

Stables Gordon

Wild Adventures round the Pole



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Wild Adventures round the Pole / Or, The Cruise of the «Snowbird» Crew in the «Arrandoon»

Chapter One.

The Twin Rivers – A Busy Scene – Old Friends with New Faces – The Building of the Great Ship – People’s Opinions – Ralph’s Highland Home

Wilder scenery there is in abundance in Scotland, but hardly will you find any more picturesquely beautiful than that in which the two great rivers, the Clyde and the Tweed, first begin their journey seawards. It is a classic land, there is poetry in every breath you breathe, the very air seems redolent of romance. Here Coleridge, Scott, and Burns roved. Wilson loved it well, and on yonder hills Hogg, the Bard of Ettrick – he who “taught the wandering winds to sing” – fed his flocks. It is a land, too, not only of poetic memories, but one dear to all who can appreciate daring deeds done in a good cause, and who love the name of hero.

If the reader saw the rivers we have just named, as they roll their waters majestically into the ocean, the one at Greenock, the other near the quaint old town of Berwick, he would hardly believe that at the commencement of their course they are so small and narrow that ordinary-sized men can step across them, that bare-legged little boys wade through them, and thrust their arms under their green banks, bringing therefrom many a lusty trout. But so it is.

Both rise in the same district, within not very many miles of each other, and for a considerable distance they follow the same direction and flow north.

But soon the Tweed gets very faint-hearted indeed.

“The country is getting wilder and wilder,” she says to her companion, “we’ll never be able to do it. I’m going south and east. It is easier.”

“And I,” says the bold Clyde, “am going northwards and west; it is more difficult, and therein lies the enjoyment. I will conquer every obstacle, I’ll defy everything that comes against me, and thus I’ll be a mightier river than you. I’ll water great cities, and on my broad breast I will bear proud navies to the ocean, to do battle against wind and wave. ‘Faint heart never won fair lady.’ Farewell, friend Tweed, farewell.”

And so they part.

This conversation between the two rivers is held fourteen hundred feet above the level of the sea, and five score miles and over have to be traversed before the Clyde can reach it. Yet, nothing daunted, merrily on she rolls, gaining many an accession of strength on the way from streams and burns.

“If you are going seaward,” say these burns, “so are we, so we’ll take the liberty of joining you.”

“And right welcome you are,” sings the Clyde; “in union lies strength.”

In union lies strength; yes, and in union is happiness too, it would seem, for the Clyde, broader and stronger now, glides peacefully and silently onwards; or if not quite silently, it emits but a silvery murmur of content. Past green banks and wooded braes, through daisied fields where cattle feed, through lonely moorlands heather-clad, now hidden in forest depths, now out again into the broad light of day, sweeping past villages, cottages, mansions, and castles, homes of serf and feudal lord

in times long past and gone, with many a sweep and many a curve it reaches the wildest part of its course. Here it must rush, the rapids and go tumbling and roaring over the lynnns, with a noise that may be heard for miles on a still night, with an impetuosity that shakes the earth for hundreds of yards on every side.

“I wonder how old Tweed is getting on?” thinks our brave river as soon as it has cleared the rocks and rapids and pauses for breath.

But the Clyde will soon be rewarded for its pluck and its daring, before long it will enter and sweep through the second city of the empire, the great metropolis of the west; but ere it does so, forgive it, if it lingers awhile at Bothwell, and if it seems sullen and sad as it dashes underneath the ancient bridge where, in days long gone, so fierce a fight took place that five hundred of the brave Covenanters lay dead on the field of battle. And pardon it when anon it makes a grand and splendid sweep round Bothwell Bank, as if loth to leave it. Yonder are the ruins of the ancient castle —

“Where once proud Murray held the festive board.

But where are now the festive board,
The martial throng, and midnight song?
Ah! ivy binds the mouldering walls,
And ruin reigns in Bothwell's halls.
O, deep and long have slumbered now
The cares that knit the soldier's brow,
The lovely grace, the manly power,
In gilded hall and lady's bower;
The tears that fell from beauty's eye,
The broken heart, the bitter sigh,
E'en deadly feuds have passed away,
Still thou art lovely in decay.”

But see, our river has left both beauty and romance far behind it. It has entered the city – the city of merchant princes, the city of a thousand palaces; it bears itself more steadily now, for hath not Queen Commerce deigned to welcome it, and entrusted to it the floating wealth of half a nation? The river is in no hurry to leave this fair city.

“My noble queen,” it seems to say, “I am at your service. I come from the far-off hills to obey your high behests. My ambition is fulfilled, do with me as you will.”

But soon as the bustle and din of the city are led behind, soon as the grand old hills begin to appear on the right, and glimpses of green on the southern banks, lo! the tide comes up to welcome the noble river; and so the Clyde falls silently and imperceptibly into the mighty Atlantic. Yet scarcely is the lurid and smoky atmosphere that hangs pall-like over the town exchanged for the purer, clearer air beyond, hardly have the waters from the distant mountains begun to mingle with ocean's brine, ere the noise of ten thousand hammers seems to rend the very sky.

Clang, clang, clang, clang – surely the ancient god Vulcan has reappeared, and taken up his abode by the banks of the river. Clang, clang, clang. See yonder is the *Iona*, churning the water into foam with her swift-revolving paddles. She has over a thousand passengers on board; they are bound for the Highlands, bent on pleasure. But this terrible noise and din of hammers – they will have three

long miles of it before they can even converse in comfort. Clang, clang, clang – it is no music to them. Nay, but to many it is.

It is music to the merchant prince, for yonder lordly ship, when she is launched from the slips, will sail far over the sea, and bring him back wealth from many a foreign shore. It is music to the naval officer; it tells him his ship is preparing, that ere long she will be ready for sea, that his white flag will be unfurled to the breeze, and that he will walk her decks – her proud commander.

And it is music – merry music to the ears of two individuals at least, who are destined to play a very prominent part in this story. They are standing on the quarter-deck of a half-completed ship, while clang, clang, clang, go the hammers outside and inside.

The younger of the two – he can be but little over twenty-three – with folded arms, is leaning carelessly against the bulwarks. Although there is a thoughtful look upon his handsome face, there is a smile as well, a smile of pleasure. He is taller by many inches than his companion, though by no means better “built,” as sailors call it. This companion has a bold, brown, weather-beaten face, the lower half of it buried in a beard that is slightly tinged with grey; his eyes are clear and honest, – eyes that you can tell at a glance would not flinch to meet even death itself. He stands bold, erect, firm. Both are dressed well, but there is a marked difference in the style of their attire. The garments of the elder pronounce him at once just what he is, – one who has been “down to the sea in ships.” The younger is dressed in the fashionable attire of an English gentleman. To say more were needless. A minute observer, however, might have noticed that there was a slight air of *négligé* about him, if only in the unbuttoned coat or the faultless hat pushed back off the brow.

“And so you tell me,” said the younger, “that the work still goes bravely on?”

“Ay, that it does,” said his companion; “there have been rumours of a strike for higher wages among the men of other yards, but none, I am proud to say, in this.”

“And still,” continued the former, “we pay but a fraction of wage more than other people, and then, of course, there is the extra weekly half-holiday.”

“There is something more, Ralph – forgive me if I call you Ralph, in memory of dear old times. You will always be a boy to me, and I could no more call you Mr Leigh than I could fly.”

Ralph grasped his companion by the hand; the action was but momentary, but it showed a deal of kindly feeling. “Always call me Ralph,” he said, “always, McBain, always. When we are back once more at sea I’ll call you captain, not till then. But what is the something more that makes our men so happy?”

“Why, your kindly manner, Ralph boy. You mix with them, you talk with them, and take an interest in all their doings, and you positively seem to know every one of them by name. Mind you, that extra half-holiday isn’t thrown away: they work all the harder, and they are happy. Why, listen to them now.”

He paused, and held up one hand. From bows to stern of the vessel there arose the sound of industry, incessant, continual; but high over the clang of hammers and the grating noise of saws there arose the voice of song.

“They sing, you see,” continued McBain; “but they don’t put down their tools to sing. But here comes old Ap. What cheer, Mr Ap Ewen?”

Those of my readers who knew Ap as he was two or three years ago – the little stiff figure-head of a fellow – would be surprised to see him now. (*Vide* “Cruise of the Snowbird.” Same Author and Publishers.) He is far more smartly dressed, he is more active looking, and more the man, had taken him in hand. He had caused him to study his trade of boat-builder in a far more scientific fashion, with the result that he was now, as our story opens, foreman over all the men employed on the ship in which Ralph Leigh stood.

Indeed, McBain himself, as well as Ap, were good examples of what earnest study can effect. There is hardly anything which either boy or man cannot learn if he applies his mind thereto.

“What cheer, Mr Ap Ewen?” said McBain.

“More hands wanted, sir,” said Ap, pulling out his snuff-box and taking a vigorous pinch.

“More hands, Ap?” exclaimed McBain.

“Ay, sir, ay; look you see,” replied Ap, “you told me to hurry on, you see, and on Monday we shall want to begin the saloon bulkheads.”

“Bravo! Ap, bravo! come to my office to-night at seven, and we’ll put that all straight.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Ap, touching his hat and retiring.

Ralph Leigh was owner of the splendid composite steamship that was now fast nearing her completion.

She was not being built by contract, but privately, and McBain was head controller of every department, and for every department he had hired experts to carry on the work. The vessel was designed for special service, and therefore she must be a vessel of purity, a vessel of strength. There must not be a flaw in her, not a patch – all must be solid, all must be good. McBain had hired experts to examine everything ere it was purchased, but he made use of his own eyes and ears as well. The yard in which the ship was built was rented, and every bit of timber that entered it was tested first, whether it were oak or teak, pine, mahogany, or cedar; and the iron the same, and the bolts of copper and steel, so that Captain McBain’s work was really no sinecure.

“Well, then,” said Ralph, “I’ve been over all the ship; I’m extremely pleased with the way things are going on, so if you have nothing more to say to me I’m off. By the way, do the people still flock down on Friday afternoons to look over the ship?”

“They do,” replied McBain; “and poor old Ap, I feel sorry for him. *He* gets no Friday half-holiday; he won’t let me stop, but he insists upon remaining himself to show the people round.”

“And the people enjoy it?”

“They do. They marvel at our engines, as well they may. The gear, so simple and strong, that Ap and I invented for the shipping and unshipping of the rudder, and the easy method we have for elevating the screw out of the water and reducing the vessel to a sailing ship, they think little short of miraculous. They are astonished, too, at the extraordinary strength of build of the ship. Indeed, they are highly complimentary to us in their general admiration. But,” continued McBain, laughing aloud, “it would amuse you to hear the remarks of some of these good, innocent souls. The two 12-pounder Dalgrens are universal favourites. They pat them as if they loved them. One girl last Friday said ‘they just looked for a’ the world like a couple o’ big iron soda-water bottles.’ They linger in the armoury; old Ap shows them our ‘express’ rifles, and our ‘bone-crushers,’ and the hardened and explosive bullets: then he takes them to the harpoon-room and shows them the harpoons, and the guns, and the electric apparatus, and all the other gear. They stare open-mouthed at the balloon-room and the sledge-lockers, but when they come to the door of the torpedo-chamber they simply hurry past with looks of awe. It is currently reported that we are bound for the very North Pole itself; I’m not sure we are not going to bring it back home with us. Anyhow, they say that as soon as we reach the ice, we are to fill our balloons, attaching one to each mast and funnel, and float away and away over the sea of ancient ice until we reach the Pole.”

Ralph laughed right merrily, and next minute he was over the side, with his face set townwards, trudging steadily on to the railway-station. It was only a trifle over three miles; there were cabs to be had in abundance, but what young man would ride if he had time to walk?

Ralph was going home. Not to his fair English home far away in the south, for ever since, in the early spring-time – and now it was autumn – the keel of the ship —*his* ship – had been laid, Ralph had taken up his abode in a rustic cottage by the banks of a broad-bosomed lake in the Highlands of Argyll. Wild though the country was all around, it was but four miles from the railway, and this journey he used to accomplish twice or oftener every week, on the back of a daft-looking Welsh pony that he had bought for the purpose. Once on board the train, two hours took him to the city, and thence a brisk walk to the building-yard.

He had watched, week after week, the gradual progress of his ship towards completion, with an interest and a joy that were quite boyish. He dearly loved to see the men at work, and listen to their cheerful voices as they laboured. Even the smell of the pine or cedar shavings was perfume to Ralph, and the way he used to climb about and wander over and through the ship, when she was little more than ribs, knees, and beams, was quite amusing.

But he was nevertheless always happy to get back to his Highland home, his books, his boat, and his fishing-rod. She was a widow who owned the humble cottage, but she was kind and good, and Ralph's rooms, that looked away out over the lake, were always kept in a state of perfect cleanliness. The widow had one little daughter, a sweetly pretty and intelligent child, over whose fair wee head five summers had hardly rolled. Jeannie was her name, Jeannie Morrison, and she was an especial pet of Ralph's. She and the collie dog always came gleefully down the road to meet him on his return from the distant city, and you may be perfectly sure he always brought something nice in his pocket for the pair of them.

When tired of reading, Ralph used to romp with wee Jeannie, or take her on his knee and tell her wonderful stories, which made her blue eyes grow bigger and more earnest than ever as she listened.

In fact, Jeannie and Ralph were very fond of each other, indeed, and every time he went to a romantic little island out in the lake to fish, he took Jeannie in the stern of the boat, and the time passed doubly quick.

"Oh, Mista Walph! Mista Walph!" cried Jeannie, bursting into Ralph's room one afternoon, clapping her hands with joy. "Mista McBain is coming; Capping McBain is coming."

"Yes," said Mistress Morrison, entering behind her little daughter. "I'm sure you'll be delighted, sir, and so am I, for the captain hasn't been here for a month."

Then Ralph got his hat, and, accompanied by the honest collie and his favourite Jeannie, went off down the road to meet McBain and bid him welcome to his Highland home.

Chapter Two.

The Dinner by the Lake – Rory’s Run Round Africa – The Return of the Wanderers

“When did you hear from Allan and Rory?” asked McBain that day, as they were seated at dinner in the little Highland cottage.

Mrs Morrison had done her best to put something nice before them, and not without success either – so thought Ralph, and so, too, thought his guest. At all events, both of them did ample justice to that noble lake trout. Five pounds did he weigh, if he weighed an ounce, and as red was he in flesh as if he had been fed upon beet. The juicy joint of mountain mutton that followed was fit to grace the table of a prince – it was as fragrant and sweet as the blooming heather tops that had brought it to perfection. Nor was the cranberry tart to be despised. The berries of which it was composed had not come over the Atlantic in a barrel of questionable flavour – no, they had been culled on the dewy braelands that very morning by the fair young fingers of wee Jeannie Morrison herself. The widow did not forget to tell them that, and it did not detract from their enjoyment of the tart. For drink they had fragrant heather ale – home-brewed.

“When did I hear from Allan and Rory?” said Ralph, repeating McBain’s question; “from the first, not for weeks – he is a lazy boy; from the latter, only yesterday morning.”

“And what says Rory?” asked McBain.

“Oh!” replied Ralph, “his letter is beautiful. It is twelve pages long. He is loud in his praises of the behaviour of the yacht, as a matter of course; but in no single sentence of this lengthy epistle does he refer definitely to the health or welfare of anybody whatever.”

“From which you infer – ?”

“From which I infer,” said Ralph, “that everybody is as well as Rory himself – that my dear father is well, and Allan, and his mother, and his sister Helen Edith. He is a queer boy, Rory, and he encloses me a couple of columns from a Cape of Good Hope paper, in which he has written an epitome of the whole voyage, since they first started in May last. He calls his yarn ‘Right round Africa.’ He commences at Suez, a place where even boy Rory, I should think, would fail to find much poetry and romance; but they must have enjoyed themselves at Alexandria, where Rory mounted on top of Pompey’s Pillar, rode upon donkeys, and did all kinds of queer things. Well, they spent a week at Malta, with its streets of stairs, its bells, its priests, its convents, and its blood-oranges. Rory missed trees and shade, though; he says Malta is a capital place for lizards, or any animal, human or otherwise, that cares to spend the day basking on the top of a stone. He liked Tunis and Algiers better, and he quite enjoyed Teneriffe and Madeira. Then they crossed over to Sierra Leone, and he launches forth in praise of the awful forests – ‘primeval,’ he calls them – and he says, in his own inimitable Irish way, that ‘they are dark, bedad, even in broad daylight.’ Then all down the strange savage West Coast they sailed; they even visited Ashantee, but he doesn’t say whether or not they called on his sable majesty the king. Of course they didn’t miss looking in at Saint Helena, which he designates a paradise in mid-ocean, and not a lonely sea-girt rock, as old books call it. Ascension was their next place of resort. That is a rock, if you like, he says; but the sea-birds’ eggs and the turtle are redeeming features. And so on to the Cape, and up the Mozambique, landing here and there at beautiful villages and towns, and in woods where they picked the oysters off the trees.”

(Oysters growing on trees seems a strange paradox. They do so grow, however. The mangrove-trees are washed by the tide, and to their tortuous roots oysters adhere, which may be gathered at low water.)

“They really must be enjoying themselves,” said McBain.

“That they are,” Ralph replied, pulling out Rory’s letter. “Just listen how charmingly he writes of the Indian Ocean – nobody else save our own poetic Rory could so write: – ‘My dear, honest, unsophisticated Ralph, – oh, you ought to have been with us as we rounded the Cape! That thunderstorm by night would have made even your somewhat torpid blood tingle in your veins. It was night, my Ralph; what little wind there was was dead off the iron-bound coast, but the billows were mountains high. Yes, this is no figure of speech. I have never seen such waves before, and mayhap never will again. I have never seen such lightning, and never heard such thunder. We remained all night on deck; no one had the slightest wish to go below. As I write our yacht is bounding over a blue and rippling sea; the low, wooded shore on our lee is sleeping in the warm sunlight, and everything around us breathes peace and quiet, and yet I have but to clap my hand across my eyes, and once again the whole scene rises up before me. I see the lightning quivering on the dark waves, and flashing incessantly around us, with intervals of the blackest darkness. I see the good yacht clinging by the bows to the crest of the waves, or plunging arrowlike into the watery ravines; I see the wet and slippery decks and cordage, and the awe-struck men around the bulwarks; and I see the faces of my friends as I saw them then – Allan’s knitted brow, his mother’s looks of terror, and the pale features of poor Helen Edith. There are nights, Ralph, in the life of a sailor that he is but little likely ever to forget; that was one in mine that will cling to my memory till I cease to breathe.’

“Don’t you call that graphic?” said Ralph.

“I do,” replied McBain; “give us one other extract, and then lend me the letter. I’ll take it to town with me, and you can have it again when you come up.”

“Well,” said Ralph, “he describes Delagoa Bay and the scenery all round it so pleasantly, that if I hadn’t an estate of my own in old England I would run off and take a farm there; right quaintly he talks of the curious Portuguese city of Mozambique; he is loud in the praises of the Comoro Islands, especially of Johanna, with its groves of citrons and limes, its feathery palm-trees, and its lofty mountains, tree-clad to the very summits; and he could write a lordly volume, he says, on the sultanic city of Zanzibar, where, it would seem, his adventures were not like angels’ visits – few and far between. He has even fought with the wild Somali Indians, and assisted at a pitched battle between Arabs and a British cruiser. Then he describes his adventures in the woods and in the far-off hills and jungles, tiger-slaying; here is a serpent adventure; here is a butterfly hunt. Fancy butterflies as big as a lady’s fan, and of plumage – yes, that is the very word Rory makes use of – ‘plumage’ more bright than a noontday rainbow.

“Here again is a description of the great Johanna hornet, two inches long, blue-black in colour, and so dreaded by the natives that they will not approach within twenty yards of the tree these terrible insects inhabit. Here is a beetle as big as a fish, and as strong apparently as a man, for he seizes hold of the top of the big pickle-jar into which Rory wants to introduce him, and obstinately refuses to be drowned in spirits; and here is a centipede as long as an adder, green, transparent, deadly; tarantulas as big as frogs, hairy and horrible; scorpions as big as crabs, green and dangerous as the centipedes themselves, that run from you, it is true, but threaten you as they run.

“It is pleasant,” continued Ralph, “to turn from his descriptions of the awful African creepie-creepies, and read of the enchanting beauty of some parts of the Zanzibar woods, the mighty trees mango-laden, the patches of tempting pine-apples, through which one can hardly wade, the curious breadfruit-trees, the pomolos, the citrons, the oranges, and the guavas, that look and taste, says Rory, ‘like strawberries smothered in cream.’ He dilates, too, on the beauty of the wild flowers, and the brilliancy of the birds – birds that never sing, but flit sadly and silently from bough to bough in the golden sunlight. From the very centre of this beautiful wood Rory, with masterly pen, carries you right away to a lovely coral island in the Indian Ocean.

“‘Although many, many miles in extent,’ he tells us, ‘although it is clothed in waving woods, although even the cocoa-nut palm waves high aloft its luscious fruit, it is not inhabited by man. Perhaps my boat was the first that ever rasped upon its shore of silvery sand, perhaps I was the first human

being that ever lay under the shade of its mangrove-trees or bathed in the waters of its sunny lagune. My boat is a skiff – a tiny skiff; our yacht lies at anchor off Chak-Chak, and I have come all alone to visit this fairy-like island. I left the ship while the stars were still glittering in the heavens, long before the sun leapt up and turned the waters into blood; and now I have rested, bathed, and breakfasted, and am once more on board my indolent skiff. Here in this bay, even half a mile from the shore, you can see the bottom distinct and clear, for the water is as pellucid as crystal, and there isn't a ripple on the sea. And what do I gaze upon? – A submarine garden; and I gaze upon it like one enchanted, the while my boat – impelled by the tide alone – glides slowly on and over it. Down yonder are flowers of every shape and hue, shrubs of every variety of foliage, coral bushes – pink, and white, and even black – rocks covered with medusae of the most brilliant colours an artist could imagine, and patches of white sand, strewn with living shells, each one more lovely to look upon than another. And every bush and shrub and flower is all a-quiver with a strange, indescribable motion, which greatly heightens their magical beauty; and why? Because every bush and shrub and flower is composed of a thousand living things. But the larger creatures that creep and crawl, or glide through this submarine garden are fantastic in the extreme. Monster crabs and crayfish, horny, abhorrent, and so strange in shape one cannot help thinking they were made to frighten each other; long transparent fishes, partly grayling partly eel; flat fishes that swim in all kinds of ridiculous ways; some fishes that seem all tail together, and others that are nothing but head. And among all the others a curious flat fish that swims on an even keel, and, by the very brilliancy of his colours and gorgeous array, seems to quite take the shine out of all the others. Both sides of this fish are painted alike; both sides of him are divided into five or six equal parts, and each part is of a different colour – one is a marigold yellow, another green, another brightest crimson, another steel grey, and so on. Him I dubbed the harlequin flounder. Yes, Ralph, Shakespeare was right when he said there are more things in heaven and earth than we dream of in our philosophy, and he might have added there are more things in ocean's depths, and stranger things, than any naturalist ever could imagine.'

"You see," said Ralph, folding Rory's funny letter, and handing it to McBain, "that our friends are enjoying themselves; but you won't fail to notice Rory's closing sentence, in which he says that, in the very midst of all the brightness and beauty so lavishly spread around him, he is oftentimes longing to visit once more the strange, mysterious regions around the Pole."

"And you have never written a word to him about our new ship and our purposed voyage?" inquired McBain.

"Never a word," cried Ralph, laughing. "You see, I want to keep that a secret till the very last. Oh, fancy, McBain, how wild with glee both Rory and Allan will be when they find that the splendid ship is built and ready, and that we but wait for the return of spring to carry us once more away to the far north again."

"I'd like to see Rory's face," said McBain, smiling, "when you break the news to him."

Just six weeks after this quiet little *tête-à-tête* dinner on the bank of the Highland lake, a very important-looking and fussy little tug-boat come puff-puffing up the Clyde from seaward, towing in a large and pretty yacht; her sails were clewed, and her yards squared, and everything looked trig and trim, not only about her, but on board of her. The blue ensign floated proudly from her staff; her crew were dressed in true yachting rig, and her decks were white as the driven snow.

An elderly lady with snow-white hair paced slowly up and down the quarter-deck, leaning lightly on the arm of a tall and gentlemanly man of mature age. In a lounge chair right aft, and abreast of the binnacle, a fair young girl was reclining, book in lap, but not reading; she was engaged in pleasant conversation with a youth who sat on a camp-stool not far off, while another who leant upon the taffrail gazing shorewards frequently turned towards them, to put in his oar with a word or two. He was taller than the former and apparently a year or two older. He was probably more manly in appearance and build, but certainly not better-looking. Both were tanned with the tropical sun, and both were dressed alike in a kind of sailor uniform of navy blue.

“Yes, Rory,” the girl was saying, “I must confess that I do feel glad to get back again to Scotland, much though I have enjoyed our cruise and all our strange adventures around that wild and beautiful coast. Oh! I do not wonder at your being fond of the sea. If I were a man I feel sure I would be a sailor.”

“And here we are,” replied Rory, with pleasure beaming from his bright, laughing eyes, “within three miles of Glasgow. And, you know, Ralph is here; how delighted he will be to meet us all again! I really wonder he did not come with us.”

But Ralph was very much nearer to them at that moment than they had any idea of.

“Helen Edith,” cried Allan at that moment, “and you, Rory, do come and have a look at this beautiful steam barque on the stocks.”

Both Helen and Rory were by his side in a moment.

“She is a beauty indeed,” said Rory, enthusiastically. “There are lines for you! There is shape! Fancy that craft in the water! Look at the beautiful rake that even her funnel has! But is she a man-o’-war, I wonder?”

“More like a despatch boat, I should say,” said Allan. “Look, she is pierced for guns.”

Allan was right about the guns, for just as he spoke a balloon-shaped cloud of white smoke rose slowly up from her side, and almost simultaneously the roar of a big gun came over the water and died away in a hundred echoes among the rocks and hills. Another and another followed in slow and measured succession, until they had counted fourteen.

“It is saluting they are,” said Allan; “but they surely cannot be saluting us; and yet there is no other craft of any consequence coming up the water.”

“But I feel sure,” said Helen, “it is some one bidding us welcome. And see, they dip the flag.”

The yacht’s flag was now dipped in return, but still the mystery remained unravelled.

But it does not remain so long.

For see, the yacht is now almost abreast of the new ship, and the decks of the latter are crowded with wildly cheering men. Ay, and yonder, beside the flagstaff, is Ralph himself, with McBain by his side, waving their hats in the air.

The good people on the yacht are for a minute rendered dumb with astonishment, but only for a minute; then the air is rent with their shouts as they give back cheer for cheer.

“Och! deed in troth,” cried Rory, losing all control of his English accent, “it’s myself that is bothered entoirely. Is it my head or my heels that I’m standing on? for never a morsel of me knows! Is it dreaming I am? Allan, boy, can’t you tell me? Just look at the name on the stern of the beautiful craft.”

Allan himself was dumb with astonishment to behold, in broad letters of gold the words, “The Arrandoon.”

Chapter Three.

Retrospection – Ralph’s Home in England – A Hearty if not Poetic Welcome

Many of my readers have met with the heroes of this tale before (in the “Cruise of the Snowbird,” by the same Author and Publishers), but doubtless some have not; and as it is always well to know at least a little of the *dramatis personae* of a story beforehand, the many must in the present instance give place to the few. They must either, therefore, listen politely to a little epitomised repetition, or sit quietly aside with their fingers in their ears for the space of five minutes. But, levity apart, I shall be as brief as brevity itself.

Which of our heroes shall we start with first? Allan? Yes, simply because his initial letter stands first on the alphabetic list.

Allan McGregor is a worthy Scot.

We met him for the first time several years prior to the date of this tale; met him in the company of his foster-father, met him in a wildly picturesque Highland glen, called Glentruim, at the castle of Arrandoon. It was midwinter; the young man’s southern friends, Ralph Leigh and Rory Elphinston, were coming to see him and live with him for a time, and right welcomingly were they received, all the more in that they had narrowly escaped losing their lives in the snow.

Allan was – and so remains – the chieftain of his clan, his father having died years before, sword in hand, on a bloodstained redoubt in India, leaving to his only son’s care an encumbered estate, a mother and one daughter, Edith, or Helen Edith.

The young chief was poor and proud, but he dearly loved his widowed mother, his beautiful sister, the romantic old castle, and the glen that had reared him from his boyhood; and how he wished and longed to be able to better the position of the former and the condition of the latter, none but he could tell or say. Allan was brave – his clan is proverbially so; his soul was deeply imbued with the spirit of religion, and, it must be added, just slightly tinged with superstition – a superstition born of the mountain mists and the stern, romantic scenery, where he had lived for the greater part of his lifetime.

Ralph Leigh was the son of a once wealthy baronet, and had just finished his education.

Rory Elphinston was an orphan, who owned estates in the west of Ireland, from which property, however, he seldom realised the rents. Like Ralph, Rory was fond of adventure, and ready and willing to do anything honest and worthy to earn that needful dross called gold; and when, one evening, McBain hinted at the wealth that lay ungathered in the inhospitable lands around the Pole, and of the many wild adventures to be met with in those regions, the relation fired the youthful blood of the trio. The boys clubbed together, as most boys might, and bought a small yacht. Small as she was, however, in her, under the able tuition of McBain, they were taught seamanship and discipline, and they became enamoured of the sea and longed to possess a larger ship, in which they might go in quest of adventures in far-off foreign lands.

Now Ralph’s father, poor though he was, was very fond – and perhaps even a little proud – of his son; he would, therefore, not refuse him anything in reason he could afford. He rejoiced to see him happy. The good yacht *Snowbird* was therefore bought, and in it our brave boys sailed away to the far north. The narrative of their adventures by sea and land is duly recorded in “The Cruise of the Snowbird.” You may seek for them there if you wish to read of them; if not, there is little harm done.

The *Snowbird* returned at last, if not really rich, yet with what sailors call an excellent general cargo, quite sufficient for each of them to realise a tolerably large sum of money from. Every shilling of his share Allan had expended in improving the glen, with its cottages and sheep farms, and the dear old castle itself. But, meanwhile, Ralph had fallen into a large fortune, and found himself possessed

of rich estates, and a splendid old mansion in – shire, England. He might have married now, and settled quietly down for life as a country squire, enjoying to the full all the pleasures and luxuries that health combined with wealth are capable of bringing to their possessors. Ah! but then the spirit of the rover had entered into him; he had learned to love adventure for the sake of itself, and to love a life on the ocean wave.

Loving a life on the ocean wave, he might, had he so chosen, have had a very pleasant cruise with his friends, had he gone with them in their run round Africa, alluded to in the last chapter of this tale; but, as would be gleaned from the conversation recorded therein, he did not so choose. He and McBain had their little secret, which they kept well. They were determined to turn explorers, so Ralph built a ship, built a noble ship – built it without acquainting any one what service it was intended for, and even his dear friends Ralph and Rory were to know nothing about her until they, returned from their cruise in the tropics. Ralph meant it all as a kindly and a glad surprise to them, for well did he know how their hearts would bound with joy at the very thoughts of sailing once more in quest of adventures. Nor, as the sequel will show, was he in one whit disappointed.

In character, disposition, and appearance my four principal heroes may be thus summed up – I have already told you about Allan's: —

McBain – Captain McBain – was a hardy, fear-nothing, daring man, his mind imbued with a sense of duty and with piety, both of which he had learned at the maternal knee.

Ralph was a young Englishman in every sense of the word – tall, broad, shapely, somewhat slow in action, with difficulty aroused, but a very lion when he did march out of his den intent on a purpose.

Somewhat more youthful was Rory, smaller as to person, poetic as to temperament, fond of the beautiful, an artist and a musician. And if you were to ask me, “Was he, too, brave?” I should answer, “Are not poets and Irishmen always brave? Does not Sir Walter Scott tell us that they laugh in their ranks as they go forward to battle – that they —

“Move to death with military glee?”

Sir Walter, I may also remind those who live in the land o' cakes, says in the same poem:

“But ne'er in battlefield throbbed heart more brave
Than that which beats beneath the Scottish plaid.”

So now we are back again at the place where we left off in the last chapter, with the yacht being towed slowly past good Ralph's ship on the stocks, and lusty cheers being exchanged from one vessel to the other.

Rory and Allan exchanged glances. The faces of each were at that moment a study for a physiognomist, but the uppermost feeling visible in either was one of astonishment – not blank astonishment, mind you, for there was something in the eyes of each, and in the smile that flickered round their lips, that would have told you in a moment that Ralph's nicely-kept secret was a secret no more. Rory, as usual with natives of green Erin, was the first to break the silence.

“Depend upon it,” he said, nodding his head mirthfully, “it is all some mighty fine joke of Ralph's, and he means giving us a pleasant surprise.”

“The same thought struck me,” replied Allan, “as soon as I clapped eyes on the word ‘*Arrandoon*.’”

“Oh?” chimed in Helen Edith, with her sweet, musical voice; “that is the reason your friend would not come with us on our delightful voyage.”

“That *was* the reason,” said Allan, emphatically, “because he was building a ship of his own, the sly dog.”

“But wherever do you think he means cruising to at all, at all?” added Rory, with puzzled face.

“That's what I should like to know,” said Allan.

And this thought occupied their minds all the way up to Glasgow; but once there, and the ladies seen safely to their hotels, Rory and Allan sped off without delay to visit this big, mysterious yacht;

and they had not been half an hour on board ere, as Rory expressed it, in language more forcible than elegant.

“The secret was out entirely, the cat flew out of the bag, and every drop of milk got out of the cocoa-nut.”

Poor Ralph was delighted at the return of his friends from their long cruise; and now that he had their company he had no longer any wish or desire to remain in the vicinity of the *Arrandoon*; so giving up his pretty Highland cottage, bidding a kindly adieu to the widow, kissing wee weeping Jeannie, and promising to be sure to return some day, the trio hurried them southwards, to spend most of their time at Ralph’s pleasant home, until the ship should be ready to launch.

Leigh Hall was a lordly mansion, possessing no very great pretensions to architectural splendour, but beautifully situated among its woods and parks on a high braeland that overlooked one of England’s fairest lakes. For miles you approached the house from behind by a road which, with many a devious turning, wound through a rich but rolling country. Past many a rural hamlet; past many a picturesque cottage, their gables and fronts charmingly painted and tinted by the hands of the magic artist Time; past stately farms, where sleek cattle seemed to low kindly welcome to our heroes as their carriage came rolling onwards, with here a wood and there a field, and yonder a great stretch of common where cows waded shoulder deep in ferns and furze, daintily cropping the green and tender tops of the trailing bramble; and here a broad, rushy moor, on which flocks of snowy geese wandered.

Alluding to the latter, says Rory, “Don’t these geese come out prettily against the patches of green grass, and how soft and easy it must be for the feet of them!”

“They’re preparing for Christmas,” said Ralph. Poet Rory gave him a look – one of Rory’s looks. “There’s never a bit of poetry nor romance in the soul of you,” he said.

“Except the romance and poetry of a well-spread table,” said Allan, laughing.

“And, ’deed, indeed,” replied Rory, “there is little to choose betwixt the pair of you; so what can I do but be sorry for you both?”

It was on a beautiful autumn afternoon that the three young men were now approaching the manor of Leigh. The trees that had been once of a tender green, whose leaves in the gentle breath of spring had rustled with a kind of silken *frou-frou*, were green now only when the sun shone upon them; all the rest was black by contrast. Feathery seedlings floated here and there on the breeze that blew from the north. This breeze went rushing through the woods with a sound that made Rory, at all events, think of waves breaking in mid-ocean, and even the fields of ripe and waving grain had, to his mind, a strange resemblance to the sea. The rooks that floated high in air seemed to glory in the wind, for they screamed with delight, baffled though at times they were – taken aback you might say, and hurled yards out of their course.

It was only a plain farmer’s autumn wind after all, but it made these youthful sailors think of something else than baffled, rooks and fields of ripening grain.

Now up through a dark oak copse, and they come all at once to one of the old park gates. Grey is it with very age, and so is the quaintly-gabled lodge; its stones are crumbling to pieces. And well suited for such a dwelling is the bent but kindly-faced old crone who totters out on her staff to open the ponderous gates. She nods and smiles a welcome, to which bows and smiles are returned, and the carriage rolls on. A great square old house; they come to it at last, so big and square that it did not even look tall at a distance. They drove up to what really appeared the back of this mansion, with its stairs and pillars and verandahs, the door opening from which led into the hall proper, which ran straight through the manor, and opened by other doors on to broad green terraces, with ribbon gardens and fountains, and then the braelike park, with its ancient trees, and so on, downwards to the beautiful lake, with the hills beyond.

Right respectfully and loyally was Ralph greeted by his servants and retainers. All this may be imagined better than I can describe it.

While Rory was marching through the long line of servants I believe he felt just a little awed; and if, as soon as they found themselves alone, Ralph had addressed himself to his guests in some such speech as follows, he would not have been very much astonished. If Ralph had said, "Welcome, Ronald Elphinston, and you, my lord of Arrandoon, to the ancient home of the Leighs!" Rory would have thought it quite in keeping with the poetry of the place.

Ralph did nothing of the kind, however; he pitched his hat and gloves rather unceremoniously on a chair, and said, all in one breath and one tone of voice, "Now, boys, here we are at last; I'm sure you'll make yourselves at home. We'll have fine times for a few weeks, anyhow. Would you like to wash your hands?"

Well, if it was not a very poetic welcome, it was a very hearty one nevertheless.

Chapter Four.

Life at Leigh Hall – The Launch of the “Arrandoon” – Trial Trips – A Row and a Fight – “Freezing Powders.”

As the owner of a large house, the head of a county family, and a landed proprietor, there were many duties devolved upon Ralph Leigh when at home, from which he never for a moment thought of shrinking. Though a great part of the day was spent in shooting, rowing, or fishing, the mornings were never his own, nor the evenings either. He had a knack of giving nice dinners, and young though he was, he also possessed the happy knack of making all his guests feel perfectly at home, so that when carriages drew round, and it was time to start for their various homes, everybody was astonished at the speed with which the evening had sped away; and that was proof positive it had passed most pleasantly.

They kept early hours at Leigh Hall, and so they did at every house all over the quiet, romantic country, and no doubt they were all the better for it, and all the more healthy.

But our heroes must be forgiven, if, after the last guest had gone, after the lights were out in the banqueting hall, and the doors closed for the night, they assembled in a cosy, fire-brightened room upstairs, all by their three selves, for a quiet confab and talk, a little exchange of ideas, a little conversation about the days o’ auld lang syne, and their hopes of adventures in the far north, whither they were so soon to sail.

About once a fortnight, McBain, whom we may as well call Captain McBain now – Captain McBain, of the steam yacht *Arrandoon*– used to run down to Leigh Hall to report progress; the “social hour,” as Rory called it, was then doubly dear to them all, and I’m not at all sure that they did not upon these occasions steal half an hour at least from midnight. You see they were very happy; they were happy with the happiness of anticipation. They never dreamt of failure in the expedition on which they were about to embark.

“In the lexicon of youth, which fate reserves
For a great manhood, there is no such word as – fail.”

True, but had they known the dangers they were to encounter, the trials they would have to come through, brave as they undoubtedly were, their hearts might have throbbed less joyfully. They had, however, the most perfect confidence in each other, just as brothers might have. The friendship, begun long ago between them, cemented, during the cruise of the *Snowbird*, in many an hour of difficulty and danger – for had they not come through fire and death together? – was strengthened during their residence at Leigh Hall. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that their affection for each other was brotherly to a degree. Dissimilar in character in many ways they were, but this same dissimilarity seemed but to increase their mutual regard and esteem. Faults each one of them had – who on this earth has not? – and each could see those of the other, if he did not always notice his own. Says Burns —

“O would some power the giftie gie us,
To see ourselves as others see us,
It would from mony a fautie free us.”

Probably, individually they did not forget these lines, and so the one was most careful in guarding against anything that might hurt the feelings of the others. Is not this true friendship?

But as to what is called “chaff,” they had all learned long ago to be proof against that – I’m not sure they did not even like it; Rory did, I know; he said so one day; and on Allan asking him his reason,

“My reason is it?” says Rory; “sure enough, boys, chaffing metres with laughing; where you find the chaff you find the laugh, and laughing is better to a man than cod-liver oil. And that’s my reason!”

And Rory’s romantic sayings and doings were oftentimes the subject of a considerable deal of chaff and fun; so, too, was what the young Irishman was pleased to call Ralph’s English “stolidity” and Allan’s Scottish fire and intensity of patriotism; but never did the blood of one of our boys get hot, never did their lips tighten in anger or their cheeks pale with vexation.

Just on one occasion – which I now record lest I forget it – was boy Rory, as he was still affectionately called, very nearly losing his temper under a rattling fire of chaff from Allan and Ralph, who were in extra good spirits. It happened months after they had sailed in the *Arrandoon*. All at once that day Rory grew suddenly quiet, and the smile that still remained on his face was only round the lips, and didn’t ripple round the eyes. It was a sad kind of a smile; then he jumped up and ran away from the table.

“We’ve offended him,” said Allan, looking quite serious.

“I hope not,” said Ralph, growing serious in turn.

“I’ll go and look him up;” this from Allan.

“No, that you won’t!” put in McBain.

“Leave boy Rory alone; he’ll come to presently.”

Meanwhile, ridiculous as it may seem, Rory had sped away forward to the dispensary, where he found the doctor. “Doctor, dear,” cried Rory, “give me a blue pill at once – a couple of them, if you like, for sure it isn’t well I am!”

“Oh!” said the surgeon, “liver a bit out of order, eh?”

“Liver!” cried Rory; “I know by the nasty temper that’s on me that there isn’t a bit of liver left in me worth mentioning! There now, give me the pills.”

The doctor laughed, but Rory had his bolus; then he came aft again, smiling, confessing to his comrades what a ninny he had very nearly been making of himself. Just like Rory!

The bearing of our young heroes towards Captain McBain was invariably respectful and affectionate; they both loved and admired him, and, indeed, he was worthy of all their esteem. In wealth there is power, but in wisdom worth, and Ralph, Rory, and Allan felt this truth if they never expressed it. McBain had really raised himself to the position he now held; he was a living proof that —

“Whate’er a man dares he can do.”

I will not deny, however that McBain possessed a little genius to begin with; but here is old Ap, once but a poor boat-builder, with never a spark of genius in him, superintending the construction of a noble ship. In him we have an example of industry and perseverance pure and simple.

The *Arrandoon* made speedy progress on the stocks, and the anxious day was near at hand when she would leave her native timbers, and slide gracefully and auspiciously it was to be hoped, into the smooth waters of the Clyde.

That day came at last, and with it came thousands to view the launch. With it came Mrs McGregor and Allan’s sister; and the latter was to break the tiny phial of wine and name the ship!

On the platform beneath, and closely adjoining the bows of the *Arrandoon*, were numerous gentlemen and ladies; conspicuous among the former was Rory. He was full of earnest and pleasant excitement. Conspicuous among the latter was Helen Edith. She certainly never looked more lovely than she did now. The ceremony she was about to engage in, in which, indeed, she was chief actress, was just a trifle too much for her delicate nerves, and as she stood, bouquet in hand, with a slight flush on her cheek and a sparkle in her eye, with head slightly bent, she looked like a bride at the altar. Rory stood near her; perhaps his vicinity comforted her, as did his remarks, to which, however, he met with but little response.

I am beginning to think that Rory loved this sweet child; if he did it was a love that was purely Platonic, and it needed be none the less sincere for all that. As for Helen Edith – but hark! A gun rings out from the deck of the *Arrandoon* causing every window in the vicinity to rattle again, and the steeples to nod. The gallant ship moves off down the slip slowly – slowly – slowly, yes, slowly but steadily, swerving neither to starboard nor larboard, quicker now faster still. Will she float? Our heroes' hearts stand still. McBain is pale and breathes not. She slows, she almost stops, now she is over the hitch and on again, on – on – and on – and into the water. Hurrah! You should have heard that cheer, and Rory shakes hands with Helen Edith, and compliments her, and positively there are tears in the foolish boy's eyes. There was a deal of hand-shaking, I can assure you, after the launch, and a deal of joy expressed, and if the truth be told, more than one prayer breathed for the future safety of the *Arrandoon* and her gallant crew. There was lunch after launch in the saloon of the new yacht, at which Allan's mother presided with the same quiet dignity she was wont to maintain at the castle that gave the ship its name.

McBain made a speech, and a good one, too, after Ralph had spoken a few words. Poor Ralph! speaking was certainly not his strong point. But there was no hesitancy about McBain, and no nervousness either, and during its delivery he stood bolt upright in his place, as straight as an arrow, and his words were manly and straightforward. Allan felt proud of his foster-father. But Rory came next. For once in his life he hadn't the slightest intention of making anybody laugh. But because he tried not to, he did; and when Irish bull after Irish bull came rattling out, "Och!" thinks Rory to himself, "seriousness isn't my forte after all;" then he simply gave himself rein, and expressed himself so comically that there was not a dry eye in the room, for tears come with laughing as well as weeping.

There was a deal to be done to the *Arrandoon* – in her, on her, and around her – after she was launched, before she was ready; but it would serve no good purpose and only waste time to describe her completion, for we long to be "steam up" and away to sea *en route* for the starry north.

She was a gallant sight, the *Arrandoon*, as she stood away out to sea, past the rocky shores of Bute, bound south on her trial trip by the measured mile. Fifteen hundred tons burden was she, with tall and tapering masts: lower, main, topgallant, and royal; not one higher; no star-gazers, skyscrapers, or moon-rakers; she wouldn't have to rake much for the wind in the stormy seas they were going to. Then there was the funnel, such a funnel as a man with an eye in his head likes to see, not a mere pipe of a thing, but a great wide armful of a funnel, with the tiniest bit of rake on it; so too had the masts, though the *Arrandoon* did not look half so saucy as the *Snowbird*. The *Arrandoon* had more solidity about her, and more soberness and staidness, as became her – a ship about to be pitted against dangers unknown.

Her figure-head was the bust of a fair and beautiful girl.

That day, on her trial trip, the ladies were on board; and Rory made this remark to Helen Edith: "The fair image on our bows, Helen, will soon be gazing wistfully north."

"Ah! you seem to long for that," said Helen, "but," she added archly, "mamma and I look forward to the time when she will be gazing just as wistfully south again."

Rory laughed, and the conversation assumed a livelier tone.

Steamers, I always think, are very similar in one way to colts, they require a certain amount of breaking in, they seldom do well on their trial trip. The *Arrandoon* was no exception; she promised well at first, and fulfilled that promise for twenty good miles and two; then she intimated to the engineers in charge that she had had enough of it. Well, this was a good opportunity of trying her sailing qualities, and in these she exceeded all expectations.

McBain rubbed his hands with delight, for no yacht at Cowes ever sailed more close to the wind, came round on shorter length, or made more knots an hour. He promised himself a treat, and that treat was to run out some day with her in half a gale of wind, when there were no ladies on board. He would then see what the *Arrandoon* could do under sail, and what she couldn't. He did this; and

the very next day after he came back he made the journey to Leigh Hall, and stopped there for a whole week. That was proof enough that the captain was pleased with his ship.

Early in the month of the succeeding February, the *Arrandoon* lay at the Broomielaw, with the blue-peter unfurled, steam up, all hands on board, and even the pilot. That very morning they were to begin their adventurous voyage. Ralph, Allan, and Rory would be picked up at Oban, and the vessel now only awaited the arrival of McBain before casting off and dropping down stream.

The Broomielaw didn't look pretty that morning, nor very comfortable. Although the hills all around Glasgow were white with snow, over the city itself hung the smoke like a murky pall. There was mud under feet, and a Scotch mist held possession of the air. Here was nothing cheering to look at, slop-shops and pawn-shops, and Jack-frequented dram-shops, bales of wet merchandise on the quay, and eave-dripping dock-houses; nor were the people pleasant to be among; the only human beings that did seem to enjoy themselves were the ragged urchins who had taken shelter in the empty barrels that lined the back of the warehouses; they had shelter, and sugar to eat. McBain thought he wouldn't be sorry when he was safely round the Mull of Cantyre.

"Come on, Jack," cried one of these tiny gutter-snipes, rushing out of his tub; "come on, here's a row."

There was a row; apparently a fight was going on, for a ring had formed a little way down the street; and simply out of curiosity McBain went to have a peep over the shoulders of the mob. As usual, the policemen were very busy in some other part of the street.

Only a poor little itinerant nigger boy lying on the ground, being savagely kicked by a burly and half-drunken street porter.

"Oh!" the little fellow was shrieking; "what for you kickee my shins so? Oh!"

McBain entered the ring in a very businesslike fashion indeed; he begged for room; he told the mob he meant thrashing the ruffian if he did not apologise to the poor lad. Then he intimated as much to the ruffian himself.

"Come on," was the defiant reply, as the fellow threw himself into a fighting attitude. "Man, your mither'll no ken ye when you gang home the nicht."

"We'll see," said McBain, quietly.

For the next three minutes this ruffianly porter's movements were confined to a series of beautiful falls, that would have brought down the house in a circus. When he rose the last time it was merely to assume a sitting position, "Gie us your hand," he said to McBain. "You're the first chiel that ever dang Jock the Wraggler. I admire ye, man – I admire ye."

"Come with me, my little fellow," said McBain to the nigger boy; and he took him kindly by the hand. Meanwhile a woman who had been standing by placed a curious-looking bundle in the lad's hand, and bade him be a good boy, and keep out of Jock the Wraggler's way next time.

"I'll see you a little way home, Jim," continued McBain, when they were clear of the crowd. "Jim is what they call you, isn't it?"

"Jim," said the blackamoor, "is what dey are good enough to call me. But, sah, Jim has no home."

"And where do you sleep at night, Jim?"

"Anywhere, sah. Jim ain't pertikler; some time it is a sugar barrel, an oder time a door-step."

A low, sneering laugh was at this moment heard from the mysterious bundle Jim carried. McBain started.

"Don't be afeared, sah," said Jim; "it's only de cockatoo, sah!"

"Have you any money, Jim?" asked McBain.

"Only de cockatoo, sah," replied Jim; "but la!" he added, "I'se a puffuk gemlam (gentleman), sah – I'se got a heart as high as de steeple, sah!"

"Well, Jim," said McBain, laughing, "would you like to sail in a big ship with me, and – and – black my boots?"

“Golly! yes, sah; dat would suit Jim all to nuffin.”

“But suppose, Jim, we went far away – as far as the North Pole?”

“Don’t care, sah,” said Jim, emphatically; “der never was a pole yet as Jim couldn’t climb.”

“Have you a surname, Jim?”

“No, sah,” replied poor Jim; “I’se got no belongings but de cockatoo.”

“I mean, Jim, have you a second name?”

“La! no, sir,” said Jim; “one name plenty good enough for a nigga boy. Only – yes now I ’members, in de ship dat bring me from Sierra Leone last summer de cap’n never call me nuffin else but Freezin’ Powders.”

McBain did not take long to make up his mind about anything; he determined to take this strange boy with him, so he took him to a shop and bought him a cage for the cockatoo, and then the two marched on board together, talking away as if they had known each other for years.

Freezing Powders was sent below to be washed and dressed and made decent. The ship was passing Inellan when he came on deck again. Jim was thunderstruck; he had never seen snow before.

“La! sah,” he cried, pointing with outstretched arm towards the hills; “look, sah, look; dey never like dat before. De Great Massa has been and painted dem all white.”

Chapter Five.

Danger on the Deep – A Forest of Waterspouts – The “Arrandoon” is Swamped – The Warning

“La la lay lee-ah, lay la le lo-O” So went the song on deck – a song without words, short, and interrupted at every bar, as the men hauled cheerily on tack and sheet.

Such a thing would not be allowed for a single moment on board a British man-o’-war, as the watch singing while they obeyed the orders of the bo’sun’s pipe, taking in sail, squaring yards, or doing any other duty required of them. And yet, with all due respect for my own flag, methinks there are times when, as practised in merchant or passenger ships, that strange, weird, wordless song is not at all an unpleasant sound to listen to. By night, for instance, after you have turned in to your little narrow bed – the cradle of the deep, in which you are nightly rocked – to hear it rising and falling, and ending in long-drawn cadence, gives one an indescribable feeling of peace and security. Your bark is all alone – so your thoughts may run – on a wild world of waters. There may not be another ship within hundreds of miles; the wind may be rising or the wind may be falling – what do you care? What need you care? There are watchful eyes on deck, there are good men and true overhead, and they seem to sing your cradle hymn, “La la lee ah,” and before it is done you are wrapt in that sweetest, that dreamless slumber that landsmen seldom know.

There was one man at least in every watch on board the *Arrandoon*, who usually led the song that accompanied the hauling on a rope, with a sweet, clear tenor voice; you could not have been angry with these men had you been twenty times a man-o’-war’s man.

It was about an hour after breakfast, and our boys were lazing below. For some time previous to the working song, there had been perfect silence on board – a silence broken only now and then by a short word of command, a footstep on deck, or the ominous flapping of the canvas aloft, as it shivered for a moment, then filled and swelled out again.

Had you been down below, one sign alone would have told you that something was going to happen – that some change was about to take place. It was this: when everything is going on all right, you hear the almost constant tramp, tramp of the officer of the watch up and down the quarter-deck, but this was absent now, and you would have known without seeing him that he was standing, probably, by the binnacle, his eyes now bent aloft, and now sweeping the horizon, and now and then glancing at the compass.

Then came a word or two of command, given in a quiet, ordinary tone of voice – there was no occasion to howl on this particular morning. And after this a rush of feet, and next the song, and the bo’sun’s pipe. Thus: —

Song. – “La la lee ah, lay la le lo-O.”

Spoken. – “Hoy!”

Boatswain’s Pipe. – “Whee-e, weet weet weet, wee-e.”

Song. – “La la lee ah, lay la le lo-O.”

Spoken. – “Belay!”

Boatswain’s Pipe. – “Wee wee weet weet weet weet, wee-e.”

Spoken. – “Now lads.”

Song. – “Lo ah o ee.”

Pipe. – “Weet weet!”

Then a hurry-scurrying away forward, a trampling of feet enough to awaken Rip van Winkle, then the bo’sun’s pipe *encore*.

Allan straightens his back in his easy-chair – he has been bending over the table, reading the “Noctes Ambrosianae” – straightens his back, stretches his arms, and says “Heigho!” Rory is busy

arranging some beautiful transparent specimens of animalculae, not bigger than midges, on a piece of black cardboard; he had caught them overnight in a gauze net dragged astern. He doesn't look up. Ralph is lying "tandem" on a sofa, reading "Ivanhoe." He won't take his eyes off the book, nor move as much as one drowsy eyelid, but he manages to say, —

"What are they about on deck, Rory?"

"Don't know even a tiny bit," says Rory.

"Rory," continues Ralph, in a slightly louder key; "you're a young man; run up and see."

"Rory won't then," says Rory, intent on his work; "fag for yourself, my lazy boy."

"Oh!" says Ralph, "won't you have your ears pulled when I do get up!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Rory, "you'll have forgotten all about it long before then."

"Freezing Powders!" roared Ralph.

The bright-faced though bullet-headed nigger boy introduced in last chapter appeared instantly. He was dressed in white flannel, braided with blue. Had he been a sprite, or a djin, he couldn't have popped up with more startling rapidity. Truth is, the young rascal had been asleep under the table.

"Off on deck with you, Freezing Powders, and see what's up."

Freezing Powders was down again in a moment.

"Take in all sail, sah! and square de yard; no wind, sah! nebber a puff."

It was just as Freezing Powders said, but there was noise enough presently, and puffing too, for steam was got up, and the great screw was churning the waters of the dark northern ocean into creamish foam, as the vessel went steadily ahead at about ten knots an hour. There was no occasion to hurry. When Rory and Allan went on deck, they found the captain in consultation with the mates, Mitchell and Stevenson.

"I must admit," McBain was remarking, "that I can't make it out at all."

"No more can we," said Stevenson with a puzzled smile. "The wind has failed us all at once, and the sea gone down, and the glass seems to have taken leave of its senses entirely. It is up one moment high enough for anything, and down the next to 28 degrees. There, just look at that sea and look at that sky."

There was certainly something most appalling in the appearance of both. The ocean was calm and unruffled as glass, with only a long low heave on it; not a ripple on it big enough to swamp a fly; but over it all a strange, glassy lustre that — so you would have thought — could have been skimmed off. The sky was one mass of dark purple-black clouds in masses. It seemed no distance overhead, and the horizon looked hardly a mile away on either side. Only in the north it was one unbroken bluish black, as dark seemingly as night, from the midst of which every now and then, and every here and there, would come quickly a little puff of cloud of a lightish grey colour, as if a gun had been fired. Only there was no sound.

There was something awe-inspiring in the strange, ominous look of sea and sky, and in the silence broken only by the grind and gride of screw and engine.

"No," said McBain, "I don't know what we are going to have. Perhaps a tornado. Anyhow, Mr Stevenson, let us be ready. Get down topgallant masts, it will be a bit of exercise for the men; let us have all the steam we can command, and —"

"Batten down, sir?"

"Yes, Mr Stevenson, batten down, and lash the boats inboard."

The good ship *Arrandoon* was at the time of which I write about fifty miles south of the Faroes, and a long way to the east. The weather had been dark and somewhat gloomy, from the very time they lost sight of the snow-clad hills around Oban, but it now seemed to culminate in a darkness that could be felt.

The men were well drilled on board this steam yacht. McBain delighted to have them smart, and it was with surprising celerity that the topgallant masts were lowered, the hatches battened down, and the good ship prepared for any emergency. None too soon; the darkness grew more intense,

especially did the clouds look threatening ahead of them. And now here and there all round them the sea began to get ruffled with small whirlwinds, that sent the water wheeling round and round like miniature maelstroms, and raised it up into cones in the centre.

“How is the glass now, Mr Stevenson?” asked McBain.

“Stands very low, sir,” was the reply, “but keeps steadily down.”

“All right,” said McBain; “now get two guns loaded with ball cartridge; have no more hands on deck than we want. No idlers, d’ye hear?”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“Send Magnus Bolt here.”

“Now, Magnus, old man,” continued McBain, “d’ye mind the time, some years ago in the *Snowbird*, when you rid us of that troublesome pirate?”

“Ay, that I do right well, sir,” said this little old weasened specimen of humanity, rubbing his hands with delight. “It were a fine shot that. He! he! he! Mercy on us, to see his masts and sails come toppling down, sir, – he! he! he!”

“Well, I want you again, Magnus; I’d rather trust to your old eye in an emergency than to any in the ship.”

“But where is the foe, sir?”

“Look ahead, Magnus.”

Magnus did as he was told; it was a strange, and to one who understood it, a dreadful sight. Apparently a thousand balloons were afloat in the blue, murky air, each one trailing its car in the sea, balloons of terrible size, flat as to their tops, which seemed to join or merge into one another, forming a black and ominous cloud. The cars that trailed on the sea were snowy white.

“Heaven help us?” said Magnus, clasping his hands for just a moment, while his cheeks assumed an ashen hue. “Heaven help us, sir; this is worse than the pirate.”

“They are all coming this way,” said McBain; “fire only at those that threaten us, and fire while they are still some distance ahead.”

Meanwhile Ralph had come on deck, and joined his companions. I do not think that through all the long terrible hour that followed, either of them spoke one word; although there was no sea on, and for the most part no motion, they clutched with one hand rigging or shroud, and gazed terror-struck at the awful scene ahead and around them.

They were soon in the very centre of what appeared an interminable forest of waterspouts. Few indeed have ever seen such a sight or encountered so pressing a danger and lived to tell it.

The balloon-shaped heads of these waterspouts looked dark as midnight; their shafts, I can call them nothing else, were immense pillars rising out of gigantic feet of seething foam. So close did they pass to some of these that the yardarms seemed almost to touch them. Our heroes noticed then, and they marvelled at it afterwards, the strange monotonous roaring sound they emitted, – a sound that drowned even the noise of the troubled waters around their shafts.

(Such a phenomenon as this has rarely been witnessed in the Northern Ocean. It is somewhat strange that on the self-same year this happened, an earthquake was felt in Ireland, and shocks even near Perth, in Scotland.)

Old Magnus made good use of his guns on those that threatened the good ship with destruction; one shot broke always one, and sometimes more, probably with the vibration; but the thundering sound of the falling waters, and the turmoil of the sea that followed, what pen can describe?

But, good shot as he is, Magnus is not infallible, else McBain would not now have to grasp his speaking-trumpet and shout, —

“Stand by, men, stand by.”

A waterspout had wholly, or partially at least, broken on board of them. It was as though the splendid ship had suddenly been blown to atoms by a terrible explosion, and every timber of her engulfed in the ocean!

For long moments thus, then her crew, half drowned, half dead, could once more look around. The *Arrandoon* was afloat, but her decks were swept. Hundreds of tons of water still filled her decks, and poured out into the sea in cataracts through her broken bulwarks; ay, and it poured below too, at the fore and main hatchways, which had been smashed open with the violence and force of the deluge. The main-yard had come down, and one whaler was smashed into matchwood. I wish I could say this was all, but two poor fellows lost for ever the number of their mess. One was seen floating about dead and unwounded on the deck ere the water got clear; the other, with sadly splintered brow, was still clutching in a death-grasp a rope that had bound a tarpaulin over a grating.

But away ahead appeared a long yellowish streak of clear sky, close to the horizon. The danger had passed.

All hands were now called to clear away the wreck and make good repairs. The pumps, too, had to be set to work, and as soon as the wind came down on them from the clear of the horizon, sail was set, for the fires had been drowned out.

The wind increased to a gale, and there was nothing for it but to lay to. And so they did all that night and all next day; then the weather moderated, and the wind coming more easterly they were able to show more canvas, and to resume their course with something akin to comfort.

The bodies of the two poor fellows who had met with so sad a fate were committed to the deep – the sailor's grave.

“Earth to earth and dust to dust.”

There was more than one moist eye while those words were uttered, for the men had both been great favourites with their messmates.

Rory was sitting that evening with his elbows resting on the saloon table, his chin on his hands, and a book in front of him that he was not looking at, when McBain came below.

“You're quieter than usual,” said McBain, placing a kindly hand on his shoulder.

Rory smiled, forced a laugh even, as one does who wants to shake off an incubus.

“I was thinking,” he said, “of that awful black forest of waterspouts. I'll never get it out of my head.”

“Oh! yes you will, boy Rory,” said McBain; “it was a new sensation, that's all.”

“New sensation!” said Allan, laughing in earnest; “well, captain, I must say that is a mild way of putting it. I don't want any more such sensations. Steward, bring some nice hot coffee.”

“Ay!” cried Ralph, “that's the style, Allan. Some coffee, steward – and, steward, bring the cold pork and fowls, and make some toast, and bring the butter and the Chili vinegar.”

Poor Irish Rory! Like every one with a poetic temperament, he was easily cast down, and just as easily raised again. Ralph's wondrous appetite always amused him.

“Oh, you true Saxon!” said Rory – “you hungry Englishman!” But, ten minutes afterwards, he felt himself constrained to join the party at the supper table.

You see, reader mine, a sailor's life is like an April day – sunshine now and showers anon.

“How now, Stevenson?” said McBain, as the mate entered with a kind of a puzzled look on his face.

“Well, sir, we are, as you said, off the Faroes. The night is precious dark, but I can see the lights of a village in here, and the lights of a vessel of some size, evidently lying at anchor.”

“Then, mate,” said the captain, “as we don't know exactly where we are, I don't think we can do wrong to steam in and drop anchor alongside this craft. We can then board her and find out. How is the weather?”

“A bit thick, sir, and seems inclined to blow a little from the east-south-east.”

“Let it, Stevenson – let it. If the other vessel can ride it out I don't think the *Arrandoon* is likely to lose her anchors. Hullo! Mitchell,” he continued, as the second mate next entered hat in hand, “what's in the wind now, man?”

“Why, sir,” said Mitchell, “I’m all ashore like, you see; I can’t make it out. But here is a boat just been a-hailing of us, and the passenger – there is only one, a comely lass enough – has just come on board, and wants to see you at once. Seems a bit cranky. Here she be, sir;” and Mitchell retired.

A young girl. She was probably not over seventeen, fair-faced, and with wild blue eyes, and yellow hair, dripping with dew, floating over her shoulders.

“Stop the ship!” she cried, seizing McBain by the arm. “Go no farther, or her ribs will be scattered over the waves, and your bones will bleach on the cliffs of the rocks.”

“Poor thing!” muttered McBain. “Oh, you heed me not!” continued the girl, wringing her hands in despair. “It will be too late – it will be too late! I tell you here is no harbour, here is no ship. The lights you see are placed there to lure your vessel on shore. They are wreckers, I tell you; they will – ”

“By the deep three!” sung the man in the chains.

Then there was a shout from the man at the foretop.

“Breakers ahead!”

Then, “Stand by both anchors. Ready about.”

Chapter Six.

A Life on the Ocean Wave – On the Rocks – Mystery – A Home on the Rolling Deep

Has the reader ever been to sea? The first feeling that a landsman objects to at sea is that of the heaving motion of the ship; to your true sailor the cessation of that motion, or its absence under circumstances, is disagreeable in the extreme. To me there is always a certain air of romance about the old ocean, and about a ship at sea; but what can be less romantic than lying in a harbour or dull wet dock, with no more life nor motion in your craft than there is in the slopshop round the corner? To lie thus and probably have to listen to the grating voices and pointless jokes of semi-inebriated stevedores, as they load or unload, soiling, as they do, your beautiful decks with their dreadful boots, is very far from pleasant. In a case like this how one wishes to be away out on the blue water once more, and to feel life in the good ship once again – to feel, as it were, her very heart throb beneath one's feet!

But disagreeable as the sensation is of lying lifeless in harbour or dock, still more so is it to feel your vessel, that one moment before was sailing peacefully over the sea, suddenly rasp on a rock beneath you, then stop dead. Nothing in the world will wake a sailor sooner, even should he be in the deepest of slumber, than this sudden cessation of motion. I remember on one particular occasion being awakened thus. No crew ever went to sleep with a greater feeling of security than we had done, for the night was fine and the ship went well. But all at once, about four bells in the middle watch, —

Kurr-r-r-r! that was the noise we heard proceeding from our keel, then all was steady, all was still. And every man sprang from his hammock, every officer from his cot.

We were in the middle of the Indian Ocean, or rather the Mozambique Channel, with no land in sight, and we were hard and fast on the dreaded Lyra reef. A beautiful night it was, just enough wind to make a ripple on the water for the broad moon's beams to dance in, a cloudless sky, and countless stars. We took all this in at the first glance. Safe enough we were – for the time; *but* if the wind rose there was the certainty of our being broken up, even as the war-ship *Lyra* was, that gave its name to the reef.

At the first shout from the man on the outlook in the *Arrandoon*, McBain rushed on deck. "Stand by both anchors. Ready about." But these orders are, alas! too late. Kurr-r-r-r! The stately *Arrandoon* is hard and fast on the rocky bottom.

The ship was under easy sail, for although there was hardly any wind, what little there was gave evident signs of shifting. It might come on to blow, and blow pretty hard, too, from the south-east or east-south-east, and Mr Stevenson was hardly the man to be caught in a trap, to find himself on a lee shore or a rock-bound coast, with a crowd of canvas. Well for our people it was that there was but little sail on her and little wind, or, speedily as everything was let go, the masts – some of them at least – would have gone by the board.

Half an hour after she struck, the *Arrandoon* was under bare poles and steam was up.

The order had been given to get up steam with all speed. Both the engineer and his two assistants were brawny Scots.

"Man!" said the former, "it'll take ye a whole hour to get up steam if you bother wi' coals and cinders alone. But do your best wi' what ye hae till I come back."

He wasn't gone long ere he came staggering down the ladder again, carrying a sack.

"It's American hams," he said; "they're hardly fit for anything else but fuel, so here goes."

And he popped a couple into the fire.

"That's the style," he said, as they began to frizzle and blaze. "Look, lads, the kettle'll be boilin' in twa seconds."

“Thank you, Stuart,” said McBain, when the engineer went on the bridge to report everything ready; “you are a valuable servant; now stand by to receive orders.”

All hands had been called, and there was certainly plenty for them to do.

It wanted several hours to high-water, and McBain determined to make the best of his time.

“By the blessing of Providence on our own exertions, Stevenson,” the captain said, “we’ll get her off all right. Had it been high-water, though, when we ran on shore, eh!”

Stevenson laughed a grim laugh. “We’d leave her bones here,” he said, “that would be all.”

The men were now getting their big guns over the side into the boats. This would lighten her a little. But as the tide was flowing, anchors were sent out astern, to prevent the ship from being carried still farther on to the reef.

“Go astern at full speed.”

The screws revolved and kept on revolving, the ship still stuck fast. The night was very dark, so that everything had to be done by the weird light of lanterns. Never mind, the work went cheerily on, and the men sang as they laboured.

“High-water about half-past two, isn’t it, Stevenson?” asked Captain McBain.

“Yes, sir,” the mate replied, “that’s about the time, sir.”

“Ah! well,” the captain said, “she is sure to float then, and there are no signs of your storm coming.”

“There is hardly a breath of wind now, sir, but you never know in these latitudes where it may come on to blow from next.”

The cheerful way in which McBain talked reassured our heroes, and towards eleven o’clock English Ralph spoke as follows, —

“Look here, boys — ”

“There isn’t a bit of good looking in the dark, is there?” said Allan.

“Well,” continued Ralph, “figuratively speaking, look here; I don’t see the good of sticking up on deck in the cold. We’re not doing an atom of good; let us go below and finish our supper.”

“Right,” said Allan; “and mind you, that poor girl is below there all this time. She may want some refreshment.”

When they entered the saloon they found it empty, deserted as far as human beings were concerned. Polly the cockatoo was there, no one else.

“Well?” said the bird, inquiringly, as she helped herself to an enormous mouthful of hemp-seed. “Well?”

“What have you done with the young lady?” asked Allan.

“The proof o’ the pudding — ”

Polly was too busy eating to say more. Peter the steward entered just then, overhearing the question as he came.

“That strange girl, sir,” he replied, “went over the side and away in her boat as soon as the ship struck.”

“Well, I call that a pity,” said Allan; “the poor girl comes here to warn us of danger and never stops for thanks. It is wonderful.”

“From this date,” remarked Ralph, “I cease to wonder at anything. Steward, you know we were only half done with supper, and we’re all as hungry as hunters, and — ”

But Peter was off, and in a few minutes our boys were supping as quietly and contentedly as if they had been in the Coffee-room of the Queen’s Hotel, Glasgow, instead of being on a lee shore, with the certainty that if it came on to blow not a timber of the good ship *Arrandoon* that would not be smashed into matchwood.

But hark! the noise on deck recommences, the men are heaving on the winch, the engines are once more at work, and the great screw is revolving. Then there is a shout from the men forward.

“She moves!”

“Hurrah! then, boys, hurrah!” cried McBain; “heave, and she goes.”

(The word “hurrah” in the parlance of North Sea sailors means “do your utmost” or “make all speed.”)

The men burst into song – tune a wild, uncouth sailor’s melody, words extempore, one man singing one line, another metreing it with a second, with a chorus between each line, in which all joined, with all their strength of voice to the tune, with all the power of their brawny muscles to the winch. Mere doggerel, but it did the turn better, perhaps, than more refined music would have done.

In San Domingo I was born,
 Chorus– Hurrah! lads, hurrah!
And reared among the yellow corn.
 Heave, boys, and away we go.
Our bold McBain is a captain nice,
 Chorus– Hurrah! lads, hurrah!
The main-brace he is *sure* to splice.
 Heave, boys, and away we go.
The Faroe Isles are not our goal,
 Oh! no, lads, no!
We’ll reach the North, and we’ll *bag* the Pole,
 Heave, boys, and away we go,
 Hurrah!

“We’re off,” cried Stevenson, excitedly. “Hurrah! men. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!”

The men needed but little encouragement now, though. Round went the winch right merrily, and in a quarter of an hour the bows were abreast of the anchors.

“Now, steward,” said the captain, “splice the main-brace.”

The ration was brought and served, Ted Wilson, who was a moving spirit in the ’tween decks, giving a toast, which every man re-echoed ere he raised the basin to his head, —

“Success to the saucy *Arrandoon*, and our bold skipper, Captain McBain.”

The vessel’s head was now turned seawards, and presently the anchors that had been taken in were let go again, and fires banked. The long night wore away, and the dismal dawn came. McBain had lain down for a short time, with orders to be roused on the first appearance of daylight. Rory, anxious to see how the land looked, was on deck nearly as soon as the captain.

A grey mist was lifting up from off the sea, and from off the shore, revealing black, beetling crags, hundreds of feet high at the water’s edge, a sheer beetling cliff around which thousands of strange sea-birds were wheeling and screaming, their white wings relieved against the black of the rocks, on which rows on rows of solemn-looking guillemots sat, and lines of those strange old-fashion-faced birds, the puffins.

The cliffs were snow-clad, the hills above were terraced with rocks almost to their summits. Between the ship and this inhospitable shore lay a long, dangerous-looking reef of rocks.

“Ah! Rory,” said McBain, “there was a merciful Providence watching over us last night. Yonder is where we lay; had it come on to blow, not one of us would be alive this morning to see the sun rise.”

Rory could hardly help, shuddering as he thought of the narrow escape they had had from so terrible a fate.

When steam was got up they went round the island – it was one of the most southerly of the Faroes; but except around one little bay, where boats might land with difficulty, it seemed impossible that human beings could exist in such a place. What, then, was the mystery of the previous evening, of the fair-haired girl, of the lights inside the reef that simulated those of a broad-beamed ship, of the lights like those of a village that twinkled on shore? The whole affair seemed strange, inexplicable.

Now that it was broad daylight the events of the preceding night, with its dangers and its darkness, had more the similitude of some dreadful dream than a stern reality.

This same evening the anchor was let go in the Bay of Thorshaven, the capital – city, shall I say? – of the Faroe Islands. I am writing a tale of adventure, not a narrative of travel, else would I willingly devote a whole chapter to a description of this quaint and primitive wee, wee town. Our heroes saw it at its very worst, its very bleakest, for winter still held it in thrall; the turf-clad roofs of its cottages, that in summer are green with grass and redolent of wild thyme, were now clad with snow; its streets, difficult to climb even in July, were now stairs of glass; its fort looked frozen out; and its little chapel, where Sunday after Sunday the hardy and brave inhabitants, who never move abroad without their lives in their hands, worship God in all humility – this little chapel stood up black and bold against its background of snow.

Although the streamlets were all frozen, although ice was afloat in the bay, and a grey and leaden sky overhead, our boys were not sorry to land and have a look around. To say that they were hospitably received would be hardly doing the Faroese justice, for hospitality really seems a part and parcel of the people's religion. The viands they placed before them were well cooked, but curious, to say the least of it. Steak of young whale, stew of young seal's liver, roast guillemot and baked auk; these may sound queer as dinner dishes, but as they were cooked by the ancient Faroese gentleman who entertained our heroes at his house, each and all of them were brave eating.

Couldn't they stop a month? this gentleman, who looked like a true descendant of some ancient viking, asked McBain. Well then, a fortnight? well, surely one short week?

But, "Nay, nay, nay," the captain answered, kindly and smilingly, to all his entreaties; they must hurry on to the far north ere spring and summer came.

The Faroese could give them no clue to the mystery that shrouded the previous night. They had never heard of either wreckers or pirates in these peaceful islands.

"But," said the old viking, "we are willing to turn out to a man; we are one thousand inhabitants in all – including the women; but even they will go; and we have ten brave, real soldiers in the fort, they too will go, and we will make search, and if we find them we will hang them on – on – " the old man hesitated.

"On the nearest tree," suggested Rory with a mischievous smile.

The viking laughed grimly at the joke.

"Well," he said, "we will hang them anyhow, trees or no trees."

But McBain could not be induced to deviate from his set purpose, and bidding these simple folk a friendly farewell, they steamed once more out of the bay, passed many a strange, fantastic island, passed rocks pierced with caves, and bird-haunted, and so, with the vessel's prow pointing to the northward and west, they left the Faroes far behind them.

Tremendous seas rolled in from the broad Atlantic all that night and all next day, little wind though, and no broken water. In the evening, in the dog-watch, the waves seemed to increase in size; they were miles long, mountains high; when down in the trough of the sea you had to look up to their crests as you would to the summer's sun at noontide. Indeed, those waves made the brave ship *Arrandoon* look wondrous small.

McBain, somewhat to Stevenson's astonishment, made the man at the wheel steer directly north.

"We're out of our course, sir," said the mate.

"Pardon me for a minute or two," replied the captain, half apologetically, "we are now broadside on to these seas, I just want to test her stability."

"Well, everything is pretty fast, sir," said the mate, quietly; "but if the ship goes on her beam-ends don't blame me."

"Perhaps, Mr Stevenson, there wouldn't be much time to blame any one; but I can trust my ship, I think. Wo! my beauty."

The beauty didn't seem a bit inclined to "wo!" however. She positively rolled her ports under, and Rory confessed that the doldrums were nothing to this.

Presently up comes Rory from below.

"Och! captain dear," he says, "my gun-case has burst my fiddle-case, and I'm not sure that the fiddle herself is safe, the darling."

Next up comes Stevenson. "Please captain," he says, "the steward says his crockery is all going to smithereens, and the cook can't keep the fire in the galley range, and Freezing Powders has broken the tureen and spilt the soup, and –"

"Enough, enough," cried McBain, laughing; "take charge, mate, and do as you like with her, I'm satisfied."

So down below dived the captain, the ship's head was once more turned north-west, and a bit of canvas clapped on to steady her.

Chapter Seven.

Sandie McFlail, M.D. – “Wha Wouldna’ be a Sea-Bird?” – The Girl Tells Her Strange Adventures – Nightfall on the Sea

There is one member of the mess whom I have not yet introduced, but a very worthy member he is, our youthful doctor. Poor fellow! never before had he been to sea, and so he suffered accordingly. Oh! right bravely had he tried to keep up for all that. He was the boldest mariner afloat while coming down the Clyde; he disappeared as the ship began to round the stormy Mull. He appeared again for a short time at Oban, but vanished when the anchor was weighed. At Lerwick, where they called in to take old Magnus Bolt on board, and ship a dozen stalwart Shetlanders, the doctor was once more seen on deck; and it was currently reported that when the vessel lay helpless on the reef, a ghostly form bearing a strong resemblance to the bold surgeon was seen flitting about in the darkness, and a quavering voice was heard to put this solemn question more than once, “Any danger, men? Men, are we in danger?” This was the last that had been seen of the medico; but Rory found a slate in the dispensary, into which sanctum, by the way, he had no right to pop even his nose. He brought this slate aft, the young rascal, and read what was written thereon to Allan and Ralph, from which it was quite evident that Sandie McFlail, M.D., of Aberdeen, had made a most intrepid attempt to keep a diary. The entries were short, and ran somewhat thus: —

“February 9th. – Dropped away from the Broomielaw and steamed down the beautiful Clyde. Charming day, though cold, and the hills on each side the river clothed in virgin snow. Felt sad and sorrowful at leaving my native land. I wonder will ever we return, or will the great sea swallow us up? Would rather it didn’t. I wonder if *she* will think of me and pray for her mariner bold when the wind blows high at night, when the cold rain beats against the window-panes of her little cot, and the storm spirit roars around the old chimneys. I feel a sailor already all over, and I tread the decks with pride.

“Feb. 10th. – At sea. The ocean getting rough. Passed some seagulls.

“Feb. 11th. – Sea rougher. Passed a ship.

“Feb. 12th. – Sea still rough. Passed some seaweed.

“Feb. 13th. – Sea mountains high. Passed – ”

“And here,” says Rory, “the diary breaks off all of a sudden like; and all of a sudden the entries close; so, really, there is no saying what the doctor passed on the 13th. But just about this time, the mate tells me, he was seen leaning languidly over the side, so – ”

“Ho, ho!” cried McBain, close at his ear. The captain had entered the saloon unperceived by boy Rory, and had been standing behind him all the time he was reading. Ralph and Allan saw him well enough, but they, of course, said nothing, although they could not refrain from laughing.

“Ho, ho, Rory, my boy!” says McBain; “ho, ho, boy Rory! so you’re fairly caught?”

“And indeed then,” says Rory, jumping up and looking as guilty as any schoolboy, “I didn’t know you were there at all at all.”

“Of that I am perfectly sure,” McBain says, laughing, “else you wouldn’t have been reading the poor doctor’s private diary. What shall we do with him, Ralph? What shall he be done to, Allan?”

“Oh!” said Ralph, mischievously; “send him to the masthead for a couple of hours. Into the foretop, mind, where he’ll get plenty of air about him.”

“No,” said Allan, grinning; “give him a seat for three hours on the end of the bowsprit. Of course, Captain McBain, you’ll let him have a bottle of hot water at his feet, and a blanket or two about him. He is only a little one, you know.”

“But now that I think of it,” said McBain, “you are all the same, boys; there isn’t one of you a whit better than the other.”

“Sure and you’re right, captain,” Rory put in, “for if I was reading, they were listening, most intently, too.”

“Well then, boys, I’ll tell you how you can make amends to the honest doctor. Off you go, the three of you, and see if you can’t rouse him out. Get him to come on deck and breathe the fresh air. He’ll soon get round.”

And off our three heroes went, joyfully, on their mission of mercy.

They found the worthy doctor in bed in his cabin, and forthwith set about kindly but firmly rousing him out. They had even brought Freezing Powders with them, to carry a pint of moselle.

“I feel vera limp,” said Sandie, as soon as he got dressed, “vera limp indeed. Well, as you say, the moselle may do me good, but I’m a teetotaler as a rule.”

“We never touch any wine,” said Ralph, “nor care to; but this, my dear doctor, is medicine.”

Sandie confessed himself better immediately when he got on deck. With Allan on one side of him and big Ralph on the other, he was marched up and down the deck for half an hour and more.

“Man! gentlemen!” he remarked, “I thought I could walk finely, but I’m just now for a’ the world like a silly drunken body.”

“We were just the same,” said Allan, “when we came first to sea – couldn’t walk a bit; but we soon got our sea-legs, and we’ve never lost them yet.”

The doctor was struck with wonder at the might and majesty of the waves, and also at the multitude of birds that were everywhere about and around them. Kittiwakes, solons, gulls, guillemots, auks, and puffins, they whirled and wheeled around the ship in hundreds, screaming and shrieking and laughing. They floated on the water, they swam on its surface, and dived down into its dark depths, and no fear had they of human beings, nor of the steamer itself.

“How happy they all seem!” said Rory; “if I was one of the lower animals, as we call them, sure there is nothing in the wide world I’d like better to be than a sea-bird.”

“True for you,” said Allan; “it’s a wild, free life they lead.”

“And they seem to have no care,” said the doctor. “Their meat is bound to their heads; at any rate, they never have far to go to seek it. When tired they can rest; when rested they can fly again. Then look at the warm and beautiful coats they wear. There is no wetting them to the skin; the water glides off o’ them like the rain from a duck’s back. Then think o’ the pleasure o’ possessin’ a pair o’ wings that can cleave the air like an arrow from a bowstring; that in a few short days, independent o’ wind or waves or weather, can carry them from the cauld north far, far awa’ to the saft and sunny south. Wha wouldna’ be a sea-bird?”

“Yes,” reiterated Rory, stopping in front of the doctor; “as you say, doctor, ‘Wha wouldna’ be a sea-bird?’ But pardon me, sir, for in you I recognise a kindred spirit, a lover of nature, a lover of the beautiful. You and I will be friends, doctor – fast friends. There, shake hands.”

“As for Ralph and Allan,” he added, with a mischievous grin, “deed in troth, doctor dear, there isn’t a bit of poetry in their nature, and they would any day far sooner see a couple of eider ducks roasted and flanked with apple sauce, than the same wildly beautiful birds happy and alive and afloat on the dark, heaving breast of the ocean. It’s the truth I’m telling ye, doctor. D’ye play at all? Have you any favourite instrument?”

“Weel, sir,” the doctor replied, “I canna say that I’m vera much o’ a musician, but I just can manage to toot a wee bit on the flute.”

“And I’ve no doubt,” said Rory, “that you ‘toot’ well, too.”

The conversation never slackened for a couple of hours, and so well did the doctor feel, that of his own free will he volunteered joining them at dinner in the saloon. McBain was as much surprised as delighted when he came below to dine, and found that their new messmate, Sandie McFlail, had at long last put in an appearance at table.

The swell on the sea was much less next morning; the wind had slightly increased, and more sail had been spread, so that the ship was moderately steady. The rugged coast and strange, fantastic

rocks of the outlying islands of Iceland were in sight, and, half-buried in misty clouds, the distant mountains could be dimly descried.

“Yonder,” said the mate, advancing towards Captain McBain, glass in hand, – “yonder is a small boat, sir, with a bit of a sail on her; she has just rounded the needle rocks, and seems standing in for the mainland.”

“Well,” said the captain, “let us overhaul her, anyhow. There can be no harm in that, and it may secure us a fresh fish or two for dinner.”

In less than an hour the *Arrandoon* had come up with this strange sail, which at first sight had seemed a mere speck on the ocean, seen at one moment and hidden the next behind some mountain roller. The surprise of our heroes may be better imagined than described, to find afloat in this cockle-shell of a boat, with an oar shipped as a mast and a tartan plaid as a main-sail, none other than the heroine of the wreckers’ reef. Seeing that she was in the power of the big ship, she made no further attempt to get away, but, dropping her sail, she seized the oars, paddled quietly and coolly alongside, and next moment stood on the quarter-deck, with bowed head and modest mien, before Captain McBain.

The captain took her kindly by the hand, smiling as he said, “Do not be afraid, my girl; consider yourself among friends – among those, indeed, who would do anything in their power to serve you, even if they were not already deeply in your debt, and deeply grateful.”

“Ah!” she said, mournfully, “my warning came all too late to save you. But, praised be God! you are safe now, and not in the power of those terrible men, who would have spared not a single life of those the waves did not engulf.”

“But tell us,” continued McBain, “all about it – all about yourself. There is some strange mystery about the matter, which we would fain have solved. But stay – not here, and not yet. You must be very tired and weary; you must first have rest and refreshment, after which you can tell us your tale. Stevenson, see the little boat hauled up; and, doctor, I place this young lady under your care; to-night I hope to land her safely in Reikjavik; meanwhile my cabin is at her disposal.”

“Come, lassie,” said the good surgeon, laconically, leading the way down the companion.

Merely dropping a queenly curtesy to McBain and our young heroes, she followed the doctor without a word.

Peter the steward placed before her the most tempting viands in the ship, yet she seemed to have but little appetite.

“I am tired,” she said at length, “I fain would rest. Long weary weeks of sorrow have been mine. But they are past and gone at last.”

Then she retired, this strange ocean waif and stray, and so the day wore gradually to a close, and they saw no more of her until the sun, fierce, fiery, and red, began to disappear behind the distant snow-clad hills; then they found her once more in their midst.

She had gathered the folds of her plaid around her, her long yellow hair still floated over her shoulders, and her dreamy blue eyes were shyly raised to McBain’s face as she began to speak.

“I owe you some explanation,” she said. “My strange conduct must appear almost inexplicable to you. My appearance among you two nights ago was intended to save you from the destruction that awaited you – from the destruction that had been prepared for you by the Danish wreckers.”

“Sir,” she continued, after a pause, “I am myself a Dane. My father was parish minister in the little village of Elmdene. Alas! I fear he is now no more. Afflictions gathered and thickened around us in our once happy little home, and the only way we could see out of them was to leave our native land and cross the ocean. In America we have many friends who had kindly offered us an asylum, until happier days should come again. Our vessel was a brig, our crew all told only twenty hands, and we, my brother, father, and myself – for mother has long since gone up beyond – were the only passengers.

“All went well until we were off the northern Shetlands, when at the dark, starry hour of midnight our ship was boarded and carried by pirates. Every one in the ship was put to the sword,

saving my father and myself. My poor dear brave brother was slain before my eyes, but he died as the Danes die – with his face to the foe. My father was promised his life if he would perform the ceremony of marriage between myself and the pirate captain, who is a Russian, a daring, fearless fellow, but a strange compound of superstition and vice – a man who will go to prayers before scuttling a ship! The object of this pirate was to seize your vessel; he would have met and fought you at sea, but the easier plan for him was to try to wreck you. Fortune seemed to favour this bold design of his. The lights placed on shore, to represent a vessel of large size, were part and parcel of his vile scheme. But the darkness of the night enabled me to escape and come towards you. Then I feared to return; but, alas! alas! I now tremble lest my dear father has had to pay the penalty of my rashness with his life.”

(The story of the pirate is founded on fact.)

“But the ship – this pirate?” said McBain. “We sailed around the island next day but saw no signs of him?”

“Then,” said the girl, “he must have escaped in the darkness, immediately after discovering the entire failure of his scheme.”

“And whither were you bound for when we overtook you, my poor girl?” asked McBain.

“At Reikjavik,” she replied, “I have an uncle, a minister. He it was who taught me all I know, while he was still at home in Elmdene – taught me among other things the beautiful language of your country, which I speak, but speak so indifferently.”

“Can this be,” said McBain, “the self-same pirate that attacked the *Snowbird*?”

“The very same thought,” answered Ralph, “was passing through my own mind.”

“And yet how strange that a pirate should, cruise in these far northern seas?”

“She has less chance of being caught, at all events,” Allan said.

“Ha?” exclaimed McBain, with a kind of grim, exultant laugh, “if she comes across the *Arrandoon*, that chance will indeed be a small one. She’ll find us a different kind of a craft from the *Snowbird*.”

The vessel was now heading directly for the south-east coast of Iceland. Somewhere in there, though at present hidden by points of land and rocky islets, lay the capital of Iceland, which they hoped to reach ere midnight.

A more lovely land and seascape than that which was now stretched out before them, it would indeed be difficult to conceive. The sun had gone down behind the western end of a long line of snow-clad mountains, serrated, jagged, and peaked, but their tops were all rose-tipped with his parting beams. Above them the sky was clear, with just one speck of crimson cloud; the lower land between was bathed in a purple mist, through which the ice-bound rocks could dimly be discerned, while the mantle of night had already been spread over the ocean.

It was “nightfall on the sea.”

Chapter Eight.

A Gale from the Mountains – Daybreak in Iceland – The Great Balloon Ascent – Rory’s Yarn – The Snow-Cloud – The Pirate is Seen

A whole week has elapsed since the events transpired which I have related in last chapter, – a week most interestingly if not always quite pleasantly spent. The *Arrandoon* is lying before the quaint, fantastical old town of Reikjavik, surrounded almost in every direction by mountains bold and wild, the peaked summits and even the sides of which are now covered with ice and snow. For spring has not yet arrived to unrivet stern winter’s chains, to swell the rivers into roaring torrents, and finally to carpet the earth with beauty. The streams are still frozen, the bay in which the good ship lies at her anchors twain, is filled with broken pancake-ice, which makes communication with the shore by means of boat a matter of no little difficulty, for oars have to be had inboard or used as pressing poles, and boat-hooks are in constant requisition.

Winter it is, and the country all around might be called dreary, were it not for the ever-varying shades of colour that, as the sun shines out, or anon hides his head behind a cloud, spread themselves over hill and dale and rugged glen. Oh! the splendour of those sunrises and sunsets, the rose tints, the purples, the emerald greens and cool greys, that blaze and blend, grow faint and fade as they chase each other among mountains and ravines! What a poor morsel of steel my pen feels as I attempt to describe them! Yet have they a beauty peculiarly their own, – a beauty which never can be forgotten by those whose eyes have once rested thereon.

The fair-haired Danish girl has been landed, and for a time has found shelter and peace in the humble home of her uncle the clergyman. Our heroes have been on shore studying the manners and customs of the primitive but hospitable people they find themselves among.

Several city worthies have been off to see the ship and to dine. But to-night our heroes are all by themselves in the saloon. Dinner is finished, nuts and fruit and fragrant coffee are on the table, at the head of which sits the captain, on his right the doctor and Ralph, on his left Allan and Rory. Freezing Powders, neatly dressed, is hovering near, and Peter, the steward, is not far off, while the cockatoo is busy as usual, helping himself to tremendous billfuls of hemp-seed, but nevertheless putting in his oar every minute, with a “Well, duckie?” or a long-drawn “Dea-ah me!”

I cannot say that all is peace, though, beyond the wooden walls of the *Arrandoon*, for a storm is raging with almost hurricane violence, sweeping down from the hills with ever-varying force, and threatening to tear the vessel from her anchorage. Steam is up, the screw revolves, and it taxes all the engineer’s skill to keep up to the anchors so as to avert the strain from them.

But our boys are used to danger by this time, and there is hardly a moment’s lull in the conversation. Even Sandie McFlail, M.D. o’ Aberdeen, has already forgotten all the horrors of *mal-de-mer*; he even believes he has found his sea-legs, and feels all over as good a sailor as anybody.

“Reikjavik?” says Ralph; “isn’t it a queer break-jaw kind of a name. It puts one in mind of a mouthful of exceedingly tough beefsteak.”

“A gastronomic simile,” says Rory; “though maybe neither poetical nor elegant, sure, but truly Saxon.”

“Ah! weel,” the doctor says, in his quiet, thoughtful, canny way, “I dinna know now. Some o’ the vera best poetry of all ages bears reference to the pleasures o’ the table. Witness Horace’s Odes, for instance.”

“Hear! hear!” from Allan; and “Horace was a brick!” from honest English Ralph; but Rory murmurs “Moore?”

“But,” continues the doctor, “to my ear there is nothing vera harsh in the language that these islanders speak. They pronounce the ‘ch’ hard, like the Scotch; their ‘j’s’ soft, like the Spanish; and turn their ‘w’s’ into ‘v’s.’ They pronounce church – kurk; and the ‘j’ is a ‘y,’ or next thing to it. ‘Reik’ or ‘reyk’ means smoke, you know, as it is in Scotch ‘reek;’ and ‘wik,’ or ‘wich,’ or ‘vik’ means a bay, as in the English ‘Woolwich,’ ‘Sandwich,’ etc, so that Reikjavik is simply ‘the bay of smoke,’ or ‘the smoking bay;’ but whether with reference to the smoke that hangs over the town, or the spray that rises mistlike from the seething billows when the wind blows, I cannot say – probably the former; and it is worthy of note, gentlemen, that some savage races far, far away from here – the aborigines of Australia, for example – designate towns by the term ‘the big smoke.’”

“How profoundly erudite you are, doctor!” says Rory. “Now, wouldn’t it have been much better for your heirs and assigns and the world at large, if you had accepted a Professorship of Antiquity in the University of Aberdeen, instead of coming away with us, to cool the toes of you at the North Pole, and maybe leave your bones to bleach beneath the Aurora Borealis, eh?”

“Ha! there I have you,” cries Sandie, smiling good-humouredly, for by this time he was quite used to Rory’s bantering ways, – “there I have you, boy Rory; and it is with the profoundest awe and respect for everything sacred, that I remind you that the Aurora Borealis never bleached any bones; and those poor unfortunates who, in their devotion for science, have wandered towards the mystery land around the Pole, and there laid down their lives, will never, never moulder into dust, but, entombed in the green, salt ice, with the virgin snow as their winding-sheet, their bodies will rest in peace, and rest intact until the trumpet sounds.”

There was a lull in the conversation at this point, but no lull in the storm; the waves dashed wildly over the ship, the wind roared through the rigging, the brave vessel quivered from stem to stern, as if in constant fear she might be hurled from the protection afforded by anchor and cable, and cast helpless upon the rock-bound shore.

A lull, broken presently by a deep sigh from Freezing Powders.

“Well, duckie?” said Polly, in sympathising tones.

“Well, Freezing Powders,” said McBain, “and pray what are you sighing about?”

“What for I sigh?” repeated Freezing Powders. “Am you not afraid you’s’e’f, sah! You not hear de wild winds roar, and de wave make too much bobbery? ’Tis a’most enuff, sah, to make a gem’lam turn pale, sah!”

“Ha! ha?” laughed Rory; “really, it’ll take a mighty big storm, Freezing Powders, to make you turn pale. But, doctor,” he continued, “what say you to some music?”

“If you’ll play,” said the surgeon, “I’ll toot.”

And so the concert was begun; and the shriek of the storm spirit was drowned in mirth and melody, or, as the doctor, quoting Burns, expressed it, —

“The storm without might roar and rustle,
They didna mind the storm a whustle.”

But after this night of storm and tempest, what a wonderful morning it was! The sun shot up amidst the encrimsoned mountain peaks, and shone brightly down from a sky of cloudless blue. The snow was everywhere dazzling in its whiteness, and there was not a sigh of wind to raise so much as a ripple on the waters of the bay, from which every bit of ice had been blown far to sea. Wild birds screamed with joy as they wheeled in hundreds around the ship, while out in the bay a shoal of porpoises were disporting themselves, leaping high in air from out of the sparkling waters, and shrieking – or, as the doctor called it, “whustling” – for very joy.

Every one on board the *Arrandoon* was early astir – up, indeed, before the sun himself – for there were to be great doings on shore to-day. The first great experimental balloon ascent and flight was about to be made. Every one on shore was early astir, too; in fact, the greatest excitement

prevailed, and on the table-land to the right of, and some little distance from, the town, from which the balloon was to ascend, the people had assembled from an early hour, even the ladies of Reikjavik turning out dressed in their gayest attire, no small proportion of which consisted of fur and feathers.

The aeronaut was a professional, Monsieur De Vere by name. McBain had gone all the way to Paris especially to engage his services. Nor had he hired him at random, for this canny captain of ours had not only satisfied himself that De Vere was in a scientific point of view a clever man, but he had accompanied him in several ascents, and could thus vouch for his being a really practical aeronaut.

Who would go with De Vere in this first great trip over the regions of perpetual snow? The doctor stepped forward as a volunteer, and by his side was Rory. Perhaps Allan and Ralph were rather lazy for any such aerial exploit; anyhow, they were content to stay at home.

“We’ll look on, you know,” said Ralph, “as long as we can see you; and when you return – that is, if ever you do return – you can tell us all about it.”

When all was ready the ropes were cast loose, and, with a ringing cheer from the assembled multitude, up arose the mighty balloon, straight as arrow from bow, into the blue, sunny sky. Like the eagle that soars from the peak of Benrinnes, she seemed to seek the very sun itself.

Rory and the surgeon, who had never been in a balloon before – nor even, for the matter of that, down in a coalpit – at first hardly relished their sudden elevation, but they soon got used to it.

Not the slightest motion was there; Rory could hardly credit the fact that he was moving, and when at last he did muster up sufficient courage to peep earthwards over the side of the car.

“Oh, look, doctor dear!” he cried; “sure, look for yourself; the world is moving away from us altogether!”

And this was precisely the sensation they experienced. Both the doctor and Rory were inclined to clutch nervously and tremulously the sides of the car in the first part of their ascent; but though the former was not much of a sailor, somewhat to his surprise he experienced none of those giddy feelings common to the landsman when gazing from an immense height. He could look beneath him and around him, and enjoy to the full the strange bird’s-eye landscape and seascape that every moment seemed to broaden and widen, until a great portion of the northern island, with its mountains, its lakes, its frozen torrents, its gulfs and bays and islands, and the great blue southern ocean, even to the far-off Faroe Isles, lay like a beautifully portrayed map beneath their feet. The grandeur of the scene kept them silent for long minutes; it impressed them, it awed them. It did more than even this, for it caused them to feel their own littleness, and the might of the Majesty that made the world.

De Vere himself seldom vouchsafed a single glance landwards; he seemed to busy himself wholly and solely with the many strange instruments with which he was surrounded. He was hardly a moment idle. The intense cold, that soon began to benumb the senses of Sandie, seemed to have no deterrent effect on his efforts.

“I must confess I do fell sleepy,” said the worthy medico, “and I meant to assist you, Mr De Vere.”

“Here,” cried the scientist, pouring something out of a phial, and handing it to him, “drink that quick.”

“I feel double the individual,” cried Sandie, brightly, as soon as he had swallowed the draught.

“Come,” said Rory, “come, monsieur, *I* want to feel double the individual, too.”

“No, no, sir,” said De Vere, smiling, “an Irishman no want etherism; you are already – pardon me – too ethereal.”

Sandie was gazing skywards.

“It is the moon,” – he was saying – “I ken her horn,
She’s blinkin’ in the lift sae hie;
She smiles, the jade! to wile us hame,
But, ’deed, I doubt, she’ll wait a wee.”

“Happy thought!” cried Rory; “let us go to the moon.”

“No,” laughed the doctor; “nobody ever got that length yet.”

“Oh, you forget, Mr Surgeon,” said Rory, – “you forget entirely all about Danny O’Rourke.”

“Tell us, then, Rory.”

“Troth, then,” began Rory, in his richest brogue, “it was just like this same. Danny was a dacint boy enough, who lived entoirely alone with Biddy his wife, and the pig, close to a big bog in old Oireland. Sitting on a stone in the midst of this bog was Danny, one foine summer’s evening, when who should fly down but an aigle. ‘Foine noight,’ says the aigle. ‘The same to you,’ says Danny, ‘and many of them.’ ‘But,’ says the aigle, ‘don’t you see that it is sinking you are?’ ‘Och! sure,’ cries Danny, ‘and so it is. I’ll be swallowed up in the bog, and poor Biddy and the pig will nivir set eyes on me again. Och! och! what’ll I do?’ ‘Git on to me back, troth,’ says the aigle, ‘and I’ll fly you sthraight to your Biddy’s door.’ ‘And the blessings av the O’Rourkes be wid ye thin,’ says Danny, putting his arms round the aigle’s neck, ‘for you are the sinsible bird, and whatever I’d have done widout ye, ne’er a bit o’ me knows. But isn’t it high enough you are now, aroon? Yonder is my cottage just down there.’ For,” continued Rory, “you must know that by this time the aigle had mounted fully a mile high with poor Danny. ‘Be quiet wid ye,’ says the aigle, ‘or I’ll shake ye off me back entoirely. Don’t ye remember robbing my nest last year? *I* do. And it’s niver a cottage you’ll ever see again, nor Biddy, nor the pig either. It’s right up to the moon I’m flying wid ye.’ ‘What!’ cries Danny, ‘to that bit av a thing like a raping-hook? Och! and och! what’ll become av me at all at all?’ But the moon got bigger the nearer they came to it, and they found it a dacint size enough when they got there entirely. ‘Catch a howld av the end av the raping-hook,’ says the aigle, ‘or by this and by that I’ll shake ye off me shoulder.’ And so poor Danny had no ho’ but just to do as he was told, and away flew the aigle and left him. While he was wondering what he should do now, a stern voice behind him says, ‘Let go – let go the end of the raping-hook, and be off wid ye back to your own counthry.’ ‘It’s hardly civil av you,’ says Danny, ‘to ask me sich a thing. Sure it is few ever come to call on you anyhow.’ ‘Let go,’ thundered the man o’ the moon; and he gave Danny just one kick, and off went the poor boy flying into the air. ‘It’s killed I’ll be,’ says he to himself, ‘killed entoirely wid the fall, and what’ll become o’ me wife Biddy and the pig is more’n I can tell.’ But he fell, and he fell, and he fell, and he never seemed to stop falling, till plump he alights right in the middle o’ the sea, and there he lay on the broad back av him, till a big lump av a whale came and splashed him all over wid his tail. But sure enough the sea was only his bed, and the big whale turned out to be Biddy herself, with the watering-pot, telling him to get up, for a lazy ould boy, and feed the pig, and troth it was nothing but a dream after all.

“But where in the name of wonder are we now?” he continued, gazing around.

It was a very natural question. It had got suddenly dark. They were enveloped in a snow-cloud. The brave balloon seemed to struggle through it.

Ballast was thrown over, and up and out into the sunshine she rose again, but what a change had come over her appearance – every rope and length of her and the car itself and our bold aeronauts were covered white with virgin snow.

“Monsieurs,” said De Vere, “this is more than I bargained for. We must descend. You see she has lost all life. De lofely soul dat was in de balloon seems to have gone. We will descend.”

Indeed the huge balloon was already moving slowly earthwards, and in a minute more they were again passing through the snow-cloud. Once clear of this a breeze sprang up, or, to speak more correctly, they entered a current of air, that carried them directly inland for many miles. Tired of this direction, the valve was opened, out roared the gas, and the descent became more rapid, until the wind ceased to blow – they were beneath the adverse current. More ballast was thrown out, and her “way” was stopped.

But see, what aileth our hero, boy Rory? For some minutes he has been gazing southwards over the sea, so intensely indeed that his looks almost frighten the honest doctor.

“The glass, the glass,” he hisses, holding round his hand, but not taking his glance for a moment off the southern horizon.

The glass is handed to him, he adjusts it to his eye, and takes one long, fixed look; and when he turns once more towards the doctor his face is radiant with joy and excitement.

“It is she,” he cried, “it is *she*, it is she!”

The doctor really looked scared.

“Man!” he said, “are ye takin’ leave o’ your wuts? There, tak’ a hold o’ my hand and dinna try to frighten folk. There’s never a ‘she’ near ye.”

“It is *she*, I tell you,” cried Rory again; “take the glass and look in under the land yonder, and heading for Stromsoe. It is the pirate herself, – the pirate we fought in the *Snowbird*. Hurrah! hurrah!”

Chapter Nine.

Mount Hekla – The Great Geyser – A Narrow Escape – The Search for the Pirate – McBain’s Little “Ruse de Guerre” – The Battle Begun

“That puts quite another complexion on the matter,” said Dr Sandy McFlail, with a sigh of relief, when Rory explained to him that he had spied the pirate, “quite another complexion, though, for the time bein’ ye glowered sae like a warlock that I did think ye had lost your reason; so give me the glass, and I’ll e’en take a look at her mysel’.

“Eh! sirs,” he continued, with the telescope at his eye, “but she is a big ship, and a bonnie ship. But, Rory boy, just catch a hold o’ my coat-tails, and I’ll feel more secure like. I wouldn’t wish to go heels o’er head out o’ the car. A fine big ship indeed – square-rigged forward and schooner-rigged aft; a vera judeecious arrangement.”

“Now,” cried Rory, “the sooner we are landed on old mother earth the better. Bend on to the valve halyards, De Vere. Down with her.”

“Sirs! sirs!” cried the doctor, in great alarm; “pray don’t be rash. Be judeecious, gentlemen, be judeecious.”

De Vere looked from one to the other, then laughed aloud. He was amused at the impetuosity of the Irishman and at the canniness of the Scot.

A very pleasant little man was this De Vere to look at, black as to hair and moustache, dark as to eyes; thoughtful-looking as a rule were these eyes, yet oft lit up with fun. He never spoke much, perhaps he cogitated the more; he seldom made a joke himself, but he had a high appreciation of humour in others. Taking him all and all he gave you the impression of one who would be little likely to lose his presence of mind in a time of danger.

“Gentlemen,” he said, quietly, “you will leave the descent in my hands, if you please. We are now, by my calculation, some ninety miles from the city of Reikjavik. You see beneat’ you wild mountains, ice-bound plains, frozen lakes, rivers and waterfalls, deep ravines and gorges, but no sign of smoke, no life. Shall I make my descent here? Shall I pull vat Monsieur Rory call de valve halyard? Shall I land in de regions of desolation?”

“Dinna think o’t,” cried Sandy. “Never mind Rory; he is only a laddie.”

“It’s yourself that’s complimentary,” quoth Rory.

“Ah! ver’ well,” said De Vere; “I will go on, for since you have been gazing on de ship, de current have change, and we once more get nearer home.”

An hour went slowly by. Both the doctor and Rory were gazing at the *far-off* mountain, Hekla, that lay to the south and east, though distant many miles. The vast hill looked a king among the other mountains; a king, but a dead king, being still and quiet in the sunshine, enrobed in a shroud of snow.

Sandy was doubly engaged – he was talking musingly, and aloud; but at the same time he was doing ample justice to the venison pie that lay so confidently on his knee, for Sandy was a bit of a philosopher in his own quiet way.

“Mount Hekla,” he was saying; “is it any wonder that these Norsemen, these superstitious sons of the ancient Vikings, look upon it as the entrance-gate to the terrible abode of fire and brimstone, gloom and woe, where are confined the souls of the unhappy dead? Hekla, round thy snow-capped summit the thunders never cease to roll – ”

“Hark,” said Rory, holding up his hand; “talk about thunder, list to that.”

Both leant over the car and looked earthwards. What could it mean, that low, deep, long-continued thunderpeal? Was a storm raging beneath them? Yes, but not of the kind they at first

imagined. For see, from where yonder hill starts abruptly from the glen, rise immense clouds of silvery white, and roll slowly adown the valley. The balloon hangs suspended right above the great *geyser*, which is now in full eruption.

“It is as I thought,” said De Vere; “let us descend a little way;” and he opened the valve as he spoke.

The balloon made a downward rush as he did so, as if she meant to plunge herself and all her occupants into the very midst of the boiling cauldron. The steam from the geyser had almost reached their feet; the car thrilled beneath them, while the never-ceasing thunder pealed louder and louder.

“My conscience!” roared honest Sandy, losing all control over himself; “we’ll be boiled alive like so many partans!”

(Partans: Scottish, crabs.)

De Vere coolly threw overboard a bag or two of sand, and the balloon mounted again like a skylark. And not too soon either, for, awful, to relate, in his sudden terror Sandy had made a grab at the valve-rope, as if to check her downward speed. Had not Rory speedily pulled him back, the consequences would have been too dreadful to think of.

De Vere only laughed; but he held up one finger by way of admonishing the doctor as he said, “Neever catch hold of de reins ven anoder man is driving.”

“But,” said Rory, “didn’t you go a trifle too near that time, Mister de Vere?”

“A leetle,” said the Frenchman, coolly. “It was noding.”

“Ach! sure no,” says Rory; “it was nothing at all; and yet, Mister de Vere, it isn’t the pleasantest thing in the world to imagine yourself being played at pitch and toss with on the top of a mighty geyser, for all the world like a nut-gall on the top of a twopenny fountain!”

Sandy resumed the dissection of his venison pie. He would have a long entry for his diary to-night, he thought.

Luck does not always attend the aeronaut, albeit fortune favours the brave, and the current of air that was carrying the balloonists so merrily back to Reikjavik, ceased entirely when they were still within ten miles of that quaint wee place. It was determined, therefore, to make a descent. Happily, they were over a glen. Close by the sea and around the bay were many small farms, and so adroitly did De Vere manage to attach an anchor to the roof of an old barn, that descent was easy in the extreme.

Perhaps the happiest man in the universe at the moment Sandy McFlail’s feet touched mother earth again was Sandy himself. “Man!” he cried to Rory, rubbing his hands and laughing with glee, “I thought gettin’ out meant a broken leg at the vera least, and I haven’t even bled my nose.”

There was some commotion, I can tell you, among the feathered inmates of the barnyard when the balloonists popped down among them; as for the farm folks, they had shut themselves up in the dwelling-house. The geese were particularly noisy. Geese, reader, always remind me of those people we call sceptics: they are sure to gabble their loudest at things they can’t understand.

But convinced at last that the aeronauts were neither evil spirits nor inhabitants of the moon, the good farmer made them heartily welcome at his fireside, and assisted them to pack, so that, by the aid of men and ponies, they found themselves late that evening safely on board the *Arrandoon*; and right glad were their comrades to see them again, you may be sure, and to listen to a narration by Rory of all their adventures, interlarded by Sandy’s queer, dry remarks, which only served to render it all the more funny.

But before they sat down to the ample supper that Peter had prepared for them, Rory reported to the captain his great discovery.

McBain’s eyes sparkled like live coals as he heard of it, but he said little. He sent quietly for the engineer and the mate. “How soon,” he asked the former, “can you get up steam?”

“In an hour, sir – easy.”

“That will do,” said the captain. “Mr Stevenson, when will the moon rise?”

“She is rising now, sir.”

“All right, Mr Stevenson. Have all ready to weigh anchor in two hours’ time.”

“Ay, ay, sir!”

The engineer still lingered. “I *could* get up steam in twenty minutes,” he said; “those American hams, sir –”

“Oh, bother the hams?” said the captain, laughing. “No, no; we may be glad of those yet when frozen in at the Pole. Bear-and-ham pie, engineer; how will that eat, eh?” and he bowed him kindly out.

By two bells in the middle watch the good ship *Arrandoon* was off the needle rocks of the Portland Huck. They stood up out of the water like tall sheeted ghosts, with the moonlight and starlight shimmering from their shoulders. The sea was calm, with only a gentle heave on it; and there were but a few snowy clouds in the sky skirting the southern horizon, so the vessel ploughed along as beautifully as any sailor could wish, with a steady, contented throb of engine and gride of screw, leaving in her wake a long silvery line for the moonbeams to dance in. Save the noise of the ship’s working there was not another sound to be heard, only occasionally a gull would float past overhead emitting a strange and mournful cry. What makes the sea-birds, I have wondered, sometimes leave the rocks at the midnight hour, and go skimming alone through the darkling air, emitting that weird and plaintive wail of theirs? It is a wail that goes directly to one’s heart, and you cannot help thinking they must be bereaved ones mourning for their dead.

Our heroes walked long on deck that night, talking quietly, as became the hour, of the prospects of their having a brush with the pirate. But they got weary at last, and turned in. Next morning they found the decks wet and slippery, more clouds in the sky, a fair beam wind blowing, and a trifle of canvas displayed.

After breakfast McBain called all hands aft. In calm, dispassionate language he told them the story of the poor girl who had risked her life on their account, of her murdered brother and captive father, and of the pirate he was about to try to find and capture. Then he paused; and as he did so every one of the crew turned eyes on Ted Wilson, who strode forward.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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