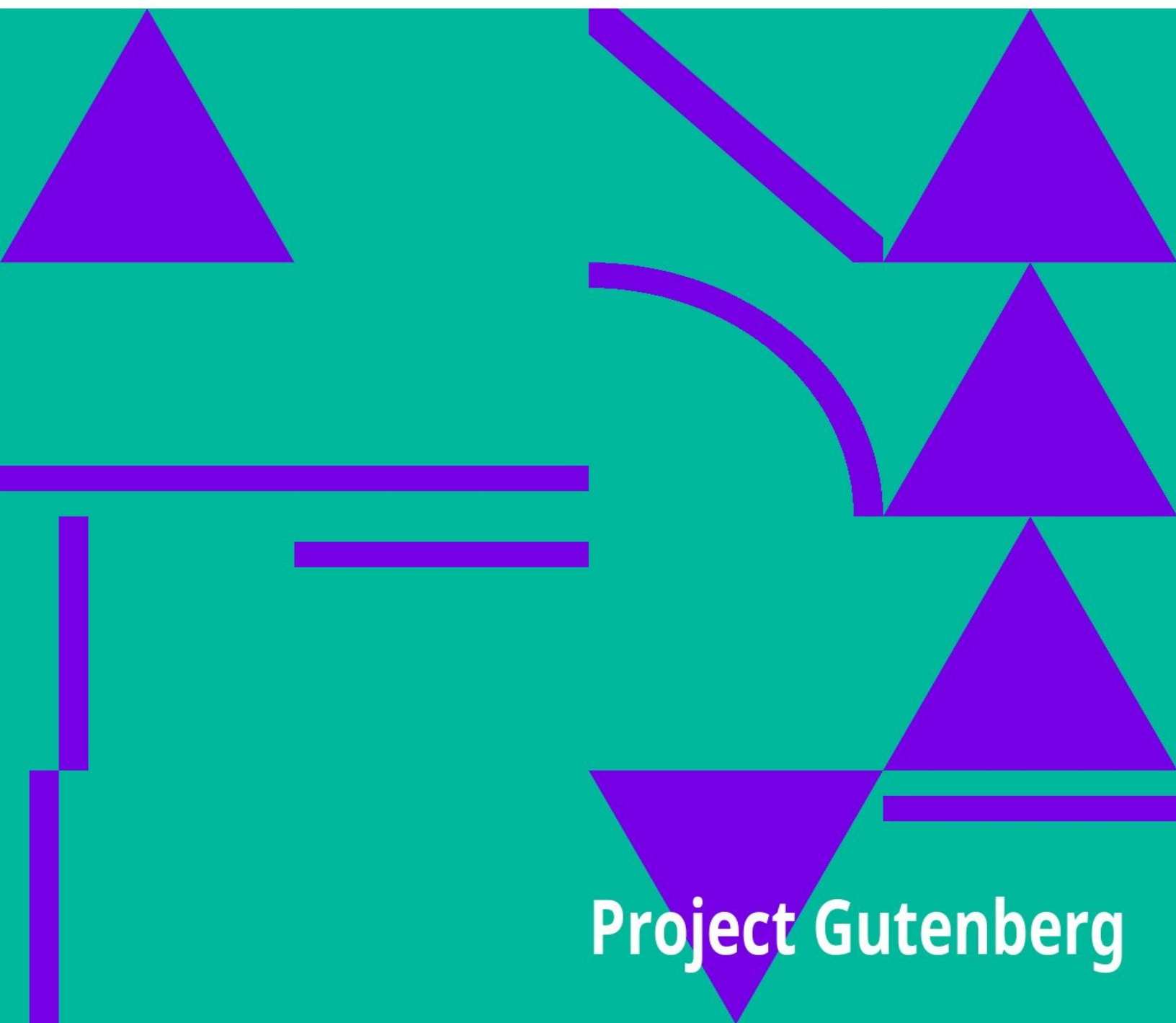


A Marriage at Sea

William Clark Russell



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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MARRIAGE AT SEA ***

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A MARRIAGE AT SEA

BY

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A MARRIAGE AT SEA

CHAPTER I

THE RUE DE MAQUETRA

My dandy-rigged yacht, the *Spitfire*, of twenty-six tons, lay in Boulogne harbour, hidden in the deep shadow of the wall against which she floated. It was a breathless night, dark despite the wide spread of cloudless sky that was brilliant with stars. It was hard upon the hour of midnight, and low down where we lay we heard but dimly such sounds of life as was still abroad in the Boulogne streets. Ahead of us loomed the shadow of a double-funnelled steamer—an inky dye of scarcely determinable proportions upon the black and silent waters of the harbour. The Capécure pier made a faint, phantom-like line of gloom as it ran seawards on our left, with here and there a lump of shadow denoting some collier fast to the skeleton timbers.

The stillness was impressive; from the sands came a dull and distant moan of surf; the dim strains of a concertina threaded the hush which seemed to dwell like something material upon the black, vague shape of a large brig almost directly abreast of us. We were waiting for the hour of midnight to strike and our ears were strained.

"What noise is that?" I exclaimed.

"The dip of sweeps, sir," answered my captain, Aaron Caudel; "some smack a-coming along—ay, there she is," and he shadowily pointed to a dark, square heap betwixt the piers, softly approaching to the impulse of her long oars, the rhythmic grind of which in the thole-pins made a strange, wild ocean music of the far-off roar of the surf, and the sob of water alongside, and the delicate wash of the tide in the green piles and timbers of the two long, narrow, quaint old piers.

"How is your pluck now, Caudel?" said I in a low voice, sending a glance up

at the dark edge of the harbour-wall above us, where stood the motionless figure of a *douanier*, with a button or two of his uniform faintly glimmering to the gleam of a lamp near him.

"Right for the job, sir—right as your honour could desire it. There's but one consideration which ain't like a feeling of sartinty—and that I must say consarns the dawg."

"Smother the dog! But you are right, Caudel. We must leave our boots in the ditch."

"Ain't there plenty of grass, sir?" said he.

"I hope so; but a fathom of gravel will so crunch under those hoofs of yours that the very dead buried beneath might turn in their coffins—let alone a live dog wide awake from the end of his beastly cold snout to the tip of his tail. Does the ladder chafe you?"

"No, sir. Makes me feel a bit asthmatic-like, and if them duniers get a sight of me they'll reckon I've visited the Continent to make a show of myself," he exclaimed, with a low, deep-sea laugh, whilst he spread his hands upon his breast, around which, under cover of a large, loose, long pea-coat, he had coiled a length of rope-ladder with two iron hooks at one end of it, which made a hump under either shoulder-blade. There was no other way, however, of conveying the ladder ashore. In the hand it would instantly have challenged attention, and a bag would have been equally an object of curiosity to the two or three Custom-House phantoms flitting about in triangular-shaped trousers and shako-like headgear.

"There goes midnight, sir!" cried Caudel.

As I listened to the chimes a sudden fit of excitement set me trembling.

"Are ye there, Job?" called my captain.

"Ay, sir," responded a voice from the bows of the yacht.

"Jim?"

"Here, sir," answered a second voice out of the darkness forward.

"Dick?"

"Here, sir."

"Bobby?"

"Here, sir," responded the squeaky note of a boy.

"Lay aft all you ship's company and don't make no noise," growled Caudel.

I looked up; the figure of the *douanier* had vanished. The three men and the boy came sneaking out of the yacht's head.

"Now, what ye've got to do," said Caudel, "is to keep awake. You'll see all ready for hoisting and gitting away the hinstant Mr. Barclay and me arrives aboard. You onderstand that?"

"It's good English, cap'n," said one of the sailors.

"No skylarking, mind. You're a listening, Bobby?"

"Ay, sir."

"You'll just go quietly to work and see all clear, and then tarn to and loaf about in the shadows. Now, Mr. Barclay, sir, if you're ready, I am."

"Have you the little bull's-eye in your pocket?" said I.

He felt and answered, "Yes."

"Matches?"

"Two boxes."

"Stop a minute," said I, and I descended into the cabin to read my darling's letter for the last time, that I might make sure of all details of our romantic plot, ere embarking on as hare-brained an adventure as was ever attempted by a lover and his sweetheart.

The cabin lamp burned brightly. I see the little interior now and myself standing upright under the skylight, which found me room for my stature, for I

was six feet high. The night-shadow came black against the glass, and made a mirror of each pane. My heart was beating fast, and my hands trembled as I held my sweetheart's letter to the light. I had read it twenty times before—you might have known that by the creases in it and the frayed edges, as though, forsooth, it had been a love-letter fifty years old—but my nervous excitement obliged me to go through it once more for the last time, as I have said, to make sure.

The handwriting was girlish—how could it be otherwise, seeing that the sweet writer was not yet eighteen? The letter consisted of four sheets, and on one of them was very cleverly drawn, in pen and ink, a tall, long, narrow, old-fashioned château, with some shrubbery in front of it, a short length of wall, then a tall hedge with an arrow pointing at it, under which was written, "HERE IS THE HOLE." Under another arrow indicating a big, square door to the right of the house, where a second short length of wall was sketched in, were written the words, "HERE IS THE DOG." Other arrows—quite a flight of them, indeed, causing the sketch to resemble a weather-chart—pointed to windows, doors, a little balcony, and so forth, and against them were written, "MAM'SELLE'S ROOM," "THE GERMAN GOVERNESS'S ROOM," "FOUR GIRLS SLEEP HERE,"—with other hints of a like kind.

I carefully read the letter. Suppose the ladder which Caudel had wound around his broad breast should prove too short? No! the height from the balcony to the ground was exactly ten feet. She had measured it herself, and that there might be no error, had enclosed me the length of pack-thread with which—with a little weight at the end of it—she had plumbed the trifling distance. She hoped it would be a fine night. If there should be thunder I must not come. She would rather die than leave the house in a thunderstorm. Neither must I come if the sea was rough. She was acting very wrongly—why did she love me so?—why was I so impatient? Could I not wait until she was twenty-one? Then she would be of age and her own mistress: three years and a month or two would soon pass, and, meanwhile, our love for each other would be growing deeper and deeper—at least *hers* would. She could not answer for mine. She was content to have faith.

All this was very much underlined, and here and there was a little smudge as though she had dropped a tear.

But she had plucked up as she drew towards the close of her letter, and, mere child as she was, there was a quality of decision in her final sentence which satisfied me that she would not fail me when the moment came. I put the letter in

my pocket and went on deck.

"Where are you, Caudel?"

"Here, sir," cried a shadow in the starboard gangway.

"Let us start," said I; "there is half-an-hour's walk before us, and though the agreed time is one, there is a great deal to be done when we arrive."

"I've been a-thinking, Mr. Barclay," he exclaimed, "that the young lady'll never be able to get aboard this yacht by that there up and down ladder," meaning the perpendicular steps affixed to the harbour wall.

"No!" cried I, needlessly startled by an insignificant oversight on the very threshold of the project.

"The boat," he continued, "had better be in waiting at them stairs, just past the smack, astarn of us there."

"Give the necessary orders," said I.

He did so swiftly, bidding two of the men to be at the stairs by one o'clock, the others to have the port gangway unshipped that we might step aboard in a moment, along with sails loosed and gear all seen to, ready for a prompt start. We then ascended the ladder and gained the top of the quay.

A *douanier* stood at a little distance. As we rose over the edge of the wall he approached, and by the aid of the lamp burning strongly close at hand, he recognised us as persons who had been coming and going throughout the day. Caudel called out "*Bong swore*," and moved off that his bulky frame might not be visible. The man in a civil voice asked in French if we had any fire-arms on us.

"No, no," I responded, "we are going to fetch a friend who has consented to take a little cruise with us. The tide is making, and we hope to be under way before two o'clock."

"You English love the sea," said he, good-naturedly; "all hours of the day and night are the same to you. For my part, give me my bed at night."

"Here is something to furnish you with a pleasant dream when you get to bed," said I, giving him a franc. "When are you off duty?"

"I am here till four o'clock," he answered.

"Good," said I, and carelessly strolled after the portly figure of my captain.

We said little until we had cleared the Rue de l'Ecu and were marching up the broad Grande Rue, with the church of St. Nicholas soaring in a dusky mass out of the market-place, and the few lights of the wide, main street rising in fitful twinklings to the shadow of the rampart walls. A mounted gendarme passed; the stroke of his horse's hoofs sounded hollow in the broad thoroughfare and accentuated the deserted appearance of the street. Here and there a light showed in a window; from a distance came a noise of chorusing: a number of fellows, no doubt, arm-in-arm, singing "Mourir pour la Patrie," to the inspiration of several glasses of sugar and water.

"I sha'n't be sorry when we're there," said Caudel. "This here ladder makes my coat feel a terrible tight fit. I suppose it'll be the first job of the sort ye was ever engaged in, sir?"

"The first," said I, "and the last too, believe me. It is nervous work. I would rather have to deal with an armed burglar than with an elopement. I wish the business was ended, and we were heading for Penzance."

"And I don't suppose the young lady feels extray comfortable, either," he exclaimed. "Let me see: I've got to be right in my latitude and longitude, or we shall be finding ourselves ashore. It's for us to make the signal, ain't it, sir?"

"Yes," said I, puffing, for the road was steep and we were walking rapidly; "first of all you'll have to prepare the ladder. You haven't forgotten the rungs, I hope?" referring to three brass pieces to keep the ropes extended, contrivances which had been made to my order, resembling stair rods with forks and an arrangement of screws by which they could be disconnected into pieces convenient for the pocket.

"They're here, sir," he exclaimed, slapping his breast.

"Well, we proceed thus: The bull's-eye must be cautiously lighted and darkened. We have then to steal noiselessly to abreast of the window on the left

of the house and flash the lantern. This will be answered by the young lady striking a match at the window."

"Won't the scraping of the lucifer be heard?" inquired Caudel.

"No, Miss Bellassys writes to me that no one sleeps within several corridors of that room."

"Well, and then I think you said, sir," observed Caudel, "that the young lady'll slip out on to the balcony, and lower away a small length of line to which this here ladder," he said, giving his breast a thump, "is to be bent on, she hauling of it up?"

"Quite right," said I; "you must help her to descend whilst I hold the ladder taut at the foot of it. No fear of the ropes breaking, I hope?"

"Lord love 'ee," he said heartily, "it's brand new rattline-stuff, strong enough to hoist the mainmast out of a first-rate."

By this time we had gained the top of the Grande Rue. Before us stretched an open space dark with lines of trees; at long intervals the gleam of an oil lamp dotted that space of gloom; on our right lay the dusky mass of the rampart walls, the yawning gateway dully illuminated by the trembling flame of a lantern into a picture which carried the imagination back into heroic times, when elopements were exceedingly common, when gallant knights were to be met with galloping away with women of beauty and distinction clinging to them, when the midnight air was vocal with guitars, and nearly every other darkling lattice framed some sweet, pale, listening face.

"Which'll be the road, sir?" broke in Caudel's tempestuous voice.

I had explored the district that afternoon, had observed all that was necessary, and discovered that the safest, if not the shortest, way to the Rue de Maquétra where my sweetheart, Grace Bellassys, was at school, lay through the Haute Ville or Upper Town as the English called it. The streets were utterly deserted; not so much as a cat stirred. One motionless figure we passed, hard by the Cathedral—a policeman or gendarme—he might have been a statue; it was like pacing the streets of a town that had been sacked, in which nothing lived to deliver so much as a groan; and the fancy was not a little improved by our emergence into what resembled a tract of country through a gateway similar to

that by which we had entered, over which there faintly glimmered out to the sheen of a near lamp the figure of Our Lady of Boulogne erect in some carving of a boat.

"Foreigners is a queer lot," exclaimed Caudel. "I dunno as I should much relish living between them walls. How much farther off is it, sir?"

"About ten minutes," said I.

"A blooming walk, Mr. Barclay, sir, begging your pardon. Wouldn't it have been as well if you'd had ordered a fee-hacre to stand by ready to jump aboard of?"

"A fee what?" said I.

"What's the French for a cab, sir?"

"Oh, I see what you mean. No. It's all down-hill for the lady. A carriage makes a noise; then there is the cabman to be left behind to tell all that he knows."

Caudel grunted an assent, and we strode onwards in silence. It was an autumn night, but the air was very soft, and the largest of the luminaries shone with the mellow glory of a summer that was yet rich and beautiful in its decay. From afar, in the direction of the Calais Road, came the dim rumbling noise of a heavy vehicle, like the sound of a diligence in full trot; otherwise the dark and breezeless atmosphere was of an exquisite serenity—too placid indeed to please me; for though the yacht was to be easily towed out of Boulogne harbour, I had no fancy for finding myself becalmed close off the pier-heads when the dawn broke.

The Rue de Maquétra was—is, I may say; I presume it still exists—a long, narrow lane leading to a pretty valley. Something more than half-way up it, on the left-hand side, stands a tall convent wall, the shadow of which, dominated as the heights were by trees on such a motionless midnight as this, plunged the roadway into deepest gloom. The whole length of the lane, to the best of my remembrance, was illuminated by two, at the outside by three, lamps which revealed nothing but their own flames, and so bewildered instead of assisting the eye.

Directly opposite the convent wall stood the old château, darkened and thickened in front by a profusion of shrubbery, with a short length of wall, as I have already said, at both extremities of it. The grounds belonging to the house, as they rose with the hill, were divided from the lane by a thick hedge which terminated at a distance of some two hundred feet.

We came to a stand and listened, staring our hardest with all our eyes. The house was in blackness; the line of the roof ran in a clear sweep of ink against the stars, and not the faintest sound came from it or its grounds, save the delicate tinkling murmur of a fountain playing somewhere amongst the shrubbery in front.

"Where'll be the dawg?" exclaimed Caudel in a hoarse whisper.

"Behind the wall there," I answered, "yonder, where the great square door is. Hark! Did not that sound like the rattle of a chain?"

We listened; then said I:

"Let us make for the hole in the hedge. I have its bearings. It directly fronts the third angle of that convent wall."

We crept soundlessly past the house, treading the verdure that lay in dark streaks upon the glimmering ground of this little-frequented lane. The clock of the convent opposite struck half-past twelve.

"One bell, sir," said Caudel; "it's about time we tained to, and no mistake. Lord, how I'm a-perspiring! Yet it ben't so hot neither. Which side of the house do the lady descend from?"

"From this side," I answered.

"Well clear of the dawg anyhow," said he, "and *that's* a good job."

"Here's the hole," I cried, with my voice shrill beyond recognition of my own hearing through the nervous excitement I laboured under.

The hole was a neglected gap in the hedge, a rent originally made probably by donkey-boys, several of whose cattle I had remarked that afternoon browsing along the ditch and bank-side. We squeezed through, and found ourselves in a

sort of kitchen garden, as I might imagine from the aspect of the shadowy vegetation; it seemed to run clear to the very wall of the house on this side in dwarf bushes and low-ridged growths.

"There'll be a path I hope," growled Caudel. "What am I atreading on? Cabbages? They crackle worse nor gravel, Mr. Barclay."

"Clear yourself of the rope-ladder, and then I'll smother you in your big pea-coat whilst you light the lamp," said I. "Let us keep well in the shadow of the hedge. Who knows what eyes may be star-gazing yonder?"

The hedge flung a useful dye upon the blackness of the night; and our figures against it, even though they should have been viewed close to, must have been indistinguishable. With a seaman's alacrity Caudel slipped off his immense coat, and in a few moments had unwound the length of ladder from his body. He wore a coloured flannel shirt—I had dreaded to find him figuring in white calico! He dropped the ladder to the ground, and the iron hooks clanked as they fell together. I hissed a sea blessing at him through my teeth.

"Have you no wick in those tallow-candle fingers of yours? Hush! Stand motionless."

As I spoke the dog began to bark. That it was the dog belonging to the house I could not swear. The sound, nevertheless, proceeded from the direction of the yard in which my sweetheart had told me the dog was chained. The deep and melancholy note was like that of a bloodhound giving tongue. It was reverberated by the convent wall and seemed to penetrate to the farthest distance, awaking the very echoes of the sleeping river Liane, and it filled the breathless pause that had fallen upon us with a torment of inquietude and expectation. After a few minutes the creature ceased.

"He'll be a whopper, sir. Big as a pony, sir, if his voice don't belie him," said Caudel, fetching a deep breath. "I was once bit by a dawg——" he was about to spin a yarn.

"For heaven's sake! now bear a hand and get your bull's eye alight," I angrily whispered, at the same moment snatching up his coat and so holding it as to effectually screen his figure from the house.

Feeling over the coat he pulled out the little bull's-eye lamp and a box of

matches, and catching with oceanic dexterity the flame of the lucifer in the hollow of his hands, he kindled the wick, and I immediately closed the lantern with its glass eclipsed. This done, I directed my eyes at the black smears of growths—for thus they showed—lying round about us, in search of a path; but apparently we were on the margin of some wide tract of vegetables, through which we should have to thrust to reach the stretch of sward that, according to the description in my pocket, lay immediately under the balcony from which my sweetheart was to descend.

"Pick up that ladder—by the hooks—see they don't clank—crouch low; make a bush of yourself as I do, and come along," said I.

Foot by foot we groped our way towards the tall, thin shadow of the house through the cabbages—to give the vegetation a name—and presently arrived at the edge of the sward; and now we had to wait until the clock struck one. Fortunately there were some bushes here, but none that rose higher than our girth, and this obliged us to maintain a posture of stooping which in a short time began to tell upon Caudel's rheumatic knees, as I knew by his snuffling and uneasy movements, though the heart of oak suffered in silence.

CHAPTER II

THE ELOPEMENT

This side of the house lay so black against the fine, clear, starry dusk of the sky that it was impossible to see the outlines of the windows in it. I could manage, however, to faintly trace the line of the balcony. My heart beat fast as I thought that even now my darling might be standing at the window peering through it, waiting for the signal flash. Caudel was thinking of her too.

"The young lady, begging of your pardon, sir, must be a gal of uncommon spirit, Mr. Barclay."

"She loves me, Caudel, and love is the most animating of spirits, my friend."

"I don't doubt it, sir. What room will it be that she's to come out of?"

"The dining-room—a big, deserted apartment where the girls take their meals."

"'Tain't her bedroom, then?"

"No. She is to steal dressed from her bedroom to the *salle-à-manger*—"

"The Sally what, sir?"

"No matter, no matter," I answered.

I pulled out my watch, but there was no power in the starlight to reveal the dial-plate. All continued still as the tomb, saving at fitful intervals a low note of silken rustling that stole upon the ear with some tender, dream-like gushing of night-air, as though the atmosphere had been stirred by the sweep of a large, near, invisible pinion.

"This here posture ain't so agreeable as dancing," hoarsely grumbled Caudel, "could almost wish myself a dwarf. That there word beginning with a Sally—"

"Not so loud, man; not so loud."

"It's uncommon queer," he persisted, "to feel one's self in a country where one's language ain't spoke. The werry soil don't seem natural. As to the language itself, burst me if I can understand how a man masters it. I was once trying to teach an Irish sailor how to dance a quadrille. 'Now, Murphy,' says I to him, 'you onderstand you're my wiz-a-wee?' 'What's dat you call me?' he cried out. 'You're anoder and a damn scoundrel besoides!' Half the words in this here tongue sound like cussing of a man. And to think of a dining-room being called a Sally—"

The convent clock struck one.

"Now," said I, "stand by."

I held up the lamp, and so turned the darkened part as to produce two flashes. A moment after a tiny flame showed and vanished above the balcony.

"My brave darling!" I exclaimed. "Have you the ladder in your hand?"

"Ay, sir."

"Mind these confounded hooks don't chink."

We stepped across the sward and stood under the balcony.

"Grace, my darling, is that you?" I called in a low voice.

"Yes, Herbert. Oh, please be quick. I am fancying I hear footsteps. My heart is scarcely beating for fright."

But despite the tremble in her low, sweet voice my ear seemed to find strength of purpose enough in it to satisfy me that there would be no failure from want of courage on her part. I could just discern the outline of her figure as she leaned over the balcony, and see the white of her face vague as a fancy.

"My darling, lower the line to pull the ladder up with—very softly, my pet—there are iron hooks which make a noise."

In a few moments she called: "I have lowered the line."

I felt about with my hand and grasped the end of it—a piece of twine, but strong enough to support the ladder. The deep, blood-hound-like baying of the dog recommenced, and at the same time I heard a sound of footsteps in the lane.

"Hist! Not a stir—not a whisper," I breathed out.

It was the staggering step of a drunken man. He broke maudlingly into a song when immediately abreast of us, ceased his noise suddenly and halted. This was a little passage of agony, I can assure you! The dog continued to utter its sullen, deep-throated bark in single strokes like the beat of a bell. Presently there was a sound as of the scrambling and crunching of feet, followed with the noise of a lurching tread; the man fell to drunkenly singing to himself again and so passed away up the lane.

Caudel fastened the end of the twine to the ladder, and then grunted out: "All ready for hoisting."

"Grace, my sweet," I whispered, "do you hear me?"

"Distinctly, dearest; but I am so frightened!"

"Pull up this ladder softly and hook the irons on to the rim of the balcony."

"Blast that dawg!" growled Caudel, "dummed if I don't think he smells us."

The ladder went rising into the air.

"It is hooked, Herbert."

"All right, Caudel, swing off upon the end of it—test it, and then aloft with you for mercy's sake!"

The three metal rungs held the ropes bravely stretched apart. The seaman sprang, and the ladder held as though it had been the shrouds of a man-of-war.

"Now, Caudel, you are a seaman—you must do the rest," said I.

He had removed his boots, and, mounting with cat-like agility, gained the balcony; then taking my sweetheart in his arms he lifted her over the rail and lowered her with his powerful arms until her little feet were half-way down the ladder. She uttered one or two faint exclamations, but was happily too frightened to cry out.

"Now, Mr. Barclay," hoarsely whispered Caudel, "you kitch hold of her, sir."

I grasped the ladder with one hand, and passed my arm round her waist; my stature made the feat an easy one; thus holding her to me I sprang back, then for an instant strained her to my heart with a whisper of joy, gratitude, and encouragement.

"You are as brave as you are true and sweet, Grace."

"Oh, Herbert!" she panted, "I can think of nothing. I am very wicked and feel horribly frightened."

"Mr. Barclay," softly called Caudel from the balcony, "what's to be done with this here ladder?"

"Let it be, let it be," I answered. "Bear a hand, Caudel, and come down."

He was alongside of us in a trice, pulling on his boots. I held my darling's hand, and the three of us made for the hole in the hedge with all possible speed. But the cabbages were very much in the way of Grace's dress, and so urgent was the need to make haste that, I believe, in my fashion of helping her, I carried her one way or another more than half the distance across that wide tract of kitchen-garden stuff.

The dog continued to bark. I asked Grace if the brute belonged to the house, and she answered yes. There seemed little doubt, from the persistency of the creature's deep delivery, that it scented some sort of mischief going forward, despite its kennel standing some considerable distance away on the other side of the house. I glanced back as Caudel was squeezing through the hole—I had told him to go first to make sure that all was right with the aperture, and to receive and help my sweetheart across the ditch—I glanced back, I say, in this brief pause; but the building showed as an impenetrable shadow against the winking brilliance of the sky hovering over and past it rich with the radiance in places of meteoric dust; no light gleamed; the night-hush, deep as death, was upon the château.

In a few moments my captain and I had carefully handed Grace through the hole and got her safe in the lane, and off we started, keeping well in the deep gloom cast by the convent wall, walking swiftly, yet noiselessly, and scarcely fetching our breath till we were clear of the lane, with the broad, glimmering St. Omer Road running in a rise upon our left.

By the aid of the three or four lamps we had passed I managed very early to get a view of my sweetheart, and found that she had warmly robed herself in a fur-trimmed jacket, and that her hat was a sort of turban as though chosen from her wardrobe with a view to her passage through the hole in the hedge. I had her hand under my arm; and pressed and caressed it as we walked. Caudel taking the earth with sailorly strides bowled and rolled along at her right, keeping her between us. I spoke to her in hasty sentences, forever praising her for her courage and thanking her for her love, and trying to hearten her; for now that the first desperate step had been taken, now that the wild risks of escape were ended, the spirit that had supported her failed; she could scarcely answer me; at moments she would direct looks over her shoulder; the mere figure of a tree would cause her to tighten her hold of my arm, and press against me as though starting.

"I feel so wicked—I feel that I ought to return—oh! how frightened I am;—how late it is!—what will mam'selle think?—How the girls will talk in the morning!"

I could coax no more than this sort of exclamations from her.

As we passed through the gate in the rampart wall and entered the Haute Ville, my captain broke the silence he had kept since we quitted the lane.

"How little do the folks who's sleeping in them houses know, Mr. Barclay, of what's a-passing under their noses. There ain't no sort of innocence like sleep."

He said this and yawned with a noise that resembled a shout.

"This is Captain Caudel, Grace," said I, "the master of the *Spitfire*. His services to-night I shall never forget."

"I am too frightened to thank you, Captain Caudel," she exclaimed. "I will thank you when I am calm. But shall I ever be calm? And ought I to thank you then?"

"Have no fear, miss. This here oneasiness 'll soon pass. I know the yarn—his honour spun it to me. What's been done, and what's yet to do is right and proper, and if it worn't—" his pause was more significant than had he proceeded.

Until we reached the harbour we did not encounter a living creature. I could never have imagined of the old town of Boulogne that its streets, late even as the hour was, would be so utterly deserted as we found them. I was satisfied with my judgment in not having ordered a carriage. The rattling of the wheels of a vehicle amid the vault-like stillness of those thoroughfares would have been heart-subduing to my mood of passionately nervous anxiety to get on board and away. I should have figured windows flung open and night-capped heads projected, and heard in imagination the clanking sabre of a gendarme trotting in our wake.

I did not breathe freely till the harbour lay before us. Caudel said as we crossed to where the flight of steps fell to the water's edge:

"I believe there's a little air of wind amoving."

"I feel it," I answered; "what's its quarter?"

"Seems to be off the land," said he.

"There is a man!" cried Grace, arresting me by a drag at my arm.

A figure stood at the head of the steps, and I believed it one of our men until a few strides brought us near enough to witness the gleam of uniform buttons, showing by the pale light of a lamp at a short distance from him.

"A *douanier*," said I. "Nothing to be afraid of, my pet."

"But if he should stop us, Herbert?" cried she, halting.

"Sooner than that should happen," rumbled Caudel, "I'd chuck him overboard. But why should he stop us, miss? We ain't smugglers."

"I would rather throw myself into the water than be taken back," exclaimed my sweetheart. I gently induced her to walk, whilst my captain advancing to the edge of the quay and looking down, sang out:

"Below there! Are ye awake?"

"Ay, wide awake," was the answer, floating up in hearty English accents from the cold, dark surface on which the boat lay.

The *douanier* drew back a few steps; it was impossible to see his face, but his steadfast suspicious regard was to be imagined. I have no doubt he understood exactly what was happening. He asked us the name of our vessel. I answered in French. "The small yacht *Spitfire* lying astern of the Folkestone steamer." Nothing more passed and we descended the steps.

I felt Grace shiver as I handed her into the boat. The harbour water washed black and cold to the dark line of pier and wharf opposite; there was an edge of chill, too, in the distant sound of surf crawling upon the sand, and the wide spread of stars carried the fancy to the broad, black breast of ocean over which they were trembling. The oars dipped, striking a dim cloud of phosphor into the eddies they made; and a few strokes of the blades carried us to the side of the little *Spitfire*. I sprang on to the deck, and lifting my darling through the gangway, called to Caudel to make haste to get the boat in and start, for the

breeze, that had before been little more than a fancy to me, I could now hear as it brushed the surface of the harbour wall, making the reflection of the large stars in the water alongside twinkle and widen out, and putting a perfume of fresh seaweed into the atmosphere, though the draught, such as it was, came from a malodorous quarter.

I led Grace to the little companion hatch, and together we entered the cabin. The lamp burnt brightly; the skylight lay open, and the interior was cool and sweet with several pots of flowers which I had sent aboard in the afternoon. It was a little box of a place, as you will suppose, of a dandy craft of twenty-six tons; but I had not spared my purse in decorating it, and I believe no prettier interior of the kind in a vessel of the size of the *Spitfire* was in those times afloat. There were two sleeping-rooms, one forward and one aft. The after cabin was little better than a hole, and this I occupied. The berth forward, on the other hand, was as roomy as the dimensions of the little ship would allow, and I had taken care that it lacked nothing to render it a pleasant, I may say an elegant, sea bedroom. It was to be Grace's until I got her ashore, and this I counted upon managing by the following Friday, that is to say in about four days from the date of this night about which I am writing.

She stood at the table looking about her, breathing fast, her eyes large with alarm, excitement, I know not what other sensations and emotions. I wish I knew how to praise her, how to describe her. "Sweet" is the best word to express her girlish beauty. Though she was three months short of eighteen years of age, she might readily have passed for twenty-one, so womanly was her figure, as though, indeed, she was of tropic breeding and had been reared under suns which quickly ripen a maiden's beauty. But to say more would be to say what? The liquid brown of her large and glowing eyes—the dark and delicate bronze of her rich abundant hair—the suggestion of a pout in the turn of her lip, that gave an incomparable air of archness to her expression when her countenance was in repose—to enumerate these things—to deliver a catalogue of her graces in the most felicitous language that love and the memory of love could dictate, is yet to leave all that I could wish to say unsaid.

"At last, Grace!" I exclaimed, lifting her hand to my lips. "How is it with you now, my pet?"

She seated herself, and hid her face in her hands upon the table, saying, "I don't know how I feel, Herbert. But I know how I ought to feel."

"Wait a little. You will regain your courage. You will find nothing wrong in all this presently. It was bound to happen. There was not the least occasion for this business of rope ladders and midnight sailings. It is Lady Amelia who forces this elopement upon us."

"What will she say?" she breathed through her fingers, still keeping her face hidden to conceal the crimson that had flushed her on a sudden and that was showing to the rim of her collar.

"Do you care? Do *I* care? We have forced her hand, and what can she do? If you were but twenty-one, Grace!—and yet I don't know. You would be three years older—three years of sweetness gone for ever! But the old lady will have to give her consent now, and the rest will be for my cousin Frank to manage. Pray look at me, my sweet one."

"I can't. I am ashamed. It is a most desperate act. What will mam'selle say—and your sailors?" she murmured from behind her hands.

"My sailors! Grace, shall I take you back whilst there is yet time?"

She flashed a look at me over her finger tips.

"Certainly not!" she exclaimed with emphasis, then hid her face again.

I seated myself by her side, but it took me five minutes to get her to look at me, and another five minutes to coax a smile from her. In this while the men were busy about the decks. I heard Caudel's growling lungs of leather delivering orders in a half-stifled hurricane note, but I did not know that we were under way until I put my head through the companion hatch, and saw the dusky fabrics of the piers on either side stealing almost insensibly past us. Now that the wide expanse of sky had opened over the land, I could witness a dimness, as of the shadowing of clouds, in the quarter of the sky against which stood the unfinished block of the cathedral. This caused me to reckon upon the wind freshening presently. As it now blew it was a very light air indeed, scarce with weight enough to steady the light cloths of the yacht. There was an unwieldy lump of a French smack slowly grinding her way up the harbour close in against the pier on the port side, and astern of us were the triangular lights of a paddle-wheeled steamer, bound to London, timed for the tide that was now high, and filling the quietude of the night with the noise of the swift beats of revolving wheels.

"Mind that steamer!" I called out to Caudel, who was at the helm.

She passed us close, noisily shearing through it, with the white water at her stem throbbing like clouds of steam to the paddles, whence the race aft spread far into the gloom astern in a wide wake of yeast; a body of fire broke from her tall chimney and illuminated the long, thick line of smoke like the play of lightning upon the face of a thunder-cloud; her saloon was aglow, and the illuminated portholes went winking past upon the vision as though there lay a coil of flame along the length of the ebony black sides. She swept past and was away, leaving behind her a swell upon which the *Spitfire* tumbled about so violently that I came very near to being thrown out of the hatch in which I was standing. The commotion presently ceased, and by this time we were abreast of the longer of the two pier-heads, clear of the harbour, but I waited still a moment or so to take another view of the night and to send a glance round. Undoubtedly the stars shining low down over the old town of Boulogne had dimmed greatly within the hour, though they still flashed with brilliance in the direction of the English coast. The surf rolling upon the sand on either side the piers broke with a hollow note that even to my inexperienced ears seemed prophetic of wind.

"What is the weather to be, Caudel?" I called to him.

"We're going to get a breeze from the south'ard, sir," he answered; "nothing to harm, I dessay, if it don't draw westerly."

"What is your plan of sailing?"

"Can't do better, I think, sir, than stand over for the English coast, and so run down, keeping the ports conveniently aboard."

"Do you mark the noise of the surf?"

"Ay, sir, that's along of this here ground swell."

I had hardly till this moment noticed the movement to which he referred. The swell was long and light, setting in flowing rounds of shadow dead on to the Boulogne shore, too rhythmically gentle to take the attention.

I re-entered the cabin, and found my sweetheart with her elbows on the table and her cheeks resting in her hands. The blush had scarcely faded from her face when I had quitted her; now she was as white as a lily.

"Why do you leave me alone, Herbert?" she asked, turning her dark, liquid eyes upon me without shifting the posture of her head.

"My dearest, I wish to see our little ship clear of Boulogne harbour. We shall be getting a pleasant breeze presently, and it cannot blow too soon to please us. A brisk fair wind should land us at our destination in three days, and then—and then—" said I, sitting down and bringing her to me.

She laid her cheek on my shoulder but said nothing.

"Now," I exclaimed, "you are of course faint and wretched for the want of refreshments. What can I get you?" and I was about to give her a list of the wines and eatables I had laid in, but she languidly shook her head, as it rested on my shoulder, and faintly bade me not to speak of refreshments.

"I should like to lie down," she said.

"You are tired—worn out," I exclaimed, not yet seeing how it was with her; "yonder is your cabin. I believe you will find all you want in it. Unhappily we have no maid aboard to help you. But you will be able to manage, Grace—it is but for a day or two; and if you are not perfectly happy and comfortable, why, we will make for the nearest English port and finish the rest of the journey by rail. But our little yacht—"

"I must lie down," she interrupted; "this dreadful motion!—get me a pillow and a rug; I will lie on this sofa."

I could have heaped a hundred injurious names upon my head for not at once observing that the darling was suffering. I sprang from her side, hastily procured a pillow and rug, removed her hat, plunged afresh into her cabin for some Eau de Cologne and went to work to bathe her brow and to minister to her in other ways. To be afflicted with nausea in the most romantic passage of one's life! I had never thought of inquiring whether or not she was a "good sailor," as it is called, being much too sentimental, much, too much in love to be visited by misgivings or conjectures in a direction so horribly prosaic as this.

I thought to comfort her by saying that if her sufferings continued we would head direct for Dover or some adjacent harbour. But, somehow, my scheme of elopement having comprised a yachting trip, the programme of it had grown into a habit of thought with me. For weeks I had been looking forward to the trip

with the impassioned eagerness of a lover, delighting my mind with the fancy of having my sweetheart all to myself in a sense that no excursion on shore could possibly parallel. On shore there would be the rude conditions of the railway, the cab, the hotel, and all the vulgarity of dispatch when in motion. But the yacht gave my heart's trick of idealising a chance. The quiet surface of sea—I was too much in love to think of a gale of wind; the glories of the sunset; the new moon; the hushed night; we two on deck; our impassioned whispers set to music by the brook-like murmurings of waters alongside; the silken fannings of phantom-like pinions of canvas; the subdued voices of the men forward... Yes! It was of these things I had thought; these were the engaging, the delightful fancies that had filled my brain.

Nor, in this candid narrative which, I trust, will carry its own apology for our audacious behaviour as it progresses, must I omit to give the chief reason for my choice of a yacht as a means of eloping with Grace. She was under twenty-one; her aunt, Lady Amelia Roscoe, was her guardian, and no clergyman would marry the girl to me without her aunt's consent. That consent must be wrested from the old lady, and the business of wresting manifestly implies a violent measure; and what then, as I somewhat boyishly concluded, could follow our lonely association at sea for three or four days, or perhaps a week, but her ladyship's sanction?

A man, in describing his own passion, and in depicting himself making love, cannot but present a foolish figure. Unhappily, this story solely concerns my elopement with Grace Bellassys and what came of it, and, therefore, it is in the strictest sense a tale of love: a description of which sentiment, however, as it worked in me and my dearest girl, I will endeavour to trouble you as little as possible with.

CHAPTER III

AT SEA

It was some time after three o'clock in the morning when Grace fell asleep. The heave of the vessel had entirely conquered emotion. She had had no smiles

for me; the handkerchief she held to her mouth had kept her lips sealed; but her eyes were never more beautiful than now with their languishing expression of suffering, and I could not remove my gaze from her face, so exceedingly sweet did she look as she lay with the rich bronze of her hair glittering, as though gold-dusted, to the lamplight, and her brow showing with an ivory gleam through the tresses which shadowed it in charming disorder.

She fell asleep at last, breathing quietly, and I cannot tell how it comforted me to find her able to sleep, for now I might hope it would not take many hours of rest to qualify her as a sailor. In all this time that I had been below refreshing her brow and attending to her, and watching her as a picture of which my sight could never weary, the breeze had freshened and the yacht was heeling to it, and taking the wrinkled sides of the swell—that grew heavier as we widened the offing—with the sheering, hissing sweep that one notices in a steam launch. Grace lay on a lee-locker, and as the weather rolls of the little *Spitfire* were small there was no fear of my sweetheart slipping off the couch. She rested very comfortably, and slept as soundly as though in her own bed in times before she had known me, before I had crossed her path to set her heart beating, to trouble her slumbers, to give a new impulse to her life and to colour, with hues of shadows and brightnesses what had been little more than the drab of virgin monotony.

These poetical thoughts occurred to me as I stood gazing at her awhile to make sure that she slept; then finding the need of refreshment, I softly mixed myself a glass of soda and brandy, and lighting a pipe in the companion-way, that the fumes of the tobacco might not taint the cabin atmosphere, I stepped on to the deck.

And now I must tell you here that my little dandy yacht, the *Spitfire*, was so brave, staunch, and stout a craft that, though I am no lover of the sea in its angry moods, and especially have no relish for such experiences as one is said to encounter, for instance, off Cape Horn, yet such was my confidence in her seaworthiness, I should have been quite willing to sail round the world in her, had the necessity for so tedious an adventure have arisen. She had been built as a smack, but was found too fast for trawling, and the owner offered her as a bargain. I purchased and re-equipped her, little dreaming that she was one day to win me a wife. I improved her cabin accommodation, handsomely furnished her within, caused her to be sheathed with yellow metal to the bends, and to be handsomely embellished with gilt at the stern and quarters, according to the

gingerbread taste of twenty or thirty years ago. She had a fine, bold spring or rise of deck forward, with abundance of beam, which warranted her for stability; but her submerged lines were extraordinarily fine, and I cannot recollect the name of a pleasure craft afloat at that time which I should not have been willing to challenge, whether for a fifty or a thousand mile race. She was rigged as a dandy, a term that no reader, I hope, will want me to explain.

I stood, cigar in mouth, looking up at her canvas and round upon the dark scene of ocean, whilst, the lid of the skylight being a little way open, I was almost within arm's reach of my darling, whose lightest call would reach my ear, or least movement take my eye. The stars were dim away over the port quarter, and I could distinguish the outlines of clouds hanging in dusky, vaporous bodies over the black mass of the coast dotted with lights where Boulogne lay, with the Cape Gris Nez lantern windily flashing on high from its shoulder of land that blended in a dye of ink with the gloom of the horizon. There were little runs of froth in the ripples of the water, with now and again a phosphoric glancing that instinctively sent the eye to the dimness in the western circle as though it were sheet lightning there which was being reflected. Broad abeam was a large, gloomy collier "reaching" in for Boulogne harbour: she showed a gaunt, ribbed, and heeling figure, with her yards almost fore and aft, and not a hint of life aboard her in the form of light or noise.

I felt sleepless—never so broad awake, despite this business now in hand that had robbed me for days past of hour after hour of slumber, so that I may safely say I had scarcely enjoyed six hours of solid sleep in as many days. Caudel still grasped the tiller, and forward was one of the men restlessly but noiselessly pacing the little fore-castle. The bleak hiss of the froth at the yacht's forefoot threw a shrewd bleakness into the light pouring of the off-shore wind, and I buttoned up my coat as I turned to Caudel, though excitement worked much too hotly in my soul to suffer me to feel conscious of the cold.

"This breeze will do, Caudel, if it holds," said I, approaching him by a stride or two that my voice should not disturb Grace.

"Ay, sir, it is as pretty a little air as could be asked for."

"What light is that away out yonder?"

"The Varne, your honour."

"And where are you carrying the little ship to?" said I, looking at the illuminated disc of compass card that swung in the short, brass binnacle under his nose.

"Ye see the course, Mr. Barclay—west by nothe. That 'll fetch Beachy Head for us, afterwards a small shift of the hellum 'll put the Channel under our bows, keeping the British ports as we go along handy, so that if your honour don't like the look of the bayrometer, why there's always a harbour within a easy sail."

I was quite willing that Caudel should heave the English land into sight. He had been bred in coasters, and knew his way about by the mere swell of the mud, as the sailors say; whereas, put him in the middle of the ocean, with nothing but his sextant to depend upon, and I do not know that I should have felt very sure of him.

He coughed, and seemed to mumble to himself as he ground upon the piece of tobacco in his cheek, then said, "And how's the young lady adoing, sir?"

"The motion of the vessel rendered her somewhat uneasy, but she is now sleeping."

I took a peep as I said this, to be certain, and saw her resting stirless, and in the posture I had left her in. No skylight ever framed a prettier picture of a sleeping girl. Her hair looked like beaten gold in the illusive lamplight; and to my eye, coming from the darkness of the sea and the great height of star-laden gloom, the sleeping form in the tender radiance of the interior was for the moment as startling as a vision, as something of unreal loveliness. I returned to Caudel.

"Sorry to hear she don't feel well, sir," he exclaimed; "but this here sea-sickness I'm told, soon passes."

"I want her to be well," said I. "I wish her to enjoy the run down Channel. We must not go ashore if we can help it; or one special object I have in my mind will be defeated."

"Shall I keep the yacht well out, then, sir? No need to draw in, if so be—"

"No, no, sight the coast, Caudel, and give us a view of the scenery. And now, whilst I have the chance, let me thank you heartily for the service you have done

me to-night. I should have been helpless without you; and what other man of my crew—what other man of any sort, indeed, could I have depended upon?"

"Oh, dorn't mention it, Mr. Barclay, sir; I beg and entreat that you worn't mention it, sir," he replied, as though affected by my condescension. "You're a gentleman, sir, begging your pardon, and that means a man of honour, and when you told me how things stood, why, putting all dooty on one side, if so be as there can be such a thing as dooty in jobs which aren't shipshape and proper, why, I says, of course, I was willing to be of use. Not that I myself have much confidence in these here elopements, saving your presence. I've got a grown-up darter myself in sarvice, and if when she gets married she dorn't make a straight course for the meeting-house, why, then, I shall have to talk to her as she's never yet been talked to. But in this job"—he swung off from the tiller to expectorate over the rail—"what the young lady's been and gone and done is what I should say to my darter or any other young woman, the sarcumstances being the same, 'go thou and dew likewise.'"

"You see, Caudel, there was no hope of getting her ladyship's consent."

"No, sir."

"Then, again, consider the cruelty of sending the young lady to a Roman Catholic school for no fairer or kinder reasons than to remove her out of my way, and to compel her, if possible, by ceaseless teasing and exhortation, and God best knows what other devices, to change her faith."

"I onderstand, sir, and I'm of opinion it was quite time that their little game was stopped."

"Lady Amelia Roscoe is a Roman Catholic, and very bigoted. Ever since she first took charge of Miss Bellassys she has been trying to convert her, and by methods, I assure you, by no means uniformly kind."

"So you was asaying, sir."

It pleased me to be thus candid with this sailor. Possibly there was in me a little disturbing sense of the need of justifying myself, though I believe the most acidulated moralist could not have glanced through the skylight without feeling that I heartily deserved forgiveness.

"But supposing, Mr. Barclay, sir," continued Caudel, "that you'd ha' changed your religion and become a Papist; would her ladyship still ha' gone on objecting to ye?"

"Supposing! Yes, Caudel, she would have gone on objecting even then. There are family feelings, family traditions, mixed up in her dislike of me. You shall have the yarn before we go ashore. It is right that you should know the whole truth. Until I make that young lady below my wife, she is as much under your care as under mine. That was agreed on between us, and that you know."

"That I *do* know, and shall remember as much for her sake as for yourn and for mine," answered the honest fellow, with a note of deep feeling in his voice. "There's only one consideration, Mr. Barclay, that worrits me. I onderstood you to say, sir, that your honour has a cousin who's a clergyman that's willing to marry ye right away out of hand."

"We must get the consent of the aunt first."

"*There* it is!" cried he, smiting the head of the tiller with his clenched fist, "suppose she dorn't consent?"

"We have taken this step," said I softly, always afraid of disturbing my sweetheart, "to *force* her to consent. D'ye think she can refuse, man, after she hears of this elopement—this midnight rope-ladder business—and the days we hope to spend together on this little *Spitfire*?"

"Still, Mr. Barclay, supposing she do, sir? You'll forgive me for saying of it; but supposing she *do*, sir?"

"No good in supposing, Caudel," said I, suppressing a little movement of irritation; "no good in obstructing one's path by suppositions stuck up like so many fences to stop one from advancing. Our first business is to get to Penzance."

By his motions, and the uneasy shifting of his posture, he discovered himself ill at ease, but his respectfulness would not allow him to persevere with his inquiries.

"Caudel," said I, "you may ask me any questions you please. The more you show yourself really anxious on behalf of Miss Bellassys, the more shall I

honour you. Don't fear. I shall never interpret your concern for her into a doubt of me. If Lady Amelia absolutely refuses her sanction, what then remains but to place Miss Bellassys with my sister and wait till she comes of age?"

So speaking, and now considering that I had said enough, I threw the end of my cigar overboard and went below.

It was daylight shortly before six, but the grey of the dawn brightened into sunrise before Grace awoke. Throughout the hours she had slept without a stir. From time to time I had dozed, chin on breast, opposite to where she lay. The wind had freshened, and the yacht was lying well down to it, swarming along, taking buoyantly the little sea that had risen, and filling the breeze, that was musical with the harmonies of the taut rigging, with the swift noise of spinning and seething water. The square of heavens showing in the skylight overhead wore a hard, marble, windy look, but the pearl-coloured streaks of vapour floated high and motionless, and I was yachtsman enough to gather from what I saw that there was nothing more in all this than a fresh Channel morning, and a sweep of southerly wind that was driving the *Spitfire* along her course some eight or nine miles in the hour.

As the misty pink flash of the upper limb of the rising sun struck the skylight, and made a very prison of the little cabin, with its mirrors and silver lamp, and glass and brass ornamentation, Grace opened her eyes. She opened them straight upon me, and, whilst I might have counted ten, she continued to stare as though she were in a trance; then the blood flooded her pale cheeks, her eyes grew brilliant with astonishment, and she sat erect, bringing her hands to her temples as though she struggled to recollect her wits. However, it was not long before she rallied, though for some few moments her face remained empty of intelligence.

"Why, Grace, my darling," I cried, "do not you know where you are?"

"Yes, now I do," she answered, "but I thought I had gone mad when I first awoke and looked around me."

"You have slept soundly, but then you are a child," said I.

"Whereabouts are we, Herbert?"

"I cannot tell for sure," I answered, "out of sight of land anyway. But where you are, Grace, you ought to know. Now, don't sigh. We are not here to be

miserable."

A few caresses, and then her timid glances began to show like the old looks in her. I asked her if the movement of the yacht rendered her uneasy, and after a pause, during which she considered with a grave face, she answered no: she felt better, she must try to stand—and so saying she stood up on the swaying deck, and, smiling with her fine eyes fastened upon my face, poised her figure in a floating way full of a grace far above dancing, to my fancy. Her gaze went to a mirror, and I easily interpreted her thoughts, though, for my part, I found her beauty improved by her roughened hair.

"There is your cabin," said I; "the door is behind those curtains. Take a peep, and tell me if it pleases you?"

There were flowers in it to sweeten the atmosphere, and every imaginable convenience that it was possible for a male imagination to hit upon in its efforts in a direction of this sort. She praised the little berth, and closed the door with a smile at me that made me conjecture I should not hear much more from her about our imprudence, the impropriety of our conduct, what mam'selle would think, and what the school girls would say.

Though she was but a child, as I would tell her, I too was but a boy for the matter of that, and her smile and the look she had given me, and her praise of the little berth I had fitted up for her made me feel so boyishly joyous that, like a boy as I was, though above six feet tall, I fell a whistling out of my high spirits, and then kissed the feather in her hat, and her gloves, which lay upon the table, afterwards springing, in a couple of bounds, on deck, where I stood roaring out for Bobby Allett.

A seaman named Job Crew was at the helm. Two others named Jim Foster and Dick Files were washing down the decks. I asked Crew where Caudel was, and he told me he had gone below to shave. I bawled again for Bobby Allett, and after a moment or two he rose through the forecastle hatch. He was a youth of about fifteen, who had been shipped by Caudel to serve as steward or cabin boy and to make himself generally useful besides. As he approached, I eyed him with some misgiving, though I had found nothing to object to in him before; but the presence of my sweetheart in the cabin had, I suppose, tempered my taste to a quality of lover-like fastidiousness, and this boy, Bobby, to my mind, looked very dirty.

"Do you mean to wait upon me in those clothes?" said I.

"They're the best I have, master," he answered, staring at me with a pair of round eyes out of a dingy skin, that was certainly not clarified by the number of freckles and pimples which decorated it.

"You can look smarter than that if you like," said I to him. "I want breakfast right away off. And let Foster drop his bucket and go to work to boil and cook. But tell Captain Caudel also that before you lay aft you must clean yourself, polish your face, brush your hair and shoes, and if you haven't got a clean shirt you must borrow one."

The boy went forward.

"Pity," said I, thinking aloud rather than talking, as I stepped to the binnacle to mark the yacht's course, "that Caudel should have shipped such a dingy-skinned chap as that fellow for cabin use."

"It's all along of his own doing, sir," said Job Crew.

"How? You mean he won't wash himself?"

"No, sir; it's along of smoking."

"Smoking?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. I know his father—he's a waterman. His father told me that that there boy Bobby saved up, and then laid out all he'd got upon a meerschaum pipe *for* to colour it. He kep' all on a smoking, day arter day, and night arter night. But his father says to me, it was no go, sir; 'stead of his colouring the pipe, the pipe coloured him, and is weins have run nothen but tobacco juice ever since."

I burst into a laugh, and went to the rail to take a look round. We might have been in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, so boundless did the spreading waters look; not a blob or film of coast on any hand of us broke the flawless sweep of the green circle of Channel waters. There was a steady breeze off the port beam, and the yacht, with every cloth which she carried on her, was driving through it as though she were in tow of a steamboat. The scene was full of life. On one bow was an English smack, as gaudy in the misty brilliance of the sunshine as an aquatic parrot, with her red mainsail and brown mizzen, and white foresail

topping, aslant, the gloomy black hull from whose sides would break from time to time a sullen, white flash, like a leap of fire from a cannon's mouth, as the swing of the sea swerved the black, wet timbers to the morning lustre. On the other bow was a little barque with a milk-white hull, the French tri-colour trembling at her gaff-end, and her canvas looking like shot silk, with the play of the shadows in the bright and polished concavities. Past her a big French lugger was hobbling clumsily over the short seas, and farther off still, a tall, black steamboat, brig-rigged, her portholes glittering as though the whole length of her was studded with brilliants, was clumsily thrusting through it. Against the hard, blue marble of the sky the horizon stood firm, making one think of the rim of a green lens, broken in places by a leaning sail—a shadowy pear-like shaft. The Channel throbbed in glory under the sun; the full spirit of the sea was in the morning; and the wide and spreading surface of waters gave as keen an oceanic significance to the inspiration of the moment, as though the eye that centred the scene gazed from the heart of a South Pacific solitude.

I stood leaning over the bulwarks humming an air. Never had my heart beaten with so exquisite a sense of gladness and of happiness, as now possessed it. I was disturbed in a reverie of love, in which was mingled the life and beauty of the scene I surveyed, by the arrival of Caudel. He was varnished with soap, and blue with recent shaving, but there was no trace of the sleepless hours I had forced him to pass in the little sea-blue eyes which glittered under his somewhat ragged, thatched brow. He was a man of about fifty years of age; his dark hair was here and there of an iron-grey, and a roll of short-cut whiskers met in a bit of a beard upon the bone in his throat. He carried a true salt-water air in his somewhat bowed legs, in his slow motions, and in his trick of letting his arms hang up and down as though they were pump-handles. His theory of dress was, that what kept out the cold also kept out the heat, and so he never varied his attire, which was composed of a thick double-breasted waistcoat, a long pilot-cloth coat, a Scotch cap, very roomy pilot-cloth trousers, a worsted cravat, and fishermen's stockings.

I exchanged a few words with him about the boy Bobby, inquired the situation of the yacht, and after some talk of this kind, during which I gathered that he was taking advantage of the breeze, and shaping a somewhat more westerly course than he had first proposed, so that he did not expect to make the English coast much before three or four o'clock in the afternoon, I went below to refresh myself after the laborious undertaking of the night.

On quitting my berth I found the boy Bobby laying the cloth for breakfast, and Grace seated on a locker watching him. Her face was pale, but its expression was without uneasiness. She had put on her hat, and on seeing me exclaimed:

"Herbert, dear, take me on deck. The fresh air may revive me," and she looked at the boy and the cloth he was laying with a pout full of meaning.

I at once took her by the hand and conducted her through the hatch. She passed her arm through mine to balance herself, and then sent her eyes bright with nervousness and astonishment round the sea, breathing swiftly.

"Where is the land?" she asked.

"Behind the ocean, my love. But we shall be having a view of the right side of these waters presently."

"What a little boat!" she exclaimed, running her gaze over the yacht. "Is it not dangerous to be in so small a vessel out of sight of land?"

"Bless your dear heart, no. Think of the early navigators! Of course mam'selle taught you all about the early navigators?"

"When shall we reach Penzance?"

"Supposing the wind to blow fair and briskly, in three or four days."

"Three or four days!" she exclaimed, and glancing down at herself, she added, "Of course you know, Herbert, that I have only the dress I am wearing?"

"It will last you till we get ashore," said I, laughing; "and then you shall buy everything you want, which, of course, will be more than you want."

"I shall send," said she, "to Mam'selle Championet for my boxes."

"Certainly—when we are married."

"All your presents, particularly the darling little watch, are in those boxes, Herbert."

"Everything shall be recovered to the uttermost ha'porth, my pet."

I observed Caudel, who stood a little forward of the companion, gazing at her with an expression of shyness and admiration. I told her that he was the captain of the yacht; that he was the man I had introduced to her last night, and begged her to speak to him. She coloured a rose red, but bade him good-morning nevertheless, accompanying the words with an inclination of her form, the graceful and easy dignity of which somehow made me think of the movement of a bough heavily foliaged, set curtseying by the summer wind.

"I hope, Miss," said Caudel, pulling off his Scotch cap, "as how I see you well this morning, freed of that there nausey as Mr. Barclay was a telling me you suffered from?"

"I trust to get used to the sea quickly—the motion of the yacht is not what I like," she answered, with her face averted from him, taking a peep at me to observe if I saw that she felt ashamed and would not confront him.

He perceived this too, and knuckling his forehead said, "It's but a little of the sea ye shall have, miss, if so be it lies in my power to keep this here *Spitfire* awalking," and so speaking he moved off, singing out some idle order as he did so by way of excusing his abrupt departure.

"I wish we were quite alone, Herbert," said my sweetheart, drawing me to the yacht's rail.

"So do I, my own, but not here—not in the middle of the sea."

"I did not think of bringing a veil—your men stare so."

"And so do I," said I, letting my gaze sink fair into her eyes, which she had upturned to mine. "You wouldn't have me rebuke the poor, harmless, sailor men for doing what I am every instant guilty of—admiring you, I mean, to the very

topmost height of my capacity in that way—but here comes Master Bobby Allett with the breakfast."

"Herbert, I could not eat for worlds."

"Are you so much in love as all that?"

She shook her head, and looked at the flowing lines of green water which melted into snow, as they came curving, with glass-clear backs, to the ruddy streak of the yacht's sheathing. However, the desire to keep her at sea until we could land ourselves close to the spot where we were to be married made me too anxious to conquer the uneasiness which the motion of the vessel excited to humour her. I coaxed and implored, and eventually got her below, and by dint of talking and engaging her attention, and making her forget herself, so to speak, I managed to betray her into breaking her fast with a cup of tea and a fragment of cold chicken. This was an accomplishment of which I had some reason to feel proud; but then, to be sure, I was in the secret, knowing this; that sea nausea is entirely an affair of the nerves; that no sufferer is ill in his sleep, no matter how high the sea may be running, or how unendurable to his waking senses the sky-high capers and abysmal plunges of the craft may be, and that the correct treatment for sea-sickness is—not to think of it. In short, I made my sweetheart forget to feel uneasy. She talked, she sipped her tea, she ate, and then she looked better, and indeed owned that she felt so.

CHAPTER IV

SWEETHEARTS IN A DANDY

For my part I breakfasted with the avidity of a shipwrecked man. Ashore it might have been otherwise, but the sea breeze is a noble neutraliser of whatever is undesirable in the obligations which attend an excess of sentiment and emotion.

The cabin made as pretty a little marine piece as ever the light of the early sun flashed into. There were flowers of fragrance and of rich colours; the small

table sparkled with its hospitable furniture; the polished bulkheads rippled with light, and the diamond-like glance of the lustrous, dancing sea seemed to be swept by the blue air gushing athwart the sky-light into the mirrors, which enriched this little boudoir of a cabin. But it was the presence of Grace which informed this picture with those qualities of sweetness, elegance, refinement, perfume, which I now found in it, but had not before noticed. How proudly my young heart rose to the sight of her! to the thought of her as my own, one and indivisible, no longer the distant hope, which for weary months past her aunt had made her to me, but my near sweetheart—my present darling—her hand within reach of my grasp.

We sat together in earnest conversation. It was not for me to pretend that I could witness no imprudence in our elopement. Indeed, I took care to let her know that I regretted the step we had been forced into taking as fully as she did. My love was an influence upon her, and whatever I said I felt might weigh with her childish heart. But I repeated what I had again and again written to her—that there had been no other alternative than this elopement.

"You wished me to wait," I said, "until you were twenty-one, when you would be your own mistress. But to wait for more than three years! What was to happen in that time? They might have converted you—"

"No," she cried.

"And have wrought a complete change in your nature," I went on. "How many girls are there who could resist the sort of pressure they were subjecting you to one way and another?"

"They could not have changed my heart, Herbert."

"How can we tell? Under their influence in another year you might have come to congratulate yourself upon your escape from me."

"Do you think so? Then you should have granted me another year, because marriage," she added, with a look in her eyes that was like a wistful smile, "is a very serious thing, and if you believe that I should be rejoicing in a year hence over my escape from you, as you call it, then you must believe that I have no business to be here."

This was a cool piece of logic that was hardly to my taste.

"Tell me," said I, fondling her hand, "how you managed last night?"

"I do not like to think of it," she answered. "I was obliged to undress, for it is mam'selle's rule to look into all the bedrooms the last thing after locking the house up. It was then ten o'clock. I waited until I heard the convent clock strike twelve, by which time I supposed everybody would be sound asleep. Then I lighted a candle and dressed myself, but I had to use my hands as softly as a spider spins its web, and my heart seemed to beat so loud that I was afraid the girls in the next room would hear it. I put a box of matches in my pocket, and crept along the corridors to the big *salle-à-manger*. The door of my bedroom creaked when I opened it, and I felt as if I must sink to the ground with fright. The *salle-à-manger* is a great, gloomy room even in day-time; it was dreadfully dark, horribly black, Herbert, and the sight of the stars shining through the window over the balcony made me feel so lonely that I could have cried. There was a mouse scratching in the room somewhere, and I got upon a chair, scarcely caring whether I made a noise or not, so frightened was I, for I hate mice. Indeed, if that mouse had not kept quiet after a while, I believe I should not be here now. I could not endure being alone in a great, dark room at that fearful hour of the night with a mouse running about near me. Oh, Herbert, how glad I was when I saw your lantern flash."

"My brave little heart!" cried I, snatching up her hand and kissing it. "But the worst part is over. There are no ladders, no great black rooms now before us, no mice even."

She slightly coloured without smiling, and I noticed an anxious expression in the young eyes she held steadfastly bent upon the table.

"What thought is troubling you, Grace?"

"Herbert, I fear you will not love me the better for consenting to run away with you."

"Is that your only fear?"

She shook her head, and said, whilst she continued to keep her eyes downcast: "Suppose Aunt Amelia refuses to sanction our marriage?"

"She will not—she dare not!" I cried vehemently; "imprudent as we may seem, we are politic in this, Grace—that our adventure must *force* your aunt into

sending us her sanction." She looked at me, but her face remained grave. "Caudel," said I, "who is as much your guardian as I am, put the same question to me. But there is no earthly good in *supposing*. It is monstrous to suppose that your aunt will object. She hates me, I know, but her aversion—the aversion of that old woman of the world with her family pride and notions of propriety—is not going to suffer her to forbid our marriage after this. Yet, grant that her ladyship—my blessings upon her false front!—should go on saying no; are we not prepared?"

"But if it has to come to my living with your sister, Herbert—"

"It will come to nothing of the sort," I whipped out.

"Would it not have been better for me," she continued, "to have remained under Aunt Amelia's care until I came of age?"

"Aunt Amelia," said I, "in that sense means your Boulogne school-mistress, and in much less than three years you would have been pestered into changing your faith."

"You think I have no strength of mind. You may be right," she added, looking at me and then around her and sighing.

"But remember, my darling, what you have written to me. What was the name now of mam'selle's confessor?"

"Père Jerome."

"Well, on your own showing, wasn't this Father Jerome ceaseless in his importunities?"

"Yes. Mam'selle was repeatedly leaving me alone with him under one excuse or another. He sent me books—I was taken to mass—only yesterday morning mam'selle lost her temper with me, and quite made me understand that her orders from Aunt Amelia were to convert me, *coûte que coûte*—"

"Then," cried I, interrupting her once more, hot with the irritation that had again and again visited me when I read her letters where she complained of the behaviour of mam'selle and this Father Jerome; "is there any mortal of our faith, I care not what may be his or her theories of human propriety, who could

pronounce against us for acting as we have? My contention is, your aunt is not a proper guardian for you. If it were your father or your mother—both Protestants, whose spirits, looking down upon you, we are bound to believe, would wish you to live and die Protestant to the heart as they were! But Lady Amelia Roscoe!—the most wretched mixture that can be imagined, of bigotry and worldliness, her head stuffed full of priests and dress, of beads and balls—"

I broke off to kiss away a tear, and a little later she was smiling with her hand in mine, as I led her up on deck.

The mistiness had gone out of the sunlight, the pearly, vaporous curls—faint of hue as the new moon beheld in the day—which had given a look of marble to the sky, had melted out or been settled by the breeze over to the English coast, and now the heavens were a pale blue, piebald with bodies of white vapour streaming up out of the south and touching the green and creaming stretch of waters with shadows of violet. There was more warmth in the sun than I should have looked for at that time of the year, and I speedily made Grace comfortable in a chair, a little distance from the tiller—in other words, out of earshot of the helmsman; I snugged her in rugs, and Caudel further sheltered her by what he called a hurricane house—a square of canvas "seized" above the line of the bulwark rail.

She gazed about her out of the wraps which rose to her ears with eyes full of childlike interest and wonder, not unmixed with fear, I saw her eagerly watching the action of the yacht as the little fabric leaned to a sea with a long, sideways, floating plunge that brought the yeast of the broken waters bubbling and hissing to the very line of her lee forecastle bulwark; then she would clasp my hand as though startled when the dandy craft brought the weight of her white canvas to windward on the heave of the underrunning sea with a sound as of drums and bugles heard afar echoing down out of the glistening concavities and ringing out of the taut rigging upon which the blue and brilliant morning breeze was splitting.

She had not been sitting long before I saw that she was beginning to like it. There was no nausea now; her eyes were bright, there was colour in her cheeks; and her red lips lay parted as though in pure enjoyment of the glad rush of the salt breeze athwart her teeth of pearl.

We had a deal to say to each other as you may suppose, and so much of the

nonsense that lovers will utter went to our talk that I should be sorry to record what was said. Caudel, conning the little ship, hung about removed from us, but I would often catch his sea-blue eye furtively directed at Grace as though he could not look at her often enough. The boy Bobby came and went betwixt the forecastle hatch and the companion; the fellow at the helm swung upon the tiller with an occasional peep at the broad wake racing, fanshaped, from under the counter into the troubled toss and windy distance, as though he wished to make sure that he was steering straight; the other two of my crew were at work forward on jobs to which, not being a sailor, I should be unable to give a name.

Thus passed the morning. There was no tedium. If ever there came a halt in our chat there were twenty things over the side to look at, to fill the pause with colour and beauty. It might be a tall, slate-coloured, steam tank, hideous with gaunt leaning funnel and famished pole-masts, and black fans of propeller beating at the stern-post like the vanes of a drowning windmill amid a hill of froth, yet poetised in spite of herself into a pretty detail of the surrounding life through the mere impulse and spirit of the bright seas through which she was starkly driving. Or it was a full-rigged ship, homeward bound, with yearning canvas and ocean-worn sides, figures on her poop crossing from rail to rail to look at what was passing, and seamen on her forecastle busy with the ship's ground tackle.

It was shortly after twelve that the delicate shadow of the high land of Beachy Head showed over the yacht's bow. By one o'clock it had grown defined and firm, with the glimmering streak of its white ramparts of chalk stealing out of the blue haze.

"There's Old England, Grace!" said I. "How one's heart goes out to the sight of the merest shadow of one's own soil! The *Spitfire* has seen the land; has she not quickened her pace?"

"I ought to wish it was the Cornwall coast," she answered; "but I am enjoying this now," she added smiling.

"How close do you intend to run in?" I called to Caudel.

He rolled up to us and answered:

"No call, I think, sir, to haul in much closer. The land trends in down Brighton and Worthing way, and there'll be nothen to see till we're off St.

Catherine's Point."

"Well, you know our destination, Caudel. Carry the yacht to it in your own fashion. But mind you get there," said I, looking at Grace.

I was made happy by finding my sweetheart with some appetite for dinner at one o'clock. She no longer sighed; no regrets escaped her; her early alarm had disappeared; the novelty of the situation was wearing off; she was now realising again what I knew she had realised before—to judge by her letters—though the excitement and terrors of the elopement had broken in upon and temporarily disordered her perception; she was now fully realising, I mean, that there was nothing for it but this step to free her from a species of immurement charged with menace to her faith and to her love; and this being her mood, her affection for me found room to show itself; so that now I never could meet her eyes without seeing how wholly I had her dear heart, and how happy she was in this recurrence of brightening out of her love from the gloom and consternation that attended the start of our headlong wild adventure.

I flattered myself that we were to be fortunate in our weather; certainly all that afternoon was as fair and beautiful in its marine atmosphere of autumn as living creature could desire. The blues and greens of the prospect of heaven and sea were enriched by the looming, towering terraces of Beachy Head, hanging large and looking near upon our starboard quarter, though I believe Caudel had not sailed very deep within the sphere in which the high-perched lantern is visible before shifting his helm for a straight down Channel course. A lugger with red canvas, the hue of which was deepened yet by the delicate crimsoning of the sun that was now sloping into the Atlantic, gliding betwixt us and the heap of land in the north, brought out the white chalk of the heights into a snow-white brilliance that almost startled the eye at first sight of it.

"I should imagine that a huge iceberg shows like that," said I to Grace.

"I wish I had my paint-box here," she answered, her eyes glistening as she looked.

"Grace," said I, "I have an idea. We will spend our honeymoon in the *Spitfire*. We will lay in a stock of paint-boxes, easels and lead pencils, sail round the coast, heave our little ship to off every point of beauty, and take our fill of English shore scenery."

"Do you mean to wait till next summer?" she asked, glancing at me shyly through her lashes, though with a hint of coquetry too in the spirit of her look.

I laughed out, seeing her meaning, for to be sure a coastal cruise in a twenty-six ton dandy would hardly fit the winter months of Great Britain, and by the time we should be prepared to enter upon our honeymoon, this autumn that was now dying would, I fear, be entirely dead.

"Then, it shall be Paris, Brussels, and Rome according to your own programme," said I.

She coloured, and said something about there being plenty of time to talk about such a matter as that, and went to the rail and leaned over it, watching the distant noble mass of land in a reverie upon which I would not intrude, so sweet did she look with her profile showing with ivory-like delicacy against the green and blue of the east where the tints were hardening to the gathering of the evening shadow there, whilst her rich hair blown by the breeze seemed to tremble into fire to the now almost level pouring of the red splendour in the west.

When the sun had fairly set I took her below, for the wind seemed to come on a sudden with the damp of night in it, and a bite as shrewd in its abruptness as frost. I had made no other provision in the shape of amusement for our sea trip of three, four, or five days as it might happen, than a small parcel of novels, scarcely doubting that all the diversion we should need must lie in each other's company. And to be sure we managed to kill the time very agreeably without the help of fiction, though we both owned, when the little cabin clock pointed to half-past nine, and she looking up at it, and yawning behind her white fingers, exclaimed, that she felt tired and would go to bed; I say, we both owned that the day had seemed a desperately long one—to be sure, with us it had begun very early—and I could not help adding that on the whole a honeymoon spent aboard a yacht the size of the *Spitfire* would soon grow a very slow business in spite of crayons and paint-boxes.

As we lingered hand in hand, she exclaimed, "What will mam'selle have been saying all to-day?"

"The excitement," said I, "has been tremendous. Mam'selle fainted to begin with. Father Jerome was sent for, and I can see him with my mind's eye taking

the ground as he makes for the château with the strides of a pantomime policeman chasing the clown. What titterings, what exclamations, what *Mon Dieux!* and *quelle horreurs!* among the girls! How many of them would like to be you? When they find that rope-ladder dangling—the burglarious bull's-eye lamp at the foot of it—"

"How *could* we have done it?" she interrupted, looking at me with a pale face and a working lip.

When she had withdrawn I put on a pea-coat, and filling a pipe, stepped on deck. The dusk was clear, but of a darker shade than that of the preceding night; there was not more wind than had been blowing throughout the day; but the sky was full of large swollen-clouds rolling in shadows of giant wings athwart the stars, and the gloom of them was in the atmosphere. Here and there showed a ship's light, some faint gleam of red or green windily coming and going out upon the weltering obscurity, but away to starboard the horizon ran black, without a single break of shore light that I could see. The yacht was swarming through it under all canvas, humming as she went. Her pace, if it lasted, would, I knew, speedily terminate this sea-going passage of our elopement, and I looked over the stern very well pleased to witness the white sweep of the wake melting at a little distance into a mere elusive faintness.

Caudel stood near the helm,

"This will do, I think," said I.

"Ay, sir," he answered; "she's finding her heels now. See that there brig out yonder?" and his arm pointed out against the stars over the horizon to a dim green light on the right of our wake astern. "She was ahead of us half an hour ago, and I allow she was walking too—warn't she, Job?"

"Warping, more like," answered the man in a grunting voice.

"You go and smoothen yourself!" cried Caudel; "why, damme a heagle can't fly if *you're* to be believed."

"When are we to be off St. Catherine's Point at this pace, Caudel?" said I.

"At this pace, sir—why, betwixt seven and eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

"What a deuce of a length this English Channel runs to!" cried I impatiently. "Why, it will be little better than beginning our voyage even when the Isle of Wight is abreast."

"Yes, sir, there's a deal o' water going to the making of this here Channel—a blooming sight too much of it when it comes on a winter's night a-blowing and a-snowing, the hatmosphere thick as muck," answered Caudel.

"There'll be a bright look-out kept to-night, I hope," said I. "Not the value of all the cargoes afloat at this present instant, Caudel, the wide world over, equals the worth of my treasure aboard the *Spitfire*."

Here Job Crew took a step to leeward to spit.

"Trust me to see that a bright look-out's kept, Mr. Barclay. There'll be no tarning in with me this night. Don't let no fear of anything going wrong disturb your mind, sir."

I lingered to finish my pipe. The fresh wind flashed into the face damp with the night and the spray-cold breath of the sea, and the planks of the deck showed dark with the moisture to the dim starlight. There was some weight in the heads of seas as they came rolling to our beam, and the little vessel was now soaring and falling briskly upon the heave of the folds whose volume, of course, gained as the Channel broadened.

"Well," said I, with a bit of a shiver, and hugging myself in my pea-coat, "I'm cold and tired, and going to bed, so good-night, and God keep you wide awake," and down I went, and ten minutes later was snugged away in my coffin of a bunk sound asleep, and snoring at the top of my pipes, I don't doubt.

Next morning when I went on deck after nine hours of solid slumber, I at once directed my eyes over the rail in search of the Isle of Wight, but there was nothing to be seen but a grey drizzle, a weeping wall of slate-coloured haze that formed a sky of its own and drooped to within a mile or so of the yacht. The sea was an ugly sallowish green, and you saw the billows come tumbling in froth from under the vaporous margin of the horizon as though each surge was formed there, and there was nothing but blackness and space beyond. The yacht's canvas was discoloured with saturation; drops of water were blowing from her rigging; there was a sobbing of a gutter-like sort in her lee scuppers, and the figures of the men glistening in oilskins completed the melancholy appearance of the little

Spitfire. Caudel was below, but the man named Dick Files was at the helm, an intelligent young fellow without any portion of Job Crew's surliness, and he answered the questions I put.

We had made capital way throughout the night he told me, and if the weather were clear, St. Catherine's Point would show abreast of us.

"There's no doubt about Caudel knowing where he is?" said I, with a glance at the blind grey atmosphere that sometimes swept in little puffs of cloudy damp through the rigging, like fragments of vapour torn out of some compacted body.

"Oh, no, sir, Mr. Caudel knows where he is," answered the man. "We picked up and passed a small cutter out of Portsmouth about three-quarters of an hour ago, sir, and he told us where we were."

"Has this sail been kept on the yacht all night?" said I, looking up at the wide spread of mainsail and gaff topsail.

"All night, sir. The run's averaged eight knots. Night hand equal to steam, sir."

"Well, you will all need to keep a bright look-out in this sort of thickness. How far off can you see?"

The man stared, and blinked, and mused, and then said he allowed about a mile and a quarter.

"Room enough," said I. "But mind your big mail boats out of Southampton! There are German skippers amongst them who would drive through the devil himself sooner than lose five minutes."

The promise of a long, wet, blank day was not very cheering. In fact, this change in the weather was as damping to my spirits as it literally was to everything else, and as I entered the companion way for shelter, I felt as though half of a mind to order the yacht to be headed for some adjacent port. But a little thinking brought back my resolution to its old bearings. It is a hard thing to avow, but I knew that my very strongest chance of gaining Lady Amelia's consent lay in this sea trip. Then again, there might come a break at any moment, with a fine day of warm sunshine and clear sky to follow. I re-entered the cabin, and on looking at the barometer observed a slight depression in the mercury, but

it was without significance to my mind.

Somewhere about this time Grace came out of her berth. She brought an atmosphere of flower-like fragrance with her, but the motions of the yacht obliged her to sit quickly, and she gazed at me with laughter in her eyes from the locker, graceful in her posture as a reposing dancer. Her face lengthened, however, when I told her about the weather, that in short there was nothing visible from the deck but a muddy, jumbled atmosphere of vapour and drizzle.

"I counted upon seeing the Isle of Wight," cried she; "there has been no land so far except those far-off high cliffs yesterday afternoon."

"No matter, my sweet. Let us take as long as possible in breakfasting. Then you shall read Tennyson to me—yes, I have a volume of that poet, and we shall find some of the verses in wonderful harmony with our mood." She gave me a smiling glance, though her lip pouted as though she would say, "Don't make too sure of my mood, my fine young fellow." "By the time we have done with Tennyson," I continued, "the weather may have cleared. If not, then we must take as long as possible in dining."

"Isn't it dangerous to be at sea in such weather as this?" she asked.

"No," said I.

"But the sailors can't see."

I feared the drift of her language and exclaimed, "It would be dangerous to attempt to make the land, for we might blunder upon a rock and go to pieces, Grace; and then farewell, a long farewell to the passions, emotions, the impulses, the sensations which have brought us together here," and I kissed her hand.

"But it would be pleasant to lie in a pretty harbour—to rest as it were," she exclaimed.

"Our business is to get married, my darling," I rejoined; "and we must hasten as swiftly as the wind will allow us to the parish where the ceremony is to be performed, for my cousin can't publish the banns until we are on the spot, and whilst he is publishing the banns we must be treating with her ladyship, and, as the diplomatists would say, negotiating a successful issue."

She sighed, and looked grave, and hung her head. In truth, she took a gloomy view of the future, was secretly convinced her aunt would not consent, was satisfied that she would have to reside with my sister until she had come of age, and my lightest touching upon the subject dispirited her. And, indeed, though I had talked big to Caudel, and to my darling also, of my sister taking charge of her, I was not at all sure—I ought undoubtedly to have asked the question of a lawyer—that Lady Amelia Roscoe could not, as her guardian, claim her, and convey her to school afresh, and do, in short, what she pleased with the child until she was twenty-one years old. But all the same I felt cocksure in my heart that it would never come to this. Our yachting trip I regarded as a provision against all difficulties.

My mind was busy with these thoughts as I sat by her side looking at her; but she loved me not less than I loved her, and so I never found it hard to coax a smile into her sweet face and to brighten her eyes.

CHAPTER V

DIRTY WEATHER

I should only weary you by reciting the passage of the hours. After breakfast I took Grace on deck for a turn, but she was glad to get below again. All day long it continued dark weather, without a sight of anything, save at intervals the shadowy figure of a coaster aslant in the thickness, and once the loom of a huge ocean passenger boat, sweeping at twelve or fourteen knots through the grey veil of vapour that narrowed the horizon to within a mile of us. The wind, however, remained a steady, fresh breeze, and throughout the day there was never a rope handled nor a stitch of canvas reduced. The *Spitfire* swung steadfastly through it, in true sea-bruising style, sturdily flinging the sea off her flaring bow, and whitening the water with the plunges of her churning keel till the tail of her wake seemed to stretch to the near sea line.

I will not feign, however, that I was perfectly comfortable in my mind. Anything at sea but thick weather! I never pretended to be more than a summer-holiday sailor, and such anxiety, as I should have felt had I been alone, was now

mightily accentuated, as you will suppose, by having the darling of my heart in my little ship with me. I had a long talk with Caudel that afternoon, and despite my eager desire to remain at sea, I believe I would have been glad had he advised that the *Spitfire* should be steered for the nearest harbour. But his counsel was all the other way.

"Lord love ye, Mr. Barclay, sir," he exclaimed, "what's a-going wrong that we should tarn to and set it right? Here's a breeze of wind that's a-doing all that could be asked for. I dorn't say it ain't thick, but there's nothen in it to take notice of. Of course, you've only got to say the word, sir, and I'll put the hellum up; but even for that there job it would be proper to make sartin first of all where we are. There's no want of harbours under our lee from Portland Bill to Bolt Head, but I can't trust to my dead reckoning, seeing what's involved," said he, casting a damp eye at the skylight; "and my motto is, there's nothen like seeing when you're on such a coast as this here. Having come all this way it 'ud be a pity to stop now."

"So long as you're satisfied!" I exclaimed; and no doubt he was, though I believe he was influenced by vanity too. Our putting into a harbour might affect him as a reflection upon his skill. He would also suppose that, if we entered a harbour, we should travel by rail to our destination, which would be as though he were told we could not trust him farther. After the service he had done me it was not to be supposed I could causelessly give the worthy fellow offence.

"You steer by the compass, I suppose?" said I.

"By nothen else, sir," he answered in a voice of wonder.

"Well, I might have known that," said I, laughing at my own stupid question that yet had sense in it too. "I should have asked you if the compass is to be trusted?"

"Ay, sir. He's a first-class compass. There's nothen to make him go wrong. Yet it's astonishing what a little thing will put a compass out. I've heered of a vessel that was pretty nigh run ashore all along of the helmsman—not because he couldn't steer; a better hand never stood at a wheel; but because he'd been physicking of himself with iron and steel, and had taken so much of the blooming stuff that the compass was wrong all the time he was at the helm."

"A very good story," said I.

"I'm sure you'll forgive me, sir," he proceeded, "for asking if your young lady wears any steel bones about her—contrivances for hoisting her dress up astarn—crinolines—bustles—you know what I mean, Mr. Barclay?"

"I cannot tell," said I.

"I've heered speak of the master of a vessel," he went on (being a very talkative man when he got into the "yarning" mood), "whose calculations was always falling to pieces at sea. Two and two never seemed to make four with him; until he found out that one of his lady passengers every morning brought a stool and sat close agin the binnacle; she wore steel hoops to swell her dress out with, and the local attraction was such, your honour, that the compass was sometimes four or five points out."

I told him that if the compass went wrong it would not be Miss Bellassys' fault; and having had enough of the deck, I rejoined my sweetheart, and, in the cabin, with talking, reading, she singing—very sweetly she sang—we killed the hours till bed-time.

This was our third night at sea, and I was now beginning to think that instead of three or four days we should occupy a week, and perhaps longer, in making Mount's Bay; in which conjecture I was confirmed when, finding myself awake at three o'clock in the morning, I pulled on my clothes and went on deck to take a look round, and found the wind a light off-shore air, the stars shining, and the *Spitfire*, with her canvas falling in and out with sounds like the discharge of small arms, rolling stagnantly upon a smooth-backed run of swell lifting out of the north-east, but with a slant in the heave of it that made one guess the impulse which set it running was fair north.

I was up again at seven o'clock, with a resolution to let the weather shape my decision as to sticking to the vessel or going ashore, and was not a little pleased to find the yacht making good way with a brilliant breeze gushing steady off her starboard bow. The heavens looked high with fine weather clouds, prismatic mare-tails for the most part, here and there a snow-white, swelling shoulder of vapour hovering over the edge of the sea.

Caudel told me we were drawing well on to Portland, but that the wind had headed him, and he was off his course, so that, unless he put the yacht about, we should not obtain a sight of the land.

"No matter," said I, "let us make the most of this slant."

"That's what I'm for doing, sir. My principle is, always make a free wind, no matter what be the air that's ablowing. Some men's for ratching with the luff of their fore and aft canvas rounding in aweather, so cleverly do they try to split the eye of the breeze. I'm for sailing myself," and he cast a glance up at the rapful canvas, following it on with a look at Jacob Crew, who was suddenly gnawing upon his quid at the tiller, as though to keep him in mind by the expression of his eye of injunctions previously delivered.

The greater part of this day Grace and I spent on deck, but nothing whatever happened good enough to keep my tale waiting whilst I tell you about it. Strong as the off-shore breeze was, there was but little sea, nothing to stop the yacht, and she ran through it like a sledge over a snow plain, piling the froth to her stem-head and reeling off a fair nine knots as Caudel would cry out to me with an exultant countenance of leather every time the log was hove. He talked of being abreast of the *Start* by three o'clock in the morning.

"Then," said I to my sweetheart, "if that be so, Grace, there will be but a short cruise to follow."

At this she looked grave, and fastened her eye with a wistful expression upon the sea over the bows as though Mount's Bay lay there, and as though the quaint old town of Penzance, with its long esplanade and rich flanking of green and well-tilled heights, would be presently showing.

I read her thoughts and said, "I have never met Mrs. Howe, but Frank's letters about her to me were as enthusiastic as mine were about you to him. He calls her sweetly pretty. So she may be. I know she is a lady; her connections are good; I am also convinced by Frank's description that she is amiable; consequently, I am certain she will make you happy and comfortable until—" and here I squeezed her hand..

"It is a desperate step, Herbert," she sighed.

Upon which I changed the subject.

There was a noble flaring sunset that evening. The crimson of it was deep and thunderous; the wild splendour was rendered portentous by an appearance as of bars of cloud stretched horizontally across, as though they railed in the flames of

a continent on fire. All day long the wind had been heading us a little off our course, which by magnetic compass was about W.S.W., and this magnificence of sunset at which Grace and I continued to stare with eyes of admiration and wonder, neither of us having ever seen the like of the red and burning glory that overhung the sea, stood well up on the starboard bow. The Channel waters ran to it in a dark and frothing green till they were smitten by the light, when they throbbled in blood for a space, then flowed in dark green afresh, hardening into a firm, cold, darkly green horizon.

A small screw steamer, with her funnel sloping almost over her stern, and her greasy poles of masts resembling fibres of gold in the sunset, was bruising her way up Channel with a frequent cock of her bow or stern which made one wonder where the sea was that tossed her so. There was nothing else in sight, and by the time she vanished the last rusty tinge of red had perished in the west, and the loneliness of the sea came like a sensible quality of cold into the darkening twilight.

"How desolate the ocean looks on a sudden!" said Grace.

I thought so too as I glanced at the ashen heads of the melting billows and up aloft at the sky, where I took notice of an odd appearance of vapour, a sort of dusky smearing, as it were—a clay-like kind of cloud, as though rudely laid on by a trowel—I cannot better express the uncommon character of the heavens that evening. Here and there a star looked sparely and bleakly down, and in the west there was a paring of moon, some day or two old, shining and crystalline enough to make the dull gleam of the stars odd as an atmospheric effect.

But the breeze blew steady; there was nothing to disturb the mind in the indications of the barometer; hour after hour the little ship was swarming through it handsomely, and we were now drawing on much too close to Mount's Bay (albeit this evening we were not yet abreast of the *Start*) to pause because of a thunder-coloured, smoking sunset, and because of a hard look of sky that might yield to the stars before midnight and discover a wide and cloudless plain of luminaries.

"How long shall you keep on this tack?" I asked Caudel.

"All night, sir, if the wind don't head us yet. It won't put us far off our port even at this."

"Shall you sight the *Start* light?"

"No, sir. Our stretching away all day'll have put it out of our *spear* of view. The Lizard light'll be all I want, and this time twenty-four hours I hope to be well on to it."

I went below, and Grace and I killed the time as heretofore in talking and reading. We found the evening too short indeed, so much had we to say to each other. Wonderful is the quality and the amount of talk which lovers are able to get through and feel satisfied with! You hear of silent love, of lovers staring on one another with glowing eyes, their lips incapable of the emotions and sensations which crowd their quick hearts and fill their throats with sighs. This may be very well too; but, for my part, I have generally observed that lovers have a very great deal to talk about. Remark an engaged couple; sooner than be silent they will whisper if there be company present; and when alone, or when they think themselves alone, their tongues—particularly the girl's—are never still. Grace and I were of a talking age—two-and-twenty, and one not yet eighteen; our minds had no knowledge of life, no experience, nothing in them to keep them steady; they were set in motion by the lightest, the most trivial breath of thought, and idly danced in us in the manner of some gossamer-light, topmost leaf to the faintest movement of the summer air.

She withdrew to her berth at ten o'clock that night with a radiant face and laughing eyes, for inane as the evening must have shown to others, to us it had been one of perfect felicity; not a single sigh had escaped her, and twice had I mentioned the name of Mrs. Howe without witnessing any change of countenance in her.

I went on deck to take a last look round, and found all well; no change in the weather, the breeze a brisk and steady pouring out of the north, and Caudel pacing the deck well satisfied with our progress. I returned below without any feeling of uneasiness, and sat at the cabin table for some ten minutes or so to smoke out a cigar, and to refresh myself with a glass of seltzer and brandy. A sort of dream-like feeling came upon me as I sat. I found it hard to realise that my sweetheart was close to me, separated only by a curtained door from the cabin I was musing in. What was to follow this adventure? Was it possible that Lady Amelia Roscoe would oppose any obstacle to our union after even *this* association of three or four days as it might be? I gazed at the mirrors I had equipped the cabin with—picked up a handkerchief my sweetheart had left

behind her and kissed it—stared at the little silver shining lamp that swung over my head—pulled a flower and smelt it in a vacant sort of way of which, nevertheless, I was perfectly sensible.... Is there anything wrong with my nerves to-night? thought I.

I extinguished my cigar and went to bed. It was then about a quarter to eleven, and till past one I lay awake, weary, yet unable to sleep. I lay listening to the frothing and seething of the water thrashing along the bends, broken into at regular intervals by the low thunder of the surge, burying my cabin porthole and rising to the line of the rail as the yacht's stern sank with a long slanting heel-over of the whole fabric. I fell asleep at last, and as I afterwards gathered, slept till somewhat after three o'clock in the morning. I was awakened by suddenly and violently rolling out of my bunk. The fall was a heavy one; I was a big fellow, and struck the plank of the deck hard, and though I was instantly awakened by the shock of the capsial, I lay for some moments in a condition of stupefaction, sensible of nothing but that I had tumbled out of my bunk.

The little berth was in pitch darkness, and I lay, as I have said, motionless and almost dazed, till my ear caught a sound of shrieking ringing through a wild but subdued note of storm on deck, mingled with loud and fearful shouts, as of men bawling for life or death, with a trembling in every plank and fastening of the little fabric as though she were tearing herself to pieces. I got on to my legs, but the angle of the deck was so prodigious that I leaned helpless against the bulkhead, to the base of which I had rolled, though unconsciously. The shrieks were continued; I recognised Grace's voice, and the sound put a sort of frenzy into me, insomuch that, scarcely knowing how I managed, I had in an instant, opened the door of my little berth, and was standing, grabbing hold of the cabin table, shouting to let her know that I was awake and up, and that I heard her.

Now, the uproar of what I took to be a squall of hurricane power was to be easily heard. The bellowing of the wind was horrible, and it was made more terrifying to land-going ears by the incessant hoarse shouts of the fellows on deck; but bewildered as I was, agitated beyond expression, not knowing but that as I stood there, gripping the table and shouting my sweetheart's name, the yacht might be foundering under my feet, I had wits enough to observe that the vessel was slowly recovering a level keel, rising from the roof-like slant which had flung me from my bed to an inclination that rendered the use of one's legs possible. I likewise noticed that she neither plunged nor rolled with greater heaviness than I had observed in her before I lay down. The sensation of her

motion was as though she was slowly rounding before the wind, and beginning to scud over a surface that had been almost flattened by a hurricane-burst into a dead level of snow. I could hear no noise of breaking seas nor of rushing water, nothing but a cauldron-like hissing, through which rolled the notes of the storm in echoes of great ordnance.

Fortunately, I had no need to clothe myself, since on lying down I had removed nothing but my coat, collar and shoes. I had a little silver match-box in my trouser's pocket, and swiftly struck a match and lighted the lamp and looked at Grace's door expecting to find her standing in it. It was closed, and she continued to scream. It was no time for ceremony; I opened the door, and called to know how it was with her.

"Oh, Herbert, save me!" she shrieked; "the yacht is sinking."

"No," I cried, "she has been struck by a gale of wind. I will find out what is the matter. Are you hurt?"

"The yacht is sinking!" she repeated in a wild voice of terror.

Spite of the lamplight in the cabin, the curtain and the door combined eclipsed the sheen, and I could not see her.

"Are you in bed, dearest?"

"Yes," she cried.

"Are you hurt, my precious?"

"No, but my heart has stopped with fright. We shall be drowned. Oh, Herbert, the yacht is sinking!"

"Remain as you are, Grace. I shall return to you in a moment. Do not imagine that the yacht is sinking. I know by the buoyant feel of her movements that she is safe."

And thus hurriedly speaking I left her, satisfied that her shrieks had been produced by terror only; nor did I wish her to rise, lest the yacht should again suddenly heel to her first extravagantly dreadful angle, and throw her, and break a limb, or injure her more cruelly yet.

The companion hatch was closed. The feeling of being imprisoned raised such a feeling of consternation in me that I stood in the hatch as one paralysed, then terror set me pounding upon the cover with my fists, till you would have thought in a few moments I must have reduced it to splinters. After a little, during which I hammered with might and main, roaring out the name of Caudel, the cover was cautiously lifted to the height of a few inches, letting in a very yell of wind, such a shock and blast of it that I was forced, back off the ladder as though by a blow in the face, and in a breath the light went out.

"It's all right, Mr. Barclay," cried the voice of Caudel, hoarse and yet shrill too with the life and death cries he had been delivering. "A gale of wind's busted down upon us. We've got the yacht afore it whilst we clear away the wreckage. There's no call to be alarmed, sir. On my word and honour as a man there's no call, sir. I beg you not to come on deck yet—ye'll only be in the way. Trust to me, sir—it's all right, I say," and the hatch was closed again.

Wreckage! The word sounded as miserably in my ear as though it had been the shout of "Heaven have mercy upon us!" What had been wrecked? What had happened? Was the yacht stove? Had we lost our mast? I had heard no crash, no noise of splintering, no resounding thump as of a fall. I listened, struck another match, and then lighted the lamp afresh. I might know now that the *Spitfire* was dead before the wind, seething almost soundlessly through the foam of the storm-swept surface. She was going along with a steadiness that was startling when one thought of and listened to the weather; for her plunges were so long and buoyant as to be scarcely noticeable, whilst sea and swell being directly in her wake, her rolling was of the lightest. This scudding likewise took something of the weight out of the blast howling after us; the echo as of thunder penetrating to the cabin was, comparatively speaking, dulled; but I was sailor enough to know that we should be having a heavy sea anon, and that if the yacht was crippled aloft or injured below, then the merciful powers only knew how it was going to end with us.

These thoughts were in my mind as I lighted the lamp. I now knocked on Grace's door, and told her to rise and dress herself, and join me in the cabin.

"There is no danger," I shouted, "nothing but a passing capful of wind."

She made some answer which I could not catch, but I might be sure that the upright posture and buoyant motions of the scudding yacht had tranquillised her

mind; moreover, all sounds would penetrate her berth in very muffled tones. Still, if she looked at her watch, she might wonder why she had to rise and dress at half-past three o'clock in the morning!

I sat alone for some ten minutes, during which the height and volume of the sea sensibly increased, though as the yacht continued flying dead before the wind, her plunges were still too long and gradual to be distressing. Occasionally a shout would sound on deck, but what the men were about I could not conceive.

The door of the forward berth was opened, and Grace entered the cabin. Her face was white as death; her large eyes, which seemed of a coal blackness in the lamplight, and by contrast with the hue of her cheeks, sparkled with alarm. She swept them round the cabin, as though she expected to behold one knows not what sort of horror, then came to my side and linked my arm tightly in hers.

"Oh, Herbert, tell me the truth. What has happened?"

"Nothing serious, darling. Do you not feel that we are afloat and sailing bravely?"

"But just now? Did not the yacht turn over? Something was broken on deck, and the men began to shriek."

"And so did you, Grace," said I, trying to smile.

"But if we should be drowned?" she cried, drawing closer to me, and fastening her sweet, terrified eyes upon my face.

I shook my head, still preserving my smile, though Heaven knows, had my countenance taken its expression from my mood, it must have shown as long as the yacht herself. I could see her straining her ears to listen, whilst her gaze—large, bright, her brows arched, her lips parted, her breast swiftly heaving—roamed over the cabin.

"What is that noise of thunder, Herbert?"

"It is the wind," I answered.

"Are not the waves getting up? Oh! feel this!" she cried, as the yacht rose with velocity and something of violence to the under-running hurl of a chasing

sea, of a power that was but too suggestive of what we were to expect.

"The *Spitfire* is a stanch, noble little craft," said I, "built for North Sea weather. She is not to be daunted by anything that can happen hereabouts."

"But what *has* happened?" she cried, irritable with alarm.

I was about to utter the first reassuring sentence that occurred to my mind, when the companion was slid a little way back, and I just caught sight of a pair of legs ere the cabin lamp was extinguished by such another yell and blast of wind as had before nearly stretched me. Grace shrieked and threw her arms round my neck; the cover was closed, and the interior, instantly becalmed again.

"Who's that?" I roared.

"Me, sir," sounded a voice out of the blackness where the companion steps stood; "Files, sir. The captain asked me to step below to report what's happened. He dursn't leave the deck himself."

I released myself from my darling's clinging embrace and lighted the lamp for the third time.

Files, wrapped in streaming oilskins, resembled an ebony figure over which a bucket of dripping has been emptied, as he stood at the foot of the steps with but a bit of his wet, grey-coloured face showing betwixt the ear-flaps and under the fore-thatch of his sou'wester.

"Now for your report, Files, and bear a hand with it for mercy's sake."

"Well, sir, it's just this; it had been breezing up, and we double-reefed the mainsail, Captain Caudel not liking the look of the weather, when a slap of wind carried pretty nigh half the mast over the side. We reckon—for we can't see—that it's gone some three or four feet below the cross-trees. The sail came down with a run, and there was a regular mess of it, sir, the wessel being buried. We've had to keep her afore it until we could cut the wreckage clear, and now we're agoing to heave her to, and I'm to tell ye with Capt'n Caudel's compliments not to take any notice of the capers she may cut when she heads the sea."

"One moment. Is she sound in her hull?"

"Yes, sir."

"Heaven be praised! And how is the wind?"

"About nor'-nor'-east, sir."

"Then, of course, we've been running sou'-sou'-west, heading right into the open channel?"

He said yes.

"How does the weather look, Files?"

"Werry black and noisy, sir."

"Tell Caudel to let me see him whenever he can leave the deck," said I, unwilling to detain him lest he should say something to add to the terror of Grace, whose eyes were riveted upon him as though he were some frightful ghost or hideous messenger of death.

I took down the lamp and screened it, whilst he opened the cover and crawled out.

CHAPTER VI

SWEETHEARTS IN A STORM

No man could imagine that so heavy a sea was already running until Caudel hove the yacht to. The instant the helm was put down the dance began! As she rounded to a whole green sea struck her full abeam, and fell with a roar like a volcanic discharge upon her decks, staggering her to the heart—sending a throe of mortal agony through her, as one might have sworn. I felt that she was buried in the foam of that sea. As she gallantly rose, still valiantly rounding into the wind, as though the spirit of the British soil in which had grown the hardy timber out of which she was manufactured was never stronger in her than now, the

water that filled her decks roared cascading over the rails.

Grace sat by my side, her arm locked in mine; she was motionless with fear; her eyes had the fixed look of the sleep-walker's, nor will I deny that my own terror was extreme; for imagining that I had heard a shriek, I believed that my men had been washed overboard, and that we two were locked up in a dismantled craft that was probably sinking—imprisoned, I say, by reason of the construction of the companion cover, which, when closed, was not to be opened from within.

I waited a few minutes with my lips set, wondering what was to happen next, holding Grace close to me, and harkening with feverish ears for the least sound of a human voice on deck. There was a second blow—this time on the yacht's bow—followed by a sensation as of every timber thrilling, and by a bolt-like thud of falling water, but this time well forward. Immediately afterwards I heard Caudel shouting close against the skylight, and I cannot express the emotion, in truth, I may call it the transport of joy, his voice raised in me. It was like being rescued from a dreadful death that an instant before seemed certain.

I continued to wait, holding my darling to me; her head lay upon my shoulder, and she rested as though in a swoon. The sight of her white face was inexpressibly shocking to me, who very well knew that there was nothing I could say to soften her terrors amid such a sea as the yacht was now tumbling upon. Indeed, the vessel's motions had become on a sudden violently heavy. I was never in such a sea before; that is to say, in so small a vessel, and the leaping of the craft from peak to base, and the dreadful careering of her as she soared, lying down on her beam ends to the next liquid summit were absolutely soul subduing.

It was idle, however, to think of going on deck. I durst not leave my darling alone lest she should swoon and be thrown down and injured, perhaps killed; whilst, for myself, the legs of a man needed a longer apprenticeship to the sea than ever I had served, or had the faintest desire to serve, to qualify him for such capering planks as these, and I was quite sure that if I wished to break my neck I had nothing more to do than to make an attempt to stand.

Well, some twenty minutes, or, perhaps, half an hour passed, during all which time I believed every moment to be our last, and I recollect cursing myself for being the instrument of introducing the darling of my heart into this abominable scene of storm in which, as I believed, we were both to perish. Why had I not gone ashore yesterday? Did not my instincts advise me to quit the sea and take

the railway? Why had I brought my pet away from the security of the Rue de Maquétra? Why, in the name of all the virtues, was I so impatient that I could not wait till she was of age, when I could have married her comfortably and respectably, freed from all obligations of ladders, dark lanterns, tempests, and whatever was next to come? I could have beaten my head upon the table. Never did I better understand what I have always regarded as a stroke of fiction—I mean the disposition of a man in a passion to tear out his hair by the roots.

At the expiration, as I supposed, of twenty minutes, the hatch cover was opened, this time without any following screech and blast of wind, and Caudel descended. Had he been a beam of sunshine he could not have been more welcome to my eyes. He was clad from head to foot in oilskins, from which the wet ran as from an umbrella in a thunder-shower, and the skin and hue of his face resembled soaked leather.

"Well, Mr. Barclay, sir," he exclaimed, "and how have you been getting on? It's been a bad job; but there's nothen to alarm ye, I'm sure." Then catching sight of Grace's face, he cried, "The young lady ain't been and hurt herself, I hope, sir?"

"Her fear and this movement," I answered, "have proved too much for her. I wish you would pull off your oilskins and help me to convey her to the lee side there. The edge of this table seems to be cutting me in halves," the fact being that I was to windward with the whole weight of my sweetheart, who rested lifelessly against me to increase the pressure, so that at every leeward stoop of the craft my breast was caught by the edge of the table with a sensation as of a knife cutting through my shirt.

He instantly whipped off his streaming waterproofs, standing without the least inconvenience whilst the decks slanted under him like a see-saw, and in a very few moments he had safely placed Grace on the lee locker with her head on a pillow. I made shift to get round to her without hurting myself, then cried to Caudel to sit and tell me what had happened.

"Well, it's just this, sir," he answered, "the mast has carried away some feet below the head of it. It went on a sudden in the squall in which the wind burst down upon us. Perhaps it was as well it happened, for she lay down to that there houtfly in a way so hobstinate that I did believe she'd never lift herself out of the water agin. But the sail came down when the mast broke, and I managed to get

her afore it, though I don't mind owing to you now, sir, that what with the gear fouling the helm, and what with other matters which there ain't no call for me to talk about, 'twas as close a shave with us, sir, as ever happened at sea."

Grace moaned, opened her eyes and then shut them again, and moved her hand that I should take it. The companion cover lay a little way open, but though tons of water might be flying over the bow for aught I knew, not a drop glittered in the hatch. I could now, however, very clearly hear the roaring *hum* of the gale, and catch the note of boiling waters; but these sounds were not so distracting but that Caudel and I clearly heard each other's voice.

"Is the yacht tight, do you think, Caudel?" cried I.

"I hope she is, sir."

"Hope! My God, but you must *know*, Caudel."

"Well, sir, she's adrainin' a little water into her—I'm bound to say it—but nothen that the pump won't keep under; and I believe that most of it finds its way into the well from up above."

I stared at him with a passion of anxiety and dismay, but his cheery blue eyes steadfastly returned my gaze as though he would make me know that he spoke the truth—that matters were not worse than he represented them.

"Has the pump been worked?" I inquired.

He lifted his hand as I asked the question, and I heard the beat of the pump throbbing through the dull roar of the wind as though a man had seized the brake of it in response to my inquiry.

"This is a frightful situation to be in," said I, with a glance at Grace, who lay motionless, with her eyes shut, rendered almost insensible by the giddy and violent motion of the hull.

"It'll all come right, sir," he exclaimed; "daybreak 'll be here soon—" he looked up at the clock, "then we shall be able to see what to do."

"But what is to be done?"

"Plenty, sir. Tarn to first of all and secure the remains of the mast. There's height enough left. We must secure him, I says, then wait for this here breeze to blow himself out, and then make sail and get away home as fast as ever we can."

"But is the vessel, wrecked aloft as she is, going to outlive such weather as this?" I cried, talking in a half-dazed way out of the sort of swooning feeling which came and went in my head like a pulse with the wild, sky-high flights and the headlong falls of the little vessel.

"I hope she will, I'm sure, sir. She was built for the seas of the Dogger, and ought to be able to stand the likes of this."

"Does much water come aboard?"

"Now and agin there's a splash, but she's doing werry well, sir. Ye see we ain't a canoe, nor a wherry. A hundred years ago the *Spitfire* would have been reckoned a craft big enough to sail to Australia in."

"Was anyone hurt by the sea as you rounded to?"

"Bobby was washed aft, sir, but he's all right agin."

I plied him with further questions, mainly concerning the prospects of the weather, our chances, the drift of the yacht, that I might know into what part of the Channel we were being blown, and how long it would occupy to storm us at this rate into the open Atlantic; and then asking him to watch by Grace for a few minutes, I dropped on my knees, and crawled to my cabin, where I somehow contrived to scramble into my boots, coat and cap. I then made for the companion steps, still on my knees, and clawed my way up the hatch till I was head and shoulders above it, and there I stood looking.

I say looking, but there was nothing to see save the near, vast, cloud-like spaces of foam, hovering as it seemed high above the rail as some black head of surge broke off the bow, or descending the pouring side of a sea like bodies of mist sweeping with incredible velocity with the breath of the gale. Past these dim masses the water lay in blackness—a huge spread of throbbing obscurity. All overhead was mere rushing darkness. The wind was wet with spray, and forward there would show at intervals a dull shining of foam, flashing transversely across the labouring little craft.

It was blowing hard indeed, yet from the weight of the seas and the motions of the *Spitfire*, I could have supposed the gale severer than it was. I returned to the cabin, and Caudel, after putting on his oilskins and swallowing a glass of brandy and water—the materials of which were swaying furiously in a silver-plated swinging tray suspended over the table—went on deck, leaving the companion cover a little way open in case I desired to quit the cabin.

Until the dawn, and some time past it, I sat close beside Grace, holding her hand or bathing her brow. She never spoke, she seldom opened her eyes; indeed, she lay as though utterly prostrated, without power to articulate, or, perhaps, to think either. It was the effect of fear, however, rather than of nausea. At any rate, I remember hoping so, for I had heard of people dying of sea sickness, and if the weather that had stormed down upon us should last, it might end in killing her; whereas, the daylight, and, perhaps, some little break of blue sky would reanimate her if her sufferings were owing to terror only, and when she found the little craft buoyant and our lives in no danger, her spirits would rise and her strength return.

But what an elopement is this! thought I, as I gazed upon her sweet, white face and closed lids darkening the cheek with the shadowing of the fringes. One reads of fugitive lovers in peril from upset stage coaches, from detectives in waiting at railway stations, from explosions, earthquakes and collisions on land and ocean. But a gale of wind—a storm-dismantled dandy yacht of twenty-six tons furiously working in the thick of a wild Channel sea, where the surge swells large with the weight of the near Atlantic—here are conditions of a runaway match, the like of which are not to be found, I believe, outside of my own experience.

The blessed daylight came at last. I spied the weak wet grey of it in a corner of the skylight that had been left uncovered by the tarpaulin which was spread over the glass. I looked closely at Grace and found her asleep. I could not be sure at first, so motionless had she been lying, but when I put my ear close to her mouth, the regularity of her respiration convinced me that she was slumbering.

That she should be able to snatch even ten minutes of sleep cheered me. Yet my spirits were very heavy, every bone in me ached with a pain as of rheumatism; though I did not feel sick, my brain seemed to reel, and the sensation of giddiness was hardly less miserable and depressing than nausea itself. I stood up, and with great difficulty caught the brandy as it flew from side

to side on the swinging tray, and took a dram, and then clawed my way as before to the companion steps, and opening the cover, got into the hatch and stood looking at the picture of my yacht and the sea.

There was no one at the helm; the tiller was lashed to leeward. The shock I received on observing no one aft, finding the helm abandoned, as it seemed to me, I shall never forget. The tiller was the first object I saw as I rose through the hatch, and my instant belief was that all my people had been swept overboard. On looking forward, however, I spied Caudel and the others of the men at work about the mast. I am no sailor and cannot tell you what they were doing, beyond saying that they were securing the mast by affixing tackles and so forth to it. But I had no eyes for them or their work; I could only gaze at my ruined yacht, which at every heave appeared to be pulling herself together, as it were, for the final plunge. A mass of cordage littered the deck; the head of the mast showed in splinters, whilst the spar itself looked withered, naked, blasted, as though struck by lightning. The decks were full of water, which was flashed above the rail, where it was instantly swept away by the gale in a smoke of crystals. The black gear wriggled and rose to the wash of the water over the planks like a huddle of eels. A large space of the bulwarks on the port side abreast of the mast was smashed level with the deck. The grey sky seemed to hover within musket shot of us, and it went down the sea in a slate-coloured weeping body of thickness to within a couple of hundred fathoms, and the dark green surges, as they came rolling in foam from out of the windward wall of blankness, looked enormous.

In sober truth a very great sea was running indeed; the oldest sailor then afloat must have thought so. The Channel was widening into the ocean, with depth enough for seas of oceanic volume, and it was still, as it had been for some hours, blowing a whole gale of wind. I had often read of what is called a storm at sea, but had never encountered one, and now I was viewing the real thing from the deck of a little vessel that was practically dismasted in the heart of a thickness that shrouded us from all observation, whilst every minute we were being settled farther and farther away from the English coast towards the great Atlantic by the hurling scend of the surges, and by the driving fury of the blast.

Caudel on seeing me came scrambling to the companion. The salt of the flying wet had dried in the hollows of his eyes and lay in a sort of white powder there, insomuch that he was scarcely recognisable. It was impossible to hear him amidst that roaring commotion, and I descended the ladder by a step or two to enable him to put his head into the hatch. He tried to look cheerful, but there was a curl in the set of his mouth that neutralised the efforts of his eye.

"Ye see how it is, Mr. Barclay?"

"Nothing could be worse."

"Dorn't say that, sir, dorn't say that. The yacht lives, and is making brave weather o't."

"She cannot go on living."

"She'll outlast this weather, sir, I'll lay."

"What are you doing?"

He entered into a nautical explanation, the terms of which I forget. It was of the first consequence, however, that the mast should be preserved, and this the men were attempting at the risk of their lives. As the mast stood there was nothing to support it, and if it went (he explained) the *Spitfire* would become a sheer hulk and then our situation would be desperate indeed; but if the men succeeded in preserving the mast, they could easily make sail upon the yacht when the weather moderated, "and the land ain't very fur off yet, sir," he added.

"But we are widening our distance rapidly."

He shook his head somewhat dolefully, saying, "Yes, that was so."

"I am thinking of the hull, Caudel. Surely this wild tossing must be straining the vessel frightfully. Does she continue to take in water?"

"I must not deceive you, sir," he answered; "she *do*. But a short spell at the pump sarves to chuck it all out again, and so there's no call for your honour to be oneasy."

He returned to the others, whilst I, heart-sickened by the intelligence that the *Spitfire* had sprung a leak—for *that*, I felt, must be the plain English of Caudel's assurance—continued standing a few moments longer in the hatch looking round. Ugly rings of vapour, patches and fragments of dirty yellow scud flew past, loose and low under the near grey wet stoop of the sky; they made the only break in that firmament of storm. The smother of the weather was thickened yet by the clouds of driving spray which rose like bursts of steam from the sides and heads of the seas, making one think of the fierce gusts and guns of the gale as of wolves tearing mouthfuls with sharp teeth from the flanks and backs of the rushing and roaring chase they pursued.

How the seamen maintained their footing I could not imagine. In order to climb the naked spar they had driven short nails at wide intervals up it; and one of them—Foster—as I watched, crawled up the mast with a big block on his back.

It seemed to me as though the men were working for life or death. The yacht rode buoyant to her lashed helm under a fragment of mizzen if I remember right, and very little water came aboard, though great fountains of spray would occasionally soar off the bow, and blow in a snowstorm fathoms away into the sea on the opposite side. But the motions of that naked height of splintered mast were like a batôn in the hands of an excited orchestra conductor, and though I believe I was not more wanting in nerves in my time than most others, my eyes reeled in my head at sight of the plucky fellow, doggedly rising nail by nail, till he had reached the point of elevation where the block was to be secured.

My anxieties, however, were below, on the locker where I had left my sweetheart sleeping, and I was about to descend, when my sight was taken by a shadow in the grey thickness to windward. It was a mere oozing of darkness, so to speak for a moment or two; then as though to the touch of the wand of an enchanter, it leapt upon the eye in the full and majestic proportions of a great, black-hulled ship, "flying light," as the term is. She came rushing down upon us under two lower topsails, and a reefed foresail, pitching to her hawse-pipes as she came, then lifting a broad surface of greenish sheathing out of the acre of yeast that the blow of her cutwater had set boiling. She rushed by close astern of us, and the thunder of the gale in her rigging and the hissing sounds of the seas as she burst into them rose high above the universal humming and seething of the storm. Two figures alone were visible; one in a sea helmet and oilskins at the wheel; a second in a long coat and fur cap, holding by a backstay. She vanished

with the velocity with which she had emerged; but I could not have conjectured her nearness till I reflected how plainly I had seen the two men—all features of their clothing—their very faces, indeed!

Shall we be run down, sent helplessly to the bottom before this weather has done its work for us? thought I, and shuddering to the fancy of a blow from such a stem as that which had just swept past us, I descended the cabin steps. Grace was awake, sitting upright, but in a listless, lolling, helpless posture. I was thankful, however, to find her capable of the exertion even of sitting erect. I crept to her side, and held her to me to cherish and comfort her.

"Oh, this weary, weary motion!" she cried, pressing her hand upon her temples.

"It cannot last much longer, my darling," I said; "the gale is fast blowing itself out, and then we shall have blue skies and smooth water again."

"Can we not land, Herbert?" she asked feebly in my ear, with her cheek upon my shoulder.

"Would to Heaven that were possible within the next five minutes!" I answered.

"Whereabouts are we?"

"I cannot tell exactly; but when this weather breaks we shall find the English coast within easy reach."

"Oh, do not let us wait until we get to Mount's Bay!" she cried.

"My pet, the nearest port will be our port *now*, depend upon it."

This sort of talk making me feel most wretchedly and miserably hopeless, I got away from the subject by asking her how she felt, and by reassuring her as to the buoyancy of the yacht, and I then coaxed her into taking a little weak brandy and water, which, as a tonic under the circumstances, was the best medicine I could have given her. I afterwards made her lie down again, and procured Eau de Cologne and another pillow, and such matters, but at a heavy cost to my bones; for had I been imprisoned in a cask, and sent in that posture on a tour down a mountain's side, I could not have been more abominably thumped and

belaboured. It was one wild scramble and flounder from beginning to end, blows on the head, blows on the shins, complete capsizals that left me sitting and dazed; and when my business of attending upon her was at an end, I felt that this little passage of my elopement had qualified me for nothing so much as for a hospital.

The day passed; a day of ceaseless storm, and of such tossing as only a smackman, who has fished in the North Sea in winter, could know anything about. The spells at the pump grew frequent as the hours progressed, and the wearisome beat of the plied break affected my imagination as though it were the tolling of our funeral bell. I hardly required Caudel to tell me the condition of the yacht when, sometime between eight and nine o'clock that night, he put his head into the hatch and motioned me to ascend.

"It's my duty to tell ye, Mr. Barclay," he exclaimed, whispering hoarsely into my ear, in the comparative shelter of the companion cover, that Grace might not overhear him, "that the leak's againing upon us."

I had guessed as much; yet this confirmation of my conjecture affected me as violently as though I had had no previous suspicion of the state of the yacht. I was thunderstruck, I felt the blood forsake my cheeks, and for some moments I could not find my voice.

"You do not mean to tell me, Caudel, that the yacht is actually *sinking*?"

"No, sir. But the pump'll have to be kept continually going if she's to remain afloat. I'm afeer'd when the mast went over the side that a blow from it started a butt, and the leak's growing worse and worse, consequence of the working of the craft."

"Is it still thick?"

"As mud, sir."

"Why not fire the gun at intervals?" said I, referring to the little brass cannon that stood mounted upon the quarter-deck.

"I'm afeered—" he paused with a melancholy shake of his head. "Of course, Mr. Barclay," he went on, "if it's your wish, sir—but it'll do no more, I allow, than frighten the young lady. 'Tis but a peashooter, sir, and the gale's like

thunder."

"We are in your hands, Caudel," said I, with a feeling of despair ice-cold at my heart, as I reflected upon the size of our little craft, her crippled and sinking condition, our distance from land—as I felt the terrible might and powers of the seas which were tossing us—and as I thought of my sweetheart!

"Mr. Barclay," he answered, "if the weather do but moderate, I shall have no fear. Our case ain't hopeless yet by a long way, sir. The water's to be kept under by continuous pumping, and there are hands enough and to spare for that job. We're not in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, but in the mouth of the English Channel, with plenty of shipping knocking about. But the weather's got to moderate. Firing that there gun 'ud only terrify the young lady, and do no good. If a ship came along no boat could live in this sea. In this here blackness she couldn't kept us company, and our rockets wouldn't be visible half a mile off. No, sir, we've got to stick to the pump, and pray for daylight and fine weather," and, having no more to say to me, or a sudden emotion checking his utterance, he pulled his head out and disappeared in the obscurity.

Grace asked me what Caudel had been talking about, and I answered with the utmost composure I could master that he had come to tell me the yacht was making a noble fight of it and that there was nothing to cause us alarm. I had not the heart to respond otherwise, nor could the bare truth, as I understood it, have served any other end than to deprive her of her senses. Even now, I seemed to find an expression of wildness in her beautiful eyes, as though the tension of her nerves, along with the weary endless hours of delirious pitching and tossing, was beginning to tell upon her brain. I sought to comfort her, I caressed her, I strained her to my heart, whilst I exerted my whole soul to look cheerfully and to speak cheerfully, and, thank God! the influence of my true, deep love prevailed; she spoke tranquilly; the brilliant staring look of her eyes was softened; occasionally she would smile as she lay in my arms, whilst I rattled on, struggling, with a resolution that now seems preternatural when I look back, to distract her attention from our situation.

At one o'clock in the morning she fell asleep, and I knelt by her sleeping form, and prayed for mercy and protection.

It was much about this hour that Caudel's face again showed in the hatch. I crawled along the deck and up the steps to him, and he immediately said to me

in a voice that trembled with agitation:

"Mr. Barclay, good noose, sir. The gale's ataking off."

I clasped my hands, and could have hugged the dripping figure of the man to my breast.

"Yes, sir," he continued, "the breeze is slackening. There's no mistake about it. The horizon's opening too."

"Heaven be praised. And what of the leak, Caudel?"

"'Taint worse than it was, sir, though it's bad enough."

"If the weather should moderate—"

"Well then, if the leak don't gain, we may manage to carry her home. That'll have to be found out, sir. But seeing the yacht's condition, I shall be for transshipping you and the lady to anything inwards bound, that may come along. Us men'll take the yacht to port, providing she'll let us." He paused, and then said: "There might be no harm now, perhaps, in firing off that there gun. If a smack 'ud show herself, she'd be willing to stand by for the sake of the salvage. We'll also send up a few rockets, sir. But how about the young lady, Mr. Barclay?"

"Everything must be done," I replied, "that is likely to preserve our lives."

There was some gunpowder aboard, but where Caudel had stowed it I did not know. However, five minutes after he had left me, and whilst I was sitting by the side of my sweetheart, who still slept, the gun was discharged. It sent a small shock through the little fabric, as though she had gently touched ground, or run into some floating object, but the report, blending with the commotion of the seas and bell-like ringing, and wolfish howlings of the wind, penetrated the deck in a note so dull that Grace never stirred. Ten or twelve times was this little cannon discharged at intervals of five and ten minutes, and I could hear the occasional rush of a rocket, like a giant hissing in wrath, sounding through the stormy uproar.

Tragical noises to harken to, believe me! communicating a significance dark as death, to the now ceaseless pulsing of the pump, to the blows of the sea against the yacht's bow, and to every giddy rise and fall of the labouring little

structure amid the hills and valleys of that savage Channel sea.

CHAPTER VII

THE CARTHUSIAN

From time to time, I would creep up into the companion, always in the hopes of finding the lights of a ship close to, but nothing came of our rockets, whilst I doubt if the little blast the quarter-deck pop-gun delivered was audible half a mile away to windward. But though the night remained a horrible black shadow—the blacker for the phantasmal sheets of foam which defined, without illuminating it, the wind about this time—somewhere between four and five o'clock—had greatly moderated. Yet at dawn it was blowing hard still, with an iron-grey, freckled sea rolling hollow and confusedly, and a near horizon thick with mist.

There was nothing in sight. The yacht looked deplorably sodden and wrecked as she pitched and wallowed in the cold, desolate, ashen atmosphere of that daybreak. The men, too, wore the air of castaway mariners, fagged, salt-whitened, pinched; and their faces, even the boy's, looked aged with anxiety.

I called to Caudel. He approached me slowly, as a man might walk after a swim that has nearly spent him.

"Here is another day, Caudel. What is to be done?"

"What can be done, sir?" answered the poor fellow, with the irritation of exhaustion and of anxiety but little removed from despair. "We must go on pumping for our lives, and pray to the Lord that we may be picked up."

"Why not get sail upon the yacht, put her before the wind, and run for the French coast?"

"If you like sir," he answered languidly, "but it's a long stretch to the French coast, and if the wind should shift—" he paused, and looked as though worry

had weakened his mind a little and rendered him incapable of deciding swiftly and for the best.

The boy Bobby was pumping, and I took notice of the glass-like clearness of the water as it gushed out to the strokes of the little brake. The others of my small crew were crouching under the lee of the weather bulwark. I looked at them, and then said to Caudel:

"Shall we call a council? Something must be done. Those men have lives to save, and I should like to have their opinion."

He at once halloed to them, and they grouped themselves about me as I stood in the companion way. Every man's voice was hoarse with fatigue, and the skin of the poor fellows' faces had a puffed, pale appearance that made one think of drowned bodies.

I asked them what they thought of my proposal of running for the French shore under all the sail we could spread; but after some discussion they were unanimous in opposing the scheme.

"Who's to tell," said Crew, "how fur off the French coast is? And what port are we agoing to make? We're nearer the English coast now than we are to France, and if there should come a shift," he added, casting his moist, blood-shot eyes at the sky, and then fixing them upon the pump, "we might be able to stagger into Plymouth or some port near it."

"This yacht," exclaimed Foster, "isn't agoing to keep afloat long, sir. If then it's to come to that there boat," indicating with a jerk of his chin the little boat that we carried, "we'd better launch her here than further out."

"Depend upon it, Mr. Barclay," exclaimed Caudel, "there's nothen for it but to keep all on as we are, and wait for the weather to improve. There are plenty of ships knocking about. Let it come clear enough for us to be seen and we shall be picked up."

In this way ran the little debate we held, but as I am not a sailor I am unable to repeat more of it than I have set down.

Before returning to Grace I looked at our little boat—she was just a yacht's dinghy—and thought of the chance the tiny ark would provide us with of saving

our lives—seven souls in a boat fit to hold five, and then only in smooth water! And yet she was the only boat we had, and there was absolutely nothing else by which we might preserve ourselves—scarce any materials that I could think of or see, out of which the rudest craft could be manufactured, though the mere thought of it coming to a raft turned me sick and faint, when I glanced at the green slopes of the hurling hills of water, and marked the frothing of their heads and the fathom-thick surface of yeast they shot from their surcharged summits.

Grace was awake when I had gone on deck at daybreak, though she had slept for two or three hours very soundly, never once moving when the cannon was discharged, frequent as the report of it had been. On my descending she begged me to take her on deck.

"I shall be able to stand if I hold your arm," she said, "and the air will do me good."

But I had not the heart to let her view the sea nor the wet, broken, shipwrecked figure the yacht made with water flying over the bow, and water gushing from the pump, and the foam flashing amongst the rigging that still littered the deck as the brine roared from side to side.

"No, my darling," said I; "for the present you must keep below. The wind, thank God, is fast moderating, and the sea will be falling presently. But you cannot imagine, until you attempt to move, how violently the *Spitfire* rolls and pitches. Besides, the decks are full of water, and a single wild heave might throw us both and send us flying overboard."

She shuddered and said no more about going on deck.

Spite of her having slept, her eyes seemed languid. Her cheeks were colourless, and there was an expression of fear and expectation that made my heart mad to behold in her sweet young face, that, when all was well with her, wore a most delicate bloom, whilst it was lovely with a sort of light that was like a smile in expressions even of perfect repose. I had brought her to this! Before another day had closed her love for me might have cost her her life! I could not bear to think of it—I could not bear to look at her—and I broke down burying my face in my hands.

She put her arm round my neck, pressed her cheek to mine, but said nothing, until the two or three dry sobs, which shook me to my very inmost soul, had

passed.

"Anxiety and want of sleep have made you ill," she said. "I am sure all will end well, Herbert. The storm, you say, is passing, and then we shall be able to steer for the nearest port. You will not wait now to reach Penzance?"

I shook my head, unable to speak.

"We have both had enough of the sea," she continued, forcing a smile that vanished in the next breath she drew; "but you could not have foretold this storm. And even now, would you have me anywhere else but here?" said she, putting her cheek to mine again. "Rest your head on my shoulder and sleep. I feel better—and will instantly awaken you if there is any occasion to do so."

I was about to make some answer, when I heard a loud and, as it appeared to me, a fearful cry on deck. Before I could spring to my feet someone heavily thumped the companion-hatch, flinging the sliding cover wide open an instant after, and Caudel's voice roared down:

"Mr. Barclay! Mr. Barclay! there's a big ship close aboard us! She's rounding to. Come on deck, for God's sake, sir, that we may larn your wishes."

Bidding Grace remain where she was, I sprang to the companion steps, and the first thing I saw on emerging was a large, full-rigged ship, with painted ports, under small canvas, and in the act of rounding with her main topsail-yard slowly swinging aback. Midway the height of our little mizzenmast streamed the ensign which Caudel or another of the men had hoisted—the union down—but our wrecked mast, and the fellow labouring at the pump must have told our story to the sight of that ship, with an eloquence that could gather but little emphasis from the signal of distress streaming like a square of flame half-mast high at our stern.

It was broad daylight now, with a lightening in the darkness to windward that opened out twice the distance of sea that was to be measured before I went below. The ship, a noble structure, was well within hail, rolling somewhat heavily, but with a majestic, slow motion. There was a crowd of sailors on her forecastle staring at us, and I remember even in that supreme moment, so tricky is the human intelligence, noticing how ghastly white the cloths of her topmast-staysail or jib showed by contrast with the red and blue shirts and other coloured apparel of the mob of seamen, and against the spread of dusky sky beyond.

There was also a little knot of people on the poop, and a man standing near them, but alone; as I watched him he took what I gathered to be a speaking-trumpet from the hand of the young apprentice or ordinary seaman who had run to him with it.

"Now, Mr. Barclay," cried Caudel, in a voice vibratory with excitement, "there's yours and the lady's hopportunity, sir. But what's your instructions? What's your wishes, sir?"

"My wishes? How can you ask? We must leave the *Spitfire*. She is already half-drowned. She will sink when you stop pumping."

"Right, sir," he exclaimed, and without another word posted himself at the rail in a posture of attention with his eyes upon the ship.

She was apparently a vessel bound to some Indian or Australian port, and seemingly full of passengers, for even as I stood watching, the people in twos and threes arrived on the poop, or got upon the main-deck bulwark-rail to view us. She was a long iron ship, red beneath the water-line, and the bright streak of that colour glared out over the foam, dissolving at her sides like a flash of crimson sunset, as she rolled from us. Whenever she hove her stern up, gay with what might have passed as gilt quarter badges, I could read her name in long, white letters—"CARTHUSIAN, LONDON."

"Yacht ahoy!" now came in a hearty tempestuous shout through the speaking trumpet, which the man I had before noticed lifted to his lips.

"Halloa!" shouted Caudel in response.

"What is wrong with you?"

"Wessel's making water fast, and ye can see," shrieked Caudel, pointing at our wrecked and naked masts, "what our state is. The owner and a lady's aboard, and want to leave the yacht. Will you stand by till you can receive 'em, sir?"

The man with the speaking trumpet lifted his hand in token of having heard, which somewhat astonished me, for though Caudel's lungs were very powerful and piercing, we were not only to leeward of the ship, but the wind, pouring dead on to us from her, was full of whistlings and yells, and the clamour of colliding and breaking seas.

The man with the speaking trumpet appeared to consult with another figure that had drawn to his side. He then took a long look round at the weather, and afterwards put the tube again to his mouth.

"Yacht ahoy!"

"Halloa!"

"We will stand by you; but we cannot launch a boat yet. Does the water gain rapidly upon you?"

"We can keep her afloat for some hours, sir."

The man again elevated his hand, and crossed to the weather side of his ship to signify, I presume, that there was nothing more to be said.

"In two or three hours, sir, you and the lady'll be safe aboard," cried Caudel; "the wind's failing fast, and by that time the sea'll be flat enough for one of that craft's fine boats."

I re-entered the cabin, and found Grace standing, supporting herself at the table. Her attitude was full of expectancy and fear.

"What have they been crying out on deck, Herbert?" she exclaimed.

"There is a big ship close beside us, darling," I answered; "the weather is fast moderating, and by noon I hope to have you safe on board of her."

"On board of her!" she cried, with her eyes large with wonder and alarm. "Do you mean to leave the yacht?"

"Yes; I have heart enough to tell you the truth now, Grace; she has sprung a leak and is taking in water rapidly, and we must abandon her."

She dropped upon the locker with her hands clasped.

"Do you tell me she is sinking, Herbert?"

"We must abandon her," I cried; "put on your hat and jacket, my darling. The deck is comparatively safe now, and I wish the people on board the ship to see

you."

She was so overwhelmed, however, by the news, that she appeared incapable of motion. I procured her jacket and hat, and presently helped her to put them on, and then, grasping her firmly by the waist, I supported her to the companion steps, and carefully, and with difficulty, got her on deck, making her sit under the lee of the weather bulwark, where she would be visible enough to the people of the ship at every windward roll of the yacht, and I crouched beside her with her arm linked in mine.

There was nothing to do but to wait. Some little trifle of property I had below in the cabin, but nothing that I cared to burthen myself with at such a time. All the money I had brought with me, bank-notes and some gold, was in the pocket-book I carried. As for my sweetheart's wardrobe, what she had with her, as you know, she wore, so that she would be leaving nothing behind her. But never can I forget the expression of her face, and the exclamations of horror and astonishment which escaped her lips, when, on my seating her under the bulwark, she sent a look at the yacht. The soaked, stained, mutilated appearance of the little craft persuaded her she was sinking even as we sat together gazing. At every plunge of the bows she would tremulously suck in her breath and bite upon her under-lip with nervous twitchings of her fingers, and a recoil of her whole figure against me.

"Oh, Herbert," she cried, "when shall we leave? We shall be drowned."

I answered her that there was no fear of that. "Though," said I, "but for that ship heaving into sight and standing by us, our fate might have been sealed before the close of the day."

"But how are we to get into the ship?" she cried, straining her eyes, brilliant with emotion, at the vessel that hung, rolling stately, so close by that I could distinguish the features of the crowds of people who lined the rails staring at us.

I explained that the gale was slackening, that fair weather was at hand, as one might tell by the gradual opening of the horizon, and the clarification of the stuff that had been hanging in soot for hours and hours low down over our splintered, withered-looking mast-head, and that, in a short time, the sea would be sufficiently quiet to enable the ship to lower one of the large white quarter-boats which were hanging by davits inboards over the poop.

"The sea runs too high yet," said I, "not for a boat to live in, but to take us off. She might be swamped, stove, sunk alongside of us; and there is time, plenty of time, my darling. Whilst that ship keeps us in view we are safe."

But though there might have been plenty of time, as I told her, the passage of it was of a heart-subduing slowness. It was some half-hour or so after our coming on deck, that Caudel, quitting the pump at which he had been taking a spell, approached me and said:

"You'll onderstand, of course, Mr. Barclay, that I, as master of this yacht, sticks to her?"

"What!" cried I, "to be drowned?"

"I *sticks* to her, sir," he repeated, with the emphasis of irritability in his manner that was not at all wanting in respect either. "I dorn't mean to say if it should come on to blow another gale afore that there craft," indicating the ship, "receives ye, that I wouldn't go too. But the weather's amoderating; it'll be tarning fine afore long, and I'm agoing to sail the *Spitfire* home."

"I hope, Caudel," said I, astonished by this resolution in him, "that you'll not stick to her on my account. Let the wretched craft go and—" I held the rest behind my teeth.

"No, sir. There'll be nothen to hurt in the leak if so be as the weather gets better, and it's fast getting better as you can see. What? Let a pretty little dandy craft like the *Spitfire* go down merely for the want of pumping? All of us men are agreed to stick to her and carry her home."

Grace looked at me; I understood the meaning her eyes conveyed, and exclaimed:

"The men will do as they please. They are plucky fellows, and if they carry the yacht home, she shall be sold, and two-thirds of what she fetches divided amongst them. But *I* have had enough of her, and more than enough of yachting. I must see you, my pet, safe on board some ship that does not leak!"

"I could not live through another night in the *Spitfire*," she exclaimed.

"No, miss, no," rumbled Caudel, soothingly; "nor would it be right and

proper that you should be asked to live through it. They'll be sending for ye presently; though, of course, as the vessel's outward bound—" here he ran his eyes slowly round the sea, "ye've got to consider that unless she falls in soon with something that'll land you, why then, of course, you both stand to have a longer spell of seafaring than Mr. Barclay and me calculated upon when this here elopement was planned."

"Where is she bound to, I wonder?" I said, viewing the tall, noble vessel, with a yearning to be aboard her with Grace at my side; the desperate seas which still stormily tossed between her and us safely traversed.

"To Australia, I allow," answered Caudel. "Them passengers ye sees forrads and along the bulwark rail ain't of the sort that goes to Chaney or the Hindies."

"We can't go to Australia, Herbert," said Grace, surveying me with startled eyes.

"My dear Grace, there are plenty of ships betwixt this Channel and Australia—plenty hard by, rolling up Channel, and willing to land us for a few sovereigns, would their steersmen only shift their helm and approach within hail."

But though there might be truth in this for aught I knew, it was a thing easier to say than to mean, as I felt when I cast my eyes upon the dark-green, frothing waters, still shrouded to within a mile or so past the ship by the damp and dirty grey of the now fast expiring gale that had plunged us into this miserable situation. There was nothing to be seen but the *Carthusian* rolling solemnly and grandly to windward, and the glancing of white heads of foam arching out of the thickness and running sullenly, but with weight too, along the course of the wind.

"Will not that ship put into an English port before she leaves for good?" asked Grace.

"She *has* left for good, miss," answered Caudel. "There's no English port for her unless she ups hellum and tries back'ards again."

"Where are we, then?" cried Grace, with a wild stare over the lee rail.

"In what they call the Chops, miss," replied Caudel.

"In the mouth of the English Channel," I explained.

"I calculate, Mr. Barclay," said Caudel, "that our drift's been all three mile an hour since, it first came on to blow. The wind's hung about nothe, nothe-east, and I don't think it's shifted a point since it first busted down upon us."

"You seriously believe, Caudel, that you can make the land, seeing where we are, in this leaky, mast-wrecked craft?"

"Ay, sir, as easy as lighting a pipe."

"For heaven's sake, consider before it is too late! There's no obligation to stick to the vessel. Give us time to get out of her and you have my consent to let her go," and I pointed downwards.

"No, sir, that's not to be the *Spitfire's* road. The weather's going to come settled, and I trust that when you get ashore ye'll find the yacht safe and snug in harbour, and me in readiness to wait upon your honour's further commands."

I could see in his face, and by the looks he directed at his mates who stood within ear-shot of us, that his mind was made up. Argument or remonstrance would have been idle. He and the others were sailors, and must be allowed to know what they were about when their resolution dealt with their own calling. No doubt, if fine weather followed this gloom and wind, the danger of navigating the yacht would be trifling. The water in the hold was to be kept under, as was proved by our salvation, when the yacht was labouring furiously and taking in whole thunderstorms of wet over the bows; the vessel then was surely to be easily kept afloat should the weather clear up; there were spare sails below, a spare gaff, and other materials for rigging the broken height of mast; and there was also plenty of fresh water and provisions. But those were considerations to weigh with men bred to the sea life; they would not in the least degree have influenced me even had I been alone.

In truth, I had had enough of the yacht; I should have cursed myself for my folly had we parted company with the ship and then met with bad weather again; it was impossible to hear the clanking of the pump, and glance at the coil of cold bright water gushing from it without a shudder that penetrated to my inmost being. And to keep my sweetheart in this perilous craft, rendered leaky and ricketty by storm; to go on subjecting her to the brain-addling convulsive pitching and tossing of the poor, mutilated hooker; to risk with her another

passage of violent winds, merely to preserve a vessel which I was now quite willing to let quietly go to the bottom!

"Not for a million!" said I aloud. "No, my darling," I continued, as I fondled her hand, "my business is to see you safe first of all. There is safety yonder," said I, pointing to the *Carthusian*, "but none here. We must take our chance of being trans-shipped from her as speedily as may be, of being put on board some passing steamer that will carry us home swiftly and comfortably. But sooner than miss the chance that vessel yonder provides us with, I would be content to make the whole round voyage in her, with you by my side, though she should occupy three years in completing it."

We had been waiting, and watching the weather for about an hour, when my eye was suddenly taken by a cloud of extraordinary shape, sailing up the sky out of the north and east, whence the wind was still blowing. It was of the colour of sulphur, and was the exact representation of a huge hand, the forefinger outstretched, the thumb curved backwards as it would be in life, the remaining fingers clenched. As it came along it seemed to project from the dirty grey surface of vapour under which it sailed; it was as though some Titan, lying hid past the clouds, had thrust his hand through the floor of vapour with the finger pointing towards the mighty Atlantic.

By the time it was over the yacht its shape had changed, and it passed away to leeward formless, a mere rag of yellowish vapour. But it had lingered long enough as a compacted colossal hand, pointing seawards, to astonish and even to awe me. It might have been that my brain was a little weakened by what we had passed through, and by want of rest; it is certain, anyway, that the spectacle of that hand of vapour touched and stirred every superstitious instinct in me. Grace, as well as Caudel and the others, had stared up at it with wonder, Job Crew agape, and the boy Bobby squeezing his knuckles into his eyes again and again as though to make sure. As it changed its form and floated away, I exclaimed to my sweetheart:

"It was the finger of Heaven pointing out our road to us, and telling us what to do."

"It was a wonderfully shaped cloud," said she.

"Grace, after that sign," I cried excitedly, "I would not remain in this yacht

though her leak were stopped, all sail made upon her, and Penzance as far off as you can see," said I, pointing.

She looked, awed by the effect of the apparition of the cloud upon me, and held my hand in silence with her eyes fixed on my face.

The ship having canvas upon her, settled slowly upon our bow at a safe distance, but our drift was very nearly hers, and during those weary hours of waiting for the sea to abate, the two crafts fairly held the relative positions they had occupied at the outset. The interest we excited in the people aboard of her was ceaseless. The line of her bulwarks remained dark with heads, and the glimmer of the white faces gave an odd pulsing look to the whole length of them, as the heave of the ship alternated the stormy light. They believed us on our own report to be sinking, and that might account for their tireless gaze and riveted attention.

I could well imagine the deplorable figure our yacht made, as she soared and sank, time after time plunging into some hollow that put her out of sight to the ship, leaving nothing showing but the splintered masthead above the clear emerald green or frothing summit of the swollen heap of water. At such times the spectators aboard the *Carthusian* might well have supposed us gone for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

OUTWARD BOUND

On a sudden, much about the hour of noon, there came a lull; the wind dropped as if by magic, here and there over the wide green surface of ocean the foam glanced, but in the main the billows ceased to break and washed along in a troubled but fast moderating swell. A kind of brightness sat in the east, and the horizon opened to its normal confines; but it was a desolate sea, nothing in sight save the ship, though I eagerly and anxiously scanned the whole circle of the waters.

The two vessels had widened their distance, yet the note of the hail, if dull,

was perfectly distinct.

"Yacht ahoy! We're going to send a boat."

I saw a number of figures in motion on the ship's poop. The aftermost boat was then swung through the davits over the side, four or five men entered her, and a minute later she sank to the water.

"Here they come, Grace!" cried I. "At last, thank Heaven!"

"Oh, Herbert, I shall never be able to enter her," she exclaimed, shrinking to my side.

But I knew better, and made answer with a caress only.

The oars rose and fell, the boat showed and vanished, showed and vanished again as she came buzzing to the yacht, to the impulse of the powerfully swept blades. Caudel stood by with some coils of line in his hand; the end was flung, caught, and in a trice the boat was alongside, and a sun-burnt, reddish-haired man, in a suit of serge, and a naval peak to his cap, tumbled with the dexterity of a monkey over the yacht's rail.

He looked round him an instant, and then came straight up to Grace and me, taking the heaving and slanting deck as easily as though it were the floor of a ball-room.

"I am the second mate of the *Carthusian*," said he, touching his cap with an expression of astonishment and admiration in his eyes as he looked at Grace. "Are all your people ready to leave, sir? Captain Parsons is anxious that there should be no delay."

"The lady and I are perfectly ready," said I, "but my men have made up their minds to stick to the yacht with the hope of carrying her home."

He looked round to Caudel who stood near.

"Ay, sir, that's right," exclaimed the worthy fellow, "it's agoing to be fine weather and the water's to be kept under."

The second mate ran his eye over the yacht with a short-lived look of

puzzlement in his face, then addressed me:

"We had thought your case a hopeless one, sir."

"So it is," I answered.

"Are you wise in your resolution, my man?" he exclaimed, turning to Caudel again.

"Ay, sir," answered Caudel doggedly, as though anticipating an argument, "who's agoing to leave such a dandy craft as this to founder for the want of keeping a pump going for a day or two? There are four men and a boy all resolved, and we'll *manage* it," he added emphatically.

"The yacht is in no fit state for the young lady, anyway," said the second mate. "Now, sir, and you, madam, if you are ready," and he put his head over the side to look at his boat.

I helped Grace to stand, and whilst I supported her I extended my hand to Caudel.

"God bless you and send you safe home!" said I; "your pluck and determination make me feel but half a man. But my mind is resolved too. Not for worlds would Miss Bellassys and I pass another hour in this craft."

He shook me cordially by the hand, and respectfully bade Grace farewell. The others of my crew approached, leaving one pumping, and amongst the strong fellows on deck and over the side—sinewy arms to raise and muscular fists to receive her—Grace, white and shrinking and exclaiming, was handed dexterously and swiftly down over the side. Watching my chance, I sprang, and plumped heavily but safely into the boat. The second mate then followed and we shoved off.

The crew of the yacht raised a cheer and waved their caps to us, and I felt heartily grieved to leave them. They had behaved well throughout the wild hours of storm now passed, and it seemed but a poor return, so to speak, on my part to quit the yacht in this fashion, as if, indeed, I was abandoning them to their fate, though, of course, they had made up their minds and knew very well what they were about; so that it was little more than sensitiveness that made me think of them as I did whilst I watched them flourishing to me and listened to their

cheers.

By this time, the light that I had taken notice of in the east had brightened; there were breaks in it, with here and there a dim view of blue sky, and the waters beneath had a gleam of steel as they rolled frothless and swollen. In fact, it was easy to see that fine weather was at hand, and this assurance it was that reconciled me as nothing else could to the fancy of Caudel and my little crew carrying the leaking, crippled yacht home.

The men in the boat pulled sturdily, eyeing Grace and me out of the corner of their eyes, and gnawing upon the hunks of tobacco in their cheeks, as though in the most literal manner they were chewing the cud of the thoughts put into them by this encounter. The second mate uttered a remark or two about the weather, but the business of the tiller held him too busy to talk. There was the heavy swell to watch, and the tall, slowly-rolling metal fabric ahead of us to sheer alongside of. For my part, I could not see how Grace was to get aboard, and, observing no ladder over the side as we rounded under the vessel's stern, I asked the second mate how we were to manage it.

"Oh," said he, "we shall send you both up in a chair with a whip. There's the block," he added, pointing to the yard-arm, "and the line's already rove, you'll observe."

There were some seventy or eighty people watching us as we drew alongside, all staring over the rail and from the forecastle and from the poop, as one man. I remarked a few bonnets and shawled heads forward, and two or three well-dressed women aft, otherwise the crowd of heads belonged to men-emigrants—shabby and grimy; most of them looking seasick, I thought, as they overhung the side.

A line was thrown from the ship, and the boat was hauled under the yard-arm whip, where she lay rising and falling, carefully fended off from the vessel's iron side by a couple of the men in her.

"Now, then, bear a hand!" shouted a voice from the poop; "get your gangway unshipped, and stand by to hoist away handsomely."

A minute later a large chair with arms dangled over our heads, and was caught by the fellows in the boat. A more uncomfortable, nerve-capsizing performance I never took a part in. The water washed with a thunderous sobbing

sound along the metal bends of the ship, that, as she stooped her side into the brine, flashed up the swell in froth, hurling towards us also a recoiling billow, which made the dance of the boat horribly bewildering and nauseating. One moment we were floated, as it seemed to my eye, to the level of the bulwarks of the stooping ship; the next we were in a valley, with the great bare hull leaning away from us—an immense wet surface of red and black and chequered band, her shrouds vanishing in a slope, and her yard-arms forking up sky high.

"Now, madam," said the second mate, "will you please seat yourself in that chair?"

Grace was very white, but she saw that it must be done, and with set lips and in silence, was helped by the sailors to seat herself. I adored her then for her spirit, for I confess that I had dreaded she would hang back, shriek out, cling to me, and complicate and delay the miserable business by her terrors. She was securely fastened into the chair, and the second mate paused for the chance.

"Hoist away!" he yelled, and up went my darling, uttering one little scream only as she soared.

"Lower away!" and by the line that was attached to the chair, she was dragged through the gangway where I lost sight of her.

It was now my turn. The chair descended, and I sat upon it, not without several yearning glances at the sloping side of the ship, which, however, only satisfied me that there was no other method by which I might enter the vessel than the chair, active as I was.

"Hoist away!" was shouted, and up I went, and I shall not readily forget the sensation. My brains seemed to sink into my boots as I mounted. I was hoisted needlessly high, almost to the yard-arm itself, I fancy, through some blunder on the part of the men who manned the "whip." For some breathless moments I dangled between heaven and ocean, seeing nothing but grey sky and heaving waters. But the torture was brief. I felt the chair sinking, saw the open gangway sweep past me, and presently I was out of the chair at Grace's side, stared at by some eighty or a hundred emigrants, all 'tweendecks passengers, who had left the bulwarks to congregate on the main deck.

"Well, thank Heaven, here we are, anyway!" was my first exclamation to Grace.

"It was a thousand times worse than the *Spitfire* whilst it lasted," she answered.

"You behaved magnificently," said I.

"Will you step this way?" exclaimed a voice overhead.

On looking up I found that we were addressed by a short, somewhat thick-set man, who stood at the rail that protected the forward extremity of the poop deck. This was the person who had talked to us through the speaking-trumpet, and I at once guessed him to be the captain. There were about a dozen first-class passengers gazing at us from either side of him, two or three of whom were ladies. I took Grace by the hand, and conducted her up a short flight of steps, and approached the captain, raising my hat as I did so, and receiving from him a sea-flourish of the tall hat he wore. He was buttoned up in a cloth coat, and his cheeks rested in a pair of high, sharp-pointed collars, starched to an iron hardness, so that his body and head moved as one piece. His short legs arched outwards, and his feet were encased in long boots, the toes of which were of the shape of a shovel. He wore the familiar tall hat of the streets; it looked to be brushed the wrong way, was bronze at the rims, and on the whole showed as a hat that had made several voyages. Yet, if there was but little of the sailor in his costume, his face suggested itself to me as a very good example of the nautical life. His nose was scarcely more than a pimple of a reddish tincture, and his small, moist, grey eyes lying deep in their sockets seemed, as they gazed at you, to be boring their way through the apertures which Nature had provided for the admission of light. A short piece of white whisker decorated either cheek, and his hair that was cropped close as a soldier's was also white.

"Is that your yacht, young gentleman?" said he, bringing his eyes from Grace to me, at whom he had to stare up as at his masthead, so considerably did I tower over the little man.

"Yes," said I, "she is the *Spitfire*—belongs to Southampton. I am very much obliged to you for receiving this lady and me."

"Not at all," said he, looking hard at Grace; "your wife, sir?"

"No," said I, greatly embarrassed by the question, and by the gaze of the ten or dozen passengers who hung near, eyeing us intently and whispering, yet, for the most part, with no lack of sympathy and good nature in their countenances. I

saw Grace quickly bite upon her under-lip, but without colouring or any other sign of confusion than a slight turn of her head as though she viewed the yacht.

"But what have you done with the rest of your people, young gentleman?" inquired the captain.

"My name is Barclay—Mr. Herbert Barclay: the name of the young lady to whom I am engaged to be married," said I, significantly sending a look along the faces of the listeners, "is Miss Grace Bellassys, whose aunt, Lady Amelia Roscoe, you may probably have heard of."

This, I thought, was introduction enough. My business was to assert our dignity first of all, and then as I was addressing a number of persons who were either English or Colonial, or both, the pronunciation of her ladyship's name was, I considered, a very early and essential duty.

"With regard to my crew—" I continued, and I told the captain they had made up their minds to carry the vessel home.

"Miss Bellassys looks very tired," exclaimed a middle-aged lady with grey hair, speaking with a gentle, concerned smile, engaging with its air of sympathetic apology, "if she will allow me to conduct her to my cabin—"

"By all means, Mrs. Barstow," cried the captain. "If she has been knocking about in that bit of a craft there through the gale that's been blowing, all I can say, ladies and gentlemen, she'll have seen more tumbling and weather in forty-eight hours than you'll have any idea of though I was to keep you at sea for ten years in this ship."

Mrs. Barstow, with a motherly manner, approached Grace, who bowed and thanked her, and together they walked to the companion hatch and disappeared.

By this time the boat had been hoisted, and the ship was full of the animation and business of her sailors piling canvas upon her. The sudden stagnation that had fallen was now threaded by a weak draught of air out of the east where the brightness of the new weather had first shown. The compacted pall of cloud was fast breaking up, settling into large bodies of vapour, with spaces of dim blue sky between and in the south there stood a shaft of golden sunshine that flashed up a space of water at its base in splendour, though past it the sulky heaps of cloud loomed the darker for that magical and beautiful lance of radiance. Miles away

in the south-west a white sail hovered, but nothing else broke the sea-line.

I took all this in at a glance: also the figure of my poor, mutilated yacht heaving forlorn and naked upon the swell that still rolled heavily, as though after the savage vexing of its heart during the past hours, old ocean could not quickly draw its breath placidly. The little vessel looked but a toy from the height of the poop of the iron ship. As I surveyed her, I marvelled to think that she had successfully encountered the weather of the past two days and nights. I could see one of the men—Dick Files—steadily labouring at the pump whilst the others were busy with the tackle and gear that supported the mast. But even as I watched, the *Carthusian* had got way upon her, and was dwarfing yet the poor brave little *Spitfire* as she slid round to the government of her helm, her yards squaring, her canvas spreading, and her crew chorussing all about her decks as she went.

The captain asked me many questions, most of which I answered mechanically, for my thoughts were fixed upon the little yacht, and my heart was with the poor fellows who had resolved to carry her home—but with *them* only! not with *her*. No! as I watched her rolling, and the fellow pumping, not for worlds would I have gone aboard of her again with Grace, though Caudel should have yelled out that the leak was stopped, and though a fair, bright breezy day, with promise of its quiet lasting for a week, should have opened round about us.

The captain wanted to know when I had sailed, from what port I had started, where I was bound to, and the like. I kept my face with difficulty when I gave him my attention at last. It was not only his own mirth-provoking, nautical countenance; the saloon passengers could not take their eyes off me, and they bobbed and leaned forward in an eager, hearkening way to catch every syllable of my replies. Nor was this all, for below on the quarter-deck and along the waist stood the scores of steerage passengers, all straining their eyes at me. The curiosity and excitement were ridiculous. But fame is a thing very cheaply earned in these days.

The captain inquired a little too curiously sometimes. So Miss Bellassys was engaged to to be married to me, hey? Was she alone with me? No relative, no maid, nobody of her own sex in attendance? To these questions the ladies listened with an odd expression on their faces. I particularly noticed one of them: she had sausage-shaped curls, lips so thin that when they were closed they formed a fine line as though produced by a single sweep of a camel's hair-brush

under her nose; the pupil of one eye was considerably larger than that of the other, which gave her a very staring, knowing look on one side of her face; but there was nothing in my responses to appease hers, or the captain's, or the others' thirst for information. In fact, ever since I had resolved to quit the *Spitfire* for the *Carthusian*, I had made up my mind to keep secret the business that had brought Grace and me into this plight. The captain and the rest of them might think as they chose; Grace was not to be much hurt by their conjectures or opinions; there could be nothing to wholly occupy our thoughts whilst aboard the *Carthusian*, but the obligation of leaving her as speedily as might be, of reaching Penzance, and then getting married.

"There can be no doubt, I hope, Captain Parsons," said I, for the second mate had given me the skipper's name, "of our promptly falling in with something homeward bound that will land Miss Bellassys and me? What the craft may prove can signify nothing—a smack would serve our purpose."

"I'll signal when I have a chance," he answered, looking round the sea and then up aloft, "but it's astonishing, ladies and gentlemen," he continued, addressing the passengers, "how lonesome the ocean is, even where you look for plenty of shipping."

"Not in this age of steam, I think," observed a tall, thin man mildly.

"In this age of steam, sir," responded the captain. "You may not credit it, but on three occasions I have measured the two Atlantics from abreast of Ushant to abreast of the Cape of Good Hope without sighting a single ship, steam or sail."

"You amaze me," said the mild, thin man.

"How far are we from Penzance, captain?" I inquired.

"Why," he answered, "all a hundred and fifty miles."

"If that be so then," I cried, "our drift must have been that of a balloon."

"Will those poor creatures ever be able to reach the English coast in that broken boat?" exclaimed one of the ladies, indicating the *Spitfire* that now lay dwarfed right over the stern of the ship.

"If they are longshoremen—and yet I don't know," exclaimed the captain with

a short laugh, "a boatman will easily handle a craft of that sort when a blue-water sailor would be all abroad." He put his hand into the skylight and lifted a telescope off its brackets, and applied it to his eye. "Still pumping," said he, talking whilst he gazed through the glass, "and they're stretching a sail along—bending it no doubt. There's plenty of mast there for cloths enough to blow them home. The pump keeps the water under—that's certain. To my mind she looks more buoyant than she was. Ladies and gentlemen, she'll do—she'll do. If I thought not—" he viewed her for a little while in silence. "Oh, yes, ladies and gentlemen, she'll do," he repeated, and then replacing the glass, exclaimed to me, "Have you lunched, Mr. Barclay?"

"No, captain, I have not, neither can I say I have breakfasted."

"Oh, confound it, man, you should have said so before. Step this way, sir, step this way," and he led me to the companion hatch that conducted to the saloon, pausing on the road, however, to beckon with a square forefinger to a sober, Scotch-faced personage in a monkey jacket and loose pilot trousers—the chief mate as I afterwards learnt—to whom in a wheezy undertone he addressed some instructions, which, as I gathered from one or two syllables I overheard, referred to the speaking of inward-bound ships, and to our trans-shipment.

The saloon was a fine, long, handsome interior, but I preserve no more of it than a general impression of mirrors, rich panels, a short row of lamps formed of some lustrous metal, an elaborate stove aft, a piano secured to the richly-decorated shaft of the mizzenmast; a long table with fixed revolving chairs on either hand, flanked to port and starboard by a row of cabins or berths. After our experience aboard the *Spitfire*, I was scarcely sensible of the motions of the deck of this big ship, albeit she was rolling and curtseying as she floated, clothed to her royal yards, over the sulky undulations of the water. But I was able to gather from certain sounds which penetrated through the closed doors of the berths that some of the passengers were not yet quite well. There was nobody in the saloon save one little man with a quantity of hair down his back after the manner of poets and professors. He was seated near the main-deck entrance with a countenance of a ghastly hue. His eyes were riveted to the deck, and when the captain cheerily called to him to know how he did, he answered without moving his figure or shifting his gaze, "Ach! Gott! don't shpeak to me."

At this moment a door close beside which I was standing opened and Grace came out, followed by the kind lady, Mrs. Barstow. She had removed her hat and

jacket, and was sweet and fresh with the application of such toilet conveniences as her sympathetic acquaintance could provide her with. Captain Parsons stared at her and then whipped off his tall hat.

"This is better than the *Spitfire*, Grace," said I.

"Oh, yes, Herbert," she answered, sending a glance of her fine dark eyes over the saloon; "but Mrs. Barstow tells me that the ship is going to New Zealand."

"So she is, so she is," cried Captain Parsons, bursting into a laugh, "and if you like, Mr. Barclay and you shall accompany us."

She looked at him with a frightened girlish air.

"Oh, no, Miss Bellassys," said Mrs. Barstow. "Captain Parsons is a great humorist. I have made two voyages with him, and he keeps me laughing from port to port. He will see that you get safely home, and I wish that we could count upon arriving at Otaga as speedily as you will reach England."

Just then a man in a camlet jacket entered the saloon—cuddy, I believe, is the proper word for it. He was the head steward, and Captain Parsons immediately called to him.

"Jenkins, here. This lady and gentleman have not breakfasted; they have been shipwrecked, and wish to lunch. You understand? And draw the cork of a quart bottle of champagne. There is no better sea-physic, Miss Bellassys. I've known what it is to be five days in

CHAPTER IX

WE ARE MUCH OBSERVED

Our lunch consisted of cold fowl and ham and champagne; good enough meat and drink, one should say, for the sea, and almost good enough, one might add, for a pair of love-sick fugitives.

"How is your appetite, my darling?" said I.

"I think I can eat a little of that cold chicken."

"This is very handsome treatment, Grace. Upon my word, if the captain preserves this sort of behaviour, I do not believe we shall be in a great hurry to quit his ship."

"Is not she a noble vessel?" exclaimed Grace, rolling her eyes over the saloon. "After the poor little *Spitfire's* cabin! And how different is this motion! It soothes me after the horrid tumbling of the last two days."

"This is a very extraordinary adventure," said I, eating and drinking with a relish and an appetite not a little heightened by observing that Grace was making a very good meal. "It may not end so soon as we hope, either. First of all, we have to fall in with a homeward-bound ship; then she has to receive us; then she has to arrive in the Channel and transfer us to a tug or a smack, or anything else which may be willing to put us ashore; and there is always the chance of her *not* falling in with such a craft as we want, until she is as high as the Forelands—past Boulogne, in short! But no matter, my own. We are together, and that is everything."

She took a sip of the champagne that the steward had filled her glass with, and said in a musing voice, "What will the people in this ship think of me?"

"What they may think need not trouble us," said I. "I told Captain Parsons that we were engaged to be married. Is there anything very extraordinary in a young fellow taking the girl he is engaged to out for a sail in his yacht, and being blown away, and nearly wrecked by a heavy gale of wind?"

"Oh, but they will know better," she exclaimed, with a pout.

"Well, I forgot, it is true, that I told the captain we sailed from Boulogne. But how is he to know your people don't live there?"

"It will soon be whispered about that I have eloped with you, Herbert," she exclaimed.

"Who's to know the truth if it isn't divulged, my pet?" said I.

"But it is divulged," she answered.

I stared at her. She eyed me wistfully as she continued: "I told Mrs. Barstow the story. I am not ashamed of my conduct, and I ought not to feel ashamed of the truth being known."

There was logic and heroism in this closing sentence, though it did not strictly correspond with the expression she had just now let fall as to what the people would think. I surveyed her silently, and after a little exclaimed:

"You are in the right. Let the truth be known. I shall give the skipper the whole yarn that there may be no misunderstanding, for after all we may have to stick to this ship for some days, and it would be very unpleasant to find ourselves misjudged."

I gazed, as I spoke, through the windows of the saloon or cuddy front, which overlooked the main-deck, where a number of steerage passengers were standing in groups. The ship was before the wind; the great main-course was hauled up to its yard, and I could see to as far as the forecastle, with a fragment of bowsprit showing under the white arch of the foresail; some sailors in coloured apparel were hauling upon a rope hard by the foremast; a gleam of misty sunshine was pouring full upon this window-framed picture, and crowded it with rich oceanic tints softened by the ruled and swaying shadows of the rigging. An extraordinary thought flashed into my head.

"By Jove! Grace, I wonder if there's a parson on board?"

"Why do you wonder?"

"If there is a parson on board he might be able to marry us."

She coloured, smiled, and looked grave all in a breath.

"A ship is not a church," said she, almost demurely.

"No," I answered, "but a parson's a parson wherever he is—he carries with him the same appetite, the same clothes, the same powers, no matter whither his steps conduct him."

She shook her head smiling, but her blush had faded, nor could her smile

disguise a look of alarm in her eyes.

"My darling," said I, "surely if there should be a clergyman on board, you will not object to his marrying us? It would end all our troubles, anxieties, misgivings—thrust Lady Amelia out of the question altogether, save us from a tedious spell of waiting ashore."

"But the objections which hold good on shore hold good here," said she, with her face averted.

"No, I can't see it," said I, talking so noisily out of the enthusiasm the notion had raised in me that she looked round to say "Hush!" and then turned her head again. "There must be a difference," said I, sobering my voice, "between the marriage ceremony as performed on sea and on shore. The burial service is different, and you will find the other is so too. There is too much horizon at sea, too much distance to talk of consent. Guardians and patents are too far off. As to banns—who's going to say 'no' on board a vessel?"

"I cannot imagine that it would be a proper wedding," said she, shaking her head.

"Do you mean in the sense of its being valid, my sweet?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"But you don't see that a parson's a parson everywhere. Whom God hath joined—"

The steward entered the saloon at that moment. I called to him and said politely, "Have you many passengers, steward?"

"Ay, sir, too many," he answered. "The steerage is pretty nigh chock-ablock."

"Saloon passengers, I mean?"

"Every berth's hoccupied, sir."

"What sort of people are they, do you know? Any swells amongst them?"

"That, depends how they're viewed," he answered, with a cautious look round

and a slow smile; "if by themselves, they're all swells; if by others—why!"

"I thought perhaps that you might have had something in the Colonial bishopric way."

"No, sir, there's nothen in that way aboard. Plenty as needs it I dessay. The language of some of them steerage chaps is something to turn the black hairs of a monkey white. Talk of the vulgarity of sailors!"

The glances of this steward were dry and shrewd, and his smile slow and knowing; I chose therefore to ask him no more questions. But then, substantially, he had told me what I wanted to gather, and secretly I felt as much mortified and disappointed as though for days past I had been thinking of nothing else than finding a parson on board ship at sea and being married to Grace by him.

A little later on Mrs. Barstow came into the saloon and asked Grace to accompany her on deck. My sweetheart put on her hat and jacket, and the three of us went on to the poop. My first look was for a ship, and I spied off the starboard bow a square of orange-coloured canvas; but the vessel was going our way and was, therefore, of no use to us. The ocean swept in a blank circle to that solitary point of sun-coloured sail; but it was fine weather at last; whilst we were seated at lunch the breeze had freshened and the sky cleared; the swell left by the gale had sensibly flattened within the past hour, and the sea was trembling and filled with the life of crisp green wrinkles running over the light folds which flowed pleasantly out of the north; the mistiness was gone from the sunshine; the light was brilliant and warm and coloured the atmosphere with a delicate tinge of yellow, though the luminary was yet high in the heavens. The clouds hung in rolls of cream-like vapour, making the noblest and most stately prospect of the sky that could be imagined as they moved slowly over our mastheads in the direction in which we steered.

I had never been aboard a full-rigged ship before—that is to say, at sea, and under canvas—and on quitting the companion-way I stood for some moments heedless of all things in my admiration of the beautiful, in truth, I may say the royal, picture I witnessed. From deck to truck rose three spires of canvas, sail upon sail of a milky softness swelling one above another. The planks of the poop deck were as white as holystoning could make them, with a glitter as of dried salt everywhere, and the shadows of the people and of the rigging, swaying with the heave of the fabric, lay like sketches wrought in pale violet ink. There was a

frequent flash of glass; there were star-like glories in polished brass; and there was an odd farmyard smell of hay in the air, with the bleating of sheep forward and a noise of cocks and hens.

"A voyage in such a ship as this, Mrs. Barstow," said I, "should make the most delightful trip of a person's life."

"It is better than yachting," said Grace softly.

"A voyage soon grows tiresome," remarked Mrs. Barstow. "Miss Bellassys, I trust you will share my cabin whilst you remain with us."

"You are exceedingly kind," said Grace.

Others of the passengers now approached, and I observed a general effort of kindness and politeness. The ladies gathered about Grace, and the gentlemen about me, and the time slipped by, whilst I related my adventures and listened to their experiences of the weather in the Channel, and such matters. It was strange, however, to feel that every hour that passed was widening our distance from home. I never for an instant regretted my determination to quit the yacht. Yet, even at this early time of our being aboard the *Carthusian*, I was disquieted by a sense of mild dismay when I ran my eye over the ship, and marked her sliding and curtseying steadily forwards to the impulse of her wide and gleaming pinions, and reflected that this sort of thing might go on for days, and perhaps for weeks; that we might arrive at the Equator, perhaps, at the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope without meeting with a vessel to serve our turn. All the wardrobe that Grace and I possessed, we stood in. Small conveniences we should be easily able to borrow, but what on earth were we to do without a change of dress or linen? A voyage half-way round the world was indeed a new and quite unconsidered detail of our elopement. From Boulogne to Mount's Bay was, I had often thought, whilst making my plans, too far by several leagues of water. But what, if in defiance of the keenest look-out for ships, we should be carried to New Zealand? Could we get married there? Did the Colonials impose the restrictions of the old home upon the nuptials of a couple? Should we have to wait for Aunt Amelia's sanction? How long would it take for her ladyship to receive a letter from, say Otaga, and for us to get her reply?

Well, in talking, and in thinking, and in walking, and in looking, that first afternoon passed, and at half-past five o'clock we went to dinner. I had had a short chat with Captain Parsons, and from him had learnt that there was no parson on board, though I flattered myself that I had put the question in such a way as not to excite in his brine-seasoned mind the faintest suspicion of the meaning of my curiosity. I had also given him to understand that I was a young gentleman of substance, and begged him to believe that any cost Grace and I might put the ship to should be repaid with interest to her owners.

This enabled me to take my seat at the table with an easy conscience, for though there can be no doubt as to the humanity and hospitality of the British shipmaster, the British ship-owner, on the other hand, I have always heard spoken of as a person eminent for thrift and economy, as is made manifest by the slenderness of the crew he ships, the unsavoriness of the provisions he supplies them with, and the very small wages he gives to his captains and mates.

It was impossible for me to find myself seated with Grace at my side at that cheerful, hospitable, sparkling, sea dinner-table, without acutely realising the difference betwixt this time and yesterday. Some ten or twelve persons sat down, but there was room for another dozen, which I believe about completed the number of saloon passengers the *Carthusian* carried. Captain Parsons, with a countenance varnished as from the recent employment of soap, was at the head of the table with Mrs. Barstow on his right, and I observed that they frequently conversed whilst they often directed their eyes at Grace and me. The setting sun shone upon the skylight, and gleamed in ruby prisms and crystals in the glass about the table. It was a warm and cheerful picture; the forward windows in the saloon framed a part of the ship—a glimpse of curved white canvas, a fragment of the galley and the long-coat, the steps leading to the forecastle, coils of gear swinging upon pins; the soft blue afternoon sky of the fine weather that had come at last shone betwixt the squares of the rattlines and floated in a tender liquid atmosphere under the arch of the sails; you could see a number of the steerage passengers pacing the main-deck, smoking and arguing; a gentle *shaling* noise of waters broken by the passage of the vessel seethed in the ear like a light, passing attack of deafness in the intervals of silence at the table.

The chief officer, the Scotch-faced man I have before written of, sat at the foot of the table, slowly and soberly eating.

"It would be strange, sir," said I, addressing him, "if we do not hereabout speedily fall in with something homeward bound."

"I would, sir," he answered, with a broad Scotch accent.

"Yet not so strange, Mr. M'Cosh," said a passenger, sitting opposite to me, "if you come to consider how wide the sea is here."

"Well, perhaps not so strange either," said Mr. M'Cosh, in his sawdusty voice, with his mouth full.

"Should you pass a steamer at night," said I, "would you stop and hail her?"

He reflected, and then said, he "thocht not."

"Then our opportunities for getting home must be limited to daylight?" said I.

This seemed too obvious to him, I suppose, to need a response.

"Are you in a very great hurry, Mr. Barclay, to get home?" exclaimed a passenger, with a slight cast in his eye that gave a turn of humour to his face.

"Why, yes," I answered, with a glance at Grace, who was eating quietly at my side, seldom looking up, though she was as much stared at, even after all these hours, as decent manners would permit. "You will please remember that we are without luggage."

"Eh, but that is to be managed, I think. There are many of us here of both sexes," continued the gentleman with the cast in his eye, sending a squint along the row of people on either side of the table. "You should see New Zealand, sir. The country abounds with fine and noble prospects, and I do not think," he added, with a smile, "that you will find occasion to complain of a want of hospitality."

"I am greatly obliged," said I, giving him a bow; "but New Zealand is a little distant for the moment."

The subject of New Zealand was now, however, started, and the conversation on its harbours, revenue, political parties, debts, prospects, and the like, was exceedingly animated, and lasted pretty nearly through the dinner. Though Grace

and I were seated at the foremost end of the table, removed nearly by the whole length of it from the captain, I was sensible that this talk to those near him mainly concerned us. He had, as I have said, Mrs. Barstow on one hand, and on the other sat the lady with the thin lips and sausage curls. I would notice him turn first to one, then to the other, his round sea-coloured face broadened by an arch knowing smile; then Mrs. Barstow would look at us; then the lady with the thin lips would stretch her neck to take a peep down the line in which we sat; others would also look, smirk a bit, and address themselves, with amused faces, in a low voice to Captain Parsons.

All this was not so marked as to be offensive, or even embarrassing, but it was a very noticeable thing, and I whispered to Grace that we seemed to form the sole theme of conversation at the captain's end.

"What can they be talking about?" said I. "I hope they are not plotting to carry us to New Zealand."

"You would not permit it!" she exclaimed, giving me an eager, alarmed look.

"No," said I, "it is too far off. Were it Madeira now—it may come to Madeira yet; but the pity of it is, my sweet," said I, low in her ear, "we are not married, otherwise we might call this trip our honeymoon, and make a really big thing of it by going the whole way to New Zealand."

She coloured and was silent, afraid, I think, of my being overheard, for my spirits were now as good as they were yesterday wretched, and whenever I felt happy I had a trick of talking rather loud.

When dinner was over we went on deck. Mrs. Barstow and the thin-lipped lady carried off Grace for a stroll up and down the planks, and I joined a few of the gentlemen passengers on the quarter-deck to smoke a cigar one of them gave me. There was a fine breeze out of the east, and the ship, with yards nearly square, was sliding and rolling stately along her course at some six or seven miles in the hour. The west was flushed with red, but a few stars were trembling in the airy dimness of the evening blue over the stern, and in the south was the young moon, a pale curl, but gathering from the clearness of the atmosphere a promise of radiance enough later on to touch the sea with silver under it and fling a gleam of her own upon our soaring sails.

I had almost finished my cigar—two bells, seven o'clock had not long been

struck—when one of the stewards came out of the saloon, and approaching me exclaimed:

"Captain Parson's compliments, sir, and he'll be glad to see you in his cabin if you can spare him a few minutes."

"With pleasure," I answered, flinging the end of my cigar overboard, instantly concluding that he wished to see me privately to arrange about terms and accommodation whilst Grace and I remained with him.

CHAPTER X

A SINGULAR PROPOSAL

I followed the man into the saloon and was led right aft where stood two large cabins. On entering I found Captain Parsons sitting at a table covered with nautical instruments, books, writing materials and so forth. A lighted bracket lamp near the door illuminated the interior, and gave me a good view of the hearty little fellow, and his sea-furniture of cot, locker, chest of drawers, and wearing apparel that slided to and fro upon the bulkhead as it dangled from pegs. His air was as grave, and his countenance as full of importance as such features as his were capable of expressing. Having asked me to take a seat, he surveyed me thoughtfully for some moments in silence.

"Young gentleman," said he at last, "before we man the windlass I have to beg you'll not take amiss any questions I may put. Whatever I ask won't be out of curiosity. I believe I can see my way to doing you and your pretty young lady a very considerable service: but I shall first want all the truth you may think proper to give me."

I heard him with some astonishment. What could he mean? What service had he in contemplation?

"The truth of what, Captain Parsons?" said I.

"Well, now, your relations with Miss Bellassys—it's an elopement, I believe?"

"That is so," I answered, hardly knowing whether to laugh or to feel vexed.

"Though the young lady," he continued, "is not one of my passengers in the sense that the rest of 'em are, she is aboard my ship, and as though by the Divine ordering, committed to my care, as are you and every man Jack of the two hundred and four souls who are sailing with me. Of course you know that we shipmasters have very great powers."

I merely inclined my head, wondering what he was driving at.

"A shipmaster," he proceeded, "is lord paramount, quite the cock of his own walk, and nothing must crow where he is. He is responsible for the safety and comfort, for the well-being, moral, spiritual, and physical, of every creature aboard his ship; no matter the circumstances under which that creature came aboard, whether by paying cabin money, by shipwreck, or by signing articles. Miss Bellassys has come into my hands, and it is my duty, as master of this ship, to see that she's done right by."

The conflict of twenty emotions rendered me quite incapable to do anything more than stare at him.

"Now, Mr. Barclay," he continued, crossing his bow legs, and wagging a little stunted forefinger in a kindly, admonishing way, "don't be affronted by this preface, and don't be affronted by what I'm going to ask, for if all be plain sailing, I shall be able to do you and the young lady a real A1, copper-fastened service."

"Pray ask any questions you wish, captain," said I.

"This is an elopement, you say?"

"It is."

"Where from?"

"Boulogne-sur-Mer."

"Bullong-sewer-mare," he repeated. "Was the young lady at school?"

"She was."

"What might be her age, now?"

"She will be eighteen next so-and-so," said I, giving him the month.

He suddenly jumped up, and I could not imagine what he meant to do, till pulling open a drawer, he took out a large box of cigars which he placed upon the table.

"Pray, light up, Mr. Barclay," said he, looking to see if the window of his port-hole was open. "They are genuine Havannah cigars." He lighted one himself and proceeded. "What necessity was there for this elopement?"

"Miss Bellassys is an orphan," I answered, still so much astonished that I found myself almost mechanically answering him as though I were in a witness-box, and he was Mr. Justice Parsons in a wig instead of an old, bow-legged, pimple-nosed, merchant skipper. "Her father was Colonel Bellassys, who died some years ago in India. On her mother's death she was taken charge of by her aunt, Lady Amelia Roscoe. Lady Amelia's husband was a gentleman named Withycombe Roscoe, whose estate in Kent adjoined my father's, Sir Herbert Barclay, the engineer."

"D'ye mean the gentleman who built the L—— docks?"

"Yes."

"Oh, indeed!" cried he, looking somewhat impressed. "And how is your father, Mr. Barclay?"

"He died about two years and a half ago," I replied. "But you have asked me for the truth of this elopement, Captain Parsons. There were constant quarrels between my father and Mr. Withycombe Roscoe over a hedge, or wall, or ditch—some matter contemptibly insignificant, but if the value of the few rods or perches of ground had been represented by the National Debt, there could not have been hotter blood, more ill-feeling between them. Litigation was incessant, and I am sorry to say that it still continues, though I should be glad to end it."

"Sort of entailed lawsuit, I suppose?" said the captain, smoking with enjoyment, and listening with interest and respect.

"Just so," said I, finding now a degree of happiness in this candour; it was a kind of easing of my conscience to tell this man my story, absolute stranger as he had been to me but a few hours before. "Mr. Roscoe died, and Lady Amelia took a house in London. I met her niece at the house of a friend, and fell in love with her."

"So I should think," exclaimed Captain Parsons, "never saw a sweeter young lady in all my time."

"Well, to cut short this part of the story—when her ladyship learnt that her niece was in love, and discovered who her sweetheart was—this occupied a few months I may tell you—she packed the girl off to Boulogne, to a Mademoiselle Championet, who keeps a sort of school at that place, though Grace was sent there professedly to learn French. This mademoiselle is some sort of poor connection of Lady Amelia, a bigotted Catholic, as her ladyship is, and it soon grew clear to my mind, from letters I received from Miss Bellassys—despatched in the old romantic fashion—"

"What fashion's that?" called out the captain.

"The bribed housemaid, sir. It soon grew clear to my mind, I say, that Lady Amelia's main object in sending the girl to Mademoiselle Championet was to get her converted."

"Bad! bad!" cried Captain Parsons.

"Her letters," I continued, growing hot as I spoke, "were all about Mademoiselle Championet's devices and mean dodges—how Miss Bellassys was taken to mass—how she was allowed to read nothing but Catholic books—how she was left alone with a priest—"

"A d——d shame!" whipped out the captain. "And such a sweet young English woman too!"

"Do you need to hear more?" said I, smiling. "I love the girl and she loves me; she was an orphan, and I did not consider the aunt a right and proper guardian for her; she consented to elope, and we did elope, and here we are,

captain."

"And you were bound to Penzance, I understand?"

"Yes."

"Why Penzance?"

"To get married at a church in that district."

"Who was going to marry ye?"

"A cousin of mine, the Reverend Frank Howe, of course, after we had fulfilled the confounded legal conditions which obstruct young people like ourselves in England."

"And what are the legal conditions? It's so long since I was married that I forget 'em," said the captain.

"Residence, as it is called; then the consent of her ladyship, as Miss Bellassys is under age."

"But she isn't going to consent, is she?"

"How can she refuse after our association in the yacht—and here?"

It took him some time to understand; he then shut one eye and said, "I see."

We pulled at our cigars in silence as we gazed at each other. The evening had blackened into night; a silver star or two slid in the open port through which came the washing noise of the water as it swept eddying and seething past the bends into the wake of the ship; now and again the rudder jarred harshly and there was a monstrous tread of feet overhead. We were at the extreme after end of the vessel, where the heave of her would be most sensibly felt, and she was still curtsying with some briskness, but I scarcely heeded the motion, so effectually had the mad behaviour of the *Spitfire* cured me of all tendency to nausea.

"And now, Mr. Barclay," exclaimed the captain, after a silence of a minute or two, "I'll explain why I have made so free as to ask you for your story. It's the

opinion of Mrs. Barstow and Miss Moggadore, that Miss Bellassys and you ought to be married right away off. It's a duty that's owing to the young lady. You can see it for yourself, sir. Her situation, young gentleman," he added with emphasis, "is not what it ought to be."

"I agree in every word," I exclaimed, "but—"

He interrupted me: "Her dignity is yours, her reputation is yours. And the sooner you're married the better."

I was about to speak, but despite my pronouncing several words he proceeded obstinately:

"Mrs. Barstow is one of the best natured women in the world. There never was a more practical lady; sees a thing in a minute; and you may believe in her advice as you would in the fathom marks on a headline. Miss Moggadore, the young lady that sat on my left at table—did you notice her, Mr. Barclay?"

"A middle-aged lady, with curls?"

"Eight and thirty. Ain't that young enough? Ay, Miss Moggadore has two curls, and let me tell you that her nose heads the right way. Miss Moggadore wasn't behind the door when brains were served out. Well, she and Mrs. Barstow, and your humble servant," he convulsed his short square figure into a sea-bow, "are for having you and Miss Bellassys married straight away off."

"So there is a clergyman on board?" I cried, feeling the blood in my face, and staring eagerly at him.

"No, sir," said he, "there's no clergyman aboard my ship."

"Then," said I, almost sulkily, "what on earth, Captain Parsons, is the good of you and Mrs. Barstow and Miss Moggadore advising Miss Bellassys and me to get married straight away off, as you term it?"

"It ought to be done," said he, with an emphatic nod.

"What, without a parson?" I cried.

"I am a parson," he exclaimed.

I imagined he intended a stupid pun upon his name.

"Parson enough," he continued, "to do your business. *I'll* marry you!"

"You?" I shouted.

"Yes, me," he returned, striking his breast with his fist.

"Pray, where were you ordained?" said I, disgusted with the bad taste of what I regarded as a joke.

"Ordained!" he echoed, "I don't understand you. I'm the master of a British merchantman, and, as such, can and do desire, for Miss Bellassys's sake, to marry ye."

Now, I do not know how, when or where I had stumbled upon the fact, but all on a sudden it came into my head that it was as Captain Parsons said: namely, that the master of a British merchantman was empowered, whether by statute, by precedent, or by recognition of the laws of necessity, to celebrate the marriage service on board his own ship at sea. I may have read it in the corner of a newspaper—in some column of answers to correspondents—as likely as not in a work of fiction; but the mere fact of having heard of it, persuaded me that Captain Parsons was in earnest; and very much indeed did he look in earnest as he surveyed me with an expression of triumph in his little eyes, whilst I hung in the wind, swiftly thinking.

"But am I to understand," said I, fetching a breath, "that a marriage at sea, with nobody but the captain of the ship to officiate, is legal?"

"Certainly," he cried, "let me splice you to Miss Bellassys, and there's nothing mortal outside the Divorce Court that can sunder you. How many couples do you think I've married in my time?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Six," he cried, "and they're all doing well, too."

"But I suppose they were all formally married afterwards?"

"No, sir," said he, misunderstanding me, "they were not formerly married."

They came to me as you and the young lady will, single folks."

"Have you a special marriage service at sea?"

"The same, word for word, as you have it in the Prayer Book."

"And when it is read—?" said I, pausing.

"I enter the circumstance in the official logbook, duly witnessed, and then there you are, much more married than it would delight you to feel if afterwards you should find out you've made a mistake."

My heart beat fast. Though I never dreamt for an instant of accepting this shipper's offices seriously, yet if the ceremony he performed should be legal it would be a trump card in my hand for any game I might hereafter have to play with Lady Amelia.

"But how," said I, "are you to get over the objections to my marriage?"

"What objections? The only objection I see is your not being married already."

"Why," said I, "residence or licence."

He flourished his hand: "You're both aboard my ship, aren't ye? That's residence enough for me. As to licence—there's no such thing at sea. Suppose a couple wanted to get married in the middle of the Pacific Ocean; where's the licence to come from?"

"But how about the consent of the guardian?"

"The lawful guardian isn't here," he answered, "the lawful guardian's leagues astern. No use talking of guardians aboard ship. The young lady being in this ship constitutes me her guardian, and it's enough for you that *I* give my consent."

His air, as he pronounced these words, induced such a fit of laughter, that for several moments I was unable to speak. He appeared to heartily enjoy my merriment, and sat watching me with the broadest of grins.

"I'm glad you take to the notion kindly," said he. "I was afraid, with Mrs.

Barstow, that you'd create a difficulty."

"I! Indeed, Captain Parsons, I have nothing in the world else to do, nothing in the world else to think of but to get married. But how about Miss Bellassys?" I added, with a shake of the head. "What will she have to say to a shipboard wedding?"

"You leave her to Mrs. Barstow and Miss Moggadore," said he with a nod; "besides, it's for her to be anxious to get married. Make no mistake, young man. Until she becomes Mrs. Barclay, her situation is by no means what it ought to be."

"But is it the fact, captain," I exclaimed, visited by a new emotion of surprise and incredulity, "that a marriage, celebrated at sea by the captain of a ship, is legal?"

Instead of answering, he counted upon his fingers.

"Three and one are four, and two are six, and two's eight, and three's eleven, and four again's fifteen." He paused, looking up at me, and exclaimed with as much solemnity as he could impart to his briny voice, "If it isn't legal, all I can say is, God help fifteen of as fine a set of children as ever a man could wish to clap eyes on—not counting the twelve parents, that I married. But since you seem to doubt—I wish I had the official log-books containing the entries—tell ye what I'll do!" he exclaimed, and jumped up. "Do you know Mr. Higginson?"

"A passenger, I presume?"

"Ay, one of the shrewdest lawyers in New Zealand. I'll send for him, and you shall hear what he says."

But on putting his head out to call for the steward, he saw Mr. Higginson sitting at the saloon table reading. Some whispering followed, and they both arrived, the captain carefully shutting the door behind him. Mr. Higginson was a tall, middle-aged man, with a face that certainly looked intellectual enough to inspire one with some degree of confidence in anything he might deliver. He put on a pair of pince-nez glasses, bowed to me, and took a chair. The captain began awkwardly, abruptly, and in a rumbling voice.

"Mr. Higginson, I'll tell you in half-a-dozen words how the case stands. No

need for mystery. Mr. Barclay's out on an eloping tour. He don't mind my saying so, for we want nothing but the truth aboard the *Carthusian*. He's run away with that sweet young lady we took off his yacht, and is anxious to get married, and Mrs. Barstow and Miss Moggadore don't at all relish the situation the young lady's put herself in, and they're for marrying her as quickly as the job can be done."

Mr. Higginson nursed his knee and smiled at the deck with a look of embarrassment though he had been attending to the skipper's words with lawyer-like gravity down to that moment.

"You see," continued Captain Parsons, "that the young lady being aboard my ship puts her under my care."

"Just so," said Mr. Higginson.

"Therefore I'm her guardian, and it's my duty to look after her."

"Just so," murmured Mr. Higginson.

"Now, I suppose you're aware, sir," continued the captain, "that the master of a British merchantman is fully empowered to marry any couple aboard his ship?"

"Empowered by what?" asked Mr. Higginson.

"He has the right to do it, sir," answered the captain.

"It is a subject," exclaimed Mr. Higginson nervously, "upon which I am hardly qualified to give an opinion."

"Is a shipboard marriage legal, or is it not legal?" demanded the captain.

"I cannot answer as to the legality," answered the lawyer, "but I believe there are several instances on record of marriages having taken place at sea; and I should say," he added slowly and cautiously, "that in the event of their legality ever being tested, no court would be found willing, on the merits of the contracts as marriages, to set them aside."

"There ye have it, Mr. Barclay," cried the captain with a triumphant swing round in his chair.

"In the case of a marriage at sea," continued Mr. Higginson looking at me, "I should certainly counsel the parties not to depend upon the validity of their union, but to make haste to confirm it by a second marriage on their arrival at port."

"Needless expense and trouble," whipped out the captain; "there's the official log-book. What more's wanted?"

"But is there no form required—no licence necessary?" I exclaimed, addressing Mr. Higginson.

"Hardly at sea, I should say," he answered, smiling.

"My argument!" shouted the captain.

"But the young lady is under age," I continued; "she is an orphan, and her aunt is her guardian. How about that aunt's consent, sir?"

"How can it be obtained?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"My argument again!" roared the captain.

"No doubt," exclaimed Mr. Higginson, "as the young lady is under age, the marriage could be rendered by the action of her guardian null and void. But would the guardian in this case take such a step? Would she not rather desire that this union at sea should be confirmed by a wedding on shore?"

"You exactly express my hope," said I; "but before we decide, Captain Parsons, let me first of all talk the matter over with Miss Bellassys."

"All right, sir," he answered, "but don't lose sight of this: that, whilst the young lady's aboard my ship, I'm her natural guardian and protector; the law holds me accountable for her safety and well-being, and what I say is, she ought to be married. I've explained why; and I say, she ought to be *married!*"

A few minutes later, I quitted the cabin, leaving the captain and Mr. Higginson arguing upon the powers of a commander of a ship, the skipper shouting as I opened the door, "I tell you, Mr. Higginson, that the master of a vessel may not only legally marry a couple, but may legally christen their infants, sir; and then legally bury the lot of them, if they should die."

CHAPTER XI

GRACE CONSENTS

I found Grace seated at the table between Mrs. Barstow and Miss Moggadore. Mrs. Barstow bestowed a smile upon me, but Miss Moggadore's thin lips did not part, and there was something very austere and acid in the gaze she fastened upon my face. The saloon was now in full blaze, and presented a very fine, sparkling appearance indeed. The motion of the ship was so quiet that the swing of the radiant lamps was hardly noticeable. Some eight or ten of the passengers were scattered about, a couple at chess, another reading, a third leaning back with his eyes fixed on a lamp, and so on. It was of an ebony blackness in the windows overlooking the main deck, though, as the door was opened and shut by the coming and going of stewards, there would enter a low, growling hum of conversation, with the scent of coarse tobacco; and now and again, a noise as of a concertina played forward on the forecastle.

I leaned over the back of my darling's chair, and addressed some commonplaces to her and to the two ladies, intending presently to withdraw her, that I might have a long talk, but after a minute or two Mrs. Barstow rose and went to her cabin, a hint that Miss Moggadore was good enough to take. I seated myself in that lady's chair at Grace's side.

"Well, my pet, and what have they been talking to you about?"

"They have been urging me to marry you to-morrow morning, Herbert," she answered, with a smile that was half a pout and a blush that did not signify so much embarrassment but that she could look at me.

"I am fresh from a long talk with the captain," said I, "and he has been urging me to do the same thing."

"It is ridiculous," said she, holding down her head; "there is no clergyman in the ship."

"But the captain of a vessel may act as a clergyman under the circumstances," said I.

"I don't believe it, Herbert."

"But see here, Grace," said I, speaking earnestly but softly, for there were ears not far distant, "it is not likely that we should regard the captain's celebration of our marriage here as more than something that will strengthen our hands for the struggle with your aunt. Until we have been joined by a clergyman in proper shipshape fashion, as Captain Parsons himself might say, we shall not be man and wife; but then, my darling, consider this: first of all it is in the highest degree probable that a marriage performed on board a ship by her captain is legal. Next, that your aunt would suppose we regarded the union as legal, when of course she would be forced to conclude we considered ourselves man and wife. Would she then *dare* come between us? Her consent must be wrung from her by this politic stroke of shipboard wedding that to her mind would be infinitely more significant than our association in the yacht. She will go about and inquire if a shipboard wedding is legal; her lawyers will answer her as best they can, but their advice will be, secure your niece by sending your consent to Penzance, that she may be legitimately married in an English Church by a Church of England clergyman."

She listened thoughtfully, but with an air of childish simplicity that was inexpressibly touching to my love for her.

"It would be merely a ceremony," said she, leaning her cheek on her hand, "to strengthen your appeal to Aunt Amelia?"

"Wholly, my darling."

"Well, dearest," said she gently, "if you wish it—"

I could have taken her to my heart for her ready compliance. I had expected a resolved refusal, and had promised myself some hours that evening and next day of exhortation, entreaty, representation. I was indeed hot on the project, and even as I talked to her I felt my enthusiasm growing. Secretly I had no doubt whatever that Captain Parsons was empowered as master of a British merchantman to marry us, and though, as I had told her, I should consider the ceremony as simply an additional weapon for fighting Aunt Amelia with, yet as a contract it might securely bind us too; we were to be parted only by the action of the aunt; this I

felt assured, for the sake of her niece's fame and future and for her own name, her ladyship would never attempt; so that from the moment the captain ended the service, Grace would be my wife to all intents and purposes, which indeed was all we had in view when we glided out of Boulogne harbour in the poor little *Spitfire*.

However, though she had sweetly and promptly consented, a great deal remained to talk about. I repeated all that Captain Parsons, and all that Mr. Higginson had said, and when we had exhausted the subject we naturally spoke of our prospects of quitting the *Carthusian*; and one subject suggesting another, we sat chatting till about nine o'clock, at which hour the stewards arrived with wine and grog and biscuits; whereupon the passengers put away their books and chess boards and gathered about the table, effectually ending our *tête-à-tête*. Then Mrs. Barstow arrived, followed by Miss Moggadore. I took the former lady aside, leaving Grace in charge of the acidulated gentlewoman with the curls.

"Miss Bellassys tells me," said I, "that you have warmly counselled her to allow Captain Parsons to marry us. You are very good. You could not do us a greater service than by giving such advice. She has consented, asking only that the ceremony shall be privately performed in the captain's cabin."

"She is very young," replied Mrs. Barstow, "too young I fear to realise her position. I am a mother, Mr. Barclay, and my sympathies are entirely with your charming sweetheart. Under such conditions as we find her in we must all wish to see her married. Were her mother living, I am sure that would be her desire."

"Were her mother living," said I, "there would have been no elopement."

She inclined her head with a cordial gesture.

"Miss Bellassys," said she, "has been very candid. As a mother myself, I must blame her; but as a woman—" she shook her head smiling.

"We are fortunate indeed," I exclaimed, "in falling into the hands of people so sympathetic and upright as yourself, and Captain Parsons. I only wish that I could thoroughly persuade myself that a marriage performed by a shipmaster is legal."

"Oh, I think you may—I am sure you may. But your first step, Mr. Barclay, when you get ashore, must be to get your cousin to re-marry you."

"Undoubtedly," I cried, "nor could I consider Grace my wife until that happened, though I suppose we shall still have to wait—for that second marriage, I mean—for the aunt's consent."

"You need not fear," she exclaimed, "the marriage to-morrow will gain her consent."

We stood apart conversing for some time, and were then interrupted by the head-steward, who came to tell me that by orders of the captain I was to sleep in a berth occupied by one of the passengers, a Mr. Tooth. I went to inspect this berth and was very well pleased to find a clean and comfortable bed prepared. Mr. Tooth accompanied me, and pointing to his razors and hair-brushes, begged me to make use of every thing that he had. He had a great quantity of under-linen he told me, enough to last the pair of us the whole round voyage, and his coats and trousers were entirely at my service, "though," said he, who was a short man, running his eyes over my tall figure with a grin, "I fear my clothes will not allow you to take very much exercise."

I drank a glass of hot whisky and water at the cabin table, and, observing that Grace looked pale and weary, I asked Mrs. Barstow to induce her to go to bed. The darling seemed reluctant to leave me. She looked about her in a sort of child-like, shrinking way, and whispered that she wished to sit with me.

"I am not sleepy, dearest," said she; "why cannot we sit alone together in this saloon, as we did in the cabin of the little *Spitfire*? You shall sleep first, and then I will put my head upon your shoulder. It is but for one night, Herbert. We are sure to meet a ship going home to-morrow."

Assuredly would it have given me the most exquisite happiness to sit alone with her, as she wished, pillowing her fair head, and watching her as she slept; but it was not to be thought of, for reasons much too obvious to need reciting, and presently she went with Mrs. Barstow to that lady's cabin, turning to look at me ere the door closed upon her.

I had my pipe and a pouch of tobacco in my pocket, and thought I would go on deck for half-an-hour before retiring to bed. As I passed the table on my way to the companion ladder, Mr. Higginson rose from a book he had been reading, and detained me by putting his hand upon my arm.

"I have been thinking over the matter of marriage at sea, Mr. Barclay," he

exclaimed, with a wary look round, to make sure that nobody was listening. "I wish we had a copy of the Merchants' Shipping Act for 1854, for I believe there is a section which provides that every master of a ship carrying an official log-book, shall enter in it every marriage that takes place on board, together with the names and ages of the parties. And I fancy there is another section which provides that every master of every foreign-going ship shall sign and deliver to some mercantile marine authority, a list containing, amongst other things, a statement of every marriage which takes place on board. There is also an Act called, if my memory serves me, the Confirmation of Marriage on her Majesty's Ships' Act. But this, I presume, does not concern what may happen in merchant vessels. I should like to read up Hammick on the Marriage Laws of England. One thing, however, is clear: marriage at sea is contemplated by the Merchant Shipping Acts of 1854. Merchantmen do not carry chaplains; a clergyman in attendance as a passenger was assuredly not in the minds of those who are responsible for the Act. The sections, in my opinion, directly point to the captain as the person to officiate; and, having turned the matter thoroughly over, I don't scruple to pronounce that a marriage solemnised at sea by the master of a British merchantman is as legal and valid as though celebrated on shore in the usual way."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," said I.

"It is a most interesting point," said he. "It ought certainly to be settled."

"Well, speaking for Miss Bellassys and myself," said I, "we intend to settle it to-morrow at the captain's convenience. He's very willing, and most kindly anxious."

"Oh, yes," said he drily, "old Parsons is noted for this sort of thing. I have heard of his having married several couples—passengers of his—in his time. I believe he cuts a very great figure at a burial at sea; but as to his claiming the right of baptising—" he burst into a laugh, and added, "I came to Europe with him last voyage, and he once told me that he had mistaken his vocation: he ought to have entered the church. 'I should have been a bishop by this time,' said he. He has a very clerical look, certainly!"

I laughed out, and went on deck with my spirits in a dance. To think of such a marriage as we contemplated! And to find it in all probability as binding as the shore-going ceremony! Assuredly it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good,

and the gale that had nearly foundered us was to end in returning us to our native shore—a wedded pair!

It was a dark night, despite the young moon in the west and a wide field of stars under which a few high clouds were floating. The wind was almost directly over the stern, and seemed but little more than a quiet fanning, owing to the ship running; but it had weight enough to keep the sails silent, and to fill the ear with the murmur of hurrying waters. The ship loomed phantasmally in the clear dusk, with a regular and stately swaying of her pale heights. All was silent and dark on the main-deck and forward; on the poop glittered a few figures of male passengers with the dark shape of one of the mates pacing the deck athwartships, a stirless shadow of a man at the wheel, and someone near him, with a glowing tip in the middle of his face signifying a lighted cigar. I filled my pipe and stood musing a bit, thinking of Caudel and the others of the little dandy, of the yacht, of the gale we had outlived, and twenty other like matters, when the voice of the captain broke in upon my reverie.

"This will be you, Mr. Barclay? I begin to know you now without candle light by your height."

"Yes, it is I, captain—just stepped on deck for a smoke and a breath of this cool wind before turning in. Do you know, when I view the great dark outline of your ship sweeping through this tremendous space of darkness, and then think of the crowds of people asleep in her heart, I can't but consider the post of commander of a big merchantman, like this vessel, foremost amongst the most responsible under the sun."

"Sir, you are right," exclaimed the little man.

"Realise what is committed to his safe keeping," I went on; "not precious human lives only, but a ship and cargo of value enough to purchase several German principalities. Nor is it one voyage only. You may make twenty in your capacity of commander. Think then of the wealth that will have been entrusted to you in your time, the crowds upon crowds of human beings whose lives were in your hands!"

"Sir, you are right," he repeated, in a voice that was oily with gratification. "Pray what is your age, Mr. Barclay?"

I told him.

"Then, considering your age, all I can say is you talk very sensibly. Let us walk, sir."

We started to measure the planks from the wheel to half-way the length of the poop.

"There is no doubt," said I, "that you, as master of this vessel, are, as you have all along contended, empowered to marry me to Miss Bellassys," and I then gave him the substance of what Mr. Higginson had said to me below.

"I knew that Higginson would see it after thinking a bit," said he. "Of course, I am empowered to marry, on board my ship, any couple that may apply to me. Have you spoken to Miss Bellassys?"

"I have."

"And is she agreeable?"

"Perfectly agreeable."

"Good!" said he with a chuckle. "Now, when shall it be?"

"Oh, it is for you to say, captain."

"Ten o'clock to-morrow morning do?"

"Very well, indeed," I answered, "but it will be quite private, Captain Parsons; it is Miss Bellassys's wish."

"Private? Why private?" he exclaimed, in a voice of disappointment; "a wedding is an interesting sight, and I intended to admit the steerage passengers. I had also seen my way to converting our usual lunch into a sort of wedding breakfast for you, and indeed I don't mind telling you, Mr. Barclay, that I've been amusing myself during the last half-hour in rehearsing several speeches."

"I can assure you, captain," said I, "that I fully appreciate all your goodness. But a public ceremony!—No, a quite private affair in your cabin, if you please."

We measured half the length of the deck in silence, and I almost dreaded to hear him speak. He then said:

"It seems a pity to rob the passengers of an edifying sight. There are several couples in the steerage who ought to be married, and the example I counted upon offering them would be certain to take effect. But of course—if it's the young lady's wish,—by the way, you'll forgive me asking the question: it's quite a matter of form—no rudeness intended—you are sure that your name is Barclay?"

"Quite sure."

"What Barclay?"

"Herbert," said I.

"Herbert Barclay!" said he, "and the young lady's name's genuine too?"

"Perfectly genuine, captain."

"Grace Bellassys!" said he; "it sound a bit theatrical, don't it?"

"It is her name, nevertheless," said I laughing.

"You see, Mr. Barclay, if the names are wrong, the marriage is wrong."

"There'll be nothing wrong in this marriage," said I, "if the rights of it are to be dependent merely upon the genuineness of our names. But now, let me put this question to you: in officiating as you propose, will you not be accepting a certain legal risk?"

"As how?" he exclaimed.

"You will be marrying a young lady who is under age, knowing, as I repeat now, and was bound to tell you at the start, that her guardian objects to the alliance."

"There are no guardians at sea," he said, "in the sense of your young lady's aunt. I'm her guardian whilst she's aboard my ship, and as I said before, so I say again, I give my consent seeing the situation she's put herself in, and understanding that it's my duty to help her out of it."

I swallowed a laugh, and changed the subject by asking him to tell me about

the couples he had married, and so in chatting, three-quarters of an hour passed, at the expiration of which time I shook him by the hand and went to bed.

Mr. Tooth tried hard to keep me awake that he might satisfy his curiosity; he had vaguely heard I was to be married next day, and wished for the story of my elopement at first hand. But I was dog tired, and no sooner did my head press the pillows than I answered him with snores.

I slept right through the night, and when I awoke, Mr. Tooth was shaving himself, and the cabin was brilliant with sunshine whitened to a finer glory yet by the broad surface of milk-white froth that was rushing past the ship. There was plainly a noble sailing breeze blowing, and the vessel was lying well down to it, with a sort of humming and tingling throughout the whole body of her. I made haste to shave, fencing with Mr. Tooth's questions, as he plied them out of a mouth that yawned darkly amid the soapsuds with which he had covered his cheeks, and then hastened into the saloon to look for Grace and take her on deck. The good-humoured little stewardess, however, told me she was not yet up, though it wanted but twenty minutes to eight, on which I shot through the companion into the windy splendour of the grandest ocean morning that ever set a man fresh from his bed blinking.

The ship was heeling to it as a yacht might; her yards were braced forward, and the snow at her forefoot soared and blew away in smoke to the sliding irresistible thrust of her sharp metal stem. The sea for leagues and leagues rolled blue, foaming, brilliant; wool-like clouds, lovely with prismatic glitterings in their skirts, as they sailed from the sun, were speeding into the south-east. The whole life of the world seemed to be in that morning—in the joyous sweep of the blue wind, in the frolicsome frothing of each long blue ridge of rolling sea, in the triumphant speeding of the ship sliding buoyant from one soft foam-freckled hollow to another.

I drew a deep breath. Ha! thought I, if it were always like this now, and New Zealand not so distant.

But as I thus thought I sent my eyes to leeward, and the first thing I saw was a large steamer heading in an opposite direction, and undoubtedly going home. Our combined speed was making her look like to be passing at the rate of forty or fifty miles an hour. I started, and stepped up to Mr. M'Cosh, who stood alone at the head of the poop ladder.

"Isn't that vessel going home?" I cried.

He viewed her deliberately as though looking at her for the first time, then said, with his Scotch accent, which I will not attempt to repeat:

"I don't doubt it, sir."

"Then why not signal, Mr. M'Cosh? I may have to wait a long time for another opportunity."

"I thought, sir," said he, looking at me with a peculiar expression in his eyes, "that you were to be married this morning?"

"Oh! well," I exclaimed, seeing that any talk about the steamer would be of no use in the face of the swiftness with which a hull of about three thousand tons was diminishing to the proportions of a wherry; "Captain Parsons is all kindness and will have his way. But marriage or no marriage, Mr. M'Cosh, I hope he will give you and your brother officers instructions to signal the next vessel we pass, for we really want to get home, you know."

As I pronounced these words the square little figure of the captain, crowned with a high hat, brushed as usual the wrong way, rose through the companion hatch. Mr. M'Cosh touched his cap and crossed to the other side of the deck. The captain gave me a friendly nod, and stood awhile to send a number of seawardly, critical glances aloft, and then round the ocean. I approached him and said, pointing to the steamer:

"There's a fine chance lost, captain."

"Lost?" cried he, "you mustn't be in a hurry yet, sir. There's your business to do first, sir."

"True," said I, "but it might help us to get home—in time—if you will instruct the officers under your command to communicate with any vessel sailing to England."

"I told Mr. M'Cosh not to communicate until you were married," he answered. "There'll be no lack of ships homeward bound, sir," and so saying he left me to go to the rail that protected the edge of the poop where he stood surveying the scores of steerage passengers which filled the main-deck, many of

them, as they squatted or hung about here and there, eating their breakfasts, which seemed to me to consist of ship's biscuit and little tin pots of black tea.

I saw nothing of Grace till the cabin breakfast was ready; most of the first-class passengers had by this time assembled, some of them who had been seasick yesterday issuing from their cabins; and I noticed a general stare of admiration as my darling stepped forth followed by Mrs. Barstow. Her long and comfortable night's rest had returned her bloom to her. How sweet she looked! how engaging the girlish dignity of her posture! how bright her timid eyes as she paused to send a glance round in search of me! I was instantly at her side.

"The ceremony is fixed for ten, I think?" said Mrs. Barstow, and here Miss Moggadore arrived as one who had a right to be with us, not to say of us.

"Yes, ten o'clock," I answered. "But do these people know what is going to happen?"

"Oh, it will certainly have got about. A ship is like a village—the lightest whisper is everywhere echoed."

"No matter, Grace," said I, "let them stare. What isn't kindness must be admiration."

"I am of opinion," said Miss Moggadore, "that the ceremony ought to be public."

"I'd rather not," I answered. "In fact, we both had rather not."

"But so many witnesses!" said Miss Moggadore.

"Shall *you* be present?" inquired Mrs. Barstow.

"I hope to receive an invitation," answered Miss Moggadore.

"We shall count upon your being present," exclaimed Grace, sweetly; but the smile with which she spoke quickly faded; she looked grave and nervous, and I found some reproach in the eyes she lifted to my face.

"It seems so unreal—almost impious, Herbert, as though we were acting a sham part in a terribly solemn act," she exclaimed, as we seated ourselves.

"There is no sham in it, my pet. Yonder sits Mr. Higginson, a lawyer, and that man has no doubt whatever that when we are united by the captain we shall be as much man and wife as any clergyman could make us."

"I consent, but only to please you," said she, with something of restlessness in her manner, and I noticed that she ate but little.

"My darling, you know why I wish this marriage performed," I said, speaking softly in her ear, for there were many eyes upon us, and some ladies, who had not before put in an appearance, were seated almost opposite, and constantly directed their gaze at us, whilst they would pass remarks in whispers when they hung their heads over their plates. "It can do no possible harm; it must be my cousin, not Captain Parsons, who makes you my wife. But then, Grace, it may be binding too, requiring nothing more than the sanctification of the union in the regular way, and it may—it will—create a difficulty for your aunt which should go very near to extinguishing her."

She sighed and appeared nervous and depressed; but I was too eager to have my way to choose to notice her manner. It would be a thing of the past in a very little while; we might hope at all events to be on our way home shortly, and I easily foresaw I should never forgive myself after leaving the *Carthusian* if I suffered Grace to influence me into refusing the captain's offer to marry us, odd as the whole business was, and irregular as it might prove, too, for all I could tell.

When breakfast was over, Mrs. Barstow took Grace to her cabin, and there they remained. Miss Moggadore stepped up to me as I was about to go on deck and said:

"It is not yet too late, Mr. Barclay, and I really think it ought to be a public ceremony."

"Sooner than that I would decline it altogether," said I, in no humour at that moment to be teased by the opinions of an acidulated spinster.

"I consider," said she, "that a wedding can never take place in too public a manner. It is proper that the whole world should know that a couple are truly man and wife."

"The whole world," said I, "in the sense of this ship, must know it so far as I

am concerned without seeing it."

"Well," said she, with a simper which her mere streak of lip was but little fitted to contrive, "I hope you will have all happiness in your wedded lives."

I bowed, muttering some reply, and passed up the steps, not choosing to linger longer in the face of the people who hung about me with an air of carelessness, but with faces of curiosity.

CHAPTER XII

A MARRIAGE AT SEA

Some male passengers paced the deck, but the captain was below, probably making sure of any hard words he would have to pronounce. I strolled forwards to the break of the poop and found the ship a lively scene of emigrants, as I call the steerage folks. There seemed about a hundred of them, many rough fellows in fur caps and shabby clothes, smoking and arguing in coarse voices, groups of women talking shrilly, little children running about in the scuppers; and amongst them the Jacks of the vessel came and went. I scarcely received a glance from these people, whence I took it that what was to happen aft had not yet got wind in the 'tweendecks.

Save a leaning shaft of sail far away down upon the horizon to starboard there was nothing in sight, unless it were a faint discolouration as of a steamer's smoke in the pale but clear and windy blue of the junction of sea and sky over the bow. I searched the ocean with some anxiety however, for every hour of this kind of sailing threatened to make a very voyage of our return, and such was my mood just then, that had anything hove in sight, marriage or no marriage, I should have exhorted the captain to transfer us.

Presently I looked at my watch: a quarter to ten. Mr. Tooth strolled up to me.

"All alone, Mr. Barclay? It is a fact, have you noticed, that when a man is about to get married people hold off from him. I can understand this of a corpse

—there is a sanctity in death; but a live young man you know—and only because he's going to get married! By the way, as it is to be a private affair, I suppose there is no chance for *me*?"

"The captain is the host," I answered. "He is to play the father. If he chooses to invite you, by all means be present." As I spoke, the captain came on deck, turning his head about in manifest search of me. He gravely beckoned with an air of ceremony, and Mr. Tooth and I went up to him. He looked at Mr. Tooth, who immediately said:

"Captain, a wedding at sea is good enough to remember; something for a man to talk about. *Can't* I be present?" and he dropped his head on one side with an insinuating smile.

"No, sir," answered Captain Parsons, with true sea grace, and putting his hand on my arm he carried me right aft. "The hour's at hand," said he. "Who's to be present, d'ye know? for if it's to be private we don't want a crowd."

"Mrs. Barstow and Miss Moggadore—nobody else, I believe."

"Better have a couple of men as witnesses. What d'ye say to Mr. Higginson?"

"Anybody you please, captain."

"And the second?" said he, tilting his hat and thinking. "M'Cosh? Yes, I don't think we can do better than M'Cosh. A thoughtful Scotchman with an excellent memory." He pulled out his watch. "Five minutes to ten. Let us go below," and down we went.

The steward was despatched to bring Mr. Higginson and the chief mate, Mr. M'Cosh, to the captain's cabin. The saloon was empty; possibly out of consideration to our feelings the people had gone on deck or withdrawn to their berths.

"Bless me, I had quite forgotten!" cried Captain Parsons, as he entered his cabin. "Have you a wedding ring, Mr. Barclay?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, laughing, and pulling out the purse in which I kept it. "Little use in sailing away with a young lady, Captain Parsons, to get married, unless you carry the ring with you."

"Glad you have it. We can't be too shipshape. But I presume you know," said the little fellow, "that any sort of a ring would do, even a curtain ring. No occasion for the lady to wear what you slip on, though I believe it's expected she should keep it upon her finger till the service is over. Let me see now; there's something else I wanted to say—oh, yes; who's to give the bride away?"

Though I must own to feeling a little nervous, even agitated, yet as he pronounced these words I could not look down at his upturned face, with its shining pimple of nose set in the midst of it, and his eyes showing like glowworms half extinguished in their notes, without breaking into a loud laugh, for which I instantly apologised by saying that his speaking of "giving away" recalled to me a very nervous uncle who had to undertake this office, and who, on the minister saying, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" gasped out, "I do," and instantly fell down in a dead faint.

There was a knock at the door and Mr. Higginson, followed by Mr. M'Cosh, entered.

"Mr. Higginson," immediately cried the captain, "you will give the bride away."

The lawyer put his hand upon his shirt-front and bowed. I glanced at M'Cosh who had scarcely had time to do more than flourish a hair brush. He was extraordinarily grave, and turned a very literal eye round about. I asked him if he had ever before taken part in a ceremony of this sort at sea. He reflected and answered, "No, neither at sea nor ashore."

"But seeing that you are a witness, Mr. M'Cosh, you thoroughly understand the significance of the marriage service, I hope?" said Mr. Higginson, drily.

"D'ye know, then, sir," answered M'Cosh, in the voice of a saw going through a balk of timber, "I never read or heard a line of the marriage service in all my life. But I have a very good understanding of the object of the ceremony."

"I hope so, Mr. M'Cosh," said the captain, looking at him doubtfully. "It is as a witness that you're here."

"'Twill be a *fact*, no doubt?" said Mr. M'Cosh.

"Certainly," said the lawyer.

"Then, of course," said the mate, "I shall always be able to swear to it."

"Ten past ten," cried the captain, whipping out his watch. "I hope Miss Moggadore's not keeping the ladies waiting whilst she powders herself, or fits a new cap to her hair."

He opened the door to call to the steward, then hopped back with a sudden convulsive sea bow to make room for the ladies who were approaching.

My darling was very white and looked at me piteously. She came to my side, and slipped her hand into mine, whispering under her breath, "Such a silly, senseless ceremony!" I pressed her fingers, and whispered back that the ceremony was not for us, but for Aunt Amelia. She wore her hat and jacket, and Mrs. Barstow was clad as for the deck; but Miss Moggadore, on the other hand, as though in justification of what the captain had said about her, made her appearance in the most extraordinary cap I had ever seen: an inflated arrangement, as though she were fresh from a breeze of wind that held it bladder-like. She had changed her gown, too, for a sort of Sunday dress of satin or some such material. She curtseyed on entering, and took up her position alongside of M'Cosh, where she stood viewing the company with an austere gaze, which so harmonised with the dry, literal, sober stare of the mate, that I had to turn my back upon her to save a second explosion of laughter.

"Are we all ready?" said the little captain, in the voice of a man who might hail his mate to tell him to prepare to put the ship about, and M'Cosh mechanically answered:

"Ay, ay, sir, all ready."

On this the captain went to the table, where lay a big Church Service in large type, and putting on his glasses, looked at us over them, as a hint for us to take our places. He then began to read, so slowly that I foresaw unless he skipped many of the passages we should be detained half the morning in his cabin. He read with extravagant enjoyment of the sound of his own voice, and constantly lifted his eyes, whilst he delivered the sentences as though he were admonishing instead of marrying us. Grace held her head hung, and I felt her trembling when I took her hand. I had flattered myself that I should exhibit no nervousness in such an ordeal as this, but though I was not sensible of any disposition to tears, I must confess that my secret agitation was incessantly prompting me to laughter

of an hysterical sort, which I restrained with struggles that caused me no small suffering. It is at such times as these, perhaps, that the imagination is most inconveniently active.

The others stood behind me; I could not see them; it would have eased me, I think, had I been able to do so. The thought of M'Cosh's face, the fancy of Miss Moggadore's cap grew dreadfully oppressive, through my inability to vent myself of the emotions they induced. My distress was increased by the mate's pronunciation of the word "Amen." He was always late with it, as though waiting for the others to lead the way, unless it was that he chose to take a "thocht" before committing himself. My wretchedness was heightened by the effect of this lonely Amen, whose belatedness he accentuated by the fervent manner in which he breathed it out.

Yet, spite of the several grotesque conditions which entered into it, this was a brief passage of experience that was by no means lacking in romantic and even poetic beauty. The flashful trembling of the sunlit sea was in the atmosphere of the cabin, and bulkhead and upper deck seemed to race with the rippling of the waves of light in them. Through the open port came the seething and pouring song of the ocean; the music of smiting billows, the small harmonies of foam bells and of seething eddies. There was the presence of the ocean too, the sense of its infinity, and of the speeding ship, a speck under the heavens, yet fraught with the passions and feelings of a multitude of souls bound to a new world, fresh from a land which many of them would never again behold.

The captain took a very long time in marrying us. Had this business possessed any sort of flavour of sentiment for Grace, it must have vanished under the slow, somewhat husky, self-complacent, deep-sea delivery of old Parsons. I took the liberty of pulling out my watch as a hint, but he was enjoying himself too much to be in a hurry. Nothing, I believe, could have so contributed to the felicity of this man as the prospect of uniting one or more couples every day. On several occasions his eyes appeared to fix themselves upon Miss Moggadore, to whom he would accentuate the words he pronounced by several nods. The Marriage Service, as we all know, is short, yet Captain Parsons kept us more than half an hour in his cabin listening to it. Before reciting "All ye that are married," he hemmed loudly, and appeared to address himself exclusively to Miss Moggadore to judge by the direction in which he continued emphatically to nod.

At last he closed his book, slowly gazing at one or the other of us over his glasses as if to witness the effect of his reading in our faces. He then opened his official log-book, and in a whisper, as though he were in church, called Mr. Higginson and Mr. M'Cosh to the table to witness his entry. Having written it he requested the two witnesses to read it. Mr. M'Cosh pronounced it "Arle reet," and Mr. Higginson nodded as gravely as though he were about to read a will.

"The ladies must see this entry, too," said Captain Parsons, still preserving his Sabbatical tone. "Can't have too many witnesses. Never can tell what may happen."

The ladies approached and peered, and Miss Moggadore's face took an unusually hard and acid expression as she pored upon the captain's handwriting.

"Pray read it out, Miss Moggadore," said I.

"Ay, do," exclaimed the captain.

In a thin, harsh voice like the *cheep* of a sheave set revolving in a block—wonderfully in accord by the way with the briny character of the ceremony—the lady read as follows:—

"10.10 A.M. Solemnised the nuptials of Herbert Barclay, Esquire, Gentleman, and Grace Bellassys, Spinster. Present: Mrs. Barstow; Miss Moggadore; James Higginson, Esquire, solicitor; Donald M'Cosh, Chief Officer. This marriage thus celebrated was conducted according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England."

"And now, Mr. Barclay," said Captain Parsons, as Miss Moggadore concluded, "you'd like a certificate under my hand, wouldn't you?"

"We're not strangers to Mr. and Mrs. Barclay's views," said Mr. Higginson, "and I am certainly of opinion, captain, that Mr. Barclay ought to have such a certificate as you suggest, that, on his arrival at home, he may send copies of it to those whom it concerns."

At the utterance of the words *Mr. and Mrs. Barclay* I laughed, whilst Grace started, gave me an appealing look, turned a deep red, and averted her face. The captain produced a sheet of paper, and after looking into a dictionary once—"Nothing like accuracy," said he, "in jobs of this sort"—he exclaimed, "Will this do?" and read as follows:—

"*Ship 'Carthusian.'*

"*At Sea (such and such a date.)*

"*I, Jonathan Parsons, of the above named ship 'Carthusian,' of London, towards New Zealand, do hereby certify that I have this day united in the holy bands of wedlock the following persons, to wit: Herbert Barclay, Esquire, and Grace Bellassys, Spinster, in the presence of the undersigned.*"

"Nothing could be better," said I.

"Now, gentlemen and ladies," said the captain, "if you will please to sign your names."

This was done, and the document handed to me. I pocketed it with a clear sense of its value, as regards I mean the effect I might hope it would produce on Lady Amelia Roscoe. Captain Parsons and the others then shook hands with us, the two ladies kissing Grace, who, poor child, looked exceedingly frightened and pale.

"What is the French word for breakfast?" said Captain Parsons.

"*Deejenwer*, sir," answered M'Cosh.

Parsons bent his ear with a frown. "You're giving me the Scotch for it, I believe," said he.

"It's *dejeuner*, I think," said I, scarce able to speak for laughing.

"Ay, that'll be it," cried the captain. "Well, as Mr. and Mrs. Barclay don't relish the notion of a public *degener*, we must drink their healths in a bottle of

champagne."

He put his head out of the cabin and called to the steward, who brought the wine, and for hard upon half an hour my poor darling and I had to listen to speeches from old Parsons and the lawyer. Even M'Cosh must talk. In slow and rugged accents he invited us to consider how fortunate we were in having fallen into the hands of Captain Parsons. Had *he* been master of the *Carthusian* there could have been no marriage, for he would not have known what to do. He had received a valuable professional hint that morning, and he begged to thank Captain Parsons for allowing him to be present on so interesting an occasion.

This said, the proceedings ended. Mrs. Barstow, passing Grace's hand under her arm, carried her off to her cabin, and I, accepting a cigar from the captain's box, went on deck to smoke it and to see if there was anything in sight likely to carry us home.

A number of passengers approached with smiling faces, guessing the wedding over, but they speedily perceived that I was in no temper for talking, and were good-natured enough to leave me to myself. Even Mr. Tooth, who promised to become a bore, carried his jokes and his grins to another part of the deck in a very short while, and I leaned against the rail, cigar in mouth, lost in thought, casting looks at the sea, or directing my eyes over the side where the white water, in a wide and throbbing sheet, was racing past.

Married! Could I believe it? If so—if I was indeed a wedded man, then, I suppose, never in the annals of love-making could anything stranger have happened than that a young couple, eloping from a French port, should be blown out into the ocean and there united, not by a priest, by but a merchant skipper. And supposing the marriage to be valid, as Mr. Higginson, after due deliberation, had declared such ocean wedding ceremonies as this to be, and supposing when we arrived ashore, Lady Amelia Roscoe, despite Grace's and my association and the ceremony which had just ended, should continue to withhold her sanction, thereby rendering it impossible for my cousin to marry us, might not an exceedingly fine point arise—something to put the wits of the lawyers to their trumps, in the case of her ladyship or me going to them? I mean this: that seeing that our marriage took place at sea, seeing, moreover, that we were in a manner urged, or, as I might choose to put it, *compelled* by Captain Parsons to marry—he assuming, as master of the ship, the position of guardian to the girl, and as her guardian exhorting and hurrying us to this union for her sake—would not the

question of Lady Amelia Roscoe's consent be set aside, whether on the grounds of the peculiarity of our situation, or because it was impossible for us to communicate with her, or because the commander of the ship, a person in whom is vested the most despotic powers, politely, hospitably, but substantially, too, *ordered* us to be married? I cannot put the point as a lawyer would, but I trust I make intelligible the thoughts which occupied my mind as I stood on the decks of the *Carthusian* after quitting the captain's cabin.

About twenty minutes later, Grace arrived, accompanied by Mrs. Barstow. My darling did not immediately see me, and I noticed the eager way in which she stood for some moments scanning the bright and leaping scene of ocean. The passengers raised their hats to her, one or two ladies approached and seemed to congratulate her; she then saw me, and in a moment was at my side.

"How long is this to last, Herbert?"

"At any hour something may heave in sight, dearest."

"It distresses me to be looked at. And yet, it is miserable to be locked up in Mrs. Barstow's cabin, where I am unable to be with you."

"Do not mind being looked at. Everybody is very kind, Grace; so sweet as you are, too—who can help looking at you? Despite your embarrassment, let me tell you that I am very well pleased with what has happened," and I repeated to her what had been passing in my mind.

But she was too nervous, perhaps too young to understand. She had left her gloves in the yacht, her hands were bare, and her fine eyes rested on the wedding ring upon her finger.

"Must I go on wearing this, Herbert?"

"Oh, yes, my own—certainly, whilst you are here. What would Captain Parsons say?—what would everybody think if you removed it?"

"But I am not your wife!" she exclaimed with a pout, softly beating the deck with her foot, "and this ring is unreal—it signifies nothing—"

I interrupted her. "I am not so sure that you are not my wife," said I. She shot a look at me out of her eyes, which were large with alarm and confusion. "At all events, I believe I am your husband, and surely, my precious, you must hope that I am. But whether or not, pray go on wearing that ring. You can pull it off when we get to Penzance, and I will slip it on again when we stand before my cousin."

"It has been a dreadful adventure," said she.

"More memorable than dreadful," I answered, putting her hand under my arm

and stepping with her over to where the second mate was standing—the young fellow who had brought us aboard out of the yacht. He touched his cap very civilly, whilst the skin of his face shrunk into a thousand wrinkles to the grin he put on.

"Surely something will be coming into view soon?" said I.

"Oh, I think so, sir," he answered.

"What is this rate of sailing?"

"About nine knots, sir."

"There it is!" cried I, "and every hour brings New Zealand nearer and makes England more distant."

"Do not talk of New Zealand," exclaimed Grace. "What sort of ships are to be met here?" she added, addressing the second mate.

"All sorts, Miss—, I beg your pardon, I mean ma'am," he answered; "ocean tramps in the main, but a mail liner here and there."

"What are your instructions?" I began, but at that instant I caught sight of old Parsons rising through the hatch with a sextant in his hand. "Oh, here is the captain coming to take sights," said I; "we must arrive at an understanding with him. I believe he would like to keep us on board as an inducement to others to get married."

He smiled with an air of importance as we advanced, and I imagined in him an effort to give himself the airs of a father, or of a father-in-law. His little damp, deep-sunk eyes, so far as they could express any species of emotion, seemed to survey us with benignity and pride as though he would say, "*That* couple is my work, ladies and gentlemen. *I* made them one. Who's next?"

"When you have finished with your sextant, captain," I exclaimed, "I should like a few words with you."

"Pray talk away," he answered, putting the instrument to his eye.

"What about our getting home?"

"At the first opportunity that comes along, I'll transfer you. Can't do more. Can't send ye home in one of my quarter-boats, you know."

"But your mates have no instructions."

"They shall have all necessary instructions presently. And how do you feel, mem, after that little job below? Being married 's a trying performance. I've known men who'd have been married twenty times over if it hadn't been for the ceremony."

He gazed with an air of satisfaction at her wedding ring, and then applied his eye afresh to the sextant. My mind was rendered easier by his promise to repeat his earlier instructions to his mates, and until the luncheon bell rang, Grace and I continued to pace the deck. By this time the news of our having been married had travelled forwards, conveyed to the Jacks and to the steerage passengers, as I took it, by one of the stewards. It was the sailors' dinner hour, and I could see twenty of them on the fore-castle staring at us as one man, whilst every time we advanced to the edge of the poop, where the rail protected the deck, there was a universal upturning of bearded, rough faces, with much pointing and nodding among the women.

After all this the luncheon table was something of a relief, despite the rows of people at it. I was afraid from the manner in which Captain Parsons from time to time regarded us that he was rehearsing a speech, a menace I could not think of without silent horror since it must inevitably compel a reply from me. However, nothing was said, and we lunched in peace, much looked at, particularly by the ladies, as you will suppose; but I found Grace easier under this inspection than I should have dared to hope; possibly she was now getting used to it. She divided her conversation between me and Mr. Higginson, who sat at her left, and she wore a very sweet and easy manner, charming with its girlish grace of dignity. Her breeding showed to perfection at that time, I thought. It was probably rendered more defined to my mind by the looks and behaviour of the other ladies, all of them, to be sure, a very good sort of homely, friendly people, with something of the true lady indeed in Mrs. Barstow.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MERMAID

Nothing was said about the marriage.

The privacy of the affair lay as a sort of obligation of silence upon the kindly-natured passengers, and though, as I have said, they could not keep their eyes off us, their conversation was studiously remote from the one topic about which we were all thinking. Lunch was almost ended when I spied the second mate peering down at us through the glass of the sky-light, and in a few minutes he descended the cabin ladder, and said something in a low voice to the captain.

"By George, Grace!" said I, grasping her hand as it lay on her lap, and whipping out with the notion put into me by a look I caught from the captain. "I believe the second mate has come down to report a ship in sight."

She started, and turned eagerly in the direction of the captain, who had quickly given the mate his orders, for already the man had returned on deck.

Mrs. Barstow, seated close to the captain, nodded at us, and Parsons himself sung out quietly down the table:

"I believe, Mr. and Mrs. Barclay, this will be your last meal aboard the *Carthusian*."

I sprang with excitement to my feet.

"Anything in sight, captain?"

"Ay, a steamer—apparently a yacht. Plenty of time," added he, rising, nevertheless, leisurely as he spoke, on which all the passengers broke from the table—so speedily dull grows the sea-life, so quickly do people learn how to make much of the most trivial incidents upon the ocean—and in a few moments we were all on deck.

"Yes, by Jove, Grace, there she is, sure enough!" cried I, standing at the side with my darling and pointing forward, where, still some miles distant, a point or two on the starboard bow, was a steamer, showing very small indeed at the

extremity of the long, far-reaching line of smoke that was pouring from her. A passenger handed me a telescope; I levelled it, and then clearly distinguished a yacht-like structure, with a yellow funnel, apparently schooner-rigged, with a sort of sparkling about her hull, whether from gilt, or brass, or glass, that instantly suggested the pleasure vessel.

It was still the same bright, joyous day that had shone over us all the morning. The sea was of a dark, rich blue, and the run of it cradle-like, with a summer-day lightness and grace in the arching and breaking of the surge. The ship, aslant in the wind, was sailing finely, with a slow, regular, stately swing of her towering fabric of canvas to windward, as she softly rolled on the floating slant of the seas. Turning my face aft, I saw the second mate and an apprentice, or midshipman in buttons, in the act of hoisting a string of colours to the gaff-end. The flags soared in a graceful semi-circle, and the whole ship looked brave in a breath with the pulling of the many-dyed bunting, each flag delicate as gossamer against the blue of the sky, and the whole show of the deepest interest as the language of the sea—as the ship's own voice!

Had we been cast away, and in the direst peril, I could scarcely have awaited the approach of that steamer with more breathless expectation. Where was she bound to? Would she receive us? Should we accept her offer to take us aboard, though she might be heading to some port wide of the place we desired to reach, such as Ireland or the North of Scotland? I could think of nothing else. The captain stood aft watching her, now and again lifting the ship's glass to his eye; the forecastle was loaded with steerage passengers all staring forward; the poop too looked full; the very stewards had left the saloon to peer; the cook had quitted his galley, and the Jacks had "knocked-off," as they call it, from the sundry jobs on which they were engaged, as though awaiting the order to bring the main topsail to the mast.

I approached the captain with Grace's hand under my arm.

"She has her answering pennant flying," he exclaimed, letting fall his glass to accost me, and he called to the second mate to haul down our signal. "I believe she will receive you, Mr. Barclay. She's a gentleman's yacht, and a fine boat at that. So much the better. After the *Carthusian*," he added, with a proud look at his noble ship, "I dare say you mightn't have found the first thing we fell in with perfectly agreeable."

"Where do you think she's bound, captain?"

"I should say undoubtedly heading for the English Channel," he answered.

"There should be no difficulty in transferring us, I think," said I, with a glance at the sea.

"Bless me, no," he answered, "get her close to leeward, and the ship'll make a breakwater for Mrs. Barclay."

"Captain Parsons, what can I say that will in any measure express my gratitude to you? May I take it that a letter addressed to you to the care of the owners of the *Carthusian* will be sure to reach you on your return?"

"Oh, yes. But never you mind about that. What I've done has given me pleasure, and I hope that you'll both live long, and that neither of you by a single look or word will ever cause the other to regret that you fell into the hands of Captain Parsons of the good ship *Carthusian*."

Grace gave him a sweet smile. Now that it seemed we were about to leave his ship she could gaze at him without alarm. He broke from it to deliver an order to the second mate, who re-echoed his command in a loud shout. In a moment a number of sailors came racing aft and fell to rounding-in, as it is called, upon the main and main-top sailbraces with loud and hearty songs, which were re-echoed out of the white hollows aloft and combined with the splashing noise of waters and the small music of the wind in the rigging into a true ocean concert for the ear. The machinery of the braces brought the sails on the main to the wind; the ship's way was almost immediately arrested, and she lay quietly sinking and rising with a sort of hush of expectation along her decks, which nothing disturbed save the odd farmyard-like sounds of the live stock somewhere forward.

The steamer was now rapidly approaching us, and by this time without the aid of a glass I made her out to be a fine screw yacht of some three hundred and fifty tons, painted black, with a yellow funnel forward of amidships, which gave her the look of a gunboat. She had a charthouse, or some such structure near her bridge, that was very liberally glazed, and blinding flashes leapt from the panes of glass as she rolled to and from the sun as though she were quickly firing cannon charged with soundless and smokeless gunpowder. A figure paced the filament of bridge that was stretched before her funnel. He wore a gold band

round his hat and brass buttons on his coat. Two or three men leaned over the head rail viewing us as they approached, but her quarter-deck was deserted. I could find no hint of female apparel or of the blue serge of the yachtsman.

Old Parsons, taking his stand at the rail clear of the crowd, waited until the yacht floated abreast, where with a few reverse revolutions of her propeller she came to a stand within easy talking distance—as handsome and finished a model as ever I had seen afloat.

"Ho, the yacht, ahoy!" shouted Captain Parsons.

"Hallo!" responded the glittering figure from the bridge, manifestly the yacht's skipper.

"What yacht is that?"

"The *Mermaid*."

"Where are you from and where are you bound to?"

"From Madeira for Southampton," came back the response.

"That will do, Grace," cried I, joyfully.

"We took a lady and a gentleman off their yacht, the *Spitfire*, that we found in a leaky condition yesterday," shouted Parsons, "having been dismasted in a gale and blown out of the Channel. We have them aboard. Will you receive them and set them ashore?"

"How many more besides them, sir?" bawled the master of the yacht.

"No more—they two only," and Parsons pointed to Grace and me, who stood conspicuous, near the main rigging.

"Ay, ay, sir; we'll receive 'em. Will you send your boat?"

Captain Parsons flourished his hand in token of acquiescence; but he stood near enough to enable me to catch a few growling sentences, referring to the laziness of yachtsmen, which he hove at the twinkling figure through his teeth in language which certainly did not accord with his priestly tendencies.

There was no luggage to pack, no parcels to hunt for, nothing for me to do but leave Grace a minute, whilst I rushed below to fee the stewards. So much confusion attended our transference that my recollection of what took place is vague. I remember that the second mate was incessantly shouting out orders, until one of the ship's quarter boats, with several men in her, had been fairly lowered to the water's edge, and brought to the gangway, over which some steps had been thrown. I also remember once again shaking Captain Parsons most cordially by the hand, thanking him effusively for his kindness and wishing him and his ship all possible good-luck under the heavens. The passengers crowded round us and wished us good-bye, and I saw Mrs. Barstow slip a little parcel into Grace's hand, and whisper a few words; whereupon they kissed each other with the warmth of old friends.

Mr. M'Cosh stood at the gangway, and I asked him to distribute the twenty-pound bank note I handed to him amongst the crew of the boat that had taken us from the *Spitfire*; I further requested that the second mate, taking his proportion which I left entirely to the discretion of Mr. M'Cosh, would purchase some trifle of pin or ring by which to remember us.

Grace was then handed into the boat—a ticklish business to the eyes of a landsman, but performed with amazing despatch and ease by the rough seaman who passed her over and received her. I followed, watching my chance, and in a few moments the oars were out and the boat making for the yacht, that lay within musket shot. She was rolling, however, faster and so much more heavily than the big iron ship, that the job of getting on board her was heightened into a kind of peril. I should never have imagined merely by looking down on the water from the height of the *Carthusian's* rail how strong was the Atlantic surge—blue, summer-like and beautiful with its lacery of froth, as it showed from the altitude of the ship's deck. It came to Grace being lifted bodily over the side by a couple of the yachtsman, who each grasped her hand. I was similarly helped up, and was not a little thankful to find ourselves safe on the solid deck of the steamer after the egg-shell-like tossing of the ship's quarter-boat alongside.

We were received by the captain of the yacht, a fellow with a face that reminded me somewhat of Caudel, of a countenance and bearing much too sailorly to be rendered ridiculous by his livery of gold band and buttons. But before I could address him old Parsons hailed to give him the name of the *Carthusian* and to request him to report the ship, and he ran on to the bridge to answer. I could look at nothing just then but the ship. Of all sea pieces I never

remember the like of that for beauty. We were to leeward of her, and she showed us the milk-white bosoms of her sails, that flashed out in silver brilliance to the sunlight through sheer force of the contrast of the vivid red of her water-line as it was lifted out of the yeast and then plunged again by the rolling of the craft. Large soft clouds resembling puffs of steam sailed over her waving mast-heads, where a gilt vane glowed like a streak of fire against the blue of the sky between the clouds.

A full-rigged ship never looks more majestic I think than when she is hove to under all plain sail, that is, when all canvas but stun'sails is piled upon her and her main topsail is to the mast, with the great main course hauled up to the yard and windily swaying in festoons. She is then like a noble mare reined in; her very hawse pipes seem to grow large like the nostrils of some nervous creature impatiently sniffing the air; she bows the sea as though informed with a spirit of fire that maddens her to leap the surge, and to rush forward once more in music and in thunder, in giddy shearing and in long floating plunges on the wings of the wind. Never does a ship show so much as a thing of life as when she is thus restrained.

But the boat had now gained the tall fabric's side; the tackles had been hooked into her, and even whilst she was soaring to the davits the great main topsail yard of the *Carthusian* came slowly round, and the sails to the royal filled. At the same moment I was sensible of a pulsation in the deck on which we were standing; the engines had been started, and in a few beats of the heart the *Carthusian* was on our quarter, breaking the sea under her bow as the long, slender, metal hull leaned to the weight of the high and swelling canvas.

I pulled off my hat and flourished it, Grace waved her handkerchief, a hearty cheer swept down to us, not only from the passengers assembled on the poop but also from the crowds who watched us from the forecastle and from the line of the bulwark rails, and for some minutes every figure was in motion, as the people gesticulated their farewells to us.

"Act the fourth!" said I, bringing my eyes to Grace's face. "One more act and then over goes the show, as the Cockneys say."

"Aren't you glad to be here, Herbert?"

"I could kneel, my duck. But how good those people are! How well they have

behaved! Such utter strangers as we are to them! What did Mrs. Barstow give you?"

She put her hand in her pocket, opened the little parcel, and produced an Indian bracelet, a wonderfully cunning piece of work in gold.

"Upon my word!" cried I.

"How kind of her!" exclaimed Grace, with her eyes sparkling, though I seemed to catch a faint note of tears in her voice. "I shall always remember dear Mrs. Barstow."

"And what yacht is this?" said I, casting my eyes around. "A beautiful little ship indeed. How exquisitely white are these planks! What money, by George! in everything the eye rests upon!"

The master, who had remained on the bridge to start the yacht, now approached. He saluted us with the respectful air of a man used to fine company, but I instantly observed, on his glancing at Grace, that his eye rested upon the wedding ring.

"I presume you are the captain?" said I.

"I am, sir."

"Pray, what name?"

"John Verrion, sir."

"Well, Captain Verrion, I must first of all thank you heartily for receiving us. I had to abandon my yacht, the *Spitfire*, yesterday. We were nearly sunk by a hurricane of wind, but the men believed they could keep her afloat and carry her home. They *would* have their way, and I heartily pray they are safe, though they cannot yet have made a port. Is the owner of this vessel aboard?"

"No, sir. She belongs to the Earl of ——. His lordship's been left at Madeira. He changed his mind and stopped at Madeira—him and the countess, and a party of three that was along with them—and sent the yacht home."

"Then there is nobody aboard except the crew?"

"Nobody, sir."

"I have not the honour of his lordship's acquaintance," said I, "but I think, Grace," I exclaimed, turning towards her, not choosing to speak of her as "this lady," whilst she wore the wedding ring, not to call her "my wife" either, "that he is a distant connection of your aunt, Lady Amelia Roscoe."

"I don't know, Herbert," she answered.

"Anyway," said I, "it is a great privilege to be received by such a vessel as this."

"His lordship 'ud wish me to do everything that's right, sir," said Captain Verrion. "I'll have a cabin got ready for you, but as to meals—" he paused, and added awkwardly, "I'm afraid there's nothen aboard but plain yachting fare, sir."

"Oh, we have been shipwrecked—we are now accustomed to the privations of the sea—anything that our teeth can meet in will do for us, captain!" I exclaimed, laughing. "When do you hope to reach Southampton?"

"Monday afternoon, sir."

"A little more than two days," I exclaimed. "You must be a pretty fast boat."

He smiled and said, "What might be the port you want to get at, sir? Southampton may be too high up for you."

"Our destination was Penzance," said I; "but any port that is in England will do."

"Oh," said he, "there ought to be no difficulty in putting you ashore at Penzance." He then asked us if we would like to step below, and forthwith conducted us into a large, roomy, elegantly, indeed sumptuously, furnished cabin, as breezy as a drawing-room, and aromatic with the smell of plantains or bananas hung up somewhere near, though out of sight. The panels were hand-painted pictures, the upper deck or ceiling was finely embellished, and there was a gilt centrepiece from which depended a small but costly chandelier or candelabra that projected some ten or twelve oil lamps. The carpet was a thick velvet pile, and there were curtains and mirrors as in a drawing-room; indeed, I never could have imagined such an interior on board a sea-going structure, and

though it was all very grand and princely to look at, I could not but regard the whole as an example of wanton, senseless extravagance.

"This should suit you, Grace!" said I.

"Is it not heavenly?" she cried.

The captain stood by with a pleased countenance, observing us.

"I don't know if I'm right in calling you *sir*?" he exclaimed; "I didn't rightly catch your name."

"My name is Mr. Herbert Barclay."

"Thank ye, sir. I was going to say if you and her ladyship—"

"No, not her ladyship," I interrupted, guessing that the fellow, having caught the name of Lady Amelia Roscoe, was confounding Grace with that title; but here I broke off, with a conscious look, I fear, for I could not speak of my sweetheart as Miss Bellassys with that ring on her finger, nor would it have been safe to talk of her as my wife either: in her presence, at all events, for she had the most sweet ingenuous face imaginable, through which every mood and thought peeped, and Captain Verrion's eyes seemed somewhat shrewd.

"I was going to say, sir," he proceeded, "that you're welcome to any of the sleeping berths you may have a mind to. If you will take your choice I'll have the beds got ready."

The berths were aft—mere boxes, each with a little bunk, but all fitted so as to correspond in point of costliness with the furniture of the living or state room. We chose the two foremost berths as being the farthest of the sleeping places from the crew; and this matter being ended, and after declining Captain Verrion's very civil offer of refreshments, we returned to the deck.

The steamer was thrashing through it at an exhilarating speed. The long blue Atlantic surge came briming and frothing to her quarter, giving her a lift at times that set the propeller racing, but the clean-edged, frost-like band of wake streamed far astern, where in the liquid blue of the afternoon that way hung the star-coloured cloths of the *Carthusian*, a leaning shaft, resembling a spire of ice.

"Bless me!" I cried, "how we have widened our distance! When a man falls overboard with what hideous rapidity must his ship appear to glide away from him!"

"Is it not delightful to be independent of the wind, Herbert?" exclaimed Grace, as she took my arm.

"Yes, but consider the beauty of a tower of canvas compared to that yellow chimney pot," said I. "The *Carthusian*!" I added, sending my glance at the distant airy gleam; "we shall never forget her. Yet she seems but a phantom ship too; some sea vision of one's sleep, so quickly has it all happened, and so astonishing what has happened. But *has* old Parsons made us man and wife?"

She shook her head.

"That cabin wedding this morning," I continued, "ought to be a fact if all the rest is a dream. But you must go on wearing that ring, Grace, and since it is on I shall have to call you Mrs. Barclay. Don't go and pull it off now. I saw this captain fasten his eye upon it, and we must be one thing or the other, my sweet."

"Oh, anything to please you, Herbert," she replied, pouting as was her custom when she was not of my mind; "but try to call me Mrs. Barclay as seldom as possible."

Thus we chatted as we walked the deck. We had the afterpart of the little ship entirely to ourselves; the captain came and went, but never offered to approach. There was a mate as I supposed, a man without a gold band to his cap, but with buttons to his coat, who replaced the skipper on the bridge when he quitted it. Owing to deck structures, funnel-casing and the like, I could see but little of the forward part of the yacht; but such men as showed seldom glanced aft, and then with such an air of respect as was excessively refreshing after the narrow, inquiring and continuous inspection we had been honoured with aboard the *Carthusian*. The quietude of a man-of-war was in the life of the yacht; the seamen spoke low; if ever one of them smoked a pipe he kept himself out of sight with it. In fact, it was like being aboard one's own vessel, and now that we were fairly going home, being driven towards the English Channel at a steady pace of some twelve or thirteen knots in the hour by the steady resistless thrust of the propeller, we could find heart to abandon ourselves to every delightful sensation born of the sweeping passage of the beautiful steamer, to every

emotion inspired by each other's society, and by the free, boundless, noble prospect of dark blue waters that was spread around us.

We were uninterrupted till five o'clock. The captain then advanced, and saluting us with as much respect as if we had been the earl and his lady, he inquired if we would have tea served in the cabin. I answered that we should be very glad of a cup of tea; but that he was to give himself no trouble; the simplest fare he could put before us we should feel as grateful for as if he sat us down to a mansion house dinner.

He said that the steward had been left ashore at Madeira, but that a sailor, who knew what to do as a waiter, would attend upon us.

"Who would suppose, Grace," said I, when we were alone, "that the ocean was so hospitable? Figure us finding ourselves ashore in such a condition as was our lot when we thought the *Spitfire* sinking under us—in other words, *in want!* At how many houses might we have knocked without getting shelter or the offer of a meal? This is like being made welcome in Grosvenor Square, and you may compare the *Carthusian* to a fine mansion in Bayswater."

"I have had quite enough of the sea, Herbert," she answered. "Its hospitality is not to my taste; and yet, if you owned such a steamer as this, I believe I should be willing to make a voyage in her with you when we are married."

I let this pass, holding that I had already said enough as to the legitimacy of our shipboard union.

And now what follows I need not be very minute in relating. The captain contrived for "tea," as he called it, as excellent a meal as we could have wished for; white biscuit, good butter, bananas, a piece of virgin corned-beef, and preserved milk to put into our tea. What better fare could one ask for? I had a pipe and tobacco with me, and as I walked the deck in the evening with my darling, I had never felt happier.

It was a rich autumn evening; the wind had slackened and was now a light air, and we lingered on deck long after the light had faded in the western sky, leaving the still young moon shining brightly over the sea, across whose dark, wrinkled, softly-heaving surface ran the wake of the speeding yacht, in a line like a pathway traversing a boundless moor.

We passed one or two shadowy ships, picking them up and then dropping them with a velocity, that to our homeward-yearning hearts was exceedingly soothing and comforting. Then, when the strong, continuous sweep of the breeze raised by the passage of the steamer grew too strong for Grace, we descended into the cabin, where our sailor attendant, lighted the fine chandelier or candelabra, and Grace and I sat in splendour, our forms reflected in the mirrors, everything visible as by sunlight, though there must have been some magic above the art of the sun in those soft pencils of light flowing from the centre-piece of oil-flames; for never before had I observed in my darling so delicate and tender a bloom of complexion; her hair, too, seemed to gather a deeper richness of dye, and her eyes—

But, enough of such parish talk; though I know not why a lover should not be as fully privileged to celebrate his sweetheart's perfection in prose, as a poet is in verse. It is a matter of custom rather than of taste. Dante might have praised his Beatrice, Waller his Sacharissa, Horace and Prior their Chloes, and a very great many other gentlemen a very great many other ladies in prose sentences, quite as fine and true to the understanding as their verse. But would they have found readers? It is this consideration that makes me take a hurried leave of Grace's eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

HOMeward BOUND

I heartily appreciated the Earl of ——'s theory of sea-beds when I sprang into my narrow shelf of bunk, and found myself buoyant on some very miracle of spring mattress. I slept as soundly as one who sleeps to wake no more; but on going on deck some little while before the breakfast was served, I was grievously disappointed to find a wet day. There was very little wind, but the sky was one dismal surface of leaden cloud, from which the rain was falling almost perpendicularly with a sort of obstinacy of descent that was full of the menace of a tardy abatement. Fortunately, the horizon lay well open; one could see some miles, and the steamer was washing along at her old pace—a full thirteen, with a

nearly becalmed collier, ragged, wet and staggering, all patches and bentinck-boom, dissolving rapidly into the weather over the starboard quarter. Captain Verrion, in streaming oilskins, catching sight of my head, came aft to inquire if I had slept comfortably. We then talked of the weather.

"One may know the English Channel ain't fur off, sir," said he, with a grin, as he looked up at the sky.

"Ay," said I, "and how would it be with us if we depended upon sails? There is better music to me in the noise of your engine-room than in the finest performance of the first opera orchestra in the world."

He respectfully assented; and to kill the time as I stood under shelter, I asked a few questions about the earl and countess, related our adventures, taking care, however, to let him suppose that we were a young married couple out on a yachting honeymoon—not that I said this; I allowed him to infer it; spoke of the chances of the *Spitfire*, and then seeing Grace at the foot of the ladder, joined her, and presently we were at breakfast.

It rained incessantly, but, happily, the wind remained small, and we travelled along as quietly in that three hundred and fifty ton yacht as though we reposed in the saloon of an Atlantic giantess. A number of volumes filled the shelves of a sumptuous bookcase; I took the liberty of seeking for a book for Grace, and found that the collection consisted almost entirely of novels. His lordship was as wise in his choice of literature for sea-going purposes as in his taste for spring-mattresses, for what but a novel in a yacht's cabin on a wet day can fix the attention?

It was some time after three o'clock in the afternoon, that on a sudden the engines were "slowed down," as I believe the term is, and a minute later the revolutions of the propeller ceased. There is always something startling in the abrupt cessation of the pulsing of the screw in a steamer at sea. One gets so used to the noise of the engines, to the vibrating sensation communicated in a sort of tingling throughout the frame of the vessel by the thrashing blades, that the suspension of the familiar sound falls like a loud and fearful hush upon the ear. Grace, who had been dozing, opened her eyes.

"What can the matter be?" cried I.

As I spoke I heard a voice, apparently aboard the yacht, hailing. I pulled on

my cap, turned up the collar of my coat, and ran on deck expecting to find the yacht in the heart of a thickness of rain and fog with some big shadow of a ship looming within biscuit-toss. It was raining steadily, but the sea was not more shrouded than it had been at any other hour of the day, saving perhaps that something of the complexion of the evening, which was not far off, lay sombre in the wet atmosphere. I ran to the side and saw at a distance of the length of the steam yacht, my own hapless little dandy, the *Spitfire*! Her main mast was wholly gone, yet I knew her at once. There she lay, looking far more miserably wrecked than when I had left her, lifting and falling forlornly upon the small swell, her poor little pump going, plied, as I instantly perceived, by the boy, Bobby Allett.

I had sometimes thought of her as in harbour, and sometimes as at the bottom of the sea, but never, somehow, as still washing about, helpless and sodden, with a gushing scupper and a leaky bottom. Caudel, poor old Caudel, stood at the rail shouting to Captain Verrion, who was singing out to him from the bridge.

I rushed forward, bawling to Captain Verrion, "That's the *Spitfire*; that's my yacht!" and then at the top of my voice I shouted across the space of water between the two vessels, "Ho, Caudel! where are the rest of you, Caudel? For God's sake launch your boat and come aboard!"

He stood staring at me, dropping his head first on one side, then on the other, doubting the evidence of his sight, and reminding one of the ghost in Hamlet: "It lifted up its head and did address itself to motion as it would speak." Astonishment appeared to bereave him of speech. For some moments he could do nothing but stare, then up went both hands with a gesture that was eloquent of — "Well, I'm *blowed*!"

"Come aboard, Caudel! Come aboard!" I roared, for the little dandy still had her dinghey and I did not wish to put Captain Verrion to the trouble of fetching the two fellows.

With the motions and air of a man dumb-founded, or under the influence of drink, Caudel addressed the lad, who dropped the pump handle, and between them they launched the boat, smack-fashion. Caudel then sprang into her with an oar and sculled across to us. He came floundering over the side, and yet again stood staring at me as though discrediting his senses. The colour appeared to have been washed out of his face by wet; his very oilskins seemed to have

surrendered their water-proof properties, and they clung to his frame as soaked rags would. His boots were full of water, and his eyes resembled pieces of jellyfish fixed on either side his nose. I grasped his hand.

"Of all astonishing meetings, Caudel! But how is it that you are here? What has become of the main mast? Where are the rest of the men? Never did a man look more shipwrecked than you. Are you thirsty? Are you starving?"

By this time Captain Verrion had joined us, and a knot of the steamer's crew stood on the forecastle looking first at the *Spitfire*, then at Caudel; scarcely, I daresay, knowing as yet whether to feel amused or amazed at this singular meeting. Caudel had the slow, laborious mind of the merchant sailor. He continued for some moments to heavily and damply gaze about him, then said:

"Dummed if this ain't wonderful, too. To find you here, sir! and your young lady, Mr. Barclay?"

"Safe and well in the cabin," I answered; "but where are the others, Caudel?"

"I'll spin you the yarn in a jiffy, sir!" he answered, with a countenance that indicated a gradual recollection of his wits. "Arter you left us we got some sail upon the yacht; but just about sundown it breezed up in a bit of a puff and the rest of the mast went overboard, a few inches above the deck. Well, there we lay. There was nothen to be done. Job Crew, he says to me, 'What's next?' says he. 'What but a tow home,' says I. 'It'll have to be that,' says he, 'and pretty quick, too,' he says, 'for I've now had nigh enough of this galliwanting.' Job was awanting in sperrit, Mr. Barclay. I own I was surprised to hear him, but I says nothen, and Dick Files, *he* says nothen, and neither do Jim Foster. Well, at daybreak a little barque bound to the River Thames comes along and hails us. I asked her to give me a tow that I might have a chance of falling in with a tug. The master shook his head, and sings out that he'd take us aboard, but we wasn't to talk of *towing*. On this Job says, 'Here goes for my clothes.' Jim follows him. Dick says to me, 'What are you going to do?' 'Stick to the yacht,' says I. He was beginning to argue. 'No good atalking,' says I, 'here I am and here I stops.' Wouldn't it have been a blooming shame," he added, turning slowly to Captain Verrion, "to have deserted that there dandy when nothen's wanted but an occasional spell at the pump, and when something was bound to come along presently to give us a drag?"

Captain Verrion nodded, with a little hint of patronage, I thought, in his appreciative reception of Caudel's views.

"Well, to make an end of the yarn, Mr. Barclay," continued Caudel, "them three men went aboard the barque, taking their clothes with 'em; but when I told Bobby to go too, 'No,' says he, 'I'll stop and help ye to pump, sir.' There's the makings of a proper English sailor, Mr. Barclay, in that there boy," he exclaimed, casting his eyes at the lad who had again addressed himself to the pump.

"And here you've been all day?" said I.

"All day, sir, and all night too, and a dirty time it's bin."

"Waiting for something to give you a tow, with a long black night at hand?"

"Mr. Barclay," said he, "I told ye I should stick to that there little dandy, and I wouldn't break my word for no man."

"You sha'n't be disappointed," said Captain Verrion, bestowing on Caudel a hearty nod of approval, this time untingered by condescension, "give us the end of your tow rope and we'll drag the dandy home for ye."

"Cap'n, I thank 'ee," said Caudel.

"You and the boy are pretty nigh wore out, I allow," exclaimed Captain Verrion. "I'll put a couple of men aboard the *Spitfire*. How often do she want pumping?"

"'Bout every half hour."

"You stay here," said Captain Verrion, looking with something of commiseration at Caudel, who, the longer one surveyed him, the more soaked, ashen, and shipwrecked one found him. "I'll send for the boy, and you can both dry yourselves and get a good long spell of rest."

He left us to give the necessary orders to his men, and, whilst the steamer launched her own boat, I stood talking with Caudel, telling him of our adventures aboard the *Carthusian*, of our marriage, and so forth. He listened very gravely whilst I talked of my marriage.

"I fear it's a sham," said I, "but it will be something to strengthen my hands with when I come to tackle Lady Amelia."

"A sham!" cried he, "no fear, sir. If you've been married by the master of a ship, there's no more splicing wanted. You're a wedded man. There can be no breaking away from it."

"How do you know?" said I, wondering whether he *did* know.

"How do I know, sir? Why, the master of a ship can do anything aboard his own craft, and whatever he does is lawful."

This was mere fore-castle superstition, and I saw that he did *not* know.

"Anyway, Caudel," said I, "the wedding ring is on the young lady's finger. Captain Verrion has noticed it, and I shall feel obliged by your calling her Mrs. Barclay whenever you have occasion to speak of her. Give Allett that hint, too, will you?"

I had got into the shelter of the companion whilst I talked, and Grace, hearing my voice, called to me to tell her why the steamer had stopped, and if there was anything wrong.

"Come here, my darling," said I. She approached and stood at the foot of the steps. "We have fallen in with the *Spitfire*, Grace, and here is Caudel."

She uttered an exclamation of astonishment. He directed his oyster-like eyes into the comparative gloom, and then catching sight of her, knuckled his forehead, and exclaimed, "Bless your sweet face! And I am glad indeed, mum, to meet ye and find you both well and going home likewise." She came up the steps to give him her hand and I saw the old sailor's face working as he bent over it.

The steamer made a short job of the *Spitfire*; but a very little manoeuvring with the propeller was needful; a line connected the two vessels; the yacht's boat returned with the boy Bobby, leaving three of the steamer's crew in the dandy; the engine-room bell sounded, immediately was felt the thrilling of the engines in motion, and presently the *Mermaid* was ripping through it once more with the poor little dismayed *Spitfire* dead in her wake. I sent for the boy, and praised him warmly for his manly behaviour in sticking to Caudel. Captain Verrion then told them both to go below and get some hot tea, and put on dry clothing

belonging to them, that had been brought from the dandy.

"I'm thinking, sir," said he, when Caudel and the other had left, "that I can't do better than run you into Mount's Bay. I never was at Penzance, but I believe there's a bit of a harbour there, and no doubt a repairing slipway, and I understood that Penzance was your destination all along."

I assured him that he would be adding immeasurably to his kindness, by doing as he proposed, "but as to the *Spitfire*," I continued, "I sha'n't spend a farthing upon her. My intention is to sell her, and divide what she will fetch amongst those who have preserved her. I have had more of the *Spitfire* than I want, Captain Verrion, and though I am glad to know that she is towing astern, I protest—assuming the safety of her crew assured—that it would not have caused me a pang to learn she had gone to the bottom."

"Well, sir, we'll head for Mount's Bay then. It will be a saving of some few hours of sea anyway for the lady," and with that he trudged forward.

From the shelter of the companion hatch we could just catch a view over the steamer's taffrail of the *Spitfire* as she came sliding after us to the pull of the tow-rope. With linked arms Grace and I stood looking at her. The air was darkening to the descent of the evening shadow, the rain poured continuously; but the wind was gone. The sea undulated in an oil-like surface, and the rain as it fell pitted the water with black points, as of ink. The melancholy of the scene was unspeakably heightened by that detail of mutilated, dismasted yacht astern, and by the tragic significance she gathered for us as we stood looking, recalling the night of the elopement, our stealthy floating out of Boulogne harbour, the gale that had nearly foundered us, and our escape that might well seem miraculous to our land-going eyes as we noticed her littleness and her present helplessness, and remembered the height of the seas which ran, and the hurricane weight of storm which she had survived.

We killed the evening with books and talk, and the minutes fled with the velocity of the flight of birds. Our sailor steward informed us that Caudel and the boy had turned in after making a hearty supper and were sleeping like dead men. I stood awhile in the companion to smoke a pipe before going to bed; but at that hour the night was as black as thunder, the wet hissed upon our decks as it fell; yet upon the white waters of the steamer's wake the dim configuration of the little *Spitfire* was visible, with her weak side-lights of red and green dimly

glimmering over the pale, faint stream of froth that rushed from the *Mermaid's* counter to the dandy's sides.

It was possibly the thoughts and memories induced by the obscure and melancholy vision of the little fabric in our wake that rendered me nervous. I thought to myself—here we are steaming at ten or twelve knots an hour through a thick, coal-black night; suppose we should plunge into some wooden or metal side? Some such apprehensions as this, not quite idle nor unmanly either, dismissed me to my cabin with a resolution to lie down fully clothed, and for three hours I lay wide awake, listening to the restless grinding of the engines and to the sounds of water flowing swiftly past. I then rose, and felt my way up the companion steps, not doubting to find the same black, weeping night I had left; instead of which my mind was instantly relieved by the spectacle of a high, clear sky, crowded with stars, with the firm ebony line of the horizon showing sharp against the distant starry reaches, and within half a mile of us on our starboard beam the huge shape of an ocean steamer, some vessel from who shall tell what distant part of the world—the Cape, the Indies, the far-off Australias—sliding past us it seemed almost half as fast again as we ourselves were going, a vast symmetric shadow, like an island, with one bright point of light only visible to my eyes.

I waited until she had drawn ahead, then turned in afresh, this time between the sheets, and slept like a top.

The change of weather, the clearness of the night helped us, and some time about two o'clock on the afternoon of Monday the *Mermaid*, with the *Spitfire* in tow, was steaming into Mount's Bay. I stood with Grace on my arm looking. The land seemed as novel and refreshing to our sight as though we had kept the sea for weeks and weeks. The sun stood high, the blue waters delicately brushed by the light wind ran in foamless ripples, the long curve of the parade with the roofs of houses past it dominated by a church came stealing out of the green slopes and hills beyond. A few smacks from Newlyn were putting to sea, and the whole picture that way was rich with the dyes of their canvas.

The steamer was brought to a stand when she was yet some distance from Penzance harbour, but long before this we had been made out from the shore, and several boats were approaching to inquire what was wrong and to offer such help as the state of the *Spitfire* suggested. Caudel and Captain Verrion came to us where we were standing, and the former said:

"I'm going aboard the dandy now, sir. I'll see her snug and will then take your honour's commands."

"Our address will be my cousin's house, which is some little distance from Penzance," I answered; "here it is," and I pulled out a piece of paper and scribbled the address upon it. "You'll be without anything in your pocket, I daresay," I continued, handing him five sovereigns. "See to the boy, Caudel, and if he wants to go home you must learn where he lives, for I mean to sell that yacht there, and there'll be money to go to him. And so farewell for the present," said I, shaking the honest fellow heartily by the hand.

He saluted Grace, and went over the side, followed by Bobby Allett, and both of them were presently aboard the little *Spitfire*.

"There are boats coming," exclaimed Captain Verrion, "which will tow your dandy into Penzance harbour, sir. Will you go ashore in one of them, or shall I have one of the yacht's boats lowered for you?"

Thanking him heartily, I replied that one of the Penzance boats would do very well, and then looking into my pocket-book and finding that I had no more gold about me than I should need, I entered the cabin, sent the sailor attendant for some ink, and wrote a couple of cheques, one of which I asked Captain Verrion to accept for himself, and to distribute the proceeds of the other amongst his crew. He was reluctant to take the money, said that the earl was a born gentleman who would wish him to do everything that had been done, that no sailor ought to receive money for serving people fallen in with in a condition of distress at sea; but I got him to put the cheques into his pocket at last, and several boats having by this time come alongside, I shook the worthy man by the hand, thanked him again and again for his treatment of us, and went with Grace down the little gangway ladder into the boat.

We had no sooner quitted the yacht than the engine-room bell rang, and the beautiful fabric was in motion, and before our boatmen had measured a dozen strokes, the steamer's stern was at us, with Captain Verrion flourishing his brass-bound cap to us from the bridge. There were two boats alongside my wretched little dandy, and so quiet was the day that I could hear Caudel talking to their occupants. But I was now wholly done with her; honest Caudel and Bobby Allett were safe, and I could think of little more than of the string of adventures I should have to relate to my cousin, and of what was beyond, what Lady Amelia

was going to do, whether it might come to my cousin being unable to publish the banns for us, and whether the darling at my side had been made my true and lawful wife by Captain Parsons' recital of the marriage service.

On landing we proceeded to the Queen's Hotel where I ordered dinner, and then wrote a letter to my cousin asking him and his wife to come to us as speedily as possible, adding that we had been very nearly shipwrecked and had met with some strange adventures, the narrative of which, if attempted, must fill a very considerable bundle of manuscript. This done I told the waiter to procure me a mounted messenger, and within three quarters of an hour of our arrival at Penzance my letter was on its way at a hard gallop to the little straggling village of —— of which Frank Howe was vicar.

When we had dined I stood with Grace at the window of the sitting-room that overlooked the noble bight of Mount's Bay. On our left rose the lofty Marazion hills, with the little town of Marazion lying white at the eastern base of the range, and beyond ran the dark blue loom of Cudden Point melting into the dim azure of the Lizard district. The sun was in the west, his light was red, and this warm dye made a glorious autumn picture of that sweep of cliff embraced waters. Several colliers lay high and dry on the mud just abreast of the town, but the *Spitfire* had vanished, towed, as I might suppose, by boats to the security of the harbour that was hidden from me. Far past the distant giant foreland point was an orange-coloured sail showing like a delicate edge of cloud over the edge of the blue, lens-like rim of the sea. I thought of the *Carthusian*—of our sea marriage—and lifting my darling's hand, toyed mechanically with the wedding-ring upon it, whilst I looked at her.

She had been pale and nervous ever since our arrival; her delight in being safely ashore at last had seemed but a short-lived sensation. She looked at the ring with which I was toying and said:

"What shall I do with this thing?"

"Go on wearing it down to the time when it will be necessary to remove it in order to replace it."

"And what will your cousin think of me—a clergyman! And his wife is a clergyman's daughter. Oh, Herbert!" she added, sighing in a shuddering way.

"They will admire you, they will consider you the sweetest of girls. What else

can they think, Grace?"

But her mood was what it had been at the time we sailed out of Boulogne harbour. She was depressed, frightened, acutely sensitive, dreading opinion, and all to such a degree that she could utter nothing which was not full of apprehension and regret, so that anyone who had watched us unseen must have concluded that either we were not lovers, or that we had been married much longer than our tender years suggested. But lovers we were all the same! and however it might have been with *her* in that little passage of worry, uncertainty, and nervousness, she had never been dearer to me; never had I felt prouder of winning her heart, nor more triumphant in my possession of her.

CHAPTER XV

THE END

Time passed, and I was beginning to fear that some engagement prevented Howe and his wife from coming over to us, when, hearing a noise of wheels, I stepped to the window and saw my cousin assisting a lady out of a smart little pony carriage.

"Here they are!" I exclaimed to Grace.

There was a pause; my darling looked about her with terrified eyes, and I believe she would have rushed from the room but for the apprehension of running into the arms of the visitors as they ascended the staircase. A waiter opened the door, and in stepped Mr. and Mrs. Frank Howe. My cousin and I eagerly shook hands, but nothing could be said or done until the ladies were introduced. I had never before met Mrs. Howe, and found her a fair-haired, pretty woman of some eight-and-twenty years, dressed somewhat "dowdily," to use the ladies' word; but her countenance so beamed with cheerfulness and good-nature that it was only needful to look at her to like her. Frank, on the other hand, was a tall, well-built man of some three-and-thirty, with small side whiskers, deep-set eyes, and a large nose, and teeth so white and regular that it was a pleasure to see him smile. One guessed that whatever special form his

Christianity took it would not be wanting in muscularity. He held Grace's hand in both his and seemed to dwell with enjoyment upon her beauty as he addressed her in some warm-hearted sentences.

Mrs. Howe kissed her on both cheeks, drew her to the sofa, seated herself by her side, and was instantly voluble and delightful.

I took Frank to the window, and with all the brevity possible in such a narrative of adventures as ours, related what had befallen us. He listened with a running commentary of "By Jove!"—"You don't say so,"—"Is it possible?" and other such exclamations, constantly directing glances at Grace, who was now deep in talk with Mrs. Howe, and, as I might know by the expression in her face, excusing her conduct by explaining the motives of it. In fact, even as I talked I could catch such words as "Ma'mselle Championet,"—"the Roman Catholic Priest,"—"Lady Amelia Roscoe's bigotry,"—with one or two other expressions, all giving me to know in what direction their conversation tended.

Mrs Howe's air was one of affection and sympathy, as though she had come to my darling with the resolution to love her and to help her.

"She is very young, Herbert," said Frank in a low voice.

"She is eighteen," I answered.

"She is exquisitely beautiful. I cannot wonder at you even if I could have the heart to condemn you. But, is not that a wedding-ring on her finger?"

"It is," I answered, looking at him.

He looked hard at me in return and exclaimed, "A mere provision against public curiosity, I presume? For surely you are not married?"

"I am not so sure of that," I answered; "but my story is not yet ended," and I then told him of the marriage service which had been performed by Captain Parsons on board the ship, *Carthusian*.

"Tut!" cried he, with a decided churchman-like shake of the head when I had made an end, "that's no marriage, man."

"I believe it is then," said I, "though, of course, until *you* unite us we do not

consider ourselves man and wife."

"I should think not," he exclaimed with vehemence. "What! a plain master of a ship empowered to solemnise holy matrimony? Certainly not. No churchman would hear of such a thing."

"Ay, but it's not for the Church, it's the affair of the law. If the law says it's all right the Church is bound to regard it as right."

"Certainly *not*," he cried, and was proceeding, but I interrupted him by repeating that we had consented to be married by Captain Parsons in the forlorn hope that the contract might be binding.

"But without banns?—without licence?—without the consent of the young lady's guardians? No! no!" he cried, "you are not married. But it is highly desirable," he added, with a look at Grace, "that you should get married without delay. And so what do you propose to do?"

"Well, time may be saved by your publishing the banns at once, Frank."

"Yes, but you must first obtain the guardian's consent."

"Oh, confound it!" I cried, "I did not know that. I believed the banns could be published whilst the consent was being worked for."

He mused awhile, eyeing his wife and Grace, who continued deep in conversation, and then, after a considerable pause, exclaimed:

"There is nothing to be done but this; we must revert to your original scheme; Miss Bellassys—"

"Call her Grace," said I.

"Well, Grace must come and stay with us."

I nodded, for *that* I had intended all along.

"I will find a lodging for you in the village." I nodded again. "Meanwhile—this very day, indeed—you must sit down and write to Lady Amelia Roscoe, saying all that your good sense can suggest, and taking your chance, as you have

put it, of the appeal your association with her niece will make to her ladyship's worldly vanity and to her perceptions as a woman of society."

"All that you are saying," I exclaimed, "I had long ago resolved on, and you will find this scheme as you have put it almost word for word in the letter in which I told you of my plans and asked you to marry us."

"Yes, I believe my recommendations are not original," said he. "There is something more to suggest, however. If Lady Amelia will send Grace her consent, why wait for the banns to be published? Why not procure a licence? It is due to Grace," said he, sinking his voice and sending a look of admiration at her, "that you should make her your wife as speedily as possible."

"Yes, yes. I have heard that said before. I have been a good deal advised on this head. My dear fellow, only consider. Would not I make her my wife this instant if you will only consent to marry us?"

He laughed and turned from me, and addressed Grace, and presently the four of us were busily talking. By this time my darling had regained some degree of confidence; her eyes were bright, her cheeks wore a little glow, there was nothing of embarrassment in her smile or general air as she addressed my cousin or met his gaze. In fact, the talk with Mrs. Howe had done her a deal of good. Her fears had foreboded a sort of Hannah More like view of things in Frank's wife—an easy capacity of recoiling and of being frosted from head to foot by such behaviour as that of an elopement; and she had no doubt that if Mrs. Howe took her to her home and showed her some kindness, her conduct would be a mere effusion of parochial sensibility; it would be her duty—her duty as a clergyman's wife, and she would not do less for a servant-maid that had run away with a grocer's assistant.

This, I say, had been my sweetheart's apprehension, but a few minutes' chat had corrected it, and she could now look with happiness and friendship at the amiable and pretty, if dowdy, woman who was seated at her side, and attend without any further appearance of constraint than what one would expect to find in so young and girlish a character to the kindly, graceful, warm-hearted conversation of my cousin Frank.

The pony and trap had been sent round to some adjacent stables, but by seven o'clock we had made all necessary arrangements, and the vehicle was again

brought to the door. Grace was to be the guest of my cousin and his wife until we heard from Lady Amelia Roscoe. I should sleep at the hotel that night, and next day take possession of the best lodgings Frank could procure for me in his little parish. It was also settled that next day Sophie—for that was Mrs. Howe's Christian name—should come to Penzance with Grace and purchase all that was immediately needful in the shape of wearing apparel, and so on.

"I shall to-night," said I, "write to Mademoiselle Championet and request her to send your boxes, Grace."

"Wait until you hear from Lady Amelia," said Frank. "She may quarrel with mademoiselle and refuse to pay her, in which case mademoiselle will have a lien upon the luggage and stick to it."

I laughed and exclaimed, "There is no hurry," and then after taking Grace in my arms and straining her to my heart, as though we were about to part for ever and ever, and after much cordial handshaking with Frank and his wife, I accompanied the three of them downstairs, saw them into the pony-carriage, and when they had driven off, returned to write a letter to Lady Amelia Roscoe.

It is some years now since all this happened. I have no copy of that letter, and my memory is not strong in points of this sort. I recollect, however, after making several attempts, that I produced something which was brief almost to abruptness, and that it satisfied me as on the whole very well put, not wanting in a quality of what I might term mild brutality, for this was an element I could not very well manage without having regard to what I had to ask and to what I had to tell. And let this reference to that letter suffice, though I must add that I took care to enclose a copy of Captain Parsons' certificate of our marriage, with the names of those who had signed it, affirming that the marriage was good in point of law, as she might easily assure herself by consulting her solicitors, and also acquainting her in no doubtful terms that the wedding-ring was on Grace's finger and that we regarded ourselves as husband and wife.

I had scarcely despatched this letter when Caudel was announced. He stood in the doorway, cap in hand, knuckling his forehead and backing a bit with a rolling gait, after the custom of the British merchant sailor.

"Well, Mr. Barclay, sir, and how are ye again? And how's the young lady after all these here traverses?"

I bade him sit down, pulled the bell for a glass of grog for him, and asked for news of the *Spitfire*. "Well, sir," he answered, "she's just what I've come to talk to ye about. She'd started a butt as I all along thought, otherwise she's as sound as a bell. There was a shipwright as came down to look at her, and he asked me what we was going to do. I told him that I didn't think the gent as owned her meant to repair her. 'I rather fancy,' I says, says I, feeling my way, 'that he wants to sell her.' 'How much do 'ee ask, d'ye know?' says he, looking at the little dandy. 'I'm sure I can't answer that,' says I, 'but dessay he'll accept any reasonable offer.' Says he, 'May I view her?' 'Sartinly,' I says, says I. He thoroughly overhauled her inside and out, and then, says he, 'I believe I knows a customer for this here craft. Suppose you go and larn what the gentleman wants, and let me know. You'll find me at—' and here he names a public-house."

"Get what you can for her, Caudel," I answered; "the more the better for those to whom the money will go. For my part, as you know, I consider her as at the bottom, but since you've pulled her through I'll ask you to pack up certain articles which are on board; the cabin clock, the plate, my books," and I named a few other items of the little craft's internal furniture.

Well, he sat with me for half-an-hour talking over the dandy and our adventures, then left me, and I went into the town to make a few necessary purchases, missing the society of my darling as though I had lost my right arm; indeed, I felt so wretched without her that, declining the landlord's invitation to join a select circle of Penzance wits over whom he was in the habit of presiding in the evening in a smoking-room full of the vapour of tobacco and the steam of hot rum and whisky, I went to bed at nine o'clock, and may say that I did not sleep the less soundly for missing the heave of the ocean.

Next morning shortly after breakfast Frank arrived to drive me over to ——. Until we were clear of the town he could talk of nothing but Grace, how sweet she was, how exquisite her breeding, how gentle. All this was as it should be, and I heard him with delight.

"But I want you to understand, Herbert, that my conscience never could have suffered me to countenance this elopement but for Lady Amelia's efforts—underhand efforts I must say—to procure her niece's perversion."

"Oh, I quite understand that," I exclaimed.

"She informs me that both her father and mother were Protestants."

"That is so."

"We have a right then to assume, as I put it to her in talking the matter over last night, that were they living they would still be Protestants and would wish their child to remain in our Church. She herself has not the slightest leaning towards Roman Catholicism. Undoubtedly her aunt's conduct is without justification. She was to be rescued, as I understood from your letter from a species of persuasion which a girl of her years and temperament might not long be able to resist. The remedy lay in this elopement. I am sorry to have to say it; but the case is altogether a peculiar one; and I, Herbert, speaking as a clergyman, cannot find it in me to pronounce against you both."

"If an elopement had made a Roman Catholic of her, her aunt would have been willing," said I.

"No doubt, no doubt. Here," said he, putting the reins into my hands, "hold these for a moment or two, Herbert. You recollect that yesterday I pooh-poohed your opinion that a marriage at sea may be a lawful ceremony?"

He pulled out a pocket-book and searched it whilst he continued to talk.

"My wife's uncle was old Admiral Clements, and at his death a number of his books came to us. We were talking last evening about the marriage on board the *Carthusian*, when Sophie suddenly exclaimed, 'Frank, I believe I know where the record of a marriage at sea is to be found.' She sat pondering and puzzling awhile, then stepped to the bookcase and exclaimed, 'This will be it, I am sure.' She pulled out a volume of memoirs of Admiral Markham, and after hunting through it, read what I have here copied for your special behoof, Herbert. 'Bessie was Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the Dean of York, the Archbishop's third son. She was born August 28th, 1790. Josephine was the French young lady adopted by the Archbishop's family. Both girls were then seventeen and devotedly attached to each other. After the Archbishop's death they were not parted but lived with his widow. On August 30th, 1815, Bessie was married to a crusty old general named Rufane Donkin and was to go out to India with him. But she could not bear to be separated from her friend, so it was arranged that Josephine should accompany her. General Donkin was of a very jealous disposition and could not endure his wife liking anything or anybody but himself. On board the

ship he began to treat her young friend with discourtesy, and at last with such brutality that it excited the indignation of both captain and passengers. Among the latter there was a young officer, named Chadwick, whose pity for the forlorn girl grew into love. He entreated her to marry him that he might have the right to protect her. At last she consented, *and the marriage ceremony was performed during the voyage by Captain Haviside, the captain of the ship.*"

He replaced the pocket-book, took the reins from me, and we stared at each other.

"Well," said I, bestowing an exultant nod upon him, "that looks ship-shape enough, doesn't it? as Admiral Clements would have said."

"They were probably re-married," said he.

"That remains to be proved," I rejoined.

"It certainly shakes me in my views," he exclaimed. "Still, it seems truly iniquitous that unconsecrated hands—such a person as a ship's captain—should enjoy the privileges of a priest."

"He can christen."

"No!" he shouted.

This discussion was only terminated by our arrival at his house; the most delightful little parsonage that can be imagined: a snug, green, nestling box to the eye, yet quite equal to the requirements of the large family which this mild and happy couple bade fair to encumber themselves with. The church was within a short walk, an aged, ivy-clad structure, with many noble trees round about it, and a yard full of ancient, leaning indecipherable, memorial stones. Grace was awaiting our arrival that she might drive with Sophie to Penzance on her shopping errands. We embraced as though we had not met for years. I said to her:

"Now you are satisfied that you are my wife?"

"No," she cried, holding up her left hand from which she had removed the wedding-ring; then producing it from her pocket, she added, "Keep it till you can put it on properly."

This damped me, and my face showed some annoyance. I honestly believed her to be my wife, willing as I was that Frank should presently confirm the ceremony that Captain Parsons had performed, and her removal of the ring was a sort of shock to me, though, to be sure, my good sense told me that if there was any virtue whatever in our shipboard union it was not to be weakened by my carrying the ring instead of her wearing it.

She stood gazing at me in her loving, girlish way for a moment, then observing disappointment, slipped her fingers into my waistcoat pocket, pulled out the ring, and put it on again. I kissed her for that, and though Frank shook his head, Sophie said, "If Grace is really married, as I believe her to be after what Frank read, then she is perfectly in the right to do what her husband wishes."

But to make an end, seeing that but little more remains to be told. It was four days after our arrival at —— that I drove Grace over to Penzance to enable her to keep an appointment with her dressmaker. Caudel still hung about the quaint old town. He had sent me a rude, briny scrawl, half the words looking as though they had been smeared out by his little finger, and the others as if they had been written by his protruded tongue, in which he said, in spelling beyond expression wonderful, that he had brought the shipwright to terms, and wished to see me. I left Grace at the dressmaker's and walked to the address where Caudel said I should find him. He looked highly soaped and polished, his hair shone like his boots, and he wore a new coat, with several fathoms of spotted kerchief wound round about his throat.

After we had exchanged a few sentences of greeting and goodwill, he addressed me thus:

"Your honour gave me leave to do the best I could with the dandy. Well, Mr. Barclay, sir, this is what I've done and here's the money."

He thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers, which buttoned up square as a Dutchman's stern, after the fashion that is long likely to remain popular with men of the Caudel breed, and pulling out a large chamois leather bag, he extracted from it a quantity of banknotes, very worn, greasy and crumpled, and some sovereigns and shillings, which looked as if they had been stowed away in an old stocking since the beginning of the century. He surveyed me with a gaze of respectful triumph, perhaps watching for some expression of astonishment.

"How much have you there, Caudel?"

"You'll scarcely credit it, sir," said he, grinning.

"But how much, man, how much?"

"One hundred and seventy-three pounds, fourteen shillun', as I'm a man,"

cried he, smiting the table with his immense fist.

I smiled, for though I had bought the dandy cheap, she had cost me a very great deal more, by the time she was fit to go afloat in, than Caudel had received for her. But Grace was not to be kept waiting, and I rose.

"You will give what you think fair to the boy Bobby, Caudel."

He looked at me stupidly.

"Did not I tell you," said I, "that what the dandy fetched was to be yours, and that something of it was to go to the boy? As to those who deserted you, they may call upon me for their wages, but they'll get no more."

He seemed overwhelmed, and indeed his astonishment surprised me, for I had imagined my intentions with regard to the yacht were well known to him. I cut short the worthy fellow's thanks by assuring him that my gratitude for his services at Boulogne and for his behaviour throughout the whole delicate business was not to be expressed by five times the amount that lay upon the table; and then telling him to let me hear of him when Miss Bellassys and I were married and settled, and promising, should I ever go yachting again, to offer him the command of my vessel, I wrung his hand and ran out, pursued by twenty "God bless ye, sirs."

Grace and I returned to —— somewhere about four o'clock, having lunched at Penzance. We alighted at the vicarage and entered the fragrant little dining-room. My cousin and his wife were sitting waiting for us. Sophie, on our entrance, started up and cried: "Grace, here is a letter for you. I believe it is from your aunt."

My darling turned white, and I was sensible of growing very nearly as pale as she. Her hand trembled as she took the letter; she eyed me piteously, seemed to make an effort to break the envelope, then extending it to me said, "I dare not read it."

I instantly tore it open, read it to myself once, then aloud:

"Lady Amelia Roscoe begs to inform her niece that she washes her hands of her. She wishes never to see nor to hear of her again. So far as Lady Amelia Roscoe's consent goes, her niece is at liberty to do what she likes and go where

she likes. Any further communication which Lady Amelia's niece may require to make must be addressed to her ladyship's solicitors, Messrs. Fox & Wyndall, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"Thank Heaven!" I exclaimed, drawing the deepest breath I had ever fetched in my life.

"Now, Herbert, I am at your service," exclaimed Frank.

Grace was crying, and Sophie, giving her husband and me a reassuring look, with sisterly gentleness took my darling's arm, and led her out of the room.

Needless to say that in due course we were married, or rather let me say, re-married. But this said, the brief incident I have endeavoured to relate—the story of the elopement—ends. Down to this present moment of writing, however, I have been unable to find out whether I was or whether I was not legitimately, validly, lawfully, made a husband of by Captain Parsons. I have put the question to solicitors; I have written to shipowners and to shipbrokers, to captains and to mates, to shipping papers, and to a variety of marine authorities, such as dock superintendents, Board of Trade officials, and nautical assessors, but to no purpose. A great many "fancy" that a shipboard marriage is "all right," but nobody is certain. What have the readers of this narrative to say? Is there any one amongst them who can speak with authority? I submit that it is a point which ought to be settled. Legislation should put an end to doubt. Could I have felt sure on the subject, I should have been spared a great deal of anxiety. That marriages have taken place at sea is beyond question; the offspring of these unions must be numerous. Are they legitimate? Many colonials should feel concerned in the question, and I trust yet to receive some definite information on the matter one way or the other.

POSTSCRIPT

Since this story was written, I find that the Rev. Thomas Moore, Rector of All-hallows-the-Great, late Surrogate in the Diocese of Canterbury, in a useful

little work on the British and foreign laws of marriage, entitled, "How to be Married,"[1] writes of marriages on board merchant vessels, that "There is no statutory provision for these. But the requirements of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1854, Section 282, providing for their proper registration in the Diocesan Registry of London, assume that they may take place." In a letter addressed to the author, Mr. Moore says: "I may say, that to constitute the validity of such marriages, which I take for granted would be marriages of emergency, the presence of a clergyman or minister would not be required, and is not contemplated. It would be sufficient that the captain of the ship officiated and made a record of the marriage. He ought, however, to report it to the proper authority as soon as possible at the end of the voyage. Such marriages, though legal, are rare."

[1] Published by Griffith and Farran.

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