

Ambrose Pratt



*King
of The Rocks*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[PROLOGUE I](#)

[PROLOGUE II](#)

[PROLOGUE III](#)

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

[CHAPTER X](#)

[CHAPTER XI](#)

[CHAPTER XII](#)

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

[CHAPTER XV](#)

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

[CHAPTER XX](#)

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

CHAPTER XXIV

CHAPTER XXV

CHAPTER XXVI

CHAPTER XXVII

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE END

PROLOGUE I

Table of Contents

JOHN STANDISH, R.N.R., captain of the finest liner, and commodore of the fleet owned by the largest steamship company trading in the Southern Hemisphere, was seated one morning in his private room at the Grosvenor, Sydney, an hotel where he was always to be found during the few days his steamer stayed in that port. A knock came to his door; an obsequious waiter entered.

"A gentleman, name o' Cap'n Jackson, wants to see you, Cap'n; particular, he says," and the waiter waited as if he expected gold to drop from the other's lips.

"Jackson, Jackson! Don't know the name. Who is he, waiter?"

Captain Standish, a stout, full-blooded Englishman, spoke habitually in a strong voice and somewhat jerky manner.

"Dunno, Cap'n, he looks like a sailor; he says you know him."

"Haw, I don't remember. However, show him up!"

"Yessir," and the waiter vanished.

John Standish exercised his memory during the next few minutes, and at last decided that his visitor was to resolve into "some demned pilot or coastal skipper. Like those fellows' cheek to call themselves 'Captains,' by Gad!"

Then came a second knock, and "Cap'n Jackson," said the waiter, who ushered in the visitor, slammed the door, and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

"Haw, how d'ye do? What can I do for you?" said Captain Standish, searching as he spoke with both hands in his vest

pockets for his pince-nez, being slightly disconcerted by his visitor's abrupt announcement.

"Don't you remember me, John Standish?"

Something in the other's voice made the captain forsake his search for the glasses and stare at his companion with quick interest—an interest which, as he stared, changed from curiosity to anger, if his features could be trusted to convey his feelings. He saw before him a tall, thin man, grey-haired, but young and active-looking still—a man whose face exhibited the strength of a Caesar, the wickedness and cunning of a Borgia.

"Manville?" cried presently Captain Standish.

"I congratulate you."

"What do you want?"

"I heard you were in Sydney, so I came to see you."

"Why did you call yourself 'Jackson'?"

"A *ruse de guerre*, my friend. I fancied you might not be expiring with anxiety to see me again."

"You thought rightly."

"I commence to flatter myself I possess some penetration."

"Again I say, what do you want with me?"

"A slight service."

"Not another penny shall I give you. You swore to be content with the last."

"Bah! that was years ago; but I don't want money."

"What, then?" the captain's voice proclaimed a vague concern.

"A favour you can grant with perfect ease."

"Name it, name it!" impatiently.

"Your head steward died on the voyage out?"

"Yes."

"I am an excellent waiter, John Standish."

"Bosh, man; *you* a servant!"

"Why not?"

"Captain Manville, R.N., once; now a ship's steward," sneered Captain Standish.

"And merchant service at that, my friend; but you need not remind me. There are some things a man does not forget."

"Well, well, you don't ask anything impossible. Be at the Company's office this afternoon, three sharp. And now, good morning."

"Your pardon, John Standish."

"What the devil more do you want?"

"Your under-stewards and cook's assistants, to the number of four men, deserted ship last night, and are now on their way to the Nundle gold rush. I won't say that I had nothing to do with the affair. They were very soft, and absolutely believed me when I told them that they had only to go there and pick up nuggets as big as their heads. I took care, too, to keep them very drunk until their train started."

"You scoundrel. But you've given yourself away. I shall telegraph for the police to arrest them when the train arrives."

Captain Standish rose to ring the bell, but hesitated on hearing his companion laugh.

"John Standish," said Manville deliberately, "you're a fool. Do you think I intended you to have these poor beggars arrested?"

The captain spluttered with anger. "Damme, sir, I'd like to know what you mean."

"Certainly, certainly, and so you shall. I have four intimate friends who are either cooks or waiters, and they all need billets very badly. I have promised these men to procure them berths upon the *Alemene*."

"The devil you have!" thundered the captain.

Manville suddenly looked at his watch, then sprang to his feet with all his manner altered. Formerly he had worn an air of half-cynical, half-humorous impertinence, now he spoke abruptly, and as one used to command.

"See here, John Standish. I have no time to waste, so I'll be quite candid for once in my life, and for your own sake you'd better attend to me. I have drawn up a full account on oath of a certain matter wherein you figure as the abominable hero, my friend, and this I have despatched by registered package to a friend of mine at Scotland Yard. In my letter of instructions to this friend I have directed him to open the package and use the contents as he pleases, if, after the lapse of six weeks, I do not personally demand it back from him or cable him to return it to me. Need I tell you, John Standish, what will happen if my friend be allowed to open that package?"

"Curse you!" said the captain, but his face grew sickly pale.

Manville smiled.

"I may take it that my cooks and stewards will receive employment, then?"

"Cooks, stewards, cooks! Do you intend to poison us all, or what?"

Manville laughed outright at the other's troubled looks.

"My poor friend," he said smoothly, "nothing so bad as that. Tell me, is it not true that the banks here are shipping large quantities of gold by you this trip to London?"

John Standish started back with a suspicious look, and fixed the other with his eye.

"Yes," he said, "gold specie worth a million."

"Precisely; well, I might inform you that during the last few years I have grown respectable. From a thief I have developed into a thief-catcher, and I am now a member of the West Australian Secret Police. A gang of five men have just booked passages in your steamer for London—two in the first saloon, three in the second. These gentry are known to the police as being the most successful and daring cracksmen and spielers in the world; they have lately pulled off a big *coup* in West Australia, but we have not yet sufficient evidence to arrest them on. I have followed them from Perth, and hold instructions to follow them if necessary to London. You might be interested to learn that these villains have arranged a plan to rob your steamer of the gold to be shipped on board by the banks we were speaking of just now. This I only learned lately in Sydney, for one of my men wormed his way partly into the rascals' confidence."

"Good God!" said Captain Standish.

"My object," pursued Manville calmly, "in enlisting your kind assistance to ship myself and my brother police on board your steamer in a menial capacity is to avoid arousing the suspicions of the gang. If we shipped as passengers they would spot us the first day; they are as cunning as rats, but cooks and stewards they would never suspect."

"Would you mind proving your words to me, and show me your credentials?" said Captain Standish, with as crafty a look as his frank face could exhibit.

Manville took from his breast a badge surmounted with a silver crown, also an unfastened letter directed to "Inspector-General Fosberry, Chief of New South Wales Police." The letter was of introduction, and presented Detective Manville, of the West Australian Police, to Inspector-General Fosberry, of Sydney, and explained, besides, the bearer's mission to New South Wales. It was stamped with the Government coat-of-arms, and signed by "Farley, Chief of the Secret Police of West Australia."

Captain Standish handed the letter and the badge back to his companion with a sigh of relief.

"You have not presented this letter of introduction?" he asked.

"It was not necessary until I had received a cable to arrest my game. That cable has not yet arrived."

"Why didn't you tell me all this at first instead of threatening me to your wishes. I would have been glad to assist you."

Manville smiled curiously.

"This business means a great deal to me," he said; "I can't afford to throw any chances away. If I am successful I get a big money reward and promotion; and I am engaged to be married to the prettiest girl in Perth. You understand?"

Captain Standish understood; he became quite hearty in his manner.

"I congratulate you, my boy, both on your turning respectable and—er—the girl."

"Thanks," drily.

"But, ah, by Gad, I hope you really know something of your business? Chief steward has a lot to do, you know."

"You may depend upon me."

"By-the-bye, I suppose I'd better telegraph to our agent at Albany to secure a man to replace you in case you leave us there."

"As you please, Captain; but for goodness' sake don't *engage* one. I may have to go on to London with you, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! what a joke it will all be afterwards!"

"Won't it? Good-bye for the present, Captain Standish."

"Good-bye, Manville; take care of yourself."

"One moment," said Manville impressively. "I can depend upon you to mention no word of what I have told you to *anyone*, your officers or your agents especially. You see, I want to pull off this *coup* and get the entire credit myself. It means a big thing to me, and one word let slip might ruin everything."

"I won't breathe a word," said the big captain good-naturedly. "Don't be later than three, and bring your friends, the new—ahem—cooks, along."

"Right!"

PROLOGUE II

Table of Contents

CAPTAIN STANDISH, early on Christmas morning, lay dozing in his cabin on the stately *Alemene*, while the floating city he was tyrant of ploughed its way at sixteen knots an hour through the Indian Ocean, Londonwards. While dreaming placidly of a delightful dish that had charmed his palate the night before, there came to his ears the sound of a muffled pistol shot, followed quickly by a perfect babel of noise—shouts, oaths, and yells of pain or rage. Springing up, he rushed in his pyjamas to the lower deck, where a strange scene greeted his wondering eyes. Lying handcuffed on the boards were five men, two of whom he recognised as saloon passengers; over them stood the chief steward, two assistant cooks, and two cabin stewards, all heavily armed; while a crowd of sailors and half-dressed passengers gaped around in dazed astonishment.

"What the deuce is this?" demanded Captain Standish.

The chief steward took a silver badge from the lining of his coat and handed it gravely to the captain.

"It means, sir," he said, "that I and these cooks and stewards are detectives. We have arrested those gentry lying there, who are wanted for a dozen crimes. If you will come with me I shall explain."

Signing to his men to guard the prisoners, the steward took the captain to a certain state-room, where he showed him spread out upon the bunk a complete collection of cracksman's tools—braces, drills, sound destroyers, jemmies, lanterns, diamond-cutters, etc., all of the most

perfect workmanship and finish. He showed him also how two of the floor planks of the cabin had been cut through so cleverly as to defy detection, and an opening made through the lower iron flooring into the vessel's hold.

"Good God, Manville," said Captain Standish, "they were after the gold!"

"Yes," said the chief cook; "their object was to bore their way into the strong-room, get the gold, and leave at the first port of call. Those drills there would go through steel bulkheads or anything."

"I can well believe it. Really, Manville, you are a born detective; you have worked this business most cleverly. If my recommendation is of any service to you, I shall give it most freely in the proper quarter. I never saw anything so clever in my life, by Gad!"

"Thank you, Captain Standish; I really think I deserve some credit."

"Credit is not the word, Manville. I am sure that my Company will reward you."

"Do you think so? Well, I suppose I'd better look after my prisoners now. You'll give me room for them, I hope?"

"Certainly. But how about yourself—are we to lose our chief steward?"

"Well," replied Manville, "just as you think best. If I have given you satisfaction hitherto I'll look after things till we get to Aden, and my men can stay on as they are, too. You'll pay our salaries, of course?"

Captain Standish smiled at this evidence of close-fistedness.

"Up to the time you leave, of course."

Manville resented the captain's smile.

"It's all very well for you to laugh, Captain," he said; "it may seem mean on my part, when I'm going to get a big reward for this job, to haggle over a few pounds, but when a man marries he's got to look after himself."

"Oh, certainly!" said the captain, thoroughly delighted at the other's annoyance; "but you'll open a bottle of champagne to celebrate the occasion, won't you? Christmas Day and all."

Manville appeared to be extremely put out.

"I don't see why I should," he answered, and retired to attend to his prisoners.

Just after breakfast, however, the chief steward again presented himself before Captain Standish. His face was flushed and his eyes were very bright; he had evidently been drinking.

"I want you, Cap'n," he said, in rather a thick voice, "to allow me to shout for all hands. It's Christmas Day, and I've just had the biggest stroke of luck that ever came my way."

The captain was both surprised and amused at Manville's proposition.

"Think of the cost," he suggested, with a wicked smile.

"Oh, damn the odds," replied Manville; "Christmas only comes once a year. I've fixed up with the purser. Champagne for the first saloon, whisky for the second, and rum—" he stopped on seeing the captain's face expand with a meaning smile. "Well, damn it then, champagne for everyone—women, sailors, and every man-jack on board—if it breaks me."

"It'll cost you £60 at least. Remember you're going to be married," said the captain.

"What the devil has that got to do with you?" asked the chief steward testily; but Captain Standish roared with laughter, and clapped the other on the back.

"Nothing at all, old chap; nothing at all. I'll drink your health with all the pleasure in life; and as you said just now, damn the odds!"

Manville retired to the store-room of the ship, where with the two under-stewards, or rather detectives, he had brought with him on board the *Alemene*, he busied himself for a couple of hours, sending out at intervals basket after basket of champagne to the main deck, until a tempting row of nearly twenty dozen bottles stood in crates before a great array of sandwiches and fruit. Before, however, the chief steward himself proceeded to the deck he retired to his cabin to lock away in his trunk a case containing a large-sized hypodermic syringe and some dozen or so damaged hollow steel tube needles.

Ten minutes afterwards could have been heard a hundred yards from the ship a perfect battle of corks, followed by the captain's voice proposing the toast, "Detective Manville!"

The champagne was drunk in relays, the first saloon partaking first, the second cabin next, and afterwards in their proper order the ship's company, cooks, stewards, and seamen. The last were very enthusiastic, and they drank their host's health with three times three, withdrawing thence to their duties, singing noisily the chorus, "For he's a jolly good fellow," a sentiment which was speedily caught up by both saloons in a rousing echo, "And so say all of us!"

Half an hour later the ship's doctor was hastily summoned to attend Captain Standish, who had been seized with a sudden weakness of his muscles, being able to move neither hand nor foot. From the door of the captain's cabin a dozen men presently implored the physician to visit others, their friends or relatives, who had been stricken in the same extraordinary manner. At one o'clock one half the ship's company, passengers and sailors alike, were lying in their cabins, on the deck, and everywhere, inanimate and paralysed in every limb; the other half, shivering with terror, vainly ministered to the unfortunates, but every moment one by one these attendants themselves would fall victims to the mysterious disease which had so suddenly attacked the ship.

At half-past four, Doctor Campbell collected a few of the still healthy passengers together.

"We have been poisoned," he said briefly. "The symptoms point to *Wourali*, a South American drug, of which but little is known."

"Is there no antidote?" demanded a portly giant, whose usually plethoric face was now pasty with fear.

"Nothing certain; artificial respiration, stimulants, and hypodermic doses of strychnine are used, but——" he paused impressively.

"Then, for God's sake, let us try and save some of these poor people; half of them are women." The speaker choked back a sob.

The doctor sighed. "I have used all my strychnine," he said; "these people, for all their flaccid muscles, are dead as

herrings. You fellows had better fill yourselves with whisky; it's the only thing left now."

He set the example by knocking the head off a bottle, and pouring the liquid down his throat. The pasty-faced giant reached out his hand for a decanter, then suddenly fell with a groan, a helpless mass of humanity, to the ground. The doctor started up, and forced some spirit down his throat, then set two of the others to work at the patient's arms and shoulders to induce artificial respiration. Suddenly one of the bystanders broke in——

"Who has poisoned us?" he demanded.

"The man whose champagne we drank a while ago."

"Detective Manville?" gasped an incredulous chorus.

"Why, certainly," said the doctor, who was working like a maniac on the giant.

"Let us go and find Manville," suggested a little man who had just drunk a tumbler of raw spirit.

"Go armed, then!"

The little man flourished a revolver in response, and strode to the door followed by the crowd. There he pitched headlong to the ground, for his legs had failed quite suddenly, and he was helpless as a child; but the others, drunk with the fear of death and liquor, rushed, a pack of raving lunatics, over the body of their stricken leader in search of the chief steward.

But Detective Manville was not to be found.

By two o'clock three hundred and sixty three men and seventy women, out of the whole ship's company, had died by poison. Of the others, three women and two men, confined to their beds by illness since the vessel left port,

had been strangled during the afternoon as they slept. Sixty women and eleven men, who, being teetotalers, had not availed themselves of Detective Manville's kind invitation to drink champagne, had retired in a panic to the first saloon, where they barricaded themselves behind the locked doors.

Detective Manville, with his four attendants and five prisoners (now free as air), assumed command of the *Alemene*.

His first act was to place an armed guard over the saloon stairs, then he stopped the vessel's engines, which were by this, however, scarcely moving, since engineers, stokers, and firemen had long been dead. Next he signalled a strange steamer which had risen like a mushroom on the horizon. Detective Manville then searched the captain's cabin, and in John Standish's private trunk he found a key.

With this he proceeded to the strong room of the *Alemene*, and found to his joy that it fitted the lock. The door opened, only however to disclose a second locked door more solid than the first, and the same key was of no service here. With a curse on his memory he darted away, and among the dead lying on the deck selected the body of the chief officer, on whose watch-chain swung a single key. This fitted the lock of the second door of the *Alemene*'s strong room just as easily as the captain's key had fitted the first; and as he applied it, Detective Manville mused in cynical admiration on the precautions which the owners of the vessel had lavished upon the care of the treasures which they carried.

"Excellent men," he said aloud, "they trusted neither the captain nor his mate, and they were right; the captain is

dead, the mate is dead. The makers of proverbs were sometimes wrong; '*Trust not, and you shall not be disappointed,*' the old saw should have run."

By five o'clock one million sovereigns' worth of gold specie had been removed from the strong room of the *Alemene* to the cabin of the *Swallow*—the strange black steamer which Detective Manville had signalled earlier that evening. By seven o'clock the dead bodies, of whom that morning had been near four hundred living human souls, were secured behind bar and bolt in the *Alemene's* after-hold. By ten o'clock the sixty women and eleven men who had taken refuge in the first saloon could not have escaped therefrom had they chosen, for the cabin doors were strongly blocked with barricades of heavy merchandise which filled up the cabin staircase to a level with the deck.

At midnight a dull but terrible explosion thundered out across the ocean. The *Alemene's* bows were lifted clear of the water some seconds preceding the sound; but instantly they settled down again, and in a few short moments the hulk of what had been the finest ship afloat sank steadily head foremost into the bowels of the sea, and presently disappeared in a swirling whirlpool of water. But the *Swallow* was already miles away, and steaming south at thirteen knots an hour.

PROLOGUE III

Table of Contents

"IT is no use talking, men; my terms or none."

Manville, owner of the *Swallow*, spoke. He was standing, his back to the mizzenmast, his hands and feet lashed firmly to the spar while before him skulked a dozen mutineers, all that remained alive from the fight in which the chief officer and half the crew had been killed, and he himself taken prisoner.

"Give him another turn, Somers!" said Raglan, formerly ship's carpenter, but now head of the mutineers, and master of the *Swallow*.

A sailor at the word twisted a rope, an end of which he held in either hand; and as this rope passed round Manville's throat, the captive groaned and choked, struggling in vain against the hempen torture.

"Stop!" said Raglan presently, and again addressed his prisoner. "Will you listen to reason now, you fool? Navigate us into Valparaiso, and a third of the gold is yours."

Manville laughed evilly. "Navigate yourself, you hound!" he gasped.

"Keep a civil tongue, or I'll slit your weazand for you!"

"Go on, you cur; I can't stop you!"

Raglan, with an oath, took a knife from his belt and advanced to the mast, but a sailor intervened.

"Out of the way, you whelp!" shouted the carpenter, and slashed at the sailor with his knife.

But Somers and some others threw themselves upon their chief and soon disarmed him.

Somers then advanced to his late captain with a deprecative air.

"Look you, Cap'n Manville, it's this way. We can't do without you, an' you can't do without us. I'm not above givin' you a fair thing since 'twas you that scooped the pool and shoved the shiners in our way. But bless yer, half's too tall, and then to kill Raglan, that's ridiculous. But you take us into port and I'll see you get a fair divvy, s'elp me Gord; a full third to you, and we 'uns 'll split the rest a'tween us."

Manville sneered as he answered:

"No use, Somers. If you want to reach Valparaiso you must release me, then throw your weapons overboard, next surrender Raglan bound *to my mercy*"—he gritted his teeth—" *then* I'll talk to you."

Somers, looking vastly disappointed, returned to his fellows, whence a bitter colloquy ensued, and the decision at length arrived at, that Manville must be starved into submission.

For three days more the *Swallow* floundered on in an aimless way at half-speed through the extreme South Pacific, her general course north-east. Three weeks had passed since she had left the waters of the Indian Ocean; no one on board but Manville knew her whereabouts; coal was running low, provisions, too, were giving out, and she was far from the ordinary track of ships. In all those three days Manville had not tasted food or drink, but his resolution was of iron still, and the baffled mutineers retired each day from the cabin into which they had thrust him, helplessly raging against the strength of their bound master's will.

On the fourth morning a hideous discovery was made—all the *Swallow's* fresh-water tanks were dry. The men tapped a barrel of rum to brace their spirits against this news, and by noon were raving drunk. They decided in their madness to delay no longer the execution of their prisoner, and were about to carry their purpose into practice when land was sighted suddenly.

A long, low ocean atoll it was, horse-shoe in shape, with one narrow inlet leading into a glass-still, landlocked harbour, fringed with a thin stretch of palm-tufted, rocky ground.

With a reckless dash the *Swallow* was steered by her drunken pilots through the narrow passage, and by wonderful good fortune carried clear of the snarling rocks of the entrance, which showed their cruel grey teeth and mumbled hungrily through their curling lips of spray as the vessel passed.

A mile farther on the engines were stopped and the anchor lowered with a sullen splash into the crystal water of the lagoon.

"Shore!" was the cry, and one and all the mutineers hastened into the long-boat and pushed off for the land. With clumsy carelessness they moored their boat to the rocks on the beach, and splashing through the low-tide mud, scrambled like a pack of school-boys to explore their new domains. Water they soon found in abundance by the palm trees, but despising this treasure now that they had found it, they strolled in groups around the island slowly and carelessly, since time was of no moment to them.

But while they wandered, steadily the tide flowed in, and with the tide a thin, mysterious current that poured in from the inlet through the mid lagoon, then set again in a strong sweep seawards along one coastline of the bay. At dusk the sailors, sober now and weary of their island, sought to return to the ship, but the boat had disappeared, and the silent *Swallow*, swinging at her anchor, was the sole inhabitant of the lagoon. Somers threw off his clothes with a laugh, and plunged into the sea to swim off to the ship, a bare five hundred yards from shore. The space of sixty feet he traversed while his comrades watched him, then he threw up his arms, with a sharp scream of pain, and vanished.

"Shark," said Raglan. "Your turn, Duggan."

But Duggan, awed by the fate of Somers, refused, and the night was spent by the mutineers among the palm trees. Next morning, when the tide was low, Duggan slipped into the water and swam scarce fifty feet before his doom took him. There remained on the island ten men, who set to work with their sheath knives to cut down palm trees for a raft. By the evening of the third day they had half cut through a single trunk, but their knives were either broken or worn out. Three of them who wore revolvers fired every shot into the stubborn wood, but their powder was wasted, and the tree shook its slender fronds in derision at their futile efforts. Shell-fish fed them for a week, then dysentery came to rob them of their manhood. On the ninth day ten wan and desperate wrecks of men sprang together into the water and swam off towards the *Swallow*, yelling and splashing as they went. Nine were torn to pieces in a

moment. Raglan, head mutineer, and last alive, was drawn under by a mighty shell-back six feet from safety, and his death shriek ringing over the bay reached the ears of a living skeleton, who lay in horrible agony in the vessel's cabin. That scream, as nothing else could, lightened the horrors of his awful solitude, and Manville, iron soul, died a little later, as he had lived, unconquered, in spite of his sufferings, a sneer curling the edges of his lips.

At that very moment the English world was ringing with the news of a terrible shipping disaster. The *Alemene* had disappeared mysteriously between Albany and Aden, leaving nothing behind her to explain the fate which had engulfed in the silence of death a magnificent liner, with her five hundred passengers and crew. The nine days' wonder was still further intensified by a startling communication made to the daily papers by the police of Scotland Yard.

Crushing proofs had suddenly come to light, which on investigation clearly damned Captain Standish, commander of the ill-fated vessel, as the perpetrator of a horrible and mysterious murder, which had shocked England some years before.

For weeks the cables worked, carrying pregnant messages to and from Australia, but the *Alemene*, lying in the slime of the ocean a thousand fathoms deep, gave no answer to the watchers who waited for her to return. It never rains but it pours. Fast on the heels of one disaster came news of a second. The *Swallow*, an ocean tramp steamer of some 2000 tons, owned and commanded by one Gerald Manville, had set out from Sydney for New Zealand. Since then the *Swallow* had not been seen nor heard of, and

as a frightful storm had swept up from the south soon after her departure from Port Jackson, it was thought she must have foundered in the open sea. No connection was imagined by the wildest dreamer between the hidden fates attending either vessels; but for long after, when storms raged at sea, men secure on shore shuddered at the eccentric cruelties of the ocean, to which they attributed each dreadful loss.



CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

THE air was very still and placid, and rarely a ripple stirred the surface of the sea as the *Dido*, after rounding the curve of the picnic island, let fall her anchor into the green and lambent waters of the bay. Presently the hiss of escaping steam drowned the hum of conversation on the yacht's deck, and the men and women lying there in easy-chairs looked drowsily forth at the thickly-wooded reaches of the far shore, or the huge sails of the racing squadron of half-deckers lying in the middle distance, which, overtaken by a calm, floated with idly-flapping wings, like great sea-hawks hovering just before their flight to sun themselves upon the surface of the stream.

"How beautiful it all is, but how-idle—how deadly still," said Mara Hescombe dreamily, when the shrill of the steam had ceased.

Cuthbert Stone, smiling, looked at the speaker, herself the personification of idleness as she reclined on a cane lounge, her hands dropping motionless beside her, her heavy-lidded eyes half closed to exclude the glare that flashed up reflected from the waters at the instance of the noon.

"What would you?" he asked, still smiling; "the most beautiful is that which is most peaceful."

The girl, who noticed his prolonged admiring glance, although her eyes seemed to be employed elsewhere, woke suddenly from her languor.

"For my part, I see more beauty in movement." She sat upright, and smartly tapped the arm of her nearest companion with her fan. "Wake up, poet," she cried laughingly. "I do believe you were asleep. Tell us which is the more beautiful, energy or peace?"

The man appealed to was fashioned in heroic mould, but his great limbs were so languidly inclined just then that he scarcely stirred at her quick-spoken command.

"Peace, peace," he muttered drowsily, in deep guttural tones; "let me be!"

All present laughed, but Miss Hescombe arose from her chair impatiently.

"Oh for a wind, a storm, anything, so that we should see a battle among those boats!"

The eyes of Cuthbert Stone followed her as she moved to the railing with swift but graceful stride, and they could not fail to mark how good she was to look upon, with the gracious curves of her well-proportioned figure, the pleasing outlines of her profile, and the golden flashings of her hair, lit then to radiance by the shining glory of the sunlight. He could not choose but follow her.

"How restless you are," he said half reproachfully.

"Oh, but everything is so calm, it is insufferable. Look! the poet sleeps, father sleeps, mother sleeps, the sea sleeps!"

She tapped her foot in a tattoo beat upon the deck.

"I am awake," said Cuthbert Stone.

"Are you? then do something!" returned Miss Hescombe imperiously.

"What do you want me to do?"

"What an-obvious question! Only a man would ask it. How do I know what you are to do? Something, anything—only do it quickly!"

Cuthbert Stone looked over the side of the yacht gravely into the sea.

"Do you know this harbour of Port Jackson reminds me most intensely of you. It is often placid as it is now—as you were a moment past—but not for any length of time. A little cloud the size of a man's hand rises in the blue sky above, Heaven knows whence or why, and the instant after it is transfigured from a peaceful lake into an angry sea, *sans pitie et sans remords*."

"So I am a creature without kindness or pity. How easily your tongue runs to flattery, Mr. Stone."

"You should be satisfied with my simile, Miss Hescombe, you who find most beauty in energy. The sea is mysterious besides."

"Ah, but that is much better. I can forgive you now for your previous accusation. Am I a mystery to you?"

Cuthbert Stone tried to look into the girl's eyes, but she evaded his glance coquettishly.

"A mystery indeed. I have studied you a whole year, and know you very little even now."

"How seriously you said that."

"It is a serious matter for me."

"My dear sir, you are foolish to consider any woman seriously."

"Miss Hescombe, I have been a long time wanting to say something to you."

The girl gave him a swift sidelong glance, and shrugged her shoulders with a little foreign gesture.

"Nothing serious, I hope. Just consider the day, its altogether too calm, dull, and—your beloved word—peaceful for seriousness; do, for goodness' sake, be frivolous in order to balance things a little better."

"I have waited and waited."

"Whatever for? You see me every day, you can speak to me at any time."

"But——"

"Ah," she interrupted, "I can see from your face that you are about to say something heavy. I forbid you to speak."

Cuthbert's face grew stern and cold. "How unkind you can be," he said.

"Rather, how unkind you can be, Mr. Stone; here am I perishing for lack of something to do, to see, to say, and you want to make me still duller with your gravity. I think your conduct downright selfish! If you must be serious, why not go and make your speech to the poet; he will listen to you quite patiently, for I'm sure he's half asleep," she added laughingly.

"Won't you listen to me?" persisted the man.

Miss Hescombe was not required to give an answer, for at that moment, with a noisy clatter, the poet rose to his feet and came towards them, a heavy-browed German giant.

"I was not asleep," he said slowly, mouthing his words in a deep voice, which transformed his "p's" into "b's," his "w's" "v's," and "s's" "z's"—"I was thinking."

"Ach Himmel!" mimicked Miss Hescombe saucily, "the boet vass dthinkging? Vot vaz id dhat the boet vaz dthinkging aboud hein?"

The giant shook a great finger at her.

"Ach, you rascal; my thoughts would not interest a rattle-plate girl like you."

"But indeed they would," declared Miss Hescombe, grown earnest with a swift, capricious change of front; "I am dull as ditch-water. Do tell me, poet dear."

The German was a philosopher, who did not pay too much court to the intellect of woman, but he was not proof against the wiles of beseeching eyes and tender smiles, so he answered her as if Mara had been one like himself.

"I was thinking," he said, "that philosophy is an exposition of maxims, which are admirable until they are submitted to the test of practical experience."

"An example?" demanded the girl.

"It is better to sleep than to wake; to rest than to move ___"

"I do not agree with you," cried Miss Hescombe.

The poet shrugged his shoulders.

"That does not matter," he said placidly; "except that you interrupt me."

"Go on, poet dear," with an apologetic smile.

"It is also better to put up with a misfortune than to seek to escape it, and so perhaps encounter a worse. Well, I was thinking these things, and all the while a ray of the sun came shining across my knees from the slit in the awning above, and my legs were made, ach, so hot. I told myself it was better to rest on and put up with this small evil."