



***MAX
PEMBERTON***

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UNDER
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THE SEA

Max Pemberton

The House Under the Sea

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Table of Contents

Chapter I. In which Jasper Begg Makes Known the Purpose of His Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and How It Came About that He Commissioned the Steam-ship Southern Cross Through Philips, Westbury, and Co.

Chapter II. We Go Ashore and Learn Strange Things

Chapter III. In which Jasper Begg Makes Up His Mind what to Do

Chapter IV. We Go Aboard, but Return Again

Chapter V. Strange Sights Ashore, and what We Saw of Them

Chapter VI. Jasper Begg Meets His Old Mistress, and is Watched

Chapter VII. In which Help Comes from the Last Quarter We had Expected It

Chapter VIII. The Bird's Nest in the Hills

Chapter IX. We Look Out for the Southern Cross

Chapter X. We are Surely Caged on Ken's Island

Chapter XI. Lights Under the Sea

Chapter XII. The Dancing Madness

Chapter XIII. The Storm

Chapter XIV. A White Pool—and Afterwards

Chapter XV. An Interlude, during which We Read in Ruth Bellenden's Diary Again

Chapter XVI. Rosamunda and the Iron Doors

Chapter XVII. In Which Jasper Begg Enters the House Under the Sea

Chapter XVIII. Chance Opens a Gate for Jasper Begg, and He Passes Through

Chapter XIX. Which Shows that a Man Who Thinks of Big Things Sometimes Forgets the Little Ones

Chapter XX. The First Attack is Made by Czerny's Men

Chapter XXI. Which Brings in the Day and what Befell Therein

Chapter XXII. The Beginning of the Sixty Hours

Chapter XXIII. The End of the Sixty Hours

Chapter XXIV. The Second Attack on Czerny's House

Chapter XXV. In which the Sun-time Comes Again

CHAPTER I IN WHICH JASPER BEGG MAKES KNOWN THE PURPOSE OF HIS VOYAGE TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN, AND HOW IT CAME ABOUT THAT HE COMMISSIONED THE STEAM- SHIP SOUTHERN CROSS THROUGH PHILIPS, WESTBURY, AND CO.

[Table of Contents](#)

Many gentlemen have asked me to write the story of Ken's Island, and in so far as my ability goes, that I will now do. A plain seaman by profession, one who has had no more education than a Kentish grammar school can give him, I, Jasper Begg, find it very hard to bring to other people's eyes the wonderful things I have seen or to make all this great matter clear as it should be clear for a right understanding. But what I know of it, I will here set down; and I do not doubt that the newspapers and the writers will do the rest.

Now, it was upon the third day of May in the year 1899, at four bells in the first dog watch, that Harry Doe, our boatswain, first sighted land upon our port-bow, and so made known to me that our voyage was done. We were fifty-three days out from Southampton then; and for fifty-three days not a man among the crew of the Southern Cross had known our proper destination, or why his skipper, Jasper Begg, had shipped him to sail for the Pacific Ocean. A pleasure voyage, the papers said; and some remembered that I had been in and out of private yachts ever since I ran away from school and booked with Skipper Higg, who sailed

Lord Kanton's schooner from the Solent; but others asked themselves what pleasure took a yacht's skipper beyond the Suez, and how it came about that a poor man like Jasper Begg found the money to commission a 500-ton tramp through Philips, Westbury, and Co., and to deal liberally with any shipmate who had a fancy for the trip. These questions I meant to answer in my own time. A hint here and there of a lady in whose interest the voyage was undertaken kept the crew quiet, if it did not please its curiosity. Mister Jacob, my first officer, and Peter Bligh (who came to me because he said I was the only man who kept him away from the drink) guessed something if they knew little. They had both served under me in Ruth Bellenden's yacht; neither had forgotten that Ruth Bellenden's husband sailed eastward for the wedding trip. If they put their heads together and said that Ruth Bellenden's affairs and the steam-ship Southern Cross were not to be far apart at the end of it, I don't blame them. It was my business to hold my tongue until the land was sighted, and so much I did for Ruth Bellenden's sake.

Well, it was the third day of May, at four bells in the first dog watch, when Harry Doe, the boatswain, sighted land on the port-bow, and came abaft with the other hands to hear what I had got to say to him. Mr. Jacob was in his bunk then, he being about to take the first watch, and Peter Bligh, who walked the bridge, had rung down for half-speed by the time I came out with my glass for the first view of the distant island. We were then, I must tell you at a rough reckoning, in longitude 150 east of Greenwich, by about 30 north; and my first thought was that we might have sighted the Ganges group, as many a ship sailing from 'Frisco to Japan; but when I had looked at the land a little while, and especially at a low spur of rocks to the northward, I knew that this was truly the Ken Archipelago, and that our voyage was done.

"Lads," I said, "yonder is your port. Good weather and good luck, and we'll put about for home before three days have passed."

Now, they set up a great cheer at this; and Peter Bligh, whose years go to fat, wiped his brow like a man who has got rid of a great load and is very pleased to have done with it.

"Thank you for that," said he. "I hope I do my duty in all weathers, Mr. Begg, but this sunshine do wear a man sadly. Will you stop her, sir, or shall we go dead slow?"

"Dead slow, if you please, Mister Pugh," said I; "the chart gives two thousand fathoms about the reef. We should have water enough, and water is a good thing, as I believe you know."

"When there's nothing else, I can manage to make shift with it—and feel a better man, sir," he added, as an after-thought. But I was already busy with my glass and that was not the hour for light talk. Yonder upon the port-bow a group of islands shaped on our horizon as shadows upon a glassy sea. I could espy a considerable cliff-land rising to the southward, and north of that the rocky spur of which I have made mention. The sun was setting behind us in a sky of orange and crimson, and it was wonderful to see the playful lights now giving veins of gold to the dark mass of the higher rocks, or washing over the shadows as a running water of flame. I have seen many beautiful sights upon the sea, in storm or tempest, God's weather or the devil's; but I shall never forget that sunset which brought me to Ken's Island on as strange an errand as ever commissioned a ship. The deep blue of the sky, the vastness of the horizon, the setting sun, the island's shaping out of the deep: these, and the curiosity which kept the glass ever at my eye, made an hour which a man might fear to tell of. True, I have sighted many a strange land in my time and have put up my glass for many an unknown shore; but yonder lay the home of Ruth Bellenden, and to-morrow's sun would tell me how it fared with her. I had sailed from England to learn as much.

Now, Mr. Jacob, the first officer, had come up to the bridge while I was searching the shore for an anchorage,

and he, who always was a prudent man, spoke up at once for laying to and leaving our business, whatever it was, until the morning.

"You'll lose the light in ten minutes, and yon's a port I do not like the look of," said he. "Better go about, sir. Reefs don't get out of the way, even for a lady."

"Mister Jacob," said I, for, little man that he was, he had a big wit in his own way, "the lady would be very glad to get out of the way of the reef, I'm thinking. However, that's for the morning. Here's Peter Bligh as pleased as any school-boy at the sight of land. Tell him that he isn't going ashore to-night, and he'll thank you nicely. Eh, Peter, are you, too, of Jacob's mind? Is it sea or shore, a glass in my cabin or what the natives will sell you in the log-cabins over yonder?" Peter Bligh shut up his glass with a snap.

"I know the liquor, Mr. Begg," said he; "as the night is good to me, I'm of Mister Jacob's way of thinking. A sound bed and a clear head, and a fair wind for the morning—you'll see little of any woman, black or white, on yonder rock to-night."

Jacob—his little eyes twinkling, as they always did at his own jokes—muttered the old proverb about choosing a wife by candle-light; but before any one could hear him a beacon shone out across the sea from some reef behind the main island I had noticed, and all eyes were turned anxiously to that. It was a queer place, truly, to set up a light, and I don't wonder that the men remarked it.

"An odd kind of a lantern to help poor mariners," said Mister Jacob, sagely. "Being kind to it, sir, I should say that it's not more than a mile too much to the northward."

"Lay your course by that, and a miracle won't carry you by the reef," added Peter Bligh, sagaciously; "in my country, which is partly Ireland, sir, we put up notice-boards for the boys that ride bicycles: 'This Hill is Dangerous.' Faith, in ould Oireland, they put 'em up at the bottom of the hills, which is useful entirely."

Some of the crew, grouped about the ladder's foot, laughed at this; others began to mutter among themselves as though the beacon troubled them, and they did not like it. A seaman's the most superstitious creature that walks the earth or sails on the sea, as all the world knows. I could see the curiosity, which had followed my men from Southampton, was coming to a head here about twelve thousand miles from home.

"Lads," cried I, quick to take the point up, "Mister Bligh says that an Irishman built yon light, and he knows, being a bit of a one himself. We're not going in by it, anyway, so you can ask questions to-morrow. There's a hundred pounds to be divided among you for your good behaviour outward, and there'll be another hundred when we make Calshot Light. To-night we'll find good sea-room, and leave their beacon to the lumber-heads that put it up. I thank you, lads, for honest work in an honest ship. Ask the purser for an extra tot of grog, and say the skipper told you to."

They gave a hearty "Aye, aye, sir," to this, and without more ado we put the ship about and went dead slow against a stiff tide setting east by north-east. For my part, I reckoned this the time to tell my officers what my intentions were, and when I had called them into the cabin, leaving our "fourth"—a mere lad, but a good one—upon the bridge, I ordered Joe, the steward, to set the decanters upon the table. Mister Jacob, as usual, put on his glasses (which he always did in room or cabin, just as though he would read a book), but Peter Bligh sat with his cap between his knees and as foolish an expression upon his face as I have ever seen.

"Now, gentlemen," I said, "no good talking in this world was ever done upon a dusty table, so we'll have a glass round and then to business. Mr. Bligh, I'm sure, will make no objection to that."

"Faith, and I know when to obey my superior officer, captain. A glass round, and after that——"

"Peter, Peter," said I, "'tis the 'after that' which sends many a good hulk to the bottom."

"Not meaning to apply the term to Peter Bligh, but by way of what the landsmen call 'silime,'" said Mister Jacob.

"'Simile' you mean, Mister Jacob. Well, it's all the same, and neither here nor there in the matter of a letter. The fact is, gentlemen, I wish you to know why I have sailed this ship to Ken's Archipelago, and under what circumstances I shall sail her home again."

They pricked up their ears at this, Peter turning his cap nervously in his hands and Mister Jacob being busy with his glasses as he loves to be.

"Yes," I went on, "you have behaved like true shipmates and spoken never a word which a man might not fairly speak. And now it's my duty to be open with you. Well, to cut it short, my lads, I've sailed to the Pacific because my mistress, Ruth Bellenden, asked me."

They had known as much, I imagine, from the start; but while Mister Jacob pretended to be very much surprised, honest Peter raised his glass and drank to Mistress Ruth's good health.

"God bless her," he said, "and may the day come when I ship along o' such a one again. Aye, you would have come out for her sake, captain—no other, I'm sure!"

"She being Ruth Bellenden no longer, but the wife of a gentleman with a name none but a foreigner can spell," added Mister Jacob; and then he went on: "Well, you surprise me very much, captain—very much indeed. Matrimony is a choppy sea and queer things swim in it. But this—this I had not looked to hear."

I knew that this was only Mister Jacob's way, and continued my story.

"It was a promise to her upon her wedding day. Ten thousand pounds she left with her lawyers for this very purpose. 'My husband has strange ideas; I may not share them,' were her words to me. 'If his yacht should not be at

the islands when I wish to visit Europe again, I should like you to find me a vessel in its place. I trust you, Jasper Begg,' she said; 'you will sail for Ken's Archipelago twelve months from today, and you will come to my house there, as you used to do in the old time, for orders. Perhaps I shall send you home again, perhaps I may like to have a yacht of my own once more. Who knows? I am quite alone in the world,' she said, laughing, 'though my brother is alive. And the Pacific Ocean is a long way from London—oh, such a long way,' she said, or something of that sort."

"Aye, and right, too. A derved long way she meant, I don't doubt, if what was in her mind came out," puts in Peter at this.

"Mr. Bligh," said I, "be pleased to hold your tongue until your opinion is asked. What I am telling you is a confidence which you two, and no others, share with me. To-morrow, as soon as daylight, I shall row ashore and ask to see Mme. Czerny, as I suppose I must call little Ruth now. If she says, 'Go home again,' very well, home we go with good wages in our pockets. If she says 'Stay,' there's not a man on board this ship that will not stay willingly—she being married to a foreigner, which all the world knows is not the same as being married to an Englishman——"

"To say nothing of an Irishman," said Peter Bligh, whose mother was from Dublin and whose father was named sometimes for a man of Rotherhithe and at other times put down to any country which it suited Peter to boast about.

"Edmond Czerny was a Hungarian," said I, "and he played the fiddle wonderful. What mad idea took him for a honeymoon to Ken's Island, the Lord only knows. They say he was many years in America. I know nothing about him, save that he had a civil tongue and manners to catch a young girl's fancy. She was only twenty-two when she married him, Mister Jacob."

"Old enough to know better—quite old enough to know better. Not that I would say anything against Ruth

Bellenden, not a word. It's the woman's part to play the capers, sir, and we poor mortal men to be took by them. Howsomever, since there was a fiddle in it, I've nothing more to say."

We laughed at Mister Jacob's notion, and Peter Bligh said what it was in my heart to say:

"Saving that if Ruth Bellenden needs a friend, she'll find twenty-six aboard this ship, to say nothing of the cook's boy and the dog. You've a nice mind, Mister Jacob, but you've a deal to larn when it comes to women. My poor old father, who hailed from Shoreham———"

"It was Newport yesterday, Peter."

"Aye, so it were—so it were. But, Newport or Shoreham, he'd a precious good notion of the sex, and what he said I'll stand by. 'Get 'em on their feet to the music,' says he, 'and you can lead 'em anywheres.' 'Tis Gospel truth that, Mister Jacob."

"But a man had better mind his steps," said I. "For my part, I shouldn't be surprised if Ruth Bellenden's husband gave us the cold shoulder to-morrow and sent us about our business. However, the sea's free to all men, lads, and the morn will show. By your leave we'll have a bit of supper and after that turn in. We shall want all our wits about us when daylight comes." They agreed to this, and without further parley we went on deck and heard what the lad "Dolly" Venn had to tell us. It was full dark now and the islands were hidden from our view. The beacon shone with a steady white glare which, under the circumstances, was almost uncanny. I asked the lad if he had sighted any ships in towards the land or if signals had been made. He answered me that no ship had passed in or out nor any rocket been fired. "And I do believe, sir," he said, "that we shall find the harbour on the far sight of yonder height."

"The morning will show us, lad," said I; "go down to your supper, for I mean to take this watch myself." They left me on the bridge. The wind had fallen until it was scarce above

a moan in the shrouds. I stood watching the beacon as a man who watches the window light of one who has been dear to him.

CHAPTER II

WE GO ASHORE AND LEARN STRANGE THINGS

Table of Contents

I have told how it came about that I sailed for Ken's Island, and now I shall tell what happened when I went ashore to find Ruth Bellenden.

We put off from the ship at six bells in the morning watch. Dolly Venn, who was rated as fourth officer, was with me in the launch, and Harry Doe, the boatswain, at the tiller. I left Mister Jacob on the bridge, and gave him my orders to stand in-shore as near as might be, and to look for my coming at sunset—no later. "Whatever passes," said I, "the night will find me on board again. I trust to bring you good news, Mister Jacob—the best news."

"Which would be that we were to 'bout ship and home again," says he; and that I did not contradict.

Now, we were to the westward of the island when we put off, and neither my glass nor the others showed any good landing there. As the launch drew in towards the cliffs I began to get the lie of the place more clearly; and especially of what I call the mainland, which was wonderfully fresh and green in the sunlight and seemed to have some of the tropic luxuriance of more southern islands. About four miles long, I judged it to be, from the high black rock to which it rose at the southward point, to the low dog's-nosed reef which defended it to the north. Trees I could see, palms and that kind, and ripe green grasses on a stretch of real down-like land; but the cliffs themselves were steep and unpromising, and the closer we drew the less I liked the look of it.

"Dolly, my lad," I said at last, "you were the wise one, after all. Yon's no shore for an honest man; he being made

like a man and not like an eagle. Let's try the starboard tack and see what luck will send us."

We headed the launch almost due south, and began to round the headland. The men were elated, they didn't know at what; Dolly Venn had a boy's delight in the difficulty.

"An ugly shore, sir," he said, pleased at my compliment. "A very ugly shore. It would be a bad night which found a ship in these parts and no better light than the fool's beacon we saw yesterday."

"As true as the parson's word," said I, "but, ugly or beautiful, I'll be up on those heights before twelve o'clock if I have to swim ashore. And speaking of that," said I, "there are men up yonder, or I'm a Dutchman!" Well, he clapped his glass to his eye and searched the green grass land as I had done; but the light was overstrong and the cliff quickly shut the view from us, so that we found ourselves presently in the loom of vast black rocks, with the tide running like a whirlpool, and a great sword-fish reef a mile from the shore, perhaps, to catch any fool that didn't want sea room. I took the tiller myself from this point, and standing well out I brought the launch round gingerly enough, but the water was deep and good once we were on the lee side; and no sooner did we head north again than I espied the cove and knew where Ruth Bellenden had gone ashore.

"It's there, lad," said I, "yonder, where the sand sparkles. There'll be a way up the cliff and good anchorage. No one but an Irishman would buy an island without a harbour; you tell Mr. Bligh that when we go aboard again."

"Mr. Bligh says he's only Irish on the mother's side, sir; that's what makes him bighearted towards the women. He'll be dying to come ashore if there are any petticoats hereabouts."

"They haven't much use for that same garment on the Pacific Islands," said I. "Peter can marry cheap here, if it's the milliners' bills he's minding—but I doubt, lad, from the

look of it, whether we'll find a jewel in this port. It's a wild-looking place, to be sure it is."

Indeed, and it was. Viewed from the eastward sea, I call Ken's Island the most fearsome place I have come across in all my fifteen years afloat. Vast cliffs, black and green and crystal, rose up sheer from the water in precipices for all the world like mighty steps. By here and there, as the ground sloped away to the northward, there were forests of teak (at least, I judged them to be that), pretty woods with every kind of palm, green valleys and grassy pastures. The sands of the cove were white as snow, and shone like so many precious stones pounded up to make a sea beach. On the north side only was there barrenness—for that seemed but a tongue of low land and black rock thrust straight out into the sea. But elsewhere it was a spectacle to impress a man; and I began, perhaps, to admit that Edmond Czerny had more than a crank's whim in his mind when he took little Ruth Bellenden to such a shore for her honeymoon. He had a fancy for wild places, said I, and this was the very spot for him. But Miss Ruth, who had always been one for the towns and cities and the bright things of life—what did she think of it? I should learn that, if she were ashore yonder.

Now, we put straight in to the cove where the silver sand was, and no sooner was I ashore than I espied a rickety wooden ladder rising almost straight up to the cliff's head, which hereabouts was no more than sixty feet high. Neither man nor beast was on the beach, nor did I make out any sign of human habitation whatever. It was just a little sandy bay, lone and desolate; but directly I slipped out of the launch I discovered footprints leading to the ladder's foot, and I knew that men had gone up before me, that very morning it must be, seeing that the tide had ebbed and the sand was still wet. At another time I might have asked myself why nobody came out to meet us, and why there was no lookout for the island to hail a strange ship in the offing; but I was too eager to go ashore, and, for that

matter, had my feet on the sand almost before the launch grounded.

"Do you, Dolly, come up with me," said I; "the others will stand by to anchor until we come down again. If it's not in an hour, lads, go back and get your dinners; but look for me at sunset anyway, for I've no mind to sleep ashore, and that you may be sure of."

They took the orders and pushed the launch off. Dolly and I ran up the crazy ladder and found ourselves at the cliff's head, but no better off in the matter of seeing than we had been before. True, the launch looked far down, like a toy ship in a big basin of blue water; we could distinguish the sword-fish reef, as the lad called it, and other reefs to the east and north, but the place we stood on was shut in by a black wood of teak and blue ebony, and, save for the rustling of the great leaves, we couldn't hear a sound. As for the path through the plantation, that was covered with long, rank grass, and some pit or other—I don't know what it was—gave a pungent, heavy odour which didn't suit a seaman's lungs. I was set against the place from the first—didn't like it, and told the lad as much.

"Dolly," said I, "the sooner we have a ship's planking under our feet again the better for our constitutions. If there's a house in this locality, the ladder is the road to it, unless one of Peter Bligh's countrymen built it. Put your best foot foremost, my lad. We'll dine early if we don't lunch late."

With this I struck the path through the wood and went straight on, not listening to the lad's chatter nor making any myself. The shade was welcome enough; there were pretty places for those that had eyes to see them—waterfalls splashing down from the moss-grown rocks above; little pools, dark and wonderfully blue; here and there a bit of green, which might have been the lawn of a country house. But of dwelling or of people I saw nothing, and to what the boy fancied that he saw I paid no heed.

"You're dreaming it, young gentleman," said I, "for look now, who should be afraid of two unarmed seamen, and why should any honest man be ashamed to show his face? If there are men peeping behind the trees, well, let them peep, and good luck go with them. It doesn't trouble me, and I don't suppose it will take your appetite away. You aren't afraid of them, surely?"

It was an unkind thing to have said, and the lad rightly turned upon me.

"Why, sir," cried he, "I would never be afraid while I was with you."

"Proudly put, my boy, and a compliment I won't forget. What sort of men did you say that they were?"

"One was old, with a goat's beard. He wore ragged breeches and a seaman's blouse. I saw him directly we entered the wood. The others were up in the hills above the waterfall. They carried rifles."

"Come, come, Dolly," exclaimed I. "Put them in Prussian blue at once, and fly the German ensign. Rifles in a place like this—and two unarmed strangers against them! Why should the rogues hide their beautiful faces? If they would know all about us, what's to prevent them? Do we look like highwaymen or honest fellows? Be sure, my lad, that the young lady I am going to see wouldn't have any blacklegs about her house. Ruth Bellenden's too clever for that. She'd send them about their business quick enough, as she's sent many a one when I was the skipper of her yacht. Did they tell you that, Dolly—that your skipper used to sail the smartest schooner-yacht that ever flew the ensign——"

The boy looked up at me and admitted frankly that he knew something.

"They said the young lady owned the Manhattan, sir. I never asked much about it. The men were fond of her, I believe."

"Adored her, lad. She was the daughter of Rupert Bellenden, who made a mint of money by building the

Western American Railroad, and afterwards in the steel way. He was drowned at sea when the Elbe went down. His son got the business, but the daughter took the house and fortune—at least, the best part of it. She was always a rare one for the sea, and owned a biggish boat in her father's time. When he died she bought the Manhattan, more's the pity, for it carried her to Mediterranean ports, and there she took up with the fiddler. He was a Chevalier or something, and could look a woman through and through. What money he had was made, the Lord knows where, not out of fiddling, I'll be bound, for his was no music to set the tongue liling. He'd been in the Pacific a while, they say, and was a Jack-of-all-trades in America. That's how he came across these islands, you may imagine—slap in the sea-way to Yokohama as they are. There's been many a good ship ashore on Ken's Island, lad, believe me, and there'll be many another. 'Tis no likely place to bring a young wife to, and none but a madman would have done it."

I told him all this just in a natural way, as one man speaking to another of something which troubled his mind. Not that he made much of it—how should he?—for there were a hundred things to look at, and his eyes were here and there and everywhere; now up at the great black rocks above us; now peering into a deep gorge, over which a little wooden bridge carried us, just for all the world like a scaffold thrown from tree to tree of the wood. It was a rare picture, I admit, and when we came out of the thicket at last and saw the lower island spread before us like a chart, with its fields of crimson flowers, its waterfalls, its bits of pasture, and its blue seas beyond, a man might well have stood to tell himself that Nature never made a fairer place. For my part, I began to believe again that Edmond Czerny knew what he was about when he built a house for Miss Ruth on such a spot; and I was just about to tell the lad as much when a man came running up the path and, hailing us in a loud voice, asked us where the devil we were going to—or

something not more civil. And, at this, I brought to and looked him up and down and answered him as a seaman should.

"To the devil yourself," said I; "what's that to do with you, and what may your name happen to be?"

He was a big man, dressed in blue serge, with a peak cap and a seaman's blouse. He had a long brown beard and a pock-marked face, and he carried a spy-glass under his arm. He had come up from the grassy valley below—and there I first saw the roof of a low bungalow, and the gardens about it. That was Ruth's home, I said, and this fellow was one of Czerny's yacht hands.

"Not so fast, not so fast," cried he; "do you know that this is private land, and you've no business ashore here?"

"Why," says I, "haven't we come ashore to see you, my beauty, and doesn't the spectacle reward us? 'Bout ship," says I, "and have done with it. My business is with your mistress, whom I knew before your brother was hanged at 'Frisco."

He swore a big oath at this, and, I do believe, was half of the mind to try which was the better man; but when he had looked down at the gardens of the bungalow, and a white figure was plainly to be seen there, he seemed to think better of it, and changed his tone entirely.

"Avast," cries he, with a bit of a laugh, "you're one of the right sort, and no mistaking that! And where would you be from, and what would you be wanting here?" he asks, grown civil as a bagman with a bit of ribbon to sell.

"Shipmate," says I, "if I'm one of the right sort, my port's Southampton and my flag's the ensign. Take me down to Mme. Czerny, whom I see among the flower-beds yonder, and you shall know enough about me in five minutes to bring the tears to your beautiful eyes. And come," says I, chaffing him, "are there any girls in this bit of a paradise? If so," says I, "I should call 'em lucky when I look at you."

Well, he took it sourly enough, but I could see he was mighty curious to hear more about me, and as we went down a winding path to the bungalow in the valley he put many questions to me, and I tried to answer them civilly. Like all seamen he had no silent wits of his own, and every word he thought, that he must speak.

"The gov'nor's not here," he said; "gone to 'Frisco. Lucky for you, for he don't like strangers. Aye," he goes on, "he's a wonderful man for his own way; to be sure he is. You'll be aboard and away before sunset, or you might see him. Take my advice and put about. The shore's unwholesome," says he.

"By the looks of you," says I, "you've nothing more than jaundice, and that I can put up with. As for your gov'nor, I remember him well when he and I did the light fandango together in European ports. He was always a wonder with the fiddle. My mistress could lead him like a pug-dog. I don't doubt she's a bit of a hand at it still."

Now, this set him thinking, and he put two and two together, I suppose, and knew pretty well who I was.

"You'll be Jasper Begg that sailed the lady's yacht Manhattan?" says he. "Well, I've heard of you often, and from her own lips. She'll be pleased to see you, right enough—though what the gov'nor might say is another matter. You see," he went on, "this same island is a paradise, sure as thunder; but it's lonely for women-kind, and your mistress, she don't take to it kindly. Not that she's complaining, or anything of that sort. A lady who has rings for her fingers and bells for her toes, and all real precious, same as any duchess might wear, she don't complain long. Why, my gov'nor could make his very teeth out of diamonds and not miss 'em, come to that! But his missus is always plaguing him to take her to Europe, and that game. As if he don't want a wife in his own home, and not in another man's, which is sense, Mister Begg, though it is spoke by a plain seaman."

I said, "Aye, aye," and held my tongue, knowing that he would go on with it. We were almost down at the house now, and the cliffs stood like a great cloud of solid rock, above which a loom of smoke was floating. Dolly walked at my heels like a patient dog. My own feelings are not for me to tell. I was going to see Ruth Bellenden again. Why, she was there in yonder garden, and nothing between us but this great hulking yellow boy, who took to buttonholing me as a parson buttonholes his churchwarden when he wants a new grate in his drawing-room.

"Now," says he, standing before me as one who had half a mind to block the road, "you be advised by me, Mister Begg, and cut this job short. Don't you be listening to a woman's parley, for it's all nonsense. I've done wrong to let you ashore, perhaps—perhaps I haven't; but, ashore or afloat, it's my business to see that the guv'nor's orders is carried out, and carried out they will be, one man or twenty agen 'em. Do you take a plain word or do you not, Mister Begg?"

"I take whatever's going, and don't trouble about the sugar," says I; and then, putting him aside, I lifted the latch of the garden gate, and went in and saw Miss Ruth.