

CHAPTER XX

IT was a different Angeline from the one John had known, who stood like a cold statue listening to what he had to say. There was never a word from her until he had ended, but a look on her face, which went right to his heart.

Tom Bonvill had gone to the town, to come back on the morrow, but the shadow of his coming was still upon the house.

“I knew men did these things—I have heard of it, but I never thought of such a thing in connection with *you*, John.”

“Angeline, you asked me once if I had ever gone to bed with any girl.”

“You did not answer—I did not know what such a thing meant, and when I did—I was proud and happy to be your bride; to give myself to you. Our two little sons, John; I thought we were a happy little world of our own, each sacred to the other. And all the time, there was another son by another woman—someone else who lay in your arms as I did.” There were tears in her eyes. “I thought I was the first who had ever done that, John.”

“What can I say?” he asked, humbly.

“Say nothing, just now. . . . And you must provide for that boy. It is his right.”

“I shall. I always meant to, but she took him away from me.”

“I think you must have broken her heart, John.”

John fell into silence.

Angeline passed quietly from the room, trying hard to keep back the tears.

On going to their bedroom, he found the door locked against him.

"Angeline."

"John, please go away from me to-night, dear. I have ordered a bed to be made up for you in the room at the end of the passage."

"May I not sleep with you—my wife? Has this news made such a difference to you? Angeline, do you not love me any more?"

There was the sound of a sob from inside the room. "God help me, I do. But I do not think you know how a woman—a wife—looks at such things. To-night, I want to be alone. Good-bye, dear."

John went miserably to bed, but not to sleep. Never in all his life had such a tumult of emotions possessed his spirit. He who had faced danger unflinchingly, had fought the world and won battles against it, was sinking into the throes of such unhappiness as he had never known. And after the happiness came a great quiet.

Gone were all thoughts of his works in the town, his seat in Parliament, his ambitions, the cloud-capped towers of the destiny he meant to win. Even his very sons were forgotten. All that he loved dearest on earth was centred in a little dark-haired blue-eyed wife lying in a troubled sleep—alone.

"I shall go away," thought John. "Things cannot be the same again: I see that now." He rose, dressed and lighted his candle and sat down to write.

It was dawn when he sealed his last letter and rose wearily. Instructions to his lawyers to secure provision for Angeline and his sons, notes to the managers of his works and businesses, and even a letter enclosing a large sum of money to Tom Bonvill were amongst the pile. And finally there was a letter for Angeline:

"Without you nothing is worth while any more. If you ever want me again, I shall come to you. I sail to-morrow in the Malvina."

Going quietly out of the house, he strode down the lane, taking no heed of the brightness of the sunshine or the blueness of the sky.

The *Malvina* slipped quietly away on the evening's tide and, sinking the lights of Liverpool behind her, was soon out on the tumbling waters of the Irish Sea.

Many hours had passed since John had left all that he held dearest. He thought of the miles of land and sea, ever increasing, which lay between Angeline and himself.

In the holds were cases upon cases of arms and munitions. Certainly the cargo of the *Malvina* did not tally with her manifest, but it was not a day when such things mattered as they do now.

In his present mood the prospect of a fight with a Federal ship-of-war would have been welcome to John. He would have fought to the end with gladness, even though he believed that such end meant oblivion for all time. At least one would forget.

Eight bells of the second dog-watch echoed through the dusk. The wind was freshening now and the ship began to roll more heavily. The loud voice of the first mate shouted an order.

"Clew up fore, main and mizzen royals. Haul down flying jib and topgallant staysails. Away aloft and furl."

Those light sails were hastily stowed as the breeze freshened.

"Lower away and clew up topgallant sails," was the next order, and gradually other sails were taken in until the *Malvina* was snugged down, and running under topsails and foresail. The heave of the ship grew perceptibly greater. The bare yards swung wildly against the sky,

now and again a solitary star between scurrying and wind-torn clouds varying the blackness of the heavens.

John leaned over the lee rail, lost in thought.

"I beg your pardon, sir, are you Mr. Woden?"

He looked round in surprise to see the second mate. He was not the officer of the watch, as John well knew, and should have been below.

"There is someone in your cabin, sir, wishes to see you," said the other nervously, as John nodded.

"Someone in *my* cabin to see me? Do we have stray callers at sea then? I do not understand you, Mr. Purcell. Whoever he is, let him come up here."

The other coughed. John Woden had the reputation of being "a hard case," and the second mate's tidings were delicate, and he was not quite sure whether they would be welcome. Still, they had to be given.

"Your visitor is—is a lady, sir."

"What the devil do you mean? Are you drunk, man?"

But the other, having lost his nerve completely, though a brave sailor enough, had retreated to the shadows. He calculated that John's curiosity would take him below, and then all would be plain sailing—at least, so he hoped.

John hesitated a moment, scowling fiercely, and then went down the companion way and on to his cabin.

There was a light burning from a swinging lamp. Someone lay in his bunk.

"Angeline. My little Angeline."

"John, I could not let you go away." She raised her arms and kissed him.

". . . And, John, I knew I could not lose you; no matter what you had done, I loved you, and as with yourself, nothing was worth while any more."

"Then you forgive me, and will try and forget?"

"I forgive you, and please God, I shall try and forget."

"But how did you come here, Angeline?"

"Dearest, even my babies did not matter to me so much as you did. I had to leave them—Nannie will look after them—I arranged all in such a hurry. I went after you. And I knew Mr. Purcell—when we went over the ship in the docks—such a nice man. I pleaded so hard. You will not be angry with him for what he did to help me, John?"

"No, I'll try and get his owners to raise his pay."

"I hid until the boat sailed, lest you should be angry and want to turn me away. But you can't now."

"I suppose we had better put about and both land at Liverpool, for all that the South are waiting for this cargo. . . . I have a good mind to carry you on to America for a second honeymoon."

"I want to go to America."

"You may have to. This is not my ship, Angeline, though I am the owner of most of the cargo. The master will have his owners to consider. You don't really want to go to America, Angeline. I have heard that it is a rather crude place, even in peace time, and you want to go home to your babies."

"Please, John, I do. I don't really want to be away all that time; I never thought of it somehow. I only meant if you were going to Charleston, I was going too. And——"

"And what?"

"I'm feeling *dreadfully* seasick."

"That settles it, you poor little thing. Have a tot of this brandy and lie still, whilst I go and see the captain about landing us."

John Woden made his wife as comfortable as possible and hurried away.