

After a moment I said gently, "I will go get it, madam." She made no answer; she was already asleep. Nor did Sparrow and I speak again. He laid himself down with his face to the ocean, and I sat with my head in my hands, and thought and thought, to no purpose.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH A GRAVE IS DIGGED

WHEN the stars had gone out and the moon begun to pale, I raised my face from my hands. Only a few glowing embers remained of the fire, and the drift-wood that we had collected was exhausted. I thought that I would gather more, and build up the fire against the time when the others should awake. The drift-wood lay in greatest quantity some distance up the beach, against a low ridge of sand dunes. Beyond these the islet tapered off to a long gray point of sand and shell. Walking toward this point in the first pale light of dawn, I chanced to raise my eyes, and beheld riding at anchor beyond the spit of sand a ship.

I stopped short and rubbed my eyes. She lay there on the sleeping ocean like a dream ship, her masts and rigging black against the pallid sky, the mist that rested upon the sea enfolding half her hull. She might have been of three hundred tons burthen; she was black and two-decked, and very high at poop and fore-castle, and she was heavily armed. My eyes traveled from the ship to the shore, and there dragged up on the point, the oars within it, was a boat.

At the head of the beach, beyond the line of shell and weed, the sand lay piled in heaps. With these friendly hillocks between me and the sea, I crept on as silently as I might, until I reached a point just above the boat. Here I first heard voices. I went a

little further, then knelt, and, parting the long coarse grass that filled the hollow between two hillocks, looked out upon two men who were digging a grave.

They dug in a furious hurry, throwing the sand to left and right, and cursing as they dug. They were powerful men, of a most villainous cast of countenance, and dressed very oddly. One with a shirt of coarsest dowlas, and a filthy rag tying up a broken head, yet wore velvet breeches, and wiped the sweat from his face with a wrought handkerchief; the other topped a suit of shreds and patches with a fine bushy ruff, and swung from one ragged shoulder a cloak of grogram lined with taffeta. On the ground, to one side of them, lay something long and wrapped in white.

As they dug and cursed, the light strengthened. The east changed from gray to pale rose, from rose to a splendid crimson shot with gold. The mist lifted and the sea burned red. Two boats were lowered from the ship, and came swiftly toward the point.

"Here they are at last," growled the gravedigger with the broken head and velvet breeches.

"They've taken their time," snarled his companion, "and us two here on this d—d island with a dead man the whole ghost's hour. Boarding a ship's nothing, but to dig a grave on the land before cockerow, with the man you're to put in it looking at you! Why could n't he be buried at sea, decent and respectable, like other folk?"

"It was his will, — that's all I know," said the first; "just as it was his will, when he found he was a dying man, to come booming away from the gold seas up here to a land where there is n't no gold, and never will be. Belike he thought he'd find waiting for him

at the bottom of the sea, all along from the Lucayas to Cartagena, the many he sent there afore he died. And Captain Paradise, he says, says he: 'It's ill crossing a dead man. We'll obey him this once more' —

"Captain Paradise!" cried he of the ruff. "Who made him captain? — curse him!"

His fellow straightened himself with a jerk. "Who made him captain? The ship will make him captain. Who else should be captain?"

"Red Gil!"

"Red Gil!" exclaimed the other. "I'd rather have the Spaniard!"

"The Spaniard would do well enough, if the rest of us were n't English. If hating every other Spaniard would do it, he'd be English fast enough."

The scoundrel with the broken head burst into a loud laugh. "D'ye remember the bark we took off Porto Bello, with the priests aboard? Oho! Oho!"

The rogue with the ruff grinned. "I reckon the padres remember it, and find hell easy lying. This hole's deep enough, I'm thinking."

They both clambered out, and one squatted at the head of the grave and mopped his face with his delicate handkerchief, while the other swung his fine cloak with an air and dug his bare toes in the sand.

The two boats now grated upon the beach, and several of their occupants, springing out, dragged them up on the sand.

"We'll never get another like him that's gone," said the worthy at the head of the grave, gloomily regarding the something wrapped in white.

"That's gospel truth," assented the other, with a prodigious sigh. "He was a man what was a man.

He never stuck at nothing. Don or priest, man or woman, good red gold or dirty silver, — it was all one to him. But he's dead and gone!"

"Now, if we had a captain like Kirby," suggested the first.

"Kirby keeps to the Summer Isles," said the second. "'T is n't often now that he swoops down as far as the Indies."

The man with the broken head laughed. "When he does, there's a noise in that part of the world."

"And that's gospel truth, too," swore the other, with an oath of admiration.

By this the score or more who had come in the two boats were halfway up the beach. In front, side by side, as each conceding no inch of leadership, walked three men: a large man, with a villainous face much scarred, and a huge, bushy, dark red beard; a tall dark man, with a thin fierce face and bloodshot eyes, the Spaniard by his looks; and a slight man, with the face and bearing of an English gentleman. The men behind them differed no whit from the two gravediggers, being as scoundrelly of face, as great of strength, and as curiously attired. They came straight to the open grave, and the dead man beside it. The three who seemed of most importance disposed themselves, still side by side, at the head of the grave, and their following took the foot.

"It's a dirty piece of work," said Red Gil in a voice like a raven's, "and the sooner it's done with, and we are aboard again and booming back to the Indies, the better I'll like it. Over with him, brave boys!"

"Is it yours to give the word?" asked the slight man, who was dressed point-device, and with a finical

nicety, in black and silver. His voice was low and clear, and of a somewhat melancholy cadence, going well with the pensiveness of fine, deeply fringed eyes.

"Why should n't I give the word?" growled the personage addressed, adding with an oath, "I've as good a right to give it as any man, — maybe a better right!"

"That would be scanned," said he of the pensive eyes. "Gentlemen, we have here the pick of the ship. For the captain that these choose, those on board will throw up their caps. Let us bury the dead, and then let choice be made of one of us three, each of whom has claims that might be put forward" — He broke off and picking up a delicate shell began to study its pearly spirals with a tender, thoughtful, half-pleased, half-melancholy countenance.

The gravedigger with the wrought handkerchief looked from him to the rascal crew massed at the foot of the grave, and, seeing his own sentiments mirrored in the countenances of not a few, snatched the bloody clout from his head, waved it, and cried out, "Paradise!" Whereupon arose a great confusion. Some bawled for Paradise, some for Red Gil, a few for the Spaniard. The two gravediggers locked horns, and a brawny devil with a woman's mantle swathed about his naked shoulders drew a knife, and made for a partisan of the Spaniard, who in his turn skillfully interposed between himself and the attack the body of a bawling well-wisher to Red Gil.

The man in black and silver tossed aside the shell, rose, and entered the lists. With one hand he seized the gravedigger of the ruff, and hurled him apart from him of the velvet breeches; with the other he presented a dagger with a jeweled haft at the breast

of the ruffian with the woman's mantle, while in tones that would have befitted Astrophel plaining of his love to rocks, woods, and streams, he poured forth a flood of wild, singular, and filthy oaths, such as would have disgraced a camp follower. His interference was effectual. The combatants fell apart and the clamor was stilled, whereupon the gentleman of contrarities at once resumed the gentle and indifferent melancholy of manner and address.

"Let us off with the old love before we are on with the new, gentlemen," he said. "We'll bury the dead first, and choose his successor afterward, — decently and in order, I trust, and with due submission to the majority."

"I'll fight for my rights," growled Red Gil.

"And I for mine," cried the Spaniard.

"And each of us'll back his own man," muttered in an aside the gravedigger with the broken head.

The one they called Paradise sighed. "It is a thousand pities that there is not amongst us some one of merit so preëminent that faction should hide its head before it. But to the work in hand, gentlemen."

They gathered closer around the yawning grave, and some began to lift the corpse. As for me, I withdrew as noiselessly as an Indian from my lair of grass, and, hidden by the heaped-up sand, made off across the point and down the beach to where a light curl of smoke showed that some one was mending the fire I had neglected. It was Sparrow, who alternately threw on driftwood and seaweed and spoke to madam, who sat at his feet in the blended warmth of fire and sunshine. Diccon was roasting the remainder of the oysters he had gathered the night before, and my lord stood and stared with a frowning face at the nine-mile-

distant mainland. All turned their eyes upon me as I came up to the fire.

"A little longer, Captain Percy, and we would have had out a search warrant," began the minister cheerfully. "Have you been building a bridge?"

"If I build one," I said, "it will be a perilous one enough. Have you looked seaward?"

"We waked but a minute ago," he answered. As he spoke, he straightened his great form and lifted his face from the fire to the blue sea. Diccon, still on his knees at his task, looked too; and my lord, turning from his contemplation of the distant kingdom of Accomac; and Mistress Percy, one hand shading her eyes, the slender fingers of the other still immeshed in her long dark hair which she had been braiding. They stared at the ship in silence until my lord laughed.

"Conjure us on board at once, captain," he cried. "We are thirsty."

I drew the minister aside. "I am going up the beach, beyond that point, again; you will one and all stay here. If I do not come back, do the best you can, and sell her life as dearly as you can. If I come back, — you are quick of wit and have been a player; look that you take the cue I give you!"

I returned to the fire, and he followed me, amazement in his face. "My Lord Carnal," I said, "I must ask you for your sword."

He started, and his black brows drew together. "Though the fortunes of war have made me in some sort your captive, sir," he said at last, and not without dignity, "I do not see, upon this isle to which we are all prisoners, the need of so strong testimony to the abjectness of my condition, nor deem it generous" —

"We will speak of generosity another day, my lord," I interrupted. "At present I am in a hurry. That you are my prisoner in verity is enough for me, but not for others. I must have you so in seeming as well as in truth. Moreover, Master Sparrow is weaponless, and I must needs disarm an enemy to arm a friend. I beg that you will give what else we must take."

He looked at Diccon, but Diccon stood with his face to the sea. I thought we were to have a struggle, and I was sorry for it, but my lord could and did add discretion to a valor that I never doubted. He shrugged his shoulders, burst into a laugh, and turned to Mistress Percy.

"What can one do, lady, when one is doubly a prisoner, prisoner to numbers and to beauty? E'en laugh at fate, and make the best of a bad job. Here, sir! Some day it shall be the point!"

He drew his rapier from its sheath, and presented the hilt to me. I took it with a bow, and handed it to Sparrow.

The King's ward had risen, and now leant against the bank of sand, her long dark hair, half braided, drawn over either shoulder, her face marble white between the waves of darkness.

"I do not know that I shall ever come back," I said, stopping before her. "May I kiss your hand before I go?"

Her lips moved, but she did not speak. I knelt and kissed her clasped hands. They were cold to my lips. "Where are you going?" she whispered. "Into what danger are you going? I—I—take me with you!"

I rose, with a laugh at my own folly that could

have rested brow and lips on those hands, and let the world wag. "Another time," I said. "Rest in the sunshine now, and think that all is well. All will be well, I trust."

A few minutes later saw me almost upon the party gathered about the grave. The grave had received that which it was to hold until the crack of doom, and was now being rapidly filled with sand. The crew of deep-dyed villains worked or stood or sat in silence, but all looked at the grave, and saw me not. As the last handful of sand made it level with the beach, I walked into their midst, and found myself face to face with the three candidates for the now vacant captaincy.

"Give you good-day, gentlemen," I cried. "Is it your captain that you bury or one of your crew, or is it only pezos and pieces of eight?"