Several of us, all more or less connected with the sea, were dining in a small river-hostelry not more than thirty miles from London, and less than twenty from that shallow and dangerous puddle to which our coasting men give the grandiose name of "German Ocean." And through the wide windows we had a view of the Thames; an enfilading view down the Lower Hope Reach. But the dinner was execrable, and all the feast was for the eyes.
That flavour of salt-water which for so many of us had been the very water of life permeated our talk. He who hath known the bitterness of the Ocean shall have its taste forever in his mouth. But one or two of us, pampered by the life of the land, complained of hunger. It was impossible to swallow any of that stuff. And indeed there was a strange mustiness in everything. The wooden dining-room stuck out over the mud of the shore like a lacustrine dwelling; the planks of the floor seemed rotten; a decrepit old waiter tottered pathetically to and fro before an antediluvian and worm-eaten sideboard; the chipped plates might have been disinterred from some kitchen midden near an inhabited lake; and the chops recalled times more ancient still. They brought forcibly to one's mind the night of ages when the primeval man, evolving the first rudiments of cookery from his dim consciousness, scorched lumps of flesh at a fire of sticks in the company of other good fellows; then, gorged and happy, sat him back among the gnawed bones to tell his artless tales of experience--the tales of hunger and hunt--and of women, perhaps!

But luckily the wine happened to be as old as the waiter. So, comparatively empty, but upon the whole fairly happy, we sat back and told our artless
tales. We talked of the sea and all its works. The
sea never changes, and its works for all the talk of
men are wrapped in mystery. But we agreed that
the times were changed. And we talked of old
ships, of sea-accidents, of break-downs, dismast-
ings; and of a man who brought his ship safe to
Liverpool all the way from the River Platte under
a jury rudder. We talked of wrecks, of short ra-
tions and of heroism--or at least of what the news-
papers would have called heroism at sea--a mani-
festation of virtues quite different from the heroism
of primitive times. And now and then falling silent
all together we gazed at the sights of the river.

A P. & O. boat passed bound down. "One gets
jolly good dinners on board these ships," remarked
one of our band. A man with sharp eyes read out
the name on her bows: Arcadia. "What a beauti-
ful model of a ship!" murmured some of us. She
was followed by a small cargo steamer, and the flag
they hauled down aboard while we were looking
showed her to be a Norwegian. She made an awful
lot of smoke; and before it had quite blown away, a
high-sided, short, wooden barque, in ballast and
towed by a paddle-tug, appeared in front of the
windows. All her hands were forward busy setting
up the headgear; and aft a woman in a red hood,
quite alone with the man at the wheel, paced the
length of the poop back and forth, with the grey
wool of some knitting work in her hands.

"German I should think," muttered one. "The
skipper has his wife on board," remarked another;
and the light of the crimson sunset all ablaze behind
the London smoke, throwing a glow of Bengal light
upon the barque's spars, faded away from the Hope
Reach.

Then one of us, who had not spoken before, a
man of over fifty, that had commanded ships for a
quarter of a century, looking after the barque now
gliding far away, all black on the lustre of the river,
said:

This reminds me of an absurd episode in my life,
now many years ago, when I got first the command
of an iron barque, loading then in a certain Eastern
seaport. It was also the capital of an Eastern king-
dom, lying up a river as might be London lies up
this old Thames of ours. No more need be said of
the place; for this sort of thing might have hap-
pened anywhere where there are ships, skippers,
tugboats, and orphan nieces of indescribable splen-
dour. And the absurdity of the episode concerns
only me, my enemy Falk, and my friend Hermann.

There seemed to be something like peculiar em-
phasis on the words "My friend Hermann," which
caused one of us (for we had just been speaking of
heroism at sea) to say idly and nonchalantly:

"And was this Hermann a hero?"

Not at all, said our grizzled friend. No hero at
all. He was a Schiff-fuhrer: Ship-conductor.
That's how they call a Master Mariner in Germany.
I prefer our way. The alliteration is good, and
there is something in the nomenclature that gives
to us as a body the sense of corporate existence:
Apprentice, Mate, Master, in the ancient and hon-
ourable craft of the sea. As to my friend Hermann,
he might have been a consummate master of the
honourable craft, but he was called officially Schiff-
fuhrer, and had the simple, heavy appearance of a
well-to-do farmer, combined with the good-natured
shrewdness of a small shopkeeper. With his shaven
chin, round limbs, and heavy eyelids he did not look
like a toiler, and even less like an adventurer of the
sea. Still, he toiled upon the seas, in his own way,
much as a shopkeeper works behind his counter.
And his ship was the means by which he maintained
his growing family.

She was a heavy, strong, blunt-bowed affair,
awakening the ideas of primitive solidity, like the
wooden plough of our forefathers. And there were,
about her, other suggestions of a rustic and homely
nature. The extraordinary timber projections
which I have seen in no other vessel made her square
stern resemble the tail end of a miller's waggon.
But the four stern ports of her cabin, glazed with
six little greenish panes each, and framed in wooden
sashes painted brown, might have been the windows
of a cottage in the country. The tiny white cur-
tains and the greenery of flower pots behind the
glass completed the resemblance. On one or two
occasions when passing under stern I had de-
tected from my boat a round arm in the act of tilt-
ing a watering pot, and the bowed sleek head of a
maiden whom I shall always call Hermann's niece,
because as a matter of fact I've never heard her
name, for all my intimacy with the family.

This, however, sprang up later on. Meantime in
common with the rest of the shipping in that East-
ern port, I was left in no doubt as to Hermann's no-
tions of hygienic clothing. Evidently he believed in wearing good stout flannel next his skin. On most days little frocks and pinafores could be seen drying in the mizzen rigging of his ship, or a tiny row of socks fluttering on the signal halyards; but once a fortnight the family washing was exhibited in force. It covered the poop entirely. The afternoon breeze would incite to a weird and flabby activity all that crowded mass of clothing, with its vague suggestions of drowned, mutilated and flattened humanity. Trunks without heads waved at you arms without hands; legs without feet kicked fantastically with collapsible flourishes; and there were long white garments that, taking the wind fairly through their neck openings edged with lace, became for a moment violently distended as by the passage of obese and invisible bodies. On these days you could make out that ship at a great distance by the multi-coloured grotesque riot going on abaft her mizzen mast.

She had her berth just ahead of me, and her name was Diana,--Diana not of Ephesus but of Bremen. This was proclaimed in white letters a foot long spaced widely across the stern (somewhat like the lettering of a shop-sign) under the cottage windows. This ridiculously unsuitable name struck
one as an impertinence towards the memory of the
most charming of goddesses; for, apart from the
fact that the old craft was physically incapable of
engaging in any sort of chase, there was a gang of
four children belonging to her. They peeped over
the rail at passing boats and occasionally dropped
various objects into them. Thus, sometime before
I knew Hermann to speak to, I received on my hat
a horrid rag-doll belonging to Hermann's eldest
daughter. However, these youngsters were upon
the whole well behaved. They had fair heads, round
eyes, round little knobby noses, and they resembled
their father a good deal.

This Diana of Bremen was a most innocent old
ship, and seemed to know nothing of the wicked sea,
as there are on shore households that know nothing
of the corrupt world. And the sentiments she sug-
gested were unexceptionable and mainly of a do-
mestic order. She was a home. All these dear chil-
dren had learned to walk on her roomy quarter-deck.
In such thoughts there is something pretty, even
touching. Their teeth, I should judge, they had
cut on the ends of her running gear. I have many
times observed the baby Hermann (Nicholas) en-
gaged in gnawing the whipping of the fore-royal
brace. Nicholas' favourite place of residence was
under the main fife-rail. Directly he was let loose he would crawl off there, and the first seaman who came along would bring him, carefully held aloft in tarry hands, back to the cabin door. I fancy there must have been a standing order to that effect. In the course of these transportations the baby, who was the only peppery person in the ship, tried to smite these stalwart young German sailors on the face.

Mrs. Hermann, an engaging, stout housewife, wore on board baggy blue dresses with white dots. When, as happened once or twice I caught her at an elegant little wash-tub rubbing hard on white collars, baby's socks, and Hermann's summer neckties, she would blush in girlish confusion, and raising her wet hands greet me from afar with many friendly nods. Her sleeves would be rolled up to the elbows, and the gold hoop of her wedding ring glittered among the soapsuds. Her voice was pleasant, she had a serene brow, smooth bands of very fair hair, and a good-humoured expression of the eyes. She was motherly and moderately talkative. When this simple matron smiled, youthful dimples broke out on her fresh broad cheeks. Hermann's niece on the other hand, an orphan and very silent, I never saw attempt a smile. This, however,
was not gloom on her part but the restraint of youthful gravity.

They had carried her about with them for the last three years, to help with the children and be company for Mrs. Hermann, as Hermann mentioned once to me. It had been very necessary while they were all little, he had added in a vexed manner. It was her arm and her sleek head that I had glimpsed one morning, through the stern-windows of the cabin, hovering over the pots of fuchsias and mignonette; but the first time I beheld her full length I surrendered to her proportions. They fix her in my mind, as great beauty, great intelligence, quickness of wit or kindness of heart might have made some her other woman equally memorable.

With her it was form and size. It was her physical personality that had this imposing charm. She might have been witty, intelligent, and kind to an exceptional degree. I don't know, and this is not to the point. All I know is that she was built on a magnificent scale. Built is the only word. She was constructed, she was erected, as it were, with a regal lavishness. It staggered you to see this reckless expenditure of material upon a chit of a girl. She was youthful and also perfectly mature, as though
she had been some fortunate immortal. She was heavy too, perhaps, but that's nothing. It only added to that notion of permanence. She was barely nineteen. But such shoulders! Such round arms! Such a shadowing forth of mighty limbs when with three long strides she pounced across the deck upon the overturned Nicholas--it's perfectly indescribable! She seemed a good, quiet girl, vigilant as to Lena's needs, Gustav's tumbles, the state of Carl's dear little nose--conscientious, hardworking, and all that. But what magnificent hair she had! Abundant, long, thick, of a tawny colour. It had the sheen of precious metals. She wore it plaited tightly into one single tress hanging girlishly down her back and its end reached down to her waist. The massiveness of it surprised you. On my word it reminded one of a club. Her face was big, comely, of an unruffled expression. She had a good complexion, and her blue eyes were so pale that she appeared to look at the world with the empty white candour of a statue. You could not call her good-looking. It was something much more impressive. The simplicity of her apparel, the opulence of her form, her imposing stature, and the extraordinary sense of vigorous life that seemed to emanate from her like a perfume exhaled by a flower, made her beautiful with a beauty of a rustic and olympian order. To watch her reaching
up to the clothes-line with both arms raised high
above her head, caused you to fall a musing in a
strain of pagan piety. Excellent Mrs. Hermann's
baggy cotton gowns had some sort of rudimentary
frills at neck and bottom, but this girl's print frocks
hadn't even a wrinkle; nothing but a few straight
folds in the skirt falling to her feet, and these, when
she stood still, had a severe and statuesque quality.
She was inclined naturally to be still whether sit-
ting or standing. However, I don't mean to say
she was statuesque. She was too generously alive;
but she could have stood for an allegoric statue of
the Earth. I don't mean the worn-out earth of our
possession, but a young Earth, a virginal planet
undisturbed by the vision of a future teeming with
the monstrous forms of life and death, clamorous
with the cruel battles of hunger and thought.

The worthy Hermann himself was not very en-
tertaining, though his English was fairly compre-
hensible. Mrs. Hermann, who always let off one
speech at least at me in an hospitable, cordial tone
(and in Platt-Deutsch I suppose) I could not un-
derstand. As to their niece, however satisfactory
to look upon (and she inspired you somehow with
a hopeful view as to the prospects of mankind)
she was a modest and silent presence, mostly en-
gaged in sewing, only now and then, as I observed, falling over that work into a state of maidenly meditation. Her aunt sat opposite her, sewing also, with her feet propped on a wooden footstool. On the other side of the deck Hermann and I would get a couple of chairs out of the cabin and settle down to a smoking match, accompanied at long intervals by the pacific exchange of a few words. I came nearly every evening. Hermann I would find in his shirt sleeves. As soon as he returned from the shore on board his ship he commenced operations by taking off his coat; then he put on his head an embroidered round cap with a tassel, and changed his boots for a pair of cloth slippers. Afterwards he smoked at the cabin-door, looking at his children with an air of civic virtue, till they got caught one after another and put to bed in various staterooms. Lastly, we would drink some beer in the cabin, which was furnished with a wooden table on cross legs, and with black straight-backed chairs--more like a farm kitchen than a ship's cuddy. The sea and all nautical affairs seemed very far removed from the hospitality of this exemplary family.

And I liked this because I had a rather worrying time on board my own ship. I had been appointed ex-officio by the British Consul to take charge of
her after a man who had died suddenly, leaving for
the guidance of his successor some suspiciously un-
receipted bills, a few dry-dock estimates hinting at
bribery, and a quantity of vouchers for three years' 
extravagant expenditure; all these mixed up to-
gether in a dusty old violin-case lined with ruby
velvet. I found besides a large account-book,
which, when opened, hopefully turned out to my
infinite consternation to be filled with verses--page
after page of rhymed doggerel of a jovial and im-
proper character, written in the neatest minute hand
I ever did see. In the same fiddle-case a photograph
of my predecessor, taken lately in Saigon, repre-
sented in front of a garden view, and in company
of a female in strange draperies, an elderly, squat,
rugged man of stern aspect in a clumsy suit of black
broadcloth, and with the hair brushed forward above
the temples in a manner reminding one of a boar’s
tusks. Of a fiddle, however, the only trace on board
was the case, its empty husk as it were; but of the
two last freights the ship had indubitably earned
of late, there were not even the husks left. It was
impossible to say where all that money had gone to.
It wasn't on board. It had not been remitted home;
for a letter from the owners, preserved in a desk
evidently by the merest accident, complained mildly
enough that they had not been favoured by a
scratch of the pen for the last eighteen months.
There were next to no stores on board, not an inch
of spare rope or a yard of canvas. The ship had
been run bare, and I foresaw no end of difficulties
before I could get her ready for sea.

As I was young then—not thirty yet—I took
myself and my troubles very seriously. The old
mate, who had acted as chief mourner at the cap-
tain's funeral, was not particularly pleased at my
coming. But the fact is the fellow was not legally
qualified for command, and the Consul was bound,
if at all possible, to put a properly certificated man
on board. As to the second mate, all I can say his
name was Tottersen, or something like that. His
practice was to wear on his head, in that tropical
climate, a mangy fur cap. He was, without excep-
tion, the stupidest man I had ever seen on board
ship. And he looked it too. He looked so con-
foundedly stupid that it was a matter of surprise
for me when he answered to his name.

I drew no great comfort from their company, to
say the least of it; while the prospect of making a
long sea passage with those two fellows was depress-
ing. And my other thoughts in solitude could not
be of a gay complexion. The crew was sickly, the
cargo was coming very slow; I foresaw I would
have lots of trouble with the charterers, and doubted whether they would advance me enough money for the ship's expenses. Their attitude towards me was unfriendly. Altogether I was not getting on. I would discover at odd times (generally about midnight) that I was totally inexperienced, greatly ignorant of business, and hopelessly unfit for any sort of command; and when the steward had to be taken to the hospital ill with choleraic symptoms I felt bereaved of the only decent person at the after end of the ship. He was fully expected to recover, but in the meantime had to be replaced by some sort of servant. And on the recommendation of a certain Schomberg, the proprietor of the smaller of the two hotels in the place, I engaged a Chinaman. Schomberg, a brawny, hairy Alsatian, and an awful gossip, assured me that it was all right. "First-class boy that. Came in the suite of his Excellency Tseng the Commissioner--you know. His Excellency Tseng lodged with me here for three weeks."

He mouthed the Chinese Excellency at me with great unction, though the specimen of the "suite" did not seem very promising. At the time, however, I did not know what an untrustworthy humbug Schomberg was. The "boy" might have been forty or a hundred and forty for all you could tell--
one of those Chinamen of the death's-head type of face and completely inscrutable. Before the end of the third day he had revealed himself as a confirmed opium-smoker, a gambler, a most audacious thief, and a first-class sprinter. When he departed at the top of his speed with thirty-two golden sovereigns of my own hard-earned savings it was the last straw. I had reserved that money in case my difficulties came to the worst. Now it was gone I felt as poor and naked as a fakir. I clung to my ship, for all the bother she caused me, but what I could not bear were the long lonely evenings in her cuddy, where the atmosphere, made smelly by a leaky lamp, was agitated by the snoring of the mate. That fellow shut himself up in his stuffy cabin punctually at eight, and made gross and revolting noises like a water-logged trump. It was odious not to be able to worry oneself in comfort on board one's own ship. Everything in this world, I reflected, even the command of a nice little barque, may be made a delusion and a snare for the unwary spirit of pride in man.

From such reflections I was glad to make any escape on board that Bremen Diana. There apparently no whisper of the world's iniquities had ever penetrated. And yet she lived upon the wide sea:
and the sea tragic and comic, the sea with its horrors
and its peculiar scandals, the sea peopled by men
and ruled by iron necessity is indubitably a part of
the world. But that patriarchal old tub, like some
saintly retreat, echoed nothing of it. She was world
proof. Her venerable innocence apparently had
put a restraint on the roaring lusts of the sea. And
yet I have known the sea too long to believe in its
respect for decency. An elemental force is ruthlessly
frank. It may, of course, have been Hermann's
skilful seamanship, but to me it looked as if the al-
lied oceans had refrained from smashing these high
bulwarks, unshipping the lumpy rudder, frightening
the children, and generally opening this fam-
ily's eyes out of sheer reticence. It looked like reti-
cence. The ruthless disclosure was in the end left
for a man to make; a man strong and elemental
enough and driven to unveil some secrets of the sea
by the power of a simple and elemental desire.

This, however, occurred much later, and mean-
time I took sanctuary in that serene old ship early
every evening. The only person on board that
seemed to be in trouble was little Lena, and in due
course I perceived that the health of the rag-doll
was more than delicate. This object led a sort of
"in extremis" existence in a wooden box placed
against the starboard mooring-bitts, tended and
nursed with the greatest sympathy and care by all
the children, who greatly enjoyed pulling long faces
and moving with hushed footsteps. Only the baby
--Nicholas--looked on with a cold, ruffianly leer,
as if he had belonged to another tribe altogether.
Lena perpetually sorrowed over the box, and all of
them were in deadly earnest. It was wonderful the
way these children would work up their compassion
for that bedraggled thing I wouldn't have touched
with a pair of tongs. I suppose they were exercis-
ing and developing their racial sentimentalism by
the means of that dummy. I was only surprised
that Mrs. Hermann let Lena cherish and hug that
bundle of rags to that extent, it was so disreputably
and completely unclean. But Mrs. Hermann would
raise her fine womanly eyes from her needlework to
look on with amused sympathy, and did not seem to
see it, somehow, that this object of affection was a
disgrace to the ship's purity. Purity, not cleanli-
ness, is the word. It was pushed so far that I seemed
to detect in this too a sentimental excess, as if dirt
had been removed in very love. It is impossible to
give you an idea of such a meticulous neatness. It
was as if every morning that ship had been ardu-
ously explored with--with toothbrushes. Her very
bowsprit three times a week had its toilette made
with a cake of soap and a piece of soft flannel. Ar-
rayed--I MUST say arrayed--arrayed artlessly in
dazzling white paint as to wood and dark green as
to ironwork the simple-minded distribution of these
colours evoked the images of simple-minded peace,
of arcadian felicity; and the childish comedy of
disease and sorrow struck me sometimes as an abom-
inably real blot upon that ideal state.

I enjoyed it greatly, and on my part I brought
a little mild excitement into it. Our intimacy arose
from the pursuit of that thief. It was in the even-
ing, and Hermann, who, contrary to his habits, had
stayed on shore late that day, was extricating him-
self backwards out of a little gharry on the river
bank, opposite his ship, when the hunt passed.
Realising the situation as though he had eyes in his
shoulder-blades, he joined us with a leap and took
the lead. The Chinaman fled silent like a rapid
shadow on the dust of an extremely oriental road.
I followed. A long way in the rear my mate
whooped like a savage. A young moon threw a
bashful light on a plain like a monstrous waste
ground: the architectural mass of a Buddhist tem-
ple far away projected itself in dead black on the
sky. We lost the thief of course; but in my disap-
pointment I had to admire Hermann's presence of
mind. The velocity that stodgy man developed in
the interests of a complete stranger earned my
warm gratitude--there was something truly cordial
in his exertions.

He seemed as vexed as myself at our failure, and
would hardly listen to my thanks. He said it was
"nothings," and invited me on the spot to come on
board his ship and drink a glass of beer with him.
We poked sceptically for a while amongst the
bushes, peered without conviction into a ditch or
two. There was not a sound: patches of slime glim-
ermed feebly amongst the reeds. Slowly we trudged
back, drooping under the thin sickle of the moon,
and I heard him mutter to himself, "Himmel! Zwei
und dreissig Pfund!" He was impressed by the
figure of my loss. For a long time we had ceased to
hear the mate's whoops and yells.

Then he said to me, "Everybody has his troub-
les," and as we went on remarked that he would
never have known anything of mine hadn't he by an
extraordinary chance been detained on shore by
Captain Falk. He didn't like to stay late ashore--
he added with a sigh. The something doleful in his
tone I put to his sympathy with my misfortune, of
course.
On board the Diana Mrs. Hermann's fine eyes expressed much interest and commiseration. We had found the two women sewing face to face under the open skylight in the strong glare of the lamp. Hermann walked in first, starting in the very doorway to pull off his coat, and encouraging me with loud, hospitable ejaculations: "Come in! This way! Come in, captain!" At once, coat in hand, he began to tell his wife all about it. Mrs. Hermann put the palms of her plump hands together; I smiled and bowed with a heavy heart: the niece got up from her sewing to bring Hermann's slippers and his embroidered calotte, which he assumed pontifically, talking (about me) all the time. Billows of white stuff lay between the chairs on the cabin floor; I caught the words "Zwei und dreissig Pfund" repeated several times, and presently came the beer, which seemed delicious to my throat, parched with running and the emotions of the chase.

I didn't get away till well past midnight, long after the women had retired. Hermann had been trading in the East for three years or more, carrying freights of rice and timber mostly. His ship was well known in all the ports from Vladivostok to Singapore. She was his own property. The profits
had been moderate, but the trade answered well
enough while the children were small yet. In an-
other year or so he hoped he would be able to sell the
old Diana to a firm in Japan for a fair price. He
intended to return home, to Bremen, by mail boat,
second class, with Mrs. Hermann and the children.
He told me all this stolidly, with slow puffs at his
pipe. I was sorry when knocking the ashes out he
began to rub his eyes. I would have sat with him
till morning. What had I to hurry on board my
own ship for? To face the broken rifled drawer in
my state-room. Ugh! The very thought made me
feel unwell.

I became their daily guest, as you know. I think
that Mrs. Hermann from the first looked upon me
as a romantic person. I did not, of course, tear my
hair coram populo over my loss, and she took it for
lordly indifference. Afterwards, I daresay, I did
tell them some of my adventures--such as they were
--and they marvelled greatly at the extent of my
experience. Hermann would translate what he
thought the most striking passages. Getting up on
his legs, and as if delivering a lecture on a phenomen-
on, he addressed himself, with gestures, to the
two women, who would let their sewing sink slowly
on their laps. Meantime I sat before a glass of
Hermann's beer, trying to look modest. Mrs. Hermann would glance at me quickly, emit slight "Ach's!" The girl never made a sound. Never.

But she too would sometimes raise her pale eyes to look at me in her unseeing gentle way. Her glance was by no means stupid; it beamed out soft and diffuse as the moon beams upon a landscape--quite differently from the scrutinising inspection of the stars. You were drowned in it, and imagined yourself to appear blurred. And yet this same glance when turned upon Christian Falk must have been as efficient as the searchlight of a battle-ship.

Falk was the other assiduous visitor on board, but from his behaviour he might have been coming to see the quarter-deck capstan. He certainly used to stare at it a good deal when keeping us company outside the cabin door, with one muscular arm thrown over the back of the chair, and his big shapely legs, in very tight white trousers, extended far out and ending in a pair of black shoes as roomy as punts. On arrival he would shake Hermann's hand with a mutter, bow to the women, and take up his careless and misanthropic attitude by our side. He departed abruptly, with a jump, going through the performance of grunts, handshakes, bow, as if in a panic. Sometimes, with a
sort of discreet and convulsive effort, he approached
the women and exchanged a few low words with
them, half a dozen at most. On these occasions Her-
mann's usual stare became positively glassy and
Mrs. Hermann's kind countenance would colour up.
The girl herself never turned a hair.

Falk was a Dane or perhaps a Norwegian, I
can't tell now. At all events he was a Scandinavian
of some sort, and a bloated monopolist to boot. It
is possible he was unacquainted with the word, but
he had a clear perception of the thing itself. His
tariff of charges for towing ships in and out was
the most brutally inconsiderate document of the sort
I had ever seen. He was the commander and owner
of the only tug-boat on the river, a very trim white
craft of 150 tons or more, as elegantly neat as a
yacht, with a round wheel-house rising like a glazed
turret high above her sharp bows, and with one slen-
der varnished pole mast forward. I daresay there
are yet a few shipmasters afloat who remember Falk
and his tug very well. He extracted his pound and
a half of flesh from each of us merchant-skippers
with an inflexible sort of indifference which made
him detested and even feared. Schomberg used to
remark: "I won't talk about the fellow. I don't
think he has six drinks from year's end to year's end
in my place. But my advice is, gentlemen, don't you have anything to do with him, if you can help it."

This advice, apart from unavoidable business relations, was easy to follow because Falk intruded upon no one. It seems absurd to compare a tug-boat skipper to a centaur: but he reminded me somehow of an engraving in a little book I had as a boy, which represented centaurs at a stream, and there was one, especially in the foreground, prancing bow and arrows in hand, with regular severe features and an immense curled wavy beard, flowing down his breast. Falk's face reminded me of that centaur. Besides, he was a composite creature. Not a man-horse, it is true, but a man-boat. He lived on board his tug, which was always dashing up and down the river from early morn till dewy eve.

In the last rays of the setting sun, you could pick out far away down the reach his beard borne high up on the white structure, foaming up stream to anchor for the night. There was the white-clad man's body, and the rich brown patch of the hair, and nothing below the waist but the 'thwart-ship white lines of the bridge-screens, that lead the eye to the sharp white lines of the bows cleaving the
muddy water of the river.

Separated from his boat to me at least he seemed incomplete. The tug herself without his head and torso on the bridge looked mutilated as it were. But he left her very seldom. All the time I remained in harbour I saw him only twice on shore. On the first occasion it was at my charterers, where he came in misanthropically to get paid for towing out a French barque the day before. The second time I could hardly believe my eyes, for I beheld him reclining under his beard in a cane-bottomed chair in the billiard-room of Schomberg's hotel.

It was very funny to see Schomberg ignoring him pointedly. The artificiality of it contrasted strongly with Falk's natural unconcern. The big Alsatian talked loudly with his other customers, going from one little table to the other, and passing Falk's place of repose with his eyes fixed straight ahead. Falk sat there with an untouched glass at his elbow. He must have known by sight and name every white man in the room, but he never addressed a word to anybody. He acknowledged my presence by a drop of his eyelids, and that was all. Sprawling there in the chair, he would, now and again, draw the palms of both his hands down his face,
giving at the same time a slight, almost imperceptible shudder.

It was a habit he had, and of course I was perfectly familiar with it, since you could not remain an hour in his company without being made to wonder at such a movement breaking some long period of stillness. It was a passionate and inexplicable gesture. He used to make it at all sorts of times; as likely as not after he had been listening to little Lena's chatter about the suffering doll, for instance. The Hermann children always besieged him about his legs closely, though, in a gentle way, he shrank from them a little. He seemed, however, to feel a great affection for the whole family. For Hermann himself especially. He sought his company. In this case, for instance, he must have been waiting for him, because as soon as he appeared Falk rose hastily, and they went out together. Then Schomberg expounded in my hearing to three or four people his theory that Falk was after Captain Hermann's niece, and asserted confidently that nothing would come of it. It was the same last year when Captain Hermann was loading here, he said.

Naturally, I did not believe Schomberg, but I own that for a time I observed closely what went
on. All I discovered was some impatience on Hermann's part. At the sight of Falk, stepping over the gangway, the excellent man would begin to mumble and chew between his teeth something that sounded like German swear-words. However, as I've said, I'm not familiar with the language, and Hermann's soft, round-eyed countenance remained unchanged. Staring stolidly ahead he greeted him with, "Wie gehts," or in English, "How are you?" with a throaty enunciation. The girl would look up for an instant and move her lips slightly: Mrs. Hermann let her hands rest on her lap to talk volubly to him for a minute or so in her pleasant voice before she went on with her sewing again. Falk would throw himself into a chair, stretch his big legs, as like as not draw his hands down his face passionately. As to myself, he was not pointedly impertinent: it was rather as though he could not be bothered with such trifles as my existence; and the truth is that being a monopolist he was under no necessity to be amiable. He was sure to get his own extortionate terms out of me for towage whether he frowned or smiled. As a matter of fact, he did neither: but before many days elapsed he managed to astonish me not a little and to set Schomberg's tongue clacking more than ever.
It came about in this way. There was a shallow bar at the mouth of the river which ought to have been kept down, but the authorities of the State were piously busy gilding afresh the great Buddhist Pagoda just then, and I suppose had no money to spare for dredging operations. I don't know how it may be now, but at the time I speak of that sand-bank was a great nuisance to the shipping. One of its consequences was that vessels of a certain draught of water, like Hermann's or mine, could not complete their loading in the river. After taking in as much as possible of their cargo, they had to go outside to fill up. The whole procedure was an unmitigated bore. When you thought you had as much on board as your ship could carry safely over the bar, you went and gave notice to your agents. They, in their turn, notified Falk that so-and-so was ready to go out. Then Falk (ostensibly when it fitted in with his other work, but, if the truth were known, simply when his arbitrary spirit moved him), after ascertaining carefully in the office that there was enough money to meet his bill, would come along unsympathetically, glaring at you with his yellow eyes from the bridge, and would drag you out dishevelled as to rigging, lumbered as to the decks, with unfeeling haste, as if to execution. And he would force you too to take the end of his own wire hawser, for the use of which there was of course
an extra charge. To your shouted remonstrances against that extortion this towering trunk with one hand on the engine-room telegraph only shook its bearded head above the splash, the racket, and the clouds of smoke in which the tug, backing and filling in the smother of churning paddle-wheels behaved like a ferocious and impatient creature. He had her manned by the cheekiest gang of lascars I ever did see, whom he allowed to bawl at you insolently, and, once fast, he plucked you out of your berth as if he did not care what he smashed. Eighteen miles down the river you had to go behind him, and then three more along the coast to where a group of uninhabited rocky islets enclosed a sheltered anchorage. There you would have to lie at single anchor with your naked spars showing to seaward over these barren fragments of land scattered upon a very intensely blue sea. There was nothing to look at besides but a bare coast, the muddy edge of the brown plain with the sinuosities of the river you had left, traced in dull green, and the Great Pagoda uprising lonely and massive with shining curves and pinnacles like the gorgeous and stony efflorescence of tropical rocks. You had nothing to do but to wait fretfully for the balance of your cargo, which was sent out of the river with the greatest irregularity. And it was open to you to console yourself with the thought that, after all,
this stage of bother meant that your departure from
these shores was indeed approaching at last.

We both had to go through that stage, Hermann
and I, and there was a sort of tacit emulation be-
tween the ships as to which should be ready first.
We kept on neck and neck almost to the finish, when
I won the race by going personally to give notice in
the forenoon; whereas Hermann, who was very slow
in making up his mind to go ashore, did not get to
the agents' office till late in the day. They told him
there that my ship was first on turn for next morn-
ing, and I believe he told them he was in no hurry.
It suited him better to go the day after.

That evening, on board the Diana, he sat with
his plump knees well apart, staring and puffing at
the curved mouthpiece of his pipe. Presently he
spoke with some impatience to his niece about put-
ting the children to bed. Mrs. Hermann, who was
talking to Falk, stopped short and looked at her
husband uneasily, but the girl got up at once and
drove the children before her into the cabin. In a
little while Mrs. Hermann had to leave us to quell
what, from the sounds inside, must have been a dan-
gerous mutiny. At this Hermann grumbled to him-
self. For half an hour longer Falk left alone with
us fidgeted on his chair, sighed lightly, then at last, after drawing his hands down his face, got up, and as if renouncing the hope of making himself understood (he hadn't opened his mouth once) he said in English: "Well... Good night, Captain Hermann." He stopped for a moment before my chair and looked down fixedly; I may even say he glared: and he went so far as to make a deep noise in his throat. There was in all this something so marked that for the first time in our limited intercourse of nods and grunts he excited in me something like interest. But next moment he disappointed me--for he strode away hastily without a nod even.

His manner was usually odd it is true, and I certainly did not pay much attention to it; but that sort of obscure intention, which seemed to lurk in his nonchalance like a wary old carp in a pond, had never before come so near the surface. He had distinctly aroused my expectations. I would have been unable to say what it was I expected, but at all events I did not expect the absurd developments he sprung upon me no later than the break of the very next day.

I remember only that there was, on that evening, enough point in his behaviour to make me, after he...
had fled, wonder audibly what he might mean. To this Hermann, crossing his legs with a swing and settling himself viciously away from me in his chair, said: "That fellow don't know himself what he means."

There might have been some insight in such a remark. I said nothing, and, still averted, he added: "When I was here last year he was just the same." An eruption of tobacco smoke enveloped his head as if his temper had exploded like gunpowder.

I had half a mind to ask him point blank whether he, at least, didn't know why Falk, a notoriously unsociable man, had taken to visiting his ship with such assiduity. After all, I reflected suddenly, it was a most remarkable thing. I wonder now what Hermann would have said. As it turned out he didn't let me ask. Forgetting all about Falk apparently, he started a monologue on his plans for the future: the selling of the ship, the going home; and falling into a reflective and calculating mood he mumbled between regular jets of smoke about the expense. The necessity of disbursing passage money for all his tribe seemed to disturb him in a manner that was the more striking because other-
wise he gave no signs of a miserly disposition. And
yet he fusssed over the prospect of that voyage home
in a mail boat like a sedentary grocer who has made
up his mind to see the world. He was racially thrifty
I suppose, and for him there must have been a great
novelty in finding himself obliged to pay for travel-
ing--for sea travelling which was the normal state
of life for the family--from the very cradle for
most of them. I could see he grudged prospectively
every single shilling which must be spent so absurd-
ly. It was rather funny. He would become doleful
over it, and then again, with a fretful sigh, he would
suppose there was nothing for it now but to take
three second-class tickets--and there were the four
children to pay for besides. A lot of money that
to spend at once. A big lot of money.

I sat with him listening (not for the first time)
to these heart-searchings till I grew thoroughly
sleepy, and then I left him and turned in on board
my ship. At daylight I was awakened by a yelping
of shrill voices, accompanied by a great commotion
in the water, and the short, bullying blasts of a
steam-whistle. Falk with his tug had come for me.

I began to dress. It was remarkable that the
answering noise on board my ship together with the
patter of feet above my head ceased suddenly. But I heard more remote guttural cries which seemed to express surprise and annoyance. Then the voice of my mate reached me howling expostulations to somebody at a distance. Other voices joined, apparently indignant; a chorus of something that sounded like abuse replied. Now and then the steam-whistle screeched.

Altogether that unnecessary uproar was distracting, but down there in my cabin I took it calmly. In another moment, I thought, I should be going down that wretched river, and in another week at the most I should be totally quit of the odious place and all the odious people in it.

Greatly cheered by the idea, I seized the hairbrushes and looking at myself in the glass began to use them. Suddenly a hush fell upon the noise outside, and I heard (the ports of my cabin were thrown open)—I heard a deep calm voice, not on board my ship, however, hailing resolutely in English, but with a strong foreign twang, "Go ahead!"

There may be tides in the affairs of men which taken at the flood... and so on. Personally I
am still on the look out for that important turn.

I am, however, afraid that most of us are fated to
flounder for ever in the dead water of a pool whose
shores are arid indeed. But I know that there are
often in men's affairs unexpectedly--even irration-
ally--illuminating moments when an otherwise in-
significant sound, perhaps only some perfectly com-
monplace gesture, suffices to reveal to us all the
unreason, all the fatuous unreason, of our compla-
cency. "Go ahead" are not particularly striking
words even when pronounced with a foreign accent;
yet they petrified me in the very act of smiling at
myself in the glass. And then, refusing to believe
my ears, but already boiling with indignation, I
ran out of the cabin and up on deck.

It was incredibly true. It was perfectly true. I
had no eyes for anything but the Diana. It was she,
then, was being taken away. She was already out
of her berth and shooting athwart the river. "The
way this loonatic plucked that ship out is a cau-
tion," said the awed voice of my mate close to my
ear. "Hey! Hallo! Falk! Hermann! What's this
infernal trick?" I yelled in a fury.

Nobody heard me. Falk certainly could not hear
me. His tug was turning at full speed away under
the other bank. The wire hawser between her and
the Diana, stretched as taut as a harpstring,
vibrated alarmingly.

The high black craft careened over to the awful
strain. A loud crack came out of her, followed by
the tearing and splintering of wood. "There!"
said the awed voice in my ear. "He's carried away
their towing chock." And then, with enthusiasm,
"Oh! Look! Look! sir, Look! at them Dutchmen
skipping out of the way on the forecastle. I hope
to goodness he'll break a few of their shins before
he's done with 'em."

I yelled my vain protests. The rays of the rising
sun coursing level along the plain warmed my back,
but I was hot enough with rage. I could not have
believed that a simple towing operation could sug-
gest so plainly the idea of abduction, of rape. Falk
was simply running off with the Diana.

The white tug careered out into the middle of the
river. The red floats of her paddle-wheels revolv-
ing with mad rapidity tore up the whole reach into
foam. The Diana in mid-stream waltzed round
with as much grace as an old barn, and flew after
her ravisher. Through the ragged fog of smoke
driving headlong upon the water I had a glimpse
of Falk's square motionless shoulders under a white
hat as big as a cart-wheel, of his red face, his yel-
low staring eyes, his great beard. Instead of keep-
ing a lookout ahead, he was deliberately turning his
back on the river to glare at his tow. The tall
heavy craft, never so used before in her life, seemed
to have lost her senses; she took a wild sheer against
her helm, and for a moment came straight at us,
menacing and clumsy, like a runaway mountain.
She piled up a streaming, hissing, boiling wave
half-way up her blunt stem, my crew let out one
great howl,—and then we held our breaths. It was
a near thing. But Falk had her! He had her in
his clutch. I fancied I could hear the steel hawser
ping as it surged across the Diana's forecastle, with
the hands on board of her bolting away from it in
all directions. It was a near thing. Hermann, with
his hair rumpled, in a snuffy flannel shirt and a pair
of mustard-coloured trousers, had rushed to help
with the wheel. I saw his terrified round face; I
saw his very teeth uncovered by a sort of ghastly
fixed grin; and in a great leaping tumult of water
between the two ships the Diana whisked past so
close that I could have flung a hair-brush at his
head, for, it seems, I had kept them in my hands
all the time. Meanwhile Mrs. Hermann sat placidly
on the skylight, with a woollen shawl on her shoulders. The excellent woman in response to my indignant gesticulations fluttered a handkerchief, nodding and smiling in the kindest way imaginable. The boys, only half-dressed, were jumping about the poop in great glee, displaying their gaudy braces; and Lena in a short scarlet petticoat, with peaked elbows and thin bare arms, nursed the ragdoll with devotion. The whole family passed before my sight as if dragged across a scene of unparalleled violence. The last I saw was Hermann's niece with the baby Hermann in her arms standing apart from the others. Magnificent in her close-fitting print frock she displayed something so commanding in the manifest perfection of her figure that the sun seemed to be rising for her alone. The flood of light brought out the opulence of her form and the vigour of her youth in a glorifying way. She went by perfectly motionless and as if lost in meditation; only the hem of her skirt stirred in the draught; the sun rays broke on her sleek tawny hair; that bald-headed ruffian, Nicholas, was whacking her on the shoulder. I saw his tiny fat arm rise and fall in a workmanlike manner. And then the four cottage windows of the Diana came into view retreating swiftly down the river. The sashes were up, and one of the white calico curtains was fluttered straight out like a streamer above the agi-
tated water of the wake.

To be thus tricked out of one's turn was an unheard of occurrence. In my agent's office, where I went to complain at once, they protested with apologies they couldn't understand how the mistake arose: but Schomberg when I dropped in later to get some tiffin, though surprised to see me, was perfectly ready with an explanation. I found him seated at the end of a long narrow table, facing his wife—a scraggy little woman, with long ringlets and a blue tooth, who smiled abroad stupidly and looked frightened when you spoke to her. Between them a waggling punkah fanned twenty cane-bottomed chairs and two rows of shiny plates. Three Chinamen in white jackets loafed with napkins in their hands around that desolation. Schomberg's pet table d'hote was not much of a success that day. He was feeding himself ferociously and seemed to overflow with bitterness.

He began by ordering in a brutal voice the chops to be brought back for me, and turning in his chair:

"Mistake they told you? Not a bit of it! Don't you believe it for a moment, captain! Falk isn't a man to make mistakes unless on purpose." His firm conviction was that Falk had been trying all
along to curry favour on the cheap with Hermann.

"On the cheap--mind you! It doesn't cost him a
cent to put that insult upon you, and Captain Her-
mann gets in a day ahead of your ship. Time's
money! Eh? You are very friendly with Captain
Hermann I believe, but a man is bound to be pleased
at any little advantage he may get. Captain Her-
mann is a good business man, and there's no such
thing as a friend in business. Is there?" He

leaned forward and began to cast stealthy glances
as usual. "But Falk is, and always was, a misera-
bles fellow. I would despise him."

I muttered, grumpily, that I had no particular
respect for Falk.

"I would despise him," he insisted, with an ap-
pearance of anxiety which would have amused me
if I had not been fathoms deep in discontent. To
a young man fairly conscientious and as well-mean-
ing as only the young man can be, the current ill-
usage of life comes with a peculiar cruelty. Youth
that is fresh enough to believe in guilt, in innocence,
and in itself, will always doubt whether it have not
perchance deserved its fate. Sombre of mind and
without appetite, I struggled with the chop while
Mrs. Schomberg sat with her everlasting stupid
"Let me tell you. It's all about that girl. I don't know what Captain Hermann expects, but if he asked me I could tell him something about Falk. He's a miserable fellow. That man is a perfect slave. That's what I call him. A slave. Last year I started this table d'hote, and sent cards out--you know. You think he had one meal in the house? Give the thing a trial? Not once. He has got hold now of a Madras cook--a blamed fraud that I hunted out of my cookhouse with a rattan. He was not fit to cook for white men. No, not for the white men's dogs either; but, see, any damned native that can boil a pot of rice is good enough for Mr. Falk. Rice and a little fish he buys for a few cents from the fishing boats outside is what he lives on. You would hardly credit it--eh? A white man, too. . . ."

He wiped his lips, using the napkin with indignation, and looking at me. It flashed through my mind in the midst of my depression that if all the meat in the town was like these table d'hote chops, Falk wasn't so far wrong. I was on the point of saying this, but Schomberg's stare was intimidat-
"He's a miser. A miserable miser," affirmed the hotel-keeper with great force. "The meat here is not so good as at home--of course. And dear too. But look at me. I only charge a dollar for the tiffin, and one dollar and fifty cents for the dinner. Show me anything cheaper. Why am I doing it? There's little profit in this game. Falk wouldn't look at it. I do it for the sake of a lot of young white fellows here that hadn't a place where they could get a decent meal and eat it decently in good company. There's first-rate company always at my table."

The convinced way he surveyed the empty chairs made me feel as if I had intruded upon a tiffin of ghostly Presences.

"A white man should eat like a white man, dash it all," he burst out impetuously. "Ought to eat meat, must eat meat. I manage to get meat for my patrons all the year round. Don't I? I am not catering for a dam' lot of coolies: Have another chop captain. . . . No? You, boy--take away!"
He threw himself back and waited grimly for the curry. The half-closed jalousies darkened the room pervaded by the smell of fresh whitewash; a swarm of flies buzzed and settled in turns, and poor Mrs. Schomberg's smile seemed to express the quintessence of all the imbecility that had ever spoken, had ever breathed, had ever been fed on infamous buffalo meat within these bare walls. Schomberg did not open his lips till he was ready to thrust therein a spoonful of greasy rice. He rolled his eyes ridiculously before he swallowed the hot stuff, and only then broke out afresh.

"It is the most degrading thing. They take the dish up to the wheelhouse for him with a cover on it, and he shuts both the doors before he begins to eat. Fact! Must be ashamed of himself. Ask the engineer. He can't do without an engineer--don't you see--and as no respectable man can be expected to put up with such a table, he allows them fifteen dollars a month extra mess money. I assure you it is so! You just ask Mr. Ferdinand da Costa. That's the engineer he has now. You may have seen him about my place, a delicate dark young man, with very fine eyes and a little moustache. He arrived here a year ago from Calcutta. Between you and
me, I guess the money-lenders there must have been
after him. He rushes here for a meal every chance
he can get, for just please tell me what satisfaction
is that for a well-educated young fellow to feed all
alone in his cabin--like a wild beast? That's what
Falk expects his engineers to put up with for fifteen
dollars extra. And the rows on board every time a
little smell of cooking gets about the deck! You
wouldn't believe! The other day da Costa got the
cook to fry a steak for him--a turtle steak it was
too, not beef at all--and the fat caught or some-
thing. Young da Costa himself was telling me of
it here in this room. 'Mr. Schomberg'--says he--
'if I had let a cylinder cover blow off through the
skylight by my negligence Captain Falk couldn't
have been more savage. He frightened the cook so
that he won't put anything on the fire for me now.'
Poor da Costa had tears in his eyes. Only try to
put yourself in his place, captain: a sensitive, gen-
tlemanly young fellow. Is he expected to eat his
food raw? But that's your Falk all over. Ask any
one you like. I suppose the fifteen dollars extra he
has to give keep on rankling--in there."

And Schomberg tapped his manly breast. I sat
half stunned by his irrelevant babble. Suddenly
he gripped my forearm in an impressive and cau-
tious manner, as if to lead me into a very cavern of
confidence.

"It's nothing but enviousness," he said in a low-
ered tone, which had a stimulating effect upon my
wearied hearing. "I don't suppose there is one
person in this town that he isn't envious of. I tell
you he's dangerous. Even I myself am not safe
from him. I know for certain he tried to poi-
son . . . ."

"Oh, come now," I cried, revolted.

"But I know for certain. The people themselves
came and told me of it. He went about saying
everywhere I was a worse pest to this town than the
cholera. He had been talking against me ever since
I opened this hotel. And he poisoned Captain Her-
mann's mind too. Last time the Diana was loading
here Captain Hermann used to come in every day
for a drink or a cigar. This time he hasn't been
here twice in a week. How do you account for
that?"

He squeezed my arm till he extorted from me
some sort of mumble.
"He makes ten times the money I do. I've another hotel to fight against, and there is no other tug on the river. I am not in his way, am I? He wouldn't be fit to run an hotel if he tried. But that's just his nature. He can't bear to think I am making a living. I only hope it makes him properly wretched. He's like that in everything. He would like to keep a decent table well enough. But no—for the sake of a few cents. Can't do it. It's too much for him. That's what I call being a slave to it. But he's mean enough to kick up a row when his nose gets tickled a bit. See that? That just paints him. Miserly and envious. You can't account for it any other way. Can you? I have been studying him these three years."

He was anxious I should assent to his theory. And indeed on thinking it over it would have been plausible enough if there hadn't been always the essential falseness of irresponsibility in Schomberg's chatter. However, I was not disposed to investigate the psychology of Falk. I was engaged just then in eating despondently a piece of stale Dutch cheese, being too much crushed to care what I swallowed myself, let alone bothering my head about Falk's ideas of gastronomy. I could expect
from their study no clue to his conduct in matters of business, which seemed to me totally unrestrained by morality or even by the commonest sort of decency. How insignificant and contemptible I must appear, for the fellow to dare treat me like this—I reflected suddenly, writhing in silent agony. And I consigned Falk and all his peculiarities to the devil with so much mental fervour as to forget Schomberg's existence, till he grabbed my arm urgently.

"Well, you may think and think till every hair of your head falls off, captain; but you can't explain it in any other way."

For the sake of peace and quietness I admitted hurriedly that I couldn't: persuaded that now he would leave off. But the only result was to make his moist face shine with the pride of cunning. He removed his hand for a moment to scare a black mass of flies off the sugar-basin and caught hold of my arm again.

"To be sure. And in the same way everybody is aware he would like to get married. Only he can't. Let me quote you an instance. Well, two years ago a Miss Vanlo, a very ladylike girl, came from home to keep house for her brother, Fred, who had an engineering shop for small repairs by the water side.
Suddenly Falk takes to going up to their bungalow after dinner, and sitting for hours in the verandah saying nothing. The poor girl couldn't tell for the life of her what to do with such a man, so she would keep on playing the piano and singing to him evening after evening till she was ready to drop. And it wasn't as if she had been a strong young woman either. She was thirty, and the climate had been playing the deuce with her. Then--don't you know--Fred had to sit up with them for propriety, and during whole weeks on end never got a single chance to get to bed before midnight. That was not pleasant for a tired man--was it? And besides Fred had worries then because his shop didn't pay and he was dropping money fast. He just longed to get away from here and try his luck somewhere else, but for the sake of his sister he hung on and on till he ran himself into debt over his ears--I can tell you. I, myself, could show a handful of his chits for meals and drinks in my drawer. I could never find out tho' where he found all the money at last. Can't be but he must have got something out of that brother of his, a coal merchant in Port Said. Anyhow he paid everybody before he left, but the girl nearly broke her heart. Disappointment, of course, and at her age, don't you know. . . . Mrs. Schomberg here was very friendly with her, and she could tell you. Awful despair.
Fainting fits. It was a scandal. A notorious scandal. To that extent that old Mr. Siegers—not your present charterer, but Mr. Siegers the father, the old gentleman who retired from business on a fortune and got buried at sea going home, HE had to interview Falk in his private office. He was a man who could speak like a Dutch Uncle, and, besides, Messrs. Siegers had been helping Falk with a good bit of money from the start. In fact you may say they made him as far as that goes.

It so happened that just at the time he turned up here, their firm was chartering a lot of sailing ships every year, and it suited their business that there should be good towing facilities on the river. See? . . . Well—there's always an ear at the keyhole—isn't there? In fact," he lowered his tone confidentially, "in this case a good friend of mine; a man you can see here any evening; only they conversed rather low. Anyhow my friend's certain that Falk was trying to make all sorts of excuses, and old Mr. Siegers was coughing a lot. And yet Falk wanted all the time to be married too. Why! It's notorious the man has been longing for years to make a home for himself. Only he can't face the expense.

When it comes to putting his hand in his pocket—it chokes him off. That's the truth and no other.

I've always said so, and everybody agrees with me by this time. What do you think of that—eh?"
He appealed confidently to my indignation, but having a mind to annoy him I remarked, "that it seemed to me very pitiful--if true."

He bounced in his chair as if I had run a pin into him. I don't know what he might have said, only at that moment we heard through the half open door of the billiard-room the footsteps of two men entering from the verandah, a murmur of two voices; at the sharp tapping of a coin on a table Mrs. Schomberg half rose irresolutely. "Sit still," he hissed at her, and then, in an hospitable, jovial tone, contrasting amazingly with the angry glance that had made his wife sink in her chair, he cried very loud: "Tiffin still going on in here, gentlemen."

There was no answer, but the voices dropped suddenly. The head Chinaman went out. We heard the clink of ice in the glasses, pouring sounds, the shuffling of feet, the scraping of chairs. Schomberg, after wondering in a low mutter who the devil could be there at this time of the day, got up napkin in hand to peep through the doorway cautiously. He retreated rapidly on tip-toe, and whispering be-
hind his hand informed me that it was Falk, Falk himself who was in there, and, what's more, he had Captain Hermann with him.

The return of the tug from the outer Roads was unexpected but possible, for Falk had taken away the Diana at half-past five, and it was now two o'clock. Schomberg wished me to observe that neither of these men would spend a dollar on a tiffin, which they must have wanted. But by the time I was ready to leave the dining-room Falk had gone. I heard the last of his big boots on the planks of the verandah. Hermann was sitting quite alone in the large, wooden room with the two lifeless billiard tables shrouded in striped covers, mopping his face diligently. He wore his best go-ashore clothes, a stiff collar, black coat, large white waistcoat, grey trousers. A white cotton sunshade with a cane handle reposed between his legs, his side whiskers were neatly brushed, his chin had been freshly shaved; and he only distantly resembled the dishevelled and terrified man in a snuffy night shirt and ignoble old trousers I had seen in the morning hanging on to the wheel of the Diana.

He gave a start at my entrance, and addressed me at once in some confusion, but with genuine ea-
gerness. He was anxious to make it clear he had nothing to do with what he called the "tam pizziness" of the morning. It was most inconvenient.

He had reckoned upon another day up in town to settle his bills and sign certain papers. There were also some few stores to come, and sundry pieces of "my ironwork," as he called it quaintly, landed for repairs, had been left behind. Now he would have to hire a native boat to take all this out to the ship. It would cost five or six dollars perhaps. He had had no warning from Falk. Nothing . . . He hit the table with his dumpy fist . . . Der ver-fluchte Kerl came in the morning like a "tam' ropper," making a great noise, and took him away.

His mate was not prepared, his ship was moored fast—he protested it was shameful to come upon a man in that way. Shameful! Yet such was the power Falk had on the river that when I suggested in a chilling tone that he might have simply refused to have his ship moved, Hermann was quite startled at the idea. I never realised so well before that this is an age of steam. The exclusive possession of a marine boiler had given Falk the whiphand of us all. Hermann, recovering, put it to me appealingly that I knew very well how unsafe it was to contradict that fellow. At this I only smiled distantly.
"Der Kerl!" he cried. He was sorry he had not refused. He was indeed. The damage! The damage! What for all that damage! There was no occasion for damage. Did I know how much damage he had done? It gave me a certain satisfaction to tell him that I had heard his old waggon of a ship crack fore and aft as she went by. "You passed close enough to me," I added significantly.

He threw both his hands up to heaven at the recollection. One of them grasped by the middle the white parasol, and he resembled curiously a caricature of a shopkeeping citizen in one of his own German comic papers. "Ach! That was dangerous," he cried. I was amused. But directly he added with an appearance of simplicity, "The side of your iron ship would have been crushed in like--like this matchbox."

"Would it?" I growled, much less amused now; but by the time I had decided that this remark was not meant for a dig at me he had worked himself into a high state of resentfulness against Falk.

The inconvenience, the damage, the expense! Gott-ferdam! Devil take the fellow. Behind the bar Schomberg with a cigar in his teeth, pretended to be writing with a pencil on a large sheet of paper;
and as Hermann's excitement increased it made me comfortably aware of my own calmness and superiority. But it occurred to me while I listened to his revilings, that after all the good man had come up in the tug. There perhaps—since he must come to town—he had no option. But evidently he had had a drink with Falk, either accepted or offered. How was that? So I checked him by saying loftily that I hoped he would make Falk pay for every penny of the damage.

"That's it! That's it! Go for him," called out Schomberg from the bar, flinging his pencil down and rubbing his hands.

We ignored his noise. But Hermann's excitement suddenly went off the boil as when you remove a saucepan from the fire. I urged on his consideration that he had done now with Falk and Falk's confounded tug. He, Hermann, would not, perhaps, turn up again in this part of the world for years to come, since he was going to sell the Diana at the end of this very trip ("Go home passenger in a mail boat," he murmured mechanically). He was therefore safe from Falk's malice. All he had to do was to race off to his consignees and stop payment of the towage bill before Falk had the time to get in
and lift the money.

Nothing could have been less in the spirit of my advice than the thoughtful way in which he set about to make his parasol stay propped against the edge of the table.

While I watched his concentrated efforts with astonishment he threw at me one or two perplexed, half-shy glances. Then he sat down. "That's all very well," he said reflectively.

It cannot be doubted that the man had been thrown off his balance by being hauled out of the harbour against his wish. His stolidity had been profoundly stirred, else he would never have made up his mind to ask me unexpectedly whether I had not remarked that Falk had been casting eyes upon his niece. "No more than myself," I answered with literal truth. The girl was of the sort one necessarily casts eyes at in a sense. She made no noise, but she filled most satisfactorily a good bit of space.

"But you, captain, are not the same kind of man," observed Hermann.
I was not, I am happy to say, in a position to deny this. "What about the lady?" I could not help asking. At this he gazed for a time into my face, earnestly, and made as if to change the subject. I heard him beginning to mutter something unexpected, about his children growing old enough to require schooling. He would have to leave them ashore with their grandmother when he took up that new command he expected to get in Germany.

This constant harping on his domestic arrangements was funny. I suppose it must have been like the prospect of a complete alteration in his life. An epoch. He was going, too, to part with the Diana! He had served in her for years. He had inherited her. From an uncle, if I remember rightly. And the future loomed big before him, occupying his thought exclusively with all its aspects as on the eve of a venturesome enterprise. He sat there frowning and biting his lip, and suddenly he began to fume and fret.

I discovered to my momentary amusement that he seemed to imagine I could, should or ought, have caused Falk in some way to pronounce himself. Such a hope was incomprehensible, but funny.
Then the contact with all this foolishness irritated me. I said crossly that I had seen no symptoms, but if there were any--since he, Hermann, was so sure--then it was still worse. What pleasure Falk found in humbugging people in just that way I couldn't say. It was, however, my solemn duty to warn him. It had lately, I said, come to my knowledge that there was a man (not a very long time ago either) who had been taken in just like this.

All this passed in undertones, and at this point Schomberg, exasperated at our secrecy, went out of the room slamming the door with a crash that positively lifted us in our chairs. This, or else what I had said, huffed my Hermann. He supposed, with a contemptuous toss of his head towards the door which trembled yet, that I had got hold of some of that man's silly tales. It looked, indeed, as though his mind had been thoroughly poisoned against Schomberg. "His tales were--they were," he repeated, seeking for the word--"trash." They were trash, he reiterated, and moreover I was young yet . . .

This horrid aspersion (I regret I am no longer exposed to that sort of insult) made me huffy too. I felt ready in my own mind to back up every asser-
tion of Schomberg's and on any subject. In a mo-
ment, devil only knows why, Hermann and I were
looking at each other most inimically. He caught
up his hat without more ado and I gave myself the
pleasure of calling after him:

"Take my advice and make Falk pay for break-
ing up your ship. You aren't likely to get any-
thing else out of him."

When I got on board my ship later on, the old
mate, who was very full of the events of the morn-
ing, remarked:

"I saw the tug coming back from the outer Roads
just before two P.M." (He never by any chance used
the words morning or afternoon. Always P.M. or
A.M., log-book style.) "Smart work that. Man's
always in a state of hurry. He's a regular
chucker-out, ain't he, sir? There's a few pubs I
know of in the East-end of London that would be
all the better for one of his sort around the bar."
He chuckled at his joke. "A regular chucker-out.
Now he has fired out that Dutchman head over heels,
I suppose our turn's coming to-morrow morning."
We were all on deck at break of day (even the sick--poor devils--had crawled out) ready to cast off in the twinkling of an eye. Nothing came. Falk did not come. At last, when I began to think that probably something had gone wrong in his engine-room, we perceived the tug going by, full pelt, down the river, as if we hadn't existed. For a moment I entertained the wild notion that he was going to turn round in the next reach. Afterwards I watched his smoke appear above the plain, now here, now there, according to the windings of the river. It disappeared. Then without a word I went down to breakfast. I just simply went down to breakfast.

Not one of us uttered a sound till the mate, after imbibing--by means of suction out of a saucer--his second cup of tea, exclaimed: "Where the devil is the man gone to?"

"Courting!" I shouted, with such a fiendish laugh that the old chap didn't venture to open his lips any more.

I started to the office perfectly calm. Calm with excessive rage. Evidently they knew all about it
already, and they treated me to a show of conster-
nation. The manager, a soft-footed, immensely
obese man, breathing short, got up to meet me,
while all round the room the young clerks, bend-
ing over the papers on their desks, cast upward
glomerances in my direction. The fat man, without
waiting for my complaint, wheezing heavily and
in a tone as if he himself were incredulous, con-
veyed to me the news that Falk—Captain Falk—
had declined—had absolutely declined—to tow my
ship—to have anything to do with my ship—this
day or any other day. Never!

I did my best to preserve a cool appearance, but,
all the same, I must have shown how much taken
aback I was. We were talking in the middle of the
room. Suddenly behind my back some ass blew
his nose with great force, and at the same time an-
other quill-driver jumped up and went out on the
landing hastily. It occurred to me I was cutting
a foolish figure there. I demanded angrily to see
the principal in his private room.

The skin of Mr. Siegers’ head showed dead white
between the iron grey streaks of hair lying plas-
tered cross-wise from ear to ear over the top of his
skull in the manner of a bandage. His narrow
sunken face was of an uniform and permanent terra-cotta colour, like a piece of pottery. He was sickly, thin, and short, with wrists like a boy of ten. But from that debile body there issued a bullying voice, tremendously loud, harsh and resonant, as if produced by some powerful mechanical contrivance in the nature of a fog-horn. I do not know what he did with it in the private life of his home, but in the larger sphere of business it presented the advantage of overcoming arguments without the slightest mental effort, by the mere volume of sound. We had had several passages of arms. It took me all I knew to guard the interests of my owners--whom, nota bene, I had never seen--while Siegers (who had made their acquaintance some years before, during a business tour in Australia) pretended to the knowledge of their innermost minds, and, in the character of "our very good friends," threw them perpetually at my head.

He looked at me with a jaundiced eye (there was no love lost between us), and declared at once that it was strange, very strange. His pronunciation of English was so extravagant that I can't even attempt to reproduce it. For instance, he said "Fferie strantch." Combined with the bellowing intonation it made the language of one's childhood
sound weirdly startling, and even if considered purely as a kind of unmeaning noise it filled you with astonishment at first. "They had," he continued, "been acquainted with Captain Falk for very many years, and never had any reason. . . ."

"That's why I come to you, of course," I interrupted. "I've the right to know the meaning of this infernal nonsense." In the half light of the room, which was greenish, because of the tree-tops screening the window, I saw him writhe his meagre shoulders. It came into my head, as disconnected ideas will come at all sorts of times into one's head, that this, most likely, was the very room where, if the tale were true, Falk had been lectured by Mr. Siegers, the father. Mr. Siegers' (the son's) overwhelming voice, in brassy blasts, as though he had been trying to articulate his words through a trombone, was expressing his great regret at a conduct characterised by a very marked want of discretion. . . As I lived I was being lectured too! His deafening gibberish was difficult to follow, but it was MY conduct--mine!--that . . . Damn! I wasn't going to stand this.

"What on earth are you driving at?" I asked in a passion. I put my hat on my head (he never
offered a seat to anybody), and as he seemed for
the moment struck dumb by my irreverence, I
turned my back on him and marched out. His vo-
cal arrangements blared after me a few threats of
coming down on the ship for the demurrage of the
lighters, and all the other expenses consequent
upon the delays arising from my frivolity.

Once outside in the sunshine my head swam. It
was no longer a question of mere delay. I per-
ceived myself involved in hopeless and humiliating
absurdities that were leading me to something very
like a disaster. "Let us be calm," I muttered to
myself, and ran into the shade of a leprous wall.
From that short side-street I could see the broad
main thoroughfare ruinous and gay, running
away, away between stretches of decaying mason-
ry, bamboo fences, ranges of arcades of brick and
plaster, hovels of lath and mud, lofty temple gates
of carved timber, huts of rotten mats--an im-
mensely wide thoroughfare, loosely packed as far
as the eye could reach with a barefooted and brown
multitude paddling ankle deep in the dust. For a
moment I felt myself about to go out of my mind
with worry and desperation.

Some allowance must be made for the feelings
of a young man new to responsibility. I thought
of my crew. Half of them were ill, and I really
began to think that some of them would end by dy-
ing on board if I couldn't get them out to sea soon.
Obviously I should have to take my ship down the
river, either working under canvas or dredging
with the anchor down; operations which, in com-
mon with many modern sailors, I only knew theo-
retically. And I almost shrank from undertaking
them shorthanded and without local knowledge
of the river bed, which is so necessary for the con-
fident handling of the ship. There were no pilots,
no beacons, no buoys of any sort; but there was a
very devil of a current for anybody to see, no end
of shoal places, and at least two obviously awkward
turns of the channel between me and the sea. But
how dangerous these turns were I would not tell. I
didn't even know what my ship was capable of!
I had never handled her in my life. A misunder-
standing between a man and his ship in a difficult
river with no room to make it up, is bound to end in
trouble for the man. On the other hand, it must
be owned I had not much reason to count upon a
general run of good luck. And suppose I had the
misfortune to pile her up high and dry on some
beastly shoal? That would have been the final un-
doing of that voyage. It was plain that if Falk
refused to tow me out he would also refuse to pull
me off. This meant—what? A day lost at the
very best; but more likely a whole fortnight of
frizzling on some pestilential mudflat, of desperate
work, of discharging cargo; more than likely it
meant borrowing money at an exorbitant rate of
interest—from the Siegers’ gang too at that. They
were a power in the port. And that elderly seaman
of mine, Gambril, had looked pretty ghastly when
I went forward to dose him with quinine that morn-
ing. HE would certainly die—not to speak of two
or three others that seemed nearly as bad, and of
the rest of them just ready to catch any tropical
disease going. Horror, ruin and everlasting re-
morse. And no help. None. I had fallen amongst
a lot of unfriendly lunatics!

At any rate, if I must take my ship down myself
it was my duty to procure if possible some local
knowledge. But that was not easy. The only per-
son I could think of for that service was a certain
Johnson, formerly captain of a country ship, but
now spliced to a country wife and gone utterly to
the bad. I had only heard of him in the vaguest
way, as living concealed in the thick of two hundred
thousand natives, and only emerging into the light
of day for the purpose of hunting up some brandy.
I had a notion that if I could lay my hands on him
I would sober him on board my ship and use him for a pilot. Better than nothing. Once a sailor always a sailor--and he had known the river for years. But in our Consulate (where I arrived dripping after a sharp walk) they could tell me nothing. The excellent young men on the staff, though willing to help me, belonged to a sphere of the white colony for which that sort of Johnson does not exist. Their suggestion was that I should hunt the man up myself with the help of the Consulate's constable--an ex-sergeant-major of a regiment of Hussars.

This man, whose usual duty apparently consisted in sitting behind a little table in an outer room of Consular offices, when ordered to assist me in my search for Johnson displayed lots of energy and a marvellous amount of local knowledge of a sort. But he did not conceal an immense and sceptical contempt for the whole business. We explored together on that afternoon an infinity of infamous grog shops, gambling dens, opium dens. We walked up narrow lanes where our gharry--a tiny box of a thing on wheels, attached to a jibbing Burmah pony--could by no means have passed. The constable seemed to be on terms of scornful intimacy with Maltese, with Eurasians, with China-
men, with Klings, and with the sweepers attached to a temple, with whom he talked at the gate. We interviewed also through a grating in a mud wall closing a blind alley an immensely corpulent Italian, who, the ex-sergeant-major remarked to me perfunctorily, had "killed another man last year."

Thereupon he addressed him as "Antonio" and "Old Buck," though that bloated carcase, apparently more than half filling the sort of cell wherein it sat, recalled rather a fat pig in a sty. Familiar and never unbending, the sergeant chucked--absolutely chucked--under the chin a horribly wrinkled and shrivelled old hag propped on a stick, who had volunteered some sort of information: and with the same stolid face he kept up an animated conversation with the groups of swathed brown women, who sat smoking cheroots on the door-steps of a long range of clay hovels. We got out of the gharry and clambered into dwellings airy like packing crates, or descended into places sinister like cellars. We got in, we drove on, we got out again for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of looking behind a heap of rubble. The sun declined; my companion was curt and sardonic in his answers, but it appears we were just missing Johnson all along. At last our conveyance stopped once more with a jerk, and the driver jumping down opened the door.
A black mudhole blocked the lane. A mound of
garbage crowned with the dead body of a dog ar-
rested us not. An empty Australian beef tin
bounded cheerily before the toe of my boot. Su-
denly we clambered through a gap in a prickly
fence. . . .

It was a very clean native compound: and the
big native woman, with bare brown legs as thick
as bedposts, pursuing on all fours a silver dollar
that came rolling out from somewhere, was Mrs.
Johnson herself. "Your man's at home," said the
ex-sergeant, and stepped aside in complete and
marked indifference to anything that might follow.
Johnson--at home--stood with his back to a native
house built on posts and with its walls made of
mats. In his left hand he held a banana. Out of
the right he dealt another dollar into space. The
woman captured this one on the wing, and there
and then plumped down on the ground to look at
us with greater comfort.

My man was sallow of face, grizzled, unshaven,
muddy on elbows and back; where the seams of his
serge coat yawned you could see his white naked-
ness. The vestiges of a paper collar encircled his neck. He looked at us with a grave, swaying surprise. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

My heart sank. How could I have been stupid enough to waste energy and time for this?

But having already gone so far I approached a little nearer and declared the purpose of my visit. He would have to come at once with me, sleep on board my ship, and to-morrow, with the first of the ebb, he would give me his assistance in getting my ship down to the sea, without steam. A six-hundred-ton barque, drawing nine feet aft. I proposed to give him eighteen dollars for his local knowledge; and all the time I was speaking he kept on considering attentively the various aspects of the banana, holding first one side up to his eye, then the other.

"You've forgotten to apologise," he said at last with extreme precision. "Not being a gentleman yourself, you don't know apparently when you intrude upon a gentleman. I am one. I wish you to understand that when I am in funds I don't work, and now . . ."
I would have pronounced him perfectly sober
hadn't he paused in great concern to try and brush
a hole off the knee of his trousers.

"I have money--and friends. Every gentle-
man has. Perhaps you would like to know my
friend? His name is Falk. You could borrow
Abruptly his tone changed. "A noble heart," he
said muzzily.

"Has Falk been giving you some money?" I
asked, appalled by the detailed finish of the dark
plot.

"Lent me, my good man, not given me. Lent,"
he corrected suavely. "Met me taking the air
last evening, and being as usual anxious to oblige
-- Hadn't you better go to the devil out of my
compound?"

And upon this, without other warning, he let
fly with the banana which missed my head, and took
the constable just under the left eye. He rushed
at the miserable Johnson, stammering with fury.
They fell... But why dwell on the wretched-
ness, the breathlessness, the degradation, the senselessness, the weariness, the ridicule and humiliation
and--and--the perspiration, of these moments? I dragged the ex-hussar off. He was like a wild
beast. It seems he had been greatly annoyed at losing his free afternoon on my account. The garden of his bungalow required his personal attention, and at the slight blow of the banana the brute in him had broken loose. We left Johnson on his back, still black in the face, but beginning to kick feebly. Meantime, the big woman had remained sitting on the ground, apparently paralysed with extreme terror.

For half an hour we jolted inside our rolling box, side by side, in profound silence. The ex-sergeant was busy staunching the blood of a long scratch on his cheek. "I hope you're satisfied," he said suddenly. "That's what comes of all that tomfool business. If you hadn't quarrelled with that tugboat skipper over some girl or other, all this wouldn't have happened."

"You heard THAT story?" I said.

"Of course I heard. And I shouldn't wonder if
the Consul-General himself doesn't come to hear of it. How am I to go before him to-morrow with that thing on my cheek--I want to know. Its YOU who ought to have got this!"

After that, till the gharry stopped and he jumped out without leave-taking, he swore to himself steadily, horribly; muttering great, purposeful, trooper oaths, to which the worst a sailor can do is like the prattle of a child. For my part I had just the strength to crawl into Schomberg's coffee-room, where I wrote at a little table a note to the mate instructing him to get everything ready for dropping down the river next day. I couldn't face my ship. Well! she had a clever sort of skipper and no mistake--poor thing! What a horrid mess! I took my head between my hands. At times the obviousness of my innocence would reduce me to despair. What had I done? If I had done something to bring about the situation I should at least have learned not to do it again. But I felt guiltless to the point of imbecility. The room was empty yet; only Schomberg prowled round me goggle-eyed and with a sort of awed respectful curiosity. No doubt he had set the story going himself; but he was a good-hearted chap, and I am really persuaded he participated in all my troubles.
He did what he could for me. He ranged aside the heavy matchstand, set a chair straight, pushed a spittoon slightly with his foot—as you show small attentions to a friend under a great sorrow—sighed, and at last, unable to hold his tongue:

"Well! I warned you, captain. That's what comes of running your head against Mr. Falk. Man'll stick at nothing."

I sat without stirring, and after surveying me with a sort of commiseration in his eyes he burst out in a hoarse whisper: "But for a fine lump of a girl, she's a fine lump of a girl." He made a loud smacking noise with his thick lips. "The finest lump of a girl that I ever . . ." he was going on with great unction, but for some reason or other broke off. I fancied myself throwing something at his head. "I don't blame you, captain. Hang me if I do," he said with a patronising air.

"Thank you," I said resignedly. It was no use fighting against this false fate. I don't know even if I was sure myself where the truth of the matter began. The conviction that it would end disastrously had been driven into me by all the succes-
sive shocks my sense of security had received. I began to ascribe an extraordinary potency to agents in themselves powerless. It was as if Schomberg's baseless gossip had the power to bring about the thing itself or the abstract enmity of Falk could put my ship ashore.

I have already explained how fatal this last would have been. For my further action, my youth, my inexperience, my very real concern for the health of my crew must be my excuse. The action itself, when it came, was purely impulsive. It was set in movement quite undiplomatically and simply by Falk's appearance in the doorway.

The room was full by then and buzzing with voices. I had been looked at with curiosity by every one, but how am I to describe the sensation produced by the appearance of Falk himself blocking the doorway? The tension of expectation could be measured by the profundity of the silence that fell upon the very click of the billiard balls. As to Schomberg, he looked extremely frightened; he hated mortally any sort of row (fracas he called it) in his establishment. Fracas was bad for business, he affirmed; but, in truth, this specimen of portly, middle-aged manhood was of a timid dis-
position. I don't know what, considering my presence in the place, they all hoped would come of it.

A sort of stag fight, perhaps. Or they may have supposed Falk had come in only to annihilate me completely. As a matter of fact, Falk had come in because Hermann had asked him to inquire after the precious white cotton parasol which, in the worry and excitement of the previous day, he had forgotten at the table where we had held our little discussion.

It was this that gave me my opportunity. I don't think I would have gone to seek Falk out.

No. I don't think so. There are limits. But there was an opportunity and I seized it—I have already tried to explain why. Now I will merely state that, in my opinion, to get his sickly crew into the sea air and secure a quick despatch for his ship a skipper would be justified in going to any length, short of absolute crime. He should put his pride in his pocket; he may accept confidences; explain his innocence as if it were a sin; he may take advantage of misconceptions, of desires and of weaknesses; he ought to conceal his horror and other emotions, and, if the fate of a human being, and that human being a magnificent young girl, is strangely involved—why, he should contemplate that fate
(whatever it might seem to be) without turning a hair. And all these things I have done; the explaining, the listening, the pretending—even to the discretion—and nobody, not even Hermann's niece, I believe, need throw stones at me now. Schomberg at all events needn't, since from first to last, I am happy to say, there was not the slightest "fracas."

Overcoming a nervous contraction of the windpipe, I had managed to exclaim "Captain Falk!" His start of surprise was perfectly genuine, but afterwards he neither smiled nor scowled. He simply waited. Then, when I had said, "I must have a talk with you," and had pointed to a chair at my table, he moved up to me, though he didn't sit down. Schomberg, however, with a long tumbler in his hand, was making towards us prudently, and I discovered then the only sign of weakness in Falk. He had for Schomberg a repulsion resembling that sort of physical fear some people experience at the sight of a toad. Perhaps to a man so essentially and silently concentrated upon himself (though he could talk well enough, as I was to find out presently) the other's irrepressible loquacity, embracing every human being within range of the tongue, might have appeared unnatural, disgust-
ing, and monstrous. He suddenly gave signs of restiveness--positively like a horse about to rear, and, muttering hurriedly as if in great pain, "No. I can't stand that fellow," seemed ready to bolt.

This weakness of his gave me the advantage at the very start. "Verandah," I suggested, as if rendering him a service, and walked him out by the arm. We stumbled over a few chairs; we had the feeling of open space before us, and felt the fresh breath of the river--fresh, but tainted. The Chinese theatres across the water made, in the sparsely twinkling masses of gloom an Eastern town presents at night, blazing centres of light, and of a distant and howling uproar. I felt him become suddenly tractable again like an animal, like a good-tempered horse when the object that scares him is removed. Yes. I felt in the darkness there how tractable he was, without my conviction of his inflexibility--tenacity, rather, perhaps--being in the least weakened. His very arm abandoning itself to my grasp was as hard as marble--like a limb of iron. But I heard a tumultuous scuffling of boot-soles within. The unspeakable idiots inside were crowding to the windows, climbing over each other's backs behind the blinds, billiard cues and all. Somebody broke a window pane, and with the sound of falling glass, so suggestive of riot and devastation, Schomberg reeled out after us in a state of
funk which had prevented his parting with his brandy and soda. He must have trembled like an aspen leaf. The piece of ice in the long tumbler he held in his hand tinkled with an effect of chattering teeth. "I beg you, gentlemen," he expostulated thickly. "Come! Really, now, I must insist . . ."

How proud I am of my presence of mind!

"Hallo," I said instantly in a loud and naive tone, "somebody's breaking your windows, Schomberg. Would you please tell one of your boys to bring out here a pack of cards and a couple of lights? And two long drinks. Will you?"

To receive an order soothed him at once. It was business. "Certainly," he said in an immensely relieved tone. The night was rainy, with wandering gusts of wind, and while we waited for the candles Falk said, as if to justify his panic, "I don't interfere in anybody's business. I don't give any occasion for talk. I am a respectable man. But this fellow is always making out something wrong, and can never rest till he gets somebody to believe him."
This was the first of my knowledge of Falk.

This desire of respectability, of being like everybody else, was the only recognition he vouchsafed to the organisation of mankind. For the rest he might have been the member of a herd, not of a society. Self-preservation was his only concern.

Not selfishness, but mere self-preservation. Selfishness presupposes consciousness, choice, the presence of other men; but his instinct acted as though he were the last of mankind nursing that law like the only spark of a sacred fire. I don’t mean to say that living naked in a cavern would have satisfied him. Obviously he was the creature of the conditions to which he was born. No doubt self-preservation meant also the preservation of these conditions. But essentially it meant something much more simple, natural, and powerful. How shall I express it? It meant the preservation of the five senses of his body--let us say--taking it in its narrowest as well as in its widest meaning. I think you will admit before long the justice of this judgment. However, as we stood there together in the dark verandah I had judged nothing as yet--and I had no desire to judge--which is an idle practice anyhow. The light was long in coming.

"Of course," I said in a tone of mutual under-
standing, "it isn't exactly a game of cards I want with you."

I saw him draw his hands down his face--the vague stir of the passionate and meaningless gesture; but he waited in silent patience. It was only when the lights had been brought out that he opened his lips. I understood his mumble to mean that "he didn't know any game."

"Like this Schomberg and all the other fools will have to keep off," I said tearing open the pack. "Have you heard that we are universally supposed to be quarrelling about a girl? You know who--of course. I am really ashamed to ask, but is it possible that you do me the honour to think me dangerous?"

As I said these words I felt how absurd it was and also I felt flattered--for, really, what else could it be? His answer, spoken in his usual dispassionate undertone, made it clear that it was so, but not precisely as flattering as I supposed. He thought me dangerous with Hermann, more than with the girl herself; but, as to quarrelling, I saw at once how inappropriate the word was. We had
no quarrel. Natural forces are not quarrelsome.

You can't quarrel with the wind that inconveniences
and humiliates you by blowing off your hat in a
street full of people. He had no quarrel with me.

Neither would a boulder, falling on my head, have
had. He fell upon me in accordance with the law
by which he was moved--not of gravitation, like a
detached stone, but of self-preservation. Of course
this is giving it a rather wide interpretation.

Strictly speaking, he had existed and could have
existed without being married. Yet he told me that
he had found it more and more difficult to live
alone. Yes. He told me this in his low, careless
voice, to such a pitch of confidence had we arrived
at the end of half an hour.

It took me just about that time to convince him
that I had never dreamed of marrying Hermann's
niece. Could any necessity have been more extrava-
gant? And the difficulty was the greater because
he was so hard hit that he couldn't imagine any-
body being able to remain in a state of indifference.
Any man with eyes in his head, he seemed to think,
could not help coveting so much bodily magnifi-
ce. This profound belief was conveyed by the
manner he listened sitting sideways to the table and
playing absently with a few cards I had dealt to
him at random. And the more I saw into him the more I saw of him. The wind swayed the lights so that his sunburnt face, whiskered to the eyes, seemed to successively flicker crimson at me and to go out. I saw the extraordinary breadth of the high cheek-bones, the perpendicular style of the features, the massive forehead, steep like a cliff, denuded at the top, largely uncovered at the temples. The fact is I had never before seen him without his hat; but now, as if my fervour had made him hot, he had taken it off and laid it gently on the floor. Something peculiar in the shape and setting of his yellow eyes gave them the provoking silent intensity which characterised his glance. But the face was thin, furrowed, worn; I discovered that through the bush of his hair, as you may detect the gnarled shape of a tree trunk lost in a dense undergrowth. These overgrown cheeks were sunken. It was an anchorite's bony head fitted with a Capuchin's beard and adjusted to a herculean body. I don't mean athletic. Hercules, I take it, was not an athlete. He was a strong man, susceptible to female charms, and not afraid of dirt. And thus with Falk, who was a strong man. He was extremely strong, just as the girl (since I must think of them together) was magnificently attractive by the masterful power of flesh and blood, expressed in shape, in size, in attitude--that is by
a straight appeal to the senses. His mind meantime, preoccupied with respectability, quailed before Schomberg's tongue and seemed absolutely impervious to my protestations; and I went so far as to protest that I would just as soon think of marrying my mother's (dear old lady!) faithful female cook as Hermann's niece. Sooner, I protested, in my desperation, much sooner; but it did not appear that he saw anything outrageous in the proposition, and in his sceptical immobility he seemed to nurse the argument that at all events the cook was very, very far away. It must be said that, just before, I had gone wrong by appealing to the evidence of my manner whenever I called on board the Diana. I had never attempted to approach the girl, or to speak to her, or even to look at her in any marked way. Nothing could be clearer. But, as his own idea of--let us say--courting, seemed to consist precisely in sitting silently for hours in the vicinity of the beloved object, that line of argument inspired him with distrust. Staring down his extended legs he let out a grunt--as much as to say, "That's all very fine, but you can't throw dust in MY eyes."

At last I was exasperated into saying, "Why don't you put the matter at rest by talking to Her-
mann?" and I added sneeringly: "You don't ex-
pect me perhaps to speak for you?"

To this he said, very loud for him, "Would
you?"

And for the first time he lifted his head to look
at me with wonder and incredulity. He lifted his
head so sharply that there could be no mistake. I
had touched a spring. I saw the whole extent of
my opportunity, and could hardly believe in it.

"Why. Speak to . . . Well, of course," I
proceeded very slowly, watching him with great at-
tention, for, on my word, I feared a joke. "Not,
perhaps, to the young lady herself. I can't speak
German, you know. But . . ."

He interrupted me with the earnest assurance
that Hermann had the highest opinion of me; and
at once I felt the need for the greatest possible
diplomacy at this juncture. So I demurred just
enough to draw him on. Falk sat up, but except
for a very noticeable enlargement of the pupils,
till the irises of his eyes were reduced to two narrow
yellow rings, his face, I should judge, was incapa-
ble of expressing excitement. "Oh, yes! Hermann
did have the greatest . . ."

"Take up your cards. Here's Schomberg peep-
ing at us through the blind!" I said.

We went through the motions of what might
have been a game of e'carte'. Presently the intoler-
able scandalmonger withdrew, probably to inform
the people in the billiard-room that we two were
gambling on the verandah like mad.

We were not gambling, but it was a game; a
game in which I felt I held the winning cards. The
stake, roughly speaking, was the success of the voy-
age--for me; and he, I apprehended, had nothing
to lose. Our intimacy matured rapidly, and before
many words had been exchanged I perceived that
the excellent Hermann had been making use of me.
That simple and astute Teuton had been, it seems,
holding me up to Falk in the light of a rival. I
was young enough to be shocked at so much duplic-
ity. "Did he tell you that in so many words?" I
asked with indignation.

Hermann had not. He had given hints only;
and of course it had not taken very much to alarm Falk; but, instead of declaring himself, he had taken steps to remove the family from under my influence. He was perfectly straightforward about it—as straightforward as a tile falling on your head. There was no duplicity in that man; and when I congratulated him on the perfection of his arrangements—even to the bribing of the wretched Johnson against me—he had a genuine movement of protest. Never bribed. He knew the man wouldn't work as long as he had a few cents in his pocket to get drunk on, and, naturally (he said—"NATURALLY") he let him have a dollar or two. He was himself a sailor, he said, and anticipated the view another sailor, like myself, was bound to take. On the other hand, he was sure that I should have to come to grief. He hadn't been knocking about for the last seven years up and down that river for nothing. It would have been no disgrace to me—but he asserted confidently I would have had my ship very awkwardly ashore at a spot two miles below the Great Pagoda. . . .

And with all that he had no ill-will. That was evident. This was a crisis in which his only object had been to gain time—I fancy. And presently he mentioned that he had written for some jewel-
lery, real good jewellery--had written to Hong-Kong for it. It would arrive in a day or two.

"Well, then," I said cheerily, "everything is all right. All you've got to do is to present it to the lady together with your heart, and live happy ever after."

Upon the whole he seemed to accept that view as far as the girl was concerned, but his eyelids drooped. There was still something in the way. For one thing Hermann disliked him so much. As to me, on the contrary, it seemed as though he could not praise me enough. Mrs. Hermann too. He didn't know why they disliked him so. It made everything most difficult.

I listened impassive, feeling more and more diplomatic. His speech was not transparently clear. He was one of those men who seem to live, feel, suffer in a sort of mental twilight. But as to being fascinated by the girl and possessed by the desire of home life with her--it was as clear as daylight. So much being at stake, he was afraid of putting it to the hazard of declaration. Besides, there was something else. And with Hermann being so
"I see," I said thoughtfully, while my heart beat fast with the excitement of my diplomacy. "I don't mind sounding Hermann. In fact, to show you how mistaken you were, I am ready to do all I can for you in that way."

A light sigh escaped him. He drew his hands down his face, and it emerged, bony, unchanged of expression, as if all the tissues had been ossified. All the passion was in those big brown hands. He was satisfied. Then there was that other matter. If there were anybody on earth it was I who could persuade Hermann to take a reasonable view! I had a knowledge of the world and lots of experience. Hermann admitted this himself. And then I was a sailor too. Falk thought that a sailor would be able to understand certain things best. . . .

He talked as if the Hermanns had been living all their life in a rural hamlet, and I alone had been capable, with my practice in life, of a large and indulgent view of certain occurrences. That was what my diplomacy was leading me to. I began
suddenly to dislike it.

"I say, Falk," I asked quite brusquely, "you haven't already a wife put away somewhere?"

The pain and disgust of his denial were very striking. Couldn't I understand that he was as respectable as any white man hereabouts; earning his living honestly. He was suffering from my suspicion, and the low undertone of his voice made his protestations sound very pathetic. For a moment he shamed me, but, my diplomacy notwithstanding, I seemed to develop a conscience, as if in very truth it were in my power to decide the success of this matrimonial enterprise. By pretending hard enough we come to believe anything--anything to our advantage. And I had been pretending very hard, because I meant yet to be towed safely down the river. But through conscience or stupidity, I couldn't help alluding to the Vanlo affair. "You acted rather badly there. Didn't you?" was what I ventured actually to say--for the logic of our conduct is always at the mercy of obscure and unforeseen impulses.

His dilated pupils swerved from my face, glan-
cing at the window with a sort of scared fury. We heard behind the blinds the continuous and sudden clicking of ivory, a jovial murmur of many voices, and Schomberg's deep manly laugh.

“That confounded old woman of a hotel-keeper then would never, never let it rest!” Falk exclaimed. “Well, yes! It had happened two years ago.” When it came to the point he owned he couldn’t make up his mind to trust Fred Vanlo—no sailor, a bit of a fool too. He could not trust him, but, to stop his row, he had lent him enough money to pay all his debts before he left. I was greatly surprised to hear this. Then Falk could not be such a miser after all. So much the better for the girl. For a time he sat silent; then he picked up a card, and while looking at it he said:

“You need not think of anything bad. It was an accident. I've been unfortunate once.”

"Then in heaven's name say nothing about it."

As soon as these words were out of my mouth I fancied I had said something immoral. He shook
his head negatively. It had to be told. He con-
sidered it proper that the relations of the lady
should know. No doubt--I thought to myself--
had Miss Vanlo not been thirty and damaged by the
climate he would have found it possible to entrust
Fred Vanlo with this confidence. And then the fig-
ure of Hermann’s niece appeared before my mind’s
eye, with the wealth of her opulent form, her rich
youth, her lavish strength. With that powerful
and immaculate vitality, her girlish form must have
shouted aloud of life to that man, whereas poor
Miss Vanlo could only sing sentimental songs to
the strumming of a piano.

"And that Hermann hates me, I know it!" he
cried in his undertone, with a sudden recrudescence
of anxiety. "I must tell them. It is proper that
they should know. You would say so yourself."

He then murmured an utterly mysterious allu-
sion to the necessity for peculiar domestic arrange-
ments. Though my curiosity was excited I did not
want to hear any of his confidences. I feared he
might give me a piece of information that would
make my assumed role of match-maker odious--
however unreal it was. I was aware that he could
have the girl for the asking; and keeping down a
desire to laugh in his face, I expressed a confident belief in my ability to argue away Hermann's dislike for him. "I am sure I can make it all right," I said. He looked very pleased.

And when we rose not a word had been said about towage! Not a word! The game was won and the honour was safe. Oh! blessed white cotton umbrella! We shook hands, and I was holding myself with difficulty from breaking into a step dance of joy when he came back, striding all the length of the verandah, and said doubtfully:

"I say, captain, I have your word? You--you--won't turn round?"

Heavens! The fright he gave me. Behind his tone of doubt there was something desperate and menacing. The infatuated ass. But I was equal to the situation.

"My dear Falk," I said, beginning to lie with a glibness and effrontery that amazed me even at the time--"confidence for confidence." (He had made no confidences.) "I will tell you that I am already engaged to an extremely charming girl at
home, and so you understand. . . ."

He caught my hand and wrung it in a crushing
grip.

"Pardon me. I feel it every day more difficult
to live alone . . . ."

"On rice and fish," I interrupted smartly, gig-
gling with the sheer nervousness of a danger es-
cape.

He dropped my hand as if it had become sud-
denly red hot. A moment of profound silence en-
sued, as though something extraordinary had hap-
pened.

"I promise you to obtain Hermann's consent,"
I faltered out at last, and it seemed to me that he
could not help seeing through that humbug-
ging promise. "If there's anything else to get
over I shall endeavour to stand by you," I conceded
further, feeling somehow defeated and overborne;
"but you must do your best yourself."
"I have been unfortunate once," he muttered unemotionally, and turning his back on me he went away, thumping slowly the plank floor as if his feet had been shod with iron.

Next morning, however, he was lively enough as man-boat, a combination of splashing and shouting; of the insolent commotion below with the steady overbearing glare of the silent head-piece above. He turned us out most unnecessarily at an ungodly hour, but it was nearly eleven in the morning before he brought me up a cable's length from Hermann's ship. And he did it very badly too, in a hurry, and nearly contriving to miss altogether the patch of good holding ground, because, forsooth, he had caught sight of Hermann's niece on the poop. And so did I; and probably as soon as he had seen her himself. I saw the modest, sleek glory of the tawny head, and the full, grey shape of the girlish print frock she filled so perfectly, so satisfactorily, with the seduction of unflagging curves—a very nymph of Diana the Huntress. And Diana the ship sat, high-walled and as solid as an institution, on the smooth level of the water, the most uninspiring and respectable craft upon the seas, useful and ugly, devoted to the support of domestic virtues like any grocer's shop on shore.
At once Falk steamed away; for there was some work for him to do. He would return in the evening.

He ranged close by us, passing out dead slow, without a hail. The beat of the paddle-wheels reverberating amongst the stony islets, as if from the ruined walls of a vast arena, filled the anchorage confusedly with the clapping sounds of a mighty and leisurely applause. Abreast of Hermann's ship he stopped the engines; and a profound silence reigned over the rocks, the shore and the sea, for the time it took him to raise his hat aloft before the nymph of the grey print frock. I had snatched up my binoculars, and I can answer for it she didn't stir a limb, standing by the rail shapely and erect, with one of her hands grasping a rope at the height of her head, while the way of the tug carried slowly past her the lingering and profound homage of the man. There was for me an enormous significance in the scene, the sense of having witnessed a solemn declaration. The die was cast. After such a manifestation he couldn't back out. And I reflected that it was nothing whatever to me now. With a rush of black smoke belching suddenly out of the funnel, and a mad swirl of paddle-wheels provoking a burst of weird and precipitated clapping, the tug
shot out of the desolate arena. The rocky islets
lay on the sea like the heaps of a cyclopean ruin
on a plain; the centipedes and scorpions lurked un-
der the stones; there was not a single blade of grass
in sight anywhere, not a single lizard sunning him-
self on a boulder by the shore. When I looked
again at Hermann's ship the girl had disappeared.
I could not detect the smallest dot of a bird on the
immense sky, and the flatness of the land continued
the flatness of the sea to the naked line of the hori-
zon.

This is the setting now inseparably connected
with my knowledge of Falk's misfortune. My di-
plomacy had brought me there, and now I had only
to wait the time for taking up the role of an ambas-
sador. My diplomacy was a success; my ship was
safe; old Gambril would probably live; a feeble
sound of a tapping hammer came intermittently
from the Diana. During the afternoon I looked
at times at the old homely ship, the faithful nurse
of Hermann's progeny, or yawned towards the dis-
tant temple of Buddha, like a lonely hillock on the
plain, where shaven priests cherish the thoughts of
that Annihilation which is the worthy reward of us
all. Unfortunate! He had been unfortunate once.
Well, that was not so bad as life goes. And what
the devil could be the nature of that misfortune?
I remembered that I had known a man before who
had declared himself to have fallen, years ago, a
victim to misfortune; but this misfortune, whose
effects appeared permanent (he looked desper-
ately hard up) when considered dispassionately,
seemed indistinguishable from a breach of trust.
Could it be something of that nature? Apart,
however, from the utter improbability that he
would offer to talk of it even to his future uncle-
in-law, I had a strange feeling that Falk's physique
unfitted him for that sort of delinquency. As the
person of Hermann's niece exhaled the profound
physical charm of feminine form, so her ador-
er's big frame embodied to my senses the hard,
straight masculinity that would conceivably kill
but would not condescend to cheat. The thing
was obvious. I might just as well have suspected
the girl of a curvature of the spine. And I per-
ceived that the sun was about to set.

The smoke of Falk's tug hove in sight, far
away at the mouth of the river. It was time for
me to assume the character of an ambassador, and
the negotiation would not be difficult except in the
matter of keeping my countenance. It was all too
extravagantly nonsensical, and I conceived that it
would be best to compose for myself a grave demeanour. I practised this in my boat as I went along, but the bashfulness that came secretly upon me the moment I stepped on the deck of the Diana is inexplicable. As soon as we had exchanged greetings Hermann asked me eagerly if I knew whether Falk had found his white parasol.

"He's going to bring it to you himself directly,"
I said with great solemnity. "Meantime I am charged with an important message for which he begs your favourable consideration. He is in love with your niece. . . ."

"Ach So!" he hissed with an animosity that made my assumed gravity change into the most genuine concern. What meant this tone? And I hurried on.

"He wishes, with your consent of course, to ask her to marry him at once--before you leave here, that is. He would speak to the Consul."

Hermann sat down and smoked violently. Five minutes passed in that furious meditation, and then, taking the long pipe out of his mouth, he
burst into a hot diatribe against Falk--against his
cupidity, his stupidity (a fellow that can hardly
be got to say "yes" or "no" to the simplest ques-
tion)--against his outrageous treatment of the
shipping in port (because he saw they were at his
mercy)--and against his manner of walking,
which to his (Hermann's) mind showed a conceit
positively unbearable. The damage to the old
Diana was not forgotten, of course, and there was
nothing of any nature said or done by Falk (even
to the last offer of refreshment in the hotel) that
did not seem to have been a cause of offence.
"Had the cheek" to drag him (Hermann) into
that coffee-room; as though a drink from him could
make up for forty-seven dollars and fifty cents of
damage in the cost of wood alone--not counting
two days' work for the carpenter. Of course he
would not stand in the girl's way. He was going
home to Germany. There were plenty of poor
girls walking about in Germany.

"He's very much in love," was all I found to
say.

"Yes," he cried. "And it is time too after mak-
ing himself and me talked about ashore the last
voyage I was here, and then now again; coming on
board every evening unsettling the girl's mind, and saying nothing. What sort of conduct is that?"

The seven thousand dollars the fellow was always talking about did not, in his opinion, justify such behaviour. Moreover, nobody had seen them. He (Hermann) seriously doubted if there were seven thousand cents, and the tug, no doubt, was mortgaged up to the top of the funnel to the firm of Siegers. But let that pass. He wouldn't stand in the girl's way. Her head was so turned that she had become no good to them of late. Quite unable even to put the children to bed without her aunt.

It was bad for the children; they got unruly; and yesterday he actually had to give Gustav a thrashing.

For that, too, Falk was made responsible apparently. And looking at my Hermann's heavy, puffy, good-natured face, I knew he would not exert himself till greatly exasperated, and, therefore, would thrash very hard, and being fat would resent the necessity. How Falk had managed to turn the girl's head was more difficult to understand. I supposed Hermann would know. And then hadn't there been Miss Vanlo? It could not be his silvery tongue, or the subtle seduction of his manner; he
had no more of what is called "manner" than an animal--which, however, on the other hand, is never, and can never be called vulgar. Therefore it must have been his bodily appearance, exhibiting a virility of nature as exaggerated as his beard, and resembling a sort of constant ruthlessness. It was seen in the very manner he lolled in the chair. He meant no offence, but his intercourse was characterised by that sort of frank disregard of susceptibilities a man of seven foot six, living in a world of dwarfs, would naturally assume, without in the least wishing to be unkind. But amongst men of his own stature, or nearly, this frank use of his advantages, in such matters as the awful towage bills for instance, caused much impotent gnashing of teeth. When attentively considered it seemed appalling at times. He was a strange beast. But maybe women liked it. Seen in that light he was well worth taming, and I suppose every woman at the bottom of her heart considers herself as a tamer of strange beasts. But Hermann arose with precipitation to carry the news to his wife. I had barely the time, as he made for the cabin door, to grab him by the seat of his inexpressibles. I begged him to wait till Falk in person had spoken with him. There remained some small matter to talk over, as I understood.
He sat down again at once, full of suspicion.

"What matter?" he said surlily. "I have had enough of his nonsense. There's no matter at all, as he knows very well; the girl has nothing in the world. She came to us in one thin dress when my brother died, and I have a growing family."

"It can't be anything of that kind," I opined. "He's desperately enamoured of your niece. I don't know why he did not say so before. Upon my word, I believe it is because he was afraid to lose, perhaps, the felicity of sitting near her on your quarter deck."

I intimated my conviction that his love was so great as to be in a sense cowardly. The effects of a great passion are unaccountable. It has been known to make a man timid. But Hermann looked at me as if I had foolishly raved; and the twilight was dying out rapidly.

"You don't believe in passion, do you, Hermann?" I said cheerily. "The passion of fear will make a cornered rat courageous. Falk's in a cor-
ner. He will take her off your hands in one thin
frock just as she came to you. And after ten years'
service it isn't a bad bargain," I added.

Far from taking offence, he resumed his air of
civic virtue. The sudden night came upon him
while he stared placidly along the deck, bringing
in contact with his thick lips, and taking away
again after a jet of smoke, the curved mouthpiece
fitted to the stem of his pipe. The night came
upon him and buried in haste his whiskers, his glob-
ular eyes, his puffy pale face, his fat knees and the
vast flat slippers on his fatherly feet. Only his
short arms in respectable white shirt-sleeves re-
mained very visible, propped up like the flippers of
a seal reposing on the strand.

"Falk wouldn't settle anything about repairs.
Told me to find out first how much wood I should
require and he would see," he remarked; and after
he had spat peacefully in the dusk we heard over
the water the beat of the tug's floats. There is, on
a calm night, nothing more suggestive of fierce and
headlong haste than the rapid sound made by the
paddle-wheels of a boat threshing her way through
a quiet sea; and the approach of Falk towards his
fate seemed to be urged by an impatient and pas-
sionate desire. The engines must have been driven
to the very utmost of their revolutions. We heard
them slow down at last, and, vaguely, the white
hull of the tug appeared moving against the black
islets, whilst a slow and rhythmical clapping as of
thousands of hands rose on all sides. It ceased all
at once, just before Falk brought her up. A sin-
gle brusque splash was followed by the long drawn
rumbling of iron links running through the hawse
pipe. Then a solemn silence fell upon the Road-
stead.

"He will soon be here," I murmured, and after
that we waited for him without a word. Meantime,
raising my eyes, I beheld the glitter of a lofty sky
above the Diana's mastheads. The multitude of
stars gathered into clusters, in rows, in lines, in
masses, in groups, shone all together, unanimously
--and the few isolated ones, blazing by themselves
in the midst of dark patches, seemed to be of a su-
perior kind and of an inextinguishable nature. But
long striding footsteps were heard hastening along
the deck; the high bulwarks of the Diana made a
deeper darkness. We rose from our chairs quickly,
and Falk, appearing before us, all in white, stood
still.
Nobody spoke at first, as though we had been covered with confusion. His arrival was fiery, but his white bulk, of indefinite shape and without features, made him loom up like a man of snow.

"The captain here has been telling me . . . ."

Hermann began in a homely and amicable voice; and Falk had a low, nervous laugh. His cool, negligent undertone had no inflexions, but the strength of a powerful emotion made him ramble in his speech. He had always desired a home. It was difficult to live alone, though he was not answerable. He was domestic; there had been difficulties; but since he had seen Hermann's niece he found that it had become at last impossible to live by himself. "I mean--impossible," he repeated with no sort of emphasis and only with the slightest of pauses, but the word fell into my mind with the force of a new idea.

"I have not said anything to her yet," Hermann observed quietly. And Falk dismissed this by a

"That's all right. Certainly. Very proper."

There was a necessity for perfect frankness--in marrying, especially. Hermann seemed attentive, but he seized the first opportunity to ask us into the
cabin. "And by-the-by, Falk," he said innocent-
ly, as we passed in, "the timber came to no less
than forty-seven dollars and fifty cents."

Falk, uncovering his head, lingered in the pas-
sage. "Some other time," he said; and Hermann
nudged me angrily--I don't know why. The girl
alone in the cabin sat sewing at some distance from
the table. Falk stopped short in the doorway.
Without a word, without a sign, without the slight-
est inclination of his bony head, by the silent in-
tensity of his look alone, he seemed to lay his her-
culean frame at her feet. Her hands sank slowly
on her lap, and raising her clear eyes, she let her
soft, beaming glance enfold him from head to foot
like a slow and pale caress. He was very hot when
he sat down; she, with bowed head, went on with
her sewing; her neck was very white under the light
of the lamp; but Falk, hiding his face in the palms
of his hands, shuddered faintly. He drew them
down, even to his beard, and his uncovered eyes as-
tonished me by their tense and irrational expres-
sion--as though he had just swallowed a heavy
gulp of alcohol. It passed away while he was
binding us to secrecy. Not that he cared, but he
did not like to be spoken about; and I looked at the
girl's marvellous, at her wonderful, at her regal
hair, plaited tight into that one astonishing and maidenly tress. Whenever she moved her well-shaped head it would stir stiffly to and fro on her back. The thin cotton sleeve fitted the irreproachable roundness of her arm like a skin; and her very dress, stretched on her bust, seemed to palpitate like a living tissue with the strength of vitality animating her body. How good her complexion was, the outline of her soft cheek and the small convoluted conch of her rosy ear! To pull her needle she kept the little finger apart from the others; it seemed a waste of power to see her sewing—eternally sewing—with that industrious and precise movement of her arm, going on eternally upon all the oceans, under all the skies, in innumerable harbours. And suddenly I heard Falk's voice declare that he could not marry a woman unless she knew of something in his life that had happened ten years ago. It was an accident. An unfortunate accident. It would affect the domestic arrangements of their home, but, once told, it need not be alluded to again for the rest of their lives. "I should want my wife to feel for me," he said. "It has made me unhappy." And how could he keep the knowledge of it to himself—he asked us—perhaps through years and years of companionship? What sort of companionship would that be? He had thought it over. A wife must know. Then why not at once?
He counted on Hermann's kindness for presenting
the affair in the best possible light. And Her-
mann's countenance, mystified before, became very
sour. He stole an inquisitive glance at me. I
shook my head blankly. Some people thought,
Falk went on, that such an experience changed a
man for the rest of his life. He couldn't say. It
was hard, awful, and not to be forgotten, but he
did not think himself a worse man than before.
Only he talked in his sleep now, he believed. . . .
At last I began to think he had accidentally killed
some one; perhaps a friend--his own father may-
be; when he went on to say that probably we were
aware he never touched meat. Throughout he
spoke English, of course of my account.

He swayed forward heavily.

The girl, with her hands raised before her pale
eyes, was threading her needle. He glanced at her,
and his mighty trunk overshadowed the table,
bringing nearer to us the breadth of his shoulders,
the thickness of his neck, and that incongruous, an-
chorite head, burnt in the desert, hollowed and lean
as if by excesses of vigils and fasting. His beard
flowed imposingly downwards, out of sight, be-
tween the two brown hands gripping the edge of
the table, and his persistent glance made sombre by
the wide dilations of the pupils, fascinated.

"Imagine to yourselves," he said in his ordinary
voice, "that I have eaten man."

I could only ejaculate a faint "Ah!" of com-
plete enlightenment. But Hermann, dazed by the
excessive shock, actually murmured, "Himmel!
What for?"

"It was my terrible misfortune to do so," said
Falk in a measured undertone. The girl, uncon-
scious, sewed on. Mrs. Hermann was absent in
one of the state-rooms, sitting up with Lena, who
was feverish; but Hermann suddenly put both his
hands up with a jerk. The embroidered calotte
fell, and, in the twinkling of an eye, he had rum-
pled his hair all ends up in a most extravagant
manner. In this state he strove to speak; with
every effort his eyes seemed to start further out of
their sockets; his head looked like a mop. He
choked, gasped, swallowed, and managed to shriek
out the one word, "Beast!"

From that moment till Falk went out of the cab-
in the girl, with her hands folded on the work lying in her lap, never took her eyes off him. His own, in the blindness of his heart, darted all over the cabin, only seeking to avoid the sight of Hermann's raving. It was ridiculous, and was made almost terrible by the stillness of every other person present. It was contemptible, and was made appalling by the man's overmastering horror of this awful sincerity, coming to him suddenly, with the confession of such a fact. He walked with great strides; he gasped. He wanted to know from Falk how dared he to come and tell him this? Did he think himself a proper person to be sitting in this cabin where his wife and children lived? Tell his niece! Expected him to tell his niece! His own brother's daughter! Shameless! Did I ever hear tell of such impudence?--he appealed to me. "This man here ought to have gone and hidden himself out of sight instead of . . ."

"But it's a great misfortune for me. But it's a great misfortune for me," Falk would ejaculate from time to time.

However, Hermann kept on running frequently against the corners of the table. At last he lost a slipper, and crossing his arms on his breast, walked
up with one stocking foot very close to Falk, in or-
der to ask him whether he did think there was any-
where on earth a woman abandoned enough to mate
with such a monster. "Did he? Did he? Did
he?" I tried to restrain him. He tore himself out
of my hands; he found his slipper, and, endeavou-
ing to put it on, stormed standing on one leg--
and Falk, with a face unmoved and averted
eyes, grasped all his mighty beard in one vast
palm.

"Was it right then for me to die myself?" he
asked thoughtfully. I laid my hand on his shoul-
der.

"Go away," I whispered imperiously, without
any clear reason for this advice, except that I
wished to put an end to Hermann's odious noise.
"Go away."

He looked searchingly for a moment at Hermann
before he made a move. I left the cabin too to see
him out of the ship. But he hung about the quar-
ter-deck.

"It is my misfortune," he said in a steady
"You were stupid to blurt it out in such a manner. After all, we don't hear such confidences every day."

"What does the man mean?" he mused in deep undertones. "Somebody had to die--but why me?"

He remained still for a time in the dark--silent; almost invisible. All at once he pinned my elbows to my sides. I felt utterly powerless in his grip, and his voice, whispering in my ear, vibrated.

"It's worse than hunger. Captain, do you know what that means? And I could kill then--or be killed. I wish the crowbar had smashed my skull ten years ago. And I've got to live now. Without her. Do you understand? Perhaps many years. But how? What can be done? If I had allowed myself to look at her once I would have carried her off before that man in my hands--like this."

I felt myself snatched off the deck, then suddenly
dropped—and I staggered backwards, feeling bewildered and bruised. What a man! All was still; he was gone. I heard Hermann's voice declaring in the cabin, and I went in.

I could not at first make out a single word, but Mrs. Hermann, who, attracted by the noise, had come in some time before, with an expression of surprise and mild disapproval, depicted broadly on her face, was giving now all the signs of profound, helpless agitation. Her husband shot a string of guttural words at her, and instantly putting out one hand to the bulkhead as if to save herself from falling, she clutched the loose bosom of her dress with the other. He harangued the two women extraordinarily, with much of his shirt hanging out of his waistbelt, stamping his foot, turning from one to the other, sometimes throwing both his arms together, straight up above his rumpled hair, and keeping them in that position while he uttered a passage of loud denunciation; at others folding them tight across his breast—and then he hissed with indignation, elevating his shoulders and protruding his head. The girl was crying.

She had not changed her attitude. From her steady eyes that, following Falk in his retreat, had
remained fixed wistfully on the cabin door, the
tears fell rapid, thick, on her hands, on the work in
her lap, warm and gentle like a shower in spring.
She wept without grimacing, without noise--very
touching, very quiet, with something more of pity
than of pain in her face, as one weeps in compassion
rather than in grief--and Hermann, before her,
declared. I caught several times the word
"Mensch," man; and also "Fressen," which last I
looked up afterwards in my dictionary. It means
"Devour." Hermann seemed to be requesting an
answer of some sort from her; his whole body
swayed. She remained mute and perfectly still;
at last his agitation gained her; she put the palms
of her hands together, her full lips parted, no
sound came. His voice scolded shrilly, his arms
went like a windmill--suddenly he shook a thick
fist at her. She burst out into loud sobs. He
seemed stupefied.

Mrs. Hermann rushed forward babbling rap-
dly. The two women fell on each other's necks,
and, with an arm round her niece's waist, she led her
away. Her own eyes were simply streaming, her
face was flooded. She shook her head back at me
negatively, I wonder why to this day. The girl's
head dropped heavily on her shoulder. They dis-
Then Hermann sat down and stared at the cabin floor.

"We don't know all the circumstances," I ventured to break the silence. He retorted tartly that he didn't want to know of any. According to his ideas no circumstances could excuse a crime—and certainly not such a crime. This was the opinion generally received. The duty of a human being was to starve. Falk therefore was a beast, an animal; base, low, vile, despicable, shameless, and deceitful. He had been deceiving him since last year.

He was, however, inclined to think that Falk must have gone mad quite recently; for no sane person, without necessity, uselessly, for no earthly reason, and regardless of another's self-respect and peace of mind, would own to having devoured human flesh. "Why tell?" he cried. "Who was asking him?" It showed Falk's brutality because after all he had selfishly caused him (Hermann) much pain. He would have preferred not to know that such an unclean creature had been in the habit of caressing his children. He hoped I would say nothing of all this ashore, though. He wouldn't like it to get about that he had been intimate with an
eater of men—a common cannibal. As to the scene
he had made (which I judged quite unnecessary)
he was not going to inconvenience and restrain
himself for a fellow that went about courting and
upsetting girls’ heads, while he knew all the time
that no decent housewifely girl could think of mar-
rying him. At least he (Hermann) could not con-
ceive how any girl could. Fancy Lena! . . . No,
it was impossible. The thoughts that would come
into their heads every time they sat down to a meal.
Horrible! Horrible!

"You are too squeamish, Hermann," I said.

He seemed to think it was eminently proper to be
squeamish if the word meant disgust at Falk’s con-
duct; and turning up his eyes sentimentally he
drew my attention to the horrible fate of the victims
--the victims of that Falk. I said that I knew
nothing about them. He seemed surprised. Could
not anybody imagine without knowing? He--for
instance--felt he would like to avenge them. But
what if--said I--there had not been any? They
might have died as it were, naturally--of starva-
tion. He shuddered. But to be eaten--after
death! To be devoured! He gave another deep
shudder, and asked suddenly, "Do you think it
is true?"

His indignation and his personality together would have been enough to spoil the reality of the most authentic thing. When I looked at him I doubted the story--but the remembrance of Falk's words, looks, gestures, invested it not only with an air of reality but with the absolute truth of primitive passion.

"It is true just as much as you are able to make it; and exactly in the way you like to make it. For my part, when I hear you clamouring about it, I don't believe it is true at all."

And I left him pondering. The men in my boat lying at the foot of Diana's side ladder told me that the captain of the tug had gone away in his gig some time ago.

I let my fellows pull an easy stroke; because of the heavy dew the clear sparkle of the stars seemed to fall on me cold and wetting. There was a sense of lurking gruesome horror somewhere in my mind, and it was mingled with clear and grotesque images. Schomberg's gastronomic tittle-tattle
was responsible for these; and I half hoped I should never see Falk again. But the first thing my anchor-watchman told me was that the captain of the tug was on board. He had sent his boat away and was now waiting for me in the cuddy.

He was lying full length on the stern settee, his face buried in the cushions. I had expected to see it discomposed, contorted, despairing. It was nothing of the kind; it was just as I had seen it twenty times, steady and glaring from the bridge of the tug. It was immovably set and hungry, dominated like the whole man by the singleness of one instinct.

He wanted to live. He had always wanted to live. So we all do—but in us the instinct serves a complex conception, and in him this instinct existed alone. There is in such simple development a gigantic force, and like the pathos of a child's uncontrolled desire. He wanted that girl, and the utmost that can be said for him was that he wanted that particular girl alone. I think I saw then the obscure beginning, the seed germinating in the soil of an unconscious need, the first shoot of that tree bearing now for a mature mankind the flower and the fruit, the infinite gradation in
shades and in flavour of our discriminating love.

He was a child. He was as frank as a child too.

He was hungry for the girl, terribly hungry, as
he had been terribly hungry for food.

Don't be shocked if I declare that in my belief
it was the same need, the same pain, the same tor-
ture. We are in his case allowed to contemplate
the foundation of all the emotions--that one joy
which is to live, and the one sadness at the root of
the innumerable torments. It was made plain by
the way he talked. He had never suffered so. It
was gnawing, it was fire; it was there, like this!
And after pointing below his breastbone, he made
a hard wringing motion with his hands. And I as-
sure you that, seen as I saw it with my bodily eyes,
it was anything but laughable. And again, as he
was presently to tell me (alluding to an early inci-
dent of the disastrous voyage when some damaged
meat had been flung overboard), he said that a
time soon came when his heart ached (that was the
expression he used), and he was ready to tear his
hair out at the thought of all that rotten beef
thrown away.

I had heard all this; I witnessed his physical
struggles, seeing the working of the rack and hear-
ing the true voice of pain. I witnessed it all pa-
tiently, because the moment I came into the cuddy
he had called upon me to stand by him--and this,
it seems, I had diplomatically promised.

His agitation was impressive and alarming in
the little cabin, like the floundering of a great
whale driven into a shallow cove in a coast. He
stood up; he flung himself down headlong; he tried
to tear the cushion with his teeth; and again hug-
ging it fiercely to his face he let himself fall on the
couch. The whole ship seemed to feel the shock
of his despair; and I contemplated with wonder the
lofty forehead, the noble touch of time on the un-
covered temples, the unchanged hungry character
of the face--so strangely ascetic and so incapable
of portraying emotion.

What should he do? He had lived by being
near her. He had sat--in the evening--I knew?--
all his life! She sewed. Her head was bent--so.
Her head--like this--and her arms. Ah! Had I
seen? Like this.

He dropped on a stool, bowed his powerful neck
whose nape was red, and with his hands stitched
the air, ludicrous, sublimely imbecile and comprehensible.

And now he couldn't have her? No! That was too much. After thinking too that . . . What had he done? What was my advice? Take her by force? No? Mustn't he? Who was there then to kill him? For the first time I saw one of his features move; a fighting teeth-baring curl of the lip. . . . "Not Hermann, perhaps." He lost himself in thought as though he had fallen out of the world.

I may note that the idea of suicide apparently did not enter his head for a single moment. It occurred to me to ask:

"Where was it that this shipwreck of yours took place?"

"Down south," he said vaguely with a start.

"You are not down south now," I said. "Violence won't do. They would take her away from you in no time. And what was the name of the
"Borgmester Dahl," he said. "It was no shipwreck."

He seemed to be waking up by degrees from that trance, and waking up calmed.

"Not a shipwreck? What was it?"

"Break down," he answered, looking more like himself every moment. By this only I learned that it was a steamer. I had till then supposed they had been starving in boats or on a raft—or perhaps on a barren rock.

"She did not sink then?" I asked in surprise.

He nodded. "We sighted the southern ice," he pronounced dreamily.

"And you alone survived?"

He sat down. "Yes. It was a terrible misfortune for me. Everything went wrong. All the
men went wrong. I survived.

Remembering the things one reads of it was difficult to realise the true meaning of his answers. I ought to have seen at once—but I did not; so difficult is it for our minds, remembering so much, instructed so much, informed of so much, to get in touch with the real actuality at our elbow. And with my head full of preconceived notions as to how a case of "cannibalism and suffering at sea" should be managed I said—"You were then so lucky in the drawing of lots?"

"Drawing of lots?" he said. "What lots? Do you think I would have allowed my life to go for the drawing of lots?"

Not if he could help if, I perceived, no matter what other life went.

"It was a great misfortune. Terrible. Awful," he said. "Many heads went wrong, but the best men would live."

"The toughest, you mean," I said. He consid-
ered the word. Perhaps it was strange to him, though his English was so good.

"Yes," he asserted at last. "The best. It was everybody for himself at last and the ship open to all."

Thus from question to question I got the whole story. I fancy it was the only way I could that night have stood by him. Outwardly at least he was himself again; the first sign of it was the return of that incongruous trick he had of drawing both his hands down his face--and it had its meaning now, with that slight shudder of the frame and the passionate anguish of these hands uncovering a hungry immovable face, the wide pupils of the intent, silent, fascinating eyes.

It was an iron steamer of a most respectable origin. The burgomaster of Falk's native town had built her. She was the first steamer ever launched there. The burgomaster's daughter had christened her. Country people drove in carts from miles around to see her. He told me all this. He got the berth as what we should call a chief mate. He seemed to think it had been a feather in his cap;
and, in his own corner of the world, this lover of life was of good parentage.

The burgomaster had advanced ideas in the ship-owning line. At that time not every one would have known enough to think of despatching a cargo steamer to the Pacific. But he loaded her with pitch-pine deals and sent her off to hunt for her luck. Wellington was to be the first port, I fancy. It doesn't matter, because in latitude 44° south and somewhere halfway between Good Hope and New Zealand the tail shaft broke and the propeller dropped off.

They were steaming then with a fresh gale on the quarter and all their canvas set, to help the engines. But by itself the sail power was not enough to keep way on her. When the propeller went the ship broached-to at once, and the masts got whipped overboard.

The disadvantage of being dismasted consisted in this, that they had nothing to hoist flags on to make themselves visible at a distance. In the course of the first few days several ships failed to sight them; and the gale was drifting them out of
the usual track. The voyage had been, from the
first, neither very successful nor very harmonious.

There had been quarrels on board. The captain
was a clever, melancholic man, who had no unusual
grip on his crew. The ship had been amply pro-
visioned for the passage, but, somehow or other,
several barrels of meat were found spoiled on open-
ing, and had been thrown overboard soon after
leaving home, as a sanitary measure. Afterwards
the crew of the Borgmester Dahl thought of that
rotten carrion with tears of regret, covetousness
and despair.

She drove south. To begin with, there had been
an appearance of organisation, but soon the bonds
of discipline became relaxed. A sombre idleness
succeeded. They looked with sullen eyes at the hori-
zon. The gales increased: she lay in the trough,
the seas made a clean breach over her. On one
frightful night, when they expected their hulk to
turn over with them every moment, a heavy sea
broke on board, deluged the store-rooms and spoiled
the best part of the remaining provisions. It seems
the hatch had not been properly secured. This in-
stance of neglect is characteristic of utter discour-
agement. Falk tried to inspire some energy into
his captain, but failed. From that time he retired
more into himself, always trying to do his utmost in the situation. It grew worse. Gale succeeded
gale, with black mountains of water hurling them-
selves on the Borgmester Dahl. Some of the men
never left their bunks; many became quarrelsome.
The chief engineer, an old man, refused to speak at all to anybody. Others shut themselves up in their berths to cry. On calm days the inert steamer
rolled on a leaden sea under a murky sky, or showed, in sunshine, the squalor of sea waifs, the
dried white salt, the rust, the jagged broken places. Then the gales came again. They kept body and soul together on short rations. Once, an English ship, scudding in a storm, tried to stand by them, heaving-to pluckily under their lee. The seas swept her decks; the men in oilskins clinging to her rigging looked at them, and they made desper-ate signs over their shattered bulwarks. Sud-
denly her main-topsail went, yard and all, in a ter-
rific squall; she had to bear up under bare poles, and disappeared.

Other ships had spoken them before, but at first they had refused to be taken off, expecting the as-
sistance of some steamer. There were very few steamers in those latitudes then; and when they
desired to leave this dead and drifting carcase, no
ship came in sight. They had drifted south out of men's knowledge. They failed to attract the attention of a lonely whaler, and very soon the edge of the polar ice-cap rose from the sea and closed the southern horizon like a wall. One morning they were alarmed by finding themselves floating amongst detached pieces of ice. But the fear of sinking passed away like their vigour, like their hopes; the shocks of the floes knocking against the ship's side could not rouse them from their apathy: and the Borgmester Dahl drifted out again unharmed into open water. They hardly noticed the change.

The funnel had gone overboard in one of the heavy rolls; two of their three boats had disappeared, washed away in bad weather, and the davits swung to and fro, unsecured, with chafed rope's ends waggling to the roll. Nothing was done on board, and Falk told me how he had often listened to the water washing about the dark engine-room where the engines, stilled for ever, were decaying slowly into a mass of rust, as the stilled heart decays within the lifeless body. At first, after the loss of the motive power, the tiller had been thoroughly secured by lashings. But in course of time these had rotted, chafed, rusted, parting one by
one: and the rudder, freed, banged heavily to and fro night and day, sending dull shocks through the whole frame of the vessel. This was dangerous.
Nobody cared enough to lift a little finger. He told me that even now sometimes waking up at night, he fancied he could hear the dull vibrating thuds. The pintles carried away, and it dropped off at last.

The final catastrophe came with the sending off of their one remaining boat. It was Falk who had managed to preserve her intact, and now it was agreed that some of the hands should sail away into the track of the shipping to procure assistance.
She was provisioned with all the food they could spare for the six who were to go. They waited for a fine day. It was long in coming. At last one morning they lowered her into the water.

Directly, in that demoralised crowd, trouble broke out. Two men who had no business there had jumped into the boat under the pretence of unhooking the tackles, while some sort of squabble arose on the deck amongst these weak, tottering spectres of a ship's company. The captain, who had been for days living secluded and unapproachable in the chart-room, came to the rail. He or-
dered the two men to come up on board and men-
aced them with his revolver. They pretended to
obey, but suddenly cutting the boat's painter, gave
a shove against the ship's side and made ready to
hoist the sail.

"Shoot, sir! Shoot them down!" cried Falk--
"and I will jump overboard to regain the boat."
But the captain, after taking aim with an irreso-
lute arm, turned suddenly away.

A howl of rage arose. Falk dashed into his cabin
for his own pistol. When he returned it was too
late. Two more men had leaped into the water, but
the fellows in the boat beat them off with the oars,
hoisted the boat's lug and sailed away. They were
never heard of again.

Consternation and despair possessed the remain-
ing ship's company, till the apathy of utter hope-
lessness re-asserted its sway. That day a fireman
committed suicide, running up on deck with his
throat cut from ear to ear, to the horror of all
hands. He was thrown overboard. The captain
had locked himself in the chart-room, and Falk,
knocking vainly for admittance, heard him recit-
ing over and over again the names of his wife and children, not as if calling upon them or commend-
ing them to God, but in a mechanical voice like an exercise of memory. Next day the doors of the chart-room were swinging open to the roll of the ship, and the captain had disappeared. He must during the night have jumped into the sea. Falk locked both the doors and kept the keys.

The organised life of the ship had come to an end. The solidarity of the men had gone. They became indifferent to each other. It was Falk who took in hand the distribution of such food as re-
ained. They boiled their boots for soup to eke out the rations, which only made their hunger more intolerable. Sometimes whispers of hate were heard passing between the languid skeletons that drifted endlessly to and fro, north and south, east and west, upon that carcase of a ship.

And in this lies the grotesque horror of this som-
bre story. The last extremity of sailors, overtaking a small boat or a frail craft, seems easier to bear, because of the direct danger of the seas. The con-
fined space, the close contact, the imminent menace of the waves, seem to draw men together, in spite of madness, suffering and despair. But there was
a ship--safe, convenient, roomy: a ship with beds, bedding, knives, forks, comfortable cabins, glass and china, and a complete cook's galley, pervaded, ruled and possessed by the pitiless spectre of starvation. The lamp oil had been drunk, the wicks cut up for food, the candles eaten. At night she floated dark in all her recesses, and full of fears.

One day Falk came upon a man gnawing a splinter of pine wood. Suddenly he threw the piece of wood away, tottered to the rail, and fell over. Falk, too late to prevent the act, saw him claw the ship's side desperately before he went down. Next day another man did the same thing, after uttering horrible imprecations. But this one somehow managed to get hold of the broken rudder chains and hung on there, silently. Falk set about trying to save him, and all the time the man, holding with both hands, looked at him anxiously with his sunken eyes. Then, just as Falk was ready to put his hand on him, the man let go his hold and sank like a stone. Falk reflected on these sights. His heart revolted against the horror of death, and he said to himself that he would struggle for every precious minute of his life.

One afternoon--as the survivors lay about on the after deck--the carpenter, a tall man with a
black beard, spoke of the last sacrifice. There was nothing eatable left on board. Nobody said a word to this; but that company separated quickly, these listless feeble spectres slunk off one by one to hide in fear of each other. Falk and the carpenter remained on deck together. Falk liked the big carpenter. He had been the best man of the lot, helpful and ready as long as there was anything to do, the longest hopeful, and had preserved to the last some vigour and decision of mind.

They did not speak to each other. Henceforth no voices were to be heard conversing sadly on board that ship. After a time the carpenter tottered away forward; but later on, Falk going to drink at the fresh-water pump, had the inspiration to turn his head. The carpenter had stolen upon him from behind, and, summoning all his strength, was aiming with a crowbar a blow at the back of his skull.

Dodging just in time, Falk made his escape and ran into his cabin. While he was loading his revolver there, he heard the sound of heavy blows struck upon the bridge. The locks of the chart-room doors were slight, they flew open, and the car-
penter, possessing himself of the captain's revolver, 
fired a shot of defiance.

Falk was about to go on deck and have it out 
at once, when he remarked that one of the ports of 
his cabin commanded the approaches to the fresh-
water pump. Instead of going out he remained in 
and secured the door. "The best man shall sur-
vive," he said to himself--and the other, he rea-
soned, must at some time or other come there to 
drink. These starving men would drink often to 
cheat the pangs of their hunger. But the carpen-
ter too must have noticed the position of the port. 
They were the two best men in the ship, and the 
game was with them. All the rest of the day Falk 
saw no one and heard no sound. At night he 
strained his eyes. It was dark--he heard a rustling 
noise once, but he was certain that no one could 
have come near the pump. It was to the left of his 
deck port, and he could not have failed to see a 
man, for the night was clear and starry. He saw 
nothing; towards morning another faint noise 
made him suspicious. Deliberately and quietly he 
unlocked his door. He had not slept, and had not 
given way to the horror of the situation. He 
wanted to live.
But during the night the carpenter, without at all trying to approach the pump, had managed to creep quietly along the starboard bulwark, and, unseen, had crouched down right under Falk's deck port. When daylight came he rose up suddenly, looked in, and putting his arm through the round brass framed opening, fired at Falk within a foot. He missed—-and Falk, instead of attempting to seize the arm holding the weapon, opened his door unexpectedly, and with the muzzle of his long revolver nearly touching the other's side, shot him dead.

The best man had survived. Both of them had at the beginning just strength enough to stand on their feet, and both had displayed pitiless resolution, endurance, cunning and courage—all the qualities of classic heroism. At once Falk threw overboard the captain's revolver. He was a born monopolist. Then after the report of the two shots, followed by a profound silence, there crept out into the cold, cruel dawn of Antarctic regions, from various hiding-places, over the deck of that dismantled corpse of a ship floating on a grey sea ruled by iron necessity and with a heart of ice—there crept into view one by one, cautious, slow, eager, glaring, and unclean, a band of hungry and
livid skeletons. Falk faced them, the possessor of
the only fire-arm on board, and the second best man
--the carpenter--was lying dead between him and
them.

"He was eaten, of course," I said.

He bent his head slowly, shuddered a little, draw-
ing his hands over his face, and said, "I had never
any quarrel with that man. But there were our
lives between him and me."

Why continue the story of that ship, that story
before which, with its fresh-water pump like a
spring of death, its man with the weapon, the sea
ruled by iron necessity, its spectral band swayed by
terror and hope, its mute and unhearing heaven?--
the fable of the Flying Dutchman with its conven-
tion of crime and its sentimental retribution fades
like a graceful wreath, like a wisp of white mist.
What is there to say that every one of us cannot
guess for himself? I believe Falk began by going
through the ship, revolver in hand, to annex all the
matches. Those starving wretches had plenty of
matches! He had no mind to have the ship set on
fire under his feet, either from hate or from despair.
He lived in the open, camping on the bridge, commanding all the after deck and the only approach to the pump. He lived! Some of the others lived too--concealed, anxious, coming out one by one from their hiding-places at the seductive sound of a shot. And he was not selfish. They shared, but only three of them all were alive when a whaler, returning from her cruising ground, nearly ran over the water-logged hull of the Borgmester Dahl, which, it seems, in the end had in some way sprung a leak in both her holds, but being loaded with deals could not sink.

"They all died," Falk said. "These three too, afterwards. But I would not die. All died, all! under this terrible misfortune. But was I too to throw away my life? Could I? Tell me, captain? I was alone there, quite alone, just like the others. Each man was alone. Was I to give up my revolver? Who to? Or was I to throw it into the sea? What would have been the good? Only the best man would survive. It was a great, terrible, and cruel misfortune."

He had survived! I saw him before me as though preserved for a witness to the mighty truth of an unerring and eternal principle. Great beads
of perspiration stood on his forehead. And sud-
denly it struck the table with a heavy blow, as he
fell forward throwing his hands out.

"And this is worse," he cried. "This is a worse
pain! This is more terrible."

He made my heart thump with the profound con-
viction of his cries. And after he had left me
alone I called up before my mental eye the image
of the girl weeping silently, abundantly, patiently,
and as if irresistibly. I thought of her tawny
hair. I thought how, if unplaited, it would have
covered her all round as low as the hips, like the
hair of a siren. And she had bewitched him. Fancy
a man who would guard his own life with the in-
flexibility of a pitiless and immovable fate, being
brought to lament that once a crowbar had missed
his skull! The sirens sing and lure to death, but
this one had been weeping silently as if for the pity
of his life. She was the tender and voiceless siren
of this appalling navigator. He evidently wanted
to live his whole conception of life. Nothing else
would do. And she too was a servant of that life
that, in the midst of death, cries aloud to our senses.
She was eminently fitted to interpret for him its
feminine side. And in her own way, and with her
own profusion of sensuous charms, she also seemed
to illustrate the eternal truth of an unerring prin-
ciple. I don't know though what sort of principle
Hermann illustrated when he turned up early on
board my ship with a most perplexed air. It
struck me, however, that he too would do his best
to survive. He seemed greatly calmed on the sub-
ject of Falk, but still very full of it.

"What is it you said I was last night? You
know," he asked after some preliminary talk.
"Too--too--I don't know. A very funny word."

"Squeamish?" I suggested.

"Yes. What does it mean?"

"That you exaggerate things--to yourself.
Without inquiry, and so on."

He seemed to turn it over in his mind. We went
on talking. This Falk was the plague of his life.
Upsetting everybody like this! Mrs. Hermann
was unwell rather this morning. His niece was
crying still. There was nobody to look after the
children. He struck his umbrella on the deck. She would be like that for months. Fancy carrying all the way home, second class, a perfectly useless girl who is crying all the time. It was bad for Lena too, he observed; but on what grounds I could not guess. Perhaps of the bad example. That child was already sorrowing and crying enough over the rag doll. Nicholas was really the least sentimental person of the family.

"Why does she weep?" I asked.

"From pity," cried Hermann.

It was impossible to make out women. Mrs. Hermann was the only one he pretended to understand. She was very, very upset and doubtful.

"Doubtful about what?" I asked.

He averted his eyes and did not answer this. It was impossible to make them out. For instance, his niece was weeping for Falk. Now he (Hermann) would like to wring his neck--but then . . . He supposed he had too tender a heart. "Frank-
ly," he asked at last, "what do you think of what
we heard last night, captain?"

"In all these tales," I observed, "there is always
a good deal of exaggeration."

And not letting him recover from his surprise I
assured him that I knew all the details. He begged
me not to repeat them. His heart was too tender.
They made him feel unwell. Then, looking at his
feet and speaking very slowly, he supposed that he
need not see much of them after they were married.
For, indeed, he could not bear the sight of Falk.
On the other hand it was ridiculous to take home a
girl with her head turned. A girl that weeps all
the time and is of no help to her aunt.

"Now you will be able to do with one cabin only
on your passage home," I said.

"Yes, I had thought of that," he said brightly,
almost. "Yes! Himself, his wife, four children
--one cabin might do. Whereas if his niece
went . . ."
"And what does Mrs. Hermann say to it?" I inquired.

Mrs. Hermann did not know whether a man of that sort could make a girl happy—she had been greatly deceived in Captain Falk. She had been very upset last night.

Those good people did not seem to be able to retain an impression for a whole twelve hours. I assured him on my own personal knowledge that Falk possessed in himself all the qualities to make his niece's future prosperous. He said he was glad to hear this, and that he would tell his wife. Then the object of the visit came out. He wished me to help him to resume relations with Falk. His niece, he said, had expressed the hope I would do so in my kindness. He was evidently anxious that I should, for though he seemed to have forgotten nine-tenths of his last night's opinions and the whole of his indignation, yet he evidently feared to be sent to the right-about. "You told me he was very much in love," he concluded slyly, and leered in a sort of bucolic way.

"As soon as he had left my ship I called Falk on
board by signal—the tug still lying at the anchor-
age. He took the news with calm gravity, as
though he had all along expected the stars to fight
for him in their courses.

I saw them once more together, and only once—
on the quarter-deck of the Diana. Hermann sat
smoking with a shirt-sleeved elbow hooked over the
back of his chair. Mrs. Hermann was sewing
alone. As Falk stepped over the gangway, Her-
mann's niece, with a slight swish of the skirt and a
swift friendly nod to me, glided past my chair.

They met in sunshine abreast of the mainmast.
He held her hands and looked down at them, and
she looked up at him with her candid and unseeing
glance. It seemed to me they had come together
as if attracted, drawn and guided to each other by
a mysterious influence. They were a complete
couple. In her grey frock, palpitating with life,
generous of form, olympian and simple, she was in-
deed the siren to fascination that dark navigator, this
ruthless lover of the five senses. From afar I
seemed to feel the masculine strength with which
he grasped those hands she had extended to him
with a womanly swiftness. Lena, a little pale,
nursing her beloved lump of dirty rags, ran to-
wards her big friend; and then in the drowsy si-
lence of the good old ship Mrs. Hermann's voice
rang out so changed that it made me spin round in
my chair to see what was the matter.

"Lena, come here!" she screamed. And this
good-natured matron gave me a wavering glance,
dark and full of fearsome distrust. The child ran
back, surprised to her knee. But the two, stand-
ing before each other in sunlight with clasped
hands, had heard nothing, had seen nothing and
no one. Three feet away from them in the shade
a seaman sat on a spar, very busy splicing a strop,
and dipping his fingers into a tar-pot, as if utterly
unaware of their existence.

When I returned in command of another ship,
some five years afterwards, Mr. and Mrs. Falk
had left the place. I should not wonder if Schom-
berg's tongue had succeeded at last in scaring Falk
away for good; and, indubitably, there was a tale
still going about the town of a certain Falk, owner
of a tug, who had won his wife at cards from the
captain of an English ship.

THE END