

ily upon one side, and from it and from his face and his whole great frame breathed a wicked jollity quite indescribable.

“Odsbodikins, captain!” he cried. “Kirby’s luck! — ’t will pass into a saw! Adzooks! and so you’re captain once more, and I’m mate once more, and we’ve a ship once more, and we’re off once more

To sail the Spanish Main,  
And give the Spaniard pain,  
Heave ho, bully boy, heave ho!

By ’r lakin! I’m too dry to sing. It will take all the wine of Xeres in the next galleon to unparch my tongue!”

## CHAPTER XXIII

## IN WHICH WE WRITE UPON THE SAND

DAY after day the wind filled our sails and sang in the rigging, and day after day we sailed through blue seas toward the magic of the south. Day after day a listless and voluptuous world seemed too idle for any dream of wrong, and day after day we whom a strange turn of Fortune’s wheel had placed upon a pirate ship held our lives in our hands, and walked so close with Death that at length that very intimacy did breed contempt. It was not a time to think; it was a time to act, to laugh and make others laugh, to bluster and brag, to estrange sword and scabbard, to play one’s hand with a fine unconcern, but all the time to watch, watch, watch, day in and day out, every minute of every hour. That ship became a stage, and we, the actors, should have been applauded to the echo. How well we played let witness the fact that the ship came to the Indies, with me for captain and the minister for mate, and with the woman that was on board unharmed; nay, revered like a queen. The great cabin was hers, and the poop deck; we made for her a fantastic state with doffing of hats and bowings and backward steps. We were her guard, — *the gentlemen of the Queen*, — I and my Lord Carnal, the minister and Diccon, and we kept between her and the rest of the ship.

We did our best, and our best was very much.

When I think of the songs the minister sang; of the roars of laughter that went up from the lounging pirates when, sitting astride one of the main-deck guns, he made his voice call to them, now from the hold, now from the stern gallery, now from the masthead, now from the gilt sea maid upon the prow, I laugh too. Sometimes a space was cleared for him, and he played to them as to the pit at Blackfriars. They laughed and wept and swore with delight, — all save the Spaniard, who was ever like a thundercloud, and Paradise, who only smiled like some languid, side-box lord. There was wine on board, and during the long, idle days, when the wind droned in the rigging like a bagpipe, and there was never a cloud in the sky, and the galleons were still far away, the pirates gambled and drank. Diccon dined with them, and taught them all the oaths of a free company. So much wine, and no more, should they have; when they frowned, I let them see that their frowning and their half-drawn knives mattered no do it to me. It was their whim — a huge jest of which they could never have enough — still to make believe that they sailed under Kirby. Lest it should spoil the jest, and while the jest out-ranked all other entertainment, they obeyed as though I had been indeed that fierce sea wolf.

Time passed, though it passed like a tortoise, and we came to the Lucayas, to the outposts of the vast hunting ground of Spaniard and pirate and buccaneer, the fringe of that zone of beauty and villainy and fear, and sailed slowly past the islands, looking for our prey.

The sea was blue as blue could be. Only in the morning and the evening it glowed blood red, or spread upon its still bosom all the gold of all the Indies, or became an endless mead of palest green shot with

amethyst. When night fell, it mirrored the stars, great and small, or was caught in a net of gold flung across it from horizon to horizon. The ship rent the net with a wake of white fire. The air was balm; the islands were enchanted places, abandoned by Spaniard and Indian, overgrown, serpent-haunted. The reef, the still water, pink or gold, the gleaming beach, the green plume of the palm, the scarlet birds, the cataracts of bloom, — the senses swooned with the color, the steaming incense, the warmth, the wonder of that fantastic world. Sometimes, in the crystal waters near the land, we sailed over the gardens of the sea gods, and, looking down, saw red and purple blooms and shadowy waving forests, with rainbow fish for humming birds. Once we saw below us a sunken ship. With how much gold she had endowed the wealthy sea, how many long drowned would rise from her rotted decks when the waves gave up their dead, no man could tell. Away from the ship darted many-hued fish, gold-disked, or barred and spotted with crimson, or silver and purple. The dolphin and the tunny and the flying fish swam with us. Sometimes flights of small birds came to us from the land. Sometimes the sea was thickly set with full-blown pale red bloom, the jellyfish that was a flower to the sight and a nettle to the touch. If a storm arose, a fury that raged and threatened, it presently swept away, and the blue laughed again. When the sun sank, there arose in the east such a moon as might have been sole light to all the realms of faery. A beauty languorous and seductive was most absolute empress of the wonderful land and the wonderful sea.

We were in the hunting grounds, and men went not there to gather flowers. Day after day we watched

for Spanish sails; for the plate fleets went that way, and some galleass or caravel or galleon might stray aside. At last, in the clear green bay of a nameless island at which we stopped for water, we found two carracks come upon the same errand, took them, and with them some slight treasure in rich cloths and gems. A week later, in a strait between two islands like tinted clouds, we fought a very great galleon from sunrise to noon, pierced her hull through and through and silenced her ordnance, then boarded her and found a king's ransom in gold and silver. When the fighting had ceased and the treasure was ours, then we four stood side by side on the deck of the slowly sinking galleon, in front of our prisoners, — of the men who had fought well, of the ashen priests and the trembling women. Those whom we faced were in high good humor: they had gold with which to gamble, and wine to drink, and rich clothing with which to prank their villainous bodies, and prisoners with whom to make merry. When I ordered the Spaniards to lower their boats, and taking with them their priests and women row off to one of those two islands, the weather changed.

We outlived that storm, but how I scarcely know. As Kirby would have done, so did I; rating my crew like hounds, turning my point this way and that, daring them to come taste the red death upon it, braving it out like some devil who knows he is invulnerable. My lord, swinging the cutlass with which he was armed, stood beside me, knee to knee, and Diccon cursed after me, making quarterstaff play with his long pike. But it was the minister that won us through. At length they laughed, and Paradise, standing forward, swore that such a captain and such a mate were

worth the lives of a thousand Spaniards. To pleasure Kirby, they would depart this once from their ancient usage and let the prisoners go, though it was passing strange, — it being Kirby's wont to clap prisoners under hatches and fire their ship above them. At the end of which speech the Spaniard began to rave, and sprang at me like a catamount. Paradise put forth a foot and tripped him up, whereat the pirates laughed again, and held him back when he would have come at me a second time.

From the deck of the shattered galleon I watched her boats, with their heavy freight of cowering humanity, pull off toward the island. Back upon my own poop, the grappling irons cast loose, and a swiftly widening ribbon of blue between us and the sinking ship, I looked at the pirates thronging the waist below me, and knew that the play was nearly over. How many days, weeks, hours, before the lights would go out, I could not tell: they might burn until we took or lost another ship; the next hour might see that brief tragedy consummated.

I turned, and going below met Sparrow at the foot of the poop ladder.

"I have sworn at these pirates until my hair stood on end," he said ruefully. "God forgive me! And I have bent into circles three half pikes in demonstration of the thing that would occur to them if they tempted me overmuch. And I have sung them all the bloody and lascivious songs that ever I knew in my unregenerate days. I have played the bravo and buffoon until they gaped for wonder. I have damned myself to all eternity, I fear, but there'll be no mutiny this fair day. It may arrive by to-morrow, though."

"Likely enough," I said. "Come within. I have eaten nothing since yesterday."

"I'll speak to Diccon first," he answered, and went on toward the forecastle, while I entered the state cabin. Here I found Mistress Percy kneeling beside the bench beneath the stern windows, her face buried in her outstretched arms, her dark hair shadowing her like a mantle. When I spoke to her she did not answer. With a sudden fear I stooped and touched her clasped hands. A shudder ran through her frame, and she slowly raised a colorless face.

"Are you come back?" she whispered. "I thought you would never come back. I thought they had killed you. I was only praying before I killed myself."

I took her hands and wrung them apart to rouse her, she was so white and cold, and spoke so strangely. "God forbid that I should die yet awhile, madam!" I said. "When I can no longer serve you, then I shall not care how soon I die."

The eyes with which she gazed upon me were still wide and unseeing. "The guns!" she cried, wresting her hands from mine and putting them to her ears. "Oh, the guns! they shake the air. And the screams and the trampling — the guns again!"

I brought her wine and made her drink it; then sat beside her, and told her gently, over and over again, that there was no longer thunder of the guns or screams or trampling. At last the long, tearless sobs ceased, and she rose from her knees, and let me lead her to the door of her cabin. There she thanked me softly, with downcast eyes and lips that yet trembled; then vanished from my sight, leaving me first to wonder at that terror and emotion in her who sel-

dom showed the thing she felt, and finally to conclude that it was not so wonderful after all.

We sailed on, — southwards to Cuba, then north again to the Lucayas and the Florida straits, looking for Spanish ships and their gold. The lights yet burned, — now brightly, now so sunken that it seemed as though the next hour they must flicker out. We, the players, flagged not in that desperate masque; but we knew that, in spite of all endeavor, the darkness was coming fast upon us.

Had it been possible, we would have escaped from the ship, hazarding new fortunes on the Spanish Main, in an open boat, sans food or water. But the pirates watched us very closely. They called me "captain" and "Kirby," and for the jest's sake gave an exaggerated obedience, with laughter and flourishes; but none the less I was their prisoner, — I and those I had brought with me to that ship.

An islet, shaped like the crescent moon, rose from out the sea before us. We needed water, and so we felt our way between the horns of the crescent into the blue crystal of a fairy harbor. One low hill, rose-colored from base to summit, with scarce a hint of the green world below that canopy of giant bloom, a little silver beach with wonderful shells upon it, the sound of a waterfall and a lazy surf, — we smelt the fruits and the flowers, and a longing for the land came upon us. Six men were left on the ship, and all besides went ashore. Some rolled the water casks toward the sound of the cascade; others plunged into the forest, to return laden with strange and luscious fruits, birds, guanans, conies, — whatever eatable thing they could lay hands upon; others scattered along the beach to find turtle eggs, or, if fortune favored

them, the turtle itself. They laughed, they sang, they swore, until the isle rang to their merriment. Like wanton children, they called to each other, to the screaming birds, to the echoing bloom-draped hill.

I spread a square of cloth upon the sand, in the shadow of a mighty tree that stood at the edge of the forest, and the King's ward took her seat upon it, and looked, in the golden light of the sinking sun, the very spirit of the isle. By this we two were alone on the beach. The hunters for eggs, led by Diccon, were out upon the farthest gleaming horn; from the wood came the loud laughter of the fruit gatherers, and a most rollicking song issuing from the mighty chest of Master Jeremy Sparrow. With the woodsmen had gone my lord.

I walked a little way into the forest, and shouted a warning to Sparrow against venturing too far. When I returned to the giant tree and the cloth in the shadow of its outer branches, my wife was writing on the sand with a pointed shell. She had not seen or heard me, and I stood behind her and read what she wrote. It was my name. She wrote it three times, slowly and carefully; then she felt my presence, glanced swiftly up, smiled, rubbed out my name, and wrote Sparrow's, Diccon's, and the King's in succession. "Lest I should forget to make my letters," she explained.

I sat down at her feet, and for some time we said no word. The light, falling between the heavy blooms, cast bright sequins upon her dress and dark hair. The blooms were not more pink than her cheeks, the recesses of the forest behind us not deeper or darker than her eyes. The laughter and the song came faintly to us now. The sun was low in the west, and a wonderful light slept upon the sea.

"Last year we had a masque at court," she said at length, breaking the long silence. "We had Calypso's island, and I was Calypso. The island was built of boards covered with green velvet, and there was a mound upon it of pink silk roses. There was a deep blue painted sea below, and a deep blue painted sky above. My nymphs danced around the mound of roses, while I sat upon a real rock beside the painted sea and talked with Ulysses — to wit, my Lord of Buckingham — in gold armor. That was a strange, bright, unreal, and wearisome day, but not so strange and unreal as this."

She ceased to speak, and began again to write upon the sand. I watched her white hand moving to and fro. She wrote, "How long will it last?"

"I do not know. Not long."

She wrote again: "If there is time at the last, when you see that it is best, will you kill me?"

I took the shell from her hand, and wrote my answer beneath her question.

The forest behind us sank into that pause and breathless hush between the noises of the day and the noises of the night. The sun dropped lower, and the water became as pink as the blooms above us.

"An you could, would you change?" I asked. "Would you return to England and safety?"

She took a handful of the sand and let it slowly drift through her white fingers. "You know that I would not," she said; "not if the end were to come to-night. Only — only" — She turned from me and looked far out to sea. I could not see her face, only the dusk of her hair and her heaving bosom. "My blood may be upon your hands," she said in a whisper, "but yours will be upon my soul."

She turned yet further away, and covered her eyes with her hand. I arose, and bent over her until I could have touched with my lips that bowed head "Jocelyn," I said.

A branch of yellow fruit fell beside us, and my Lord Carnal, a mass of gaudy bloom in his hand, stepped from the wood. "I returned to lay our first-fruits at madam's feet," he explained, his darkly watchful eyes upon us both. "A gift from one poor prisoner to another, madam." He dropped the flowers in her lap. "Will you wear them, lady? They are as fair almost as I could wish."

She touched the blossoms with listless fingers, said they were fair; then, rising, let them drop upon the sand. "I wear no flowers save of my husband's gathering, my lord," she said.

There was a pathos and weariness in her voice, and a mist of unshed tears in her eyes. She hated him; she loved me not, yet was forced to turn to me for help at every point, and she had stood for weeks upon the brink of death and looked unfalteringly into the gulf beneath her.

"My lord," I said, "you know in what direction Master Sparrow led the men. Will you reënter the wood and call them to return? The sun is fast sinking, and darkness will be upon us."

He looked from her to me, with his brows drawn downwards and his lips pressed together. Stooping, he took up the fallen flowers and deliberately tore them to pieces, until the pink petals were all scattered upon the sand.

"I am weary of requests that are but sugared commands," he said thickly. "Go seek your own men, an you will. Here we are but man to man, and I

budge not. I stay, as the King would have me stay, beside the unfortunate lady whom you have made the prisoner and the plaything of a pirate ship."

"You wear no sword, my Lord Carnal," I said at last, "and so may lie with impunity."

"But you can get me one!" he cried, with ill-concealed eagerness.

I laughed. "I am not zealous in mine enemy's cause, my lord. I shall not deprive Master Sparrow of your lordship's sword."

Before I knew what he was about he crossed the yard of sand between us and struck me in the face. "Will that quicken your zeal?" he demanded between his teeth.

I seized him by the arm, and we stood so, both white with passion, both breathing heavily. At length I flung his arm from me and stepped back. "I fight not my prisoner," I said, "nor, while the lady you have named abides upon that ship with the nobleman who, more than myself, is answerable for her being there, do I put my life in unnecessary hazard. I will endure the smart as best I may, my lord, until a more convenient season, when I will salve it well."

I turned to Mistress Percy, and giving her my hand led her down to the boats; for I heard the fruit gatherers breaking through the wood, and the hunters for eggs, black figures against the crimson sky, were hurrying down the beach. Before the night had quite fallen we were out of the fairy harbor, and when the moon rose the islet looked only a silver sail against the jeweled heavens.