

A tropical beach scene with several tall palm trees in the foreground and middle ground. In the background, there is a body of water and a small hut with a thatched roof. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

AN OUTCAST
OF THE
ISLANDS

JOSEPH
CONRAD

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JOSEPH CONRAD



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Pues el delito mayor Del hombre es haber nacido
CALDERON

TO EDWARD LANCELOT SANDERSON

Author's Note

*

"An Outcast of the Islands" is my second novel in the absolute sense of the word; second in conception, second in execution, second as it were in its essence. There was no hesitation, half-formed plan, vague idea, or the vaguest reverie of anything else between it and "Almayer's Folly." The only doubt I suffered from, after the publication of "Almayer's Folly," was whether I should write another line for print. Those days, now grown so dim, had their poignant moments. Neither in my mind nor in my heart had I then given up the sea. In truth I was clinging to it desperately, all the more desperately because, against my will, I could not help feeling that there was something changed in my relation to it. "Almayer's Folly," had been finished and done with. The mood itself was gone. But it had left the memory of an experience that, both in thought and emotion was unconnected with the sea, and I suppose that part of my moral being which is rooted in consistency was badly shaken. I was a victim of contrary

stresses which produced a state of immobility. I gave myself up to indolence. Since it was impossible for me to face both ways I had elected to face nothing. The discovery of new values in life is a very chaotic experience; there is a tremendous amount of jostling and confusion and a momentary feeling of darkness. I let my spirit float supine over that chaos.

A phrase of Edward Garnett's is, as a matter of fact, responsible for this book. The first of the friends I made for myself by my pen it was but natural that he should be the recipient, at that time, of my confidences. One evening when we had dined together and he had listened to the account of my perplexities (I fear he must have been growing a little tired of them) he pointed out that there was no need to determine my future absolutely. Then he added: "You have the style, you have the temperament; why not write another?" I believe that as far as one man may wish to influence another man's life Edward Garnett had a great desire that I should go on writing. At that time, and I may say, ever afterwards, he was always very patient and gentle with me. What strikes me most however in the phrase quoted above which was offered to me in a tone of detachment is not its gentleness but its effective wisdom. Had he said, "Why not go on writing," it is very probable he would have scared me away from pen and ink for ever; but there was

nothing either to frighten one or arouse one's antagonism in the mere suggestion to "write another." And thus a dead point in the revolution of my affairs was insidiously got over. The word "another" did it. At about eleven o'clock of a nice London night, Edward and I walked along interminable streets talking of many things, and I remember that on getting home I sat down and wrote about half a page of "An Outcast of the Islands" before I slept. This was committing myself definitely, I won't say to another life, but to another book. There is apparently something in my character which will not allow me to abandon for good any piece of work I have begun. I have laid aside many beginnings. I have laid them aside with sorrow, with disgust, with rage, with melancholy and even with self-contempt; but even at the worst I had an uneasy consciousness that I would have to go back to them.

"An Outcast of the Islands" belongs to those novels of mine that were never laid aside; and though it brought me the qualification of "exotic writer" I don't think the charge was at all justified.

For the life of me I don't see that there is the slightest exotic spirit in the conception or style of that novel. It is certainly the most *tropical* of my eastern tales. The mere scenery got a great hold on me as I went on, perhaps

because (I may just as well confess that) the story itself was never very near my heart.

It engaged my imagination much more than my affection. As to my feeling for Willems it was but the regard one cannot help having for one's own creation. Obviously I could not be indifferent to a man on whose head I had brought so much evil simply by imagining him such as he appears in the novel—and that, too, on a very slight foundation.

The man who suggested Willems to me was not particularly interesting in himself. My interest was aroused by his dependent position, his strange, dubious status of a mistrusted, disliked, worn-out European living on the reluctant toleration of that Settlement hidden in the heart of the forest-land, up that sombre stream which our ship was the only white men's ship to visit. With his hollow, clean-shaved cheeks, a heavy grey moustache and eyes without any expression whatever, clad always in a spotless sleeping suit much be-frogged in front, which left his lean neck wholly uncovered, and with his bare feet in a pair of straw slippers, he wandered silently amongst the houses in daylight, almost as dumb as an animal and apparently much more homeless. I don't know what he did with himself at night. He must have had a place, a hut, a palm-leaf shed, some sort of hovel

where he kept his razor and his change of sleeping suits. An air of futile mystery hung over him, something not exactly dark but obviously ugly. The only definite statement I could extract from anybody was that it was he who had "brought the Arabs into the river." That must have happened many years before. But how did he bring them into the river? He could hardly have done it in his arms like a lot of kittens. I knew that Almayer founded the chronology of all his misfortunes on the date of that fateful advent; and yet the very first time we dined with Almayer there was Willems sitting at table with us in the manner of the skeleton at the feast, obviously shunned by everybody, never addressed by any one, and for all recognition of his existence getting now and then from Almayer a venomous glance which I observed with great surprise. In the course of the whole evening he ventured one single remark which I didn't catch because his articulation was imperfect, as of a man who had forgotten how to speak. I was the only person who seemed aware of the sound. Willems subsided. Presently he retired, pointedly unnoticed—into the forest maybe? Its immensity was there, within three hundred yards of the verandah, ready to swallow up anything. Almayer conversing with my captain did not stop talking while he glared angrily at the retreating back. Didn't that fellow bring the Arabs into the river! Nevertheless Willems turned up next morning on Almayer's verandah. From

the bridge of the steamer I could see plainly these two, breakfasting together, tete a tete and, I suppose, in dead silence, one with his air of being no longer interested in this world and the other raising his eyes now and then with intense dislike.

It was clear that in those days Willems lived on Almayer's charity. Yet on returning two months later to Sambir I heard that he had gone on an expedition up the river in charge of a steam-launch belonging to the Arabs, to make some discovery or other. On account of the strange reluctance that everyone manifested to talk about Willems it was impossible for me to get at the rights of that transaction. Moreover, I was a newcomer, the youngest of the company, and, I suspect, not judged quite fit as yet for a full confidence. I was not much concerned about that exclusion. The faint suggestion of plots and mysteries pertaining to all matters touching Almayer's affairs amused me vastly. Almayer was obviously very much affected. I believe he missed Willems immensely. He wore an air of sinister preoccupation and talked confidentially with my captain. I could catch only snatches of mumbled sentences. Then one morning as I came along the deck to take my place at the breakfast table Almayer checked himself in his low-toned discourse. My captain's face was perfectly impenetrable. There was a moment of profound silence

and then as if unable to contain himself Almayer burst out in a loud vicious tone:

"One thing's certain; if he finds anything worth having up there they will poison him like a dog."

Disconnected though it was, that phrase, as food for thought, was distinctly worth hearing. We left the river three days afterwards and I never returned to Sambir; but whatever happened to the protagonist of my Willems nobody can deny that I have recorded for him a less squalid fate.

J. C. 1919.

PART I

*

Chapter One

*

When he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect. It was going to be a short episode—a sentence in brackets, so to speak—in the flowing tale of his life: a thing of no moment, to be done unwillingly, yet neatly, and to be quickly forgotten. He imagined that he could go on afterwards looking at the sunshine, enjoying the shade, breathing in the perfume of flowers in the small garden before his house. He fancied that nothing would be changed, that he would be able as heretofore to tyrannize good-humouredly over his half-caste wife, to notice with tender contempt his pale yellow child, to patronize loftily his dark-skinned brother-in-law, who loved pink neckties and wore patent-leather boots on his little feet, and was so humble before the white husband of the lucky sister. Those were the

delights of his life, and he was unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things, could dim the light of the sun, could destroy the perfume of the flowers, the submission of his wife, the smile of his child, the awe-struck respect of Leonard da Souza and of all the Da Souza family. That family's admiration was the great luxury of his life. It rounded and completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority. He loved to breathe the coarse incense they offered before the shrine of the successful white man; the man that had done them the honour to marry their daughter, sister, cousin; the rising man sure to climb very high; the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. They were a numerous and an unclean crowd, living in ruined bamboo houses, surrounded by neglected compounds, on the outskirts of Macassar. He kept them at arm's length and even further off, perhaps, having no illusions as to their worth. They were a half-caste, lazy lot, and he saw them as they were—ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat, and deposited askew upon decaying rattan chairs in shady corners of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was

going to be their very last. He heard their shrill quarrellings, the squalling of their children, the grunting of their pigs; he smelt the odours of the heaps of garbage in their courtyards: and he was greatly disgusted. But he fed and clothed that shabby multitude; those degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors; he was their providence; he kept them singing his praises in the midst of their laziness, of their dirt, of their immense and hopeless squalor: and he was greatly delighted. They wanted much, but he could give them all they wanted without ruining himself. In exchange he had their silent fear, their loquacious love, their noisy veneration. It is a fine thing to be a providence, and to be told so on every day of one's life. It gives one a feeling of enormously remote superiority, and Willems revelled in it. He did not analyze the state of his mind, but probably his greatest delight lay in the unexpressed but intimate conviction that, should he close his hand, all those admiring human beings would starve. His munificence had demoralized them. An easy task. Since he descended amongst them and married Joanna they had lost the little aptitude and strength for work they might have had to put forth under the stress of extreme necessity. They lived now by the grace of his will. This was power. Willems loved it. In another, and perhaps a lower plane, his days did not want for their less complex but more obvious pleasures. He liked the simple games of skill—billiards; also games not

so simple, and calling for quite another kind of skill—poker. He had been the aptest pupil of a steady-eyed, sententious American, who had drifted mysteriously into Macassar from the wastes of the Pacific, and, after knocking about for a time in the eddies of town life, had drifted out enigmatically into the sunny solitudes of the Indian Ocean. The memory of the Californian stranger was perpetuated in the game of poker—which became popular in the capital of Celebes from that time—and in a powerful cocktail, the recipe for which is transmitted—in the Kwang-tung dialect—from head boy to head boy of the Chinese servants in the Sunda Hotel even to this day. Willems was a connoisseur in the drink and an adept at the game. Of those accomplishments he was moderately proud. Of the confidence reposed in him by Hudig—the master—he was boastfully and obtrusively proud. This arose from his great benevolence, and from an exalted sense of his duty to himself and the world at large. He experienced that irresistible impulse to impart information which is inseparable from gross ignorance. There is always some one thing which the ignorant man knows, and that thing is the only thing worth knowing; it fills the ignorant man's universe. Willems knew all about himself. On the day when, with many misgivings, he ran away from a Dutch East-Indiaman in Samarang roads, he had commenced that study of himself, of his own ways, of his own abilities, of those fate-compelling qualities of

his which led him toward that lucrative position which he now filled. Being of a modest and diffident nature, his successes amazed, almost frightened him, and ended—as he got over the succeeding shocks of surprise—by making him ferociously conceited. He believed in his genius and in his knowledge of the world. Others should know of it also; for their own good and for his greater glory. All those friendly men who slapped him on the back and greeted him noisily should have the benefit of his example. For that he must talk. He talked to them conscientiously. In the afternoon he expounded his theory of success over the little tables, dipping now and then his moustache in the crushed ice of the cocktails; in the evening he would often hold forth, cue in hand, to a young listener across the billiard table. The billiard balls stood still as if listening also, under the vivid brilliance of the shaded oil lamps hung low over the cloth; while away in the shadows of the big room the Chinaman marker would lean wearily against the wall, the blank mask of his face looking pale under the mahogany marking-board; his eyelids dropped in the drowsy fatigue of late hours and in the buzzing monotony of the unintelligible stream of words poured out by the white man. In a sudden pause of the talk the game would recommence with a sharp click and go on for a time in the flowing soft whirr and the subdued thuds as the balls rolled zig-zagging towards the inevitably successful

cannon. Through the big windows and the open doors the salt dampness of the sea, the vague smell of mould and flowers from the garden of the hotel drifted in and mingled with the odour of lamp oil, growing heavier as the night advanced. The players' heads dived into the light as they bent down for the stroke, springing back again smartly into the greenish gloom of broad lamp-shades; the clock ticked methodically; the unmoved Chinaman continuously repeated the score in a lifeless voice, like a big talking doll—and Willems would win the game. With a remark that it was getting late, and that he was a married man, he would say a patronizing good-night and step out into the long, empty street. At that hour its white dust was like a dazzling streak of moonlight where the eye sought repose in the dimmer gleam of rare oil lamps. Willems walked homewards, following the line of walls overtopped by the luxuriant vegetation of the front gardens. The houses right and left were hidden behind the black masses of flowering shrubs. Willems had the street to himself. He would walk in the middle, his shadow gliding obsequiously before him. He looked down on it complacently. The shadow of a successful man! He would be slightly dizzy with the cocktails and with the intoxication of his own glory. As he often told people, he came east fourteen years ago—a cabin boy. A small boy. His shadow must have been very small at that time; he thought with a smile that he was

not aware then he had anything—even a shadow—which he dared call his own. And now he was looking at the shadow of the confidential clerk of Hudig & Co. going home. How glorious! How good was life for those that were on the winning side! He had won the game of life; also the game of billiards. He walked faster, jingling his winnings, and thinking of the white stone days that had marked the path of his existence. He thought of the trip to Lombok for ponies—that first important transaction confided to him by Hudig; then he reviewed the more important affairs: the quiet deal in opium; the illegal traffic in gunpowder; the great affair of smuggled firearms, the difficult business of the Rajah of Goak. He carried that last through by sheer pluck; he had bearded the savage old ruler in his council room; he had bribed him with a gilt glass coach, which, rumour said, was used as a hen-coop now; he had over-persuaded him; he had bested him in every way. That was the way to get on. He disapproved of the elementary dishonesty that dips the hand in the cash-box, but one could evade the laws and push the principles of trade to their furthest consequences. Some call that cheating. Those are the fools, the weak, the contemptible. The wise, the strong, the respected, have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power. On that text he preached often to the young men. It was his doctrine, and he, himself, was a shining example of its truth.

Night after night he went home thus, after a day of toil and pleasure, drunk with the sound of his own voice celebrating his own prosperity. On his thirtieth birthday he went home thus. He had spent in good company a nice, noisy evening, and, as he walked along the empty street, the feeling of his own greatness grew upon him, lifted him above the white dust of the road, and filled him with exultation and regrets. He had not done himself justice over there in the hotel, he had not talked enough about himself, he had not impressed his hearers enough. Never mind. Some other time. Now he would go home and make his wife get up and listen to him. Why should she not get up?—and mix a cocktail for him—and listen patiently. Just so. She shall. If he wanted he could make all the Da Souza family get up. He had only to say a word and they would all come and sit silently in their night vestments on the hard, cold ground of his compound and listen, as long as he wished to go on explaining to them from the top of the stairs, how great and good he was. They would. However, his wife would do—for to-night.

His wife! He winced inwardly. A dismal woman with startled eyes and dolorously drooping mouth, that would listen to him in pained wonder and mute stillness. She was used to those night-discourses now. She had rebelled once—at the beginning. Only once. Now, while he

sprawled in the long chair and drank and talked, she would stand at the further end of the table, her hands resting on the edge, her frightened eyes watching his lips, without a sound, without a stir, hardly breathing, till he dismissed her with a contemptuous: "Go to bed, dummy." She would draw a long breath then and trail out of the room, relieved but unmoved. Nothing could startle her, make her scold or make her cry. She did not complain, she did not rebel. That first difference of theirs was decisive. Too decisive, thought Willems, discontentedly. It had frightened the soul out of her body apparently. A dismal woman! A damn'd business altogether! What the devil did he want to go and saddle himself. . . . Ah! Well! he wanted a home, and the match seemed to please Hudig, and Hudig gave him the bungalow, that flower-bowered house to which he was wending his way in the cool moonlight. And he had the worship of the Da Souza tribe. A man of his stamp could carry off anything, do anything, aspire to anything. In another five years those white people who attended the Sunday card-parties of the Governor would accept him—half-caste wife and all! Hooray! He saw his shadow dart forward and wave a hat, as big as a rum barrel, at the end of an arm several yards long. . . . Who shouted hooray? . . . He smiled shamefacedly to himself, and, pushing his hands deep into his pockets, walked faster with a suddenly grave face. Behind him—to the left—a

cigar end glowed in the gateway of Mr. Vinck's front yard. Leaning against one of the brick pillars, Mr. Vinck, the cashier of Hudig & Co., smoked the last cheroot of the evening. Amongst the shadows of the trimmed bushes Mrs. Vinck crunched slowly, with measured steps, the gravel of the circular path before the house.

"There's Willems going home on foot—and drunk I fancy," said Mr. Vinck over his shoulder. "I saw him jump and wave his hat."

The crunching of the gravel stopped.

"Horrid man," said Mrs. Vinck, calmly. "I have heard he beats his wife."

"Oh no, my dear, no," muttered absently Mr. Vinck, with a vague gesture. The aspect of Willems as a wife-beater presented to him no interest. How women do misjudge! If Willems wanted to torture his wife he would have recourse to less primitive methods. Mr. Vinck knew Willems well, and believed him to be very able, very smart—objectionably so. As he took the last quick draws at the stump of his cheroot, Mr. Vinck reflected that the confidence accorded by Hudig to Willems was open, under the circumstances, to loyal criticism from Hudig's cashier.

"He is becoming dangerous; he knows too much. He will have to be got rid of," said Mr. Vinck aloud. But Mrs. Vinck had gone in already, and after shaking his head he threw away his cheroot and followed her slowly.

Willems walked on homeward weaving the splendid web of his future. The road to greatness lay plainly before his eyes, straight and shining, without any obstacle that he could see. He had stepped off the path of honesty, as he understood it, but he would soon regain it, never to leave it any more! It was a very small matter. He would soon put it right again. Meantime his duty was not to be found out, and he trusted in his skill, in his luck, in his well-established reputation that would disarm suspicion if anybody dared to suspect. But nobody would dare! True, he was conscious of a slight deterioration. He had appropriated temporarily some of Hudig's money. A deplorable necessity. But he judged himself with the indulgence that should be extended to the weaknesses of genius. He would make reparation and all would be as before; nobody would be the loser for it, and he would go on unchecked toward the brilliant goal of his ambition.

Hudig's partner!

Before going up the steps of his house he stood for

awhile, his feet well apart, chin in hand, contemplating mentally Hudig's future partner. A glorious occupation. He saw him quite safe; solid as the hills; deep—deep as an abyss; discreet as the grave.

Chapter Two

*

The sea, perhaps because of its saltiness, roughens the outside but keeps sweet the kernel of its servants' soul. The old sea; the sea of many years ago, whose servants were devoted slaves and went from youth to age or to a sudden grave without needing to open the book of life, because they could look at eternity reflected on the element that gave the life and dealt the death. Like a beautiful and unscrupulous woman, the sea of the past was glorious in its smiles, irresistible in its anger, capricious, enticing, illogical, irresponsible; a thing to love, a thing to fear. It cast a spell, it gave joy, it lulled gently into boundless faith; then with quick and causeless anger it killed. But its cruelty was redeemed by the charm of its inscrutable mystery, by the immensity of its promise, by the supreme witchery of its possible favour. Strong men with childlike hearts were faithful to it, were content to live by its grace—to die by its will. That was the sea before the time when the French mind set the Egyptian muscle in motion and produced a dismal

but profitable ditch. Then a great pall of smoke sent out by countless steam-boats was spread over the restless mirror of the Infinite. The hand of the engineer tore down the veil of the terrible beauty in order that greedy and faithless landlubbers might pocket dividends. The mystery was destroyed. Like all mysteries, it lived only in the hearts of its worshippers. The hearts changed; the men changed. The once loving and devoted servants went out armed with fire and iron, and conquering the fear of their own hearts became a calculating crowd of cold and exacting masters. The sea of the past was an incomparably beautiful mistress, with inscrutable face, with cruel and promising eyes. The sea of to-day is a used-up drudge, wrinkled and defaced by the churned-up wakes of brutal propellers, robbed of the enslaving charm of its vastness, stripped of its beauty, of its mystery and of its promise.

Tom Lingard was a master, a lover, a servant of the sea. The sea took him young, fashioned him body and soul; gave him his fierce aspect, his loud voice, his fearless eyes, his stupidly guileless heart. Generously it gave him his absurd faith in himself, his universal love of creation, his wide indulgence, his contemptuous severity, his straightforward simplicity of motive and honesty of aim. Having made him what he was, womanlike, the sea served him humbly and let him bask unharmed in the

sunshine of its terribly uncertain favour. Tom Lingard grew rich on the sea and by the sea. He loved it with the ardent affection of a lover, he made light of it with the assurance of perfect mastery, he feared it with the wise fear of a brave man, and he took liberties with it as a spoiled child might do with a paternal and good-natured ogre. He was grateful to it, with the gratitude of an honest heart. His greatest pride lay in his profound conviction of its faithfulness—in the deep sense of his unerring knowledge of its treachery.

The little brig Flash was the instrument of Lingard's fortune. They came north together—both young—out of an Australian port, and after a very few years there was not a white man in the islands, from Palembang to Ternate, from Ombawa to Palawan, that did not know Captain Tom and his lucky craft. He was liked for his reckless generosity, for his unswerving honesty, and at first was a little feared on account of his violent temper. Very soon, however, they found him out, and the word went round that Captain Tom's fury was less dangerous than many a man's smile. He prospered greatly. After his first—and successful—fight with the sea robbers, when he rescued, as rumour had it, the yacht of some big wig from home, somewhere down Carimata way, his great popularity began. As years went on it grew apace. Always visiting out-of-the-way places of that part of the

world, always in search of new markets for his cargoes—not so much for profit as for the pleasure of finding them—he soon became known to the Malays, and by his successful recklessness in several encounters with pirates, established the terror of his name. Those white men with whom he had business, and who naturally were on the look-out for his weaknesses, could easily see that it was enough to give him his Malay title to flatter him greatly. So when there was anything to be gained by it, and sometimes out of pure and unprofitable good nature, they would drop the ceremonious "Captain Lingard" and address him half seriously as Rajah Laut—the King of the Sea.

He carried the name bravely on his broad shoulders. He had carried it many years already when the boy Willems ran barefooted on the deck of the ship Kosmopoliet IV. in Samarang roads, looking with innocent eyes on the strange shore and objurgating his immediate surroundings with blasphemous lips, while his childish brain worked upon the heroic idea of running away. From the poop of the Flash Lingard saw in the early morning the Dutch ship get lumberingly under weigh, bound for the eastern ports. Very late in the evening of the same day he stood on the quay of the landing canal, ready to go on board of his brig. The night was starry and clear; the little custom-house building was shut up, and

as the gharry that brought him down disappeared up the long avenue of dusty trees leading to the town, Lingard thought himself alone on the quay. He roused up his sleeping boat-crew and stood waiting for them to get ready, when he felt a tug at his coat and a thin voice said, very distinctly—

"English captain."

Lingard turned round quickly, and what seemed to be a very lean boy jumped back with commendable activity.

"Who are you? Where do you spring from?" asked Lingard, in startled surprise.

From a safe distance the boy pointed toward a cargo lighter moored to the quay.

"Been hiding there, have you?" said Lingard. "Well, what do you want? Speak out, confound you. You did not come here to scare me to death, for fun, did you?"

The boy tried to explain in imperfect English, but very soon Lingard interrupted him.

"I see," he exclaimed, "you ran away from the big ship

that sailed this morning. Well, why don't you go to your countrymen here?"

"Ship gone only a little way—to Sourabaya. Make me go back to the ship," explained the boy.

"Best thing for you," affirmed Lingard with conviction.

"No," retorted the boy; "me want stop here; not want go home. Get money here; home no good."

"This beats all my going a-fishing," commented the astonished Lingard. "It's money you want? Well! well! And you were not afraid to run away, you bag of bones, you!"

The boy intimated that he was frightened of nothing but of being sent back to the ship. Lingard looked at him in meditative silence.

"Come closer," he said at last. He took the boy by the chin, and turning up his face gave him a searching look. "How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"There's not much of you for seventeen. Are you hungry?"

"A little."

"Will you come with me, in that brig there?"

The boy moved without a word towards the boat and scrambled into the bows.

"Knows his place," muttered Lingard to himself as he stepped heavily into the stern sheets and took up the yoke lines. "Give way there."

The Malay boat crew lay back together, and the gig sprang away from the quay heading towards the brig's riding light.

Such was the beginning of Willems' career.

Lingard learned in half an hour all that there was of Willems' commonplace story. Father outdoor clerk of some ship-broker in Rotterdam; mother dead. The boy quick in learning, but idle in school. The straitened circumstances in the house filled with small brothers and sisters, sufficiently clothed and fed but otherwise running

wild, while the disconsolate widower tramped about all day in a shabby overcoat and imperfect boots on the muddy quays, and in the evening piloted wearily the half-intoxicated foreign skippers amongst the places of cheap delights, returning home late, sick with too much smoking and drinking—for company's sake—with these men, who expected such attentions in the way of business. Then the offer of the good-natured captain of Kosmopoliet IV., who was pleased to do something for the patient and obliging fellow; young Willems' great joy, his still greater disappointment with the sea that looked so charming from afar, but proved so hard and exacting on closer acquaintance—and then this running away by a sudden impulse. The boy was hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea. He had an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for. Lingard soon found this out. He offered to send him home in an English ship, but the boy begged hard to be permitted to remain. He wrote a beautiful hand, became soon perfect in English, was quick at figures; and Lingard made him useful in that way. As he grew older his trading instincts developed themselves astonishingly, and Lingard left him often to trade in one island or another while he, himself, made an intermediate trip to some out-of-the-way place. On Willems expressing a wish to that effect, Lingard let him enter Hudig's service. He felt a little sore at that

abandonment because he had attached himself, in a way, to his protege. Still he was proud of him, and spoke up for him loyally. At first it was, "Smart boy that—never make a seaman though." Then when Willems was helping in the trading he referred to him as "that clever young fellow." Later when Willems became the confidential agent of Hudig, employed in many a delicate affair, the simple-hearted old seaman would point an admiring finger at his back and whisper to whoever stood near at the moment, "Long-headed chap that; deuced long-headed chap. Look at him. Confidential man of old Hudig. I picked him up in a ditch, you may say, like a starved cat. Skin and bone. 'Pon my word I did. And now he knows more than I do about island trading. Fact. I am not joking. More than I do," he would repeat, seriously, with innocent pride in his honest eyes.

From the safe elevation of his commercial successes Willems patronized Lingard. He had a liking for his benefactor, not unmixed with some disdain for the crude directness of the old fellow's methods of conduct. There were, however, certain sides of Lingard's character for which Willems felt a qualified respect. The talkative seaman knew how to be silent on certain matters that to Willems were very interesting. Besides, Lingard was rich, and that in itself was enough to compel Willems' unwilling admiration. In his confidential chats with

Hudig, Willems generally alluded to the benevolent Englishman as the "lucky old fool" in a very distinct tone of vexation; Hudig would grunt an unqualified assent, and then the two would look at each other in a sudden immobility of pupils fixed by a stare of unexpressed thought.

"You can't find out where he gets all that india-rubber, hey Willems?" Hudig would ask at last, turning away and bending over the papers on his desk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. Not yet. But I am trying," was Willems' invariable reply, delivered with a ring of regretful deprecation.

"Try! Always try! You may try! You think yourself clever perhaps," rumbled on Hudig, without looking up. "I have been trading with him twenty—thirty years now. The old fox. And I have tried. Bah!"

He stretched out a short, podgy leg and contemplated the bare instep and the grass slipper hanging by the toes. "You can't make him drunk?" he would add, after a pause of stertorous breathing.

"No, Mr. Hudig, I can't really," protested Willems, earnestly.

"Well, don't try. I know him. Don't try," advised the master, and, bending again over his desk, his staring bloodshot eyes close to the paper, he would go on tracing laboriously with his thick fingers the slim unsteady letters of his correspondence, while Willems waited respectfully for his further good pleasure before asking, with great deference—

"Any orders, Mr. Hudig?"

"Hm! yes. Go to Bun-Hin yourself and see the dollars of that payment counted and packed, and have them put on board the mail-boat for Ternate. She's due here this afternoon."

"Yes, Mr. Hudig."

"And, look here. If the boat is late, leave the case in Bun-Hin's godown till to-morrow. Seal it up. Eight seals as usual. Don't take it away till the boat is here."

"No, Mr. Hudig."

"And don't forget about these opium cases. It's for to-night. Use my own boatmen. Transship them from the

Caroline to the Arab barque," went on the master in his hoarse undertone. "And don't you come to me with another story of a case dropped overboard like last time," he added, with sudden ferocity, looking up at his confidential clerk.

"No, Mr. Hudig. I will take care."

"That's all. Tell that pig as you go out that if he doesn't make the punkah go a little better I will break every bone in his body," finished up Hudig, wiping his purple face with a red silk handkerchief nearly as big as a counterpane.

Noiselessly Willems went out, shutting carefully behind him the little green door through which he passed to the warehouse. Hudig, pen in hand, listened to him bullying the punkah boy with profane violence, born of unbounded zeal for the master's comfort, before he returned to his writing amid the rustling of papers fluttering in the wind sent down by the punkah that waved in wide sweeps above his head.

Willems would nod familiarly to Mr. Vinck, who had his desk close to the little door of the private office, and march down the warehouse with an important air. Mr. Vinck—extreme dislike lurking in every wrinkle of his

gentlemanly countenance—would follow with his eyes the white figure flitting in the gloom amongst the piles of bales and cases till it passed out through the big archway into the glare of the street.

Chapter Three

*

The opportunity and the temptation were too much for Willems, and under the pressure of sudden necessity he abused that trust which was his pride, the perpetual sign of his cleverness and a load too heavy for him to carry. A run of bad luck at cards, the failure of a small speculation undertaken on his own account, an unexpected demand for money from one or another member of the Da Souza family—and almost before he was well aware of it he was off the path of his peculiar honesty. It was such a faint and ill-defined track that it took him some time to find out how far he had strayed amongst the brambles of the dangerous wilderness he had been skirting for so many years, without any other guide than his own convenience and that doctrine of success which he had found for himself in the book of life—in those interesting chapters that the Devil has been permitted to write in it, to test the sharpness of men's eyesight and the steadfastness of their hearts. For one short, dark and solitary moment he was dismayed, but he had that

courage that will not scale heights, yet will wade bravely through the mud—if there be no other road. He applied himself to the task of restitution, and devoted himself to the duty of not being found out. On his thirtieth birthday he had almost accomplished the task—and the duty had been faithfully and cleverly performed. He saw himself safe. Again he could look hopefully towards the goal of his legitimate ambition. Nobody would dare to suspect him, and in a few days there would be nothing to suspect. He was elated. He did not know that his prosperity had touched then its high-water mark, and that the tide was already on the turn.

Two days afterwards he knew. Mr. Vinck, hearing the rattle of the door-handle, jumped up from his desk—where he had been tremulously listening to the loud voices in the private office—and buried his face in the big safe with nervous haste. For the last time Willems passed through the little green door leading to Hudig's sanctum, which, during the past half-hour, might have been taken—from the fiendish noise within—for the cavern of some wild beast. Willems' troubled eyes took in the quick impression of men and things as he came out from the place of his humiliation. He saw the scared expression of the punkah boy; the Chinamen tellers sitting on their heels with unmovable faces turned up blankly towards him while their arrested hands hovered

over the little piles of bright guilders ranged on the floor; Mr. Vinck's shoulder-blades with the fleshy rims of two red ears above. He saw the long avenue of gin cases stretching from where he stood to the arched doorway beyond which he would be able to breathe perhaps. A thin rope's end lay across his path and he saw it distinctly, yet stumbled heavily over it as if it had been a bar of iron. Then he found himself in the street at last, but could not find air enough to fill his lungs. He walked towards his home, gasping.

As the sound of Hudig's insults that lingered in his ears grew fainter by the lapse of time, the feeling of shame was replaced slowly by a passion of anger against himself and still more against the stupid concourse of circumstances that had driven him into his idiotic indiscretion. Idiotic indiscretion; that is how he defined his guilt to himself. Could there be anything worse from the point of view of his undeniable cleverness? What a fatal aberration of an acute mind! He did not recognize himself there. He must have been mad. That's it. A sudden gust of madness. And now the work of long years was destroyed utterly. What would become of him?

Before he could answer that question he found himself in the garden before his house, Hudig's wedding gift. He looked at it with a vague surprise to find it there. His past

was so utterly gone from him that the dwelling which belonged to it appeared to him incongruous standing there intact, neat, and cheerful in the sunshine of the hot afternoon. The house was a pretty little structure all doors and windows, surrounded on all sides by the deep verandah supported on slender columns clothed in the green foliage of creepers, which also fringed the overhanging eaves of the high-pitched roof. Slowly, Willems mounted the dozen steps that led to the verandah. He paused at every step. He must tell his wife. He felt frightened at the prospect, and his alarm dismayed him. Frightened to face her! Nothing could give him a better measure of the greatness of the change around him, and in him. Another man—and another life with the faith in himself gone. He could not be worth much if he was afraid to face that woman.

He dared not enter the house through the open door of the dining-room, but stood irresolute by the little work-table where trailed a white piece of calico, with a needle stuck in it, as if the work had been left hurriedly. The pink-crested cockatoo started, on his appearance, into clumsy activity and began to climb laboriously up and down his perch, calling "Joanna" with indistinct loudness and a persistent screech that prolonged the last syllable of the name as if in a peal of insane laughter. The screen in the doorway moved gently once or twice in the breeze,

and each time Willems started slightly, expecting his wife, but he never lifted his eyes, although straining his ears for the sound of her footsteps. Gradually he lost himself in his thoughts, in the endless speculation as to the manner in which she would receive his news—and his orders. In this preoccupation he almost forgot the fear of her presence. No doubt she will cry, she will lament, she will be helpless and frightened and passive as ever. And he would have to drag that limp weight on and on through the darkness of a spoiled life. Horrible! Of course he could not abandon her and the child to certain misery or possible starvation. The wife and the child of Willems. Willems the successful, the smart; Willems the conf Pah! And what was Willems now? Willems the. . . . He strangled the half-born thought, and cleared his throat to stifle a groan. Ah! Won't they talk to-night in the billiard-room—his world, where he had been first—all those men to whom he had been so superciliously condescending. Won't they talk with surprise, and affected regret, and grave faces, and wise nods. Some of them owed him money, but he never pressed anybody. Not he. Willems, the prince of good fellows, they called him. And now they will rejoice, no doubt, at his downfall. A crowd of imbeciles. In his abasement he was yet aware of his superiority over those fellows, who were merely honest or simply not found out yet. A crowd of imbeciles! He shook his fist at the evoked image of his

friends, and the startled parrot fluttered its wings and shrieked in desperate fright.

In a short glance upwards Willems saw his wife come round the corner of the house. He lowered his eyelids quickly, and waited silently till she came near and stood on the other side of the little table. He would not look at her face, but he could see the red dressing-gown he knew so well. She trailed through life in that red dressing-gown, with its row of dirty blue bows down the front, stained, and hooked on awry; a torn flounce at the bottom following her like a snake as she moved languidly about, with her hair negligently caught up, and a tangled wisp straggling untidily down her back. His gaze travelled upwards from bow to bow, noticing those that hung only by a thread, but it did not go beyond her chin. He looked at her lean throat, at the obtrusive collarbone visible in the disarray of the upper part of her attire. He saw the thin arm and the bony hand clasping the child she carried, and he felt an immense distaste for those encumbrances of his life. He waited for her to say something, but as he felt her eyes rest on him in unbroken silence he sighed and began to speak.

It was a hard task. He spoke slowly, lingering amongst the memories of this early life in his reluctance to confess that this was the end of it and the beginning of a

less splendid existence. In his conviction of having made her happiness in the full satisfaction of all material wants he never doubted for a moment that she was ready to keep him company on no matter how hard and stony a road. He was not elated by this certitude. He had married her to please Hudig, and the greatness of his sacrifice ought to have made her happy without any further exertion on his part. She had years of glory as Willems' wife, and years of comfort, of loyal care, and of such tenderness as she deserved. He had guarded her carefully from any bodily hurt; and of any other suffering he had no conception. The assertion of his superiority was only another benefit conferred on her. All this was a matter of course, but he told her all this so as to bring vividly before her the greatness of her loss. She was so dull of understanding that she would not grasp it else. And now it was at an end. They would have to go. Leave this house, leave this island, go far away where he was unknown. To the English Strait-Settlements perhaps. He would find an opening there for his abilities—and juster men to deal with than old Hudig. He laughed bitterly.

"You have the money I left at home this morning, Joanna?" he asked. "We will want it all now."

As he spoke those words he thought he was a fine fellow. Nothing new that. Still, he surpassed there his own

expectations. Hang it all, there are sacred things in life, after all. The marriage tie was one of them, and he was not the man to break it. The solidity of his principles caused him great satisfaction, but he did not care to look at his wife, for all that. He waited for her to speak. Then he would have to console her; tell her not to be a crying fool; to get ready to go. Go where? How? When? He shook his head. They must leave at once; that was the principal thing. He felt a sudden need to hurry up his departure.

"Well, Joanna," he said, a little impatiently—"don't stand there in a trance. Do you hear? We must. . . ."

He looked up at his wife, and whatever he was going to add remained unspoken. She was staring at him with her big, slanting eyes, that seemed to him twice their natural size. The child, its dirty little face pressed to its mother's shoulder, was sleeping peacefully. The deep silence of the house was not broken, but rather accentuated, by the low mutter of the cockatoo, now very still on its perch. As Willems was looking at Joanna her upper lip was drawn up on one side, giving to her melancholy face a vicious expression altogether new to his experience. He stepped back in his surprise.

"Oh! You great man!" she said distinctly, but in a voice

that was hardly above a whisper.

Those words, and still more her tone, stunned him as if somebody had fired a gun close to his ear. He stared back at her stupidly.

"Oh! you great man!" she repeated slowly, glancing right and left as if meditating a sudden escape. "And you think that I am going to starve with you. You are nobody now. You think my mamma and Leonard would let me go away? And with you! With you," she repeated scornfully, raising her voice, which woke up the child and caused it to whimper feebly.

"Joanna!" exclaimed Willems.

"Do not speak to me. I have heard what I have waited for all these years. You are less than dirt, you that have wiped your feet on me. I have waited for this. I am not afraid now. I do not want you; do not come near me. Ah-h!" she screamed shrilly, as he held out his hand in an entreating gesture—"Ah! Keep off me! Keep off me! Keep off!"

She backed away, looking at him with eyes both angry and frightened. Willems stared motionless, in dumb amazement at the mystery of anger and revolt in the head

of his wife. Why? What had he ever done to her? This was the day of injustice indeed. First Hudig—and now his wife. He felt a terror at this hate that had lived stealthily so near him for years. He tried to speak, but she shrieked again, and it was like a needle through his heart. Again he raised his hand.

"Help!" called Mrs. Willems, in a piercing voice. "Help!"

"Be quiet! You fool!" shouted Willems, trying to drown the noise of his wife and child in his own angry accents and rattling violently the little zinc table in his exasperation.

From under the house, where there were bathrooms and a tool closet, appeared Leonard, a rusty iron bar in his hand. He called threateningly from the bottom of the stairs.

"Do not hurt her, Mr. Willems. You are a savage. Not at all like we, whites."

"You too!" said the bewildered Willems. "I haven't touched her. Is this a madhouse?" He moved towards the stairs, and Leonard dropped the bar with a clang and made for the gate of the compound. Willems turned back to his wife.

"So you expected this," he said. "It is a conspiracy. Who's that sobbing and groaning in the room? Some more of your precious family. Hey?"

She was more calm now, and putting hastily the crying child in the big chair walked towards him with sudden fearlessness.

"My mother," she said, "my mother who came to defend me from you—man from nowhere; a vagabond!"

"You did not call me a vagabond when you hung round my neck—before we were married," said Willems, contemptuously.

"You took good care that I should not hang round your neck after we were," she answered, clenching her hands, and putting her face close to his. "You boasted while I suffered and said nothing. What has become of your greatness; of our greatness—you were always speaking about? Now I am going to live on the charity of your master. Yes. That is true. He sent Leonard to tell me so. And you will go and boast somewhere else, and starve. So! Ah! I can breathe now! This house is mine."

"Enough!" said Willems, slowly, with an arresting

gesture.

She leaped back, the fright again in her eyes, snatched up the child, pressed it to her breast, and, falling into a chair, drummed insanely with her heels on the resounding floor of the verandah.

"I shall go," said Willems, steadily. "I thank you. For the first time in your life you make me happy. You were a stone round my neck; you understand. I did not mean to tell you that as long as you lived, but you made me—now. Before I pass this gate you shall be gone from my mind. You made it very easy. I thank you."

He turned and went down the steps without giving her a glance, while she sat upright and quiet, with wide-open eyes, the child crying querulously in her arms. At the gate he came suddenly upon Leonard, who had been dodging about there and failed to get out of the way in time.

"Do not be brutal, Mr. Willems," said Leonard, hurriedly. "It is unbecoming between white men with all those natives looking on." Leonard's legs trembled very much, and his voice wavered between high and low tones without any attempt at control on his part. "Restrain your improper violence," he went on

mumbling rapidly. "I am a respectable man of very good family, while you . . . it is regrettable . . . they all say so . . ."

"What?" thundered Willems. He felt a sudden impulse of mad anger, and before he knew what had happened he was looking at Leonard da Souza rolling in the dust at his feet. He stepped over his prostrate brother-in-law and tore blindly down the street, everybody making way for the frantic white man.

When he came to himself he was beyond the outskirts of the town, stumbling on the hard and cracked earth of reaped rice fields. How did he get there? It was dark. He must get back. As he walked towards the town slowly, his mind reviewed the events of the day and he felt a sense of bitter loneliness. His wife had turned him out of his own house. He had assaulted brutally his brother-in-law, a member of the Da Souza family—of that band of his worshippers. He did. Well, no! It was some other man. Another man was coming back. A man without a past, without a future, yet full of pain and shame and anger. He stopped and looked round. A dog or two glided across the empty street and rushed past him with a frightened snarl. He was now in the midst of the Malay quarter whose bamboo houses, hidden in the verdure of their little gardens, were dark and silent. Men, women