# ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

## SAVED BY THE LIFEBOAT

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# Содержание

# R. M. Ballantyne
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## Chapter One
## The Wreck in the Bay

On a dark November afternoon, not many years ago, Captain Boyns sat smoking his pipe in his own chimney-corner, gazing with a somewhat anxious expression at the fire. There was cause for anxiety, for there raged at the time one of the fiercest storms that ever blew on the shores of England.

The wind was howling in the chimney with wild fury; slates and tiles were being swept off the roofs of the fishermen's huts and whirled up into the air as if they had been chips of wood; and rain swept down and along the ground in great sheets of water, or whirled madly in the air and mingled with the salt spray that came direct from the English Channel; while, high and loud above all other sounds, rose the loud plunging roar of the mighty sea.

"I fear there will be a call before long, Nancy, for the services of the new lifeboat," said Captain Boyns, rising and taking down an oilcloth coat and sou'-wester, which he began to put on leisurely; "I'll go down to the beach and see what's doin' at the Cove."

The captain was a fine specimen of a British sailor. He was a massive man, of iron build, and so tall that his sou'-wester almost touched the ceiling of his low-roofed parlour. His face was eminently masculine, and his usual expression was a compound of sternness, gravity, and good-humour. He was about forty years of age, and, unlike the men of his class at that time, wore a short curly black beard and moustache, which, with his deeply bronzed countenance, gave him the aspect of a foreigner.

"God help those on the sea," said Mrs Boyns, in reply to her husband's remark; "I'm thankful, Dan, that you are on shore this night."

Nancy was a good-looking, lady-like woman of thirty-three or thereabouts, without anything particularly noteworthy about her. She was busy with her needle at the time we introduce her, and relapsed into silence, while her stalwart husband pulled on a pair of huge sea-boots.

"Did you hear a gun, Nancy?" cried the captain, as a terrific blast shook every timber in the cottage—"there! ain't that it again?"

Nancy listened intently, but could hear nothing save the raging of the storm. The captain completed his toilet, and was about to leave the room when the door suddenly burst open, and a lad of about fourteen years of age sprang in.

"Father," he cried, his eyes flashing with excitement, "there's a brig on the sands, and they are going to launch the new lifeboat!"

"Whereaway is't, lad?" asked Boyns, as he buttoned up his

coat.

"To lee'ard of the breakwater."

"Oh Harry, don't be too venturesome," cried Mrs Boyns earnestly, as her strapping boy was about to follow his father out into the pelting storm.

Harry, who was tall and strong for his age, and very like his father in many respects, turning round with a hearty smile, cried, "No fear, mother," and next instant was gone.

The scene on the beach when father and son reached it was very impressive. So furious was the gale that it tore up sand and gravel and hurled it against the faces of the hardy men who dared to brave the storm. At times there were blasts so terrible that a wild shriek, as if of a storm-fiend, rent the air, and flakes of foam were whirled madly about. But the most awful sight of all was the seething of the sea as it advanced in a succession of great breaking "rollers" into the bay, and churned itself white among the rocks.

Out among these billows, scarce visible in the midst of the conflicting elements, were seen the dark hull, shattered masts, and riven sails of a large brig, over which the waves made clear breaches continually.

In the little harbour of the seaport, which was named Covelly, a number of strong men were engaged in hastily launching a new lifeboat, which had been placed at that station only three weeks before, while, clustering about the pier, and behind every sheltered nook along the shore, were hundreds of excited

spectators, not a few of whom were women.

Much earnest talk had there been among the gossips in the town when the lifeboat referred to arrived. Deep, and nautically learned, were the discussions that had been held as to her capabilities, and great the longing for a stiffish gale in order that her powers might be fairly tested in rough weather, for in those days lifeboats were not so numerous as, happily, they now are. Many of the town's-people had only heard of such boats; few had seen, and not one had ever had experience of them. After her arrival the weather had continued tantalisingly calm and fine until the day of the storm above referred to, when at length it changed, and a gale burst forth with such violence that the bravest men in the place shook their heads, and said that no boat of any kind whatever could live in such a sea.

When, however, the brig before referred to was seen to rush helplessly into the bay and to strike on the sands where the seas ran most furiously, all lent a willing hand to launch the new lifeboat into the harbour, and a few men, leaping in, pulled her across to the stairs near the entrance, where a number of seamen were congregated, holding on under the lee of the parapet-wall, and gazing anxiously at the fearful scene outside.

"Impossible!" said one; "no boat could live in such a sea for half a minute."

"The moment she shows her nose outside the breakwater she'll capsize," observed another.

"We'll have to risk it, anyhow," remarked a stout young fellow,

"for I see men in the foreshrouds of the wreck, and I, for one, won't stand by and see them lost while we've got a lifeboat by us. Why, wot's the use o' callin' it a lifeboat if it can't do more than other boats?"

As he spoke there came an unusually furious gust which sent a wave right over the pier, and well-nigh swept away one or two of them. The argument of the storm was more powerful than that of the young sailor—no one responded to his appeal, and when the boat came alongside the stairs, none moved to enter her except himself.

"That's right, Bob Gaston," cried one of the four men who had jumped into the boat when she was launched, "I know'd you would be the first."

"And I won't be the last either," said young Gaston, looking back at the men on the pier with a smile.

"Right, lad!" cried Captain Boyns, who came up at the instant and leaped into the boat. "Come, lads, we want four more hands —no, no, Harry," he added, pushing back his son; "your arms are not yet strong enough; come lads, we've no time to lose."

As he spoke, a faint cry was heard coming from the wreck, and it was seen that one of the masts had gone by the board, carrying, it was feared, several poor fellows along with it. Instantly there was a rush to the lifeboat! All thought of personal danger appeared to have been banished from the minds of the fishermen when the cry of distress broke on their ears. The boat was overmanned, and old Jacobs, the coxswain, had to order several

of them to go ashore again. In another minute they were at the mouth of the harbour, and the men paused an instant as if to gather strength for the mortal struggle before quitting the shelter of the breakwater, and facing the fury of wind and waves.

"Give way, lads! give way!" shouted old Jacobs, as he stood up in the stern-sheets and grasped the steering oar.

The men bent to the oars with all their might, and the boat leaped out into the boiling sea. This was not one of those splendid boats which now line the shores of the United Kingdom; nevertheless, it was a noble craft—one of the good, stable, insubmergible and self-emptying kind which were known as the Greathead lifeboats, and which for many years did good service on our coasts. It sat on the raging waters like a swan, and although the seas broke over it again and again, it rose out of the water buoyantly, and, with the brine pouring from its sides, kept end-on to the seas, surmounting them or dashing right through them, while her gallant crew strained every muscle and slowly urged her on towards the wreck.

At first the men on shore gazed at her in breathless anxiety, expecting every moment to see her overturned and their comrades left to perish in the waves; but when they saw her reappear from each overwhelming billow, their hearts rose with a rebound, and loud prolonged huzzas cheered the lifeboat on her course. They became silent again, however, when distance and the intervening haze of spray and rain rendered her motions indistinct, and their feelings of anxiety became more and more

intense as they saw her draw nearer and nearer to the wreck.

At last they reached it, but no one on the pier could tell with what success their efforts were attended. Through the blinding spray they saw her faintly, now rising on the crest of a huge wave, then overwhelmed by tons of water. At last she appeared to get close under the stern of the brig, and was lost to view.

"They're all gone," said a fisherman on the pier, as he wiped the salt water off his face; "I know'd that no boat that ever wos built could live in that sea."

"Ye don't know much yet, Bill, 'bout anything a'most," replied an old man near him. "Why, I've see'd boats in the East, not much better than two planks, as could go through a worse surf than that."

"May be so," retorted Bill, "but I know—hallo! is that her coming off?"

"That's her," cried several voices—"all right, my hearties."

"Not so sure o' that," observed another of the excited band of men who watched every motion of the little craft intently, —"there—why—I do believe there are more in her now than went out in her, what think 'ee, Dick?"

Dick did not reply, for by that time the boat, having got clear of the wreck, was making for the shore, and the observers were all too intent in using their eyes to make use of their tongues. Coming as she did before the wind, the progress of the lifeboat was very different from what it had been when she set out. In a few minutes she became distinctly visible, careering on the

crest of the waves towards the harbour mouth, and then it was ascertained beyond doubt that some at least, if not all, of the crew of the brig had been rescued. A short sharp Hurrah! burst from the men on the outlook when this became certain, but they relapsed into deep silence again, for the return of the boat was more critical than its departure had been. There is much more danger in running before a heavy sea than in pulling against it. Every roaring billow that came into the bay near the Cove like a green wall broke in thunder on the sands before reaching the wreck, and as it continued its furious career towards the beach it seemed to gather fresh strength, so that the steersman of the lifeboat had to keep her stern carefully towards it to prevent her from turning broadside on—or, as it is nautically expressed, broaching to. Had she done so, the death of all on board would have been almost inevitable. Knowing this, the men on the pier gazed with breathless anxiety as each wave roared under the boat's stern, lifted it up until it appeared perpendicular; carried it forward a few yards with fearful velocity, and then let it slip back into the trough of the sea.

But the boat was admirably managed, and it was seen, as she drew near, that the steering oar was held in the firm grip of Captain Boyns. On it came before the gale with lightning speed towards the harbour mouth; and here a new danger had to be faced, for the entrance was narrow, and the seas were sweeping not into but athwart it, thereby rendering the danger of being dashed against the pier-end very great indeed.

"Missed it!" burst from several mouths as the boat flew round the head of the breakwater and was overwhelmed by a heavy sea which rendered her for one moment unmanageable, but almost as soon as filled she was again emptied through the discharging tubes in her floor.

"No fear of father missing it," exclaimed young Harry Boyns, with a proud look and flashing eye as he saw the stalwart form of the captain standing firm in the midst of the foam with his breast pressed hard against the steering oar.

"Back your starboard oars! Hold water hard!" shouted several voices.

"She's round! hurrah!" cried Harry, as the boat almost leaped out of the foam and sprang into the comparatively smooth water at the harbour mouth. The rowers gave vent to a short shout of triumph, and several worn, exhausted seamen in the bottom of the boat were seen to wave their hands feebly. At the same time, Captain Boyns shouted in a deep loud voice—"All saved, thank God!" as they swept towards the land.

Then did there arise from the hundreds of people assembled on and near the pier a ringing cheer, the like of which had never been heard before in Covelly. Again and again it was repeated while the lifeboat shot up on the beach, and was fairly dragged out of the sea, high and dry, by many eager hands that were immediately afterwards extended to assist the saved crew of the brig to land.

"Are all saved, father?" asked Harry Boyns, who was first at

the side of the boat.

"Ay, lad, every one. Fifteen all told, includin' a woman and a little girl. Lend a hand to get the poor things up to our house, Harry," said the captain, lifting the apparently inanimate form of a young girl over the side as he spoke; "she ain't dead—only benumbed a little with the cold."

Many hands were stretched out, but Harry thrust all others aside, and, receiving the light form of the child in his strong arms, bore her off to his father's cottage, leaving his comrades to attend to the wants of the others.

"Oh Harry!" exclaimed Mrs Boyns, when her son burst into the house, "is your father safe?"

"Ay, safe and well," he cried. "Look sharp, mother—get hot blankets and things ready, for here's a little girl almost dead with cold. She has just been rescued from a wreck—saved by the new lifeboat!"

# Chapter Two
# Describes a merchant and his god, and concludes with "a message from the sea."

A close-fisted, hard-hearted, narrow-minded, poor-spirited man was John Webster, Esquire, merchant and shipowner, of Ingot Lane, Liverpool. And yet he was not altogether without good points. Indeed, it might be said of him that if he had been reared under more favourable circumstances he might have been an ornament to society and a blessing to his country, for he was intelligent and sociable, and susceptible to some extent of tender influences, when the indulging of amiable feelings did not interfere with his private interests. In youth he had even gone the length of holding some good principles, and was known to have done one or two noble things—but all this had passed away, for as he grew older the hopeful springs were dried up, one by one, by an all-absorbing passion—the love of money—which ultimately made him what he was, a disgrace to the class to which he belonged, and literally (though not, it would seem, in the eye of law) a wholesale murderer!

At first he began by holding, and frequently stating, the opinion that the possession of much money was a most desirable

thing; which undoubtedly was—and is, and will be as long as the world lasts—perfectly true, if the possession be accompanied with God's blessing. But Mr Webster did not even pretend to look at the thing in that light. He scorned to make use of the worldly man's "Oh, of course, of course," when that idea was sometimes suggested to him by Christian friends. On the contrary, he boldly and coldly asserted his belief that "God, if there was a God at all, did not interfere in such matters, and that for his part he would be quite satisfied to let anybody else who wanted it have the blessing if he only got the money." And so it pleased God to give John Webster much money without a blessing.

The immediate result was that he fell in love with it, and, following the natural laws attached to that vehement passion, he hugged it to his bosom, became blind to everything else, and gave himself entirely up to it with a self-denying devotion that robbed him of much of his natural rest, of nearly all his graces, and most of his happiness—leaving him with no hope in this world, save that of increasing his stores of money, and with no hope for the world to come at all.

The abode of Mr Webster's soul was a dingy little office with dirty little windows, a miserable little fireplace, and filthy little chairs and tables—all which were quite in keeping with the little occupant of the place. The abode of his body was a palatial residence in the suburbs of the city. Although Mr Webster's soul was little, his body was large—much too large indeed for the jewel which it enshrined, and which was so terribly knocked

about inside its large casket that its usual position was awry, and it never managed to become upright by any chance whatever.

To the former abode Mr Webster went, body and soul, one dark November morning. Having seated himself before his desk, he threw himself back in his chair and began to open his letters —gazing with a placid smile, as he did so, at the portrait of his deceased wife's father—a very wealthy old gentleman—which hung over the fireplace.

We omitted to mention, by the way, that Mr Webster had once been married. This trifling little event of his life occurred when he was about forty-eight years of age, and was a mercantile transaction of an extremely successful kind, inasmuch as it had brought him, after deducting lawyers' fees, stamps, duties, lost time in courtship, wedding-tour expenses, doctor's fees, deathbed expenses, etcetera, a clear profit of sixty thousand pounds. To be sure there were also the additional expenses of four years of married life, and the permanent board, lodging, and education of a little daughter; but, all things considered, these were scarcely worth speaking of; and in regard to the daughter —Annie by name—she would in time become a marketable commodity, which might, if judiciously disposed of, turn in a considerable profit, besides being, before she was sold, a useful machine for sewing on buttons, making tea, reading the papers aloud, fetching hats and sticks and slippers, etcetera. There had, however, been a slight drawback—a sort of temporary loss—on this concern at first, for the piece of goods became damaged,

owing to her mother's death having weighed heavily on a sensitive and loving spirit, which found no comfort or sympathy at home, save in the devoted affection of an old nurse named Niven. When Annie reached the age of six years, the doctors ordered change of air, and recommended a voyage to the West Indies. Their advice was followed. Nothing was easier. Mr Webster had many ships on the sea. These were of two classes. The first class consisted of good, new, well found and manned ships, with valuable cargoes on board which were anxiously watched and longed for; the second class comprised those which were old, worn-out, and unseaworthy, and which, being insured beyond their value, might go to the bottom when they pleased.

One of the best of the first class was selected—the *Water Lily*, A1 on Lloyd's—and in it Annie, with her nurse, was sent to sea for the benefit of her health. The parting was a somewhat important event in Mr Webster's life, for it convinced him, to his own surprise, that his power to love a human being was not yet utterly gone! Annie's arms clasped convulsively round his neck at the moment of parting—her sobbing "Good-bye, darling papa," had stirred depths which had lain unmoved almost from the days of early manhood. But the memory of this passed away as soon as he turned again to gaze upon the loved countenance of his yellow mistress.

The voyage did Annie much good. The short residence in Demerara, while the vessel was discharging cargo and reloading, wrought wonders, and a letter, forwarded by a ship that sailed a

short time after their arrival in "foreign parts," told Mr Webster that he might expect to see his daughter home again, sound and well, in a month or two at the farthest.

But, to return from this digression to the abode of Mr Webster's soul:—

Having looked at the portrait of his late wife's father for a moment and smiled, he glanced at the letter in his hand and frowned. Not because he was displeased, but because the writing was cramped and difficult to read. However, the merchant was accustomed to receive such letters from seafaring men on many subjects of interest; he therefore broke the seal and set himself patiently to decipher it. Immediately his countenance became ghastly pale, then it flushed up and became pale again, while he coughed and gasped once or twice, and started up and sat down abruptly. In fact Mr Webster exhibited all the signs of having received a severe shock, and an eye-witness might have safely concluded that he had just read the news of some great mercantile loss. So it was in one sense—but that was not the ordinary sense.

The letter in question was in the handwriting of a fussy officious "bumble" friend of the wealthy man, who dwelt in the town of Covelly. It ran as follows:

> "My dear Sir,—I write in great haste, and in much perturbation, having just heard from my servant of the wreck of your ship, the *Water Lily*, in Covelly Bay. She does not seem to be quite sure, however, of the name, and says

that the only man who has been rescued is scarcely able to speak, so that I do sincerely hope my domestic, who is a stupid old woman, may turn out to be mistaken. I am on the point of hasting down to the shore to ascertain the truth for myself, but am obliged to write to you this brief and unsatisfactory account of what I have heard, in order to save the post, which is just being closed. You shall hear from me again, of course, by the next mail.—I remain, my dear sir, in much anxiety, your most obedient humble servant,

"***Joseph Dowler***."

It chanced that at the moment the above letter was handed to the postmaster, and while the wax was being melted before the final sealing of the post-bag, a sailor lad, drenched to the skin and panting vehemently, dashed into the office.

"Stop! stop!" he cried, "a letter—about the wreck—the *Water Lily*—to the owners—not too late, I hope?"

"No, no, just in time. Here, in with it. There, all right. Now, Jim, off with 'ee."

The postman jumped on his vehicle, the whip cracked, and in another minute the Royal Mail was gone. Thus it came to pass that two epistles reached Mr Webster that morning from Covelly. But in the extreme agitation of his spirit, he did not observe the other letter which lay among the usual morning mass that still awaited examination. After reading the letter twice, and turning it over with trembling hands, as if he wished there were more in it, he pronounced a deep malediction on his "humble" friend, and rang the bell for his confidential clerk, who was an

unusually meek, mild, and middle-aged little man, with a bald head, a deprecatory expression of countenance, and a pen behind his ear.

"Mr Grinder," said Mr Webster, putting strong constraint on himself, and pretending to be quite composed, "a letter from Covelly informs me that it is feared the *Water Lily* has been wrecked in—"

"The *Water Lily*, sir!" exclaimed Grinder, starting as if he had received an electric shock.

"I spoke audibly, did I not?" said Mr Webster, turning with a sharp look on his confidential clerk.

"Ye–es, sir, but, I—Miss An—" The poor man could get no further, being of a timid, nervous temperament, and Mr Webster, paying no attention to his remark, was going on to say that he intended to go by the mail to Covelly without delay to ascertain the truth for himself, when he was interrupted by the confidential clerk who exclaimed in a burst of agitation—

"There were *two* letters, sir, from Covelly this morning—did you read—"

He stopped, for already his employer had sought for, found, and torn open the second epistle, which was written in a fair, legible hand. It ran thus:—

> "***Sir***,—My father, Captain Boyns, directs me to inform you that your daughter, Miss Annie, has been saved from the wreck of your brig, the *Water Lily*, which ran aground here this afternoon, and has become a total wreck. Your

daughter's nurse and the crew have also been rescued by our new lifeboat, which is a noble craft, and, with God's blessing, will yet do good service on this coast. I have pleasure in adding, from myself, that it was my father who rescued your child. She fell into the sea when being passed from the wreck into the boat, and sank, but my father dived and brought her up in safety.

"Much of the brig's cargo has been lost, I regret to say, but a good deal of it has been washed ashore and saved in a damaged state. The captain says that defective compasses were the cause of the disaster. There is not time to give you a more particular account, as it is close upon post-time. Miss Annie sends you her kindest love, and bids me say she is none the worse of what she has passed through.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

"***Harry Boyns***."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mr Webster fervently. "Why, what are you staring at, Mr Grinder?" he added, on observing that his confidential servant was gazing at him with an expression of considerable surprise.

"Excuse me, sir," stammered the unfortunate man, "I—I—in fact—you have so often told me that you did not believe in God that I fancied—I—wondered—"

"Really, Mr Grinder, I must beg of you to confine your remarks in future entirely to matters of business. The so-called religious observations which you sometimes venture to make in my presence are extremely distasteful, I assure you. In

explanation of what I said, however, I may tell you that this letter informs me of my daughter's safety, and I merely used the expression of satisfaction that is usual on such occasions. The phrase, as it is generally understood (except by weak men), commits me to nothing more. But enough of this. I find that the *Water Lily* has indeed been lost. It was fully insured, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, it was."

"Very well; report the matter without delay. I will go to Covelly to-night, and shall probably be back to-morrow."

Saying this, Mr Webster left the office, and, on the evening of that day, found himself seated in Captain Boyns's parlour, with little Annie on his knee. Her pretty head was on his shoulder, her fair curls straggled over his chest, and her round little arms tightly encircled his large body as far as they could reach, while she sobbed on his bosom and kissed him by turns.

This was quite a new experience in the life of the gold-lover. He had declined to submit to familiar caresses in former years, but on such an occasion as the present, he felt that common propriety demanded the sacrifice of himself to some extent. He therefore allowed Annie to kiss him, and found the operation—performed as she did it—much more bearable than he had anticipated; and when Annie exclaimed with a burst of enthusiasm, "Oh, dear, dear papa, I did feel such a dreadful longing for you when the waves were roaring round us!" and gave him another squeeze, he felt that the market price of the bundle of goods on his knee was rising rapidly.

"Did you think you were going to be drowned, dear?" said Mr Webster with the air of a man who does not know very well what to say.

"I'm not sure what I thought," replied Annie smiling through her tears. "Oh, I was so frightened! You can't think, papa, how very dreadful it is to see the water boiling all round, and sometimes over you; and such awful thumping of the ship, and then the masts breaking; but what I feared most was to see the faces of the sailors, they were so white, and they looked as if they were afraid. Are men ever afraid, papa?"

"Sometimes, Annie; but a white face is not always the sign of fear—that may be caused by anxiety. Did any of them refuse to obey orders?"

"No; they were very obedient."

"Did any of them get into the lifeboat before you and nurse!"

"Oh, no; they all refused to move till we were put into it, and some of them ran to help us, and were very very kind?"

"Then you may be quite sure they were not afraid, however pale their faces were; but what of yourself, Annie—were you afraid?"

"Oh, dreadfully, and so was poor nurse; but once or twice I thought of the text that—that—you know who was so fond of, —'Call upon me in the time of trouble and I will deliver thee,' so I prayed and felt a little better. Then the lifeboat came, and, oh! how my heart did jump, for it seemed just like an answer to my prayer. I never felt any more fear after that, except when I fell

into the sea; but even then I was not so frightened as I had been, for I felt somehow that I was sure to be saved, and I was right, you see, for dear Captain Boyns dived for me. I love Captain Boyns!" cried Annie, and here again she kissed her father and held him so tight that he felt quite angry with Mrs Niven, who entered at the moment, and said, apologetically—

"Oh! la, sir, I didn't know as Miss Annie was with you. I only came to say that everythink is ready, sir, for going 'ome."

"We don't intend to go home," said Mr Webster; "at least not for a day or two. I find that Captain Boyns can let us stay here while I look after the wreck, so you can go and arrange with Mrs Boyns."

During the few days that Mr Webster remained at Coral Cottage (Captain Boyns's residence), Mrs Niven found, in the quiet, sympathetic Mrs Boyns, if not a congenial friend, at least a kind and sociable hostess, and Annie found, in Harry Boyns, a delightful companion, who never wearied of taking her to the cliffs, the shore, and all the romantic places of the neighbourhood, while Mr Webster found the captain to be most serviceable in connection with the wreck. One result of all this was that Mr Webster offered Captain Boyns the command of one of his largest vessels, an offer which was gladly accepted, for the captain had, at that time, been thrown out of employment by the failure of a firm, in the service of which he had spent the greater part of his nautical career.

Another result was, that Mr Webster, at Annie's earnest

solicitation, agreed to make Covelly his summer quarters next year, instead of Ramsgate, and Mrs Boyns agreed to lodge the family in Coral Cottage.

This having been all settled, Mr Webster asked Captain Boyns, on the morning of his departure for Liverpool, if he could do anything more for him, for he felt that to him his daughter owed her life, and he was anxious to serve him.

"If you could give my son Harry something to do, sir," said Boyns, "you would oblige me very much. Harry is a smart fellow and a good seaman. He has been a short time in the coasting trade; perhaps—"

"Well, yes, I'll see to that," interrupted Mr Webster. "You shall hear from me again as to it."

Now the fact is that Mr Webster did not feel attracted by young Boyns, and he would willingly have had nothing to do with him, but being unable to refuse the request after having invited it, he ultimately gave him a situation in one of his coasting vessels which plied between London and Aberdeen.

About a year after that, Captain Boyns sailed in the *Warrior*, a large new ship, for the Sandwich Islands and the Chinese seas.

True to his promise, Mr Webster spent the following summer with Annie and Mrs Boyns at Covelly, and young Boyns so managed matters that he got his captain to send him down to Covelly to talk with his employer on business. Of course, being there, it was natural that he should ask and obtain leave to spend a few days with his mother; and, of course, it was quite as natural

that, without either asking or obtaining leave, he should spend the whole of these days in roaming about the shore and among the cliffs with Annie Webster.

It would be absurd to say that these two fell in love, seeing that one was only seven and the other fifteen; but there can be no doubt they entertained some sort of regard for each other, of a very powerful nature. The young sailor was wildly enthusiastic, well educated, manly, and good-looking—little wonder that Annie liked him. The child was winning in her ways, simple, yet laughter-loving, and very earnest—less wonderful that Harry liked *her*!

Another year fled, and again the Websters visited Covelly, and again Harry spent a few days with his mother; and although Mr Webster did not get the length of liking the youth, he at last came to the condition of not disliking him.

Year followed year, and still, each summer, Annie pressed her father to return to the old place, and he agreed, chiefly because it mattered little to him where he went. He regarded the summer trip in the light of a penance to be paid for the sin of being a member of society and the head of a household, and placed every minute so wasted to the debit of the profit and loss account in the mental ledger of his life's affairs, for it must not be supposed that Mr Webster's character was changed by the events which followed the rescue of his child from the sea. True, he had been surprised out of his habitual hardness for a short time, but he soon relapsed, if not quite back to the old position, at least so

near to it that the difference was not appreciable.

As time ran on, men begun to look for the return of the *Warrior*, but that vessel did not make her appearance. Then they began to shake their heads and to grow prophetic, while those who were most deeply interested in the human beings who manned her became uneasy.

"Don't fret over it," said Harry one day to his mother, in a kind, earnest tone; "you may depend upon it father will turn up yet and surprise us. He never lost a ship in his life, and he has sailed in worse ones than the *Warrior* by a long way."

"It may be so," replied Mrs Boyns, sadly; "but it is a long, long time since he went away. God's will be done. Whether He gives or takes away, I shall try to bless His name."

At last Harry gave over attempting to comfort his mother, for he began to fear that his father's ship was destined to be placed on the dark, dreary list of those of which it is sometimes said, with terrible brevity, in the newspapers, "She sailed from port on such and such a day, and has not since been heard of."

In course of time Harry made one or two trips to the East Indies as first mate of one of Mr Webster's vessels, and ultimately obtained the command of one.

At last a day came when there appeared in a Welsh newspaper a paragraph, which ran thus:– "A Message from the Sea—A bottle, corked and sealed, was found by a woman on the beach, above Conway, North Wales. Inside was a letter containing the following:—

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.