

The Riddle of the Sands

by Erskine Childers

The Riddle of the Sands (1903)

A Record of Secret Service Recently Achieved

Edited by

Erskine Childers

(1870-1922)

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Preface

A WORD about the origin and authorship of this book.

In October last (1902), my friend 'Carruthers' visited me in my chambers, and, under a provisional pledge of secrecy, told me frankly the whole of the adventure described in these pages. Till then I had only known as much as the rest of his friends, namely, that he had recently undergone experiences during a yachting cruise with a certain Mr 'Davies' which had left a deep mark on his character and habits.

At the end of his narrative—which, from its bearing on studies and speculations of my own, as well as from its intrinsic interest and racy delivery, made a very deep impression on me—he added that the important facts discovered in the course of the cruise had, without a moment's delay, been communicated to the proper authorities, who, after some dignified incredulity, due in part, perhaps, to the pitiful inadequacy of their own secret service, had, he believed, made use of them, to avert a great national danger. I say 'he believed', for though it was beyond question that the danger was averted for the time, it was doubtful whether they had stirred a foot to combat it, the secret discovered being of such a nature that mere suspicion of it on this side was likely to destroy its efficacy.

There, however that may be, the matter rested for a while, as, for personal reasons which will be manifest to the reader, he and Mr 'Davies' expressly wished it to rest.

But events were driving them to reconsider their decision. These seemed to show that the information wrung with such peril and labour from the German Government, and transmitted so promptly to our own, had had none but the most transitory influence on our policy. Forced to the conclusion that the national security was really being neglected, the two friends now had a mind to make their story public; and it was about this that 'Carruthers' wished for my advice. The great drawback was that an Englishman, bearing an honoured name, was disgracefully implicated, and that unless infinite delicacy were used, innocent persons, and, especially, a young lady, would suffer pain and indignity, if his identity were known. Indeed, troublesome rumours, containing a grain of truth and a mass of falsehood, were already afloat.

After weighing both sides of the question, I gave my vote emphatically for publication. The personal drawbacks could, I thought, with tact be neutralized; while, from the public point of view, nothing but good could come from submitting the case to the common sense of the country at large. Publication, therefore, was agreed upon, and the next point was the form it should take. 'Carruthers', with the concurrence of Mr 'Davies', was for a bald exposition of the essential facts, stripped of their warm human envelope. I was strongly against this course, first, because it would aggravate instead of allaying the rumours that were current; secondly, because in such a form the narrative would not carry conviction, and would thus defeat its own end. The persons and the events were indissolubly connected; to evade, abridge, suppress, would be to convey to the reader the idea of a concocted hoax. Indeed, I took bolder ground still, urging that the story should be made as explicit and circumstantial as possible, frankly and honestly for the

purpose of entertaining and so of attracting a wide circle of readers. Even anonymity was undesirable. Nevertheless, certain precautions were imperatively needed.

To cut the matter short, they asked for my assistance and received it at once. It was arranged that I should edit the book; that 'Carruthers' should give me his diary and recount to me in fuller detail and from his own point of view all the phases of the 'quest', as they used to call it; that Mr 'Davies' should meet me with his charts and maps and do the same; and that the whole story should be written, as from the mouth of the former, with its humours and errors, its light and its dark side, just as it happened; with the following few limitations. The year it belongs to is disguised; the names of persons are throughout fictitious; and, at my instance certain slight liberties have been taken to conceal the identity of the English characters.

Remember, also that these persons are living now in the midst of us, and if you find one topic touched on with a light and hesitating pen, do not blame the Editor, who, whether they are known or not, would rather say too little than say a word that might savour of impertinence.

E. C.

March 1903

NOTE

The maps and charts are based on British and German Admiralty charts, with irrelevant details omitted.

I. The Letter

I HAVE read of men who, when forced by their calling to live for long periods in utter solitude—save for a few black faces—have made it a rule to dress regularly for dinner in order to maintain their self-respect and prevent a relapse into barbarism. It was in some such spirit, with an added touch of self-consciousness, that, at seven o'clock in the evening of September 23 in a recent year, I was making my evening toilet in my chambers in Pall Mall. I thought the date and the place justified the parallel; to my advantage even; for the obscure Burmese administrator might well be a man of blunted sensibilities and coarse fibre, and at least he is alone with nature, while I—well, a young man of condition and fashion, who knows the right people, belongs to the right clubs, has a safe, possibly a brilliant, future in the Foreign Office—may be excused for a sense of complacent martyrdom, when, with his keen appreciation of the social calendar, he is doomed to the outer solitude of London in September. I say 'martyrdom', but in fact the case was infinitely worse. For to feel oneself a martyr, as everybody knows, is a pleasurable thing, and the true tragedy of my position was that I had passed that stage. I had enjoyed what sweets it had to offer in ever dwindling degree since the middle of August, when ties were still fresh and sympathy abundant. I had been conscious that I was missed at Morven Lodge party. Lady Ashleigh herself had said so in the kindest possible manner, when she wrote to acknowledge the letter in which I explained, with an effectively austere reserve of language, that circumstances compelled me to remain at my office. 'We know how busy you must be just now', she wrote, 'and I do hope you won't overwork; we shall *all* miss you very much.' Friend after friend 'got away' to sport and fresh air, with promises to write and chaffing condolences, and as each deserted the sinking ship, I took a grim delight in my misery, positively almost enjoying the first week or two after my world had been finally dissipated to the four bracing winds of heaven. I began to take a spurious interest in the remaining five millions, and wrote several clever letters in a vein of cheap satire, indirectly suggesting the pathos of my position, but indicating that I was broad-minded enough to find intellectual entertainment in the scenes, persons, and habits of London in the dead season. I even did rational things at the instigation of others. For, though I should have liked total isolation best, I, of course, found that there was a sediment of unfortunates like myself, who, unlike me, viewed the situation in a most prosaic light. There were river excursions, and so on, after office-hours; but I dislike the river at any time for its noisy vulgarity, and most of all at this season. So I dropped out of the fresh air brigade and declined H——'s offer to share a riverside cottage and run up to town in the mornings. I did spend one or two week-ends with the Catesbys in Kent; but I was not inconsolable when they let their house and went abroad, for I found that such partial compensations did not suit me. Neither did the taste for satirical observation last. A passing thirst, which I dare say many have shared, for adventures of the fascinating kind described in the *New Arabian Nights* led me on a few evenings into some shady haunts in Soho and farther eastward; but was finally quenched one sultry Saturday night after an hour's immersion in the reeking atmosphere of a low music-hall in Ratcliffe Highway, where I sat next a portly

female who suffered from the heat, and at frequent intervals refreshed herself and an infant from a bottle of tepid stout.

By the first week in September I had abandoned all palliatives, and had settled into the dismal but dignified routine of office, club, and chambers. And now came the most cruel trial, for the hideous truth dawned on me that the world I found so indispensable could after all dispense with me. It was all very well for Lady Ashleigh to assure me that I was deeply missed; but a letter from F——, who was one of the party, written 'in haste, just starting to shoot', and coming as a tardy reply to one of my cleverest, made me aware that the house party had suffered little from my absence, and that few sighs were wasted on me, even in the quarter which I had assumed to have been discreetly alluded to by the underlined *all* in Lady Ashleigh's 'we shall *all* miss you'. A thrust which smarted more, if it bit less deeply, came from my cousin Nesta, who wrote: 'It's horrid for you to have to be baking in London now; but, after all, it must be a great pleasure to you' (malicious little wretch!) 'to have such interesting and important work to do.' Here was a nemesis for an innocent illusion I had been accustomed to foster in the minds of my relations and acquaintances, especially in the breasts of the trustful and admiring maidens whom I had taken down to dinner in the last two seasons; a fiction which I had almost reached the point of believing in myself. For the plain truth was that my work was neither interesting nor important, and consisted chiefly at present in smoking cigarettes, in saying that Mr So-and-So was away and would be back about October 1, in being absent for lunch from twelve till two, and in my spare moments making *précis* of—let us say—the less confidential consular reports, and squeezing the results into cast-iron schedules. The reason of my detention was not a cloud on the international horizon—though I may say in passing that there was such a cloud—but a caprice on the part of a remote and mighty personage, the effect of which, ramifying downwards, had dislocated the carefully-laid holiday plans of the humble juniors, and in my own small case had upset the arrangement between myself and K——, who positively liked the dog-days in Whitehall.

Only one thing was needed to fill my cup of bitterness, and this it was that specially occupied me as I dressed for dinner this evening. Two days more in this dead and fermenting city and my slavery would be at an end. Yes, but—irony of ironies!—I had nowhere to go to! The Morven Lodge party was breaking up. A dreadful rumour as to an engagement which had been one of its accursed fruits tormented me with the fresh certainty that I had not been missed, and bred in me that most desolating brand of cynicism which is produced by defeat through insignificance. Invitations for a later date, which I had declined in July with a gratifying sense of being much in request, now rose up spectrally to taunt me. There was at least one which I could easily have revived, but neither in this case nor in any other had there been any renewal of pressure, and there are moments when the difference between proposing oneself and surrendering as a prize to one of several eagerly competing hostesses seems too crushing to be contemplated. My own people were at Aix for my father's gout; to join them was a *pis-aller* whose banality was repellent. Besides, they would be leaving soon for our home in Yorkshire, and I was not a prophet in my own country. In short, I was at the extremity of depression.

The usual preliminary scuffle on the staircase prepared me for the knock and entry of Withers. (One of the things which had for some time ceased to amuse me was the laxity of manners, proper to the season, among the servants of the big block of chambers where I lived.) Withers demurely handed me a letter bearing a German post-mark and marked 'Urgent'. I had just finished dressing, and was collecting my money and gloves. A momentary thrill of curiosity broke in upon my depression as I sat down to open it. A corner on the reverse of the envelope bore the blotted legend: 'Very sorry, but there's one other thing—a pair of rigging screws from Carey and Neilson's, size 1-3/8, *galvanized*.' Here it is:

Yacht *Dulcibella*,

Flensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, *Sept.* 21.

Dear Carruthers,—I daresay you'll be surprised at hearing from me, as it's ages since we met. It is more than likely, too, that what I'm going to suggest won't suit you, for I know nothing of your plans, and if you're in town at all you're probably just getting into harness again and can't get away. So I merely write on the offchance to ask if you would care to come out here and join me in a little yachting, and, I hope, duck-shooting. I know you're keen on shooting, and I sort of remember that you have done some yachting too, though I rather forget about that. This part of the Baltic—the Schleswig fiords—is a splendid cruising-ground—A 1 scenery—and there ought to be plenty of duck about soon, if it gets cold enough. I came out here *via* Holland and the Frisian Islands, starting early in August. My pals have had to leave me, and I'm badly in want of another, as I don't want to lay up yet for a bit. I needn't say how glad I should be if you could come. If you can, send me a wire to the P.O. here. Flushing and on by Hamburg will be your best route, I think. I'm having a few repairs done here, and will have them ready sharp by the time your train arrives. Bring your gun and a good lot of No. 4's; and would you mind calling at Lancaster's and asking for mine, and bringing it too? Bring some oilskins. Better get the eleven-shilling sort, jacket and trousers—not the 'yachting' brand; and if you paint bring your gear. I know you speak German like a native, and that will be a great help. Forgive this hail of directions, but I've a sort of feeling that I'm in luck and that you'll come. Anyway, I hope you and the F.O. both flourish. Good-bye.

Yours ever, Arthur H. Davies.

Would you mind bringing me out a *prismatic compass*, and a pound of Raven Mixture?

This letter marked an epoch for me; but I little suspected the fact as I crumpled it into my pocket and started languidly on the *voie douloureuse* which I nightly followed to the club. In Pall Mall there were no dignified greetings to be exchanged now with well-groomed acquaintances. The only people to be seen were some late stragglers from the park, with a perambulator and some hot and dusty children lagging fretfully behind; some rustic sightseers draining the last dregs of the daylight in an effort to make out from their guide-books which of these reverend piles was which; a policeman and a builder's cart. Of course the club was a strange one, both of my own being closed for cleaning, a coincidence expressly planned by Providence for my inconvenience. The club which you are 'permitted to make use of' on these occasions always irritates with its strangeness and discomfort. The few occupants seem odd and oddly dressed, and

you wonder how they got there. The particular weekly that you want is not taken in; the dinner is execrable, and the ventilation a farce. All these evils oppressed me to-night. And yet I was puzzled to find that somewhere within me there was a faint lightening of the spirits; causeless, as far as I could discover. It could not be Davies's letter. Yachting in the Baltic at the end of September! The very idea made one shudder. Cowes, with a pleasant party and hotels handy, was all very well. An August cruise on a steam yacht in French waters or the Highlands was all very well; but what kind of a yacht was this? It must be of a certain size to have got so far, but I thought I remembered enough of Davies's means to know that he had no money to waste on luxuries. That brought me to the man himself. I had known him at Oxford—not as one of my immediate set; but we were a sociable college, and I had seen a good deal of him, liking him for his physical energy combined with a certain simplicity and modesty, though, indeed, he had nothing to be conceited about; liked him, in fact, in the way that at that receptive period one likes many men whom one never keeps up with later. We had both gone down in the same year—three years ago now. I had gone to France and Germany for two years to learn the languages; he had failed for the Indian Civil, and then had gone into a solicitor's office. I had only seen him since at rare intervals, though I admitted to myself that for his part he had clung loyally to what ties of friendship there were between us. But the truth was that we had drifted apart from the nature of things. I had passed brilliantly into my profession, and on the few occasions I had met him since I made my triumphant *début* in society I had found nothing left in common between us. He seemed to know none of my friends, he dressed indifferently, and I thought him dull. I had always connected him with boats and the sea, but never with yachting, in the sense that I understood it. In college days he had nearly persuaded me into sharing a squalid week in some open boat he had picked up, and was going to sail among some dreary mudflats somewhere on the east coast. There was nothing else, and the funereal function of dinner drifted on. But I found myself remembering at the *entrée* that I had recently heard, at second or third hand, of something else about him—exactly what I could not recall. When I reached the savoury, I had concluded, so far as I had centred my mind on it at all, that the whole thing was a culminating irony, as, indeed, was the savoury in its way. After the wreck of my pleasant plans and the fiasco of my martyrdom, to be asked as consolation to spend October freezing in the Baltic with an eccentric nonentity who bored me! Yet, as I smoked my cigar in the ghastly splendour of the empty smoking-room, the subject came up again. Was there anything in it? There were certainly no alternatives at hand. And to bury myself in the Baltic at this unearthly time of year had at least a smack of tragic thoroughness about it.

I pulled out the letter again, and ran down its impulsive staccato sentences, affecting to ignore what a gust of fresh air, high spirits, and good fellowship this flimsy bit of paper wafted into the jaded club-room. On reperusal, it was full of evil presage—'A 1 scenery'—but what of equinoctial storms and October fogs? Every sane yachtsman was paying off his crew now. 'There ought to be duck'—vague, very vague. 'If it gets cold enough'—cold and yachting seemed to be a gratuitously monstrous union. His pals had left him; why? 'Not the "yachting" brand'; and why not? As to the size, comfort, and crew of the yacht—all cheerfully ignored; so many maddening blanks. And, by the way, why in Heaven's name 'a prismatic compass'? I fingered a few magazines, played a game of fifty with a friendly old fogey, too importunate to be worth the labour of resisting, and

went back to my chambers to bed, ignorant that a friendly Providence had come to my rescue; and, indeed, rather resenting any clumsy attempt at such friendliness.

II. **The *Dulcibella***

THAT two days later I should be found pacing the deck of the Flushing steamer with a ticket for Hamburg in my pocket may seem a strange result, yet not so strange if you have divined my state of mind. You will guess, at any rate, that I was armed with the conviction that I was doing an act of obscure penance, rumours of which might call attention to my lot and perhaps awaken remorse in the right quarter, while it left me free to enjoy myself unobtrusively in the remote event of enjoyment being possible.

The fact was that, at breakfast on the morning after the arrival of the letter, I had still found that inexplicable lightening which I mentioned before, and strong enough to warrant a revival of the pros and cons. An important pro which I had not thought of before was that after all it was a good-natured piece of unselfishness to join Davies; for he had spoken of the want of a pal, and seemed honestly to be in need of me. I almost clutched at this consideration. It was an admirable excuse, when I reached my office that day, for a resigned study of the Continental Bradshaw, and an order to Carter to unroll a great creaking wall-map of Germany and find me Flensburg. The latter labour I might have saved him, but it was good for Carter to have something to do; and his patient ignorance was amusing. With most of the map and what it suggested I was tolerably familiar, for I had not wasted my year in Germany, whatever I had done or not done since. Its people, history, progress, and future had interested me intensely, and I had still friends in Dresden and Berlin. Flensburg recalled the Danish war of '64, and by the time Carter's researches had ended in success I had forgotten the task set him, and was wondering whether the prospect of seeing something of that lovely region of Schleswig-Holstein, [[See Map A](#)] as I knew from hearsay that it was, was at all to be set against such an uncomfortable way of seeing it, with the season so late, the company so unattractive, and all the other drawbacks which I counted and treasured as proofs of my desperate condition, if I *were* to go. It needed little to decide me, and I think K——'s arrival from Switzerland, offensively sunburnt, was the finishing touch. His greeting was 'Hullo, Carruthers, you here? Thought you had got away long ago. Lucky devil, though, to be going now, just in time for the best driving and the early pheasants. The heat's been shocking out there. Carter, bring me a Bradshaw'—(an extraordinary book, Bradshaw, turned to from habit, even when least wanted, as men fondle guns and rods in the close season).

By lunch-time the weight of indecision had been removed, and I found myself entrusting Carter with a telegram to Davies, P.O., Flensburg. 'Thanks; expect me 9.34 p.m. 26th'; which produced, three hours later, a reply: 'Delighted; please bring a No. 3 Rippingille stove'—a perplexing and ominous direction, which somehow chilled me in spite of its subject matter.

Indeed, my resolution was continually faltering. It faltered when I turned out my gun in the evening and thought of the grouse it ought to have accounted for. It faltered again when I contemplated the miscellaneous list of commissions, sown broadcast through Davies's letter, to fulfil which seemed to make me a willing tool where my chosen *rôle*

was that of an embittered exile, or at least a condescending ally. However, I faced the commissions manfully, after leaving the office.

At Lancaster's I inquired for his gun, was received coolly, and had to pay a heavy bill, which it seemed to have incurred, before it was handed over. Having ordered the gun and No. 4's to be sent to my chambers, I bought the Raven mixture with that peculiar sense of injury which the prospect of smuggling in another's behalf always entails; and wondered where in the world Carey and Neilson's was, a firm which Davies spoke of as though it were as well known as the Bank of England or the Stores, instead of specializing in 'rigging-screws', whatever they might be. They sounded important, though, and it would be only polite to unearth them. I connected them with the 'few repairs,' and awoke new misgivings. At the Stores I asked for a No. 3 Rippingille stove, and was confronted with a formidable and hideous piece of ironmongery, which burned petroleum in two capacious tanks, horribly prophetic of a smell of warm oil. I paid for this miserably, convinced of its grim efficiency, but speculating as to the domestic conditions which caused it to be sent for as an afterthought by telegram. I also asked about rigging-screws in the yachting department, but learnt that they were not kept in stock; that Carey and Neilson's would certainly have them, and that their shop was in the Minories, in the far east, meaning a journey nearly as long as to Flensburg, and twice as tiresome. They would be shut by the time I got there, so after this exhausting round of duty I went home in a cab, omitted dressing for dinner (an epoch in itself), ordered a chop up from the basement kitchen, and spent the rest of the evening packing and writing, with the methodical gloom of a man setting his affairs in order for the last time.

The last of those airless nights passed. The astonished Withers saw me breakfasting at eight, and at 9.30 I was vacantly examining rigging-screws with what wits were left me after a sulphurous ride in the underground to Aldgate. I laid great stress on the 3/8's, and the galvanism, and took them on trust, ignorant as to their functions. For the eleven-shilling oilskins I was referred to a villainous den in a back street, which the shopman said they always recommended, and where a dirty and bejewelled Hebrew chattered with me (beginning at 18s.) over two reeking orange slabs distantly resembling moieties of the human figure. Their odour made me close prematurely for 14s., and I hurried back (for I was due there at 11) to my office with my two disreputable brown-paper parcels, one of which made itself so noticeable in the close official air that Carter attentively asked if I would like to have it sent to my chambers, and K—— was inquisitive to bluntness about it and my movements. But I did not care to enlighten K——, whose comments I knew would be provokingly envious or wounding to my pride in some way.

I remembered, later on, the prismatic compass, and wired to the Minories to have one sent at once, feeling rather relieved that I was not present there to be cross-examined as to size and make. The reply was, 'Not stocked; try surveying-instrument maker'—a reply both puzzling and reassuring, for Davies's request for a compass had given me more uneasiness than anything, while, to find that what he wanted turned out to be a surveying-instrument, was a no less perplexing discovery. That day I made my last *précis* and handed over my schedules—Procrustean beds, where unwilling facts were stretched and tortured—and said good-bye to my temporary chief, genial and lenient M——, who wished me a jolly holiday with all sincerity.

At seven I was watching a cab packed with my personal luggage and the collection of unwieldy and incongruous packages that my shopping had drawn down on me. Two deviations after that wretched prismatic compass—which I obtained in the end secondhand, *faute de mieux*, near Victoria, at one of those showy shops which look like jewellers' and are really pawnbrokers'—nearly caused me to miss my train. But at 8.30 I had shaken off the dust of London from my feet, and at 10.30 I was, as I have announced, pacing the deck of a Flushing steamer, adrift on this fatuous holiday in the far Baltic.

An air from the west, cooled by a midday thunderstorm, followed the steamer as she slid through the calm channels of the Thames estuary, passed the cordon of scintillating lightships that watch over the sea-roads to the imperial city like pickets round a sleeping army, and slipped out into the dark spaces of the North Sea. Stars were bright, summer scents from the Kent cliffs mingled coyly with vulgar steamer-smells; the summer weather held immutably. Nature, for her part, seemed resolved to be no party to my penance, but to be imperturbably bent on shedding mild ridicule over my wrongs. An irresistible sense of peace and detachment, combined with that delicious physical awakening that pulses through the nerve-sick townsman when city airs and bald routine are left behind him, combined to provide me, however thankless a subject, with a solid background of resignation. Stowing this safely away, I could calculate my intentions with cold egotism. If the weather held I might pass a not intolerable fortnight with Davies. When it broke up, as it was sure to, I could easily excuse myself from the pursuit of the problematical ducks; the wintry logic of facts would, in any case, decide him to lay up his yacht, for he could scarcely think of sailing home at such a season. I could then take a chance lying ready of spending a few weeks in Dresden or elsewhere. I settled this programme comfortably and then turned in.

From Flushing eastward to Hamburg, then northward to Flensburg, I cut short the next day's sultry story. Past dyke and windmill and still canals, on to blazing stubbles and roaring towns; at the last, after dusk, through a quiet level region where the train pattered from one lazy little station to another, and at ten o'clock I found myself, stiff and stuffy, on the platform at Flensburg, exchanging greetings with Davies.

'It's awfully good of you to come.'

'Not at all; it's very good of you to ask me.'

We were both of us ill at ease. Even in the dim gaslight he clashed on my notions of a yachtsman—no cool white ducks or neat blue serge; and where was the snowy crowned yachting cap, that precious charm that so easily converts a landsman into a dashing mariner? Conscious that this impressive uniform, in high perfection, was lying ready in my portmanteau, I felt oddly guilty. He wore an old Norfolk jacket, muddy brown shoes, grey flannel trousers (or had they been white?), and an ordinary tweed cap. The hand he gave me was horny, and appeared to be stained with paint; the other one, which carried a parcel, had a bandage on it which would have borne renewal. There was an instant of mutual inspection. I thought he gave me a shy, hurried scrutiny as though to test past conjectures, with something of anxiety in it, and perhaps (save the mark!) a tinge of admiration. The face was familiar, and yet not familiar; the pleasant blue eyes, open, clean-cut features, unintellectual forehead were the same; so were the

brisk and impulsive movements; there was some change; but the moment of awkward hesitation was over and the light was bad; and, while strolling down the platform for my luggage, we chatted with constraint about trivial things.

'By the way,' he suddenly said, laughing, 'I'm afraid I'm not fit to be seen; but it's so late it doesn't matter. I've been painting hard all day, and just got it finished. I only hope we shall have some wind to-morrow—it's been hopelessly calm lately. I say, you've brought a good deal of stuff,' he concluded, as my belongings began to collect.

Here was a reward for my submissive exertions in the far east!

'You gave me a good many commissions!'

'Oh, I didn't mean those things,' he said, absently. 'Thanks for bringing them, by the way. That's the stove, I suppose; cartridges, this one, by the weight. You got the rigging-screws all right, I hope? They're not really necessary, of course' (I nodded vacantly, and felt a little hurt); 'but they're simpler than lanyards, and you can't get them here. It's that portmanteau,' he said, slowly, measuring it with a doubtful eye. 'Never mind! we'll try. You couldn't do with the Gladstone only, I suppose? You see, the dinghy—h'm, and there's the hatchway, too'—he was lost in thought. 'Anyhow, we'll try. I'm afraid there are no cabs; but it's quite near, and the porter'll help.'

Sickening forebodings crept over me, while Davies shouldered my Gladstone and clutched at the parcels.

'Aren't your men here?' I asked, faintly.

'Men?' He looked confused. 'Oh, perhaps I ought to have told you, I never have any paid hands; it's quite a small boat, you know—I hope you didn't expect luxury. I've managed her single-handed for some time. A man would be no use, and a horrible nuisance.' He revealed these appalling truths with a cheerful assurance, which did nothing to hide a naïve apprehension of their effect on me. There was a check in our mobilization.

'It's rather late to go on board, isn't it?' I said, in a wooden voice. Someone was turning out the gaslights, and the porter yawned ostentatiously. 'I think I'd rather sleep at an hotel to-night.' A strained pause.

'Oh, of course you can do that, if you like,' said Davies, in transparent distress of mind. 'But it seems hardly worth while to cart this stuff all the way to an hotel (I believe they're all on the other side of the harbour), and back again to the boat to-morrow. She's quite comfortable, and you're sure to sleep well, as you're tired.'

'We can leave the things here,' I argued feebly, 'and walk over with my bag.'

'Oh, I shall have to go aboard anyhow,' he rejoined; 'I *never* sleep on shore.'

He seemed to be clinging timidly, but desperately, to some diplomatic end. A stony despair was invading me and paralysing resistance. Better face the worst and be done with it.

'Come on,' I said, grimly.

Heavily loaded, we stumbled over railway lines and rubble heaps, and came on the harbour. Davies led the way to a stairway, whose weedy steps disappeared below in gloom.

'If you'll get into the dinghy,' he said, all briskness now, 'I'll pass the things down.'

I descended gingerly, holding as a guide a sodden painter which ended in a small boat, and conscious that I was collecting slime on cuffs and trousers.

'Hold up!' shouted Davies, cheerfully, as I sat down suddenly near the bottom, with one foot in the water.

I climbed wretchedly into the dinghy and awaited events.

'Now float her up close under the quay wall, and make fast to the ring down there,' came down from above, followed by the slack of the sodden painter, which knocked my cap off as it fell. 'All fast? Any knot'll do,' I heard, as I grappled with this loathsome task, and then a big, dark object loomed overhead and was lowered into the dinghy. It was my portmanteau, and, placed athwart, exactly filled all the space amidships. 'Does it fit?' was the anxious inquiry from aloft.

'Beautifully.'

'Capital!'

Scratching at the greasy wall to keep the dinghy close to it, I received in succession our stores, and stowed the cargo as best I could, while the dinghy sank lower and lower in the water, and its precarious superstructure grew higher.

'Catch!' was the final direction from above, and a damp soft parcel hit me in the chest. 'Be careful of that, it's meat. Now back to the stairs!'

I painfully acquiesced, and Davies appeared.

'It's a bit of a load, and she's rather deep; but I *think* we shall manage,' he reflected. 'You sit right aft, and I'll row.'

I was too far gone for curiosity as to how this monstrous pyramid was to be rowed, or even for surmises as to its foundering by the way. I crawled to my appointed seat, and Davies extricated the buried sculls by a series of tugs, which shook the whole structure, and made us roll alarmingly. How he stowed himself into rowing posture I have not the least idea, but eventually we were moving sluggishly out into the open water, his head just visible in the bows. We had started from what appeared to be the head of a narrow loch, and were leaving behind us the lights of a big town. A long frontage of lamp-lit quays was on our left, with here and there the vague hull of a steamer alongside. We passed the last of the lights and came out into a broader stretch of water, when a light breeze was blowing and dark hills could be seen on either shore.

'I'm lying a little way down the fiord, you see,' said Davies. 'I hate to be too near a town, and I found a carpenter handy here— There she is! I wonder how you'll like her!'

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