. Charles C. 11/1/1917

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to remind him to whom he was speaking, to which Slyne was impervious.

Captain Dove, relieved by this compact from his duty at the door, came forward and refreshed himself again. They left the room together and turned inward, through a cool, shady courtyard, on which opened many doors, where a plashing fountain kept a wealth of flowers alive. Skirting that, they came on a young man in uniform, in earnest conversation with a handsome girl lying, lithe and graceful, in a luxurious hammock, and then the volatile Slyne greeted gaily, the girl in correct Castilian and the youth in colloquial English. But they answered him in a manner gravely reserved, and he passed on, laughing.

"You'll be losing Doña Carmen one of these days, I doubt, Casado," he said, and His Excellency laughed lightly also, with no less sang-froid.

Captain Dove was chiefly interested in the plan of the place, which seemed to have been built to withstand a siege. In shape it was quadrilateral, divided into two squares. Through an arched passageway, corresponding to that at the entrance, in the chambered division between these, with a great iron gate at each end standing open, they reached an interior courtyard, flower-filled also, and cooled by another fountain. But the massive marble walls that en-

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closed the patio there were blank except for a few infinitesimal grated windows and a single, steel-sheathed door in a corner at a safe angle from the passage-way.

"My private apartments," Casado explained unconcernedly as he thrust a key into the lock. And Eustace Gildersleeve started apprehensively as the door clanged to behind them. The place was too like a prison to suit his taste.

They passed through a succession of cool, dark rooms, all opening into one another in the South American style, till they came at last to a little one, very plainly furnished for sleeping, overlooking the broad ravine on one bank of which the villa was built. From a cupboard there Casado supplied them with candles, and they lit these while he was lifting a table and rug from over a trap-door in the flooring. Through that they reached a spacious cellar, hewn out of the living rock, in which were ranged in long ranks a great number of casks, very dimly visible by the insufficient light they had with them.

The atmosphere underground was eerie in the extreme. No one spoke. Casado paused, to look curiously at Slyne, but Slyne still raised interrogative eyebrows and the President saw that he knew too much to be put off by any pretext. He went on again, and finally stopped in front of a big, dusty barrel exactly like all the others.

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His three companions stood over him, watching inquisitively, while he inserted in it a spigot he had brought with him and the water with which it was filled ran slowly to waste in a sloping gutter with an infinitesimal outlet from which he had drawn a small wooden plug. The cask empty, he easily tipped it off its dusty trestles and so uncovered another trap-door it had concealed. Slyne understood then how invaluable José Maria Moreno's lost plans might have been: for, to have hurriedly stove in all those casks in search of that opening and with the outlet plugged, would merely have flooded the cellar and baffled further research. A crude device, yet one that might have proved very serviceable in time of stress.

Casado, stooping, cast back two carefully oiled bolts, unlocked and lifted the heavy door with an effort. It was wet on the under side. Looking down, they saw a small square of black, stagnant water, level with the lip of the opening.

"I keep the lower vault flooded, from the ravine," he explained patiently, in answer to their angrily impatient glances, and, crossing to the outer wall, under Captain Dove's watchful convoy, lifted an invisible lever there to its full extent. The still surface of the water stirred and sucked.

Within ten minutes the vault below was as dry as it might be made, and throughout that space of time Casado stood silently at the trap-door, facing

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the others. But no one of them could read the least of the thoughts that were chasing each other through his busy brain.

"You go first," Slyne requested of him. "Got your gun handy, Dove? You stay on top, Gildersleeve, and stand by the hatch. D'ye hear?"

Casado went down the slippery steps without demur, Dove following him, revolver in hand, and Slyne came last with his candle. He looked breathlessly about him — and his lips parted in a swift, triumphant smile. He saw there what he had hoped and dreamed he might see — varnished bullion-boxes, all glistening wet, stacked as high as the arched rock-roof, a heap of waterproof oilskin bags in a corner, a couple of pairs of soaked mule-panniers with lids agape thrown carelessly to one side. Almost within his eager grasp lay wealth which promised to exceed his wildest hopes and dreams.

He darted forward, his face suffused, set his light down, and pulled at one of the boxes. It was no less weighty than he had anticipated. He lifted it down, and with his knife picked frantically at the wax with which its countersunk lock had been made watertight.

"The key, Casado," he ordered hoarsely, and the President loosened one from the key-ring attached to a chain at his hip. It would have been idle to hesitate, with Captain Dove's squat shadow so close to

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his own, the muzzle of Captain Dove's revolver no more than a foot from his ribs, and Captain Dove's eager finger fondling the trigger. He did not even dare to look round at that other shadow which seemed to be creeping upon them.

It crept still closer, without a sound, a lean, stooping, covetous shadow, and, just as Slyne succeeded in prying open the lid of the box he was bending over, Casado sprang suddenly backward, pushed Eustace Gildersleeve headlong into Dove's arms. Their candles fell sputtering in a pool on the floor. Dove hurled his unseen assailant aside with a beast-like howl and made for the trap-door. Had he reached it an instant sooner, it would have brained him as it descended. Slyne thrust after him, set his shoulder, too, to the hatch. Together they heaved, and strained, and panted there in the darkness. But it was useless. Casado, above, had already got both bolts shot.

He was still kneeling on the casing, his chest laboring. Great drops of perspiration had broken out on his forehead. He leaned forward on his hands, and they trembled under him. But presently he got up, and felt his way, staggering, to where the lever of the outlet-sluice was hidden. He let it fall, noiselessly, found the hydrant by means of which he might flood the vault, and turned that partly on.

"The slower the better!" said he savagely to

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himself. "They'll no doubt need all the time they'll have for repentance."

He lifted on to its trestles again the empty cask which served to hide the trap-door, and, turning to leave the cellar, paused, listened very attentively. But no least sound came from below. The heavy, steel-cased covering fitted tight as a coffin-lid.

CHAPTER XIV

A MASTERLY MOVE

IN the bedroom above, Casado hurriedly brushed himself down, dried his wet boots with a hand-towel, and, having assured himself that his uniform showed no perceptible trace of the trying experience he had just undergone, went back into the living world again, without devoting another thought to the three doomed wretches below. The iron hand, at which men safe from its grip might laugh in their ignorance, had behind it an iron heart.

In the cool, shady outer courtyard he found Ulick Scarlett still hanging over the hammock from which the Doña Carmen was still looking lazily up into that lovelorn youth's ardent eyes. And the girl sprang to her feet in a white foam of rustling skirts as her father approached.

The President smiled benignly on both of them.

"Will you tell Colonel Scarlett I'd be very glad to see him — at once, please, Ulick?" he ordered, and, as the young man sped away on that mission, he drew his daughter's arm into his, and held it closely there.

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"We must leave the villa again immediately, Carmen," he said, pacing up and down the patio with her. "Tell your maid to pack in a single suit-case whatever you're likely to need for the next few days — and leave your heavy baggage all ready to be brought away. Those precious diamonds of yours will have to stay behind meantime also, but — they're quite safe. I have seen to that myself. And now go, *niñita*. The horses will be at the door presently, and I have a great deal to do yet."

Her proud eyes clouded over a little, but she turned away, dumbly docile; and then came back to where he stood looking fondly after her.

"There is danger here?" she asked swiftly.

"Yes, dear one," he replied.

"Does — do the life-guards go with us?" she whispered, and he smiled again as he answered: "They leave the villa before we do, and — their duty lies elsewhere. Comfort yourself, however. They will be idle — in a safe camp."

She waited to hear no more, but went off blushing confusedly, as Colonel Scarlett came striding into the courtyard at his best speed, with a heartsome jingle of steel. And His Excellency gaily returned that grave-faced soldier's precise salute.

"We must sound *Boot and Saddle* again, my colonel," he cried, "though not, thank God! for such a long ride as our last. We must evacuate the

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villa at once. Our friends of Portugal out there are going to bombard it. You know how matters stand."

Scarlett stood at attention, listening. It did not lie within his sphere of obligation to offer either comment or advice. He was there to receive whatever orders there might be for the life-guards of his command.

"Delimiting a danger-zone of half a mile on either side - to allow for wild shooting—" the President continued, "the roadway must be picketed in both directions at that distance. Send Ulick with a troop out toward Bella Vista. You will entrench yourself with the remainder at a commanding point between here and the Port. And—listen, Scarlett. You are both to hold your positions against all comers. You will let no one whatsoever pass without authority signed and sealed by myself. The villa is to be absolutely isolated till further orders. The road between El Puerto and the capital is therewith closed. You understand?"

"I understand," said Colonel Sarlett. "I am to break camp at once?"

"Send Ulick off as soon as all the servants are ready—they go into camp with him—but you yourself will ride with me when I leave for the Port. If you parade in twenty minutes, that will do."

Scarlett saluted and made off without more words,

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while Casado called for his steward and made that functionary directly responsible for the immediate despatch of the entire staff of indoor servants, gardeners, grooms, and the live-stock about the place. And amid all the bustle and confusion which such a sweeping clearance could not but create, he sat undisturbed at a telephone, pulling sundry strings among his malcontent officials in the township of El Puerto. Some of whom did not hesitate to express their extreme disapproval of the drastic step he was taking in closing the only road between the Port and Caragua, the capital. But to none of them did he deign any explanation of his policy.

By the time he had cut off the last of them, the Casa Rosada was empty except for himself and his daughter. Its recent inmates were no more than a cloud of dust on the hot high-road that leads along the shore-level for perhaps half a mile before it begins to slope toward Bella Vista. Ulick Scarlett had been informed that there was occasion for haste, and had shepherded the bewildered servants along to excellent purpose.

Colonel Scarlett had his men drawn up in front of the door, and when Casado, assured that he had left no living creature within the walls, appeared with the Doña Carmen, locking the great iron gates securely behind him, there was no more to be done than to mount and ride.

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At a convenient point on the road, a spot where it ran through a short defile in a rough rock-ridge which stretched from the precipitous mountain-face to a sheer cliff overhanging the sea, he bade Colonel Scarlett pitch camp, enjoining on him for the second time, and somewhat unnecessarily, a strict observance of his instructions.

"You'll hold this post against all comers — from either direction," he said, "until I return myself or send you other orders. It's unassailable from above, and from seaward also. It should be quite impregnable, Scarlett?"

"It shall be," returned Colonel Scarlett quietly, and the President rode on with the Doña Carmen, quite satisfied that he had secured this approach. With Ulick holding the other, the villa was safely segregated till it should suit himself to revisit it.

There were but few people abroad in the shimmering streets of El Puerto at this hot hour, and such as there were evinced no surprise at the spectacle of their President, accompanied by his daughter and attended only by a corporal's command of his life-guards, spurring past at a pace that somewhat distressed his escort, not so well mounted as he and burdened with some light baggage. Nothing that His Excellency of the Iron Hand could do would have surprised his subjects more than a little, and the good citizens of the Port had long since

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ceased to concern themselves as to his erratic comings and goings.

They knew that his present appearance was due to another of those unfortunate complications with a foreign power, which had once more brought strange battle-ships to their roadstead. They knew that a bombardment was threatened, and did not doubt that he would in some manner and at the last moment, as usual, manage to save them. They went about their own business uninterestedly, and left him to attend to his.

His took him to the National Telegraph Office, beside the Banco de Nicazuela in the Plaza Libertad. There, in the manager's private room, while the obsequious manager entertained the Doña Carmen without, he sat for five minutes over a desk with a pad of duplicate forms before him, and then wrote rapidly. He tore up the original message, but the carbon copy he enclosed in an envelope which he handed to the manager with a whispered order, as he went out.

At the street-door he paused for a moment and then turned along toward the bank, where he was received with all ceremony by Mr. Cadwallader Waples, who had, however, some difficulty in concealing his very natural agitation over such an unceremonious visit from the august founder of the

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financial establishment in which he himself occupied a post so responsible.

But his countenance cleared when he saw that the Doña Carmen was with her father. It did not seem so probable then that the President would strictly adhere to his telegraphic threat to have him shot at sight. And his pardonable curiosity in that respect was finally assuaged by the bland smile with which His Excellency acknowledged his honeyed greeting.

"But I have a bone to pick with you, Waples," said that personage as soon as the three were seated within the banker's luxurious private room and the Doña Carmen, who did not care much for Mr. Waples, had been supplied with a pile of the *Graphic* and *Punch*. "I learn that you have been making rash statements, and to foreigners, concerning the resources of this, our National Bank! That was not well done, my friend. You must be less communicative. It pains me to feel that you do not safeguard the confidence I repose in you."

Mr. Waples' face fell again, dismally. He sat very still in his managerial chair, oozing a profuse penitence, but he made no defense in words, since it was apparent that least said would be soonest mended. And presently Casado seemed to forget that cause of complaint.

"Have you any petty cash in the safe?" he in-

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quired casually, and Mr. Cadwallader Waples rose, speechless still. He unlocked and threw open the ponderous steel door of a safe built into the wall behind his desk, mutely exposing its nakedness. From its middle shelf he took a small canvas bag, its sole contents, and handed that to the President.

"Unpaid salaries," he explained.

His Excellency assured himself that it held gold, and slipped it into one of his pockets.

"Charge it to my private account," he ordered, and the bank-manager bowed submissively.

No more was said on that subject, but they talked indifferently for ten minutes more about the rate of exchange, and the cacao crop, and the current crisis.

"I have done my best to avert any rashly precipitate action on the part of the Portuguese fleet," said Casado, his tone virtuously austere, and rose from his seat as he glanced at the watch he wore on his wrist. "And I'm going out to interview the Portuguese admiral now. Come, Carmen."

She rose, willingly, and Mr. Waples escorted them to the street-door. By the way His Excellency paused to address the sullenly expectant clerks.

"Fellow Nicazuelans," he said, standing squarely before the mahogany counter at which they had gathered, "my heart bleeds for you. But even while my heart bleeds my brain is busy on your be-

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half. I go hence to sacrifice my life, if need be, on the altar of patriotism. For our dear country I shall die gladly. But, if I live, those who have supported me through trial and affliction will not be forgotten. On that glad day when I shall succeed in wresting peace with honor from Portugal your salaries shall be paid in full, with a month's honorarium added."

The applause that followed this oratorical effort was of the faintest. It served, none the less, to cover Casado's retreat, and Mr. Waples, still bowing unctuously from the steps of the Bank, watched him disappear with the Doña Carmen in the direction of the Customs' wharf.

"It's a demned good thing I've drawn six months' pay in advance," said the obese banker to himself. "I don't quite undahstand what that fellah's little game is, but — seems to me deuced rash of him to be payin' the Portuguese any visits at present. I'll drop Enrique Vidal a wire, and find out what's what in Caragua."

But his telegram was returned to him, an hour or two later, with the information that the line between El Puerto and the capital had been cut. And thereat he whistled still more surprisedly.

When President Casado reached the harbor-master's office, he found that worthy in a state of tremulous expectation.

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"The boat is at the steps, Excellency," he volunteered, "and — here is the flag you desired."

"Good!" said the President briefly. "I shall not forget that you have been helpful."

"Will — will there be any bombardment, Excellency?" ventured the harbor-master, and his Excellency smiled up from the stern-sheets of the small craft which had been awaiting him with his light baggage already on board. The men at the oars pressed into such service at pistol point, by the corporal of the President's recent escort, were listening, all ears.

"There may be," he answered, loudly enough for them to hear. "But not of the Port. If I cannot come to terms with the admiral of the fleet outside, he will content himself with shelling my residence. So much is already agreed. I am, as ever, prepared to sacrifice myself for our country!"

He acknowledged, always with the same virtuous austerity, the muttered plaudits that his heroic speech evoked from his conscript crew, and bade them give way with a will. By the time they had reached the end of the mole and emerged from under its cover, he had seized to the flag-pole behind him the small Amerian flag which the harbor-master had handed him. Under its shelter he felt secure from any immediate misuse on the part of the Portuguese.

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He had instructed the Governor of the Port, by telephone from the villa, to have word sent out to their admiral that the President of the Republic would presently seek a personal interview with him, to the end that the manifold differences between their respective governments might still, if possible, be peaceably adjusted. But he did not yet know what success had attended that belated effort to stave off for a little longer the stringent measures which, he had been warned, would be adopted at noon. He had already tried the Portuguese admiral's patience sorely, and — he could see, from the white feathers floating at the funnel-tops, that the little fleet had steam up. They had hove short on their cables and cleared for action. The mid-day gun would be fired at the fort within a few minutes.

A short-boat came speeding landward from the *Olive Branch*, its rowers straining every muscle in hot haste to gain shelter of some sort before the impending bombardment should be begun. They paid no attention whatever to the President, but a telegraph-peon, their sole passenger, rose unsteadily and, clutching at the gunwale, bowed, bare-headed, to that all-powerful personage. Casado took no notice of him, but bade his own apprehensive crew put more strength into their stroke. Time was almost up, and they had still some distance to cover.

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Both hands of the watch on his wrist touched twelve, and he looked astern. A white cloud burst from an embrasure in the black wall of the fort at the eastern edge of the town. The dull percussion of a blank charge fired from an old-fashioned gun came booming down the wind. He turned his head, and peered expectantly, with wrinkled eyes, through the blinding sunshine, at the three men-of-war now lying broadside on to the Port.

Their flag-ship suddenly spat smoke and a shell shrieked landward. Above the *bang!* that followed rose the voices of his rowers, craven voices full of fear. His daughter sat impassive in her place, although her face had blanched.

He saw where the shell struck, on a scarp of the mountain-face, where it did no damage. And then his boat dashed foaming alongside the *Olive Branch*, stopped with a clumsy crash at the foot of her steep accommodation-ladder, on the side sheltered from the Portuguese fleet.

He listened curiously to hear whether the fort would reply to the flag-ship's attempt at intimidation. He had instructed the commandment to withhold his fire, but — the commandment and his unpaid troops were in a state of rank insubordination, ready to take the law into their own hands. No further shot was fired meantime, however, and, as he reached the gangway, his moustache curled in a

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quick smile. He understood that the admiral had merely meant to intimate the establishment of the strict blockade so often threatened; he was now prepared to postpone further active measures pending the result of the conference still to take place. He had again, and at the very last moment, gained what he wanted most — which was time — just time enough to complete that masterly move he had mapped out while he had stood watching the water drain away from the vault at the villa.

A stout, bull-necked young man with a stupidly honest face met him at the gangway, and shook, with an unconscious strength which made his Excellency wince, the hand held out to him. But that long-suffering diplomat still smiled. His eyes had lighted on an orange envelope in the young man's free fist.

"I am President Casado," he explained patronizingly. "Mr.— er — Mr.—"

"Yoxall — chief mate," supplemented that individual as his visitor paused.

"— Mr. Yoxall, and this is my daughter, the Doña Carmen." The Doña Carmen also smiled, very pleasantly, as she bowed. She had been glancing curiously about her and had just caught sight of another girl, a young girl and pretty as any picture, with strangely wistful, appealing eyes, who had been regarding her uncertainly from a little distance.

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She bowed to the stout ship's-officer, and, leaving her father to talk to him, went forward with a very pleasant smile, and a word or two in the quaint, shy English she had been learning from Ulick Scarlett. She greatly desired to make friends with an English girl.

"You have no doubt been expecting us?" Casado remarked to the mate. "You have of course heard from Captain Dove? — that I have chartered the *Olive Branch* — that you are to place her entirely at my disposal."

Reuben Yoxall's sun-burned visage assumed a most puzzled frown. He looked again at the telegram he had just received, at the President, at the two girls standing together in the shade of a canvas wind-sail on the other side of the deck. He cleared his throat, and, "Where is Captain Dove?" he demanded abruptly.

CHAPTER XV.

PRESIDENT CASADO'S PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

“**W**HERE is Captain Dove?” Reuben Yoxall demanded, and so abruptly as almost to confuse his masterful visitor. But Casado raised his eyebrows in time to keep the tell-tale lids from flickering.

“Captain Dove is on his way to Caragua,” he answered without hesitation. “But—I thought he would have explained everything to you in his wire. He promised me he would do so.”

The mate of the *Olive Branch* once more smoothed out the crumpled telegram-form he had in his hand, and reread its contents carefully to himself.

“Am going up-country with Slyne and Gildersleeve, to collect money at capital. All previous orders canceled. Have chartered ship to Casado, President of Nicazuela. Place her entirely at his disposal and carry out his instructions till I return.

“DOVE.”

Casado, knowing no more than he did, had not

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dared to be more precise in the bogus message he had fabricated at the telegraph-office. He was trusting now to his own quick wits for a plausible answer to any other awkward question that might be asked. And it did not seem to him that the stout-necked young man before him was overburdened with brains.

Reuben Yoxall was, as a matter of fact, in a state of the direst perplexity. He did not for a moment doubt the authenticity of the despatch he had just received, nor had he any intention but to obey it. The complex problem before him now was how he could best do so. And Reuben Yoxall hailed from Cumberland in England, where they breed some seafaring men, of a canny, slow-thinking, sure-going sort.

In the first place he would have to deal with not only the turbulent rascals of Captain Dove's own crew, but also the insolent, ill-disciplined ruffians whom Eustace Gildersleeve had recruited by specious promises of plunder and license to work their will once they should reach land; and for sole curb on the latter he had the ex-captain of the *Calixte*, a sodden scoundrel, who, with his equally worthless subordinates, had already made all the trouble he could for the regular ship's-officers. They were within sight of land now, waiting eagerly till one o'clock should be sounded to get ashore.

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When all these should have been drilled into line, a task to which Reuben Yoxall, a very capable driver, would willingly have applied himself with the help of his own underlings, there was still the Portuguese fleet to be reckoned with. Its admiral had sent on board the *Olive Branch* again, shortly before eight bells, to intimate that, since her master had thought fit to ignore the friendly warning afforded him on the previous night, he must now consider himself included in the blockade, and stay where he was. Should he so much as attempt to heave short on his anchor, the fleet would combine to make a sieve of his ship. It seemed that the Portuguese admiral's temper was badly roused, that he was no longer inclined to count consequences.

Such being the case, how was Reuben Yoxall to place the *Olive Branch* entirely at the charterer's disposal and carry out his instructions, as directed by Captain Dove!

"When will Captain Dove be back?" he asked vexedly, and the President made a quick mental calculation.

"I should think that by riding hard he'd reach Caragua late to-night," he returned. "A day there, a night's rest — and back again to Altamirano. Better not count on seeing him before Saturday, Mr. Yoxall."

"Saturday!" the mate echoed, dismayed. "And

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what d'you want me to do for you in the meantime, sir?"

Casado had hard work to disguise the satisfaction this simple question afforded him, since it showed that his good faith was taken for granted.

"Come into the chart-room, out of the sun, and sit down," Reuben Yoxall suggested, and, as the President looked round for his daughter: "the two young ladies have gone below together," he added indifferently, leading the way.

"Now, Mr. Yoxall," the President continued in his most impressive manner, as soon as they were seated, "I'm going to take you into my confidence. I'm going to tell you exactly my plan of campaign. Let me mention, in passing, that those in whom I confide, and who trust me, always find that the mutual compact pays them most handsomely. Let me entrust you with this small earnest of my intentions toward you."

Reuben Yoxall, looking still more puzzled, took from him, though by no means willingly, the canvas bag which the President had obtained from Cadwallader Waples.

"If it's money," he said, "I'll send it forward, in your name. It will help to quieten the crew down. They're a mutinous lot of dogs, and will be very ill-pleased at hearing that they're not to get ashore in the meantime."

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"Do so, my good sir," Casado begged earnestly. "And if you should need more to keep them in leash for a little, you'll let me know."

"The situation ashore is so very involved at present," he went on quickly, "that to let them land would be like setting a match to a powder-magazine."

"The situation afloat's no better," said Yoxall bluntly, determined to unbosom himself of his difficulties. But the President forestalled him.

"You mean because of those Portuguese animals," he agreed. "But leave them to me, Mr. Yoxall. As soon as I have explained to you what I wish done, I shall settle matters with them so that you will have no further trouble in that connection. There will be an armistice, Mr. Yoxall, between Nicazuela and Portugal. And, during that armistice, the *Olive Branch* will take her lading on board."

"It lies at my villa on shore — a matter of a few boatloads. I shall bring it on board myself, if you will let me have a boat's crew of your steadiest and most daring men. They will be well paid for the work."

"Once it is safely on board, we stand out to sea. If necessary, we must run the blockade,— and that should be easy enough on a craft like the old *Reconquista*, eh, Mr. Yoxall! Captain Dove told me she steams a steady fifteen knots. We must show

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those Portuguese animals our heels outside, and then give them the slip altogether, for we shall have to send a landing-party ashore at Altamirano, a village a few miles from here, to the westward, where Captain Dove and his friends have agreed to meet us with the balance of the cargo, which they are to bring down from Caragua on mule-back. By Saturday they should be there. But we'll no doubt hear from them again before then. Where was your wire handed in — and at what time?"

"Bella Vista, at eleven-twenty," the mate responded, scratching his head to expedite its digestion of the President's glibly outlined plan.

"That's just where they would be, by traveling fast," Casado remarked thoughtfully. He was reflecting that it would be easy enough, when the time came, to account for their disappearance. Not many days passed, at the best of times, without a murder among the mountains, and, in the present chaotic state of the country, the fact that these supposed travelers were thought to be bringing money with them from the capital would supply a sufficiently obvious motive for such a mishap in their case. Whereupon the *Olive Branch* would proceed on the trip for which it was understood he had chartered her, a trip to some safe port in Europe yet to be fixed on. A savagely simple scheme, and all the more likely therefore to prove successful — if only

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an armistice, even till noon to-morrow, could be arranged.

"And, now I've made everything clear to you, Mr. Yoxall," he said genially, "I must ask you to send a messenger to the Portuguese flag-ship, with a few lines from me for the admiral."

As he pulled out a pocket-book and began to write, honest Reuben Yoxall went off to order a boat away, well enough satisfied after all, since the charterer seemed to know not only what was to be done, but also, and luckily for himself, how to do it. He was less pleased, however, to see, as he stepped out into the open air, that one of the three Portuguese war-vessels had shifted her berth and dropped anchor inshore of the *Olive Branch*, between his ship and the town.

He went down into the foredeck alone to inform the composite crew there that, for reasons sufficient to him, no landing would now take place: a very dangerous errand and one that might have resulted disastrously to one less steeled to such danger. But they accepted his dictum, at any rate for the moment, with no more than a low and ominous growling among themselves. No voice was raised against him, and he left them Casado's bag of sweated doubloons to salve their sore feeling a little.

His boat came back from the flag-ship with word that the admiral would presently follow, and, when

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that dignitary arrived, Reuben Yoxall received him and his aide at the gangway, and led them to the shady side of the charthouse, where the President was awaiting them. Casado had not thought it politic to display any excess of courtesy in advance.

The two antagonists saluted each other with all due ceremony, and the mate went up on to the bridge to get his binoculars. He had just espied a small gray speck on the sea-rim. The deck-watch were stationed below in the well, invisible. A solitary look-out was pacing the forecastle-head. It was a standing rule on the *Olive Branch* that all hands except those on duty must spend their time in port under hatches.

The conversation on the quarter-deck was therefore almost informal, and the President soon succeeded in establishing a surface cordiality with the representative of Portugal. He himself was an adept in what may be best described as skating on the merest semblance of ice, and presently had the blunt-witted sailor sorely bewildered among the twists and turns which he executed with so much assurance. But then it seemed that the ice was about to give way, that the reckless skater must be submerged. For the Portuguese admiral absolutely refused to depart by so much as a hairsbreadth from the remaining terms of his ultimatum.

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He had refrained for the moment from shelling the Port, he said, as a personal favor to the President himself, and on the distinct understanding that some satisfactory compromise would be forthcoming at once. If, as it seemed was the case, the President had no such proposal to make, there was, however unfortunately, nothing for it but to carry out in its entirety the programme he had, under a misapprehension, postponed.

President Casado twisted and turned in vain. With all his facility he could not twist or turn the admiral from his adamant purpose. The claims of Portugal, claims admittedly just under international law, must be met forthwith and in full, or —

President Casado was once more at his wits' end. His whole plan of campaign hinged on arranging an armistice, during which he might remove his wealth, under cover of night, from the villa to the *Olive Branch*. He curbed his ever-growing resentment against the obdurate admiral, all unwittingly arbiter of his future, and with tireless pertinacity, tried him on another tack.

"You are rash, *señor almirante*," he said, "to precipitate hostilities as you seem determined to do. I speak frankly, in the mutual interests of our respective countries, on neutral ground, under the flag of a paramount power." He indicated with out-

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stretched hand the Stars and Stripes afloat in the breeze at the lofty pole on the poop of the *Olive Branch*.

"I have offered you my assurance that your claims against me may be adjusted by arbitration, but that offer you have flouted. You have also scorned my promise of a payment to account of one of these claims, within a week or ten days. You have refused to allow me the time necessary for the peaceful settlement of our dispute. I am at the end of resources adequate to meet your oppressive demands.

"I shall therefore remain here, on neutral ground, under the flag of a power paramount, and — you will no doubt act as you see fit. I shall, of course, send to Washington a full report as to your present and future policy."

The Portuguese admiral was undoubtedly staggered by this new move. Casado had laid down now, and, according to the rules of the international ring, he could not very well kick Casado, dearly as he would have liked to do so. He would have been glad to step apart and consult with his aide, but that would not have been dignified. His saffron features curled in a sudden, ferocious scowl, and he snapped his fingers full in Casado's face.

"That for the doctrine that helps rogues like you to ruin your fellow-countrymen!" he cried explosively, his native politeness entirely vanquished by

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the invincible audacity of his opponent. "I tell you for the last time, sir, that you will either comply with my equitable claims, or —" He paused, on an inspiration.

"I'll hold you as hostage for their settlement," he said. "You will remain on board this steamer — the *Olive Branch* — for four-and-twenty hours. During that time you may only communicate with the shore by means of a despatch-boat which I shall send you. And if, at the expiration of that renewed period of grace you are still intractable — I'll rid South America of one of its pests! I'll sink the *Olive Branch* at her moorings, with you on board and alone.

"You'll send me word if you come to your senses in the interim, and — I bid your Excellency adieu."

Wherewith the excitable sailor stamped away, in a paroxysm of passion over the President's shuffling. And the President looked after him, very evilly.

"But hard words break no bones," Casado said to himself thankfully, watching him on the way back to the flag-ship of his ineffectual fleet. "I've got what I want, and — within four-and-twenty hours I'll be far enough from here. If we should only be lucky enough to meet that Portuguese pig at sea — the *Olive Branch* carries four quick-firing guns to a broadside, and — Ah, Carmen! You startled me."

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The Doña Carmen smiled up at him, a somewhat tremulous smile, and the evil light in his eyes died out as he made shift to smile back at her. He was never so preoccupied that he could not spare her a moment. And to him, while in the midst of all these grave issues he listened patiently, she poured forth, in swift, broken sentences, that strange and pitiful story which she had succeeded in charming from the young American girl she had discovered on board.

He listened patiently, although to tell the truth, he was not in any temper just then to be entertained with the woes of errant American girls. And Eileen Saxilby, in the background, observing his obvious abstraction, almost repented herself of having granted her new-found friend permission for its retelling. But, when his impetuous daughter mentioned Eustace Gildersleeve's name, Casado became all attention.

He heard her out in grave silence, with growing interest. He was only sorry that he had not sooner known of these very serious criminal charges against his chief creditor. He was wondering whether they might not be of use to him even yet, when his chief creditor was —. He thought of the vault at the villa again, and shrugged his shoulders.

"She need fear nothing more from Eustace Gildersleeve now," he assured his daughter, in answer

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to her urgent prayer that he would afford the luckless Eileen his all-powerful protection against her oppressors. "Tell her, *querida*, that she may count me as well as yourself her friend. I'll think it all over, and see what's best to be done. Then we'll do it, you and I, for this new friend of yours. Will that satisfy you, eh?"

He pinched her ear playfully, and, turning away as she went back with a beaming smile to impart to the anxious captive the promise made her, climbed hastily to the bridge to get a better view of a vessel that had just come into sight from behind the furthestmost of the Portuguese fleet. At the same moment a number of men emerged from a hatch in the well-deck beneath. One of whom, suddenly desecrying him, shrank back and so disappeared; but not before the President recognized him.

"José Maria Moreno!" Casado said to himself in a hissing whisper, his lips drawn back from his set teeth. "He'll soon have still more reason to be sorry he ever shipped on the *Olive Branch*!"

Reuben Yoxall rejoined him while he was inspecting the incoming steamer contentedly and at his leisure. She had hove to, at the Portuguese flag-ship's order, and he could see the admiral's boat on its way to board her.

"What ship's that?" the mate asked abruptly, and glared at the men in the well-deck. "Give me

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the glasses a minute, sir, before I go down and drive those swine back into their quarters."

He was still staring with furrowed brows at the stranger when a sharp, fear-stricken cry came up from below, and the sullen group in the well-deck turned to look seaward. One of their number was pointing toward her, with outstretched hand. They crossed to the bulwark, and stood there, craning their necks, for a moment. Then they swung about, and disappeared through the hatch again, as if the devil himself had been at their heels, without other driving: all save one, who remained where he was, and whined and clawed at the air with crooked fingers.

"I'll soon sort you!" the mate muttered wrathfully, and, sliding down the stair-rails, sprang at the ex-captain of the *Calixte*, gripped him by the scruff of the neck, and kicked him, still whimpering miserably, into the hatchway after his fellows.

As he himself regained the quarterdeck, scowling, scarlet of face, Eileen Saxilby ran toward him, with wide, eager eyes, and, "Oh, Mr. Yoxall!" she cried in an awe-stricken voice, "that — that's the *Calixte*!"

CHAPER XVI

THE BONA ROBA

NO sooner had the Portuguese admiral, still in a state of sputtering indignation, regained the poop of his flag-ship than the officer of the watch politely drew his attention to the strange steamer approaching the fleet from seaward. And the admiral no less politely requested to be informed whether the officer of the watch believed him to be stone-blind.

"Signal her to heave to," said the admiral, simmering over, "and have my gig piped away again, if you please. I, myself, since my subordinates are of a brainlessness so crapulent and revolting, shall interview the commander of the vessel — which I have been observing for some time past.

"And, meanwhile, take a quick but correct note of these further orders: A boat is to be placed at the disposal of President Casado, at present a prisoner in my hands, on the *Olive Branch*, but solely for the purpose of carrying despatches. Word is to be sent to the captain of the *São João* that he is to picket the *Olive Branch* day and night, allow no other boat

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to leave or approach her, and that, should she show the least disposition to slip her moorings, he is to draw yard-arm to yard-arm and disable her with a broadside. A communication in English is to be delivered by the despatch-boat to the master of the *Olive Branch*, advising him of these measures. A landing-party is to proceed in the steam-pinnace to where the telegraph-cable runs ashore — there is a white beacon above the beach at the spot. They are to cut the cable, draw it seaward for some distance, and sink it safely.

"That is all, I thank you, and — why, then, do you procrastinate here? I await my gig."

The officer of the watch put up his note-book and hurried away, with a flushed scowl, to carry out these instructions and warn his fellow-sufferers from that source of the cyclonic conditions prevailing aft. All on board, indeed, were delighted to see the admiral's back when he presently set out again on his self-imposed errand, and no one in any way envied the crew of his gig.

The steamer approaching had hove to, in response to his signal. From her shapely lines he would have supposed her a pleasure yacht, but the plight she was in precluded that supposition. He gazed open-mouthed at her as he ran alongside, and, having puffed very pompously up the ladder let down for his benefit, stopped at the gangway to touch his hat

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in salute, looked about him still more surprisedly.

He had observed from below that, although her davits were all swung inboard, the boat-chocks were black and empty. Where he now stood he could see for himself how that had come about. From abaft the bridge to the break of the poop, charred timbers and blistered paintwork, all washed to the bone by the seas which had since swept over them, spoke mutely of mishandling as well as mishap: no merely accidental fire should have done so much damage on a modern ship. Of the after-deckhouse nothing was left but a ragged, incomplete skeleton, twisted steel ribs and stringers and beams, too tough to be swept overside. Here and there the deck-plates showed, red with dust, through great gaps burned in their planking. Her whole appearance was desolate and disheveled to a degree.

But what still puzzled him was that there seemed to be no one in charge of her. On the bridge he had only observed a girl, a girl in a ravishing costume of white and lapis-lazuli, a broad-brimmed hat most becoming to her: whom he, gaping up at her from his gig, had very greatly desired to see at a shorter range. And she was coming aft now, toward the gangway, alone. She had just returned his formal salute in orthodox quarterdeck style. He bowed before her, enchanted, a hand on his heart, his smallsword sticking out behind like a tail.

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She stopped, standing straight before him, her head well back, her hands at her sides, a slender and gallant figure with an intangible something about her which he could not quite explain to himself, which indeed perplexed him extremely. His first impression of her at such close quarters was curiously confused. He was chiefly aware of her eyes, eyes with strange, lambent lights in them, like twin rainbows, before which his own soon fell furtively, afraid that she might see more than she should, so penetrating was her calm, unconcerned scrutiny.

The cut of her costly yachting-suit spoke plainly of Paris, even to him. One dainty ankle, above a rubber-soled shoe a little advanced, showed silk in the sun. It disappeared and he looked up again, blinking.

"I — I beg to see the captain, *senhorita*," he stammered, in a mixture of English and Portuguese intelligible enough. "What ship is this?"

"This is an American ship — as you can see from her flag," she answered coolly in his own tongue, made very musical by her clear, confident voice. "I'm acting captain. What is your business with me?"

The Portuguese admiral was absolutely stunned by the mental shock such a statement could not but cause him. And his face mirrored his mind. He peered at her stupidly, still blinking in the hot light,

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like one purblind. She was not in the least like any other girl he had ever seen, but he could by no means bring himself to believe that even a Nereid in petticoats might captain a steamship on the high seas. The mere idea was preposterous.

And yet there was something in her fearless, level regard that almost compelled belief. And she herself was apparently well assured of her status: for while he was still staring blankly at her, her perfect features had slowly assumed a faint, interrogative frown. He suddenly bethought himself that he owed her — since he must, of course, concede her the rank she claimed — a prompt account of himself and his errand there.

"Your pardon, *senhorita capitão*," said he, with an elaborate courtesy meant to mask his evident scepticism. "I come to inform you that this port is closed to trade. I, admiral of the fleet before you, have been reluctantly forced, by international difficulties, to institute a blockade of the most rigorous. To-morrow I shall probably have to shell the town. Meantime I cannot permit any craft to enter or leave that part of the roadstead circumscribed by my ships."

He felt better pleased with himself after he had delivered himself of this ultimatum. He noticed that her questioning eyes had grown anxious, and this gratified him, as illustrating his own importance,

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somewhat compromised. She turned, to look across at his three cruisers, and at the shimmering white town on the sea-shore.

"But — there's a steamer at anchor in the inner roadstead now," she objected, as if in doubt. "The *Olive Branch*, isn't it?"

"The *Olive Branch*, yes. Her, too, I warned — but she heeded not. Now, she must stay where she is."

"She won't wait to ask anybody's leave when she wants to put to sea," the girl asserted unguardedly, and an instant, sinister suspicion sprang up in his mind. Could it possibly be that these two American ships were in league with each other — and with Casado — and against him? Putting two and two together, in urgent alarm, he made a mental figure of five, and surmise, condensed, became certainty. For the girl had apparently realized from his expression the slip she had made, and, under his searching glance, displayed a momentary confusion which seemed to him evidence sufficient of her complicity in some far-reaching plot to frustrate him in his projected *coup d'état*.

He knew that he had incurred a responsibility of the gravest in subjecting the *Olive Branch* to constraint, and that the inopportune appearance of this mysterious craft, her consort, could not but add heavily to the hazard in which he stood — a personal

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hazard to which he had only exposed himself as a last resort in his battle of wits with Casado. He knew, too, that, if he should now fall short of final success in his undertaking, he would most assuredly lose his official head. And these instantaneous reflections served to steady him, left him cool and very alert, entirely on the defensive. He would, indeed, have returned to his flag-ship forthwith, had it not been his obvious duty to see as much more as he might of this new and unusual enemy, of whom, since he had surprised her secret, he was no longer afraid. He felt quite sure that he could cope with a girl.

He therefore accepted complaisantly her invitation to crack a bottle of wine on board, according to naval custom. She seemed to be thoroughly versed in all the routine of her rank. And, as he followed her, with a smirk of self-satisfaction in spite of his inward misgivings, she called an order across to a man passing aft on the other side of the deck — the only man besides the look-out on the fore-castlehead of whom he had yet caught sight.

"Tim!" she called, and her slightly raised voice, of a velvet softness now, delighted the admiral's ears as he listened, without understanding. "Tim Finucane! Go and rouse Mr. Ingersoll out, and — Mr. Judson's on duty below. Tell them I'd like to see them both, in the chartroom."

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She led the way to a black, scorched doorway under the bridge. The admiral would not enter before her, but stood bowing elegantly, hat in hand, till she preceded him with an indifferent nod, to whose significance he was blind. He seated himself conveniently and with a complacent smile, although she was quite oblivious to the blandishment of his glance. But, almost at once, before he could frame words to fit his flirtatious intentions, these were thrown entirely out of gear by the unceremonious interruption of an ugly, oily engineer, who came thrusting in, regardless of etiquette, wiping his hands on a wisp of waste, and was in no wise abashed by the obvious indignation of the admiral, whom indeed he greeted with a very genial grin. While the admiral, observing what he did not seem to observe, the sudden shyness of the girl's regard, gallantly strove to stifle the chagrin and disgust with which he could not but view the intrusion of any such individual and more especially at such a juncture.

Close on that intruder's heels, too, another appeared, another young man, much cleaner and better looking, though somewhat haggard of face, clad in shabby, seafaring blue without any badges of rank, and rubbing his eyes, who looked askance at the admiral, and turned to the girl with some quick inquiry unintelligible to him. But she, answering, spoke of the *Olive Branch* again, and that was easy

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of comprehension, besides reminding the admiral that he was among enemies.

And, if anything had been wanting to confirm him in that belief, the behavior of the last comer would assuredly have sufficed. For, at the name of the *Olive Branch*, the young man in blue had swung about with a curt exclamation and would have dashed out on deck again, had not the girl held him with some hasty, whispered caution. He hung on his heel, to hear what she had to say, and, having heard, turned on the admiral with a demeanor so threatening that the admiral got hurriedly to his feet. But the girl interposed again, and the younger man restrained himself, though with a visible effort. He seemed to be in a very dangerous humor.

At a sign from her, however, he also seated himself, between the admiral and the door. And she brought out from a locker a bottle of wine, and set a glass before each of the three men. She was so assuredly mistress of the situation that the admiral was impelled to toast her, with all due ceremony, and thus win a smile in despite of the other two. The wine was most excellent old Madeira. The smile he had won was bewitching. He even unbent, for her sake, in so far as to accept from the presumptuous engineer at his side a somewhat damp cigar and a lighted match. Then he folded his arms and sat stiffly upright, wishing the other two at the

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devil, only waiting till they should be gone. She was talking with them now, in rapid sentences whose import he could not gather, although the ominous name of the *Olive Branch* cropped up constantly, and it ruffled his self-esteem to be so ignored. He would have returned to his flagship forthwith, but — his eyes always on the girl, he lingered, indeterminately.

Studying her, unnoticed himself, so intent were they in their colloquy, he could come to no further conclusion concerning her, or her ship, or her ship's company. She was not in the least like any other girl he had ever seen. There was an intangible something about her which set her apart, clearly separate and distinct from the every-day young lady of any land he had visited on voyages which had taken him all over the world. She was not of the half-world either, he knew intuitively, although she could play so perfectly and in an age so prosaic as this the rôle of a *bona roba*, although the craft she professed to command was more like a pirate than anything else and he would have had no hesitation in hanging her two companions off-hand for gallows-bound buccaneers.

They were both looking blackly at him by now, and behind the black looks of one at least lay imminent action. But, at a word from her, the engineer disappeared again, as promptly as he had appeared. The other followed him, after a few more words

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with her, but slowly and looking backward. And she turned once more to the admiral, with a smile of apology. He was glad then that he had been patient.

She refilled his glass, and sat down in the corner opposite him, one elbow upon a cushion, a foot tucked under her on the settee. And, looking straight into his eyes, she began to speak.

He listened as if spell-bound to the most amazing and altogether incredible story she told him; a story with which he felt sure she was seeking to hoodwink him: the story of a trust betrayed, an abducted heirless, a ship fired and scuttled at sea, a quest quixotic, insane as any ever conceived by Cervantes. And, if it did occur to him while he sat there, one hand on his wine-glass, waiting, with ever and anon a courteous inclination of the head to show his close attention, that she must think him very gullible indeed if she expected him to take for fact a fabrication so fantastic on the face of it, he showed no sign of discontent. He was sufficiently well pleased to be so entertained while he might contemplate unchecked a picture such as she made at that moment.

When she had told him all she might, she paused, regarding him attentively, and then made the appeal he had expected — that he would grant her and her friends immediate access to the *Olive Branch*, if only for an hour.

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She had almost bewitched him into an easy belief in her nonsensical narrative. He had all but succumbed to the wistful entreaty in her anxious eyes. He would very gladly have gained her favor by granting any she might ask of him, but — the stem of the wine-glass he was holding suddenly snapped in his fingers, and the spell she had woven about him was broken. He sat up, with a nervous start, recalling quite clearly then all that any ill-judged generosity might cost him. She had almost bewitched him, but even for her he could not jeopardize his last chance of success in a matter of still more moment than her immediate conquest.

He looked away from her, in case she should yet succeed in undermining his adamant decision. The blockade must be maintained intact. He could at present allow no communication between the two American craft. He must in the meantime give up all hope of ingratiating himself with her. And, seeing that he stood in grave danger of losing ground again should he delay there in her company, he rose reluctantly, and threw his cigar away with a grimace of disgust.

"Ask me anything but that, *senhorita*," said he in a grieved voice. And she seemed to understand at once that he was not to be turned from his purpose. She did not seek to detain him.

"After noon to-morrow, perhaps," he added,

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emerging on deck, "it may be possible. But until then, alas!" He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly and turned toward the gangway.

He did not notice the two young men who had started out from behind the smoke-stack at sight of him, but the girl did and waved them away. She saw him as far as the gangway herself, and he answered readily enough her quick questions as to the situation afloat and ashore, since by doing so he could to some extent exculpate himself for his seeming ungraciousness. And from the stern of his gig as it carried him off, he waved his cocked hat to her with a most fascinating flourish. She had expressed the hope that she might meet him again, on the morrow.

He felt sure that she herself had a soft side toward him, and that, but for the execrable couple who had imposed on him their insolent society, he would have got along with her still more famously. On the poop of his flag-ship again, strutting to and fro, one hand behind him, the other thrust into the breast of his tight-fitting frock-coat, he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to find out the name of the craft she professed to command; and simultaneously he recalled the witchery of her smile. He stopped, to curl his moustaches with all the self-sufficiency of the professional lady-killer, and his glance shifted from the strange steamer outside to the *Olive*

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Branch, inshore. The latter had just hoisted a string of signals; the despatch-boat had left her, and was well on its way to the flag-ship.

He ran to the poop-rail, to issue an angry order, and called for the code-book, from which he had plenty of time to translate their message ere another of his boats could reach her and have them hauled down.

"Name of ship and official number?" the question ran, and, while he waited eagerly to see what the answer would be, the stranger began to move. He flew to his bridge, desperately intent on preventing her from approaching the Port or the steamer inside. His own ship was cleared for action. He piped his gun-crews to quarters.

But the stranger turned slowly seaward, and, as she gathered speed, some balls of bunting traveled aloft on her signal-halliards. A pull set them fluttering free, and the admiral fumbled impatiently at the code again till he found there what he wanted.

"We are standing by to assist you," he read wrathfully, and threw the book down with a curse as the sub-lieutenant of the despatch-boat approached, holding out a long envelope.

"I was right, after all, you see!" he hissed to himself, snatching the message from the young officer. "They are in connivance, those two, with Casado."

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And I shall soon have a whole hornet's nest about my ears since I have left one at liberty.

"But — no matter. I have so far acted quite constitutionally. And, if I am left alone till to-morrow, I'll end this farce, once and for all. That South American scoundrel shall pay very dearly for having involved me in such a disastrous risk."

And he remained where he was, morosely watching the *Calixte* on her way westward till she disappeared from his ken behind a beetling promontory which forms a buttress of the mountains below Bella Vista.

CHAPTER XVII

A DEAD-LOCK

BUT, as may be supposed, those on board the *Calixte* were in no case to cause him any inconvenience.

Half of her scanty crew had been sound asleep when Saleh, standing her watch on the bridge, had at last picked out the white splash of color that was El Puerto at the foot of the dark mountains slowly rising over the sea-rim. And she had not thought it worth while to rouse out the bone-weary men below: she knew that they needed all the sleep they were likely to get before they must turn to again. Watch and watch on a short-handed ship is heart-breaking work.

Only six of the full fore-castle complement with which the *Calixte* had left New York had been foolish enough to refuse the bait Eustace Gildersleeve had held out to them before he had scuttled the yacht. In addition to these he had perforce left on board Tim Finucane, Mrs. Mannering's footman, whom he had signed on as assistant steward and as a likely recruit to his scheme, but who had proved very much the reverse, and one Quinlan, a quarter-



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master, ringleader of the obstructionists; also, and most unfortunately for the success of his scheme, the yacht's second-engineer, Elihu Hitchcock, of Hoboken.

For it was Hitchcock who had saved her from foundering.

Battened below with the others, to roast or drown as might happen first, he had made his way amidships by means of the water-tight doorways the conspirators had left wide, dived for the two separate bilge-cocks that were rapidly flooding her, and fought with them, under water, bare-handed, blind in the pitch-black, bubbling hell, till he had got them screwed fast again — in time and no more.

And the same solid rain-squall that had sealed the fate of the *Fulmar*, a few miles astern, had quenched the fire raging on deck.

It was Hitchcock also who, still laboring for dear life at the hand-pumps with his fellow-castaways, in the ghostly gray of the dawn, had sighted a water-logged dinghy adrift in the grip of the dying gale and bearing helplessly to leeward of the derelict yacht; who had plunged overside with a line, cheapening his own life again, and so brought Ingersoll safely on board — Ingersoll almost spent in body and mind, still suffering under the added horror of his belief that Tommy Judson had gone down with the unfortunate *Fulmar*.

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But he in turn took his place at the clacking pumps, and worked there dumbly at intervals throughout that age-long day during which it was still uncertain whether the pumps or the sea would win; through another night to make sure of the slow victory when calm succeeded the storm. So the yacht was safely afloat again by the time that out of the fog there came from southward one of her own boats with Tommy Judson on board and Saleh for company.

Had it not been for their providential arrival, Hitchcock would assuredly have been at pains to attract the attention of that unseen craft which went blindly by in the fog a few minutes later shattering the stark silence with bell and whistle; and so would unwittingly have brought down on them all the doom they had scarcely escaped. But Saleh's most timely warning had saved him from mistaking the *Olive Branch* for a friend. And from that moment their luck had stayed steadily by them.

It had been their first intention to make straight back for New York as soon as it should be possible to get steam up again. But Saleh, with Tommy Judson to aid and abet her at every turn, had changed that also. She had found means to enlist the men in a project too utterly hare-brained to have appealed to any but sailors. Hitchcock, a man of few words, quietly nursing a very personal grudge against Eus-

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tace Gildersleeve, had concurred with a nod, and Ingersoll was, of course, unspeakably eager to carry her most audacious suggestion into effect.

And thus it had fallen out that the *Calixte*, as shipshape again as she might be made, held south under a full head of steam, on the track of the *Olive Branch*.

Hitchcock and Tommy Judson between them attended to the invalid engines. Saleh and Ingersoll took turn about on the bridge, and Saleh's training in navigation by Captain Dove stood them in excellent stead. Quinlan, the ex-quartermaster, performed yeoman service in his degree, and Tim Finucane, too, was a host in himself. Of the fore-castle hands not one failed in his double duty, in the stokehold or on deck. And, the weather favoring, they at last reached the roadstead of El Puerto without noteworthy mishap.

The Portuguese admiral's interdict was all the more aggravating therefore, and Ingersoll in particular had been chafed almost beyond endurance by that totally unexpected obstacle cropping up when they had all but gained their goal. He had been anticipating daily throughout these arduous days the moment when he might beard Eustace Gildersleeve, and use his own dear-bought knowledge of that gray-haired rascal's unholy secrets to buy Eileen Saxilby back from him — even at the price of silence.

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In the light of what Tommy Judson and Saleh had told him concerning the *Olive Branch*, his fears on Eileen's account had increased day by day and a thousand-fold. The heavy insurances on her life which, as he had learned from the docketed sheaf of papers he had picked up in Eustace Gildersleeve's library, her guardian had so lately effected, seemed of a much more malign significance now. Every hour's delay could not but add to the horrible risk overhanging her. Since all Eustace Gildersleeve's other expedients seemed to have failed him, he would not balk very long at that last murderous shift to stave off beggary.

Ingersoll was almost distracted, and, had it not been for Saleh, he would without doubt, and however unwisely, have called the Portuguese admiral to account in person for his high-handed and arbitrary procedure. But he owed Saleh too much already to disregard her earnest appeal to his better judgment, and left her to deal with the admiral as might seem best to herself. Even when, after the admiral had returned to his flag-ship, she had to admit that she had failed in her utmost effort to move him, he choked down the sick disappointment he could not but feel, and applied his mind resolutely to the planning of some other move in the desperate game they were playing. But the strain was obviously telling on him.

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"What now, Saleh?" he asked, as cheerfully as he could, rejoining her on her way back to the bridge, and she smiled encouragement. Her frank and simple comradeship was very comforting to him. She had been below, to the engine-room. Tommy Judson had already returned to his duty there, and Hitchcock to the sodden sleep from which he had been aroused to relieve his assistant. But Ingersoll was too much on edge to court sleep again.

"On to Altamirano," she answered confidently. "We'll see whether we can't board the *Olive Branch* to-night from the shore."

His drawn face cleared a little. That seemed feasible enough: more feasible undoubtedly than any such rash attempt from seaward as he had been revolving in his own mind. He was busy over the chart when she spoke again, one hand on the engine-room telegraph.

"Captain Dove's going to talk to us," she said in a calm, indifferent voice, and picked up the signal code. A cool, casual attitude of detachment was one of her many unusual characteristics. "'Name of ship and official number,' he wants to know: but — I don't think we'll commit ourselves. Tell you what, though — if we say, 'We're standing by to assist you,' perhaps Reuben Yoxall'll have sense enough to tell Eileen Saxilby. That'll help to hearten her up, and, anyhow, it'll puzzle the Old Man some."

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Ingersoll nodded silent and grateful assent. He was dimly aware that, for some reason also obscure to him, she had no great love for the girl she had done, and was doing, so much to serve. But he knew very well that her nature was finely generous.

She called Quinlan up and gave him the signal letters, so that, as the *Calixte* began to move, the cryptic answer she had devised streamed out on the hot north wind.

"I hope Rube gets the idea," she remarked, and Ingersoll once more nodded silently. He hated to let the *Olive Branch* out of his sight again, and stood staring back at her through a pair of binoculars till the bluff below Bella Vista shut in the anchorage of El Puerto; and then he faced about, still without a word, to take stock of Altamirano over the bow.

There was nothing at all prepossessing about the appearance of the little fishing-village which clung to the draggled skirts of the mountain: a number of squalid, mud-walled hovels, built at haphazard, between the cliffs and the sea, about the banks of the mountain stream off whose mouth the *Calixte* shortly dropped anchor. And its inhabitants paid slight attention to the arrival. Only a few came to their doorways to peer through the sunshine at the shapely white steamer which had awakened wild echoes among the rocks above with the roar of its anchor-chain.

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But when three foreigners landed on the unclean beach below — two muscular-looking, brown-faced men and a very beautiful girl in a gown that called all the women out in a hurry — from a shabby, weather-worn dinghy, which at once returned to the steamer, some signs of sensation among the natives became apparent. A number of slouching men joined the slovenly women in the low doorways, and a pack of mongrel dogs ran baying at the intruders till Ingersoll kicked one in the ribs, since no one seemed disposed to recall them, and they fled to a safer distance, snarling savagely.

The three strangers halted at the first hut they came to, and while they were holding speech with its occupant, a sullen half-breed, most of his fellows shuffled over to hear what was going on. When it turned out that the *gringos* were seeking horses to take them as far as the Port, the visible population of Altamirano laughed, unpleasantly. Was it likely that poor fisher-folk would have horses at heck and manger!

Their insolent mirth angered Ingersoll, grown very irritable of late, and he would promptly have dealt with them as he had with their curs, had not Saleh once more laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Have patience," she whispered reprovingly, and turned to one of the younger men with a smile that served to enlist him at least in her service. And,

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presently, there were others also willing to aid her. But, with it all, there was only a single horse to be had, and that a sorry-looking brute belonging to a charcoal-burner, who did not happen to be at home then.

"Yoke it into its cart," said Saleh coolly, and her command was at once complied with. The cart was filled with clean straw. One brought out a stool for a step and she leaped lightly into her place. Tommy Judson took the ragged rope-reins, and Ingersoll seated himself on the insecure tail-board.

"How far to the Port?" Saleh called back to the little gathering they were already leaving behind: and: "Less than three leagues, señorita," answered a dozen voices in chorus.

"Tell the charcoal-burner that he shall have his horse back by to-morrow morning at latest — *y hasta luego amigos*," she cried, and her clear, bell-like tones reached their ears distinctly where they stood bowing, bare-headed, in the hot sunshine till a sudden curve of the road hid them and their squalid village from those in the cart.

The roadway was one of the roughest and quite unmade. It twisted and turned to follow the broken bend of the beach, sometimes on loose shingle, again among massive boulders under the dwarf-oaks on the mountainsides. For over an hour they jolted and rattled along, Tommy Judson driving dexterously,

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without exchanging more than a sentence or two, since conversation under such circumstances was practically impossible. But, notwithstanding, they were well content, for they would have been much worse off without that ramshackle tumbril. And then they reached a point where the track they had been following joins the high-road, at the foot of the long, steep slope that leads down from Bella Vista toward the Port.

"We'll get along faster now," said Tommy, ever an optimist; and, as they turned the corner: "Hello! What's this?"

He drew up so hurriedly that the charcoal-burner's horse sat down on its haunches.

"What's this?" said he, recovering his own balance. "Looks like a high-jump to me, and — I don't think this Orby of ours is any sort of an aeroplane!"

But Ingersoll, intolerant of delay, had already leaped down and was advancing on foot toward a rough fosse and loopholed stockade set squarely across the highway and flanked on either hand by a steep, stone-clad escarpment of natural formation.

"Halt, there!" ordered a harsh voice, in Spanish, and he was aware of a rifleman regarding him suspiciously over the parapet. He looked round for Saleh to act as interpreter since he knew little or

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nothing of the local language, and found her almost at his elbow.

"The road this way is closed," she told him after the sentry had spoken again. "No one whatsoever may pass. It is by the President's order. We are to turn back and keep well beyond rifle-range. If we come near again we'll be shot."

Ingersoll groaned aloud in his grievous vexation of spirit, but he did not turn away although the man on the parapet was ostentatiously displaying a well-kept, workmanlike Mauser. And Saleh stood fast, undismayed.

"Ask for the officer in charge," shouted Tommy Judson, leaning against one shaft of the cart, legs crossed, in a negligent attitude, and, at the words, another head and shoulders popped into sight from behind the palisade. They were those of a very young officer, a handsome boy in his blue and gold, whose eyes seemed to be irresistibly attracted to Saleh.

He stared at her for a moment without a word, threw himself astride the stockade, and paused in the act of slipping down its outer face to whisper a word or two to the sentry. Then he descended with lithe ease, climbed out of the dry ditch again and, coming forward, saluted her with a decorous precision.

"You're English," he said delightedly, and his freckled face broke into a beaming smile as her eyes met his. "I'm the officer in charge here. My

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name's Scarlett — Ulick Scarlett. Can I do anything for you?"

"You can help us to reach the Port," Saleh answered, and his face fell, very dismally, as he shook his head.

"I'm *awf'ly* sorry," he said, in a most despondent tone and by no means as a mere matter of form, "but — you can no doubt understand how I'm situated. My orders came from the President himself and are quite explicit. No one whatsoever may pass. And, even if I weren't here, you know, my brother Ludovic — Colonel Scarlett — would hold you up at his post further on. The road's absolutely closed."

He shook his head again, gloomily, and sighed. His present duty had of a sudden become altogether distasteful to him, but — he could not shirk it.

"I'm *awf'ly* sorry," said he. "I'd give a great deal to have been able to do anything for you."

Saleh smiled again, and his frown melted under the sunshine of her regard.

"But why is the road closed?" she asked.

"The Portuguese fleet outside's going to shell the President's villa. He's had to evacuate it for the present. There isn't a living soul between here and my brother's post, and no one's to be allowed to enter the danger zone. It's really very decent of the President to have taken such precautions, don't

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you think? And they're only temporary, of course. The moment things are more settled the road will be open to traffic again."

He was prompt with his explanation, glad to justify with a plea so valid his strict attention to orders. And Saleh saw that it would be idle to impeach his employer to him. He was not to be suborned. She extended a shapely hand to him, since there was no more to be said, and he, his sword held close to his side, bowed over it deferentially, blushing. He was no more than a boy, in exile, for all his soldierly bearing and smart uniform.

"I'm *awf'ly* sorry," said he, for the third time, and she hesitated for a moment, still holding his hand, looking wistfully into his eyes, while Ingersoll, standing silently by, regarded the two of them with a preoccupied, puzzled frown. Then she turned away and rejoined Tommy Judson. The last they saw of Ulick Scarlett was his head and shoulders, behind the stockade again, as he stood staring dejectedly after them.

The charcoal-burner's crock traveled slowly on its way homeward. And they did not seek to hurry it, since there was nothing to be gained by hurry. The *Olive Branch* was enclosed on all sides against them.

Ingersoll trudged back to Altamirano behind the cart, on foot and stumbling often. His mind was

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almost a blank He was unutterably cast down by the absolute dead-lock to which these unforeseen complications had brought them. And neither of the other two had anything at all to say.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KEY TO THE SITUATION

THE heavy-eyed inhabitants of the village flocked out in force to receive them on their return, and foremost among these on this occasion was the charcoal-burner himself, loudly bewailing the adverse lot of his cherished horse; but close at his heels came the young fisherman on whom Saleh had first prevailed to assist her.

"Leave me to settle with them," she told Tommy Judson, and he, knowing her capabilities, made no demur but took Ingersoll off down to the beach, to signal the yacht for their boat.

Quinlan was on watch, and sent the dinghy ashore at once. Saleh did not keep them waiting either, but came tripping down the shingle on the arm of her chief assistant and in close conversation with him, followed by a combined and friendly farewell from his fellows, including the fractious charcoal-burner, — and their womenkind. Even the dirty children wallowing in the dust shrilled a valediction after her as she turned in her seat to wave an inclusive adieu to the half-savage folk over whom she had gained

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such speedy ascendance. And Tommy Judson, observing her, smiled all over his ugly face. To see her play Princess Charming was a rare pleasure, and the part suited her to perfection.

Hitchcock had come up from his engine-room to hear what had happened ashore. He was sick for the feel of dry land underfoot himself, and she, understanding, stopped at the gangway to tell him how they had fared. Ingersoll, unable to stand still so long, had passed on and was once more pacing the bridge with head bent, hands clasped tight behind him. Tommy Judson glanced anxiously after him, but thought best to leave him alone for the present.

"Did you manage to get that key made?" Saleh asked eagerly of the engineer, and he, nodding, glad to be able to please her, produced from one pocket a long, thin, strangely shaped piece of steel.

"It's a skeleton," he informed her. "I've been busy at it ever since you went ashore. The ward's a very intricate one."

"What's that for?" Tommy Judson demanded, and Hitchcock as well looked inquisitive.

"It's the key to the situation," said Saleh with brisk and inspiring certainty. "Come below and I'll tell you all about it. But you'd better get another hour or two's sleep, Mr. Hitchcock — you'll probably have a long watch to stand to-night."

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"I expect we'll be going ashore again after dark," she added, as the engineer was turning away, a little disconsolately, "and we'll have to leave you in charge on board, in case of any change in the weather. How many of the men would it be safe to take with us? With Quinlan on deck — and a couple of others — Could you handle the *Calixte* with a crew of three, Mr. Hitchcock?"

"In anything short of a hurricane," he returned valiantly, and strove to conceal his visible disappointment. "I'll keep steam up all the time, of course, and, if we've to shift, I'll shift early, to save the anchor. Then I'll stand by in the offing, and show a white light every now and then to let you know where I am. When you come out, give me a long and a short flash from your sailing-lantern, and I'll pick you up. But I don't expect to have to shift — the glass is steady enough and there's no sign of wind yet."

She bestowed on him a satisfied nod and a warm smile of approval, but he, gazing after her as she went on her way, heaved a heavy sigh. He would willingly have changed places with Tommy Judson, who, he thought, did not seem to appreciate as he ought the sunshine of her society. Then he, too, disappeared below, obedient to her behest, content to leave the ordering of affairs in her very competent hands: for, having pledged himself to her service,

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Elihu Hitchcock was not the man to serve her grudgingly.

Tommy Judson seated himself at the table in the mildewed main-saloon off which Saleh had her quarters in the suite of rooms Eileen Saxilby had once occupied. Those Mrs. Mannering had inhabited, on the opposite side, had been under water while the accommodation to port had been left high and dry by the list of the ship.

"I wish I hadn't given that brass-bound Portuguese blue-fish my last cigar!" he said to himself disconsolately, and Saleh laughed from within.

"You'll find one among the wine-glasses on the buffet," she called. "I picked it up in the passage this morning and left it there to dry."

"More luck to you!" he returned with a grin of gratification, and was not long in possessing himself of the precious weed. He was turning it over tenderly in his fingers when she came forth from her cabin again.

"Listen, Tommy," she said, in a more serious tone, and laid on the table a roll of papers she had brought with her.

He struck a match, reseated himself, opposite her, puffing vigorously, and, "I'm listening," he returned. In all his dealings with her he behaved just as he would with another man, very courteous always but without constraint or formality.

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She snoothed out the papers and spoke again, concise and matter of fact.

"The Portuguese admiral's holding Casado, the President of Nicazuela, prisoner — on the *Olive Branch*. And he won't allow us on board her, or to send Captain Dove or Slyne or Gildersleeve any word, till he's good and ready. He wants money from Casado, and Casado won't part. We, too, want money and — we know where to get it. The admiral doesn't. The Casa Rosada's deserted, and under guard — but from a safe enough distance for us. Now's our time to have a try for the treasure there. If José Maria Moreno's plans are worth anything, all we have to do is to help ourselves."

She ceased abruptly, but her eyes — eyes eager, aglow, with strange, lambent lights in them, like twin rainbows — still held his. His jaw had dropped. He sat there glowering at her, like a man in a trance.

In her smartly tailored shore-going suit, one of those which she had adapted to her own use from the plentiful wardrobe Eileen Saxilby had perforce left on board, with a broad-brimmed hat and a folded veil hiding her heavy red-gold hair, she might have been any conventional young woman of his acquaintance. It had startled him immeasurably to hear her propose, in her cool, clear voice — with that little, elusive lilt in it which had stirred his pulses so singularly when he first heard it — an exploit that

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would have been well conceived a couple of hundred years ago and under the Jolly Roger. He had almost grown accustomed to Saleh, and yet —

He rose from his seat, to free himself of her steadfast, magnetic glance — he could scarcely think while she held him so — and for a time shuffled up and down the dilapidated saloon, sucking spasmodically at his cold cigar.

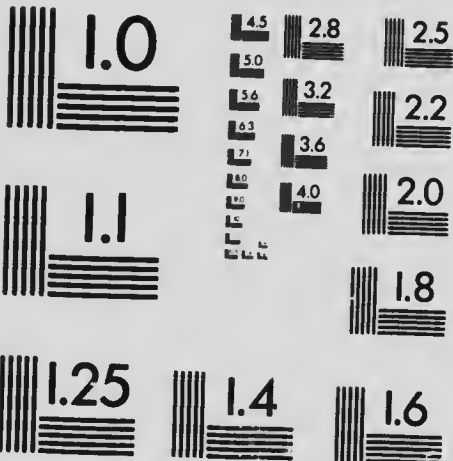
"I promised the men I'd show them the way to the vault at the villa, if we could get here in time," said Saleh, "and they've worked well." But he merely nodded to show he had heard. It was not of the men he was thinking just then, but of her, and himself, and the recent past, and the always more problematic future; for he could not but subscribe to her bold design.

It was only the grotesquely abnormal exigency of the moment that at first sight had confounded him. It had been more than a little difficult to imagine himself, at such short notice and in the twentieth century, in the rôle of a working pirate. And during the last few weeks he had undergone a sufficiency of such disconcerting changes.

But he knew that, on broad grounds, the course she suggested now was by no means so criminal as it sounded. He could have no real scruples of conscience concerning it; for the hoard in the vault at the President's villa consisted in part at least of



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Eustace Gildersleeve's ill-advised loan. Eileen Saxilby had been despoiled of her fortune to augment that, and Eustace Gildersleeve had robbed Ingersoll also of no meager amount in the course of his crooked dealings with the defunct firm of Aylwin and Ingersoll.

"Well?" Saleh demanded, a little impatiently, and he paused in his promenade.

"But — how are we going to get there — and back?" he asked, his voice strange and far-away in his own ears, wondering what the end of all these unexampled entanglements was likely to be.

"Here are the maps and plans," she rejoined, always with the same businesslike brevity, and spread them out on the table. It was evident that to her at least there was nothing unprecedented in such a proceeding. "Here's the master-key Mr. Hitchcock has made from a tracing Moreno had. We're going to get there and back in a big fishing-boat I've been promised the use of by one of those people ashore.

"My idea is to drift along to the villa, close in-shore, after dark. We'll take all but the three men we must leave Mr. Hitchcock, so that, if we've any luck, we may be able to bring away all we want without wasting a moment. And, once we've got that safely on board, we'll be in a much better position to do something for — that girl on the *Olive Branch*."

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She looked up, over her shoulder, a quick, keen, questioning glance, as he halted again, behind her chair, to stare, still somewhat stupidly, at the crumpled papers she had displayed: he found it hard to believe that any such golden opportunity was to be so simply seized. But he did not observe her expression, and the little catch in her voice conveyed nothing to him. From his preoccupied air he might, indeed, have been quite insensible to the spell of her presence.

"How'd you like to be President of Nicazuela, Tommy?" she asked suddenly, and he shrugged his shoulders over such an inconsequent idea.

"Not at all," he responded bluntly, and she bit her lip.

When Ingersoll, looking ever more haggard and careworn, came below, a few minutes later, he found them poring together over Moreno's plan of the villa and its approaches. And at sight of him Tommy Judson, suddenly jubilant, jumped to his feet, that he might the more conveniently propound Saleh's daring project. But she sat silent, scanning their faces closely. She did not feel very sure that Ingersoll might not be piqued by her having taken Tommy into her confidence first, although she had not done so thoughtlessly. And she had had more to say to Tommy, but for his coming.

There was no time for any further confidence then, however. Ingersoll threw himself heart and soul

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into this necessary phase of their enterprise, a phase he had lately overlooked altogether. Tommy rushed off to rouse Hitchcock out, and came back with the engineer, all agog. They spent the rest of the afternoon in arranging the details of the expedition, getting together such gear as might be of use, selecting the men for the landing-party by lot, since all were anxious to go, and instructing them in their multifarious duties. Only five could be spared from the ship, but even those to be left behind were busy and wide awake.

The sun had set before they had completed their preparations and sat down to a much-needed meal. And scarcely had they gone on deck again when out of the dull haze already enshrouding Altamirano came very quietly a blurred brown shape, which, as it lumbered alongside, developed the concrete form of the fishing-boat Saleh was anxiously expecting.

There was only one man on board it. He drew his heavy sweep inboard, caught the rope Quinlan threw him, and, having made fast, climbed nimbly up the yacht's side. Saleh crossed to the rail and held out a hand to him in most friendly fashion.

"Here I am, *señorita*," said he breathlessly, bending over it, "as I promised you. And no one else knows."

"I felt sure you would not fail me," she answered with a radiant smile, and his olive face lighted up

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with gratification. "And now — you will wait here on board until we return."

His eyes expressed hurt disappointment, but he bowed his head.

"To serve you, *señorita*," he said submissively; and she, pleased to find him so tractable, turned to commend him to Hitchcock's especial care.

"I'll look after him all right," the engineer promised, "and, say, Miss Saleh, if you'd like to take Quinlan along, I can manage well enough with this chap and the two others. You'll want every —"

"If you're quite sure," she said anxiously and yet eagerly, and, as Hitchcock nodded with quiet assurance, Quinlan stepped forward, pulling excitedly at his forelock, his features one wide smile.

"Thank ye kindly, Mr. Hitchcock," said he. "It 'ud have been cruel hard to be left behind." And he disappeared in the wake of his fellows already swarming down on the fishing-boat.

Such appliances for the sack of the villa as they had been able to improvise were passed overside. Saleh and Ingersoll and Tommy Judson in turn descended the ladder. The fishing-boat pushed off, with four men at the sweeps, and almost at once was swallowed up in the surrounding obscurity.

CHAPTER XIX

UNDER THE SEARCH-LIGHT

THE boat traveled almost noiselessly, for the men had muffled their sweeps. Tommy Judson, steering, headed her as well as he could for the lofty bluff at the eastern end of the bay. There was no wind, and the heat-haze thickened the gathering darkness. A dog yowled evilly in the village, and the sound helped them to keep some sense of direction till, in the course of time, they could hear the grumble of the ground-swell among the rocks on the shore. Then they held slowly along the land, at a safe distance, steering by oar, and seeing nothing until, beyond the bluff, they opened up the roadstead of El Puerto, and caught sight of the ship's lights there; and then of the dimly twinkling town.

"The admiral's got his search-light going," said Ingersoll, breaking the two hours' silence that had obtained since they had set out, and, even as he spoke, a long, white finger flashed through the night, swept over the *Olive Branch*, darkly outlining her, and traced the curve of the beach with its tip till it

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pointed directly toward the fishing-boat — and passed on.

"We must keep still closer inshore," Saleh whispered, "and stop every time it strikes us. And we'll drape the sail overside, so's to hide our shape. From where they are we'll look like a rock, if they don't catch us moving."

They skirted along in the deeper shadow of the mountain-face for another half-hour, drawing ever nearer the danger. The questing finger traversed their course three times before it at last hung back and halted, straight over them. They crouched low, and waited, holding their breaths, the boat at a quick stand-still. After an interval, interminable to them, the finger-tip slowly retraced the curve it had come by, and, in an instant, overlay the boat again.

"We must make a dash for it," said Saleh, "the moment they lift the light. That's the villa, there, in the clump of palms, close ahead of us, and I saw the creek as well. Let me take the tiller, Tommy."

The white finger trembled a little and faded away.

"Now's our time," Tommy Judson ejaculated. "Their carbon's burned out or gone bust. Give way, men! It won't take them a minute to ship another."

The boat sprang forward under the drive of its

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heavy sweeps with all hands at work. Saleh stood up, straining her eyes in the darkness.

"Easy all!" she ordered presently. "Back-water! Stand by to fend off!" The fishing-boat ran smoothly into a rock-bound creek, and took the ground there with a bump. A man splashed overboard with a rope which he made fast to a sturdy dwarf-oak on the hummock behind. His ship-mates were no less active. By the time that Tommy and Ingersoll had got Saleh ashore dryshod, the others had everything ready for moving on; so that there was no delay and they set forward for the villa at once, stumbling doggedly over the rough ground in the thick gloom.

The search-light came into action again before they had gone very far, and that helped them more than a little. Each time it flashed along the shore they were enabled to get their bearings, and once, when it rested for a short space on the low white building before them, they, in the shadow, mended their pace to a run which took them as far as the avenue under the palms.

Thereafter they made quicker progress, creeping noiselessly, in Indian file, along the turf at the edge of the avenue, past the great iron gates that closed the villa entrance against them, round to its rearmost wall, where the voices of the ravine warned them against going farther. They had observed no least

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sign of life within, and were not in the mood to waste a moment.

"Here's the place," said Tommy Judson, who had been counting the narrow, grated windows on that side by sense of touch as he came along.

Quinlan, leading the line behind him, stepped swiftly forward, swung a strong arm once or twice, and sent something hurtling through the air toward the parapet-rail above.

"Stand from under!" he whispered hoarsely as the grapnel bit at the stucco balustrade, brought down a shower of chips, and fell back with a vicious thud.

He threw it again, and it held. He pulled on the line leading through a light block shackled to it, and clung to that while the man behind him went over to test the hold of the rope-ladder he had run up. The grapnel gave a little under their double weight, but maintained its grip. The man at the ladder was on the parapet in a trice and soon had the topmost rung secured to the coping. Those waiting below were not long in joining him on the flat, flagged roof.

Tommy crossed it cautiously and looked down on the inner courtyard. It also was black and dark. He listened intently, but the only faint sound that reached his ears was the tinkle of water falling from some invisible fountain. The others were standing motionless and in perfect silence.

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He gave vent to a low, sibilant whistle, and, as they came toward him, unwound a coil of rope from about his waist, made it fast to a projecting chimney, and let himself down into the courtyard, hand over hand. Ingersoll came slipping after him. Satisfied that all was as safe as it might be, he whistled again and the ladder was lowered on that side. Saleh was down in a moment, and the men followed her no less speedily. The last of them laced through the ladder one end of the rope he had cast off from the chimney and so hoisted it from the ground to the coping in a neat, invisible roll.

"Got the key?" asked Saleh softly, and Tommy laid it against her fingers in answer before moving onward. They might have been a procession of ghosts, so noiselessly did they pass along the verandah about the flower-garden and its always tinkling fountain. Tommy stopped before the only door there and carefully inserted his key in its lock.

He tried to turn it, gently at first, then more firmly, but the ward withstood both these methods. It yielded, however, to a counterpressure, and he blessed Hitchcock under his breath. He pushed the door open, and the shrill, insistent whir of an electric alarum rent the silence with nerve-shattering suddenness. He sprang inside, closed the door again, and fumbled there till he found the connecting wire,

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which he wrenched from its fastenings. The others trooped in, and the door clicked to behind them.

He felt his way to the window, and found it shuttered, as he had expected, so that he could now safely light the small candle-lamp he had with him. Its faint glimmer showed that his little force was all there and in order.

"Would it not be as well to leave a look-out?" he suggested to Saleh and Ingersoll, but the girl shook her head decidedly, and Ingersoll made no remark.

"Every man's worth his weight in gold to us," she reminded him, and without more words he addressed himself to the inner door. It also yielded to the master-key, and they passed from room to room at short intervals, treading on tiptoe, closing each door quietly behind them since every one was set on strong springs and would not stand open unsecured.

They were on that side of the edifice which overhung the ravine, and the echo of the cascade there came dully to their ears through the shuttered windows. Each time they came to a stop, they listened closely, but without hearing anything else. A growing sense of security possessed them, and Tommy did not linger at the last door.

A flood of light poured out on them as he pulled it open, and so startled him that he sprang back and let it go. It closed with a clang of steel, and left

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them in black darkness again, for his candle had flickered out as he jumped. The men behind him stood where they were, waiting, on the alert.

"Stand clear," he whispered hoarsely and once more stepped to the door, his revolver cocked. Again he pulled it open, but this time he sprang forward, into the light. And Ingersoll was close at his heels. A single swift glance sufficed to show that the room was empty. The light came from a syphon-fed lamp on one of the white-washed walls. Its reservoir might have held oil to burn for a fortnight.

Tommy Judson was inwardly much relieved, but his face was quite expressionless as he looked about him with leisurely interest while the men filed in. The place was very plainly furnished as a sleeping-room and showed signs of recent occupancy. There was dirty water in the basin on a deal wash-stand under the window. A clothes-whisk and a boot-polisher lay on the uncovered table. There were muddy foot-prints not very many hours old on the uncarpeted floor.

"This is the President's den," said Saleh, at his shoulder. "Casado must have been here this morning, before he went out to the *Olive Branch*. And he's been down in the cellar, too. The trap-door should be under this table. Help me to shift it."

Ingersoll lifted the table aside and displaced the

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mat that had lain under it. Saleh stooped down, lifted the carefully carpentered hatch herself, and stood over it, flushed, triumphant. She had felt herself responsible for the accuracy of the plans they had had to help them so far.

Tommy Judson had relighted his lamp, and with it went down the steps. But its dim flare did little more than accentuate the still gloom of that cimerian burrow. As soon as his eyes had somewhat recovered from the glare above, he began to inspect the place methodically, with Saleh's assistance. Ingersoll was telling the men off for the prompt portorage of the booty they were so shortly to broach.

Lamp in hand, Tommy counted carefully the great wine-casks ranged on trestles in equal ranks, from wall to wall of the square cellar.

"How many do you make, Saleh?" he asked anxiously, and she looked puzzled as she replied, "I thought I had counted thirteen, but — there should be only eleven. Moreno's mark's on the sixth from that end."

"And the fifth from this end," said he. "It's very awkward, but — patience! We'll find the right one in time, if we have to empty them all. I fancy we're safe enough here for the night, and —"

A dull, distant thud was audible from overhead and they looked with dilated eyes at each other.

"Someone's coming this way," Saleh whispered

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through compressed lips. "That was a door shutting."

"Get the trap shut, O. K.," Tommy hissed. "Set the table over it first and draw the rug right as you let it down."

"There may be a watchman on the premises after all," he suggested to Saleh, "and, anyhow, we'd better lie low here till we know who it is, don't you think. Take cover behind a cask, and I'll get the men stowed away out of sight where they'll be best able to take charge of any intruders."

Another door clanged to and yet another, each nearer than that before, while Ingersoll was coolly carrying out the instructions he had received. When he and Tim Finucane at length let the trap gently down above them, while the mat which was to cover it settled smoothly into place, he felt sure that no one in the room above would notice that it had been lately standing open. Tim Finucane concealed himself somewhere about the foot of the steps, while Tommy drew Ingersoll into hiding beside himself.

"Don't move so much as an eyelid till you get the word!" he whispered to his invisible men, and, having made sure that he had matches ready at hand, blew out his light.

They could hear firm, hasty footsteps not far off now. The door of the room above was speedily opened and left to swing back to the lock on its springs. The footsteps approached the trap-door.

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The table was pulled away, and the rough rug kicked swishing to one side. The scrape and splutter of a struck match came plainly to the ears of those below. The footsteps turned back and forward. They were those of only one man.

"We'll let him alone when he comes down," Tommy breathed in Ingersoll's ear, "till we find out what he's after."

The trap-door lifted and a long shaft of light streamed into the cellar. He could see indistinctly someone on the floor above, head cocked to one side, listening; and he earnestly hoped that his own almost inaudible murmur had not penetrated so far.

A pair of highly varnished riding-boots appeared on the top step, and, as these descended carefully, there came into view the rest of a cavalry uniform, brave with gold-lace and bearing the insignia of the highest rank. Its wearer had discarded spurs and sword and sabretasche, and carried only a lighted candle.

He was a man of rather more than medium height and squarely muscular in build. A black beard and moustache concealed the lower part of his face, but his whole aspect, even in such circumstance, was that of one accustomed to command, expecting prompt obedience.

"That's President Casado," Tommy Judson assured himself, and President Casado halted, holding up his light, to peer suspiciously about him.

CHAPTER XX

A CASE OF CHAMPAGNE

HIS EXCELLENCY the President had not been idle since the Portuguese admiral, on the quarterdeck of the *Olive Branch*, had stamped away in a passion and left him to his own devices. He promptly dismissed from his mind, for the moment, the dire affront offered him by the angry sailor, and fell to pacing the deck again, his brain busy with expedients for the safe transport to the *Olive Branch* of the treasure in the vault at his villa.

Of the three men he had left there, to die by inches among his millions, he took no more thought at all. They had sought to outwit him, and — they had failed. With them he had closed his account.

He would, of course, in due time invent a plausible explanation of the fate that had befallen them, but there would be time enough for this before their corpses were discovered by whomsoever he might delegate to empty the vault and bring its other contents on board: a matter which he could not now

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superintend in person, since the Portuguese admiral held him practically a prisoner.

"I have no option," he muttered at length, pulling perplexedly at his trim beard. "I must trust that presumptuous fellow, Yoxall. He's honest, I think, although, if he be, I don't know what he's doing on such a ship as this. But — yes, he's honest, and — he can control his men. I'll send him ashore with a boat's crew to bring off the boxes as soon as it's dark.

"If I could only have depended on Waples — But, then, I can't. And the Scarlett's — are far too scrupulous for such work. I have no option at all."

He was still considering carefully each step he must take to ensure the success of this not altogether safe remedy for the very dangerous dilemma in which he found himself, when the despatch-boat the Portuguese admiral had promised him came foaming across from the flag-ship. The officer in charge reported himself at His Excellency's orders. And, a moment later, Reuben Yoxall reappeared, very red in the face and angry: he had just received the admiral's intimation that the *Olive Branch* would be sunk by the *São João* if she should offer to slip her moorings or lower a boat of her own.

The thoroughness of his enemy's methods was no less provoking to the President, whose newest project was thus rendered null and void. He heard the

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São João's picket-boats piped away, saw them set afloat to imprison him more securely. Within that cordon he was altogether impotent, and — he had only a few hours left in which to recover the fruits of his labors throughout many long, troublous years.

He received, however, with bland condescension the sub-lieutenant in charge of the despatch-boat, and soothed the irate Reuben Yoxall with tranquil, tolerant explanations; for he had already the germ of another stratagem in his mind, a stratagem that appeared the more strongly to him since it was so sheerly ironic.

"I have no orders for you at the moment," he told the Portuguese officer, and, linking an arm confidentially in one of the mate's, led Reuben Yoxall across the deck.

"Think no more of the admiral's insolence," he advised, and his tone was one of grave sympathy. "We have matters of much more importance to occupy us, Mr. Yoxall, and, since I have chartered the *Olive Branch*, I feel sure that I may depend on you to set all personal feeling aside and attend solely to my interests."

"What is it you want me to do?" Reuben Yoxall demanded bluntly, and Casado deemed it but politic to be equally abrupt. He was no bad judge of men.

"We must get our lading on board, and to-night," said he, "in spite of the Portuguese. I had intended,

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as I told you, to use one of the ship's boats for that purpose. It would be idle to think of doing so now, but — I think I can arrange with the admiral to have it brought off from the villa — in his own boats if necessary."

He was watching the mate's face closely, but noticed no trace of surprise or even interest in it.

"It must be securely stowed as it comes on board," he continued.

"I'll see to that," Reuben Yoxall assured him.

"Then, as soon as it's under hatches, we'll put to sea, in the dark. We'll have to run the blockade, of course, but — we can depend on the *Olive Branch* to show those war-ships a clean pair of heels! And she can more than hold her own against them in gunnery. Altogether, I think, you should earn your percentage pretty easily, Mr. Yoxall. I'll hand you twenty thousand American dollars as soon as we sight the coast of Europe."

"You get your freight brought on board and I'll attend to the rest," said the mate. He had no expectation of ever receiving the over-lavish reward Casado was so ready to promise, but, just for a moment, he thought how much it would mean to him to be financially independent. And, in his own mind, he saw Saleh again, Saleh, wilful, imperious, with her bewitching smile — that smile which had first brought him on board the *Olive Branch*, against his

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own better judgment, the memory of which still held him there that haply he should yet hear news of her, news he might miss if he threw up his post. He spoke less brusquely to the President.

"I'll do the best I can to carry out all your wishes, sir. And as for that bumptious Dago's tin-kettle blockade — trust me. He'll get the surprise of his life as soon as you're ready to start."

Casado was overjoyed by his change of tone.

"I thank you, Mr. Yoxall," said he, in his most impressive voice. "I've taken you into my confidence. I trust you entirely. And now I must be off to attend to my own part of our programme. You'll keep your men quiet below in the meantime, and — tell them they'll be on blue water again by this time to-morrow, with their pockets full, if they behave as they ought."

"I'll see that they behave as they ought," the mate in turn promised grimly, and therewith His Excellency, well satisfied, descended to the saloon, where he applied himself to the composition of a polite letter to the Portuguese admiral.

In this he apologized handsomely for all past misunderstandings, and deprecated any further dissension. It was his earnest desire, he said, to promote a peaceful settlement of most questions, and, to prove this, he was prepared to make a prompt financial proposal to the admiral in person. He therefore

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ventured to ask that the admiral would revisit him without delay, and subscribed himself the admiral's most assiduous and attentive servant.

Having read the effusion over, and deleted the word "financial" as scarcely politic, he copied it out again and took it on deck, where he entrusted it to the officer in charge of the despatch-boat, with a pleasant word or two and a gracious smile; so that the Portuguese sub-lieutenant made good speed on his way to the flagship, although he did not return for some little time.

Casado, waiting about on deck, observed Reuben Yoxall at the signal-halliards with the two girls close at hand, and watched with idle interest the exchange of signals between the *Olive Branch* and the strange steamer outside, already on its way elsewhere.

"What ship's that?" he asked, as the mate strode past him, scowling. The good Reuben had just imparted to Eileen Saxilby the irritatingly ambiguous answer he had received to his inquiry. It was the newcomer's name and official number, not its assistance, he had desired. And there were too many ambiguities in the air already to suit a simple seaman.

"I don't know," he replied curtly to the President's question, and went on his way to cross-tion the ex-captain of the *Calixte* as to the almost inconceivable possibility of that vessel's still being afloat.

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Another boat came racing across from the flagship and an angry Portuguese officer abolished the signal halliards entirely. The mate was still below. The two girls had disappeared again, and Casado smiled indifferently to himself over that belated precaution. The other steamer was out of sight, behind the bluff below Bella Vista. And he could see the despatch-boat, on its way back to the *Olive Branch*. It brought him word that the admiral would follow within five minutes, and he smiled again, covertly.

The admiral was as good as his word, and him Casado received with a serious courtesy that impressed him much more favorably than had the President's previous consequential attitude; so that he did not demur when he was invited to shelter himself from the sun in the midship saloon, while they should be discussing their mutual interests. There His Excellency provided a bottle of champagne on ice, and offered the admiral a cigar. They lighted up, regarding each other in more friendly fashion, and then Casado broached his surprising proposal.

He had been thinking matters over, he said, and had come to the conclusion that he would best serve the interests of his country by admitting without further argument the greater part of Portugal's claim against Nicazuela. And he felt sure that the admiral, on the other hand, would not deny him the

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boon of arbitration as to the remainder, which aggregated no great amount. The admiral nodded.

That being agreed, then, His Excellency continued, refilling his visitor's glass, he thought he could at last see his way to make an immediate and material payment toward the total of the liabilities thus definitely acknowledged. In order to do so, indeed, he only needed the admiral's endorsement of the measure he had now mapped out to that end.

"Nicazuela," said His Excellency very gravely, "is a republic. The voice of the people is paramount in all its affairs, domestic or foreign. I myself am merely a figurehead, of strictly limited powers.

"The voice of the people is loud and unanimous against any compromise with your country. I stand alone in my amicable intentions, in my wish for peace with honor. The people clamor for war.

"But, for their ultimate good, I must act as my conscience dictates. I have, very fortunately, remembered that I have the means to do so. Afterward I may be sacrificed to appease the popular outcry, but, if I die a martyr to duty, they will later learn to bless me for my wise foresight. And, for these reasons, I must act with seeming stealth.

"I am an *ex-officio* president of the Banco de Nicazuela, and I hold the key to its safely secreted gold reserve. If you will lend me your assistance to

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bring that on board the *Olive Branch* to-night after dark, I shall make payment to you to-morrow forenoon of whatever sum it may represent."

The admiral emptied his glass again, and sat sunk in reflection. Casado pushed the bottle over toward him, and puffed at his own cigar.

"I'll take the money straight to my own ship from shore," the sailor remarked abruptly, and helped himself to champagne.

"Don't make it any harder for me to face my misguided fellow-countrymen afterward," the President urged in a grieved voice. "They would brand me as poltroon and traitor were I to consent to that course, and — they would be justified. I cannot treat with you ashore, in the midst of them, for the reasons stated. I will not have it said that under the flag of the enemy, I suffered myself to be frightened into betraying my trust. No! It must be here, on neutral ground, and of my own free will, that I pay you the price of peace with honor."

Again the Portuguese admiral paused to reflect. He was inwardly congratulating himself on having at last brought the President to an understanding of his position. He was beginning to see his own way out of a most comfortless quandary. He would win credit and renown, once he should reach the Tagus with his strong-room full of gold. A pleasant sense of elation inclined him to temper justice with mercy.

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In his own hour of triumph he need not press the vanquished too hard. And, since he had the *Olive Branch* also helpless under his heel, he could afford to humor this sensitive South American patriot.

"Very well," he agreed. "So be it. I must of course take such precautions as may seem to me needful, but otherwise I am ready to meet your wishes. What assistance will you require to bring the bullion on board?"

"A single boat's crew. And I must go with them. If you yourself will accompany me, I shall esteem it a favor. Let me show you some slight hospitality while the boxes are being embarked. Why should we not dine together ashore, at my villa? where the gold is stored. Say at nine o'clock! My daughter will be of the party, and she will be delighted to meet a gentleman so accomplished."

The Portuguese admiral hesitated — he was very much addicted to feminine society — and was lost. It might be a little rash on his part to accept any such invitation, but —

"You honor me," he answered with a courtly bow, his self-esteem in no wise impaired by the President's florid compliment. "I shall attend you punctually. This is very excellent wine!"

"Yes, quite good," His Excellency assented. "I am the more pleased that it suits your taste because you will find a case awaiting you on your flag-ship."

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And, until then, there is no lack of it here.—
Steward!”

Another bottle was promptly brought, and over that they fraternized for another hour. When the admiral did at length return to his fleet, he had formed a much more pleasant opinion of President Casado, and was a little inclined to repent himself of his former harshness. Casado had also told him how the untenanted villa stood fenced against all intrusion from landward, and he had no qualms of conscience now as to the wisdom of the course he had agreed to adopt. On the contrary, he had made up his mind that to-morrow, after all those troublesome international questions should have been satisfactorily adjusted, he would entertain His Excellency, and His Excellency's enchanting daughter, of whom he had caught a glimpse as he was leaving the *Olive Branch*, to the most sumptuous luncheon possible on his flag-ship.

Casado called the Doña Carmen across the deck as soon as his guest had gone, and she, leaving Eileen Saxilby in the shade of the chart-house, hurried toward him.

“We go ashore again this evening at eight,” he told her, and her eyes sparkled. “But, listen, *querida!* It may be for the last time. I have at last made up my mind to resign the reins of government, and — if all goes well, we shall be on our way

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to Europe soon after midnight. It will be very pleasant to see Paris, eh?"

But the gladness in her eyes had died, and their lids drooped. He looked vexedly into her downcast face.

"You must be brave, *niñita!*" he said. "You must help me to be brave. And listen yet! The Portuguese admiral dines with us at the villa to-night. You are to act as hostess. Bid whom you will to the party, except from the town."

She glanced up at him, less disconsolate.

"The servants all went away with Ulick Scarlett," she murmured, blushing. "You'll have to send for them. Might not he come, too?"

"Most assuredly," he returned, "and — you know that I'm well disposed toward Ulick, Carmen. Once we are settled in Paris, I may perhaps be able to do something for him, if he comes across — in a year, perhaps, after you have seen more of the world. We shall be in a much less difficult position there than here, where our fellow-countrymen are all consumed with jealousy of our foreign friends. He shall dine with us to-night, and — is there anyone else?"

"The Señorita Saxilby, father. You promised her your protection, and — she begs that you will not leave her on board this ship."

"Tell her to be ready by eight, then, and she shall go with us, if Mr. Yoxall does not object," the Presi-

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dent answered, and looked fondly after his handsome daughter as she, quite happy again in the present, left him in haste to assuage the added suspense her new friend had been suffering since the mate had translated to them the *Calixte's* mysterious signal; for Eileen, knowing nothing of what had happened, was almost afraid to hope.

The Portuguese admiral came alongside the *Olive Branch* punctually at eight, in his steam pinnace, with a picked crew all fully armed. He had already broached the case of champagne President Casado had sent him, but his native caution was in no sense obscured by the bumpers he had consumed. He was, on the contrary, keenly alive to all that was going on, very wide awake, at his most brilliant.

He had left explicit instructions with his second in command as to the conduct of affairs in his absence. He had with him a force sufficient to cope with any contingency. He had arranged for a rescue-party to follow him to the villa in case he should fail to return to his fleet in due course. There was, in short, no detail so trifling that it had escaped his attention, and, every eventuality thus provided for, he was much disposed to enjoy himself in the meantime.

He helped Eileen Saxilby and the Doña Carmen into the pinnace, with a captivating smile, received President Casado no less cordially, and gave the order to bear away for the landing-place at the mouth

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of the stream on which his host's villa stood, in a tone so dulcet that his men nudged each other surprisedly.

The steam pinnace did not travel along the lane of the flag-ship's search-light, lying athwart the villa, but down one side of it, in the darkness; for the Portuguese admiral and President Casado were on their way to do good by stealth, and did not desire that anyone else should be party to their proceedings. As soon as they reached the landing-place, the admiral sent an orderly off in a hurry with a written message from the President to Ulick Scarlett, which he had first read, at His Excellency's request. This merely said: "Bring my cook and three table-servants to the villa, at a gallop. Your troop will stand fast where it is, and keep the road always closed."

Then they went on at a leisurely pace toward the squat, white building that stood out so conspicuously in the long, steady shaft of light which stretched from the flag-ship to the mountain-face. The admiral offered the Doña Carmen his arm, and her father escorted Eileen. Two men of the crew stayed behind to look after the pinnace. Of the rest, a few marched ahead of the admiral to make his pathway clear, and their fellows followed the President, very closely. But His Excellency took no notice of them. He was chatting affably with Eileen, interesting himself in her welfare as if he had not a care of his own in the world.

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When Ulick Scarlett came galloping up to the gates with his motley command, he was vastly surprised to see the Portuguese sentries there. But the President in person received him, and, having sent the servants scurrying indoors to their urgent duties, presented him to the admiral with a few flattering words. As soon as the spacious drawing-rooms had been lighted, they three adjourned thither, and there the two girls presently rejoined them, more winsome still in cool evening-gowns. The Doña Carmen's face flushed a little at sight of the young officer. Eileen's eyes were alight with expectation; for the admiral had been telling the Doña Carmen, and she in turn had just told her friend, about the unaccountable trio he had met that afternoon on the strange steamer outside. The admiral was enraptured with both, and Casado, keenly observant, saw his opportunity.

"If you will give me leave," he whispered to the smiling sailor, "I'll see to the opening of the vault at once. Then, while we are at dinner, your men can be carrying —"

"By all means," answered the admiral, very graciously, content that no ill could result since he had instructed his men that no one should now be allowed to enter or leave the villa. "I shall be perfectly happy here until you return." And he turned to Eileen with a self-important smirk, while the Presi-

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dent, on his way to the door, shot a swift, meaning glance at the Doña Carmen.

Casado smiled sardonically as he let himself through into the dark inner patio and closed both its heavy gates very quietly behind him. He had observed the servants breathlessly busy in the dining-room, could hear the cook scuttling to and fro in the kitchen. The idea of the dinner had surely been a master-stroke! All the details of his ultimate stratagem, so sheerly ironic in its hardihood, were working out to admiration. He could foresee no possible hitch now and was entirely assured of success.

He paused before the low doorway in its dark corner, and having carefully set the switch that served to disconnect the electric alarm within, entered the range of rooms which led to his last retreat. He needed no light to find his way, but crossed from door to door with assured tread until at length the lamp he had left burning beyond the inmost shone out on him.

It was his present object to dispose of the three bodies in the vault beneath the cellar, and — he knew that would not be a pleasant task. But it was one he could not shirk, and, after all, it would not take him long to drag them up, toss them to one side, out of sight, among the wine-casks. He did not wait to think it over, but pulled the table from above the

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trap-door, kicked the coir mat across the room, and turned to get a candle from the cupboard. With this in one hand he lifted the hatch, and, hesitating for a moment, looked down into the darkness.

But time pressed, and, no matter how uninviting the prospect before him, he could not afford to indulge in any delay. He descended, a little slowly and in the eerie gloom below he halted again, and glanced about him. The blackness was almost blinding after the glare above. Then he made his way to a niche in the wall behind the outermost row of casks and lifted the lever within it. He turned off the tap of the inlet hydrant, and crossed to the cask whose trestles stood upon the steel-clad cover of the opening through which alone the vault might be entered or left. He set his candle down and lifted the cask away. As he stooped to remove its cradle he heard something creak behind him, and started upright, glaring, his lips drawn back from his teeth.

For a time he listened intently, and then "*Alma de dios!*" he swore, breathing heavily. "I am surely grown an old woman that I must imagine sounds where none are." And, stooping again, he pushed the trestle off the trap-door. Its bolts were securely shot, as he had left them. He drew one back, but lingered over the other.

"I have five minutes to see," said he, and his voice struck strangely upon the tomb-like silence.

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He rose, and returned to the room above. The pop of a cork was audible in the cellar, and then the hissing gurgle of heady liquor hastily poured.

He came down the steps again, more confidently, drawing the back of his disengaged hand across his moustache.

"Now I feel more fit to face my three ghosts!" said he, and, loosening the last bolt, lifted the trap-door.

CHAPTER XXI

NEMESIS

CASADO lifted the trap-door and set it carefully back on its hinges. He peered distastefully into the vault, and his nostrils curled against the chill, dank odor that had assailed them. He waited, to look at the watch on his wrist. The time was twenty-five minutes to nine.

Glancing downward as he descended, he could see the stone-flagged floor, wet, glistening in the glimmer of his inadequate light. The vault was already empty of water. He went forward doggedly, holding his candle above his head, treading delicately lest he should stumble over — anything.

Reaching the grated outlet-sluice at which he had expected to find what he was in search of, he stooped over it, thrusting his light hither and thither, without result. A quick sensation of fear filled his heart, and his face turned white, instantaneously. Still stooping, his eyes dilated by an unspeakable dread, his attitude beastlike, he looked very slowly round behind him, over his shoulder.

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There was a man sitting on the steps which led to the cellar above, a man in his shirt-sleeves, a white-haired, weak-eyed, unctuous-looking old fellow with a smooth, flat face, shaven but for a fringe of whisker and distorted then by a dog-toothed, ferocious grin. He was holding close to his chin a cocked revolver, pointed, straight and steadily, at the President's back. On either side of him there was dimly visible another face, one cruel, mocking, malevolent beyond words, its neighbor gray, agonized, ghastly, the mask of a mind very nearly unhinged by horror.

"Stand up, Casado," said a harsh voice, "and you'd better not drop that candle unless you want to die in the dark!"

The figure stooping above the grating straightened itself, with a laborious effort.

"Stay just where you are," ordered the same voice. "Strike another light, Gildersleeve, and be quick about it. Or — here — give me the candle, curse you! Now hold it, till I take away Casado's gun."

The President offered no resistance to this proceeding. He was striving to regain his grip on himself, to shake off the visible effect of that moment of cold terror, a moment which had left him sick and shaking still. His forehead was wet, but his lips were dry and shriveled. He tried to moisten them with his tongue, but it was like a parched sponge.

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He signed to his captors that he could not speak, and, scooping up a few drops of water from a pool on the floor, swallowed them greedily.

"You startled me, Slyne," he said then, in a hoarse, choked whisper. "I knew you were here, of course, and I couldn't understand —"

"How it happened that we weren't lying dead at the sluice," Slyne put in, with an evil smile. "You dog!" he cried, in a sudden access of fury. "You'd have drowned us like rats in a trap, if we hadn't found means to balk you. But we did, you see. Look there!"

Casado looked up at the multitudinous fissures in the rock-face at the further end of the vault, through which the water should have poured in. They were caulked and stoppered with shreds of cloth, which still dripped ominously. And he recollected, with bitter self-reproach, how he had lessened the weight of the flood which would otherwise have rendered useless such a device.

"We've been working like rats for our lives," said Slyne, "for God knows how many days and nights. And I've shown you how we've saved them, so that, before *you* drown, you may suffer a little more than we've suffered. You're going to stay here now, Casado — and with your hands tied! See?"

Captain Dove got up off the steps and laughed,

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rocking to and fro on his feet. Eustace Gildersleeve would have edged past him and made his escape from that purgatory, but he pushed the shivering coward roughly aside.

"Stand back there!" he snarled. "You've surely done us harm enough already, sneaking about in the dark!

"That's the way to talk, Slyne. Take my belt and truss that black-bearded swine by the wrists to one of these boxes."

He held out a long leather strap to Slyne, and Slyne took it from him. Casado stood motionless where he was, studying their fierce faces with apprehensively cunning eyes. Slyne stepped watchfully toward him, and he spoke, with more composure, making a final, desperate bid for his life.

"You are over-hasty," he said. "Reflect for a moment. Is it worth your while to sacrifice everything else that you may compass my death. I am not afraid to die.

"The position of affairs has changed since I saw you last," he went on unhurriedly, as Slyne paused. "The villa is now in possession of the Portuguese. They have sentries posted all round it. You may possibly get away yourselves after you've killed me, but what's here you'll have to leave behind, unless —"

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"Unless what?" demanded Slyne viciously. Some instinct told him that Casado was speaking the truth, for once.

"I knew you were here, of course," His Excellency continued, ignoring the angry question. "Had I turned the water full on, you would all have drowned at once, but — I didn't. I owed you a grudge, you see, but I meant you no real harm. I'll show you how the hydrant works, if you like."

"Tie him up. We've no time to waste," counseled Captain Dove, but Slyne still hesitated.

The President shrugged his shoulders.

"The Portuguese are going to put these boxes on board the *Olive Branch*," he said simply. "Their admiral came ashore with me for that purpose. He's waiting dinner above for me now. If I don't go back to him very shortly, he'll send down to see what's happened. If he finds that anything *has* happened to me, he'll take them straight to his flagship. And that will be the last you'll see of them, Captain Dove."

He had spoken with that quiet assurance which had so often stood him in good stead. He was still watching their faces intently, and its effect soon became apparent. Slyne was plainly interested, and Captain Dove's virulent expression gave place to one of wrathful surprise.

"On board the *Olive Branch*!" he exclaimed with

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a blasphemous oath, and struck savagely at Eustace Gildersleeve, who had drawn nearer the ladder again. That sufferer under his just suspicion drew back with a weary, despairing groan.

"Speak out, Casado," said Jasper Slyne with a very acid inflection. "We've no time to trifle here, and you can't buy your life from us with any cock-and-bull story. I'll give you exactly one minute to say what you mean, and, if that isn't very well worth listening to — off we go: while you stay behind, as I told you. So, get to the point."

The President did not change countenance, but his tense muscles relaxed a little and his heart leaped at this late relief. None knew better than himself how near he had been to meeting that short and merciless shrift which would have meant a dreadful death, a death of his own devising. Once more, and at the very last gasp again, had his wits sufficed to win life at least. And life had seemed very precious to him during these past moments.

His voice was a little tremulous as he began to relate his doings since the forenoon, but it grew rapidly steadier when his subtle tongue, having told as much of the truth as he deemed expedient, passed on to further artifice. He explained with engaging frankness how he had tricked first Reuben Yoxall — whom Captain Dove, listening thunderstruck, cursed with point and vigor — and then the Portuguese admiral.

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He proceeded to point out how the current critical situation might yet be turned to his captors' advantage, and, incidentally, to his own; while, without him, they would be worse off than ever. And the looks of exasperated disgust Slyne and Dove exchanged as he finished told him that, little as they might like the prospect, they could see nothing else for it but to take him into partnership.

That was grace sufficient for him. He had always faith in the future, and his single superstition was that he had been born under a lucky star. All he asked of the moment was that he might get his gold embarked, on the *Olive Branch*. That operation in process, or even after it was completed, he would contrive some feasible *tour de force* by means of which he might rid himself for all time of this piratical trio. He pulled at the skirts of his crumpled tunic, and smoothed out a crease on its chest.

"Five minutes to nine," said he conversationally, glancing again at the watch on his wrist. "Time for me to be getting back to the drawing-room. My daughter and Miss Saxilby — I brought her ashore with me, Mr. Gildersleeve — are entertaining the admiral. But I promised him that dinner would be at nine sharp.

"I'd ask you all to join us, Slyne, but that would only arouse his suspicions. It is best that you should wait in the ante-room at the entrance until the

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boxes are all carried down to the shore. And then, if you will come forward as we're leaving, I'll introduce you. No, you needn't fear that I'll try to give you the slip. I'm practically a prisoner myself at present, and I need your help now, just as you must have mine. If we play each other false it will simply mean that the Portuguese take — all this."

Jasper Slyne looked perplexedly at the bullion-boxes stacked as high as the roof, and even Captain Dove could find no flaw in that argument. They four were interdependent now and combined against the Portuguese.

"We'll wait," said Captain Dove suddenly, "in the anteroom at the entrance." He was quite sober and could see clearly that there was no other recourse. "You'll bring us in some dry clothes and a bottle of brandy. While you're at dinner the men can be taking the boxes down to the beach, and we'll keep tally as they pass by. You'll tell the admiral that we're waiting there, and we'll show up as you're leaving. And we'll all go aboard together.

"And, see here, President Casado! We've got you boxed to rights now. If you show the least little sign of running crooked again — the Portuguese scoop the pool! They'll share it with us, fast enough. Mr. Gildersleeve's got the United States at his back, and one-half of this pile here will satisfy that other son-of-a-gun.

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"So up you go now, Slyne. There's no use waiting here. You come after me, President, and — Gildersleeve! I've a good mind to leave *you* behind, since it was you and your damned disobedience of orders that got us into this mess. Keep back! — or I'll put a bullet into your useless carcass."

"Let him be, Dove," said Slyne indifferently, one foot on the slippery steps, while Eustace Gildersleeve was still pleading piteously with the evil-minded, malignant seaman. Casado had not yet moved, was looking on at the scene with contempt. And, while Captain Dove, heedless of all else in his vindictive desire to torment his wretched confederate, was still pressing him backward at pistol-point, Jasper Slyne disappeared through the trap-door. The trap-door fell shut, almost instantly.

Casado remained where he was, but trembling as though with an ague. The candle in one of his hands cast wavering shadows about the black, dripping walls of the vault. Eustace Gildersleeve had collapsed altogether, lay limply huddled and moaning against a low shelf of wet varnished boxes. Captain Dove had turned his back on both, but still menaced them with his cocked revolver.

He crept on tiptoe toward the steps and up them, put his head against the hatch at the top, and pushed. It was fast. He faced about and sat down there. His features were livid. He tried to speak, but

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could not. And, for a time, they three kept each other company thus, their faculties almost paralyzed.

But Captain Dove was none the less on the alert. The trap-door was lifted a little and he instantly thrust the muzzle of his revolver into the opening. He would have pulled the trigger too, but that he felt sure Slyne would have discounted that probability. The hatch sank a little and so held his weapon fast.

"Let go that gun, and get away down the steps," snapped a voice that was not in the least like Jasper Slyne's, and Captain Dove, starting back aghast, had all but done so involuntarily. But he regained his grip on the butt, and held fast.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded thickly.

No answer was vouchsafed him, but he heard a muffled whisper above, and, a moment later, the plash of water, as the inflow to the vault, turned full on, washed the caulking out of the crevices he and his friends had been able to stop against the lighter current by means of which Casado had meant to drown them very slowly. Eustace Gildersleeve uttered a harsh scream of terror. Casado came across to the foot of the steps with his candle and laid a hand on Dove's heels.

"Come down," he urged, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Come down, you madman! What can you do there?"

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Captain Dove turned and stared at him as if he had been a stranger, and then shuffled down the steps, leaving the revolver behind him, and feeling for another he had at his hip. The first had disappeared before he reached the President's side and stood there, up to the ankles in water.

"Up you come again," the voice ordered. "Put both your hands out. You other two stand back, and stay there till you're told to move, or we'll shut you all down for good."

Captain Dove was tempted almost beyond his strength to chance just a single shot, but the rapidly rising water proved argument sufficient against any such foolhardy action. It was evident that his unseen enemy did not mean to be trifled with, and he obeyed dumbly, with staring eyes which yet saw nothing. Casado had already drawn Eustace Gildersleeve, whimpering lamentably, away from the steps, and held him in a firm grip while Captain Dove's outstretched wrists were being bound together, and that utterly dumbfounded scoundrel in turn disappeared bodily through the trap. Gildersleeve went next, by command, and on the same footing. The water was turned off, and Casado followed, most thankfully, although he bit his lip and had almost groaned aloud as he held out his hands to be secured.

"Blow out that light," said the dictatorial voice overhead, and he extinguished the candle standing

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on the top step; so that, when he was lifted into the darkness above and laid alongside the other three there, after his ankles also had been trussed together, he had not the faintest notion as to the hands into which he had fallen. But he could hear heavy breathing about him and knew that there must be a number of men in the cellar.

He would have spoken, but was still wondering confusedly how he should couch his question to obtain a reply, when Captain Dove intervened.

"I know who you are — and be damned to you!" the old man suddenly snarled, straining at his bonds. "I couldn't remember all at once where I'd heard you bark before. You're the same identical hoodoo that Saleh fished out of the sea. I know you! I'll —"

"Clap a wad of waste in his mouth," commanded the voice, "and shut the others up, too. Sling them over there in the corner, behind those casks. That's right. And now we'll have to fix that Portuguese filibuster upstairs."

CHAPTER XXII

THREE TO ONE

TO the little company awaiting Casado's return in the sumptuous drawing-room of the villa, the time passed all too swiftly till within a few minutes of nine. The Portuguese admiral had made himself very comfortable beside Eileen Saxilby within a convenient alcove at an inner corner of the long chamber: a move partly strategic, since from there he could command a clear view of the doorway diagonally opposite, at the far end of the antechamber adjoining, through which Casado must reappear. The admiral had no fear of foul play on the part of the President; he felt quite safe within the cordon of picked sentries posted about the villa, but, at the same time, he thought it wise to be watchful. He did not mean to be taken by surprise, in any shape or form.

And while he flirted ponderously, in broken English, with Eileen,—whom the Doña Carmen, in a hasty aside, had begged to humor him and who was very ready to do all she might for such a good friend in need—he also kept a kindly but careful eye on

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the Doña Carmen herself and Ulick Scarlett, seated together well within his range of observation. They made a very pleasing picture, the young officer in his dashing cavalry uniform and the handsome, languorous, graceful girl. But, at that moment, Eileen's blond beauty appealed most strongly to the admiral, and he turned to whisper another idle compliment into her ear for the pleasure of seeing her shy eyes droop and the wild-rose blush on her cheeks again.

As he did so, the Doña Carmen, watching him, unobserved, glanced anxiously at the clock on the console behind her. In another minute it would chime nine. And she had seen enough of the situation to understand, among other things, that the admiral must not be allowed to become impatient pending her father's return. She rose, while he was still ogling Eileen, and touched an electric bell close beside the clock. He heard the shrill, distant tinkle, and emerged from his alcove instantly, regarding her with a glance of polite inquiry.

A servant appeared. "See that dinner is served in exactly twenty minutes," she ordered coolly. "And meantime bring wine and cigarettes — for these gentlemen." Then she turned toward the grand piano at the other side of the room, and, sitting down there, ran her fingers lightly over its ivory keys.

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"Twenty minutes to nine?" said the admiral, somewhat surprisedly, as he in turn glanced at the clock — which she had in an instant set back as much as she dared. He would no doubt have pulled forth the watch in his waistcoat pocket, but his tunic was tightly buttoned and belted over it, and, at that moment, the Doña Carmen broke into a Spanish love-song, a haunting and melodious serenade, in a minor key. He stood for a little listening, delighted, to her rich voice, till Ulick Scarlett went over to her on the pretext of turning a page of the music; when he himself returned to Eileen in the alcove, quite pleased to spend twenty minutes more in her company, under the dim rose-light of the shaded lamp there.

The servant whom the Doña Carmen had summoned came again, with a big silver salver, laden. The admiral helped himself, liberally. And when soon afterward the Doña Carmen asked him to sing something in Portuguese, he was inspired to the rendering of a passionate composition containing over a dozen verses, to a tune which he vamped himself.

While he was at the piano, Ulick Scarlett sat contentedly beside the Doña Carmen and Eileen remained by herself, engrossed in her own reflections. She also was conscious of some indefinable tension in this new atmosphere, but, knowing little or nothing of the plots and counterplots that had been born of

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it, was not greatly concerned. She had, indeed, grown accustomed to an atmosphere of tension since that fatal afternoon on which she had foolishly let herself be inveigled on board the *Calixte* in New York harbor, only a few hours before she was to have met and married Oswald Ingersoll.

She knew now that Eustace Gildersleeve, eavesdropping, had overheard the elopement scheme Tommy Judson had suggested to her on his friend's behalf at Mrs. Mannering's dance; and she had spent many anguished hours since that scheme had so signally miscarried. She shuddered, even now, at the recollection of her first awakening to her guardian's true character. The remembrance of that awful night they had spent at sea after leaving the *Calixte* and before the *Olive Branch* picked them up was still sufficient to make her feel sick and faint. She closed her eyes, giddily, and opened them again with an effort. The admiral was still singing.

She recalled her first encounter on board Captain Dove's infamous vessel with Jasper Slyne, and how Eustace Gildersleeve, at Slyne's instigation, had at length confessed to her his gross breach of the trust her dead father had reposed in him, the fact that she was now practically a pauper: a crime she could perhaps have condoned but for its other consequences, the worst of which was the cure he proposed for the plight in which she had been left. If she would

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only agree, of her own free will, to take Jasper Slyne for her husband, she would thus, her guardian had told her, retrieve from the wreck of the past not only her own future but also his. And he had implored her to help him in his dire extremity by sacrificing herself.

Jasper Slyne had no doubt thought that she might be so induced to treat him more tolerantly. On the *Olive Branch* both she and her guardian had been almost absolutely in his power. But, though he had forced the latter to carry out his every wish, she herself had resolutely refused to hold any farther communication with him. She abhorred him utterly, and Eustace Gildersleeve little less. For Mrs. Mannering, their weakly unscrupulous tool in betraying her, whom also they had betrayed, she felt only a half-contemptuous pity.

As for herself, she had suffered in silence throughout the voyage, extracting such comfort as she could from the strange message that had reached her through the dumb woman Ambrizette. She kept the curl to encourage herself in the hope that Tommy and Oswald Ingersoll would yet save her from the dreadful, impending fate of which her conscienceless guardian had more than once hinted in connection with Jasper Slyne. Mrs. Mannering and she had been berthed in an alleyway by them-

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selves, on the other side of the ship from that occupied by the rest of the quarter-deck complement, but they had of tacit consent dropped even the outward semblance of friendship, and, dreading she knew not what, she had slept but little until her guardian and Slyne had gone ashore at El Puerto.

She had been almost worn out with fatigue and anxiety when the President and his daughter had come on board the *Olive Branch* in the roadstead, and it had not needed much sympathetic persuasion to induce her to confide as much as she might in the Doña Carmen; who had at once and most willingly undertaken to aid her.

Then had happened the most miraculous reappearance of the *Calixte*, and the signaled message that had so aggrieved the good Reuben Yoxall, which, obscure though its source had been, had brought such comfort to her.

And now, at last, she was safely ashore, with the promise of full protection from her enemies. Her friends were not far away. The contrast between the spacious, luxurious room in which she was sitting and her cramped quarters on the *Olive Branch*, with Mrs. Mannering's faded, fractious face for sole company, was grateful to her beyond words. She knew instinctively that she could trust the Doña Carmen and Ulick Scarlett. His Excellency the

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President was vouched for by his own daughter. And even the Portuguese Admiral, with all his foreign effusion, was obviously well-meaning.

The admiral had just risen from the piano and was receiving with ill-assumed deprecation the Doña Carmen's compliments on his inharmonious chant. Ulick Scarlett also had got to his feet and was supplementing these with equal diplomacy, when Eileen, still seated in her alcove, wondering what she should say that might serve the occasion, heard the clock on the console strike. And while the clock was still striking, there appeared in the distant doorway a figure that paused on the threshold as if to study the occupants of the room.

It was not President Casado, nor yet the servant who should have announced dinner, but a young girl in an evening gown, admirably becoming to her, a gown which the Doña Carmen had offered Eileen in their dressing-room not an hour before. Moreover, something about her besides her perfect features and figure, and her faultless attire, held Eileen still and silent. She was manifestly a stranger there and somewhat uncertain of her reception. But she came forward confidently none the less, her head well up, her eyes, strangely magnetic eyes, fixed on Eileen's face.

The Doña Carmen caught sight of her, and the admiral turned on his heel with a quick exclamation.

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She stopped and they stood thus for a tense instant. Then Ulick Scarlett started toward her with outstretched hand, his features alight, but — the admiral was before him. And, while the Doña Carmen looked on in amazement, that fickle lady-killer was greeting the fair unknown as though she had been an invited guest there; and she was smiling on him quite unembarrassed.

She shook Ulick Scarlett's hand, and turned tactfully to the Doña Carmen. "We are not to wait dinner for His Excellency," she said with no less sang-froid, her eyes meeting those of the President's daughter, now quiet, dominant. "In twenty minutes or half an hour his boxes will be all ready for your men," she explained to the admiral over her shoulder, "and he will rejoin us then."

"Dinner is served, señorita," a sonorous voice proclaimed from the doorway, and that distraction saved any awkwardness. The Doña Carmen had to take for granted meantime this stranger, who had made free with her wardrobe, yet whose name even she did not know, although both the admiral and Ulick Scarlett appeared to have met her before. Any hesitancy on her part might have endangered her father's plans, plans as to which she was still in the dark.

The admiral also had been greatly taken aback by the unexpected appearance there of his enchantress

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of the afternoon. But, knowing now how grossly he had misjudged her, his surprise had been pleasurable entirely. He was delighted beyond expression to have such an opportunity of reinstating himself in her good graces, and, in that frame of mind, the fact that the other two had received her as an intimate was sufficient for him.

Ulick Scarlett, simple and honest soldier, supposed her a friend of his sweetheart's and was glad indeed that they should be friends. Only Eileen Saxilby, looking on, saw clearly that there was something wrong.

She came forth as the Doña Carmen beckoned her, and a sudden ecstatic light dawned on her understanding when the newcomer addressed her also by name. But she took that cue without any change of expression, and the admiral, acutely observant, congratulated himself again. He offered the Doña Carmen his arm and led her ceremoniously forth, followed by Ulick Scarlett between the other two girls; so that Eileen Saxilby entered the brilliantly lighted dining-room with her shapely little head all awheel, her cheeks pink with excited anticipation, her gray eyes sparkling. Twenty anxious questions were trembling upon her lips, but she instinctively understood that it would not be wise to ask them just then. The lady of the *Calixte* was talking to Ulick Scarlett. To the Doña Carmen's further surprise, since she

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had ordered five covers only, the table was set for six. But she, like her father, was not unaccustomed to cope with the unexpected, and, crediting him with the origin of each new turn of events, leaving herself to be guided by circumstances in her blind endeavor to help him in his policy of the moment, she took one end of the table facing the door, motioned the admiral and Ulick Scarlett to her right and left, the other two to the seats beyond them, leaving the vacant chair at the foot for her father. Then she threw herself whole-heartedly into the part for which chance had cast her in that tragic-comedy, and to such good purpose did she and the other two girls, no less on the *qui vive*, exert themselves to keep the admiral in good humor that time sped all unheeded while the deft, soft-footed servants brought course after course to the table. It seemed that His Excellency the President was to have all the grace he could wish.

The admiral, indeed, was quite in his element. It was long since he had enjoyed such a meal, and in such surroundings. The lights in the beautifully appointed room had been lowered so that the tinted table-lamps enhanced the glamour of the three fair, animated faces, of the sparkling eyes that had turned their batteries on him. Ulick Scarlett's gay uniform and his own with its gilt epaulettes and gold buttons looked their bravest between the shapely

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white shoulders on either side, against the subdued gleam of the snowy cloth, with its glistening silver and crystal and cutlery, its bright epergne gay with tropical blooms.

The admiral was at his best, enjoying himself immensely, master of a situation such as he could only have conceived in a dream. He was the life and soul of the little party, allowed no moment of dullness to mar its mirth, devoted all his resources to the entertainment of the three girls. But, as he was in the act of clinking glasses with Ulick Scarlett, for whom also, it would seem, he had acquired a profound esteem, while the stolid native servants looked on with smiles on their usually expressionless faces, there came from the patio without, a strange shuffling sound. Hearing that suddenly, he set his glass down untasted and looked round over his shoulder toward the open doorway through which, above the flowers and the tinkling fountain, were visible the sky and a star or two twinkling dimly through the heat-haze overhead.

The Doña Carmen, lips parted, leaned to one side, that she might see past the epergne which stood between her and the head of the table where her father should have been sitting. The two girls, nearest the doorway, were looking out, and Ulick Scarlett, surprised at the sudden silence that had befallen, listened intently, rose, and reached for his sword which

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he had discarded when he sat down. He buckled it on, unnoticed, except by the servants edging away from the door. But the admiral had drawn from the breast of his tunic a silver whistle, which he held between his set lips. The tramp of the Portuguese sentry, on his beat at the great entrance-gates, was audible to them all, but the other incomprehensible sound had not ceased. It was growing louder.

The lights on the table shed a soft, mellow radiance across the paved passage-way that led past the door. Into that obscure illumination there came very slowly and on ground-level a head, a human head, white-haired, a smooth, flat face showing a bristling fringe of whisker above the bandage about its jaws, which held it dumb.

It stopped for a moment to glare most murderously at the little group in the dining-room, and then, with a galvanic jerk, writhed forward again, like a wounded snake, till there came into sight the body to which it belonged: that of an old man, in shirt-sleeves and blue-serge breeches, his hands tied fast behind him, his ankles securely lashed together.

The admiral had sprung to his feet, revolver ready, and the shrill shriek of his whistle rent the tense silence. Ulick Scarlett had drawn his sword and stepped in front of Eileen as she shrank backward at sight of Captain Dove in such plight. The fair, mysterious stranger, her vis-à-vis, who had been

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studying her intently throughout the meal, had come coolly round the end of the table, past the Doña Carmen standing there as if spell-bound, and whispered a quick sentence or two in her ear while the clatter of heavy boots on the paved patio preceded the prompt appearance of the admiral's men, half a dozen of them under a petty officer.

Two of them seized the prone body they had almost stumbled over, set it roughly on its feet, held it upright there. The others drew up in the doorway, awaiting orders.

"How did — *that* — come here?" demanded the admiral, in an explosion of righteous wrath. It was a very gross outrage on his dignity that the dinner-party should thus have been interrupted and his pleasure spoiled. And, while he and his petty officer were exchanging quick questions and answers, the bound and silent figure that had so startled him became almost black in the face with forcibly suppressed feeling.

"Take the gag out of his mouth, fool!" ordered the admiral, in a frenzy, and the petty officer, drawing a sheaf-knife, quickly restored Captain Dove to freedom of speech. But all Captain Dove's bottled up profanity failed him then. He could find no words in which to express his opinion of the Portuguese admiral, who had already wasted so much unspeakably precious time. He gulped and gobbled

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and choked till, at length, he regained command of himself. Then: "Cut me loose, damn you!" said he in a deadly whisper; "if you want me to show you where Casado is with his gold. Cut my feet loose, if you're afraid of my hands, and come with me."

"Loose his feet," said the admiral in a strangled, husky whisper and started forward, now thoroughly alarmed. "Make sure on your life that no one enters or leaves the villa. See that the sentries outside are on the alert. And now — lead the way, you! What are you waiting for? Take me to the President, instantly."

CHAPTER XXIII

A MAN OF METAL

CAPTAIN DOVE said no farther word, good or bad, as he shuffled hastily along the patio, between two Portuguese sailors, his hands still tied. At his heels, with drawn sword, went Ulick Scarlett, and behind him, at a safe distance, panted the admiral, attended by two more of his men, all four of whom carried candles snatched from their scones in the drawing-room, where the three girls had been left under guard, prisoners. The admiral had set a sentry at the door, with whispered instructions to see that they stayed there till he should return. He had begun to fear that his complaisance toward them had been misplaced, and was determined to make an immediate end of all these harassing mysteries.

The double gates that gave on the inner patio were standing ajar, and Captain Dove led the way directly to the low door of the President's private apartments. It stood wide open, and seemed to have been fastened back, as was the case with the others they passed till they reached the end room,

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where a lamp was burning. And there Captain Dove, at the admiral's order, halted impatiently over the gaping trap-door that led to the cellar below.

The admiral bade Ulick Scarlett and two of the sailors go down and investigate. He was all eagerness himself, but his native caution counseled delay till he could be sure that he was not to be ambushed underground in the darkness. And Captain Dove, no less cunning, knew what he feared, but casted no words in any vain attempt to convince him otherwise, only groaning inwardly over this farther futile delay.

Ulick Scarlett soon came hurrying up the steps to report, and his face of horror helped to assure the admiral that he at least was not concerned in any possible plot.

"This seems to be a wine cellar, sir," said the young Scots soldier of fortune breathlessly. "His Excellency the President is lying bound and gagged, beside two other men I have never seen before, among the barrels. There's another trap-door below, leading to a vault full of what look to me like specie-boxes. Your men will not allow me to unloose His Excellency. Will you please pass the word to —"

The admiral had listened intently, with kindling eyes. On the spur of the moment an inspiration had

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come to him. He shouted an order in Portuguese to the men below.

"Go back," he said to the young officer of life-guards, "and set the President free." And, uttering some quick words in the same tongue to Captain Dove's two attentive guardians, he went down the steps himself, revolver in hand.

Ulick Scarlett had sheathed his sword and was stooping over Casado, who gave him a very grateful glance, about to unknot the gag which was irking his august employer so sorely, when both his arms were suddenly seized from behind. He gave vent to a wild cry of mingled rage and surprise, but he was forced forward upon his face and so expeditiously silenced and bound that his utmost efforts against these measures availed him nothing. At the same time Captain Dove was hustled below, and, cursing insanely, since other protest availed him nothing, reduced to the same ignominious bondage from which he had been at such pains to attempt escape. Tied hand and foot, he had crawled, as a worm might, from the cellar to the dining-room — only to be restored to his place beside his companions, no better off than they who had made no such desperate exertion in the common cause. It was bitter as death, too, to be deprived again of the power of speech, of the opportunity to make any terms at all for himself with the man who had thus fortuitously been

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enabled to overreach them all. His weak, red-rimmed eyes winked tearfully in the dim, flickering light of the candle with which the Portuguese admiral was scanning curiously the features of his five prisoners.

The thoughts of the other four were no less visible in their faces, and the admiral smiled triumphantly as he finished his survey. Then he turned away with his light to inspect the vault.

When he came puffing up the damp steps again, his expression was one of virtuous surprise and austerity. He had found that excuse for his conduct which he, a Knight of the Golden Fleece, could not but desire.

He set his candle down again, where it would display to him the demeanor of his audience, and spoke severely, to the President.

"You have not dealt honorably with me, Señor Casado," he said, "although I have kept my pact with you, at my own personal risk. And, now that I know you have acted so treacherously toward me, I must proceed otherwise than I had intended. The gold is there, as you said, but — you have taken advantage of my good-nature; you have grossly betrayed the trust I was so ill-advised as to repose in your promises. A number, and very many, no doubt, of the bullion-boxes stored in your vault have very recently been removed. The evidence against

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you is sufficiently plain to satisfy me that you had intended to trick me entirely. And — good! I am no such simpleton as you think me.

“The bullion remaining will promptly be transferred to my flag-ship. That done, you and I and our other friends here will follow it with me. There we will adjust our account, and — that settled, I'll either set you ashore again or land you in Lisbon, as you prefer. I am generous, you see, but — please understand that I am not so easily to be hoodwinked as you have imagined.”

He ceased, well satisfied with himself and to see his perfidious enemy writhing there impotent, almost heartbroken by the irony of that charge, so absolutely unfounded. To the others he paid no farther attention. since they were merely pawns in the game.

At a word from him one of his men, all eying him with amazement and admiration, scurried off to fetch the strongest fatigue-party that could be spared from his little force, for the purpose of conveying the boxes below to the launch at the landing stage. The launch came, bearing a dozen sailors, with rifles slung, under a master-at-arms, and case after case of packed gold coin was carried up to the patio, past the man who had spent the best years of his life in accumulating that hoard. And the admiral stood there, looking on, keeping count of the boxes, heedless of everything else now that the object of all

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efforts was almost attained. He could already hear the cheers that would greet him as he sailed up the Tagus, with his strong-room better lined than any Portuguese warship's had ever been, even when Portugal was a power to be counted with on the high and narrow seas.

His master-at-arms had furnished his men with torches, whose smoky flare filled the cellar with a rich light. But the captives in one corner, behind a big wine-cask, could see nothing of more interest than the Portuguese admiral's back, where he stood supervising these operations. All they could hear was the steady tramp of feet as man after man came up the stone steps laden, to descend light. A million of money in gold weighs a good deal, and a dozen men are none too many to handle a dozen millions.

But, above the steady tramp of the sailors, another sound supervened, a sound at which the admiral cocked his ears apprehensively; that of someone running through the rooms above, toward the cellar. He stepped to the ladder which led from it, as if to ascend, but, as he reached that, the petty officer of the Portuguese guard came clambering down in hot haste, and recognizing him, stopped short, at the salute.

"Pardon, *senhor almirante*," he gasped, breathing heavily, "but there has come to the outer gate word

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that the Nicazuelan army is marching upon the villa, and will be here almost instantly."

The admiral glared at him. "Who brings the news?" he demanded in a white heat.

"A trooper of the President's life-guards, seeking speech with Lieutenant Scarlett."

"Bring him here to me immediately," cried the admiral, and coughed grievously as the acrid, pungent smoke with which the cellar was rapidly filling caught him by the throat. The petty officer was away again at a run before he had half-recovered and no less rapidly reappeared, stumbling down the steps in the rear of a dusty, bedraggled, half-dazed native cavalry soldier, disarmed on admittance.

"Who leads the attack?" asked the admiral crisply. The prospect of plain fighting had acted on his frayed nerves as a tonic. His voice rang firmly above the steady tramp of his sailors' feet as they passed and repassed him, laden or light.

"The Señor Don Enrique Vidal, Excellency," answered the man, cringing before him and eager to curry favor. "He has been proclaimed President in place of Don Fermín Casado. He is on the march from the capital to El Puerto. The troop to which I belong was detailed to hold the road against him, and we would perhaps have done so, but our officer also has deserted us, and we had no option out to surrender to the President. The sergeant-major

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sent me on ahead at the gallop to carry the news to Lieutenant Scarlett and to our colonel, if he be still at his post. But my horse was shot by a sentry at the roadside, and ---"

"How many men has the Señor Vidal brought with him?" the admiral interrupted, and the fear-stricken cavalryman held up his hands hopelessly.

"A legion," he answered; "regiments without number, artillery also. I myself saw one of their guns, standing ready, trained, to breach our stockade. We could in no wise have held the position against them. I saw also ---"

"The man is lying," a cool, level voice interrupted, and the admiral jumped nervously round, revolver raised. He could have told those tones from among a thousand, and he was half-afraid that Casado was free again. He uttered a startled ejaculation as his glance fell instinctively on his arch-enemy.

The ex-President still lay, securely bound, where he had been left by his original captors. But, by means of heroic measures, he had managed to free himself from his gag. The admiral had left a lighted candle on the flagged floor not far from his head. He had held his face to the flame till the cloth about his chin had charred through. His beard and moustache were scorched and frizzled. On one cheek-bone was a red and angry burn.

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"The man lies," he remarked, in a cold, quiet voice. "There are no field-guns in the republic. The defenses of the capital consist of heavy cannon and garrison artillery."

The admiral still stood silent, listening, and he went on, no less coolly. "Even without them, however, Enrique Vidal may prove very dangerous. He has probably a strong force of infantry with him, and a sufficient proportion of mounted men. If he besieges you here, you will undoubtedly have to capitulate — and he will most assuredly seize the — the gold.

"But, notwithstanding your grievous treatment of me, I am still willing to stand your friend. And not without reason, for Vidal will certainly cut my throat if he finds me here. I would not for worlds either that he should lay hands on my — on the gold reserve of the Banco de Nicazuela. You have entirely misunderstood my intentions. This is no time to tell you what has happened here before you found me as I am now. But I have not broken faith with you, as you think. Free me — and those others — and I'll show you how we may yet get the boxes safely to — the *Olive Branch*."

He ceased, abruptly, said nothing more. The Portuguese admiral stood gazing at him, not knowing what to believe, like one in a trance. And always the sailors maintained their endless chain be-

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tween the vault and the patio, the links on one side always iden, dredging the vault of its treasure.

"Better stop them," Casado advised. "You won't get the boxes down to the beach that way now. But I can show you how we may yet get them safely to the *Olive Branch*."

The dull, faint echo of a distant rifle-shot was audible over the tramp of feet on the stone-flagged floor and the steps and the wooden ladder that led to the little room above where the lamp was burning. Followed by another, and then another, and a very ragged volley, it served to supplement his assertion. The admiral was between the horns of a most horrible dilemma.

All he wished was to get away with the gold. With that to show for himself he would need no excuse for this very unconstitutional conduct of his distant country's affairs in a far away corner of the world. Without it he would undoubtedly be called to the strictest account for all he had done. And it would be difficult to explain some of the steps he had taken in his country's interests — that little dinner-party, for instance; his procedure with the President — ex-President now, deposed, and perhaps through his actions; his patently probable clash with the forces of Don Enrique Vidal. At any cost he must get away with sufficient money to justify all his actions.

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He made up his mind with a promptitude commendable in view of the champagne he had drunk during the afternoon and evening. "Halt!" he cried to the double line of men passing to and fro at one side.

"Give me your knife," he directed a sweating sailor, and with his own hands cut the cords with which Casado had been secured.

The ex-President of Nicazuela got to his feet and stretched himself stiffly. From overhead, in the distance, came the intermittent crackle of rifle-fire. The Portuguese admiral glanced hither and thither, uncertainly.

"Order your men to draw inside the villa," Casado advised. "A couple of hours will suffice us to get away with our lading, and we must hold the house for so long. But that will be easy enough, and—you may as well set my friends here free. They'll help us."

The admiral could see nothing else for it, and, little as he liked the idea of liberating the others also, he could not afford to hesitate even at that.

"Remove their arms and release them," he told the men looking on, and this was quickly accomplished. The four remaining prisoners, freed, rose somewhat sheepishly, and stood silent for a moment, glad to be drawing free breath again. It was

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self-evident that now was no time for recrimination or paying off old scores. They were for the present reunited and in a purpose that might by no means be postponed except at the common cost. Ulick Scarlett would perhaps have precipitated the personal trouble brewing, but the ex-President, understanding his state of mind, held up a peremptory hand and he had perforce to restrain himself.

Casado, indeed, assumed the command from that moment, and the admiral prudently yielded him precedence, contenting himself with swearing at his own men when occasion offered.

The defense of the villa was their first care, and Casado had often enough already studied out all the details involved in that. It was very defensibly built and situated, and he knew that a mere handful of men might maintain it even against such a force as Vidal was leading against it, for long enough at least to satisfy him. He sent Ulick Scarlett off with as many of the fatigue-party as the admiral would permit to withdraw from the cellar, and clear instructions as to the disposition of the little fighting force.

"And see that the gates of the inner patio are ready to swing to, in case you are forced to retire so far," he finished. "When I send you word to do so, bring your men down here, but make quite sure that the bolts of the door at the entrance to my apart-

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ments are shot well home behind you. Report to me here in the interim, and bring Carmen and her friend down with you too."

A frown of anxiety flitted across his features at thought of his daughter, but passed at once. He knew that she would be safe enough behind the bullet-proof shutters in the drawing-room, and he knew moreover that he could trust her to think for herself during any such crisis. This would not be the first occasion by a good many on which she had heard unmoved the crackle of musketry and shown wit sufficient to serve him as well as herself.

"Get the boxes above brought back here, if you please," he requested abruptly of the admiral, and the admiral reluctantly gave the word. The living line was immediately reestablished, began to bring down the boxes it had carried up, and then, greatly to the Portuguese sailor's relief, Casado disclosed his last and most precious secret. Under an already empty cask in a corner there was a subterranean exit from the cellar.

"Into the ravine," said Casado, reading aright the other's mute, questioning glance; "thence under an overhang of the rock to the landing-stage where your launch is. But the men must go bare-foot, and—the first that makes a sound will be strangled! There may be passers-by on the bridge that carries the road across the ravine. The pathway's straight

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and level from this stair-foot, but I'll lead the way if you like, once my daughter comes down."

"I'd rather you'd stay here with me," said the admiral bluntly. "My men will do that part of the work if you and your friends will help on the spot. Here — you fellows!"

He selected six and set them to act as transport to the landing-stage, saw them off himself, thoroughly posted in their dangerous duty, after a hissed threat of dire consequences should they fail in any respect. And he waited in sore suspense at the tunnel-opening till he heard the soft *pad-pad* of their bare feet on the stone steps as they came perspiring back.

"All is well, sir," the first reported promptly, returning the key the admiral had obtained from Casado. "The launch is still there and her men on the look-out ready to cast off. There had been passers-by, carrying boxes also. We left our lading on board."

"Good!" grunted the admiral. "Get away with more. Keep going." And as he turned again to Casado, he drew the back of one hand across his damp brow, and heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he observed that the stack of boxes behind him had grown perceptibly.

Captain Dove, applying himself to that object, was driving relentlessly the few remaining Portuguese sailors who formed his party. Slyne also had taken

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his place in the panting line, was proving himself a man of his hands at the unaccustomed labor. Only Casado and the Portuguese admiral remained on their dignity, unable, even in that hour of sore stress, to set aside the remembrance that they were of lineage and position too lofty to entertain for an instant the absurd idea of acting as common porters. Eustace Gildersleeve stood by useless, an old, broken man, seeking no more than escape with his life from the scene of all those horrors he had endured. And, beyond making sure that he remained where he was, no one paid any attention to him.

Casado looked up eagerly as he heard the clink of Ulick Scarlett's spurs in the room above and smiled as he saw the edge of a tweed skirt at the top of the steps. His daughter smiled back at him as she tripped nimbly down in a smart traveling dress, and instinctively stood to one side that her escort might make his report on the instant.

"The Portuguese fleet has sent a strong landing-party ashore," said the young officer concisely. "It seems to be trying to fight its way to the villa, but Don Enrique Vidal's men are driving it back. They have almost succeeded in reaching the entrance-gate, and are preparing to breach it. We have lost five men, severely wounded or dead."

Casado looked at the admiral with uplifted eyebrows. He understood now why the dull echo of

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the distant conflict had so much increased in volume.

"I ordered a rescue-party to follow me in case I didn't return on time," the Portuguese admiral explained vexedly. "I don't know how the devil I'm to get word to them now that —"

"Leave them to fight it out with Vidal," said Casado coolly, "till we get away with the launch. Then we'll signal them to retire at once. And then —"

Captain Dove set down a box of gold with a bang on the growing mound beside them. "Where are the other two?" he demanded hotly of Ulick Scarlett. "Where's Saleh — and that Saxilby girl?"

The boy looked the truculent old ruffian full in the face.

"What business is that of yours?" he asked quietly. "You needn't worry about anyone but yourself."

And, even as Captain Dove would have sprung at him, a low, little musical laugh rang out very clearly above the din.

"Here I am, Captain Dove," said an unconcerned voice, and Saleh herself appeared, smiling, behind Jasper Slyne.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNDER A RED MOON

SALEH had assuredly reason to be well pleased with herself. It was entirely owing to her that the rash adventurers of the *Calixte* were not at that moment prisoners in the hands of their enemies. She had planned and carried out with inimitable courage and audacity each step of their perilous enterprise, and, always on the edge of a disaster, found means of some sort to overcome every unforeseen obstacle.

It had been a heavy blow to their hopes when they, concealed in the cellar above, had overheard Casado explain to the three confederates whom he had treated so treacherously the recent change in the situation. And not even his malicious intimation to Eustace Gildersleeve that Eileen Saxilby was with the others in the drawing-room could counter-balance the news that the road back to their boat was closed against them by the Portuguese sentries posted about it; for that must inevitably mean the loss of much precious time, and add a thousand-fold to the risk of discovery.

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But Saleh was not to be baffled, even by such a complication, while there remained any single chance of success. She had been brought up among men accustomed to stake everything on that. As soon as Casado and his no less dumfounded accomplices had been secured, she bade Ingersoll seek out the underground exit shown in José Maria Moreno's plan of the cellar, and get as many of the bullion-boxes as possible to the beach while she should be keeping the Portuguese admiral occupied. For the means to accomplish that and to free Eileen she must trust to luck.

And Ingersoll, curbing his fierce impatience, dumbly compliant, set to work wildly lest the almost overwhelming temptation to break away by himself and succor Eileen single-handed should yet vanquish common-sense. He was scarcely master of his own actions now.

At a sign from her, Tommy Judson followed her from the cellar, and, with his master-key, took her through to the outer patio. She had much to say to him by the way, and he listened with close attention, nodding from time to time in the darkness, but grudgingly. He would infinitely rather have faced himself the risk she was so ready to take to rescue Eileen.

As they stepped out into the patio they saw that the moon had risen above the mountains, a great red

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orb that loomed obscurely through the thick heat-haze, whose faint glow, reflected by the pink walls of the flower-filled court they were crossing made it look like some dim, unreal dream-garden in fairyland. Saleh stopped suddenly, in the shadow of the always tinkling fountain, laid a hand on Tommy Judson's strong arm. He halted and looked round at her in surprise, but she had bent her head so that no light should fall on her face and was studying his.

"What shall I say to — that Saxilby girl when I see her, Tommy?" she asked in a low whisper.

"Tell her I'm here, and Ingersoll, too," he whispered back hurriedly. "Tell her everything will be all right now, and — you know what to say, Saleh. Get her through to us as soon as you see a chance, and we'll be off — even if we've to leave the gold behind. We'd better not wait now — we're working with seconds. You — you're not afraid to go on alone, are you?"

In his ugly, honest face she saw only concern for her courage: that and nothing more.

"No, I'm not afraid," she said gently, "to go on alone. And I'll bring her back with me, Tommy." And, with that, she went on toward the gates. But, ere she slipped through the second, she held out a hand to him, mutely, and he took it, wondering, in a quick, nervous clasp. Then she disappeared in the

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shadows beyond, and he, leaving the gates both ajar, turned back, with a heavy heart. He set wide all the doors leading into the cellar, that she might rejoin them the more speedily, and, satisfied that he had taken every precaution possible, applied himself resolutely to the work on hand.

Saleh took in the situation on her side without the loss of a moment. She could see the servants engrossed in their tasks in the lighted kitchen and dining-room; one passed along the patio with a silver salver on which were set bottles and glasses and boxes of cigarettes. She peeped out of the darkness into the drawing-room, and saw enough of the scene there to choose her own course at once. The door of the Doña Carmen's dressing-room was half-open, the profusion of frocks from which she and Eileen Saxilby had chosen their dinner-costumes left hanging over the chairs. Saleh entered, and very shortly emerged again, dressed for the part she was going to play. She only paused to pluck a flower for her breast from the beautiful blossoms about the fountain as she crossed boldly to the dining-room.

"You will set an extra place at table," she said quietly to the servant who looked round as she came in. And he, never doubting her right to give such an order, set to at once to make the required alteration. The staff of the President's household were all well-trained and not in the habit of questioning

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any quick change or qucer counter-order. And the dinner-hour had just been set back twenty minutes, greatly to the cook's disgust, so that there was still time enough.

Encouraged by that result, Saleh went on to the drawing-room, and, with her heart in her mouth now, halted doubtfully at the threshold. Then she caught Eileen Saxilby's eye, and swept in, herself again, her head well back, her lips parting in a slow, radiant smile.

She could see that the Portuguese admiral did not immediately know what to make of her presence there, but Ulick Scarlett's glad greeting gave her all the opening she needed. And the same quick, feminine foresight that had induced her to spend ten precious minutes in dressing to suit the occasion showed her how she might best deal with the President's daughter. The information Casado himself had unintentionally afforded stood her in good stead with the Doña Carmen, and, as dinner was announced, she saw that her most audacious pretension was to pass unquestioned for the time being. That was sufficient for her.

She scanned Eileen Saxilby very closely as the American girl approached, and throughout the tense, effervescent gaiety that prevailed at the dinner-table, glanced over at her from time to time with eyes enigmatic, inscrutable. But Eileen's clear gaze met

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hers gladly and most gratefully always, and, when Captain Dove's alarming appearance brought dinner to an abrupt conclusion, Saleh moved round the room toward her, and gave her Tommy Judson's message, in his own words, while the rest were too busy otherwise to overhear.

She herself was not a little dismayed at the thought of what the old man's escape from the cellar might mean to her friends and herself, but quick reflection helped her to hope that they had already got clear away with their booty. She had surely held the admiral back long enough to allow of that, and might now devote all her energies to saving herself — and Eileen.

Alone she might have trusted to her own fleetness to reach the inner patio and get the gates at its entrance fast before the heavy-footed Portuguese sailors could reach her. And then the steel door farther on would have baffled them till she could reach the beach. But she had no wish to escape alone. She had promised Tommy to bring Eileen Saxilby back with her: and she meant to keep that promise.

But after Captain Dove's acrimonious explosion the admiral shepherded the three girls back into the drawing-room, set a sentry over them, and went off with the old man and Ulick Scarlett. They were, to all intents, prisoners.

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The Doña Carmen turned with a quick imploring gesture to Saleh.

"My father?" she asked, ignoring all else in her urgency.

"Your father is safe, in the cellar," said Saleh. "Come farther away from the door, both of you, and I'll tell you what has happened. It concerns us all." And she moved toward the alcove, beyond earshot of the Portuguese sentry and yet within his view, where Ellen and the admiral had been sitting before dinner.

Saleh's sole scant hope of escape now lay in enlisting the Doña Carmen's sympathies in Eileen's cause. And the Doña Carmen reassured as to her father's safety, listened willingly to all she had to say, pieced that together in her own mind with what she herself had already heard from Eileen, and was quick to promise whatever help she could possibly render. She felt that her father would surely approve of her doing so, and — she herself had a gallant lover. She was still speaking, in low, eager tones, when, from beyond the verge of the palm-grove about the villa, a shot rang out, followed by another and then another and a very ragged volley. Eileen started nervously but the Doña Carmen slipped a comforting arm round her waist.

"Fear nothing," she urged. "We are quite safe within these walls. It is merely a false alarm."

It seemed impossible, in the luxurious drawing-

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room where the three girls in their pretty gowns were grouped together under the rose-light of a shaded lamp, that the atmosphere about them could be surcharged with all the elements of battle, murder and sudden death. But the intermittent crackle of rifle-fire proved that the first shot had been no false alarm, and, presently, they heard the clatter of feet, approaching hastily, on the pavement. The sentry at the door called a gruff challenge in Portuguese, and was answered in the same tongue, by the petty officer whom the admiral had sent back from the cellar with a few men to accompany Ulick Scarlett.

The sentry stood aside, at the petty officer's order, and Ulick looked in at the doorway.

"All's well now," he cried encouragingly to his sweetheart. "I'll come in again in a minute or two. Please wait here till then, all of you." And he ran on toward the outer gate, bidding the sentry also follow him.

Saleh was almost tempted to take advantage of that opportunity, but thought it more prudent to wait, for a little at least, to hear what was happening outside, before making any move. She crossed to the doorway and watched the return of the Portuguese sailors from their posts among the palms, saw them climbing to the roof to take position behind its loop-holed parapet, and, as the great iron outer gates clanged to behind the last of them, caught sight of

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Ulick Scarlett directing these operations. Soon after that he came back to the drawing-room to give them the news for which she was anxiously waiting.

"Vidal has taken advantage of your father's absence from the capital to usurp his place," he cried breathlessly to the Doña Carmen. "He's brought a strong force across the mountains with him to besiege the villa. But we're all right, of course: the place is practically impregnable, and the Portuguese admiral is working with us. I haven't time to explain everything, and Señor Casado wishes you to come with me to the cellar."

The three girls exchanged anxious glances, and then the Doña Carmen called Ulick back: he was already on his way to the door. Then, taking him a little apart, she told him in a few words Eileen's story, poured into his ear an appeal so pitiful that he, for all his devotion to the strict letter of duty, could find no argument with which to resist it. But he stood for a moment, considering it, undecided, biting his lip. He had learned from his elder brother to think for himself, and, while both of them would have spent their lives ungrudgingly for the man from whom they held their commissions, neither would, even at his command, have done anything inconsistent with a strict personal code of honor.

In this case, he saw no good reason why he should not please his sweetheart, and follow his own incli-

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nation, by helping the young American girl to re-join her friends, to escape from the clutches of that ill-favored trio within the cellar. It scarcely needed Saleh's added entreaty to help him to the decision that he could do so, that, if, in doing so, he should incur Casado's displeasure, he would willingly confront such a consequence.

"Come on!" he said gladly, "I'll see you through. There's not a moment to lose. But — wait a minute! What's that?"

He warned them back with raised hand and hurried away again. The sounds of conflict without had suddenly trebled in volume. Wild cries came from the parapet behind which the Portuguese sailors were more than holding their own against the besiegers.

A trellis served him for ladder, and, reaching the roof, he speedily learned what had happened. A strong landing-party had just come ashore from the Portuguese fleet, was engaging Vidal's forces on that flank, might possibly manage to fight its way to the villa. He slipped to the ground again, and called to the girls in the drawing-room: but they were not there.

"Ulick!" cried a low voice, which came from across the fountain, and, turning thankfully, he was aware of a warm white shoulder outlined in the glow of the lamp-light at the partly opened door of a

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room on the other side of the patio. He ran toward this, and the door closed to a narrow crack. "Wait just a minute," begged the voice. "We won't be longer."

And, within five minutes, during which he paced impatiently to and fro on the flags, the light inside was extinguished, and three figures emerged, their gay evening gowns exchanged for dark traveling dresses.

He did not delay to commend this forethought, but led the way at once to the inner patio. At the spot where she had first set foot in the villa Saleh stopped and whistled softly. Something came slipping down from above through the shadows there, and she grasped with eager hands the rope-ladder by means of which she had descended a couple of hours before. She climbed to the coping. Eileen only paused to throw her arms round the Doña Carmen's neck. That was no time for any prolonged leave-taking.

"May we meet again, that I may be able to thank you better," she whispered simply and followed Saleh.

The ladder was quickly withdrawn, and the Doña Carmen turned to the young man beside her, with a little satisfied sigh. For were not they two also devotees of that very inconstant star which serves the jack-o'-lantern of luck for light.

"I wonder if you'd do as much for me as some man has done for that girl?" she questioned, and he,

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hearing the tremor in her voice, took her into his arms, for the first time, kissed her full on the lips, unresisting. And for five fleeting minutes, there in the shadow, while the dim red moonlight lay tenderly on the rose-pink garden before them, they let time drift, stood hand in hand, forgot all the rest of the world for each other.

On the flat roof above, Saleh found Oswald Ingersoll, almost consumed with that gnawing, anxious impatience which had very nearly induced him to go down into the villa himself and find out what had delayed her. Only his promise to Tommy Judson that he would not do so except as a last resort had served to restrain him so long.

When she did at last appear she moved quickly to one side, and he did not dare to ask her the all-important question, but lay there straining his eyes through the gloom to see whether anyone would follow her. He did not feel sure that he could stand the shock of a further disappointment. And when at length he saw, very dimly, Eileen's white face coming upward, he lay back and turned his head away, choking down the cry that had all but escaped his lips. When he looked round again she was standing over him, helpless, the flush of the moon on her features, her tremulous lips moving mutely. And he, on his knees, took her tenderly into his arms.

The roof of the building enclosing the inner patio

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was isolated from that overlooking the fore-court by means of a much higher parapet, which made the rear of the villa a small fortress in itself, defensible against any force that might succeed in storming the outer stronghold. Saleh could therefore walk freely over to that side abutting on the ravine, leaving the other two to follow her as soon as they should be ready. And there, attached to the parapet, she found the last resort she had planned with Tommy against the cutting off of their retreat, a stout block and tackle, a whip by means of which they might at least reach the ravine. She pulled once or twice at the line, and an answering tug told her all was ready.

A cautious, impatient whistle brought Eileen and Ingersoll to her. And Eileen was sent down first, secured in a loop of the line, lashed fast, shivering a little, perhaps, as she swung out over the black gulf below, but bravely subduing her fears. Ingersoll would have had Saleh go next, but she flatly refused.

"It wouldn't be fair to that Scarlett boy," she insisted. "He's taken a heavy risk in help one of us to get away, and, if I went, too, the Old Man would certainly murder him. So, I told him I'd go straight back to the cellar. I'm going to keep my promise, and — you've got to look after that girl. Don't think about me at all — I'll be all right: and I'll be back on board the *Calixte* before you are, if you don't look sharp!"

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He saw that she was not to be moved from her purpose, and yet, in his desire to serve her, lingered to play one last, unvalued card.

"But what shall I say to Tommy —" he was beginning, when she cut him short.

"Anything you please on your own account. On mine I'll say all there is to be said myself."

He shook hands with her, and: "I'm desperately sorry, Saleh," said he, a lump in his throat. Then he set one foot in the loop and was lowered away.

As soon as the signal came back that he was safely landed below, Saleh drew the rope up, coiled it carefully under the parapet, and made her way down to the cellar alone, her radiant eyes overcast and somber. But they lighted again, with their old gallant, reckless, irresistible light, as she overheard Captain Dove's fierce voice. And she intervened in time, and no more, to save Ulick Scarlett from his blind, furious onslaught.

For a moment it seemed as if the old man would have sprung at her instead. But his long, enforced sobriety had tamed him a little, rendered him a little less regardless of consequences. He calmed down, contented himself with watching her as a cat does a mouse, while she stood unconcernedly waiting, apparently without interest in her surroundings, until the last of the bullion boxes should have been despatched to the beach.

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These had been set down at one side for the moment, and Eustace Gildersleeve, utterly worn, had seated himself upon them, his back against a big cask. Two of the Portuguese sailors sprang toward them, but he still sat staring fixedly at the scene before him. One clutched at his arm to attract his attention, and jumped back again as he heeled suddenly over and, falling, face downward on the muddy floor, lay there motionless.

Jasper Slyne advanced, and, kneeling, subjected him to a hasty but no less conclusive examination.

"Dead!" said he, looking round. "Heart failure, no doubt. He was too old, anyhow."

And, as he dragged the lifeless body of the old financier out of the way, the men once more sprang toward the boxes.

Casado had sent Ulick Scarlett back to bring him word of the battle above and close the doors behind him. When the young officer reappeared with news that it was still raging hotly, the last of the gold was gone.

The Portuguese admiral, pondering deeply, was not sure now whether he should withdraw all his men at once and desert the villa — since by doing so he might embarrass the rescue-party still striving to get in touch with him — or get away with his booty first and then recall them. He recollected that the launch must by now be very heavily laden and chose the

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latter alternative. He had over half a dozen of his own sailors with him, more than sufficient to make sure that the ex-President and his friends, all unarmed, would behave as they ought.

He blandly took over again the ordering of affairs, and Casado, with his daughter on his arm, followed by his fellow-conspirators — all except Eustace Gildersleeve, left lying where Slyne had laid him — and Saleh escorted by Ulick Scarlett, went down the underground stairway with an escort of loaded rifles. The admiral himself brought up the rear, and found time by the way to admire the care with which Casado had constructed the secret passage to the landing-stage.

They found the launch there, and all was quiet. The boats that had brought the rescue-party ashore from the fleet had gone farther down the beach to debark their force. The stout, tubby little craft lay very low in the water, but, luckily, the sea was still smooth and the land-wind light.

"All aboard!" the admiral ordered in a sharp whisper, and, at the word, Ulick Scarlett left Saleh's side, and sought out his sweetheart from among the other shadows shuffling about in the mirk at the mouth of the deep ravine.

"Carmen!" he said swiftly, and caught at her hand. Her father lingered a little — he liked the young man well enough to do that.

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"Carmen, I can't come with you. I must find Ludovic and warn him of what's happened. You understand, don't you, dear? I'll follow you, and — you'll wait for me, won't you?"

She did understand, and had nothing to urge against his determination, although it was like to break her heart that they should part thus, under cover of night, she and her father fugitives from their country. She threw both arms round his neck, and kissed him passionately.

"I'll wait for you, Ulick," she promised, "and —"

"Come, Carmen," said Casado imperatively, and she went, weeping. "Creep forward," he commanded, as he handed her into the launch, "and lie down there, well under the hood." She did so, and Saleh, following, slipped a comforting hand into one of hers. Casado seated himself contemplatively on a pile of boxes behind them. Slyne and Captain Dove stepped on board abaft of the smoke-stack, and the admiral took his place beside the man at the tiller.

"Easy ahead," he hissed. "Full speed as soon as she'll stand it. And then make her travel for all she's worth."

The squat launch, so heavily laden, snorted and puffed valiantly, but did not at once gather way, and the admiral was in terror lest he should after all be

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caught there, as in a trap, by any of the enemy who might be attracted by the uproar.

"Get the sweeps out and help to pole her off-shore, all of you," he ordered hoarsely, and all save Casado complied. Captain Dove and Slyne were especially active, and with that assistance the launch was soon moving along at more speed. They had almost emerged from the darkness of the ravine, into the open estuary of the stream flowing through it, when from the bridge behind them, a voice hailed peremptorily.

"Halt, there!" it shouted. "Reverse your engines and come back to shore — or I'll open fire on you, from a hundred rifles."

And another voice answered it from below — an agonized voice, crying, "Don't fire, Ludovic. For God's sake, don't fire!"

So, the launch continued its course, and still gathered speed. But, in the interval between these two voices, quick chaos has broken out on board, and, as it surged forward into the dim, red moonlight from which the ravine and the mountain-face had so far sheltered it, those on shore could see men struggling fiercely as if for their lives on the uneven foothold afforded by its hastily stacked cargo. Wild shrieks and imprecations with the ceaseless sounds of strife from about the villa combined to make an inferno of the hot, sweltering night, and the

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strange, dull sheen of the haze that enshrouded all only heightened the ghastly effect.

The admiral, his nerves overstrung, had looked round in helpless alarm as he heard the first hail, and, at that, Captain Dove and Slyne and Casado, as one man, had grasped opportunity.

The Portuguese sailors, poling along, had to stand close to the gunwale. Casado tripped two up, and tossed them overside without even rising from where he was seated. Slyne swept the legs from under one and, dropping his sweep, sprang at another, knocked him also overboard, so violently that he himself almost followed. But he recovered his footing and got into grips with a third reaching for a rifle. Captain Dove had thrown himself on the admiral and the man at the tiller, holding them pinned so fast together with his long, gorilla-like arms that their most desperate efforts to break free proved futile, and the boat kept her course on a steady helm.

The engineer fired at him, but missed. Slyne, his eyes ablaze, picked up a box of gold and brained the man with it. Casado had seized a rifle and shot the stoker, at that moment drawing trigger. And there remained only the two prisoners in the stern-sheets. He hurried aft, and found Slyne already assisting there.

The steersman was promptly thrown overboard, and the Portuguese admiral, moaning grievously, al-

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most insane, was set face outward over the transom, so that the swirling brine the propeller kicked up soaked him to the knees of his gold-laced breeches.

Of the breathless, triumphant trio holding him there no one had a word to say to him, since he was no longer a factor in their affairs, till, presently, Casado addressed him abruptly.

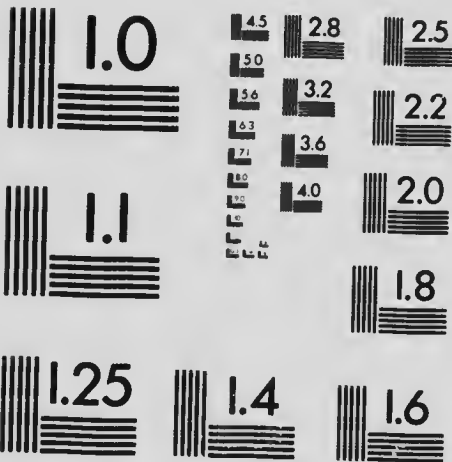
"The water shoals at the point there," said the ex-President, thrusting a hand past the admiral's head to indicate the direction clearly. "It's only a few yards away, and — you needn't drown if you like to swim for it."

The other two let go at a sign from him, and, when the admiral came to the surface again, speechless, spluttering, he had no recourse but to follow Casado's advice. But he stopped and trod water for long enough to shake his fist slow and solemnly at the three men regarding him from the stern of the receding steam-launch.



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CHAPTER XXV

THE LANTERN OF LUCK

FOR the first time in his life Ulick Scarlett had disobeyed the lawful command of his superior officer. His brother had twice ordered him to come up from the landing-stage at the edge of the stream to the bridge that carried the roadway across the ravine, and he had remained where he was, motionless, staring fixedly, fear-stricken, at the strange happenings on the launch. And there Colonel Scarlett found him, when he himself descended, in a white rage, to find out what was going on, the reason for that agonized appeal that had caused him to hold his fire. The two brothers were on most brotherly terms, but in matters official their difference of rank in the service was always strictly observed.

Colonel Scarlett, scenting something wrong at the Casa Rosada, had brought half his men on patrol from the post he was holding, between the town and the villa. He knew nothing of recent happenings, and, for all his wrath, his first quick words took the shape of a question.

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"What th' devil's the matter?" he demanded, as Ulick, hearing his hasty footsteps, half-turned toward him.

"Casado's cleared out," the younger man answered hoarsely. "He's gone off with a boat-load of bullion, and taken — his daughter with him. It was on her account that I begged you not to fire. Vidal has been proclaimed at the capital. He's here with a heavy force, fighting to get into the villa. He doesn't know yet that Casado's gone. The Portuguese have two landing-parties ashore. One's holding the villa — Casado fixed that with the admiral — and the other's trying to join it.

"Meantime Casado's thrown the admiral overboard — they both went off in the launch, and — there the beggar is, by jove! in a boiling rage, too, after his bath." He pointed to a half-moon curve of the beach between the landing-stage and the villa, where a long sand-spit pushed seaward. There were three or four dark figures dimly visible on it, and another was approaching them, seemingly from the ocean, squatting through the water in ludicrous haste, swearing hoarsely in Portuguese.

Colonel Scarlett gave vent to a long, low whistle. He was no longer angry, but very anxious — for Ulick, his younger brother, and for his men. When he spoke again he had come to a quick decision.

"Both our commissions are canceled," he said.

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"If we are unlucky enough to fall into Vidal's hands, we're done for: he doesn't like his late master's guards. Ulick, we've got to get out of this, as fast as ever we can. But I must disperse my men first. Wait here for five minutes, and I'll rejoin you."

He was off again without more words, his chief concern for the safety of those under him. The captain and those of his men who had escaped the launch alive had disappeared inland from the mouth of the spit. Within the ravine there was only a faint light, and that but dully, the din of the fight in the distance. The Portuguese were apparently not to be beaten back, and Don Enrique Vidal was no less determined. Above that din the voice of a girl came softly to Ulick Scarlett's hearing. And it had spoken his name.

He swung about, too much startled to answer at once. His thoughts had been wandering elsewhere in spite of the urgency of the predicament in which his brother and he were thus fortuitously involved, and of the fact that they would not easily find means of escape from Nicazuela at such short notice.

"Who's that?" he demanded, peering at a ghostly shape in the gloom, and, as it spoke his name again, "Is — It's Miss Saxilby!" said he, in a tone of the blindest surprise.

"Yes," said Eileen shyly, and stopped before him.

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"I've been in hiding a little behind you with — with my friends, waiting for the launch to go. We came down the bed of the stream, you know. And now we want to get on to the place where a boat should be waiting us."

"It's not very safe along the beach," he objected, "or anywhere else at the moment. Where d'you want the boat to take you?"

"Out to the yacht," she explained, "the *Calixte*."

"To the yacht!" said he eagerly. "D'you mean that big white craft that went westward this afternoon?" And, as she nodded assent, "I wonder," said he, "if you'd care to do me a good turn — if you'd take my brother and me along? It's really rather a matter of life and death to us, don't you know, because, if we're caught here —"

"Oh, how can you talk like that!" she broke in, not a little hurt by his casual manner of speech. "Surely, you know —"

They heard the click of boot-heels on the shale behind them and down the steep bank came slipping another shadow.

"I've sent the men off," it said breathlessly, "and now — Hello! Who's this?"

"A lady, Ludovic," said Ulick Scarlett. "Miss Saxilby, may I introduce my brother, Sir Ludovic Scarlett?"

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Eileen could almost have laughed over his untimely formality, but circumstances were not conducive to laughter, and there was no time to be lost.

"Oswold!" she called softly, and Ingersoll came forward at once from behind a boulder in the bed of the almost dry ravine where he had been awaiting that signal. Tim Finucane and a deck-hand from the *Calixte*, who had remained on shore with him when the fishing-boat had gone back to the yacht with its cargo, came close at his heels. And a few hasty words of explanation from Eileen sufficed to make everything clear to him and the Scarletts. It only remained to get into touch with the boat the *Calixte* was to send ashore for them.

But the Portuguese flag-ship's search-light still lay athwart the villa, most inconveniently for both of the factions still fighting there. And both of these forces were hostile to the fugitives, for, while Vidal would have shot both the Scarletts at sight, they still wore the life-guards' uniform that would have been in equal danger from the Portuguese. There seemed to be nothing for it but to stay where they were in the meantime, since neither Eileen nor Ingersoll would for a moment agree to the brothers' urgent suggestion that they should make good their own retreat, leaving them to fend for themselves.

But the march of events elsewhere had been no less rapid, and fortune was favoring them. The

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dripping Portuguese admiral had got into touch with his reinforcements, and soon put a stop to the futile fighting. He offered the Señor Don Enrique Vidal no immediate explanation, but hinted at a mutual misapprehension of facts, and gladly surrendered the villa to him in return for safe passage for his own force to their boats. What he desired above all else was to get back to his fleet and hold speech with those three unspeakable scoundrels of the *Olive Branch*.

He scourged his men to the beach with the wickedest words he knew, and, leaving a boat to bring away the garrison of the villa, put off for his flagship with the flotilla that had come ashore to his help. The survivors of the garrison followed him five minutes later, and the new President's army swarmed in to ransack his predecessor's residence to its foundations.

As soon as the last of the Portuguese boats had put off, the watchers within the ravine ventured forth from their hiding-place, and, skirting the beach with all caution, went westward, in the direction of Altamirano. And, in the creek where the fishing-boat had lain hidden, they found the *Calixte's* boat awaiting them, the two men who had brought it ashore in a fever of anxiety over their long delay.

They put to sea no less speedily than had the Portuguese, and, half a mile outside, riding easily over the long, smooth swell, picked up the *Calixte's*

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single flash in answer to the signal of their sailing lantern.

There were four oars at work and they steered always westward, farther away from the arc of the flag-ships search-light. But that precaution proved needless, for, shortly before the big white yacht bore down on them and took them aboard, there occurred among the ships in the roadstead an instantaneous change.

The wavering of the search-light first drew their attention to it, and, looking over their quarter, they saw the *Olive Branch* on the move.

She moved quickly, but not so quickly that she could altogether escape the broadside which the guard-ship lying level with her fired ere she had forged half a cable's length ahead. And the search-light was instantly switched upon her. The boats from the shore were by this time only a few hundred yards from the fleet.

"Casado must have got all his boxes on board by now," said Ulick Scarlett, in a most unhappy tone, "and he's going to make a break for it. D' you think the Portuguese gunners are likely to be any good, Ludovic?"

But his brother did not reply; for the *Olive Branch* had, no less suddenly, retaliated on the aggressor. From her stern-ports spat two tongues of

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flame: a double concussion shook the hot, heavy atmosphere. And she was well under weigh now, while the admiral's boats had still a short distance to travel.

The *Calixte*, bearing down on her own boat, showed the white light again, and the rowers lay on their oars to watch the short, sharp sea-fight that followed. The *Olive Branch*, barking viciously back at the fleet, had got perhaps half a mile of a start before the Portuguese landing-parties rejoined their various vessels and got their boats swung. But half a mile is no great grace against more or less modern guns and such odds as three to one. The three cruisers slipped their cables and started in chase of the contumacious tramp-freighter, their bow-guns belching ceaselessly, the flag-ship's search-light pointing a long, white finger toward their target.

It seems scarcely possible that they could miss such a mark, and Ulick Scarlett's agonized face showed what he thought of their chances as one report following another told of shell after shell shrieking on its mission of death. The *Olive Branch*, too, seemed to be holding its ineffectual fire.

But suddenly two more sparks showed at her stern, and no less suddenly did the search-light that so endangered her die into darkness.

"By gad!" said Sir Ludovic Scarlett, "but that's

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great shooting. And they'll probably get away all, for they seem to have the heels of the guese."

After that they saw nothing more of the since the *Olive Branch* was showing no lights and those shining from the open ports of the ers were already being blotted from view by blood-red haze that was growing thicker as moon sank. And they had other matters to oc them, for the scarred white chain-plates of the *lixte* had loomed up out of the darkness, and could hear the bridge-telegraph ring, in instant sponse to Ingersoll's shout of warning.

They climbed on board one by one, and Tom Judson was waiting to welcome them. Except the engine-room, where Hitchcock was at his post there were no lamps burning and the decks were in darkness, but Eileen could almost see the smile with which he received her.

"I've made good, after all," said he, in a glad voice, "haven't I?" And she smiled back at him dumbly grateful, her heart so full that speech failed her.

He shook hands excitedly with Ulick Scarlett, and as Sir Ludovic reached the deck, looked over the side, expectant. Tim Finucane came next, and then only remained one man below, who led the boat away from the gangway-foot to the falls dangling

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ready to be hooked on to her under a pair of the midship davits. As soon as she had been swung, Quinlan, on the bridge, rang for full speed ahead.

"Where's Saleh? Where's Saleh Harez?" asked Tommy Judson of Ingersoll, in a voice that it was not good to hear. But it was Eileen who answered him, very sorrowfully, "She's gone back to the *Olive Branch*." And he stumbled suddenly on the smooth deck as he turned toward her.

"Who's Saleh Harez?" demanded another voice, that of a man roughly touched on a still raw wound, and Tommy stared stupidly at the shadow that was Sir Ludovic Scarlett, which had asked, "Who's Saleh Harez?"

But for a time no one spoke again. The close, stifling atmosphere seemed to be charged with the portent of some dire misadventure. The dull advance of the screw-propeller was like the beat of a heavy heart.

"Why did she go back to the *Olive Branch*?" Tommy Judson asked brokenly. "Why did you let her go?" he cried, turning to Ingersoll. "Surely you —"

"She wouldn't listen to me," his friend answered forlornly. "I did all I could to get her to come off with us, Tommy, but —"

Ulick Scarlett drew Tommy Judson aside and held out to him a slip of white paper. "She told me

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to give you this privately," he said in a whisper. "Perhaps it will clear things up." And, as Tom took it, my, taking it from him without a word, made haste toward the saloon-companion, the others followed him silently.

He struck a match and lit a single candle in the saloon. All the ports had been carefully screened and food was set on the table there. Before the others had reached the companion-foot he had read the hastily penciled message Saleh had sent him and hidden the precious scrap of paper away.

He faced his friends as a sick man might. "I can't take the bridge for a bit," said he. "I can't stand the heat down here. I—I—I want some fresh air. You can come up when you're ready, O. Have some supper first, and—and don't mind me."

He bolted on deck again, and Ingersoll sighed. He had done the best he could for the man to whom he himself owed everything, but, at that moment he thought he might perhaps have done better still. Eileen slipped a hand into his and led him toward the table. At a sign from her Ulick Scarlett also sat down. But Sir Ludovic remained standing.

"Who is Saleh Harez?" he asked again and so urgently that Ingersoll looked up in astonishment. He was almost worn out, too weary to explain anything. But he saw that Ulick also was gazing at him with a tense expectancy which showed that the

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question was one of serious moment to them. And so, while Eileen listened with an ever-growing wonder in her clear eyes, he told them as much of Saleh's strange history as he had heard from herself on board the *Calixte*.

The two brothers heard him out in a stricken silence, and then Ulick Scarlett spoke.

"I saw her twice, Ludovic," he said in a hurtful whisper, "and I — didn't know."

But Sir Ludovic said nothing for a long time. He had thrown himself into a chair. His face had suddenly become gray and drawn. The hand he had laid on the table was clenched and white about the knuckles. And the other two, not knowing what was in his mind, remained speechless also, in sympathy.

"It wasn't your fault, Ulick, I'm not blaming you; I'm to blame myself," he said, bowing courteously to Eileen and Ingersoll, "for my abruptness. But I feel sure you'll pardon me when I tell you — If you're not too tired?" he asked of Eileen.

She shook her head, unable to speak lest her voice should betray the tears in her heart; for his tone told of a bitterness almost more deadly than death itself. And, after another long interval, he spoke again.

"We Scarletts are Scots," he said, "of the western islands. What we call home is an old, gray, crumbling house, built long ago by one Niall Scar-

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lett, on a bleak rock that looks across the open lantic. And — there's said to be a curse hanging over it, called down on Niall and his descendants by a wise woman — a witch, you know — who hovel he razed to make more room for its foundations. I don't know — it would seem more laughable to me if I hadn't suffered my share of them. We're Scots, you know, and — superstitious, perhaps. Anyhow, Niall Scarlett was killed at Culloden, 1745, fighting for a lost cause. And not one of his descendants but has shared the same fate, following some will-o'-the-wisp, just as the wise woman said. Ulick and I are the last of the line, penniless and venturers both.

“Our father, too, was a soldier in foreign service. Our mother died while we were in England at school. She died of hunger and thirst in a fort on the frontier where my father held his command, under a decaying power. And for close on a couple of years after that, he fought and suffered to save a dynasty that was doomed. In the end he was brought to bay again, behind the mud-walls of a wretched village. Where he and the handful of men with him met their death.

“We learned from letters which reached us long afterward, that a girl-child had been born to him in the fort where our mother died. He had never a chance to send it south for safety. But, when the

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village where he had made his last stand was sacked and burned, it was spared, for the sake of what it would fetch from the next traveling trader.

"I have been there — and heard all there was to hear. The child, our little sister, was sold to the first caravan that came along, and carried off — God knows where. The name of the village was Saleh Harez. It lies in the heart of the Baluchistan."

He ceased, for his voice had grown harsh and unsteady. And there was no more to tell. His brother was leaning over the table, face hid behind clenched hands. Ulick Scarlett knew now what it was that had so perplexed him in the fair features he had first seen at his post on the road below Bella Vista. And Ingersoll bitterly regretted that he, too, had been so blindly preoccupied then. He rose from his seat, and, since he could say nothing now that might help them, left the saloon very quietly, taking Eileen with him. He knew that they also would be best alone with their trouble for a little while.

But, before Eileen went off to her room and the sleep she needed so sorely, he had found means to comfort her and encourage her to believe, as he did, that matters might still be mended. So, she left him at last with a smile which in turn heartened him to face Tommy Judson. He was no longer drowsy, but wide awake.

He found Tommy pacing the bridge, alone. The

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lights of El Puerto were no more now than so many obscure stars on the horizon astern. Ahead, the sea was dark and empty, but he could already feel the cool breath of coming dawn. He stopped to study the chart, took a long look at the binnacle, and then ventured a remark.

"I did my best for you, Tommy," he said, "but she wouldn't listen to me."

Tommy Judson stopped before him.

"It was my own fault," he said miserably. "I ought — I ought to have asked her; but I was afraid I'd give my heart's blood to lay the dust for her feet, but — how could I have the nerve to suppose she'd ever look twice at an ugly devil like me!"

"And she was mistaken, too. She thought . . . He faced his friend frankly. "She thought I was in love with Eileen myself — and perhaps I was. I don't know. But whether I was or not, it made no difference, did it? I've done the right thing by both of you, haven't I?" He looked anxiously into Ingersoll's eyes, and his own cleared a little at what he saw there as Ingersoll gripped his hand.

The *Calixte* reeled off mile after mile of the miles that lay between her and home while they two kept watch there together and talked, as men talk sometimes, but very seldom. They talked of the unforgettable past, and the still precarious present, but

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chiefly of the future and the promise it held for both. And out of the horrors they had endured there came back to them by degrees as they talked, that tempered and steadfast courage with which men may look fate itself in the face, undismayed.

"The world's a great big, extensive place," said Tommy Judson at last, "but I'll find her again." He turned to Ingersoll, but Ingersoll had disappeared into the wheel-house, and he drew carefully from a pocket the slip of paper Saleh had sent him. He needed no light now to assure him that he had read its message aright: 'You love one who loves another. And one who loves you, you have no love for.'

"But she's wrong. God bless her brave heart and keep her safe through it all!" he whispered, staring out at the sea. "If I had a figurehead worth having, it wouldn't have happened so. But, just as soon as I find her again, I'll show her how far she's wrong."

"Hitchcock will be thinking it's high time he was relieved," he said cheerily, as Ingersoll reappeared. Day was breaking out of the dark, amethystine east. "And here come the Scarletts. But I won't wait. You tell them what we've planned to do, and"—he pointed to the single star of the morning, shining sheerly ahead, that which had lighted them on their outward way from New York—"and show them the lantern of luck."

EPILOGUE

CHEZ MAXIM

AT Maxim's in Paris one meets — among other amusing people with money — the world and his wife on their honeymoon. Mr. and Mrs. Oswald Ingersoll were to dine there on the last evening of their short sojourn in Europe.

Their official honeymoon had been brief, not because they could not afford to prolong it, but, on the contrary, because the cares of wealth called for their presence elsewhere. They had started off from New York in a hurry, leaving behind many matters of grave importance to be attended to promptly on their return. Their lawyers had almost refused to let them go at all, but Ingersoll had flatly informed those gentlemen that they must do their own work, and look after his money for him if they wanted any of it for themselves. And, as Ingersoll was once more a client well worth deferring to, they had, however reluctantly, agreed to do their best for him and themselves in his absence.

They had a somewhat tangled skein to unravel

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for him, but, on the other hand, matters were simplified by the fact that he and Eileen were now husband and wife. They had already recovered for him no small proportion of that comfortable fortune which he had sacrificed to clear the name of Aylwin & Ingersoll. The trust securities his dead partner was said to have made away with, whose value had added so much to the amount of his self-imposed liabilities, had turned out to be part of that estate which Eustace Gildersleeve had held in trust for Eileen. The stolen certificates had been canceled upon due proof of the trustee's crime, and new ones issued at once to their rightful owner. Ingersoll's own lawyer had luckily held over for a night the checks his client had drawn in favor of Gildersleeve and Slyné for other amounts supposed to be due them by the derelict firm, and that precious couple had perforce fled the country before they could lay hands on these.

So, with the boxes of bullion stored in the vaults of a New York bank pending partition among the ex-pirates of the *Calixte*, and the handsome salvage that the relieved underwriters had already paid on the yacht, Mr. and Mrs. Oswald Ingersoll bade fair to be better off in the end than they had been in the beginning. They were not in any way worried as to their future, and went into Maxim's with such glad faces that even the blasé waiters there, well used

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to wealthy young honeymoon couples, turned to look a second time at them.

But it was not their worldly circumstances, although these were very delightful to contemplate after their recent experiences, that had called forth this expression. The young American bride blushed and smiled still more sweetly, if that were possible, as three men approached the table at which she and her husband had just sat down — for she and her husband had bidden Tommy Judson and the two Scarletts, also on their way through Paris in haste to dine with them there: the first dinner-party the two had yet undertaken.

The rest of the room, its attention attracted by the shout of welcome with which Ingersoll had sprung from his seat at sight of his friends, looked on with smiling approval while the four thin-faced sun-tanned men and the one pretty girl of the party exchanged gay congratulations and greetings. The rest of the room, too, knew how it feels to be back in Paris again from the ends of the earth, and was a little sorry, perhaps, when they all sat down and so became merged in the crowd.

"Any good news, Tommy?" asked Eileen Ingersoll eagerly of the young man at her side, and her face clouded over a little in quick sympathy as he shook his head.

"Not a scrap yet," he answered. "We've

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sought everywhere for word of the *Olive Branch*, but she seems to have disappeared from the seven seas. I'm hoping for a wire to-night, though, from the Portuguese naval administration with word as to what report of his fight with her they've had from that wild Indian who was in command of the cruisers we met down in Nicazuela. I told the hotel-clerk to send anything that arrives for me along here."

"It'll all come right some day very soon," she told him comfortingly, and he nodded with calm assurance.

"I'm not giving up," said he, "before we've even begun to get busy. We're starting off to-morrow, Eileen — the Scarletts and I, with Hitchcock and Quinlan and Tim Finucane. If the six of us can't find —"

"Mees-taire Joodson?" interrupted a thin, shrill voice, and he turned, to find at his elbow an undersized boy with a telegram. He took it, with fingers that trembled in spite of himself, and hurriedly ripped the envelope open.

"Who can read Portuguese?" he demanded, frowning over the message, and thrust it into Sir Ludovic Scarlett's outstretched hand.

Sir Ludovic scanned its contents, and let it fall. He lay back in his chair, and his lips moved but made no sound. The others leaned forward, waiting, with

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a terrible, strained expectancy in their faces, till he should speak.

He sat up, slowly, groped for the message again, and perused it a second time.

"'Fleet commander reports *Olive Branch* sunk at sea,'" he translated it, in a difficult, husky whisper, and stared at it as though it had been some poisonous thing.

A man at the table adjoining remarked to the maiden with him that there seemed to be bad news in the air, and sent out in haste for the latest evening paper. Others also were glancing over at the Americans. Ulick Scarlett had got up from his chair, was standing unsteadily there, one hand on its back. He suddenly started across the room at a rate that caused some commotion among the waiters who were in his way.

"Look! Look!" urged Eileen, and the three men remaining turned in their seats to look open-mouthed at an apparition regarding them from a little distance with a faint, hesitant smile.

"*Casado!*" exclaimed Sir Ludovic Scarlett, still in a whisper, and scarcely daring to credit the evidence of his own eyes. But the apparition did not melt away, as he had half-expected it would, when his brother approached it. And neither did that of the Doña Carmen, become visible as her father, having shaken hands with the hasty young man who had

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thus claimed his acquaintance, stepped a little to one side.

But for Ulick's precipitate action, indeed, the ex-President would probably have passed on. He could not be certain how they would receive him, and had no intention of making advances which might, and not unnaturally, bring him a public rebuff. But, when Eileen also came forward, with shining eyes and hands held out to his daughter, he felt satisfied that, if only for her sake and Carmen's, he need fear no disconcerting reference to the past, might safely accept her eager invitation to join her party.

She came back across the room on his arm, and Ulick Scarlett escorted the Doña Carmen, meeting boldly a multitude of curious and admiring glances. The other diners also had been much interested in the encounter of that distinguished-looking quartette.

Casado, outwardly casual, indifferent, a little bored, expressed conventional pleasure over the introduction of his hostess's husband and Tommy Judson. But to his late colonel of life-guards he merely bowed, gravely cordial, without offering to shake hands — lest such an offer might not meet with immediate response.

Withal, however, and taking into account all the strange circumstances that had combined to bring

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them together there was no such awkwardness or constraint as might have been expected. He had come in the nick of time to contradict conclusively that untoward telegram from Lisbon, and — there was so much more he might be able to tell them. Fate had so shuffled the cards that they could not but be grateful for his company.

And he seemed to harbor no *arrière pensée* as to the part they had played in any event of the past. He did not scruple to answer, frankly enough and as fast as he could, the urgent questions they had to ask: for had not they also taken the law into their own hands, despoiled him as unconcernedly as ever he had despoiled anyone? It did not occur to him that they had merely recovered what was their own — and a margin to meet expenses. But, in any case, he bore them no grudge. What he could not keep for himself he would yield gracefully. Lose or win, he would face the outcome unmoved, imperturbable. And — he had lost very little in comparison with his winnings.

Eileen was in close confabulation with the Doña Carmen and Ulick Scarlett. The others were listening intently to every word Casado let fall, but, of tacit understanding, they kept their own counsel concerning the real object of their indirect inquiries.

He could tell them nothing, however, as to the whereabouts of the *Olive Branch*: except that she

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was not at the bottom of the Carribean, as the Portuguese admiral had asserted in his dispatches. She had landed him and his daughter and Mrs. Manner-
ing one dark night at a North African port, and sailed again, before dawn, showing no lights, for parts unknown. Eustace Gildersleeve's wretched sister had been taken in charge by an American missionary, pending her removal to an asylum in her own country. While the ex-President, with his daughter, had come on to Paris, incognito and by easy stages.

He had not found life on the *Olive Branch* altogether an empty dream, he admitted blandly. Slyne and Dove were a couple of conscienceless rascals, but — he had found means to curb their exactions. He did not apparently think it worth while to state what these means had been, but afterward let it slip that he had left Captain Dove and Slyne on the right road to convalescence. Reuben Yoxall had been very useful to him, but José Maria Moreno had, most unfortunately, seen fit to jump overboard while they had been under fire from the Portuguese fleet.

And Saleh? Ah! was there ever the equal of Saleh? She was wonderful, superb — a girl among millions! The ex-President, hands uplifted and palms turned outward, gave rapturous expression to the esteem with which Saleh had inspired him. But for her, it appeared, the Doña Carmen

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and he — he especially — would have fared much worse on the *Olive Branch* than they had. He did not admit, as he might since Saleh had told him so, that she had befriended him and his daughter because his daughter had first helped her at a pinch.

He was still holding forth in her praise when a stout, shabby-looking man, very much out of place in an atmosphere where shabbiness has no part, came shuffling across the crowded room, and, ignoring the frowns of the waiters hovering near, approached the ex-President, who received him with a stony stare.

"If you don't go away at once, my good Waples," Casado said quietly in answer to a low-toned speech on the newcomer's part, "I shall send out for a gendarme to escort you. You seem to think you have some hold over me, but, believe me, once and for all, you have none whatever. You aren't the sort of man who can blackmail me. Listen! If I ever see you or hear of you again, you shall spend the rest of your life in an English prison. You know I don't use idle threats. I have real'y been too good to you in the past.

"Now go — and work for your living, as I have done."

He looked across at Eileen, his hostess, with an apologetic shrug of the shoulders. The stout man was slinking away, cowed for the time being.

"One of my former parasites," he explained,

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"who has waylaid me already, forgetting that I am no longer an official personage." And she, catching her husband's eye, accepted the statement for what it was worth.

Casado picked up his glass, and spoke again, meditatively. He had already dismissed from his mind the incident that had intervened.

"A girl among millions," he said. "And — how a crown would become her! I always imagine her so — among drawn swords — on a throne. Gentlemen — will you drink with me to the hope that she may some day meet — the right man?"

They rose to their feet, every one of them, and so, amid the stares of the onlookers, the hope that was one day to be fulfilled so far away, was toasted at Maxim's, in Paris. And only Casado could not understand why all the others had just clinked glasses with Tommy Judson.

THE END

