

Cord and Creese

James De Mille

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Chapter

1 THE LETTER FROM BEYOND THE SEA

On the morning of July 21, 1840, the *Daily News* announced the arrival of the ship *Rival* at Sydney, New South Wales. As ocean steam navigation had not yet extended so far, the advent of this ship with the English mail created the usual excitement. An eager crowd beset the post-office, waiting for the delivery of the mail; and little knots at the street corners were busily discussing the latest hints at news which had been gathered from papers brought ashore by the officers or passengers.

At the lower end of King Street was a large warehouse, with an office at the upper extremity, over which was a new sign, which showed with newly gilded letters the words:

COMPTON & BRANDON.

The general appearance of the warehouse showed that Messrs. Compton and Brandon were probably commission merchants, general agents, or something of that sort.

On the morning mentioned two men were in the inner office of this warehouse. One was an elderly gentleman, with a kind, benevolent aspect, the senior partner of the firm. The other was the junior partner, and in every respect presented a marked contrast to his companion.

He had a face of rather unusual appearance, and an air which in England is usually considered foreign. His features were regular—a straight nose, wide brow, thin lips, and square, massive chin. His complexion was olive, and his eyes were of a dark hazel color, with a peculiarity about them which is not usually seen in the eye of the Teutonic or Celtic race, but is sometimes found among the people of the south of Europe, or in the East. It is difficult to find a name for this peculiarity. It may be seen sometimes in the gipsy; sometimes in the more successful among those who call themselves "spiritual mediums," or among the more powerful mesmerizers. Such an eye belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte, whose glance at times could make the boldest and greatest among his marshals quail. What is it? Magnetism? Or the revelation of the soul? Or what?

In this man there were other things which gave him the look of the great Napoleon. The contour of feature was the same: and on his brow, broad and massive, there might be seen those grand shadows with which French artists love to glorify the Emperor. Yet in addition to this he had that same serene immobility of countenance which characterized the other, which could serve as an impenetrable mask to hide even the intensest person.

There was also about this man a certain aristocratic air and grace of attitude, or of manner, which seemed to show lofty birth and gentle breeding, the mysterious index to good blood or high training. How such a man could have happened to fill the position of junior partner in a commission business was certainly a problem not easily solved. There he was, however, a man in appearance out of place, yet in reality able to fill that place with success; a man, in fact, whose resolute will enabled him to enforce success in any calling of life to which either outside circumstances or his own personal desires might invite him.

"The mail ought to be open by this time," said Brandon, indifferently, looking at his watch. "I am somewhat curious to see how things are looking. I noticed quotations of wool rather higher than by last mail. If the papers are correct which I saw then we ought to do very well by that last cargo."

Mr. Compton smiled.

"Well, Brandon," said he, "if it is so it will show that you are right. You anticipated a rise about this time, you know. You certainly have a remarkable forecast about the chances of business."

"I don't think there is much forecast," said Brandon, with a smile. "It was only the most ordinary calculation made from the well-known fact that the exportation this year had been slight. But there comes Hedley now," he continued, moving his head a little to one side so as to look up the street. "The letters will soon show us all."

Mr. Compton looked out in the direction which Brandon indicated and saw the clerk approaching. He then settled himself back in his chair, put his hands in his pockets, threw one leg over the other, and began whistling a tune with the air of a man who was so entirely prosperous and contented that no news whether good or evil could greatly affect his fortunes.

In a short time the clerk entered the inner office and, laying the letters down upon the table nearest Mr. Compton, he withdrew.

Mr. Compton took up the letters one by one and read the addresses, while Brandon looked carelessly on. There were ten or twelve of them, all of which, except one, were addressed to the firm. This one Mr. Compton selected from among the others, and reaching it out in his hand said:

"This is for you, Mr. Brandon."

"For me?" repeated Brandon, with marked surprise; and taking the letter he looked at the address with eager curiosity.

The address was simply as follows:

Louis Brandon, Sydney, New South Wales.

The letters were irregular and loosely formed, as though written by a tremulous hand—such letters as old men form when the muscles have become relaxed.

Mr. Compton went on opening the letters of the firm without taking any further notice of his partner. The latter sat for some time looking at the letter without venturing to open it. He held it in both hands, and looked fixedly at that address as though from the address itself he was trying to extort some meaning.

He held it thus in both hands looking fixedly at it, with his head bent forward. Had Mr. Compton thought of taking a look at his usually impassive companion, he would have been surprised at the change which had taken place in him at the mere sight of that tremulous handwriting. For in that he had read grief, misfortune, perhaps death; and as he sat there, pausing before he dared to break the seal, the contents of the letter had already been conjectured.

Gloom therefore unutterable gathered upon his face; his features fixed themselves into such rigidity of grief that they became more expressive than if they had been distorted by passionate emotions; and over his brow collected cloud upon cloud, which deepened and darkened every instant till they overshadowed all; and his face in its statuesque fixedness resembled nothing so much as that which the artist gives to Napoleon at the crisis hour of Waterloo, when the Guard has recoiled from its last charge, and from that Imperial face in its fixed agony the soul itself seems to cry, "Lost!" "Lost!"

Yet it was only for a few minutes. Hastily subduing his feeling Brandon rose, and clutching the letter in his hand as though it were too precious to be trusted to his pocket, he quietly left the office and the warehouse and walked up the street.

He walked on rapidly until he reached a large building which bore the sign "Australian Hotel." Here he entered, and walked up stairs to a room, and locked himself in. Then when alone in his own apartments he ventured to open the letter.

The paper was poor and mean; the handwriting, like that of the address, was tremulous, and in many places quite illegible; the ink was pale; and the whole appearance of the letter seemed to indicate poverty and weakness on the part of the writer. By a very natural impulse Brandon hesitated before beginning to read, and took in all these things with a quick glance.

At last he nerved himself to the task and began to read.

This was the letter.

"Brandon, March 10, 1846.

"My dear Boy,—These are the last words which you will ever hear from your father. I am dying, my dear boy, and dying of a broken heart; but *where* I am dying I am afraid to tell you. That bitterness I leave for you to find out some day for yourself. In poverty unspeakable, in anguish that I pray you may never know, I turn to you after a silence of years, and my first word is to implore your forgiveness. I know my noble

boy that you grant it, and it is enough for me to ask it. After asking this I can die content on that score.

"Lying as I do now at the point of death, I find myself at last freed from the follies and prejudices which have been my ruin. The clouds roll away from my mind, and I perceive what a mad fool I have been for years. Most of all I see the madness that instigated me to turn against you, and to put against the loyal love of the best of sons my own miserable pride and the accusation of a lying scoundrel. May God have mercy upon me for this!

"I have not much strength, dear boy; I have to write at intervals, and by stealth, so as not to be discovered, for I am closely watched. *He* must never know that I have sent this to you. Frank and your mother are both sick, and my only help is your sister, my sweet Edith, she watches me, and enables me to write this in safety.

"I must tell you all without reserve before strength leaves me forever.

"That man Potts, whom you so justly hated, was and is the cause of all my suffering and of yours. You used to wonder how such a man as that, a low, vulgar knave, could gain such an influence over me and sway me as he did. I will try to explain.

"Perhaps you remember something about the lamentable death of my old friend Colonel Despard. The first that I ever heard of this man Potts was in his connection with Despard, for whom he acted partly as valet, and partly as business agent. Just before Despard left to go on his fatal voyage he wrote to me about his affairs, and stated, in conclusion, that this man Potts was going to England, that he was sorry to lose him, but recommended him very earnestly to me.

"You recollect that Colonel Despard was murdered on this voyage under very mysterious circumstances on shipboard. His Malay servant Uracao was convicted and executed. Potts distinguished himself by his zeal in avenging his master's death.

"About a year after this Potts himself came to England and visited me. He was, as you know, a rough, vulgar man; but his connection with my murdered friend, and the warm recommendations of that friend, made me receive him with the greatest kindness. Besides, he had many things to tell me about my poor friend, and brought the newspapers both from Manilla and Calcutta which contained accounts of the trial.

"It was this man's desire to settle himself somewhere, and I gave him letters to different people. He then went off, and I did not see him for two years. At the end of that time he returned with glowing accounts of a tin mine which he was working in Cornwall. He had bought it at a low price, and the returns from working it had exceeded his most sanguine expectations. He had just organized a company, and was selling the stock. He came first to me to let me take what I wished. I carelessly took five thousand pounds' worth.

"On the following year the dividend was enormous, being nearly sixty per cent. Potts explained to me the cause, declaring that it was the richest mine in the kingdom, and assuring me that my £5000 was worth ten times that sum. His glowing accounts of the mine interested me greatly. Another year the dividend was higher, and he assured me that he expected to pay cent. per cent.

"It was then that the demon of avarice took full possession of me. Visions of millions came to me, and I determined to become the richest man in the kingdom. After this I turned every thing I had into money to invest in the mine. I raised enormous sums on my landed estate, and put all that I was worth, and more too, into the speculation. I was fascinated, not by this man, but by the wealth that he seemed to represent. I believed in him to the utmost. In vain my friends warned me. I turned from them, and quarreled with most of them. In my madness I refused to listen to the entreaties of my poor wife, and turned even against you. I can not bear to allude to those mournful days when you denounced that villain to his face before me; when I ordered you to beg his pardon or leave my roof forever; when you chose the latter alternative and became an outcast. My noble boy—my true-hearted son, that last look of yours, with all its reproach, is haunting my dying hours. If you were only near me now how peacefully I could die!

"My strength is failing. I can not describe the details of my ruin. Enough that the mine broke down utterly, and I as chief stockholder was responsible for all. I had to sell out every thing. The stock was worthless. The Hall and the estates all went. I had no friend to help me, for by my madness I had alienated them all. All this came upon me during the last year.

"But mark this, my son. This man Potts was *not* ruined. He seemed to have grown possessed of a colossal fortune. When I reproached him with being the author of my calamity, and insisted that he ought to share it with me, the scoundrel laughed in my face.

"The Hall and the estates were sold, for, unfortunately, though they have been in our family for ages, they were not entailed. A feeling of honor was the cause of this neglect. They were sold, and the purchaser was this man Potts. He must have bought them with the money that he had plundered from me.

"Now, since my eyes have been opened, I have had many thoughts; and among all that occurs to me none is more prominent than the mysterious murder of my friend. This man Potts was with him at the time. He was chief witness against the Malay. The counsel for the defense bore down hard on him, but he managed to escape, and Uracao was executed. Yet this much is evident, that Potts was largely benefited by the death of Despard. He could not have made all his money by his own savings. I believe that the man who wronged me so foully was fully capable of murder. So strong is this conviction now that I sometimes

have a superstitious feeling that because I neglected all inquiry into the death of my friend, therefore he has visited me from that other life, and punished me, by making the same man the ruin of us both.

"The mine, I now believe, was a colossal sham; and all the money that I invested in stocks went directly to Potts. Good God! what madness was mine!

"O my boy! Your mother and your brother are lying here sick; your sister attends on us all, though little more than a child. Soon I must leave them; and for those who are destined to live there is a future which I shudder to contemplate. Come home at once. Come home, whatever you are doing. Leave all business, and all prospects, and come and save them. That much you can do. Come, if it is only to take them back with you to that new land where you live, where they may forget their anguish.

"Come home, my son, and take vengeance. This, perhaps, you can not do, but you at least can try. By the time that you read these words they will be my voice from the grave; and thus I invoke you, and call you to take vengeance.

"But at least come and save your mother, your brother, and your sister. The danger is imminent. Not a friend is left. They all hold aloof, indignant at me. This miscreant has his own plans with regard to them, I doubt not; and he will disperse them or send them off to starve in some foreign land. Come and save them.

"But I warn you to be careful about yourself for their sakes. For this villain is powerful now, and hates you worse than any body. His arm may reach even to the antipodes to strike you there. Be on your guard. Watch every one. For once, from words which fell from him hastily I gathered that he had some dark plan against you. Trust no one. Rely on yourself, and may God help you!

"Poor boy! I have no estate to leave you now, and what I do send to you may seem to you like a mockery. Yet do not despise it. Who knows what may be possible in these days of science? Why may it not be possible to force the sea to give up its prey?

"I send it, at any rate, for I have nothing else to send. You know that it has been in our family for centuries, and have heard how stout old Peter Leggit, with nine sailors, escaped by night through the Spanish fleet, and what suffering they endured before they reached England. He brought this, and it has been preserved ever since. A legend has grown up, as a matter of course, that the treasure will be recovered one day when the family is at its last extremity. It may not be impossible. The writer intended that something should come of it.

"If in that other world to which I am going the disembodied spirit can assist man, then be sure, O my son, I will assist you, and in the crisis of your fate I will be near, if it is only to communicate to your spirit what you ought to do.

"God bless you, dear boy, and farewell.

"Your affectionate father.

"RALPH BRANDON."

This letter was evidently written by fragmentary portions, as though it had been done at intervals. Some parts were written leisurely—others apparently in haste. The first half had been written evidently with the greatest ease. The writing of the last half showed weakness and tremulousness of hand; many words would have been quite illegible to one not familiar with the handwriting of the old man. Sometimes the word was written two or three times, and there were numerous blots and unmeaning lines. It grew more and more illegible toward the close. Evidently it was the work of one who was but ill able to exert even sufficient strength to hold a pen in his trembling hand.

In this letter there was folded a large piece of coarse paper, evidently a blank leaf torn from a book, brown with age, which was worn at the folds, and protected there by pieces of cotton which had been pasted upon it. The paper was covered with writing, in ink that was much faded, though still quite legible.

Opening this Brandon read the following:

"One league due northe of a smalle islet northe of the Islet of Santa Cruz northe of San Salvador—I Ralphe Brandon in my shippe Phoenix am becalmed and surrounded by a Spanish fleete—My shippe is filled with spoyle the Plunder of III galleons—wealth which myghte purchase a kyngdom-tresure equalle to an Empyr's revenue—Gold and jeweles in countless store—and God forbydde that itt shall falle into the hands of the Enemye—I therefore Ralphe Brandon out of mine owne good wyl and intente and that of all my men sink this shippe rather than be taken alyve—I send this by my trusty seaman Peter Leggit who with IX others tolde off by lot will trye to escape in the Boate by nighte—If this cometh haply into the hands of my sonne Philip let him herebye knowe that in this place is all this tresure—which haply may yet be gatherd from the sea—the Islet is knowne by III rockes that be pushed up like III needles from the sande.

"Ralphe Brandon"

Chapter

2 A LIFE TRAGEDY

Not a word or a gesture escaped Brandon during the perusal, but after he had finished he read the whole through twice, then laying it down, he paced up and down the room. His olive skin had become of a sickly tawny hue, his eyes glowed with intense lustre, and his brow was covered with those gloomy Napoleonic clouds, but not a nerve was shaken by the shock of this dread intelligence.

Evening came and night; and the night passed, and morning came, but it found him still there pacing the room.

Earlier than usual next morning he was at the office, and waited for some time before the senior partner made his appearance. When he came in it was with a smile on his face, and a general air of congratulation to all the world.

"Well, Brandon," said he, cordially, "that last shipment has turned out finely. More than a thousand pounds. And it's all your doing. I objected, but you were right. Let me congratulate you."

Something in Brandon's face seemed to surprise the old gentleman, and he paused for a moment. "Why what's the matter, my boy?" he said, in a paternal voice. "You have not heard any bad news, I hope, in that letter—I hope it's nothing serious?"

Brandon gave a faint smile.

"Serious enough," said he, looking away with an abstracted gaze, "to put a sudden end to my Australian career."

"Oh no—oh no!" said the other, earnestly; "not so bad as that."

"I must go home at once."

"Oh well, that may be, but you will be back again. Take a leave of absence for five years if you wish, but don't quit for good. I'll do the business and won't complain, my boy. I'll keep your place comfortable for you till your return."

Brandon's stern face softened as he looked at the old man, whose features were filled with the kindest expression, and whose tone showed the affectionate interest which he felt.

"Your kindness to me, Mr. Compton," said he, very slowly, and with deep feeling, "has been beyond all words. Ever since I first came to this country you have been the truest and the best of friends. I hope you know me well enough to believe that I can never forget it. But now all this is at an end, and all the bright prospects that I had here must give way to the call of the sternest duty. In that letter which I received last night there came a summons home which I can not neglect, and my whole life hereafter must be directed toward the fulfillment of that

summons. From mid-day yesterday until dawn this morning I paced my room incessantly, laying out my plans for the future thus suddenly thrust upon me, and though I have not been able to decide upon any thing definite, yet I see plainly that nothing less than a life will enable me to accomplish my duty. The first thing for me to do is to acquaint you with this and to give up my part in the business."

Mr. Compton placed his elbow on the table near which he had seated himself, leaned his head upon his hand, and looked at the floor. From Brandon's tone he perceived that this resolution was irrevocable. The deep dejection which he felt could not be concealed. He was silent for a long time.

"God knows," said he, at last, "that I would rather have failed in business than that this should have happened."

Brandon looked away and said nothing.

"It comes upon me so suddenly," he continued. "I do not know what to think. And how can I manage these vast affairs without your assistance? For you were the one who did our business. I know that well. I had no head for it."

"You can reduce it to smaller proportions," said Brandon; "that can easily be done."

The old man sighed.

"After all," he continued, "it is not the business. It's losing you that I think of, dear boy. I'm not thinking of the business at all. My grief is altogether about your departure. I grieve, too, at the blow which must have fallen on you to make this necessary."

"The blow is a heavy one," said Brandon; "so heavy that every thing else in life must be forgotten except the one thought—how to recover from it; and perhaps, also," he added, in a lower voice, "how to return it."

Mr. Compton was silent for a long time, and with every minute the deep dejection of his face and manner increased. He folded his arms and shut his eyes in deep thought.

"My boy," said he at last, in that same paternal tone which he had used before, and in a mild, calm voice. "I suppose this thing can not be helped, and all that is left for me to do is to bear it as best I may. I will not indulge in any selfish sorrow in the presence of your greater trouble. I will rather do all in my power to coincide with your wishes. I see now that you must have a good reason for your decision, although I do not seek to look into that reason."

"Believe me," said Brandon, "I would show you the letter at once, but it is so terrible that I would rather that you should not know. It is worse than death, and I do not even yet begin to know the worst."

The old man sighed, and looked at him with deep commiseration.

"If our separation must indeed be final," said he, at last, "I will take care that you shall suffer no loss. You shall have your full share of the

capital."

"I leave that entirely to you," said Brandon.

"Fortunately our business is not much scattered. A settlement can easily be made, and I will arrange it so that you shall not have any loss. Our balance-sheet was made out only last month, and it showed our firm to be worth thirty thousand pounds. Half of this is yours, and—"

"Half!" interrupted the other. "My dear friend, you mean a quarter."

The old man waved his hand.

"I said half, and I mean half."

"I will never consent."

"You must."

"Never."

"You shall. Why, think of the petty business that I was doing when you came here. I was worth about four thousand. You have built up the business to its present dimensions. Do you suppose that I don't know?"

"I can not allow you to make such a sacrifice," said Brandon.

"Stop," said Mr. Compton. "I have not said all. I attach a condition to this which I implore you not to refuse. Listen to me, and you will then be able to see."

Mr. Compton rose and looked carefully out into the office. There was no one near. He then returned, locked the door, and drawing his chair close to Brandon, began, in a low voice:

"You have your secrets and I have mine. I don't wish to know yours, but my own I am going to tell to you, not merely for the sake of sympathy, but rather for the sake of your assistance. I am going to tell you who I am, and why I came out here.

"My name is not Compton. It is Henry Lawton. All my early life was passed at York. There I married, had a son, and lived happily for years—in fact, during the childhood of my boy.

"It was that boy of mine, Edgar, that led to all my troubles. I suppose we indulged him too much. It was natural. He was our only child, and so we ruined him. He got beyond our control at last and used to run about the streets of York. I did what I could to save him, but it was too late.

"He went on from bad to worse, until at last he got in with a set of miscreants who were among the worst in the country. My God! to think how my boy, once a sweet child, could have fallen so low. But he was weak, and easily led, and so he went on from bad to worse.

"I can not bear to go into particulars," said the old man, after a long pause. "I will come at once to point. My poor, wretched boy got in with these miscreants, as I was telling you, and I did not see him from one month's end to another. At last a great burglary took place. Three were arrested. Among these two were old offenders, hardened in vice, the one named Briggs, the other Crocker; the third was my unhappy boy."

The old man was silent for some time.

"I do not think, after all, that he was guilty: but Briggs turned King's Evidence, and Crocker and my son were condemned to transportation. There was no help.

"I sold out all I had in the world, and in compliance with the entreaties of my poor wife, who nearly went mad with grief, I came out here. I changed my name to Compton. My boy's term was for three years. I began a business out here, and as my boy behaved well he was able to get permission to hire out as a servant. I took him nominally as my servant, for no one knew that he was my son, and so we had him with us again.

"I hoped that the bitter lesson which he had learned would prove beneficial, but I did not know the strength of evil inclinations. As long as his term of imprisonment lasted he was content and behaved well; but at last, when the three years were up, he began to grow restive. Crocker was freed at about the same time and my boy fell again under his evil influence. This lasted for about a year, when, at last, one morning a letter was brought me from him stating that he had gone to India. My poor wife was again nearly distracted. She thought of nothing but her boy. She made me take her and go in search of him again. So we went to India. After a long search I found him there, as I had feared, in connection with his old, vicious associates. True, they had changed their names, and were trying to pass for honest men. Crocker called himself Clark, and Briggs called himself Potts."

"Potts," cried Brandon.

"Yes," said the other, who was too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the surprise of Brandon. "He was in the employ of Colonel Despard, at Calcutta, and enjoyed much of his confidence."

"What year was this?" asked Brandon.

"1825," replied Mr. Compton. "Crocker," he continued, "was acting as a sort of shipping agent, and my son was his clerk. Of course, my first efforts were directed toward detaching my son from these scoundrels. I did all that I could. I offered to give him half of my property, and finally all, if he would only leave them forever and come back. The wretched boy refused. He did not appear to be altogether bad, but he had a weak nature, and could not get rid of the influence of these men.

"I staid in India for a year and a half, until I found at last that there was no hope. I could find nothing to do there, and if I remained I would have to starve or go out to service. This I could not think of doing. So I prepared to come back here. But my wife refused to leave her son. She was resolved, she said, to stay by him till the last. I tried to dissuade her, but could not move her. I told her that I could not be a domestic. She said that she could do even that for the sake of her boy. And she went off at once and got a situation as nurse with the same Colonel Despard with whom Briggs, or, as he called himself, Potts, was staying."

"What was the Christian name of this Potts?" asked Brandon, calmly.

"John—John Potts."

Brandon said nothing further, and Compton resumed.

"Thus my wife actually left me. I could not stay and be a slave. So I made her promise to write me, and told her that I would send her as much money as I could. She clung to me half broken-hearted as I left her. Our parting was a bitter one—bitter enough: but I would rather break my heart with grief than be a servant. Besides, she knew that whenever she came back my heart was open to receive her.

"I came back to my lonely life out here and lived for nearly two years. At last, in September 1828, a mail arrived from India bringing a letter from my wife and Indian papers. The news which they brought well-nigh drove me mad."

Compton buried his face in his hands and remained silent for some time.

"You couldn't have been more than a child at that time, but perhaps you may have heard of the mysterious murder of Colonel Despard?"

He looked inquiringly at Brandon, but the latter gave no sign.

"Perhaps not," he continued—"no: you were too young, of course. Well, it was in the *Vishnu*, a brig in which the Colonel had embarked for Manilla. The brig was laden with hogshead staves and box shooks, and the Colonel went there partly for his health, partly on business, taking with him his valet Potts."

"What became of his family?" interrupted Brandon.

"He had a son in England at school. His wife had died not long before this at one of the hill stations, where she had gone for her health. Grief may have had something to do with the Colonel's voyage, for he was very much attached to his wife.

"Mails used only to come at long intervals in those days and this one brought the account not only of the Colonel's fate, but of the trial at Manilla and the execution of the man that was condemned.

"It was a very mysterious case. In the month of July a boat arrived at Manilla which carried the crew and one passenger from the brig *Vishnu*. One of the men, a Malay named Uracao, was in irons, and he was immediately given up to the authorities."

"Who were the others?"

"Potts, as he called himself, the Colonel's valet, Clark, three Lascars, and the Captain, an Italian named Cigole. Information was at once laid against the Malay. Potts was the chief witness. He said that he slept in the cabin while the Colonel slept in an inner state-room; that one morning early he was roused by a frightful shriek and saw Uracao rushing from the Colonel's state-room. He sprang up, chased him, and caught him just as he was about to leap overboard. His creese covered with blood was in his hand. The Colonel, when they went to look at him, had his throat cut from ear to ear. Clark swore that he was steering the vessel and saw Potts catch Uracao, and helped to hold him. The Captain,

Cigole, swore that he was waked by the noise, and rushed out in time to see this. Clark had gone as mate of the vessel. Of the Lascars, two had been down below, but one was on deck and swore to have seen the same. On this testimony Uracao was condemned and executed."

"How did they happen to leave the brig?"

"They said that a great storm came up about three days' sail from Manilla, the vessel sprang a leak, and they had to take to the boat. Their testimony was very clear indeed, and there were no contradictions; but in spite of all this it was felt to be a very mysterious case, and even the exhibition of the Malay creese, carefully covered with the stains of blood, did not altogether dispel this feeling."

"Have you got the papers yet, or are there any in Sydney that contain an account of this affair?"

"I have kept them all. You may read the whole case if you care about it."

"I should like to, very much," said Brandon, with great calmness.

"When I heard of this before the mail was opened I felt an agony of fear lest my miserable boy might be implicated in some way. To my immense relief his name did not occur at all."

"You got a letter from your wife?" said Brandon, interrogatively.

"Yes," said the old man, with a sigh. "The last that I ever received from her. Here it is." And, saying this, he opened his pocket-book and took out a letter, worn and faded, and blackened by frequent readings.

Brandon took it respectfully, and read the following:

"CALCUTTA, August 15, 1828.

"MY DEAREST HENRY,—By the papers that I send you, you will see what has occurred. Our dear Edgar is well, indeed better than usual, and I would feel much cheered if it were not for the sad fate of the poor Colonel. This is the last letter that you will ever receive from me. I am going to leave this country never to return, and do not yet know where I will go. Wherever I go I will be with my darling Edgar. Do not worry about me or about him. It will be better for you to try and forget all about us, since we are from this time the same as dead to you. Good-by forever, my dearest husband; it shall be my daily prayer that God may bless you.

"Your affectionate wife, MARY."

Brandon read this in silence, and handed it back.

"A strange letter," said Compton mournfully. "At first it gave a bitter pang to think of my Mary thus giving me up forever, so coldly, and for no reason: but afterward I began to understand why she wrote this.

"My belief is, that these villains kept my son in their clutches for some good reason, and that they had some equally good reason for keeping her. There's some mystery about it which I can't fathom. Perhaps she knew too much about the Colonel's affairs to be allowed to go free. They might have detained her by working upon her love for her son, or

simply by terrifying her. She was always a timid soul, poor Mary. That letter is not her composition: there is not a word there that sounds like her, and they no doubt told her what to write, or wrote out something, and made her copy it.

"And now," said Compton, after another long pause, "I have got to the end of my story. I know nothing more about them. I have lived here ever since, at first despairing, but of late more resigned to my lot. Yet still if I have one desire in life it is to get some trace of these dear ones whom I still love as tenderly as ever. You, my dear boy, with your ability may conjecture some way. Besides, you will perhaps be traveling more or less, and may be able to hear of their fate. This is the condition that I make. I implore you by your pity for a heart-broken father to do as I say and help me. Half! why, I would give all that I have if I could get them back again."

Brandon shuddered perceptibly at the words "heart-broken father;" but he quickly recovered himself. He took Compton's hand and pressed it warmly.

"Dear friend, I will make no objection to any thing, and I promise you that all my best efforts shall be directed toward finding them out."

"Tell them to come to me, that I am rich, and can make them happy."

"I'll make them go to you if they are alive," said Brandon.

"God bless you!" ejaculated the old man, fervently.

Brandon spent the greater part of that day in making business arrangements, and in reading the papers which Compton had preserved containing an account of the Despard murder.

It was late at night before he returned to his hotel. As he went into the hall he saw a stranger sitting there in a lounging attitude reading the *Sydney News*.

He was a thin, small-sized man, with a foreign air, and quick, restless manner. His features were small, a heavy beard and mustache covered his face, his brow was low, and his eyes black and twinkling. A sharp, furtive glance which he gave at Brandon attracted the attention of the latter, for there was something in the glance that meant more than idle curiosity.

Even in the midst of his cares Brandon's curiosity was excited. He walked with assumed indifference up to the desk as though looking for the key of his room. Glancing at the hotel book his eye ranged down the column of names till it rested on the last one.

"*Pietro Cigole*."

—Cigole! the name brought singular associations. Had this man still any connection with Potts? The words of his father's letter rushed into his mind—"His arm may reach even to the antipodes to strike you. Be on your guard. Watch every one. He has some dark plan against you."

With these thoughts in his mind Brandon went up to his room.

Chapter

3 "A MAN OVERBOARD!"

In so small a town as Sydney then was Brandon could hope to learn all that could be learned about Cigole. By casual inquiries he learned that the Italian had come out in the *Rival*, and had given out that he was agent for a London house in the wool business. He had bought up a considerable quantity which he was preparing to ship.

Brandon could not help feeling that there was some ruse about this. Yet he thought, on the other hand, why should he flaunt his name so boldly before the world? If he is in reality following me why should he not drop his name? But then, again, why should he? Perhaps he thinks that I can not possibly know any thing about his name. Why should I? I was a child when Despard was murdered. It may be merely a similarity of names.

Brandon from time to time had opportunities of hearing more about Cigole, yet always the man seemed absorbed in business.

He wondered to himself whether he had better confide his suspicions to Mr. Compton or not. Yet why should he? The old man would become excited, and feel all sorts of wild hopes about discovering his wife and son. Could it be possible that the Italian after so many years could now afford any clew whatever? Certainly it was not very probable.

On the whole Brandon thought that this man, whoever he was or whatever his purpose might be, would be encountered best by himself singly. If Mr. Compton took part he would at once awaken Cigole's fears by his clumsiness.

Brandon felt quite certain that Mr. Compton would not know any thing about Cigole's presence in Sydney unless he himself told him. For the old man was so filled with trouble at the loss of his partner that he could think of nothing else, and all his thoughts were taken up with closing up the concern so as to send forward remittances of money to London as soon as possible. Mr. Compton had arranged for him to draw £2000 on his arrival at London, and three months afterward £3000-£10,000 would be remitted during the following year.

Brandon had come to the conclusion to tell Mr. Compton about Cigole before he left, so that if the man remained in the country he might be bribed or otherwise induced to tell what he knew; yet thinking it possible that Cigole had designed to return in the same ship with him, he waited to see how things would turn out. As he could not help associating Cigole in his mind with Potts, so he thought that whichever way he turned this man would try to follow him. His anticipations proved correct. He had taken passage in the ship *Java*, and two days

before the vessel left he learned that Cigole had taken his passage in her also, having put on board a considerable quantity of wool. On the whole Brandon felt gratified to hear this, for the close association of a long sea voyage would give him opportunities to test this man, and probe him to the bottom. The thought of danger arising to himself did not enter his mind. He believed that Cigole meant mischief, but had too much confidence in his own powers to fear it.

On the 5th of August the ship *Java* was ready, and Mr. Compton stood on the quarterdeck to bid good-by to Brandon.

"God bless you, dear boy! You will find the money coming promptly, and Smithers & Co.'s house is one of the strongest in London. I have brought you a parting gift," said he, in a low voice. He drew from his pocket a pistol, which in those days was less known than now—indeed, this was the first of its kind which had reached Australia, and Mr. Compton had paid a fabulous price for it. "Here," said he, "take this to remember me by. They call it a revolver. Here is a box of patent cartridges that go with it. It is from me to you. And mind," he continued, while there came over his face a vengeful look which Brandon had never seen there before—"mind, if ever you see John Potts, give him one of those patent cartridges, and tell him it is the last gift of a broken-hearted father."

Brandon's face turned ghastly, and his lips seemed to freeze into a smile of deadly meaning.

"God bless you," cried Compton, "I see by your face that you will do it. Good-by."

He wrung Brandon's hand hard and left the ship.

About six feet away stood Cigole, looking over the stern and smoking a cigar. He was near enough to hear what had been said, but he did not appear to have heard it. Throwing his cigar into the water, he plunged his hands into his pockets, and began whistling a lively air.

"Aha, Capitano," said he, in a foreign accent, "I have brought my wool off at last."

Brandon paced the deck silently yet watchfully.

The good ship *Java* went out with a fine breeze, which continued for some days, until at last nothing could be seen but the wide ocean. In those few days Brandon had settled himself comfortably on board, and had learned pretty well the kind of life which he would have to lead for the next six months or so. The captain was a quiet, amiable sort of a person, without much force of character; the mate was more energetic and somewhat passionate; the crew consisted of the average order of men. There was no chance, certainly, for one of those conspiracies such as Mr. Compton had hinted at as having taken place on the *Vishnu*; for in his account of that affair he evidently believed that Uracao had been made a scape-goat for the sins of the others.

Brandon was soon on the best of terms with the officers of the ship. As to Cigole it was different. The fact of their being the only passengers on board might of itself have been a sufficient cause to draw them together; but Brandon found it difficult to pass beyond the extremest limits of formal intercourse. Brandon himself considered that his purposes would be best served by close association with this man; he hoped that in the course of such association he might draw something from Cigole. But Cigole baffled him constantly. He was as polite and courteous as all Italians are; he had an abundance of remarks all ready about the state of the weather, the prospects of the voyage, or the health of the seamen; but beyond these topics it was difficult to induce him to go. Brandon stifled the resentment which he felt toward this man, in his efforts to break down the barriers of formality which he kept up, and sought to draw him out on the subject of the wool trade. Yet here he was baffled. Cigole always took up the air of a man who was speaking to a rival in business, and pretended to be very cautious and guarded in his remarks about wool, as though he feared that Brandon would interfere with his prospects. This sort of thing was kept up with such great delicacy of management on Cigole's part that Brandon himself would have been completely deceived, and would have come to consider him as nothing more than a speculator in wool, had it not been for a certain deep instinct within him, which made him regard this man as one who was actuated by something far deeper than mere regards for a successful speculation.

Cigole managed to baffle the most dextrous efforts and the most delicate contrivances of Brandon. He would acknowledge that he was an Italian, and had been in all parts of Italy, but carefully refrained from telling where he was born. He asserted that this was the first time that he had been in the Eastern seas. He remarked once, casually, that Cigole was a very common name among Italians. He said that he had no acquaintances at all in England, and was only going there now because he heard that there was a good market for wool. At another time he spoke as though much of his life had been passed in Marseilles, and hinted that he was a partner of a commercial house there.

Cigole never made any advances, and never even met half-way those which Brandon made. He was never off his guard for one instant. Polite, smiling, furtive, never looking Brandon fairly in the face, he usually spoke with a profusion of bows, gestures, and commonplaces, adopting, in fact, that part which is always at once both the easiest and the safest to play—the non-committal, pure and perfect.

It was cunning, but low cunning after all, and Brandon perceived that, for one who had some purpose to accomplish, with but a common soul to sustain him, this was the most ordinary way to do it. A villain of profounder cunning or of larger spirit would have pursued a different path. He would have conversed freely and with apparent unreserve; he

would have yielded to all friendly advances, and made them himself; he would have shown the highest art by concealing art, in accordance with the hackneyed proverb, "*Ars est celare artem*."

Brandon despised him as an ordinary villain, and hardly thought it worth his while to take any particular notice of him, except to watch him in a general way. But Cigole, on the contrary, was very different. His eyes, which never met those of Brandon fairly, were constantly watching him. When moving about the quarter-deck or when sitting in the cabin he usually had the air of a man who was pretending to be intent on something else, but in reality watching Brandon's acts or listening to his words. To any other man the knowledge of this would have been in the highest degree irksome. But to Brandon it was gratifying, since it confirmed his suspicions. He saw this man, whose constant efforts were directed toward not committing himself by word, doing that very thing by his attitude, his gesture, and the furtive glance of his eye. Brandon, too, had his part, but it was infinitely greater than that of Cigole, and the purpose that now animated his life was unintelligible to this man who watched him. But Cigole's whole soul was apparent to Brandon; and by his small arts, his low cunning, his sly observation, and many other peculiarities, he exhibited that which is seen in its perfection in the ordinary spy of despotic countries, such as used to abound most in Rome and Naples in the good old days.

For the common spy of Europe may deceive the English or American traveler; but the Frenchman, the German, the Spaniard, or the Italian, always recognizes him.

So Brandon's superior penetration discovered the true character of Cigole.

He believed that this man was the same Cigole who had figured in the affair of the *Vishnu*; that he had been sent out by Potts to do some injury to himself, and that he was capable of any crime. Yet he could not see how he could do any thing. He certainly could not incite the simple-minded captain and the honest mate to conspiracy. He was too great a coward to attempt any violence. So Brandon concluded that he had simply come to watch him so as to learn his character, and carry back to Potts all the knowledge that he might gain.

This was his conclusion after a close association of one month with Cigole. Yet he made up his mind not to lose sight of this man. To him he appeared only an agent in villainy, and therefore unworthy of vengeance; yet he might be made use of as an aid in that vengeance. He therefore wished to have a clew by which he might afterward find him.

"You and I," said he one day, in conversation, "are both in the same trade. If I ever get to England I may wish some time to see you. Where can I find you?"

Cigole looked in twenty different directions, and hesitated for some time.

"Well," said he at last, "I do not think that you will wish to see me—" and he hesitated; "but," he resumed, with an evil smile, "if you should by any possibility wish to do so, you can find out where I am by inquiring of Giovanni Cavallo, 16 Red Lion Street, London."

"Perhaps I may not wish to," said Brandon, coolly, "and perhaps I may. At any rate, if I do, I will remember to inquire of Giovanni Cavallo, 16 Red Lion Street, London."

He spoke with deep emphasis on the address. Cigole looked uncomfortable, as though he had at last made the mistake which he dreaded, and had committed himself.

So the time passed.

After the first few days the weather had become quite stormy. Strong head-winds, accompanied often by very heavy rains, had to be encountered. In spite of this the ship had a very good passage northward, and met with no particular obstacle until her course was turned toward the Indian Ocean. Then all the winds were dead against her, and for weeks a succession of long tacks far to the north and to the south brought her but a short distance onward. Every day made the wind more violent and the storm worse. And now the season of the equinox was approaching, when the monsoons change, and all the winds that sweep over these seas alter their courses. For weeks before and after this season the winds are all unsettled, and it seems as if the elements were let loose. From the first week in September this became manifest, and every day brought them face to face with sterner difficulties. Twice before the captain had been to Australia; and for years he had been in the China trade; so that he knew these seas well; but he said that he had never known the equinoctial storms begin so early, and rage with such violence.

Opposed by such difficulties as these the ship made but a slow passage—the best routes had not yet been discovered—and it was the middle of September before they entered the Indian Ocean. The weather then became suddenly calm, and they drifted along beyond the latitude of the western extremity of Java, about a hundred miles south of the Straits of Sunda. Here they began to encounter the China fleet which steers through this strait, for every day one or more sails were visible.

Here they were borne on helplessly by the ocean currents, which at this place are numerous and distracted. The streams that flow through the many isles of the Indian Archipelago, uniting with the greater southern streams, here meet and blend, causing great difficulties to navigation, and often baffling even the most experienced seaman. Yet it was not all left to the currents, for frequently and suddenly the storms came up; and the weather, ever changeable, kept the sailors constantly on the alert.

Yet between the storms the calms were frequent, and sometimes long continued, though of such a sort as required watchfulness. For out of the

midst of dead calms the storm would suddenly rise in its might, and all the care which experience could suggest was not always able to avert disaster.

"I don't like this weather, Mr. Brandon. It's the worst that we could have, especially just here."

"Why just here?"

"Why, we're opposite the Straits of Sunda, the worst place about these parts."

"What for?"

"Pirates. The Malays, you know. We're not over well prepared to meet them, I'm afraid. If they come we'll have to fight them the best way we can; and these calms are the worst thing for us, because the Malay proas can get along in the lightest wind, or with oars, when we can't move at all."

"Are the Malays any worse than usual now?" asked Brandon.

"Well, no worse than they've been for the last ten years. Zangorri is the worst of them all."

"Zangorri! I've heard of him."

"I should think you had. Why, there never was a pirate in these seas that did so much damage. No mortal knows the ships that devil has captured and burned."

"I hope you have arms for the seamen, at any rate."

"Oh, we have one howitzer, and small-arms for the men, and we will have to get along the best way we can with these; but the owners ought never to send us here without a better equipment."

"I suppose they think it would cost too much."

"Yes; that's it. They think only about the profits, and trust to luck for our safety. Well, I only hope we'll get safely out of this place— that's all."

And the captain walked off much more excited than usual.

They drifted on through days of calm, which were succeeded by fierce but short-lived storms, and then followed by calms. Their course lay sometimes north, sometimes south, sometimes nowhere. Thus the time passed, until at length, about the middle of September, they came in sight of a long, low island of sand.

"I've heard of that sand-bank before," said the captain, who showed some surprise at seeing it; "but I didn't believe it was here. It's not down in the charts. Here we are three hundred and fifty miles southwest of the Straits of Sunda, and the chart makes this place all open water. Well, seein's believin'; and after this I'll swear that there is such a thing as Coffin Island."

"Is that the name?"

"That's the name an old sea-captain gave it, and tried to get the Admiralty to put it on the charts, but they wouldn't. But this is it, and no mistake."

"Why did he call it Coffin Island?"

"Well, he thought that rock looked like a coffin, and it's dangerous enough when a fog comes to deserve that name."

Brandon looked earnestly at the island which the captain mentioned, and which they were slowly approaching.

It lay toward the north, while the ship's course, if it had any in that calm, was southwest. It was not more than six miles away, and appeared to be about five miles long. At the nearest extremity a black rock arose to a height of about fifty feet, which appeared to be about five hundred feet long, and was of such a shape that the imagination might easily see a resemblance to a coffin. At the farthest extremity of the island was a low mound. The rest of the island was flat, low, and sandy, with no trace of vegetation perceptible from the ship, except a line of dingy green under the rock, which looked like grass.

The ship drifted slowly on.

Meanwhile the captain, in anticipation of a storm, had caused all the sails to be taken in, and stood anxiously watching the sky toward the southwest.

There a dense mass of clouds lay piled along the horizon, gloomy, lowering, menacing; frowning over the calm seas as though they would soon destroy that calm, and fling forth all the fury of the winds. These clouds seemed to have started up from the sea, so sudden had been their appearance; and now, as they gathered themselves together, their forms distended, and heightened, and reached forward vast arms into the sky, striving to climb there, rolling upward voluminous cloud masses which swiftly ascended toward the zenith. So quick was the progress of these clouds that they did not seem to come from the banks below; but it was rather as though all the air suddenly condensed its moisture and made it visible in these dark masses.

As yet there was no wind, and the water was as smooth as glass; but over the wide surface, as far as the eye could reach, the long swell of the ocean had changed into vast rolling undulations, to the motion of which the ship yielded, slowly ascending and descending as the waters rose and fell, while the yards creaked, and the rigging twanged to the strain upon them.

Every moment the sky grew darker, and as gloom gathered above so it increased below, till all the sea spread out a smooth ebon mass. Darkness settled down, and the sun's face was thus obscured, and a preternatural gloom gathered upon the face of nature. Overhead vast black clouds went sweeping past, covering all things, faster and faster, till at last far down in the northern sky the heavens were all obscured.

But amidst all this there was as yet not a breath of wind. Far above the wind careered in a narrow current, which did not touch the surface of the sea but only bore onward the clouds. The agitation of the sky above contrasted with the stillness below made the latter not consoling but

rather fearful, for this could be none other than that treacherous stillness which precedes the sudden outburst of the hurricane.

For that sudden outburst all were now looking, expecting it every moment. On the side of the ship where the wind was expected the captain was standing, looking anxiously at the black clouds on the horizon, and all the crew were gazing there in sympathy with him. From that quarter the wind would burst, and it was for this assault that all the preparations had been made.

For some time Brandon had watched the collecting clouds, but at length he turned away, and seemed to find a supreme fascination in the sand-bank. He stood at the stern of the ship, looking fixedly toward the rock, his arms folded, and his thoughts all absorbed in that one thing. A low railing ran round the quarter-deck. The helmsman stood in a sheltered place which rose only two feet above the deck. The captain stood by the companion-way, looking south at the storm; the mate was near the capstan, and all were intent and absorbed in their expectation of a sudden squall.

Close by the rudder-post stood Cigole, looking with all the rest at the gathering storm. His face was only half turned, and as usual he watched this with only a furtive glance, for at times his stealthy eyes turned toward Brandon; and he alone of all on board did not seem to be absorbed by some overmastering thought.

Suddenly a faint, fluttering ripple appeared to the southward; it came quickly: it seemed to flash over the waters; with the speed of the wind it moved on, till a quick, fresh blast struck the ship and sighed through the rigging. Then a faint breathing of wind succeeded; but far away there rose a low moan like that which arises from some vast cataract at a great distance, whose roar, subdued by distance, sounds faintly, yet warningly, to the ear.

At this first touch of the tempest, and the menacing voice of its approach, not a word was spoken, but all stood mute. Brandon alone appeared not to have noticed it. He still stood with folded arms and absorbed air, gazing at the island.

The roar of the waters in the distance grew louder, and in the direction from which it came the dark water was all white with foam, and the boiling flood advanced nearer in myriad-numbered waves, which seemed now like an army rushing to the charge, tossing on high its crested heads and its countless foam-plumes, and threatening to bear down all before it.

At last the tornado struck.

At the fierce blast of the storm the ship rolled far over, the masts creaked and groaned, the waves rushed up and dashed against the side.

At that instant Cigole darted quickly toward Brandon, and the moment that the vessel yielded to the blow of the storm he fell violently against him. Before Brandon had noticed the storm or had time to

steady himself he had pushed him headlong over the rail and helplessly into the sea—

"—liquidæ projecit in undas Praecipitem."

Cigole clung to the rail, and instantly shrieked out:

"Man overboard!"

The startling cry rang through the ship. The captain turned round with a face of agony.

"Man overboard!" shouted Cigole again. "Help! It's Brandon!"

"Brandon!" cried the captain. "He's lost! O God!"

He took up a hen-coop from its fastenings and flung it into the sea, and a couple of pails after it.

He then looked aloft and to the south with eyes of despair. He could do nothing. For now the storm was upon them, and the ship was plunging furiously through the waters with the speed of a race-horse at the touch of the gale. On the lee-side lay the sand-bank, now only three miles away, whose unknown shallows made their present position perilous in the extreme. The ship could not turn to try and save the lost passenger; it was only by keeping straight on that there was any hope of avoiding that lee-shore.

All on board shared the captain's despair, for all saw that nothing could be done. The ship was at the mercy of the hurricane. To turn was impossible. If they could save their own lives now it would be as much as they could do.

Away went the ship—away, farther, and farther, every moment leaving at a greater distance the lost man who struggled in the waters.

At last they had passed the danger, the island was left behind, and the wide sea lay all around.

But by this time the storm was at its height; the ship could not maintain its proper course, but, yielding to the gale, fled to the northwest far out of its right direction.

Chapter

4 SINKING IN DEEP WATERS

Brandon, overwhelmed by the rush of waters, half suffocated, and struggling in the rush of the waves, shrieked out a few despairing cries for help, and sought to keep his head above water as best he could. But his cries were borne off by the fierce winds, and the ship as it careered madly before the blast was soon out of hearing.

He was a first-rate swimmer, but in a sea like this it needed all his strength and all his skill to save himself from impending death. Encumbered by his clothes it was still more difficult, yet so fierce was the rush of wind and wave that he dared not stop for a moment in his struggles in order to divest himself of his clothing.

At first, by a mere blind instinct, he tried to swim after the ship, as though by any possibility he could ever reach her again, but the hurricane was against him, and he was forced sideways far out of the course which he was trying to take. At last the full possession of his senses was restored, and following the ship no longer, he turned toward the direction where that sand island lay which had been the cause of his disaster. At first it was hidden from view by the swell of waves that rose in front, but soon rising upon the crest of one of these he perceived far away the dark form of the coffin-shaped rock. Here then before him lay the island, and toward this both wind and wave impelled him.

But the rock was far to the right, and it might be that the island did not extend far enough to meet him as he neared it. It was about five miles in length, but in his efforts he might not be able to reach even the western extremity. Still there was nothing else to do but to try. Resolutely, therefore, though half despairingly, he put forth his best strength, and struggled manfully to win the shore.

That lone and barren sand-bank, after all, offered but a feeble chance for life. Even if he did reach it, which was doubtful, what could he do? Starvation instead of drowning would be his fate. More than once it occurred to him that it would be better then and there to give up all efforts and let himself go. But then there came the thought of those dear ones who waited for him in England, the thought of the villain who had thrown him from the ship, and the greater villain who had sent him out on his murderous errand. He could not bear the idea that they should triumph over him so easily and so quickly. His vengeance should not be taken from him; it had been baffled, but it still nerved his arm.

A half hour's struggle, which seemed like many hours, had brought him much nearer to the island, but his strength was almost exhausted. His clothes, caught in the rush of the waves, and clinging to him,

confined the free action of his limbs, and lent an additional weight. Another half hour's exertion might possibly bring him to the shore, but that exertion hardly seemed possible. It was but with difficulty now that he could strike out. Often the rush of the waves from behind would overwhelm him, and it was only by convulsive efforts that he was able to surmount the raging billows and regain his breath.

Efforts like these, however, were too exhaustive to be long continued. Nature failed, and already a wild despair came over him. For a quarter of an hour longer he had continued his exertions; and now the island was so near that a quarter of an hour more might bring him to it. But even that exertion of strength was now no longer possible. Faintly and feebly, and with failing limbs and fiercely-throbbing heart, he toiled on, until at last any further effort seemed impossible. Before him was the mound which he had noticed from the ship. He was at the western extremity of the island. He saw that he was being carried in such a direction that even if he did struggle on he might be borne helplessly past the island and out into the open sea. Already he could look past the island, and see the wide expanse of white foaming waves which threatened to engulf him. The sight weakened what little strength was left, and made his efforts even feebler.

Despairingly he looked around, not knowing what he sought, but seeking still for something, he knew not what. In that last look of despair his eyes caught sight of something which at once gave him renewed hope. It was not far away. Borne along by the waves it was but a few yards distant, and a little behind him. It was the hen-coop which the Captain of the *Java* had thrown overboard so as to give Brandon a chance for life. That last chance was now thrown in his way, for the hen-coop had followed the same course with himself, and had been swept along not very far from him.

Brandon was nerved to new efforts by the sight of this. He turned and exerted the last remnants of his strength in order to reach this means of safety. It was near enough to be accessible. A few vigorous strokes, a few struggles with the waves, and his hands clutched the bars with the grasp of a drowning man.

It was a large hen-coop, capable of keeping several men afloat. Brandon clung to this and at last had rest. Every minute of respite from such struggles as he had carried on restored his strength to a greater degree. He could now keep his head high out of the water and avoid the engulfing fury of the waves behind. Now at last he could take a better survey of the prospect before him, and see more plainly whither he was going.

The sand-bank lay before him; the mount at the western extremity was in front of him, not very far away. The rock which lay at the eastern end was now at a great distance, for he had been swept by the current abreast of the island, and was even now in danger of being carried past

it. Still there was hope, for wind and wave were blowing directly toward the island, and there was a chance of his being carried full upon its shore. Yet the chance was a slender one, for the set of the tide carried him beyond the line of the western extremity.

Every minute brought him nearer, and soon his fate would be decided. Nearer and nearer he came, still clinging to the hen-coop, and making no efforts whatever, but reserving and collecting together all his strength, so as to put it forth at the final hour of need.

But as he came nearer the island appeared to move more and more out of the line of his approach. Under these circumstances his only chance was to float as near as possible, and then make a last effort to reach the land.

Nearer and nearer he came. At last he was close by it, but the extreme point of the island lay to the right more than twenty yards. This was the crisis of his fate, for now if he floated on any longer he would be carried farther away.

The shore was here low but steep, the waters appeared to be deep, and a heavy surf dashed upon the island, and threw up its spray far over the mound. He was so near that he could distinguish the pebbles on the beach, and could see beyond the mound a long, flat surface with thin grass growing.

Beyond this point was another a hundred yards away, but farther out of his reach, and affording no hope whatever. Between the two points there was an inlet into the island showing a little cove; but the surf just here became wilder, and long rollers careered one past another over the intervening space. It was a hopeless prospect. Yet it was his last chance.

Brandon made up his mind. He let go the hen-coop, and summoning up all his strength he struck out for the shore. But this time the wind and sea were against him, bearing him past the point, and the waves dashed over him more quickly and furiously than before. He was swept past the point before he had made half a dozen strokes; he was borne on still struggling; and now on his left lay the rollers which he had seen. In spite of all his efforts he was farther away from the island than when he had left the hen-coop. Yet all hope and all life depended on the issue of this last effort. The fifteen or twenty minutes of rest and of breathing-space which he had gained had been of immense advantage, and he struggled with all the force which could be inspired by the nearness of safety. Yet, after all, human efforts can not withstand the fury of the elements, and here against this strong sea the strongest swimmer could not hope to contend successfully.

"Never I ween was swimmer In such an evil case."

He swam toward the shore, but the wind striking him from one side, and urging on the sea, drove him sideways. Some progress was made, but the force of the waters was fearful, and for every foot that he moved forward he was carried six feet to leeward. He himself saw this, and

calculating his chances he perceived with despair that he was already beyond the first point, and that at the present rate there was no possibility of gaining the farther point.

Already the waves leaped exultingly about him, dashing over him now more wildly, since he was exposed more than before to their full sweep. Already the rollers lay close beside him on his left. Then it seemed as though he would be engulfed. Turning his head backward with a last faint thought of trying to regain the hen-coop, so as to prolong life somewhat, he saw it far away out of his reach. Then all hope left him.

He was now at the outermost line of rollers. At the moment that he turned his head a huge wave raised him up and bore him forward. He struggled still, even in that time of despair, and fought with his enemies. They bore him onward, however, none the less helplessly, and descending carried him with them.

But now at last, as he descended with that wave, hope came back, and all his despair vanished.

For as the wave flung him downward his feet touched bottom, and he stood for a moment erect, on solid, hard sand, in water that scarcely reached above his knees. It was for a moment only that he stood, however, for the sweep of the water bore him down, and he fell forward. Before he could regain himself another wave came and hurled him farther forward.

By a violent effort he staggered to his feet. In an instant he comprehended his position. At this western end the island descended gently into the water, and the shoal which it formed extended for miles away. It was this shoal that caused the long rollers that came over them so vehemently, and in such marked contrast with the more abrupt waves of the sea behind.

In an instant he had comprehended this, and had taken his course of action.

Now he had foothold. Now the ground beneath lent its aid to his endeavor; he was no longer altogether at the mercy of the water. He bounded forward toward the shore in such a direction that he could approach it without opposing himself entirely to the waves. The point that stretched out was now within his reach. The waves rolled past it, but by moving in an oblique direction he could gain it.

Again and again the high rollers came forward, hurling him up as they caught him in their embrace, and then casting him down again. As he was caught up from the bottom he sustained himself on the moving mass, and supported himself on the crest of the wave, but as soon as his feet touched bottom again he sprang forward toward the point which now became every minute more accessible. Wave after wave came, each was more furious, each more ravenous than the preceding, as though hounding one another on to make sure of their prey. But now that the hope of life was strong, and safety had grown almost assured, the