

**MRS. FALCHION:
A NOVEL**

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Mrs. Falchion: A Novel by Gilbert Parker

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A NOVEL**

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MRS. FALCHION

A NOVEL

BY

Sir GILBERT PARKER, *bart.*

AUTHOR OF THE SEATS OF THE MIGHTY
THE TRANSLATION OF A SAVAGE
THE TRAIL OF THE SWORD
THE TRESPASSER
ETC.



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MRS. FALCHION.

BOOK I.

BELOW THE SUN LINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE GATES OF THE SEA.

THE part I played in Mrs. Falchion's career is not very noble, but I shall set it forth plainly here, else I could not have the boldness to write of her faults or those of others. Of my own history little need be said in preface. Soon after graduating with honors, as a physician, I was offered a professional post in a college of medicine in Canada. It was difficult to establish a practice in medicine without some capital, else I had remained in London; and, being in need of instant means, I gladly accepted the offer. But six months were to intervene before the beginning of my duties;—how to fill that time profitably was the question. I wished to travel, having scarcely been out of England during my life. Some one suggested the position of surgeon on one of the great steamers running between England and Australia. The idea of a long sea-voyage was seductive, suffering as I had been from over-study, though the position itself was not very distinguished. But in those

days I cared more for pleasing myself than for what might become a newly-made professor, and I was quite prepared to say with a renowned Irish dean : "Dignity and I might be married, for all the relations we are."

I secured the position with humiliating ease and humiliating smallness of pay. The steamer was the *Fulvia*. It was one of the largest belonging to the Occidental Company; it carried no emigrants, and had a passenger list of fashionable folk. On the voyage out to Australia the weather was pleasant (save in the Bay of Biscay); there was no sickness on board, and there were many opportunities for social gaieties, the cultivation of pleasant acquaintances, and the encouragement of that brisk idleness which aids to health. This was really the first holiday in my life, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. Nothing of unusual interest occurred on the outward voyage, for one thing, because there were no unusual people among the passengers; for another, because the vessel behaved admirably. The same cannot be said of the return voyage; and with it my story really begins. Misfortune followed us out of Sydney Harbor. We broke a crank-shaft between there and Port Phillip, Melbourne; a fire in the hold occurred at Adelaide, and at Albany we buried a passenger who had died of consumption one day out from King George's Sound.

At Colombo also we had a misfortune, but it was of a peculiar kind, and did not obtrude itself at once; it consisted of an addition to our passenger list. I had spent a day in exploring Colombo—visiting Arabi Pasha, inspecting Hindu temples, watching the jugglers and snake-charmers, evading the sellers of brummagem jewelry, and guides, and idling in the Cinnamon Gardens. I returned to the ship tired out. After I had done some official duties, I sauntered to the gangway, and, leaning against the bulwarks, idly watched the passengers come

on board from the tender. Two of these made an impression on me. One was a handsome and fashionably-dressed woman who was followed by (as I guessed) a maid or companion, carrying parcels; the other, a shabbily-dressed man, who was the last to come up from the tender. The woman was going down the companion-way when he stepped on deck with a single bag in his hand, and I noticed that he watched her with a strange look in his eyes. He stood still as he looked, and remained so for a moment after she had gone; then he seemed to recover himself, and started, as I thought, almost guiltily, when he saw that my attention was attracted. He nervously shifted his bag from one hand to the other, and looked round, as though not certain of where he should go. A steward came to him officiously, and patronizingly too,—which is the bearing of servants to shabbily-dressed people,—but he shook his head, caught his bag smartly away from the steward's fingers, and moved towards the after-part of the ship, reserved for intermediate passengers. As he went he hesitated, came to the side of the vessel, looked down at the tender for a moment, cast his eyes to where the anchor was being weighed, made as if he would go back to the tender; then, seeing that the ladder was now drawn up, sighed, and passed on to the second-class companion-way, through which he disappeared.

I stood commenting idly to myself upon this incident, which, slight though it was, appeared to have significance of a kind, when Hungerford, the fifth officer, caught me slyly by the arm, and said: "Lucky fellow! Nothing to do but watch the world go by. I wish I had you in the North Atlantic on a whaler, or in the No Man's Sea on a pearl-smack for a matter of thirty days."

"What would come of that, Hungerford?" said I.

"An exchange of mind for matter, Marmion; muscle for meditation, physics for philosophy."