FULLER ANNA

A BOOKFUL OF GIRLS

Anna Fuller
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Содержание

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Blythe Halliday's Voyage

CHAPTER I
THE CROW'S NEST

"You never told me how you happened to name her Blythe."

The two old friends, Mr. John DeWitt and Mrs. Halliday, were reclining side by side in their steamer-chairs, lulled into a quiescent mood by the gentle, scarcely perceptible, motion of the vessel. It was an exertion to speak, and Mrs. Halliday replied evasively, "Do you like the name?"

"For Blythe, – yes. But I don't know another girl who could carry it off so well. Tell me how it happened."

Then Blythe's mother reluctantly gathered herself together for a serious effort, and said: "It was the old Scotch nurse who did it. She called her 'a blythe lassie' before she was three days old. We had been hesitating between Lucretia for Charles's mother and Hannah for mine, and we compromised on Blythe!"

Upon which the speaker, allowing her eyes to close

definitively, took on the appearance of gentle inanition which characterised nine-tenths of her fellow-voyagers, ranged side by side in their steamer-chairs along the deck.

They had passed the Azores, that lovely May morning, and were headed for Cape St. Vincent, – the good old *Lorelei* lounging along at her easiest gait, the which is also her rapidest. For there is nothing more deceptive than a steamer's behaviour on a calm day when the sea offers no perceptible resistance to the keel.

Here and there an insatiable novel-reader held a paper-covered volume before his nose, but more often the book had slid to the deck, to be picked up by Gustav, the prince of deck-stewards, and carefully tucked in among the wraps of the unconscious owner.

Just now, however, Gustav was enjoying a moment of unaccustomed respite from activity, for his most exacting beneficiaries were not sufficiently awake to demand a service of him. He had administered *bouillon* and lemonade and cracked ice by the gallon; he had scattered sandwiches and ginger cookies broadcast among them; he had tenderly inquired of the invalids, "'Ow you feel?" and had cheerfully pronounced them, one and all, to be "mush besser"; and now he himself was, for a fleeting moment, the centre of interest in the one tiny eddy of animation on the whole length of the deck.

Just aft of the awning, in the full sunshine, he was engaged in "posing," with the sheepish air of a person having his photograph

taken, while a fresh, comely girl of sixteen stood, kodak in hand, waiting for his attitude to relax. Half a dozen spectators, elderly men and small boys, stood about making facetious remarks, but Gustav and his youthful "operator" were too much in earnest to pay them much heed.

Blythe Halliday was usually very much in earnest; by which is not to be inferred that she was of an alarmingly serious cast of mind. Her earnestness took the form of intense satisfaction in the matter in hand, whatever that might be, and she had found life a succession of delightful experiences, of which this one of an ocean voyage was perhaps the most delectable of all.

In one particular Blythe totally disagreed with her mother; for Mrs. Halliday had declared, on one of the first universally unbecoming days of the voyage, that it was a mystery how all the agreeable people got to Europe, since so few of them were ever to be discovered on an ocean steamer! Whereas Blythe, for her part, had never dreamed that there were so many interesting persons in the world as were to be discovered among their fellow-voyagers.

Was not the big, bluff Captain himself, with his unfathomable sea-craft and his autocratic power, a regular old Viking such as you might read of in your history books, but would hardly expect to meet with in the flesh? And was there not a real Italian Count, elderly but impressive, who had dealings with no one but his valet, the latter being a nimble personage with a wicked eye who seemed to possess the faculty of starting up through the deck as

if summoned by a species of wireless telegraphy? Best of all, was not Blythe's opposite neighbour at the Captain's table a shaggy, keen-eyed Englishman, figuring on the passenger-list as "Mr. Grey," but who was generally believed to be no less a personage than Hugh Dalton, the famous poet, travelling incognito?

This latter gentleman was more approachable than the Count, and had taken occasion to tell Blythe some very wonderful tales, besides still further endearing himself to her by listening with flattering attention to such narratives as she was pleased to relate for his benefit. Indeed, they were rapidly becoming fast friends and she was seriously contemplating a snap-shot at his expense.

Mr. Grey, meanwhile, had joined the group in the sunshine, where he stood, pipe in mouth, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his reefer, regarding Gustav's awkwardness with kindly amusement.

"There they go, those energetic young persons!" Mr. De Witt observed, a few minutes later, as Blythe and the Englishman walked past, in search of the Captain, whom Mr. Grey had suggested as the next subject for photographic prowess. "Do you suppose that really is Dalton?"

Mr. De Witt spoke with entire disregard of the fact that Mrs. Halliday appeared to be slumbering tranquilly. And indeed an interrupted nap is so easily made good on shipboard that Blythe used sometimes to beg her mother to try and "fall awake" for a minute!

On this occasion, as she walked past with the alleged poet,

she remarked: “Even Mr. De Witt can’t keep Mamma awake on shipboard, and she isn’t a bit of a sleepy person on dry land.”

By way of response, Mr. Grey turned to contemplate the line of steamer-chairs, billowy with voluminous wraps, saying: “Doesn’t the deck look like a sea becalmed? See! Those are the waves, too lazy to break!”

“How funny the ocean would look if the waves forgot to turn over!” Blythe exclaimed, glancing across the gently undulating surface of the sea. “I don’t suppose they’ve kept still one single instant in millions of years!”

“Not since the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” her companion returned, with quiet emphasis; and Blythe felt surer than ever that he really was the great poet whom people believed him to be.

A moment later they had stormed the bridge, where they two, of all the ship’s company, were pretty sure of a welcome. They found the Captain standing, with his sextant at his eye, the four gold stripes on his sleeve gleaming gaily in the sunshine. Evidently things were going right, for the visitors and their daring proposal were most graciously received.

The fine old sea-dog stood like a man to be shot at; and as Blythe faced him, kodak in hand, the breeze playing pranks with her hair and blowing her golf-cape straight back from her shoulders, it was all so exhilarating that before she knew it she had turned her little camera upon the supposed Hugh Dalton himself, who made an absurd grimace and told her to “let her

go!"

It was always a delightful experience for Blythe to stand on the bridge and watch the ship's officers at their wonderful work of guiding the great sea-monster across the pathless deep. Here was the brain of the ship, as Mr. Grey had once pointed out, and to-day, when a sailor suddenly appeared above the gangway and, touching his hat, received a curt order, – "That is one of the nerves of the vessel," her companion said. "It carries the message of the brain to the furthest parts of the body."

"And I suppose the eyes are up there," Blythe returned, glancing at the "crow's nest," half-way up the great forward mast, where the two lookouts were keeping their steady watch.

"Yes," he rejoined, "that must be why they always have a pair of them, – so as to get a proper focus. *Nicht wahr, Herr Capitän?*"

And the little fiction was explained to the Captain, who grew more genial than ever under the stimulus of such agreeable conversation.

"*Ja wohl!*" he agreed, heartily; "*Ja wohl!*" – which was really quite an outburst of eloquence for Captain Seemann.

"If I couldn't be captain," Blythe announced, "I think I should choose to be lookout."

"How is dat?" the Captain inquired.

"It must be the best place of all, away up above everything and everybody."

"And you would like to go up dare?"

"Of course I should!"

"And you would not be afraid?"

"Not I!"

Upon which the Captain, in high good-humour, declared, "I belief you!"

After that he fell to speaking German with Mr. Grey, and Blythe moved to the end of the bridge, and stood looking down upon the steerage passengers, where they were disporting themselves in the sun on the lower deck.

They were a motley crew, and she never tired of watching them, as they sat about in picturesque groups, singing or playing games, or lay stretched on the deck, fast asleep.

Somewhat apart from the others was a woman with a little girl whom Blythe had not before observed. The child lay on a bright shawl, her head against the woman's knee, her dark Italian eyes gazing straight up into the luminous blue of the sky. There was a curiously high-bred look in the pale features, young and unformed as they were, and Blythe wondered how such a child as that came to belong to the stout, middle-aged woman who did not herself seem altogether out of place in the rough steerage.

At this point in her meditations, a quiet, matter-of-fact voice struck her ear, and, turning, she found that Mr. Grey had come up behind her.

"The Captain says he will have the 'crow's nest' lowered and let you go up in it if you like," was the startling announcement which roused her from her revery.

"Oh, you are making fun!" she protested.

"I don't wonder you think so, but he seems quite in earnest, and I can tell you it's the chance of a lifetime!"

"I should think it was!" she gasped. "Oh, tell him he's an angel with wings! And please, *please* don't let him change his mind while I run and ask Mamma!" With which Blythe vanished down the gangway, her golf-cape rising straight up around her head as the draught took it.

We may well believe that such a prospect as that drove from her mind all speculations as to the steerage passengers, and that even the thought of the little girl with the wonderful eyes did not again visit her in the few hours intervening.

Yet when, that afternoon at eight-bells, she passed with Mr. Grey down the steep gangway to the steerage deck, which they were obliged to traverse on their way to the forecastle, and they came upon the little creature lying, with upturned face, against the woman's knee, Blythe felt a sharp pang of compunction and pity. The child looked even more pathetic than when seen from above, and the young girl involuntarily stooped in passing, and touched the wan little cheek. Whereupon one of those ineffable smiles which are the birthright of Italians lighted the little face, and the small hand was lifted with so captivating a gesture that Blythe, clasping it in her own, dropped on her knees beside the child.

"Is it your little girl?" she asked, looking up into the face of the woman, whose marked unlikeness to the child was answer enough.

"No, no, Signorina," the woman protested. "She is my little Signorina."

"And you are taking her to Italy?"

"*Si, Signorina; alla bella Italia*!"

Then the lips of the little girl parted with a still more radiant smile, and she murmured, "*Alla bella Italia*!"

A moment later, Blythe and her companion had passed on and up to the forward deck where, climbing a short ladder to the railing of the "crow's nest," they dropped lightly down into this most novel of elevators. There was a shrill whistle from the boatswain, the waving of white handkerchiefs where Mrs. Halliday and Mr. DeWitt stood, forward of the wheel-house, to watch the start; then the big windlass began to turn, the rope was "paid out," and the slow, rather creaky journey up the mast had begun.

It was a perfect day for the adventure. The ship was not rolling at all, the little motion to be felt being a gentle tilt from stem to stern which manifested itself at long intervals in the slightest imaginable dip of the prow. And presently the ascent was accomplished, and the "crow's nest" once more clung in its accustomed place against the mast, – forty feet up in the air, according to Mr. Grey's reckoning.

As they looked across the great sea the horizon seemed to have receded to an incalculable distance, and the airs that came to them across that broad expanse, unsullied by the faintest trace of man or his works, were purer than are often vouchsafed to

mortals. Blythe felt her heart grow big with the sense of space and purity, and this wonderful swift passage through the upper air. Involuntarily she took off her hat to get the full sweep of the breeze upon her forehead.

Suddenly, a new sound reached her ear, – a small, remote, confidential kind of voice, that seemed to arrive from nowhere in particular.

"It's the Captain, hailing us through his megaphone," her companion remarked; and, glancing down, far down, in the direction of the bridge, Blythe beheld the Captain, looking curiously attenuated in the unusual perspective, standing with a gigantic object resembling a cornucopia raised to his lips.

"You like it vare you are?" quoth the uncanny voice, not loud, but startlingly near.

And Blythe nodded her head and waved her hat in vigorous assent.

The great ship stretched long and narrow astern, the main deck shut in with awnings through which the huge smokestacks rose, and the wide-mouthed ventilators crooked their necks. Along either outer edge of the awnings a line of lifeboats showed, tied fast in their high-springing davits, while from the mouth of the yellow ship's-funnels black masses of smoke floated slowly and heavily astern. The *Lorelei* swam the water like a wonderful white aquatic bird, leaving upon the quiet sea a long snowy track of foam.

On a line with their lofty perch a sailor swung spider-like

among the network of sheets and halyards that clung about the mainmast, its meshes clearly defined against the pure blue of the sky, while below there, on the bridge, the big brass nautical instruments gleamed, and the caps of the Captain and his lieutenants showed white in the sun. As Blythe glanced down and away from this stirring outlook, she could just distinguish among the dark figures of the steerage the small white face of the child upturned toward the sky; and again a sharp pang took her, a feeling that the little creature did not belong among those rough men and women. No wonder that the beautiful Italian eyes always sought the sky; it was their only refuge from sordid sights.

"I suppose the woman meant that the child was her little mistress; did she not?" Blythe asked abruptly.

"That was what I understood."

"It's probably a romance; don't you think so?" and Blythe felt that she was applying to a high authority for information on such a head.

"Looks like it," the great authority opined. "I think we shall have to investigate the case."

"Oh, will you? And you speak Italian so beautifully!"

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I'm sure of it! It sounds so exactly like the hand-organ men!"

"Look here, Miss Blythe," the poet protested, "you must not flatter a modest man like that. My daughter would say you were turning my head."

"Oh, I rather think your daughter knows that it's not the kind of head to be turned," Blythe answered easily. She was beginning to feel as if she had known this famous personage all her life.

"I shall tell her that," said he.

Presently one-bell sounded a faint tinkle far below, and the big megaphone inquired whether they wanted to come down, and was assured that they did not. And all the while during their voyage through the air, which was prolonged for another half-hour, the two good comrades were weaving romances about the little girl; and with a curious confidence, as if, forsooth, they could conjure up what fortunes they would out of that vast horizon toward which the good ship was bearing them on.

At last the time came for them to go below, and they reluctantly signalled to the sailors, grouped about the deck in patient expectation. Upon which the windlass was set going, and slowly and creakingly the "crow's nest" was lowered from its airy height.

The two aëronauts found the steerage still populous with queer figures, and the atmosphere seemed more unsavoury than ever after their sojourn among the upper airs. To their disappointment, however, the woman and her Signorina were nowhere to be seen. Blythe and Mr. Grey looked for them in every corner of the deck, but no trace of them was to be found, and Blythe mounted the gangway to their own deck with much of the reluctance which she often felt in submitting to an interruption in a serial story.

They found Mrs. Halliday amusing herself with a glass of cracked ice, giving casual attention the while to a very long story told by a garrulous fellow-passenger in a wadded hood.

"Oh, Mamma," Blythe cried, perching upon the extension foot of her mother's chair, "why didn't you and Mr. DeWitt stay longer? And how did it happen that nobody else got wind of it? I don't believe a single person knows what we've been about! And oh! we have had such a glorious time! It was like being a bird! Only that little girl in the steerage oughtn't to be there, and Mr. Grey and I are going to see what can be done about it, and–"

The wadded hood had fallen silent, and now its wearer rose, with an air of resignation, and carried her tale to another listener, while Mr. Grey also moved away, leaving Blythe to tell her own story.

They were great friends, Mrs. Halliday and this only child of hers, and well they might be; for, as Blythe had informed Mr. Grey early in their acquaintance; "Mamma and I are all there are of us."

As she sat beside this best of friends, – having dropped into the chair left vacant by the wadded hood, – Blythe lived over again every experience and sensation of that eventful afternoon, and with the delightful sense of sharing it with somebody who understood. And, since the most abiding impression of all had been her solicitude for the little steerage passenger, she found no difficulty in arousing her mother to an almost equal interest in the child's fate.

And presently, when the cornet player passed them, with the air of short-lived importance which comes to a ship's cornet three times a day, and, stationing himself well aft, played the cheerful little tune which heralds the approaching dinner-hour, Blythe slipped her hand into her mother's and said:

"We'll do something about that little girl; won't us, Mumsey?"

Upon which Mrs. Halliday, rising, and patting the rosy cheek which she used to call the "apple of her eye," said:

"I shouldn't wonder if us did, Blythe."

CHAPTER II
THE LITTLE SIGNORINA

Blythe lay awake a long time that night, thinking, not of the bridge nor of the "crow's nest," not of the Captain nor of the supposed Hugh Dalton, but of the child in the steerage. How stifling it must be down there to-night! It was hot and airless enough here, where Blythe had a stateroom to herself, – separated from her mother's by a narrow passageway, and where the port-holes had been open all day. Now, to be sure, they were closed; for the sea was rising, and already the spray dashed against the thick glass. Oh, how must it be in the steerage! And how did it happen that that nice woman had been obliged to take her little Signorina in such squalid fashion to *la bella Italia*?

Blythe fell asleep with the sound of creaking timbers in her ears, as the good ship strained against the rising sea, and when the clear note of the cornet, playing the morning hymn, roused her from her dreams, the roaring of wind and waves sent her thoughts with a shock of pity to the little steerage passenger shut up below. For with such a sea as this the waves must be sweeping the lower deck, and there could be no release for the poor little prisoner.

"Vhy you not report that veather from the lookout?" the Captain asked with mock severity as Blythe appeared at the breakfast table.

The racks were on, and the knives and forks had begun their time-honoured minuet within their funny little fences. The amateur "lookout" glanced across the table at her friend and ally the poet, who nodded encouragingly as she answered:

"Oh, we knew the Captain knew all about it!"

"You think de Capitän know pretty much eferything, *wie es scheint*!" was the reply, uttered in so deep a guttural that Blythe knew the old Viking did not take very seriously the "bit of weather" that seemed to her so violent. In fact, he owned as much before he had finished his second cup of coffee.

Yet when she came up the companionway after breakfast, she found a stout rope stretched across the deck from stanchion to stanchion to hold on by, the steamer chairs all tied fast to the rail that runs around the deckhouse, and every preparation made for rough weather.

It was not what a sailor would have called a storm, but the sea was changed enough from the smiling calm of yesterday. Not many passengers were on deck, half a dozen, only, reclining in their chairs in the lee of the deckhouse, close reefed in their heavy wraps; while here and there a pair of indefatigable promenaders lurched and slid along the heaving deck arm in arm, or clung to any chance support in a desperate effort to keep their footing.

Blythe had to buffet her way lustily as she turned a corner to windward. Holding her golf-cape close about her and jamming her felt hat well down on her head, she made her way to the

narrow passageway forward of the wheel-house where one looks down into the steerage. The waves were dashing across the deck, which was deserted excepting for one or two dark-browed men crouched under shelter of the forecastle.

There was a light, drizzling rain, and now and then the spray struck against her face. Blythe looked up at the "crow's nest," which was describing strange geometrical figures against the sky. The lookouts in their oil-coats did not seem in the least to mind their erratic passage through space. She wished it were eight-bells and time for them to change watch; it was always such fun to see them running up the ladder, hand over hand, their quick, monkey-like figures silhouetted against the sky.

How nobly the great ship forged ahead against an angry sea, climbing now to the crest of a big wave, and giving a long, shuddering shake of determination before plunging down into a black, swirling hollow! And how the wind and the waters bellowed together!

The Captain was on the bridge in his rubber coat and sou'-wester. He had said this would not last long, and he had stopped for a second cup of coffee before leaving the table. All the same, Blythe would not have ventured to accost him now, even if he had passed her way.

Presently she returned under shelter of the awning and let Gustav tuck her up in her chair to dry off. And Mr. DeWitt came and sat down beside her and instructed her in the delectable game of "Buried Cities," in which she became speedily so proficient

that, taking her cue from the lettering on one of the lifeboats, she discovered the city of Bremen lying "buried" in "the som*bre men*ace of the sea!"

After a while, Gustav appeared before them, bearing a huge tray of *bouillon* and sandwiches, with which he was striking the most eccentric angles; and Blythe discovered that she was preposterously hungry. And while her nose was still buried in her cup, she espied over its rim a pair of legs planted well apart, in the cause of equilibrium, and the big, pleasant voice of Mr. Grey made itself heard above wind and sea, saying, "Guess where I've been."

"In the smoking-room," was the prompt reply.

"Guess again."

"On the bridge, – only you wouldn't dare!"

"Once more."

"Oh, I know," Blythe cried, setting her thick cup down on the deck, and tumbling off her chair in a snarl of steamer-rugs; "You've been down in the steerage finding out about the little Signorina!"

"Who told you?"

"You did! You looked so pleased with yourself! Oh, do tell me all about her!"

"Well, I've had a long talk with the woman. Shall we walk up and down?"

And off they went, with that absence of ceremony which characterises life on shipboard, leaving Mr. DeWitt to bury his

cities all unaided and unapplauded. Then, as the two walked up and down, – literally up and down, for the ship was pitching a bit, and sometimes they were labouring up-hill, and sometimes they were running down a steep incline, – as they walked up and down Mr. Grey told his story.

The woman, Giuditta, had confided to him all she knew, and he had surmised more. Giuditta had known the family only since the time, three years ago, when she had been called in to take care of the little Cecilia during the illness of the Signora. The father had been a handsome good-for-nothing, who had got shot in a street row in that quarter of New York known as "Little Italy." He was nothing, —*niente*, *niente*; – but the Signora! Oh, if the gentleman could but have known the Signora, so beautiful, so patient, so sad! Giuditta had stayed with her and shared her fortunes, which were all, alas! misfortunes, – and had nursed her through a long decline. But never a word had she told of her own origin, – the beautiful Signora, – nor had her father's name ever passed her lips. Had she known that she was dying, perhaps then, for the child's sake, she might have forgotten her pride. But she was always thinking she should get well, – and then, one day, she died!

There was very little left, – only a few dollars; but among the squalid properties of the pitiful little stage where the poor young thing had enacted the last act of her tragedy, was one picture, a *Madonna*, with the painter's name, G. Bellini, just decipherable. It was a little picture, twelve inches by sixteen, in a dingy old

frame, and not a pretty picture at that. But a kind man, a dealer in antiquities, had given Giuditta one hundred dollars for it. "Think of that, Signore! One hundred dollars for an ugly little black picture no bigger than that!"

"I suppose," Mr. Grey remarked, as they stood balancing themselves at an angle of many degrees, – "I suppose that the picture was genuine, – else the man would hardly have paid one hundred dollars for it."

"And would it be worth more than that?"

"A trifle," he replied, rather grimly. "Somewhere among the thousands."

"But why should they have kept such a picture when they were so poor? Why didn't they sell it?"

"That would hardly have occurred to them. It was evidently a family heirloom that the girl had taken with her because she loved it. I doubt if she guessed its value. A Bellini! A Giovanni Bellini, in a New York tenement house! Think of it! And now I suppose some millionaire has got it. Likely enough somebody who doesn't know enough to buy his own pictures! Horrible idea! Horrible!" and Mr. Grey strode along, all but snorting with rage at the thought.

"But tell me more about the little girl," Blythe entreated, wishing the wind wouldn't blow her words out of her mouth so rudely. "Her name is Cecilia, you say?"

"Yes; Cecilia. Dopo is the name they went by, but the nurse doesn't think it genuine. Her idea is that her Signora was the

daughter of some great family, and got herself disowned by marrying an opera singer who subsequently made a fiasco and dropped his name with his fame. She doesn't think Dopo ever was a family name. It means 'after,' you know, and they may have adopted it for its ironical significance."

"And the poor lady died and never told!" Blythe panted, as they toiled painfully up-hill with the rain beating in their faces.

"Yes, and – look out! hold tight!" for suddenly the slant of the deck was reversed, and they came coasting down to an impromptu seat on a bench.

"It seems," Mr. Grey went on, when they had resumed their somewhat arduous promenade, – "it seems the woman, Giuditta, is quite alone in the world and has been longing to get back to Italy. So she easily persuaded herself that she could find the child's family and establish her in high life. Giuditta has an uncommonly high idea of high life," he added. "I think she imagines that somebody in a court train and a coronet will come to meet her Signorina at the pier in Genoa. Poor things! There'll be a rude awakening!"

"But we won't let it be rude!" Blythe protested. "We must do something about it. Can't you think of anything to do?"

They were standing now, clinging to the friendly rope stretched across the deck, shoulder high.

"Giuditta's plan," Mr. Grey replied, "is the naïve one of appealing to the Queen about it. And, seriously, I think it may be worth while to ask the American Minister to make inquiries. For

there is, of course, a bare chance that the family may be known at Court. In the meantime–"

"In the meantime," Blythe interposed, "we've got to get her out of the steerage!"

"But how?"

"Oh, Mamma will arrange that. We'll just make a cabin passenger of her, and I can take her in with me in my stateroom. Oh! how happy she will be, lying in my steamer chair, with that dear Gustav to wait on her! I must go down at once and get Mamma to say yes!"

"And you think she will?"

"I know she will! She is always doing nice things. If you really knew her you wouldn't doubt it!" And with that the young optimist vanished in her accustomed whirl of golf-cape.

If faith can move mountains, it is perhaps no wonder that the implicit and energetic faith of which Blythe Halliday was possessed proved equal to the removal of a small child from one quarter to another of the big ship. The three persons concerned in bringing about the change were easily won over; for Mrs. Halliday was quite of Blythe's mind in the matter, Mr. Grey had little difficulty in bringing the Captain to their point of view, while, as for Giuditta, she hailed the event as the first step in the transformation of her small Signorina into the little "great lady" she was born to be.

Accordingly, close upon luncheon time, when the sun was just breaking through the clouds, and the sea, true to the Captain's

prediction, was already beginning to subside, the tiny Signorina was carried, in the strong arms of Gustav, up the steep gangway by the wheel-house, where Blythe and her mother, Mr. DeWitt and the poet, to say nothing of Captain Seemann himself, formed an impromptu reception committee for her little ladyship.

As the child was set on her feet at the head of the gangway, she turned to throw a kiss down upon her faithful Giuditta, and then, without the slightest hesitation, she placed her hand in Blythe's, and walked away with her.

That evening there was a dance on board the *Lorelei*; for it had been but the fringe of a storm which they had crossed, and the sea was again taking on its long, easy swell.

The deck presented a festal appearance for the occasion. Rows of Japanese lanterns were strung from side to side against the white background of awning and deckhouse, and the flags of many nations lent their gay colours to the pretty scene. The ship's orchestra was in its element, playing with a "go" and rhythm which seemed caught from the pulsing movement of the ship itself.

As Blythe, with Mr. DeWitt, who had been a famous dancer in his day, led off the Virginia Reel, she wondered how it would strike the sailors of a passing brig, – this gay apparition of light and music, riding the great, dark, solemn sea.

The dance itself was rather a staid, middle-aged affair, for Blythe was the only young girl on board, and none but the youngest or the surest-footed could put much spirit into a dance

where the law of gravitation was apparently changing base from moment to moment. Blythe and her partner, however, took little account of the moving floor beneath their feet, or the hesitating demeanour of their companions. One after another, even the most reluctant and self-distrustful of the revellers found themselves caught up into active participation in the figure.

In a quiet corner of the deck sat Mrs. Halliday, with little Cecilia beside her, snugly stowed away in a nest of steamer-rugs; for they could not bear to take her below, out of the fresh, invigorating air. Their little guest spoke hardly any English, but, although Mrs. Halliday was under the impression that she herself spoke Italian, the child seemed more conversable in Blythe's company than in that of any one else, not excepting Mr. Grey, about whose linguistic accomplishments there could be no question.

Accordingly when, the Virginia Reel being finished, Blythe came and sat on the foot of the little girl's chair, they fell into an animated conversation, each in her own tongue. And presently, during a pause in the music, the Italian Count chanced to pass their way, and, stopping in his solitary promenade, appeared to give ear to their talk.

Suddenly he stooped, and, looking into the animated face of the child, inquired in his own tongue; "What is thy name, little one?"

But when the pure, liquid, childish voice answered "Cecilia Dopo," he merely lifted his hat and, bowing ceremoniously,

passed on.

Mr. Grey, who had watched the little scene from a distance, joined the group a moment later and, taking a vacant chair beside Mrs. Halliday, remarked:

"I think we shall have to cultivate the old gentleman. He might be induced to lend a hand in behalf of this young person. They are both Florentines," he added, thoughtfully, "and Florentine society is not large."

"Then you really believe the nurse is right about the child?" Mrs. Halliday asked.

"Oh, I shouldn't dare say that the mother was a great lady," he returned; "but there is certainly something high-bred about the little thing."

"They often have that air," Mrs. Halliday demurred, – "even the beggar children."

"Yes; to our eyes. But, do you know, I rather think the Italians themselves can tell the difference. I would rather trust Giuditta's judgment than my own. Besides," he added, after a long pause, during which he had been watching the expressive face of the child. "Besides, – there's that Giovanni Bellini. That sort of thing doesn't often stray into low society."

At this juncture the tall Italian moved again into their neighbourhood, and stood, at a point where the awning had been drawn back, gazing, with a preoccupied air, out to sea.

Rising from his seat, Mr. Grey approached him, remarking abruptly, and with a jerk of the head toward Cecilia, "Florentine,

is she not?"

"*Sicuro*," was the grave reply; upon which the Count moved away, to be seen no more that evening.

As the Englishman rejoined them after this laconic interview, Blythe greeted him with a new theory.

"Do you know," she said, "I used to think the Count was haughty and disagreeable, but I have changed my mind."

"That only shows how susceptible you good Republicans are to any sign of attention from the nobility," was the teasing reply.

"Perhaps you are right," Blythe returned, with the fair-mindedness which distinguished her. "You know I never saw a titled person before, excepting one red-headed English Lord, who hadn't any manners. I've often thought I should like, of all things, to know a King or Queen really well!"

"You don't say so!" Mr. Grey laughed. "And what's your opinion now, of the old gentleman, since he deigned to interrupt your conversation?"

"I believe he is unhappy."

"What makes you think so?"

"There's an unhappy look away back in his eyes. I never looked in before, – and then–"

"And then–?"

"There's something about his voice."

"Yes; Tuscan, you know."

"Oh, is that it? Well, any way, I like him!"

"If that's the case, perhaps you could make better headway

with him than I."

"But I don't speak Italian."

"Perhaps you speak French."

"I know my conjugations," was the modest admission.

"And I'm sure he would be enchanted to hear them," Mr. Grey laughed, as the orchestra struck into the familiar music of the Lancers, causing him to beat a retreat into the smoking-room.

And while Blythe danced gaily and heartily with a boy somewhat younger than herself, and not quite as tall, her little protégée fell into a deep sleep. And presently, the dance being over, the faithful Gustav carried her down to Blythe's stateroom, where she was snugly tucked away in the gently rocking cradle of the lower berth.

As for Blythe, thus relegated to the upper berth, she entered promptly into an agreeable dreamland, where she found herself speaking Italian fluently, and where she discovered, to her extreme satisfaction, that the Queen of Italy was her bosom friend!

CHAPTER III
A NEW DAWN

It was pretty to see the little Signorina revive under the favouring influences of prosperity; and indeed the soft airs of the southern seas were never sweeter nor more caressing than those which came to console our voyagers for their short-lived storm.

Life was full of interest and excitement for the little girl. The heavy lassitude of her steerage days had fallen from her, and already that first morning a delicate glow of returning vigour touched the little cheek.

"She's picking up, isn't she?" Mr. DeWitt remarked, as he joined Blythe and the child at the head of the steerage gangway, where the little one was throwing enthusiastic kisses and musical Italian phrases down upon the hardly less radiant Giuditta.

"Oh, yes!" was the confident reply. "She's a different child since her saltwater bath and her big bowl of oatmeal. Mamma says she really has a splendid physique, only she was smothering down there in the steerage."

Then Mr. DeWitt stooped and, lifting the child, set her on the railing, where she could get a better view of her faithful friend below.

"There! How do you like that?" he inquired.

Upon which the little girl, finding herself unexpectedly on a level with Blythe's face, put up her tiny hand and stroked her

cheek.

"Like-a Signorina," she remarked with apparent irrelevance.

"Oh! You do, do you? Well, she's a nice girl."

"Nice-a girl-a," the child repeated, adding a vowel, Italian fashion, to each word.

Then, with an appreciative look into the pleasant, whiskered countenance, whose owner was holding her so securely on her precarious perch, she pressed her little hand gently against his waistcoat, and gravely remarked, "Nice-a girl-a, *anche il Signore*!"

"So! I'm a nice girl too, am I?" the old gentleman replied, much elated with the compliment.

And Giuditta, down below, perceiving that her Signorina was making new conquests, snatched her bright handkerchief from her head, and waved it gaily; whereupon a score of the steerage passengers, seized with her enthusiasm, waved their hats and handkerchiefs and shouted; "*Buon' viaggio, Signorina! Buon' viaggio*!"

And the little recipient of this ovation became so excited that she almost jumped out of the detaining arms of Mr. DeWitt, who, being of a cautious disposition, made haste to set her down again; upon which they all walked aft, under the big awning.

"She makes friends easily," Mr. Grey remarked, later in the morning, as he and Blythe paused a moment in their game of ring-toss. The child was standing, clinging to the hand of a tall woman in black, a grave, silent Southerner who had hitherto kept

quite to herself.

"Yes," Blythe rejoined, "but she is fastidious. She will listen to no blandishments from any one whom she doesn't take a fancy to. That good-natured, talkative Mr. Distel has been trying all day to get her to come to him, but she always gives him the slip." And Blythe, in her preoccupation, proceeded to throw two rings out of three wide of the mark.

"Has the Count taken any more notice of her?" Mr. Grey inquired, deftly tossing the smallest of all the rings over the top of the post.

"Apparently not; but she takes a great deal of notice of him. See, she's watching him now. I should not be a bit surprised if she were to speak to him of her own accord one of these days."

"There are not many days left," her companion remarked. "The Captain says we shall make Cape St. Vincent before night."

"Oh, how fast the voyage is going!" Blythe sighed.

Yet, sorry as she would be to have the voyage over, no one was more enchanted than Blythe when Cape St. Vincent rose out of the sea, marking the end of the Atlantic passage. It was just at sundown, and the beautiful headland, bathed in a golden light, stood, like the mystic battlements of a veritable "Castle in Spain," against a luminous sky.

"Mamma," Blythe asked, "did you ever see anything more beautiful than that?"

They were standing at the port railing, with the little girl between them, watching the great cliffs across the deep blue sea.

"Nothing more beautiful than that seen through your eyes, Blythe."

"I believe you do see it through my eyes, Mumsey," Blythe answered, thoughtfully, "just as I am getting to see things through Cecilia's eyes. I never realised before how things open up when you look at them that way."

And Mrs. Halliday smiled a quiet, inward smile that Blythe understood with a new understanding.

They took little Cecilia ashore with them at Gibraltar the next morning, and again Blythe experienced the truth of her new theory.

It was our heroine's first glimpse of Europe, and no delectable detail of their hour's drive, no exotic bloom, no strange Moorish costume, no enchanting vista of cliff or sea, was lost upon her. Yet she felt that even her enthusiasm paled before the deep, speechless ecstasy of the little Cecilia. It was as if, in the tropical glow and fragrant warmth, the child were breathing her native air, – as if she had come to her own.

On their return, as the grimy old tug which had carried them across the harbour came alongside the big steamer, the child suddenly exclaimed, "*Ecco, il Signore!*" and, following the direction of her gesture, their eyes met those of the Count looking down upon them. He instantly moved away, and they had soon forgotten him, in the pleasurable excitement of bestowing upon Giuditta the huge, hat-shaped basket filled with fruit which they had brought for her.

Later in the day, as they weighed anchor and sailed out from the shadow of the great Rock, Blythe found herself standing with Mr. Grey at the stern-rail of their own deck, watching the face of the mighty cliff as it changed with the varying perspective.

"Oh! I wish I were a poet or an artist or something!" she cried.

"Would you take that monstrous fortress for a subject?" he asked.

"Yes, and I should do something so splendid with it that nobody would dare to be satirical!" and she glanced defiantly at her companion, whose good-humoured countenance was wrinkling with amusement.

"Let us see," he said. "How would this do?" And he gravely repeated the following:

> "There once was a fortress named Gib,
> Whose manners were haughty and —

What rhymes with Gib?"

"Glib!" Blythe cried.

"Good!

> Whose manners were haughty and glib.
> If you tried to get in,
> She replied with a grin, —

Quick! Give me another rhyme for Gib."

"Rib!" Blythe suggested, audaciously.

"Excellent, excellent! Rib! Now, how does it go?

> There once was a fortress named Gib,

Whose manners were haughty and glib!
If you tried to get in,
She replied, with a grin,
'I'm Great Britain's impregnable rib!'

Rather neat! Don't you think?"

"O Mr. Grey!" Blythe cried. "You've got to write that in my voyage-book! It's the–"

At that moment, a gesture from her companion caused her to turn and look behind her. There, only a few feet from where they were standing, but with his back to them, was the Count, sitting on one of the long, stationary benches fastened against the hatchway, while just at his knees stood little Cecilia. She was balancing herself with some difficulty on the gently swaying deck, holding out for his acceptance a small bunch of violets, which one of the market-women at Gibraltar had bestowed upon her.

As he appeared to hesitate: "*Prendili!*" she cried, with pretty wilfulness. Upon which he took the little offering, and lifted it to his face.

The child stood her ground resolutely, and presently, "Put me up!" she commanded, still in her own sweet tongue.

Obediently he lifted her, and placed her beside him on the seat, where she sat clinging with one little hand to the sleeve of his coat to keep from slipping down, with the gentle dip of the vessel.

The two sat, for a few minutes, quite silent, gazing off toward

the African coast, and Blythe and her companion drew nearer, filled with curiosity as to the outcome of the interview.

Presently the child looked up into the Count's face and inquired, with the pretty Tuscan accent which sounded like an echo of his own question on the evening of the dance:

"What is thy name?"

"Giovanni Battista Allamiraviglia."

Cecilia repeated after him the long, musical name, without missing a syllable, and with a certain approving inflection which evidently had an ingratiating effect upon the many-syllabled aristocrat; for he lifted his carefully gloved hand and passed it gently over the little head.

The child took the caress very naturally, and when, presently, the hand returned to the knee, she got possession of it, and began crossing the kid fingers one over the other, quite undisturbed by the fact that they invariably fell apart again as soon as she loosed her hold.

At this juncture the two eavesdroppers moved discreetly away, and Blythe, leaving her fellow-conspirator far behind, flew to her mother's side, crying:

"O Mumsey! She's simply winding him round her finger, and there's nothing he won't be ready to do for us now!"

"Yes, dear; I'm delighted to hear it," Mrs. Halliday replied, with what Blythe was wont to call her "benignant and amused" expression. "And after a while you will tell me what you are talking about!"

But Blythe, nothing daunted, only appealed to Mr. Grey, who had just caught up with her.

"You agree with me, Mr. Grey; don't you?" she insisted.

"Perfectly, and in every particular. Mrs. Halliday, your daughter and I have been eavesdropping, and we have come to confess."

Whereupon Blythe dropped upon the foot of her mother's chair, Mr. Grey established himself in the chair adjoining, and they gave their somewhat bewildered auditor the benefit of a few facts.

"I really believe," the Englishman remarked, in conclusion, – "I really believe that haughty old dago can help us if anybody can. And when your engaging young protégée has completed her conquest, – to-morrow, it may be, or the day after, for she's making quick work of it, – we'll see what can be done with him."

And, after all, what could have been more natural than the attraction which, from that time forth, manifested itself between the Count and his small countrywoman? If the little girl, in making her very marked advances, had been governed by the unwavering instinct which always guided her choice of companions, the old man, for his part, could not but find refreshment, after his long, solitary voyage, in the pretty Tuscan prattle of the child. Most Italians love children, and the Count Giovanni Battista Allamiraviglia appeared to be no exception to his race.

The two would sit together by the hour, absorbed, neither in

the lovely sights of this wonderful Mediterranean voyage, nor in the movements of those about them, but simply and solely in one another.

"She's telling her own story better than we could do," Mr. Grey used to say.

It was now no unusual thing to see the child established on the old gentleman's knee, and once Blythe found her fast asleep in his arms. But it was not until the very last day of the voyage that the most wonderful thing of all occurred.

The sea was smooth as a lake, and all day they had been sailing the length of the Riviera. All day people had been giving names to the gleaming white points on the distant, dreamy shore, – Nice, Mentone, San Remo, – names fragrant with association even to the mind of the young traveller, who knew them only from books and letters.

Blythe and the little girl were sitting, somewhat apart from the others, on the long bench by the hatchway where Cecilia had first laid siege to the Count's affections, and Blythe was allowing the child to look through the large end of her field-glass, – a source of endless entertainment to them both. Suddenly Cecilia gave a little shriek of delight at the way her good friend, Mr. Grey, dwindled into a pigmy; upon which the Count, attracted apparently by her voice, left his chair and came and sat down beside them.

As he lifted his hat, with a polite "*Permetta, Signorina*," Blythe noticed, for the first time on the whole voyage, that he was without his gloves. Perhaps the general humanising of his

attitude, through intercourse with the child, had caused him to relax this little point of punctilio.

Cecilia, meanwhile, had promptly climbed upon his knee, and now, laying hold of one of the ungloved hands, she began twisting a large seal ring which presented itself to her mind as a pleasing novelty. Presently her attention seemed arrested by the device of the seal, and she murmured softly, "*Fideliter*."

Blythe might not have distinguished the word as being Latin rather than Italian, had she not been struck by the change of countenance in the wearer of the ring. He turned to her abruptly, and asked, in French:

"Does she read?"

"No," Blythe answered, thankful that she was not obliged to muster her "conjugations" for the emergency!

There was a swift interchange of question and answer between the old man and the child, of which Blythe understood but little. She heard Cecilia say "Mamma," in answer to an imperative question; the words "*orologio*" and "*perduto*" were intelligible to her. She was sure that the crest and motto formed the subject of discussion, and it was distinctly borne in upon her that the same device – a mailed hand and arm with the word *Fideliter* beneath it – had been engraved on a lost watch which had belonged to the child's mother. But it was all surmise on her part, and she could hardly refrain from shouting aloud to Mr. Grey, standing over there, in dense unconsciousness, to come quickly and interpret this exasperating tongue, which sounded so pretty, and eluded

her understanding so hopelessly.

The mind of the Count seemed to be turning in the same direction, for, after a little, he arose abruptly, and, setting the child down beside Blythe, walked straight across the deck to the Englishman, whom he accosted so unceremoniously that Blythe's sense of wonders unfolding was but confirmed.

The two men turned and walked away to a more secluded part of the deck, where they remained, deep in conversation, for what seemed to Blythe a long, long time. She felt as if she must not leave her seat, lest she miss the thread of the plot, – for a plot it surely was, with its unravelling close at hand.

At last she saw the two men striding forward in the direction of the steerage, and with a conspicuous absence of that aimlessness which marks the usual promenade at sea.

The little girl was again amusing herself with the glasses, and, as the two arbiters of her destiny passed her line of vision, she laughed aloud at their swiftly diminishing forms. Impelled by a curious feeling that the child must take some serious part in this crucial moment of her destiny, Blythe quietly took the glasses from her and said, as she had done each night when she put her little charge to bed:

"Will you say a little prayer, Cecilia?"

And the child, wondering, yet perfectly docile, pulled out the little mother-of-pearl rosary that she always wore under her dress, and reverently murmured one of the prayers her mother had taught her. After which, as if beguiled by the association of

ideas into thinking it bedtime, she curled herself up on the bench, and, with her head in Blythe's lap, fell fast asleep.

And Blythe sat, lost in thought, absently stroking the little head, until suddenly Mr. Grey appeared before her.

"You have been outrageously treated, Miss Blythe," he declared, seating himself beside her, "but I had to let the old fellow have his head."

"Oh, don't tell me anything, till we find Mamma," Blythe cried. "It's all her doing, you know, – letting me have Cecilia up here," and, gently rousing the sleeper, she said, "Come, Cecilia. We are going to find the Signora."

"And you consider it absolutely certain?" Mrs. Halliday asked, when Mr. Grey had finished his tale. She was far more surprised than Blythe, for she had had a longer experience of life, to teach her a distrust in fairy-stories.

"There does not seem a doubt. The child's familiarity with the crest was striking enough, but that Bellini *Madonna* clinches it. And then, Giuditta's description of both father and mother seems to be unmistakable."

"Oh! To think of his finding the child that he had never heard of, just as he had given up the search for her mother!" Blythe exclaimed.

Cecilia was again playing happily with the glasses, paying no heed to her companions.

"The strangest thing of all to me," Mrs. Halliday declared, "is his relenting toward his daughter after all these years."

"You must not forget that Fate had been pounding him pretty hard," Mr. Grey interposed. "When a man loses in one year two of his children, and the only grandchild he knows anything about, it's not surprising that he should soften a bit toward the only child he has left."

They were still discussing this wonderful subject, when, half an hour later, the tall figure of the Count emerged from the companionway. As he bent his steps toward the other side of the deck he was visible only to the child, who stood facing the rest of the group. She promptly dropped the glasses upon Blythe's knee, and crying, "*Il Signore!*" ran and took hold of his hand; whereupon the two walked away together and were not seen for a long, long time.

Then Blythe and Mr. Grey went up on the bridge and told the Captain. No one else was to know – not even Mr. DeWitt – until after they had landed, but the Captain was certainly entitled to their confidence.

"For," Blythe said, "you know, Captain Seemann, it never would have happened if you had not sent us up in the crow's nest that day."

Upon which the Captain, beaming his brightest, and letting his cigar go out in the damp breeze for the sake of making his little speech, declared:

"I know one thing! It would neffer haf happen at all, if I had sent anybody else up in the crow's nest but just Miss Blythe Halliday with her bright eyes and her kind heart!"

And Blythe was so overpowered by this tremendous compliment from the Captain of the *Lorelei* that she had not a word to say for herself.

That evening Mr. Grey inscribed his nonsense-verse in Blythe's book; and not that only, for to those classic lines he added the following:

"The above was composed in collaboration with his esteemed fellow-passenger, Miss Blythe Halliday, by Hugh Dalton, *alias* 'Mr. Grey.'"

It was, of course, a great distinction to own such an autograph as that; yet somehow the kind, witty Mr. Grey had been so delightful just as he was, that Blythe hardly felt as if the famous name added so very much to her satisfaction in his acquaintance.

"I knew it all the time," she declared, quietly; "but it didn't make any difference."

"That's worth hearing," said Hugh Dalton.

They parted from the little Cecilia at sunrise, but with promises on both sides of a speedy meeting among the hills of Tuscany.

The old Count, with the child's hand clasped in his, paused as he reached the gangway, at the foot of which the triumphant Giuditta was awaiting them, and pointed toward the rosy east which was flushing the beautiful bay a deep crimson.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.