ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

SHIFTING WINDS: A TOUGH YARN

Robert Michael Ballantyne

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
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Chapter One.
The Cottage and its Inmates

The family board was spread; the family kettle—an unusually fat one—was singing on the fire, and the family chimney was roaring like a lion by reason of the wind, which blew a hurricane outside, and shook the family mansion, a small wooden hut, to its foundations.

The hour was midnight. This fact was indicated by the family clock—a Dutch one, with a face which had once been white, but was now become greenish yellow, probably from horror at the profanity of the artist who had painted a basket of unrecognisable fruit above it, an irate cockatoo below it, and a blue church with a pink steeple as near to the centre of it as the hands would admit of.

The family circle, consisting of a stout good-looking woman of thirty or thereabouts, and a little boy and girl, were of the fisher class, obviously so to the senses of sight and smell. They sat by the fire.

It was an unusual hour for supper, but then it was an unusually wild night, and the frequent glance cast by the woman at the Dutch clock with the horrified countenance, showed clearly that the board was not spread for the family meal, but that they waited up for some absent one.

I have said that the family circle sat by the fire, but this is not strictly correct. One member of it, the little boy, stood in the middle of the room, howling!—howling so violently that his fat face had changed from its wonted bright red to deep purple. Looking at him—as he stood there arrayed in his uncle's red night-cap, his own night-shirt, which was also a day-shirt and much too small, and his father's pea-jacket, which was preposterously too large—one could not avoid the alarming surmise that there *might* be such a thing as juvenile apoplexy, and that that boy was on the point of becoming a living, if not a dead, example of the terrible disease.

Oh! it was a sweet child, a charming infant, altogether a delightful creature to look upon, that son of Stephen Gaff, as it stood there yelling like a hyena, stamping like a mad bull, washing its dirty hands in tears on its dirtier cheeks, cramming its little knuckles into its swollen eyes as if it sought to burst the organs of vision in their sockets, and presenting, generally, an appearance of rampant rage and woe that baffles all capacity of conception, and therefore defies all power of description.

This cherub's name was Billy,—Billy Gaff; more familiarly known amongst his friends as "The Bu'ster," owing to his tendency to explode into tears, or laughter, or mischief, or fun, as the case might be. He was about eleven years of age.

My own name, reader, is Bingley. Having retired on half-pay from the Royal Navy, I reside in a pleasant cottage in the suburbs of the well-known and important seaport town of Wreckumoft, situate on the east coast of England. My front windows command a magnificent view of the sea; my back windows command an equally magnificent view of landscape. I have a magnificent wife, and she commands the household, myself included. There was a time—I reflect on it with melancholy pride and subdued satisfaction—when I commanded a British seventy-four. I command nothing now but my temper. That, however, is a stronghold from which nothing terrestrial can drive me.

My friends style me "The Captain," but I am not the hero of this tale. No, by no means. I am altogether unheroic in my nature, commonplace in my character. If a novelist were to describe me, he would write me down a stout little old gentleman, with a bald head and a mild countenance; mentally weak in expression, active in habits, and addicted to pipes and loose clothing.

Do not imagine that this is my account of myself; no, it is an ideal resulting from the oft-repeated assurances of my wife, who is a strong-minded woman, a few inches taller than myself,

somewhat raw-boned and much more powerful, physically, though less rotund. In fact, if I were to attempt a brief comprehensive description of her, I would say, without the most distant feeling of disrespect of course, that she is square and skinny—singularly so!

Mrs Bingley's contempt for my intellect is excelled, I might almost say redeemed, by her love for myself. How she manages to separate between myself and my intellect I have never been able to understand; but then she *is* strong-minded, which perhaps accounts for her seeing farther into this millstone than I can. She tells me, not unfrequently, that I am weak-minded. She even goes the length at times of calling me imbecile; but she is a dear good affectionate woman, and I have no sympathy with the insolent remark I once overheard made by an acquaintance of mine, to the effect that it was a pity Mrs Bingley had not been born with a man's hat and trousers on—no, none whatever.

Before dismissing myself, descriptively at least, (for, being an honorary agent of the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Society, and an actor in some of the scenes which I am about to describe, I cannot conveniently dismiss myself altogether); before dismissing myself, I say, it may be as well to explain that my strong-minded wife, in concert with a number of variously-minded women, (all more or less strong), and a good many weak and otherwise minded men, have come to form their opinion of me in consequence of my holding rather strongly a few opinions of my own —to the effect that there are a good many wrong things in this world, (admittedly wrong things); a good many muddles; a good many glaring and outrageous abuses and shameful things the continuance of which reflects discredit on the nation, and the wiping out or putting right of which ought, by all means, to be set about earnestly and at once.

Now, curiously enough, it is the idea conveyed in the last two words—at once—which sticks in the throats of my strong-minded opponents! They agree with me as to the existence of the evils, they honestly deplore them, but they charge me with mental imbecility when I suggest that things should be put right *at once*. They counsel delay, and when the dispute reaches a certain stage they smile at me with contempt, or pity, or they storm, according to individual temperament, and usually wind up with a rasping reiteration of their original opinions, highly peppered and salted, and an assurance that I have been born at least a century before my time.

If the men of the next century are destined to do good, "as their hands find opportunity," without previous delay until thousands of opportunities are lost and gone for ever; if those who put their hands to a piece of work shall carry it out with vigour in their *own* lifetime; if those who counsel delay shall mean due time for full consideration by *themselves*, and shall *not* mean an extended procrastination which shall free themselves from worry, and leave their work to be handed down as a legacy to their children, who shall likewise hand it down to *their* children, and so on *ad infinitum* until "delay" shall become a synonym for death and destruction to tens of thousands of better men than themselves,—if this shall be the sentiment and practice of the men of next century, then I confess that my sympathies are with them, and I really suspect that I must have got into the wrong century by mistake. But as the position is irremediable now, I suppose I must, in an imbecile sort of fashion, go on my way rejoicing —if I can—sorrowing if I cannot rejoice.

Mrs Bingley having more than once threatened to scratch my face when I have ventured to express the last sentiment, it may be perhaps as well to change the subject and return to Billy Gaff, the charming child, *alias* the Bu'ster.

Billy deserves to be somewhat particularly introduced, because, besides being an actor in this tale, he was a boy of strong character. If I were to sum him up and reduce the total to a concentrated essence, the result would be a sentence to the following effect:– Billy Gaff had a will of his own! Perhaps I should say a very strong will of his own. For instance, he, on several different occasions, willed to screw off the spout of the family tea-pot, a pewter one, and, having willed to do it, he did it. Again he willed, more than once, to smash a pane of glass in the solitary window of the family mansion, and he *did* smash a pane of glass in that window; nay, more, in consequence of being heartily whacked for the deed, he immediately willed to smash, *and* smashed, a second pane, and was

proceeding to will and smash a third when he was caught up by his mother, beaten almost into the condition of a mummy, and thrust under the clothes of the family bed, which immediately creaked as if with convulsions, and tossed its blankets about in apparent agony.

On the present occasion the Bu'ster had awakened out of a sound sleep to the conviction that he was hungry. Observing the loaf on the table, he immediately willed to have a second supper, and arising, donned his father's pea-jacket, in order to enjoy the meal more thoroughly.

It was the sudden removal of the said loaf by his mother to an unreachable shelf that induced the youthful Billy to stand in the middle of the room and howl, as already described.

He was still engaged in emulating the storm, and Mrs Gaff, utterly indifferent to him, had cast another glance at the horrified clock, and remarked to her little girl Tottie, that "Uncle John must have found work on the shore, for he was long of coming," when a heavy tread was heard in the little porch outside the door.

"Hold yer noise," said Mrs Gaff sternly.

Billy obeyed, not by any means in consequence of the command, but because he was curious to know who was about to enter, and meant to resume yelling immediately after his curiosity on this point should be satisfied.

The door opened, and a strong-built seaman stepped into the room, and looked at the family with a quiet smile on his sunburnt face. His hair and garments were dripping with water, as if he had just walked out of the sea.

On beholding him the family rose and stood for a moment speechless. Billy sat down on the floor in that prompt manner which is peculiar to young children when they lose their balance; simultaneously with the shock of being seated the word "faither" burst from his lips. Mrs Gaff uttered a suppressed cry, and ran into the wet man's arms. Tottie and the Bu'ster each ran at a leg, and hugging it violently, squeezed a cataract of salt water into their respective bosoms.

"Stephen, lad, is't you?" said the wife, raising her head for a moment and looking up in the man's face.

"Ay, dear lass, wrecked again; but safe home, thank God."

Mrs Gaff was not wont to give way to the melting mood, but she could not restrain a few tears of joy. Tottie, observing this, cried from sympathy; and the Bu'ster, not to be outdone, willed, began, and carried into execution, a series of true British cheers, that could not have been surpassed, perhaps could not have been equalled, by any boy of his age in or out of the Royal Navy.

Chapter Two.
Wrecked, Rescued, and Resuscitated—Mrs Niven receives a Surprise, also the Gift of a Child

On the same dark tempestuous night of which I write, a little ship was wrecked on the east coast of England.

She had sailed from the antipodes, had weathered many a gale, had crossed the great ocean in safety, had sighted the lights and the cliffs of "home," and was dashed to pieces at last on the rocks within two hours' sail of the port to which she was bound.

Hundreds of ships, great and small, were wrecked on the coasts of Britain during that memorable gale. The little ship to which I refer was one of the many in regard to which the newspapers said, "she was dashed to pieces, and all hands perished."

But in this particular case all hands had not perished: two lives had been spared, unknown to journalists and coastguardsmen.

It was the dead of night when the vessel struck. The spot was lonely, at least a mile distant from human habitations. No anxious eyes on shore saw her quiver as each successive billow lifted her up and hurled her cruelly down; no sorrowing ear heard the shriek of despair that rose above the yelling storm, when, in little more than ten minutes, the vessel broke up, and left the crew and passengers to perish within sight of their native land.

There was one man among the number who did not shriek, who did not despair. He was not a hero of romance whose soul raised him above the fear of sudden death—no, he was only a true-hearted British tar, whose frame was very strong, whose nerves were tightly strung and used to danger. He had made up his mind to save his life if he could; if he should fail—what then? He never thought of "what then," because, in regard to terrestrial matters, he had not been accustomed to cast his thoughts so far in advance of present exigencies.

Just before the ship broke up, this man was standing on the lee bulwark, holding by the shrouds of the mainmast, the lower part of which was still standing. A lady and gentleman clung to each other, and to the rigging close beside him. They were husband and wife. Both were comparatively young, and up to that night had been full of hope and high spirits. The husband with his right arm encircled his wife, and grasped the rigging; with his left, he pressed their little girl to his breast over which flowed the fair hair of the little one, drenched and dishevelled.

The father was a brave man and strong, but his face was very pale, for he felt that courage and strength could not avail to save both wife and child in such a raging sea. An occasional upward glance of his eye seemed to indicate that he sought comfort from God in his extremity.

"You'll never manage 'em both, sir; let me have the child," said the strong seaman, suddenly grasping the little girl, and attempting to unlock her arms which were tightly clasped round her father's neck.

The father hesitated, but a terrific wave was rushing towards the doomed ship. Without even the comfort of a hurried kiss he resigned the child. The young mother stretched out her arms towards her, uttering a piteous cry. At that moment the ship rose on the billow's crest as if it were no heavier than a flake of the driving foam—a crash followed—it was gone, and the crew were left struggling in the sea.

The struggle was short with most of them. Previous exposure and anxiety had already quite exhausted all but the strongest among the men, and even these were unable to withstand the influence of the ice-cold water more than a few seconds. Some were struck by portions of the wreck and killed at once. Others sank without an effort to save themselves. A few swam with unnatural vigour for a yard or two, and then went down with a gurgling cry; but in a very few minutes the work of death

was complete. All were gone except the strong seaman, who clasped the little child in his left arm and buffeted the billows with his right.

Once and again were they overwhelmed; but as often did they rise above the foam to continue the battle. It was a terrible fight. A piece of wreck struck the man on his back and well-nigh broke it; then a wave arched high above them, fell with a crash, and drove them nearly to the bottom, so that the child was rendered insensible, and the strong man was nearly choked before he rose again to the surface to gasp the precious air. At last a wave broke behind them, caught them on its crest, and hurled them on a beach of sand. To cling to this while the water retired was the fiercest part of the conflict—the turning-point in the battle. The wave swept back and left the man on his hands and knees. He rose and staggered forward a few paces ere the next wave rushed upon him, compelling him to fall again on hands and knees and drive his bleeding fingers deep down into the shingle. When the water once more retired, he rose and stumbled on till he reached a point above high-water mark, where he fell down in a state of utter exhaustion, but still clasping the little one tightly to his breast.

For some time he lay there in a state of half-consciousness until his strength began to revive; then he arose, thanking God in an audible voice as he did so, and carried the child to a spot which was sheltered in some degree by a mass of cliff from the blinding spray and furious gale. Here he laid her with her face downwards on a grassy place, and proceeded to warm his benumbed frame.

Vitality was strong in the sailor. It needed only a few seconds' working of the human machine to call it into full play. He squeezed the water out of his jacket and trousers, and then slapped his arms across his chest with extreme violence, stamping his feet the while, so that he was speedily in a sufficiently restored condition to devote his attention with effect to the child, which still lay motionless on the grass.

He wrung the water out of her clothes, and chafed her feet, hands, and limbs, rapidly yet tenderly, but without success. His anxiety while thus employed was very great; for he did not know the proper method to adopt in the circumstances, and he felt that if the child did not revive within a few minutes, all chance of her recovery would be gone. The energy of his action and the anxiety of his mind had warmed his own frame into a glow. It suddenly occurred to him that he might make use of this superabundant heat. Opening the little frock in front, he placed the child's breast against his own, and held it there, while with his right hand he continued to chafe her limbs.

In a few minutes he felt a flutter of the heart, then a gentle sigh escaped from the blue lips; the eyelids quivered, and finally the child revived.

"D'ye feel gettin' better, Emmie?" said the man, in a low, soft voice.

A faint "yes" was all the reply.

The seaman continued his efforts to instil warmth into the little frame. Presently the same question was repeated, and the child looking up, said—

"Is that 'oo, Gaff?"

"Ay, dear, 'tis me."

"Where am I—where's mamma?" inquired Emmie, looking round in some degree of alarm.

"Hush, dear; don't speak just now. I've just brought 'ee ashore fro' the wreck, an' am goin' to tak 'ee home. Try to sleep, dear."

Gaff wrapped his jacket round the child, and hurried away in search of the highroad. He knew the place well. He had been wrecked on a reef within two miles of his native hamlet, and within three of the town of Wreckumoft. He soon found the road, and broke from a fast walk into a run. The child lay quietly in his arms, either being too much exhausted to speak, or having fallen asleep.

The man muttered to himself as if in perplexity—

"It'll never do to tak 'er home wi' me. She'd remember us, and that would let the secret out. No, I'll tak 'er straight there."

Gaff reached his native village as he came to this resolve. It was all astir. Three ships had been cast on the rocks there within a hundred yards of each other. The lifeboat was out; the rocket

apparatus had that moment arrived from the neighbouring town, and was being dragged on its waggon through the village to the scene of danger. All the men, and many of the women and children of the place, were on the beach, while eager groups of those who could not face the storm were collected in doorways and sheltered places, awaiting news from the shore. Many of these had anxious faces, for they knew their kinsmen, the fishermen of the place, to be bold, daring fellows, who would not hesitate to risk life and limb to save a fellow-creature from death.

Stopping a moment at the outskirts of the village, Gaff laid down his burden, and tied a large blue cotton kerchief round his neck, so as to cover his mouth and chin. By pulling his sou'wester cap well over his eyes, he concealed his face so effectually that little more than the point of his nose was visible. Not satisfied, however, with his disguise, he climbed a fence and struck into a bypath, which enabled him to avoid the village altogether.

Setting off at a quick pace, he soon regained the highroad beyond the village, and did not pause until he came to a large iron gate which opened into the shrubbery in front of a handsome villa. He went straight up to the front door and rang the bell.

Of course, at such an hour, the family had retired to rest, and it is probable that in ordinary circumstances Gaff would have had to wait a considerable time before an answer should have been given to his summons. But on this night, the only son and heir of the family, Kenneth by name, knowing that wrecks were likely to occur on the coast, and being of a bold, romantic, restless disposition, had mounted his horse and ridden away, accompanied by his groom, in search of adventure.

The housekeeper of the family, usually styled Mrs Niven, being devotedly attached to this son and heir, had resolved to sit up all night and await his return. Mrs Niven had prophesied confidently for the previous ten years, that "Master Kenneth was certain to be drownded sooner or later, if 'e didn't come to die before;" and being fully persuaded of the truth of her prophetic powers, she conscientiously waited for and expected the fulfilment of her own prophecy.

At the moment when Gaff rang the bell she was awaiting it in a chair in front of a good fire, with her feet on the fender and sound asleep. It would be more correct to say that Mrs Niven was in a state of mixed sleep and suffocation, for her head hung over the back of the chair, and, being very stout, there was only just sufficient opening in the wind-pipe to permit of her breath passing stertorously through her wide-open mouth.

The first summons passed unheard; the second caused Mrs Niven to open her eyes and shut her mouth, but she could not rise by reason of a crick in her neck. An angry shout, however, of "why don't you answer the bell?" from the master of the family, caused her to make a violent struggle, plunge her head into her lap, by way of counteracting the crick, rush up-stairs, and fling open the door.

"I know'd it," exclaimed Mrs Niven wildly, on beholding a wet sailor with a bundle in his arms; "I always said he would be—goodness me! it's only his trunk," she added in horror, on observing that the bundle was a rough jacket without head or legs!

"Clap a stopper on your jaw, woman," said Gaff impatiently. "Is this Seaside Villa—Mr Stuart's?"

"It is," replied Mrs Niven, trembling violently.

Gaff quickly removed the jacket, kissed the child's pale cheek, and laid her in Mrs Niven's ready arms.

"She ain't dead surely, sir?" inquired the housekeeper.

"No, bin saved from a wreck an' half drownded! She'll come to in a bit—tak' care of 'er."

Gaff turned on his heel as he hastily uttered these words, ran down the garden walk and disappeared, leaving Mrs Niven standing at the open door in a state of speechless amazement, with the unconscious Emmie in her arms and pressed, by reason of an irresistible impulse of motherly sympathy, to her bosom.

Chapter Three.
The Cottage at Cove invaded—Dan Horsey speaks "Toorko" to Russians, and fails to enlighten them

Retracing his steps hastily to the village of Cove, Stephen Gaff sought out his own humble cottage, which, during his absence on his frequent voyages, was left under the charge of his fisherman brother-in-law, John Furby. Presenting himself at the door, he created the family sensation which has been described at the end of the first chapter.

The first violent demonstrations of surprise and joy over, Mrs Gaff dragged her husband into a small closet, which was regarded by the household in the light of a spare room, and there compelled him to change his garments. While this change was being made the volatile Bu'ster, indignant at being bolted out, kicked the door with his heel until he became convinced that no good or evil could result from the process. Then his active mind reverted to the forbidden loaf, and he forthwith drew a chair below the shelf on which it lay. Upon the chair he placed a three-legged stool, and upon the stool an eight-inch block, which latter being an unstable foundation, caused Billy to lose his balance when he got upon it. The erection instantly gave way, and fell with a hideous crash. Tottie, who stood near, gazing at her brother's misdeeds, as was her wont, in awe-stricken admiration, was overwhelmed in the débris.

Nothing daunted, the Bu'ster "returned to the charge," and fell a second time,—with the loaf, however, in his arms.

"Hah!" exclaimed Mrs Gaff, issuing from the spare room, and rushing at her offspring with uplifted hand.

"Stop, lass," said Stephen, arresting her, and catching up the boy, whom he placed on his knee as he sat down in a chair beside the fire. "How are 'ee, Billy, my lad?"

Billy, glaring defiance at his mother, who returned the glare with interest in the shape of a united shake of the fist and head, replied that he was "fuss'rate."

Tottie having immediately claimed, and been put in possession of the other knee, divided her father's attention, and while the goodwife busied herself in preparing the supper, which had been originally intended for "Uncle John," a quick fire of question and reply of the most varied and unconnected sort was kept up by the trio at the fire, in tones, and accompanied by hugs and gestures, which proved beyond all doubt that Stephen Gaff was a father of the right kind, and that the little ones hailed him as an inestimable addition to their household joys.

It would be unjust to Mrs Gaff were I to permit the reader to suppose that she was a disagreeable contrast to the father. She was true-hearted and loving, but she had been born and bred in the midst of a class of people whose manners are as rough as their calling, and was by no means tender or considerate. A terrific scream, or a knock-down slap, from Mrs Gaff, was regarded both by giver and recipient in much the same light as is a mild reproof in more polite society.

"Wrecked again, Stephen," said Mrs Gaff, pausing in her occupation, and recurring to the remark made by her husband when he first entered the room, "where have 'ee bin wrecked this time?"

"A'most at the door, lass, on the Black Rock."

"Ay, an' was all the rest saved?" inquired the wife.

"No, none of 'em. A' lost save one, a little child."

"A child, lad!" exclaimed the wife in surprise; "what have 'ee done wi' it?"

"Took it to its friends."

As he said this the sailor gave his wife a look which induced her to refrain from further questioning on that subject.

"An' who saved ye, Stephen?"

"God saved me," replied the man, earnestly.

"True, lad; but was there none o' the boys there to lend a hand?"

"No, none. It puzzled me a bit," said Stephen, "for the lads are wont to be on the look-out on a night like this."

"It needn't puzzle ye, then," replied the wife, as she set a chair for her husband at the table, and poured out a cup of tea, "for there's bin two sloops an' a schooner on the rocks off the pier-head for three hours past, an' a' the lads are out at them,—Uncle John among the rest. They've made him coxswain o' the new lifeboat since ye last went to sea."

Stephen set down the cup, which he had just raised to his lips, untasted, and rose hastily.

"Wrecks at the pier-head, lass," he exclaimed, "and you let me sit here idle!"

"Don't go, Stephen," entreated Mrs Gaff; "you're not fit to do anything after sitch a night, an' its o'er late."

The man paid no attention to the remonstrance, but buttoned up his coat, and seized his cap.

Mrs Gaff promptly locked the door with an air of thorough determination, put the key in her bosom, and crossed her arms thereon tightly.

Stephen smiled slightly as he turned, raised the window, and leaped through it into the road, followed by a vociferous cheer from Billy, whose spirit was wildly stirred by the boldness and success of the movement, and mightily rejoiced at the discomfiture of his mother.

Mrs Gaff relieved her feelings by slapping the Bu'ster's face, and was about to close the window when her husband quietly stepped through it again, saying—

"Open the door, lass, you've no need to fear; I'll remain now."

There was a trampling of many feet outside. The door had scarcely been unlocked when they were in the passage. Next moment four fishermen entered, bearing the figure of a man in their arms.

"He an't drownded, lass, only swownded," said one of the men to Mrs Gaff, with the view of relieving the good woman's anxiety, as they laid a seaman on the bed. "Look alive now, old girl, an' git hot blankets an' bottles."

While Mrs Gaff obeyed in silent haste, the room was filled with men, some of whom supported or half-carried others, whose drooping heads, torn garments, and haggard faces, showed that they had just been rescued from the angry sea. None of them were more than partially clothed; some were nearly naked. With excited haste the fishermen crowded the wrecked men round the fire, and spread blankets and sails, or whatever came first to hand, on the floor for those who were most exhausted to lie down upon, while Stephen Gaff poured hot tea and hot grog indiscriminately into cups, saucers, pannikins, and soup-plates, and urged them to drink with rough but kindly hospitality.

The wrecked men, (there were twelve of them), were Russians, and as a matter of course could not understand a word that was said to them, although some of the fishermen asked them, with as much earnestness as if their lives depended on the answer, "Who—they—wos—an'—whar'—they —com'd—fro'?"

Receiving for reply a stare and a shake of the head from such of the men as were able to attend, one of the fishermen tried them again with great precision and slowness of speech, and with much solemnity of manner, "What—part—o' the arth—d'ye hail fro',—lads?"

No answer, accompanied by a stare and a shake.

"Oh, it's o' no use," cried one, "let the poor lads a-be."

"Hallo! Dan," cried another, as a man forced his way through the crowded room towards the fire, "you've bin in Toorkey, I believe; I say, try them fellers wi' a screed o' Toorko. P'raps they'll make *that* out."

The individual addressed was very different from the men amongst whom he stood. He was a thin, slightly-made, yet strong and active young man, in a very short grey coat, a very long striped vest, and very tight corduroy trousers—a sort of compound of footman and jockey. In truth, Daniel Horsey

was both; being at once valet and groom to the romantic Kenneth, whose fate it was, (according to the infallible Mrs Niven), to be "drownded."

Dan's first inquiry was as to whether any one had seen his master, and the tones in which the question was put betokened him, beyond all doubt, a son of the Green Isle.

Being told that no one had seen his master, he was about to leave the hut in quest of him when he was collared by several stout men, and placed forcibly in front of a Russian with a huge red beard, who appeared to be the least exhausted of the party.

"Come now, Dan, say somethin' to them Roosians."

"Arrah! d'ye think I'll spake a word av ye stick yer great ugly fists into my jooglar veins like that? Hands off," he cried indignantly, "or niver a taste o' spaitch ye'll git from me, bad or good. Besides, what duv *I* know about Roosian?"

"Ye've bin in Toorkey, han't ye?" inquired a fisherman.

"Troth I have, an' what o' that?" replied Dan, as his captors released their hold of his collar.

"Ye can speak Toorko, can't ye?"

"Maybe I can," he replied cautiously.

"Well, I'm told that Toorkey lies to the suthard o' Roosia, just as England lies to the suthard o' Scotland, an' so, mayhap, they'll understand a bit Toorko."

"Faix, av they don't understand Thoorko better nor the English understand Scotch, it's little speed I'll come wi' them," said Dan with a leer. "Howsomediver, I'll give 'em a trial. I say, Mr Red-beard, hubba doorum bobble moti squorum howko joski tearum thaddi whak? Come, now, avic, let's hear what ye've got to say to that. An' mind what ye spake, 'cause we won't stand no blarney here."

Dan uttered this with immense volubility and assurance, and the fishermen regarded him with deepening respect, as they awaited the Russian's answer. He replied by a stare and a shake of the head as before.

"Hookum daddy," resumed Dan, stooping to gaze earnestly into the man's face, and placing the thumb of his right hand into the palm of his left, by way of emphasising his remark, "Hookum daddy, saringo spolli-jaker tooraloo be japers bang falairo—och!" he added, turning away with a look of disgust, "he don't understand a word. I would try him wi' Frinch, but it's clear as ditch wather that he's half drownded still."

Convinced that Dan Horsey's "Toorko" was of no use, the fishermen at length allowed him to retire.

Chapter Four.
The Rescue

While this scene was enacting in the cottage, I was hasting up from the beach, where the lifeboat men had rendered good service that night.

As the honorary agent for the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, I had been summoned by a special messenger as soon as it was known that vessels were on the rocks off the entrance to our harbour. I was accompanied by my niece, Lizzie Gordon, who always joined me on such occasions, carrying with her a basket in which were a flask of brandy, another of port wine, a bottle of smelling salts, and several small articles which she fancied might be of use in cases of emergency. We had called at the Sailors' Home in passing, to see that they were astir there, and ready to receive shipwrecked people. We afterwards remained on the beach, under the lee of a boathouse, while the lifeboat men saved the crews of the wrecked vessels.

The work was nobly done! John Furby, the coxswain, with a sturdy crew of volunteers—twelve in all—were ready for action, with cork life-belts and oilskin coats on, when the team of four stout horses came tearing along the sands dragging the lifeboat after them, assisted and cheered on by a large crowd of men and boys. No unnecessary delay occurred. Opposite the first wreck, the carriage was wheeled round, so that the bow of the boat pointed to the sea. The crew sprang into their seats, and, shipping the oars, sat ready and resolute.

Immense breakers thundered on the beach, and rushed inland in fields of gurgling foam that looked like phosphoric light in the darkness. Into this the carriage was thrust as far as it could be with safety by many strong and willing hands. Then the men in the surf seized the launching lines, by means of which the boat could be propelled off its carriage. A peculiar adaptation of the mechanism enabled them, by *pulling backward*, to force the boat *forward*. For a moment they stood inactive as a towering wave rolled in like a great black scroll coming out of the blacker background, where the sound of the raging storm could be heard, but where nothing could be seen, save the pale red light which proved that the wreck still held together.

The sea flew up, almost overwhelming the carriage. John Furby, standing at his post by the steering oar, with the light of the small boat-lamp shining up into his rugged face, gave the word in a clear, strong voice.

"Hurrah!" shouted the men on shore, as they ran up the beach with the ends of the launching ropes.

The boat sprang into the surf, the crew bent to their oars with all their might, and kept pace with the rush of the retreating billow, while the sea drew them out as if it were hungry to swallow them.

The lifeboat met the next breaker end-on; the men, pulling vigorously, cleft it, and, passing beyond, gained the deep water and disappeared from view.

The minutes that followed appeared like hours, but our patience was not long tried. The boat soon re-appeared, coming in on the crest of a towering wave, with six saved seamen in her. As she struck the beach she was seized by the crowd on shore, and dragged out of danger by main force.

Thus far all was well. But there was stern work still to be done. Having ascertained that the vessel was a collier, and that none of her crew were lost, I sent the six men with an escort to the Sailors' Home, and followed the lifeboat, which was already on its way to the second wreck, not more than five hundred yards from the first.

Here they were equally successful, three men and a boy being rescued from the vessel, which also proved to be a small collier. Then the boat was conveyed to the third wreck, which turned out to be a brig, and was nearly a mile removed from the harbour, just opposite the fishing village of Cove.

The crew of the lifeboat being now much exhausted, were obliged to give up their oars and life-belts to fresh men, who volunteered for the service in scores. Nothing, however, would persuade John Furby to resign his position, although he was nearly worn out with fatigue and exposure.

Once more the lifeboat dashed into the sea, and once again returned with a crew of rescued men, who were immediately led up to the nearest hut, which chanced to be that of Stephen Gaff. One of the saved men, being insensible, was carried up and laid in Stephen's bed, as I have already described.

There was still some uncertainty as to whether all those on board the wreck had been rescued, so the boat put off again, but soon returned, having found no one. As she struck the shore a larger wave than usual overwhelmed her, and washed the coxswain overboard. A loud cry burst from those who witnessed this, and one or two daring fellows, running into the surf up to their waists, nearly perished in their brave but vain efforts to grasp the drowning man.

Furby did not struggle. He had been rendered insensible by the shock, and although several ropes were thrown to him, and one actually fell over him, he could make no effort to save himself, as the waves rolled him inshore and sucked him back again.

At this moment the sound of horses' hoofs was heard on the sands, and my young friend Kenneth Stuart dashed past us, at full gallop, into the sea!

Kenneth was a splendid and a fearless rider. He kept the finest horses in the neighbourhood. On this occasion he was mounted on a large strong chestnut, which he had trained to gallop into a foaming surf.

Checking his pace suddenly, when about knee-deep in the foam, he took up such a position that the next billow would wash the drowning man within his reach.

The wave came on. When about a hundred yards from the spot where the young horseman stood, it fell with a prolonged roar, and the foam came sweeping in like a white wall, with the dark form of Furby tossing in the midst. The sea rushed furiously upon horse and rider, and the terrified horse, rearing almost perpendicular, wheeled round towards the land. At the same instant the coxswain was hurled against them. Kenneth seized the mane of his steed with one hand, and grasping Furby with the other, held on. The noble charger, swept irresistibly landward, made frantic efforts to regain his footing, and partially succeeded before the full force of the retreating water bore back upon him.

For one moment he stood quivering with the strength of his effort. Kenneth was very strong, else he had never maintained his grasp on the collar of the coxswain.

A moment more, and the horse made a plunge forward; then a dozen hands caught him by bridle and saddle-girth, and almost dragged the trio out of the sea, while a loud cheer greeted their deliverance.

I ordered four stout men to carry the coxswain to Gaff's cottage, remaining behind for a few minutes in order to congratulate my young friend on his escape and success, as well as to see that no other wrecks had occurred in the neighbourhood. Having satisfied myself as best I could on this latter point, I was about to proceed to the cottage when Kenneth came forward, leading his good horse by the bridle, and offered his disengaged arm to my niece.

Lizzie thanked him and declined, observing that, after his gallant and successful rescue of Furby, he must himself stand in need of assistance, or something to that effect. I cannot say what his reply was, but I observed that she immediately afterwards took the proffered arm, and we all walked up to the hut together.

On reaching it we met Kenneth's groom coming out, he having failed, as has been shown, to make any impression on the Russians with his Turkish!

I found the place completely filled with men and women, the latter being in a state of great excitement.

"Here's the agent! make way, lads! here comes Cap'n Bingley," several voices exclaimed as I entered.

Going to the bed and seeing how matters stood with poor Furby, who had been placed on his back, I ordered the people to leave the hut, and had the half-drowned man turned instantly on his face. The other half-drowned man, having recovered, was lying on a blanket before the fire.

"Clear the room, lads," said I firmly, "the man wants fresh air; open the window, and take these wrecked men up to the Home in town. Everything is prepared for them there, hot coffee and beds, and a hearty welcome. Away with you, now; carry those who can't walk."

With the assistance of Kenneth and his man the hut was soon cleared, only a few being allowed to remain to aid me in my efforts to recover the coxswain.

"You see," said I, as I rolled Furby gently and continuously from his face to his side, in order to produce what I may term artificial breathing, "it is not good to lay a half-drowned man on his back, because his tongue will fall into his throat, and prevent the very thing we want to bring about, namely, respiration. Go to the foot of the bed, Kenneth, put your hands under the blankets, and chafe his legs with hot flannel. Hold the smelling salts to his nose, Lizzie. That's it, now. Mrs Gaff, put more hot bottles about him; see, he begins to breathe already."

As I spoke the mysterious vital spark in the man began to revive, and ere long the quivering eyelids and short fitful gasps indicated that "Uncle John," as the coxswain of the lifeboat was styled by the household, had recovered. We gave him a teaspoonful or two of hot coffee when he was able to swallow, and then prepared to take our leave.

I observed, while I was busy with Furby, that my niece took Mrs Gaff aside, and appeared to be talking to her very earnestly. Lizzie was a lovely girl. She was tall and slightly formed, with rich brown hair and a dark clear complexion that might have been almost styled Spanish, but for the roses which bloomed on her cheeks. I could not help admiring the strong contrast between her and the fair face and portly figure of worthy Mrs Gaff, who listened to what she said with an air of deep respect.

Little Tottie had taken Lizzie's hand in both of hers, and was looking up in her face, and the boy Billy was gazing at her with open-mouthed admiration. I observed, too, that Kenneth Stuart was gazing at her with such rapt attention that I had to address him several times before he heard me!

This I was not surprised at, for I remember to this day the feelings of pleasure with which I beheld my pretty niece, when, having lost her father and mother, poor dear! she came to find a home under my roof, and it was natural she should inspire admiration in a young man like Kenneth.

My family and the Stuarts had become acquainted only a few weeks before the events of which I am now writing, and this was the first time that the young people had met. They were not altogether unknown to each other, however, for Lizzie had heard of Kenneth from the fishermen, who used to speak with interest of his horsemanship and his daring feats in rescuing drowning people from the sea during the storms that so frequently visited our coast, and Kenneth had heard of Lizzie, also from the fishermen, amongst whom she was a frequent visitor, especially when sickness entered their cots, or when the storm made their wives widows, and their little ones fatherless.

I had set my heart on seeing these two married. My dear wife, for the first time in her life I believe, thoroughly agreed with me in this wish. I mention the fact with unalloyed pleasure, as being what I may term a sunny memory, a bright spot, in a life of subdued though true happiness. We neither of us suspected at that time what bitter opposition to our wishes we were to receive from Kenneth's father, who, although in many respects a good man, was very stern—unpleasantly stern.

Having done all that could be done for the wrecked people, Lizzie and I returned to our residence in Wreckumoft at about four in the morning.

Kenneth insisted on walking with us, sending his man home with his horse, which Lizzie patted on the neck, and called a noble creature. It was quite evident that Kenneth wished that he himself was his own horse on that occasion—so evident that Lizzie blushed, and taking my arm hurriedly urged me to go home as it was "very late."

"Very early would be more correct, my dear," said I, "for it is past four. You must be tired, Lizzie; it is wrong in me to allow you to subject yourself to such storms. Give her your arm, Kenneth."

"If Miss Gordon will accept of it," said the youth approaching her promptly, "I shall be—"

"No, thank you," said Lizzie, interrupting him and clinging closer to me; "I am not in the least tired, and your assistance is quite sufficient, uncle."

I must confess to being surprised at this, for it was quite evident to me that Kenneth admired Lizzie, and I was pretty certain—so was my dear wife—that Lizzie admired Kenneth, although of course she never gave us the slightest hint to that effect, and it seemed to me such a good and reasonable opportunity for—well, well, I need not bore you, reader, with my wild ideas, so peculiarly adapted it would seem for the twentieth century—suffice it to say, that I *was* surprised. But if truth must be told, I have always lived in a state of surprise in regard to the thoughts and actions of women, and on this particular night I was doomed to the unpleasant surprise of being received with a sharp rebuke from Mrs Bingley, who roundly asserted that she would stand this sort of thing no longer. That she had no notion of being disturbed at such unearthly hours by the noisy advent of a disagreeably damp and cold husband, and that if I intended to continue to be an agent of the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, she would insist upon a separate maintenance!

I was comforted, however, by finding a good fire and a hot cup of coffee in the parlour for myself and Lizzie, provided by our invaluable housekeeper, Susan Barepoles, a girl who was worthy of a better name, being an active, good-looking, cheerful lass. She was the daughter of the skipper of one of our coal sloops, named Haco Barepoles, a man of excellent disposition, but gifted with such a superabundance of animal spirits, courage, and recklessness, that he was known in the port of Wreckumoft as Mad Haco.

Much exhausted by one of the hardest nights of toil and exposure I ever spent, I retired to my room and sought and found repose.

Chapter Five.
The Breakfast Party at Seaside Villa

The morning after the storm was bright and beautiful. The breakers, indeed, were still thundering on the shore, but otherwise the sea was calm, and the sun shone into the breakfast parlour of Seaside Villa with a degree of intensity that might have warmed the heart of an oyster. It certainly warmed the heart of the household cat, which, being an early riser, was first down-stairs, and lay at full length on the rug, enjoying at once the heat of the glowing fire which tinged its brown back with red, and the blazing sun which turned its white breast yellow.

Presently a dark cloud entered the room. It sat on the brow of George Stuart, Esquire, of Wreckumoft, the head of the family. Mr Stuart walked up to the fire and turned his back to it, as if to offer it a deliberate insult, while yet he accepted all the benefit it could afford him on that cold December morning.

The cat being in his way, he moved it out of his way with his foot. He did it roughly, but he did not exactly kick it, for he was not a cruel, or naturally unkind man.

Having disposed of the cat, and looked twice at his watch, and blown his nose three times—the last twice unnecessarily—Mr Stuart rang the bell with violence.

Mrs Niven entered.

"Why is breakfast not ready?" said the master with asperity.

"Breakfast *is* ready, sir," replied the housekeeper with dignity.

"Where is my sister, then, and the rest of them?" The questioner was partly answered by the abrupt and somewhat flurried entrance of the sister referred to.

"What's the meaning of this, Peppy?" demanded Mr Stuart with a frown.

"My dear George," said Miss Peppy, bustling about actively, "I really *am* sorry, but you know things can't always be just as one would wish, and then when things *do* turn out occasionally as one would *not* wish, and as one had no expectation of, and, so to speak, without consulting one at all, (dear me, where *is* that key?)—and when one can't help things turning out so, you know, it's really too much to—to—you know what I mean, brother; come now, be reasonable."

"I do *not* know what you mean, Peppy," (the lady's name when unabbreviated was Penelope, but as she never was so named by any one, she might as well not have had the name at all), "and," continued Mr Stuart, emphatically, "I would advise *you* to be reasonable and explain yourself."

"Dear George, how *can* you," said Miss Peppy, who talked with great volubility, and who never for a moment ceased to bustle about the room in a series of indescribable, as well as unaccountable, not to say unnecessary, preparations for the morning meal, which had already been prepared to perfection by Mrs Niven; "you surely don't forget—things do happen *so* surprisingly at times—really, you know, I *can not* see why we should be subjected to such surprises. I'm quite sure that no good comes of it, and then it makes one look *so* foolish. Why human beings were made to be surprised so, *I* never could understand. No one ever sees pigs, or horses, or cows surprised, and they seem to get through life a great deal easier than we do, at all events they have less worry, and they never leave their children at their neighbour's doors and run away—what *can* have got it?—I'm quite sure I put it there last night with the thimble and scissors."

Miss Peppy thrust her right hand deep into that mysterious receptacle of household miscellanies her pocket, and fingered the contents inquiringly for a few moments.

"What are you looking for?" inquired her brother impatiently.

"The key of the press," said Miss Peppy with a look of weariness and disappointment.

"What key is that in your left hand?" said Mr Stuart.

"Why, I declare, that's *it*!" exclaimed his sister with a laugh; "there *is* no accounting for things. My whole life is a series of small surprises and perplexities. I *wonder* what I was born for! It seems to me so ridiculous that so serious a thing as life should be taken up with such little trifles."

"What's that you say about trifles, aunt?" asked Kenneth, who entered the room at the moment, and saluted Miss Peppy on the cheek.

"Nothing, Kennie, nothing worth mentioning," (she seated herself at the table and began to pour out the tea): "it seems that you have been saving more lives last night."

"Well, yes, at least I saved *one*," said Kenneth, with a look of mingled pride and pleasure; "stout John Furby, the coxswain of the new lifeboat, was knocked overboard and nearly drowned. Bucephalus and I chanced to be near the spot at the time, so we managed to pull him out between us."

"I don't like Bucephalus," observed Miss Peppy, stirring her tea with her egg-spoon by mistake.

"Don't you, aunt—why?"

"Because he's so big and strong and fierce. I wonder you can take pleasure in riding such a great cart-horse, Kennie."

Miss Peppy at this moment discovered her mistake in regard to the egg-spoon, and rectified it, observing with a look of resignation, that there *was* no accounting for the way in which things happened in this world.

"Don't call my Bucephalus a cart-horse, aunt," said Kenneth, beginning to eat languidly; "true, he is uncommonly big and strong, but then I am unusually big too, so we're well matched; and then his limbs are as delicately turned as those of a racer; and you should see him taking a five-barred gate, aunt!—he carries me over as if I were a mere feather. Think of his swimming powers too. John Furby is not the first man he has enabled me to drag out of the stormy sea. Ah! he's a noble horse—worthy of higher praise than you seem inclined to give him, believe me."

"Well I'm sure I have no objection to the horse if you have none, Kennie, and it's a good thing for a beast to be able to save human lives, though why human lives should require to be saved at all is a mystery that I never could fathom; surely if men would only agree to give up going to sea altogether, and never build any more ships, there would be no more drowning, and no need of lifeboats and cork boots—or coats, I forget which—that enable them to walk on the water, or float in it, I don't remember which. I'm sure with all that I have to remember it's no wonder—what with ridiculous little trifles to worry one, such as keys, and thimbles, and scissors, when we should be giving our minds to the solemn realities of life—and then,—as if that were not enough for any woman's shoulders,—to have a little child left at one's door."

"Oh, by the way," interrupted Kenneth, "I had quite forgotten the child. Mrs Niven told me about it, and I looked into the crib as I went up to bed last night, or rather this morning, and saw that it was sleeping—somewhat restlessly I fancied. Who brought it here?"

Mr Stuart, who had hitherto eaten his breakfast in silence, looked at his sister as if the reply would interest him.

Before the answer could be given the door opened, and a smart handsome youth of apparently eighteen years of age entered. His dress bespoke him a midshipman in the navy, and the hearty familiarity of his manner showed that he was on intimate terms with the family.

"Gildart, my boy, how are you?" cried Kenneth, springing up and shaking the youth warmly by both hands.

"Hearty, old fellow, and happy to see my ancient chum. How d'ye do, Miss Penelope? How are ye, Mr Stuart?"

My son Gildart had been Kenneth's favourite companion when they were boys at school. They had not met for many years.

"Sit down," said Kenneth, pressing his friend into a chair; "when did you arrive; where did you come from; what brought you home?—your appearance is so unexpected!—hope you've come to stay with *us*. Had breakfast?"

"Well, now, such a string of 'em to answer all at once," replied Gildart Bingley, laughing. "Suppose I try to reply in the same order—came this morning; direct from China, where we've been sinking junks and peppering pirates; got leave of absence for a few weeks to run down here and see the old folks at home; whether I stay with *you* will depend on the treatment I receive; I have had breakfast, and came down here supposing that yours would have been over—but I'm capable of a second meal at any time; have tried a third occasionally with reasonable success. Now, Kennie—I'm not afraid to call you by the old name, you see, although you *have* grown so big and manly, not to say fierce—having answered your questions, will you be so good as to tell me if it's all true that I hear of your having saved the life of a fisherman last night?"

"It is true that I pulled him out of the sea, aided and abetted by Bucephalus, but whether all that you have heard of me is true I cannot tell, not knowing what you have heard. Who told you of it?"

"Who? why the household of the Bingleys, to be sure—all speaking at once, and each louder than the other, with the exception of my pretty coz, by the way, who did not speak at all until the others were out of breath, and then she gave me such a graphic account of the affair that I would certainly have forgotten where I was, and been transported to the scene of action, had not her pretty flushed face and blazing black eyes riveted me to the spot where I sat. I actually gave vent to an irresistible cheer when she concluded. D'ye know, Kennie, you seem to have made an impression in that quarter? I wish I were you!"

The little midshipman sighed, and helped himself to a second slice of buttered toast. Kenneth laughed lightly, glanced askance at his father, and requested another cup of tea. Mr Stuart glanced at his son, frowned at his finished egg, and stuck the spoon through the bottom of the shell as he would have struck a dagger into the hopes of Kenneth, had he possessed the power.

"Peppy," he said, pushing his cup from him, "before our young friend arrived, you were speaking of the little boy who was left mysteriously here last night—"

"It's a girl," interrupted Miss Peppy, "not but that it might have been a boy, brother, if it had been born so, but one cannot ignore facts, and to the best of my belief it was a girl last night. To be sure I was very sleepy when I saw it, but it may be a boy this morning for all I know to the contrary. I'm sure the perplexities that *do* surround us in this world!" (Here Miss Peppy sighed.) "But if there is any doubt on the question we had better ring for Mrs Niven, and send her up-stairs to ascertain."

At that moment Mrs Niven entered, and handed a letter to Mr Stuart.

"Niven," said Miss Peppy, who spoke so fast, all in one tone, that no one had a chance of interrupting her,—"Niven, will you be so good as to go up-stairs and inquire whether the girl—no, the boy—I—I mean the young human being, that—"

"La! ma'am," exclaimed the housekeeper in surprise, "why do you call her a boy? She's as sweet and lovely a girl as ever my two heyes looked on. I never saw nothink like 'er golden 'air—it's quite 'eavenly, ma'am, if I may use the hexpression."

"Oh! she *is* a girl then? ah! I thought so," said Miss Peppy, with a sigh of resignation, as if the fact were a perplexity too deep for investigation, at least at that time.

"It matters nothing to me," said Mr Stuart sternly, "whether she be a boy or a girl, I mean to send her to the workhouse."

"Workhouse, brother!" exclaimed Miss Peppy in surprise.

"Workhouse, sir!" echoed Mrs Niven in horror.

"Father!" said Kenneth, remonstratively.

"Mrs Niven," said Mr Stuart, breaking the seal of the letter very slowly, "you may leave the room. Sister, I do not choose to have my intentions commented on in such a manner, especially before the domestics. This child I have nothing whatever to do with; it has no claim on me, and I shall certainly hand it over to the parochial authorities to be dealt with—"

"According to law," suggested the middy.

"Yes, according to law," assented Mr Stuart with much severity, applying himself to the letter while the rest of the party rose from table.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, with an expression of annoyance, as his eye fell on the first lines, "I find that Emma and her good-for-nothing husband will, in all likelihood, be here to-night."

"To-night, father!" said Kenneth, with a look of gladness.

"Probably," replied Mr Stuart. "The vessel in which they sailed from Australia was seen off the Lizard yesterday, at least my agent writes that he thinks it was the 'Hawk,' but the fog was too thick to permit of a clear sight being obtained; so, I suppose, we shall be inflicted with them and their child to-night or to-morrow."

"To-night or to-morrow, it may be so, *if they have weathered the storm*," muttered Kenneth in a deep, sad tone.

Chapter Six.
Kenneth indulges in Suspicions and Surmises

"Will you walk or ride?" said Kenneth Stuart as he and Gildart issued from Seaside Villa, and sauntered down the avenue that led to the principal gate.

"Ride, by all means," said Gildart, "if you have a respectable horse. I love to ride, not only on the 'bursting tide,' but on the back of a thoroughbred, if he's not too tough in the mouth, and don't incline to shy."

Kenneth replied that he had a mount to give him, which, although not quite thoroughbred, was nevertheless a good animal, and not addicted to the bad qualities objected to.

As he spoke Daniel Horsey walked up, and, touching his hat, asked if the horses would be required.

"Yes, Dan. Is Bucephalus none the worse of last night's work?"

"Niver a taste, sur. He's like a lark this mornin'."

"Well, saddle him, and also the brown horse. Bring them both over to Captain Bingley's as soon as you can."

"Yis, sur." Dan touched his cap, and walked smartly away.

"Why to my father's?" asked Gildart.

"Because, after your father and Miss Gordon were exposed to such unwonted fatigue, I wish to inquire for them personally."

"Humph! you're not satisfied with my assurance that they are well?"

"Not quite, my boy," said Kenneth, with a smile; "I wish to have the assurance from the lips of your sweet cousin."

"Whew! in love!" exclaimed Gildart.

"No; not in love *yet*," replied the other; "but, to change the subject, did you observe the manner in which my father received the news of the arrival of the 'Hawk?'"

"Well, it did not require a fellow to have his weather eye *very* wide-open to perceive that your father has a decided objection to his son-in-law, and does not seem over anxious to meet with him or his wife or child. What have they been up to, Kennie—eloped, eh?"

"No, they did not exactly elope, but they married without my father's consent, or rather against his wishes, and were discarded in consequence. You must not think my father is an unkind man, but he was deeply disappointed at poor Emma's choice; for, to say truth, her husband was a wild harum-scarum sort of fellow, fond of steeple-chasing—"

"Like you," interpolated Gildart.

"Like me," assented Kenneth, with a nod, "and also of yachting and boating, *like you*."

"Like me," assented the middy.

"Nevertheless," resumed Kenneth, "a good-hearted fellow in the main, who, I am certain, would have acted his part in life well if he had been better trained. But he was spoiled by his father and mother, and I must admit that poor Tom Graham was not over fond of work."

"Ha!" ejaculated Gildart.

"Hum!" responded his friend, "do either of us, I wonder, perceive in ourselves any resemblance to him in this latter point? I suppose it would require a third party to answer that question truly. But, to continue—My father gave Emma, (for he would not consent to see Tom), a thousand pounds, and dismissed her from his presence, as he said, 'for ever,' but I am convinced that he did not mean what he said, for he paced about his bedroom the whole of the night after his last interview with poor Emma, and I heard him groan frequently, although the partition that separates our rooms is so thick that sounds are seldom heard through it. Do you know, Gildart, I think we sometimes judge men

harshly. Knowing my father as I do, I am convinced that he is not the cold, unfeeling man that people give him credit for. He acted, I believe, under a strong conviction that the course he adopted was that of duty; he hoped, no doubt, that it would result in good to his child, and that in the course of time he should be reconciled to her. I cannot conceive it possible that any one would cast off his child deliberately and *for ever*. Why, the man who could do so were worse than the beasts that perish."

"I agree with you. But what came of Tom and Emma?" asked Gildart.

"They went to Australia. Tom got into business there. I never could make out the exact nature of it, but he undoubtedly succeeded for a time, for Emma's letters to me were cheerful. Latterly, however, they got into difficulties, and poor Emma's letters were sad, and came less frequently. For a year past she has scarcely written to me at all. Tom has never written. He was a high-spirited fellow, and turned his back on us all when my father cast him and Emma off."

"Humph!" ejaculated Gildart, "nevertheless his high spirit did not induce him to refuse the thousand pounds, it would seem."

"You wrong him, Gildart; Emma knew him well, and she told me that she had placed the money in a bank in her own name, without telling him of it. Any success that attended him at first was the result of his own unaided energy and application to business. It is many years now since they went away. Some time ago we heard that they, with their only daughter, little Emma, were coming back to England, whether in wealth or in poverty I cannot tell. The vessel in which they were to sail is named the 'Hawk,' and that is the ship that my father has heard of as having been seen yesterday."

"How comes it, Kenneth, that you have never opened your lips to me on this subject during our long acquaintance? I did not know even that you had a sister."

"Why, to say truth, the subject was not one on which I felt disposed to be communicative. I don't like to talk of family squabbles, even to my most intimate friends."

"So we may look for some family breezes and squalls ere long, if not gales," said Gildart with a laugh.

Kenneth shook his head gravely.

"I fear much," said he, "that the 'Hawk' was exposed to last night's gale; she must have been so if she did not succeed in making some harbour before it came on; but I cannot shake off the feeling that she is wrecked, for I know the vessel well, and practical men have told me that she was quite unseaworthy. True, she was examined and passed in the usual way by the inspectors, but every one knows that *that* does not insure the seaworthiness of vessels."

"Well, but even suppose they *have* been wrecked," suggested Gildart, "it does not follow that they have been drowned."

"I don't know," replied the other in a low voice—"I have a strange, almost a wild suspicion, Gildart."

"What may that be?"

"That the little girl who was left so mysteriously at our door last night is my sister's child," said Kenneth.

"Whew!" whistled the midshipman, as he stopped and gazed at his friend in surprise; "well, that *is* a wild idea, so wild that I would advise you seriously to dismiss it, Kennie. But what has put it into your head?—fancied likeness to your sister or Tom, eh?"

"No, not so much that, as the fact that she told Niven last night that her name is Emmie."

"That's not Emma," said Gildart.

"It is what I used to call my sister, however; and besides that there is a seaman named Stephen Gaff, who, I find, has turned up somewhat suddenly and unaccountably last night from Australia. He says he has been wrecked; but he is mysterious and vague in his answers, and do what I will I cannot get rid of the idea that there is some connexion here."

"It is anxiety, my boy, that has made you think in this wild fashion," said Gildart. "Did I not hear Mrs Niven say that the child gave her name as Emmie Wilson?"

"True, I confess that the name goes against my idea; nevertheless I cannot get rid of it, so I mean to canter to-day down to Cove, where Gaff stays, and have a talk with him. We can go together by the road along the top of the cliffs, which is an exceedingly beautiful one. What say you?"

"By all means: it matters nothing to me what course you steer, so long as we sail in company. But pray don't let the fascinating Lizzie detain you too long. Oh! you need not laugh as if you were invulnerable. I'll engage to say that you'll not come away under an hour if you go into the house without making me a solemn promise to the contrary."

"Why, Gildart, it strikes me that *you* must be in love with your fascinating cousin from the way in which you speak."

"Perhaps I am," said the middy, with a tremendous sigh; "but come, here we are, and the horses at the door before us; they must have been brought round by the other road. Now, then, promise that you'll not stay longer than half an hour."

Kenneth smiled, and promised.

On entering my residence, which had been named, by Mrs Bingley's orders, "Bingley Hall," the young men found my pretty niece coming down the staircase in that most fascinating of all dresses, a riding-habit, which displayed her neat and beautifully rounded figure to perfection. Lizzie could not be said to blush as she bowed acknowledgment to Kenneth's salutation, for a blush, unless it were a *very* deep one, usually lost itself among the blush roses that at all times bloomed on her cheek; but she smiled with great sweetness upon the stalwart youth, and informed him that, having just been told that John Furby was still suffering from the effects of his recent accident, she had ordered out her pony and was about to ride down to Cove to see him.

Kenneth began to remark on the curious coincidence that he too had come out with the intention of riding down to the same place; but the volatile middy burst in with—

"Come, Lizz, that's jolly, we're bound for the same port, and can set sail in company; whether we keep together or not depends on circumstances, not to mention wind and weather. I rather think that if we take to racing, Bucephalus and Kenneth will be there first."

"Bucephalus is always well behaved in the company of ladies, which is more than I can say of you, Gildart," retorted his friend, as he opened the door to let Lizzie Gordon pass out.

"And we won't race, good cousin," said Lizzie, "for my uncle is to ride with me, and you know he is not fond of going very fast."

"How d'ye know that, lass?" said I, coming down-stairs at the moment; "not a few of my friends think that I go much too fast for this century—so fast, indeed, that they seem to wonder that I have not ridden ahead of them into the next! How d'ye do, Kenneth? Gildart was not long of finding you out, I see."

Saying this, I mounted my cob and cantered down the avenue of Bingley Hall, followed by the young people, whose fresh and mettlesome steeds curvetted and pranced incessantly.

It may be as well to remark here, good reader, that at the time of which I write I was unacquainted, as a matter of course, with many of the facts which I am now narrating: they were made known to me piecemeal in the course of after years. I feel that this explanation is necessary in order to account for my otherwise unaccountable knowledge of things that were said and done when I was not present.

Chapter Seven.
Lizzie Gordon is run away with, and Gaff is "pumped"

The road to the Cove lay along the top of the cliffs, and was in many parts exceedingly picturesque; now passing, in the form of a mere bridle-path, along the verge of the precipices, where thousands of sea-gulls floated around the giddy heights, or darted down into the waves which fell on shingly beach, or promontory, or bay of yellow sand, far below; anon cutting across the grassy downs on some bold headland, or diverging towards the interior, and descending into a woody dell in order to avoid a creek or some other arm of the sea that had cleft the rocks and intruded on the land.

The day was sunny and sufficiently warm to render a slow pace agreeable to my nag, which was a sedate animal, inclined to corpulency like myself. My young companions and their horses were incapable of restraining themselves to my pace, so they dashed on ahead at intervals, and sometimes came back to me at full gallop. At other times they dismounted and stood on the cliffs looking at the view of the sea, which appeared to them, as it has always been to me, enchanting.

I think a view from a high cliff of the great blue sea, dotted with the white and brown sails of ships and boats, is one of the grandest as well as the most pleasant prospects under the sun.

Kenneth Stuart thought so too, for I heard him make use of that or some similar expression to Lizzie as he stood beside her talking earnestly, in spite of the light and jocular remarks of my son, who stood at Lizzie's other side commenting on things in general with that easy freedom of speech which is characteristic of middies in the British navy, although not entirely confined to them.

The party had dismounted, and Kenneth held Lizzie's horse by the bridle, while Gildart held his own. Bucephalus was roaming at large. His master had trained him so thoroughly that he was as obedient as a dog. He followed Kenneth about, and would trot up to him when he whistled. I don't think I ever saw such a magnificent horse, as to size, beauty, and spirit, coupled with docility, either before or since.

"Why, uncle, we thought you must have gone to sleep," said Lizzie, turning towards me with a laugh as I rode up.

"Or fallen over the cliffs," added Gildart.

"In either case you would not have taken it much to heart, apparently," said I; "come, mount and push on."

Lizzie placed her little foot in Kenneth's hand, and was in the saddle like a flash of thought, and with the lightness of a rose-leaf. Gildart, being a little fellow, and his horse a tall one, got into the saddle, according to his own statement, as a lands-man clambers into the main-top through the "lubber's hole" in a squall; and I think the idea was not far-fetched, for, during the process of mounting, his steed was plunging like a ship in a heavy sea. Bucephalus came up at once when whistled to.

"You seem very fond of your horse," said Lizzie, as Kenneth vaulted into the saddle.

"I *love* him," replied the youth enthusiastically.

"You love other creatures besides horses," thought I; but the thought had barely passed through my brain when Lizzie went off like an arrow. Kenneth sprang forward like a thunderbolt, and Gildart followed—if I may so speak—like a zig-zag cracker. Now, it chanced that Lizzie's horse was in a bad humour that morning, so it ran away, just as the party came to a grassy slope of half a mile in extent. At the end of this slope the road made a sharp turn, and descended abruptly to the beach. Kenneth knew that if the horse came to this turn at a furious gallop, nothing could save Lizzie from destruction. He therefore took the only course open to him, which was to go by a short cut close along the edge of the cliff, and thus overshoot and intercept the runaway. He dashed spurs into Bucephalus, and was off like an arrow from a bow. There was but one point of danger—a place where the bridle-path

was crossed by a fence, beyond which the road turned sharp to the left. The risk lay in the difficulty of making the leap and the turn almost at the same instant. To fail in this would result in horse and man going over the cliff and being dashed to pieces. On they went like the wind, while my son and I followed as fast as we could.

"Bravo, Kenneth!" shouted Gildart, as Bucephalus took the fence like a deer, and disappeared.

Gildart did not know the dangers of the leap: I did, and hastened to the spot with a feeling of intense alarm. On reaching it I saw Kenneth flying far down the slope. He was just in time; a few seconds more, and Lizzie would have been lost. But the bold youth reached the road in time, caught her bridle, reined the horse almost on his haunches, then turned him gradually aside until he galloped with him to a place of safety.

This episode induced us to ride the rest of the way in a more leisurely fashion.

Arrived at Cove, we each went on our several pieces of business, arranging to meet at the north end of the village in about an hour afterwards.

Kenneth found Stephen Gaff at home. Leaving Lizzie to make inquiry as to the health of John Furby, he took the seaman out and walked towards the Downs.

"Well, Stephen, you have been wrecked again, I am told?" said Kenneth.

"So I have, sir; it's the sixth time now. It's quite plain I ain't born to be drownded. I only hope as how I won't live to be hanged."

"I hope not, Stephen. What was the name of the ship?"

"The 'Fairy Queen.'"

"The 'Fairy Queen,'" echoed Kenneth, with a slight feeling of disappointment; "from Australia?"

"Yes, from Australia."

"Did she go to pieces?"

"Ay, not an inch of her left. She was an old rotten tub not fit for sea."

"Indeed! That's by no means an uncommon state of things," said Kenneth, with some degree of warmth. "It seems to me that until men in power take the matter up, and get a more rigid system of inspection instituted, hundreds of lives will continue to be sacrificed every year. It is an awful thing to think that more than a thousand lives are lost annually on our shores, and that because of the indifference of those who have the power, to a large extent, to prevent it. But that is not the point on which I want to speak to you to-day. Was the 'Fairy Queen' bound for this port?"

"No; for the port of London," said Gaff, with a cautious glance at his questioner.

"Then why did she make for Wreckumoft?" inquired Kenneth.

"That's best known to the cap'n, who's gone to his long home," said Gaff gravely.

"Were *all* lost except yourself?" pursued Kenneth, regarding his companion's face narrowly; but the said face exhibited no expression whatever as its owner replied simply—

"It's more than *I* can tell; mayhap some of 'em were carried away on bits o' wreck and may turn up yet."

"At all events none of them came ashore, to your knowledge?"

"I believe that every mother's son o' the crew wos lost but me," replied Gaff evasively.

"Were none of the children saved?"

"What child'n?" asked the other quickly. "I didn't say there was child'n aboord, did I?"

Kenneth was somewhat confused at having made this slip; and Gaff, suddenly changing his tactics, stopped short and said—

"I tell 'ee wot it is, young man—seems to me you're pumpin' of me for some ends of yer own as I'm not acquainted with; now, I tell 'ee wot it is, I ain't used to be pumped. No offence meant, but I ain't used to be pumped, an' if you've got anything to say, speak it out fair and above board like a man."

"Well, well, Gaff," said Kenneth, flushing and laughing at the same moment, "to say truth, I am not used to pump, as you may see, nor to be otherwise than fair and aboveboard, as I hope you will believe; but the fact is that a very curious thing has occurred at our house, and I am puzzled as well as suspicious, and *very* anxious about it."

Here Kenneth related all that he knew about the little girl having been left at Seaside Villa, and candidly admitted his suspicion that the child was his niece.

"But," said Gaff, whose visage was as devoid of expression as a fiddle figure-head, "your brother-in-law's name was Graham, you know."

"True, that's what puzzles me; the child's Christian name is Emma—the same as that of my niece and sister—but she says her last name is Wilson."

"Well, then, Wilson ain't Graham, you know, any more nor Gaff ain't Snooks, d'ye see?"

"Yes, I see; but I'm puzzled, for I *do* see a family likeness to my sister in this child, and I *cannot* get rid of the impression, although I confess that it seems unreasonable. And the thought makes me very anxious, because, if I were correct in my suspicion, that would prove that my beloved sister and her husband are drowned."

Kenneth said this with strong feeling, and the seaman looked at him more earnestly than he had yet done.

"Your father was hard on your sister and her husband, if I bean't misinformed," said Gaff.

"He thought it his duty to be so," answered Kenneth.

"And you agreed with him?" pursued Gaff.

"No, never!" cried the other indignantly. "I regretted deeply the course my father saw fit to pursue. I sympathised very strongly with my dear sister and poor Tom Graham."

"Did you?" said Gaff.

"Most truly I did."

"Hum. You spoke of suspicions—wot was your suspicions?"

"To be candid with you, then," said Kenneth, "when I came to see you I suspected that it was *you* who left that child at our house, for I heard of your sudden re-appearance in Cove, but I am convinced now that I was wrong, for I know you would not tell me a falsehood, Gaff."

"No more I would, sir," said Gaff, drawing himself up, "and no more I *did*; but let me tell to you, sir, nevertheless, that your suspicions is c'rect. *I* left Emmie Wilson at your house, and Emmie Wilson *is* Emma Graham!"

Kenneth stopped and looked earnestly at his companion.

"My sister and brother?" he asked in a low suppressed voice.

"Dead, both of 'em," said Gaff.

With a mighty effort Kenneth restrained his feelings, and, after walking in silence for some time, asked why Gaff had concealed this from his family, and how it happened that the child did not know her proper name.

"You see, sir," replied the sailor, "I've know'd all along of your father's ill-will to Mr Graham and his wife, for I went out with them to Australia, and they tuk a fancy to me, d'ye see, an' so did I to them, so we made it up that we'd jine company, pull in the same boat, so to speak, though it *was* on the land we was goin' and not the sea. There's a proverb, sir, that says, 'misfortin makes strange bed fellows,' an' I 'spose it's the same proverb as makes strange messmates; anyhow, poor Tom Graham, he an' me an' his wife, we become messmates, an' of course we spun no end o' yarns about our kith and kin, so I found out how your father had treated of 'em, which to say truth I warn't s'prised at, for I've obsarved for years past that he's hard as nails, altho' he *is* your father, sir, an' has let many a good ship go to the bottom for want o' bein' properly found—"

"You need not criticise my father, Gaff," said Kenneth, with a slight frown. "Many men's sins are not so black as they look. Prevailing custom and temptation may have had more to do with his courses of action than hardness of heart."

"I dun know *that*," said Gaff, "hows'ever, I don't mean for to krittysise him, though I'm bound to say his sins is uncommon dark grey, if they ain't black. Well, I wos a-goin' to say that Mr Graham had some rich relations in Melbourne as he didn't want for to see. He was a proud man, you know, sir, an' didn't want 'em to think he cared a stiver for 'em, so he changed his name to Wilson, an' let his beard an' mowstaches grow, so that when he put his cap on there was nothin' of him visible except his eyes and his nose stickin' out of his face, an' when his hair grew long, an' his face was tanned wi' the sun, his own mother would have cut him dead if she'd met him in the street.

"Well, we worked a year in Melbourne to raise the wind. Tom, (he made me call him Tom, sir), bein' a clever fellow, got into a store as a clerk, an' I got work as a porter at the quays; an' though his work was more gentlemanly than mine, I made very near as much as him, so we lived comfortable, and laid by a little. That winter little Emma was born. She just come to poor Tom and his wife like a great sunbeam. Arter that we went a year to the diggin's, and then I got to weary to see my old missus, so I left 'em with a promise to return. I com'd home, saw my wife, and then went out again to jine the Grahams for another spell at the diggin's; then I come home again for another spell wi' the missus, an' so I kep' goin' and comin', year by year, till now.

"Tom was a lucky digger. He resolved to quit for good and all, and return to settle in England. He turned all he had into gold-dust, and put it in a box, with which he shipped aboard the 'Fairy Queen,' of which I was one o' the crew at the time. The 'Fairy Queen,' you must understand, had changed owners just about that time, havin' bin named the 'Hawk' on the voyage out. We sailed together, and got safe to British waters, an' wos knocked all to bits on British rocks, 'cause the compasses wasn't worth a button, as no more wos our charts, bein' old ones, an' the chain o' the best bower anchor had bin got cheap, and wasn't fit to hold a jolly-boat, so that w'en we drove on a lee-shore, and let go the anchor to keep off the reefs, it parted like a bit o' packthread. I took charge of Emmie, and, by God's blessin', got safe to land. All the rest went down.

"Now, sir," continued Gaff, "it came into my head that if I took the little gal to her grandfather, he, bein' as hard as nails, an' desp'rit unforgivin', would swear I wos tellin' a lie, and refuse to take her in. So I thought I'd just go and put her down in the passage an' leave her, so that he'd be obleeged to take her in, d'ye see, not bein' able to see what else to do wi' her. You know he couldn't throw her out, and let her die in the street, could he, sir?"

"Not exactly," replied Kenneth, with a sad smile, "nevertheless he would not find it difficult to dispose of her in some other way; in fact, he has already spoken of sending her to the workhouse."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Indeed I do, but keep your mind easy, Gaff, for, without telling my father who little Emmie is, I will see to it that she is properly cared for."

Kenneth rode back to town that day with a heart so heavy that the bright eyes of Lizzie Gordon failed to rouse him to even the semblance of cheerfulness, and the effervescing small-talk of the volatile Gildart was almost intolerable.

Chapter Eight.
Dan Horsey does the Agreeable in the Kitchen

"Captain Bingley," said Kenneth, entering my study somewhat hastily on the following morning, "I am going to carry off Gildart for the day to have a ride with me, and I looked in on you in passing to tell you that Haco has arrived in his schooner, and that he is going to sail this evening for London and will take your Russians to their consul if you wish it."

"Thank you, lad; many thanks," said I, "some of them may be able to go, but others, I fear, are too much hurt, and may require to be nursed in the 'Home' for some time yet. I will consider it; meanwhile will you carry a note to your father for me?"

"With pleasure; at least I will send Dan Horsey with it, if that will do as well."

"Quite as well, if you can spare him; send him into the kitchen while I write the note. Adieu, lad, and see that you don't break Gildart's neck. Remember that he is not much accustomed to horses."

"No fear of him," said Kenneth, looking back with a laugh as he reached the door, "he is well used to riding out hard gales, and that is more arduous work than steeple-chasing." When Dan Horsey was told to go to the kitchen and await further orders, he received the command with a cheerful smile, and, attaching the bridle of his horse to a post, proceeded to obey it.

The kitchen of Bingley Hall was the abode of two females who severally owned a distinct and dissimilar character, both mental and physical. The first female—first in most senses of the word—was Bounder the cook, who was fat, as cooks ought to be in order to prove that their productions agree with them; and self-opinionated, as cooks generally are, in order, no doubt, to prove that they know their business.

The second female was Susan Barepoles, a slim, graceful housemaid, apparently modest, (cook did not even pretend to that virtue), and wonderfully sharp-eyed. Both females were good-looking and young, and both were desperately in love with Daniel Horsey. Each knew the fact, and so did Dan. Each was mortally jealous of the other, and Dan was dreadfully perplexed in consequence.

Not that he was uncertain as to which of the two he preferred, for Susan's image was "engruven," as he expressed it, deeply on his heart, to the exclusion of all other images, but he found that the jealousy of the two interfered somewhat with the course of true love, causing it to run in its proverbially rough channel.

"It's a fine mornin', my darlints," said Dan, as he entered the kitchen with a swagger, and laid his hat and riding-whip on the dresser, at the same time seating himself on the edge of a small table that stood near the window. This seat he preferred to a chair, partly because it enabled him to turn his back to the light, and partly because it afforded him an opportunity of swinging his legs gently with an easy motion that was agreeable, and, at the same time, in his opinion, graceful.

"None o' yer imperance," said cook, stirring the contents of a large pan carefully.

Susan tossed her head slightly, but admitted that the morning *was* good.

"He's a-writin' of a letter to Grumpy," said Dan, pointing with his thumb towards the ceiling, in order to indicate that the "he" referred to was myself.

"Who's Grumpy?" inquired cook, with a look of interest.

"Arrah, now, don't ye know it's old Stuart?"

Susan laughed, and cook observed that the name seemed to her an extremely disrespectful one.

"It's not bad enough for him, the old pair o' tongs," said Dan, taking up his whip with a gentlemanly assumption of ease, and flipping the toe of his boot with it; "av it wasn't for the love that my master Kenneth bears me, I'd have left 'em long ago. But, you see, the young master is a first-rater, and couldn't get on without me no how, so I'm willin' to stop. Besides," continued Dan, with a *very* small sigh, "I have private raisons for not carin' to leave just now."

He accompanied the latter remark with a sly glance at Susan, who chanced quite accidentally to cast a sly glance at Dan, so that their eyes met, and the result was that Susan blushed and began to rub the silver tea-pot, which she was cleaning, unmercifully, and Dan laughed. Whereupon cook looked round hastily and asked what he was laughing at, to which Dan responded that his own imagination, which happened to be a brilliant one, had just then suggested a train of comical ideas which had tickled his risible muscles so that he couldn't help it!

"I don't believe it," said cook, who observed Susan's confusion of face, and became internally red hot with jealousy, "I b'lieve you was larfin' at me."

"Och, Miss Bounder!" exclaimed Dan, looking at her with an expression so awfully reproachful that cook instantly repented and laughed.

"There's bin some strange doin's up at the Villa," said Susan, by way of changing the subject, while she polished the tea-pot yet more unmercifully.

"Ah," exclaimed cook, "that's true; what does it all mean, Mr Horsey?"

"That's more nor myself can tell," said Dan; "the facts o' the case is clear, so far as they come'd under our obsarvation. But as to the circumstances o' the case, 'specially those of 'em as hasn't yet transpired, I don't rightly know myself wot opinions I ought to entertain."

Susan listened to these remarks with profound admiration, chiefly because she did not understand them; but cook, who was more matter-of-fact in her nature, and somewhat demonstrative in her tendencies, advised Dan not to talk gammon, but to explain what he meant.

"Explain what I mean, coolinary sunbeam!" said Dan; "isn't it explainin' that I am as plain as the nose on yer face, (an' a purty wan it is), though I haven't got the powers of a lawyer, nor yit a praist? Didn't a drippin' wet sailor come to our door at the dead o' night an' ring the bell as bowld as brass, an' when Mrs Niven, whose intellect was niver much beyond that of a poplypus—"

"What's a poplypus?" interrupted cook.

"Well now," remonstrated Dan, "I ain't 'xactly a walkin' dictionary; but I b'lieve it's a baist o' the say what hain't got nothin' but a body an' a stummik, indeed I'm not sure but that it's all stummik together, with just legs enough to move about with, or may be a fin or two, an' a hole to let in the wittles; quite in your line, by the way, Miss Bounder."

"Imperance!" ejaculated cook.

"No offence," said Dan; "but 'to resoom the thread o' the narrative,' as the story books say, Mrs Niven she opened the door, and the drippin' wet sailor he puts a little wet spalpeen in her arms, an' goes right off without so much as by your lave, an' that's all we know about it. An' Grumpy he goes ragin' about the house sayin' he'll have nothin' to do wi' the poor little thing—who's not so little naither, bein' a ten-year-old if she's an hour, an' a purty sweet face to boot—an' that he'll send her to the workus' or pris'n, or anywhere; but in his house she's not to stop another day. Well, not havin' the management o' the whole of this world's affairs, (fort'nately, else a scrubbily managed world it would be), Grumpy finds out that when he wants to send little Emmie, (as she calls herself), off, she's knocked down by a ragin' fever, an' the doctor he says it's as much as her life is worth to move her. So Grumpy has to grin and bear it, and there's little Emmie lyin' at this minit in our best bed, (where Mrs Niven put her the moment she was took bad), a-tossin' her purty arms in the air, an' makin' her yellow hair fly over the pillows, and kickin' off the close like a young angel in a passion, and callin' on her mama in a voice that would make a stone immage weep, all the while that Miss Penelope is snivellin' on one side o' the bed, an' Mrs Niven is snortin' on the other."

"Poor dear," said Susan in a low voice, devoting herself with intensified zeal to the tea-pot, while sympathetic tears moistened her eyes.

I interrupted the conversation at this point by entering the kitchen with my note to my friend Stuart. I had to pass through the kitchen to my back garden when I wished to leave my house by the back garden gate. I had coughed and made as much noise as possible in approaching the cook's

domains, but they had been so much engrossed with each other that they did not hear me. Dan sprang hastily off the table, and suddenly assumed a deeply respectful air.

"Dan," said I, "take this note to Mr Stuart as quickly as possible, and bring me an answer without delay. I am going to see Haco Barepoles at—"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Susan with a start, and looking at me interrogatively.

"Oh, I forgot, Susan; your father has just arrived from Aberdeen, and is at this moment in the Sailors' Home. You may run down to see him, my girl, if you choose."

"Thank you, sir," said Susan, with a glow of pleasure on her good-looking face, as she pushed the tea-pot from her, and dropt the cloth, in her haste to get away to see her sire.

"Stay, Susan," said I; "you need not hurry back. In fact, you may spend the day with your father, if you choose; and tell him that I will be down to see him in a few minutes. But I shall probably be there before you. You may take Mr Stuart's answer to the Home," I added, turning to Dan; "I shall be there when you return with it."

"*Yes*, sir," said Dan in a tone so energetic as to cause me to look at him. I observed that he was winking towards the kitchen door. Casting my eyes thither I saw that Susan's face was much flushed as he disappeared into the passage. I also noted that the cook's face was fiery red, and that she stirred a large pot, over which she bent, with unnecessary violence—viciously, as it were.

Pondering on these things I crossed my garden and proceeded towards the Home, which stood on a conspicuous eminence near the docks, at the east end of the town.

Chapter Nine.
The Sailors' Home and the Mad Skipper

The Sailors' Home in Wreckumoft was a neat, substantial, unpretending edifice, which had been built by a number of charitable people, in order to provide a comfortable residence, with board at moderate terms, for the numerous seamen who frequented our port. It also served as a place of temporary refuge to the unfortunate crews of the numerous wrecks which occurred annually on our shores.

Here I found Haco Barepoles, the skipper of a coal sloop, seated on the side of his bed in one of the little berths of the Home, busily engaged in stuffing tobacco into the bowl of a great German pipe with the point of his little finger. Susan, who had outstripped me, was seated beside him with her head on his shoulder.

"Oh, father!" I heard Susan say, as I walked along the passage between the rows of sleeping berths that lined each side of the principal dormitory of our Home; "I shall lose you some day, I fear. How was it that you came so near bein' wrecked?"

Before the skipper could reply I stood in the doorway of his berth.

"Good-day, Haco," said I; "glad to see you safe back once more."

"Thankee, Cap'n Bingley—same to you, sir," said Haco, rising hastily from the bed and seizing my hand, which he shook warmly, and, I must add, painfully; for the skipper was a hearty, impulsive fellow, apt to forget his strength of body in the strength of his feelings, and given to grasp his male friends with a gripe that would, I verily believe, have drawn a roar from Hercules.

"I've come back to the old bunk, you see," he continued, while I sat down on a chest which served for a chair. "I likes the Home better an' better every time I comes to it, and I've brought all my crew with me; for you see, sir, the 'Coffin's' a'most fallin' to pieces, and will have to go into dock for a riglar overhaul."

"The Coffin?" said Susan, interrogatively.

"Yes, lass; it's only a nickname the old tub got in the north, where they call the colliers coal-coffins, 'cause it's ten to one you'll go to the bottom in 'em every time ye go to sea."

"Are they *all* so bad as to deserve the name?" inquired Susan.

"No, not 'xactly all of 'em; but there's a good lot as are not half so fit for sea as a washin' tub. You see, they ain't worth repairin', and owners sometimes just take their chance o' makin' a safe run by keepin' the pumps goin' the whole time."

I informed Haco that I had called for the purpose of telling him that I had applied to Mr Stuart, who owned his little coal sloop, to give a few wrecked Russians a passage to London, in order that they might be handed over to the care of their consul; but that I would have to find a passage for them in some other vessel, as the "Coffin" was so unseaworthy.

"Don't be in too great a hurry, sir," said Haco, with a peculiar smile and twinkle in his eye; "I'm inclined to think that Mr Stuart will send her back to London to be repaired there—"

"What!" exclaimed Susan, with a flush of indignation, "an' risk your life, father?"

"As to that, lass, my life has got to be risked anyhow, and it ain't much worth, to say the truth; so you needn't trouble yourself on that pint."

"It's worth a great deal to me," said Susan, drawing herself closer to the side of her rugged parent.

I could not help smiling as I looked at this curious specimen of a British seaman shaking his head gravely and speaking so disparagingly of himself, when I knew, and every one in the town knew, that he was one of the kindest and most useful of men. He was a very giant in size, with a breadth of shoulder that would have made him quite ridiculous had it not been counterbalanced by an altitude of

six feet four. He had a huge head of red hair, and a huge heart full of tenderness. His only fault was utter recklessness in regard to his own life and limbs—a fault which not unfrequently caused him to place the lives and limbs of others in jeopardy, though he never could be brought to perceive that fact.

"Whatever your life may be worth, my friend," said I, "it is to be hoped that Mr Stuart will not risk it by sending you to sea in the 'Coffin' till it is thoroughly overhauled."

"Come in!" shouted the skipper, in answer to a rap at the door.

The invitation to enter was not accepted, but the rap was repeated.

"Go, Susan," said I, "see who it is."

Susan obeyed—with unusual alacrity, as I fancied, but did not return with equal quickness. We heard her whispering with some one; then there was a sound as if of a suppressed scream, followed by something that was marvellously like a slap applied to a cheek with an open hand. Next moment Susan re-appeared with a letter and a very flushed face.

"A letter, sir," said Susan, dropping her eyes.

"Who brought it?" I inquired.

"Mr Horsey, sir." Susan stammered the name, and looked confused. "He waits an answer, sir."

Haco Barepoles had been eyeing his daughter gravely the while. He now sprang up with the wild energy that was his peculiar characteristic, and flinging the door wide-open with a crash that shook the whole framework of the berth, stood face to face with Dan Horsey.

Intense gravity marked the features of the groom, who stood, hat in hand, tapping the side of his top-boot with a silver-mounted riding-whip. He met Haco's steady frown with a calm and equally steady gaze of his clear grey eyes; and then, relaxing into a smile, nodded familiarly, and inquired if the weather was fine up there, bekaise, judgin' from his, (Haco's), face he would be inclined to think it must be raither cowld!

Haco smiled grimly: "Ye was to wait an answer, was ye?"

"If I may venture to make so bowld as to say so in the presence of your highness, I was."

"Then wait," said Haco, smiling a little less grimly.

"Thank ye, sir, for yer kind permission," said Dan in a tone and with an air of assumed meekness.

The skipper returned to the bed, which creaked as if taxed to its utmost, when he sat down on it, and drew Susan close to his side.

"This is from Mr Stuart, Haco," said I, running my eye hastily over the note; "he consents to my sending the men in your vessel, but after what you have told me—"

"Don't mind wot I told ye, Captain Bingley. I'll see Mr Stuart to-day, an'll call on you in the afternoon. The 'Coffin' ain't quite so bad as she looks. Have 'ee any answer to send back?"

"No," said I, turning to Dan, who still stood at the door tapping his right boot with a jaunty air; "tell your master, with my compliments, that I will see him about this matter in the evening."

"And hark'ee, lad," cried Haco, again springing up and confronting the groom, "d'ye see this young 'ooman?" (pointing to Susan.)

"Sure I do," replied Dan, with a smile and a nod to Susan, "an' a purty cratur she is, for the eye of man to rest upon."

"And," shouted Haco, shaking his enormous fist within an inch of the other's nose, "d'ye see them there knuckles?"

Dan regarded them steadfastly for a moment or two without winking or flinching.

"They're a purty bunch o' fives," he said at length, drawing back his head, and placing it a little on one side in order to view the "bunch," with the air of a connoisseur; "very purty, but raither too fat to do much damage in the ring. I should say, now, that it would get 'puffy' at the fifth round, supposin' that you had wind and pluck left, at your time of life, to survive the fourth."

"Well now, lad," retorted the skipper, "all I've to say is, that you've seed it, an' if you don't mind yer eye ye'll *feel* it. 'A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse.'"

Haco plunged the "bunch of fives" into his coat-pocket, and sat down again beside his agitated daughter.

"I can speak purfessionally," said Dan, "in regard to yer last obsarvation consarnin' blind hosses, and I belave that ye're c'rect. It *don't* much matter whether ye nod or wink to a blind hoss; though I can't spake from personal exparience 'caise I niver tried it on, not havin' nothin' to do with blind hosses. Ye wouldn't have a weed, would ye, skipper?" he added, pulling out a neat leather case from which he drew a cigar!

"Go away, Dan, directly," said I with some asperity, for I was nettled at the impudence of the man in my presence, and not a little alarmed lest the angry Haco should kick him down-stairs.

Dan at once obeyed, bowing respectfully to me, and, as I observed, winking to Susan as he turned away. He descended the stair in silence, but we heard him open the door of the public room and address the Russians, who were assembled there, warming themselves at the fire, and enjoying their pipes.

"Hooray! my hearties," said Dan; "got yer broken legs rewived I hope, and yer spurrits bandaged up? Hey,—och! I forgot ye can swaller nothin' but Toorko—cum, squaki lorum ho po, doddie jairum frango whiskie looro—whack?—eh! Arrah! ye don't need to answer for fear the effort opens up yer wounds afresh. Farewell, lads, or may be it's wishin' ye fair-wind would be more nat'ral."

So saying he slammed the door, and we heard him switching his boots as he passed along the street under the windows, whistling the air of "The girls we left behind us," followed, before he was quite out of earshot, by "Oh my love is like the red red rose, that's newly sprung in June."

Immediately after Dan's departure I left Haco and Susan together, and they held the following conversation when left alone. I am enabled to report it faithfully, reader, because Susan told it word for word to her mistress, who has a very reprehensible habit of listening to the gossip of her maid. Of course Mrs B told it to me, because she tells everything to me, sometimes a good deal more than I care to hear. This I think a very reprehensible habit also. I am bound to listen, because when my strong-minded wife begins to talk I might as well try to stop a runaway locomotive as attempt to silence her. And so it comes about that I am now making the thing public!

"Susan," said Haco, earnestly looking at his daughter's downcast face, on which the tell tale blood was mantling. "Are you fond o' that—that feller?"

"Ye–yes, father," replied Susan, with some hesitation.

"Humph! an' is he fond o' *you*?"

"Oh, isn't he, just," said Susan, with a little confused laugh.

"Susan," continued Haco, with increasing earnestness, "Are ye sure he's worthy of you?"

"Yes, father, I'm *quite* sure of that."

"Well then, Susan, you're a sensible girl, and you ought to know best; but I don't feel easy about ye, 'cause you're just as like as two peas to your dear mother, what went to the bottom in the last coal-coffin I commanded, an' you would ha' gone too, darlin', if I hadn't bin spared to swim ashore with ye on my back. It was all I could do. Ah, Susan! it was a black night for you an' me that. Well, as I was a sayin', you're as like yer mother as two peas, and she was as trustful as you are, an' little knew wot a bad lot she got when she set her heart on me."

"Father, that's not true."

"Ain't it, lass? Well, let it pass, but then this feller, this Dan Hursey—"

"Horsey, father," said Susan.

"Well, well, it ain't much better; this Horsey is an Irishman, an' I don't like Irishmen."

"Father, you'd get to like 'em if you only knew 'em better," said Susan earnestly. "What bell's that?" she added, as a loud ringing echoed through the house.

"The dinner bell, lass. Come an' see wot a comf'rable feed they git. I can tell 'ee that them Sailors' Homes is the greatest blessin' that was ever got up for us sea-dogs. We ain't 'xactly such soft good natur'd ignorant big babies as some o' your well-meanin' pheelanthropists would make us out;

but we *are* uncommon hard put to it when we git ashore, for every port is alive with crimps an' land-sharks to swaller us up when we come off a long voyage; an' the wust of it is, that we're in a wild reckless humour for the most part when we git ashore with our pockets full o' yellow boys, an' are too often quite willin' to *be* swallered up, so that lots of us are constantly a-goin' to sticks an' stivers. An' then before the Homes was set a-goin', the fellers as wanted to get quiet lodgin's didn't find it easy to know where to look for 'em, an' was often took in; an' when they wanted to send cash to their wives or mothers, they didn't well know how to manage it; but now, wherever there's a Home you can git cheap board, good victuals, help in the way o' managin' yer cash, an' no end of advice gratis. It's only a pity there ain't one or two of 'em in every port in the kingdom.

"See here," continued Haco, warming with his subject as he led Susan past the dormitories where the Russians, who had been maimed during the recent wrecks, were being supplied with dinner in their berths, "see here,—another o' the best o' the institootions o' this land looks arter them poor fellers, an' pays their shot for 'em as long as they're here, an' sends them to their homes free of expense —that's the Shipwrecked Fishermen's and Mariners' Society. You've heerd o' that Society, Susan, haven't 'ee?"

"No father, never."

"What, never heerd o' the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society with its hundreds o' honorary agents all round the coast, who have done more to dry the tears o' orphans an' comfort widders' hearts than tongue can tell?—Never heerd o' it, an' you a sailor's daughter?"

"I daresay I'm very stupid for being so ignorant, father; but I never heard of it. You know I've spent most o' my life inland with old Auntie Bess, an' only come here this year.

"Mayhap," continued Haco, shaking his head gravely, "you've never heer'd, neither, o' the Lifeboat Institootion."

"Never," said Susan meekly. "I've seen the lifeboat we have here, you know, but I never heard of the Institootion."

"Well, well, Susan, I needn't be surprised, for, to say truth, there's many in this country, who think no small beer o' theirselves, that know precious little about either the one or the other, although they're the most valooable Institootions in the country. I'll tell 'ee about 'em, lass, some other time —how they saves hundreds o' lives, an' relieves no end o' distress annooally. It's enough just now to say that the two Institootions is what I calls brother an' sister—the Lifeboat one bein' the brother; the Shipwrecked Mariners' one bein' the sister. The brother, besides savin' thousands o' pounds worth o' goods, saves hundreds o' lives every year. But when the brother has saved the shipwrecked sailor, his work is done. He hands him over to the sister, who clothes him, feeds him, warms him—as you see bein' done to them there Roosians—and then sends him home. Every sailor in the country should be a member o' the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, say I. I've been one myself for many years, an' it only costs me three shillings a year. I'll tell 'ee some other time what good it does me; but just now you an' I shall go an' have some grub."

"Where shall we go to get it, father?"

"To the refreshment room below, lass. It won't do to take ye to the dinin' hall o' the Home for three reasons,—first, 'cause ye're a 'ooman, an' they ain't admitted; second, 'cause it wouldn't be pleasant for ye to dine wi' forty or fifty Jack-tars; and, thirdly, if ye wanted it ever so much yer old father wouldn't let ye—so come along, lass, to dinner."

Chapter Ten.
The Dinner in the Restaurant—Haco meets an Old Friend and becomes Communicative

The room to which Haco led his daughter was a small oblong one, divided off into compartments similar to those with which we are familiar in eating-houses and restaurants of the poorer class. It formed part of the Home, but was used by the general public as well as by seamen, who wished to order a meal at any time and pay for it.

Haco Barepoles, being at the time a boarder in the home, was entitled to his dinner in the general mess-room, but being bent on enjoying his meal in company with Susan, he chose to forego his rights on that occasion.

Being the hour at which a number of seamen, labourers, clerks, and others were wont to experience the truth of the great fact that nature abhors a vacuum, the room was pretty full, and a brisk demand was going on for soup, tea, coffee, rolls, and steaks, etcetera, all of which were supplied on the most moderate terms, in order to accommodate the capacities of the poorest purse.

In this temple of luxury you could get a small bowl of good soup for one penny, which, with a halfpenny roll, might form a dinner to any one whose imagination was so strong as to enable him to believe he had had enough. Any one who was the fortunate possessor of threepence, could, by doubling the order, really feel his appetite appeased. Then for those whose poverty was extreme, or appetite unusually small, a little cup of tea could be supplied for one halfpenny—and a good cup of tea too, not particularly strong, it is true, but with a fair average allowance of milk and sugar.

"Waiter," cried Haco Barepoles in a voice that commanded instant attention.

"Yessir."

"Soup for two, steaks an' 'taties for ditto to foller."

"Yessir."

"Please, father, I would like a cup of coffee after the soup instead of a steak. I don't feel very hungry."

"All right, lass. Waiter, knock off one o' the steaks an' clap a cup o' coffee in its place."

"Yessir. Roll with it, Miss?"

"Of course," said Haco.

"Butter, Miss?"

"Sartinly. An' double allowance o' milk an' sugar," replied the skipper. "S'pose you han't got cream?"

"No sir."

"Never mind. Look alive now, lad. Come, Susan, here's a box with only one man in't, we'll—Hallo! shiver my timbers if it ain't—no—it can't be—Stephen Gaff, eh! or his ghost?"

"Just so," said Stephen, laying down his knife and fork, and shaking warmly the hand which Haco stretched across the table to him; "I'm always turnin' up now an' again like a bad shillin'. How goes life with 'ee, Haco? you don't seem to have multiplied the wrinkles since I last saw ye."

"Thank 'ee, I'm pretty comf'rable. This is my darter Susan," said Haco, observing that his friend glanced inquiringly at his fair companion—"The world always uses me much the same. I find it a roughish customer, but it finds me a jolly one, an' not easily put out. When did I see ye last? Let me see,—two years come Christmas. Why, I've been wrecked three times since then, run down twice, an' drownded at least half-a-dozen times; but by good luck they always manages to bring me round—rowsussitate me, as the doctors call it."

"Ay, you've had hard times of it," observed Gaff, finishing his last morsel of meat, and proceeding to scrape up the remains of gravy and potato with his knife; "I've bin wrecked myself

sin' we last met, but only once, and that warn't long ago, just the last gale. You coasters are worse off than we are. Commend me to blue water, and plenty o' sea-room."

"I believe you, my boy," responded the skipper. "There's nothin' like a good offing an' a tight ship. We stand but a poor chance as we go creepin' 'long shore in them rotten tubs, that are well named 'Coal-Coffins.' Why, if it comes on thick squally weather or a gale when yer dodgin' off an' on, the 'Coal-Coffins' go down by dozens. Mayhap at the first burst o' the gale you're hove on your beam-ends, an' away go the masts, leavin' ye to drift ashore or sink; or p'raps you're sharp enough to get in sail, and have all snug, when, just as ye're weatherin' a headland, away goes the sheet o' the jib, jib's blowed to ribbons, an' afore ye know where ye are, 'breakers on the lee bow!' is the cry. Another gust, an' the rotten foretops'l's blow'd away, carryin' the fore-topmast by the board, which, of course, takes the jib-boom along with it, if it an't gone before. Then it's 'stand by to let go the anchor.' 'Let go!' 'Ay, ay, sir.' Down it goes, an' the 'Coffin's' brought up sharp; not a moment too soon, mayhap, for ten to one but you see an' hear the breakers, roarin' like mad, thirty yards or so astern. It may be good holdin' ground, but what o' that?—the anchor's an old 'un, or too small; the fluke gives way, and ye're adrift; or the cable's too small, and can't stand the strain, so you let go both anchors, an' ye'd let go a dozen more if ye had 'em for dear life; but it's o' no use. First one an' then the other parts; the stern is crushed in a'most afore ye can think, an' in two minutes more, if not less, it's all up with ye, unless there's a lifeboat at hand."

"Ah! pity there's not more of 'em on the coast," said Gaff.

"True," rejoined Haco, "many a poor feller's saved every year by them blessed boats, as would otherwise have gone to the bottom, an' left widder and childer to weep for him, an' be a burden, more or less, on the country."

The waiter appeared at this point in the conversation with the soup, so Haco devoted himself to dinner, while Gaff ordered a plate of bread and cheese extra in order to keep him company. For some minutes they all ate in silence. Then Haco, during the interval between the courses, informed Gaff that he expected to return to the port of London in a day or two; whereupon Gaff said that he just happened to be lookin' out for a ship goin' there, as he had business to do in the great city, and offered to work his way. The skipper readily promised to ship him as an extra hand, if the owner chose to send the 'Coffin' to sea without repairs, "which," observed Haco, "is not unlikely, for he's a close-fisted customer."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.