

The Second Mission

CHAPTER IV

THE HAUNTED SIGNAL-BOX OF HELVERTON

The 4th of November 19— was as wild a night as one could well wish to see. The rain fell in icy sheets, while the wind rushed with swoops over hill and dale, carrying away signboards and chimney-pots in its mad career, and making the pedestrians cling to the nearest object within reach. Overhead, the sky was covered with black clouds, which occasionally parted to show a glimpse of moonlight, and closed together again, shrouding the universe with a deep pall.

On such nights Nature calls to the sea, and waves arise, grow, and wax mighty, till they assume the dimension of mountains with crests of foam, roaring and seething to their work of destruction. Many a good ship laden with its living freight falls beneath those charging walls of green, and is dashed to pieces on the jagged rocks.

But to-night Death walks not only on the sea, nor is the wail of the dying confined to broken barques; the wind shows its hand within the coast lines, and rooting up trees, hurls them in all directions as if they were slender sticks. Some fall by the roadside, others are swept in the flood of rivers until they are piled in gigantic stacks from bank to bank. Death is waiting by the sign-post which totters in the blast: by the gap in the hedge made by the crashing elms, by the lone church where the weathercock clatters on the steeple. He is everywhere, riding on the storm, plying his sickle when and where he will.

Very near does he seem to the engine-driver as the line leads him across an open tract of country, with nothing to protect him from the elements or save the lives of those behind should the train leave the metals. Sometimes, as he rushes on, he fancies the great engine is being forced aside, that the wheels no longer grip; he almost shuts his eyes not to see the sickening fall. Then he awakes to find that the train is still running safely, that the passengers are yet unhurt; that Death was only telling him what he could do if he chose. "Providence is with me," he thinks, and then strains his eyes to make out that peculiar-looking object that seems to loom ahead just where he must pass.

"What do you make of it, Bill?" he asks his companion.

"My God!" cries Bill. "Pull up, we are in it." Crash! a chorus of cries and the train stands still, but not all of it. A few carriages, roughly shaken by the collision, have become detached, and slide, not along the metals, but over the embankment, down into the sullen waters of the flyer. The engine-driver has short time to say his prayers, his iron horse is twisted and tortured out of shape, and he himself mangled beyond recognition.

This is but one of the horrors of the night in question; there are many others in all parts of the country visited by the tempest.

Folks in Helverton, a village on the Great Western Railway within a score of miles of Bristol, say it is just such a night as the fourth of November five years ago, when the Cornish express met with its appalling disaster.

The accident, due to the carelessness of a signalman, had taken place about a hundred and fifty yards from the Helverton Tunnel, within a stone's throw of the White Hart Inn, the inmates of which had been awakened by the cries of the sufferers. Strange to say, the author of the catastrophe had vanished, and, despite a most vigilant search by the police, was never found. Public opinion therefore credited him with the murder of some fifty passengers.

This was five years ago.

The Helverton signal-box commands on one side a stretch of flat country only relieved from absolute ugliness by the silvery windings of the river Askon; on the other side it is confronted by the yawning mouth of Helverton Tunnel. The wind rages about it, dashing sheets of rain against the window with threatening violence; and John Adams, the man on night duty, shivers uneasily as he turns to a much-soiled novel, in order to forget the storm. There is something uncanny in the beating on the glass, the creaking of the timber, the whistling of the wind. It enforces upon him the sense of his isolation, with no prospect of relief for ten long hours. He is a strong-minded man, well able to do his work; but it is his first experience of the Helverton box, and he does not like it.

“It’s absurd,” he mutters, “yet I could swear some one is here with me. I can feel him at hand though I can’t see anything.”

Every time the wind howled, the feeling of a “presence” became more definite. Once or twice he heard a gentle breathing; once his heart turned cold at the sound of a snore. There was no longer any doubt—some weird presence haunted the cabin.

Human nature suggested flight, the man’s stern sense of duty bade him stay—and he stayed. Glancing at his watch he perceived that it was close on midnight—no train was due for three hours. He determined to brew himself some coffee and have a meal. Thanks to a thoughtful wife, he could sit down to a spread of bread and meat, with cheese as a second course, while the flame of his spirit lamp made his kettle sing.

In spite of his endeavours to feel comfortable, he could not get rid of the idea of some ghostly visitant.

“If nothing more happens,” he assured himself, “I can stick it all right.”

But something did happen. It wanted two minutes to twelve—of this he was strangely certain, when to his horror he saw the shadowy outline of a man’s face pressed against the window-pane, looking into the room with lurid eyes. It was a cruel face, long and thin, with a high retreating forehead and heavy eyebrows. In the intensity of his fear he noticed every detail of the horrid countenance, even those of colour and shape.

The ghostly visitant was not looking at the signalman, but at something else; and, following the direction of the eyes, Adams saw, with another start, a man clad like himself in the company’s uniform, sitting opposite him in a sound sleep. The door swung silently open, admitting a cold blast of wind, and a sprinkling of water. The sinister man from outside approached the table with a cat-like tread.

Adams waited, too fascinated to move or cry out. All resistance had died away out of him, and the bright wicked eyes of the intruder held him glued to his chair. Nearer and nearer the shadowy figure came, until it was within a few feet of the table. Then it paused, placed one hand inside the breast of its coat, fumbled about for a second or two, and drew out something which glittered. Still the man at the table slept on, and the other crept closer—closer—so close that he could have touched any part of his body. It was only when he prepared to strike that the other awoke, glanced over his shoulder, and uttered a cry that froze the blood in Adams’ veins.

The struggle that ensued was brief and conclusive, and the murderer, still dripping with the rain from outside, coolly cleaned his knife on the dead man’s coat, and after mopping up, with a red handkerchief, the blood that had been spilt, sat down, evidently to think out his next movements.

It was then that Adams noticed how curiously his left hand was tattooed, bearing the device of a stag's head with the skull and cross-bones underneath. He had barely time to observe this when the shrill whistle of a train broke upon his ear.

Mechanically he glanced at his watch and trembled. Horror was being heaped upon horror, for this could be no earthly train!

Nearer and nearer it came; the whistle sounded louder and louder—he could even hear the rumbling of the wheels as they hurried over the metals. He calculated that it was within a hundred yards, when with a loud shriek it rattled past the box, and the vibration made the floor quiver. Another moment and it would be in the tunnel. But hark! there is a sound of crashing, the falling of a heavy body—a significant bump, bump, terrible shouts for help, and then the final horror—the loud splash as the carriages are precipitated into the river below. It is so ghastly that Adams' fortitude at last gives way, and he loses consciousness!

How long he remained helpless he could not accurately say—but when he recovered it was 12.30 by his watch. The murderer had vanished, and with him all signs of the crime—and Adams, shaken yet relieved, anxiously awaited the morning, intending to see the last of Helverton once his duty was over. The storm raged till dawn, and the first light broke over a scene of fearful destruction—the fields by the river resembled a great lake dotted over with the debris of timber, one could not say where the shallow water ended and where the deep began.

Adams gazed upon the desolation with a prayer for his wife and children upon his lips—for their cottage was dangerously near those meadows and below the level of the river. How slowly his watch ticked on! It was the longest night he ever knew. Each minute seemed an hour, and each hour seemed a day, and his time not up yet!

One o'clock, two, three, four, FIVE! The last hour seemed longer than all the rest put together, and he could have cried with joy to see Bill Black's lantern flashing through the gloom, and to hear his heavy, lumbering step on the gravel path. There was no disguising the anxiety of his greeting nor the feverishness of his handshake. Sturdy Bill Black wondered if Adams had gone mad.

Adams did not speak of the night incident, but breathlessly asked after his family, and uttered a fervent "Thank God!" to hear of the safety of the cottage. "Though it was a precious close shave; your missis," said Bill with solemn emphasis, "could heave a bucket into the water, it lies so nigh her door."

"Thank God she didn't get heaved in herself," and Adams broke into a weak, helpless sort of laugh that frightened his companion. The strain on his nerves had told at last, and with the much-needed relief, the reaction had set in with hysteria. Black, not being an emotional man himself, and also ignorant of what his friend had gone through, thought it odd, and only muttered a few awkward words of consolation. Adams, however, seemed to resent even this, and walked out of the ill-omened box, shaking his feet as if to free them from the murder-tainted dust, as he walked down the railway track.

As he crossed the bridge which spans the river at its widest part, he met his wife with the two children, and there was love in her eyes, such as he had never seen so clearly since their courting days.

"You look mighty cold, honey," she cried, and she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"It has been cold all night," he replied, so solemnly that she stared at him wonderingly.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

“Nay, sweetheart, but much to be thankful for; you and the kids are safe, what more can I want?”

But the woman was not convinced. While he warmed himself before their cottage fire, his meal standing steaming on the table, she plied him with the same questions.

“Come now, honey, what’s up? You look that woebegone, you might have seen a ghost!”

Adams started and shivered so visibly that she laughed. “Well, Jack,” she cried, “tell me whose ghost it was, and what it did, for upon my word I believe you have been scared!”

Adams crouched closer to the fire.

“If women minded their own business,” he muttered, ungraciously enough, “the world would turn round faster.”

There was another peal of laughter, then with feminine mutability Mrs Adams flung herself upon the bed and commenced to cry. Jack could not stand this.

“Cheer up, lassie!” he said, with something like a sob in his own throat; “if I spoke rough, I’m sorry, but I’m a bit out of sorts. You see I was worrying all night about you and the kids, thinking of that flood rushing through the valley, knocking down houses and drowning every one. What was more natural on such a night? You should just have heard the wind playing Old Harry round that box.” He paused and turned round to the food with a show of appetite that would have contradicted his words, had it been genuine; but she saw at once that it was assumed to please her, and she smiled.

“But that ain’t all, Jack,” she broke in, “and I’m dying to hear the truth. Come, tell me!”

The man ceased eating, and spoke with the slowness of his class:

“Well, suppose I do, what good will it do you? and you won’t believe a word I say!”

This she gainsaid, but still her husband hesitated. He had a horror of being thought a fool, and there was something decidedly incongruous in a ghost story this sunshiny morning. It was only when he saw his wife was getting angry—and she had a temper—that he at last complied. With an effort to be fluent he told her what had taken place. At the end of his rambling speech she cross-examined him like any lawyer. Poor Adams succumbed to the test and bungled badly; nevertheless, she was satisfied of the truth of his story, and, to his relief, did not ridicule him. On the contrary she remarked, as he lay in bed in a corner of the room with the blinds down, that she had “a good mind to sift the matter, there’s something in it.”

These were the last words he heard before he fell into a sound sleep, which lasted unbroken until she awoke him late in the afternoon with the welcome tale of tea.

By her advice he told his story to no one but the stationmaster, a shrewd, silent man, who heard him out and shut him up with the ironical observation, “Don’t be such a fool again,” but he coupled it with the hint to “Keep his mouth shut, and not be afraid, for he wouldn’t see it again till the same night next year,”—which made Adams marvel all the more.

One thing, however, he resolved, with all the stubbornness of his nature—to keep a sharp lookout for the pale man with the tattoo marks.

CHAPTER V

MR JONES, SHIPOWNER AND FRIEND

The Hotwell Road, Bristol, still contains many houses interesting to those who are fond of the relics of eighteenth century architecture.

Not far from Cumberland Basin stands an old-fashioned public-house, once the resort of George the Third's Jack Tars, and the scene of many an awkward brawl—now the respectable headquarters of merchant skippers and their cronies.

The proprietor, Jabez Wheeler, has withdrawn from his parlour, yielding it with the best possible grace to David Jones, one of his oldest patrons, and a man whom he desired to please at any price. Jones is the owner of a fleet of small vessels trading between London, Bristol, and Cork with mixed cargoes. It is with the *Maria Jane*, a barquentine, still called "stout" by sailors who like the word and do not mind applying it to iron plates thick with rust, that this story deals. Twice the Board of Trade has pounced on her and threatened to condemn her unless she is more carefully loaded and kept in better order. Yet the boat has always managed to sail on the appointed day with her preposterous crew of seven, her heavy cargo, and her honest skipper—a man a trifle old, perhaps, for the wearying life afloat, but with a character unspotted as the sails of the smartest yacht. Some knowing ones have been heard to throw out hints to the effect that the *Maria Jane* was well insured, and that a few pounds would please old Jones more than the safety of his employés. Others—but of course there are spiteful fellows everywhere—growl out anathemas over their grog, and prophesy a fate for the *Maria Jane* like that of the *Susan Grey*, which sank with all hands off the Manacle Rocks, one moonlight night when the sea was still as a millpond. She too had belonged to David Jones, and he had moved into a larger and finer house after the disaster.

The private sitting-room ceded for the evening to David Jones is similar to the parlour of most houses of the style. There are the same cheap prints in tawdry frames—Nelson dying in Hardy's arms over the mantelpiece, Kitchener of Omdurman between the windows, and a few coloured heads of burlesque actresses; a round table with a red and blue check cloth and a workbox, a horsehair sofa with a white antimacassar—and a general frowsiness of atmosphere.

The only occupant of the room at this time was Mr Jones himself, sitting before the fire, his chair tilted back till it seemed on the verge of collapse, and a much discoloured pipe in the corner of his mouth.

Few people would be favourably prepossessed on an introduction to him. There was a selfish glitter in the prominent blue eyes, and a coarseness amounting to brutality in the full lips and thick nostrils. By his dress he would pass muster as a well-to-do tradesman upon whom one had better not venture to play tricks. Drawing an envelope from his pocket he slowly pulled out of it a piece of notepaper and perused the scrawling calligraphy:—

"4 TENNISON STREET, LONDON, S.E.

"*Friday, March 20th, 19—*

"DEAR MR JONES,—Your letter to hand and contents carefully considered. I will meet you at the place you mention at the time named. Cannot, however, agree to proposal on terms stated, as the risk is so great.—Yours faithfully,

"THOMAS B. HUMBER."

"What a stomach folks have for money!" Mr Jones soliloquised between puffs. "I consider fioo ample for one in his impecunious state, besides, he'll get a few pickings from the ship. Why should I give in to his grumblings when there are lots of poor devils would jump at the offer of £50? Why—?"

He regarded the jamb on the left with an angry stare, and apparently annoyed at its inability to answer him, went on with increasing irritation:

“He strikes for more because he thinks he has the pull over me and could send me to the dock with a word. Bah! the pitiful fool forgets his own calendar. A pretty night’s work that was! and I said that’s the man for me, and I was right; I always am in speculations. The devil is a better friend than God, at any rate”—and the man chuckled hoarsely—“he hears when I use his name, and t’other don’t.”

The humour of this remark was too much for Mr Jones, and he laughed long and loudly. The idea of the devil’s help suited his mood—he loved to boast of the good understanding between himself and Diaphernes.

His merriment, however, was interrupted. A knock came to the door, and in response to his invitation a stranger entered.

The newcomer was a tall man with fair hair and a cadaverous face—a face noticeable for its cunning and the cruel glint of the eyes. His mouth and chin were hidden by a moustache and beard of the same undecided dust-colour as his hair. He had nothing of the slight “swagger” so usual in seamen, though his clothes indicated the ocean as his profession. On the contrary, a certain cringing air which would have repelled all honourable men, pointed rather to the tradesman. He entered the room in the doubtful way of one who expects an important but distasteful interview, and glanced at Mr Jones with furtive restlessness.

“Sit down, my friend,” said the latter. “I suppose you have just arrived from London. Upon my word, I envy you being in town, it’s so dull and sleepy in this old city.”

The sailor drew a long breath, as one anxious to get through an unpleasant task, and replied, “Yes, I have only been in Bristol an hour. You got my note?”

Jones eyed him steadily. Then puffing out a cloud of smoke and moving so as to allow the newcomer a share of the warmth, he signalled to him to be seated, and made answer:

“To be sure, it came by the morning post. Let me see”—and after a slight pause during which his eyes never left the other’s face—“you didn’t seem satisfied with the sum offered—eh?”

The sailor shifted uneasily, more at the stare than at the words.

“There’s my wife and children, Mr Jones,” he muttered. “Who’s going to provide for them? And you must allow, sir, the game is risky.”

“I’m glad you’re so provident,”—his host spoke with unconcealed irony—“your wife and children must be compensated. But £300 is a lot of money. Many men would do the job for half.”

He watched the effect of the words—it was not what he expected. The sailor had recovered his presence of mind, and, now that the ice was broken, called up all his native craftiness.

“You are right, sir,” he replied with an extra amount of sulkiness, “many would do it for half, yes, a quarter. But,” he lowered his voice impressively, “there are very few who know you as well as I. We are such old friends.”

Mr Jones coloured—the rogue knew how to play his cards. There had been too many shady transactions between them to make it safe to throw him over now, and the fellow was sharp enough to appreciate the situation.

“You would blackmail me if I refused, then?” Mr Jones went on. “Do you add that to your other accomplishments?”

The sailor, feeling victory was within his grasp, was not to be balked.

“Blackmail’s not a nice word,” he observed, “but if you force me, I don’t say ‘no’ to it. You daren’t clap me in prison, and I’m not afraid of being murdered.”

“Or of murdering either—eh?” asked Jones.

The man muttered an imprecation, his skin turning three shades paler.

“Oh, come,” he exclaimed, with a pitiable attempt at jocularly, “don’t harp on that old subject. It’s worn threadbare; besides, you’ve no proof!”

Mr Jones smiled indulgently. He liked to touch upon people’s sore points—it flattered his vanity.

“Well,” he said, refilling the other’s glass with whisky, “I don’t want to quarrel; let’s say £130.”

The sailor frowned. “Won’t do,” he muttered. “It ain’t worth the risk, and you’ll score too much—you, who have only to sit still and wait.”

“I shan’t give a cent more,”—Mr Jones spoke with decision—“and if you won’t do it, I’ll go elsewhere.”

“Say £200, and I’m your man.”

“No, £130, and any swag you can take from the wreck. The captain may be of use in that way, he carries a few valuables.”

For several minutes there was a solemn silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock. Both men thought they were by themselves in that tiny parlour where the flaring firelight casts grotesque shadows on the walls—shadows resembling bodiless heads, and headless bodies—yet, standing in the uncertain light by the chair of the sailor Humber, one hand resting on his shoulder and the other pressed against his forehead, was a tall, gaunt, copper-coloured form, very weird and sinister. Every now and then it bent over the man’s head and breathed evil words which sank into the ready blackness of his soul. And that form was mine—Agonostes, humble servant of Diaphernes.

And at my instigation Humber faced his tempter with the reply:

“I’ll take it, then, on condition the money is paid in advance.”

“No, no, my worthy friend,” replied his host, “what guarantee have I that the work would be done after?”

Humber rose to the occasion. “And what guarantee have I that you’ll keep your part of the bargain after I’ve done the work? Come now, Mr Jones!”

The man he addressed smoked and meditated awhile. “I’ve hit it!” he said at last. “I give you £50 in advance and the rest whenever you come back with the news.”

After some further parleying—for my client was loath to fall in with this proposal—the agreement stood as follows

At ten o’clock next day Humber was to accompany Jones to the County Bank, and there receive from him £50, and on the ensuing Monday he would embark as mate on board the *Maria Jane*. He would have plenty of opportunity before Wednesday to form a friendship with the man who would have charge of the wheel that night. The captain, an officer with a reputation for seamanship, and a man of strict integrity, was fond of a glass or two of grog, so he could make all safe in that quarter. The fate of the ship then would be in his hands—his own must depend on the weather, the nature of the vessel’s injuries, and his own powers of swimming. When Mr Jones pocketed the insurance he would receive the remaining £80.

Humber clinched the bargain with a couple more glasses of whisky, and then, somewhat hazier in the mind than he had been two hours previously, he bade his host good-bye, and stepped out into Hot-well Road. The sky was bright with stars, and the clear moon augured fine weather. The air also was crisp and dry.

The man halted for a moment beneath the electric light, and stooped to fasten his bootlace. A passerby glanced casually at him, and uttered a sudden exclamation. Humber looked up in

surprise to meet the horror-stricken gaze of an absolute stranger. Yet, filled with a vague foreboding of peril, he hurried off.

“D—n!” was his comment. “What a fool I was to let that Jap tattoo me! I wonder if my hand’s given me away. Yet, who the devil could the fellow have been—and why did he stare?”

CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNING OF THE VOYAGE

There is nothing picturesque about this ship, with her dingy black hull, her yellow masts with their rain-sodden rigging, and the ropes lying strewn about her deck. On her stern you see in white letters the name, “*Maria Jane*, Bristol.”

If you go a bit farther and descend into her narrow sweltering hold, you will find that the cargo—half as much again as she is registered to carry—is packed so close that it would be well-nigh impossible to wedge in another case.

Her crew should number ten at least, and she carries only seven—not including a stewardess, the cook’s wife, and a stowaway. Her list ran—captain, Joseph Thomas; mate, Thomas B. Humber; boatswain, Luke Radnor; cook-steward, Carl Heineman; able-bodied seamen, Fielding and Gunter; ship’s boy, Wilkes. There were also the stewardess, Elizabeth Heineman, and William Hardup, stowaway, of whom more anon.

The nine persons on board are quite enough for her scanty accommodation in case of disaster—for she possesses one crazy boat and three or four life-belts. The boat is sticking in the chocks, for the ropes are new, cheap, and nasty to handle, and she could scarcely be launched at less than half an hour’s notice.

Bearing in mind the owner’s instructions, Humber first set to work to curry favour with the captain. It was not easy. The skipper, a bluff, honest seaman, with sterling qualities of his own and keen appreciation of the like in others, took an instant aversion to the lanky mate, and showed it. But there are people in this world who will not take offence. Humber was one of them. He took the skipper’s snubs with saintly forbearance, varying the game by bullying the crew on the sly.

He discovered that the boatswain would be at the wheel just at the time when the vessel should be off the Lizard, and he laid his plans accordingly.

The weather on Monday was ideal. The *Maria Jane* passed slowly down the Channel, leaving the Holmes and the dangerous North Devon coast behind. Everything seemed to augur a prosperous voyage.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday passed uneventfully, the *Maria Jane* running merrily with stretched canvas before a gentle nor’west wind, her bows scarcely rising and falling in the soft green swell. About noon on Wednesday, the wind began to increase, and a few clouds crept up black round the horizon. Sails were reefed, hatches battened down, and the ship made as ready as possible to meet the coming storm, while the skipper, with the grim look of the warrior upon his face—the look that only those who have fought and conquered the elements can wear—paced the little slippery deck prepared for anything.

One only needed to glance at his strong face, the set mouth and square resolute chin, to recognise a man bound by that strongest of human bonds, the tie of Duty. Nothing—sea, nor wind, nor danger had ever daunted him. Yet, strong man as he was, he had one weakness—he loved his drink. He was no drunkard, but an epicure. In a locker in his cabin, well concealed

from the inquisitive eye, there it lay shining in its glass casing—port—real genuine port, Ai brand—but no one had ever seen him drink it. It was only when his door was bolted, and some hours of sleep before him, that he opened the locker with delicious expectancy, and drew thence that precious bottle. There was always much love-making on his part,—a gentle pressure of the fingers, a softening of the eyes, an affectionate smile, and then—oh, heavenly!—a long deep pull at the soothing liquid.

On Thursday night, after the first watch was over (it extends from 8 P.M. till midnight), he retired to his cabin. Just as he was on the first rung of the ladder a figure darted down the passage from the direction of his cabin and vanished. Feeling puzzled, he followed it, as he thought to the galley, but in spite of a vigorous search discovered no one. Next to the galley was the mate's cabin, and thinking some one might be hidden there, he opened the door and peered in. A flood of moonlight poured through the port-hole direct on the pillow of the bunk, and he saw the head of the sleeper.

"Hullo, Humber!" he cried in a high-pitched voice, "are you ill or anything?"

The only answer was the heavy breathing of the slumberer: so, half-convinced that he had been the victim of an optical illusion, the skipper closed the door and went quietly to his own cabin.

All night the ship held on her course with the wind roaring and the white spray swilling the decks, while on the boatswain rested the responsibility for the safety of those asleep within the black hull. On—on—a changing sky, now black as a sable mantle, now bright with the rays of the moon, a heaving, angry sea, crying for human victims. The lone watcher would not have been a man had he not felt a certain awe at the surrounding scene, and had he not shuddered a little at the foaming expanse, the flapping of the loose tackle, the thud of waves on the shaking deck, the souging of the bitter wind. "The devil is loose to-night," he muttered; yet he did not see the copper-coloured fiends astride on the surging billows. And as the vessel sailed at the mercy of the elements, God and the devil alike seemed to leave her alone to take her chance with Nature.

Friday morning broke clear and cold, with a blue sky and a hint of snow-clouds down Channel under a falling wind. The effects of the previous night were plainly visible on board the *Maria Jane*. Her sails were torn, her gear unroven, a sweeping wave had smashed her bulwarks, and the deck was strewn with debris. She presented a sorry spectacle to the men who crossed the deck to their respective duties, and some exchanged forebodings as to their fate should they meet another storm. To add to their anxiety, their boat, such as it was, was gone, and they had only the little dinghy to look to in emergencies. The two A.B.'s who were trying to repair some of the damage took matters at their worst. Sailors are often wont to outrival landmen as pessimists.

"I'll give yer the straight tip, Bill," said one "that if the skipper don't put in at Penzance and have this blamed old craft made taut, I'll d—d well desert when we get ashore."

"Ay, that's my way of thinking," said his companion; "it's tantalisin' Providence, so it is. 'Ere's the *Maria Jane* loaded with twice as much cargo as is good for 'er, the plates on 'er bottom rotting, 'er sails 'anging like blooming rags, and 'er only boat gone. No, I don't call it fair, and if he don't lay low for repairs, I'm with you."

The men would have said more had not the skipper come up and cursed them, as only a skipper can, for a pair of skulkers.

"Stir yourselves, you lazy lubbers!" he shouted with a clenching of his fists; "what the H— do you think you're here for—to gas about your sweethearts? Rouse yourselves, or I'll have to come and wake you!"

Bill swore under his breath, and sullenly obeyed. There was no getting in a word edgewise with such a captain, whose fist was no mere ornament, and whose temper stopped short only of manslaughter. So the men ceased grumbling and worked on, while the sun rose higher; and by and by they sighted the bare rocks of Land's End gleaming in the sunshine, while the wind blew over its cliffs to give them a foretaste of Cornish hospitality. In spite of the white breakers the sea was much calmer now. Away on their right they saw a three-funneled steamer ploughing her way oceanwards, and knew her for the latest addition to the American line. Nearer in they passed a tramp in woeful plight, her decks swept clean, and her bows heading for Penzance, though, judging from her present speed, it would be long before her presence graced the harbour.

The skipper of the *Maria Jane* would have done what he could for her, but as she showed no distress signals, he concluded that she meant to struggle on independently, and left her, holding on his own course with dogged tenacity. About sunset there was a freshening of the breeze from the south-west, and some formidable white-headed rollers gathered in the Channel. With the past night's danger fresh in their minds, the crew were in no way disposed to meet the advent of darkness without apprehension. Yet none of them cared to tackle the skipper in his present mood; so they kept their feelings to themselves, or only vented them in invectives in the seclusion of the fo'c'sle.

It was a comfortless fore-castle enough—a relic of the old school when seamen were considered a little beneath the level of cattle, and stowed away anywhere, anyhow. Filthy beams covered with cockroaches stretched over their hammocks, and there was little or no place wherein to stow their chests. The *Maria Jane* had long been recognised as the worst-equipped ship in all Bristol Docks, and none knew it better than her unfortunate crew.

Now, as they sat there prior to turning in to their hammocks, they were tortured with the presentiment of a hurrying doom, eager to snatch from them even such a life as they had. Neglected, depressed, overworked dregs of the shipping world as they were, they could fear—they had feelings—and their souls rose in revolt against the iron ears of Providence and skippers. It was not that they disliked their captain. Indeed, they preferred him to many men they knew in port; but they hated his fine sense of duty and carelessness of danger—they wanted to save their own skins, and cared for little besides. My client played his subtle game well in their company, friend of all parties, espouser of none. He had always been ready to follow his evil tendencies. True, there were moments when conscience gained an audience, even a triumph—but they were very rare. Up to the present I had found no difficulty in defeating the machinations of my antagonist. Now, however, an unexpected obstacle was thrown in my path in the person of the stewardess. This woman was no stranger to Humber. She had been an old flame of his, and even now preferred him to her ugly German husband. She had married the latter for two reasons—he had a snug berth, and she loved the sea—a Bristol lass, she had been born and bred to the fascination of it. Humber saw in her a useful ally. She was avaricious; he remembered she was unscrupulous; he recollected strange rumours about her step-daughter's death; and with these characteristics he felt sure of her.

After a shrewd observation of her treatment of the steward, and comparing it with her attitude towards himself, he made a bold movement. There was no difficulty in finding her alone, and a few moments put her in possession of all his designs. The conversation took place in the officer's cabin.

The waves beat angrily against the port-holes, and the floor never remained a minute at the same level; sometimes bows up, sometimes down, or again a heavy list to port or starboard. Had the furniture not been securely fastened, there would have been a tremendous breakage; as it

was, merely a few odds and ends were thrown about. Humber signed to the woman to be seated, and then examined the door to guard against eavesdropping.

The stewardess was wary, she misunderstood his precautions, and half rose to remonstrate.

“Don’t be uneasy, my dear,” the fellow said familiarly, seating himself opposite to her and gazing into her brown eyes. They were hard and dry—thoroughly suited to his purpose. He began cautiously, “Do you know why I have brought you here?”

“*Brought*, indeed!” the woman tossed her head. “Hoity toity—what next?”

“Beg pardon, I meant no offence. You came of your own accord, my darling, of course,” he said soothingly.

“That’s better, Tom,” she leaned back and smiled, but the eyes never lost their glitter. “But what do you want? Remember, I’m married now.” She made a show of edging away from him.

“You ain’t so well off but what you could do with little more money, are you?” He asked it with such an extra amount of cunning that she became alarmed.

Just at this moment I was aware of an opposing force, as if my will, after running freely, had been brought to a standstill by a contrary current of energy.

I stood at the left hand of my client, my elbow on his shoulder as I whispered in his ear:

“Be explicit,” I said, “she is weak and will be won.”

But her answer disappointed us.

“What do you mean?” she said coolly, smoothing her black apron with coarse hands.

“That’s soon told, but you must swear secrecy. Say ‘I’ll never tell a soul what you are going to tell me—so—help me, God.’ ”

She gazed with fear into his eyes and held her tongue.

“Pish,” I muttered, directing my attention to her, “don’t be a fool! The man means something to your advantage. Swear, and break the oath after if you will.”

But then I heard the hated voice of Sagatheela, low and clear and full of pathos—that somehow against my will made me think of perfect beauty, for nothing unlovely could possess such a voice.

“Nay, do not heed the ill-adviser—he means no good. How darest thou break an oath before God—and of surety what he tells thee will be a secret of no easy keeping.”

Her breath came like lily-scent to my nostrils, and made me hate her but the more.

“Art thou here, meddling chatterer—and why?” I said, approaching the spot where I judged she stood.

“To be of service to mankind,” she replied. I marvelled at the calmness of her voice.

“Service,” I sneered, “a plague on thy service! Wilt thou thwart the work of my Prince Diaphernes?”

“Ay, I would, and I will,” she replied. “Yet I bear thee no ill-will, Agonostes; if thou but knewest, thou wouldest leave alone evil and let mischief take care of itself.”

“A pretty counsel indeed,” I broke in, “the cry of all thy sex—leave alone evil! Yet they seek not good themselves, but break men’s hearts and ruin souls. Ay, I know them—deny it not.”

I heard her sigh, but she spoke to me no more. My client grew impatient.

“Are you afraid to answer, my dear,” he said, leaning forward and laying his hand on hers. There was not much difference between the two coarse, toilworn, insensitive hands.

“I don’t know what you are going to say. I might want to let out on you.”

She was candid for perhaps the first time in her life—and I cursed Sagatheela.

“I’ll risk it then, and tell you,” said Humber. “I have it in my mind to be rich yet. You laugh, but maybe it’s nearer than you think. I’ve been promised £130 for one job.”

The woman looked at him curiously, but he was evidently serious, so she let him continue.

“Yes,” he said, stroking her hand. “£130, how do you like that? Enough to start a tidy public and leave a bit over in the bank. And then I could marry the woman I’ve an eye for.” He paused and watched her colour fade. (“All these dark women are jealous,” I whispered, “follow it up.”) “The woman I marry would be well off—she might do worse. The Hotwell Road’s the right place for business, eh?”

“Yes,” she replied with a certain nervous slowness. “But,” with a sudden quickening, “what is the job, and who is the woman?”

“Your oath first,” he said resolutely.

A terrible struggle took place now for the soul of the woman. I sprang at Sagatheela and tried to thrust her from her place, but she met me with strong anus, and for a while kept me at bay. At last, with a fervent cry to Diaphernes, I hurled her off for a moment, and the willing natures of the man and woman did the rest. The stewardess hesitated no longer, and the oath was taken. I no longer felt the presence of Sagatheela.

My client took the citadel by storm and explained all without reserve.

“There will be no danger,” he said in an explanatory tone; “when the vessel sinks, you will leap with me into the sea—we shall wear lifebelts, and, with the tide in our favour, shall easily reach Coverack Cove.”

The woman shivered, the risk seemed to her awful; still, the money loomed on the horizon, and she was very tired of her fat German husband.

“What do you want me to do?” she asked cautiously.

“Doctor the lads’ grog,” said my client hurriedly, after peering round at the door. “Slip some of this powder into it. Make sure of your husband; I’ll see to the skipper and the man at the wheel. We’ll collect any valuables we can carry easily, wait till the ship is about to strike, and drop off her stern. I suppose there is *some* risk, but think what succeeding means! Now, will you help?”

She was silent, weighing *pro* and *con*. Life was not too full of promise with her German spouse. He might lose his billet, and she was tired of the sea. All the romance of it had faded. With a fine recklessness that told of gipsy blood in her veins, she closed with the terrible offer, and sealed the compact with a kiss that seemed to burn into Humber’s lips.

The conspirators had little time for dallying, for the Lizard lights were already left behind, and the vessel still kept well on her true course.

It was only on very rare occasions that the seamen received an addition to their supper of coffee or tea, with fried fish, onions and bread—only when the weather was extra cold, or their spare hours were taken from them for heavy work in high-running seas. There was no lowering of the temperature now, nor any sign of imminent danger, but she brought them grog—and with sailor-like simplicity, they put it down to sheer good nature.

She was kinder, cheerier, prettier than they ever remembered to have seen her before, and took their rough compliments with a coquettishness and mirth that made them drink a toast in her honour.

“Carl Heineman’s a lucky devil to have got such a girl,” said the boatswain; “wish I were in his shoes!”

“Ay,” said another, “she’s a wench worth having, and mighty good to us chaps too, at times.”

“At times,” muttered a third, who was no believer in women, and even on this occasion could not smother his distrust. “This rum tastes bitter,” he growled on; but they all knew his way, and paid no heed.

The woman had not spared the laudanum. A happy sleepiness soon made itself manifest among the men, and one by one they yielded to it. They lay there on the boards, some with their heads on their chests, one on the table, all silent and asleep. The skipper gave no trouble. Alone with his beloved port, he never noticed that the bottle had been tampered with, but sipped and sipped in the comfort of his warm cabin, till he lost count of the articles in the place. The pictures in their cheap frames, the books, the chairs, the table—all receded farther and farther, and lost themselves in haziness. He no longer heard the sea without, nor felt the rolling of the ship; he forgot all the troubles of the day and the previous night's anxieties, everything, in the delicious drowsiness which warped his senses and carried him to the very gates of paradise. By-and-by even that was blank; he remembered no more, and slept on in a dreamless and unwaking slumber.

There was now only one man to make sure of—the A.B. who had relieved the boatswain at the wheel, and he was standing grimly at his post wrapped up in his oilskin and sou'wester and cursing his luck.

Providence allowed this man, blaspheming as he was, a chance of life: Fate held aloof for a moment and watched the game. As Humber was making his way aft, the stewardess threw herself in his path, and with tears in her eyes averred her sorrow at what she had done, and begged him to desist.

So—Sagatheela had conquered!

The woman threw her anus round Humber's neck and kept him from ascending the companion way.

"Don't," she cried, "don't let the men be murdered. We have done enough; let us drop overboard now, and get off with their valuables."

"Nonsense," said Humber gruffly, "there's the £130."

"Never mind it," she pleaded, "let us be satisfied with what we've got. I can't bear to think we are murderers—it's dreadful. Tom, darling, don't!"

The man's nerves were failing and he began to fall in with her views. I sprang to his side, only to meet with a repulse which hurled me back, and which was the beginning of one of the most terrible struggles in which I had ever been engaged. I was forced on my knees, out through wood and iron, away from my client and his interlocutor—away until the dark water lapped about my feet and I fell without a splash into the depths.

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF THE VOYAGE

As speedily as the battered tiger renews his attack upon the furious boar, I sprang up again and hurled myself through wood and iron to the spot I had just left. Then I laughed in triumph. My gaze encountered the form of the woman lying prone upon the floor, her feet resting upon the lowest step of the stair. Had the rolling of the ship caused this accident—or—? A glance at the body told me all I wished to learn. Humber had killed her; I saw the crimson pouring from a great wound over her heart, a great gaping wound that no fall could have caused. My client's weakness had vanished. Everything made for success now, and, as I reasoned with him, what were a few lives more or less to *him*? The men could never rise again to trouble him, they would be hidden away fathoms deep, and bound down by the heavy water. Not one must escape. He was well rid of this woman, to begin with. She had rebelled against her share of the work—

broken one part of her oath—might she not equally well break the other and denounce him? But he must act promptly. I caught him by the arm and urged him vehemently. Yet he hesitated.

Sagatheela spoke too—and he listened.

A wave of anger enveloped me and filled me with fresh vigour. My words became suaver, more plausible, and I was gaining ground. Suddenly a huge wave broke above us, and the spray poured down the companion like a shower over my client. It was a timely occurrence. The man's face hardened, his eyes glittered angrily, and he ascended the companion ladder and walked quickly towards the wheel.

The moonlight showed the gaunt Cornish coastline in the distance, but only at intervals, for every now and then clouds of darkness covered the sky—and then only the twinkling light of the Lizard gleamed over the heaving sea.

Humber splashed over the deck, keeping his equilibrium with difficulty.

"Hullo, Bill!" he shouted. No answer.

"Hub, Bill!"

The man looked round.

"Who the devil's calling me?" he snarled.

"It's me! The mate! How are you getting on?"

"Neither better nor worse than one expects on a Hell's night like this. What do you want?"

"The skipper told me to look after you—thought you might be having a tough time. Have a pull of whisky?" and a flask glinted in the moonlight.

"You're a nice officer," laughed the A.B., "offering a drink to a man on duty, but as you *are* an officer, I reckon I may as well."

He took the flask, and placing it to his lips, swallowed the liquid in great gulps. My client watched him eagerly. The stuff was so strongly doctored that it ought to act almost at once.

"That's right, lad," he said, when he thought the man had had enough, "that will keep the cold out. It's genuine stuff and won't hurt your head; besides, we're on a clear course now with the Manacles well to leeward."

The seaman was smacking his lips.

"Yes," he said diffidently, "we poor fellows are out in all weathers, freezing, hailing, snowing, or raining, it's all one to us. What odds? To-day we live, to-morrow we die. Who would be a blamed sailor if he hadn't been born with a restless spirit, I wonder?"

"Well, well," said Humber sententiously. "I suppose ours is a hard life; but it's better than starving in dock, or the humdrum of the labourer. Now, I must be off; good luck!"

Humber went below, and found all silent as the grave. The skipper was snoring, the crew lay heavy and unconscious, and the only vigilant creature on board was the stowaway lad, whose existence Humber had forgotten.

William Hardup was a slum boy, reared in a vicious home, with only evil companions and a craving taste for unhealthy literature. He had the usual thirst for adventure, and, under its influence, had sneaked on board the *Maria Jane*, as she lay coaling in the Cumberland Basin.

But his search for romance was a vain one. There was nothing of the bold buccaneer about this vessel, no cut-throat sailors, nor armour-plated sides, nor punishment at the mast-head, and not even by the rope's end. No, but worse, far worse, he was made to work—swab decks, peel potatoes, ladle in coal, and be generally useful—it was cruelly disappointing. He did more work in twenty-four hours after he had made his presence known than he had done in all his previous life.

Between toil and sea-sickness, he thought he would be better off in gaol, but the green waves between him and land showed him that he could not even desert.

He had been skulking in the galley when the fall of the stewardess made him wonder what could be the matter. Cautiously opening the door he peered out into the passage, when a sudden lurch of the boat sent him out head foremost. The walls of the passage now towered above him, now lay low at his feet in a giddy chasm. Everything was like a nightmare to the wretched boy, who felt his flesh creep at the sound of the wind and waves. When he saw the woman's body lying in a pool of blood a few yards off, his hair rose and he fairly yelled. Just then an extra lurch pitched him over again, this time full on top of the corpse.

Gathering himself with terrified rapidity, he scrambled up the ladder to the deck, where he promptly landed on his head—for the boards were as slippery as glass. It was here that Humber found him prone.

"Get up, you lumbering scullion!" the mate shouted, accompanying his words with a lusty kick. "What do you want up here, prying around when you ought to be in your bunk, you good-for-nothing stowaway? Get below or I'll—well, I don't know what I won't do."

There was a look in his eyes that froze the blood in his listener's veins, and the stains on the mate's hands and clothes added to the lad's horror. He pulled the boy to his feet and sent him whizzing down the hatchway, with a cuff on the side of his head. All was going well, the steersman lay sleeping soundly on the planks beside the wheel. Humber caught hold of the spokes and sharply turned the ship's head landward. He could not see the coast, but he knew that his calculations were sound, and that about an hour should bring the *Maria Jane* to the Manacles. There are moments in every man's life when he passes through an acute crisis, and stops as it were on the brink of a chasm which his next action must render impassable.

Some call this the awakening of responsibility—the dying flicker of conscience—others, the master effort of a guardian angel. Cab it what you will, it still remains a fact—sure to come sooner or later in the course of existence.

Such a moment came to Thomas Humber as he touched the wheel. He had lived a restless, criminal life, sensual, revengeful, consistently avaricious. From his cradle his passion had swayed him wholly. Yet his guardian angel kept to his side, sorrowful, æpulsed, discouraged, yet not wholly driven away, ever ready to stretch out her white arms and shield him—his angel, my enemy, Sagatheela. She was pleading with him now.

"It is a crime against God and man," she urged. "Thou shalt do no murder, it is written. Thou shalt answer before Him who judges. And for the fate of thy shipmates, the wreck of the ship, thou shalt also answer to Man. Oh, think web before it is too late. By the great and infinite love of the Christ whom thou hast mocked, by the tie of common nature which binds thee even to these men—pause, I adjure thee. Think of the women and children helpless, destitute. Darest thou cause this? Hast thou the wicked hardihood to create such trouble as would make even thy world shun thee as a thing too foul to live? Darest thou, with such a calendar of crime written in blood upon thy brow, tempt the sea, weighed down as thou art with stolen goods? Ah! be advised—pause—repent! God is merciful, even to thee, even now."

With such words she assailed my client, until to my dismay I saw he was inclined to yield, fumbling at the wheel to correct the vessel's course and turn her away from the nearing Manacles.

The waves were increasing again, chasing each other across the moonlight stretch. It was a wonderful scene, at once silent and noisy, such as one can only meet at sea, with a fickle moon and an angry sea and wind and a line of dark cliffs beyond. I set myself to my difficult task.

“Ay, consider well,” I spoke into his ear, as I laid my hand on the arm directing the wheel. “Consider well, and carefully. Too much has been done to leave the rest undone. It is thy life or theirs. Go on! The captain and crew lie helpless; thou hast their money and jewels. Wilt thou restore these? After thy labour art thou not entitled to some reward? And when they wake and find the dead stewardess, find the man at the helm drugged also, will they have mercy in their hearts for thee? It is too late—think of the vengeance of those whom thou wouldst spare. Away with maudlin sentiment, and be a man!”

“Nay, be a hero!” Sagatheela broke in.

“Don’t heed such foolishness!” I cried angrily.

“Hear the voice of God!” she urged.

“There is *no* God,” I muttered—and her hand was shaken off. So much I had gained.

“There must be a God, or there would be no virtue.”

“Virtue is the worst vanity, an outward show to cloak and dissemble Vice.”

“Nay, nay, Honesty exists, and Mercy and Love. Are these not virtues ?

“If there be a God then,” I said, seeing him turn to her again, “thou hast never yearned for Him before, but rather abused His name, and vilified His gifts. Obscenity, theft, murder—a strange record to bring to Him, indeed.”

As I finished Sagatheela spoke again:

“To no man in whom repentance is not dead is the grace of God denied. He is ready, willing, longing for the soul to turn to Him in its hour of need. No sins are too foul for His pardon if repentance be there.”

“False, false,” I cried, trying to wrest my client from her arms, “thy sins are past forgiveness, thou hast been an incarnation of sin. Canst thou deny it?”

The man wiped the perspiration from his brow—the struggle was becoming an exhausting torture. He saw that there was no room for indecision, of two courses he must follow one, and that speedily. Both were full of peril. The retrospect of his misdeeds startled him, and the idea of braving the dangers of the sea with his sins upon his head filled him with horror. On the other hand the reward was enticing, and was there even now room to retract? He paused between us, and the wind howled, and the white breakers washed against the crazy hub. Nearer and nearer the Manacles hove in view, and now the bell-buoy was audible above the wind.

“Keep off! keep off! beware, beware!” it rang. “Stand clear, stand clear!”

The oil lamp at the *Maria Jane’s* masthead cast its smoky glare ahead, it swayed to and fro as the bow plunged in the green water—and the ship flew on.

“Hurrah!” I cried, “the dice is thrown!”

My client had by his dallying settled the matter and left no doubts. The heads of the rocks were within a hundred yards, and the vessel was going at full speed. If he himself were to be saved, there was no time to lose. He descended hastily to the lower deck, wrapped a lifebelt about him, and making sure that the bag of valuables was securely attached to his belt, prepared to leap overboard, when a hand touched his arm. Frightened, he turned round, to encounter the scared gaze of the stowaway.

“What have you done, mister?” said the lad in a half-choked voice. “Why are you going overboard?”

Humber raised his fist threateningly. Then, to my surprise, his demeanour changed, and he performed, perhaps, the one kindly action of his whole life.

“Here, take this, lad!” he said, removing the lifebelt from his own body and fitting it round the boy. “I can fend for myself.”

Another belt was close by; he seized it, but had barely time to slip it over his shoulder before the ship ran with a sickening crunch upon the rocks.

Without another word or look round, he caught hold of his companion, dropped him overboard, and leaped after him, the two splashes following in quick succession. He heard the rush of the wind in his ears, felt it in his nostrils, and then came a fearful plunge straight down, down into the cold. Oh! it was icy! It petrified his body, choked his lungs. Years seemed to pass before he came to the surface and found himself struggling in the hollow of a wave. Crash, and another volume of water forced him under. Once more the fight for breath, the freezing descent into a pit of horror. Again he rose to a glimpse of the sky and the jeering moon, and drank in the air with a new sense of life and vigour. With all his might he struck out, rising and falling on the backs of the billows, buoyed up by the hastily donned lifebelt. The first strokes seemed to require a tremendous output of exertion which he almost despaired of being able to maintain, but after a few moments it became easier, and at a distance of a hundred yards from the vessel he was swimming with scarcely an effort. From old experience Humber knew his own powers of endurance. The fierce waves were old and well-known opponents, he had faced them in the turbulent Bay of Barnstaple, had ridden them from Lamorna to Newlyn, had conquered them always. He could almost afford to chuckle when he had gone two hundred yards. But he did not, for the water was cold and a new fear met him. What if he should fall a victim to the chilliness and lose the use of his limbs?

The idea spurred him to effort, and he swam faster. On—on! he dared not allow his thoughts to wander over his own sins, nor ponder over his last fight with conscience—for the words of Sagatheela were awe-inspiring to his guilty soul. Swish—swish—the waves bore him on. Once he fancied he heard cries of distress, and he pictured the vessel sinking, the drugged crew perhaps awakened by the shock only to realise their doom. He could not shut his ears to those cries, they followed him.

On and on the sea carried him, and he never tired. It was a brave fight, and any onlookers, had they been there, would have acclaimed the daring of the dauntless sailor.

On—on! A wild sea of white and black catching here and there the glimmer of the moon—a sea doubtless dragging down many a good ship's crew, giving them over to the care of the seaweed and crabs. There among the caves lurk creatures—things with bony feelers and hideous flippers and eager eyes—things that rejoice over a sunken ship with orgies unspeakable.

Humber thought of this now—and of those who had lately been his comrades. On and on he swam, Sagatheela on his right and I on his left. And I was rejoicing, for I had conquered in all but the one unimportant detail of the stowaway. I rejoiced the more in knowing the sadness of Sagatheela—for my hatred of her was overwhelming.

At last to my client's watchful eyes appeared the outline of Coverack Cove; and in a few minutes more, all bruised and bleeding, with a singing in his head and a numbness in his limbs, he was lying high and dry on the shingles.

He had been a long time in the water and travelled a little over two and a half miles, a wonderful performance indeed, taking into consideration the roughness of the sea, the intense cold, and the intermittent darkness of that strange night.

CHAPTER VIII

MR ADAMS COMES TO THE FRONT

John Adams had not forgotten the tragedy he had been compelled to witness in the signal-box at Helverton; nor his subsequent meeting in Bristol with the man with the tattooed hand. The whole scene was as clear to his mind several months afterwards as it had been on the night of the occurrence; nor had he any doubt about the marks on the hand of the weird assassin. He was not a man one would call adventurous or hyper-sensitive, he had never wearied of the routine of station-duty which he calmly accepted as his lot in life. He was unimaginative, methodical, and practical as those of his calling generally are, hard to turn from his accustomed way, and averse to companions other than reputable. In short, he was a sober-minded, industrious employé, well fitted to perform the duties entrusted to him. Yet, since that memorable night, Adams had grown restless and superstitious. It was in vain he tried to keep his mind off the subject, to persuade himself it was fancy, or a nightmare. His thoughts would run in one direction, and he was powerless to check them.

His wife would chide and even rave at him for his changed conduct. His comrades began to make fun of various nervous mannerisms he had adopted, but all to no purpose. He was a different man. The murder in the signal-box haunted him by day and darkened his dreams by night. He tried every means in his power to rid himself of the ever present horror, became more careful than ever about his attendance at chapel, said the Lord's Prayer with an extra amount of vehemence, never allowed the faintest approach to swearing to pass his lips, only read religious books—but still the dream came. He saw the tattoo mark everywhere, on the hand of his own wife, of the minister, of every tramp that passed: It stared at him, magnified to a grotesque size, in every direction. It was the bugbear of his life, and seemed likely to drive him mad.

Finally, it got him into trouble. He electrified the village constable by seizing his hand and crying, "You are he—you are he! There's the mark, I've got you!" Another time he suddenly gripped the doctor by the wrist, and, much to the worthy gentleman's amazement, whispered in a voice of exaggerated tragedy, "I caught you. Don't deny it, you are the ghost who has tormented me!"

The doctor naturally concluded that the man was drunk, and, being good-natured, decided to take no notice of the incident. It was otherwise with the squire, a retired match merchant, too much in love with his own newly acquired dignity to excuse any familiarity on the part of "common people." When Adams—who had shadowed his steps cunningly from the church to the station—caught his hand and addressed him as "You murderer!"—he gave the signalman into custody.

Poor Adams was fined five shillings and costs, and warned not to do it again. Had it not been for the good-will of the stationmaster, he would also have lost his place. After this, he managed to refrain from open acclamations, contenting himself with observing carefully, perfectly conscious of his delusion—but equally convinced that, one day, it would prove no delusion.

One morning when Bristol was ringing with the news of the loss of the *Maria Jane*, barquentine—owner, David Jones of that city—which had mysteriously gone ashore on the *Manacles* with the loss of all on board save one, and he a stowaway, Adams sat down on a trolley for a few leisure moments to glance at a paper.

Being a Bristol man, the news interested him. It was a repetition of many disasters at or about the same spot.

Probably the loss of the *Maria Jane* would have excited little interest outside Bristol, had it not been that she had gone down off the infamous Manacles. But some attention was attracted by the decidedly sensational narrative of the escaped stowaway. He, poor boy, had been picked up by the Porthoustock lifeboat, a few hundred yards from the scene of the disaster, wholly exhausted, and insensible from cold.

Upon being placed in bed and treated by a medical man he slowly recovered. Afterwards, when seven bodies were recovered and an inquest opened at St Kevernes Church, he was able to make some thrilling statements.

It appeared that on the evening of the wreck he had been surprised to find the sailors in the fo'c'sle, the cook, and the captain alike sound asleep. Being alarmed, he went from one cabin to another, hoping to find some one awake. Upon quitting the main saloon he came upon the stewardess, lying dead in a pool of blood at the foot of the companion ladder. Terrified, and for some inexplicable reason associating this tragedy with the condition of the men, he scrambled up the ladder. On deck he met the mate, who seemed much agitated, and threatened to "do for him" unless he made himself scarce. He observed the body of a man lying beside the wheel—and also saw the mate throw a knife overboard. Questioned as to whether he observed any wound on the woman's body, he said that the second time he saw it he noticed a knife wound over the heart. He would swear to this. Questioned as to the personal appearance and character of the mate Humber, he said he had rarely seen him, and he was never talked of much by the crew. He was a tall, thin man—perhaps thirty-five years old—fair hair, long face, with a scraggy, washed-out kind of beard. One thing had always struck him as odd—a queer tattoo mark the mate had on his hand, a stag's head with a skull and cross-bones underneath.

Adams sat for a few moments after reading the account, too dumfounded to move or speak. Was it true—or was he dreaming again? He covered his eyes for a moment with his hand to shut out the light, then looked at the newspaper again, half expecting to find that the mention of the tattoo mark had vanished. No—he had not been deceived this time—there were the words in legible black print.

He repeated the experiment, and the words were still there. Then he asked a passing comrade to read it to him. The latter certainly said—"the tattoo mark, a stag's head with skull and cross-bones underneath." There was no doubting it after that: and, filled with a queer wild joy, Adams rose and paced the platform, in imagination a famous detective already. He had not forgotten the place in the Hotwell Road where he had a glimpse of that mark, nor the public-house out of which the man had gone. He could easily find that spot, and he resolved to frequent it in all his spare hours—to walk up and down and linger about, till fate should bring him once again in contact with this arch-villain.

* * *

"So, Sagatheela, white angel who pretendest to love me," I mused, "thou hast failed again, and art after all a poor antagonist for one of Diaphernes' emissaries. Yet why I hate thee so I cannot tell—save that thou art good—and hast the soul of a woman. Strange anomaly!"

I then wondered why my sandals did not bear me back to my Prince—for surely the fight was over.

I was in familiar surroundings—the inn-parlour in the Hotwell Road. Nothing had been changed, not even the pictures on the wall; and the same man arose to greet my client. The expression of his countenance was an interesting study.

“Be seated,” he said, pointing to a high-back chair. “I am as pleased as I am amazed to see you.” He ran his eye over Humber, not the same in appearance as a week ago, but a stouter, cleaner-shaven personage, dressed to suggest a low comedian, “‘Pon my word, your masquerading’s very neat.”

The sailor eyed him curiously.

“You don’t look pleased, but I daresay you are amazed,” he said. “You didn’t believe I could hold out, did you?”

“There are not many men who could keep afloat so long in such a sea,” said Jones evasively. “It was a great feat.”

“And worthy of

“A reward?” said David Jones. “Yes, it was, and you shall have one. I shall not forget. But—are you not in some danger?”

Humber lifted his head and clenched his fists.

“Of what?” he asked angrily.

“Don’t fly into a temper, for Heaven’s sake!” said the other coolly. “Have a cigar? No? Have a glass of whisky? Yes; that’s right, fill it up to your liking.”

“Cut it short, mister,” Humber muttered.

“What? the whisky?”

“No, the gas. I haven’t the time to lose.”

He was slow of speech, and Jones always gained an advantage in this respect.

“I suppose you’re afraid of being nabbed,” he said gently. “Poor fellow—how ill you are being used, hunted from place to place.”

Humber interrupted with an oath. “Stop your infernal prattle!” he cried, lifting his hand menacingly, but only to let it drop again as he saw Jones casually fingering a revolver. “I didn’t come here to talk about—things like that—I want to talk business. I’ve done my share of the transaction according to agreement—now you may do yours. And bustle, for my time presses.”

A crafty smile lighted up Jones’ face—there was a world of cunning in his protruding grey eyes, and a fierceness that would have alarmed some men.

“One moment,” the shipowner began, “before I hand you the cheque I want you to do something for me—only to promise me something. Will you?”

Humber gave a grudging assent.

“I know an oath isn’t particularly binding with men of your sweet disposition,” Jones went on; “but, just as a matter of form, you must swear never to visit Bristol again after you. leave it, which must be to-morrow. You’ll do this?”

“Oh, certainly!” replied Humber.

“That’s all right. Besides, you must write something on this paper.”

He drew a piece of vellum from his breast-pocket, and, rising, spread it on the round table in the centre of the room. He then moved the table towards the fire, placing it in front of Humber. The latter helped himself to another glass of whisky before he asked—“What’s all this about?”

“You may say,” began Jones, clearing his throat and breathing deep with an oratorical air. “As follows: ‘I, Thomas Humber, late first mate of the *Maria Jane*, of Bristol—owners, David Jones & Son, testify that I, and I alone, was the cause of the loss of that vessel on the Manacle Rocks, December 11th, 19—. No one else was a party to the alleged accident, and I hereby exonerate the owner, David Jones, the captain, officers, and seamen of the *Maria Jane*, from all share in it.’ Then sign your name to it.”

Jones watched my client narrowly, noting how his colour came and went, and he cast furtive glances towards door and window. There was a long silence before Humber spoke, breathing hard—

“I won’t write it. I’ll be d—d if I do!”

“You’ll be that anyway,” was the cool reply. “Gentlemen of your sort aren’t exactly received in heaven. Come, think of the £80 and do it.”

“No.”

“You won’t?”

“I won’t, and what’s more, I’ll have £200.”

He rose from his chair, but, encountering the inscrutable and smiling gaze of his employer, subsided again.

“You see,” said Jones soothingly, “you can’t bully me, and I didn’t come unprepared for emergencies.” He allowed the bright muzzle of his revolver to show for a moment. “Be wise; you had better do it for your children’s sake.”

Humber was passing through another struggle. Leaning over his left shoulder, I urged his compliance.

“There may be a chance of getting the paper afterwards and destroying his hold over you,” I pointed out. “If you refuse, he will circumvent you yet.”

The man listened, and yielded with an ill grace; he took the pen and sullenly wrote at the other’s dictation. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked on. It was half-past four, and the evening was very dark. From outside came the sounds of traffic, the soft movement of electric trams, the clatter of horses’ hoofs, the bells of motor cars and cycles. Paper-boys yelled out, “Inquest on the *Maria Jane*. Startling rumours! Evening special!” A barrel-organ ground on, and errand boys whistled. No moon was visible—not a star. The electric light was left to look after the needs of mankind.

People hurried to and fro, eager to get home; it—was not an inviting evening, only one man seemed inclined to spend his leisure out of doors—and he stood with his hands in his pockets, leaning against the street wall of the inn. And still Humber wrote on; he was a bad penman, and the task presented some difficulty.

At last it was finished, and he dropped the scratchy pen by his side.

“There you are, mister,” he said, refilling his glass. “My job’s done. Now for the money.”

Jones carefully placed the document in his pocket, then walked towards the window, drew out a greasy pocket-book, and returning to Humber, presented him with a bundle of bank-notes. He was fingering his revolver all the time.

“Only £50 here,” said Humber. “What does this mean?”

“It means,” said Jones, “that that’s all you get.”

“A thousand devils! Give me the rest, or, by Heaven, I’ll do for you.”

He was white with rage, and his eyes and teeth gleamed with fury. There was murder in the air. The lust for blood was in me and I laughed.

Between the men were a table and a chair. With a quick movement Humber seized the latter and caught Jones full in the face with one of the legs. Then a fearful struggle commenced. Humber was like a madman, furious at the other’s perfidy. He cared for nothing but revenge, and, heedless of the disturbance he was creating, simply fought to kill.

It was the only way left to him, the only means of alike punishing and preventing the treachery of his instigator. To and fro they swayed, struggling and cursing. The revolver was still in Jones’s hand, but he was powerless to use it, for Humber had gripped his wrist like a vice. Such a

hubbub as they caused could not but attract the attention of the household; and when finally the pistol went off, and its report was followed by the cracking and falling of broken glass, the room was full of people in an instant, and the combatants were separated by force. Then a man, flushed with excitement, stepped from the midst of the curious crowd and caught hold of lumber's left hand.

"Hold him fast, mates!" he cried. "You've got the man who murdered a signalman in Helverton Tunnel Box, as web as the villain who wrecked the *Maria Jane*."

Had a bomb gone off in their midst, the listeners could not have been more astonished. A short silence followed the sensational statement, and then a babel of voices.

Humber's was heard above the rest.

"It's a lie," he said stolidly. "I know nothin' about either Helverton or the *Maria Jane*."

One of the bystanders asked Adams for an explanation.

"The man who murdered the signalman in Helverton Box on the fourth of November, five years ago, and wrecked the Cornish express the same night, had a tattoo mark on his left hand—a stag's head over a skull and cross-bones, and so had the first mate of the *Maria Jane*—him as the coppers want."

"And here's the mark on this bloke," commented one of the men who was holding Humber.

A low murmur of surprise burst from those present; it was as good as any theatre tragedy.

"Send for a cop," some one cried.

But a policeman was there already, nay, two, a sergeant and a constable, who had entered while Adams was speaking, and had taken their cue accordingly.

The sergeant took in lumber's description at a glance—tall, fair and thin; no beard certainly, but that was easily changed, and the mark.

"Thomas lumber," he said in the solemn voice of his profession on important occasions, "I have a warrant for your arrest."

"On what charge?" asked the sailor, trying to appear righteously indignant and failing miserably.

"On the charge of wilful murder, of course." My client's bravado was fast leaving him; the contemptuous faces around terrified him. One or two showed their opinion of him by coarse abuse, and the fight with Jones had physically exhausted him. He sank, weak and powerless, into the constable's arms, permitted himself to be handcuffed without protest, and was led like one in a dream through the crowd of expectant faces, out of the room and into the street.

CHAPTER IX

AGONOSTES VERSUS THE CHAPLAIN

During his incarceration previous to the trial, my client seemed in a state of drowsy indifference to his fate. Only one thing worried him.

Adams had visited him, and, in reply to a surly inquiry as to what he meant by a murder at Helverton, had told him about the apparitions in the signal-box. Not that Adams was eager to give away his secret—he had hesitated long; and had only done so in the hope that his listener might be startled into confession.

The result was disappointing. Humber, instead of being frightened, evinced the utmost incredulity.

“How the deuce,” he said, “how in the name of all that’s wonderful, do you think a live man could have a ghost?”

This was a puzzler, but Adams replied slowly:

“Oh, I reckon a live man may have a ghost as well as a dead man—’tain’t a thing to be monopolised.”

“You lick me,” retorted my client, “come now, why not be straight, and tell me how you got at it?”

Adams’ wits came back.

“Then you acknowledge you did it?” he said quickly, and noticed how the other shrank at his words. Humber covered his confusion with a curse.

“I don’t acknowledge anything,” he sneered. “I only want to know how in thunder you got up such a cock and bull story.”

But Adams was touchy regarding his apparition, and resented the slighting words.

“If you don’t believe it, do the other thing,” he said. “But I’ll give you a bit of advice. Ease your conscience, for you’ve a lump on it that will weigh heavy if you don’t.”

After Adams had gone, the prisoner sat wondering. All the details of the story were so exact. He remembered so well how he had watched his victim through the window, and cautiously entered when he fell into a doze. The manner in which he killed him had been so exactly described. Not a link in the awful chain had been omitted—the swift blow, the brief struggle, the attempt to remove the blood stains from the boards. Oh, there was no doubt that some third person had been there and seen it all. He looked at his left hand, and for the hundredth time cursed the Japanese tattooist.

None of his soliloquies ever turned in the direction of repentance. Of all his many crimes, in one sense the thought of the murder at Helverton troubled him least; the man he had murdered had once been his companion in a burglary at Blackheath, when, quite by accident, the lady of the house had been strangled. They had quitted the premises safely and left no clue—but the act had lain heavy on the railwayman’s conscience. At last it worried him so much that he determined to give himself up, and, with quite admirable candour had told his comrade of his resolve. Humber, however, failed to see the advisability of this course, and quietly resolved to put his friend out of the way before it could be carried out.

Fate favoured him. He exchanged clothes with his victim, and, after dropping the corpse into the river, returned to the box, when, to start a plausible explanation of the deceased’s disappearance, he deliberately wrecked the down express at the entrance of the tunnel.

It was cleverly worked out. Diaphernes could find use for such brains as my client’s when the time came.

So the trial came round.

According to a late Act of Victoria, the prisoner could be put under examination as a witness. This proved his ruin. Cute and phlegmatic as he had been when others were questioned, he broke down when his own time came. Perhaps he owed some of his bad luck to me. I was in close attendance throughout, my left arm in his, and our heads close together.

Sagatheela pleaded with him to confess. I counselled him to resist. He could not altogether refrain from listening to her words, even while his will followed mine. Between us he fell into confusion, and all was lost.

An attempt to incriminate David Jones was frustrated by the production of the signed statement, though it was evident that the court put little faith in the shipowner’s own words—he was so evidently trying to inculcate the prisoner. The stowaway’s tale contained by far the most

damning evidence, incoherent and badly told as it was. Adams's examination was even more interesting; he asked leave to tell his story in his own way, and, leave being promptly given, he launched out into a transparently genuine account of the Helverton tragedy. The account being irrelevant, he was not allowed to tell it all. But while he spoke, unknown to him, unseen by any but my client and myself, the ghost of the murdered man stood at the witness's side.

It overpowered Humber so, that when his turn came, contradiction followed contradiction, lie succeeded lie. The prosecuting counsel turned him inside out. In a state of bewilderment he lost sight of the court, of the fine stern old face of the judge, of the red-faced policeman, the listening jury, the gaping crowds. Everything retreated—and he stood answering at random those terrible merciless questions that he barely understood. Would the day never end?

When led back, still in a dream, to his place in the dock, his soul broke loose from me and yielded to the seductions of Sagatheela.

He stood up and confessed.

He began at the beginning and told the story of all his crimes, sparing himself nothing. The pitiful, shrinking coward of a few moments before now faced the eyes of hundreds, erect and manly, speaking with the slow, dignified confidence of a man accustomed to be heard.

Such a category of horrors no one had been prepared to learn—no one had conceived there could be such attributed to a single individual. Yet so marked was the transformation of the man from the despicable to the strong, that many a heart leaned towards clemency when he finished speaking.

This was a stroke in favour of my enemy. I was only anxious for a chance to counteract her.

The jury returned from their short consultation, and in answer to the customary question the foreman said "guilty." The judge then sentenced the prisoner to execution; the sentence to take effect at Horfield on the eighteenth of February. In passing sentence he said that after the evidence and the confession, no reasonable doubt could remain in the minds of any one.

The prisoner received the sentence unmoved, looking almost as if he had not heard it. He left the dock with a firm tread, and a careless nod to his wife, whose tear-stained face turned pathetically towards him from the crowd.

In prison he maintained a demeanour of callousness that augured well for me. Nothing seemed to weigh on his mind or to renew the awakening of conscience. Only on the morning of the execution did any change become manifest. It was a damp, raw morning; a heavy fog hung over the Bristol Channel and bathed the coast with wet mist.

The neighbourhood of Horfield was silent and deserted. Few pedestrians were about at such an early hour and in such uninviting weather. No vehicle of any sort, not even a cycle, passed along the deserted streets—nothing moved the echoes save the heavy tramp of the policeman on duty. The lights shone brightly from the lamp-post. It was to all appearance still night. The majority of citizens were sleeping and would sleep for hours. Who in the sleepy old city thought of the condemned murderer and his impending fate?

Inside the prison it was different. Officials hurried to and fro, along passages and over the stone-flagged yards where several reporters stood in a disconsolate group.

The chaplain came out of his quarters at a run; he had overslept himself, and there would be little time to spend in the doomed man's cell. The clock in the quadrangle showed him there was not half an hour; and being very conscientious, he hurried across the stone flags to make a final effort. It was a stubborn soul he fain would serve.

My client stirred uneasily in bed. What was the time? It was so long since it had struck three, it must be nearly four now. Strange to say, he hated the delay, and wished for the fatal moment to

arrive. There was a savage joy in his heart at the thought of leaving the world he had grown to hate. Excitement had kept him awake. He compared his unsettled state with that of a man about to change his quarters and anxious not to miss the early train. He thought not of repentance, of the future, nor of God. Why should he? All his life he had sneered at the first and questioned the existence of the two latter. Like all who call themselves atheists, he found it convenient in his misdeeds to deny the existence of an Almighty Being who might call him to account. Men like lumber worship the liberty which allows them the indulgence of vice; a Power which forbids licentiousness is tyranny to them.

As I said, he did not sleep. He lay wondering how he should deport himself on the scaffold. Once or twice his thoughts were interrupted by something so uncanny that his blood ran cold. He seemed to see the shadowy outline of a man's body with a gaping wound in the head and a blotch of blood on one cheek. There was a look of agony in the eyes that made lumber hide his head under the clothes.

These appearances were, however, rare, and of brief duration, lasting a few seconds only. Still, when the chaplain entered, my client could not persuade himself that he was not glad—very glad; for the company of a mortal was preferable to that of a phantom, belonging to Heaven only knew where!

The clergyman was thoroughly sincere and well-meaning, but, like most university men ordained before they have gained a knowledge of the world, or the sympathy with humanity which only toil and sorrow can produce, he set to work in the very way to harden a heart like Humber's. He pointed out the greatness of God and how terrible a thing it was to incur His wrath—went on to speak in harrowing language of the prisoner's own crimes, finally urging him to seek forgiveness, for without it he must be eternally damned. Never once did his voice lose the aristocratic tone eminently suited to a respectable congregation, and scarcely did he touch on the gentle side of the Divine nature, nor on the manhood of Christ, with His readiness to forgive and love the vilest of sinners.

If the prisoner's rigidity showed signs of breaking down it was not owing to his efforts, though perhaps he believed it was. To be just, I must give the credit to Sagatheela. She was ever at lumber's side. I could hear the words she muttered, and the follow-lug is the speech that passed between us all:

Sagatheela. Heed not the promptings of thy hard heart. Let love conquer. Think of Christ, who died that no sin should bar the gates of Paradise to repentant sinners.

Agonostes. Wilt thou be led now to humbleness by this man's unsympathetic words? Art thou so weak as to yield thy lifelong convictions at his bidding?

Humber (to the chaplain). You talk of a God. Who is He, or what is He?

Chaplain. He is God, the Creator, the Master of us all, omnipotent, a Ruler to be feared and loved.

Agonostes. He does not answer thy question. He only repeats the word *God*. And how can one love a Being whom one fears?

Sagatheela. Nay, God is love. Does not one fear -to grieve or injure what one loves?

Chaplain. God is a Ruler.

Humber. So is the King of Denmark. Is he a God? I can understand him, for he is like one of us. But your God—where is He? Where was He before He, as you say, created the world?

Chaplain. Come, this is foolish. You try to pry into knowledge that is forbidden to us. Be satisfied that God is, and unburden your heart to Inn.

Agonostes. See how this priest, of a so-called God evades thy questions! There can be no God! Before the world was created, He must have dwelt in space, alone, with none to converse with, nothing to remember, nothing to see, needing no reason and no senses. Yet men say He is a wise and rational Being. Then the earth is full of misery, diseases, poverty, hunger, thirst, starvation. Men kill one another—men go mad through toil, and all but the rich are slaves, groaning under the burden of their bondage. And yet his God is merciful! The rich are tyrants, the thieves prosper, the virtuous suffer—and he says God is just.

Chaplain. Time presses. If I can be of no use to you—though I do so in sorrow, I must leave you.

Humber. I've confessed all I did. Isn't that enough?

Chaplain. For man's sense of justice—perhaps. For God's, no.

Humber. What more should I do?

Chaplain. Fall on your knees and pray for God's mercy. Come, I will join with you in prayer.

Humber. But I can't pray to what I don't know exists. How can I?

Chaplain (despairingly). Oh! unhappy man, your heart is harder than the stone walls of the prison.

Sagatheela. Repent, repent! Ask for the pardon of Christ who loves all men. Thou wilt not deny Him!

Agonostes. Beware, this priest is but mocking thee, he knows no God himself.

Chaplain. Can I do nothing for you?

Sagatheela. Oh, repent, pray!

Agonostes. Tell him to go!

Then we stood and waited the final decision of my client. I could feel Sagatheela's warm breath on my cheek and the magnetism of her touch as it passed through lumber's body to mine. I even depicted her as she stood there, and imagined her wondrous fair. Yet how I hated her!

My client opened his lips, his soul looked out of his eyes—and his voice came clear and firm:

"Go! I don't want any of your prayers."

So I had conquered. There was a madness in me as I sprang into the air and waved my anus. What capers I went through—how I laughed and rejoiced! Sagatheela is vanquished, is vanquished! Vain boast of thine, thou woman spirit! hateful sex, most hateful of thy sex, thou art defeated. All praise be to Diaphernes! Hurrah!

* * *

On sped the moments. The mournful procession left the condemned cell—the chaplain in front, pale and solemn; the warders, one on either side of the prisoner; the governor of the gaol, swelling with importance, though somewhat sensitive to the chill of the morning—and the executioner.

They passed down the passage, a hundred phantoms following them. Death clanked in the rear of all, his hollow orbs alive with green fire and one bony arm uplifted—while all the ghostly tribe kept time in a mocking chant.

Death—death—death! Parades along slowly, parades along proudly, knowing his power over all.

See, all the monarchs—see, all the nobles—see, all the peasants bow to his call.

Death alone wonderful, over all glorious, death transforms every one—none can ye save.

Where there was splendour, where there was envy, now rest there only the bones in the grave.

Such little details as the creases in the chaplain's trousers, the seams in the warders' tunics, the division between the flags of the floor, impressed themselves upon Humber during that walk—the last he was ever to take upon earth.

Ding—dong—ding, dong—ding—dong, the chapel bell rang sonorously. There was no sympathy in its metallic voice—only doom—doom—doom. Yet it was truly the cold damp that made lumber shiver and not fear. The air cut into the marrow of his bones, and the warders felt him tremble.

“Curse that bell!” he muttered once.

They had reached the fatal spot now, and saw the newspaper reporters muffled up in ulsters awaiting them.

A terrible silence prevailed as the bell ceased ringing—and the executioner fastened a handkerchief round my client's forehead, covering his eyes. The warders led him gently to the spot indicated, and he shrank slightly as the noose was adjusted round his neck. And Sagatheela made a last pleading effort—“For Christ's sake!”

A wave of indecision swept through him—but the chaplain spoke, and that decided the question.

“Again—can I do *nothing*,” he asked. The prisoner sullenly shook his head.

Then the signal was given, the bolt drawn, and the body launched into space; and I, receiving the liberated soul in my triumphant arms, bore it away to the hall of Diaphernes.

Yet, in the joy of my victory there remained something of sadness—and for all my skill and knowledge I could not understand why.