ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE COXSWAIN'S BRIDE; ALSO, JACK FROST AND SONS; AND, A DOUBLE RESCUE

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The Coxswain's Bride; also, Jack Frost and Sons; and, A Double Rescue

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R. M. Ballantyne
The Coxswain's Bride; also, Jack Frost and Sons; and, A Double Rescue

Story 1 – Chapter 1.
The Rising Tide—A Tale of the Sea

The coxswain went by the name of Sturdy Bob among his mates. Among the women of the village he was better known as handsome Bob, and, looking at him, you could not help seeing that both titles were appropriate, for our coxswain was broad and strong as well as good-looking, with that peculiar cast of features and calm decided manner which frequently distinguish the men who are born to lead their fellows.

Robert Massey, though quite young, was already a leader of men—not only by nature but by profession—being coxswain of the Greyton lifeboat, and, truly, the men who followed his lead had need to be made of good stuff, with bold, enthusiastic, self-sacrificing spirits, for he often led them into scenes of wild—but, hold! We must not forecast.

Well, we introduce our hero to the reader on a calm September evening, which blazed with sunshine. The sun need not have been mentioned, however, but for the fact that it converted the head of a fair-haired fisher-girl, seated beside Bob, into a ball of rippling gold, and suffused her young cheeks with a glow that rudely intensified her natural colour.

She was the coxswain's bride-elect, and up to that date the course of their true love had run quite smoothly in spite of adverse proverbs.

"I can't believe my luck," said Bob, gravely.

He said most things gravely, though there was not a man in Greyton who could laugh more heartily than he at a good joke.

"What luck do you mean, Bob?" asked Nellie Carr, lifting her eyes from the net she was mending, and fixing them on the coxswain's bronzed face with an air of charming innocence. Then, becoming suddenly aware of what he meant without being told, she gave vent to a quick little laugh, dropped her eyes on the net, and again became intent on repairs.

"To think," continued Bob, taking two or three draws at his short pipe—for our hero was not perfect, being, like so many of his class, afflicted with the delusion of tobacco!—"to think that there'll be no Nellie Carr to-morrow afternoon, only a Mrs Massey! The tide o' my life is risin' fast, Nellie—almost at flood now. It seems too good to be true—"

"Right you are, boy," interrupted a gruff but hearty voice, as a burly fisherman "rolled" round the stern of the boat in front of which the lovers were seated on the sand. "W'en my Moggie an' me was a-coortin' we thought, an' said, it was too good to be true, an' so it was; leastwise it was too true to be good, for Moggie took me for better an' wuss, though it stood to reason I couldn't be both, d'ee see? an' I soon found her wuss than better, which—"

"Come, come, Joe Slag," cried Bob, "let's have none o' your ill-omened growls to-night. What brings you here?"

"I've comed for the key o' the lifeboat," returned Slag, with a knowing glance at Nellie. "If the glass ain't tellin' lies we may have use for her before long."

Massey pulled the key from his pocket, and gave it to Slag, who was his bowman, and who, with the exception of himself, was the best man of the lifeboat crew.

"I'll have to follow him," said Bob, rising soon after his mate had left, "so good-bye, Nellie, till to-morrow."

He did not stoop to kiss her, for the wide sands lay before them with fisher-boys playing thereon—apparently in their fathers' boots and sou'-westers—and knots of observant comrades scattered about.

"See that you're not late at church to-morrow, Bob," said the girl, with a smile and a warning look.

"Trust me," returned Bob.

As he walked towards the lifeboat-house—a conspicuous little building near the pier—he tried to blow off some of the joy in his capacious breast by whistling.

"Why, Slag," he exclaimed on entering the shed, "I do believe you've been an' put on the blue ribbon!"

"That's just what I've done, Bob," returned the other. "I thought you'd 'ave noticed it at the boat; but I forgot you could see nothin' but the blue of Nellie's eyes."

"Of course not. Who'd expect me to see anything else when I'm beside *her*?" retorted Bob. "But what has made you change your mind? I'm sure the last time I tried to get you to hoist the blue-peter ye were obstinate enough—dead against it."

"True, Bob; but since that time I've seed a dear woman that I was fond of *die* from drink, an' I've seed Tom Riley, one of our best men, get on the road to ruin through the same; so I've hoisted the blue flag, as ye see."

"That's a good job, Slag, but don't you forget, my lad, that the blue ribbon won't save you. There's but *one* Saviour of men. Nevertheless, it's well to fight our battles under a flag, an' the blue is a good one—as things go. Show your colours and never say die; that's my motto. As you said, Slag, the glass *is* uncommon low to-day. I shouldn't wonder if there was dirty weather brewin' up somewhere."

The coxswain was right, and the barometer on that occasion was a true prophet. The weather which "brewed up" that evening was more than "dirty," it was tempestuous; and before midnight a tremendous hurricane was devastating the western shores of the kingdom. Many a good ship fought a hard battle that night with tide and tempest, and many a bad one went down. The gale was short-lived but fierce, and it strewed our western shores with wreckage and corpses, while it called forth the energies and heroism of our lifeboat and coastguard men from north to south.

Driving before the gale that night under close-reefed topsails, a small but well-found schooner came careering over the foaming billows from the regions of the far south, freighted with merchandise and gold and happy human beings. Happy! Ay, they were happy, both passengers and crew, for they were used by that time to facing and out-riding gales; and was not the desired haven almost in sight—home close at hand?

The captain, however, did not share in the general satisfaction. Out in "blue water" he feared no gale, but no one knew better than himself that the enemy was about to assail him at his weakest moment—when close to land. No one, however, could guess his thoughts as he stood there upon the quarter-deck, clad in oil-skins, drenched with spray, glancing now at the compass, now at the sails, or at the scarce visible horizon.

As darkness deepened and tempest increased, the passengers below became less cheerful, with the exception of one curly-haired little girl, whose exuberant spirit nothing could quell. Her young widowed mother had given in to the little one's importunities, and allowed her to sit up late on this the last night at sea, to lend a helping hand while she packed up so as to be ready for landing next day. Consent had been the more readily given that the white-haired grandfather of little Lizzie volunteered to take care of her and keep her out of mischief.

The other passengers were as yet only subdued, not alarmed. There were men and women and little ones from the Australian cities, rough men from the sheep farms, and bronzed men from the gold mines. All were busy making preparations to land on the morrow. With the exception of those preparations things on board went on much as they had been going on in "dirty weather" all the voyage through.

Suddenly there was a crash! Most of the male passengers, knowing well what it meant, sprang to the companion-ladder—those of them at least who had not been thrown down or paralysed—and rushed on deck. Shrieks and yells burst forth as if in emulation of the howling winds. Crash followed crash, as each billow lifted the doomed vessel and let her fall on the sands with a shock that no structure made by man could long withstand. Next moment a terrific rending overhead told that one, or both, of the masts had gone by the board. At the same time the sea found entrance and poured down hatchways and through opening seams in cataracts. The inclined position of the deck showed that she was aground.

The very thought of being *aground* comforted some, for, to their minds, it implied nearness to land, and *land* was, in their idea, safety. These simple ones were doomed to terrible enlightenment. Little Lizzie, pale and silent from terror, clung to her grandfather's neck; the young widow to his disengaged arm. With the other arm the old man held on to a brass rod, and prevented all three from being swept to leeward, where several of the women and children were already struggling to escape from a mass of water and wrecked furniture.

"Come on deck—all hands!" shouted a hoarse voice, as one of the officers leaped into the cabin, followed by several men, who assisted the people to rise.

It is usual to keep passengers below as much as possible in such circumstances, but the position of the schooner, with her bow high on a bank, and her stern deep in the water, rendered a different course needful on this occasion.

With difficulty the passengers were got up to the bow, where they clustered and clung about the windlass and other points of vantage. Then it was that the true nature of their calamity was revealed, for no land was visible, nothing was to be seen around them but a hell of raging foam, which, in the almost total darkness of the night, leaped and glimmered as if with phosphoric light. Beyond this circle of, as it were, wild lambent flame, all was black, like a wall of ebony, from out of which continually there rushed into view coiling, curling, hoary-headed monsters, in the shape of roaring billows, which burst upon and over them, deluging the decks, and causing the timbers of the ship to writhe as if in pain.

"We've got on the tail o' the sands," muttered a sailor to some one as he passed, axe in hand, to cut away the wreckage of the masts, which were pounding and tugging alongside.

On the sands! Yes, but no sands were visible, for they had struck on an outlying bank, far from shore, over which the ocean swept like the besom of destruction.

It was nearly low water at the time of the disaster. As the tide fell the wreck ceased to heave. Then it became possible for the seamen to move about without clinging to shrouds and stanchions for very life.

"Fetch a rocket, Jim," said the captain to one of the men.

Jim obeyed, and soon a whizzing line of light was seen athwart the black sky.

"They'll never see it," muttered the first mate, as he got ready another rocket. "Weather's too thick."

Several rockets were fired, and then, to make more sure of attracting the lifeboat men, a tar-barrel, fastened to the end of a spar, was thrust out ahead and set on fire. By the grand lurid flare of this giant torch the surrounding desolation was made more apparent, and at the fearful sight hearts which had hitherto held up began to sink in despair.

The mate's fears seemed to be well grounded, for no answering signal was seen to rise from the land, towards which every eye was anxiously strained. One hour passed, then another, and another, but still no help came. Then the tide began to rise, and with it, of course, the danger to increase. All this time rockets had been sent up at intervals, and tar-barrels had been kept burning.

"We had better make the women and children fast, sir," suggested the mate, as a heavy mass of spray burst over the bulwarks and drenched them.

"Do so," replied the captain, gathering up a coil of rope to assist in the work.

"Is this necessary?" asked the widow, as the captain approached her.

"I fear it is," he replied. "The tide is rising fast. In a short time the waves will be breaking over us again, and you will run a chance of bein' swept away if we don't make you fast. But don't despair, they must have seen our signals by this time, an' we shall soon have the lifeboat out."

"God grant it," murmured the widow, fervently, as she strained poor little trembling Lizzie to her breast.

But as the moments flew by and no succour came, some gave way altogether and moaned piteously, while others appeared to be bereft of all capacity of thought or action. Many began to pray in frantic incoherence, and several gave vent to their feelings in curses. Only a few maintained absolute self-possession and silence. Among these were the widow and one or two of the other women.

They were in this condition when one of the crew who had been noted as a first-rate singer of sea songs, and the "life of the fo'c's'l," had occasion to pass the spot where the passengers were huddled under the lee of the starboard bulwarks.

"Is there never a one of ye," he asked, almost sternly, "who can pray like a Christian without screechin'? You don't suppose the Almighty's deaf, do you?"

This unexpected speech quieted the noisy ones, and one of the women, turning to a man beside her, said, "You pray for us, Joe."

Joe was one of those who had remained, from the first, perfectly still, except when required to move, or when those near him needed assistance. He was a grave elderly man, whose quiet demeanour, dress, and general appearance, suggested the idea of a city missionary—an idea which was strengthened when, in obedience to the woman's request, he promptly prayed, in measured sentences, yet with intense earnestness, for deliverance—first from sin and then from impending death—in the name of Jesus. His petition was very short, and it was barely finished when a wave of unusual size struck the vessel with tremendous violence, burst over the side and almost swept every one into the sea. Indeed, it was evident that some of the weaker of the party would have perished then if they had not been secured to the vessel with ropes.

It seemed like a stern refusal of the prayer, and was regarded as such by some of the despairing ones, when a sudden cheer was heard and a light resembling a great star was seen to burst from the darkness to windward.

"The lifeboat!" shouted the captain, and they cheered with as much hearty joy as if they were already safe.

A few minutes more and the familiar blue and white boat of mercy leaped out of darkness into the midst of the foaming waters like a living creature.

It was the boat from the neighbouring port of Brentley. Either the storm-drift had not been so thick in that direction as in the neighbourhood of Greyton, or the Brentley men had kept a better look-out. She had run down to the wreck under sail. On reaching it—a short distant to windward—the sail was lowered, the anchor dropped, the cable payed out, and the boat eased down until it was under the lee of the wreck. But the first joy at her appearance quickly died out of the hearts of some, who were ignorant of the powers of lifeboats and lifeboat men, when the little craft was seen at one moment tossed on the leaping foam till on a level with the ship's bulwarks, at the next moment far down in the swirling waters under the mizzen chains; now sheering off as if about to forsake them altogether; anon rushing at their sides with a violence that threatened swift destruction to the boat; never for one instant still; always tugging and plunging like a mad thing. "How can we ever get into that?" was the thought that naturally sprang into the minds of some with chilling power.

Those, however, who understood the situation better, had more legitimate ground for anxiety, for they knew that the lifeboat, if loaded to its utmost capacity, could not carry more than half the souls that had to be saved. On becoming aware of this the men soon began to reveal their true characters. The unselfish and gentle made way for the women and children. The coarse and brutal, casting shame

and every manly feeling aside, struggled to the front with oaths and curses, some of them even using that false familiar motto, "Every man for himself, and God for us all!"

But these received a check at the gangway, for there stood the captain, revolver in hand. He spoke but one word—"back," and the cravens slunk away. The mild man who had offered prayer sat on the ship's bulwarks calmly looking on. He understood the limited capacity of the boat, and had made up his mind to die.

"Now, madam, make haste," cried the mate, pushing his way towards the widow.

"Come, father," she said, holding out her hand; but the old man did not move.

"There are more women and little ones," he said, "than the boat can hold. Good-bye, darling. We shall meet again—up yonder. Go."

"Never!" exclaimed the widow, springing to his side. "I will die with you, father! But here, boatman, save, oh, save my child!"

No one attended to her. At such terrible moments men cannot afford to wait on indecision. Other women were ready and only too glad to go. With a sense almost of relief at the thought that separation was now impossible, the widow strained the child to her bosom and clung to her old father.

At that moment the report of a pistol was heard, and a man fell dead upon the deck. At the last moment he had resolved to risk all and rushed to the side, intending to jump into the boat.

"Shove off," was shouted. The boat shot from the vessel's side. The bowman hauled on the cable. In a few seconds the oars were shipped, the anchor was got in, and the overloaded but insubmergible craft disappeared into the darkness out of which it had come.

The wretched people thus left on the wreck knew well that the boat could not make her port, land the rescued party, and return for them under some hours. They also knew that the waves were increasing in power and volume with the rising water, and that their vessel could not survive another tide. Can we wonder that most of them again gave way to despair—forgetting that with God "all things are possible?"

They were not yet forsaken, however. On the pier-head at Greyton their signals had indeed been observed, but while the Brentley boat, owing to its position, could run down to the wreck with all sail set, it was impossible for that of Greyton to reach it, except by pulling slowly against wind and tide.

The instant that Bob Massey saw the flare of the first tar-barrel he had called out his men. One after another they came leaping over the rocks—eager for the God-like work of saving life.

It is one of the grand characteristics of our lifeboatmen that on being summoned to the fight there are often far more volunteers than are required. Joe Slag, as in duty bound, was first to answer the call. Then several of the younger men came running down. Last of all—almost too late—Tom Riley appeared, buckling on his lifebelt as he ran. His gait was not quite steady, and his face was flushed. The coxswain was quick to note these facts.

"Take that lifebelt off!" he said, sternly, when Riley came up.

No need to ask why. The tippler knew the reason why only too well, and he also knew that it was useless as well as dangerous to disobey the coxswain. He took off the belt at once, flung it down, and staggered away back to his grog-shop.

A powerful young fisherman—who had felt almost heart-broken by being refused permission to go for want of room—gladly put on the belt and took Riley's place. Another minute and they were out of the harbour, battling with the billows and fighting their way inch by inch against the howling blast. At last they got out so far that they could hoist sail and run with a slant for the wreck.

Story 1 – Chapter 2

It was daylight by the time the Greyton lifeboat arrived at the scene of action, but the thick, spray-charged atmosphere was almost as bad to see through as the blackness of night.

“I’m afeared she’s gone,” shouted Slag to the coxswain, putting his hand to his mouth to prevent the words being blown bodily away.

“No—I see her bearing sou’-west,” was the brief reply, as Bob Massey plied his steering oar.

A few minutes later, and the despairing people on the wreck, catching sight of the boat, greeted her with a long, wild cheer of reviving hope.

“What is it?” asked the widow, faintly, for she had been growing gradually weaker from prolonged exposure.

“The lifeboat, darling,” said her father. “Did I not say that He would not forsake us?”

“Thank God!” murmured the poor woman, fervently. “Look up, Lizzie; the lifeboat is coming to save us!”

The child, who had been comparatively warm and sheltered, at the expense of her mother, looked up and smiled.

Soon the boat was alongside, and much the same scene that we have already described was re-enacted; but there were no rebels this time. By the captain’s resolute bearing at first many lives had probably been saved.

When most of the people had been lowered into the boat—not without great risk and many bruises—the widow, who, cowering with her father and child under the forecastle, had been overlooked, was led to the side with her child.

“Not together, ma’am,” said the captain. “You’d likely drop her. Let me lower the child down first; or come first yourself—that will be better.”

“Give Lizzie to me,” said the grandfather. “I’ll hold her till you are safe, and ready to receive her.”

“Look alive, ma’am,” urged one of the lifeboat men, who had scrambled on deck to render assistance.

The widow was soon in the boat, and held out her arms for little Lizzie. Somehow—no one could tell how—the men made a bungle of it. Perhaps the very fear of doing so was the cause. Instead of being caught by the boatmen, Lizzie slipped between the boat and the vessel into the boiling sea. Giving one agonised cry, the grandfather leaped after her, but the surging boat swept in at the moment, and the old man fortunately fell into that instead of the sea. He was not hurt, for strong arms had been upraised to receive him. The little child rose above the foam as she was whirled past the stern of the boat by a swift current. Bob Massey saw her little out-stretched arms. There was no time for thought or consideration. With one bound the coxswain was overboard. Next moment the crew saw him far astern with the child in his arms.

“Get ’em all aboard *first*!” came back, even against the wind, in Bob’s powerful, deep-toned voice.

Another moment, and he was lost to sight in the boiling waste of waters. Slag knew well what he meant. If they should cast off the rope before rescuing all, for the purpose of picking up the coxswain, there would be no possibility of getting back again to the schooner, for she was fast breaking up. Every current and eddy about these sands was well known to Joe Slag, also the set of the tides—besides, had not Bob got on his lifebelt? He felt, nevertheless, that it was a tremendous risk to let him go. But what could poor Slag do? To cast off at once would have been to sacrifice about a dozen lives for the sake of saving two. It was a fearful trial. Joe loved Bob as a brother. His heart well nigh burst, but it stood the trial. He did his duty, and held on to the wreck!

Duty, on that occasion, however, was done with a promptitude, and in a fashion, that was not usual in one of his sedate nature. Fortunately, none but men remained on the wreck by that time.

"Tumble 'em in—sharp!" cried Slag.

The lifeboat men obeyed literally, and tumbled them in with a celerity that might almost have awakened surprise in a sack of potatoes!

To haul up the anchor would have been slow work. Slag—economical by nature—became extravagant for once. An axe made short work of cable and anchor.

"Let 'em go!" he growled, as the boat drifted away.

The sail was set with miraculous speed, for now the wind was in their favour, and the gay lifeboat bounded off in the direction where Bob had disappeared, as though it felt a lively interest in the recovery of its coxswain. It seemed as if the very elements sympathised with their anxiety, for just then the gale sensibly abated, and the rising sun broke through a rift in the grey clouds.

"There he is—I see him!" shouted the man in the bow—pointing eagerly ahead.

"It's on'y a bit o' wreck, boy," cried a comrade.

"Right you are," returned the bowman.

"There he is, though, an' no mistake, this time. Port!—port! hard-a-port!"

As he spoke, the boat swept round into a sort of cross-current among the waves, where an object resembling a man was observed spinning slowly round like a lazy teetotum. They were soon alongside. A dozen claw-like hands made a simultaneous grasp, and hauled the object on board with a mighty cheer, for it was, indeed, the coxswain—alive, though much exhausted—with his precious little curly-haired burden in his arms.

The burden was also alive, and not much exhausted, for the weather was comparatively warm at the time, and Bob had thrust her little head into the luxuriant thicket of his beard and whiskers; and, spreading his great hands and arms all over her little body, had also kept her well out of the water—all which the great buoyancy of his lifebelt enabled him easily to do.

Shall we describe the joy of the widow and the grandfather? No; there are some sacred matters in life which are best left to the imagination. The sunshine which had begun to scatter the clouds, and flood both land and sea, was typical of the joy which could find no better means than sobs wherewith to express gratitude to the God of mercy.

We have said that the gale had begun to abate. When the lifeboat escaped from the turmoil of cross-seas that raged over the sands and got into deep water, all difficulties and dangers were past, and she was able to lay her course for Greyton harbour.

"Let's have another swig o' that cold tea," said Bob Massey, resuming his rightful post at the helm. "It has done me a power o' good. I had no notion that cold tea was so good for warmin' the cockles o' one's heart."

Ah! Bob Massey, it was not the cold tea, but the saving of that little girl that sent the life's blood careering so warmly through your veins! However, there's no harm done in putting it down to the credit of the cold tea. Had the tea been hot, there might have been some truth in your fancy.

"What's the time?" asked Bob, with a sudden look of anxiety.

"Just gone ten," said Slag, consulting a chronometer that bore some resemblance to an antique warming-pan.

The look of anxiety on the coxswain's countenance deepened.

"Ease off the sheet a bit," he said, looking sternly over the weather quarter, and whistling for a fresher breeze, though most men would have thought the breeze fresh enough already.

As if to accommodate him, and confirm the crew in the whistling superstition, the breeze did increase at the moment, and sent the lifeboat, as one of the men said, "snorin'" over the wild sea towards the harbour of Greyton.

It was a grand sight to behold the pier of the little port on that stormy morning. Of course, it had soon become known that the lifeboat was out. Although at starting it had been seen by only a

few of the old salts—whose delight it was to recall the memory of grand stormy times long past, by facing the gales at all hours in oiled coats and sou'-westers—the greater part of the fishing village only became aware of the fact on turning out to work in the morning. We have said that the gale had moderated, and the sun had come out, so that the pier was crowded, not only with fisher-folk, but with visitors to the port, and other landsmen.

Great was the hope, and sanguine the expectation of the crowd, when, after long and anxious waiting, the lifeboat was at last descried far out at sea, making straight for the harbour.

"All right, Bill," exclaimed an old fisherman, who had been for some time past sweeping the horizon with his glass, "the flag's a-flyin'."

"What does that mean?" asked a smart young lady, who had braved the blast and run the risk of a salt-wash from the sprays at the pier-end in her eager desire to see the boat arrive.

"It means, Miss, that they've managed to save somebody—how many, in course, we can't tell till they come."

There was a strong disposition on the part of the crowd to cheer when this was said.

After a few minutes' further observation, the old man with the glass murmured, as if speaking to himself, "I do believe she's chock-full o' people."

When this was repeated, the suppressed cheer broke forth, and the excitement increased. Soon the people with good eyes could see for themselves that the swiftly approaching boat was as full as she could hold of human beings. At the same time, those who were in the boat could see the swarms of sympathisers on the pier who awaited their arrival.

But there was one man who took no note of these things, and seemed indifferent to everything around him. The coxswain of the lifeboat was spiritually absent from the scene.

"You seem to've got the fidgets, Bob," remarked Joe Slag, looking earnestly at his friend. "That swim has been too much for 'ee."

"'Taint that, Joe," replied Bob, quickly. "What's the time now, lad?"

Pulling out the antique warming-pan again, Slag said it was nigh a quarter past ten, and added that he, (Bob), seemed to be "uncommon consarned about the time o' day that mornin'."

"And so would you be, lad," returned the coxswain, in a low voice, as he advanced his mouth to his comrade's ear, "if you was in my fix. I've got to be spliced this day before twelve, an' the church is more'n two miles inland!"

"That's awk'ard," returned Slag, with a troubled look. "But, I say, Bob, you've kep' this uncommon close from us all—eh? I never heerd ye was to be spliced so soon."

"Of course I kep' it close, 'cos I wanted to give you an' my mates a surprise, but it strikes me I'll give some other people a surprise to-day, for there's no time to put on clean toggery."

"You'll never manage it," said Slag, in a sympathetic tone, as he once more consulted the warming-pan. "It's gettin' on for half arter ten now, an' it takes a mortal time to rig out in them go-to-meetin' slops."

"Do I look anything like a bridegroom as I am?" asked the coxswain with a curious glance.

"Sca'cely," replied Slag, surveying his friend with a grim smile—"(mind your helm, Bob, there's a awk'ard run on the tide round the pier-head, you know.) No; you're not wery much like one. Even if your toggery was all ship-shape—which it ain't—it would stand dryin', and your hair would be the better o' brushin'—to say nothin' o' your beard—an' it do seem, too, as if a bit o' soap might improve your hands an' face arter last night's work. No, Bob, I couldn't honestly say as you're exactly ship-shape as you stand."

"Listen, Joe Slag," said Bob Massey, with sudden earnestness. "I've never yet come in after a rescue without seein' the boat hauled up an' made snug. 'Dooty first, an' pleasure arter,' that's bin my motto, as *you* know. But dooty lies in another direction *this* day, so you promise to see her hauled up, an' cleaned, an' properly housed, won't you?"

"In coorse I does."

“Well, then,” continued Bob, in the same low, earnest tone, “arter that’s done, you’ll go an’ invite all our mates an’ friends to a jolly blow-out in the big shed alongside o’ my old mother’s house. Don’t tell who invites ’em, or anything about it, an’ ask as many as like to come—the shed’s big enough to hold ’em all. Only be sure to make ’em understand that they’ll get no drink stronger than coffee an’ tea. If they can’t enjoy themselves on that, they may go to the grog-shop, but they needn’t come to *me*. My mother will be there, and she’ll keep ’em in order!”

“What!” exclaimed Slag, with a look of slight surprise. “Your mother! Her what’s bin bed-ridden for years, an’ hasn’t got no legs at all—leastwise not to speak of?”

“Just so, lad. We’ll lift her in, bed an’ all. Now you be off to the bow. Oars out, lads; stand by the halyards!”

They were by that time close to the pier-head, where the people were shouting and cheering, some of them even weeping, and waving hats, ’kerchiefs, sticks, and umbrellas, almost wild with joy at seeing so many fellow-creatures rescued from the maw of the hungry sea.

The first man who leaped out when the lifeboat touched the pier was the coxswain, dripping, dirty, and dishevelled.

“Bless you, my gallant fellow!” exclaimed an irrepressible old enthusiast, stepping forward and attempting to grasp the coxswain’s hand.

But Bob Massey, brushing past him, ran along the pier, leaped a fence, and sprang up the steep path that led to the cliffs, over the top of which he was finally seen to bound and disappear.

“Poor fellow!” exclaimed the irrepressible enthusiast, looking aghast at Slag, “exposure and excitement have driven him mad!”

“Looks like it!” replied Slag, with a quiet grin, as he stooped to assist the widow and little Lizzie to land, while ready hands were out-stretched to aid and congratulate the old grandfather, and the rest of the rescued people.

The coxswain ran—ay, he ran as he had been wont to run when he was a wild little fisher-boy—regardless alike of appearances and consequences. The clock of the village steeple told him that the appointed hour had almost arrived. Two miles was a long way to run in heavy woollen garments and sea-boots, all soaked in sea-water. But Bob was young, and strong, and active, and—you understand the rest, good reader!

The church had purposely been selected at that distance from the village to prevent Bob’s comrades from knowing anything about the wedding until it should be over. It was a somewhat strange fancy, but the coxswain was a man who, having taken a fancy, was not easily turned from it.

In order to her being got comfortably ready in good time, Nellie Carr had slept the night before at the house of an uncle, who was a farmer, and lived near the church. The house was in a sheltered hollow, so that the bride was scarcely aware of the gale that had been blowing so fiercely out at sea. Besides, being much taken up with cousin-bridesmaids and other matters, the thought of the lifeboat never once entered her pretty head.

At the appointed hour, arrayed in all the splendour of a fisherman’s bride, she was led to the church, but no bridegroom was there!

“He won’t be long. He’s *never* late,” whispered a bridesmaid to anxious Nellie.

Minutes flew by, and Nellie became alarmed. The clergyman also looked perplexed.

“Something must have happened,” said the farmer-uncle, apologetically.

Watches were consulted and compared.

At that moment a heavy rapid tread was heard outside. Another moment, and Bob Massey sprang into the church, panting, flushed, dirty, wet, wild, and, withal, grandly savage.

“Nellie!” he exclaimed, stopping short, with a joyful gaze of admiration, for he had never seen her so like an angel before.

“Bob!” she cried in alarm, for she had never before seen him so like a reprobate.

"Young man," began the clergyman, sternly, but he got no further; for, without paying any attention to him whatever, Bob strode forward and seized Nellie's hands.

"I dursen't kiss ye, Nell, for I'm all wet; but I hadn't one moment to change. Bin out all night i' the lifeboat an' saved over thirty souls. The Brentley boat's done as much. I'm ashamed, sir," he added, turning to the clergyman, "for comin' here like this; but I couldn't help it. I hope there's nothin' in Scriptur' agin' a man bein' spliced in wet toggery?"

Whether the clergyman consulted his Cruden's Concordance with a view to clear up that theological question, we have never been able to ascertain; but it is abundantly clear that he did not allow the coxswain's condition to interfere with the ceremony, for in the *Greyton Journal*, of next day, there appeared a paragraph to the following effect:

> "The marriage of Robert Massey, the heroic coxswain of our lifeboat, (which, with all its peculiar attendant circumstances, and the gallant rescue that preceded it, will be found in another part of this day's issue), was followed up in the afternoon by a feast, and what we may style a jollification, which will live long in the memory of our fisher-folk.
>
> "Several circumstances combined to render this wedding-feast unique. To say nothing of the singular beauty of the bride, who is well known as one of the most thrifty and modest girls in the town, and the stalwart appearance of our coxswain, who, although so young, has already helped to save hundreds of human lives from the raging sea, the gathering was graced by the presence of the bridegroom's bed-ridden mother. Old Mrs Massey had been carried in, bed and all, to the scene of festivity; and it is due to the invalid to state that, despite rheumatics and the singularity of her position, she seemed to enjoy herself exceedingly. Besides this, the friends and comrades of the coxswain—backed by the enthusiastic groomsman, Joe Slag—would not permit Massey to don wedding garments, but insisted on his dancing himself dry in the rough garb in which he had effected the rescue. This he had no difficulty in doing, having already run himself more than half dry in hastening from the lifeboat to the church, which latter he reached only just in time.
>
> "The little girl whom Massey personally saved was also present, with her mother and grandfather; and one interesting episode of the evening was the presentation to our coxswain of a gold watch and a purse of fifty sovereigns by the grateful old grandfather. Another peculiarity of the proceedings was that Massey insisted—although the clergyman was present—on his old mother asking God's blessing on the feast before it began. All who are acquainted with our liberal-minded vicar will easily understand that he highly approved of the arrangement.
>
> "To crown all, the feast was conducted on strictly teetotal principles. We have frequently advocated the principles of total abstinence in these columns—at least for the young, the healthy, and the strong—and we are glad to acknowledge that this wedding has greatly helped our cause; for the fun and hilarity in all, the vigour of limb in dancing, and of lung in singing—in short, the general jollity—could not have been surpassed if the guests had been swilling rivers of beer and brandy, instead of oceans of tea. Yes, as one of the Irish guests remarked, 'It was a great occasion intoirely,' and it will be long before the event is forgotten, for the noble deeds of our Greyton lifeboat are, from this day forward, intimately and inseparably connected with her coxswain's wedding!"

Thus spake the Greyton oracle; but, prophet though that journal professed to be, the oracle failed to discern that from that time forward the names of Robert Massey and Joe Slag would very soon cease to be connected with the Greyton lifeboat.

Story 1 – Chapter 3

Soon after the wedding recorded in the last chapter an event occurred which entirely altered the character and current of our coxswain's career, at least for a time. This was the sudden death of the bed-ridden old mother, who had played such an interesting part at the wedding-feast.

To our hero, who was a tender-hearted man, and a most affectionate son, the blow was almost overwhelming, although long expected.

"I don't think I can stay here much longer," he said one evening to his pretty wife, as they sat together outside their door and watched the village children romping on the sands; "everything minds me o' the dear old woman, an' takes the heart out me. If it wasn't for you, Nell, I'd have been off to the other side o' the world long before now, but I find it hard to think o' takin' you away from all your old friends and playmates—and your Aunt Betty."

A peculiar smile lit up Nellie's face as her husband concluded.

"I should be sorry to leave the old friends here," she replied, "but don't let that hinder you if ye want to go away. I'd leave everything to please you, Bob. And as to Aunt Betty—well, I'm not ungrateful, I hope, but—but *she* wouldn't break her heart at partin' wi' *me*."

"Right you are, Nell, as you always was, and always will be," said Massey. He laughed a short, dry laugh, and was grave again.

It was quite evident that Aunt Betty would not be a hindrance to the departure of either of them and no wonder, for Betty had received Nellie Carr into her family with a bad grace when her widowed brother, "old Carr," died, leaving his only child without a home. From that day Betty had brought the poor little orphan up—or, rather, had scolded and banged her up—until Bob Massey relieved her of the charge. To do Aunt Betty justice, she scolded and banged up her own children in the same way; but for these—her own young ones—she entertained and expressed a species of affection which mankind shares in common with cats, while for Nellie Carr she had no such affection, and contrived to make the fact abundantly plain. As we not infrequently find in such circumstances, the favoured children—which numbered seven—became heart-breakers, while the snubbed one turned out the flower of the flock.

"Then you're sure you won't think it hard, Nell, if I ask you to leave home and friends and go wi' me over the sea?"

"Yes, Bob, I'm quite sure. I'm willin' to follow you to the end o' the world, or further if that's possible!"

"Then the thing's settled," said Massey, with decision, rising and thrusting his short pipe into his vest pocket, the lining of which had already been twice renewed in consequence of the inroads of that half-extinguished implement.

In pursuance of his "settled" purpose, our coxswain proceeded to the lifeboat-shed in search of his bowman, Joe Slag, and found him there.

"Joe," said he, in the quiet tone that was habitual to him, "Nell and I have made up our minds to go to Australia."

"To Austrailly!" exclaimed Slag, leaning his arms on the mop with which he had been washing down the lifeboat.

"Ay; I can't settle to work nohow since the dear old woman went away; so, as Nell is agreeable, and there's nothin' to keep me here, I've decided to up anchor and bear away for the southern seas."

The bowman had seated himself on a cask while his friend was speaking, and gazed at him with a bewildered air.

"Are 'ee in arnest, Bob?"

"Ay, Joe, in dead earnest."

"An' you say that you've nothin' to keep you here! What's this?" said Slag, laying his strong hand tenderly on the blue side of the boat.

"Well, I'll be sorry to leave *her*, of course, an all my friends in Greyton, but friends will get along well enough without me, an' as for the boat, she'll never want a good coxswain while Joe Slag's alive an' well."

"You're wrong there, mate," returned the bowman, quickly, while a look of decision overspread his bluff countenance, "there'll be both a noo cox'n and a noo bowman wanted for her before long, for as sure as the first goes away the tother follers."

"Nonsense, Joe; you're jokin' now."

"Yes, I'm jokin' if *you're* jokin'; otherwise, I'm in dead arnest too—in as dead arnest as yourself, if not deader. Wasn't you an' me born on the same day, Bob? Didn't our mothers crow over us cheek by jowl when we was babbies? Haven't we rollicked together on the shore ever since we was the height of our daddies' boots, an' gone fishin' in company, fair weather an' foul, to the present hour, to say nothin' o' the times we've lent a hand to rescue men an' women an' child'n i' the lifeboat? No, no, Bob Massey! if you lay yer course for Austrailly, Joseph Slag follers, as sure as a gun."

Finding that his comrade was in downright earnest, and possessed of a will as inflexible as his own, Bob made no effort to dissuade him from his purpose. On the contrary, he approved of the determination, for he was pleased at the unexpected demonstration of affection which his announcement had called forth in one who was by nature undemonstrative, and who, having thus given vent to his aroused feelings, quickly resumed the reserve from which he had been so suddenly drawn out. Massey, therefore, shook hands with him, by way of sealing an unspoken compact of eternal friendship, and suggested that they should proceed together to the office of an emigration agent, who had recently made his appearance in the village.

In the office they found a very small boy, with an air of self-possession that would have been suitable in his grandfather.

"Is the agent in?" asked the coxswain.

"Yes, but engaged. Sit down; he'll attend to you directly."

The lifeboat men obeyed, almost sheepishly, the one speculating as to whether highly developed precocity was not almost criminal, the other wondering how such a boy would look and act if obliged to undergo the process of being rescued—say by the hair of his head—from a wreck.

Their minds were diverted from this subject of contemplation by the entrance of a man and woman. These, like themselves, were told to sit down and wait. The man was long, thin, and lugubrious. The woman short, slight, and lackadaisical, though rather pretty.

Evidently the agent was a busy man, for he kept them waiting some time. When he at length appeared he almost took the breath away from his visitors by the rapid and enthusiastic way in which he described the advantages of the great island on the other side of the globe. There was gold—yes, *enormous* quantities of gold in all directions. There was land of the finest quality to be had for next to nothing; work for all who were blessed with good bone and muscle; a constant demand for labour—skilled or unskilled—at high wages; a climate such as the Olympian gods might revel in, and—in short, if all England had heard the oration delivered by that man, and had believed it, the country would, in less than a month, have been depopulated of its younger men and women, and left to the tender mercies of the old and middle-aged.

Our two fishermen were captivated. So were the lugubrious man and his mild little wife. The end of it was that, three weeks later, these four, with many other men and women of all ranks and conditions, found themselves on board the good ship *Lapwing*, ploughing their way through the billows of the broad Atlantic Ocean bound for the sunny isles of the Antipodes.

Wheels within wheels—worlds within worlds—seems to be the order of nature everywhere. Someone has written, with more of truth than elegance—

“Big fleas have little fleas upon their legs to bite ’em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas—and so *ad infinitum*.”

One’s native land is to millions of people the world in which their thoughts centre, and by which they are circumscribed. A farmer’s homestead is the world to him, and one of the farmer’s cheeses contains a mighty world in itself. But the most complete, compact, and exclusive world in existence, perhaps, is a ship at sea—especially an emigrant ship—for here we find an epitome of the great world itself. Here may be seen, in small compass, the operations of love and hate, of wisdom and stupidity, of selfishness and self-sacrifice, of pride, passion, coarseness, urbanity, and all the other virtues and vices which tend to make the world at large—a mysterious compound of heaven and hell.

Wherever men and women—not to mention children—are crowded into small space, friction ensues, and the inevitable result is moral electricity, positive and negative—chiefly positive! Influences naturally follow, pleasant and unpleasant—sometimes explosions, which call for the interference of the captain or officer in charge of the deck at the time being.

For instance, Tomlin is a fiery but provident man, and has provided himself with a deck-chair—a most important element of comfort on a long voyage. Sopkin is a big sulky and heedless man, and has provided himself with no such luxury. A few days after leaving port Sopkin finds Tomlin’s chair on deck, empty, and, being ignorant of social customs at sea, seats himself thereon. Tomlin, coming on deck, observes the fact, and experiences sudden impulses in his fiery spirit. The electricity is at work. If it were allowable to venture on mental analysis, we might say that Tomlin’s sense of justice is violated. It is not fair that he should be expected to spend money in providing comforts for any man, much less for a man who carelessly neglects to provide them for himself. His sense of propriety is shocked, for Sopkin has taken possession without asking leave. His self-esteem is hurt, for, although Sopkin knows it is his chair, he sits there doggedly, “like a big brute as he is,” and does not seem to care what Tomlin thinks or how he looks. Besides, there is thrust upon Tomlin the disagreeable necessity of claiming his own, and that, too, in a gentlemanly tone and manner—for it will not do to assume beforehand that Sopkin is going to refuse restitution. Tomlin is not aware that he thinks all this, but he knows that he feels it, and, in spite of himself, demands his property in a tone and with a look that sets agoing the electrical current in Sopkin, who replies, in a growling tone, “it is *my* chair just now.”

Ordinary men would remonstrate in a case of this kind, or explain, but Tomlin is not ordinary. He is fiery. Seizing the back of his property, he hitches it up, and, with a deft movement worthy of a juggler, deposits the unreasonable Sopkin abruptly on the deck! Sopkin leaps up with doubled fists. Tomlin stands on guard. Rumkin, a presumptuous man, who thinks it his special mission in life to set everything wrong right, rushes between them, and is told by both to “mind his own business.” The interruption, however, gives time to the captain to interfere; he remarks in a mild tone, not unmixed with sarcasm, that rough skylarking is not appropriate in the presence of ladies, and that there is a convenient fo’c’s’l to which the gentlemen may retire when inclined for such amusement.

There is a something in the captain’s look and manner which puts out the fire of Tomlin’s spirit, and reduces the sulky Sopkin to obedience, besides overawing the presumptuous Rumkin, and from that day forth there is among the passengers a better understanding of the authority of a sea captain, and the nature of the unwritten laws that exist, more or less, on ship-board.

We have referred to an incident of the quarter-deck, but the same laws and influences prevailed in the forepart of the vessel in which our coxswain and his friend had embarked.

It was the evening of the fifth day out, and Massey, Joe Slag, the long lugubrious man, whose name was Mitford, and his pretty little lackadaisical wife, whose name was Peggy, were seated at one end of a long mess-table having supper—a meal which included tea and bread and butter, as well as salt junk, etcetera.

"You don't seem quite to have recovered your spirits yet, Mitford," said Massey to the long comrade. "Have a bit o' pork? There's nothin' like that for givin' heart to a man."

"Ay, 'specially arter a bout o' sea-sickness," put in Slag, who was himself busily engaged with a mass of the proposed remedy. "It 'ud do yer wife good too. Try it, ma'am. You're not half yerself yit. There's too much green round your eyes an' yaller about yer cheeks for a healthy young ooman."

"Thank you, I—I'd rather not," said poor Mrs Mitford, with a faint smile—and, really, though faint, and called forth in adverse circumstances, it was a very sweet little smile, despite the objectionable colours above referred to. "I was never a great 'and with victuals, an' I find that the sea don't improve appetite—though, after all, I can't see why it should, and—"

Poor Mrs Mitford stopped abruptly, for reasons best known to herself. She was by nature rather a loquacious and, so to speak, irrelevant talker. She delivered herself in a soft, unmeaning monotone, which, like "the brook," flowed "on for ever"—at least until some desperate listener interrupted her discourteously. In the present instance it was her own indescribable feelings which interrupted her.

"Try a bit o' plum-duff, Mrs Mitford," suggested Massey, with well-intentioned sincerity, holding up a lump of the viand on his fork.

"Oh! please—don't! Some tea! Quick! I'll go—"

And she went.

"Poor Peggy, she never *could* stand much rough an' tumble," said her husband, returning from the berth to which he had escorted his wife, and seating himself again at the table. "She's been very bad since we left, an' don't seem to be much on the mend."

He spoke as one who not only felt but required sympathy—and he got it.

"Och! niver give in," said the assistant cook, who had overheard the remark in passing. "The ould girl'll be all right before the end o' this wake. It niver lasts more nor tin days at the outside. An' the waker the patients is, the sooner they comes round; so don't let yer sperrits down, Mr Mitford."

"Thank 'ee, kindly, Terrence, for your encouragin' words; but I'm doubtful. My poor Peggy is so weak and helpless!"

He sighed, shook his head as he concluded, and applied himself with such energy to the plum-duff that it was evident he expected to find refuge from his woes in solid food.

"You don't seem to be much troubled wi' sickness yourself," remarked Massey, after eyeing the lugubrious man for some time in silence.

"No, I am not, which is a blessin'. I hope that Mrs Massey ain't ill?"

"No; my Nell is never ill," returned the coxswain, in a hearty tone. "She'd have been suppin' along with us to-night, but she's nursin' that poor sick lad, Ian Stuart, that's dyin'."

"Is the lad really dyin'?" asked Mitford, laying down his knife and fork, and looking earnestly into his companion's face.

"Well, it looks like it. The poor little fellow seemed to me past recoverin' the day he came on board, and the stuffy cabin, wi' the heavin' o' the ship, has bin over much for him."

While he was speaking Nellie herself came softly to her husband's side and sat down. Her face was very grave.

"The doctor says there's no hope," she said. "The poor boy may last a few days, so he tells us, but he may be taken away at any moment. Pour me out a cup o' tea, Bob. I must go back to him immediately. His poor mother is so broken down that she's not fit to attend to him, and the father's o' no use at all. He can only go about groanin'. No wonder; Ian is their only child, Bob—their first-born. I can't bear to think of it."

"But you'll break down yourself, Nell, if you go nursin' him every night, an' all night, like this. Surely there's some o' the women on board that'll be glad to lend a helpin' hand."

"I know *one* who'll be only too happy to do that, whether she's well or ill," said Mitford, rising with unwonted alacrity, and hastening to his wife's berth.

Just then the bo’s’n’s stentorian voice was heard giving the order to close reef tops’ls, and the hurried tramping of many feet on the deck overhead, coupled with one or two heavy lurches of the ship, seemed to justify the assistant cook’s remark—“Sure it’s durty weather we’re goin’ to have, annyhow.”

Story 1 – Chapter 4

The indications of bad weather which had been observed were not misleading, for it not only became what Terrence O'Connor had termed "durty," but it went on next day to develop a regular gale, insomuch that every rag of canvas, except storm-sails, had to be taken in and the hatches battened down, thus confining the passengers to the cabins.

These passengers looked at matters from wonderfully different points of view, and felt accordingly. Surroundings had undoubtedly far greater influence on some of them than was reasonable. Of course we refer to the landsmen only. In the after-cabin, where all was light, cosy, and comfortable, and well fastened, and where a considerable degree of propriety existed, feelings were comparatively serene. Most of the ladies sought the retirement of berths, and became invisible, though not necessarily inaudible; a few, who were happily weather-proof, jammed themselves into velvety corners, held on to something fixed, and lost themselves in books. The gentlemen, linking themselves to articles of stability, did the same, or, retiring to an appropriate room, played cards and draughts and enveloped themselves in smoke. Few, if any of them, bestowed much thought on the weather. Beyond giving them, occasionally, a little involuntary exercise, it did not seriously affect them.

Very different was the state of matters in the steerage. There the difference in comfort was not proportioned to the difference in passage-money. There was no velvet, not much light, little space to move about, and nothing soft. In short, discomfort reigned, so that the unfortunate passengers could not easily read, and the falling of tin panikins and plates, the crashing of things that had broken loose, the rough exclamations of men, and the squalling of miserable children, affected the nerves of the timid to such an extent that they naturally took the most gloomy view of the situation.

Of course the mere surroundings had no influence whatever on the views held by Bob Massey and Joe Slag.

"My dear," said the latter, in a kindly but vain endeavour to comfort Mrs Mitford, "rumpusses below ain't got nothin' to do wi' rows overhead—leastways they're only an effect, not a cause."

"There! there's another," interrupted Mrs Mitford, with a little scream, as a tremendous crash of crockery burst upon her ear.

"Well, my dear," said Slag, in a soothing, fatherly tone, "if all the crockery in the ship was to go in universal smash into the lee scuppers, it couldn't make the wind blow harder."

Poor Mrs Mitford failed to derive consolation from this remark. She was still sick enough to be totally and hopelessly wretched, but not sufficiently so to be indifferent to life or death. Every superlative howl of the blast she echoed with a sigh, and each excessive plunge of the ship she emphasised with a weak scream.

"I don't know what *you* think," she said, faintly, when two little boys rolled out of their berths and went yelling to leeward with a mass of miscellaneous rubbish, "but it do seem to be as if the end of the world 'ad come. Not that the sea *could* be the end of the world, for if it was, of course it would spill over and then we would be left dry on the bottom—or moist, if not dry. I don't mean that, you know, but these crashes are so dreadful, an' my poor 'ead is like to split—which the planks of this ship will do if they go on creakin' so. I *know* they will, for 'uman-made things can't—"

"You make your mind easy, my woman," said her husband, coming forward at the moment and sitting down to comfort her. "Things are lookin' a little better overhead, so one o' the men told me, an' I heard Terrence say that we're goin' to have lobscouse for dinner to-day, though what that may be I can't tell—somethin' good, I suppose."

"Something thick, an' luke-warm, an' greasy, *I* know," groaned Peggy, with a shudder.

There was a bad man on board the ship. There usually is a bad man on board of most ships; sometimes more than one. But this one was unusually bad, and was, unfortunately, an old acquaintance of the Mitfords. Indeed, he had been a lover of Mrs Mitford, when she was Peggy Owen, though her

husband knew nothing of that. If Peggy had known that this man—Ned Jarring by name—was to be a passenger, she would have prevailed on her husband to go by another vessel; but she was not aware of it until they met in the fore-cabin the day after leaving port.

Being a dark-haired, sallow-complexioned man, he soon became known on board by the name of Black Ned. Like many bad men, Jarring was a drunkard, and, when under the influence of liquor, was apt to act incautiously as well as wickedly. On the second day of the gale he entered the fore-cabin with unsteady steps, and looked round with an air of solemn stupidity. Besides being dark and swarthy, he was big and strong, and had a good deal of the bully in his nature. Observing that Mrs Mitford was seated alone in a dark corner of the cabin with a still greenish face and an aspect of woe, he staggered towards her, and, sitting down, took her hand affectionately.

"Dear Peggy," he began, but he got no further, for the little woman snatched her hand away, sprang up and confronted him with a look of blazing indignation. Every trace of her sickness vanished as if by magic. The greenish complexion changed to crimson, and the woebegone tones to those of firm resolution, as she exclaimed—

"Ned Jarring, if you ever again dare to take liberties with *me*, I'll tell my 'usband, I will; an' as sure as you're a-sittin' on that seat 'e'll twist you up, turn you outside in, an' fling you overboard!"

Little Mrs Mitford did not wait for a response, but, turning sharply round, left the cabin with a stride which, for a woman of her size and character, was most impressive.

Jarring gazed after her with an expression of owlish and unutterable surprise on his swarthy countenance. Then he smiled faintly at the unexpected and appalling—not to say curious—fate that awaited him; but reflecting that, although lugubrious and long, Mitford was deep-chested, broad-shouldered, and wiry, he became grave again, shook his head, and had the sense to make up his mind never again to arouse the slumbering spirit of Peggy Mitford.

It was a wild scene that presented itself to the eyes of the passengers in the *Lapwing* when the hatches were at last taken off, and they were permitted once more to go on deck. Grey was the prevailing colour. The great seas, which seemed unable to recover from the wild turmoil into which they had been lashed, were of a cold greenish grey, flecked and tipped with white. The sky was steely grey with clouds that verged on black; and both were so mingled together that it seemed as if the little vessel were imbedded in the very heart of a drizzling, heaving, hissing ocean.

The coxswain's wife stood leaning on her stalwart husband's arm, by the foremast, gazing over the side.

"It do seem more dreary than I expected," she said. "I wouldn't be a sailor, Bob, much as I've bin used to the sea, an' like it."

"Ah, Nell, that's 'cause you've only bin used to the *sea-shore*. You haven't bin long enough on blue water, lass, to know that folks' opinions change a good deal wi' their feelin's. Wait till we git to the neighbour'ood o' the line, wi' smooth water an' blue skies an' sunshine, sharks, and flyin' fish. You'll have a different opinion then about the sea."

"Right you are, Bob," said Joe Slagg, coming up at that moment. "Most people change their opinions arter gittin' to the line, specially when it comes blazin' hot, fit to bile the sea an' stew the ship, an' a dead calm gits a hold of 'e an' keeps ye swelterin' in the doldrums for a week or two."

"But it wasn't that way we was lookin' at it, Joe," returned Nellie, with a laugh. "Bob was explainin' to me how pleasant a change it would be after the cold grey sea an' sky we're havin' just now."

"Well, it may be so; but whatever way ye may look at it, you'll change yer mind, more or less, when you cross the line. By the way, that minds me that some of us in the steerage are invited to cross the line to-night—the line that separates us from the cabin—to attend a lectur' there—an' you'll niver guess the subjec', Bob."

"I know that, Joe. I never made a right guess in my life, that I knows on. Heave ahead, what is it?"

"A lectur' on the 'Lifeboat,' no less! But it aint our lifeboat sarvice: it's the American one, cause it's to be given by that fine young fellow, Dr Hayward, who looks as if suthin' had damaged his constitootion somehow. I'm told he's a Yankee, though he looks uncommon like an Englishman."

"He's tall an' 'andsome enough, anyhow," remarked Massey.

"Ay, an' he's good enough for anything," said Nellie, with enthusiasm. "You should see the kind way he speaks to poor Ian when he comes to see him—which is pretty much every day. He handles him, too, so tenderly—just like his mother; but he won't give him medicine or advice, for it seems that wouldn't be thought fair by the ship's doctor. No more it would, I suppose."

"D'ee know what's the matter wi' him?" asked Mitford, who had joined the group.

"Not I," returned Massey. "It seems more like gineral weakness than anything else."

"I can tell you," said a voice close to them. The voice was that of Tomlin, who, although a first-class passenger, was fond of visiting and fraternising with the people of the fore-cabin. "He got himself severely wounded some time ago when protecting a poor slave-girl from her owner, and he's now slowly recovering. He is taking a long voyage for his health. The girl, it seems, had run away from her owner, and had nearly escaped into Canada, where of course, being on British soil, she would be free—"

"God bless the British soil!" interrupted little Mrs Mitford, in a tone of enthusiasm which caused a laugh all round; but that did not prevent some of the bystanders from responding with a hearty "Amen!"

"I agree with you, Mrs Mitford," said Tomlin; "but the owner of the poor slave did not think as you and I do. The girl was a quadroon—that is, nearly, if not altogether, white. She was also very beautiful. Well, the owner—a coarse brute—with two followers, overtook the runaway slave near a lonely roadside tavern—I forget the name of the place—but Dr Hayward happened to have arrived there just a few minutes before them. His horse was standing at the door, and he was inside, talking with the landlord, when he heard a loud shriek outside. Running out, he found the girl struggling wildly in the hands of her captors. Of course, he demanded an explanation, though he saw clearly enough how matters stood.

"'She's my slave,' said the owner, haughtily. He would not, perhaps, have condescended even with that much explanation if he had not seen that the landlord sympathised with the doctor.

"This was enough, however, for Hayward, who is a man of few words and swift action. He was unarmed, but carried a heavy-handled whip, with this he instantly felled the slave-owner and one of his men to the ground before they had time to wink, but the third man drew a pistol, and, pointing it straight at the doctor's head, would have blown out his brains if the landlord had not turned the weapon aside and tripped the man up. Before he could recover Hayward had swung the girl on his horse, leaped into the saddle, and dashed off at full speed. He did not draw rein till he carried her over the frontier into Canada, and had placed her beyond the reach of her enemies."

"Brayvo! the doctor," exclaimed Slag, heartily.

"Then he found," continued Tomlin, "that he had been wounded in the chest by the ball that was meant for his head, but made light of the wound until it was found to be serious. The ball was still in him, and had to be extracted, after which he recovered slowly. The romantic part of it is, however, that he fell in love with Eva—that was the girl's name—and she with him, and they were married—"

"Ah, poor thing," said Mitford; "then she died and he married again?"

"Not at all," returned Tomlin, "she did not die, and he did not marry again."

"How—what then about that splendid wife that he's got in the after-cabin *now*?" asked Mitford.

"That's her. That's Eva, the quadroon. She's not only as white as Mrs Massey or Mrs Mitford there, but she's been educated and brought up as a lady and among ladies, besides having the spirit of a *real* lady, which many a born one hasn't got at all."

There were many fore-cabin passengers who "crossed the line" that night in order to hear the gallant American lecture, but chiefly to see the beautiful lady who had been so romantically rescued from slavery.

"Not a drop of black blood in her body!" was Mrs Mitford's verdict after the lecture was over.

"An' what if there was?" demanded Slag, in a tone of indignation. "D'ee think that white blood is worth more than black blood in the eyes o' the Almighty as made 'em both?"

The lecture itself was highly appreciated, being on a subject which Bob and Joe had already made interesting to the steerage passengers. And the lecturer not only treated it well, but was himself such a fine, lion-like, yet soft-voiced fellow that his audience were quite charmed.

Soon the *Lapwing* was gliding through the warm waters of the equatorial seas, and those of the passengers who had never visited such regions before were immensely interested by the sight of dolphins, sharks, and especially flying-fish.

"I *don't* believe in 'em," said Mrs Mitford to Mrs Massey one day as they stood looking over the side of the ship.

"I do believe in 'em," said Mrs Massey, "because my Bob says he has seen 'em."

Not long after this double assertion of opinion there was a sudden cry that flying-fish were to be seen alongside, and Mrs Mitford actually beheld them with her own eyes leap out of the sea, skim over the waves a short distance, and then drop into the water again; still she was incredulous! "Flyin'" she exclaimed, "nothin' of the sort; they only made a long jump out o' the water, an' wriggled their tails as they went; at least they wriggled something, for I couldn't be rightly sure they *'ad*

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