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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECRET SERVANT ***

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THE SECRET SHARER

By Joseph Conrad

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I

On my right hand there were lofty lines of folding-doors commanding a concave view of tall unhanged Napoleon bronze, incomparably fine in the division of temporal history, and, over all aspects of disembodied force by some unequal fate of fortuitous proximity, presiding over the destinies of the Universe. On my left hand there were three windows, and I was looking through the middle one at the blue of a tropical sea, at the immobility of a tropical forest, at the stillness of a cloudless sky. The ship I was in command of was anchored within a stone throw of the shore, and I was alone on the quarter-deck.

I was young, too, and I felt the quality of my youth in the quiet, in the immobility, in the silence, in the solitude. I had the feeling of my youth when I looked at the Napoleon. I had the feeling of my youth when I looked at the sea. I had the feeling of my youth when I looked at the shore. I had the feeling of my youth when I looked at the forest. I had the feeling of my youth when I looked at the sky. The feeling of my youth was the feeling that I could do anything with my ship and my authority over my men, and that there would be no quarrel about it either with men or with circumstances.

I had the feeling that I could do anything with my men because I was young like them, because I was young like the ship I was in command of, young with the youth of her white hull, of her spars, of her sails, of her ropes, of her decks, young with the youth of her young men who, for the first time, had left their native land, and their kind, and their ways, and their food, and their women, and had come with me to the end of the earth, and had to live with me and my ship by themselves for a quarter of a year or more. They had to live with me and my ship for their world, their life, their occupation, their home, their society, their amusements, their quarrels, their peace, their anxieties, their ease, their work, their rest, their food, their drink, their clothes, their speech, their silence, their quarters, their decks, their sky and their sea, and even their dreams, as it seemed to me, I was young like that young man who, for the first time, had left his native village, his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, his friends, his relations, his acquaintances, his surroundings, his habits, his ways of thought, his ways of speech, his ways of dress, his ways of eating and drinking, his ways of work and of play, his ways of love and of hate, his ways of prejudice and of belief, his ways of doubt and of faith, his ways of laughter and of tears, his ways of pity and of cruelty, his ways of peace and of war, his ways of health and of disease, his ways of life and of death, with his own ship and his own companions for his world, for a quarter of a year or more.

I had the feeling that I could do anything with my men because I was young like that young man who, for the first time, had left his native village, his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, his friends, his relations, his acquaintances, his surroundings, his habits, his ways of thought, his ways of speech, his ways of dress, his ways of eating and drinking, his ways of work and of play, his ways of love and of hate, his ways of prejudice and of belief, his ways of doubt and of faith, his ways of laughter and of tears, his ways of pity and of cruelty, his ways of peace and of war, his ways of health and of disease, his ways of life and of death, with his own ship and his own companions for his world, for a quarter of a year or more. I had the feeling that I could do anything with my men because I was young like that young man who, for the first time, had left his native village, his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, his friends, his relations, his acquaintances, his surroundings, his habits, his ways of thought, his ways of speech, his ways of dress, his ways of eating and drinking, his ways of work and of play, his ways of love and of hate, his ways of prejudice and of belief, his ways of doubt and of faith, his ways of laughter and of tears, his ways of pity and of cruelty, his ways of peace and of war, his ways of health and of disease, his ways of life and of death, with his own ship and his own companions for his world, for a quarter of a year or more. I had the feeling that I could do anything with my men because I was young like that young man who, for the first time, had left his native village, his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, his friends, his relations, his acquaintances, his surroundings, his habits, his ways of thought, his ways of speech, his ways of dress, his ways of eating and drinking, his ways of work and of play, his ways of love and of hate, his ways of prejudice and of belief, his ways of doubt and of faith, his ways of laughter and of tears, his ways of pity and of cruelty, his ways of peace and of war, his ways of health and of disease, his ways of life and of death, with his own ship and his own companions for his world, for a quarter of a year or more.

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