

## CHAPTER XXIII

**T**HE blaze of the late afternoon sun shone upon the little city of Nassau, its coloured walls and white streets. Up on the hill by the old fort were two people gazing over the vivid ultramarine of the tropical sea.

"John, why must you go? You don't need to go. It is not your country's war."

"No, Angeline, it is not my country's war, although my sympathies are with the South."

"Slavery?"

"One man to own another; I know it has an ugly sound to your ears. The cause lies deeper than that, Angeline. The South are fighting for the right of the higher to dominate the lower; fighting against a specious equality. The North—I think at heart their aims are to suppress free black labour with which their industrialists will never be able to compete, and to overthrow the Southern aristocracy whom they hate and who despise them."

"But it is not your war, John."

"No; I am merely a trader, who, if lucky, will take guns and ammunition into Charleston in the *Malvina* and bring out cotton. Not my war, but mostly my cargo. Come, Angeline, what would you think of me if I were afraid?"

"I know you would never be afraid; you were not afraid in Vienna long ago."

"Little Miss One-Shoe-Off-and-One-Shoe-On! So you know that, do you, puss? But the captain and crew of the

*Malvina* do not. I could not—you must not ask me to show the white feather."

"I think gun-running is horrid, John. Why does Captain Turner do such a thing for you or any man? I know his sympathies are with the North."

"I like him," said John, "although he does not like me. I appreciate his motives. His owners order him to Charleston, and his sense of duty makes him obey. The cargo and the consignees are their affairs and on their consciences and mine and those, if any, of the other consignors. He is one of a fast-dying race of men, Angeline. He is of those who give all their loyalty and duty to those who pay their wages. He belongs to a rather splendid past."

"I know he dislikes steam," Angeline answered. "He told me he could never get another command in sail. Says that there will not be any sailors in years to come; just deck-hands on steam kettles; that there will be no men able to go aloft; only those able to revel in grease and coal dust. Why, John, he hates trains; he says when he was a boy, good horseflesh was enough to pull any man. Real horseflesh, he means; not the poor beasts pulling the new trams along the Bayswater Road."

"Mr. Train's new trams," laughed John. "Don't you remember how frightened you were to go on them, Angeline, when we went to London two years ago?"

"I wish I were in London, now," sighed Angeline, dolefully.

"*Would I were in an alehouse in London,*" quoted John, smiling. "*I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety.* Is that how you feel, Angeline?"

"I feel dreadfully thirsty, John—and I *do* want you to be safe."

"Well, we shall go down into this little place which is growing so rich on the war, and see what we can give you to drink. But not ale, Angeline. You don't like it?"

"John, I hate it. But I am so thirsty; isn't this a hot place? . . . John, what I said next I meant the most. I *do* want you to be safe. I wish you would come with me."

"You are going home by the next steamer, lady love, and I'll follow very soon after, never you fear. Blockade-running is quite safe when you know the way; these waters are filled with ships going on their unlawful occasions."

They were descending the hill to the town. In the long verandah-shaded room in Bay Street John was to wait with her until dark, when he purposed sailing on his way.

"John," she said, suddenly, "whatever happens—don't tell me I am nervous; dear, something *might* happen—but whatever does, remember I love you. What I discovered; all you told me about—about the other girl," she faltered a little, "I have forgiven all that. At first it hurt me terribly. I thought if I were to lie in your arms again, I should think that she had done the same—ever would it come to me. That is why I shut my door against you that night. But I was wrong."

"Angeline!"

"I knew that I had your love, but she—nothing but your lust. I was your wife; she had just been your mistress."

"Not that, Angeline, not even that. There was but the one night, and as I told you, I was a boy; stirring with new impulses; curious—that was all."

"I, too, John, have stirred with impulses and been curious. I had no lovers but my husband. What would *you* have said if your confession had been mine, if I had experimented at the call of sex?"

"I should have been desperately sorry—for you, but I should have loved you just the same."

She held up her face to be kissed. "It is all past now, dear. I see things differently. I love you: I trust you. You are my husband."

"My wife, Angeline."

"I pray God that He will keep you while you are away—He in whom you do not believe. I do. I wish you believed, John."

"Believe for me, Angeline, and even if I am wrong, there will then be a hope for me."

The *Malvina* was nearing Charleston, behind her a "soldier's wind" at a good ten knots. So far fortune had favoured her vastly; not one of the line of Federal cruisers had hailed her. Now, however, the danger point had come and no longer was her course set ostensibly for Boston; she had turned and was heading due West. A few hours should see her either in Charleston Harbour or a prize of a Federal man-of-war bound for the adjudication of the Admiralty Court in New York.

Old Turner was as stolid as ever, John Woden, as placid and unmoved, but others were getting very "jumpy" in their nerves.

"I wish it had been Wilmington," said Mr. Purcell. "A much safer port for this job. The other side of the Frying-pan Shoals and a straight run for Fort Caswell would have been my plan."

"It is a little nearer New York—an advantage for the Yankees, who might wish to take us there, but no consideration for us," answered John Woden. "Cheer up, Mr. Purcell; we could hardly have had a better night had we ordered it."

The sky was velvety black and there was no moon. The ship's lights were out and, daring all, Turner had put on her every rag of canvas she could carry. She was racing through the water at a pace hardly to be equalled by steam.

"If we are not careful we'll miss the harbour and be into Folly Island," said Purcell, who was in a pessimistic mood. "I have a wife and children in Liverpool."

It was his watch below, but he was in no mood for sleep.

The atmosphere was tense with excitement. Somewhere ahead lay the unlighted Confederate coast and Charleston Harbour; somewhere between unlighted Federal ships of war. Voices were subdued.

"Will he never shorten sail?" murmured Purcell. "My God, what's that?"

There was the flare of a Coston light right ahead, so close that it lit up the *Malvina's* decks. The outline of a great ship lay across her bows. A yell came from many throats.

"Hard-a-port, or you'll be into her!"

Frantic hands spun the wheel, but it was too late. The old West Indiaman went almost bows on into the side of the Federal man-of-war. A rattle of gear and canvas came down from aloft as her fore and main masts went by the board. Helpless, stove in and going down by the head, she swung away from the other ship and drifted into the trough of the waves.

They were trying to lower the boats now. Not hearing his voice, John looked round for old Turner.

"Where's the old man, Purcell?"

"I don't know . . . Easy there . . . Send up a rocket." Purcell was far too busy with orders to heed. Other flares were going up from the blockading fleet now. The vessel they had rammed was too occupied with her own hurts to worry, but boats were being lowered from others. Rockets and Coston lights lit the sea.

John rushed to the port rail and looked over to see someone struggling feebly in the water, every moment being borne further away.

"Mr. Woden! Hurry up, Mr. Woden, and get in this boat."

John did not hear. Very swiftly pulling off his boots and his coat, he dived headforemost into the water. A

few powerful strokes brought him to the struggling man, who was but half-conscious and nearly done. There was a thin stream of blood on his head, welling red each time his head came above the sea.

"It's old Turner. All right, sir, I have you safe."

The other opened his eyes. "Mr. Woden . . . I was hit by the gear . . ."

"It's all right. Leave it to me." He sent a hail over the waters.

Looking round, it was surprising how far they had drifted. The tide was making strongly; already the line of Federal ships, the sinking Indiaman, the lowered boats were far away. Wind and sea alike were against him. Every now and again he sank between great waves, and was then borne on their crests. He hailed again with all the strength of his lungs, but the wind caught his voice and carried it away.

Setting his teeth, he tried to swim to the fleet, but, weighted as he was, he made no progress.

"Captain Turner—Captain Turner, do you hear me? How many miles are we from the shore?"

The other opened his eyes. "I made it three."

"A long swim," said John. "Hold tight round my neck and we'll do it."

"Let me go, Mr. Woden. Let me go. No good both drowning, and you are young and have a wife."

"Whom I dare not face if I play the coward. Both or neither, Captain Turner. Hold on . . ."

It was a very exhausted John who, many hours later in the morning sunlight, dragged his unconscious burden ashore on Folly Island. Even his giant strength had been taxed to the uttermost.

"I wonder if he will be friendly now," he mused as he looked down on the man he had saved.

Far out could be seen the line of the blockaders. One had gone, finding her crippled way to the nearest Federal

port. The others were there, keeping eternal watch and ward for cotton to come out or guns to go in.

"Damn you," said John Woden. "You have cost me fifteen thousand pounds, and my reputation for caring for no man save myself."