

One

The deck was a shambles. Men lay dead and dying; there was split woodwork, a welter of broken mizzen and sagging sail, dust and grime, and the reek of powder. A ball screamed through the rigging overhead; another tore the sea into wild foam beneath the galleon's stern. She seemed to stagger, to reel, to list heavily to port. From his quarterdeck Don Juan de Narvaez gave a sharp order; his lieutenant went running down the companion into the waist of the ship.

Soldiers crowded there in steel breastplates and chased morions. They had halberds and pikes, and some held long double-edged swords. They looked out to sea, to where the smaller ship came steadily on, the Red Cross of St George flying at her mainmast head. They were sure now that it would end in a hand to hand fight; they were even glad of it: they knew themselves to be the finest soldiers in Christendom. What chance could these bold English have against them at close quarters? The English ship had held off beyond reach of the Spanish guns this past hour, ceaselessly bombarding the *Santa Maria* with her longer-reached cannons. The soldiers in the waist did not know how serious was the damage she had wreaked, but they were fretting and nervous from their impotence, and their forced inaction. Now the English ship drew nearer, the wind filling her white sails, and bearing her on like a bird through the scudding waves.

Don Juan watched her come, and saw his guns belch fire upon her. But she was close, and there was little damage done,

full half of the Spanish guns shooting above her from the over-tall sides of the galleon. The *Venture* – and he knew now beyond all doubt that it was the *Venture* herself – bore down upon them undaunted.

She came up alongside, discharging her fire into the galleon's waist, and passed on unscathed. Drawing a little ahead of the Spaniard she wore suddenly, came sailing across the galleon's bows, and raked her cruelly fore and aft.

The *Santa Maria* was riddled and groaning; there was panic aboard, and a hopeless confusion. Don Juan knew his ship was crippled and cursed softly in his beard. But he had cool courage enough, and he knew how to rally his men. The *Venture* was coming round, and it was evident that she meant to grapple the larger galleon now. Well, therein lay hope. Let her come: the *Santa Maria* was doomed, but aboard the *Venture* was El Beauvallet – Beauvallet the mocker of Spain, the freebooter, the madman! His capture would be worth even the loss of so noble a galleon as the *Santa Maria*: ay, and more than that! There was not a Spanish admiral who had not that capture for his ambition. Don Juan drew in his breath on the thought. El Beauvallet who bit his thumb at Spain! If it should fall to his lot to take this man of a charmed life prisoner for King Philip he thought he would ask no more of life.

It had been with this in mind that Don Juan had challenged the ship when she hove into sight that afternoon. He had known that El Beauvallet was sailing in these waters; at Santiago he had seen Perinat who had sailed forth to punish the *Venture* not a fortnight ago. Perinat had come back to Santiago in his own long boat, biting his nails, a beaten man. He had talked wildly of witchcraft, of a devil of a man who threw back his head and laughed. Don Juan had sneered at that. The bungler Perinat!

Now it seemed that he too stood in danger of having bungled. He had thrown down the gauntlet to Beauvallet, who never refused a challenge, and Beauvallet had picked it up, and flirted his dainty craft forward through the sparkling sea.

There had been some desire to show a lady what a Narvaez could accomplish. Don Juan chewed his lip, and knew a pang of remorse. Below, in the panelled stateroom, was no less a personage than Don Manuel de Rada y Sylva, late Governor of Santiago, with his daughter Dominica. Don Juan knew only too well in what peril they now stood. But when it came to hand to hand fighting the tables might still be turned.

The soldiers were armed and ready in the waist and on the forecastle. There were gunners, grimed and stained with sweat, standing by their culverins; the brief panic had been swiftly quelled. Let the *Venture* come!

She was near, standing the fire from the long basiliscos; she drew nearer, and through the smoke one might see the men on her with boarding axes and swords, ready for the order to board the Spaniard. Then, suddenly, there was a crack and a roar, the bursting flame and the black smoke of a score of swivel-guns on her decks, all trained upon the waist of the *Santa Maria*. There was havoc wrought among the Spanish soldiery; cries, groans, and oaths rent the air, and swiftly, while havoc lasted, the *Venture* crept up, and grappled the tall galleon.

Men swarmed up the sides, using their boarding axes to form scaling ladders. From the spritsail yard they sprang down upon the deck of the *Santa Maria*, daggers between their teeth, and long swords in hand. No might of Spanish soldiery, maimed as it was by the wicked fire, could stop them. They came on, and the fight was desperate over the slippery decks: sword to sword, slash and cut, and the quick stab of daggers.

Don Juan stood at the head of the companion, sword in hand, a tall figure in breastplate and tassets of fluted steel. He sought in the press for a leader amongst the boarders, but could see none in that hurly-burly.

It was hard fighting, frenzied fighting, over wounded and dead, with ever and again the crack of a dag fired at close range. The pandemonium was intense; no single voice could be distinguished amongst the hubbub of groans, shouted orders, sharp cries, and clash of arms. One could not tell for a while who

had the advantage: the fight swayed and eddied, and the *Santa Maria* lay helpless under all.

A man seemed to spring up out of the mob below, and gained the companion. A moment he stood with his foot upon the first step, looking up at Don Juan, a red sword in his hand, a cloak twisted about his left arm, and a black pointed beard upthrust. A chased morion shaded the upper part of his face, but Don Juan saw white teeth agleam, and crouched for the stroke that should send this stranger to perdition. 'Down, *perro!*' he snarled.

The stranger laughed, and answered him in pure Castilian. 'Nay, señor, the dog comes up.'

Don Juan peered to see more closely into the upturned face. 'Come up and die, dog,' he said softly, 'for I think you are he whom I seek.'

'All Spain seems to seek me, señor,' answered the stranger merrily. 'But who shall slay Nick Beauvallet? Will you try?'

He came up the first steps in a bound, and his sword took Don Juan's in a strong parry that beat it aside for a moment. He brought his cloak swirling into swift play, and entangled Don Juan's sword in it. He was up on the quarter-deck in a flash, even as Don Juan, livid, shook his sword free of the cloak. The two blades rang together, but Don Juan knew that he had met his master. He was forced back and back across the deck to the bulwarks, fighting grimly every inch of the way.

Cruzada, his lieutenant, came running from the poop-deck. Beauvallet saw, and made a quick end. His great sword whirled aloft, cleaved downwards, hissing through the air, and shattered the pauldron over Don Juan's shoulder. Don Juan sank, half-stunned, to his knees, and his sword clattered to the deck. Beauvallet turned, panting, to meet Cruzada.

But there were Englishmen on the quarter-deck now, hard upon the heels of their leader, and from all sides came cries from the Spaniards for quarter. Beauvallet's sword held Cruzada in check. 'Yield, señor, yield,' he said. 'I hold your general prisoner.'

'But yet I may slay you, pirate!' gasped Cruzada.

‘Curb ambition, child,’ Beauvallet said. ‘Here, Daw, Russet, Curlew! Overpower me this springald. Softly, lads, softly!’

Cruzada found himself surrounded, and cried out in fury. Rough hands seized him from behind, and dragged him back; he saw Beauvallet leaning on his sword, and cursed him wildly for a coward and a poltroon.

Beauvallet chuckled at that. ‘Grow a beard, child, and meet me when it’s grown. Mr Dangerfield!’ His lieutenant was at hand. ‘Have a guard about the worthy señor,’ said Beauvallet, and indicated Don Juan by a brief nod. He bent, picked up Don Juan’s sword, and was off, light-footed, down the companion into the waist of the ship.

Don Juan recovered his senses to find himself unarmed, and El Beauvallet gone. He came staggering to his feet, an English hand at his elbow, and was aware of a fair boy confronting him. ‘You are my prisoner, señor,’ said Richard Dangerfield, in halting Spanish. ‘The day is lost.’

The sweat was in Don Juan’s eyes; he brushed it away, and could see the truth of this statement. All over the galleon his men were laying down their arms. The rage and anguish that convulsed him were wiped suddenly from his face. By a supreme effort he recovered his *sosiego*, and stood straight and looked impassively as should befit his breeding. He achieved a bow. ‘I am in your hands, señor.’

Over the quarter-deck towards the poop men were hurrying already in search of plunder. Some three or four stout fellows went clattering down the companion that led to the staterooms. They came upon a sight to astonish them. Backed against the wall, with hands laid along the panelling to either side of her stood a lady, a lady all cream and rose and ebony. Cream her skin, and rose her lips, ebony the lustrous hair confined under a net of gold. Her eyes were dark and large under languorous lids, the brows delicately marked, the nose short and proud, the full lips curved and ripe. She wore a gown of purple camlet, worked cunningly with a pattern of gold thread, with a kirtle of armazine to fall from the veriest hint of a farthingale. Behind her head

reared up a high ruff of lace sewn with crystals. It framed a face piquant and lovely. The square of her bodice was cut low across her breast; a jewel lay upon the white skin, rising and falling with her quickened breath.

The foremost of the invaders stood in an amazed stare, but recovered before those behind him might push forward. 'A wench!' he cried on a coarse laugh. 'A rare wench, as I live!'

His fellows came crowding to get a sight of this miracle. There were sparks of anger in the lady's eyes, and, at the back of them, fear.

A man rose from a high-backed chair by the table, a man of middle age, enfeebled by the West Indian climate. Latent fever had him in its grip; it might be seen in his overbright eyes, and in the intermittent ague that shook him. He wore a long furred gown, and a close cap, and he leaned heavily upon a stick. There was a priest of the Franciscan order beside him, cowed darkly, but the holy man paid no heed to anything but his beads, over which he muttered ceaselessly. The other man went with an infirm step to stand before his daughter, shielding her from curious eyes. 'I demand to be taken before your commander!' he said in the Spanish tongue. 'I am Don Manuel de Rada y Sylva, late Governor of the island of Santiago.'

It is doubtful whether much of this was intelligible to the English seamen. A couple advanced into the stateroom and put Don Manuel aside. 'Hold off, old greybeard!' William Hick advised him, and put a dirty hand under the lady's chin. 'The pretty chuck! Buss me, sweeting!'

There came instead the sound of a ringing slap. William Hick started back with a rueful hand clapped to his cheek. 'Oh, a shrew!'

John Daw caught the lady about her trim waist, clipping one of her arms to her side. The other fighting hand was imprisoned in his huge paw. 'Softly, my cosset, softly!' he chuckled, and gave her a hearty kiss. 'That's the way to use, lads!'

Don Manuel, held between two men, cried out. 'Unhand her, fellow! Your commander! I demand to see your commander!'

They caught at the last word, and it sobered them a little. 'Ay, hail 'em before the General. It's safer.' John Daw pushed Hick aside, who was fingering the jewel about the girl's neck. 'Let be! Do you want Mad Nick after you? Come, lass, on deck with you!'

The lady was forced, resisting to the door. She did not know what they were going to do with her, and struggled wildly, throwing herself back against their pulling hands. It did not serve. 'The curst wench!' growled Hick, still smarting from the blow she had dealt him. He snatched her up into his arms and bore her up the companion to the poop-deck.

There were others gathered there, others who greeted the appearance of this frightened, wrathful lady with amazement and some ribaldry. She was set on her feet, and straightway fell upon Hick like a wild-cat. She ignored a warning cry from her father, brought under ward on to the deck, and hit out at Hick, stamped with her heel on a large foot, scratched at a bearded face. She was seized and held fast, each wrist in custody of a grinning sailor. One of them chucked her under the chin, and laughed hugely to see her throw up her head. 'Little turtle-dove, pretty lovebird!' said John Daw, essaying satire.

There were men crowded all about her, wondering, jesting, feasting their eyes. A lip was smacked; there was a knowing wink and a bawdy joke. The lady shrank.

Then, all at once, a ringing voice authoritatively from beyond the group that encircled her. 'God's death! What's this? Give way there!'

Two men went staggering aside, spun apart by an iron hand on the shoulder of each. The lady looked fearfully into the face of El Beauvallet.

He had cast aside his morion, and his close black hair showed, curling neatly over his head. Under straight brows she saw fine eyes, the blue of the sea with the sunlight on the water. They were bright eyes and keen, vivid under the black lashes; laughing eyes, watchful yet careless.

The laugh was stayed in them now as he checked in his impatient stride. He stood staring; a mobile eyebrow flew up

comically; Sir Nicholas Beauvallet appeared incredulous, and blinked at this unexpected vision.

His glance, quick moving, took in next the lady's captors, and the stilled laughter went right out of his eyes. He was swift in action, too swift for Hick, still stupidly grasping one of the lady's wrists. A clenched fist shot out and took Master Hick neatly on the point of the jaw. Master Hick fell a-sprawl on the deck. 'Cullions! Daw-cocks!' said Beauvallet terribly, and swung round to deal in kind with John Daw.

But Master Daw had hurriedly released the wrist he held, and was making off as quickly as he could. He was sped on his way by a shrewd kick to the rearward. Beauvallet turned to the lady. 'A million pardons, señora!' he said, as though here were no great matter.

The lady was forced to admit him to be a personable fellow, and she found his smile irresistible. She bit back an answering gleam: one would not smile friendly upon an English free-booter. 'Unhand my father, señor!' she commanded, mighty haughty.

The tone seemed to amuse Beauvallet; his shoulders shook appreciatively. He looked round for sign of my lady's parent, and saw him standing between guards who straightway let him go, and stepped back in something of a hurry.

Don Manuel was shaken, and ashen pale. He spoke breathlessly. 'I demand instantly to see the commander!'

'A million more pardons!' Beauvallet responded. 'Behold the commander, Nicholas Beauvallet, at your service!'

The lady exclaimed at that. 'I knew it! You are El Beauvallet!'

Beauvallet turned to her; the eyebrow was raised again, and the eyes themselves were twinkling. 'Himself, señora. Wholly at your feet.'

'I,' said Don Manuel stiffly, 'am Don Manuel de Rada y Sylva. You address my daughter, Dona Dominica. I demand to know the meaning of this outrage.'

'Outrage?' said Beauvallet, honestly puzzled. 'What outrage, señor?'

Don Manuel flushed, and pointed a shaking finger to the shambles forward. 'You need ask, señor?'

'The fight! Why, to say truth, noble señor, I had thought that this ship opened fire upon me,' said Beauvallet pleasantly. 'And I was never one to refuse a challenge.'

'Where,' demanded Dona Dominica, 'is Don Juan de Narvaez?'

'Under guard, señora, until he goes aboard his own long boat.'

'You beat him! You, with that little ship!'

Beauvallet laughed out at that. 'I, with that little ship,' he bowed.

'What of us?' Don Manuel interrupted.

Sir Nicholas looked rueful, ran a hand through his crisp hair. 'You have me there, señor,' he confessed. 'What a-plague are you doing aboard this vessel?'

'I conceive that to be none of your business, señor. If you must know I am on my way home from Santiago to Spain.'

'Why, an evil chance,' said Beauvallet sympathetically. 'What folly possessed that numskull of a commander of yours to open fire on me?'

'Don Juan did his duty, señor,' said Don Manuel haughtily.

'Alack then, that virtue has not been better rewarded,' said Sir Nicholas lightly. 'And what am I to do with you?' He bit his finger, pondering the question. 'There is of course the long boat. She puts off as soon as may be for the island of Dominica. It lies some three miles to the north of us. Do you choose to go aboard her?'

Dona Dominica took a quick step forward. Since her fears were lulled her temper rose. This careless manner was not to be borne. She broke into impassioned speech, shooting her words at Beauvallet. 'Is that all you can say? Sea-robber! Hateful pirate! Is it nothing to you that we must put back to the Indies and wait perhaps months for another ship? Oh nothing, nothing! You see where my father stands, a sick man, and you care nothing that you expose him to such rough usage. Base, wicked robber! What

do you care! Nothing! I could spit on you for a vile English freebooter!’ She ended in a sob of rage, and stamped her foot at him.

‘Good lack!’ said Beauvallet, staring down into that exquisite face of fury. A smile of amusement and of admiration crept into his eyes. It caused Dona Dominica to lose the last shreds of her temper. What would you? She was a maid all fire and spirit. She struck at him, and he caught her hand and held it, pulled her closer, and looked down into her face with eyes a-twinkle. ‘I cry pardon, señora. We will amend all.’ He turned his head and sent a shout ringing for his lieutenant.

‘Loose me!’ Dominica said, and tried to pull her hand away. ‘Loose me!’

‘Why, you would scratch me if I did,’ Beauvallet said, teasing.

It was not to be borne. The lady’s eyes fell, and encountered the hilt of a dagger in Beauvallet’s belt. She raised them again, held his in a defiant stare, and stole her hand to the dagger’s hilt.

Sir Nicholas looked quickly down, saw what she would be at, and laughed. ‘Brave lass!’ He let her go, let her draw out his dagger, and flung wide his arms. ‘Come then! Have at me!’

She stepped back, uncertain and bewildered, wondering what manner of man was this who could mock at death itself. ‘If you touch me I will kill you,’ she said through her teeth.

Still he came on, twinkling, daring her. She drew back until the bulwarks stayed her.

‘Now strike!’ invited Beauvallet. ‘I’ll swear you have the stomach for it!’

‘My daughter!’ Don Manuel was aghast. ‘Give back that knife! I command you! Señor, be good enough to stand back.’

Beauvallet turned away from the lady. It seemed he gave no second thought to the dangerous weapon she held. He waited for Dangerfield to come up, standing with his hands tucked negligently into his belt.

‘Sir, you called me?’

Beauvallet indicated Don Manuel and his daughter with a

comprehensive sweep of his hand. 'Convey Don Manuel de Rada y Sylva and his daughter aboard the *Venture*,' he said, in Spanish.

Don Manuel started; Dominica gave a gasp. 'Is it a jest, señor?' Don Manuel demanded.

'In God's Name, why should I jest?'

'You make us prisoners?'

'Nay, I bid you be my guests, señor. I said I would amend all.'

The lady broke out again. 'You mock us! You shall not take us aboard your ship. We will not go!'

Beauvallet set his hands on his hips. The mobile eyebrow went up again. 'How now? First you will and then you will not. You tell me I am a dog to hinder your return to Spain, and curse me roundly for a rogue. Well, I have said I will amend the fault: I will convey you to Spain with all speed. What ails you then?'

'Take us to Spain!' said Don Manuel uncomprehendingly.

'You cannot!' cried Dominica, incredulous. 'You dare not!'

'Dare not? God's Son, I am Nick Beauvallet!' said Sir Nicholas, amazed. 'Dared I sail into Vigo a year back, and lay all waste? What should stop me?'

She flung up her hands, and the dagger flashed in the sunlight. 'Oh, now I know that they named you well who named you Mad Beauvallet!'

'You have it wrong,' Beauvallet said, jesting. 'Mad Nicholas is the name they call me. I make you free of it, señora.'

Don Manuel interposed. 'Señor, I do not understand you. I cannot believe you speak in good faith.'

'The best in the world, señor. Is an Englishman's word good enough?'

Don Manuel knew not how to answer. It was left for his daughter to say No, very hotly. All she got by that was a quick look and a slight laugh.

Across the deck came Don Juan de Narvaez, stately even in defeat. He bowed low to Don Manuel, lower still to Dona Dominica, and ignored Beauvallet. 'Señor, the boat waits. Permit me to escort you.'

‘Get you aboard, Señor Punctilio,’ said Sir Nicholas. ‘Don Manuel sails with me.’

‘No!’ said Dominica. But it is very certain that she meant yes.

‘I have no desire to jest with you, señor,’ Don Juan said coldly. ‘Don Manuel de Rada naturally sails with me.’

A long finger beckoned to Don Juan’s guard. ‘Escort Don Juan to the long boat,’ said Sir Nicholas.

‘I do not stir from here without Don Manuel and his daughter,’ said Narvaez, and struck an attitude.

‘Take him away,’ said Sir Nicholas, bored. ‘God speed you, señor.’ Narvaez was led away, protesting. ‘Señora, be pleased to go aboard the *Venture*. Diccon, have their traps conveyed at once.’

Dominica braved him, to see what might come of it. ‘I will not go!’ She clenched the dagger. ‘Constrain me at your peril!’

‘A challenge?’ inquired Beauvallet. ‘Oh, rash! I told you that I never refused a challenge.’ He bore down upon her, and dodged, laughing, the dagger’s point. He caught her wrist, and had his other arm firmly clipped about her waist. ‘Cry peace, sweetheart,’ he said, and took the dagger from her, and restored it to its sheath. ‘Come!’ he said, tossed her up in his arms, and strode off with her to the quarter-deck.

Dominica forebore resistance. It would be useless, she knew, and her dignity would suffer. She permitted herself to be carried off, and liked the manner of it. They did not use such ready methods in Spain. There was great strength in the arm that upheld her, and the very carelessness of the man intrigued one. A strange, mad fellow, with an odd directness. One would know more of him.

She was carried down the companion into the waist, where the men were busy with the treasure – China silks, and linen-cloths, ingots of gold, bars of silver, and spices from the islands. ‘Robber!’ said Dominica softly.

He chuckled. It was annoying. To the bulwarks he went, and she wondered how he would manage now. But he did it easily enough, with a hand on the shrouds, and a leap up. He stood

poised a moment. ‘Welcome aboard the *Venture*, sweetheart!’ he said audaciously, and climbed down with her safe tucked in his arm to his own poop-deck below.

She was set on her feet, ruffled and speechless, and saw her father being helped carefully down the side of the tall galleon. Don Manuel appeared to be both bewildered and amused.

‘See them well bestowed, Diccon,’ Beauvallet bade the fair youth, and went back the way he had come.

‘Will it please you to come below, señora?’ Dangerfield said shyly, and bowed to them both. ‘Your chests will be here anon.’

Don Manuel smiled a little wryly. ‘I think the man is either mad – or else – an odd, whimsical fellow, my daughter,’ he remarked. ‘We shall doubtless learn which in time.’

Two

Dona Dominica was escorted below decks, and led to a fair cabin which she guessed to be the home of Master Dangerfield, hurriedly evicted. She was left there alone, while Master Dangerfield took her father on to yet another cabin. She took stock of her surroundings, and was pleased to approve. There were mellow walls, oak-panelled, a cushioned seat under the porthole, a table with carved legs, a joint-stool, a fine Flanders chest, a cupboard against the bulkhead, and the bunk.

There was presently a discreet scratching on the door. She bade enter, and a small man with an inquisitive nose and very bravely curling mustachios insinuated his head into the room. Dona Dominica regarded him in silence. A pair of shrewd grey eyes smiled deprecatingly. 'Permit that I bring your chests, señora,' said the newcomer in perfect Spanish. 'Also your ladyship's woman.'

'Maria!' called out Dominica joyfully.

The door was opened farther to admit a plump creature who flew to her, and sobbed, and laughed. 'Señorita! They have not harmed you!' She fell to patting Dominica's hands, and kissing them.

'But where were you all this time?' Dominica asked.

'They locked me in the cabin, señorita! Miguel de Vasso it was! Serve him right that he took a grievous knock on the head! But you?'

'I am safe,' Dominica answered. 'But what will happen to us I know not. The world's upside down, I believe.'

The man with the mustachios came into the room and revealed a spare figure garbed in sober brown fustian. 'Have no fear, señora,' said this worthy cheerfully. 'You sail upon the *Venture*, and we do not harm women. Faith of an Englishman!'

'Who are you?' Dominica asked.

'I,' said the thin man, puffing out his chest, 'am no less a person, señora, than Sir Nicholas Beauvallet's own familiar servant, Joshua Dimmock, at your orders. Ho, there! bring on the baggage!' This was addressed to someone without. In a moment two youngers appeared laden, and dumped down their burdens upon the floor. They lingered, gaping at the lady, but Joshua waved his hands at them. 'Hence, get hence, numskulls!' He hustled them out, and shut the door upon them. 'Please you, noble lady, I will dispose.' He looked upon the mountain of baggage, laid a finger to his nose, skipped to the cupboard, and flung it open. The raiment of Master Dangerfield was exposed to Maria's titters. Joshua swooped, came away with an armful of doublets and hose, and cast them into the alleyway outside the cabin. 'Ho there! Avoid me these trappings!' he commanded, and the two women heard footsteps coming quickly in obedience to the summons. Joshua returned to the cupboard and swept it bare, flung out the boots and the pantoffles that stood ranged upon its floor, and stepped back to observe with pride the barrenness of his creating. 'So!' The chest caught his eye; he went to it in a rush, lifted the lid, and clicked his tongue in impatience. He seemed to dive into it head first.

Dominica sat down on the cushioned seat to watch the surprising gyrations of Master Dimmock. Maria knelt by her, clasping a hand still in both of hers, and giggled under her breath. An indignant voice was uplifted in the alleyway. 'Who cast them here? That coystrill! Dimmock, Joshua Dimmock, may the black vomit seize you! Master Dangerfield's fine Venice hosen to lie in the dust! Come out, ye skinny rogue!'

Joshua emerged from the chest with an armful of shirts and netherstocks. The door was rudely opened; Master Dangerfield's

servant sought to make a hasty entrance, but was met on the threshold by Joshua, who thrust the pile of linen into his arms, and drove him out. 'Avoid them! Avoid, fool! The noble lady hath this cabin. By the General's orders, mark you! Hold your peace, wastrel! The Venice hose! What's that to me? Make order there! Pick up that handruff, that boot, those stocks! There are more shirts to come. Await me!' He came back, spread his hands, and shrugged expressive shoulders. 'Heed naught, señora. A hapless fool. Master Dangerfield's man. We shall have all in order presently.'

'I should not wish to turn Master Dangerfield from his cabin,'
Dominica said. 'Is there none other might house me?'

'Most noble lady! Waste no moment's thought upon it!' Joshua said, shocked. 'Master Dangerfield, forsooth! A likely gentleman, I allow, but a mere lad from the nursery. This mountain of raiment! Ho, the young men! all alike! I dare swear a full score of shirts. Sir Nicholas himself owns not so many.' He threw the rest of Master Dangerfield's wardrobe out of the cabin, and shut the door smartly upon the protests of Master Dangerfield's man.

Dominica watched the disposal of her baggage about the room. 'I must suppose you a man of worth,' she said, gently satirical.

'You may say so, indeed, señora. I am the servant of Sir Nicholas. I have the ear. I am obeyed. Thus it is to be the lackey of a great man, lady,' Joshua answered complacently.

'Oh, is this Sir Nicholas a great man by your reckoning?'

'None greater, lady,' said Joshua promptly. 'I have served him these fifteen years, and seen none to equal him. And I have been about the world, mark you! Ay, we have done some junketting to and fro. I allow you Sir Francis Drake to be a man well enough, but lacking in some small matters wherein we have the advantage of him. His birth, for example, will not rank with ours. By no means! Raleigh? Pshaw! he lacks our ready wit: we laugh in his sour countenance! Howard? A fig for him! I say no more, and leave you to judge. That popinjay, Leicester? Bah! A man of

no weight. We, and we alone have never failed in our undertakings. And why, you ask? Very simply, señora: we reckon not! The Queen's grace said it with her own august lips. "God's death," quoth she – her favourite oath, mark you! – "God's death, Sir Nicholas, you should take *Reck Not* to be your watchword!" With reason, most gracious lady! Certain we reckon not. We bite our glove in challenge to whosoever ye will. We take what we will: Beauvallet's way!

Maria sniffed, and cocked up her pert nose. Joshua looked severely. 'Mark it, mistress! I speak for both: we reckon not.'

'He is a bold man,' Dominica said, half to herself.

Joshua beamed upon her. 'You speak sooth, señora. Bold! Ay, a very panther. We laugh at fear. That's for lesser men. I shall uncord these bundles, gracious lady, so it please you.'

'What is he? What is his birth?' Dominica asked. 'Is he base or noble?'

Joshua bent a frown of some dignity upon her. 'Would I serve one who was of base birth, señora? No! We are very nobly born. The knighthood was not needed to mark our degree. An honour granted upon our return from Drake's voyage round the world. I allow it to have been due, but we needed it not. Sir Nicholas stands heir to a barony, no less!'

'So!' said Dominica with interest.

'Ay, and indeed. He is own brother to Lord Beauvallet. A solid man, señora, lacking our wits, maybe, but a comfortable wise lord. He looks askance at all this trafficking upon the high seas.' Joshua forgot for a moment his rôle of admiring and faithful servant. 'Well he may! Rolling up and down the world, never at rest – it is not fit! We are no longer boys to delight in harebrained schemes and chancy ventures. But what would you? A madness is in us; we must always be up and about, nosing out danger.' He rolled up the cords he had untied. 'I leave you, señora. Ha! we cast off!' He hopped to the porthole, and peered out. 'In good time: that hulk is done. I go now to see the noble señor safely housed. By your leave, señora!'

'Where is my father?' Dominica asked.

‘Hard by, señora. You may rap on this bulkhead, and he will hear. Mistress –’ he looked austerely at Maria – ‘see to the noble lady!’

‘Impudence!’ Maria cried. But the door had shut behind Joshua Dimmock.

‘An oddity,’ said Dominica. ‘Well – like master, like man.’ She went to the port, and stood on tiptoe to look out. The waves were hissing round the sides of the *Venture*. ‘I cannot see our ship. That man said she was done.’ She came away from the port. ‘And so here we are, upon an English ship, and in an enemy’s power. What shall come of it, I wonder?’ She did not seem to be disturbed.

‘Let them dare to touch you!’ Maria said, arms akimbo. ‘I am not locked in my cabin twice, señorita!’ She abandoned the fierce attitude, and began to unpack my lady’s baggage. She shook out a gown of stiff crimson brocade, and sighed over it. ‘Alas, the brodered taffety that I had in my mind for you to wear this night!’ she lamented.

Dominica smiled secretly. ‘I will wear it,’ she said.

Maria stared. ‘Your finest gown to be wasted on a party of English pirates! Now if it were Don Juan –’

Dominica was impatient suddenly. ‘Don Juan! A fool! A beaten braggart! He strutted, and swore he would sink this ship to the bottom of the sea, and take the great Beauvallet a prisoner to Spain! I hate a man to be beaten! Lay out the gown, girl. I will wear it, and the rubies too.’

‘Never say so, señorita!’ cried Maria in genuine horror. ‘I have your jewels safe hid in my bosom. They would tear them from your neck!’

‘The rubies!’ Dominica repeated. ‘We are here as the guests of El Beauvallet, and I vow we will play the part right royally!’

There was a soft scratching on the door, and Don Manuel looked in. ‘Well, my child?’ he said, and looked around him with approval.

Dona Dominica waved her hand. ‘As you see, señor, I am very well. And you?’

He nodded, and came to sit beside her. 'They house us snugly enough. There is a strange creature giving orders to my man at this moment. He says he is El Beauvallet's lackey. I do not understand these English servants, and the license they have. The creature talks without pause.' He drew his gown about his knees. 'We labour with the unexpected,' he complained, and looked gravely at his daughter. 'The commander bids us to supper. We shall not forget, Dominica, that we sail as guests upon this ship.'

'No,' said Dominica doubtfully.

'We shall use Sir Nicholas with courtesy,' added Don Manuel.

'Yes, señor,' said Dominica, more doubtfully still.

An hour later Joshua came once more to her door. Supper awaited her, he said, and bowed her down the alleyway to the stateroom. She went regally, and rubies glowed on her bosom. The dull red of her stiff gown made her skin appear the whiter; she carried a fan of feathers in her hand, and had a wired ruff of lace sewn over with jewels behind her head.

The stateroom was low pitched, lit by two lamps hung on chains from the thick beams above. On the bulkhead opposite the door arms were emblazoned, arms crossed with the bar sinister, and with a scroll round the base, bearing the legend *Sans Peur*. A table was spread in the middle of the room, and there were high-backed chairs of Spanish make set round it. Beside one of these was standing Master Dangerfield, point-de-vice in a bombasted doublet of grograine, and the famous Venice hosen. He bowed and blushed when he saw Dominica, and was eager to set a chair for her.

She had no quarrel with Dangerfield; she smiled upon him, enslaved him straightway, and sat her down at the table, unconcernedly fanning herself.

There was a cheerful voice uplifted without, a strong masculine voice that had a ringing quality. One might always know when Sir Nicholas Beauvallet approached.

He came in, apparently cracking some jest, escorting Don Manuel.

Dominica surveyed him through her lashes. Even in dinted

armour, with his hair damp with sweat, and his hands grimed with powder he had appeared to her personable. She saw him now transformed.

He wore a purple doublet, slashed and paned, with great sleeves slit to show stitched linen beneath. A high collar clipped his throat about, and had a little starched ruff atop. Over it jutted his beard: none of your spade beards this, but a rare stiletto, black as his close hair. He affected the round French hosen, puffed about the thighs, and the netherstocks known in England as Lord Leicester's since only a man with as good a leg as his might reasonably wear them. There were rosettes upon his shoon, and knotted garters, rich with silver lace, below his knees. Starched handruffs were turned back from his wrists; he wore a jewel on one long finger, and about his neck a golden chain with a scented pomander hanging from it.

He entered, and his quick glance took in Dominica at the table. He swept her a bow, and showed his even white teeth in a smile that was boyish and swift, and curiously infectious. 'Well, met, señora! Has my rogue seen to your comfort? A chair for Don Manuel, Diccon!' The room seemed to be full of Sir Nicholas Beauvallet, a forceful presence.

'I am ashamed to have stolen Señor Dangerfield's cabin from him,' Dominica said, with a pretty smile bestowed upon Richard.

He stammered a disclaimer. It was an honour, a privilege. Dominica, choosing to ignore Beauvallet at the head of the table, pursued a halting conversation with Dangerfield, exerting herself to captivate. No difficult task this: the lad looked with eyes of shy admiration already.

'A strange, whimsical fellow ordered everything, señor,' she said. 'I cry pardon: it was not I threw your traps out on to the alleyway! I hope the master was not so incensed as was the man?'

Dangerfield smiled. 'Ay, that would be Joshua, señora. My man's a fool, a dolt. He is greatly enraged against Joshua. You must understand, señora, that Joshua is an original. I daresay he