

DUNCAN NORMAN

THE CRUISE OF
THE SHINING
LIGHT

Norman Duncan

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Содержание

I	5
II	8
III	14
IV	18
V	21
VI	24
VII	30
VIII	32
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

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The Cruise of the Shining Light

I

NICHOLAS TOP

My uncle, Nicholas Top, of Twist Tickle, was of a cut so grotesque that folk forgot their manners when he stumped abroad. Bowling through the streets of St. John's, which twice a year he tapped with staff and wooden leg, myself in leading—bowling cheerily, with his last rag spread, as he said, and be damned to the chart—he left a swirling wake of amazement: craning necks, open mouths, round eyes, grins so frank, the beholders being taken unaware, that 'twas simple to distinguish hearts of pity from savage ones.

Small wonder they stared; my uncle was a broad, long-bodied, scowling, grim-lipped runt, with the arms and chest of an ape, a leg lacking, three fingers of the left hand gone at the knuckles, an ankle botched in the mending (the surgery his own), a jaw out of place, a round head set low between gigantic shoulders upon a thick neck: the whole forever clad in a fantastic miscellany of water-side slops, wrinkled above, where he was large, flapping below, where he was lean, and chosen with a nautical contempt for fit and fashion, but with a mysteriously perverse regard for the value of a penny.

“An' how much, lad,” says he, in the water-side slop-shops, “is a penny saved?”

'Twas strange that of all men he should teach me this old-fashioned maxim as though 'twere meant for my own practice. 'Twas well enough for him, it seemed; but 'twas an incumbrance of wisdom in the singular case of the lad that was I.

“A penny made, sir,” says I.

“Co'-rect!” says he, with satisfaction.

There was more to be wondered at: beginning at my uncle's left ear, which was itself sadly puckered and patched, a wide, rough scar, of changing color, as his temper went, cut a great swath in his wiry hair, curving clear over the crown of his head. A second scar, of lesser dimension and ghastly look, lay upon his forehead, over the right eyebrow, to which though by nature drooping to a glower, it gave a sharp upward twist, so that in a way to surprise the stranger he was in good humor or bad, cynical or sullen, according to the point of approach.

There were two rolls of flabby flesh under his chin, and a puff of fat under each of his quick little eyes; and from the puffs to the lower chin, which was half submerged in the folds of a black cravat, the broad, mottled expanse was grown wild with short gray beard, save where, on the left cheek, a ragged scar (the third) kept it bare and livid. 'Twas plain the man had blundered into some quarrel of wind and sea, whence he had been indifferently ejected, in the way of the sea, to live or die, as might chance: whereof—doubtless to account for his possession of me—he would tell that my father had been lost in the adventure.

“Swep' away by the third big sea,” says he, his face wan with the terror of that time, his body shrunk in the chair and so uneasy that I was moved against my will to doubt the tale. “May God A'mighty forgive un the deed he done!”

“Was it a sore, wicked thing my father did?”

“God forgive un—an' me!”

“Is you sure, Uncle Nick?”

“God forgive un!”

“You're not likin' my poor father,” I complained, “for the sinful thing he done.”

“’Tis a sinful wicked world us dwells in,” says he. “An’ I ’low, b’y,” says he, in anxious warning, “that afore you goes t’ bed the night... Pass the bottle. Thank ’e, lad ... that afore you goes t’ bed the night you’d best get a new grip on that there little anchor I’ve give ye t’ hang to.”

“An’ what’s that?” says I.

“The twenty-third psa’m,” says he, his bottle tipped, “for safety!”

My uncle would have (as he said) no dealings with a glass. There was none in the places familiar to his eyes; and when by chance, in the tap-rooms of the city, he came face to face with himself, he would start away with a fervent malediction upon the rogue in the mirror, consigning him to perdition without hope of passage into some easier state.

’Twas anathema most feeling and complete.

“Hist!” cries I. “You’re never so bad as *that*, Uncle Nick!”

“None worse,” says he, “than that there ol’ lost rascal!”

I did not believe it.

“I isn’t took a steady look at my ol’ figger-’ead,” he was used to saying, with his little eyes widened to excite wonder, “this five year! In p’int o’ looks,” says he, smirking, vain as you please, “I’m t’ windward o’ most o’ the bullies when I trims my beard. Ah, lad, they’s a raft o’ bar-maids an’ water-side widows would wed ol’ Nicholas Top. An’ why? ’Tain’t money, God knows! for Nicholas Top haves none. Nar a dollar that a lone water-side widow could nose out! An’ if ’tisn’t money,” says he, “why, Lord love us! ’tis *looks*. It can’t be nothin’ else. ’Tis looks or money with the widows; they cares not which. Come, now, lad,” says he, “would you ’low it *could* be otherwise than looks?”

I must wag my head.

“Lord love us, Dannie!” says he, so vain—so innocently vain of the face he would not see—that my lips twitch with laughter to think of it. “You an’ them water-side widows is got a wonderful judgment for looks!”

By this I was flattered.

“Now, look you!” says he, being now in his cups and darkly confidential with me, “I’m havin’, as I says, no dealin’ with a glass. An’ why? Accordin’ t’ the water-side widows ’tis not ill-favor o’ face. Then why? I’m tellin’ you: ’Tis just because,” says he, tapping the table with his forefinger, “Nick Top isn’t able t’ look hisself in the eye... Pass the bottle. Thank ’e, lad... There you haves it!” says he, with a pitiful little catch of the breath. “Nicholas Top haves a wonderful bad eye!”

I must nod my assent and commiseration.

“In p’int o’ beauty,” says my uncle, “Nicholas Top is perfectly content with the judgment o’ water-side widows, which can’t be beat; but for these five year, Lord help un! he’ve had no love for the eye in his very own head.”

’Twas said in such chagrin and depth of sadness that I was moved to melancholy.

“His own eye, lad,” he would repeat, “in his very own head!”

My uncle, I confess, had indeed a hint too much of the cunning and furtive about both gait and glance to escape remark in strange places. ’Twas a pity—and a mystery. That he should hang his head who might have held it high! At Twist Tickle, to be sure, he would hop hither and yon in a fashion surprisingly light (and right cheerful); but abroad ’twas either swagger or slink. Upon occasions ’twas manifest to all the world that following evil he walked in shame and terror. These times were periodic, as shall be told: wherein, because of his simplicity, which was unspoiled—whatever the rascality he was in the way of practising—he would betray the features of hang-dog villany, conceiving all the while that he had cleverly masked himself with virtue.

“Child,” says he, in that high gentleness by which he was distinguished, “take the old man’s hand. Never fear t’ clasp it, lad! Ye’re abroad in respectable company.”

I would clasp it in childish faith.

“Abroad,” says he, defiantly, “in highly respectable company!”

Ah, well! whether rogue or gentleman, upon whom rascality was writ, the years were to tell. These, at any rate, were the sinister aspects of Nicholas Top, of Twist Tickle, whose foster-child I was, growing in such mystery as never was before, I fancy, and thriving in love not of the blood but rich and anxious as love may be: and who shall say that the love which is of the blood—a dull thing, foreordained—is more discerning, more solicitous, more deep and abiding than that which chances, however strangely, in the turmoil and changes of the life we live? To restore confidence, the old dog was furnished with an ample, genial belly; and albeit at times he drank to excess, and despite the five years' suspicion of the eye in his very own head, his eyes were blue and clear and clean-edged, with little lights of fun and tenderness and truth twinkling in their depths. I would have you know that as a child I loved the scarred and broken old ape: this with a child's devotion, the beauty of which (for 'tis the way of the heart) is not to be matched in later years, whatever may be told. Nor in these days, when I am full-grown and understand, will I have a word spoken in his dishonor.

Not I, by Heaven!

I came to Twist Tickle, as I am informed, on the wings of a southeasterly gale: which winds are of mean spirit and sullenly tenacious—a great rush of ill weather, overflowing the world, blowing gray and high and cold. At sea 'twas breaking in a geyser of white water on the Resurrection Rock; and ashore, in the meagre shelter of Meeting House Hill, the church-bell clanged fearsomely in a swirl of descending wind: the gloaming of a wild day, indeed! The *Shining Light* came lurching through the frothy sea with the wind astern: a flash of white in the mist, vanishing among the careering waves, doughtily reappearing—growing the while into the stature of a small craft of parts, making harbor under a black, tumultuous sky. Beyond the Toads, where there is a turmoil of breaking water, she made a sad mess of it, so that the folk of the Tickle, watching the strange appearance from the heads, made sure she had gone down; but she struggled out of the spray and tumble, in the end, and came to harbor unscathed in the place where Nicholas Top, himself the skipper and crew, was born and fished as a lad.

They boarded him, and (as they tell) he was brisk and grim and dripping upon the deck—with the lights dancing in his eyes: those which are lit by the mastery of a ship at sea.

“Ay, mates,” says he, “I’m come back. An’,” says he, “I’d thank ye t’ tread lightly, for I’ve a wee passenger below, which I’ve no wish t’ have woke. He’s by way o’ bein’ a bit of a gentleman,” says he, “an’ I’d not have ye take a liberty.”

This made them stare.

“An’ I’d not,” my uncle repeated, steadily, glancing from eye to eye, “have ye take a liberty.”

They wondered the more.

“A bit of a gentleman!” says my uncle, in savage challenge. “A bit of a gentleman!”

He would tell them no more, nor ever did; but in imperturbable serenity and certainty of purpose builded a tight little house in a nook of Old Wives’ Cove, within the harbor, where the *Shining Light* might lie snug; and there he dwelt with the child he had, placidly fishing the grounds with hook and line, save at such times as he set out upon some ill-seeming business to the city, whence he returned at ease, it seemed, with himself and his errand, but something grayer, they say, than before. The child he reared was in the beginning conscious of no incongruity, but clothed the old man with every grace and goodly quality, in faith and understanding, as children will: for these knowing ones, with clearer sight than we, perceive neither guile nor weakness nor any lack of beauty in those who foster them—God be thanked!—whatever the nature and outward show may be. There is a beauty common to us all, neither greater nor less in any of us, which these childish hearts discover. Looking upon us, they are blind or of transcendent vision, as you will: the same in issue—so what matter?—since they find no ugliness anywhere. 'Tis the way, it may be, that God looks upon His world: either in the blindness of love forgiving us or in His greater wisdom knowing that the sins of men do serve His purpose and are like virtue in His plan.

But this is a mystery...

II

AT THE SIGN OF THE ANCHOR AND CHAIN

The Anchor and Chain is a warm, pleasantly noisy place by the water-side at St. John's, with a not ungrateful reek of rum and tobacco for such outport folk as we; forever filled, too, with big, twinkling, trumpeting men, of our simple kind, which is the sort the sea rears. There for many a mellow hour of the night was I perched upon a chair at my uncle's side, delighting in the cheer which enclosed me—in the pop of the cork, the inspiring passage of the black bottle, the boisterous talk and salty tales, the free laughter—but in which I might not yet, being then but seven years old, actively partake.

When in the first of it my uncle called for his dram, he would never fail to catch the bar-maid's hand, squeeze it under the table, with his left eyelid falling and his displaced jaw solemnly ajar, informing her the while, behind his thumb and forefinger, the rest of that hand being gone, that I was a devil of a teetotaler: by which (as I thought, and, I'll be bound, he knew well I would think) my years were excused and I was admitted to the company of whiskered skippers upon a footing of equality. 'Tis every man's privilege, to be sure, to drink rum or not, as he will, without loss of dignity.

If his mates would have me drink a glass with them my uncle would not hinder.

"A nip o' ginger-ale," says I, brash as a sealing-captain.

'Twas the despair of my uncle. "Lord love us!" says he, looking with horror upon the bottle.

"T' you, sir," says I, with my glass aloft, "an' t' the whole bally crew o' ye!"

"Belly-wash!" groans my uncle.

And so, brave and jolly as the rest of them, forgetting the doses of jalap in store for me when I was got back to the Tickle, I would now have my ninny (as they called it). Had the bar-maids left off kissing me—but they would not; no, they would kiss me upon every coming, and if I had nothing to order 'twas a kiss for my virtue, and if I drank 'twas a smack for my engaging manliness; and my only satisfaction was to damn them heartily—under my breath, mark you! lest I be soundly thrashed on the spot for this profanity, my uncle, though you may now misconceive his character, being in those days quick to punish me. But such are women: in a childless place, being themselves childless, they cannot resist a child, but would kiss queer lips, and be glad o' the chance, because a child is lovely to women, intruding where no children are.

As a child of seven I hated the bar-maids of the Anchor and Chain, because they would kiss me against my will when the whiskered skippers went untouched. But that was long ago...

I must tell that at the Anchor and Chain my uncle blundered in with Tom Bull, of the *Green Billow*, the owner and skipper thereof, trading the ports of the West Coast, then coast-wise, but (I fancy) not averse to a smuggling opportunity, both ways, with the French Islands to the south of us; at any rate, 'twas plain, before the talk was over, that he needed no lights to make the harbor of St. — Pierre, Miquelon, of a dark time. 'Twas a red-whiskered, flaring, bulbous-nosed giant, with infantile eyes, containing more of wonder and patience than men need. He was clad in yellow oil-skins, a-drip, glistening in the light of the lamps, for he was newly come in from the rain: a bitter night, the wind in the northeast, with a black fog abroad (I remember it well)—a wet, black night, the rain driving past the red-curtained windows of the Anchor and Chain, the streets swept clean of men, ourselves light-hearted and warm, indifferent, being ashore from the wind, the cloudy night, the vicious, crested waves of the open, where men must never laugh nor touch a glass.

They must have a dram together in a stall removed from the congregation of steaming men at the long bar. And when the maid had fetched the bottle, Tom Bull raised it, regarded it doubtfully, cocked his head, looked my shamefaced uncle in the eye.

"An' what might this be?" says he.

“’Tis knowed hereabouts, in the langwitch o’ waterside widows,” replies my uncle, mildly, “as a bottle o’ Cheap an’ Nasty.”

Tom Bull put the bottle aside.

“*Tis* cheap, I’ll be bound,” says my uncle; “but ’tis not so wonderful nasty, Tom,” he grieved, “when ’tis the best t’ be had.”

“Skipper Nicholas,” says Tom, in wonder, “wasn’t you give aforetime t’ the use o’ Long Tom?”

My uncle nodded.

“Dear man!” Tom Bull sighed.

My uncle looked away. Tom Bull seemed now first to observe his impoverished appearance, and attacked it with frankly curious eyes, which roamed without shame over my uncle’s shrinking person; and my uncle winced under this inquisition.

“Pour your liquor,” growls he, “an’ be content!”

Tom Bull grasped the bottle, unafraid of the contents, unabashed by the rebuke. “An’ Skipper Nicholas,” asks he, “where did you manage t’ pick up the young feller?”

My uncle would not attend.

“Eh?” Tom Bull persisted. “Where did you come across o’ he?”

“This,” says my uncle, with a gentle tug at my ear, “is Dannie.”

“Ay; but whose young one?”

“Tom Callaway’s son.”

“Tom Callaway’s son!” cries Tom Bull.

There was that about me to stir surprise; with those generous days so long gone by, I will not gainsay it. Nor will I hold Tom Bull in fault for doubting, though he stared me, up and down, until I blushed and turned uneasy while his astonished eyes were upon me.

“Tom Callaway’s son!” cries he again.

That I was.

“The same,” says my uncle.

Forthwith was I once more inspected, without reserve—for a child has no complaint to make in such cases—and with rising wonder, which, in the end, caused Tom Bull to gape and gasp; but I was now less concerned with the scrutiny, being, after all, long used to the impertinence of the curious, than with the phenomena it occasioned. My uncle’s friend had tipped the bottle, and was now become so deeply engaged with my appearance that the yellow whiskey tumbled into his glass by fits and starts, until the allowance was far beyond that which, upon information supplied me by my uncle, I deemed proper (or polite) for any man to have at one time. The measurement of drams was in those bibulous days important to me—of much more agreeable interest, indeed, than the impression I was designed to make upon the ’longshore world.

“No such nonsense!” exclaims Tom Bull. “Tom Callaway died ’thout a copper t’ bury un.”

“Tom Callaway,” says my uncle, evasively, “didn’t have no *call* t’ be buried; he was drown-ded.”

My uncle’s old shipmate sipped his whiskey with absent, but grateful, relish, his eyes continuing to wander over so much of me as grew above the table, which was little enough. Presently my uncle was subjected to the same severe appraisal, and wriggled under it in guilty way—an appraisal of the waterside slops: the limp and shabby cast-off apparel which scantily enveloped his great chest, insufficient for the bitter rain then sweeping the streets. Thence the glance of this Tom Bull went blankly over the foggy room, pausing nowhere upon the faces of the folk at the bar, but coming to rest, at last, upon the fly-blown rafters (where was no interest), whence, suddenly, it dropped to my hand, which lay idle and sparkling upon the sticky table.

“Tom Callaway’s son!” he mused.

My hand was taken, spread down upon the calloused palm of Tom Bull, in disregard of my frown, and for a long time the man stared in puzzled silence at what there he saw. ’Twas very still,

indeed, in the little stall where we three sat; the boisterous laughter, the shuffling and tramp of heavy boots, the clink of glasses, the beating of the rain upon the windows seemed far away.

"I'd not be s'prised," says Tom Bull, in the low, hoarse voice of awe, "if them there was di'monds!"

"They is," says my uncle, with satisfaction.

"Di'monds!" sighs Tom Bull. "My God!"

'Twas boredom—the intimate inspection, the question, the start of surprise. 'Twas all inevitable, so familiar—so distastefully intrusive, too. 'Twas a boredom hard to suffer, and never would have been borne had not the occasion of it been my uncle's delight. 'Twas always the same: Diamonds? ay, diamonds! and then the gasped "My God!" They would pry into this, by the Lord! and never be stopped by my scowl and the shrinking of my flesh. It may be that the parade my misguided guardian made of me invited the intimacy, and, if so, I have no cry to raise against the memory of it; but, whatever, they made free with the child that was I, and boldly, though 'twas most boresome and ungrateful to me. As a child my hand was fingered and eyed by every 'longshore jack, coast-wise skipper, and foreign captain from the Turkey Cock to the sign of The King George. And wherever I went upon the streets of St. John's in those days there was no escape: the glitter of me stopped folk in their tracks—to turn and stare and wonder and pass muttering on.

"Three in that one, Tom," adds my uncle.

'Twas a moment before Tom Bull had mastered his amazement. "Well, well!" cries he. "Di'monds! Three in that one! Lord, Lord, think o' that! This wee feller with all them di'monds! An' Skipper Nicholas," says he, drawing closer to my beaming uncle, "this here red stone," says he, touching the ring on my third finger, "would be a jool? A ruby, like as not?"

"'Tis that," says my uncle.

"An' this here?" Tom Bull continues, selecting my little finger.

"Well, now, Tom," says my uncle, with gusto, for he delighted in these discussions, "I 'low I better tell you 'bout that. Ye see, lad," says he, "that's a seal-ring, Tom. I'm told that gentlemen wears un t' stamp the wax o' their corr-ee-spondence. 'Twas Sir Harry that give me the trick o' that. It haves a D for Daniel, an' a C for Callaway; an' it haves a T in the middle, Tom, for Top. I 'lowed I'd get the Top in somewheres, so I put it in atween the D an' the C t' have it lie snug: for I'm not wantin' this here little Dannie t' forget that Top was t' the wheel in his younger days." He turned to me, and in a voice quite broken with affection, and sadly hopeless, somehow, as I recall, "Dannie, lad," says he, "ye'll never forget, will ye, that Top was t' the wheel? God bless ye, child! Well, Tom," turning now to his shipmate, "ye're a man much sailed t' foreign parts, an' ye wouldn't think it ungenteel, would ye, for a lad like Dannie t' wear a seal-ring? No? I'm wonderful glad o' that. For, Tom," says he, most earnestly, "I'm wantin' Dannie t' be a gentleman. He's just *got* t' be a gentleman!"

"A gentleman, Nick?"

"He've *got* t' be a gentleman!"

"You'll never manage that, Nick Top," says Tom Bull.

"Not manage it!" my uncle indignantly complained. "Why, look, Tom Bull—jus' *look*—at them there jools! An' *that's* on'y a poor beginnin'!"

Tom Bull laid my hand very gingerly upon the table, as though 'twere a thing not lightly to be handled lest it fall to pieces in his grasp. He drew my left hand from my pocket and got it under the light.

"Two pearls," says my uncle, "longside a emerald. Aft o' that you'll be like t' find two more di'monds. Them's first-water Brazil, Tom."

Tom Bull inquiringly touched my watch-guard.

"Eighteen karat," says my uncle.

Tom Bull drew the watch from its pocket and let it lie glittering in his hand; the jewels, set shyly in the midst of the chasing, glowed in the twilight of the stall.

“Solid,” says my uncle.

Tom Bull touched my velvet jacket with the tip of his finger.

“Imported direck,” says my uncle, “from Lon’on. Direck, Tom—is you hearin’ me?—direck from Lon’on. Not,” says he, with quick consideration, “that we’ve no respect for home talent. My, my, no! Dannie haves a matter o’ thirteen outfits done right here in St. John’s. You beat about Water Street for a week, Tom, an’ you’ll *sight* un. Fill your glass, Tom! We’re well met this night. Leave me talk t’ you, lad. Leave me talk t’ ye about Dannie. Fill up, an’ may the Lord prosper your smugglin’! ’Tis a wild night without. I’m glad enough t’ be in harbor. ’Tis a dirty night; but ’tis not blowin’ *here*, Tom—an’ that’s the bottle; pour your dram, lad, an’ take it like a man! God save us! but a bottle’s the b’y t’ make a fair wind of a head wind. Tom,” says he, laying a hand on my head—which was the ultimate expression of his affection—“you jus’ ought t’ clap eyes on this here little ol’ Dannie when he’ve donned his Highland kilts. He’s a little divil of a dandy then, I’m tellin’ you. Never a lad o’ the city can match un, by the Lord! Not match my little Dannie! Clap eyes,” says he, “on good ol’ little Dannie! Lord save ye, but of all the young fellers you’ve knowed he’s the finest figger of a lad—”

“Uncle Nick!” I cried, in pain—in pain to be excused (as shall be told).

“Hush, lad!” croons he. “Never mind!”

I could not help it.

“An’ talkin’ about outfits, Tom,” says my uncle, “this here damn little ol’ Dannie, bein’ a gentleman, haves his *best*—from Lon’on. Ye can’t blame un, Tom; they *all* doos it.”

’Twas all hands t’ the pumps for poor Tom Bull. “Dear man!” he gasped, his confusion quite accomplished.

“An’ *paid* for,” says my uncle.

Tom Bull looked up.

“’Tis all,” says my uncle, solemnly jerking thumb down towards the bowels of the earth, “paid for!”

Tom Bull gulped the dregs of his whiskey.

By-and-by, having had his glass—and still with the puzzle of myself to mystify his poor wits—Tom Bull departed. My uncle and I still kept to the stall, for there was an inch of spirits in my uncle’s glass, and always, though the night was late and stormy, a large possibility for new company. ’Twas grown exceeding noisy in a far corner of the place, where a foreign captain, in from the north (Fogo, I take it), loaded with fish for Italian ports, was yielding to his liquor; and I was intent upon this proceeding, wondering whether or not they would soon take to quarrelling, as often happened in that tap-room, when Tom Bull softly came again, having gone but a step beyond the threshold of the place. He stepped, as though aimlessly, to our place, like a man watched, fearing the hand of the law; and for a time he sat musing, toying with the glass he had left.

“Skipper Nicholas,” says he, presently, “I ’low Dannie Callaway haves a friend t’ buy un all them jools?”

“This here little ol’ Dannie,” says my uncle, with another little reassuring tug at my ear, “haves no friend in all the world but me.”

’Twas true.

“Not one?”

“Nar a friend in all the world but ol’ Nick Top o’ Twist Tickle.”

“An’ *you* give un them jools?”

“I did.”

There was a pause. Tom Bull was distraught, my uncle quivering; and I was interested in the rain on the panes and in the foreign captain who was yielding to his liquor like a fool or a half-grown boy. I conceived a contempt for that shaven, scrawny skipper—I remember it well. That he should drink himself drunk like a boy unused to liquor! Faugh! ’Twas a sickening sight. He would involve himself in some drunken brawl, I made sure, when even I, a child, knew better than to misuse the

black bottle in this unkind way. 'Twas the passage from Spain—and the rocks of this and the rocks of that—and 'twas the virtues of a fore-and-after and the vices of an English square rig for the foremast. He'd stand by the square rig; and there were Newfoundlanders at his table to dispute the opinion. The good Lord only knew what would come of it! And the rain was on the panes, and the night was black, and the wind was playing devil-tricks on the great sea, where square-rigged foremasts and fore-and-afters were fighting for their lives. A dirty night at sea—a dirty night, God help us!

“Skipper Nicholas,” says Tom Bull, in an anxious whisper, “I'm tied up t' Judby's wharf, bound out at dawn, if the wind holds. I 'low you is in trouble, lad, along o' them jools. An' if you wants t' cut an' run—”

In the pause my uncle scowled.

—“The little *Good Omen*,” says Tom Bull, under his breath, “is your'n t' command!”

'Twas kind of intention, no doubt, but done in folly—in stupid (if not befuddled) misconception of the old man's mettle. My uncle sat quite still, frowning into his glass; the purple color crept into the long, crescent scar of his scalp, his unkempt beard bristled like a boar's back, the flesh of his cheeks, in composure of a ruddy hue, turned a spotty crimson and white, with the web of veins swelling ominously. All the storm signals I had, with the acumen of the child who suffers unerring discipline, mastered to that hour were at the mast-head, prognosticating a rare explosion of rage. But there was no stirring on my uncle's part; he continued to stare into his glass, with his hairy brows drawn quite over his eyes.

The blundering fellow leaned close to my uncle's ear. “If 'tis turn-tail or chokee for you, along o' them jools,” says he, “I'll put you across—”

My uncle's eyes shifted to his staff.

—“T' the Frenchmen—”

My uncle's great right hand was softly approaching his staff.

—“Well,” says the blundering Tom Bull, “give the old girl a wind with some slap to it, I'll put you across in—”

My uncle fetched him a smart crack on the pate, so that the man leaped away, in indignation, and vigorously rubbed his head, but durst not swear (for he was a Methodist), and, being thus desperately situated, could say nothing at all, but could only petulantly whimper and stamp his foot, which I thought a mean thing for a man to do in such circumstances. “A poor way,” says he, at last, “t' treat an old shipmate!” I thought it marvellously weak; my uncle would have had some real and searching thing to say—some slashing words (and, may be, a blow). “An you isn't a thief,” cries Tom Bull, in anger, “you *looks* it, anyhow. An' the rig o' that lad bears me out. Where'd you come by them jools? Eh?” he demanded. “Where'd you come by them di'monds and pearls? Where'd you come by them rubies an' watches? *You*— Nick Top: Twist Tickle hook-an'-line man! Buyin' di'monds for a pauper,” he snorted, “an' drinkin' Cheap an' Nasty! Them things don't mix, Nick Top. Go be hanged! The police 'll cotch ye yet.”

“No,” says my uncle, gently; “not yet.”

Tom Bull stamped out in a rage.

“No,” my uncle repeated, wiping the sweat from his brow, “Tom Bull forgotten; the police 'll not cotch me. Oh no, Dannie!” he sighed. “They'll not cotch me—not yet!”

Then out of the black night came late company like a squall o' wind: Cap'n Jack Large, no less! newly in from Cadiz, in salt, with a spanking passage to make water-side folk stare at him (the *Last Hope* was the scandal of her owners). He turned the tap-room into an uproar; and no man would believe his tale. 'Twas beyond belief, with Longway's trim, new, two-hundred-ton *Flying Fish*, of the same sailing, not yet reported! And sighting Nicholas Top and me, Cap'n Jack Large cast off the cronies he had gathered in the tap-room progress of the night, and came to our stall, as I expected when he bore in from the rain, and sent my uncle's bottle of Cheap and Nasty off with contempt, and called for a bottle of Long Tom (the best, as I knew, the Anchor and Chain afforded), which must

be broached under his eye, and said he would drink with us until we were turned out or dawn came. Lord, how I loved that man, as a child, in those days: his jollity and bigness and courage and sea-clear eyes! 'Twas grand to feel, aside from the comfort of him, that he had put grown folk away to fondle the child on his knee—a mystery, to be sure, but yet a grateful thing. Indeed, 'twas marvellously comfortable to sit close to him. But I never saw him again: for the *Last Hope* went down, with a cargo of mean fish, in the fall of the next year, in the sea between St. John's and the West Indies.

But that night—

“Cap'n Jack,” says I, “you quit that basket.”

He laughed.

“You quit her,” I pleaded. “But ecod, man!” says I, “please quit her. An you don't I'll never see you more.”

“An' you'll never care,” cries he. “Not *you*, Master Callaway!”

“Do you quit her, man!”

“I isn't able,” says he, drawing me to his knee; “for, Dannie,” says he, his blue eyes alight, “they isn't ar another man in Newf'un'land would take that basket t' sea!”

I sighed.

“Come, Dannie,” says he, “what'll ye take t' drink?”

“A nip o' ginger-ale,” says I, dolefully.

Cap'n Jack put his arm around the bar-maid. “Fetch Dannie,” says he, “the brand that comes from over-seas.”

Off she went.

“Lord love us!” groans my uncle; “that's two.”

“Twill do un no harm, Nick,” says Cap'n Jack. “You just dose un well when you gets un back t' the Tickle.”

“I will,” says my uncle.

He did...

And we made a jovial night of it. Cap'n Jack would not let me off his knee. Not he! He held me close and kindly; and while he yarned of the passage to my uncle, and interjected strange wishes for a wife, he whispered many things in my ear to delight me, and promised me, upon his word, a sailing from St. John's to Spanish ports, when I was grown old enough, if only I would come in that basket of a *Lost Hope*, which I maintained I never would do. 'Twas what my uncle was used to calling a lovely time; and, as for me, I wish I were a child again, and Cap'n Jack were come in from the rain, and my uncle tipping the bottle of Long Tom (though 'twere a scandal). Ay, indeed I do! That I were a child again, used to tap-room bottles, and that big Cap'n Jack had come in from the gale to tell me I was a brave lad in whom he found a comfort neither of the solid land nor of water-side companionship. But I did not think of Cap'n Jack that night, when my uncle had stowed me away in my bed at the hotel; but, rather, in the long, wakeful hours, through which I lay alone, I thought of Tom Bull's question, “Where'd ye get them jools?”

I had never before been troubled—not once; always I had worn the glittering stones without question.

“Where'd ye get them jools?”

I could not fall asleep: I repeated the twenty-third psalm, according to my teaching; but still I could not fall asleep...

III

THE CATECHISM AT TWIST TICKLE

Of an evening at Twist Tickle Nicholas Top would sit unstrung and wistful in his great chair by the west window, with the curtains drawn wide, there waiting, in deepening gloom and fear, for the last light to leave the world. With his head fallen upon his breast and his eyes grown fixed and tragical with far-off gazing, he would look out upon the appalling sweep of sea and rock and sky, where the sombre wonder of the dusk was working more terribly than with thunder: clouds in embers, cliffs and mist and tumbling water turning to shadows, vanishing, as though they were not. In the place of a shining world, spread familiar and open, from its paths to the golden haze of its uttermost parts, there would come the cloud and mystery and straying noises of the night, wherein lurk and peer and restlessly move whatsoever may see in the dark.

Thus would he sit oppressed while night covered the world he knew by day. And there would come up from the sea its voice; and the sea has no voice, but mysteriously touches the strings within the soul of a man, so that the soul speaks in its own way, each soul lifting its peculiar message. For me 'twas sweet to watch the tender shadows creep upon the western fire, to see the great gray rocks dissolve, to hear the sea's melodious whispering; but to him (it seemed) the sea spoke harshly and the night came with foreboding. In the silence and failing light of the hour, looking upon the stupendous works of the Lord, he would repeat the words of the prophet of the Lord:

“For behold the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with the flames of fire.” And again, with his hand upon his forehead and his brows fallen hopelessly, *“With his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with the flames of fire.”* Still repeating the awful words, his voice broken to a terrified whisper, *“His rebuke with the flames of fire!”* And in particular moods, when the prophets, however sonorous, were inadequate to his need, my uncle would have recourse to his own pithy vocabulary for terms with which to anathematize himself; but these, of course, may not be written in a book.

When the dusk was come my uncle would turn blithely from this melancholy contemplation and call for a lamp and his bottle. While I was about this business (our maid-servant would not handle the bottle lest she be damned for it), my uncle would stump the floor, making gallant efforts to whistle and trill: by this exhorting himself to a cheerful mood, so that when I had moved his great chair to the table, with the lamp near and turned high, and had placed a stool for his wooden leg, and had set his bottle and glass and little brown jug of cold water conveniently at hand, his face would be pleasantly rippling and his eyes all a-twinkle.

“Up with un, Dannie!” says he.

'Twas his fancy that he had gout in the tip of his wooden leg. I must lift the ailing bit of timber to the stool with caution.

“Ouch!” groans he. “Easy, lad!”

'Twas now in place.

“All ship-shape an' cheerful,” says he. “Pass the bottle.”

He would then stand me up for catechism; and to this task I would come with alacrity, and my heels would come together, and my shoulders square, and my hands go behind my back, as in the line at school. 'Twas a solemn game, whatever the form it took, whether dealing with my possessions, hopes, deportment, or what-not; and however grotesque an appearance the thing may wear, 'twas done in earnest by us both and with some real pains (when I was stupid or sleepy) to me. 'Twas the way he had, too, of teaching me that which he would have me conceive him to be—of fashioning in my heart and mind the character he would there wear. A clumsy, fore-castle method, and most pathetically engaging, to be sure! but in effect unapproached: for to this day, when I know him as

he was, the man he would appear to be sticks in my heart and will not be supplanted. Nor would I willingly yield the wistful old dog's place to a gentleman of more brilliant parts.

"Dannie, lad," he would begin, in the manner of a visiting trustee, but yet with a little twitch and flush of embarrassment, which must be wiped away with his great bandanna handkerchief—"Dannie, lad," he would begin, "is ol' Nicholas Top a well-knowed figger in Newf'un'land?"

"He's knowed," was the response I had been taught, "from Cape Race t' Chidley."

"What for?"

"Standin' by."

So far so good; my uncle would beam upon me, as though the compliment were of my own devising, until 'twas necessary once more to wipe the smile and blush from his great wet countenance.

"Is it righteous," says he, "t' stand by?"

"'Tis that."

He would now lean close with his poser: "Does it say so in the Bible? Ah ha, lad! Does it say so *there*?"

"'Twas left out," says I, having to this been scandalously taught, "by mistake!"

'Twas my uncle's sad habit thus to solve his ethical difficulties. To a gigantic, thumb-worn Bible he would turn, the which, having sought with unsuccess until his temper was hot, he would fling back to its place, growling: "Them ol' prophets was dunderheads, anyhow; they left out more'n they put in. Why, Dannie," in vast disgust, "you don't find the mention of barratry from jib-boom t' taffrail! An' you mean t' set there an' tell me them prophets didn't make no mistake? No, sir! I 'low they was well rope's-ended for neglect o' dooty when the Skipper cotched un in the other Harbor." But if by chance, in his impatient haste, he stumbled upon some confirmation of his own philosophy, he would crow: "There you got it, Dannie! Right under the thumb o' me! Them ol' bullies was wise as owls." 'Twas largely a matter of words, no doubt (my uncle being self-taught in all things); and 'tis possible that the virtue of standing by, indirectly commended, to be sure, is not specifically and in terms enjoined upon the righteous. However—

"Come, now!" says my uncle; "would you say that ol' Nicholas Top was *famous* for standin' by?"

'Twas hard to remember the long response. "Well," I must begin, in a doubtful drawl, every word and changing inflection his own, as I had been taught, "I wouldn't go *quite* t' the length o' that. Ol' Nicholas Top wouldn't claim it hisself. Ol' Nicholas Top on'y claims that he's *good* at standin' by. His cronies do 'low that he can't be beat at it by ar a man in Newf'un'land; but Nicholas wouldn't go t' the length o' *sayin'* so hisself. 'Ol' Nick,' says they, 'would stand by if the ship was skippered by the devil and inbound on a fiery wind t' the tickle t' hell. Whatever Nick says he'll *do*,' says they, 'is all the same as *did*; an' if he says he'll stand by, he'll stick, blow high or blow low, fog, ice, or reefs. "Be jiggered t' port an' weather!" says he.¹ But sure," I must conclude, "ol' Nicholas wouldn't say so hisself. An' so I wouldn't go t' the length o' holdin' that he was famous for standin' by. Take it by an' all, if I was wantin' sea room, I'd stick t' *well knowed* an' be done with it."

"Co'-rect!" says my uncle, with a smack of satisfaction. "You got that long one right, Dannie. An' now, lad," says he, his voice turning soft and genuine in feeling, "what's the ol' sailorman tryin' t' make out o' *you*?"

"A gentleman."

"An' why?"

Then this disquieting response:

"'Tis none o' my business."

'Twould have been logical had he asked me: "An', Dannie, lad, what's a gentleman?" But this he never did; and I think, regarding the thing from this distance, that he was himself unable to frame

¹ 'Twas really "damned t' port an' weather" my uncle would have me say; but I hesitate to set it down, lest the more gentle readers of my simple narrative think ill of the man's dealings with a child, which I would not have them do.

the definition, so that, of course, I never could be taught it. But he was diligent in pursuit of this knowledge; he sat with open ears in those exclusive tap-rooms where “the big bugs t’ St. John’s” (as he called them) congregated; indeed, the little gold watch by which Skipper Tom Bull’s suspicion had been excited at the Anchor and Chain came to me immediately after the Commissioner of This had remarked to the Commissioner of That, within my uncle’s hearing—this at the Gold Bullet over a bottle of Long Tom—that a watch of modest proportions was the watch for a gentleman to wear (my other watches had been chosen with an opposite idea). And my uncle, too (of which anon), held in high regard that somewhat questionable light of morality and deportment whom he was used to calling ol’ Skipper Chesterfield. But “What is a gentleman?” was omitted from my catechism.

“An’ is this ol’ Nicholas Top a liar?” says my uncle.

“No, sir.”

“Is he a thief?”

“No, sir.”

“Smuggler?”

“No, sir.”

“Have he ever been mixed up in burglary, murder, arson, barratry, piracy, fish stealin’, or speckalation?”

“No, sir.”

To indicate his utter detachment from personal interest in the question to follow, my uncle would wave his dilapidated hand, as though leaving me free to answer as I would, which by no means was I.

“An’ of how much,” says he, “would he rob his neighbor that he might prosper?”

’Twas now time for me to turn loud and indignant, as I had been taught. Thus: my head must shoot out in truculent fashion, my brows bend, my lips curl away from my teeth like a snarling dog’s, my eyes glare; and I must let my small body shake with explosive rage, in imitation of my uncle, while I brought the table a thwack with all my force, shouting:

“Not a damn copper!”

“Good!” says my uncle, placidly. “You done that very well, Dannie, for a lad. You fetched out the damn quite noisy an’ agreeable. Now,” says he, “is Nicholas Top a rascal?”

’Twas here we had trouble; in the beginning, when this learning was undertaken, I must be whipped to answer as he would have me. Ay, and many a night have I gone sore to bed for my perversity, for in respect to obedience his severity was unmitigated, as with all seafaring men. But I might stand obstinate for a moment—a moment of grace. And upon the wall behind his chair, hanging in the dimmer light, was a colored print portraying a blue sea, spread with rank upon rank of accurately measured waves, each with its tiny cap of foam, stretching without diminution to the horizon, upon which was perched a full-rigged ship, a geometrical triumph; and from this vessel came by small-boat to the strand a company of accurately moulded, accurately featured, accurately tailored fellows, pulling with perfect accuracy in every respect. I shall never forget the geometrical gentleman upon that geometrically tempestuous sea, for as I stood sullen before my uncle they provided the only distraction at hand.

“Come, Daniel!” says he, in a little flare of wrath; “is he a rascal?”

“Well,” says I, defiantly, “I’ve heard un lied about.”

“Wrong!” roars my uncle. “Try again, sir! Is ol’ Nicholas Top a rascal?”

There was no help for it. I must say the unkind words or be thrashed for an obstinate whelp.

“A damned rascal, sir!” says I.

“Co’-rect!” cries my uncle, delighted.²

² Of course, the frequent recurrence of this vulgarity in my narrative is to be regretted. No one, indeed, is more sensible of the circumstance than I. My uncle held the word in affectionate regard, and usefully employed it: ’tis the only apology I have to offer.

And now, presently, my uncle would drawl, “Well, Dannie, lad, you might ’s well measure out the other,” and when I had with care poured his last dram would send me off to bed. Sometimes he would have me say my prayers at his knee—not often—most when high winds, without rain, shook our windows and sang mournfully past the cottage, and he was unnerved by the night. “The wind’s high the night,” says he, with an anxious frown; “an’ Dannie,” says he, laying a hand upon my head, “you might ’s well overhaul that there

“Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless Thy little lamb to-night,’

afore you turns in. ’Twill do you good, an’ ’twon’t manage t’ do me no harm.” And this done I would off to bed; but had no sooner bade him good-night, got my gruff response, and come to the foot of the stair, than, turning to say good-night again, I would find myself forgot. My uncle would be sunk dejectedly in his great chair, his scarred face drawn and woful. I see him now—under the lamp—a gray, monstrous, despairing man, a bottle beside him, the familiar things of the place in shadow. The old feeling of wonder and regret returns. I sigh—as then, a child, bound up to a lonely chamber in the night, I sighed.

“Good-night, sir!”

There was no response; but he would look in upon me on the way to bed—into the little room where I lay luxuriously, in the midst of those extravagant comforts which so strangely came to me. And more often than not he would haul this way and that upon the covers until, as though by some unhappy accident, I was awakened.

“God bless you, Dannie,” says he.

“Good-night, sir.”

’Twas all he wanted—a good wish spoken in the night. To his own bare room he would then be off, a bit uncertain (I recall) in the management of his wooden leg.

Under my window, at the foot of a short cliff which fell roughly into the open cove, as shall be told, the sea broke. While sleep waited ’twas my habit to listen to the waves upon the rocks: in that brief and mystical interval when many truths take shape, definite and lovely, as in a mist, but are forgot before dawn stirs us, nor can be remembered. Of still moonlit nights; of windless dusks, with the swell of past storms sullenly remaining; in clammy, breathless weather; with fresh winds blowing our craft to and fro on their way in search of the fish; in blackest gales, when the men of Twist Tickle kept watch for wrecks upon the heads—forever I listened to the voice of the sea before I fell asleep. But the sea has no voice, but may only play upon the souls of men, which speak from the uttermost depths, each soul in its own way: so that the sea has a thousand voices, and listening men are tranquil or not, as may chance within them, without mystery. Never since those far-off days, when the sea took my unspoiled soul as a harp in its hands, have I been secure in the knowledge of truth, untroubled by bewilderment and anxious questions. Untroubled by love, by the fear of hell, ’twas good to be alive in a world where the sea spoke tenderly below the window of the room where sleep came bearing dreams.

And my uncle? God knows! The harp was warped, and the strings of the harp were broken and out of tune...

Would it not be possible for the more delicate readers of my otherwise inoffensive narrative to elide the word? or to supply, on the spur of the moment, an acceptable equivalent, of which, I am told, there is an infinite variety? or (better still) to utter it courageously? I am for the bolder course: ’tis a discipline rich in cultural advantages. But ’tis for the reader, of course, to choose the alternative.

IV ON SINISTER BUSINESS

Our pilgrimages to St. John's, occurring twice a year, were of a singular description: not only in the manner of our progress, which was unexampled, in view of our relationship and condition, but in the impenetrable character of our mission and in the air of low rascality it unfailingly wore. For many days before our departure from Twist Tickle by the outside boat, my uncle would quit the Green Bull grounds, where he fished with hook and line, would moor his punt fore and aft, and take to the bleak hills of Twin Islands, there (it seemed) to nurse some questionable design: whence at dusk he would emerge, exhausted in leg and spirit, but yet with strength to mutter obscure imprecations as he came tapping up the gravelled walk from the gate, and with the will to manage a bottle and glass in the kitchen.

"The bottle!" cries he. "Ecod! the dog'll never scare ol' Nick Top. Dannie, the bottle!"

While I fled for this he would sit growling by the table; but before I was well returned the humor would be vanishing, so that sometimes I guessed (but might be mistaken) he practised this rage and profanity to play a part.

"Ol' Nick Top," says he, "is as saucy a dog as you'll find in the pack!"

'Twas said with a snap.

"A saucy ol' dog!" snarls he. "An' Lord love ye! but he's able t'-t'-t' *bite!*"

"Uncle Nick," says I, "you're all wore out along o' walkin' them hills."

"Wore out!" cries he, an angry flash in his wide little eyes. "*Me* wore out?.. Pass the bottle... Ye'd never think it, lad, an ye could see me t' St. John's," says he, "at the—"

The revelation came to a full stop with the tipping of the square black bottle.

"Where's that?" says I.

"'Tis a wee water-side place, lad," says he, with a grave wink, "where ol' Nick Top's the sauciest dog in the pack!"

I would pass the water for his liquor.

"An' here," cries he, toasting with solemn enthusiasm, "is wishin' all water-side rascals in"—'twas now a long pull at the glass—"jail!" says he. "'Twould go agin my conscience t' wish un worse. I really isn't able!"

By these wanderings on the hills the slow, suspicious wits of our folk of Twist Tickle were mystified and aroused to superstitious imaginings. 'Twas inevitable that they should pry and surmise—surmising much more than they dared pry. They were never bold, however, in the presence of my uncle, whether because of their courteous ways or because of his quick temper and sulphurous tongue, in respect to meddling, I am not able to say; but no doubt they would have troubled us a deal had my uncle even so much as admitted by the set of his eyelid (which he never would do) that there was a mystery concerning us. The lads of the place lurked upon the hills when the business went forward, continuing in desperate terror of my uncle at such times. They learned, notwithstanding their fright, that he trudged far and hard, at first smiling with the day, then muttering darkly, at last wrathfully swishing the spruce with his staff; but not one of them could follow to the discovery of the secret, whatever it might be, so that, though 'twas known the old man exchanged a genial humor for an execrable one, the why and wherefore were never honestly fathomed.

Came, at last, the day before our departure, upon which my wardrobe for the journey must be chosen from the closets and chests, inspected, scrupulously packed—this for travel, that for afternoon, this, again, for dinner—tweed and serge and velvet: raiment for all occasions, for all weathers, as though, indeed, I were to spend time with the governor of the colony. Trinkets and cravats presented pretty questions for argument, in which my uncle delighted, and would sustain with spirit, watching

rather wistfully, I recall, to see my interest wax; and my interest would sometimes wax too suddenly for belief, inspired by his melancholy disappointment, so that he would dig me in the ribs with his long forefinger and laugh at me because he had discovered my deception. My uncle was a nice observer (and diligent) of fashion, and a stickler for congruity of dress, save in the matter of rings and the like, with which, perhaps, he was in the way of too largely adorning me.

“Ye’ll be wearin’ the new Turkish outfit aboard ship, Dannie?” says he.

I would not.

“Lon’on *Haberdasher* come out strong,” says he, at a coax, “on Turkish outfits for seven-year-olds.”

’Twas not persuasive.

“Wonderful pop’lar across the water.”

“But,” I would protest, “I’m not likin’ the queer red cap.”

“Ah, Dannie,” says he, “I fears ye’ll never be much of a gentleman if ye’re careless o’ the fashion. Not in the fashion, out o’ the world! What have ol’ Skipper Chesterfield t’ say on that p’int? Eh, lad? What have the bully o’ skipper t’ say—underlined by Sir Harry? A list o’ the ornamental accomplishments, volume II., page 24. ‘T’ be extremely clean in your person,’ says he, ‘an’ perfectly well dressed, accordin’ t’ the fashion, be that what it will.’ There you haves it, lad, underlined by Sir Harry! *Be that what it will.*’ But ye’re not likin’ the queer red cap, eh? Ah, well! I ’low, then, ye’ll be havin’ t’ don the kilt.”

This I would hear with relief.

“But I ’low,” growls he, “that Sir Harry an’ Skipper Chesterfield haves the right of it: for they’re both strong on manners—if weak on morals.”

Aboard ship I was put in the cabin and commanded to bear myself like a gentleman: whereupon I was abandoned, my uncle retreating in haste and purple confusion from the plush and polish and glitter of the state-room. But he would never fail to turn at the door (or come stumping back through the passage); and now heavily oppressed by my helplessness and miserable loneliness and the regrettable circumstances of my life—feeling, it may be, some fear for me and doubt of his own wisdom—he would regard me anxiously. To this day he lingers thus in my memory: leaning forward upon his short staff, half within the bright light, half lost in shadow, upon his poor, fantastic, strangely gentle countenance an expression of tenderest solicitude, which still would break, against his will, in ripples of the liveliest admiration at my appearance and luxurious situation, but would quickly recover its quality of concern and sympathy.

“Dannie, lad,” he would prescribe, “you better overhaul the twenty-third psa’m afore turnin’ in.”

To this I would promise.

“‘The Lard is my shepherd,’” says he. “‘I shall not want.’ Say it twice,” says he, as if two doses were more salutary than one, “an’ you’ll feel better in the mornin’.”

To this a doleful assent.

“An’ ye’ll make good use o’ your time with the gentlefolk, Dannie?” says he. “Keep watch on ’em, lad, an’ ye’ll l’arn a wonderful lot about manners. ‘List o’ the necessary ornamental accomplishments (without which no man livin’ can either please or rise in the world), which hitherto I fear ye want,’” quotes he, most glibly, “an’ which only require your care an’ attention t’ possess.’ Volume II., page 24. ‘A distinguished politeness o’ manners an’ address, which common-sense, observation, good company, an’ imitation will give ye if ye will accept it.’ There you haves it, Dannie—underlined by Sir Harry! Ye got the sense, ye got the eye, an’ here’s the company. Lord love ye, Dannie, the Commissioner o’ Lands is aboard with his lady! No less! An’ I’ve heard tell of a Yankee millionaire cruisin’ these parts. They’ll be wonderful handy for practice. Lay alongside, Dannie—an’ imitate the distinguished politeness: for ol’ Skipper Chesterfield cracks up imitation an’ practice most wonderful high!”

The jangle of the bell in the engine-room would now interrupt him. The mail was aboard: the ship bound out.

“An’ Dannie,” says my uncle, feeling in haste for the great handkerchief (to blow his nose, you may be sure), “I’m not able t’ *think* o’ you bein’ lonely. I’m for’ard in the steerage, lad—just call that t’ mind. An’ if ye find no cure in that, why, lad”—in a squall of affectionate feeling, his regard for gentility quite vanished—“sink me an’ that damn ol’ Chesterfield overside, an’ overhaul the twenty-third psa’m!”

“Ay, sir.”

“You is safe enough, lad; for, Dannie—”

’Twas in the imperative tone, and I must instantly and sharply attend.

—“I’m for’ard, standin’ by!”

He would then take himself off to the steerage for good; and ’twas desperately lonely for me, aboard the big ship, tossing by night and day through the rough waters of our coast.

V

TAP-TAP ON THE PAVEMENT

My uncle would not have speech with me again, lest his rough look and ways endanger the social advantages he conceived me to enjoy in the cabin, but from the lower deck would keep sly watch upon me, and, unobserved of others, would with the red bandanna handkerchief flash me messages of affection and encouragement, to which I must not for the life of me respond. Soon, however, 'twas my turn to peer and wish; for, perceiving at last that I was not ill (the weather being fair), and that I had engaged the companionship of gentlefolk—they were quick enough, indeed, these St. John's folk and spying wanderers, to attach themselves to the mystery of old Nick Top's child—my uncle would devote himself to his own concerns with unhappy result.

The manner of his days of preparation upon the hills of Twin Islands would return: the ill temper and cunning and evil secretiveness, joined now with the hang-dog air he habitually wore in the city. And these distressful appearances would by day and night increase, as we passed the Funks, came to Bonavist' Bay, left the Bacalieu light behind and rounded the Brandy Rocks, until, instead of a rotund, twinkling old sea-dog, with a gargoylish countenance, with which the spirit had nothing to do, there landed on the wharf at the city a swaggering, wrathful pirate, of devilish cast and temper, quick to flush and bluster, mighty in profanity, far gone in drink.

Thence to the hotel, in this wise: my uncle, being clever with his staff and wooden leg and vastly strong, would shoulder my box, make way through the gang-plank idlers and porters with great words, put me grandly in the lead, come gasping at a respectful distance behind, modelling his behavior (as he thought) after that of some flunky of nobility he had once clapped eyes on; and as we thus proceeded up the hill—a dandy in tartan kilt and velvet and a gray ape in slops—he would have a quick word of wrath for any passenger that might chance to jostle me. 'Twas a conspicuous progress, craftily designed, as, long afterwards, I learned; we were not long landed, you may be sure, before the town was aware that the mystery of Twist Tickle was once more come in by the *Lake*: old Skipper Nicholas Top and the lad with the rings, as they called me!

Having come now to the hotel (this by night), where would be a cheerful fire awaiting us in my comfortable quarters, my uncle would unstrap my box and dispose its contents in clean and handy places, urging me the while, like a mother, to make good use of my opportunity to observe the ways of gentlefolk, especially as practised in the dining-room of the hotel, that I might expeditiously master polite manners, which was a thing Skipper Chesterfield held most seriously in high opinion. I must thus conduct myself (he said), rather than idly brood, wishing for his company: for a silk purse was never yet made of a sow's ear but with pain to all concerned. "An' Dannie," says he, jovially, when he had clapped the last drawer shut and put my nightclothes to warm at the fire, "if you was t' tweak that there bell-pull—"

I would gladly tweak it.

"Thank 'e, Dannie," says my uncle, gently. "It'll be the best Jamaica—a nip afore I goes."

In response to this would come old Elihu Wall, whom in private I loved, exaggerating every obsequious trick known to his kind to humor my uncle. I must then act my part, as I had been taught, thus: must stride to the fire, turn, spread my legs, scowl, meditatively ply a tooth-pick (alas! my groping uncle), become aware of old Elihu Wall, become haughtily conscious of my uncle, now in respectful attitude upon his foot and wooden leg; and I must scowl again, in a heavier way, as though angered by this interruption, and rub my small quarters, now heated near beyond endurance, and stare at the ceiling, and, dropping my eyes sharply upon Elihu Wall, say with a haughty sniff, a haughty curl of the lip:

"Elihu"—with a superior jerk towards my uncle—"fetch this man a dram o' your best Jamaica!"

'Twas not hard to do—not hard to learn: for my uncle was unceasing in solicitous and patient instruction, diligent in observation, as he cruised in those exclusive places to which (somehow) he gained admittance for my sake and a jolly welcome for his own. And 'twas a grateful task, too, to which I heartily gave my interest, for I loved my uncle. 'Twas his way of teaching me not only the gentlemanly art of dealing with menials, as he had observed it, but, on his part, as he stood stiff and grave, the proper attitude of a servant towards his master. In these days, long distant from the first strange years of my life, I am glad that I was not wilful with him—glad that I did not obstinately resist the folly and boredom of the thing, as I was inclined to do. But, indeed, it must not be counted to me for virtue; for my uncle had a ready hand, though three fingers were missing, and to this day I remember the odd red mark it left (the thumb, forefinger, and palm), when, upon occasion, it fell upon me.

“Elihu,” says I, “fetch this man a dram o’ your best Jamaica!”

Upon the disappearance of Elihu Wall, my uncle and I would resume intimate relations.

“You done well, Dannie!” cries he, gleefully rubbing his hands. “I never knowed Sir Harry t’ do it better.”

We were both mightily proud.

“Dannie,” says he, presently, with gleeful interest, “give un a good one when he gets back. Like a gentleman, Dannie. Just t’ show un what you can do.”

Enter Elihu Wall.

“What the devil d’ye mean?” says I, in wrath. “Eh? What the devil d’ye mean?”

“Yes, sir,” says Elihu Wall. “Sorry, sir. *Very*, sir.”

“Devil take your sorrow!” says I.

I would then slip the old fellow a bit of silver, as I was bidden, and he would obsequiously depart.³

“You done well, Dannie!” cries my uncle again, in delight. “Lord! but 'twas grand! You done wonderful well! I never knowed Sir Harry t’ do it better. I wisht ol’ Chesterfield was here t’ see. Ecod!” he chuckles, with a rub at his nose, gazing upon me with affectionate admiration, in which was no small dash of awe, “you done it well, my lad! I’ve heard Sir Harry say *more*, mark you! but I’ve never knowed un t’ do it better. *More*, Dannie, but t’ less purpose. Ah, Dannie,” says he, fondly, “they’s the makin’s of a gentleman in *you!*”

I was pleased—to be sure!

“An’ I ’low, by an’ all,” my uncle would boast, scratching his head in high gratification, “that I’m a-fetchin’ ye up very well!”

'Twas hard on old Elihu Wall—this unearned abuse. But Elihu and I were fast friends, nevertheless: he sped many a wearisome hour for me when my uncle was upon his grim, mysterious business in the city; and I had long ago told him that he must not grieve, whatever I said—however caustic and unkind the words—because my uncle’s whims must be humored, which was the end to be served by us both. With this assurance of good feeling, old Elihu Wall was content. He took my insolence in good part, playing the game cheerfully: knowing that the hard words were uttered without intention to wound, but only in imitation of gentlemen, from whom Elihu Wall suffered enough, Heaven knows! (as he confided to me) not to mind what I might say.

I must tell that, once, taken with pain, having overeaten myself, left alone in the hotel at St. John’s, I got out of bed and sought my uncle’s lodgings, which I was never permitted to see. 'Twas a rough search for a sick child to follow through in the night, ending by the water-side—a dismal stair, leading brokenly to a wretched room, situate over a tap-room too low for frequency by us, where women quarrelled with men. Here my uncle sat with his bottle, not yet turned in. He was amazed

³ My uncle would instantly have thrashed me had I approached an oath (or any other vulgarity) in conversation upon ordinary occasions.

when I entered, but scolded me not at all; and he gave me brandy to drink, until my head swam, and took me to sleep with him, for the only time in all my life. When I awoke 'twas to disgust with the bed and room in which I lay—with the smell and dirt of the place—the poverty and sordidness, to which I was not used.

I complained of the housing my uncle had.

“Dannie, lad,” says my uncle, sighing unhappily, “the old man’s poor, an’ isn’t able t’ help it.”

Still I complained.

“Don’t, Dannie!” says he. “I isn’t able t’ bear it. An’ I’m wishin’ you’d never found out. The old man’s poor—wonderful poor. He’s on’y a hook-an’-line man. For God’s sake ask un no questions!”

I asked him no questions...

Every morning while at St. John’s, my uncle and I must walk the lower streets: my hand in his, when I was a child, and, presently, when I was grown into a lad, myself at his heels. Upon these occasions I must be clad and conduct myself thus and so, with utmost particularity: must be combed and brushed, and carry my head bravely, and square my shoulders, and turn out my toes, and cap my crown so that my unspeakably wilful hair, which was never clipped short, as I would have it, would appear in disarray. Never once did I pass the anxious inspection without needing a whisk behind, or, it may be, here and there, a touch of my uncle’s thick finger, which seemed, somehow, infinitely tender at that moment.

“I’m wantin’ ye, Dannie,” says he, “t’ look like a gentleman the day. They’ll be a thing come t’ pass, come a day.”

There invariably came a thing to pass—a singular thing, which I conceived to be the object of these pilgrimages; being this: that when in the course of our peregrinations we came to the crossing of King Street with Water he would never fail to pause, tap-tap a particular stone of the walk, and break into muttered imprecations, continuing until folk stared and heads were put out of the windows. In so far as one might discern, there was nothing in that busy neighborhood to excite the ill-temper of any man; but at such times, as though courting the curious remark he attracted, my uncle’s staff would strike the pavement with an angry pat, his head wag and nod, his eyes malevolently flash, and he would then so hasten his steps that 'twas no easy matter to keep pace with him, until, once past, he would again turn placid and slow.

“There you haves it, Dannie!” he would chuckle. “There you haves it!”

'Twas all a mystery.

My uncle must once get very drunk at St. John’s—this for a day and a night, during which I must not leave my quarters. These were times of terror—and of loneliness: for it seemed to my childish mind that when my uncle was drunk I had no friend at all. But 'twas all plain sailing afterwards—a sober, cheerful guardian, restless to be off to Twist Tickle. My uncle would buy new outfits for me at the shops, arrange the regular shipment of such delicacies as the St. John’s markets afforded according to the season, seek gifts with which to delight and profit me, gather the news of fashion, lie in wait for dropped hints as to the manners and customs of gentlemen, procure his allowance of whiskey for the six months to come: in every way providing for my happiness and well-being and for such meagre comfort as he would allow himself.

Then off to Twist Tickle: and glad we were of it when the *Lake* got beyond the narrows and the big, clean, clear-aired sea lay ahead!

VI THE FEET OF CHILDREN

Once of a still night at Twist Tickle (when I was grown to be eleven) my uncle abandoned his bottle and came betimes to my room to make sure that I was snug in my sleep. 'Twas fall weather without, the first chill and frosty menace of winter abroad: clear, windless, with all the stars that ever shone a-twinkle in the far velvet depths of the sky beyond the low window of my room. I had drawn wide the curtains to let the companionable lights come in: to stare, too, into the vast pool of shadows, which was the sea, unquiet and sombre beneath the serenity and twinkling splendor of the night. Thus I lay awake, high on the pillows, tucked to my chin: but feigned a restful slumber when I caught the sigh and downcast tread of his coming.

“Dannie,” he whispered, “is you awake?”

I made no answer.

“Ah, Dannie, isn’t you?”

Still I would not heed him.

“I wisht you was,” he sighed, “for I’m wonderful lonely the night, lad, an’ wantin’ t’ talk a spell.”

'Twas like a child’s beseeching. I was awake at once—wide awake for him: moved by the wistfulness of this appeal to some perception of his need.

“An’ is you comfortable, Dannie, lyin’ there in your own little bed?”

“Ay, sir.”

“An’ happy?”

“Grand, sir!” said I.

He crept softly to my bed. “You don’t mind?” he whispered. I drew my feet away to make room. He sat down, and for a moment patted me with the tenderness of a woman. “You don’t mind?” he ventured again, in diffidence. I did not mind (but would not tell him so); nay, so far was I from any objection that I glowed with content in this assurance of loving protection from the ills of the world. “No?” said he. “I’m glad o’ that: for I’m so wonderful old an’ lonely, an’ you’re sort o’ all I got, Dannie, t’ fondle. ’Tis pleasant t’ touch a thing that’s young an’ not yet smirched by sin an’ trouble. ’Tis some sort o’ cure for the souls o’ broken folk, I’m thinkin’. An’ you don’t mind? I’m glad o’ that. You’re gettin’ so wonderful old yourself, Dannie, that I was a bit afeared. A baby yesterday an’ a man the morrow! You’re near growed up. ’Leven year old!” with a wry smile, in which was no pride, but only poignant regret. “You’re near growed up.” Presently he withdrew a little. “Ay,” said he, gently; “you is housed an’ clad an’ fed. So much I’ve managed well enough.” He paused—distracted, his brows bent, his hand passing aimlessly over the scars and gray stubble of his head. “You’re happy, Dannie?” he asked, looking up. “Come, now, is you sure? You’d not be makin’ game o’ the old man, would you, Dannie? You’d not tell un you *was* when you *wasn’t*, would you? Is you sure you’re happy? An’ you’re glad, is you, t’ be livin’ all alone at Twist Tickle with a ol’ feller like Nick Top?”

“Wonderful happy, sir,” I answered, used to the question, free and prompt in response; “happy, sir—with you.”

“An’ you is sure?”

I was sure.

“I’m glad o’ that,” he continued, but with no relief of the anxious gloom upon his face. “I’m glad you is comfortable an’ happy. I ’low,” said he, “that poor Tom Callaway would like t’ get word of it. Poor Tom! Poor ol’ Tom! Lord love you, lad! he was your father: an’ he loved you well—all too well. I ’low he’d be wonderful *glad* just t’ know that you was comfortable an’ happy—an’ good. You is good, isn’t you? Oh, I knows you is! An’ I wisht Tom Callaway could know. I wisht he could: for I ’low ’twould perk un up a bit, in the place he’s to, t’ get wind of it that his little Dannie was

happy with ol' Nick Top. He've a good deal t' bear, I'm thinkin', where he's to; an' 'twould give un something t' distract his mind if he knowed you was doin' well. But, Dannie, lad," he pursued, with a lively little flash of interest, "they's a queer thing about that. Now, lad, mark you! 'tis easy enough t' send messages Aloft; but when it comes t' gettin' a line or two o' comfort t' the poor damned folk Below, they's no mortal way that I ever heard tell on. Prayer," says he, "wings aloft, far beyond the stars, t' the ear o' God Hissel; an' I wisht—oh, I wisht—they was the same sort o' telegraph wire t' hell! For," said he, sadly, "I've got some news that I'd kind o' like t' send."

I could not help him.

"I'm *tired!*" he complained, with a quick-drawn sigh. "I'm all wore out; an' I wisht I could tell Tom Callaway."

I, too, sighed.

"But I 'low," was my uncle's woe-begone conclusion, "that that there poor ol' Tom Callaway 'll just have t' wait till I sees un."

'Twas with a start of horror that I surmised the whereabouts of my father's soul.

We were but newly come from St. John's: a long sojourn in the water-side tap-rooms—a dissipation protracted beyond the habit (and will) of my uncle. I had wearied, and had wondered, but had found no explanation. There was a time when the rage and stagger of his intoxicated day had been exceeded past my remembrance and to my terror. I forgave him the terror: I did, I am sure! there was no fright or humiliation the maimed ape could put upon me but I would freely forgive, remembering his unfailing affection. 'Twas all plain now: the course of his rascality had not run smooth. I divined it; and I wished, I recall, lying there in the light of the untroubled stars, that I might give of myself—of the ease and placid outlook he preserved for me—some help to his distress and melancholy. But I was a child: no more than a child—unwise, unhelpful, in a lad's way vaguely feeling the need of me from whom no service was due: having intuitive discernment, but no grown tact and wisdom. That he was scarred, two-fingered, wooden-legged, a servant of the bottle, was apart: and why not? for I was nourished by the ape that he was; and a child loves (this at least) him who, elsewhere however repugnant, fosters him. I could not help with any spoken word, but still could have him think 'twas grateful to me to have him sit with me while I fell asleep; and this I gladly did.

My uncle looked up. "Dannie," said he, "you don't mind me sittin' here for a spell on your little bed, do you? Honest, now?"

'Twas woful supplication: the voice a child's voice; the eyes—dimly visible in the starlight—a child's beseeching eyes.

"Jus' for a little spell?" he pleaded.

I said that I was glad to have him.

"An' you isn't so wonderful sleepy, is you?"

"No, sir," I yawned.

He sighed. "I'm glad," said he. "An' I'm grateful t' you, lad, for bein' kind t' ol' Nick Top. He ain't worth it, Dannie—*he's* no good; he's jus' a ol' fool. But I'm lonely the night—most wonderful lonely. I been thinkin' I was sort o' makin' a mess o' things. You *is* happy, isn't you, Dannie?" he asked, in a flash of anxious mistrust. "An' comfortable—an' good? Ah, well! maybe: I'm glad you're thinkin' so. But I 'low I isn't much on fetchin' you up. I'm a *wonderful* poor hand at that. I 'low you're gettin' a bit beyond me. I been feelin' sort o' helpless an' scared; an' I was wishin' they was somebody t' lend a hand with the job. I overhauled ol' Chesterfield, Dannie, for comfort; but somehow I wasn't able t' put my finger on a wonderful lot o' passages t' tie to. He've wonderful good ideas on the subjeck o' manners, an' a raft of un, too; but the ideas he've got on souls, Dannie, is poor an' sort o' damned scarce. So when I sot down there with the bottle, I 'lowed that if I come up an' you give me leave t' sit on the side o' your little bed for a spell, maybe you wouldn't mind recitin' that there little piece you've fell into the habit o' usin' afore you goes t' bed. That wee thing about the Shepherd. You wouldn't

mind, would you, just sort o' givin' it a light overhaulin' for me? I'd thank you, Dannie, an you would be so kind; an' I'll be as quiet as a mouse while you does it."

"The tender Shepherd?"

"Ay," said he; "the Shepherd o' the lambs."

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me;

Bless thy little lamb to-night;
Through the darkness be Thou near me;

Keep me safe till morning light.

"All this day Thy hand has led me,

And I thank Thee for Thy care;
Thou hast warmed me, clothed and fed me:

Listen to my evening prayer.

"Let my sins be all forgiven;

Bless the friends I love so well;
Take us all at last to heaven,

Happy there with Thee to dwell."

And now the lower stars were paling in a far-off flush of light. I had been disquieted, but was by this waxing glow made glad that the sea and rock of the world were to lie uncovered of their shadows while yet I was awake. 'Twas a childish prayer—too simple in terms and petition (as some may think) for the lad that was I to utter, grown tall and broad and lusty for my years; but how sufficient (I recall) to still the fears of night! They who are grown lads, like the lad that was I, got somewhat beyond the years of tenderness, cling within their hearts to all the lost privileges of love they must by tradition affect to despise. My prayer for the little lamb that was I presented no aspect of incongruity to my uncle; it left him silent and solemnly abstracted: the man being cast into a heavy muse upon its content, his head fallen over his breast, as was his habit, and his great gray brows drawn down. How still the night—how cold and clear: how unfeeling in this frosty calm and silence, save, afar, where the little stars winked their kindly cognizance of the wakeful dwellers of the earth! I sat up in my bed, peering through the window, to catch the first glint of the moon and to watch her rise dripping, as I used to fancy, from the depths of the sea.

"But they stray!" my uncle complained.

'Twas an utterance most strange. "Uncle Nick," I asked, "what is it that strays?"

"The feet o' children," he answered.

By this I was troubled.

"They stray," he repeated. "Ay; 'tis as though the Shepherd minded not at all."

"Will my feet stray?"

He would not answer: and then all at once I was appalled—who had not feared before.

"Tell me!" I demanded.

He reached out and touched my hand—a fleeting, diffident touch—and gently answered, "Ay, lad; your feet will stray."

“No, no!” I cried.

“The feet of all children,” said he. “’Tis the way o’ the world. They isn’t mothers’ prayers enough in all the world t’ change the Shepherd’s will. He’s wise—the Shepherd o’ the lambs.”

“’Tis sad, then,” I expostulated, “that the Shepherd haves it so.”

“Sad?”

“Ay—wondrous sad.”

“I’m not able t’ think ’tis sad,” said he. “’Tis wise, Dannie, I’m thinkin’, t’ have the lads wander in strange paths. I’d not have un suffer fear an’ sorrow, God knows! not one poor lad of all the lads that ever was. I’d suffer for their sins meself an’ leave un go scot free. Not one but I’d be glad t’ do it for. But still ’tis wise, I’m thinkin’, that they should wander an’ learn for themselves the trouble o’ false ways. I wisht,” he added, simply, “that they was another plan—some plan t’ save un sorrow while yet it made un men. But I can’t think o’ none.”

“But an they’re lost?”

He scratched his head in a rush of anxious bewilderment. “Why, Dannie,” cries he, “it cannot be! Lost? Some poor wee lads lost? *You* lost, Dannie? My God! *You*, Dannie—you that lies there tender an’ kind an’ clean o’ soul in your little bed? You that said the little prayer t’ the tender Shepherd? *You* lost! God! it *could* not be. What’s this you’re tellin’ me? I’m not able t’ blaspheme the Lord God A’mighty in a way that’s vile as that. Not you, lad—not you! Am I t’ curse the God that would have it so?” cries he, in wrath. “Am I t’ touch your young body here in the solemn night, am I t’ look into your unspoiled eyes by day, an’ feel that you fare into the dark alone, a child, an’ without hope? *Me* think that? Ol’ Nick Top? Not I! Sin? Ay; *you’ll* sin. God knows so well as I you’ll sin. He made you, lad, an’ knows full well. You’ll be sore hurt, child. For all he learns o’ righteousness, Dannie, a man suffers; an’ for all he learns o’ sin he pays in kind: ’tis all the same—he learns o’ good an’ evil an’ pays in the same coin o’ sorrow. I’m not wishin’ you sorrow: I’m wishin’ you manhood. You’ll wander, like all lads, as God knows, who made un an’ the world they walks in; but the Shepherd will surely follow an’ fetch home all them that stray away upon hurtful roads accordin’ t’ the will He works upon the sons o’ men. They’s no bog o’ sin in all the world He knows not of. He’ll seek the poor lads out, in patience an’ love; an’ He’ll cure all the wounds the world has dealt un in dark places, however old an’ bleared an’ foul they’ve growed t’ be, an’ He’ll make un clean again, rememberin’ they was little lads, once—jus’ like you. *Why, by God! Dannie,*” cried he, “*I’d do as much meself!*”

“Ay,” quoth I; “but the parsons says they’re lost for good an’ all.”

“Does they?” he asked, his eyes blank.

“Deed so—an’ often!”

“Ah, well, Dannie!” said he, “bein’ cut off from the discussion o’ parsons by misdeeds, I’m not able t’ say. But bein’ on’y a lost soul I’m ’lowed t’ think; an’ I’ve thunk a idea.”

I wondered concerning it.

“Which is, speakin’ free an’ easy,” said he, “that they lie!”

“Twill be hard,” I argued, “t’ save un all.”

“’Twould be a mean poor God,” he replied, “that couldn’t manage a little thing like that.”

My uncle’s soul, as I had been taught (and but a moment gone informed), was damned.

“Uncle Nick,” I inquired, “will the Shepherd find you?”

“Me?” cries he.

“Ay,” I persisted; “will he not seek till he finds you, too?”

“Hist!” he whispered. “I’m damned, Dannie, for good an’ all.”

“You?”

“Good Lord, yes!” said he, under his breath. “Hist! Certain sure, I is—damned t’ hell for what I’m doin’.”

At this distant day I know that what he did was all for me, but not on that moonlit night of my childhood.

“What’s that?” said I.

“I’m damned for it, anyhow,” he answered. “Say no more, Dannie.”

I marvelled, but could make nothing of it at all. ’Tis strange (I have since thought) that we damn ourselves without hesitation: not one worthy man in all the world counting himself deserving of escape from those dreadful tortures preached for us by such apostles of injustice as find themselves, by the laws they have framed, interpreting without reverence or fear of blunder, free from the common judgment. Ay, we damn ourselves; but no man among us damns his friend, who is as evil as himself. And who damns his own child? ’Tis no doubt foolish to be vexed by any philosophy comprehending what is vulgarly called hell; but still (as I have thought) this is a reasonable view: there is no hell in the philosophy of a mother for her own child; and as by beneficent decree every man is the son of his mother, consequently there is no hell; else ’twould make such unhappiness in heaven. Ah, well! I looked out of the window where were the great works of the Lord: His rock and sea and sky. The moon was there to surprise me—half risen: the sea shot with a glistening pathway to the glory of the night. And in that vast uncertain and inimical place, far out from shore, there rode a schooner of twenty tons, dawdling unafraid, her small sails spread for a breeze, in hope. Whither bound? Northward: an evil coast for sailing—craft—cruel waters: rock and fog and ice and tempestuous winds. Thither bound, undaunted, with wings wide, abroad in the teeth of many perils, come wreck or not. At least (I thought) she had ventured from snug harbor.

“Dannie,” said my uncle, “you’re all alone in the world.”

Alone? Not I! “Why, sir,” said I, “I’ve *you!*”

He looked away.

“Isn’t I?” I demanded.

“No, lad,” he answered; “you isn’t.”

’Twas the first step he had led me from dependence upon him. ’Twas as though he had loosened my hand a little from its confident clasp of his own. I was alarmed.

“Many’s the lad,” said he, “that thinks he’ve his mother; an’ many’s the mother that thinks she’ve her lad. But yet they is both alone—all alone. ’Tis the queerest thing in the world.”

“But, Uncle Nick, *I haves you!*”

“No,” he persisted; “you is all alone. Why, Lord! Dannie, you is ’leven. What does I know about *you?*”

Not enough.

“An’ what does *you* know about *me?*”

I wondered.

“All children is alone,” said he. “Their mothers doesn’t think so; but they is. They’re alone—all alone. They got t’ walk alone. How am I t’ help you, Dannie? What can I *do* for you? Of all the wisdom I’ve gathered I’d give you all an’ go beggared, but you cannot take one jot. You must walk alone; ’tis the way o’ the world. An’, Dannie, could I say t’ the evil that is abroad, ‘Stand back! Make way! Leave this child o’ mine t’ walk in holiness!’ I would not speak the word. ’Twould be hard t’ stand helpless while you was sore beset. I’m not knowin’ how I’d bear it. ’Twould hurt me, Dannie, God knows! But still I’d have you walk where sin walks. ’Tis a man’s path, an’ I’d have you take it, lad, like a man. I’d not have you come a milk-sop t’ the Gate. I’d have you come scathless, an that might be with honor; but I’d have you come a man, scarred with a man’s scars, an need be. You walk alone, Dannie, God help you! in the world God made: I’ve no knowledge o’ your goings. You’ll wander far on they small feet. God grant you may walk manfully wherever they stray. I’ve no more t’ hope for than just only that.”

“I’ll try, sir,” said I.

My uncle touched me again—moving nearer, now, that his hand might lie upon me. “Dannie,” he whispered, “if you must sin the sins of us—”

“Ay, sir?”

“They’ll be some poor folk t’ suffer. An’ Dannie—”

I was very grave in the pause.

“You’ll not forget t’ be kind, will you,” he pleaded, “t’ them that suffer for your sins?”

“I will not sin,” I protested, “t’ the hurt of any others.”

He seemed not to hear. “An’ you’ll bear your own pain,” he continued, “like a man, will you not?”

I would bear it like a man.

“That’s good,” said he. “That’s very good!”

The moon was now risen from the sea: the room full of white light.

“They is a Shepherd,” said my uncle. “God be thanked for that. *He’ll* fetch you home.”

“An’ you?” said I.

“Me? Oh no!”

“He’ll remember,” said I, confidently, “that you was once a little lad—jus’ like me.”

“God knows!” said he.

I was then bade go to sleep...

Presently I fell asleep, but awoke, deep in the night, to find my uncle brooding in a chair by my bed. The moon was high in the unclouded heaven. There was no sound or stirring in all the world—a low, unresting, melancholy swish and sighing upon the rocks below my window, where the uneasy sea plained of some woe long forgot by all save it, which was like a deeper stillness and silence. The Lost Soul was lifted old and solemn and gray in the cold light and shadow of the night. I was troubled: for my uncle sat in the white beam, striking in at my window, his eyes staring from cavernous shadows, his face strangely fixed and woful—drawn, tragical, set in no incertitude of sorrow and grievous pain and expectation. I was afraid—’twas his eyes: they shook me with fear of the place and distance from which it seemed he gazed at me. ’Twas as though a gulf lay between, a place of ghostly depths, of echoes and jagged rock, dark with wind-blown shadows. He had brought me far (it seemed) upon a journey, leading me; and having now set my feet in other paths and turned my face to a City of Light, lifted in glory upon a hill, was by some unworthiness turned back to his own place, but stayed a moment upon the cloudy cliff at the edge of darkness, with the night big and thick beyond, to watch me on my way.

“Uncle Nick,” said I, “’tis wonderful late in the night.”

“Ay, Dannie,” he answered; “but I’m wantin’ sore t’ sit by you here a spell.”

“I’ll not be able,” I objected, “t’ go t’ sleep.”

“’Twill do no hurt, lad,” said he “if I’m wonderful quiet. An’ I’ll be quiet—wonderful quiet.”

“But I’m *wantin’* t’ go t’ sleep!”

“Ah, well,” said he, “I’ll not trouble you, then. I would not have you lie awake. I’ll go. Good-night. God bless you, lad!”

I wish I had not driven him away...

VII TWIN ISLANDS

In all this time I have said little enough of Twist Tickle, never a word (I think) of Twin Islands, between whose ragged shores the sheltering tickle winds; and by your favor I come now gratefully to the task. 'Tis a fishing outpost: a place of rock and sea and windy sky—no more than that—but much loved by the twelvescore simple souls of us, who asked for share of all the earth but salt-water and a harbor (with the winds blowing) to thrive sufficient to ourselves and to the world beyond. Had my uncle sought a secret place to foster the child that was I—which yet might yield fair wage for toil—his quest fortuitously ended when the *Shining Light* ran dripping out of the gale and came to anchor in the quiet water of the tickle. But more like 'twas something finer that moved him: in that upheaval of his life, it may be, 'twas a wistful turning of the heart to the paths and familiar waters of the shore where he lived as a lad. Had the *Shining Light* sailed near or far and passed the harbor by, the changed fortunes of—but there was no sailing by, nor could have been, for the great wind upon whose wings she came was passionate, too, and fateful.

If 'tis a delight to love, whatever may come of it (as some hold), I found delight upon the grim hills of Twin Islands...

They lie hard by the coast, but are yet remote: Ship's Run divides them from the long blue line of main-land which lifts its barren hills in misty distance from our kinder place. 'Tis a lusty stretch of gray water, sullen, melancholy, easily troubled by the winds, which delight, it seems, sweeping from the drear seas of the north, to stir its rage. In evil weather 'tis wide as space; when a nor'easter lifts the white dust of the sea, clouding Blow-me-down-Billy of the main-land in a swirl of mist and spume, there is no departure; nor is there any crossing (mark you) when in the spring of the year a southerly gale urges the ice to sea. We of Twin Islands were cut off by Ship's Run from all the stirring and inquisitive world.

According to Tumm, the clerk of the *Quick as Wink*, which traded our harbor, Twin Islands are t' the west'ard o' the Scarf o' Fog, a bit below the Blue Gravestones, where the *Soldier o' the Cross* was picked up by Satan's Tail in the nor'easter o' the Year o' the Big Shore Catch. "Oh, I knows un!" says he. "You opens the Tickle when you rounds Cocked Hat o' the Hen-an'-Chickens an' lays a course for Gentleman Cove, t'other side o' the bay. Good harbor in dirty weather," says he: "an', ecod! my lads, a hearty folk." This is forbidding enough, God knows! as to situation; but though the ancient islands, scoured by wind and rain, are set in a misty isolation and show gray, grimly wrinkled faces to the unkind sea, betraying no tenderness, they are green and genial in the places within: there are valleys; and the sun is no idler, and the lean earth of those parts is not to be discouraged.

"God-forsaken place, Nick!" quoth Tom Bull, at the Anchor and Chain.

"How was you knowin' that, Tom?" says my uncle. "You isn't never *been* there."

"*Sounds* God-forsaken."

"So does hell."

"Well, hell *is*."

"There you goes again, Tom Bull!" cries my uncle, with a sniff and wrathful twitch of the lip. "There you goes again, you dunderhead—jumpin' t' conclusions!"

Tom Bull was shocked.

"Hell God-forsaken!" growls my uncle. "They's more hard labor for the good Lord t' do in hell, Tom Bull, than any place I knows on; an' I 'low He's right there, kep' double watches on the jump, a-doin' of it!"

Twist Tickle pursues an attenuated way between the Twins, broadening into the harbor basin beyond the Pillar o' Cloud, narrowing at the Finger and Thumb, widening, once more, into the lower

harbor, and escaping to the sea, at last, between Pretty Willie and the Lost Soul, which are great bare heads. You get a glimpse of the Tickle from the deck of the mail-boat: this when she rounds the Cocked Hat and wallows off towards Gentleman Cove. 'Tis but a niggardly glimpse at best, and vastly unfair to the graces of the place: a white house, wee and listlessly tilted, gripping a rock, as with expiring interest; a reach of placid water, deep and shadowy, from which rise the hills, gray, rugged, splashed with green; heights beyond, scarfed with clinging wisps of mist.

The white houses are buildd in a fashion the most disorderly at the edge of the tickle, strung clear from the narrows to the Lost Soul and straying somewhat upon the slopes, with the scrawny-legged flakes clinging to the bare declivities and the stages squatted at the water-side; but some houses, whose tenants are solitary folk made morose by company, congregate in the remoter coves—where the shore is the shore of the open sea and there is no crowd to trouble—whence paths scramble over the hills to the Tickle settlement. My uncle's cottage sat respectably, even with some superiority, upon a narrow neck of rock by the Lost Soul, outlooking, westerly, to sea, but in the opposite direction dwelling in a way more intimate and fond upon the unruffled water of Old Wives' Cove, within the harbor, where rode the *Shining Light*.

"An' there she'll lie," he was used to saying, with a grave and mysteriously significant wink, "until I've sore need o' she."

"Ay," said they, "or till she rots, plank an' strand."

"An she rots," says my uncle, "she may rot: for she'll sail these here waters, sound or rotten, by the Lord! an I just put her to it."

Unhappy, then, perhaps, Twin Islands, in situation and prospect; but the folk of that harbor, who deal barehanded with wind and sea to catch fish, have this wisdom: that a barren, a waste of selfish water, a low, soggy sky have nothing to do with the hearts of men, which are independent, in love and hope and present content, of these unfeeling things. We were seafaring men, every jack of the place, with no knowledge of a world apart from green water, which forever confronted us, fashioning our lives; but we played the old comedy as heartily, with feeling as true and deep, the same fine art, as you, my gentlefolk! and made a spectacle as grateful to the gods for whom the stage (it seems) is set.

And there is a road from the Tickle to the sea—to an outer cove, high-cliffed, frothy, sombre, with many melancholy echoes of wind and breakers and listless human voices, where is a cluster of hopeless, impoverished homes. 'Tis a wilful-minded path, lingering indolently among the hills, artful, intimate, wise with age, and most indulgently secretive of its soft discoveries. It is used to the lagging feet of lovers. There are valleys in its length, and winding, wooded stretches, kindly places; and there are arching alders along the way to provide a seclusion yet more tender. In the moonlight 'tis a path of enchantment—a way (as I know) of pain and high delight: of a wandering hope that tantalizes but must in faith, as we are men, be followed to its catastrophe. I have suffered much of ecstasy and despair upon that path. 'Tis the road to Whisper Cove.

Judith dwelt at Whisper Cove...

VIII

A MAID O' WHISPER COVE

Fourteen, then, and something more: a footloose lad of Twist Tickle—free to sail and wander, to do and dream, to read the riddles of my years, blithe and unalarmed. 'Tis beyond the will and wish of me to forget the day I lay upon the Knob o' Lookout, from afar keeping watch on the path to Whisper Cove—the taste of it, salty and cool, the touch of it upon my cheek and in my hair, the sunlight and scampering wind: the simple haps and accidents, the perception, awakening within me, and the portent. 'Twas blowing high and merrily from the west—a yellow wind from the warm west and from the golden mist and low blue line of coast at the other side of the bay. It rippled the azure floor between, and flung the spray of the breakers into the sunshine, and heartily clapped the gray cliff, and pulled the ears of the spruce, and went swinging on, in joyous mood, to the gray spaces of the great sea beyond Twin Islands. I shall not forget: for faith! the fates were met in conspiracy with the day to plot the mischief of my life. There was no warning, no question to ease the issue in my case: 'twas all ordained in secret; and the lever of destiny was touched, and the labor of the unfeeling loom went forward to weave the pattern of my days.

Judith (as I know) washed her mother's face and hands with conscientious care: 'twas her way. Doubtless, in the way she had, she chattered, the while, a torrent of affectionate reproof and direction, which gave no moment for promise or complaint, and at last, with a raised finger and a masterful little flash of the eye, bade the flighty woman keep out of mischief for the time. What then, 'tis easy to guess: she exhausted the resources of soap and water in her own adornment (for she smelled of suds in the cabin of the *Shining Light*), and set out by the path from Whisper Cove to Twist Tickle, with never a glance behind, but a prim, sharp outlook, from shyly downcast eyes, upon all the world ahead. A staid, slim little maid, with softly fashioned shoulders, carried sedately, her small head drooping with shy grace, like a flower upon its slender stalk, seeming as she went her dainty way to perceive neither scene nor incident of the passage, but yet observing all in swift, sly little flashes.

"An' a-ha!" thinks I, "she's bound for the *Shining Light*!"

It was blowing: on the edge of the cliff, where the path was lifted high above the sea, winding through sunlit space, the shameless old wind, turned skyward by the gray cliff, made bold, in the way the wind knows and will practise, wherever it blows. The wind cared nothing for the tragic possibility of a lad on the path: Judith was but a fluttering rag in the gust. At once—'twas a miracle of activity—her face reappeared in a cloud of calico and tawny hair. She looked fearfully to the path and yellow hills; and her eyes (it must be) were wide with the distress of this adventure, and there were blushes (I know) upon her cheeks, and a flash of white between her moist red lips. Without hint of the thing (in her way)—as though recklessly yielding to delight despite her fears—she lifted her hands and abandoned the pinafore to the will of the wind with a frightened little chuckle. 'Twas her way: thus in a flash to pass from nay to yea without mistrust or lingering. Presently, tired of the space and breeze, she dawdled on in the sunshine, idling with the berries and scrawny flowers by the way, and with the gulls, winging above the sea, until, as with settled intention, she vanished over the cliff by the goat-path to Old Wives' Cove, where rode the *Shining Light*, sound asleep under a blanket of sunshine in the lee of the Lost Soul.

I followed.

In the cabin of the *Shining Light*, cross-legged on the table, in the midst of the order she had accomplished, her hands neatly folded in her lap, Judith sat serene. She had heard my clatter on the gang-plank, my shuffle and heavy tread on the deck. 'Twas I, she knew: there was no mistaking, God help me! the fall of my feet on road or deck. It may be that her heart for a moment fluttered to

know that the lad that was I came at last. She has not told me: I do not know. But faith! my own was troublesome enough with a new and irritating uneasiness, for which was no accounting.

I feigned astonishment. "Hello!" quoth I; "what you doin' here?"

She turned away—the eager expectation all fled from her face: I saw it vanish.

"Eh?" says I.

She sniffed: 'twas a frank sniff of contempt—pain, like a half-heard sob, mixed with the scorn of it.

"What you doin' here?"

I stood reproached; she had achieved it in a glance—a little shaft of light, darting upon me, departing, having dealt its wound.

"Well, maid," cries I, the smart of her glance and silence enraging me, "is you got no tongue?"

She puckered her brows, pursed her lips; she sighed—and concerned herself with her hair-ribbon, quite placid once more. 'Twas a trick well known to me. 'Twas a trick aggravating to the temper. 'Twas a maid's trick—an ensnaring, deadly trick. 'Twas a trick ominous of my imminent confusion.

"Eh?" I demanded.

"Dannie, child," she admonished, gently, "God hates a liar!"

I might have known.

"T' make believe," cries she, "that I'd not be here! How could you!"

"'Tis not a lie."

"'Tis a white lie, child," she chided. "You've come, Dannie, poor lad! t' be a white liar. 'Tis a woful state—an' a parlous thing. For, child, if you keeps on—"

She had paused. 'Twas a trick to fetch the question. I asked it.

"You'll be a blue one," says she. "An' then—"

"What then?"

"Blue-black, child. An' then—"

I waited.

"Oh, Dannie, lad!" cries she, her little hands clasped, a pitiful quaver in her voice, so that I felt consigned to woe, indeed, for this misdoing, "you'll be a liar as black as—"

There was no more of it.

"You dare not say it!" I taunted.

I did not wish that she should: not I! but still, being a lad, would have her come close enough to sauce the devil. But I would not have her say that word. Indeed, I need not have troubled. 'Twas not in her mind to be so unmaidenly, with a lad at hand to serve her purpose.

"No," says she, "I dare not; but you, Dannie, bein' a lad—"

Her voice trailed off expectantly.

"Black as hell?"

She nodded.

"Come, maid," says I, "you've called me a liar."

"I wasn't wantin' to."

"No odds," says I. "An' if I'm a liar," says I, "I 'low I'm a fool for it?"

"You is."

"Then, my maid," cries I, in triumph, "you'll be keepin' me company in hell! You've called me a fool. 'An' whoso calleth his brother a fool—"

"Oh no," says she, quite undisturbed. "'Tis not so."

"Not so?"

"Why, no, child! Didn't you know?"

"But it *says* so!"

“Dannie, child,” says she, with unruffled superiority, “I come down from heaven one year an’ five months after God sent you. An’ God *told* me, Dannie, just afore I left Un at the Gate, that He’d changed His mind about that.”

The particular color of this stupendous prevarication I am still unable to determine...

Here in the cabin of the *Shining Light* was my workshop. On the bench, stout-hulled and bravely masted, was a bark to be rigged. My fingers itched to be dealing with the delicate labor. ’Twas no time now, thought I, all at once, to dally with the child. The maid was a sweet maid, an amiably irritating maid, well enough, in her way, to idle with; but the building of the ship was a substantial delight, subject to the mastery of a man with hands and a will, the end a sure achievement—no vague, elusive thing, sought in madness, vanishing in the grasp. I would be about this man’s-work. Never was such a ship as this ship should be! And to the work went Judith and I. But presently, as never happened before, I was in some strange way conscious of Judith’s nearness. ’Twas a soft, companionable presence, indeed! I bungled the knots, and could no longer work my will upon the perverse spars, but had rather dwell upon her slender hands, swiftly, capably busy, her tawny hair, her sun-browned cheeks and the creamy curve of her brow, the blue and flash and fathomless depths of her eyes. I remembered the sunlight and freshening breeze upon the hills, the chirp and gentle stirring of the day, the azure sea and far-off, tender mist, the playful breakers, flinging spray high into the yellow sunshine. ’Twas no time now, thought I, to be busied with craft in the gloomy cabin of the *Shining Light*, which was all well enough in its way; ’twas a time to be abroad in the sunlit wind. And I sighed: not knowing what ailed me, but yet uneasy and most melancholy. The world was an ill place for a lad to be (thinks I), and all the labor of it a vanity...

Now the afternoon was near spent. My hands were idle—my eyes and heart far astray from the labor of the time. It was very still and dreamful in the cabin. The chinks were red with the outer glow, and a stream of mote-laden sunlight, aslant, came in at the companionway.

It fell upon Judith.

“Judy,” I whispered, bending close, “I ’low I might as well—might as well have—”

She looked up in affright.

“Have a kiss,” said I.

“Oh no!” she gasped.

“Why not? Sure I’m able for it!”

“Ay,” she answered, in her wisdom yielding this; “but, Dannie, child, ’tisin’t *lowed*.”

“Why not?”

Her eyes turned round with religious awe. “God,” said she, with a solemn wag, “wouldn’t like it.”

“I’d never stop for that.”

“May be,” she chided; “but I ’low, lad, we ought t’ ’blige Un once in a while. ’Tis no more than kind. An’ what’s a kiss t’ lack? Pooh!”

I was huffed.

“Ah, well, then!” said she, “an your heart’s set on it, Dannie, I’ve no mind t’ stop you. But—”

I moved forward, abashed, but determined.

“But,” she continued, with an emphasis that brought me to a stop, “I ’low I better ask God, t’ make sure.”

’Twas the way she had in emergencies.

“Do,” said I, dolefully.

The God of the lad that was I—the God of his childish vision, when, in the darkness of night, he lifted his eyes in prayer, seeking the leading of a Shepherd—was a forbidding God: white, gigantic, in the shape of an old, old man, the Ancient of Days, in a flowing robe, seated scowling upon a throne, aloft on a rolling cloud, with an awful mist of darkness all roundabout. But Judith, as I knew, visualized in a more felicitous way. The God to whom she appealed was a rotund, florid old gentleman, with the briefest, most wiry of sandy whiskers upon his chops, a jolly double chin, a

sunburned nose, kindly blue eyes forever opened in mild wonder (and a bit bleared by the wind), the fat figure clad in broadly checked tweed knickerbockers and a rakish cap to match, like the mad tourists who sometimes strayed our way. 'Twas this complacent, benevolent Deity that she made haste to interrogate in my behalf, unabashed by the spats and binocular, the corpulent plaid stockings and cigar, which completed his attire. She spread her feet, in the way she had at such times; and she shut her eyes, and she set her teeth, and she clinched her hands, and thus silently began to wrestle for the answer, her face all screwed, as by a taste of lemon.⁴

Presently my patience was worn.

“What news?” I inquired.

“Hist!” she whispered. “He’s lookin’ at me through His glasses.”

I waited an interval.

“What now, Judy?”

“Hist!” says she. “He’s wonderful busy makin’ up His mind. Leave Un be, Dannie!”

'Twas trying, indeed! I craved the kiss. Nor by watching the child’s puckered face could I win a hint to ease the suspense that rode me. Upon the will of Judith’s Lord God Almighty in tweed knickerbockers surely depended the disposition of the maid. I wished He would make haste to answer.

“Judy, maid,” I implored, “will He never have done?”

“You’ll be makin’ Un mad, Dannie,” she warned.

“I can wait no longer.”

“He’s scowlin’.”

I wished I had not interrupted.

“I ’low,” she reported, “He’ll shake His head in a minute.”

'Twas a tender way to break ill news.

“Ay,” she sighed, opening her eyes. “He’ve gone an’ done it. I knowed it. He’ve said I hadn’t better not. I’m wonderful sorry you’ve t’ lack the kiss, Dannie. I’m wonderful sorry, Dannie,” she repeated, in a little quiver of pity, “for *you!*”

She was pitiful: there’s no forgetting that compassion, its tearful concern and wistfulness. I was bewildered. More wishful beseeching must surely have softened a Deity with a sunburned nose and a double chin! Indeed, I was bewildered by this fantasy of weeping and nonsense. For the little break in her voice and the veil of tears upon her eyes I cannot account. 'Twas the way she had as a maid: and concerning this I have found it folly to speculate. Of the boundaries of sincerity and pretence within her heart I have no knowledge. There was no pretence (I think); 'twas all reality—the feigning and the feeling—for Judith walked in a confusion of the truths of life with visions. There came a time—a moment in our lives—when there was no feigning. 'Twas a kiss besought; and 'twas kiss or not, as between a man and a maid, with no Almighty in tweed knickerbockers conveniently at hand to shoulder the blame. Ah, well, Judith! the golden, mote-laden shaft which transfigured your childish loveliness into angelic glory, the encompassing shadows, the stirring of the day without, the winds of blue weather blowing upon the hills, are beauties faded long ago, the young denial a pain almost forgot. The path we trod thereafter, Judith, is a memory, too: the days and nights of all the years since in the streaming sunlight of that afternoon the lad that was I looked upon you to find the shadowy chambers of your eyes all misty with compassion.

“Dannie,” she ventured, softly, “you’re able t’ take it.”

“Ay—but will not.”

“You’re wonderful strong, Dannie, an’ I’m but a maid.”

“I’ll wrest no kisses,” said I, with a twitch of scorn, “from maids.”

⁴ I am informed that there are strange folk who do not visualize after the manner of Judith and me. 'Tis a wonder how they conceive, at all!

She smiled. 'Twas a passing burst of rapture, which, vanishing, left her wan and aged beyond her years.

"No," she whispered, but not to me, "he'd *not* do that. He'd not-do that! An' I'd care little enough for the Dannie Callaway that would."

"You cares little enough as 'tis," said I. "You cares nothing at all. You cares not a jot."

She smiled again: but now as a wilful, flirting maid. "As for carin' for *you*, Dannie," she mused, dissembling candor, "I *do*- an' I don't."

The unholy spell that a maid may weave! The shameless trickery of this!

"I'll tell you," she added, "the morrow."

And she would keep me in torture!

"There'll be no to-morrow for we," I flashed, in a passion. "You cares nothing for Dannie Callaway. 'Tis my foot," I cried, stamping in rage and resentment. "'Tis my twisted foot. I'm nothin' but a cripple!"

She cried out at this.

"A limpin' cripple," I groaned, "t' be laughed at by all the maids o' Twist Tickle!"

She began now softly to weep. I moved towards the ladder—with the will to abandon her.

"Dannie," she called, "take the kiss."

I would not.

"Take two," she begged.

"Maid," said I, severely, "what about your God?"

"Ah, *but*—" she began.

"No, no!" cries I. "None o' that, now!"

"You'll not listen!" she pouted.

"Twill never do, maid!"

"An you'd but hear me, child," she complained, "I'd 'splain—"

"*What about your God?*"

She turned demure—all in a flash. "I'll ask Un," said she, most piously. "You—you—you'll not run off, Dannie," she asked, faintly, "when I—I—shuts my eyes?"

"I'll bide here," says I.

"Then," says she, "I'll ask Un."

The which she did, in her peculiar way. 'Twas a ceremony scandalously brief and hurried. Once I caught (I thought) a slit in her eye—a peep-hole through which she spied upon me. Presently she looked up with a shy little grin. "God says, Dannie," she reported, speaking with slow precision, the grin now giving place to an expression of solemnity and highest rapture, "that He 'lows He didn't know what a fuss you'd make about a little thing like a kiss. He've been wonderful bothered o' late by overwork, Dannie, an' He's sorry for what He done, an' 'lows you might overlook it this time. 'You tell Dannie, Judy,' says He, 'that he've simply no idea what a God like me haves t' put up with. They's a woman t' Thunder Arm,' says He, 'that's been worryin' me night an' day t' keep her baby from dyin', an' I simply can't make up my mind. She'll make me mad an she doesn't look out,' says He, 'an' then I'll kill it. An' I've the heathen, Judy—all them heathen—on my mind. 'Tis enough t' drive any God mad. An' jus' now,' says He, 'I've got a wonderful big gale blowin' on the Labrador, an' I'm near drove deaf,' says He, 'by the noise them fishermen is makin'. What with the Labradormen an' the woman t' Thunder Arm an' the heathen 'tis fair awful. An' now comes Dannie,' says He, 't' make me sick o' my berth! You tell Dannie,' says he, 't' take the kiss an' be done with it. Tell un t' go ahead,' says He, 'an' not be afeared o' me. I isn't in favor o' kissin' as a usual thing,' says He, 'for I've always 'lowed 'twas sort o' silly; but if *you*

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