

DEW OF THE SEA

CHAPTER I

I

IN the ward-room of that fine cruiser, H.M.S. *Anaconda*, during guest-night, the health of the King had just been drunk. This provoked a question from a guest :

" I say, why don't you fellows stand up to drink the King's health ? "

Bobby Pickering, better known as " Flags," answered :

" Because the Prince Consort, in the days of the good old wooden ships, bumped his august head against a low beam. The Great White Queen ordained, after this regrettable incident, that her health should be drunk thereafter—*sitting*."

His guest nodded.

The *Anaconda* was at moorings in Portsmouth Harbour, and not likely to remain there long. A dance was to follow this particular dinner. As the port circulated, the guest who sat next to Pickering began to talk to another man. For a moment Pickering sipped his wine in silence, broken by the sharp, incisive voice of Jim Lingard, the gunnery officer.

" You are grinning, Flags. What at ? "

Pickering's face flushed.

" Who is she ? " asked Lingard.

Pickering went on grinning. Lingard was senior to him, but a pal. And Lingard, someway, although admittedly " one of the best," had a face that didn't, as a

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rule, inspire sentimental confidence. A "she," indeed, had provoked a grin—and much more than a grin—but for the moment, so Flags decided, it would be wise not to give the young lady a name, for the excellent reason that he was hoping to induce her that night to consent to change her patronymic for his.

"I was grinning," he replied, "because I was thinking that I shan't have much more of this."

Lingard looked surprised. But he knew that Pickering had independent means. He could chuck the Service if he pleased. At the same time, it annoyed him that a keen young officer should consider such a possibility. Pickering's income was certainly not big enough to justify a life of mere leisure and pleasure.

"You are fed up? Why?"

Flags betrayed slight uneasiness. He valued Lingard's good opinion, but he had established him in his mind as a rising man, who must go on rising in his chosen profession, because he was still young, capable, and did not possess independent means. Lingard, of course, regarded the Navy from the poor man's angle. But Flags didn't like to say that. So he blurted out:

"Damnable restrictions. They are really one too many for me. I have the stuff to be happy and free ashore. Dash it all, if I want to play a game of tennis I have to ask before I can leave the ship."

"If your elders and betters can stick it, I suppose you can. We get fun out of life simply because our discipline is strict and has to be. The less leave a sailor has the more he values it."

"Good old Jim! But there's not much doing, is there?"

Lingard surveyed his ingenuous face, not the face of a slacker.

"You will be wiser about that before you are much older."

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Flags accepted this statement as authoritative, but etiquette forbade a junior officer demanding from a senior detailed information. Luckily, too, his guest turned to him, and intimate talk between Lingard and himself was at an end.

Soon afterwards Lingard and the senior officers left the ward-room, and within ten minutes of their departure a glorious "rag" began. The long table was removed to make space for polo. Players astride chairs galloped about brandishing spoons as sticks, and smiting a tough orange that served, till it burst, as a ball. Many sustained trifling injuries. Flags, for instance, came into violent collision with his own guest.

"First blood to me!" yelled the guest.

The discomfited Flags had to retire to his cabin with a streaming nose and a black eye, where his servant administered first-aid.

"Hasn't improved my appearance, has it?"

"No, sir," a whimsical eye twinkled. "But you will remind the ladies, sir, of Jutland."

Further observations were interrupted by an orderly, who stared impassively at a swollen nose.

"Captain wants to see you in his cabin, sir."

Flags muttered to his servant:

"I'd sooner meet the ladies."

However, orders on board ship have to be obeyed instantly. Flags went to the Captain's cabin, where eye and nose provoked comment.

"Are you taking that wrecked face on deck to-night?"

"If you have no objection, sir."

"None. It's your face, not mine."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you your signal books and codes corrected up to date?"

Pickering bowed.

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“ Good. I’m expecting orders not to be opened till we put to sea. Lie low on this.”

“ Aye, aye, sir.”

The Captain added one remark :

“ It is a nuisance that our Commander is sick. He will go ashore into hospital to-night. Number One will be Second-in-Command.”

Flags retired to his cabin much excited, thinking that Lingard was in luck to find himself Second-in-Command of so fine a ship. Then his thoughts flew ashore.

“ What will *she* say to this ? ”

II

At precisely the same moment Mrs. Reeve was expostulating with her daughter, her only child, who had been christened Rose Marie. At school the double name had been turned into Rosemary by an enlightened mistress, who pointed out that Rosemary meant dew of the sea. Also the plant of that name has a fragrant smell and a somewhat pungent taste. Rose Marie smelled sweet and looked sweet ; and, under provocation, displayed a sharp wit. All the girls called her Rosemary.

The young lady stood before her mother in petticoat and camisole. Upon her bed lay a pretty frock bought especially for the *Anaconda* dance. An English Rose was dominating a French Marie. As a rule it is tempting Providence to baptize any child by a botanical name. Ironical Fate is tempted to bestow red cheeks upon the lily, and a daisy may be larger than a chrysanthemum. Still, we have our red and white roses. Rosemary’s cheeks were delicately encarmined as she gazed with slight defiance at her masterful mother ; and a skin of fine texture was not spoilt by too much powder. Her neat head, too, had remained unshingled: Rosemary, as Rosemary, appeared at first glimpse as typically English, of her

country and of her time. The Gallic Marie will show herself presently.

Mrs. Reeve had been born a Frenchwoman, and she had married the late Captain Reeve, R.N., when she was young and thoughtless. Speaking of her marriage, she laid stress upon her thoughtlessness, although she admitted that she had married for love. And she had been a good and faithful wife to a most excellent but impecunious fellow. Being practical in all things, Mrs. Reeve preferred the French system to the English. Money to her was a synonym for comfort and reasonably good cooking. She had brought a small dowry with her to the altar and relations had rubbed well into her plastic mind the disagreeable fact that she might have looked higher than a Naval officer with negligible private means.

She pointed to the frock.

"You put it on at once—my child."

"No."

"You refuse me, your mother? I—I who have made hateful economies to buy this frock. But, my God! why—why have you changed your mind? Tell me that, please."

Bickerings were frequent between the pair, and yet each respected and loved the other.

"I am not going to the dance, because things are going to try me too high if I do."

"Sword of my father! You mean a—man?"

"I mean two men."

"And I say so much the better. You are pretty enough to have three, four men dancing after you."

"If they would dance with me and not after me——!" She sighed, smiling faintly. "I feel in my bones that Mr. Pickering and Mr. Lingard are going to ask me to marry them to-night."

"Good! And which do you love? For me, yes, I

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‘would marry both if the stupid law allowed. But—tell me, which do you love, my cabbage?’”

“That’s it. I—I don’t know. I do know this: I shan’t be able to prevent their proposing.”

“*Pouf-f-f!* Always you take after your papa. He, poor man, could not prevent my proposing to him.”

Thus speaking, with the disarming smile that had captivated Second Lieutenant Reeve, Mrs. Reeve dissolved into tears.

“If you are going to cry about it, I will go.”

“I shall go on crying till you do.”

Rosemary crossed to the bed and slipped into the frock. Once in it, and fortified by a reassuring glance into a mirror, she laughed gaily:

“If they propose, I can say ‘No.’”

In animated tones Mrs. Reeve suggested the kindlier dissyllable “Perhaps.”

“I am to say ‘perhaps’ to *both*?”

“I ask you—why not? Mr. Lingard will be an admiral one day. He doesn’t say so, but others do. Mr. Pickering has fifteen hundred a year.”

“Little mother—how do you know?”

“Because everybody tells me that he has three thousand—made in trade, it is true, but I have in me the true spirit of commerce. To both these young men you whisper sweetly, with a sigh, *hein*, your little ‘perhaps.’ Good!”

Rosemary looked unhappy, a maid at grips with herself, and at grips with life rather than love. She knew more of one than the other, having graduated with honours in that educational institution—the British boarding-house.

The “*Marie*” in her was attracted to Flags—like to like—because the same simple gaiety of outlook informed both man and maid. They laughed at the same jokes (a jolly bond of union); and each played games well with

sunny, equally - good - fun - whether - we - win - or - lose temperaments. Marie, too, (as Rose was aware), devoted more time than was strictly warrantable to frocks and frills; Marie had a tincture of vanity and ate chocolates between meals. Rose, on the other hand, soared above mere trivialities, and rebuked Marie severely upon occasion. And Rose, as may be guessed, recognized a kindred spirit in the sterner Lingard. They liked the same books, and shared views on life and conduct. Lingard's "drive" appealed strongly to Rose, filling her with enthusiasm. She respected greatly the friendship between the two men.

And so we must try to behold Rosemary very much at civil war with herself.

"I shall say 'perhaps' without sighing at all," murmured Rose.

"You may have right. At a dance a smile is better than a sigh. After supper, too, you may say 'yes' to one of these brave fellows. It was after supper that your dear father said 'yes' to me."

"You will joke about that."

"My God! Marriage is no joke."

As Rosemary seemed to be concentrating her attention upon placing a glittering comb upon her head, Mrs. Reeve continued amicably:

"Lingard is serious. He thinks; he doesn't say much; he is oak and steel, that man. Pickering is jolly, yes, he has joy in life; and he has looks, but he may grow fat and lazy. Still, they are both good fellows, comrades. In marriage, little hen, that counts enormously. But Lingard might be the better helpmeet and Pickering the better playmate."

"Do you know," asked Rosemary, "that these two are great friends, and I—I stand between them?"

A practical woman dismissed this with an airy gesture.

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III

Captain Vereker received his guests upon an embellished and beflagged quarter-deck. As Rosemary and her mother approached him, his kindly eyes lingered upon the girl, because he knew that Providence had designed her to be a sailor's wife. The captain of a cruiser knows much that he keeps to himself. After greeting the ladies, and as they passed on to mix with the other guests, he saw, with an inward smile, the serious Lingard (followed by Pickering) getting under way. "Odds about even," he reflected.

Lingard, as senior officer, exercised his prerogatives.

"Can I have a dance, Miss Reeve?"

"The first, if you like," she replied. At the same moment she beheld Pickering's face. Adroitly the younger man slipped past Lingard before that gentleman had time to ask for a second dance, and exclaimed dashingly:

"Some frock!"

"Some face!" replied Rosemary.

Flags, a champion at small talk, smiled beamingly upon mother and daughter as he said:

"My face is not my fortune, but yours is, Rosemary. How many are you going to give a maimed and battered veteran?"

"You can have the second, and one or two more, if—if you earn them."

A dance on any man-of-war makes provision for the piping times of peace. There are many nooks where two chairs snuggle engagingly up to each other. Lingard wasted no time in finding one of these as soon as the first dance was over. He knew that the *Anaconda* was under orders to sail at dawn; and he wondered if Flags knew. Rosemary detected at a glance that a gunnery officer was clearing decks for action. In ordinary circumstances this

might have amused her, but she had to admit that the circumstances were not ordinary. Courage oozed from her as Lingard leaned forward, bent upon steering a straight course.

"I shan't see you at tennis the day after to-morrow."

"No——?"

"We shall be in blue water, Miss Reeve."

"Oh!"

"I can't say more, but I have said enough. We may be back here in a week or two; we may be absent for many months."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"It is rather a wrench saying good-bye to you, or even *au révoir*——"

Rosemary said nervously:

"Let it be *au révoir*, Mr. Lingard."

This was a clever maid's way of saying "perhaps." Pleased with herself, she went on talking at random, which might have been regarded by a man with a larger experience of women as significant of nervousness. Lingard listened perfunctorily, telling himself that a nice girl had guessed what was in his mind and wished to let him down lightly. And then, before Rosemary had finished chattering, Pickering came up for the second dance. Lingard secured "One more" later on, bowed, and vanished. Pickering's methods, as contrasted with Lingard's, may perhaps be commended to young men as more likely to achieve success. He could dance better than Lingard, and he knew that Rosemary was well aware of this. So he said:

"I didn't dance the first dance because I wanted to keep myself for this."

And Rosemary, much to her annoyance, found herself blushing. During the second dance, Flagg held his tongue and danced his best, because too many couples were on the deck, and most of them indifferent performers.

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In his subconscious mind he may have been saying : " I'll show the little darling what sort of a partner I am." Anyway, he glided here and there through the crowd with skill and confidence, holding Rosemary securely but tenderly. In his arms the girl was conscious of a relaxing of her tissues, mental and physical. With Lingard she had kept a weather eye upon the wild men colliding with everybody, abjectly apologetic, but unrestrained in their gyrations. With Flags, she could half close her eyes and give herself up to the sensuous delight of a perfect dance. At the end of it he hustled her back to the same nook. Rosemary reflected swiftly : " He can't know that his friend wants me. Am I going to be proposed to by two men in the same place ? " Delicacy was affronted at the thought.

Immediate apprehensions were relieved. The gallant Flags was in no hurry. He had decided to propose after supper. He intended to secure Rosemary for two supper dances, and he did so there and then, showing himself solicitous of her having a good time apart from himself.

" If you would like to stroll about and give the other fellows a chance——"

Rosemary assented, and was promptly " booked up " for the rest of the evening. It occurred to her that Flags might not propose at all—a disconcerting reflection. She thought more of him because he seemed to be thinking less of her.

The " perhaps " to Lingard was exacted later. He was not to be denied that " perhaps," although he asked for a flat " yes " or " no." And he pleaded his case resolutely :

" I must stick to the Service. I'm no catch for a girl like you ; but I want you desperately."

She had no doubts on that point. For the first time in her life she realized the strangle-hold that she had upon

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an honest man's affections and ambitions. She was to be the driving power behind endeavour. When at the end she remained silent, on the edge of tears, he said bluntly :

"I can't make love nicely ; I've had no practice ; you are the greatest thing in the world to me."

Finally, the "perhaps" fell falteringly from her lips, as he grasped at it.

"I have rushed you——"

"No."

"But to-morrow ? Where shall we be ?"

Rosemary wondered where she would be, say, six months hence. In some other boarding-house. She and her mother went abroad each winter—on the cheap. They travelled—on the cheap. They did everything—on the cheap. Both women confronted poverty valiantly. Rosemary wondered what would happen if one of them fell ill.

Lingard took leave of her ; he had work to do ; and the work had to be done. But he promised to write.

Supper with Flags brought a sparkle back to her eyes and a gay laugh to her lips. Oddly enough, a swollen nose and the discoloured eye took from Flags the smugness of the carpet knight. His injuries punctuated the fact that the Senior Service, even when at play, accepted hard knocks as a matter of course.

Flags made love "nicely." It might not be so easy to murmur "perhaps" to him. He played with his food, as she did, too excited to eat.

Finally they were alone together, and instantly Flags became serious. Without preliminary sparring he declared himself to be a true lover.

"I want to chuck the Service, my darling, and devote myself body and soul to you."

His voice quavered with emotion.

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“ Chuck the Service ? ”

“ Why not ? ”

“ You—you would be at a loose end.”

“ Not,” he urged, “ if I were spliced tight and taut to you, Rosemary.”

“ Do you know what Rosemary means ? ”

“ Rosemary for remembrance—some sort of marine plant.”

Quoting her mistress, the proud possessor of a significant name said :

“ Ros Maris—Dew of the Sea.”

“ Suits you down to the ground.”

“ I think it does. The sea is in my blood.”

She spoke decisively, letting her soft eyes rest upon his smart kit, upon his alert, eager face.

“ But you are not, I hope, quite as changeable as the sea ? ”

From the laughing tone of his voice the girl knew that he did not so regard her. She answered gravely :

“ I hope not, but I don't know. I have always thought of you as a sailor.”

“ No complaints ! All the same, a sailor's wife doesn't see too much of her hubby.”

“ Perhaps on that account she loves him all the more.”

“ Does that mean ‘ yes ’ ? ”

Sorely tempted was she to leave the hand he had grasped in his. A composite photograph of all the boarding-houses in the world blotted out the young, handsome face in front of her. In the inevitably shabby sitting-room she saw her mother darning stockings, keeping the fire just alight, playing patience, playing bridge for stakes which, however small, *mattered*.

“ Oh, Bobby, it can only be ‘ perhaps.’ ”

He had quality enough to accept this cheerfully :

“ Bless you for that,” he replied.

Mrs. Reeve asked no questions till mother and daughter were alone in the latter's bedroom.

"Well, my little one——?"

Rosemary looked distressed as she murmured: "We may not see them again for ever so long."

"What do you mean?"

"The *Anaconda* is leaving——"

Mrs. Reeve gasped.

"Leaving Portsmouth——! And, may Heaven forgive me, I—I advised you to say 'perhaps.' But you are a clever girl, my own child; you know enough to strike when the iron is hot. You said 'yes' to one of these nice fellows, *hein?*"

"I said 'perhaps' to both of them."

"How your poor father comes out in you at the wrong moment. You said 'perhaps' to Mr. Lingard; that I comprehend. But Bobee——! Name of a name! If Bobee had asked me to-night, I should have said 'yes' with all my heart. Bobee, with a black eye, is adorable. And I—I come home, if you call this home, so happy, because I win eight shillings. And you—you lose fifteen 'undred a year. O my God!"

Rose vanished temporarily and Marie took her place.

"From your point of view, little mother, I am a fool, no doubt."

"It seems to me, yes, that you must love one of them."

"They are so different."

"True. Lingard appeals to the head; and Bobee to the heart. But one you like better than the other—which?"

"I—I don't know—yet."

"How tiresome of you!"

Rosemary kissed her.

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"Little mother, don't make it too hard for me."

"No, no. Still, if you knew what I know. It is so easy to love any nice sailor man. Bobee has a way with him. Ah! I'm so sorry for Bobee."

She dabbed at her eyes.

"So am I," wailed Rosemary, then adding desperately :
"but there it is."

And there it was left.

V

After the dance, Pickering and Lingard met. Flags seized his senior's arm.

"My dear old Number One, the little darling is almost ripe for the picking. I shall gather her in to-morrow."

Lingard frowned.

"Kindly explain : who is the little darling ripe for the Pickering ?"

"I said—picking. Why, Rosemary Reeve, of course."

"Rosemary Reeve ?"

"Who else could it be ?"

Lingard temporized :

"You see, Flags, being desperately in love with a pretty girl is your normal condition. Your *She* might have been any one of half a dozen."

He spoke stiffly, unable to avow his own feelings. Flags replied hotly :

"Rosemary is the One and Only. I cottoned to her at sight ; and she cottoned to me. She's half French."

"What has that to do with it ?"

Flags laughed gaily.

"Well, I love the French side best. Probably she has shown the English half to you, old man. Still, you hardly know her, do you ?"

Again Lingard pushed opportunity from him, saying gruffly :

"Is the affair cut and dried ?"

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“ She whispered ‘ perhaps.’ What does ‘ perhaps ’ mean, eh ? ”

“ I can’t answer that question. It depends how it is said and to whom it is said. To me it might mean ‘ no ’ from a girl who shrank from hurting my feelings. To you it might mean ‘ yes ’ ! ”

“ Bless you, Jim. It will mean ‘ yes ’ to-morrow.”

“ Will it ? I saw the Owner ten minutes ago. We’re raising steam now. We sail at six a.m. to-day. Destination unknown.”

“ Help ! ” ejaculated Flags. “ The Owner asked me if my codes were in order, but——”

“ You will have time to send a letter ashore.”

With this, the Second-in-Command, with work to do, turned on his heel. Flags retired to his cabin to remove his peace paint. As he passed along the deck the wind was rising. In the Solent a sou’-west gale might be anticipated, with disturbance in the cook’s galley when the *Anaconda* put to sea. Already the great cruiser was squirming uncomfortably. Flags, with duties of his own to attend to, got into working kit. Three hours later he turned in ; and, as he did so, some books in a rack above his bunk fell heavily upon his head. Flags hurled them to the floor, muttering to himself :

“ It’s not always rag-time in the Navy.”

CHAPTER II

I

PROBABLY there is no man, outside of kings and hermits, who stands more aloof from his fellow-men than the captain of a cruiser. He is undisputed monarch of his ship, subject only to orders from the Admiralty. He goes into the ward-room occasionally to have a cocktail or to spin a yarn, but he lives a life apart from his brother officers. A rigorous etiquette imposes a gulf even between him and the first lieutenant.

Captain Vereker, however, bridged that gulf because he happened to be a man of sympathy and warm social instincts ; and he regarded Jim Lingard as a stout friend and a colleague upon whose sound judgment he could rely. Also Vereker disdained the petty jealousies which too often, in both Services, keep men at arm's length. Lingard was likely to attain high rank ; Vereker, a much older man, was nearing the end of a useful but not brilliant career.

When the sealed orders were opened, Vereker found himself instructed to proceed to Rogotana, a small republic in Central America. With the orders a marked map of Rogotana was enclosed.

Many days passed before the Captain sent for his First Lieutenant and explained at length why the *Anaconda* had been dispatched to Rogotanian waters. Apparently British interests in the Rogotanian oil fields were imperilled, because a revolutionary party was attempting to get into power by paralysing Rogotanian industries. The President, Don José Arrillanes, had applied through

the British Consul to the Foreign Office for a mild demonstration of force. The Consul's name was Massingham. According to Massingham, presumably well informed, the mere presence of the *Anaconda* outside Rogota, the capital and principal seaport, would suffice. Lingard listened attentively to this and much more, making no comment because comment seemed superfluous. He had been on such errands before. As a rule nothing happened. A British cruiser delivers its own silent message to revolutionaries asking for trouble, and palsied into inactivity when trouble presents itself.

Then Vereker said gravely :

" I have shown you the rind of the lemon handed to us ; the juice is here. Listen ! "

He read aloud to Lingard a memorandum from the Foreign Office :

" We have reason to fear that the President is not considering British interests, but his own. Accept with reservation protestations of friendship from a man notoriously double-faced and unscrupulous to the nth degree. British Rogotian Oils are stagnant. Wireless will keep you in touch with the market here. In the case of a sharp rise or fall be prepared for dirty weather. "

Lingard nodded. He had heard of Don José Arrillanes. Vereker went on :

" We shall learn more from Massingham when we drop anchor in Rogota Bay. Of course we are dealing with scoundrels bent on feathering their own nests. Rogotian Oils are stagnant, but a lot of money has been sunk in them ; and the fields are rich. The revolutionary party, you know, is out-and-out Bolshevik. "

" Quite, " said Lingard. " So are our guns. "

" Eh ? "

" I mean they are no respecters of property. "

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“Not with you, Number One, directing their fire. However, our instructions are plain enough. We are not to anticipate trouble, but to be prepared for it. Look at this map. The oil fields are marked in red.”

“Near the coast, sir.”

“Do you happen to know any Spanish?”

“A smattering. I can understand this Central American lingo better than I can jabber it.”

“That may come in useful. I wonder whether there is any decent small game shooting.”

“Plenty of monkeys and parrots; and I include among them the natives.”

“There won't be much shore leave,” said Vereker.

II

Upon the afternoon of the day when the *Anaconda* put to sea, two letters reached Rosemary, which she read and put away without showing them to her mother. The first was from Flags:

“DEAREST AND BEST BELOVED,—

Only a minute to write and send this ashore. We are off—the Lord knows where. Probably on a longish cruise. I'll write again at the first opportunity. You looked a witch last night. I send you all the kisses which you won't let me give you.

BOBBY.”

Rosemary smiled because she could almost hear Flags speaking. She was pleased, too, with his handwriting, firm, well spaced, no flourishes. She thought to herself: “The goods are in the shop window, attractive goods, no shoddy.”

The second letter was from Lingard:

“DEAR MISS REEVE,—

We put to sea in a few minutes. I ask you to forgive me for what I was hustled into saying last night, but not to forget it. Nobody knows—you, probably, least of all—the depth of my feelings for you. I took you by surprise; and you were very kind and considerate to me. I shall carry you, the essential you, with me wherever I go.

Always your friend, in fair weather or foul.

JAMES LINGARD.”

Lingard's handwriting was slightly stiff and cramped. Rosemary decided that it indicated more originality than the other, and about it, somehow, was the tang of the sea. She sat for some time with both letters in her lap. Then she re-read them and put them away in a battered, brass-bound desk that had belonged to her father.

When her mother came in, after playing bridge, the girl was trimming a hat with deft cleverness, making something out of little. Mrs. Reeve stared at it with French eyes.

“My faith, little one, your wits are in your fingers, not in your head. Well, well, you get that from me. I have had to trim my hats. Heavens! when one pauses to think that I might have married Gaston Dupont, who is now a millionaire.”

“I wonder what I should have been like,” murmured Rosemary. She had schooled herself to these allusions, not too barbed, to Monsieur Dupont, now masquerading in Mrs. Reeve's active mind as Robert Pickering. Twice, since breakfast, had an anxious mother mentioned Monsieur Dupont's name.

“You enjoyed your bridge?” asked Rosemary.

Mrs. Reeve removed her hat and gloves and sat down.

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"I must tell you something. I have not been playing bridge. I fibbed about my bridge this afternoon. I have been to Dr. Bolton."

Rosemary dropped her hat, jumping up, breathless and apprehensive.

"Seat yourself, child. Let us be calm. Yes—I have been—how you put it?—yes—*vatted*."

"Vatted?"

"Overhauled," murmured a sailor's wife. "And it seems, little one, that I may—I may have to go into dry-dock."

"Mother!"

"Be calm. I am prepared. We French are not as you English. You put your little economies into a hat, but I put mine into a stocking, *hein?* And in my stocking is provision for this dry-dock."

But when the details were given Rosemary decided that dry-docking would make terrible inroads upon what was in the stocking. Nevertheless, her mother's courage sustained her, although her heart—which might have been in another's possession—sank into her shoes. Having said all that could be said, she glanced with renewed interest at the hat. Into that hat she had, it is true, put some small economies and some large ambitions.

Next day she called upon Dr. Bolton. That gentleman, a genial general practitioner, was reassuring.

"There is heart trouble. Your mother, Miss Reeve, should have come to me many weeks ago. And the less she does now, the more she will do later on."

"And if—?"

"Put the 'ifs' from you. Mrs. Reeve will be herself again in a few months. Good food, rest, a little sound wine, comfortable quarters, freedom from anxiety. She has great vitality and a sound constitution. Believe me, I am not alarmed. She has just escaped a breakdown."

"Thank you," said Rosemary.

She went back to her hat, which didn't please her. During the following week she examined critically every hat she saw, whether displayed in shops or on the heads of smartly dressed women. She said nothing to her mother about hats; and Mrs. Reeve spoke, for the first time in her life, about family money matters.

"If I do not get better, little one, you will find yourself with a small sum of ready money, and the same income that we have always had. What has been enough for two will surely be enough for one." She added briskly: "And now talk of something else."

Not easy to do, but Rosemary did it, feeling miserably depressed. Dr. Bolton remained, like all wise G.P.'s, non-committal. Time and Nature would deal faithfully with Mrs. Reeve. It might be expedient to settle down for six months or so in some quiet country village.

"Do you mean that my mother will be an invalid for several months? You do. She doesn't know this, does she?"

Dr. Bolton pursed up cautious lips.

"N-no. It might depress her. Well, well, cheer up, my dear young lady. I am quite satisfied. I repeat—rest—good food—dainty dishes—and there you are."

"Yes—and there we aren't," thought Rosemary.

She had an acquaintance, a sensible, middle-aged woman, a fellow-lodger in the boarding-house, who was running, and running well, a girls' employment agency. Rosemary called upon her.

"My dear, I'm so busy."

"I know; I want to be busy too. Surely there must be something that I can do."

"Have you had special training in anything? Even a scullery-maid must serve her apprenticeship; and apprentices all along the line earn little and often are expected to pay a premium."

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Rosemary pulled off her hat and held it aloft. It was the second hat she had trimmed.

"I trimmed this."

"Let me look at it."

Shrewd eyes appraised it.

"Very clever! But, obviously, the work of an amateur. It would arrest attention if I showed it to the right man. It might secure admission to some millinery establishment—on terms."

"What terms?"

"If my man waived the premiums, two years with your nose to the grindstone at a minimum wage."

"I know nothing of typewriting or stenography," said Rosemary. "You told me that your books were full of the names of nursery governesses and old ladies' companions. There remains domestic service. I might take a place as parlourmaid."

"You are too attractive, my dear. No wise mistress would engage you. I wish I could help you, but I'm afraid I can't."

Rosemary returned to the shabby sitting-room and began to knit jumpers. She had sold a jumper or two to friends.

Mrs. Reeve had to lie in bed. Yet she chatted gaily enough, serene in her faith that soon she would be up and about again.

By this time it was known, somehow, in Naval circles that the *Anaconda* was on her way to Rogotana.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Mrs. Reeve.

III

As the *Anaconda* steamed nearer to Rogotana over summer seas, Flagg thought more and more of his independent means. He had two thousand a year, invested in gilt-edged securities. "Why stick this?"

he asked himself as he sweltered in his bunk. The magic word "perhaps" seemed to be inscribed in golden letters upon the wall. Then it faded, and "yes" took its place.

Barbados lay far astern when Vereker sent for his First Lieutenant. Without a word he pushed a slip of paper across the cabin table.

"*Rogotians slumping, heavily.*"

"Wireless from the Admiralty," said Vereker. "It means that we may expect trouble. Well, we'll soon knock that on the head. Do you know anything about these oils?"

"Very little, sir."

"Same here, Number One. Still, if they weren't worth protecting we shouldn't be sent to protect 'em, what?"

"That's fairly obvious, sir."

"And if there's one thing I'd put my shirt on it's Sea Power. The oil is there, and lashin's of it. We shall make it a marketable proposition. I have faith in my mission. When the trouble is wiped out or squelched there'll be a boom. Damn it, if I had a bit of money laid by I'd be tempted to bung some of it into Rogotian Oils. At the worst it would be a lock-up; at the best it might mean a big winner."

"I'm of your opinion, sir."

Vereker said no more, and Lingard wondered whether a kindly man had given him a gilt-edged tip. He went to his cabin and glanced at his bank-book. Upon the last page were listed his few investments. He stared at them thoughtfully. He had bought sound Industrials on the advice of a friend, a fairly prosperous broker on the Stock Exchange, he had never gambled in speculative counters.

"It might mean a lot to Rosemary," he reflected. Then lying back in his chair he, too, saw the word "perhaps," but dared not translate it into "yes."

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To beguile fancy he wrote out a cablegram instructing his friend to sell a thousand pounds' worth of Industrials and to buy Rogotanian Oils.

Forty-eight hours later that cablegram was on its way to London. Lingard sent it ashore at the first opportunity. Pickering, without any consultation with Number One, dispatched another message :

“ Miss Reeve, 5 Rodney Villas, Portsmouth.—Perhaps worries me ; cable yes ; answer paid.—PICKERING, *Anaconda*, Rogota.”

IV

Massingham, the British Consul, came aboard the *Anaconda*, was received with due honours, and soon found himself alone with Vereker in the Captain's cabin. He was a thin, desiccated man, with a face of crinkled parchment, who spoke sharply to the point.

“ The situation is tricky. We are dealing with rogues who never say what they mean or mean what they say. The President is a liar of the first magnitude, but the strings are pulled by Belalcazar, the power behind the throne.”

“ Then why isn't he on it ? ” asked Vereker.

“ He may be soon.”

“ And the wells ? ”

“ This for your private ear. Belalcazar has a big holding of shares. Oil property is easily wrecked. So far no damage has been done. You will call on the President ; he will return your call and ask you to dine. You will ask him to dine. He will bring Belalcazar. After dinner you will be vastly entertained. All these scoundrels are gamblers. It's in the blood, and their counters are human lives.”

“ Am I to infer,” asked Vereker, “ that no damage has been done to the oil wells because this Beelzebub, or

whatever his name is, is standing in with the Revolutionaries ? ”

“ Upon the Equator,” drawled Massingham, “ we have to form judgments upon very insufficient data. I should like you, Captain Vereker, to form your own independent judgment after meeting these two men. Each talks English. Then we can colloque again.”

Upon the following day a cablegram reached Flags. It contained one word—“ Yes.” Incontinently a joyous and cock-a-whoop young fellow rushed off in search of Number One, whom he found reading in his cabin.

“ The little darling has cabled me ‘ yes.’ ”

“ Rosemary Reeve ? ”

“ Could it be anybody else ? I shall send in my papers, old lad, and you’ll be best man, won’t you ? What about a bottle of pop ? ”

Lingard stood up, gripping Pickering’s outstretched hand.

“ You are a lucky fellow, Flags.”

An older and more experienced man might have guessed something from Lingard’s face and manner. But Flags hadn’t a notion that Rosemary had said “ perhaps ” to Lingard, and he regarded his friend as something of a fossil where women were concerned. Lingard, he thought, might have been more “ bucked ” ; on the other hand, comparisons must have obtruded themselves between a junior who could chuck the Service and marry the girl of his heart, and a senior who was not in the same enviable condition.

“ Shall we have the pop here ? ”

“ No,” said Lingard. “ I’m dining to-night with the President, and I must have my wits about me. Another time, Flags, if you don’t mind.”

Flags cracked more than one bottle with the junior officers. Lingard, alone in his cabin, murmured to himself :

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"I was right. Her 'perhaps' meant 'no.'"

Nothing happened worth recording at the dinner at the palace. Vereker and his Number One, comparing notes afterwards, agreed that Don José Arrillanes was a round fat oily rogue. Belalcazar displayed Mephistophelian attributes and features, a predatory beak, eyes set too close together, prehensile fingers and a glittering smile.

"Typical villain of melodrama," said Lingard.

"Yes; and Massingham tells me that life is melodrama in Rogota. We left the palace no wiser than we went to it. But to-morrow this pretty brace of blackguards are dining with me. I may have something of interest to tell you."

"I'm sure you will," replied Lingard hopefully.

CHAPTER III

I

PICKERING'S cablegram was delivered to Rosemary in the presence of her mother, who was lying upon the sofa at the time with a mind possibly more active because the overworked body was at rest.

"Keep her in cotton-wool," insisted Dr. Bolton. "The trouble is not organic, but it may yet be."

Rosemary, knowing nothing of medical terminology, was frightened. She assured the good kind fellow that she would do her best, but "mother was rather difficult."

"Yes, yes; I know that. They always are difficult, these cases of slight breakdown. I should defeat my own ends, Miss Reeve, if I tried to—er—well, 'put the wind up' your mother. That is not necessary yet. It might be necessary if she became—er—refractory."

Somewhat to Rosemary's surprise Mrs. Reeve was not refractory. Sound common sense told her that it was childish to consult a doctor and then flaunt his advice. But all the same, inaction distressed her. And having little else to think about she concentrated attention upon Rosemary's future.

After reading the cablegram Rosemary handed it to her mother.

"God be praised," exclaimed Mrs. Reeve in French. "This, this," she tapped the message, "will cure me."

"Little mother, don't get excited!"

"But it is so exactly right. The good God has not forsaken us."

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“ I—I like Bobby ; I don’t love him.”

“ You will love him. *Pouf-f-f!* He will attend to that. Have no fear. Let us be practical. I say—and I know—that the happiest marriages are arranged with, of course, due consideration for both parties. You two are young and healthy—and good ; he can give you what every woman wants—security.”

The word sank in. *Security*—— ! A treatise could be written upon what security means to women whose lives are insecure. Security drives women into marriage, and keeps others out of it.

In the argument that followed Mrs. Reeve had the best of the encounter, partly because her daughter obeyed the doctor’s injunctions that his patient must not be excited.

“ I must think it over.”

With that she flitted away, after kissing the little mother tenderly. She had an engagement to play tennis at a house belonging to the comfortably prosperous. Mrs. Reeve could behold Marie appraising, with discerning eyes, comfort and security, fully alive to their antitheses. Surely—the child was more Marie than Rose.

As the front door of the boarding-house slammed, Mrs. Reeve got up from the sofa. Rosemary had placed the cablegram in a drawer of the writing-table. Mrs. Reeve sat down, and drew from the drawer the cablegram and the blank form thoughtfully attached to it. Temptation assailed and overcame her. She filled in the form.

“ PICKERING—ANACONDA—ROGOTA—YES—
REEVE.”

She rang the bell, and instructed the maid who answered it to take it at once to the telegraph office. Then she returned to the sofa, lay down, and indulged herself

in a delightful day-dream, which began with buying a modest trousseau and ended with the purchase of a layette.

II

Rose returned from her tennis party, flying the red ensign of triumph upon her cheeks. She had been victorious in three closely contested sets; she had received many compliments from distinguished Naval officers.

“Did you see, my child, any young men as handsome and nice as Bobee?”

“No; I didn’t.”

“Good! That makes it easier for me. After all, I am French. I say with our great Victor Hugo,” she quoted him in his own tongue, “‘when I survey England, I am proud that I am French.’ A French mother thinks and acts, yes, acts, for her daughter. I have bestowed you, my cherished one, upon a nice young man. I have cabled to your Bobee—‘YES.’”

She beamed upon the confounded Rose, who, at that moment, was certainly all English.

“Mother——!”

“Ah! You say everything in that one blessed word. Because I am truly your mother, because I—who might have married Gaston Dupont—know my child better, far better, than she knows herself, I have said what I have said. *Voilà!*”

Rose protested vehemently, and yet it was impossible to wipe out Marie. Civil war raged in a maid’s heart.

“I will not be flung to any man!”

Mrs. Reeve cooed at her.

“Flung——! Is he a monster, your Bobee? I ask you that.”

“He is not my Bobby. I refuse to regard him as mine.”

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"You will make him yours, all yours. Yes—how you put it?—he will eat out of your hand. Now Lingard—always, I think, you have a sneaking fondness for Lingard—will not eat out of your hand."

"As if I should ask him to?"

"Be reasonable, my chicken. Use your good French brains."

"I—I don't understand men."

"Ah! That is where English women are such fools. Did I try to understand your father? No. Did he try to understand me? No. We accepted each other frankly. I did not pick holes in him; he did not pick holes in me. Always we made the best of each other. That is the true philosophy of marriage. I read the other day, yes, 'a wise wife keeps her eyes shut and her arms open.' Bobee loves you. And for women, mark you, it is better to be loved than to love."

"I have heard you say that it is easier to inspire love than to keep it."

"True. But you, my child, will know how to keep this nice young man's love. He will be so nice to you, because you will be so nice to him."

In the end Marie vanquished Rose, or, as Mrs. Reeve expressed it, common sense triumphed. There was one dramatic moment. The little mother produced a telegram form and a pencil which she shook beneath a nose sensitive to the fact that onions were being prepared for dinner.

"Write 'no'—write 'no'—and eat your leeks."

The difficulty of writing "no," not to mention the expense of sending such a heart-breaking message half-way round the earth, confounded both Rose and Marie.

Accordingly, Rosemary said gently:

"I will make him a good wife. I swear I will."

"Embrace me! I see clear, my little hen. I see——" she went on vivaciously, speaking her beloved language,

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to describe what she saw, ending, as might be expected, with, or rather in, a *bassinette*.

"He will be adorable, the angel! I am kissing his pink toes. You call him Reeve, no? Reeve Pickering——!"

"Why not Gaston? Possibly Monsieur Dupont would act as godfather."

"That is a happy thought. Kiss me again, and tell me that you are happy."

It came to that finally. And when Rosemary kissed her mother, she whispered:

"You shall have rest, good food, good wine, and no worrying."

Madame Reeve—Gallic through and through—laughed gaily.

"I signed the cablegram—Reeve. If you do not take Bobee, why, I—I marry him myself."

III

The President of Rogotana, accompanied by Señor Belalcazar, dined with Captain Vereker on board the *Anaconda*. Not till the cigars were served did the Old Man touch upon the subject that had brought such sharply contrasted types together. Lingard was present; nobody else of the officers.

Fortified by an excellent dinner, Vereker addressed Don José Arrillanes:

"May I congratulate you, Mr. President, upon your fluent English. The situation appears to be this: the security of the British oil wells is in danger. You fear that they may be wrecked. There are only a few Englishmen on the spot. They would be wiped out. Your own troops are disaffected. You cannot count on them. You are sure that your agents will warn you when the attack is to be made. I am prepared with a landing party. I accept your heartfelt assurance of friendship and your desire to

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establish happier relations between the Great Power I serve and the Republic of Rogotana."

The President smiled.

"I swear to you, Señor Capitan, that if I were not President of Rogotana I should wish to be a captain of the *Anaconda*."

They clinked glasses.

"And I swear to you, Mr. President, that if I were not Captain of the *Anaconda*, I should wish to be."

Belalcazar said little, and appeared to be singularly abstemious both with food and drink. He may have remarked that Lingard was just as moderate in the use of such good creatures as himself. What he did say must be recorded :

"I am not alarmed, gentlemen. As confidential adviser to Don José, I have told him, and I tell you, that the presence of this magnificent cruiser in our waters will suffice. We shall not need, I hope, your landing party. Still, it is well to be prepared."

After these distinguished guests were duly seen over the side, with thundering honours, Vereker and Lingard returned to the cabin. Vereker smiled grimly :

"It is well to be prepared. Massingham sent me this note before dinner. Read it."

Lingard read it :

"Serious trouble is impending. The Revolutionary party has been fired to action by the presence of the *Anaconda*. They want to precipitate a crisis. I have learned that Belalcazar is meeting one of the scoundrels at an obscure drinking and dancing cabaret, vaingloriously entitled 'Sol de Rogota.' All the Englishmen whom I can trust here are well known. Have you any officer who understands Spanish and who has not been ashore yet? If he drifted in in mufti about eleven, half-seas over, he might pick up information of importance to us. It's a thousand to three chance, but worth taking."

Lingard returned the note, saying :

" I'll go ; it will be a job after my own heart."

" Right. You may be back late. Render your report in writing by nine o'clock on the following morning."

" In writing, sir ? "

" To protect you and myself in case of an inquiry. Documentary evidence might be useful."

" Aye, aye, sir."

IV

Seaport towns in Central America present much the same appearance. Upon the water-front mean houses and huts appear to be crushed together. Higher up are the shops, and above these the residential quarter. It is said that every equatorial town has its own particular smell ; but Lingard decided that Rogota had many smells, each more evil than the other.

He went ashore at dusk, disguised as a beachcomber, one of the " broken brigade," and as such able to drift through slums unnoticed, regarded all the world over as " poor white trash."

At the Sol de Rogota beachcombers were welcome if they brought with them a few pesetas. Lingard saw at a glance that the cabaret was half empty. At one side of the room was a small stage ; at the other a long bar, behind which, enthroned, sat a fat woman, half Indian, half Spanish. Lingard slapped down a piece of silver and demanded brandy. When the stout Hebe addressed him in Spanish he shook his head. An Indita indicated a small table and brought the brandy. She, too, spoke in Spanish and rolled her eyes ; but Lingard took no notice of her, leaning back in his chair. The presiding genius of the bar decided that the stranger was drunk, but not disorderly. She knew the type well. He would drink his brandy and then fall asleep.

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On the stage girls danced and sang, and then wandered about the bar-room, chattering with customers who were willing to stand them drinks. Lingard chuckled to himself as they passed him by. Some sniffed, as well they might, inasmuch as the brandy—that didn't come from Cognac—was applied externally. Presently he called for more—which laid the dust at his feet. He was about to stagger away when Belalcazar strolled in. Obviously he knew the *padrona*, for he talked to her in low whispers across the bar, taking no notice of any others. But twice he glanced at his watch.

Finally another man entered the cabaret, and greeted Belalcazar ceremoniously. By this time most of the small tables were occupied, and the regular entertainment being at an end men and women were dancing in the middle of the room. Lingard rose from his table, lurched away from it, and sat down upon a seat against the wall. The ruse succeeded. Belalcazar and his friend took the vacant table.

An hour later Lingard was in his cabin.

V

At nine-thirty on the following morning Vereker sent for his Number One. He grinned approvingly.

“I have your report. Have you anything to add to it?”

“Only this. Doesn't it occur to you, sir, that the whole thing has been too easy?”

“Too easy?”

“Well, we get a hint from Massingham that matters of importance may be talked over in a low drinking-shop. Are such matters ever talked over in such a place?”

Vereker's honest face expressed bewilderment.

“Carry on,” he growled.

“Massingham said it was a thousand to three chance. On that chance I went; and I found out that the wells

are to be wrecked at twelve to-night, and that the Englishmen and the few *peones* in charge are to be wiped out. I know a little, not much, about Central American political intrigues. Belalcazar wanted me to overhear this; he stage-managed the affair; he spotted me."

"Never! Your own mother wouldn't have known you."

"He spotted me as the one stranger in that den."

"But—why not tell us straight out that this attack was planned?"

"Simply because they don't do things that way in these latitudes. There is always the touch of comic opera. Belalcazar is playing his own game. That's all."

Vereker nodded grimly. If Señor Belalcazar chose to pull the legs of British Naval officers, he might find it a dangerous pastime. He said curtly:

"I shall send a landing party to protect our interests. Pickering will be in charge. I hear that he complains of life being dull in the Navy."

Lingard made no comment. The sentry outside was instructed to fetch the signal officer. Flagg beamed when he received his instructions.

"Jolly good fun. I hope there'll be a scrap."

"I don't anticipate anything of the sort," said Vereker.

Later on, however, a note from Massingham caused him to reconsider this opinion. He showed it to Lingard:

"As I suspected and feared, the President is at the bottom of all this trouble. He is secretly inciting the Revolutionaries to wreck our wells, not caring a damn about British interests. *He doesn't know that Belalcazar holds shares.* There may be a serious fight. The President is counting on the just anger of England. The Revolutionaries will run amok, and whether they wreck the mines or not, they will wreck unquestionably their chances of being recognized as a legal government by our people.

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The President, playing innocent, will be secured in power for several years."

"A dirty dog," observed Vereker.

"All dirty dogs," said Lingard.

"I didn't expect a serious scrap, simply because I got this yesterday by wireless." He took from a tin box a slip of paper.

"Rogotanian Oils booming."

Lingard betrayed no excitement. Vereker glanced at his impassive face.

"I dropped a hint, Number One. It seemed to me a sifter that they would boom."

"I acted on your hint, sir, to the tune of a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds! Stout fellow."

"Such a small purchase would hardly affect the market."

"No; probably Belalcazar is a big buyer. We know that the President isn't a holder. He may intend to smash Belalcazar. Bit of a puzzle, what? Can we compete with these rascals at their own game?"

"We can defend adequately British interests."

"You can speak out, Number One."

"I suggest, sir, that you double the landing party and put me in charge of it."

"You?"

"Pickering is a gallant young fellow, but reckless."

"Yes. You believe that there may be a big scrap?"

"I do, sir."

"Right! Pick your own men."

But Pickering was furious when he learned that Lingard, his friend, had usurped his place. He had to dissemble before the Captain, but he spoke intemperately to the Second-in-Command:

"Why have you, my pal, put this spoke in my wheel?"

Such a question outraged etiquette. Perhaps Lingard bore with a junior officer because the question was difficult to answer. What had been his motive? Is any analysis, ultimate analysis, of our sudden impulses possible? When Vereker told him that the Rogotanian Oils were booming, a man who had been short of cash all his life told himself that luck had turned too late. If the big gamble "came off," an extra thousand or two would mean nothing without Rosemary. That was his first thought. On the heels of that, wincing under an ironical caress from fortune, came the swift reflection that the malicious Jade contemplated the delivery of a foul blow. He saw Flags shot down, and Rosemary derelict. That might mean a sporting chance for him later on, but everything that was best in the man shrank from such a possibility. And, dominating these reflections, was the longing for action. He welcomed the prospect of a fight.

Lingard said, mildly for him :

"I'm a gunnery officer. I know my own job."

"I can handle a machine-gun as well as you can."

"You are speaking to your superior officer. Leave my cabin."

Flags hesitated, flushed, and obeyed orders.

Nevertheless, that night, as Lingard was going over the gangway with his landing party, the young fellow rushed up to him, gripped his hand and said warmly :

"Best of luck, Number One."

VI

Lingard marched his party across some white sands and through green patches of irrigated land till they came to gravelly hills and barren rocks, rich, however, in bituminous deposits. Above these was a more or less level plateau where the wells had been sunk. Massingham had

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said that vast quantities of oil had been stored in tanks, pending the construction of a pipe-line to the harbour, and Lingard had understood that the wells were capped, and that active work had been suspended owing to the unsettled conditions of the country and difficult litigation with small holders of sugar-cane and cotton lands. In a word, the Rogotanian Oil Fields were regarded as a big gamble not very enticing to English speculators. But nobody doubted the richness of the deposits, specially valuable because they were near the coast.

On the plateau, plainly visible by the mellow moonlight, were many bamboo shacks, and a bungalow, where the Englishmen lived. Thanks to excellent maps, Lingard had approached the plateau from the coast, not taking the road from Rogota by which, presumably, the Revolutionaries would come.

Lingard left his men near the huge tanks and derricks and knocked at the door of the bungalow, which was opened by an Englishman in pyjamas, carrying an electric torch. He betrayed surprise when Lingard explained his presence, but no nervousness.

"You have had no warning that there might be trouble?"

The Englishman laughed.

"There is always trouble brewing in these parts, but it never comes to a head. I can count on my fellows."

"Where are they—your fellows?"

"Faith! And with nothing doing here, where should they be? Saying their prayers in Rogota, may be."

"You're an Irishman?"

"Glory be—I am. Terence McCudden, from County Kerry. Come in and wet your whistle."

"Presently."

During five minutes' talk McCudden soon established himself as a type familiar enough to Lingard: the reckless Celt, generally to be found in the wild places of the

earth, accepting hard knocks genially and spending freely what he could pick up. Lingard learned from him that hitherto the oil deposits in and about Central America were little more than seepages of no commercial value.

"But we have struck it rich," he added.

He scoffed at danger to himself. "They might wreck the wells, but they wouldn't kill me." "You say you got the straight tip that the boys were coming to-night?"

"Yes, I dare say they knew you would be alone. What about your Indians?"

"Not many of them since we closed down."

"You post no sentries?"

McCudden laughed.

"And wouldn't the lazy dogs sleep at their posts if I did?"

"Kick 'em out of their bunks," said Lingard. "I'll post my men."

McCudden nodded. It was easy to see from the expression on his face that he believed Lingard had been dispatched on a fool's errand. Lingard was coming slowly to the same conclusion. He was spoiling for a fight; and a fight, seemingly, was not on the programme. He glanced about him. To the right stretched the road, winding down the hill; above the plateau were the foothills bristling with cactus and thick brush. The *patio* was quite pretty, embellished with tubs holding oleanders and other flowering shrubs, a tiny oasis easily held against ordinary attack by a few determined men. One machine-gun would command the road.

Number One posted his men here and there, hiding them. Discreetly he paid no attention to chuckles. Obviously, Jack ashore shared his leader's conviction that the party were out for a moonlit stroll.

McCudden came back presently, brandishing a thick blackthorn.

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"I have ten *peones*, all told," he said carelessly. "I've stuck an automatic into my pocket, but it's a sitter I shan't use it."

Lingard inspected the *peones*, who smiled ingratiatingly. Most of them carried *machetes*, the long sharp knives of the country.

"Post 'em where you like," said McCudden. "They'll leg it into the brush at the first shot, if there is a shot."

"You can't depend on them at all?"

"Not on a mother's son of 'em. I've caught on. It will be known in Rogota that you came here to-night. That will quash any possible trouble. Our sly old fox of a President works things that way, not a bad way, but open fighting——! No, sir! They're trained to slip a knife into you when your back is turned. Ah, now, as soon as I clapped eyes on your cruiser, says I to myself: 'Our stuff is booming.'"

"It is."

Lingard wondered how often British cruisers had been used to boom British enterprises, but he didn't say so. He observed to McCudden:

"We command the road."

"Will they risk their precious skins on the road? Not much. It's dodging in and out of cactus and scrub that suits their style of scrapping."

"Tell your men to hide near my men."

McCudden did so. Lingard remained where he was. Suddenly, he started as four peculiar notes boomed upon the silence. McCudden joined him.

"Did ye hear that?" Lingard nodded. "A gib owl, what we call the Mother of the Moon, may have made it."

"May——?"

"Not quite convincing to me," whispered McCudden.

As he spoke there floated to them an answering cry from the scrub.

"Me for a reconnaissance," said McCudden.

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Swiftly he vanished, leaving Lingard alone, but very alert.

"Must have been an owl," thought Lingard.

A transformed McCudden crept out of the shadows, finger upon lip.

"The scrub is crawling with 'em," he whispered. "If we could get your machine-gun on to the roof we could give 'em snuff."

"I'm instructed to avoid bloodshed, if possible."

McCudden appeared disappointed. Lingard hastened to his men, telling them to await attack, and to fire the first volley over the assailants' heads.

"If they bolt we'll take what prisoners we can. If they come on, give 'em beans."

A disconcerting period of inaction followed. McCudden with all the aptitudes of a cat burglar, effected another reconnaissance from the bungalow roof, peering over the top of it. He slid back down the steep pitch, and reported gleefully that attack was imminent.

Finally the plateau was rushed. Black forms, sharply defined against the white buildings and the sand of the *patio*, darted towards the wells, but not *en masse*.

"Fire!" ordered Lingard.

Instantly, as McCudden had predicted, the assailants, palsied by surprise, stood still, and then turned to seek cover. One man, taller than the others, attempted to rally them.

"Go for 'em!" shouted Lingard.

"Worry—worry—worry!" yelled McCudden.

Immediately the assailants skedaddled. Lingard raced after the leader, followed by the less active McCudden, howling delight and waving his shillelagh.

"Catch as catch can," commanded Number One.

"Who—whoop!" replied McCudden.

Cactus, chaparral and darkness swallowed pursuers and pursued. But here, in the rank undergrowth, Nature

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became the enemy of the British Navy. There is no barbed-wire entanglement so effective as cactus, and the Indians know how to slip through it. The handy-man doesn't. Loud curses filled the air.

"Better shoot," panted McCudden, as the leader slightly gained upon them.

"Take the beggar alive," replied Lingard.

The leader had swerved from the thick scrub, being a white man. His objective seemed to be Rogota, for he was heading for the road. Suddenly he appeared to trip and fall. Lingard, four yards ahead of the Irishman, hurled himself upon the prostrate body; and at the same moment a knife slid into his pectoral muscles. A son of Kerry saw a head and bashed it in.

"Horoosh!"

The scrap was over.

Lingard was carried into the bungalow, where first aid was administered to a slight flesh wound. Discomfited able seamen picked the poisonous cactus spines out of each other. Nobody, apparently, had been killed; nobody was seriously injured. McCudden summed up the situation:

"Comic opera."

Nevertheless, precautions were taken and sentries posted as McCudden's Indians returned to the unstricken field. They had bolted at the first shot.

Meanwhile the leader recovered consciousness. McCudden bandaged his head, chaffing the man in Spanish.

"The President will deal with you, señor."

Thus speaking, McCudden struck out his tongue and jerked forward his head significantly. But this intimation of approaching dissolution by hanging made little impression. McCudden whispered to Lingard:

"Don José is in this."

"Looks like it," replied Lingard.

“Total bag—this chap. But there may be a pick-up,” he added hopefully, “in the brush to-morrow.”

A sentry hurried on to the veranda.

“Three men on mules, sir, coming up the road.”

“The regular army,” predicted McCudden. “In these latitudes they arrive after the fun of the fair.”

But before the three men reached the plateau Lingard made a discovery. He had taken from his breast pocket a thin silver cigarette-case as soon as his wound was dressed. Lighting a cigarette, he noticed a deep dent upon the case. An ejaculation escaped him.

“In pain?” asked McCudden.

“No—this saved me.”

McCudden examined the case. Then he opened it. Inside was an inscription :

“To Number One from Flags. Cheerio !”

“This is a funny world,” remarked Lingard.

Ten minutes later a lean and black-visaged Spaniard rode into the *patio*, accompanied by two soldiers.

“Bgorra ! It’s Belalcazar,” said McCudden.

Belalcazar, for it was he, greeted Lingard with grave courtesy !

“You see, señor, at the last moment Truth popped out of her well. The lady does so occasionally, and then it is disconcerting for liars. All is quiet in Rogota. All will remain quiet. You have my assurance that you can return to your ship in peace.”

“But I don’t understand,” said Lingard irritably.

“No ? You see, Don José Arrillanes was very clever, but—*ay de mi !*—too clever. He ran with the hare, me, but he coursed, too, with those dogs of Revolutionaries. And they, señor, have eaten him. He was dispatched—shall we say to—to Purgatory ?—less than an hour ago.”

“And you, señor ?” asked Lingard.

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"I," replied Belalcazar, "am now President of Rogotana; and I own a one-third interest in this valuable property. That is why you have my private assurance that it will not be wrecked."

He smiled blandly. The Englishman, who understood Rogotanian ways, bowed politely :

"After your ride, Señor Presidente, may I have the honour to offer you—a glass of champagne?"

"It would be churlish to refuse," said Belalcazar. He glanced at Lingard. "I am sure," he murmured suavely, "that the champagne will be more to your taste, señor, than the brandy at the Sol de Rogota."

Lingard suspended judgment on that. But later, over a sparkling glass, the President said a few enlightening words :

"A demonstration in force was needed, but I am a man of peace. All Rogota knows that you are here, and why you are here. For the rest, our methods are not British methods."

"But I feel a bit of a fool, Mr. President."

"No modest man is a fool, señor. I say no more; into a shut mouth no flies enter. My felicitations. You have achieved your object without bloodshed."

VII

Don José, of course, had been assassinated, but not by Belalcazar. The story leaked out before the *Anaconda* left Rogota Bay. Massingham supplied details to Vereker and Lingard : Don José had been dispatched to purgatory or elsewhere in many pieces. According to Massingham, it would take Lucifer all his time to put him together again. Some Delilah had placed a small infernal machine in a large box of cigars. It was known that the late President always smoked a cigar before retiring for the night. When he opened the box, what happened can be

left to the imagination. Abundant evidence was forthcoming to show that he had intrigued against the Loyalists, who decided to put Belalcazar in his place. Massingham was of opinion that Belalcazar's turn would come.

"Gentlemen," he declared solemnly, "they are all thieves, and the affair has ended well, because I would not exchange the life of one British sailor for the whole gang of them."

Nevertheless, Number One had to endure a certain amount of chaff.

CHAPTER IV

I

SOME three weeks later Rosemary received a letter from Flagg in which he declared that she would see him very shortly. And in it he hinted that he was contemplating giving up the Service and devoting himself to the sweetest little woman in the world. The postscript alone is worth recording :

“ The fuss here ended in an absurd fiasco. I was most frightfully sick because Jim Lingard, at the last moment, went ashore with a landing party, taking my place, confound him ! The jealousy of some of these seniors is contemptible. However, he got spoofed. Nothing doing ! He isn't quite the sort I took him to be. When I asked him to be best man at our wedding he made some fatuous excuse which simply howls for explanation.”

Rosemary did not show this letter to her mother, but she said something, not much, about a young fellow leaving his chosen profession. Whereupon little mother remarked sharply :

“ He is giving it up for you. Yes, for love of you ! Heaven, what more could any girl want ? ”

“ If I were sure ? Love of me ? It might mean love of ease, of comfort, of sport ? ”

“ You are a queer child.”

“ Am I ? ”

“ You ought to be dancing about this room as I am.”

To demonstrate her return to health Mrs. Reeve executed a neat pirouette, smiling as she did so. Rose smiled, too, saying whimsically :

“ I am years older than you are.”

“ That,” declared Mrs. Reeve, “ is a perfectly just observation. The world was younger and happier, my faith, when I was sweet and twenty. All you young people are old, too old. It is of the most extraordinary. I wish that I understood you.”

Rosemary moved to the window. Their sitting-room was upon the first floor, and from it part of the immense harbour might be seen, enough at any rate to whet imagination. Portsmouth Harbour has astounding significance, because it is an epitome of past, present and future. How many of us can gaze unmoved at the *Victory*, or at the house where Nelson spent his last night ashore? Who is not thrilled when a great ship puts to sea, or when she returns after a perilous voyage? Rosemary was susceptible to all these influences. A siren boomed in the far distance three times.

“ Am I putting to sea,” reflected the girl, “ under sealed orders, destination unknown?”

She tried to behold Bobby as the best of husbands and fathers; not too difficult a task. As she turned from the window her mother may have read her thoughts, for Mrs. Reeve said nimbly :

“ It is like this, my hen. You English girls ask for too much, more than most of you deserve, *hein?* Your Bobby is a nice young man. But you will keep him, if you are wise, where I kept your poor father, under your thumb. That is why the good God gave us women thumbs. No violence—just a gentle pressure now and again at the right time. *Oh, là là!*”

“ I remember,” said Rosemary, with a faint smile. She could see the late Captain Reeve thumb-pushed into safe channels.

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"But if—if I take after father? You have steered me, mother. I—I don't think I have much initiative."

"*Pouf-f-f!*"

"For instance, if Bobby wants to leave the Service, would you will be strong enough to persuade——"

"*Coax——*"

"To coax him to remain on."

"Good! You try and see."

"I—I feel that he ought to stay on."

"If you feel that way, probably you are right."

II

At that moment the *Anaconda* was steaming up the English Channel. Plymouth lay off her port quarter, and Start Point off her port beam. And, oddly enough, unless telepathy can account for such coincidences, Flagg was talking about leaving the Service to Number One as they paced the deck together. The old cordial relations between the two had not been resumed. The shadow of a woman lay between them, but the younger man did not know that. Still, he valued Lingard's advice, the more so, perhaps, because it was given under more or less impatient protests.

"There are two thousand golden reasons, old chap, for sending in my papers, and a jolly girl, and *that*." He indicated Start Point. "Thank God, we shall be home in the morning and hear the 'Pompey' (Portsmouth) chimes. With luck to-morrow night I shall be enjoying myself at the Hippodrome."

"And the jolly girl?"

"She will be sitting beside me, of course. 'Wouldn't you chuck all this if you were in my place?'"

"No, I shouldn't. Whatever happened I should stick to my job."

To emphasize this he turned from Flags to speak to a petty officer. Flags paced on, thinking : " No blighting sentiment about old Jim ! "

When the *Anaconda* came to her moorings in Portsmouth Harbour, Flags, in great excitement, applied for and got shore leave ; and a jeweller's shop was his first objective. Perhaps it did not occur to him that Rosemary—if she were to wear the engagement ring—ought to be given a voice in its selection. He decided to buy the best—what he considered the best. A tall young man in a frock-coat slightly dampened this decision by observing quietly :

" We shall be happy, sir, to exchange any ring—if it should not please, for another."

" You think that——"

" One is never quite sure, sir. To-day, sir, the ladies often exercise the privilege of the sex and change their minds."

Flags leapt to the conclusion that the speaker had experience in such matters.

" Right ! There's no hurry, really. On second thoughts, and acting under your very sound advice, I'll bring the lady here."

He bustled off. The tall young man wondered mournfully whether he had made a mistake. He was sure that he had, when the proprietor of the shop, who had overheard what had passed, came up and observed tartly :

" It's your job, Mr. Simpkins, to sell goods, not to give away advice."

" Yes, sir," replied Mr. Simpkins humbly.

III

Mrs. Reeve and Rosemary were together when Flags was shown into the shabby sitting-room by an over-

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worked boarding-house parlourmaid. The little mother embraced a future son-in-law upon both cheeks.

"How well you look!" she exclaimed maternally.

He kissed the hands that Rosemary held out to him, and contented himself with that for the moment. He could see that Rosemary's lips were quivering, but her smiles and blushes reassured him. After a decent interval of small talk Mrs. Reeve would leave them. In a joyous tone he spoke of his plans.

"I shall send in my papers."

"You haven't done so yet?" asked Rosemary.

"Not yet, my dearest."

Mrs. Reeve rose.

"I will leave you to talk that over."

Flags opened the door for her to go out, closed it, smiled, and held out his arms. To his confounding, Rosemary sat still.

"Give me a little time," she whispered.

"Why, of course."

He drew a chair close to hers.

"What will you do, Bobby, when you leave the Service?"

"I shall hunt and shoot a bit, darling. We'll play about together, travel, go bird's-nesting, have a hatful of fun."

"And then——?"

"Why, then—something will turn up."

"It might not. If I asked you to stick to the Navy——?"

"But, you dear thing, I've got two thou' a year, and more coming. It's a great Service for fellows like Jim Lingard. He's a dyed-in-the-wool sailor. I'm not. And how about you? You know the old tag: 'If you love a sailor he's always at sea, if you hate him he's always ashore.' Our Old Man, Vereker, doesn't see much of his missus. I don't say he wants to. I tell

you, the Navy means enforced celibacy for most of us."

"You are giving it up on my account?"

Flags hesitated. He was honest, and not a fool. An emphatic 'Yes' lay pat to his lips. To his credit, he told the truth.

"I'm giving it up on both our accounts. I suppose I'm fed up. I got the needle over that landing-party business. It was a knock."

"Tell me."

Flags aired his grievance, which he had kept to himself in the ward-room. A rare chance given to him had been taken away by a senior, once a pal.

"Do you mean that there was a chance of a fight?"

"There was a ridiculous sort of rough and tumble. The dagoes bolted at the first shot. Nobody was hurt except Lingard."

"Mr. Lingard was—hurt?"

She spoke breathlessly. Flags, watching her attentively, saw the colour flow into her cheeks.

"Lingard was scratched. It might have been serious. The knife struck an old cigarette-case that I had given him, and glanced."

"A cigarette-case that you had given him——!"

"Yes; lucky beggar. I tell you he's got some kudos out of this, because there was no bloodshed. The leader was taken by Lingard, and hanged afterwards by a chap called Belakazar. Now, tell me, why couldn't I have bossed such a rotten little show? Number One coolly scrapped me."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm *very* sick about it. Lingard made good during the war. I needed just such a little boost as this would have given me. Jim knows that he hasn't played the game."

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“What makes you say that?”

“Because he refuses to be my best man.”

Rosemary remained silent, but appeared oddly distressed. In a low whisper she faltered:

“Perhaps there might be another reason.”

“I dare say there might be, but there isn't. How queerly you look at me.”

By this time a jolly boy was feeling cross and asking himself questions. Why were such a soft pair of lips withheld from his? Had she no sympathy for her lover? He heard a quavering voice:

“I'm not looking at you, Bobby. I'm trying to look at myself. Did Mr. Lingard know that you had got that telegram when he took your place at the head of the landing party?”

Flags reflected for a moment.

“Yes; he did.”

“You are sure?”

“Quite.”

“Then I must tell you something. The night of the dance, Mr. Lingard asked me to marry him. And I said ‘perhaps’ to him just as I did to you.”

“Good Lord!”

“From what you tell me, you might have gone in his place and—and been killed.”

“Are you hinting that he foresaw that possibility?”

“I—I don't know.”

“But—you think he did.”

“From the opinion I have formed of him it is possible.”

Rose, not Marie, had recovered her self-possession. Rose understood Lingard; Marie did not quite understand Flags. A piteous face belonging to Marie provoked comment.

“Look here, can't we cut Jim out of this? You've said enough about him, and I'm most awfully sorry. Of

course I misjudged him, but why couldn't he tell me the truth about himself and you?"

Rose could have answered the question; Marie temporized, full of pity for everybody concerned, but feeling invertebrate. She was saying to herself: "I must marry this nice boy, I must."

She said hurriedly:

"I didn't want to go to the dance because I feared that I should come between two such splendid friends. And I have. That makes me perfectly miserable."

"Why didn't you say 'no' to Jim?"

Marie might have fibbed.

Rose said simply:

"You see, I had not quite made up my silly little mind about either of you."

"Let's think this out," gasped Flags.

Possibly the Senior Service is better qualified to think things out more swiftly than the Junior Arm. Midshipmen, barely released from their mothers' apron-strings, have to think and act upon their own initiative, and excuses for failure are not accepted by Authority. Flags put his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands. Was it Marie or Rose who, seeing him at a disadvantage, attempted beguilements?

"Bobby, dear——"

"Yes?"

"Mr. Lingard is your true friend. What does he say about your leaving the Service?"

Flags growled out:

"He thinks that I ought to stay in it?"

"And so do I. I seem to have come not only between you and your friend, but between you and your profession."

"Are you in love with me or with my profession?" he asked sharply.

As he spoke a bell tinkled, but neither noticed it.

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Flags jumped up excitedly, approaching Rosemary, staring searchingly at her.

"You don't love me," he exclaimed. "You are trying to impose conditions. That's not love."

The parlourmaid opened the door.

"Mr. Lingard," she announced. After a glance at Rosemary's face, she whimpered feebly: "I told the gentleman, miss, that you was particularly engaged, but he said he knew that."

IV

Lingard was at a loss to know what had happened. Having something to say, he said it.

"I guessed that I should find you here, Flags; and I wanted to catch you two together. I'm heartily ashamed of myself. You asked me to be your best man, and, like a cur in the manger, I refused. I *will* be your best man."

He was looking at Pickering. As he spoke, Rosemary went to the window. Flags glanced at her and then at the hand held out to him, which he gripped.

"Thanks, Jim," he said. "I understand. Still, one is a bit curious. On your honour, did you take my place that night because you loved her?"

"I took your place," said Lingard curtly, "because I believed that I could fill it. The Owner thought so too."

"Why didn't you tell me that you loved her?"

"Because I was absolutely sure that she loved you."

"You're a smart officer, Number One, but you slip up sometimes. Rosemary doesn't love me."

"She doesn't love you——!"

"I found that out two minutes ago."

"Nonsense," said Lingard sharply, "of course she loves you."

He turned eagerly to her, but she remained silent, with her back to the two men. There was a moment's silence, before Flags said hoarsely :

"Jim, old chap, you accepted defeat like a gentleman ; I shall try to do the same."

He left the room.

Lingard, almost stunned, glanced at Rosemary, still at the window, gazing out over the harbour. As the front door slammed, she turned.

From her face he could infer nothing except distress tintured by bewilderment. The situation was more humiliating for her because she could read protest and censure in Lingard's eyes. Obviously, he believed that she had jilted his friend.

"Is it true ? You don't love him ?"

"That is true," she faltered.

"But you cabled 'yes.' I saw the cable. And then, I suppose, you changed your mind ?"

"No ; I meant to marry him."

As they stared at each other, Mrs. Reeve came in. Her bedroom happened to be above the sitting-room. She was sitting in a chair, giving herself up to pleasing anticipations, when she heard the front door slam. Looking out of the window she had seen Flags striding down Rodney Road. She was not aware that another visitor was with her daughter.

Nevertheless, although shaken by astonishment, she greeted Lingard with Gallic politeness.

"Mr. Lingard, I am enchanted to see you. How well you look !"

This—it may be remembered—was Count d'Orsay's invariable salutation, which disarmed even duns. It failed to disarm an honest sailor.

"I called, madame," he replied stiffly, "to congratulate your daughter upon her approaching marriage, which, so it seems, will not take place."

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“Sword of my father !” exclaimed madame, sinking into a chair.

Rosemary hastened to her, fearing a heart attack, but the mother sat erect, gripping the arms of the chair.

“You—you, my child, have done this ? Why, I ask ? Answer me.”

“He has found out that I don’t love him, as—as he wishes to be loved.”

“Love—— ! Always that silly word in this country of fogs. You were cold, yes. I kiss him ; you hold out your hands. Love—— !” She turned an eager face to Lingard. “And you, you read your Johnson ? Ah ! What a man !”

“Johnson ?” repeated Lingard.

“Yes ; Sam Johnson. He said that an ill-assorted marriage was preferable to cheerless celibacy. But this marriage was not ill-assorted, no. I—I arranged it.”

“You arranged it ?” said Lingard.

“You mustn’t excite yourself, mother.”

“I never excite myself over business.” She turned again to Lingard. “Yes, I arrange it, because, if anything happens to me, she, the blessed one, would be left in cheerless celibacy.”

“I understand,” replied Lingard gravely. “You persuaded your daughter to cable ‘yes’ ?”

“No ; I cabled ‘yes’ myself. Why ? Because the poor little fool would have cabled ‘no.’ And, when she come to her good senses inherited from me, she is pleased and content, as I am. And now you, monsieur, have upset—how you put it ?—the apple cart.”

“I have not upset anything.”

“*Oh—là-là !* You English ! How much you can learn from us. So you, standing there stiff as a ramrod, do not realize that you—you are to blame for this ?”

“Mother—— !” entreated Rosemary, crimson with confusion.

"Thank God, ungrateful child, that you have a mother!"

She sprang up, approached Lingard, and waved a minatory forefinger under his nose.

"You silly fellow! Rose Marie does not love Bobee, because she loves you. And I know that. But I have been so poor all my life. Ah, my God! How I hate poverty—your English bread and scrape. You—you are honest. Can you give her more than bread and scrape—*hein?*"

Lingard smiled upon her reassuringly.

"I think so, Mrs. Reeve. You see, since we met last, luck has buttered my bread. I bought Rogotanian Oils when they were very low. I backed my faith in Sea Power. And Rogotanian Oils have boomed sky-high. How high I never discovered till to-day, when I glanced at the market prices. I shall sell out and take my profit. I have made a few thousand pounds, and with what I have, besides my pay, I can offer any young lady more than bread and scrape."

To his amazement Mrs. Reeve flung her arms about his neck, exclaiming gaily:

"I had right; always, but always I have great right. Yes—I tell Rose Marie that Bobee might be the better playmate, and you the better helpmate. And, perhaps, now I like you more than Bobee, because you have so strong the smell of the sea. I adore that. *Au revoir, mon fils!*"

She swept him a curtsy, laughed, and ran nimbly out of the room.

Lingard said to Rosemary:

"If I had cabled——"

"Why didn't you?"

Later on, when thoughts of an unhappy Flagg assailed a happy but tender-hearted girl, Lingard spoke a few consoling words:

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"Bobby confided all his love affairs to me. You were the seventh. Surely he will find an eighth."

Rosemary assimilated this. Then she whispered to Number One :

"Jim, after all you will be the best man at my wedding." And unquestionably he was.