

A detailed black and white illustration of a ship's deck, showing several crew members in period clothing engaged in various tasks. The rigging and masts are prominent, and the sea is visible in the background. The overall style is reminiscent of a classic book cover or a historical engraving.

**CLASSICS TO GO**  
**'TWIXT LAND AND SEA**

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## **A SMILE OF FORTUNE**

### **HARBOUR STORY**

EVER since the sun rose I had been looking ahead. The ship glided gently in smooth water. After a sixty days' passage I was anxious to make my landfall, a fertile and beautiful island of the tropics. The more enthusiastic of its inhabitants delight in describing it as the "Pearl of the Ocean." Well, let us call it the "Pearl." It's a good name. A pearl distilling much sweetness upon the world.

This is only a way of telling you that first-rate sugar-cane is grown there. All the population of the Pearl lives for it and by it. Sugar is their daily bread, as it were. And I was coming to them for a cargo of sugar in the hope of the crop having been good and of the freights being high.

Mr. Burns, my chief mate, made out the land first; and very soon I became entranced by this blue, pinnacled apparition, almost transparent against the light of the sky, a mere emanation, the astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar. It is a rare phenomenon, such a sight of the Pearl at sixty miles off. And I wondered half seriously whether it was a good omen, whether what would meet me in that island would be as luckily exceptional as this beautiful, dreamlike vision so very few seamen have been privileged to behold.

But horrid thoughts of business interfered with my enjoyment of an accomplished passage. I was anxious for success and I wished, too, to do justice to the flattering

latitude of my owners' instructions contained in one noble phrase: "We leave it to you to do the best you can with the ship." . . . All the world being thus given me for a stage, my abilities appeared to me no bigger than a pinhead.

Meantime the wind dropped, and Mr. Burns began to make disagreeable remarks about my usual bad luck. I believe it was his devotion for me which made him critically outspoken on every occasion. All the same, I would not have put up with his humours if it had not been my lot at one time to nurse him through a desperate illness at sea. After snatching him out of the jaws of death, so to speak, it would have been absurd to throw away such an efficient officer. But sometimes I wished he would dismiss himself.

We were late in closing in with the land, and had to anchor outside the harbour till next day. An unpleasant and unrestful night followed. In this roadstead, strange to us both, Burns and I remained on deck almost all the time. Clouds swirled down the porphyry crags under which we lay. The rising wind made a great bullying noise amongst the naked spars, with interludes of sad moaning. I remarked that we had been in luck to fetch the anchorage before dark. It would have been a nasty, anxious night to hang off a harbour under canvas. But my chief mate was uncompromising in his attitude.

"Luck, you call it, sir! Ay—our usual luck. The sort of luck to thank God it's no worse!"

And so he fretted through the dark hours, while I drew on my fund of philosophy. Ah, but it was an exasperating, weary, endless night, to be lying at anchor close under that black coast! The agitated water made snarling sounds all round the ship. At times a wild gust of wind out of a gully

high up on the cliffs struck on our rigging a harsh and plaintive note like the wail of a forsaken soul.

## CHAPTER I

By half-past seven in the morning, the ship being then inside the harbour at last and moored within a long stone's-throw from the quay, my stock of philosophy was nearly exhausted. I was dressing hurriedly in my cabin when the steward came tripping in with a morning suit over his arm.

Hungry, tired, and depressed, with my head engaged inside a white shirt irritatingly stuck together by too much starch, I desired him peevishly to "heave round with that breakfast." I wanted to get ashore as soon as possible.

"Yes, sir. Ready at eight, sir. There's a gentleman from the shore waiting to speak to you, sir."

This statement was curiously slurred over. I dragged the shirt violently over my head and emerged staring.

"So early!" I cried. "Who's he? What does he want?"

On coming in from sea one has to pick up the conditions of an utterly unrelated existence. Every little event at first has the peculiar emphasis of novelty. I was greatly surprised by that early caller; but there was no reason for my steward to look so particularly foolish.

"Didn't you ask for the name?" I inquired in a stern tone.

"His name's Jacobus, I believe," he mumbled shamefacedly.

"Mr. Jacobus!" I exclaimed loudly, more surprised than ever, but with a total change of feeling. "Why couldn't you say so at once?"

But the fellow had scuttled out of my room. Through the momentarily opened door I had a glimpse of a tall, stout man standing in the cuddy by the table on which the cloth was already laid; a “harbour” table-cloth, stainless and dazzlingly white. So far good.

I shouted courteously through the closed door, that I was dressing and would be with him in a moment. In return the assurance that there was no hurry reached me in the visitor’s deep, quiet undertone. His time was my own. He dared say I would give him a cup of coffee presently.

“I am afraid you will have a poor breakfast,” I cried apologetically. “We have been sixty-one days at sea, you know.”

A quiet little laugh, with a “That’ll be all right, Captain,” was his answer. All this, words, intonation, the glimpsed attitude of the man in the cuddy, had an unexpected character, a something friendly in it—propitiatory. And my surprise was not diminished thereby. What did this call mean? Was it the sign of some dark design against my commercial innocence?

Ah! These commercial interests—spoiling the finest life under the sun. Why must the sea be used for trade—and for war as well? Why kill and traffic on it, pursuing selfish aims of no great importance after all? It would have been so much nicer just to sail about with here and there a port and a bit of land to stretch one’s legs on, buy a few books and get a change of cooking for a while. But, living in a world more or less homicidal and desperately mercantile, it was plainly my duty to make the best of its opportunities.

My owners’ letter had left it to me, as I have said before, to do my best for the ship, according to my own judgment.

But it contained also a postscript worded somewhat as follows:

“Without meaning to interfere with your liberty of action we are writing by the outgoing mail to some of our business friends there who may be of assistance to you. We desire you particularly to call on Mr. Jacobus, a prominent merchant and charterer. Should you hit it off with him he may be able to put you in the way of profitable employment for the ship.”

Hit it off! Here was the prominent creature absolutely on board asking for the favour of a cup of coffee! And life not being a fairy-tale the improbability of the event almost shocked me. Had I discovered an enchanted nook of the earth where wealthy merchants rush fasting on board ships before they are fairly moored? Was this white magic or merely some black trick of trade? I came in the end (while making the bow of my tie) to suspect that perhaps I did not get the name right. I had been thinking of the prominent Mr. Jacobus pretty frequently during the passage and my hearing might have been deceived by some remote similarity of sound. . . . The steward might have said Antrobus—or maybe Jackson.

But coming out of my stateroom with an interrogative “Mr. Jacobus?” I was met by a quiet “Yes,” uttered with a gentle smile. The “yes” was rather perfunctory. He did not seem to make much of the fact that he was Mr. Jacobus. I took stock of a big, pale face, hair thin on the top, whiskers also thin, of a faded nondescript colour, heavy eyelids. The thick, smooth lips in repose looked as if glued together. The smile was faint. A heavy, tranquil man. I named my two officers, who just then came down to breakfast; but why Mr. Burns’s silent demeanour should suggest suppressed indignation I could not understand.



While we were taking our seats round the table some disconnected words of an altercation going on in the companionway reached my ear. A stranger apparently wanted to come down to interview me, and the steward was opposing him.

“You can’t see him.”

“Why can’t I?”

“The Captain is at breakfast, I tell you. He’ll be going on shore presently, and you can speak to him on deck.”

“That’s not fair. You let—”

“I’ve had nothing to do with that.”

“Oh, yes, you have. Everybody ought to have the same chance. You let that fellow—”

The rest I lost. The person having been repulsed successfully, the steward came down. I can’t say he looked flushed—he was a mulatto—but he looked flustered. After putting the dishes on the table he remained by the sideboard with that lackadaisical air of indifference he used to assume when he had done something too clever by half and was afraid of getting into a scrape over it. The contemptuous expression of Mr. Burns’s face as he looked from him to me was really extraordinary. I couldn’t imagine what new bee had stung the mate now.

The Captain being silent, nobody else cared to speak, as is the way in ships. And I was saying nothing simply because I had been made dumb by the splendour of the entertainment. I had expected the usual sea-breakfast, whereas I beheld spread before us a veritable feast of shore provisions: eggs, sausages, butter which plainly did not

come from a Danish tin, cutlets, and even a dish of potatoes. It was three weeks since I had seen a real, live potato. I contemplated them with interest, and Mr. Jacobus disclosed himself as a man of human, homely sympathies, and something of a thought-reader.

“Try them, Captain,” he encouraged me in a friendly undertone. “They are excellent.”

“They look that,” I admitted. “Grown on the island, I suppose.”

“Oh, no, imported. Those grown here would be more expensive.”

I was grieved at the ineptitude of the conversation. Were these the topics for a prominent and wealthy merchant to discuss? I thought the simplicity with which he made himself at home rather attractive; but what is one to talk about to a man who comes on one suddenly, after sixty-one days at sea, out of a totally unknown little town in an island one has never seen before? What were (besides sugar) the interests of that crumb of the earth, its gossip, its topics of conversation? To draw him on business at once would have been almost indecent—or even worse: impolitic. All I could do at the moment was to keep on in the old groove.

“Are the provisions generally dear here?” I asked, fretting inwardly at my inanity.

“I wouldn’t say that,” he answered placidly, with that appearance of saving his breath his restrained manner of speaking suggested.

He would not be more explicit, yet he did not evade the subject. Eyeing the table in a spirit of complete abstemiousness (he wouldn’t let me help him to any

eatables) he went into details of supply. The beef was for the most part imported from Madagascar; mutton of course was rare and somewhat expensive, but good goat's flesh—

“Are these goat's cutlets?” I exclaimed hastily, pointing at one of the dishes.

Posed sentimentally by the sideboard, the steward gave a start.

“Lor', no, sir! It's real mutton!”

Mr. Burns got through his breakfast impatiently, as if exasperated by being made a party to some monstrous foolishness, muttered a curt excuse, and went on deck. Shortly afterwards the second mate took his smooth red countenance out of the cabin. With the appetite of a schoolboy, and after two months of sea-fare, he appreciated the generous spread. But I did not. It smacked of extravagance. All the same, it was a remarkable feat to have produced it so quickly, and I congratulated the steward on his smartness in a somewhat ominous tone. He gave me a deprecatory smile and, in a way I didn't know what to make of, blinked his fine dark eyes in the direction of the guest.

The latter asked under his breath for another cup of coffee, and nibbled ascetically at a piece of very hard ship's biscuit. I don't think he consumed a square inch in the end; but meantime he gave me, casually as it were, a complete account of the sugar crop, of the local business houses, of the state of the freight market. All that talk was interspersed with hints as to personalities, amounting to veiled warnings, but his pale, fleshy face remained equable, without a gleam, as if ignorant of his voice. As you may imagine I opened my ears very wide. Every word was

precious. My ideas as to the value of business friendship were being favourably modified. He gave me the names of all the disponible ships together with their tonnage and the names of their commanders. From that, which was still commercial information, he condescended to mere harbour gossip. The *Hilda* had unaccountably lost her figurehead in the Bay of Bengal, and her captain was greatly affected by this. He and the ship had been getting on in years together and the old gentleman imagined this strange event to be the forerunner of his own early dissolution. The *Stella* had experienced awful weather off the Cape—had her decks swept, and the chief officer washed overboard. And only a few hours before reaching port the baby died.

Poor Captain H— and his wife were terribly cut up. If they had only been able to bring it into port alive it could have been probably saved; but the wind failed them for the last week or so, light breezes, and . . . the baby was going to be buried this afternoon. He supposed I would attend—

“Do you think I ought to?” I asked, shrinkingly.

He thought so, decidedly. It would be greatly appreciated. All the captains in the harbour were going to attend. Poor Mrs. H— was quite prostrated. Pretty hard on H— altogether.

“And you, Captain—you are not married I suppose?”

“No, I am not married,” I said. “Neither married nor even engaged.”

Mentally I thanked my stars; and while he smiled in a musing, dreamy fashion, I expressed my acknowledgments for his visit and for the interesting business information he had been good enough to impart to me. But I said nothing of my wonder thereat.

“Of course, I would have made a point of calling on you in a day or two,” I concluded.

He raised his eyelids distinctly at me, and somehow managed to look rather more sleepy than before.

“In accordance with my owners’ instructions,” I explained. “You have had their letter, of course?”

By that time he had raised his eyebrows too but without any particular emotion. On the contrary he struck me then as absolutely imperturbable.

“Oh! You must be thinking of my brother.”

It was for me, then, to say “Oh!” But I hope that no more than civil surprise appeared in my voice when I asked him to what, then, I owed the pleasure. . . . He was reaching for an inside pocket leisurely.

“My brother’s a very different person. But I am well known in this part of the world. You’ve probably heard—”

I took a card he extended to me. A thick business card, as I lived! Alfred Jacobus—the other was Ernest—dealer in every description of ship’s stores! Provisions salt and fresh, oils, paints, rope, canvas, etc., etc. Ships in harbour victualled by contract on moderate terms—

“I’ve never heard of you,” I said brusquely.

His low-pitched assurance did not abandon him.

“You will be very well satisfied,” he breathed out quietly.

I was not placated. I had the sense of having been circumvented somehow. Yet I had deceived myself—if there

was any deception. But the confounded cheek of inviting himself to breakfast was enough to deceive any one. And the thought struck me: Why! The fellow had provided all these eatables himself in the way of business. I said:

“You must have got up mighty early this morning.”

He admitted with simplicity that he was on the quay before six o’clock waiting for my ship to come in. He gave me the impression that it would be impossible to get rid of him now.

“If you think we are going to live on that scale,” I said, looking at the table with an irritated eye, “you are jolly well mistaken.”

“You’ll find it all right, Captain. I quite understand.”

Nothing could disturb his equanimity. I felt dissatisfied, but I could not very well fly out at him. He had told me many useful things—and besides he was the brother of that wealthy merchant. That seemed queer enough.

I rose and told him curtly that I must now go ashore. At once he offered the use of his boat for all the time of my stay in port.

“I only make a nominal charge,” he continued equably. “My man remains all day at the landing-steps. You have only to blow a whistle when you want the boat.”

And, standing aside at every doorway to let me go through first, he carried me off in his custody after all. As we crossed the quarter-deck two shabby individuals stepped forward and in mournful silence offered me business cards which I took from them without a word under his heavy eye. It was a useless and gloomy ceremony. They were the

touts of the other ship-chandlers, and he placid at my back, ignored their existence.

We parted on the quay, after he had expressed quietly the hope of seeing me often “at the store.” He had a smoking-room for captains there, with newspapers and a box of “rather decent cigars.” I left him very unceremoniously.

My consignees received me with the usual business heartiness, but their account of the state of the freight-market was by no means so favourable as the talk of the wrong Jacobus had led me to expect. Naturally I became inclined now to put my trust in his version, rather. As I closed the door of the private office behind me I thought to myself: “H’m. A lot of lies. Commercial diplomacy. That’s the sort of thing a man coming from sea has got to expect. They would try to charter the ship under the market rate.”

In the big, outer room, full of desks, the chief clerk, a tall, lean, shaved person in immaculate white clothes and with a shiny, closely-cropped black head on which silvery gleams came and went, rose from his place and detained me affably. Anything they could do for me, they would be most happy. Was I likely to call again in the afternoon? What? Going to a funeral? Oh, yes, poor Captain H—.

He pulled a long, sympathetic face for a moment, then, dismissing from this workaday world the baby, which had got ill in a tempest and had died from too much calm at sea, he asked me with a dental, shark-like smile—if sharks had false teeth—whether I had yet made my little arrangements for the ship’s stay in port.

“Yes, with Jacobus,” I answered carelessly. “I understand he’s the brother of Mr. Ernest Jacobus to whom I have an introduction from my owners.”

I was not sorry to let him know I was not altogether helpless in the hands of his firm. He screwed his thin lips dubiously.

“Why,” I cried, “isn’t he the brother?”

“Oh, yes. . . . They haven’t spoken to each other for eighteen years,” he added impressively after a pause.

“Indeed! What’s the quarrel about?”

“Oh, nothing! Nothing that one would care to mention,” he protested primly. “He’s got quite a large business. The best ship-chandler here, without a doubt. Business is all very well, but there is such a thing as personal character, too, isn’t there? Good-morning, Captain.”

He went away mincingly to his desk. He amused me. He resembled an old maid, a commercial old maid, shocked by some impropriety. Was it a commercial impropriety? Commercial impropriety is a serious matter, for it aims at one’s pocket. Or was he only a purist in conduct who disapproved of Jacobus doing his own touting? It was certainly undignified. I wondered how the merchant brother liked it. But then different countries, different customs. In a community so isolated and so exclusively “trading” social standards have their own scale.



## CHAPTER II

I WOULD have gladly dispensed with the mournful opportunity of becoming acquainted by sight with all my fellow-captains at once. However I found my way to the cemetery. We made a considerable group of bareheaded men in sombre garments. I noticed that those of our company most approaching to the now obsolete sea-dog type were the most moved—perhaps because they had less “manner” than the new generation. The old sea-dog, away from his natural element, was a simple and sentimental animal. I noticed one—he was facing me across the grave—who was dropping tears. They trickled down his weather-beaten face like drops of rain on an old rugged wall. I learned afterwards that he was looked upon as the terror of sailors, a hard man; that he had never had wife or chick of his own, and that, engaged from his tenderest years in deep-sea voyages, he knew women and children merely by sight.

Perhaps he was dropping those tears over his lost opportunities, from sheer envy of paternity and in strange jealousy of a sorrow which he could never know. Man, and even the sea-man, is a capricious animal, the creature and the victim of lost opportunities. But he made me feel ashamed of my callousness. I had no tears.

I listened with horribly critical detachment to that service I had had to read myself, once or twice, over childlike men who had died at sea. The words of hope and defiance, the winged words so inspiring in the free immensity of water and sky, seemed to fall wearily into the little grave. What was the use of asking Death where her sting was, before that small, dark hole in the ground? And then my thoughts escaped me altogether—away into matters of life—and no very high matters at that—ships, freights, business. In the

instability of his emotions man resembles deplorably a monkey. I was disgusted with my thoughts—and I thought: Shall I be able to get a charter soon? Time's money. . . . Will that Jacobus really put good business in my way? I must go and see him in a day or two.

Don't imagine that I pursued these thoughts with any precision. They pursued me rather: vague, shadowy, restless, shamefaced. Theirs was a callous, abominable, almost revolting, pertinacity. And it was the presence of that pertinacious ship-chandler which had started them. He stood mournfully amongst our little band of men from the sea, and I was angry at his presence, which, suggesting his brother the merchant, had caused me to become outrageous to myself. For indeed I had preserved some decency of feeling. It was only the mind which—

It was over at last. The poor father—a man of forty with black, bushy side-whiskers and a pathetic gash on his freshly-shaved chin—thanked us all, swallowing his tears. But for some reason, either because I lingered at the gate of the cemetery being somewhat hazy as to my way back, or because I was the youngest, or ascribing my moodiness caused by remorse to some more worthy and appropriate sentiment, or simply because I was even more of a stranger to him than the others—he singled me out. Keeping at my side, he renewed his thanks, which I listened to in a gloomy, conscience-stricken silence. Suddenly he slipped one hand under my arm and waved the other after a tall, stout figure walking away by itself down a street in a flutter of thin, grey garments:

“That's a good fellow—a real good fellow”—he swallowed down a belated sob—“this Jacobus.”

And he told me in a low voice that Jacobus was the first man to board his ship on arrival, and, learning of their misfortune, had taken charge of everything, volunteered to attend to all routine business, carried off the ship's papers on shore, arranged for the funeral—

“A good fellow. I was knocked over. I had been looking at my wife for ten days. And helpless. Just you think of that! The dear little chap died the very day we made the land. How I managed to take the ship in God alone knows! I couldn't see anything; I couldn't speak; I couldn't. . . . You've heard, perhaps, that we lost our mate overboard on the passage? There was no one to do it for me. And the poor woman nearly crazy down below there all alone with the . . . By the Lord! It isn't fair.”

We walked in silence together. I did not know how to part from him. On the quay he let go my arm and struck fiercely his fist into the palm of his other hand.

“By God, it isn't fair!” he cried again. “Don't you ever marry unless you can chuck the sea first. . . . It isn't fair.”

I had no intention to “chuck the sea,” and when he left me to go aboard his ship I felt convinced that I would never marry. While I was waiting at the steps for Jacobus's boatman, who had gone off somewhere, the captain of the *Hilda* joined me, a slender silk umbrella in his hand and the sharp points of his archaic, Gladstonian shirt-collar framing a small, clean-shaved, ruddy face. It was wonderfully fresh for his age, beautifully modelled and lit up by remarkably clear blue eyes. A lot of white hair, glossy like spun glass, curled upwards slightly under the brim of his valuable, ancient, panama hat with a broad black ribbon. In the aspect of that vivacious, neat, little old man there was something quaintly angelic and also boyish.

He accosted me, as though he had been in the habit of seeing me every day of his life from my earliest childhood, with a whimsical remark on the appearance of a stout negro woman who was sitting upon a stool near the edge of the quay. Presently he observed amiably that I had a very pretty little barque.

I returned this civil speech by saying readily:

“Not so pretty as the *Hilda*.”

At once the corners of his clear-cut, sensitive mouth dropped dismally.

“Oh, dear! I can hardly bear to look at her now.”

Did I know, he asked anxiously, that he had lost the figurehead of his ship; a woman in a blue tunic edged with gold, the face perhaps not so very, very pretty, but her bare white arms beautifully shaped and extended as if she were swimming? Did I? Who would have expected such a thing . . . After twenty years too!

Nobody could have guessed from his tone that the woman was made of wood; his trembling voice, his agitated manner gave to his lamentations a ludicrously scandalous flavour. . . . Disappeared at night—a clear fine night with just a slight swell—in the gulf of Bengal. Went off without a splash; no one in the ship could tell why, how, at what hour—after twenty years last October. . . . Did I ever hear! . . .

I assured him sympathetically that I had never heard—and he became very doleful. This meant no good he was sure. There was something in it which looked like a warning. But when I remarked that surely another figure of a woman could be procured I found myself being soundly rated for my levity. The old boy flushed pink under his clear tan as if I

had proposed something improper. One could replace masts, I was told, or a lost rudder—any working part of a ship; but where was the use of sticking up a new figurehead? What satisfaction? How could one care for it? It was easy to see that I had never been shipmates with a figurehead for over twenty years.

“A new figurehead!” he scolded in unquenchable indignation. “Why! I’ve been a widower now for eight-and-twenty years come next May and I would just as soon think of getting a new wife. You’re as bad as that fellow Jacobus.”

I was highly amused.

“What has Jacobus done? Did he want you to marry again, Captain?” I inquired in a deferential tone. But he was launched now and only grinned fiercely.

“Procure—indeed! He’s the sort of chap to procure you anything you like for a price. I hadn’t been moored here for an hour when he got on board and at once offered to sell me a figurehead he happens to have in his yard somewhere. He got Smith, my mate, to talk to me about it. ‘Mr. Smith,’ says I, ‘don’t you know me better than that? Am I the sort that would pick up with another man’s cast-off figurehead?’ And after all these years too! The way some of you young fellows talk—”

I affected great compunction, and as I stepped into the boat I said soberly:

“Then I see nothing for it but to fit in a neat fiddlehead—perhaps. You know, carved scrollwork, nicely gilt.”

He became very dejected after his outburst.

“Yes. Scrollwork. Maybe. Jacobus hinted at that too. He’s never at a loss when there’s any money to be extracted from a sailorman. He would make me pay through the nose for that carving. A gilt fiddlehead did you say—eh? I dare say it would do for you. You young fellows don’t seem to have any feeling for what’s proper.”

He made a convulsive gesture with his right arm.

“Never mind. Nothing can make much difference. I would just as soon let the old thing go about the world with a bare cutwater,” he cried sadly. Then as the boat got away from the steps he raised his voice on the edge of the quay with comical animosity:

“I would! If only to spite that figurehead-procuring bloodsucker. I am an old bird here and don’t you forget it. Come and see me on board some day!”

I spent my first evening in port quietly in my ship’s cuddy; and glad enough was I to think that the shore life which strikes one as so pettily complex, discordant, and so full of new faces on first coming from sea, could be kept off for a few hours longer. I was however fated to hear the Jacobus note once more before I slept.

Mr. Burns had gone ashore after the evening meal to have, as he said, “a look round.” As it was quite dark when he announced his intention I didn’t ask him what it was he expected to see. Some time about midnight, while sitting with a book in the saloon, I heard cautious movements in the lobby and hailed him by name.

Burns came in, stick and hat in hand, incredibly vulgarised by his smart shore togs, with a jaunty air and an odious twinkle in his eye. Being asked to sit down he laid his hat

and stick on the table and after we had talked of ship affairs for a little while:

“I’ve been hearing pretty tales on shore about that ship-chandler fellow who snatched the job from you so neatly, sir.”

I remonstrated with my late patient for his manner of expressing himself. But he only tossed his head disdainfully. A pretty dodge indeed: boarding a strange ship with breakfast in two baskets for all hands and calmly inviting himself to the captain’s table! Never heard of anything so crafty and so impudent in his life.

I found myself defending Jacobus’s unusual methods.

“He’s the brother of one of the wealthiest merchants in the port.” The mate’s eyes fairly snapped green sparks.

“His grand brother hasn’t spoken to him for eighteen or twenty years,” he declared triumphantly. “So there!”

“I know all about that,” I interrupted loftily.

“Do you sir? H’m!” His mind was still running on the ethics of commercial competition. “I don’t like to see your good nature taken advantage of. He’s bribed that steward of ours with a five-rupee note to let him come down—or ten for that matter. He don’t care. He will shove that and more into the bill presently.”

“Is that one of the tales you have heard ashore?” I asked.

He assured me that his own sense could tell him that much. No; what he had heard on shore was that no respectable person in the whole town would come near Jacobus. He lived in a large old-fashioned house in one of the quiet

streets with a big garden. After telling me this Burns put on a mysterious air. "He keeps a girl shut up there who, they say—"

"I suppose you've heard all this gossip in some eminently respectable place?" I snapped at him in a most sarcastic tone.

The shaft told, because Mr. Burns, like many other disagreeable people, was very sensitive himself. He remained as if thunderstruck, with his mouth open for some further communication, but I did not give him the chance. "And, anyhow, what the deuce do I care?" I added, retiring into my room.

And this was a natural thing to say. Yet somehow I was not indifferent. I admit it is absurd to be concerned with the morals of one's ship-chandler, if ever so well connected; but his personality had stamped itself upon my first day in harbour, in the way you know.

After this initial exploit Jacobus showed himself anything but intrusive. He was out in a boat early every morning going round the ships he served, and occasionally remaining on board one of them for breakfast with the captain.

As I discovered that this practice was generally accepted, I just nodded to him familiarly when one morning, on coming out of my room, I found him in the cabin. Glancing over the table I saw that his place was already laid. He stood awaiting my appearance, very bulky and placid, holding a beautiful bunch of flowers in his thick hand. He offered them to my notice with a faint, sleepy smile. From his own garden; had a very fine old garden; picked them himself that morning before going out to business; thought I would