

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

ACROSS THE SALT SEAS

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Across the Salt Seas / A Romance of the War of Succession

CHAPTER I

Dreams he of cutting foreign throats, of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades; of healths five fathoms deep. -Shakespeare.

"Phew!" said the captain of *La Mouche Noire*, as he came up to me where I paced the deck by the after bittacle. "Phew! It is a devil in its death agonies. What has the man seen and known? Fore Gad! he makes me shudder!"

Then he spat to leeward-because he was a sailor; also, because he was a sailor, he squinted into the compass box, then took off his leather cap and wiped the warm drops from his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Death agonies!" I said. "So! it is coming to that. From what? Drinking, old age, or-"

"Both, and more. Yet, when I shipped him at Rotterdam, who would have thought it! Old and reverend-looking, eh, Mr. Crespin? White haired-silvery. I deemed him some kind of a minister-yet, now, hearken to him!"

And as he spoke he went to the hatchway, bent his head and shoulders over it, and beckoned me to come and do likewise; which gesture I obeyed.

Then I heard the old man's voice coming forth from the cabin where they had got him, the door of it being open for sake of air, because, in this tossing sea, the ports and scuttles were shut fast-heard him screaming, muttering, chuckling and laughing; calling of healths and toasts; dying hard!

"The balustrades!" he screamed. "Look to them. See! Three men, their hands stretched out, peering down into the hall; fingers touching. God!" – he whispered this, yet still we heard-"how can dead men stand thus together, gazing over, glancing into dark corners, eyes rolling? See how yellow the mustee's eyes are! But still, all dead! Dead! Dead! Dead! Yet there they stand, waiting for us to come in from the garden. Ha! quick-the passado-one-two-in-out-good! through his midriff. Ha! Ha! Ha!" and he laughed hideously, then went on: "The worms will have a full meal. Or" – after a pause, and hissing this: "Was he dead before? Hast run a dead man through?"

"Like this all day long," the captain muttered in my ear, "from the dawn. And now the sun is setting; see how its gleams light up the hills inland. God's mercy! I hope he dies ere long. I want not his howlings through my ship all night. Mr. Crespin," and he laid his hand on my arm, "will you go down to him, to service me? You are a gentleman. Maybe can soothe him. He is one, too. Will you?"

I shrugged my shoulders and hitched my sea cloak tighter round me; then I said:

"To do you a service-yes. Yet I like not the job. Still, I will go," and I put my hand on the brass rail to descend. Then, as I did so, we heard him again-a-singing of a song this time. But what a song! And to come from the dying lips of that old, white-haired, reverend-looking man! A song about drinkings and carousings, of girls' eyes and lips and other charms, which he should have thought no more of for the past two score years! and killing of men, and thievings and plunder. Then another change, orders bellowed loudly, as though he trod on deck-commands given to run out guns-cutlasses to be ready. Shrieks, whooping and huzzas!

"He has followed the sea some time in his life," the captain whispered as I descended the companion steps. "One can tell that. And I thought him a minister!"

I nodded, looking up at him as I went below, then reached the open door of the cabin where the man lay.

He was stretched out upon his berth, the bedding all dishevelled and tossed beneath him, with, over it, his long white hair, like spun flax, streaming. His coat alone of all his garments was off, so that one saw the massive gold buttons to his satin waistcoat; could observe, too, the richness of his cravat, the fineness of his shirt. His breeches, also, were of satin, black like his waistcoat-the stuff of the very best; his buckles to them gold; his shoes fastened with silver latchets. That he was old other things than his hair showed-the white face was drawn and pinched with age, the body lean and attenuated, the fingers almost fleshless, the backs of his hands naught but sinews and shrivelled skin. And they were strange hands, too, for one to gaze upon; white as the driven snow, yet with a thickness at the tips of the fingers, and with ill-shapen, coarse-looking nails, all seeming to say that, once, in some far off time, those hands had done hard, rough work.

By the side of the berth, upon one of the drawers beneath it, pulled out to make a seat, there squatted a mulatto-his servant whom he had brought on board with him when we took him into the ship in the Maas. A mulatto, whose brown, muddy looking eyeballs rolled about in terror, as I thought, of his master's coming death, and made me wonder if they had given his distempered brain that idea of the "mustee's yellow eyes," about which he had been lately shrieking. Yet, somehow, I guessed that 'twas not so.

"How is 't with him now?" I asked the blackamoor, seeing that his master lay quiet for the time being; "is this like to be the end?"

"Maybe, maybe not," the creature said in reply. "I have seen him as far gone before-yet he is alive."

"How old is he?"

"I know not. He says he has seventy years."

"I should say more," I answered. Then I asked: "Who is he?"

"The captain has his name."

"That tells nothing. When he is dead he will be committed to the sea unless we reach Cadiz first. And he has goods," casting my eye on two chests, one above the other, standing by the cabin bulkhead. "They will have to be consigned somewhere. Where is he going?"

"To Cadiz."

"Ha! Well, so am I. He is English?"

"Yes-he is English."

'Twas evident to me that this black creature meant to tell nothing of his master's affairs-for which there was no need to blame him-and I desisted from my enquiries. For, in truth, this old man's affairs were not my concern. If he died he would be tossed into the sea, and that would be the end of him. And if he did not die-why still 'twas no affair of mine. I was but a passenger, as he was.

Therefore, I turned me on my heel to quit the cabin, when, to my astonishment, nay, almost my awestruck wonderment, I heard the old man speaking behind me as calmly as though there were no delirium in his brain nor any fever whatever. Perhaps, after all, I thought, 'twas but the French brandy and the Geneva he had been drinking freely of since we took him on board, and which he brought with him in case bottles, that had given him his delirium, and that the effect was gone now with his last shriekings and ravings.

But that which caused most my wonderment was that he was speaking in the French-which I had very well myself.

"What brings you here, Grandmont?" he asked, his eyes, of a cold grey, fixed on me.

"So," thinks I, "you are not out of your fever yet, to call me by a name I never heard of." But aloud, I answered:

"I have taken passage the same as you yourself. And we travel the same road-toward Cadiz."

Meanwhile the negro was a-hushing of him-or trying to-saying: "Master, master, you wander. Grandmont is not here. This gentleman is not he"; and angered me, too, even as he said it, by a scornful kind of laugh he gave, as though to signify: "Not anything like him, indeed."

But the old man took no heed of him-pushing him aside with a strength in the white coarse hand which you would not have looked to see in one so spent-and leaned a little over the side of the berth, and went on:

"Have you heard of it, yet, Grandmont?"

Not knowing what to do, nor what answer to make, I shook my head-whereon he continued: "Nineteen years of age now, if a day. Four years old then-two hundred crowns' worth of good wood burnt, – all burnt-a mort o' money! But we have enough left and to serve, 'tis true. A plenty o' money-though 'tis soaked in blood. Nineteen years old, and like to be a devil-like yourself, Grandmont!"

"Grandmont is dead," the negro muttered. "Drownded dead, master. You know."

This set the old man off on another tack, doubtless the words "drownded dead" recalling something to him; and once more he began his chantings-going back to the English-which were awful to hear, and brought to my mind the idea of a corpse a-singing:

"Fishes' teeth have eat his eyes; His limbs by fishes torn."

Then broke off and said: "Where am I? Give me to drink."

This the negro did, taking from out the drawer he sat upon a bottle of Hungary water, and pouring a draught into a glass, which, when the old man had tasted, set him off shrieking curses.

"Brandy!" he cried, "Brandy! French brandy, not this filth. Brandy, dog!" and as he spoke he raised his hand and clutched at the other's wool, "If I had you in Martinique-" then, exhausted, fell back on his pillows and said no more, forgetting all about the desired drink.

Now, that night, when I sat with the captain after supper, he being a man who had roamed the world far and wide, and had not always been, as he was now, a carrier of goods only, with sometimes a passenger or two, from London to the ports of France, Spain and Portugal, we talked upon that hoary-headed old sinner lying below in the after-starboard cabin; I telling him all that had passed in my hearing.

And he, smoking his great pipe, listened attentively, nodding his head every now and again, and muttering much to himself; then said:

"Spoke about two hundred crowns' worth of good wood being burnt, eh? That would be at Campeachy. Humph! So! So! We have heard about that. Told the black, too, that he wished he had him in Martinique, did he? Also knew Grandmont. Ha! 'tis very plain." Then he rose and went to his desk, lifted up the sloping lid and took out a book and read from it-I observing very well that it was his log.

"See," he said, pushing it over to me, "that's what he calls himself now. Yet 'tis no more his name than 'tis mine-or yours."

Glancing my eye down the column, I came to my own name-after a list of things by way of cargo which he had on board, such as a hundred and seventy barrels of potash, sixty bales of hemp, a hundred bales of Russia leather, twenty barrels of salted meat, twenty-eight barrels of whale oil and many other things. Came to my own name, Mervyn Crespin, officer, passenger to Cadiz. Then to the old man's:

"John Carstairs, gentleman, with servant, passenger to Cadiz."

"No more his name than 'tis mine-or yours," the captain repeated.

"What then?" I asked.

"It might be-anything," and again he mused. "Martinique," he went on, "Campeachy. A friend of Grandmont's. Let me reflect. It might be John Cuddiford. He was a friend of Grandmont's. It might be Alderly. But no, he was killed, I think, by Captain Nicholas Crafez of Brentford. Dampier, now-nay, this one is too old; also William Dampier sailed from the Downs three years ago. I do believe 'tis Cuddiford."

"And who then is Grandmont, Captain? And this Cuddiford-or Carstairs?"

"Ho!" said he, "'tis all a history, and had you been sailor, or worn that sword by your side for King William as you wear it now for Queen Anne, you would have known Grandmont's name. Of a surety you would have done so, had you been sailor."

"Who are they, then?"

"Well now, see. Grandmont was-for he is dead, drowned coming back from the Indies in '96-that's six years ago-with a hundred and eighty men, all devils like himself."

As he said this I started, for his words were much the same as those which the old man had used an hour or so before when he had spoken of something-a child, as I guessed-that had been four years old, and was now nineteen and "like to be a devil" like himself-Grandmont. It seemed certain, therefore, that this man, Grandmont, was a friend in life, and that now there was roaming about somewhere a son who had all the instincts of its father, and who was known to Carstairs, or Cuddiford.

This made the story of interest to me, and caused me to listen earnestly to the captain's words.

"Coming back from the Indies, and not so very long, either, after the French king had made him a lieutenant of his navy-perhaps because he was a villain. He does that now and again. 'Tis his way. Look at Bart, to wit. There's a sweet vagabond for you. Has plagued us honest merchants and carriers more than all Tourville's navy. Yet, now, he is an officer, too."

"But Grandmont, Captain! Grandmont."

"Ah! Grandmont. Well, he was a filibuster-privateer-buccaneer-pirate-what you will! Burnt up all their woods at Campeachy-the old man spake true-because the commandant wouldn't pay the ransom he and his crew demanded; also because the commandant said that when he had slaughtered them all, if he did so, he would never find out where their buried wealth was. Then he took a Pink one day with four hundred thousand francs' worth of goods and money on board, and slew every soul in the ship. Tied dead and living together, back to back, and flung them into the sea. Oh! He was a devil," he concluded. "A wicked villain! My word! If only some of our ships of war could have caught him."

"Yet he is dead?"

"Dead enough, the Lord be praised."

"And if this is a friend of his-this Cuddiford, or Carstairs-he must needs be a villain, too."

"Needs be! Nay, is, for a surety. And, Mr. Crespin," he said, speaking slowly, "you have heard his shrieks and singings-could you doubt what he has been?"

"Doubt? No," I answered. "Who could? Yet, I wonder who were the dead men looking down the stairs, as they came in from the garden."

"Who? Only a few of their victims. If he and Grandmont worked together they could not count 'em. Well, one is dead; good luck when the other goes too. And, when he does, what a meeting they will have there!" and he pointed downward.

CHAPTER II. SECRET SERVICE

It seemed not, however, as though this meeting were very likely to take place yet, since by the time we were off Cape St. Vincent—which was at early dawn of the second morning following the old man's delirium—that person seemed to have become very much restored. 'Tis true he was still very weak, and kept his berth; but otherwise seemed well enough. Also all his fever and wanderings were gone, and as he now lay in his bunk reading of many papers which the negro handed to him from the open uppermost chest, he might, indeed, have passed for that same reverend minister which the captain had, at the beginning, imagined him to be.

Both of us—the captain because he was the captain, and I because I was the only other passenger—had been in and out to see him now and again and to ask him how he did. Yet, I fear, 'twas not charity nor pity that induced either of us to these Christian tasks. For the skipper was prompted by, I think, but one desire, namely, to get the man ashore alive out of his ship, and, thereby, to have done with him. He liked not pirates, he said, "neither when met on the high seas, nor when retired from business"; while as for myself, well! the man fascinated me. He seemed to be, indeed, so scheming an old villain, and to have such a strange past behind him, that I could not help but be attracted.

Now in these visits which I had paid him at intervals, he had told me that he was on his way to Cadiz, where he had much business to attend to; sometimes, he said, in purchasing goods that the galleons brought in from the Indies, sometimes in sending out other goods, and so forth. Also he said—which was true enough, as I knew very well—the galleons were now due; it was for this reason he was on his way to the south of Spain.

"So," said the captain, when I repeated this, "the devil can speak truth sure enough when he needs. To wit, it is the truth that the galleons are on their way home. What else has he said to you, Mr. Crespin?"

"He has asked me what my business may be."

"And you have told him?"

"Nay. I tell no one that," I replied, "It is of some consequence, and I talk not of it."

Yet here, and with a view to making clear this narrative which I am setting down, 'tis necessary that I should state who and what I am, and also the reason why I, Mervyn Crespin, am on my road to Cadiz on board a coasting vessel, *La Mouche Noire*—once a French ship of merchandise, now an English one. She was taken from that nation by some of our own vessels of war, sold by public auction, and bought by her present captain, who now is using her in his trade between England and Holland, and Holland and Spain—a risky trade, too, seeing that war has broken out again, that England and Austria are fighting the French and Spanish, and that the sea swarms with privateers; yet, because of the risk, a profitable trade, too, for those who can make their journeys uncaught by the enemy.

However, to myself.

I am, let me say, therefore, an officer of the Cuirassiers, or Fourth Horse, which, a short time before the late King William's death, has been serving in the Netherlands under the partial command of Ginkell, Earl of Athlone. The rank I hold is that of lieutenant—aspiring naturally to far greater things—and already I have had the honor of taking part in several sieges, amongst others Kaiserswerth, with which the war commenced, as well as in many skirmishes. Now, 'twas at this place, where my Lord the Earl of Athlone commanded, that I had the extreme good fortune, as I shall ever deem it, of being wounded, and thereby brought under his Lordship's notice. As for the wound, 'twas nothing, one of M. Bouffler's lancers having run me through the fleshy part of my arm, and it was soon healed; but the earl happened to see the occurrence, as also the manner in which I cut the man down a second later, and from that moment he took notice of me—sent for me to his quarters when the siege was

over, spoke with commendation of my riding and my sword play, and asked me of my family, he being one who, although a Dutchman who came only into England with his late master, knew much of our gentry and noble homes.

"Of the Crespins of Kent, eh?" he said. "The Crespins-a fair, good family. I knew Sir Nicholas, who fell at the Boyne. What was he to you?"

"My uncle, sir. The late king gave me my guidon in the Cuirassiers because of his service."

"Good! He could do no less. Your uncle was a solid man-trustworthy. If he said he would do a thing, he did it-or died. 'Twas thus in Ireland. You remember?"

"I remember, sir. He said he would take prisoner Tyrconnel with his own hands, and would have done it had not a bullet found his brain."

"I do believe he would. Are you as trustworthy as he?"

"Try me," and I looked him straight in the face.

"Maybe I will. A little later," and even as he spoke fell a-musing, while he drank some schnapps, which was his native drink, and on which, they say, these Hollanders are weaned-from a little glass. Then soon spake again:

"What languages have you? Any besides your own?"

"I have the French. Also some Spanish. My grandmother was of Spanish descent, and dwelt with us in Kent. She taught me."

"Humph!" And again he mused, then again went on, though now-doubtless to see if my French was any good, and to try me-he spoke in that tongue.

"Could you pass for a Frenchman, think you, amongst those who are not French, say in Spain itself?"

"Yes, amongst those who are not French, I am sure I could. Even amongst those who are French, if I gave out that I was, say, a Dutchman speaking with an accent," and I laughed, for I could not help it. The earl had a bottle nose and eyes like a lobster's, and made a queer grimace when I said this boldly. Then he, too, laughed.

"So I've an accent, eh, when I speak French? You mean that?"

"I mean, sir, that however well one speaks a language not their own, there is some accent that betrays them to those whose native tongue they are speaking. A Dutchman, a Swiss, most Englishmen and many Germans can all speak French, and 'twould pass outside France for French. But a native of Touraine, or a Parisian, or any subject of King Louis could not be deceived."

"True. Yet you or I could pass, say in Spain, for Frenchmen."

"I am sure."

"Humph! Well, we will see. And, perhaps, I will, as you say, try you. Only if I do, 'twill be a risky service for you. A lieutenant-colonelcy or a gibbet. A regiment or a bullet. How would you like that?"

"I risk the bullet every moment that the Cuirassiers are in action, and there is no lieutenant-colonelcy in the other scale if I escape. I prefer the 'risky service,' when there is one. As for the gibbet; well, one death is the same as another, pretty much, and the gibbet will do as well as any other, so long as 'tis not at Tyburn-which would be discreditable."

"You are a man of metal!" the Dutchman exclaimed, "and I like you, although you don't approve of my accent. You will do. I want a man of action, not a courtier-"

"I meant no rudeness," I interposed.

"Nor offered any. Tush! man, we Dutch are not courtiers, either. But we are staunch. And I will give you a chance of being so. Come here again to-morrow night. You shall have a throw for that colonelcy-or that gibbet."

"My Lord, I am most grateful to you."

"Good day. Come to-morrow night. Now I must sleep." And he began to divest himself of his wig and clothes, upon which I bowed and withdrew.

Be sure I was there the next night at the same time, exchanging my guard with Bertram Saxby, who, alas! was killed shortly afterward at Ruremonde. The day I had passed in sleeping much, for I had a suspicion that it was like enough Ginkell would send me on the service he had spoken of that very night; might, indeed, order me to take horse within the next hour, and I was desirous of starting fresh-of beginning well. He was a rough creature, this Dutch general-or English, rather, now! – and would be as apt as not to give me my instructions as I entered the room, and bid me be miles away ere midnight struck. Therefore I went prepared. Also my horse was ready in its stall.

He was not alone when I did enter his quarters. Instead, he was seated at a table covered with papers and charts, on the other side of which there sat another gentleman, a man of about fifty, of strikingly handsome features; a man who, in his day, I guessed, must have played havoc with women's hearts-might, indeed, I should think, have done so now had he been inclined that way. Those soft, rounded features, and those eyes, themselves soft and liquid-I saw them clearly when he lifted them to scan my face! – would, I guessed, make him irresistible to the fair sex.

He spoke first after I had saluted the Earl of Athlone-and I observed that, intuitively, he also returned my salute by a bend of his head, so that I felt sure he was used to receive such courtesies wherever he might be and in whatever company-then he said to the Dutchman, in a voice that, though somewhat high, was as musical as a chime of bells.

"This is the gentleman, Ginkell?"

"This is the gentleman. A lieutenant of the Fourth Horse."

"Sir," said the other, "be seated," and he pointed with a beautifully white hand to a chair by the table. "I desire some little conversation with you. I am the Earl of Marlborough." And as he mentioned his name he put out that white hand again and offered it to me, I taking it with all imaginable respect. He was at this time the most conspicuous subject of any sovereign in the world; his name was known from one end of Europe to the other. Also it was the most feared, although he had not yet put the crowning point to his glory nor risen to the highest rank for which he was destined. But he was very near his zenith now-his greatness almost at its height-and, I have often thought since, there was something within him at this time which told him it was close at hand. For he had an imperturbable calmness, an unfailing quiet graciousness, as I witnessed afterward on many occasions, which alone could be possessed by one who felt sure of himself. In every word he spoke, in his every action, he proclaimed that he was certain of, and master of, his destiny!

"My Lord Athlone tells me," he continued, when I was seated, the soft voice flowing musically, "that you have the fitting aspirations of a soldier-desire a regiment, and are willing to earn one."

I bowed and muttered that to succeed in my career was my one desire, and that if I could win success I would spare no effort. Then he went on:

"You speak French. That is good. Also Spanish. That, too, is good. Likewise, I hear, can disguise your identity as an Englishman if necessary. That is well, also. Mr. – " and he took up a piece of paper lying before him, on which I supposed my name was written, "Mr. Crespin, I-we-are going to employ you on secret service. Are you willing to undertake it?"

"I am willing, my Lord, to do anything that may advance my career. Anything that may become a soldier."

"That is as it should be. The light in which to regard matters-anything that may become a soldier. That before all. Well, to be short, we are going to send you to Cadiz."

"To Cadiz, my Lord!" I said, unable to repress some slight feeling of astonishment.

"Yes. To Cadiz, where you will not find another English soldier. Still that will, perhaps, not matter very much, since we do not desire you when there to appear as a soldier yourself. You are granted leave from your regiment indefinitely while on this mission, and, at the first at least, you will be a private gentleman. Also, when at Cadiz, you will please to be anything but an *English* gentleman."

"Or a Dutch one," put in the other earl with a guttural laugh. "Therefore, assume not the Dutch accent."

Evidently my Lord Marlborough did not know of the joke underlying this remark, since he went on:

"As a Frenchman you will have the best chance. Or, perhaps, as a Swiss merchant. But that we leave to you. What you have to do is to get to Cadiz, and, when there, to pass as some one, neither English nor Dutch, who is engaged in ordinary mercantile pursuits. Then when the fleet comes in-"

"The fleet, my Lord!"

"Yes. The English fleet. I should tell you-I must make myself clear. A large fleet under Admirals Rooke and Hopson, as well as some Dutch admirals, are about to besiege Cadiz. They will shortly sail from Portsmouth, as we have advices, and it is almost a certainty that they will succeed in gaining possession of the island, which is Cadiz. That will be of immense service to us, since, while we are fighting King Louis in the north, the Duke of Ormond, who goes out in that fleet in command of between thirteen and fourteen thousand men, will be able to attack the Duke of Anjou, or, as he now calls himself, King Philip V of Spain, in the south. But that is not all. We are not sending you there to add one more strong right arm to His Grace's forces-we could utilize that here, Mr. Crespin," and he bowed courteously, "but because we wish you to convey a message to him and the admirals."

I, too, bowed again, and expressed by my manner that I was listening most attentively, while the earl continued:

"The message is this: We have received information from a sure source that the galleons now on their way back to Spain from the Indies have altered their plan of arrival because they, in their turn, have been informed in some way, by some spy or traitor, that this expedition will sail from England. Therefore they will not go near Cadiz. But the spot to which they will proceed is Vigo, in the north. Now," and he rose as he spoke, and stood in front of the empty fireplace, "your business will be to convey this intelligence to Sir George Rooke and those under him, and I need not tell you that you are like enough to encounter dangers in so conveying it. Are you prepared to undertake them?"

CHAPTER III. I FIND A SHIP

"You see," the Earl of Marlborough continued, while Ginkell and I stood on either side of him, "that neither your risks nor your difficulties will be light. To begin with, you must pass as a Frenchman, or, at least, not an Englishman, for Cadiz, like all Spanish ports and towns, will not permit of any being there. Therefore, your only way to get into it is to be no Englishman. Now, how, Mr. Crespin, would you suggest reaching the place and obtaining entry? It is far away."

I thought a moment on this; then I said:

"But Portugal, my lord, is not closed to us. That country has not yet thrown in its lot with either France or Austria."

"That is true. And the southern frontier of Portugal is very near to Spain-to Cadiz. You mean that?"

"Yes. I could proceed to the frontier of Portugal, could perhaps get by sea to Tavira-then, as a Frenchman, cross into Spain, and so to Cadiz."

He pondered a little on this, then said: "Yes, the idea is feasible. Only, how to go to Tavira?" and he bent over a chart lying on the table, and regarded it fixedly as he spoke. "How to do that?" running his finger down the coast line of Portugal as he spoke, and then up again as far north as the Netherlands, stopping at Rotterdam.

"All traffic is closed," he muttered, "between Spain and Holland now, otherwise there would be countless vessels passing between Rotterdam and Cadiz which would doubtless put you ashore on the Portuguese coast. But now-now-there will scarce be any."

Ginkell had been called away by one of his aides-de-camp as his lordship bent over the chart and mused upon it, or, doubtless, his astute Dutch mind might have suggested some way out of the difficulty that stared us in the face; but even as we pondered over the sheet an idea occurred to me.

"My Lord," I said, "may I suggest this: That I should make my way to Rotterdam to begin with-by some chance there may be a ship going south-through some part of the bay at least. But even if it is not so-if all traffic is stopped-why then I could at least get to England, might arrive there before the fleet sails for Cadiz."

"Nay," his Lordship interrupted; "you would be too late. They may have sailed by now."

"I know not what further to propose, my Lord."

"We must risk it," he said, promptly. "Chance your finding some vessel by which you can proceed, even if only part of the way. The hope is a poor one, yet 'tis worth catching at. King Louis wants the money those galleons are bringing; his coffers are empty; he hardly knows where to turn for the wherewithal to pay his and his grandson's men; we want it, too, if we can get it. Above all, we want to prevent the wealth falling into the hands of Spain, which now means France. Mr. Crespin, on an almost forlorn chance you must start for Rotterdam."

"When shall I go, my Lord? To-night? At once?"

"You are ready?"

"I am ready."

"Good! You have the successful soldier's qualities. Yes, you must go at once-at once."

* * * * *

That night I was on the road for Rotterdam, which is fifty leagues and more to the northeast of Kaiserswerth, so that I had a fair good ride before me ere I reached what might prove to be the true outset of my journey.

I did not go alone, however, since at this time I rode in the company of my Lord Marlborough, who was returning to the Hague, to which he had come in March as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the States General, as well as Captain General of all Her Majesty's forces, both at home and abroad. Also, his Lordship had been chosen to command the whole of the allied forces combined against the King of France and his grandson, the King of Spain, whom we regarded only as the Duke of Anjou; and he was now making all preparations for that great campaign, which was already opened, and was soon to be pushed on with extreme vigour and with such success that at last the power and might of Louis were quite crushed and broken. This concerns not me, however, at present.

Nor did my long ride in company with his Lordship and a brilliant staff offer any great incident. Suffice it, therefore, if I say that on the evening of the second day from my setting out, and fifty hours after I had quitted Kaiserswerth, I rode into Rotterdam, and, finding a bed for the night at the "Indian Coffee House," put up there.

This I did not do, however, without some difficulty, since, at this time, Rotterdam was full of all kinds of people from almost every part of Europe, excepting always France and Spain, against the natives of which countries very strict laws for their expulsion had been passed since the declaration of war which was made conjointly by the Queen, the Emperor and the States General, against those two countries on the 4th of May of this year, 1702.

But of other peoples the town was, as I say, full. In the river there lay coasting vessels, deep sea vessels, merchant ships, indeed every kind of craft almost that goes out to sea, and belonging to England, to Holland, to Denmark and other lands. Also there were to be seen innumerable French vessels; but these were prizes which had been dragged in after being taken prisoners at sea, and would be disposed of shortly, as well as their goods and merchandise, by the Dyke-Grauf, or high bailiff. And of several of these ships, the captains and the seamen, as well as in many cases the passengers who were belated on their journeys, were all ashore helping to fill up the inns and taverns. Also troops were quartered about everywhere, these being not only the Dutch, or natives, who were preparing to go forward to the Hague and thence to wheresoever my Lord Marlborough should direct, but also many of our own, brought over by our great ships of war to Helvetsluys, and, themselves, on their way to serve under his command.

The room, therefore, which I got at the Indian Coffee House, was none of the best, yet, since I was a soldier, I made shift with it very well, and in other ways the place was convenient enough for my purpose. It may be, indeed, that I could scarce have selected a better house at which to stop, seeing that the "ordinary" below was the one most patronized by the merchant captains who flocked in daily for their dinner, and for the conversation and smoking and drinking which succeeded that meal.

And now, so that I shall arrive as soon as may be at the description of all that befell me, and was the outcome of the mission which the Earl of Marlborough confided to me, let me set down at once that it was not long before I, by great good chance, stumbled on that very opportunity which I desired, and which was so necessary to the accomplishment of what his Lordship wanted.

This is how it happened:

After the ordinary, at which I myself took a seat every day at one o'clock, the drinking and the smoking and the conversation began, as I have said, and none, however strange they might be at first to the customers of the place, could be there long without the making of acquaintances; for all the talk ran on the one subject in which all were interested and absorbed, namely, the now declared war and the fighting which had been done, and was also to do; on the stoppage to trade and ruin to business that must occur, and such like. And I can tell you that many an honest sea captain and many a burly Rotterdam burgher drank down his schnapps or his potato brandy or seidel of brown beer, as his taste might be, while heaving also of sighs, or muttering pious exclamations or terrible curses—also as his taste might direct—at the threatened ruin, and also at the fear which gripped his heart, that soon he would not have the wherewithal left for even these gratifications, humble as they were.

"Curse the war!" said one, to whom I had spoken more than once. He was, indeed, my captain of *La Mouche Noire*, in whose ship you have already found me; "it means desolation for me and mine if it lasts, hunger and shoelessness for my wife and little ones at home in Shadwell. Above all I curse the ambition of the French king, who has plunged all Europe into it; placed all honest men 'twixt hawk and buzzard, as to fortune. Curse him, I say."

"Ay, gurse him!" chimed in a fat Friesslander captain, who sat at his elbow. "Gurse him, I say, too. I was now choost maging for Chava; should have peen out of the riffer mit meine vreight if his vleet had not gorne along mit that von gursed Chean Part in it, ven I had to put pack. And here I am mit all mein goots-"

"And here am I, mit all mein!" broke in my captain, a-laughing in spite of himself, "yet-yet I know not if I will not make a push for it. I think ever of the home at Shadwell and the little ones. I could not abide to think also of their calling for bread, and of their mother having none to give them. Yet 'twill come to that ere long. And the war may last for years."

"Where were you for?" I asked him, using indeed what had become a set phrase in my mouth since I had consorted with all these sailors. For by enquiring of each one with whom I conversed what his destination had been, or would be if he had courage to risk the high seas outside, I thought that at last I might strike upon one whose way was mine. For all were not afraid to go forth; indeed there was scarcely a dark night in which one or two did not get down the river and sneak out into the open, thinking that, when there, there was a chance of escaping the French ships of war and privateers and of reaching their destination, while by remaining here there was no chance of earning a brass farthing. And I had known of several ships going out since I had been in Rotterdam, only they were of no use to me. One was bound for Archangel, another one for the Indies, a third for our colony of Massachusetts.

"I," said my captain, whose name I knew afterward to be Tandy. "I? Oh, I was freighted for Cadiz. But of course, that can never be now. Yet if I could but get away I might do much with my goods. At Lisbon they would sell well, or even farther south. Though, 'tis true, there's not much money below that till one comes to Spain."

Though I had thought the time must come when I should hear one of these sailors say that Cadiz was, or had been, his road (I knew that if it did not come soon 'twould be no good for me, and I might as well make my way back to my regiment), yet now, when I did so hear it, I almost started with joyful surprise. Yet even in so hearing, what had I gained? The captain had but said that at one time, before the declaration of hostilities, he had been ready to sail for Cadiz. He did not say that at this moment-almost three months later-he was still likely to go. Instead, had said it could never be now.

But-for it meant much to me! – my heart beat a little faster as I asked, leaning across the beer and spirit-slopped table to him:

"Do you ever on your cruises carry passengers?"

He gave me a quick glance. I read it to mean that he would be glad to know what my object could be in such a question, put seriously and in a somewhat low tone, as though not intended for other people's ears. Then he said:

"Oh! ay! I carry 'em, when I can get 'em, if they will pay fairly. But who do you think would trust themselves aboard a coaster now, in such times as these, unless she was under convoy of one of the queen's ships in company with others?"

"I would," I replied, leaning even a little more forward than before, and speaking in a still lower tone. "I would, to get as near to Cadiz as might be. And pay well, too."

He did not speak for a moment; instead, he glanced his eye over me as though scanning my outward gear for proof of what I had said as to paying handsomely. Yet I did not fear this scrutiny, for I was well enough appareled at all points, having when I left Venloo put off my uniform and donned a very fair riding suit of blue cloth, well faced and passemented; also my plain sword and wig were of the best, such as befitted a gentleman.

"Pay well," he said, when he had concluded this inspection, "pay well. Humph! That might induce me, since I am like enough to lose my goods ere I sight Cape Finisterre. Pay well. You mean it? Well, now see! What would you pay? Come. A fancy price? To be put as near Cadiz as can be compassed. And no questions asked," and he winked at me so that I wondered what he took me for. Later on I found that he supposed me to be one of the many spies in the pay of France, who, because they had both the English and French tongue, were continually passing from one part of the continent of Europe to another.

"As to the questions," I replied, "you might ask as many as you desired. They would not be answered. As to the pay, what will you take?"

He thought a moment, and again his eye ranged over my habiliments; then he said, sharply:

"A hundred guineas. Fifty down, on the nail, the rest at the end of the journey. You to take all risks. That is, I mean, even though we get no further than the mouth of the Scheldt-which is like enough. Say, will you give it?"

"'Tis, indeed, a fancy price, yet, on conditions, yes," I answered promptly.

"Those conditions being-

"That you weigh within twenty-four hours; that if we are chased you run, or even fight, till there is no further hope, and that if we escape capture you approach to the nearest point to Cadiz possible. Tavira to be that point."

He got up and went out of the door into the street, and I saw him looking up into the heavens at the clouds passing beneath the sun. Then he came back and resumed his seat, after which he said:

"If the wind keeps as 'tis now I will weigh ere twenty-four hours are past. The conditions to be as you say. And the fifty guineas to be in my hands ere we up anchor. They," he added, half to himself, "will be something for the home even though I lose my ship."

And this being settled and all arrangements concluded, we went off in his boat, which was lying at the steps of the Boömjies, to see the ship. Then, I having selected my cabin out of two which he had unoccupied, returned to the coffee house to write my Lord Marlborough word of what I had done, to dispose of my horse-which I was sorry enough to do, since it was a good, faithful beast that had carried me well; yet there was no use in keeping it, I not knowing if I should ever see Rotterdam again-to make one or two other preparations, and to write to my mother at home.

As to the hundred guineas-great as the demand was, I felt justified in paying it, since, if I succeeded in my task, the result might be splendid for England. Also I had a sufficiency of money with me, the earl having ordered two hundred guineas to be given me out of the regimental chest (which was pretty full, seeing that at Venloo eight great chests of French gold were taken possession of by us on gaining the town), and had also given me bills for three hundred more guineas, signed by his own hand, which the money changers would be only too glad to pay anywhere. And, besides this, I had some money of my own, and should have more from the sale of the horse.

There remains one thing, however, to mention, which I have almost forgot to set down, namely, that at the Indian Coffee House I had given my name accurately, his Lordship, who was perfectly acquainted with France-indeed, he had once served her under Turenne, in his capacity of colonel of the "English Regiment" sent out by King Charles the Second-having said that Crespin was as much a French as an English name. And although no questions had as yet been asked as to what my business was, there being, indeed, none who had any right or title to so ask, I had resolved that, if necessary, I would do this: namely, here in Holland I would be English, since, at the time, and we being allies, it was almost one and the same thing; and that in Spain I would be French, which was also at the period one and the same thing. And if we were to be captured by any of Louis' privateers or ships of war also I should be French, in that case possibly a Canadian, to account for any strangeness in my accent.

And with this all fixed in my mind I made my preparations for going to sea in *La Mouche Noire*.

CHAPTER IV. AN ESCAPE

The wind shifted never a point, so that, ere sunset the next day, we were well down the river and nearing the mouth, while already ahead of us we could see the waves of the North Sea tumbling about. Also, we could see something else, that we could have done very well without, namely, the topmasts of a great frigate lying about three miles off the coast, or rather cruising about and keeping off and on, the vessel being doubtless one of Louis' warships, bent on intercepting anything that came out of the river.

"Yet," said Captain Tandy, as he stood on the poop and regarded her through his perspective glass, "she will not catch us. Let but the night fall, and out we go, while, thanks to the Frenchman who built our little barky, we can keep so well in that she can never come anear us."

"She can come near enough, though, to send a round shot or two into our side," I hazarded, "if she sees our lights."

"She won't see our lights," the captain made answer, and again he indulged in that habit which seemed a common one with him—he winked at me; a steady, solemn kind of a wink, that, properly understood, conveyed a good deal. And, having favoured me with it, he gave orders that the light sail under which we had come down the river should be taken in, and, this done, we lay off the little isle of Rosenberg, which here breaks the Maas in two, until nightfall.

And now it was that Tandy gave me a piece of information which, at first, I received with anything but satisfaction; the information, to wit, that at the last moment almost—at eleven o'clock in the morning, and before I had come on board—he had been fortunate enough to get another passenger, this passenger being the man Carstairs—or Cuddiford, as he came to consider him—whom, at the opening of this narrative, you have seen in a delirium.

"I could not refuse the chance, Mr. Crespin," he said, for he knew my name by now. "Things are too ill with me, owing to this accursed fresh war, for me to throw guineas away. So when his blackamoor accosted me at the 'Indian' and said that he heard I was going a voyage south—God, He knows how these things leak out, since I had never spoke a word of my intention, though some of the men, or the ship's chandler, of whom I bought last night, may have done so—and would I take his master and him? I was impelled to do it! There are the wife and the children at home."

"And have you got another hundred guineas from him?" I asked.

"Ay, for him and the black. But they will not trouble you. The old gentleman—who seems to be something like a minister—tells me he is not well, and will not quit his cabin. The negro will berth near him; they will not interfere with you."

"Do they know there is another passenger aboard?"

"I have not spoken to the old man; maybe, however, some of the sailors may have told the servant. Yet none know your name; but I—it can be kept secret as you wish." And again he winked at me, thinking, of course, as he had done before, that my business was of a ticklish nature, as indeed it was, though not quite that which he supposed. Nay, he felt very sure it must be so, since otherwise he would have got no hundred guineas out of me for such a passage.

"I do not wish it known," I said. "It *must* be kept secret. Also my country. There must be no talking."

"Never fear," he replied. "I know nothing. And I do not converse with the men, most of whom are Hollanders, since I had to pick them up in a hurry. As for the old man, you need not see him; and, if you do, you can keep your own counsel, I take it."

I answered that I could very well do that; after which the captain left me—for now the night had come upon us, dark and dense, except for the stars, and we were about to run out into the open. But

even as I watched the men making sail, and felt the little ship running through the water beneath me-I could soon hear her fore foot gliding through it with a sharp ripple that resembled the slitting of silk-I wished that those other passengers had not come aboard, that I could have made the cruise alone.

Yet we were aboard, he and I, and there was no help for it; it must be endured. But still I could not help wondering what any old minister should want to be making such a journey as this for; especially wondered, also, why he should be attended by a black servant; and why, again, it should be worth his while to pay a hundred guineas for the passage.

But you know now as well as I do that this man was no minister, but rather, if Tandy's surmises were right, some villainous old filibuster who had lived through evil days and known evil spirits; my meditations are, therefore, of no great import. Rather let me get on to what was the outcome of my journey.

When we were at sea we showed no light at all; no! not at foremast, main or mizzen; so that I very well understood now why the captain had winked as he said that the Frenchman, if she was that, would not see us; and especially I understood it when, on going below, I found that the cabin windows were fastened with dead lights so that no ray could steal out from them. Also, the hatches were over the companions so that neither could any light ascend from below. In truth, as we slapped along under the stiff northeast breeze that blew off the Holland coast, we seemed more like some dark flying spectre of the night than a ship, and I could not but wonder to myself what we should be taken for if seen by any passer-by. Yet, had I only known, there were at that time hundreds of ships passing about in all these waters in the same manner-French ships avoiding the English war vessels, and English and Dutch avoiding the French war vessels; and-which, perhaps, it was full as well I did not know-sometimes two of them came into contact with each other, after which neither was ever more heard of. Only, in different ports there were weeping women and children left, who-sometimes for years! – prayed for the day to come when the wanderers might return, they never knowing that, instead of those poor toilers of the sea having been made prisoners (as they hoped) who would at last be exchanged, they were lying at the bottom of the sea.

"'Tis a gay minister, at any rate," I said to Captain Tandy when I returned to the deck-for all was so stuffy down below, owing to the closing up of every ingress for the fresh air, that I could not remain there-"and he at least seems not to mind the heat."

"What is he doing, then?" the captain asked.

"He is singing a little," I replied, "and through the half open door of his cabin one may hear the clinking of bottle against glass. A merry heart."

"The fiend seize his mirth! I hope he will not make too much turmoil, nor set the ship afire. If he does we shall be seen easy enough."

I hoped so, too, and as each night the old man waxed more noisy and the clink of the bottle was heard continuously-until at last his drinking culminated as I have written-the fear which the captain had expressed took great hold of me, so that I could scarce sleep at all. Yet those fears were not realized, the Lord be praised! or I should scarcely be penning this narrative now.

The first night passed and, as 'twas summer, the dawn soon came, by which time we were running a little more out to sea, though-since to our regret we saw that the frigate was on our beam instead of being left far behind, as we had hoped would be the case-we now sailed under false colours. Therefore at our peak there flew at this time the lilies of France, and not our own English flag. Yet 'twas necessary-imperative, indeed-that such should be the case if we would escape capture. And even those despised lilies might not save us from that. If the frigate, which we knew by this time to be a ship of war, since her sides were pierced three tiers deep for cannon, and on her deck we could observe soldiers, suspected for a moment those colours to be false she would slap a shot at us; the first, perhaps, across our bows only, but the second into our waist, or, if that missed, then the third, which would doubtless do our office for us.

At present, however, she did nothing, only held on steadily on her course, which nevertheless was ominous enough, for this action told plainly that she had seen us leave the river, or she would have remained luffing about there still. And, also, she must have known we were not French, for what French ship would have been allowed to come out of the Maas as we had come?

She did nothing, I have said; yet was not that sleuth-like following of hers something? Did it not expound the thoughts of her captain as plainly as though he had uttered them in so many words? Did it not tell that he was in doubt as to who and what we were; that he set off against the suspicious fact of our having quitted the river, which bristled with the enemies of France, the other facts, namely, that our ship was built French fashion, that maybe he could read her French name on her stern, and that she flew the French flag?

Yet what puzzled us more than aught else was, how had the frigate known that we had so got out? The night had been dark and black, and we showed no lights.

Still she knew it.

The day drew on and, with it, the sea abated a little, so that the tumbling waves, which had often obscured the frigate from us for some time, and, doubtless, us from it, became smoother, and Tandy, who had never taken his eye off the great ship, turned round and gave now an order to the men to hoist more sail. Also another to the man at the wheel to run in a point.

Then he came to where I was standing, and said:

"She draws a little nearer; I fear they will bring us to. Ha! as I thought." And even as he spoke there came a puff from the frigate's side; a moment later the report of a gun; another minute, and, hopping along the waves went a big round shot, some fifty yards ahead of us.

"What will you do?" I asked the captain. "The next will not be so far ahead."

"Run for it," he said. "They may not hit us-short of a broadside-and if I can get in another mile or so they cannot follow. Starboard, you below," he called out again to the man at the wheel, and once more bellowed his orders to the men aloft.

This brought the ship's head straight for where the land was-we could see it plain enough with the naked eye, lying flat and low, ten miles away-also it brought our stern to the frigate, so that we presented nothing but that to them-a breadth of no more than between twenty and twenty-five feet.

"'Twill take good shooting to hit us this way," said Tandy very coolly. "Yet, see, they mean to attempt it."

That this was so, one could perceive in a moment; then came three puffs, one after the other, from their upper tier; then the three reports; then the balls hurtling along on either side of us, one just grazing our larboard yard-arm-we saw the splinters fly like feathers! – the others close enough, but doing no harm.

"Shoot, and be damned to you," muttered Tandy; "another ten minutes more, and you can come no further. Look," and he pointed ahead of us to where I saw, a mile off, the water crisping and foaming over a shoal bank, "'tis eight miles outside Blankenberg, and is called 'The Devil's Bolster.' And we can get inside it, and they cannot." Then again he bellowed fresh orders, which even I, a landsman, understood well enough, or, at least, their purport. They were to enable us to get round and inside the reef, and so place it between us and the frigate.

They saw our move as soon as it was made, however, whereupon the firing from their gun-ports grew hotter, the balls rattling about us now in a manner that made me fear the ship must be struck ere long; nay, she was struck once, a round shot catching her on her starboard quarter and tearing off her sheathing in a long strip. Yet, at present, that was all the harm she had got, excepting that her mizzen shroud was cut in half.

But now we were ahead of the reef and about half a mile off it; ten minutes later we were inside it, and, the frigate being able to advance no nearer because of her great draught, we were safe. They might shoot, as the captain said, and be damned to them; but shoot as much as they chose, they were not very like to hit us, since we were out of range. We were well in sight of each other, however, the

reef lying like a low barricade betwixt us, and I could not but laugh at the contempt which the sturdy Dutch sailors we had on board testified for the discomfited Frenchmen. There were three of them at work on the fo'castle head at the time the frigate left off her firing, and no sooner did she do so and begin to back her sails to leave us in peace-though doubtless she meant lying off in wait for us when we should creep out-than these great Hollanders formed themselves into a sort of dance figure, and commenced capering and skipping about, with derisive gestures made at the great ship. And as we could see them regarding us through their glasses, by using our own, we knew very well that they saw these gestures of contempt. Tandy, however, soon put a stop to these, for, said he, "They may lie out there a week waiting for us, and if then they catch us, they will not forget. And 'twill go all the harder with us for our scorn. Peace, fools, desist." Whereon the men left off their gibes.

"Lie out there a week," thinks I to myself. "Fore Gad! I trust that may not be so. For if they do, and one delay follows another, heaven knows when I shall see Cadiz. Too late, anyway, to send the fleet after the galleons, who will, I fear, be in and unloaded long before the admiral can get up to Vigo."

Yet, as luck would have it, the frigate was not to lie there very long-not even so long as an hour. For, see, now, how Providence did intervene to help me on my way, and to remove at least that one obstacle to my going forward on my journey.

Scarce had those lusty Dutch sailors been ordered off the head by Tandy than, as I was turning away from laughing at them, my attention was called back by a shout from the same quarter, and on looking round, I saw two of them spring up the ladder again to the very spot they had left, and begin pointing eagerly away beyond the frigate. And following their glances and pointing, this is what I saw:

Two other great ships looming large on the seascape, rising rapidly above the water, carrying all their canvas, coming on at a mighty rate. Two great ships sailing very free but near together, which in a few moments spread apart, so that they put me in mind of some huge bird opening of its wings-I know not why, yet so it was! – and then came on at some distance from each other, their vast black hulls rising every moment, and soon the foam becoming visible beneath their bows as their fore feet flung it asunder.

"Down with that rag," shouted Tandy, squinting up at the lilies on our peak, and hardly shifting his perspective glass to do so. "Down with it, and up with our own. My word! The Frenchman will get a full meal now. Look at their royal masts and the flag of England flying on them."

I did look, and, after a hasty glance, at something else-the French frigate, our late pursuer!

Be very sure that she had seen those two avengers coming up in that fair breeze-also that she was making frantic efforts to escape. But her sails were all laid aback as I have said, also, she was off the wind. The glasses showed the confusion that prevailed on board her. And she had drifted so near the shoal that her danger was great. Unless she boldly ran out to meet those two queen's ships she would be on it ere long, and that was what she dared not do.

For now from the others we saw the puff of smoke, like white balls of wool, come forth; we saw the spits of flame; saw the Frenchman's mainmast go down five minutes later, and hang over the side nearest us like some wounded creature all entangled in a net. And still she neared the shoal, and still the white balls puffed out till they made a long fleecy line, through which the red flames darted; borne on the air we heard shouts and curses; amidst the roaring of the English cannon firing on the helpless, stricken thing, we heard another sound, a grinding, crashing sound, and we knew she was on the bank. Then saw above, at her mizzen, the French flag pulled down upon the cap, and heard through their trumpets their loud calls for assistance from the conquerors.

"Humph! Humph!" said Tandy. "Old Lewis," for so he spoke of him, "has got one ship the less-that's all. Loose the foresheet, there, my lads; stand by the mainsail halyards. Good. That's it; all together!"

And away once more we went.

CHAPTER V. THE ENGLISH SHIPS OF WAR

After that we met with no further trouble or interference, not even, so far as we knew, being passed by anything of more importance than a few small carrying craft similar to ourselves, who bore away from us on sighting with as much rapidity as we were prepared to bear away from them, since in those days, and for long after, no ship passing another at sea but dreaded it as though it was the Evil One himself; dreaded that the cabin windows, with their clean dimity cloths run across them, might be, in truth, nothing but masked gun ports with the nozzles of the cannon close up against the other side of those running curtains; dreaded, also, that, behind the bales of goods piled up in the waist, might be lurking scores of men, armed to the teeth, and ready for boarding!

Also, as though to favour us-or me, who needed to get to the end of my journey as soon as might be-the wind blew fresh and strong abaft us from the north, so that by the evening of the fifth day from leaving Rotterdam we were drawing well to our journey's end, and were, in fact, rounding Cape St. Vincent, keeping in so near the coast that we could not only see the cruel rocks that jut out here like the teeth of some sea monster, but also the old monks sitting sunning themselves in front of their monastery above the cliffs.

And now it was at that time, and when we were getting very near to Tavira-which must be our journey's end, unless the English fleet, of which Lord Marlborough had spoken, was already into Cadiz, and masters of the place-that the old man who called himself Carstairs was taken with his delirium, of which I have written already.

But, as also I have told, he was better the next day, by noon of which we were well into the Bay of Lagos, and running for Cape Santa Maria; and 'twas then that he told me that story of his having much business to attend to at Cadiz, and that, the galleons being now due there, he was on his way to meet them.

That I laughed in my sleeve at the fool's errand on which this old man had come-this old man, who had been a thieving buccaneer, if his wanderings and Tandy's suspicions were true-you may well believe. Also, I could not help but fall a-wondering how he would feel if, on nearing Tavira, we learnt that our countrymen were masters of Cadiz. For then he would do no business with his precious galleons, even should my Lord Marlborough be wrong-which, however, from the sure way in which he had spoken, I did not think was very like to be the case-and even if they had made for Cadiz, since they would at once be seized upon.

It was, however, of extreme misfortune that just at this time when all was so well for my chances, and when we were nearing our destination, the weather should have seen fit to undergo a sudden change, and that not only did the wind shift, but all the summer clearness of the back end of this fair August month should have departed. Indeed, so strange a change came over the elements that we knew not what to make of it. Up to now the heat had been great, so great, indeed, that I-who could neither endure the stuffiness of my cabin below nor the continual going and coming of the negro in the gangway which separated his master's cabin from mine, nor the stench of some drugs the old man was continually taking-had been sleeping on the deck. But now the tempest became so violent that I was forced to retreat back to the cabin, to bear the closeness as best I might, to hear the flappings of the black creature's great feet on the wooden floor at all hours of the night, and, sometimes again, the yowlings of the old man for drink.

For with the shifting of the wind to the east, or rather east by south, a terrible storm had come upon us; across the sea it howled and tore, buffeting our ship sorely and causing such destruction that it seemed like enough each moment that we should go to the bottom, and this in spite of every precaution being taken, even to striking our topmasts. Also we lay over so much to our starboard, and

for so long, that again and again it seemed as though we should never right, while as we thus lay, the sea poured into us from port and scuttle. But what was worse for me-or would be worse if we lived through the tempest we were now in the midst of-we were being blown not only off our course, but back again the very way we had come, and out into the western ocean, so that to all else there had to be added the waste of most precious time. Time that, in my case, was golden!

Meanwhile Carstairs, who during the whole of our passage from Rotterdam had carefully kept his cabin-not even coming on deck during the time we were chased by the French frigate nor, later, when the two ships of war had battered and driven her on to the shoal bank-now saw fit to appear on deck and to take a keen interest in all that was going on around.

"A brave storm," he said, shrieking the words in my ear-I having at last struggled up again to get air-amidst the howling of the wind and the fall of the sea upon our deck, each wave sounding as though a mountain had fallen, "a brave storm! Ha! I have seen a-many, yet I know not if ever one worse than this."

"What think you of our chances?" I bawled back at him, while I noticed that his eye was brighter and clearer than I had seen it before, and that in his face there was some colour.

"We shall do very well," he answered, "having borne up till now. That fellow knows his work," and he nodded toward where Tandy was engaged in getting the foreyard swayed up. "We shall do."

His words were indeed prophetic, for not an hour after he had uttered them the wind shifted once more, coming now full from the south, which was, however, of all directions the very one we would not have had it in; and with the change the sea went down rapidly, so that in still another hour the waves, instead of breaking over our decks, only slapped heavily against the ship's sides, while the vessel itself wallowed terribly amongst them. Yet so far we were saved from worse.

But now to this there succeeded still another change-the sea began to smoke as though it were afire; from it there rose a cold steaming vapour, and soon we could not see twenty yards ahead of us, nor was the man at the wheel able to see beyond the fore-hatch. So that now we could not move in any direction for fear of what might be near, and were forced to burn lights and fire guns at intervals to give notice of our whereabouts in chance of passers by.

Again, however-this time late at night-the elements changed, the mist and fog thinned somewhat and rose some feet from the surface of the now almost tranquil sea; it was at last possible to look ahead somewhat, though not possible to proceed, even if the light wind which blew beneath the fog would have taken us the way we desired to go.

And still the mist cleared so that we could see a mile-or two miles-around, and then we observed a sight that none of us could comprehend, not even Cuddiford, who whispered once to himself, though I heard him plain enough, "What in the name of the devil does it mean? What? What?"

Afar off, on our starboard quarter, we saw in the darkness of the night-there was no moon-innumerable lights dotting the sea; long lines of light such as tiers of ports will emit from ships, also lights higher up, as though on mastheads and yards-numbers of them, some scores each in their cluster.

Cuddiford's voice sounded in my ear. Cuddiford's finger was laid on my arm.

"You understand?" he asked.

"No."

"'Tis some great fleet."

I started-hardly could I repress that start or prevent myself from exclaiming: "The English fleet for Cadiz!"

Yet even as I did so, the water rippled on the bows where we were standing. It sounded as if those ripples blended with the man's voice and made a chuckling laugh.

"A large fleet," he said slowly, "leaving Spain and making for the open."

Then a moment later he was gone from my side.

Leaving Spain and making for the open! What then did that mean? "Leaving Spain and making for the open!" I repeated to myself again. Was that true? And to assure myself I leant further forward

into the night-as though half a yard nearer to those passing lights would assist my sight! – and peered at those countless clusters.

Was it the English fleet that was leaving Spain? Whether that was or not-whether 'twas in truth the English fleet or not-it *was* leaving Spain; I could understand that. We in our ship were almost stationary; that body was rapidly passing out to sea.

What did it mean? Perhaps that the English had done their work-destroyed Cadiz. I did not know if such were possible, but thought it might be so. Perhaps that the galleons had been on their way in, after all, and had been warned of those who were there before them, and so had turned tail and fled.

Yet I feared-became maddened and distraught almost at the very idea-that, having done their work, my countrymen should have left the place, gone out to the open on, perhaps, their way back to England. Became maddened because, if such were the case, there was no opportunity left me of advising them about the galleons. While, on the other hand, if that passing fleet was in truth the galleons, then were they saved, since never would they come near the coast of Spain again while British ships remained there. Rather would they keep the open for months, rather put back again to the Indies than run themselves into the lion's jaws.

Truly I was sore distressed in pondering over all this; truly my chance of promotion seemed very far off now. Yet I had one consolation: I had done my best; it was not my fault.

That night, to make things more unpleasant than they already were-and to me it seemed that nothing more was wanting to aid my melancholy! – Cuddiford began his drinkings and carousals again, shutting off himself with the negro in his cabin, from whence shortly issued the sounds of glasses clinking, of snatches of songs-in which the black joined-of halloaing and of toasts and other things. Ribald bawlings, too, of a song of which I could catch only a few words now and again, but which seemed to be about a mouse which had escaped from a trap and also from a great fierce cat ready to pounce on it. Then, once more, clappings and clinkings of glasses together-an intolerable noise, be sure! – and presently, with an oath, confusion drank to England.

"So," thinks I, "my gentleman, that is how you feel, is it? Confusion to England! Who and what are you, then, in the devil's name? Spy of France or Spain, besides being retired filibuster, or what? Confusion to England, eh?"

And even as I thought this and heard his evil toast, I determined to hear more. Whereon I slipped quietly off my bunk, got out into the gangway and listened across it to his cabin opposite, feeling very sure as I did so that both he and his black imagined I was up on deck.

Then I heard him say, going on, evidently, with a phrase he had begun:

"Wherefore, I tell you, my lily, my white pearl, that those accursed seamen and soldiers-this Rooke, who chased me once so that I lost all my goods in my flight-are tricked, hoodwinked, *embustera; flanqués comme une centaine d'escargots!* Done for-and so is this white-livered Englishman over there in t'other cabin-who I do believe is an English spy. Ho! that we had him in Maracaibo or Guayaquil. Hein! Hey! my snowball?"

"Hoop! Hoop!" grunted the brute, his companion. "Hoop! Maracaibo! Hoop! But, but, John" – "John," thinks I, "and to his master!" – "don't speak so loud. Perhaps they hear you."

"Let them hear and be damned to them. What care I?" Yet still he lowered his voice, though not so low but what I made out his words:

"Fitted out a fleet, did they, to intercept the galleons? Oh! the beautiful galleons! Oh! the sweet and lovely galleons! Oh, my beautiful *Neustra Senora de Mercedes*. You remember how she sits on the water like a swan, Cæsar? And the beautiful *Santa Susanna!* What ships! what lading! Oh! I heard it all in London. I know. Thought they would catch 'em in Cadiz, did they? Ha! Very well. Now, see, my lily white. They have been too quick; got in too soon-and-and what's the end on't? Those are the galleons going out-back again to the sea-and the English fleet can stop in Cadiz till the forts sink 'em

or they rot. Give me some more drink. 'Of all the girls that there can be, the Indy girl's the girl for me,'" and he fell a-singing.

"If he is right, my Lord Marlborough has been deceived," I whispered to myself. "Yet which knows the most? Still this old ruffian must be right. Who else could be putting to sea but the galleons?" and I went back once more to my cabin to ponder over matters.

But now-all in a moment-there arose such an infernal hubbub from that other cabin that one might have thought all the fiends from below had been suddenly let loose; howls from the negro, so that I thought the other must be killing of him in his drunken frenzy; peals of laughter from the old man, bangings and kickings of bulkheads and the crash of a falling glass. And, in the middle of it all, down ran Tandy from the deck above, with, as I thought, a more concerned look upon his face than even such an uproar as this called for. Then he made at once for the cabin where those two were; yet, even as he advanced swiftly, he paused to ask me if I had heard him speak a passing picaroon a quarter of an hour back.

"Not I," I replied. "Who could hear aught above in such a din as this below? What did they tell you?"

"Bad! Bad news. But first to quell these brutes," and he ran on as he spoke, and kicked against the fast-closed cabin door.

"Bad news!" I repeated to myself, even as I followed him. "Bad news. My God! the old villain is right and the galleons have escaped. Farewell, my hopes of promotion; I may as well get back to the regiment by the first chance that comes."

But now I had to listen to Tandy setting his other passenger to his facings, which he did without more ado, since, the cabin door not being opened quick enough, he applied his brawny shoulder to it and soon forced it to slide back in its frame, the lock being torn out by his exertion. Then after a few oaths and curses, which need not be set down here, he roared as follows:

"See here, you drunken, disreputable old vagabond, out you go from this ship to-morrow morning, either ashore in Lagos bay or in the first Guarda Costa or sailing smack that comes anigh us carrying the Portygee colours. And as for you, you black, shambling brute," turning to the negro and seizing him by the wool, whereby he dragged him into the gangway, after which he administered to him a rousing kick, "get you forward amongst the men, and, by God! if you come back aft again I'll shoot you like a dog."

"My friend," said old Carstairs, speaking now with as much sobriety and dignity as though he had been drinking water all these days; "my good friend, you forget. I have paid my passage to Cadiz, and to Cadiz I will go, or the nearest touching point. Also, there are laws-"

"There are," roared Tandy, "and 'twill not suit you to come within a hundred leagues of any of them. To-morrow you go ashore."

"I have business with the in-coming galleons," said Carstairs, leering at him. "Those galleons going out now will come in again, you know. Soon!" and still he leered.

"Galleons, you fool!" replied the captain. "Those are the English warships. Your precious galleons may be at the bottom of the ocean. Very like are by now."

And then that old man's face was a sight to see, as, suddenly, it blanched a deathly white.

"The English warships," he murmured. "The English warships," and then fell back gasping to his berth, muttering: "Out here! Out here!"

"Is this true?" I asked him a moment later, as we went along forward together. "Is it true?"

"Ay, partly," he replied. "Partly. They are the English ships of war, but, my lad, I have had news which I did not tell him. They are in retreat. Have failed. Cadiz is not taken, and they are on their way back to England."

"My God!" I exclaimed. And I know that as I so spoke I, too, was white to the lips.

"On their way back to England!" I repeated.

"Ay-that's it," he said.

CHAPTER VI. GALLEONS ABOUT!

"What's to do now? That's the question," said Tandy, an hour later, as he and I sat in his little cabin abaft the mainmast, while, to hearten ourselves up, we sipped together a bottle of Florence wine which he had on board, and he sucked at his great pipe. "What now? No use for me to think of Cadiz, though what a chance I would have had if our countrymen had only made themselves masters of it! And for you, Mr. Crespin? For you? I suppose, in truth, you knew of this-had some affair of commerce, too, which brought you this way, on the idea that they would be sure to capture the place."

"Ay, I had some idea," I answered, moodily, thinking it mattered very little what I said now, short of the still great secret that the galleons were going into Vigo, and never did mean coming into these more southern regions. This secret I still kept, I say-and for one reason. It was this, namely, that I thought it very likely that, even though the fleet under Rooke might be driven back from Cadiz, they yet had a chance of encountering the galleons making their way up to Vigo, and, if they did so, I felt very sure that they would attack those vessels, even in their own hour of defeat. Therefore, I said nothing about the real destination of the Spanish treasure ships, though I knew well enough that all hope was gone of my being the fortunate individual to put my countrymen on their track.

Also, I remembered that that hoary-headed old ruffian, Carstairs, had spoken of two at least of those galleons as being of importance to him-and you may be sure that I had no intention whatever of enlightening him as to anything I knew.

"What did the Portuguese picaroon tell you?" I asked of Tandy, now; "what information give? And-are they sure of their news?"

"Oh, very sure," he answered. "No doubt about that. No doubt whatever that we have failed in the attack on Cadiz-abandoned the siege, gone home. They were too many for us there, and-'tis not often that it happens, God be praised! – we are beaten."

"But why so sure? And are they-these Portuguese-to be trusted?"

"What use to tell lies? They *are* Portuguese, and would have welcomed a victory."

I shrugged my shoulders at this-then asked again what the strength of their information was.

To which the captain made reply:

"They came in, it seems, early in the month, and called on the governor to declare for Austria against France, to which he returned reply that it was not his custom to desert his king, as many of the English were in the habit of doing, he understood; whereon-the Duke of Ormond being vexed by such an answer, which, it seems, did reflect on him-the siege of Port St. Mary's commenced, the place being taken by our people and being found to be full of wealth-

"Taken and full of wealth!" I exclaimed. "Yet you say we are defeated!"

"Listen," went on Tandy, "that was as nothing; for now the German Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt, who had come too, in the interests of his Austrian master, interfered, begging of Rooke and that other not to destroy the town, since it would injure their cause forever with the Spaniards, and-and-well, the Portygee captain of that picaroon I spoke says that they were only too willing to fall in with his desires and retire without making further attempt."

"And these are English seamen and soldiers!" I muttered furiously. "My God! To turn tail thus!"

"Ormond agreed not with these views, it seems," Tandy went on, "but he could not outweigh the admirals-and that is all I know, except that he will perhaps impeach 'em when they get back to England. And, anyway, they are gone."

"And with them," I thought to myself, "go all my hopes. The galleons will get in safe enough; there is nothing for it but to make back for Holland and tell the earl that I have failed. No more than that," and my bitterness was great within me at these reflections, you may be sure.

Tandy, I doubted not, observed these feelings which possessed me, for a minute later he said-while I observed that in a kindly way he filled up my glass for me, as I sat brooding with my head upon my hands by the side of the cuddy table:

"I see this touches you nearly, Mr. Crespin, and am grieved. Yet what will you do now? Since you have missed your chance-I know not what-will you return with me? If so you are very welcome, and-and," he spoke this with a delicacy I should scarce have looked for, "and there will be no-no-passage money needed. *La Mouche Noire* is at your service to Rotterdam, or, for the matter of that, to Deal or London, or where you will. I shall but stay to go in to Lagos for wood and water, and, perhaps, sell some of my goods, if fortune serves so far, and then-why then, 'tis back again to Holland or England to see what may be done. I have the passage moneys of you and that old ribald aft. For me things might be worse, thank God!"

At first I knew not what answer to make to this kindly, offer-for kindly it was, since there was according to our compact no earthly reason whatsoever why he should convey me back again, except as a passenger paying highly for the service. In truth, I was so sick and hipped at the vanishing of this, my great opportunity, that I had recked nothing of what happened now. All I knew was that I had failed; that I had missed, although through no fault of mine own, a glorious chance. Therefore I said gloomily:

"Do what you will-I care not. I must get me back to Holland somehow, and may as well take passage there with you as go other ways. In truth there is none that I know of. Yet, kind as your offer is to convey me free of charge, it must not be. I cannot let you be at a loss, and I have a sufficiency of money."

"Oh! as for that, 'tis nothing. However, we will talk on this later. Now let's see for getting into Lagos-there is nothing else to be done. 'Specially as I must have wood and water."

Then he went away to study his chart and compass, while I sought my bed again, and, all being perfect silence at this time in Carstairs' cabin-doubtless he was quite drunk by now! – I managed to get some sleep, though 'twas uneasy at the best.

In the morning when I again went on deck I saw that we were in full sail, as I had guessed us to be from the motion of the ship while dressing myself below; also, a look at the compass box told me we were running due north-for Lagos. And, if aught could have cheered the heart of a drooping man, it should have been the surroundings of this fair, bright morning. It was, I remember well, September 22-the glistening sea, looking like a great blue diamond sparkling beneath the bright sun, the white spume flung up forward over our bows, the equally white sheets above. Also, near us, to add to the beauty of the morn, the sea was dotted with a-many small craft, billander rigged, their sails a bright scarlet-and these, Tandy told me, were Portuguese fishing boats out catching the tunny, which abounds hereabout. While, away on our starboard beam, were-I started as I looked at them-what were they?

Three great vessels near together, their huge white sails bellied out to the breeze, sailing very free; the foam tossed from their stems, almost contemptuously, it seemed, so proudly did they dash it away from them; vessels full rigged, and tightly, too; vessels along the sides of which there ran tier upon tier of gun-ports; vessels also, from each of whose mastheads there flew a flag-the flag of England!

"What does it mean?" I asked Tandy, who strolled along the poop toward me, his face having on it a broad grin, while his eye drooped into that wink he used so. "What does it mean? They are our own ships of war; surely they are not chasing us!"

"Never fear!" said he. "They are but consorts of ours just now. Oh! it's a brave talk we have been having together with the flags this morning. They are of the fleet-are Her Majesty's ships *Eagle*, *Stirling Castle* and *Pembroke*-and are doing exactly the same as ourselves, are going into Lagos for water. Also those transports behind," and he pointed away aft, where half a dozen of those vessels were following.

"The fleet," I gasped, "the fleet that has left Cadiz-the great fleet under Sir George Rooke-and going into Lagos!"

"Some of them-those you see now on our beam, and the transports coming up."

"And the others," I gasped again, overcome by this joyful news, "the others? What of them?"

"Oh! they will lie off till these go out with the fresh water casks. Then for England."

"Never," I said to myself. "Not yet, at least," and I turned my face away so that Tandy should not perceive the emotion which I felt sure must be depicted on it.

For think, only think, what this meant to England-to me!

It meant that I-the only man in the seas around Spain and Portugal who knew of where the galleons would be, or were by now-I who alone could tell them, tell this great fleet, which I had but lately missed, of the whereabouts of those galleons-had by God's providence come into communication with them again; meant that the instant we were in Lagos bay I could go aboard one of those great warships and divulge all-tell them to make for Vigo, tell them that it was in their power to deal so fierce a blow to Spain and France as should cripple them.

I could have danced and sung for very joy. I could have flung my arms around Tandy's sun-burned and hairy neck in ecstasy, have performed any act of craziness which men indulge in when a great happiness falls upon them; nay, would have done any deed of folly, but that I was restrained by the reflection of how all depended on me now, and of how-since I was the bearer of so great a piece of news from so great a man as the Earl of Marlborough-it behooved me to act with circumspection and decorum. Therefore I calmed myself, instead of indulging in any transports whatever. I recollect that I even forced myself to make some useless remark upon the beauty of the smiling morn; that I said also that I thought *La Mouche Noire* was making as good seaway as the great frigates themselves, then asked coldly and indifferently, with the same desire for disguise, when Tandy thought we might all be in the bay and at anchorage.

He glanced up at the sun-he had a big tortoise-shell watch in his pocket, but, sailor-like, never looked at it during the day, and when he had the sun for horologe-then leaned over the high gunwale of the ship and looked between his hands toward the north, and said:

"The old castle of Penhas is rising rapidly to view. 'Tis now eight of the clock. By midday we shall have dropped anchor."

"And the frigates?" I asked, with a nod toward the queen's great ships, which still were on our beam, in the same position to us as before.

"About the same. Only they will go in first to make choice of their anchorage." Then he added: "But they will not stay long; no longer than to fill the casks. Perhaps a day, or till nightfall."

"'Twill be long enough for me," I thought. "An hour would suffice to get on board one of them, ask to be taken off and sent to the admiral's ship to tell my tale. Long enough."

And now I went below again-with what different feelings from those which possessed me when I went on deck, you may well suppose-and began hastily to bestow my necessities, such as they were, into the bag I had carried behind me on my horse from Venloo to Rotterdam: a change of linen, some brushes, a sleeping gown and a good cloak, carried either around me or the bag, if warm and dry weather, my powder flask and a little sack of bullets for my cavalry pistols-that was all. Also I counted my pieces, took out my shagreen bill case and saw that my Lord Marlborough's money drafts were safe, as well as my commission to the regiment, which must now serve as a passport and letter of presentation, and I was ready to go ashore at any moment, and to transfer myself to one of the ships if they would take me with them after I had told my news, as my Lord had said I was to demand they should do. Yet, little while enough as I had been a-doing of these things, 'twas not so quickly finished but that there was time for an interruption; interruption from Mr. Carstairs, who, a moment or so after I had been in my cabin, tapped gently, almost furtively, it seemed to me, upon the door, and on my bidding him come in-I suspecting very well who it was-put his head through the opening he had made by pushing it back.

"Are we in danger?" he asked, while as he spoke, I could not but observe that he looked very badly this morning-perhaps from the renewals of his drinkings. His face was all puckered and drawn, and whiter, it seemed to me, than before; his eyes were hideously bloodshot-that must, I guessed, be the drink-while the white, coarse hand with which he grasped the panel shook, I observed.

"Danger!" I repeated coldly, as well as curtly, for, as you may be sure, I had come to thoroughly despise, as well as cordially to detest, this dissolute old man who, besides, had a black and fearful past behind him, if his feverish wanderings of mind were to be trusted. "Danger! From what?"

"There are war frigates by us," he whispered. "Do you not know?"

"Yes, I know. But you who have been, it seems, a sailor, should also know our own flag, I think."

"Our own flag! Our English flag!"

"Can you not see?"

"They are on the other side of the ship. I cannot see aught through my port."

"Look through mine, then," I answered, pointing to it, and he, with many courteous excuses for venturing to intrude-he was much changed now, I thought-went over to my window, and gazed at the queen's vessels.

"True," he said. "True. They are English-our-ships. Where could they come from, do you suppose?"

"From the Cadiz fleet. And they are going into Lagos, as we are."

"And then-do you know where to, then-afterward-noble sir?"

"Then they will go north."

He drew a long breath at this-I guessed it to be a sigh of satisfaction at the thought that the English fleet should be going north, while the galleons, in which he had seemed to be so concerned, should either be going into, or gone into, Cadiz-as he supposed. Then he said:

"Oh, sir, this is, indeed, good news. For-for-I have business at Cadiz-very serious business, and-if they had remained here in the south they might have done much harm to honest traders, might they not? Do you not think so?"

"They may do harm elsewhere," I answered, again curtly. And my brevity caused him to look at me enquiringly.

"What harm? What can they do?"

"Oh! as for that," I said, unable to resist the temptation of repaying him somewhat for all the discomfort he had caused in the ship, and also because I so much despised him, "as for that, they might do much. They say there are some galleons about. Supposing they should meet them. 'Tis a great fleet; it could be fateful to a weaker one."

"Galleons! Galleons about!" he repeated-shrieked, almost. "Nay! Nay! Nay! The galleons are safe in Cadiz by now."

"Are they?" I said, shrugging of my shoulders.

"Are they not?" And now his face was death itself.

"We spoke a ship last night which did not say so," I answered. "No galleons have passed this way, gone in yet."

I almost regretted my words, seeing, a moment later, their effect on him. For that effect was great-I had nigh written terrible.

He staggered back from the port-hole by which he had been standing, gazing out at the *Pembroke* and her consorts, his face waxy now from the absence of blood; his lips a bluish purple, so that I could see the cracks in them; his coarse white hands twitching; and his eyes roving round my cabin lighted on my washing commode, on which stood the water ewer; then he seized it and the glass, poured out from one to the other-his hand shook so that the neck of the vessel clinked a tune upon the rim of the glass-and drank, yet not without some sort of a murmured apology for doing so-an apology that became almost a whine.

"Not passed this way-not gone in yet? My God! Where are they? And-and-with that fleet here-here-here-'twixt here and Cape St. Vincent! Where are they?"

"Probably coming in now-on their way," I made answer. "Or very near." Then next said, quietly: "You seem concerned about this?"

"Concerned!" he wailed. "Concerned! I have my fortune, my all-'tis not much, yet much to me-on board two of the galleons, and-and-ah!" and he clutched at his ruffled shirt front. "The English fleet is there-across their path! My God!"

CHAPTER VII. LAGOS BAY

Tandy had timed our arrival in the bay with great exactness, since, soon after midday, both the queen's ships and ourselves had dropped anchor within it, the former saluting, and being saluted in return, by some artillery from the crazy old castle that rose above the shore. And now from those three frigates away went pinnaces and jolly boats, as well as the great long boats and launches, all in a hurry to fetch off the water which they needed, while also I could see very well that from the *Pembroke* they were a-hoisting overboard their barge, into which got some of the land officers-as the sailors call the soldiers-and also a gentleman in black who was, I supposed, a chaplain.

And then I considered that it was time for me to be ashore, too, since I knew not how long 'twould take for the ships of war to get in what they wanted, and to be off and away again; though Tandy told me I need be in no manner of hurry, since they had let down what he called their shore anchors, which they would not have done had they intended going away again in a moment, when they would have used instead their kedge, or pilot, anchors.

However, I was so impatient that I would not be stayed, and consequently begged the captain to let me have one of the shore boats, which had come out on our arrival and were now all around us, called alongside; and into this I jumped the instant it touched our ship. My few goods I left on board, to be brought on land when the captain himself came, which he intended to do later; nor did I make my farewells to him, since I felt pretty sure we should meet again shortly, while it was by no means certain that the admiral would take me with him, after I had delivered my news; but, instead, might order me to return at once to the earl with some reply message. Yet I hoped this would not be so, especially since his Lordship had bidden me see the thing out and then bring him, as fast as I could make my way back to the Netherlands, my account of what had been done.

As for that miserable old creature, Carstairs, I clean forgot all about him; nor even if I had remembered his existence, should I have troubled to pay him any adieux, for in truth, I never supposed that I should see him again in this world, and for certain, I had no desire to do so; yet as luck would have it-but there is no need to anticipate.

I jumped into the shore boat, I say, as soon as it came alongside *La Mouche Noire*, and was quickly rowed into the port, observing as I went that there was a considerable amount of craft moored in the bay, many of which had doubtless run in there during the storms of a night or two ago, while, also, there were some sheltering in it which would possibly have been lying in other harbors now-and those, Spanish ones-had it not been for the war and the consequent danger of attack from the English and Dutch navies in any other waters than those of Portugal, she being, as I have said, neutral at present, though leaning to our-the allies'-side. To wit, there were at this moment some German ships, also a Dane or two, a Dutchman and a Swedish bark here.

And now I stepped ashore on Portuguese ground, and found myself torn hither and thither by the most ragged and disorderly crowd of beggars one could imagine, some of them endeavouring to drag me off to a dirty inn at the waterside, in front of which there sat two priests a-drinking with some scaramouches, whom I took to be Algarvian soldiers, while others around me had, I did believe, serious intentions on my pockets had I not kept my hands tight in them. Also-which hearted me up to see-there were many of our English sailors about, dressed in their red kersey breeches with white tin buttons, and their grey jackets and Welsh kersey waistcoats, all of whom were bawling and halloaing to one another-making the confusion and noise worse confounded-and using fierce oaths in the greatest good humour. And then, while I stood there wondering how I should find those whom I sought for, I heard a voice behind me saying in cheery tones in my own tongue:

"Faith, Tom, 'tis an Englishman, I tell you. No doubt about that. Look to his rig; observe also he can scarce speak a word more of the language of the country he is in than we can ourselves. Does not that proclaim him one of us? Except our beloved friends, the French, who are as ignorant of other tongues as we are, we are the worst. Let's board him-we are all in the same boat."

Now, knowing very well that these remarks could hardly be applied to any one but me, I turned round and found close to my elbow a fat, jolly-looking gentleman, all clad in black, and with a black scarf slung across him, and wearing a tie-wig, which had not been powdered for many a day-a gentleman with an extremely red face, much pitted with the small-pox. And by his side there stood four or five other gentlemen, who, 'twas easy to see at a glance, were of my own trade-their gold laced scarlet coats, the aiguillettes of one, the cockades in all their hats, showed that.

"Sir," said the one who had spoken, taking off his own black hat, which, like his wig, would have been the better for some attention, and bowing low. "I fear you overheard me. Yet I meant no offense. And, since I am very sure that you are of our country, there should be none. Sir, I am, if you will allow me to present myself, Mr. Beauvoir, chaplain of her Majesty's ship, *Pembroke*. These are my friends, officers serving under his Grace of Ormond, and of my Lord Shannon's grenadiers and Colonel Pierce's regiment"; whereon he again took off his hat to me, in which polite salutation he was followed by the others, while I returned the courtesy.

And now I knew that I had found what I wanted-knew that the road was open to me to reach the admiral, to tell my tale. I had found those who could bring me into communication with the fleet; be very sure I should not lose sight of them now. But first I had to name myself, wherefore I said:

"Gentlemen, I am truly charmed to see you. Let me in turn present myself. My name is Mervyn Crespin, lieutenant in the Cuirassiers, or Fourth Horse, and it is by God's special grace that I have been so fortunate as to encounter you. For," and here I glanced round at the filthy crowd which environed us, and lowered my voice a little, "I am here on a special mission to your commander from my Lord Marlborough. Yet I thought I had failed when I heard you were off and away from Cadiz."

Now, when I mentioned the position which I held in the army all looked with increased interest at me, and again took off their hats, while when I went on to speak of my mission from the Earl of Marlborough there came almost a dazed look into some of their faces, as though 'twas impossible for them to understand what the Captain-General of the Netherlands could have to say with the fleet that had been sent forth from England to Cadiz.

"A message to our commander," Mr. Beauvoir said. "A message to our commander. By the Lord Harry, I am afraid 'tis even now a bootless quest, though. Our commander with all his fleet is on his way back to England-and pretty well dashed, too, through being obliged to draw off from Cadiz, I can tell you. I fear you will not see him this side of Spithead, even if you go with us, who are about to follow him."

That I was also "pretty well dashed" at this news needs no telling, since my feelings may be well enough conceived; yet I plucked up heart to say:

"I do think, if your captain but hears the news I bring, that he will endeavour to catch the fleet and turn it from its homeward course-ay, even though he sets sail again to-night without so much as a drop of fresh water in his casks. 'Tis great news-news that may do much to cripple France."

"Is it private, sir?" the chaplain asked. "For the ears of the admirals alone?"

"Nay," said I; "by no means private from English ears; yet," I continued, with still another glance around, "not to be spoken openly. Is there no room we can adjourn to?"

"We have been trying ourselves for half an hour to find an inn," said one of the grenadiers, with a laugh, "which swarms not with vermin of all sorts. Yet, come, let us endeavour again. Even though there is naught for gentlemen to eat or drink, we may, at least, be alone and hear this news. Come, let us seek for some spot," and he elbowed his way through the waterside crowd which still stood gaping round us, and which, even when we all moved away, hung on our heels, staring at us as

though we were some strange beings from another world. Also, perhaps, they thought to filch some scrap of lace or galloon from off our clothes.

"Away, vagabonds! What in heaven's name is Portuguese for 'away, vagabonds'?" muttered Mr. Beauvoir, making signs to the beggarly brood, who-perhaps because often our ships put in here for water, and they were accustomed to seeing the English-held out their dirty, claw-like hands, and shrieked: "Moaney! Moaney! Englase moaney!" "Away, I say, and leave us in peace!"

And gradually, seeing there was nothing more to be gotten after one or two of us had flung them a coin or so, they left us to our devices, so that we were able to stroll along the few miserable streets which the town possessed; able to observe, also, that there was no decent inn into which a person, who valued his future comfort and freedom from a month or so of itching, could put his foot in safety.

But now we reached a little open spot, or *plaza*, a place which had a melancholy, deserted look-there being several empty houses in this gloomy square-while, on another, we saw the arms of France stuck up, a shield with a blazing sun upon it, – the emblem of Louis! – and the lilies on it, also-and guessed it must be the consul's place of business. And here it seemed to me as if this was as fitting an opportunity as I should find for making the necessary disclosures-disclosures which, when these gentlemen had heard them, might induce them to hurry back to the *Pembroke*, bring me into communication with the captain, and lead him to put to sea, in the hopes of picking up the remainder, and chief part, of the English fleet, which was but twenty-four hours ahead of them.

"Gentlemen," I said, "here is a quiet spot" – as indeed it was, seeing that there was nothing alive in this mournful *plaza* but a few scraggy fowls pecking among the stones, and a lean dog or two sleeping in the sun. "Let me tell you my news."

Whereupon all of them halted and stood round me, listening eagerly while I unfolded my story and gave them the intelligence that the galleons had gone into Vigo, escorted, as the earl had said while we rode toward Rotterdam, by a large French fleet.

"Fore George, Harry," said Mr. Beauvoir, turning toward the elder of the officers with him, a captain in Pierce's regiment, "but this is mighty fine news. Only-can it be true? I mean," he went on with a pleasant bow to me, "can it be possible that the Earl of Marlborough is not mistaken? For, if 'tis true and we can only communicate with Sir George Rooke and get him back again, 'twill be a fine thing; wipe out the scandal and hubbub that will arise over our retreat from Cadiz, go far to save Parliament enquiries and the Lord knows what-to say nothing of court martials. Humph?"

"Why should the earl be mistaken in this?" asked one of the others. "At least he was right in judging they would not go into Cadiz."

"We must take you at once to Captain Hardy, of our ship," said the chaplain. "'Tis for him to decide when he has heard your story. Come, let us get back to the pinnace-no time must be wasted."

"With the very greatest will in the world," said I. "'Tis for that I have travelled from Holland, and, pray God, I have not come too late. Success means much for me."

Then we turned to go, while the officers attacked me on all sides for an account of the siege of Kaiserswerth, of which they had not yet heard full accounts, and we were just leaving the square when there appeared at the door of the French consul's house a man who, no sooner did he observe us and our English appearance-which betrays us all over Europe, I have noticed, though I know not why-and also the brilliancy of the officers' dress, than he set to work bowing and grimacing like a monkey; also he began calling out salutations to us in French, and asking us how the English did now in the wars? and saying that, for himself, he very much regretted that France and England had got flying at one another's throats once more, since if they were not fools and would only keep united, as they had been in the days of him whom he called *le grand roi Charles Deux*, they might rule the world between them; which was true enough as regarded their united powers (if not the greatness of that late king of ours), as many other people more sensible than he have thought.

"'Tis a merry heart," said Mr. Beauvoir, smiling on the fantastic creature as he gibbered and jumped about on his doorstep, while the others looked contemptuously at him, for we soldiers had

but a poor opinion of the French, though always pleased to fight them; "a joyous blade! Let us return his civility"; whereupon he took off his hat, which courtesy we all imitated, and wished him "Good day" politely in his own language.

"Ha! you speak French, monsieur," the other said at this; "also you have the *bonne mine*. English gentlemens is always gentlemens. Ha! I ver' please see you." – he was himself now speaking half English and half French. "*Je vous salue*. Lagos ver' *triste*. I always glad see gentlemens. *Veuillez un verre de vin? C'est Français, vrai Français!* Ver' goot."

"'Tis tempting," said the chaplain of the Pembroke, his face appearing to get more red than before at the invitation. "Well, we can do no harm in having a crack with him. Only-silence, remember," and he glanced at the officers. "Not a word of our doings-lately, now, or to come."

"Never fear," said the eldest. "We can play a better game than that would be," whereon the chaplain, after bowing gracefully to our would-be host, said in very fair French that, if he desired it, we would all drink a glass of wine with him-only he feared we were too many.

"Not a jot, not a jot," this strange creature cried, beckoning all of us into the house and forthwith leading us into a whitewashed room, in the middle of which was a table with, upon it, a great outre of wine, bound and supported by copper bands and flanked with a number of glasses, so that one might have thought he was ever offering entertainment to others. Then, with great dexterity, he filled the requisite number of glasses, and, after making us each touch his with ours, drank a toast.

"*A la fin de la guerre*," he said, after screaming, first, "*Attention, messieurs*," and rapping on the table with his glass to claim that attention, "*à l'amitié incassable de la France et de l'Angleterre. Vivent, vivent, vivent la France et l'Angleterre*," and down his throat went all the wine.

"A noble toast," said Mr. Beauvoir, with a gravity which-I know not why! – I did not think, somehow, was his natural attribute, "a noble toast. None-be he French or English-could refuse to pledge that," and, with a look at the others, away went his liquor, too, while my brother officers, with a queer look upon their faces, which seemed to express the thought that they scarce knew whether they ought to be carousing in this manner with the representative of an enemy, swallowed theirs.

"Ha! goot, ver' goot," our friend went on, "we will have some more." And in a twinkling he had replenished the glasses and got his own up to, or very near to, his lips. And catching a glance of Mr. Beauvoir's grey eye as he did this, I felt very sure that the reverend gentleman knew as well as I did, or suspected as well as I did, that these were by no means the first potations our friend had been indulging in this morning.

"Another toast," he cried now, "*sacré nom d'un chien!* we will drink more toasts. *A la santé*" – then paused, and muttered: "No, no. I cannot propose that. No. *Ce n'est pas juste*."

"What is not just, monsieur?" asked Mr. Beauvoir, pausing with his own uplifted glass.

"Why, *figurez-vous*, I was going to commit an *impolitesse*-what you call a *rudesse*-rudeness-in your English tongue. To propose the continued prosperity of France-no! *vraiment il ne faut pas ça*. Because you are my guests-I love the English gentlemens always-and it is so certain-so very certain."

"The continued success of France is very certain, monsieur?" said one of the grenadiers, looking darkly at him. "You say that?"

"*Sans doute*. It cannot be otherwise. On sea and land we must triumph now-and then-then we shall have *la paix incassable*. Oh! yes, now that Chateaurenault is on the seas, we must perforce win there-win every-everything. And for the land, why-"

"Chateaurenault is on the seas!" exclaimed the chaplain, looking very grave. "And how long has that been, monsieur?"

"Oh, some time, some time." Then he put his finger to his nose and said, looking extremely cunning in his half drunkenness. "And soon now he will be free to scour them, turn his attention to you and the Dutch-curse the Dutch always, they are *cochons!*-soon, ver' soon. Just as soon as the galleons are unloaded at Vigo-when we need protect them no more."

Swift as lightning all our eyes met as the good-natured sot said this in his boastfulness; then Mr. Beauvoir, speaking calmly again, said:

"So he is protecting them at Vigo, eh? 'Tis not often they unload there."

"Ah, *non, non*. Not ver' often. But, you see, you had closed Cadiz against them, so, *naturellement*, they must go in somewhere."

"Naturally. No-not another drop of wine, I thank you."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON BOARD H. M. S. PEMBROKE

A good snoring breeze was ripping us along parallel with the Portuguese coast a fortnight later, every rag of canvas being stretched aloft-foretop gallant royals, mizzentop gallant royals and royal staysails. For we had found the main body of the fleet at last, after eleven days' search for them, and we were on the road to Vigo.

Only, should we be too late when we got there? That was the question!

Let me take up my tale where I left off. Time enough to record our hopes and fears when that is told.

Our French friend, whose boastfulness had increased with every drop of Montrâchet he swallowed (and 'twas real good wine, vastly different, the chaplain, who boasted himself a fancier, said afterward, from the filthy concoctions to be obtained in that part of Portugal), had been unable to hold his tongue, having got upon the subject of the greatness of his beloved France, and the consequence was that every word he let fall served but to corroborate the Earl of Marlborough's information and my statement. Nay! by the time he allowed us to quit his house, which was not for half an hour after he had first divulged the neighborhood of Chateaurenault and the galleons, and during which period he drank even more fast and furious than before, he had given us still further information. For, indeed, it seemed that once this poor fool's tongue was unloosed, there were no bounds to his vaunts and glorifications, and had it not been that he was our host and, also, that every word he said was of the greatest value to us, I do, indeed, believe that one or other of the officers would have twisted his neck for him, so exasperating was his bragging.

"*Pauvre Angleterre! Pauvre Angleterre!*" he called out, after we had refused to drink any more, though he himself still kept on unceasingly; "Poor England. Ah, mon Dieu, what shall become of her! Beaten at Cadiz!"

"Retired from Cadiz, if you please, monsieur," one of Pierce's officers said sternly, "because the Dutch ships had run out of provisions, and because, also, the admiral and his Grace could not hope to win Spain to the cause of Austria by bombarding their towns and invading their country. Remember that, sir, if you please."

"*Oh, la la! C'est la même chose.* It matters not." Then the talkative idiot went on: "I hope only that the fleet is safe in England by now. Ver' safe, because otherwise-"

"Have no fear, sir," the officer said again, though at a sign from Mr. Beauvoir, he held his peace and allowed the Frenchman to proceed.

"Ver' safe, because, otherwise, Chateaurenault will soon catch them-poof! like a mouse in grimalkin's claws. The *débarquement* must be over by now-oh yes, over by now! -*l'amiral* will be free to roam the seas with his great fleet. *Tiens! c'est énorme!* There is, for instance, *La Sirène*, *L'Espérance*, *La Superbe*, *Le Bourbon*, *L'Enflame*-all terrible vessels. Also many more. *Le Solide*, *Le Fort*, *Le Prompte-Fichtre!* I cannot recall their names-they are fifteen in all. What can you do against that?"

"What did we do at La Hogue?" asked Mr. Beauvoir quietly.

"Ha! La Hogue! *Voilà-faute de bassesse-faute de-*"

"Sir," said the chaplain, interrupting, "let us discourse no more on this subject. If we do we shall but get to quarrelling-and you have been polite and hospitable. We would not desire that to happen. Sir, we are obliged to you," and he held out his hand.

The strange creature took it-he took all our hands and shook them; he even seemed about to weep a little at our departure, and muttered that Lagos was "ver' triste." He loved to see any one, even though a misguided enemy.

"And," said Mr. Beauvoir, as we made our way down to the quay where the pinnace was to take them off, "to chatter to them as well as see them. Forgive him, Lord, he is a madman! Yet, I think," turning to me, "you should be satisfied. He corroborates you, and he has told us something worth knowing. Fifteen ships of war in all, eh?" whereon he fell a-musing. "A great fleet, in truth; yet ours is larger and we are English. That counts."

It took us a very little while to fetch off to the *Pembroke*, and on arriving on board, Mr. Beauvoir instantly sent to know if he could see the captain, since he brought great news from the shore. The sentry would not, however, by any means undertake to deliver the message, since Captain Hardy was now abed, he having been on the poop all night while the ships were coming in; whereupon Mr. Beauvoir, saying that the business we were now on took precedence of sleep and rest, pushed his way into the great cabin and instantly knocked at the door outside the captain's berth. Also, he called to him to say that he had news of the galleons and the French admiral's fleet, and that there waited by his side an officer of the land forces charged with a message to him from the Earl of Marlborough.

"What!" called out the captain as we heard him slip his door open, after hearing also a bound as he leaped from his bunk to the floor. "What!" and a minute after he stood before us, a fine, brave-seeming gentleman, without his coat or vest on.

"What! News of the galleons! Are you the messenger, sir?" looking at me and returning my salute. "Quick! Your news; in as few words as may be."

And in a few words I told him all while he stood there before me, the chaplain supplementing of my remarks in equally few words by a description of what the drunken French consul had maundered on about in his boastings.

And the actions of this captain showed me at once that I was before one of those sea commanders who, by their daring and decision, had done so much to make our power on the ocean feared, notwithstanding any checks such as that of Cadiz, which they might now and again have to submit to.

"Sentry!" he called out, running into his cabin to strike upon a gong by his bedside at the same time. "Sentry!" And then, when the man appeared, went on: "Send the yeoman of the signals to me at once. Away with you."

"Make signal," he said to the lad, who soon came tumbling down the companion ladder, his glass under his arm, "to Captain Wishart in the *Eagle*, and all the captains in the squadron, to repair here for consultation without loss of time. Up! and waste no moment."

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