JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
'SWEETER THAN BLUE-EYED VIOLETS OR THE DAMASK ROSE'

That Bella Waldron should have felt sad, and her night's rest have been disturbed in consequence, was, in the circumstances, most natural. For one cannot suppose that any young girl leaves her home, her mother, and her country without much grief and perturbation; without tears and sorrow and heavy sighs, as well as tremendous fears that she may never return to, nor see, them again. And such is what Bella was about to do when this particular night should have come to an end: she was about to traverse not one ocean, but two; to pass from a life that, if not luxurious, was at least comfortable, to another which, if more brilliant, would undoubtedly be strange, and, consequently, not easily to be adopted at first. In fact, to go from one side of the world to the other.

Yet, all the same, it was singular that, between her intervals of weeping and sobbing, and when she had at last cried herself to sleep, she should have been tormented with such frightful

dreams as those which came to her. Dreams of horrors that in their weirdness became almost ludicrous, or would have been ludicrous to those who, knowing of them, did not happen to be experiencing them. Thus, the idea of a crocodile regarding one with a glittering eye from its ambush in the sand, seems for some reason, in our waking moments, to conjure up a comical sense of terror-perhaps because of the 'glittering eye'; yet there was nothing comical about it to the mind of Bella as she awoke with a shriek from her sleep after the vision of the creature had had momentary existence in the cells of her brain. And, even when she was thoroughly awakened and knew that she had only been suffering from a bad dream, she still shuddered at the recollection, and muttered, 'It appeared as if it was creeping towards me to seize me with its horrid jaws! Oh, it was dreadful!'

Then she slept again-only, however, to dream of other things. Of a desolate shore at first, with, upon it, a misty creature waving its hands mournfully above its head, those hands being enveloped in some gauzy material, so that the figure appeared more like a skirt-dancer than aught else; then, of two lions fighting savagely; and then of a vast black cave with an opening as high as St. Paul's and as wide as a railway terminus is long, against which, armed with a spear and protected with a buckler, she seemed to stand trembling. Trembling, too, because she could not see one yard into the deep and profound darkness before her, yet into which, as she peered furtively and with horror, she appeared to perceive things-forms half-animal and half-human-crawling,

revolving, creeping about. Then, again, she awoke with a start.

But by now the room was light with the gray, mournful glimmer of the approaching dawn; so light that she could see her wicker-basket trunks in their American-cloth wrappers standing by the wall, with the lids open against it; soon, too, she heard the sparrows twittering outside, as well as other congenial suburban sounds, such as the newspaper boys shrieking hideously to one another, and the milkman uttering piercing yells; and-though it was her last day in England-she was glad to spring out of bed and know herself once more a unit in the actual world instead of a wanderer in a world of dreams.

'I wish,' the girl muttered to herself, standing by the window and drawing up the blind half-way, whereby she was enabled to see that the gray dawn of a May morning gave promise of a warm, fine day later on, 'that, if I were to have such bad dreams at all, I might have been spared them on the very day of my departure for the other side of the globe. I am not superstitious, yet, yet-well! – I shall think of this dream, I know, for many a day to come.' Then she slipped on her dressing-gown, thrust her pretty little white feet into some warm, felt bath-slippers, and, opening her door quietly, because it was still early and she did not wish to awaken those in the house who might be asleep, she went across the passage to her mother's room.

Yet, ere she did so, let us regard this young girl, whose story and adventures we are now to follow-this girl whose dreams of leering crocodiles and dark, mystic caves, with hideous creatures

gyrating in them, will, as we shall see, be far outnumbered and outshone by the actual realities that she will experience in her passage across the world. For it had been resolved on by Fate, or Providence, or Destiny, or whatever one may term that power which controls our earthly existence, that to Bella Waldron were to come experiences, strange, horrible, and fantastic, such as the last decade of our expiring century rarely assaults men with, and women hardly ever. Standing there in the now clear light of the morning, her long dressing-gown enshrouding her tall, shapely, and *svelte* figure, and with her masses of hair hanging dishevelled-hair a warm brown with golden gleams in it, such as has the ripening corn-an observer would decide at once that she was beautiful. Beautiful, also, by the gift of clear, hazel-gray eyes-eyes that were pure and innocent in their glance; beautiful as well by her softly-rounded face, her rich red lips-the upper one divinely short-and also by her colouring. If, too, one applies to her the lines of that old poet dead and gone two hundred years ago, the words describing Gloriana: -

> More fair than the red morning's dawn,
> Sweeter than pearly dews that scent the lawn,
> Than blue-eyed violets, or the damask rose
> When in her hottest fragrancy she glows,

Bella Waldron may be considered as depicted.

'Mother,' she said, going in now to the room where the poor lady whom she addressed had herself passed a sad and tearful

night, bemoaning the fact that soon-in a few hours-indeed now-because the fateful day had come-her child was to be torn from her. 'Oh, mother! It is to-day-to-day! Oh, my darling! how can I part from you?' And then, folding her mother in her arms while she sat on the bedside, the two women wept together.

'Yet,' said Mrs. Waldron, to whom advancing years brought the power of philosophic resignation, if not the thorough strength to overcome that which rendered her unhappy, 'yet, Bella, my dearest, it is so much for you. Such a position, such a future! Oh, think of it! A position you could scarcely ever have hoped to obtain. And the love, my child, the love! Think how Gilbert loves you and you love him. For you do love him, Bella. Of all men, he is the one for you.'

'With my whole heart and soul I love him!' her daughter answered. 'Mother, if I had never met him I do not believe I could have ever loved any other man. Ah, I am glad Juliet called Romeo the god of her idolatry! It has taught me how to think of Gilbert.'

'And the position, Bella. The position-think of that! In our circumstances, even though you come of a good stock and are descended from ladies and gentlemen on both sides from far-off years, you could never have hoped to make such a match.'

'The position is nothing to me, mother. I love Gilbert fondly. I long to be his wife. Why should I think of the position?'

'Every woman must think of it, child. When you are as old-and worn-as I am, you-you will teach your own children to think of it. It is everything to be the wife of a gentleman, better still

the wife of a man of rank. Everything! Short of being the wife of a distinguished man, a man whose name is on everybody's tongue, there is no other position so good. And, even then, that distinguished man may not be a gentleman as well. That would be dreadful. Yet your husband will be both. Think, Bella! He is sure to become a nobleman, and he may become the most renowned admiral in the Navy.'

'You dear old mother! But I love Gilbert because he is Gilbert. Otherwise, neither the nobility which is certain, nor the renown which is prospective, would take me across the world to him. Do you think I would go to Bombay to marry the heir to a title or a possible admiral if I did not love him?'

'Heaven forbid!' Mrs. Waldron replied, as she sat up in her bed and smoothed her hair. 'Heaven forbid! Yet,' she murmured, perhaps a little weakly for a lady who had just delivered herself of such admirable sentiments, 'yet I do honestly think, darling, that the love you bear each other-yes! above all, the love-and the position-I must think of the position, Bella! – and the certainty of a brilliant future for you, reconcile me a little to parting with you. Some day, when you are a mother, you will understand me.'

'I understand you now, darling. Yet, yet-ah!' and now she sobbed on her mother's shoulder-'yet, to think of our being parted for so long-for three years! Gilbert must remain on the station for that length of time.' Now it is certain that Mrs. Waldron was sobbing too, yet, because there was something of the Spartan mother, something, too, of Cornelia, mother of the

Gracchi, about her, she calmed her sobs. For she, too, had been ruthlessly torn by an all-conquering lover, who would take no denial, from her parents, arms. Yet that lover had had no such proud future to offer her as the Gilbert of whom they spoke had to offer his beloved Arabella; for her there had been nothing to flavour her existence except the glorious spice tasted by us all-of loving and being loved. And now-now that she was what she called old-which was not the case, since she was still short of her forty-fifth year-now she knew-and, knowing, said-that love accompanied by brilliant prospects and an assured future was the most satisfactory of all loves.

'Your father,' Mrs. Waldron said, 'remained on his station, the Pacific, for seven years, and we were separated all that time. He there, I here, in London. And in lodgings, Bella-oh those lodgings and that cooking! – you remember, darling? You must remember the lodgings and the cooking, child though you were. And he was not a future peer, though he did once think he might become an admiral.'

'Forgive me, mother,' Bella said, kissing her mother again and again. 'I will not repine any more. I ought not to do so, I know. For is not my Gilbert the handsomest, bravest sailor that ever wore the Queen's uniform? And it won't be so long after all. Only-only-I do wish there wasn't that awful journey. Oh if there were only a bridge!' and for the first time she smiled. 'Or a railway,' she added.

'I am sure, Bella,' her mother said, forgetting how she would

feel that evening when her child was gone, and neither the bright voice nor brisk footsteps would be heard any more in the house, 'I am sure you cannot complain of the manner in which you are going out. The vessel may not be as comfortable as they say the great liners are, but at least your uncle is the captain, and it is his own ship. And that cabin he showed us yesterday, when we went down to Gravesend, is far better than anything you could get in any liner, even the best. I had one once, when I went out to join your father at Halifax, in which there was nowhere but the pockets of my clothes to keep things in, while the other lady above me could open the scuttle as she lay in her berth. And your cabin is as big as a dining-room, with a sofa-'

'You dear, darling mother!' Bella exclaimed. 'You are an angel to comfort me thus, when I know all the time that your heart is as sad as mine. Oh if we had not to part!' And again the two women hugged and kissed each other.

CHAPTER II
STEPHEN CHARKE

A year before this momentous day when Arabella Waldron was to set sail for India in her uncle's full-rigged ship, the Emperor of the Moon, there had come to her that supreme joy which is the most sweet experience of a young girl's life. The man she was madly in love with had asked her to be his wife, and, so far as it was possible to forecast the future, it seemed that before them both there stretched a long vista of happy years to be spent together, or as many years together as a sailor and his wife can pass during the greater part of their lives. Yet, who can foretell the future-even so much as what to-morrow may bring forth? To-day we are here, to-morrow we are gone. A bicycle accident has done for us, or we have caught a fever or pneumonia, and we are no more. How, then, was Bella to know that events would so shape themselves that, ere she had been a year engaged to her future husband, she would be on board the *Emperor of the Moon*, bound for the other side of the world, and that during her passage in the good old ship, named after an ancient play-a representation of which one of the late owners had witnessed in his boyhood-she would encounter such calamities and perils? But let us not anticipate. Rather, instead, let us describe who Bella was, and how she came to love and to be loved, to be wooed and won.

Our English girl! The girl fairly tall, and full to the brim with health; full, too, of a liking for all exercise which befits the dawning woman-for boating, riding, walking, cycling: not ashamed to acknowledge that she likes a good dance and that she has a good appetite for a ball supper; one who is, withal, not a fool! Where in all the world can you find anything better than that-better than the honest girls who have been our mothers, are our wives, and, please God, are what our daughters will be?

Such a one was Bella Waldron. She could take a scull-and pull it, too-as well as any of her sisters whom you shall meet 'twixt Richmond and Windsor; she could cycle thirty miles a day, eat a good dinner afterwards, and then go to a dance in the evening; and she thought nothing of walking from West Kensington to Piccadilly or Regent Street, with a glance at the Kensington High Street shops on her way! – especially when the winter remnant sales were on and advertised daily in glowing terms. Of riding she knew little, because horse-exercise is a more or less expensive luxury, and also because an income of £600 a year does not allow much in the way of luxuries, even when there are only two people in the family and two servants (with an odd boy) kept. And that sum represented Mrs. Waldron's income.

Bella's mother had been a Miss Pooley, who had married the late Commander Waldron (retired with the brevet rank of captain), and to this lady there remained only one near relative, besides Bella, at the time this veracious narrative opens. Now, this gentleman merits a slight description, not only because he

plays a considerable part in those adventures and tribulations which, later on, befell the girl, but also because he occupied a position almost unique and, consequently, conspicuous in these modern days. Fifty-nay, thirty years ago, there would not have been anything peculiar in the career he followed; but now, with the twentieth century close upon us, that career was almost a singular one.

Captain Pooley was a sea captain-a mercantile sea captain-owning two ships of his own, and always in command of one of them. That which he now commanded was the very *Emperor of the Moon* of which you have already heard, and of which, if you follow this narrative, you will hear a great deal more; the other was a brig called *Sophy*, which will not figure at all in these pages. Now Captain Pooley, as he was called by everybody, though, of course, he had no right whatever to that distinctive appellation, had as a young man possessed an extraordinary love for the sea, so intense a love, indeed, that he, not being able to obtain a nomination for the Royal Navy, had induced his father to apprentice him to the merchant service. Later in life-one must be brief in these preliminary descriptions! – he had, after obtaining all his certificates, purchased one after the other, with some little money he had inherited, shares in first the one ship and then the second, and eventually, by aid of savings and successful trading, had become the entire owner of both. For the rest-to be again brief-he was a gentleman in manner and in feelings, while in his person he was a handsome, burly man, with

the brightest of blue eyes, a vast shock of remarkably white hair above a good-looking, ruddy, tan-brown face; and was also the possessor of a smile which appeared more often than not upon his good-humoured countenance, and helped to make him welcome wherever he went, both at home and abroad. He was, it should be added, a married man, but childless, and it was not unusual for him to occasionally take his wife on the voyages he made for the purpose of transporting the goods which he sold in distant parts of the world, as well as for the purpose of purchasing other goods for sale in England. Otherwise, Mrs. Pooley remained at home in a pretty little villa at Blackheath, of which he owned a long lease.

It was a year before the great joy of Bella's life came to her that the 'captain,' returned from a voyage to Calcutta, and, as was always the case with him, he went to West Kensington to visit his sister and niece, accompanied by his wife. These visits were invariably paid, and also invariably returned by Mrs. and Miss Waldron, and were generally productive of a great deal of pleasure on either side. Captain Pooley-as we will continue to term him-was a kind-hearted, open-handed man, who loved his own kith and kin and cherished an old-fashioned notion-still in existence, Heaven be praised, amongst many members of various classes of society-that people should do as much as lay in their power to make their relatives happy. Wherefore, on this night, he said, as he took the head of Mrs. Waldron's table-which she always insisted on his doing whenever he stayed with her-and while he carved a pair of most excellent fowls:

'So I think we shall have a good time of it all round, Mary,'- Mary being Mrs. Waldron's name. 'To-night we will go to the Lyceum, and to-morrow-well, to-morrow-we'll see. Then, next week, Southsea. Southsea's the place for us. Great doings there next week, Bell. The visit of the foreign fleet now there will beat everything that has gone before.'

'But the expense, George!' exclaimed his sister. 'The expense will be terrible. I saw in the paper that everything would be at famine price.'

The captain pooh-poohed this remark, however, saying that an old friend of his, who had retired from the Royal Navy and was now living at that lively watering-place, knew of a little furnished house which could be obtained reasonably if taken for the following week, as well as for the principal one. And he clinched the remark by saying, 'And I have told him to secure it.' There was therefore nothing further to be said on that score, Bella alone remarking that she had the best old uncle and aunt that ever lived.

'There will be,' he continued, putting a slice of the breast upon her plate, probably as a reward for her observation, 'plenty to amuse Bella. There is a garden-party at Whale Island; another given by the General; and a ball given by the Navy at the Town Hall. That's the place for you, Bella. If you don't find a husband there-and you a sailor's daughter, too-well! – '

But these remarks were hushed by his wife, who told him not to tease the child, and by the beautiful rose blush which promptly

rushed to his niece's cheeks. Yet, all the same, Bella thought it very likely that she would have a good time of it.

They were playing *Madame Sans-Gêne* at the Lyceum that evening-though Pooley rather wished it had been something by Shakespeare-and on the road to the theatre in the cab he told them that he had taken another stall, to which he had invited a young friend of his whom he had run against in town a day or two ago.

'And a very good fellow, too,' he said, 'besides being a first-rate sailor. And he has had a pretty hard struggle of it, owing to his being cursed with a cross-grained old father, who seemed to imagine his son was only brought into the world that he might sit upon him in every way. All the same, though, Stephen Charke got to windward of him somehow.'

'Whoever is he, uncle?' Bella asked, interested in this story of the unknown person who was to make a fifth of their party; while her mother addressed a similar question to Mrs. Pooley.

'He is,' said the captain, 'a young man of about thirty, who once went to sea with me in the *Sophy*; the son of an old retired officer, who was years ago in a West Indian regiment. After petting and spoiling the boy, and-as Stephen Charke himself told me-almost treating him with deference because he happened to have been born his son, he afterwards endeavoured to exert a good deal of authority over him, which led to disagreeables. He wanted the lad to go in for the Army, and Stephen wanted to go to sea.'

'And got his way, apparently,' said Bella.

'He did,' her uncle replied, 'by absolutely running away to sea-just like a hero in a boy's book.'

'How lovely!' the girl exclaimed.

'Ha! humph!' said Pooley, rather doubtfully, he being a man who entirely disapproved of disobedience in any shape or form from a subordinate. 'Anyhow, his experiences weren't lovely at first. They don't take runaways in the best ships, you know. However, he stuck to it-he had burnt his boats as far as regards his father-and-well! – he holds a master's certificate now, and he's both a good sailor and a good fellow. He is in the Naval Reserve, too, and has had a year in a battleship.'

'And his father?' Mrs. Waldron asked. 'Are they reconciled?'

'The old man is dead, and Charke has three or four thousand or so, which makes him more or less independent. He's a queer fish in one way, and picks and chooses a good deal as to what kind of ship he will serve in. For instance, he won't go in a passenger steamer, because, he says, the mates are either treated with good-natured tolerance or snubbed by the travellers, and he aims at being an owner. However, as I said before, he's a good fellow.'

By this time the cab had forced its way along the Strand amidst hundreds of similar vehicles, many of which were disgorging their fares at the various other theatres, and at last, after receiving a gracious permission to pass from those autocratic masters of the public-the police stationed at the foot of Wellington Street-wrenched itself round and pulled up in its turn beneath the

portico of the theatre.

'There's Charke!' said Pooley, while, as he spoke, a rather tall, good-looking man of dark complexion, who was irreproachably attired in evening dress, came up to them and was duly introduced.

To Bella, whose knowledge of the world-outside the quiet, refined circle in which she had moved-was small, this man came more as a surprise than anything else. She knew nothing of the sea, although she was the daughter of an officer who had been in the Royal Navy, and her idea of what a 'mate' was like was probably derived from those she had seen on the Jersey or Boulogne packet-boats, when her mother and she had occasionally visited these and similar places in the out-of-town season. Yet Stephen Charke (she supposed because he was a gentleman's son, and also because of that year in a battleship as an officer of the R.N.R.) was not at all what she had expected. His quiet, well-bred tones as he addressed her-with, in their deep, ocean-acquired strength, that subtle inflexion which marks the difference between the gentleman and the man who is simply not bad-mannered-took her entirely by surprise; while the courteous manner in which he spoke, accompanied by something that proclaimed indubitably his acquaintance, not only with the world, but its best customs, helped to contribute to that surprise. So that, as they proceeded towards their stalls, she found herself reflecting on what a small acquaintance she had with things in general outside her rather limited circle of vision.

CHAPTER III
'LET THOSE LOVE NOW WHO NEVERLOVED BEFORE'

The 'captain' led the way into the five stalls he had booked, followed, of course, by the elder ladies, and, as Stephen Charke naturally went last, it fell out that Bella and he sat by each other. And between the acts, the intervals of which were quite long enough for sustained conversation to take place, the girl had time to find her interest in him, as well as her surprise, considerably increased. She had perused in her time a few novels dealing with the sea, and, in these, the mates of ships of whom she had read had more or less served to confirm her opinion, already slightly formed from real life. But, when Charke began to talk to her about the actual source from which the play they were witnessing was drawn, she acknowledged to herself that, somehow, she must have conceived a wrong impression of those seafarers. Certainly he, she thought, could not be one of the creatures who cursed and abused the men if they objected to their food, and threatened next to put them in irons; nor did she remember that such individuals had ever been depicted in sea stories as knowing much about the Revolution in France and the vulgar amusements of Napoleon.

Then, during the next interval, he approached the subject of the forthcoming festivities at Portsmouth, to which Bella's uncle

had told him he was going to take his relatives, and from that he glided off into the statement that he himself would be there.

'I am going down next Monday,' he said, 'to see one or two of my old mess-mates of the *Bacchus*-in which I served for a year in the Channel Squadron-and I fancy I shall be in at most of the functions. Have you ever been to a naval ball?'

Bella told him she never had been to one, her mother's intimacy with the Service having entirely ceased since Captain Waldron's death, and he then proceeded to give her an account of what these delightful functions were like. Indeed, so vividly did he portray them that Bella almost wished they were going on that very night to take part in one.

When the play was over, she-who acknowledged to herself that which probably no power on earth would have induced her to acknowledge so soon to any one else, namely, that Stephen Charke was an agreeable, if not a fascinating, companion-in company with the others prepared to return to West Kensington, bidding goodbye to him in the vestibule of the theatre.

'Where are you staying?' Mrs. Waldron asked him, as they stood on the steps waiting for their cab to make its appearance in turn. 'And are you in London for any time?'

Charke mentioned the name of a West End caravanserai, at which he had a room, as his abode for the next day or so, and by doing so he administered one more shock of surprise to the girl standing hooded and muffled by his side. For, again, in her ignorance, or perhaps owing to her reading of nautical

novels, she had always thought of the officers of merchant vessels as living somewhere in the purlieus of Ratcliffe Highway when ashore, and rarely penetrating farther west than the city itself. It seemed, however, that either she had formed a totally erroneous impression of such people, or that the above sources of information must be wrong if all were really like Mr. Charke. But then, suddenly, there occurred to her mind the fact that her uncle had said this young officer was in possession of some few thousand pounds of his own-and this, probably, would explain why he was living in a comfortable manner when he was ashore.

'I am at home to my friends every other Friday,' Mrs. Waldron said, as now the cab had got to the portico, and a man was bawling out 'Mrs. Pooley's carriage' at the top of his voice-which announcement, nevertheless, served the purpose required-'and the day after to-morrow happens to be one of those Fridays. If you care to call-though I know gentlemen despise such things-we shall be glad to see you.'

'I do not despise them,' Charke answered, 'and I shall be delighted to come.'

Then he bade them all good-night, saw the cab off, and strolled down to his hotel. In his innermost heart Charke did despise such things as 'at homes,' or 'tea fights,' as he termed them contemptuously to himself, yet, in common with a great many other men, he was willing enough to go to them when there was any attraction strong enough to draw him.

And he told himself that there was an attraction at Mrs.

Waldron's such as he had never been subjected to before.

'What a lovely girl,' he thought to himself; 'what eyes and hair-and a nice girl, too! Now I begin to understand why other men curse the sea, and say they would rather earn their living on shore driving busses than following our calling. And, also, why they nail up photographs in their cabins and watch every chance of getting mails off from the shore. I suppose I should have understood it earlier if I had ever met a girl like this.'

He did call on the following Friday, after having passed the intervening two days in wandering about London; in going to a race meeting one day and a cricket match at the Oval the next; in trying a dinner at one foreign restaurant on the Wednesday, and another at a second foreign restaurant on Thursday; but all the time he felt restless and unsettled, and wished that four o'clock on Friday was at hand.

'This won't do,' he said to himself, before the cricket match on Thursday was half over, and while he sat baking in the sun that streamed down on to the Oval-which disturbed him not at all, and had no power to make him any browner-'this won't do. I must go to sea at once. By the time I have seen that girl again I shall be head over ears in love with her. And the interest on £4000 in India Stock-by Jove! it isn't quite £4000 since I've been loafing about on shore! – and a chief officer's pay won't keep a wife. Not such a wife as she would be, anyway.'

He did not know it-or, perhaps, he did know it and would not acknowledge it to himself-but he was very nearly head over

ears in love with Bella Waldron already. And he had only seen her once-been by her side at a theatre for three hours-with three intervals of ten minutes in which to talk to her! Yet the girl's beauty, her gentle innocence, and above all, that trusting confidence with which she seemed to look out upon all that was passing before her, and to regard the world as what it appeared to be and to take it at its own valuation, had captured him. Still, he should have known-he must have known-that when a man who has never thought much of the women he has met heretofore, and has generally forgotten what their features were like by the next day, takes to lying awake for hours dreaming at last of one woman with whom he has by chance come into contact, he is as nearly in love with her as it is possible for him to be.

So, at least, those report who have been in love, and so it has been told to the writer of this narrative!

He made his way to Montmorency Road, West Kensington, exactly at four o'clock, and while he sat in the pretty drawing-room talking to Mrs. Waldron, who was alone at present-the appearance of Bella being promised by her mother in a few moments-he found himself wondering what the girl did with her life here. He had seen a bicycle in the passage as he was shown upstairs, so he supposed she rode that; while there were some photographs of rather good-looking men standing about on the semi-grand and on the plush-covered mantelshelf-which made him feel horribly annoyed, until Mrs. Waldron, seeing his glance fixed on them, informed him that they were mostly

cousins who were out of the country, and that one or two of them happened to have succumbed to various climatic disorders abroad, for which catastrophes he did not seem to feel as sorry as he supposed he ought to do. Then Bella came in, looking radiantly beautiful in a summer dress (a description of which masculine ignorance renders impossible), and Stephen Charke was happy for ten minutes. For they all talked of the impending *fêtes* at Portsmouth in honour of the foreign fleet, and Charke found himself in an Elysium when Bella promised him-without the slightest self-consciousness or false shame-that she would undoubtedly have some dances reserved for him.

Yet, soon, other callers came in, and Stephen Charke found himself deprived of the pleasure of further conversation with Bella. An elderly dowager claimed her attention, and a middle-aged lady-of, as he considered, menacing aspect-regaled him with the evil doings of her domestic servants, a subject of about as much interest to this wanderer of the seas as that of embroidery or tatting would have been. An Irish Doctor of Divinity also disturbed his meditations on Bella's beauty by telling funny stories, the point of which the divine had forgotten until he refreshed his memory by reference to a little note-book in which he had them all written down, while a young militia subaltern who had failed for the Army-and seemed rather proud of it! – irritated him beyond endurance. Yet, even through this fatuous individual, there came something that was welcome to him, since he saw Bella regarding the youth with a look of

scarcely veiled contempt, and he longed to tell the idiot that the only failure for which women have no pity in this world is that of the intellect.

'Goodbye,' he said to Bella, who accompanied him to the head of the stairs, after he had made his adieux to her mother. 'Goodbye. Next week-Portsmouth-and-my dances.'

'I shall not forget,' she said.

After which he wandered off by devious and intricate ways (which reminded him of some of the narrow passages he knew of between the islands in the China seas) and so arrived at the District Railway.

And all the time he was telling himself that he was a fool-an absolute fool. 'I have fallen in love with a girl I have only seen twice,' he meditated, as the train ran through the sulphurous regions underground, and he endeavoured to protect his lungs by smoking cigarette after cigarette; 'a girl who is not, and never can be, anything to me. She will make a good match some day; she must make a good match-girls of her position and looks always do; and, a year or two hence, I shall luff into some unearthly harbour abroad, and run against Pooley, who will tell me that she has done so.'

Yet, all the same, he took comfort from remembering that he had not seen anybody at Mrs. Waldron's 'afternoon' who was likely to be the individual to carry her off.

But, in spite of this soothing reflection, he braced himself to a stern resolution: he determined that, as already in his life he

had triumphed over other things, so he would triumph now. He would triumph over this swift-flowering and still growing love; conquer it by absence from the object which inspired it; trample it down till there was nothing left of life in it.

'I have no money to keep a wife,' he thought, as he walked up from Charing Cross Station to his hotel; 'certainly no money to keep such a wife as she would be. And, even if I had, it is not likely that she would marry me; "a common mate," as I have heard ourselves called. Portsmouth shall end it,' he concluded. 'I'll have one good week there, and then to sea again on a long cruise. That ought to do it! I'll go down to the docks to-morrow and see what's open.'

Wherefore, full of this determinate resolution to drive from out of him the frenzy which had taken possession of his heart and mind, he went to the hotel and read in his bedroom for an hour or so, during all of which time Bella Waldron's face was looking out at him from the pages of the *Navy and Army Illustrated*, and was always before him until he went forth to try still another foreign restaurant. Yet she was there too, and her pure, innocent eyes were gazing at him across the imitation flowers and the red candle-shades in the middle of the table; and so, also, they were in the stalls of the Empire, until he fell asleep in his seat. Nor was she absent from his mind during the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER IV
PORTSMOUTH *EN FÊTE*

The lunch at Whale Island was over, and there was a slight breathing-space ere the garden-party, which followed it, began. Meanwhile, from Southsea pier, from down by the pontoon at the foot of the old Hard, and over from Gosport, picket-boats, steam pinnaces, and launches-all belonging to Her Majesty's ships lying out at Spithead-were coming fast, as well as shore boats and numerous other craft that blackened the waters. And they bore in them a gaily-dressed crowd of men and women, the ladies being adorned in all those beauteous garments which they know so well how to assume on such an occasion; while, among the gentlemen, frock-coats, tall hats, and white waistcoats, as well as full dress, or 'No. 1' uniform, were the order of the day. For all these ship's-boats, after putting off from the battleships and cruisers to which they belonged, had, by order of the Vice-Admiral commanding the Channel Squadron, called at the above-named places to fetch off the visitors to the Whale Island festivities.

Stephen Charke, in the uniform of the R.N.R., came in the picket-boat of the *Bacchus*, wherein he had been lunching with the wardroom officers, and as she went alongside of Southsea pier, and afterwards at the Old Town pier, he had eagerly scanned the ladies who were waiting to be taken off. He was not, however,

particularly disappointed or cast down at not seeing the one girl he was looking out for at either of them, since, in the continual departure of similar boats, and the running backwards and forwards of these craft between Whale Island and the landing-stages, it was, of course, hardly to be supposed that she would happen upon the particular boat in which he was.

He saw her, however, directly he, with his companions, had made their way to the lawn on which the wife of the Port-Admiral was receiving her guests, and-in so seeing her-he recognised instantly that he was not going to enjoy his afternoon as much as he had hoped to do.

'Who's that?' he asked of the Staff-Commander of the *Bacchus*, with whom he happened to be walking at the moment. 'I mean that flag-lieutenant talking to the young lady in the white dress?'

'That?' replied his companion, regarding the young officer indicated. 'Oh, that's Gilbert Bampfyld, flag-lieutenant to the Rear-Admiral. He's a good chap; I'll introduce you later. A lucky fellow, too. He's heir to his uncle, Lord D'Abernon. He's all right,' he concluded inconsequently.

'I know the young lady,' Stephen said. 'I've been at sea with her uncle.'

'Good-looking,' said the Staff-Commander, who was a single man. 'Fine girl, too. I hope she's coming to the ball.'

'She is,' Charke replied, and then stood observing her companion from the little group of which they now formed part.

Certainly the young officer was 'all right,' if good looks and a manly figure can entitle any one to that qualification. He was undoubtedly handsome, with the manliness which women are stated (by authorities on such matters) to admire: his bright eyes and good complexion, as well as his clear-cut, regular features, leaving little else to desire. He was also fairly tall, while, if anything were required to set off his appearance, it was furnished by his full-dress and his flag-lieutenant's aiguillettes. He was talking now in an animated way, as Charke could see easily enough from where he stood by the refreshment tent; and it was not possible for him to doubt that he was making himself very interesting to Bella.

For a moment, Stephen stood hesitating as to whether he should go up and present himself to the girl who had never been out of his thoughts since he said 'goodbye' to her in West Kensington; then, while he still debated the matter in his mind, Bella saw him and smiled and nodded pleasantly, while she looked-as he thought-as though she expected he should come up to her. Which of course decided him.

There was no affectation in the manner wherewith Bella greeted him; in truth, she was glad to see him and, honestly, as she did everything else, she said so.

'I have been looking for you for the last half-hour,' she remarked, as he reached her side, 'and wondering if you were coming or not'; after which she introduced Stephen Charke and Gilbert Bampfyld to each other. Then, some other officers

coming up at this moment, more introductions took place, while Bampfyld said that he must move off.

'I have escaped from my Admiral for a few moments,' he said, while he added with a laugh: 'I am not quite sure, however, that he is not congratulating himself on having escaped from me. I hope, Miss Waldron,' he added, 'that you have an invitation for the ball?'

'Yes,' Bella said; and she smiled at Lieutenant Bampfyld's request that he might not be forgotten on that occasion, though she did not say positively whether that calamity would occur or not. Then, when he had moved on to join the distinguished officer to whom it was his duty to be attached almost as tightly as a limpet to a rock, she said to Charke, 'Come, now, and see mamma. She is in the shade behind the tent, and she has found an old friend of father's.'

But it was so evident that Mrs. Waldron was thoroughly enjoying herself with that old friend, who was a retired post-captain (she was, indeed, at the moment of their arrival engaged in reminiscences of the North American and West Indian stations), that they strolled away together, and, finding soon another shady seat, sat down and passed an agreeable hour or so. Wherefore, as you may thus see, Stephen Charke did spend a happy afternoon, notwithstanding that first apparition of the flag-lieutenant in converse with the girl who was now never out of his thoughts. Indeed, it would have been to him a perfect afternoon, had he not more than once seen Bampfyld (who again

appeared to have escaped from his Admiral!) roaming about the place with a somewhat disconsolate, as well as penetrating, look upon his face; which look Charke construed into meaning that the other was seeking for the girl of whom he himself had now obtained temporary possession. However, even so, he did not think it necessary to call Bella's attention to the fact. But we must not tarry over these soft summer beguilements to which the old naval capital and all in her had given themselves up. There lie other matters before us-matters which, when they afterwards occurred, caused three people now partaking of these enjoyments to, perhaps, cast back their memories, – memories that were not untinged by regret. Suffice it, therefore, that we hurry on, and passing over another garden-party which took place at the Military Commandant's, and an 'at home' given on board the foreign visitors, flagship, as well as entertainments at which only the male sex were present, we come to the Naval ball at the Town Hall.

That was a great night, a night on which, if one may judge by subsequent events, many loving hearts were made happy; on which, too, some saw the dawn of the first promise of future happiness-and one man, at least, was made unhappy. It was a great night! A night no more forgotten by three people in the days that followed it than was the garden-party which preceded it by a day or so.

The First Lord of the Admiralty led off the quadrille with the wife of the Commander-in-Chief, while the Prince who was

in command of the foreign fleet danced with the First Lord's wife; there being in that set, round which the other guests formed a vast circle, the most prominent individuals then present in Portsmouth. And Bella, standing close by with her hand upon the arm of Stephen Charke, while they waited for the first dance in which all the guests could participate, felt that, at last, she knew what a ball was.

'It isn't quite like a State Ball,' whispered Lieutenant Bampfyld to them as he passed by with his Admiral, he being qualified to give such information in consequence of his duties as flag-lieutenant having often given him the opportunity of attending those great functions, 'but it is much prettier.' Then he disappeared for a time.

'It could scarcely be prettier than it is,' Bella said to Charke. 'How has the room been made so beautiful?'

'The men of the *Vernon* have done it all,' her companion answered; 'they are good at that sort of thing.'

As, indeed, they seemed to be, judging by the effect they had produced. Trophies of arms, flags, devices, life-buoys white as snow, with the names of vessels belonging both to the visitors and ourselves painted in gold upon them, decorated the vast room; while, from the dockyard, had been unearthed old armour and weapons, such as, in these present days, are forgotten. Also the colour lent by various uniforms, naval, military, and marine, as well as by flowers and the bouquets carried by ladies, added to the brilliant scene-while the sombre black of civilians helped to

give a contrast to the bright hues. For civilians were not forgotten: Admiralty officials, private residents, special correspondents-with a wary eye on their watches, so that they might be able to rush over to the Post-office with their last messages for the great London and provincial papers-were all there.

'Come,' said Stephen Charke, as the band of the Royal Marines struck up the first waltz, 'come, Miss Waldron; it is our turn now.'

And for ten minutes he realised what happiness meant.

That he would have to resign her for the greater part of the evening, he knew very well-her programme was already full! – his name appearing three times on it, and Lieutenant Bampfyld's also three times-yet, later, he did so none the less willingly for that knowledge. How could he? He loved the girl with his whole heart and soul-madly! 'I shall love her always, until I die,' he muttered to himself as he stood by, seeking no other partner and watching her dancing now with the flag-lieutenant. Then, next, he saw her dancing with the flag-lieutenant of the other Admiral-though that did not seem to him to be so disturbing a matter. 'Till I die!' he repeated again; and then once more called himself a fool.

His second dance with her arrived, and once more he was in his seventh heaven; for the moment he was again supremely happy.

'I hope I may have the pleasure of taking you in to supper,' he almost whispered in her ear as they paused for a moment

for breath, and it seemed as if the light of his enjoyment-for that evening at least-had been suddenly extinguished when she, raising those sweet, clear eyes to his, exclaimed:

'Oh, I am so sorry! But I have promised Lieutenant Bampfyld that he shall do so.'

For the remainder of the ball Charke did not let a single dance pass by without taking part in it, and allowed his friends to introduce him right and left to any lady who happened to require a partner, though reserving, of course, the one for which he was engaged to Bella at what would be almost the end of the evening. In fact, as his friend the Staff-Commander said, 'he let himself go pretty considerably,' and he so far exemplified that gentleman's remark that he took in to supper one of the plainest of those middle-aged ladies who happened to be gracing the ball with their presence.

Yet this lady found nothing whatever to complain of to herself (to her friends she would have uttered no complaint of her cavalier, even though he had been as stupid as an owl and as dumb as a stone, she being a wary old campaigner), but, instead, thought him a charming companion. Perhaps, too, she had good reason to do so, since, from the moment he conducted her across the temporarily constructed bridge which led from the Town Hall proper to the supper tent erected in a vacant plot of ground, his conversation was full of smart sayings and pleasant, though occasionally sub-acid, remarks on things in general. Yet, naturally, it was impossible that she should know

that the undoubtedly bright and piquant conversation with which he entertained her was partly produced by his bitterness at seeing Gilbert Bampfyld and Bella enjoying themselves thoroughly at a table *à-deux* close by where he and his partner were seated, and partly by his stoical determination to 'let things go.' And by, also, another determination at which he had arrived-namely, to go to sea again at the very first moment he could find a ship.

CHAPTER V
'SO FAREWELL, HOPE!'

Nine months had passed since the entertainment of the foreign fleet at Portsmouth-months that had been pregnant with events concerning the three persons with whom this narrative deals; and Bella sat now, at the end of a dull March afternoon, in the pretty drawing-room in West Kensington. She sat there meditating deeply, since she happened to be alone at the moment, owing to Mrs. Waldron having gone out to pay several calls.

Of all who had been at those entertainments, of all in the party which, in the preceding June, had gathered together at Portsmouth, the three ladies of the family, Mrs. Waldron, Mrs. Pooley, and Bella, were alone in England; the three men-the three sailors-were all gone to different parts of the world. Captain Pooley had sailed with his vessel to Australia; Stephen Charke had gone to China as first officer of a large vessel; and Gilbert Bampfyld, who, in consequence of the Rear-Admiral's retirement, no longer wore the aiguillettes of a flag-lieutenant, had been appointed to the *Briseus*, on the East Indian station.

And Bella, sitting now in her arm-chair in front of the drawing-room fire, with a letter lying open on her lap before her, was thinking of the writer of that letter, as well as of all that it contained. If one glances at it as it lies there before her, much

may be gleaned of what has happened in those nine months; while perhaps, also, some idea, some light, may be gained of that which is to come.

'My Darling,' it commenced (and possibly the writer, far away, may have hoped that, as he wrote those words, they would be kissed as often by the person to whom they were addressed as he fondly desired), 'My Darling-Your letter came to me to-day, and I must write back to you at once-this very instant-not only because I want to put all my thoughts on paper, but also because I can thus catch the P. and O. mail. How good! how good you are! While, also, I do not forget how good your mother is. I know I ought not-at least I suppose I ought not-to ask you to do such a thing as come out to me, and I can assure you I hesitated for weeks before daring to do so. Yet, when I reflected that, if you could not bring yourself to come, as well as induce your mother to give her consent to your coming, we could not possibly be married for three years, I could not hesitate any longer. And now-now-oh, Bella, my darling! I could dance for joy if my cabin was big enough to allow of such a thing-you are coming! You will come! How happy we shall be! I can think of nothing else-nothing. You don't know how I feel, and it's useless for me to try to tell you…'

No more need be read of this letter, however, and, since the reader will shortly be informed of what led to it, nothing more need be said than that, after a good deal of explanation as to how the young lady to whom it was addressed was to make her plans

for reaching Bombay, it was signed 'Gilbert Bampfyld.'

So that one sees now what had been the outcome of that week of delight at Portsmouth during the last summer; one understands all that had been the result of those garden-parties and that ball.

They-the festivities-were followed by a renewal of the acquaintanceship between Mrs. Waldron and her daughter and Gilbert Bampfyld, as, indeed, the latter had quite made up his mind should be the case, and as-since the truth must always be spoken-Bella had hoped would happen. They were followed, that is to say, directly the naval man[oe]uvres were over, for which important function both divisions of the Channel Squadron were of course utilised, while not a week had elapsed from the time of the return of the ships to their stations before Gilbert Bampfyld presented himself in Montmorency Road. And that presentation of himself at this suburban retreat was, it is surely unnecessary to say, succeeded by many other things, all showing what was impending and what actually happened later on. Gilbert Bampfyld told Bella that he loved her and wanted her for his wife, and-well, one can imagine the rest. What was there to stand between those loving hearts? What? Nothing to impede their engagement, nothing that need have impeded their immediate marriage, except the fact that Bella's maiden modesty could never have been brought to consent to a union so hurriedly entered into as would have been necessary, had she agreed to become Gilbert's wife ere he set out for Bombay to join the *Briseus*, to which he was now appointed.

One regrets, however, when describing such soft and glowing incidents as these, that space is so circumscribed (owing to the canvas having to be filled with larger events now looming near) as to leave no room for more minute description of this love idyl. It would have been pleasant to have dwelt upon Bella's ecstatic joy at having been asked to be the wife of the one man-the first man-whose love she had ever desired (ah, that is it-to be the first man or the first girl who has ever touched the heart of him or her we worship); only it must not be-the reader's own imagination shall be asked to fill the missing description. Let those, therefore, who remember the earliest whispered word of love they ever spoke or had spoken to them; who recall still the first kiss they ever gave or took; and those who can remember, also, all the joy that came to them when first they loved and knew themselves beloved, fill the hiatus. That will suffice.

'We shall be so happy, dearest,' Gilbert said, when all preliminaries had been arranged in so far as their engagement was concerned, and when he did not know at the time that he was about to be sent on foreign service, but hoped that he would either be allowed to remain in the Channel Squadron or be transferred to the Training Squadron, or, at worst, appointed to the Mediterranean. 'We shall be so happy, darling. I hoped from the first to win you-though-though sometimes I feared there might be some one else.'

'There could never have been any one else. Never, after I had once met you,' she murmured. 'Oh, Gilbert!' and then she, too,

said she was so happy. Yet a moment later she whispered: 'But, somehow, it seems too good to be true. All has come so easily in the way that I-well, as we-desired, that sometimes I think there may be-that something may arise to-to-'

'What-prevent our marriage? Nothing can do that. Nothing could have done that-nothing!'

'Suppose your uncle, Lord D'Abernon, had objected?' she said, remembering that she had heard how this nobleman was not always given to making things quite as easy and comfortable to those by whom he was surrounded as was considered desirable. 'Suppose that had happened?'

'Oh, he's all right,' Gilbert replied. 'He expected his opinion to be asked and his consent obtained, and all that sort of thing, but, outside that, he's satisfied. And if he wasn't, it wouldn't have made any difference to me-after I had once seen you.' For which remark he was rewarded with one of those chaste salutes which Bella had learnt by now to bestow without too much diffidence. As regards Mrs. Waldron-well, she was a mother, and it was not to be supposed that such a distinguished match as Bella was about to make could be aught but satisfactory to her; while Captain Pooley, who had not yet departed with the *Emperor of the Moon* for Australia, told his niece that she was a lucky girl. He also informed Gilbert that, as he was a childless man, Bella would eventually fall heiress to anything he and his wife might leave behind them. Matters looked, therefore, as though they would all go merry as the proverbial marriage bell. All, as the old

romancists used to say, was very well.

Then fell the first blow-the one that was to separate those two fond hearts. Gilbert was suddenly appointed to the *Briseus* and ordered to proceed to Bombay to join her at once, and a fortnight later he was gone, and poor Bella was left behind lamenting.

She was sitting, lamenting still, before her fire on this March day, with this newly-arrived letter on her lap-in solemn truth, she had been lamenting his departure ever since it had taken place-when, suddenly, there broke in upon her ears the sound of a visitor's knock below. Then, ere she could distinguish whose voice was addressing the servant who had answered the door, she heard a manly footstep on the stairs, and, a moment later, the maidservant announced: 'Mr. Charke.' Mr. Charke! the man whose memory had almost faded from her mind-as she had reproached herself for more than once, when it did happen to recur to her-the man whom she had learnt to like so much during all that happy time last year. Now, as she gazed on him, and noticed how brown he was as he came forward-more deeply browned, indeed, than she had thought it possible for him, who was already so tanned and sunburnt, to be-and noticed, too, the strong, self-reliant look on his face, she reproached herself again. She acknowledged, also, that she had liked him so much that even her new-found happiness ought not to have driven all recollection of him entirely from her mind.

Then she greeted him warmly, saying all the pleasant little words of welcome that a woman whose heart goes in unison with

her good breeding knows how to say; and made him welcome. Yet, as she did so, she observed that he was graver, more sad, it seemed to her, than she had ever remarked before.

'You are not ill?' she asked, as this fact became more and more apparent to her. 'Surely, you, a sailor, have not come back from the sea unwell? At least I hope not.'

'No,' he said, 'no. Nor, I hope, do I seem so. Do you know that, besides any desire to call and see you, I came for another purpose?' and now his eyes rested on her with so strange a light-so mournful, deep a light-that in a moment her woman's instinct told her what he meant as plainly as though his voice had done so.

Like a flash of lightning, that instinct revealed to her the fact that this man loved her; that, from the moment they had parted, months ago, she had never been absent from his mind. She knew it; she was certain she was right-she could not be deceived! Then to herself she said: 'Heaven help him-Heaven prevent him from telling me so.'

But aloud, her heart full of pity, she said: 'Indeed,' and smiled bravely on him while she spoke. 'Indeed, what was that purpose?'

'To congratulate you. To-

'Congratulate me!'

'Yes. I met the *Emperor of the Moon* at Capetown. We were both homeward bound. And-and-your uncle told me the news. I offer my congratulations now.' Yet, as he said the words, she saw that his face was turned a little aside so that she could not perceive his eyes. Congratulations! Well, they might be sincere

in so far as that, because he loved her, he wished her well and desired that she should be happy, but-but-otherwise-no! it was not to be thought upon.

As he said the words: 'I congratulate you,' he followed an old custom-one more foreign than English-and held out his hand, taking hers. And he kept it, too, fast in his own, while he said in the voice that his struggles with the elements had made so deep and sonorous:

'Yes, I congratulate you. I must do that. To-to-see you happy-to know you are so, is all that I have-all-I hope for now. Yet there is no treachery to him in what I say. Heaven help me! I mean none-but-but-I-from the first-I have lo-'

'No, no,' she murmured, striving to withdraw her hand, yet not doing so angrily. 'No, no. Don't say it, Mr. Charke. Don't, pray don't.' And, now, neither could he see her eyes nor her averted face. 'Don't say it. You do not desire to make me unhappy?' she murmured.

'Never, as God hears me. But-I have said it. I had to say it. Goodbye.'

'Goodbye,' she said-and then, as he neared the door, she turned once and looked at him with eyes that were full of intense pity and compassion.

CHAPTER VI
'AND BEND THE GALLANT MAST, MY BOYS'

Events are now drawing near to that night when Bella was to have those distressing dreams which have been mentioned at the opening of this narrative; all was arranged for her departure to Bombay. A little more, and she will be on her way to India and to wedlock.

Yet all had not been quite easy and smooth in the settlement of affairs. At first, Mrs. Waldron, good, loving mother though she was, and fully cognisant of the facts-namely, that Bella loved Lieutenant Bampfyld madly and would be an unhappy woman if she did not become his wife long ere three years had passed, and that the match which her child was about to make was undoubtedly a brilliant one-refused to hear of such a thing as that she should go out to him.

'If you are worth having,' she said, when first the proposal was submitted to her, 'you are surely worth coming for.' And, since this was a truism, it was hardly to be gainsaid. Yet, as we know by now, she had been won over by her daughter's pleadings and entreaties; by, too, the plain and undeniable fact that there was not the slightest possibility of Lieutenant Bampfyld being able to come home to marry her, or to return to England in any way-

short of being invalided-until the *Briseus* herself returned.

Then, no sooner had this difficulty been surmounted than another reared its head before mother and daughter. How was she to go out to Bombay alone and unprotected? A young married woman, who had to proceed to India to join her husband, might very well undertake such a journey, but not a young single woman such as Bella was, while for chaperon or protectress there was no one forthcoming. At first, it is true, Mrs. Waldron had meditated accompanying Bella herself (she being an old sailor, to whom long sea voyages were little more than railway journeys are to some more stay-at-home ladies); only, down in the depths of her nature, which was an extremely refined one, there was some voice whispering to her that it would be indelicate to thus bring her daughter out in pursuit of her affianced husband. It is true, however, that authorities on social etiquette who have since been consulted have averred that this was a false feeling which was in possession of Mrs. Waldron's mind; but be that as it may, it existed. Then, too, she still regarded the matter of her child going to her future husband, instead of that husband coming to fetch her, as one of particular delicacy; one of such nicety as to permit of no elaboration; and she resolved that, come what might-even though she should have to purchase, or hire rather, the services of an elderly and austere travelling companion-she must not herself accompany Bella.

'Heaven knows what is to be done,' she said to her daughter, as they discussed the important point, 'but I suppose it will

come to that'; the 'that' meaning the hired chaperon. Then she sighed a little, remembering how the late Captain Waldron had encompassed thousands of miles in a voyage which he made from the Antipodes to espouse her.

Yet, ere many days had passed, the clouds of obstruction were suddenly removed in a manner which seemed almost-as the fond mother stated-providential. Captain Pooley's ship had followed home, after a week or so of interval, that in which Stephen Charke had returned to England, and its arrival was soon succeeded by his own in Montmorency Road.

'Going out to him to be married!' he exclaimed, after his sister-who happened to be alone at the time of his visit-had made him acquainted with what she had given her consent to some two or three months before, on Gilbert's application backed up by Bella's supplications, and which consent she had moaned over inwardly ever since she had so given it. 'Going out to be married, eh? Why, she must want a husband badly!' Yet, because he knew well enough the customs of Her Majesty's service and the impossibility which prevailed in that service of an officer coming home to marry his bride, he did not repeat her words, 'If she is worth having, she is worth coming for.'

'So other people have thought, if they have not openly said so,' Mrs. Waldron replied. 'I am sure they must have thought so. Yet,' she went on, with determination, 'I have agreed to it, and I cannot retract my word. It is given, and must be kept. No, it is not that which troubles me.'

'What, then?'

'Why, the getting out. How is the child to go alone, in a great liner, with two or three hundred passengers, all the way to Bombay? How?' she repeated.

'Bombay, eh? Bombay. Oh, well, if that's her destination, she can go comfortably enough. There need be no trouble about that. Only she will be more than double the time the P. and O., or any other line, would take to carry her.'

'What do you mean, George?'

'Why,' he said, 'I happen to be taking the old *Emperor* to Bombay next month with a general cargo-calling at the Cape on the way. She can go with me, and welcome. There's a cabin fit for a duchess which she can have.'

* * * * * *

It was a cabin fit for a duchess, as Bella and her mother acknowledged when, a fortnight later, they went down to Gravesend to inspect the *Emperor of the Moon*, and after it had been decided in solemn family conclave that, by this ship, the former should make the voyage to India. And it was more than likely that the girl would make it under particularly pleasant circumstances, since this was one of those occasions on which Mrs. Pooley had decided to accompany her husband, she not having felt very well during the past winter. At present, the cabin was empty and denuded of everything, Pooley having decided to have it refurnished; but when he told them how that furniture would be arranged in the great roomy place, which would have

been dignified as a 'state-room' in one of the old clippers, Bella said again, as she had said so often before, that 'he was the best old uncle in the world.'

Now the *Emperor of the Moon* was a smart, though old-fashioned, full-rigged ship of about six hundred tons, her lines being perfect, while leaving her full of room inside. Her saloon was a comfortable one, well furnished with plush-covered chairs and benches-the covering being quite new; a piano-also looking new-was lashed to the stem of the mizzen-mast, while there were swinging vases, in which, no doubt, fresh ferns and flowers would be placed later. On deck she was very clean and white, with much brass and everything neat and shipshape, while the seaman who should regard her bows and stern would at once acknowledge that she left little to desire, old as she was. For, in the days when she was laid, they built ships with a view to both sea qualities and comfort, and the *Emperor of the Moon* lacked neither. Her sleeping-cabins were bedrooms, her saloon was a dining-room as good as you would find in a fifty-pound-a-year suburban residence, and her masts would have done credit to one of Her Majesty's earlier ships.

Altogether, Bella was pleased with everything, especially with her cabin, which was on the port side of the saloon, and she was, besides, pleasantly excited at the idea of so long a sailing voyage.

'I know,' she said to her uncle, 'that we shall have a delightful time of it, and for companionship I shall have you and auntie. That's enough.'

'You will have some one else, too,' Pooley said, with a smile; 'you know I have two officers. Come'-and again he smiled-'it is our "lay days,"' by which he meant that they were shipping their cargo. 'Come, I will introduce them to you.' Then he led the way up the companion to the deck.

They met one of these officers, the second mate, a young man whom Pooley introduced as Mr. Fagg, and then, while they were all talking together, Bella heard a deep, low voice behind her say: 'How do you do, Miss Waldron?' A voice that caused her to start as she turned round to find herself face to face with Stephen Charke.

'You!' she exclaimed involuntarily. 'You! Are you going on this voyage?'

'I am first officer,' he said. 'I wanted a berth, and Captain Pooley has given me one.' And amidst her uncle's joyous laughter and his remark that he knew this would be a pleasant surprise for Bella, and while, too, Mrs. Waldron said that she was delighted to think he would be in the ship to look after her daughter, that daughter had time to think herself-to reflect.

In her heart, she would far rather that Charke had not been here; while she wondered, too, how he could have brought himself to accept his present position, knowing, as he must have known, that she was going in the ship.

'It is so vain, so useless,' she thought; 'and can only lead to discomfort. We shall both feel embarrassed all the way. Oh, I wish he were not coming!' Then, although she pitied him, and

although she had always liked him, she resolved that, through the whole of the time they were together in the ship, she would see as little of Stephen Charke as possible.

'You do not object to my presence, I hope?' he said a moment later, as they both stood by the capstan alone-Pooley and his wife and sister having moved off forward. 'I should be sorry to think that my being here was disagreeable to you. I have to earn my living, you know.'

'What right could I have to object, Mr. Charke?'

'Perhaps you think I have behaved indiscreetly?'

For a moment she let her eyes fall on him and rest upon his own; then she said: 'I will not give any opinion. You have to earn your living, as you say; while as for me-well, you know what I am going to India for.'

'Yes,' he answered. 'I do know.' After which he added: 'Do not be under any wrong impression. I shall not annoy you. I am the chief officer of this ship and you are a passenger. That is, I understand, how the voyage is to be made?'

'If you please,' Bella replied very softly, and the tones of her voice might well have brought some comfort to him, if anything short of the possession of her love could have done so.

A fortnight or three weeks later the pilot had left the *Emperor of the Moon*, the lee main braces were manned, the ship was lying over under her canvas, the wind was well astern. Bella was on her way to India and her lover!

Let us pass over this parting between mother and child,

the fond embraces, the tears and sobs which accompanied that parting following after the dawn when we first made the girl's acquaintance, and following, too, that night of unrest and disturbing dreams. No description of such partings is necessary; many of us, young and old, men and women, have had to make them; to part from the loved, gray-haired mother who has sobbed on our breast ere we went forth to find our livelihood, if not our fortune, in a strange world; many of us have had to let the child of our longings and our hopes and prayers go forth from us who have sheltered and nurtured it-from us who have perhaps prayed God night and day that, in His mercy, it might never leave our side. We go away ourselves because we must; also they go from us because they must; and there is nothing but the same hope left in all our hearts-the hope that we shall not be forgotten-that, as the years roll by, those we have left behind will keep a warm spot for us in their memory, or that those who have left us behind will sometimes turn their thoughts back longingly to us in our desolation. It has to be, and it has to be borne; alas, that parting is the penalty we all have to pay for having ever been permitted to be together.

And, so, across the seas, the stout old *Emperor of the Moon* went; buffeting with the Channel, throwing aside the rough waves with her forefoot as though she despised them, sinking England and home behind her with every plunge she made.

And at the moment that she was leaving the Lizard far away astern of her, and was running well out into the Atlantic, a

telegram was delivered in Montmorency Road addressed to Bella, which was opened by her mother. A telegram signed 'Gilbert,' which ran: 'Don't start. *Briseus* appointed to East Coast Africa, slaver catching.' A telegram that had come three days too late! A telegram that was re-forwarded to Capetown, where it lay for forty-seven days awaiting the arrival of the *Emperor of the Moon*, and, then, – was forgotten!

CHAPTER VII
'AN OCEAN WAIF'

From the time the men had sheeted home the topsails as the *Emperor of the Moon* got under way until now when, having left the Cape of Good Hope behind her, she was travelling through the water at a very fair speed and with her head set due north, scarcely anything had occurred much worthy of note. Soon-after the first two days had passed, during which time Bella had lain flat in her berth in the large roomy cabin provided for her by her uncle, while his wife had administered to her odd glasses of champagne, little cups of rich, succulent soup, and such like delicacies-the girl was able to reach the deck. And, once there and under an awning stretched from the ensign staff to past the mizzen-mast, she would sit and meditate for hours on the forthcoming meeting with her lover which was drawing nearer and nearer with each plunge of the Emperor's forefoot into the sapphire sea. Sometimes, too, she would read aloud a novel to Mrs. Pooley, who, perhaps because she was good and motherly, and fat, would listen to nothing but the most romantic love-stories which the vivid brains of fashionable novelists could turn out; though, when alone, and reading for her own amusement, Bella would pore over books of adventure in wild parts of the world, or devour some of the histories of marine voyages which her uncle

possessed in his neat mahogany bookcases below.

Of Stephen Charke she saw, of course, a good deal, as it was natural she should do. You cannot be in a ship, however large or small, without seeing much of all on board; but when it comes to sitting down every twenty-four hours to what Captain Pooley called 'four square meals a day, with intervals between for refreshments,' you must not only be brought into constant touch with your companions, but also enter into much discourse with them. Yet, as the girl told herself, Charke was behaving well, extremely well; so that, gradually, she lost all sense of discomfort that would otherwise have arisen through being thrown continuously into his society, and, ere long, she would observe his approach without the slightest tremor of susceptibility. Soon, too, she began to acknowledge to herself that Stephen was a gentleman in his feelings, and that, no matter what his sentiments might be towards her-if they existed still and were unchanged from what they had once been-he at least knew how to exercise that control over them which a gentleman should be capable of. Until now, he had never said one word to her that any other person might not have uttered who had found himself thrown into her society on board the *Emperor of the Moon*, nor had he unduly sought her presence or, being in it, endeavoured to remain there as long as it was possible.

Nothing of much note had occurred thus far on the voyage, it has been said; yet there had of course been some of those incidents without which no voyage of any distance is ever made.

Once through the Bay, and, while they ran swiftly south, they had found themselves in a dense fog-a most unusual thing in such a latitude and at such a time of year; then, upon the top of that fog, there had sprung up a stiff breeze which gradually developed into a gale, so that, from clewing the main royal to furling the top-gallant sails of the mizzen and foremasts was but the action of a moment, as was the next work of taking in the main top-gallant sail. And thus, ere long, Bella had her first experience of what a storm at sea was like, and, as she heard the live stock grunting and squealing forward; the ship's furniture more or less thundering about wherever it could get loose; the piano-on which, only the night before, she had played the accompaniment to her uncle's deep bass voice as he trolled out 'In Cellar Cool'-thumping heavily against the bulkhead to which it was usually lashed, and the cries of the sailors as they uttered words which might not, perhaps, be properly denominated as 'cries, alone, she began to wonder how her darling Gilbert could ever have chosen such a calling. While, too, the streaming planks when, at last, she ventured on deck, the dull sepia clouds and the mournful look of the Emperor herself, under reefed topsails, foresail, fore topmast staysail, main trysail and spanker, as she rolled and yawed about in the troughs and hollows of the sea, and took the water first over one bow and then over another-and then, for a change, over her stem-only increased that wonder.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.