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By Clemence Dane

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THE NELSON TOUCH

HE BRINGS GREAT NEWS

a story

by

CLEMENGE DANE

Give him tending;
He brings great news.
Shakespeare.



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**For
'HOOK'**

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HE BRINGS GREAT NEWS

CHAPTER I

FOR an hour and a quarter the balloon and its buck-basket rose up into the heavens, revolving slowly as it drifted westwards on a road of air, which followed almost exactly the road of earth below. Over Bagshot, Andover, Salisbury, Axminster, Exeter it ran, and on beyond Dartmoor into the Duchy, and the two men slung below the great striped onion had just identified Falmouth when the wind veered, driving them back upon their course, while clouds, coming up over the brim of Ireland, chased, overtook and enveloped them. But always the currents and counter-currents drove them upwards in this vast game of shuttle-cock, till the Irish clouds in turn lay as far below as the fields had lain, and the balloon hung at last in a blue not to be matched upon earth.

The elder man muttered: "Wedgwood? No! Sèvres? Not that either!" and then, with numbed fingers, jotted clumsily: 'Intense prussian-blue,' as he said to his companion:

"And your face has taken on a most extraordinary purple tinge. How is mine?"

"The same," said the other in correct, foreigner's English, "and your lips are much discoloured. Do you desire to sleep?"

"Not now. I did," said the elder man.

"Ah! On my first air-voyage I was unconscious more than once. The sensation is intermittent, and one soon becomes seasoned. But we are too high. We do not want a frost-bite. I think it is time to descend."

"Now and again I feel sickish," said the Englishman. "There, that was a qualm!" His mouth contracted.

"Time to descend," repeated the Frenchman cheerfully, and busied himself with the strings of the upper valve. He had worker's hands, with broad palms and fingers like well-made tool, the nails carefully kept, but the skin

stained and scarred. They were hands that had nothing in common with the sober clothes he wore, the clothes of a merchant's clerk: and these clothes, again, did not suit the slender figure, nor the look of breeding that stamped him as hand-made paper is stamped, by its own quality. He had dark hair, dark eyes, and the neat features of his race. By contrast his companion loomed bulky, common and shapeless; but he incarnated authority as the other breeding, and, while they talked as equals, it was plain enough that the Englishman was the employer.

"What is that sound?" he asked drowsily.

"The whistle of the wind in our ropes. We are dropping fast."

"Is that all?" He scribbled a note. "In the silence it seemed a terrible sound. I shall never be able to convey the nature of this silence to those below."

"It is God," muttered the Frenchman.

The Englishman's attention was distracted by a movement underneath his cloak. He unbuttoned it and looked down at a small terrier that burrowed into his shirt-ruffles for warmth. It whined, and he cosseted it for a moment with hand and voice before wrapping the folds of his muffler thicker about it and buttoning up his coat again. As he did so a billow of fog received them; but they sank through it, out into sunshine, into fog again half a dozen times, then emerged finally into clear, open sky.

"This is better," said the Englishman. "There is warmth in this sunshine. What is that far below, scudding across those seas of cloud?"

"Our shadow."

"Incredible! It is the breadth of my hand."

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes. And warmer."

"I shall be so sorry if you feel any lasting ill effects. I have made eleven journeys into space and I felt none, never, after the first time. There, that space between the clouds, do you see it? That is not violet mist, but our Mother Earth." •

"Where are we, do you suppose?"

"Look to the east! There lies your metropolis threaded by its river Thames! There, where the haze swallows it, is Oxford perhaps, or perhaps it is only a cloud. Those low clouds, they lie upon earth like puffs of gunfire. But I think the haze is Oxford."

"And the water to the south, that must be the Channel."

"La Manche! For you see now," said the Frenchman, "that it is better named by us. It *is* a sleeve, a sleeve of *lamé*. If we could see as far as Dover I could show you the cuff; for when I crossed from Paris during the peace I particularly noticed that the white cliffs of Dover and the wave-crests of the tide at Calais formed veritable lace wrist-ruffles. I was much nearer earth, of course. Look, there lies Cherbourg, shaping the elbow of the sleeve!"

"Where is Boulogne? I want to see Boney's camp. They say he has built a wall of soldiers nine miles long,"

"Had! The gentleman has gone to Wurtemberg."

"Again—so they say. But I think that if we could have a look at Boulogne it would be worth a battle to the government. We know that Bonaparte was there last August——"

"And if we come down in enemy country, or in the sea?"

"Hang it, man, I have paid the piper. Let me call my own tune! Now listen, lad! We all tell each other glibly that the fear of invasion is over. But—how do we know? You say Boney has gone to Wurtemberg. Well, has he? Suppose that's a flam? And suppose Villeneuve and his fleet slip through Nelson's fingers? They may. His lordship ain't God, is he, to command the winds? Well, if Boney has not broke camp at Boulogne, where shall we be? Six hours' control of the Channel! That's all he asks for. He says so himself. And here are you and me given a chance to find out what's doing at Boulogne. Shan't we snatch at it? Open the valve, or whatever you call it, and bring us down a little lower!"

"I will not risk my liberty."

"You are right, I suppose, to think first of your own skin. But 'tisn't English."

The young Frenchman swallowed. "Sir," he said bleakly, "at these heights there is sometimes a mental dis-

turbance. But if you will repeat the imputation after we have landed——"

"Don't be a fool! If it can't be done, it can't. I'm reasonable. But you'll own it would be tempting to see what's afoot."

"I shall be happy to meet any representative of yours——any swordsman of my own years."

"There, there, there! I apologize. I did not mean to be offensive. If I barked at you, I am sorry."

The Frenchman bowed. "I must accept the apology——"

"That's it. You must not be touchy, lad. In England, you know, we don't go in for bowings and scrapings when we like a fellow."

"——but I fear I have trespassed upon hospitality. As soon as we land I will relieve you of myself and my——balloonage."

"Haven't I apologized? What more can I say except that I am sixty, and that I like you? Give over, and be human!"

The young man shrugged; but he relaxed, and managed to return, thinly, the older man's smile. There was charm in it, and such rough good-will as might have disarmed a man more punctilious than the Frenchman could afford to be. He thought: 'You offend against all my codes; but you mean no harm, as you say. Then, in effect, no harm is done. The truth is I like you also, and——one must live!' Aloud he said: "Then you have the intention to continue these experiments with my balloon?"

"Most certainly I have. Young fellow, every rich man over fifty has to make his choice for the rest of his days. He must be a reactionary or a prophet. Well, I choose to be a prophet. I say that within twenty years from this day the sky will be as full of balloons as the field behind my house is full of turnips, and I choose, as a man of business, to help my prophecy come true. I am not afraid of change. Chinese porcelain is pretty enough, but I preferred to make my own china from my own clay pits, and though the county jeered at me for going into trade it has been worth my while, as all the world knows."

The other assented with sharp-eyed respect.

"Today," continued the older man, "my neighbours call me mad because I keep adventurers instead of fox hounds. What do I care? All I know is that some hundred and fifty people have ascended into the sky in these last twenty years. That is adventure, and if it is to go on they must have money. Well, I have got money—and faith as well: my mother was a Quaker. I am Moses on Pisgah. I have seen from afar the promised age."

"You believe that?" The young man's eyes glistened.

"Believe it enough to remake my will. I shall leave you a little—not much—and the rest shall go to found a school of aeronautics here in England. The English think a balloon is a public-garden show. Time we learnt better. You people of France, you know when to take things seriously.⁵⁵

"Which France?" asked the young man bitterly.

"What?"⁵⁵

"I say—which France? There was such a France as you describe—the France of Besnier, of Charles, of Pilâtre de Rozier. Where is that France today? When, in 1784, on that sacred day of May, Montgolfier made his experiment with the captive fire-balloon, who shared in it? Proprietors of public-gardens? Jugglers? Tumblers? No! There went up into the air with him a Marquis and Marquise of France. When, in June of that same immortal year, the first balloon, untethered, carried its living freight into the sky, who watched the ascent? A king of France! Where is that king, and where is his France today? (I must throw out sand. We descend too swiftly.) Sir, you are mad to waste your British money on me and my antiquated balloon. As you observed, rightly, the mastery of the air was to be the contribution of ancient France to the science of earth. But in modern France the dream is scattered as I scatter this sand. Garnerin, that Columbus of the skies, is reduced to buffoon, hired to celebrate the coronation of Buonaparte with a balloon display. Well, he obeys, for he must, or live in exile. The machine rises from Paris tricked out with fairy lights like a dancer in spangles. *That effect*

they advertise—not the conquest of space, but the expense of the two thousand lamps. Well, you see, at daybreak this balloon arrives above Rome. Its unworthy mission is accomplished with brilliance. Vive l'Empereur! But—here is bitterness for the Emperor—as it falls to earth to drown in a lake that lies convenient, it is ripped open against the tomb of Nero the tyrant, and the crown-imperial of its decoration rolls ignominiously on the ground."

"The tomb of Nero! That is a famous good joke. We have not heard it over here."

"Naturally not! Our high lord Buonaparte, who is superstitious, falls into a rage and forbids any mention of the balloon's fate by anyone, anywhere, at any time. He is afraid that it will be said: 'An omen!' "

"More likely afraid that you will all laugh at him."

"We do not laugh much, these days, in France. But mark this, dear sir! At Meudon the Academy of Aeronautics is forthwith closed, and the Aerostatic Corps disbanded."

"No—that I don't believe!"

"You may. France abandons the conquest of the air. The Corsican found balloons useful enough to fright the natives of Egypt until Sir Nelson arrives to do as much for him; but we, being beaten—"

"You are too bitter. Say we beat Jack Corse! Bonaparte is not France.⁵⁵

"Ah fah! I speak facts. We French never fight against facts. You beat the Corsican, and we make him our Emperor in spite of it. Well then, you beat us. He has bewitched us, that great thief. He takes everything: our freedom, our invincibility, even our wit. Now he takes from us the new kingdom of the air. It is true, I tell you. Garnerin, Charles, Pilâtre de Rozier, Blanchard—this was a new fellowship of the Paladins, and some thought, green fools, that Buonaparte—I will not say Bonaparte, as he wishes—comes out of Corsica to be their Charlemagne. But we dreamed wrong. For the French, to dream at all is always a sin. Now the dream is broken—soap-bubbled—

how do you say? Gernerin is discredited, Rozier burned to death, Blanchard an old man. I, squire of those great ones, poor discard of the old France, am lucky to earn my bread among the new France's enemies, lucky to tramp your better-kept roads with the remnants of my balloon packed in its basket on my back, lucky to show it for sixpence at the village fairs. Sir, I showed it once in that very field on which Lunardi the Italian descended twenty years ago, the field called Etna, or Italy, on account of some local tale. A stone immortalizes his arrival."

"That will be the Stone of Ware! In Hertfordshire, eh?"

"That is the place. Well, I tell you, there is an inscription of magnificence upon that stone. 'Let Posterity know and be astonished—the First Aerial Traveller in Britain—Powers of Chemistry—Improvement of Science—Fortitude of Man.' Well, and after twenty years the peasants still remember Lunardi and his balloon, so I earned in all seven shillings 'to buy myself more gas!' Yes, I am lucky, a lucky poor devil of an émigré, lucky—" his face changed, the bitterness lightened to charm, "—lucky because in the end I met you, sir, and found in you one soul at least in this careless, uncomprehending land who knows at once how to dream and how to aid others to realize their dreams."

He began a formal bow, then, as the car tilted at the movement, shrugged at himself and sat down again.

The older man answered nothing, but watched the passionate face with a look between contempt and sympathy, and there was admiration in it too. He thought in his turn: 'A foreigner—to be despised: a youth—to be excused: a genius—to be admired: an investment—*not* to be wasted!'⁵ Aloud he said:

"Boney will meet his match one day, you know."

"Never!"

"Oh yes! Nelson and Collingwood—what more do you desire? And when they have composed Europe, there will be the time for a smart young fellow like you to make a stir. I am not mocking. I am behind you, remember! Ballooning—yes! When the days of adventure are over there is always commerce."

"Commerce? Ah well! But I do not know why you believe in me."

"This is a well-planned machine. I watched you make it. You shall make me other novelties."

"Novelties! Your English view of knowledge!"

"Where are we now? Is not that Salisbury spire? My word, we have drifted. That will be the London road directly under us. The coaches might be stag-beetles, eh? Were you ever nipped by a stag-beetle lying on its back? Look at that great fellow below us, edging the farm-cart into the ditch! Likes the road to himself. Have you ever driven a four-in-hand? Capital sport! Why, what is the matter?"

For while he rambled the young Frenchman had sprung up and without a word was fumbling at the network of ropes.

"Throw out more ballast, please sir!"⁵⁵ he said over his shoulder, and then: "Quickly!"⁵⁵

For a second the elder man hesitated, then obeyed, more slowly and with more effort, yet with the same neat efficiency as his French companion. Indeed there was a resemblance between them, which explained the unusual partnership. There exist fathers and sons between whom there is no physical tie.

"What is it?"⁵⁵ he said at last in a voice that the senior clerks and trusted superintendent of his great factory alone had ever heard, and they not often. "Something wrong, eh?"

"Throw out more sand!"⁵⁵

"What, all?"⁵⁵

"Dribble it!"⁵⁵

"To command!"⁵⁵ Then, after a pause: "Is the wind the trouble? We might be on the Channel and not over it, the way we are rocking. Ha, now we drive inland! That is better, eh?"⁵⁵

"Throw out more ballast! The instruments, sir, and the moveables! Your coat! Even, at need, the dog!"⁵⁵

"I don't throw Toby out,"⁵⁵ said the manufacturer.

"Well——" The other shrugged, intent.

"Answer me! I am not a child. What's amiss?"

"One of the seams has begun to split."

"There go my shoes. Give me yours!"

Without releasing his grip on the nets above him the Frenchman held out his booted leg.

"Tug, please! I must not let go."

His companion was deft, and the boots followed the rest of the precious rubbish.

"It will not hold much longer. There will be a crash," said the younger man looking down from the rigging.

"I'll jump it."

"No! Break a leg that way!"

"We are not dropping so fast now, eh?"

"The wind helps us. But for how long?"

"I'll tell you what we do. First we swing Toby over on a long rope. If he makes it, then I let you down, my lad. You are light weight."

"I think we will lie down, both of us, on the floor of the basket," decided the young man. "There will be less shock."

"I paid for this balloon, young fellow, and my orders——"

"Yes, I know, but I stay with you. Lie down, sir, and I will swing your dog over into safety, as far as I can, and when I judge that the appropriate moment has come."

"Where shall we land?" said the elder man. He had unwound his muffler, and was bandaging a sling about the terrier's middle.

"It is still the Plain. Directly below us at this moment there is a heap of stones, like those at Carnac, which is my home."

"Damn your home! This is Stonehenge, my lad. You pray for a good scatter of juniper-bushes! If we drop upon the stones we are done for."

CHAPTER II

MEANWHILE the coach, which they had so recently observed between the cloud-gaps, was rumbling on towards Salisbury, unaware of aerial inspection. It was one of

those uneasy vehicles which the genius of the language had labelled 'Accommodation Coach', an old stager, its smart bloom long since rubbed off, serving passengers who had but short journeys to make and were not particular about punctuality. The riders inside its roomy body did well enough, but the box-seat passenger complained bitterly of the jolting.

"I hear," he said to the coachman, "that they are putting the boxes of all stage-coaches on springs as soon as may be. Well, the sooner the better!"

"You may well say so, sir," returned the coachman, a ruddy, middle-aged man with a sharp eye and very well-cut overcoats. "Springs—Lord love you, you could drive in your sleep on the new box-springs. Now, sitting here shows a man's mettle. You must go with the swing of the box, see, or you'd wear yourself out in a week. But when I was driving the *Land Schooner*—"

"Well, and why are you not driving it now? I missed you last week going down to Portsmouth."

"Ah, sir, it's a wicked story. I had Lord Lindo beside me one day, as it might be you, and he was for ever at me to let him tool her along a bit. I wouldn't hear of it, no I wouldn't, though he offered me a ten-p'un note."

"Had that way before, eh?"

"Twice—and one young gentleman took the wheel off and the other lamed the grey there, poor old Bessie. That's why she's shifted to an accommodation coach, like yours truly. My own fault. I'd had my warning from the company, on account of which I stuck to orders fair and firm, and it was all blowing over nicely, till what must my lord do but chivy me into playing the Game with him—you know, sir, Road Piquet. 'Twasn't any way fair, for his eyes are younger and sharper than mine. Well, he won my last shilling off me, and then says he: 'Come now, Price, let me tool 'em along a bit and I'll give you back your losings and a ten-p'un note to sweeten it all. Now sir, what would you have done?'"

"What you did, I daresay. Was there an accident?"

"No, but I had my own new manager inside observing of

me, and never knew it till I was hauled up afore the Board and my reins and my character taken away. I'd ha' been sacked outright if it hadn't been for his lordship. He took the blame, I will say that for him. So the end of it was they give me this old come-up-easy, and I'm to go back to the mails in three months if there's no further complaint. Well, there won't be, I tell you that. It's not my style, an accommodation coach, and the vails would shock you. We drive women mostly."

"So I cannot persuade you to play the Road Game with me for the same stakes?"

"No, sir! But I'll play the Road Game with you for an honest dollar. Toss for sides!" And the coachman fumbled in his swathings and produced a crown-piece. "Heads I keep my own side. Tails you take it. High into heaven, boy!" He flicked the great coin dexterously. "Down he comes—heads! And I take my own side. You look left!"

"I forget how we score."

"A pig, one—a black sheep, one—magpie, one—white magpie, five—a cat, five—cat in a window, ten."

"What is a grey horse?"

"Five."

"And a rarity is game, eh? Who decides that?"

"We umpire ourselves."

"What? Can I trust you? Has not your crown-piece got two heads on it?"

"Spotted that, did you sir?" The coachman was unabashed. "All right, sir! No more tricks! Ready? Go? Then I claim five for Bess there—she's grey."

"I thought you said no tricks! Hulloo, there's a pig and a piglet—two to me!"

"A magpie!" said the coachman. "Makes me six."

"A rabbit!" said the outside passenger. "And another! Makes me four."

"Mistletoe!" said the coachman in a hoarse, triumphant voice. "Makes me nine."

They rolled on, absorbed in an amusement to which the bright, delaying weather contributed; for the summer of

eighteen hundred and five had slid gracefully beneath a senile sun into the mildest of autumns. Here, bonfire smoke curled into a mansion over beds of unwithered dahlias, those curious blooms so recently introduced by the Marchioness of Bute, and there the dry green of the oaks still matched the venetian-blinds of the smart villas. The beeches had their autumn look of professional youth, and in the bedewed grass, swelling in second growth, a few July sweets were scattered—a knapweed, a head of yarrow, a clock-tower of St John's-wort. The rabbits were everywhere, and few of the other hedgerow creatures had gone to bed. It was a fine afternoon for the Road Game.

One of the inside passengers, a young gentleman who had spent the best part of the last three miles with head and shoulders thrust out of the window, now drew them in, and, sitting down, addressed the elderly magnate who sat opposite him reading the 'Times'.

"What's the date?" asked the younger passenger, who was red-headed and romantically dishevelled.

"The twenty-first of October," growled the other. "Why?"

"I wanted to know. I wanted to remember this bold innovation on the part of Nature. She departs, you see, from the Old Master tradition in autumns. Delightful fashionable snobbery! This is a Lawrence year, with young Wilkie in attendance."

"A painter, eh?"

"I admit it."

"Gypsies!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say to you what I say to the gypsies when they come up before me on the bench. I say to them: 'Why don't you settle down and do an honest day's work?' We need hands in the pilchard season. I am the Mayor of Falmouth."

"Your worship need not apologize." The young man's tone was gracious, but there was a glint in his eye. "The head of my profession was Mayor of Plympton—in his spare time! One Reynolds, if you ever heard of him."

"Ever heard of him? Do you mean the great Sir Joshua? Give him his title, boy! Not know Sir Joshua? Why, my father went to his father's school. He painted my picture when I was no more than five years old, yes, and put me in one of his allegories as well. Classical."

"Venus or Mars?"

"I was not a principal. I was a rosy Love," said the Mayor belligerently. But the red-headed young man was off on another course.

"Old Josh painted as for the theatre," said he with authority. "His grouping of figures is always a staging of them. His daylight is theatre daylight." He turned to the female passenger in the far corner, aware that the conversation had made her lift her head, and that when she smiled she was pretty. "I have designed for the theatre in my time. I should know."

"It must be very hard," she returned with sympathy, "to paint pictures the size of a whole stage."

"I don't know. Scope! And the work is seen, at least." His eyes wandered to the back-folded 'Times' which the Mayor of Falmouth held before him like a shield. "The name of Boney confronts me. There's another of the fraternity! 'The best actor in the world, whether for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral and so forth.' That coronation spectacle, and the business with the Lombard crown was theatrically very well done. I am obliged to have a reluctant admiration for Boney." He coughed. "Any news of him, your worship, on your page?"

"When I have quite finished with my 'Times'," said the Mayor of Falmouth, "you are welcome to borrow it, so long as you return it before they drop me off. But I would rather you did not bore into my back sheet, and I would rather not listen to your treasonable talk."

"He is right." The young man smiled at the female passenger. "Why read a newspaper when there are two windows to look out of? 'Treason to Nature!' says his worship."

"I do not. I'm speaking of the way you spoke of Boney."

"And I have forgotten him for Nature! There is a briar-

bush on that bank with roses and hips blooming all together. Now such a sight I have never seen before. That is notional!" and he half rose, tugging his sketch-book out of his overcoat pocket. But the Mayor of Falmouth put his fat hand on the window-strap.

"Keep your seat, sir! Other people want to see out as well as you. All the young lady and I have had for the last five miles is a view of your Bond Street nethers."

"For that matter," said the dishevelled young gentleman, rather red, and with a glance at the far corner, "when you hold up your 'Times' between us and the light it is quite impossible for anyone to see out of the window at all. However, as I was unable to procure a newspaper for myself, I made no objection. I do not care whether I read the back or the front page first." Then, as the owner inverted the double sheet: "Have you seen the 'Times' today, madam?" and he turned to the young woman with smiling confidence, for a glance had made him aware that at least she was not ranged against him.

"No, sir," said she demurely.

"Then I shall be happy to acquaint you with the news." With that he leant forward at a zealous angle and began to read off the headlines.

"Court News? Shipping News? The Leading Article? The Leading Article devotes itself to the war, and is very apprehensive in tone—shall we skip it? There is a letter from the 'Sydney Gazette', if you would care to hear it. Or this? 'The *Hind* frigate—' perhaps you have naval acquaintance? '—sailed on Friday from Portsmouth with dispatches for Lord Nelson.' Ah, that interests you! Then here again is more about Lord Nelson. 'The arrival of Sir Robert Calder may be daily expected, as Lord Nelson, on arriving off Cadiz, was to send the officer immediately.' How do you pronounce Cadiz? Spanish fashion, or to rhyme with 'ladies'? Perhaps you are acquainted with Sir Robert Calder, madam?"

"No, sir," said she.

"Forgive me! I meant no impertinent enquiry. But you looked so alert of a sudden."

"At this moment in our history," she returned valiantly, "any mention of Lord Nelson——"

"Indeed, indeed I agree. There is no other news in the world at this moment. It must be three weeks or more since he sailed. Let us see if we can find any further items concerning him. If his worship will lift the news-sheet a trifle I could read aloud from the lower columns to you."

The 'Times' was instantly dashed aside, and its owner delivered himself redly.

"Sir, your interest in my 'Times' is mere impertinence."

"So was your interest in my tailor."

"Puppy!" said the Mayor of Falmouth.

"Oh hush, your worship! A lady is present. And I asked you to lift the paper, not to lower it."

The Mayor condescended no reply, but very deliberately folded and refolded his 'Times' till it was no bigger than a large envelope, and re-addressed himself to the oblong of print. The young woman giggled, a mouse of a sound, but it was enough for the dishevelled young man, who from then on, and with sparkling eyes, addressed himself solely to her.

"You joined at Basingstoke, I think, as I did. We both missed the pleasure of the morning start."

"Oh, I started very early! I left my friend's at dawn."

"Ah well, a country dawn is fair enough. But you should see London as I did yesterday, wearing the beauty of the morning like a garment."

"Oh! What a pretty idea!" She met his eyes for the first time.

"Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air." "

"Oh, verse! I see. Did you write it, sir?"

"I?" he laughed, flattered.

"The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

No! Sonnetizing is not my art."

"But it is excellent. 'The very houses seem asleep.' I have been struck by the same thought myself. Who wrote it?"

"A Lake poet. One Wordsworth."

"I never heard of him. What is the name of the poem? I should like to read it again."

"I will write it down for you. I know it by heart." And he took out a note-book, and began to scribble.

"How obliging you are. But I meant I would buy the book."

"It is not in print."

"Oh, do you know Mr. Wordsworth?"

"A travelling acquaintance. I was for France in the year 'two—the end of July, or thereabouts—and on the outgoing packet I was of service to an English lady and her brother. He was the squeamish one. You know, an imposing fellow of thirty-two in a shepherd's plaid, sea-sick, is a spectacle."

She laughed.

"Ah," he said, "but the lady pleased me, so I would not laugh. She was small, bright-eyed, a little like you; but she would not laugh either. We did our best for him. After they had landed at Calais I found on the floor such a sheet of paper as this." He continued to scribble.

"You did not read his private paper!"

He stared. "I always read private papers. I am obliged to it by my interest in human nature."

"Oh!"

"Well, but you can see for yourself in this case how fortunate it was that I have such a weakness. I at once recognized the beauty of the lines, knew that the fellow must be a somebody, and hastened after them. My courtesy was not well received by him. She was all charming gratitude; but he—have you ever seen Kemble? He reminded me of Kemble. Not a smile, and he made me feel that he thought I was spying upon him. Here you are!" He folded the paper and handed it to her with a bow.

"Thank you. I am glad to have it. I will copy it into my commonplace book. Did you say a Lake poet? Somebody told me that Lake poets are not quite the thing."

"Oh, if you go by the critics! I know nothing of writing. I only know what pleases me."

"I am the same," said she, charmed. "Are you pleased with Cowper?"

"No!"

"Oh! Have you ever read *The Castaway*?"

"No!"

"Oh!"

"Why 'Oh' in that tone? I can say 'Oh!' as well as you when I disapprove. I'll say it now. Oh, you meek, well-bred women with your explicit silences, how irritating you all are!"

She laughed. "I am sorry, sir."

"That's better. Now you are human again. Silence is not human. A silent woman has too much of the dangerous brute in her for me. Now about *The Castaway*—have I missed something? Is it great verse? Does it stir the dust of the inner chamber?" And then, as she stared, "I mean, has it imagination?"

"I do not know. It is about a man drowning at sea. He has fallen overboard, and the storm will not let them stop to save him. There is one line that goes round in my head:

'He long survives who lives an hour
In ocean, self-upheld—'

You see, in these days with so many battles, so many ships sunk, so many sailors——" She ceased, with a contraction of the mouth.

"I will read it," he said, watching her. "I am ashamed not to know it if it is as fine as you say. I suppose we moderns are unjust to Cowper. He cannot have his reputation for nothing; but oh—oh, again!—his subjects! Sofas and souls! I hate a man to be too much concerned with his own damnation. Now Wordsworth at least shares his universe. I do not pretend to you that Wordsworth will live, but I do say that when I walked over Westminster Bridge two dawns ago I saw all I saw because he had seen it first,"

"You are an early riser?"

"Often I paint all night. I am sure Rembrandt did. See your work by daylight: put it down by candlelight! No servile copying! Rely on memory! Hit or miss! Give me an attic with its one candle, giant shadows, mice exploring the waste-paper basket, the death-watch matching your heart-beats in the woodwork, and all that mighty heart lying still—*then* I can paint!"

"I should be afraid of ghosts."

"I saw a ghost once—it was nothing. Yes, midnight is the creative hour. Mind you, I design scenes that have to be viewed by candlelight, or at least by this illuminating gas which they were showing at the Lyceum last spring. A fellow called Winsor—rolled his Rs like our gracious King! He says we shall be lighting the streets with gas in ten years, and then theatres, and finally the private houses. Shall you like it?"

"Is that the same gas," said she with polite concentration of intelligence, "which they put inside balloons?"

"Dear madam, who cares what they put inside balloons? A balloon is a toy. I would not walk across the road to see a balloon. They decorate them, you know, with comic portraits and fairy lights. It is a new sort of 'Punch and Judy'."

"But to go up into the air——!"

"Why, you may do as much if you climb Snowdon or St. Paul's."

"But think," she persisted, "of what it must be like to look down upon spread England! Think of being up in the high sunset!"

"I am content to watch it from below." He looked out of the window. "With these rising mists it will be a splendid one. But tomorrow, after such a sunset, there must be frost, and all colours will die overnight. No more of your zinnias." He looked at the great bunch hanging in the pocket beside her. "They will be blackened and putrid, and berries will acquire 'bloom'—do you know what 'bloom' means, in that special sense?—and there will be grey drifts, fogs, in a still-warmish daylight, and

violets coming out untimely. We are at the end of glory, summer's glory. There will, moreover, be storms at sea."

"At sea?" she said sharply. "How do you know?"

"I apprenticed myself to Nature at a very early age, I live by the look of things."

The Mayor put down his paper.

"He is right: there will be storms. I smelt one coming before I left Plymouth, where I had business, on the fifteenth. The waters were full of porpoises. Saw them with my own eyes, tumbling about the Sound and into Catwater and Hamoaze."

"Any of them shot?"

"Shot at, yes; but you cannot kill a porpoise. Shot bounces off its back. A thick skin, if you take me." He twinkled at the young woman. "But porpoises are a sign of trouble to come. In about five days, I'd say. The fishermen know. They were planning a holiday. They will not go out in a hurricane."

"If you saw your dolphins—"

"Porpoises—"

"—on the fifteenth, and today is the twenty-first, your hurricane is overdue."

"You wait till sundown!" He returned to his 'Times'. The young man smiled contemptuously.

"Do you know the sea?" asked the girl.

"I've lived by the sea on and off."

"But have you been much upon it?" she asked, with unnecessary particularity, as he thought.

"Well, pollock-fishing and so forth."

"Oh!"

"I never had a yearning for a naval life," he said irritably as he felt her interest wane. "We cannot all be Nelsons. But the sea—sea water—that is another matter, and I own Nature's marine painting does attract me: it is such successful theatre. But Nature is at the very head of the theatrical profession. There—those banks of beeches—they are your proof- Thais is burning Persepolis, with orchestral effects."

"Orchestral? Do you mean birds?" she wondered timidly, left far behind.

"No, no, no! Thrice no! Oh, the dreadful agony of birdsong at dawn! No, I mean the October combinations of colour—hawthorn, rose-hip, mountain-ash, ivy, elderberry. What is the hue of elderberry? 'Cello-coloured or double-bass?"

"I only learnt the harp at school."

"Lovely poses for the female arm. Once I saw Lady Hamilton play the harp."

The Mayor put down his 'Times' and leant forward, while the young woman beside him sat bolt upright. Her cheeks glowed. Shyness forsook her.

"Lady Hamilton?" said she.

"Lady Hamilton?" said the Mayor at the same moment, "Lady Hamilton herself. It was in Romney's studio. Some of us, you know, took it over after the old man decayed. One afternoon, latish, we were—do you speak German?—'ausgelassen' is the word—and in the thick of the riot came a knock at the door. I opened it. There she stood—oh, milk and roses!—a big woman, a woman enormous, a goddess. I thought to myself: 'This is the Juno whom Jove hung up in chains by her wrists in the starry vault, and put anvils on her ankles to keep her decorous between heaven and earth.' What did she care? She wrenched herself free, she fell down, she escaped from her heavy fetters and danced, billowy as a piled cloud in the sunset. So much for her looks. As to voice, well, it is thrilling and sweet, and jolly as a seaman's, though more in manner than in volume. She clamoured for her old friend Romney. I asked her to honour us by coming in to rest, my friends sprang up—but you can imagine the run of the scene. We told her Romney's sad story, and she cried at it openly. The tears rolled down her cheeks: such full, round tears. Then she wiped her eyes and looked at us. Then she talked to us. Then she was on her feet seeing all the changes in the room. Somebody at the cupboard popped open a bottle of champagne."

"Oh!"

"She likes champagne. Then she posed for us, attitude after attitude, while we drew in mad haste. What a model! She represented any painting or statue we asked for—made no trouble of it. Oh, how quick she was! Affable lightning! She made me pull the curtains over the skylight, so that she could stand for us as she used to stand for Romney, she told us, at the far end of the great half-dark room, with the narrow window to her left. It glistened her with light. Hair, brow, and left shoulder and arm, thigh and foot, became one flowing, curving silver line. There is an ancient word for her and her performances—glamour—'nothing is but what is not'. She became, in all slenderness, the Dancing Muse, with butterflies on her wrists, her hair floating. Then, as Cassandra, her hair died into muddiness and every curve flattened and sagged. Then she arose and was Flora, moving so lightly that you could see the flowers eased from the grass by the warm pressure of her foot. And then—oh, if I had but my sketches with me!—then she was Agrippina, holding up her son's ashes to the Roman people. That surpassed anything I ever saw done, except by Mrs Siddons. Indeed, Lady Hamilton is a great actress wasted. Ten attitudes she gave us in all, and later she sang to us. Yes, I have lived. I have seen Mrs Siddons put down the candle in 'Macbeth'—Mrs Pritchard never relinquished it, you know—and I have *seen* Lady Hamilton sing to the harp. I say 'seen', for the noise was but so-so; but the pose, the divine pose, was the marriage of England and Greece."

"And did you speak with her," asked the young woman, "I mean as yourself, not as host?"

"No, but I drank to her. I held up my glass: she held up hers. Across the bubbling amber and the rim's circle, thin as a young moon, I met her dark-blue glance."

"Is that from Wordsworth, too?"

"I will not be quizzed."

"I only thought—go on about her dark-blue glance!"

"Well," he said, half sulky, "I was going to say, it had the same spark in it as the sweet champagne. Her face was flushed, by the same champagne, if you like; but it was the sun-flush on a peach, none the less. There were no blotches

from the wine: it was a smooth, even deepening of colour."

"Her hair?"

"That hillside yonder! She was sitting down by then. I had pulled up Romney's chair for her. I am sorry to disillusion you, but she was so stout that she fitted into it like a chestnut into its burr."

The Mayor of Falmouth coughed and refolded his paper noisily; but the young woman leant forward, unheeding.

"And was *he* with her?" she breathed.

"Lord Nelson? I wish I could please you by saying yes. But Lord Nelson was in the North Sea on that occasion. A week later we had the news of Copenhagen."

"A friend of mine should have been with Nelson at Copenhagen, but the Admiralty is very unjust."

"All composite bodies are unjust. It is the same at the Academy now that Sir Joshua is dead. It is the same with the patent theatres. The injustices of those monopolies! The number of fine artists, actors, painters, musicians, who travel the country unable to get a foothold in London would surprise you. I assure you there is a regular conspiracy to keep the touring actor out of Drury Lane, and still more the actress. The managers find it less trouble to give the public what the public already knows than to try out new performers, however gifted. I have in mind at this moment a young woman——"

"Why are they staring?" interrupted the Mayor. "Excuse me, madam!"

He rose and came heavily over to the right-hand window, blocking her view. They were approaching a turn-pike and a couple of cottages, and at the doors little groups of smock-frocks and country petticoats were gaping, not at the coach, as might have been expected, but at the sky. The Mayor, ostentatiously indifferent to the beauties of nature, had nevertheless an observant eye for humanity, and the upturned faces had roused his curiosity. So, while the young woman shrank a little, guarding her skirts, and the young man mourned in pantomime the ruptured conversation, he thrust head and shoulders out of the window, while from overhead came a shout:

"A balloon, by Christ! I claim game!"

"A balloon, George! A billy balloon!"

The young man leaped to the other window and craned out. The coachman reined in his horses.

"Where? Where?"⁵ roared the Mayor, and the entire hamlet answered him.

"There, sir! Betwixt that gap in the clouds! Striped like a sugar-stick, and coming down fast. Look, sir! They're letting down—'sneaks, it's a dog! Dangling it down on the rope as careful as china. See it, sir, running away into the bushes? Crash she comes after! No, she don't! The wind saves her. They're in for trouble, though, no bounds! Half the side blown out! It's a wonder the wind still carries them. See the dog running? See him there with the rope over his tail, biting at it as he runs? Good dog, now! After 'em, Towser!"

"We ought to follow them," shouted the Mayor, and swore as a blob of mud splattered his face, while the coachman retorted:

"How could my wheels get through the meadows? No, sir! Can't be done. Whoa there! Whoa, Bessie!" He slowed to a halt at the turn-pike gate.

"Castaways!" said the young man to the girl as the Mayor drew in his head.

"Poor, poor fellows!"

"Reckless dare-devils!" said the Mayor, with a gleam of approbation, as he reached for his carpet-bag.

"Can nothing be done?"

"Yes, yes. I will attend to it. I break the journey here. I will have help sent to them. I hope the rest of your journey will be without alarm."

"Thank you, sir. It is only as far as Salisbury—at least I am to be met there. I hope they are saved. Good day to you!"

"And to you! They have a chance. Good day, young sir!"

"Good day, sir!"

"Good day! Good day!" and the Mayor was out of the coach and waving to a family turn-out as the turn-pike

formalities concluded. Then the gates swung open and the coach drew briskly forward along a straight road whose banks exactly resembled sofas upholstered in threadbare green plush. The height of them, however, varied greatly. For half a mile they would be sky-touching, crested with berry-bushes and spectral clematis; then they would dwindle to furrow ridges, and behind them the vast Plain would be revealed, cultivated here and there, but for the most part an encampment of juniper-bushes.

"I do not wonder,"⁵⁵ said the young man, following her glance, "that the little men of the past lived, or so they tell us, on such plains and uplands. They could be safe against all their enemies in the junipers. I never saw such natural deception. Odd little bushes! We could discover all humanity modelled in junipers. There, do you see that family of performing dwarfs?"

She saw, and was delighted.

"There is a midshipman," said she.

"And there sit my aunts at tea: and that tufted bush over there might be Napoleon. Do you see the arm tucked in the shirt-front? I tell you, Nature is an artist of parts. How pleasantly she arranged for the Mayor's relations to live hereabouts. I am glad he is gone. Are you glad he is gone?"⁵⁶

He leaned back, looking at her with a smile. So pleasant was it that she ceased to be disturbed by the thought that she was now alone in a coach with a strange young man: and she returned it frankly, which decided him in turn to ignore the convention that, as she had no maid with her, he should join the outside passengers.

It came to this, that both were of a generation much pre-occupied by the niceties of human relationship, and their sentimental instincts were in perfect training. Each had been aware for the last half-hour that the other was emotionally pre-engaged, and because of it each felt a great desire for unburdening. Each thought: 'Stranger as you are, I think you would understand me.' But then their thoughts had diverged. She had said to herself: 'I could not imagine myself marrying him. But I can understand that some

woman would find him the man to marry.' His thought was less practical, but equally direct. 'The aroma of love, how unmistakable it is!' he had reflected. 'It is an invisible warmth lingering in a swept grate where recently there has been a fire. It is the reverberation after the bells have stopped ringing on a Sunday evening. It is a mystery, but a solved one. I know beyond contradiction that my fellow passenger is in love. I daresay, nay I am certain, that she knows as much about me. I wonder what she would think of my Helena. A lady, young, pleasing, married—she is the sort of friend I should choose for Helena. God knows, my poor girl needs a friend.'

More and more did this ideal friend for a young woman in difficulties take the shape of his travelling companion. He assumed that she was married because of the gold band on the third finger of her left hand, and because of her age; for, though she bloomed in the dark coach interior, she was no schoolgirl. He wished very much to know who she was, and determined, at the risk of impertinence, to find out.

"You have a long journey in front of you?"

"As far as Axminster. But I daresay we shall not travel beyond Shaftesbury tonight. I am to be met at Salisbury."

"So am I to be met," said he, making the remark significant. "I hope we shall be in good time. Hot chocolate and muffins—ha! It is worth sleeping a night on the way to arrive in a town at muffin-time. I hate a torchy darkness, and your baggage mislaid in the confusion, and the supper dried up on red-hot plates. I like to settle into my quarters by sunset at latest, and then have the pleasure of strolling out into the High Street—"

"The High Street at Salisbury?"

"Any High Street—in that opalescent half-light so specially contrived to display the English country-town, with its red bricks and brass-work, and its white doorsteps. Have you ever noticed the wan colour of doorsteps after sunset? Honesty-leaf doorsteps, moonstone doorsteps!"

"It comes of the chalk used to whiten them, I suppose."

"I daresay. Chalk is the most light-retaining of all white

surfaces. I have a passion for chalk. And then the black geraniums on the sills!⁵

"Black?"

"Black!"

"Oh, now I see your picture! In Cornwall the cottages are washed just that chalky white, and the geraniums grow to the thatch. Yes, and they go black in the moonlight! Of course they do. I had noticed as much, but I did not know it till now. Go on! You were at the black of geraniums."

"And the elegance of railings and chain-posts, and the hideous gothic of the old inns, except the new-fronted ones, Bath'd, Milsom Streeted, as one might say, by some enterprising landlord. It has been done at the White Hart in Salisbury. Then you turn and turn again, half knowing the streets from some while ago visit, till you come at last along the neatest tiled walk to the most charming portico of all."

"The church?"

"No, madam, the playhouse with its posters. Do you love a play?"

"Yes, a good play."

"Well, but I love, I do honestly and sincerely *love* the inch-deep letters of a play-bill. It is an I.O.U. of pleasure in lamp-black print, and let who will care for the smudges! Which is your favourite play? Have you seen 'Lovers' Vows'? Shakespeare, is he yours? Which of his plays do you prefer? I hope you will say 'The Merchant of Venice'. And that reminds me, did the Mayor say—surely he did not say that the date was the twenty-first of October?"

"Oh yes! The twenty-first, Monday the twenty-first."

"Because, you know, the twenty-first of October is to me the supreme date in English history, and I will tell you why. Four years ago, on the twenty-first of October, at Covent Garden—" he paused impressively, "— I first saw 'The Merchant of Venice' performed. I am to see it again to-night—and for the second time it is the twenty-first of October. I wish I could persuade you to attend the performance."

"Persuade me, sir?" She was a little frosty, suddenly

wondering if she had made a mistake by being so easy with him.

"You and your friends, I mean," said he, sensitively aware of the misunderstanding. "I thought, as you said that you would be met by friends——"

"Oh, I see! Yes, my sister is to meet me," she said with relief.

"I am to be met also," said he, smiling at her, and she returned the smile. Both were pleased that the infinitesimal misunderstanding was dissipated. "I am to be met," his smile broadened, "by a very dear acquaintance—the lady who is to play Portia. *Then*—in 1801—she played Nerissa. That is why I wish you could be persuaded to honour the theatre with your presence."

"I am afraid we are to travel straight on."

"So I shall never see you again?"

"Well sir, it is scarcely likely." She was amused; for she was perfectly aware that his admiration was impersonal, and that, except to get whatever he wanted of her, he did not particularly desire to see her again.

"If then," he leant forward, eager, "we are companions for a half-hour only, may I talk to you? I am so full of my destiny at this moment. I so long to unburden. My sister, to whom I am devoted, is not available, and I am formal with the rest of my family. I need advice, for myself—and another. May I tell you about her?"

"The lady of the theatre, who is to meet you?"

"Oh, how clever you are, and how kind!"

She looked full at him, with the friendliness of an unspoiled nature. He saw that her eyes were a greenish lilac, with brown lashes which looked short because the tips were golden. She had pushed back her travelling hat, or the jolting had done it. At any rate it sat now a little awry upon her round white brow, the charming greenish-hazel curl slipping out of its confinement. This disturbed bonnet was light brown with a sprig of heliotrope in it, and was tied with brown ribbon. She wore a brown spencer, and a muslin with lilac spots. She had small feet, helpless gestures, and a determined mouth.

"I met her," said the dishevelled young man with great simplicity, "when I was no older than you."

"You are twenty-seven? Impossible!" she began thoughtlessly, while he at the same moment cried:

"You cannot be twenty-seven!"

They both stopped, aware that they had sinned. She should not have mentioned her age, and he should not have discovered it, and in an accommodation coach. Then both said hurriedly and at the same moment, she:

"Well, time passes——" And he:

"As it happens I am twenty-three," and continued, the quicker to recover: "Twenty-seven—what is twenty-seven after all? With women it is a matter of bloom, not years. And I guess that you married at seventeen."

"I am not married, sir."

He was genuinely annoyed to be twice mistaken. His glance fell accusingly on her left hand, and she saw it.

"Oh," she said, "the stone is so heavy that it slips round!" She fiddled with the ring as she spoke, revealing it as a thin band holding a large and beautiful ruby. "I — I should not be wearing it," she finished, dismissing the subject. "Well, sir?"

"Well, as I say," but his glance of curiosity still lingered on the ruby, "I was eighteen when I first saw her. I had been packed off on the grand tour, and it was my last night in London, and I was taken to see the 'Merchant' at Covent Garden. But I was in a rage, because I had been dying to see Mrs Siddons. You have seen her, I daresay?"

"Once, in 'Macbeth'. She gave a very clever performance."

"Clever?" he wilted. "How can you?"

"I mean no harm. Is she not clever?"

"She is grand. She has stature."

"Oh no! A little woman."

"I do not care. She has the stature of an Alp."

"Now I see what you mean. But that is what I meant by 'clever'. I shall never forget her when she has just read the letter, and the messenger comes in breathless to say that Macbeth will come. She is so natural. She thinks of the

messenger, you see, though she is in a suffocation of excitement."

" 'Give him tending—he brings great news.' "

"Yes, that is the passage."

"But you must praise Shakespeare for it, I am afraid, not Mrs Siddons."

"I do not care. After the next speech, the one about the raven, I was quite sick with fright."

"You did not faint, though? I have known a lady faint in the sleep-walking scene. Very embarrassing for her party! Well, I had never seen Mrs Siddons; while my tutor had never been inside the new Covent Garden. He had his way; but I was very loudly bored in consequence, ill-mannered cub that I was, until the ladies entered,"

"Portia?"

"Oh yes, the Portia was well enough; but I am speaking of the Nerissa. The actress who should have played the part had a thrice-blessed illness, and her role was assumed at an hour's notice—the familiar jargon!—by a young lady who had never before appeared in London. Jerningham was the surname, and she was a Helena. 'Fair Helena, who more engilds the night, than all yon fiery oes and eyes of light.' A very fair Helena, or so I thought. The audience did not agree with me, and it is true there is nothing of Nerissa in her. They expected a Jewess, one of the Cherry-Ripes; but Helena is fair——"

The lady asked the inevitable question: "How did she look?" and the gentleman, as inevitably, misunderstood it.

"Alarmed. She had, has, little sense of comedy."

"I meant what did she wear?"

"I do not remember. Vile stage garments. But she came forward—I will give you a homely simile—like a young colt, wanting the tit-bit but incapable of taking the last necessary step. She had just such wild eyes, such untrained movements. There was no kittenish grace. There is—regrettably, I think—nothing of the cat in Helena. An actress should be feline. And even I, who adored her at sight, could see that she would have to wait a year or two to be beautiful. She has very rich hair."

"What colour?"

"Cowslip-colour. Well, I went abroad the next day. But first I sent her a young fool's tribute—impertinent, but well-chosen—of earrings. The shape of her head, the Grecian outline, ending perfectly in the little lobes, demanded earrings, and these were diamonds, an oe and an eye of light. I sent with them a spray of such heliotropes as you have in your bonnet, because—well, you know the sentiment which the heliotrope conveys."

"Devotion," said she, smiling.

"Exactly, and I never forgot my devotion to her. Memory was aided, no doubt, by the intolerable boredom I suffered in my tutor's company. I could not endure his conversation, and his clothes reeked of some preparation against moth. So one night I helped myself to all he held in trust for me—left him his passport and enough money to get home, of course, and set off on my own grand tour. But I am one of the few Englishmen who have never fallen in love with Italy, nor felt the challenge of the Alps. As for the French, I cannot describe to you how unEnglish they are—all the ladies with men's brains, and all the men with ladies' ways. Gallant, of course: they have courage; but—an unbelieving people. No doubt I am prejudiced at the moment, but even in peace-time I cannot like the French. So I came home ahead of my licence, and arrived in London with a few good antiques, a surprising amount of cash, and not the least desire for reconciliation with my family. You are the perfect listener," he broke off suddenly.

She laughed, and moved a little nearer. He observed that the bonnet had slipped right off her head, and now lay on the nape of her neck, freeing the slight curls. A part of his mind renewed a promise to himself to paint her one day. Another part thought only of another bonnet that he had seen lie, just so, on another woman's longer, nobler neck.

"Well, as I tell you, I came back emancipated, and to be sure, my first evening in London was spent at Covent Garden. But the moon did not rise. There were a couple of

very bright stars, but—no Helena! Well, I made enquiries—the silver key, you know—and I soon heard the wretched story: a drinking vagabond of a husband, who took her money and beat her, troubles in the company, jealous women, quarrels, influences, a clique—such a familiar story. Helena had not been dismissed; but when the company reformed her name did not figure on the list. She had at once joined some travelling company, I was told; but I could not trace her further. Well, it was a romantic disappointment, but no more, for, at that period, I was fathoms deep in love with Lawrence and linseed oil. (Did you know that Lawrence nearly went on the stage?) Well, I took the studio in Cavendish Square, once Romney's, with some other fellows. Now it is my own. I have a pretty talent, to tell you the truth, for painting women, and I soon made enough money to establish my independence and, perhaps, my reputation; for I found myself, in spite of myself, re-adopted by Society. Then I met my brother one day in Bond Street, and as I was arm-in-arm with a lord he was pleased to see me, and dressed the fatted calf for me at his rooms in the Albany, while the family wrote its approval from several counties—we have scattered since my mother died. Oh, and I forgot to tell you, I had two pictures in the Academy that year—not skied. All this put me in conceit with myself, I will own it. I planned a work in the Haydon manner, and I let it be known that I paid my models handsomely. Well, one morning——"

"There was a knock at the door and *she* walked in."

"Now how did you guess?"

"There is a circulating library at Liskeard."

"Now that is too bad of you! Real life does quite often resemble a novel, especially in its coincidences. For you speak familiarly of Liskeard?"

"I stay there."

"Ah! Well, I have a cousin and his family living at Liskeard or somewhere near, an old gentleman, a former naval officer. A French name. Lapanotiere."

"The Lapanotieres are your cousins?" She sat very still.

"So you know them? How small the world is! Are you

acquainted with the younger Lapenotiere, the charming fellow with the big nose, my cousin John Richards? Yes, they came over with William of Orange, and we intermarried during the last century—my name, by the way, is Feilding—but how close the connection is I could not tell you, you would have to ask my aunts. But I remember that Cousin John went into the Navy at twelve—like Nelson."

"The likeness between them," she said proudly, "has often been noted."

"As to that, I could not tell you; for I saw him last when I was a child. I stayed with them at Ilfracombe when Cousin John was just home from a three years' voyage. He was in the fur trade, I think."

"Ah yes, he went on a sealing expedition when he was fifteen, just as Nelson did. At least his lordship was on a Polar expedition at fifteen. And Lord Nelson went to the East Indies, and so did John Richards. And they were both in the Merchant Service for a time. But John Richards only rejoined when the war broke out—not this war, the last one. He was with Lord St Vincent when Lord St Vincent was still Sir John Jervis, you know. That was in 'ninety-four. Lord St Vincent thinks the world of him, and so does Sir James Saumarez, and so does the Admiralty. Why, he has been thanked by all three. You must have read how the *Pickle*—he commands the *Pickle*—saved the crew of the *Magnificent* when it was wrecked near Brest. It was only last year. It made the greatest stir."

"By Jove, was that my cousin?"

"He is always rescuing people and doing brave deeds, though he would never tell you himself."

"What have they done for him?"

"He is still a lieutenant."

"Well, he is young. Promotion will come."

"He is much older than you. He is thirty-four."

"Poor John Richards to be thirty-four! He is not married?"

"He is a widower," she said primly, "since last year."

"Any children?"

"Two little girls—babies—boarded out."

"He should marry again,"

"He is too poor, I should think."

"He ought to have picked up a living in these warlike times."

"Well, the *Pickle* is only a schooner, eight twelve-pounders, thirty-five men. She was the *Sting*, you know. She was built in Bermuda. She cost eight hundred."

"You are extremely precise——"

"My father was a naval officer."

"That explains it. I was going to say—when you reel off your 'eight twelve-pounders, thirty-five men' you have me at a disadvantage. No picture forms in my mind. How many masts—is there a cabin? What sort of a ship does my cousin command?"

"Well, of course, the *Pickle* is tiny. Her guns, as John says, are about as dangerous as four pair of jackboots."

"You have seen her?"

"No, but I have been presented with a sketch of her."

"Another artist in the family?"

"Your cousin sketches."

"Oh, my cousin sketches! Is he proud of her?"

"He says that she is faster than you would believe. He says he would not change her for the *Royal Sovereign*"

"He says that until he gets promotion. Then, goodbye the *Pickle!*"

"He does not think that he will ever get promotion."

"He must have some influence. Our family is self-loyal."

"He says he will not be a poor relation. Besides, there is always the hope—you see, Nelson himself has taken notice of him. He had a gold watch once from Nelson. And then, of course, Collingwood——"

"Oh, is Collingwood his friend? Well, with two admirals behind him——"

"We must not say 'friend', that is too strong; but his aunt has hopes of them both, but most of Admiral Collingwood, You see, I do not know these things from your cousin, only from his aunt."

"Is she mine?"

"No, she is not on the Feilding side. She is his

mother's sister, and John Richards is her favourite nephew, and he tells her things that he would not tell the family, because they would mock at him. The Lapenotieres have all very clever brown eyes, and tongues as quick as fireworks, because of their French blood. They were Huguenots, you know. Yes, of course you would know that."

"I fancy," said he, smiling, "that I know much less about them than you do. I know, of course, that they came over with Dutch William. I suppose they fled from France after the revocation."

"Of the Edict of Nantes? Oh no, no! Much earlier. They first settled in Holland in the time of William the Silent. John says the Lapenotieres are more Dutch than French, and that is why he does not lose his head in a crisis. He is very cool. That is how he pleased Collingwood. You see, he was coming home on some ship or other, and Admiral Collingwood was also a passenger. And one day—I do not know the details—but the ship was running on the rocks because of a wrong order to the steersman, and he took the wheel from him without any right to do it, and steered so very cleverly that he saved the ship. And the Admiral sent for Ricky, and told him that he would not forget that he had saved their lives, and that if ever he had the opportunity he would repay him."

"But so far he has not repaid him?"

"No," she sighed, "and he has no patrons at home. You cannot rise in the Navy without patrons at home. Even Lord Nelson, you know, cannot do much at the Admiralty when it is a question of preferments. They have so many sons and nephews at the Admiralty. I think Ricky will be a lieutenant to the end of his days as my poor father was. It is a great misfortune to be poor."

There was a silence. He broke it at last with:

"Yes, it is a misfortune. But to be poor is not to be in real misery."

"I will tell you what is hard," said she, "that there is no work by which a woman can enrich herself. She can be a governess, yes, and when she is old have a school. But to

make money, to acquire an income and independence, a fortune—there is no hope of that, unless she is——" She broke off in sudden discomfort.

"Unless she is an actress, you were going to say."

"Of course," she said hurriedly, "they are often most respectable, like Mrs Siddons."

He flung himself along the carriage seat to be opposite her, and leant forward, smiling and persuasive.

"If a most respectable young actress were in need of—I hardly know how to put it—help, countenance, and so forth, would you give it if you had the power? Now think of Collingwood and John Richards."

"Yes," she said, "I would give it."

"I may hold you to that one day."

"We are not likely to meet again."

"We are certain to meet again. I am a cousin of Lapenotiere's, and you," he glanced at her ring, "are his champion, are you not? So I shall make a point of looking him up when the *Pickle* is home, and I shall be re-introduced to you in proper form. And if we have become friends, then one day I might bring to you for your kindness, for your consideration, for social re-establishment and the unfreezing of a heart, for all the things that a woman can give to a woman, (I alone should be your suppliant for this: she has never knelt in her life), I would bring to you—Helena."

"She would not like me. What—a friend chosen for her? That is silly."

"Let me tell you the rest of her story! She did come to me that morning exactly as I have related to you, by mere chance, my most lucky chance. I knew her at once, though she, of course, never dreamed that I knew her or knew of her. She asked me for work—as a model. She was in desperate straits. Her husband had been pressed for the Navy, and she was left destitute with a child to support, a horrid little girl, to whom she is most unaccountably devoted. However that is the maternal instinct. We must admire it, I suppose. At any rate she is well rid of the husband, though she will not quite believe it, and if she did would never own to the knowledge. She is most perfectly virtuous; but I do

know that her heart is free or freeable, and I will tell you how I know it. I gave her work, of course—I have painted *seven* portraits of her, and sketches innumerable—and so, do you see, she has been able bit by bit to redeem her wardrobe and her little treasures. Well, one day she came to me wearing the earrings."

"The oes and eyes?" said she, twiddling her own treasure.

"Yes, the diamonds. I had waited for that day. Painting them an hour later, I asked her what they were. A wedding gift? She said: 'An unfulfilled romance.'⁵"

"Then you told her, did you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"I—do not know. Delicacy? It is no business of mine—but suppose she did not want to know."

"But I wanted to tell her. Do not misunderstand me, Miss——?"

"Graves. My name is Mary Ann Graves."

"And my name is Feilding, Scipio Cockain Feilding."

"Oh!"

"Yes, it is a mouthful! I owe it to my great-great-grandfather, whose name was Scipio Cockain. He must have been an original, eh, to charm down such a name upon himself? Feilding is not half so fine, even though we break grammar."

"I before e except after c."

"And after F, if you are a Feilding; though my grandfather's cousin—he wrote 'Torn Jones', you know—has betrayed us all. He spells it i-e. But novelists tend to be conventional."

"You do not write?"

"Artist purely, which, as the Mayor says, is next door to a gypsy. Did you take what he meant by gypsy?"

"No."

"He meant outlaw."

"Did he?"

"Of course. To a Mayor of Falmouth, anyone who

behaves directly and with independence, above all anyone who speaks his mind freely, is outside the law, his law—your law."

"What is my law?"

"The law of gentility."

"Why is it wrong to be genteel?" she said, reddening. "I am not free to behave like a gypsy. What can a single woman do but be genteel? It does not mean that we have no feeling, no heart, no—wildness, because we are not men. I do not know what you mean by the law of gentility."

"Genteelity, I should have said."

"Well, I still do not know what you mean."

"I mean that I think you would live an old maid for a man's sake. But would you run to him without marriage lines?"

"No," she said angrily.

"Ah, but Helena——"

"Would she?"

"Who knows what Helena may do one day. However that is all in the future. I am telling you now of the past, and of my callow passion for her. You purse your lips?"

"I do not," she said tartly. "I cannot help my expression; but I am not a schoolgirl to be shocked."

"Well, whether you are shocked or no, it was passion. I have never had such an overwhelming experience. I was carried out to sea on a wave, and not afraid of drowning. I wanted to drown—drown in her."

"You speak," she said, "with such exaggeration."

"Why are you suddenly against me? How am I offending you?"

"You are not offending me. Go on!"

"Well, everything in my life was changed by the experience. I painted to astonish myself and my hardest critics, because—because Helena existed and was in London. I went jubilantly to routs and entertainments, and was noisy, ostentatious, always just overstepping the touchline of good taste, because Helena existed and was in London. I drank too much, or I was puritanically sober, because Helena

existed and was in London. I became a fop, the tailors rejoiced in me. I flung my money about, I was insolent to my betters and was thought a wit for it, I was lavish to the beggars and they wished me luck, and I had luck, such swelling, mounting luck, oh, I was in that balloon we saw, rising ever higher, higher into the blue serene, because Helena existed and was in London. In short, I loved. Then one day I told her so. At once crisis and crash! I had offended all her notions. I had broken the rule, the unwritten rule of our intercourse. I—I suppose you genteel women would say that I behaved badly. Well, if I did, I paid for it. The next day, week, month—I forget how long that burning wrangle lasted—all my gloriousness was at an end; for Helena existed, but she was not in London. Instead of her presence and a morning of exquisite work, I had a letter from her. In it—an earring! It lay in my palm, winking and glittering. It was her farewell, do you see. I knew that immediately. It was a keepsake she flung to me as into the pond of Lethe."

"But what did it mean?"

"It meant that she was returning to the stage. She had procured herself an engagement, the pay so small that it would not purchase the heliotrope in your bonnet, in a barn-storming company. She owned that she still had ambitions, still believed in her art—oh, you know the rigmarole! Anyway she was gone, washing her hands of me, for my sake even more than hers, or so she said. High-flown notions, and her pen speaking, not her heart! Would she have sent me the one jewel and kept the other unless she hoped (against herself) that it was not farewell? Did my cousin give you that garnet in farewell? Of course not! But it is not a garnet, is it? Surely it is a very fine stone."

"It is a Burma ruby. He brought it from the East. It is not mine. I but keep it safe for him; for at sea, you know, things get lost, and he is in some ways too easy. He locks up nothing. He says if he cannot trust his men he might as well stay ashore—which is nonsense. It is his one fault, that he mislays and loses his possessions."

"It proves our cousinship. I too mislay and lose—time—hope—Helena! O Miss Graves, are you not sorry for me in my loss of Helena?"

"What did you do?"⁵⁵

"I sat and shivered, with the diamond in my hand. I still remember how cold I felt. My teeth chattered with cold. It penetrated to my heart and marrow. I had to drink a glass of brandy merely to warm myself enough to begin thinking of what I had best do to rescue myself and her. Well, in the end, of course, I tracked her to her lair, argued, entreated, wore her down: and she wore me down, and we called a truce. This she gained, that I no longer attempted to prevent her performing upon the stage. She convinced me that she obeyed an instinct as real as mine for canvas and brushes. She had learnt amazingly since I saw her at Covent Garden. That early venture was not ill-luck for her really. An apprenticeship was needed. She has had it. Now she has only to be seen. She shall be seen. It is arranged. I am on my way to bring her that good news. She knows I am coming, and will meet me. I shall have the rapture of telling her that a London manager——" He broke off. "Why, we are in the High Street! Did you observe that we had entered Salisbury? When did we pass the outskirts? This is the effect of your conversation upon me. We have been on the stones ten minutes, and I noticed nothing, though now we shall arrive in a moment. Now, may I help you; for unless you collect your bags and parcels beforehand you will get sour looks in the yard. There are always so many passengers waiting to snatch our places."

He rose, swaying with the rock of the coach, and she observed with interest and approval that as soon as there was something active to be done he was ready to do it quickly, neat in his movements, and astonishingly unselfish in his care for her comfort.

'I see very well,' she thought as she emptied the pocket, 'how he comes to be the cousin of John Richards. He knows how to be kind. The stream of talk is but froth.'

"It is like driving into a theatre," said he, still frothing,

as they rattled into the yard, "an unsuccessful theatre, few spectators in the galleries. I will get down first, then I will help you," and out he leapt, pushing aside the inn people, and got her down upon clean paving-stones, while the outside passengers, like fowls dropping off a henroost, landed in puddles reeking of ammonia, and shook themselves, squawking.

CHAPTER III

YOUNG Mr Feilding remained at Miss Graves's elbow while she tipped the coachman and the guard, his mere presence preventing incivility, besides protecting her from the molestations of the prentices with their bags of cutlery and impudent solicitations. Then he collared a yard-boy and saw her baggage into the house, and, while the outside passengers made for the bowls of water and towels, headed her through the mob. All the while he frothed pleasantly, but his eyes ranged over the spaces of the yard like a leading-man who, in his arrogance, watches the audience while he plays an intimate scene. 'Where is she? Where is she?' said his eyes, though his tongue said:

"You are being met, I believe, but I see no private carriage. Probably your friends have been delayed. The roads at this time of year defeat Paterson. I shall enquire for you; but in the meantime I recommend the coffee-room. (Where is she? Where is she?) This was once a famous house, you know, for chocolate, and the Salisbury ladies still make it a meeting-place, so it is a very fit room for you to wait in. (She has not met me. Helena has not met me.) Come down this corridor! Do you dislike stuffed animals looming down from walls as much as I do? Here is a moth-eaten bear strayed in from the North Pole. Do you remember the Nelson story: 'Sir, I wanted to kill the bear to bring home the skin to my father.'? Turn to your right! (She has not come! She has cheated me!) This part of the structure was visited by Queen Elizabeth, or so they say, but it is all rebuilt now. Down these two steps! Now,

behold their Brussels carpet! Is it not showy? I suspect it came out of the Palace surreptitiously between the departure of Bishop Barrington and the enthronement of Bishop Douglas, who, by the way, is another of my cousins. Are you a bishopy person? I mean, is it Church with you, or God? I thought, if you sat here, you could see the door and not be seen. I will tell them as I go out to send you chocolate—coffee?"

"Chocolate, please! Oh, here is my sister!" and she turned to meet the hurrying matron, like herself, but with a blowsed complexion and a stouter shape. A small boy tagged at her hand.

"Ah, Mary Ann, so you are ahead of us! We had an adventure. A balloon came down in the centre of the road and delayed us half an hour. It was a fine sight for Tom, was it not, Tom? One man had a broken arm and the other was French. Conceive it, they let a Frenchman balloon about the country in war time! I do not like it, do you? They say these emigres hate Bonaparte; but still I do not like it. Tom said how-do-you-do to him in French though, didn't you Tom? Tom—tell your aunt what you said!"

"Comment vous porty-vous?"

"Yes, and I never told him to say it."

"Fawnia, this is Mr Feilding, who has most kindly helped me with my baggage."

"I am obliged to you, sir. We did not like my sister to travel alone; but the servant we were to send for her had to be dismissed quite suddenly, and we have not yet replaced him. Mary Ann, will you order chocolate? We shall be very happy, sir, if you will take a cup with us. We shall be here a good hour, the ostler says, before we get another chaise." Then, as the waiter bustled in with a laden tray, she continued: "You are sure, my man, that it is not half-cold stuff prepared for another traveller?"

"Fawnia!" said the younger sister uneasily.

"Well, but it does no harm to ask. They will cheat you if they can. Yes Tom, you shall have some; but let Mamma pour it out! Then good day to you sir, if you really will not partake. Sit down, Mary Ann!"

But Mary Ann preferred to stand while she listened composedly to the adieus of the stranger, and her resolution irritated her sister. 'She behaves quite as though she were a married woman,' thought Fawnia. 'I daresay she has been talking to that odd-looking man for the last half-hour. She does not object to familiar manners.'

"Thank you, thank you!" young Feilding was murmuring as he kissed her hand with fervour.

"For what?" said Mary Ann.

"For listening to me, and for the good luck which I feel you are wishing down on me. Thank you, and thank you—Helena!"

For at the far end of the carpet, so suggestive of the red strip leading to altar-steps, there stood a sombre young woman, taller than he, her face shadowed by bonnet and veil. He saw her, and became a whirl of capes. His fervent greeting echoed through the room, till the young woman checked it with a hand on his arm, a dropped voice, and a quick movement down the steps. Then he turned with her, another person, an agitated creature, pressing after her, conciliating, obeying, his speech streaming out into exuberances and quieting again, yet still spurting irregularly like a high-springing fountain when the leaden cap is but half jammed down upon the jet. The two swept each other into the nearest alcove, as unconscious of spectators as if they moved enclosed in a bubble of air.

The elder sister lifted her eyebrows.

"That young man is not at all the thing. Why did you let yourself be drawn into conversation. It is never necessary to chat on these occasions. A bow and a thank you, of course, for any services, but——"

"His name is Scipio Feilding. He is a cousin of the Lapenotieres. He has visited the family at Ilfracombe."

"So you have come back, after all these months of visiting, as obstinate as ever? Mary, you are the wickedest girl in England. I have heard about the baronet."

"He was fifty, Fawnia."

"But the settlement! Forty thousand pounds and the first wife's diamonds. How could you?"

"How could I what?"

"Refuse a baronet."

"Oh! Oh yes, I refused him!"

"Well sister, let me tell you this. At your age it was an insane act. You still look very well, I do not deny it, and are smartened up. I like those new sleeves. By the way, have you brought me the pelisse? Well, thank you for that. And did you match the jonquil pattern? Oh, you did? I am glad of it. I should not have liked blue, though I sent a pattern in case there was no yellow at my price. But you have not the bloom you once had, and you will have less colour as you get on, like my aunt Clara. And I suppose you would never rouge."

"Never! That child will be sick if he drinks more chocolate."

"No Tom, no more! Yes, you may have one cake. Mary Ann, it is not fair to snub me when we have always told each other secrets."

"But Fawnia, the conversation is unprofitable. You see, I do not feel old, however I look."

"Oh, you are not too bad!"

"And there are compensations. At twenty-seven I find myself a more agreeable person than I was at fifteen. I rate myself high."

"It is all because of John Richards. You are still angry just because I told you long ago that you and Lapenotiere could not marry."

"Well, and we did not. He married someone else. Quit the subject!"

"Yes, and now he is a widower. I saw the obituary notice. But you have not inherited any fortune, and he is still a lieutenant. It is worse than before! He is now burdened with two infants. You cannot all four live on a lieutenant's pay."

"Dear Fawnia, we have discussed this till I am tired of the subject. I know my duty. I shall do nothing to hurt him or the little girls, you may be sure of that."

"I was not thinking of him."

"Now leave it alone, will you not? I have looked forward

to coming to you and Walter for a few days. Do not make me regret the plan!"

"A few days! You are promised for at least two months. I have saved up all the darning for you. My dear Mary Ann, Mamma does not in the least want you. She is quite well again. Nobody wants you at home, and after the trouble I have had with my Phoebe I think I have first claim. Did you not get my last letter?"

"In which you said that she was sometimes impertinent?"

"That was the last but one. Everything you can imagine abominable has happened since then. My dear Mary, she was out in the orchard after dark—at least there was a moon, but what is a moon?—with Walter's new water-bailiff that he cried up so, (who was to have fetched you, you know,) and if little Tom here had not called out for a drink of water just as we were all going to bed nobody would have known it. That comes of fine dressing. I told you not to give her your old lilac print. Now, Tom! Oh, Tom!"

For Tom was determined to have the cakes which the waiter had left just out of his reach, and his tugging had upset the chocolate-pot. The waiter came hurrying: his mother scolded: Tom howled, and was borne from the room to be sponged and dried.

Mary Ann did not follow, but stayed to placate the waiter, guard the bags and reticules, and envisage the prospect of two months at Axminster minding a naughty child and mending her brother-in-law's hose. She sighed, glancing at the hotel clock, ponderous of voice in the far corner. Half-past four! And she had been travelling since six, a jolting, awkward journey with tiresome waits. She wondered if she would ever have her own, her private carriage, with the right to travel at her own pace and leisure, and looked half enviously across to the far corner where her fellow traveller and the young woman were ensconced. They, at least, had the freedom of their own affairs.

The two were cut off from the general room by the partition. All she could see of Scipio was the eloquent back

arm and hand; but his Helena had sunk into the angle between the wall and the settle's back, her face lifted and exposed to the light. She sat very still, her hands folded in her lap, and in all their conversation never once leaned towards her companion. It was he who leaned and argued, and offered. Their passionate dialogue was low-pitched, but the panelling acted as a sounding-board, and it was as audible in the long, empty room as if they had been seated in the next alcove.

"Success," he was saying, "at long last—success!" And then, with a catch in his voice: "Oh my darling!"

"Mr Feilding, please—not here!"

"I have not seen you for five weeks, and you say Mr Feilding——"

"Scipio, then."

"My small name is Skip!"

"Skip—dear Skip! So you have news for me. Well?"

"The 'well' is that I have got the great man to take an interest."

"What, not Elliston?"

"Yes, indeed! Elliston's scout Foulger is to be in Wiltshire at the turn of the month, and Elliston has promised me, or rather he has promised friends of mine who influence him, that he shall look in on you at Andover during the first week of November."

"That gives us eight to ten days," said she feverishly. "How soon must you go back?"

"I shall not leave you, not till he has come and gone. There is much to be done. I have brought dresses down."

"Oh bless you, Skip!"

"There is the Lyons velvet in which I painted you last year, some white brocade, and some silver and yellow, and several shawls. Then there must be a very careful revision of the whole play. I have had a hack at work on it these three days. A new Arviragus must be engaged. That urchin will not do. I told you so three months ago. Now, if all goes well——"

"Oh Skip, how good you are!"

"No."

"Yes."

"Now if all goes well," he began again, very low. The listener felt as she drew back into her corner that she had no right to hear so well, to see so clearly. But the alien and indecent scene fascinated her: it was too curious to be resisted. The rich sunset streamed in upon the polished walls of the eating-box and made an aureole of Scipio's red hair. He had stopped speaking, but there must have been some wordless further communication between the two; for he suddenly slumped across the table stretching out his hands to the woman, who, as at last she leaned in turn towards him, was also illuminated. Then Mary Ann saw what had caused his silence. The woman Helena was weeping.

"Very proud weeping," thought Mary Ann. "She does not even care to wipe her eyes."

Then she heard his low expostulation.

"Helena—do not! What has happened? Bad news?" The joy had gone out of his voice, candle-sudden.

"I am a fool, that is all."

"What is it?"

She brushed at her eyes impatiently with the back of her hand. "I am always a prey to fear. You know that."

"What? Afraid of Foulger?"

"No, dear! But—but I have heard from Jerningham, after two years. He is still at sea."

"What ship?"

"The *Colossus*."

"Where?"

"With the Fleet at Cadiz. He thinks there is to be a battle soon. He wrote to enquire after the child."

"Is that all?"

"He has suffered, I think. He wrote of the press-gang with horror."

"What does he want?"

"If he survives—well, what is he to do? He writes to ask me."

"Does he think you will take him back?"

"I can be forced to take him back."

"I have told you, you have only to go to a court and tell the truth about him——"

"What, bring a case while he is away fighting?"

"We talked like this," he said, "two years ago."

"But the situation has changed."

"You know well enough that if he comes back and finds you with your fortune made——"

"It will never happen," said she, wrapping her shabby black shawl close about her. "How draughty this place is! I must get back to the theatre."

"He could take every penny of your earnings. He could take the child."

"Yes, as you say, we have been through this so often."

"Why are you crying? For him or for me?"

"For myself, I think. Skip, you had better face it. I shall always fail. I have not the gift of picking up my luck when it is thrown to me."

"Where——" He caught her by the shoulder and pulled her round to him. "Where are your earrings?"

She shrugged.

"You have pawned them again?"

"He wanted money. He will probably be killed."

"How weak women are! Do you love him?"

"No!" she said, not looking at him.

"If he should be killed—please God he is killed!—then will you marry me?"

She stood up, composing her features and her dress. "What is the time?" she asked in her strong, carrying voice. "Are you coming to the theatre with me? I am sorry I have spoiled your welcome as usual. Why must we have these scenes of feeling?" Looking along the room she met Mary's eye. "Oh!" she said scornfully. "We have been entertaining an audience. Well? Are you coming?"

Then he too turned and saw the shrinking, embarrassed Miss Graves. He hesitated, bowed with a shrugging attempt at his former manner, then abjectly, as one dragged by a rope, he followed the graceful figure up the two altar-steps and out into the tunnel of the corridor.

The going of the lovers emptied the room and lightened

it. The spectator had been aware of the dying sun's outburst only because it gilded the actress's cheek, and turned her lover's hair into an image of itself. Now, however, Miss Graves observed that the horizontal rays were drawing lesser responses from every polished surface in the apartment. Glasses, mirrors, pots, kettles, pewter mugs, metal spittoons, the brass corner-guards to the table, the silver plate standing upon it, all winked, glistened or flashed. The black-oak panels reddened into rosewood, the carpet glowed, and still the red flood of colour increased and intensified till her dazzled eyes began to see an array of phantom green metal objects superimposed upon the real glass and metal ware.

Mary Ann rose and went to the window, wondering for an instant if there could be a fire somewhere in the town. It was, however, merely the customary sun going down behind roofs; but the fleeces of the lower skies held and reflected an extraordinary greenish light, while at the zenith heavy black clouds with crimson bellies had gathered, and were travelling fast.

She thought to herself: "This sunset will be a landmark in time. All over Britain people will notice its colour and strangeness, and speak of it in years to come. In France, too, our enemies will see it and say to each other: 'Do you remember that blood-red sunset in the autumn of the year 'five, when we were fighting the English?' Yes, and when he comes home I shall say to John Richards: 'Where were you on that day of the purple sunset? In October it was—the twenty-first, I think.' How odd we humans are to boast, as if it did us credit, when we see a January rose, a white blackbird, or a fire-ball, or any other wonder. I know I shall boast of this one, for it is a wonder. At least it fills me with wonder to know that this red light which bathes me here in a southern county of England, is also falling upon John Richards and his little *Pickle* out in the Atlantic. That balloon never went high enough to see us both at once; but those very high clouds must at this moment be looking down upon the western coasts of Europe and the eastern water-fringe of the Atlantic. They see us both. They know

what I do and what John does. What is he doing, I wonder? He may be standing on deck waiting for this very wind which rattles the window and drives the leaves down the street to flit across Europe and fill his sails. Tight airs'—that is how it will go down in the *Pickle's* log. Light airs! The lovely phrase! How dull the room is suddenly! Ah, the sun has dropped behind the roofs and the day is over for me, but not for John Richards: sunset is only beginning for him.⁵⁵

A door slammed in the rising wind, and suddenly, easily, for the window-seat was low, she slipped on to her knees in instinctive prostration, and began to send up into the red heavens her hurried, ardent prayers. 'O merciful Father—Father—Father—let Thy sun go down on a peaceful sea, and not on gunfire and wreckage, and drownings of Thy children! O merciful Father, do not let the two fleets ever meet! Let the war be settled in some other way, some honourable way that brings our men home safe! I pray to Thee. I pray Thee. Amen! And I wonder, how I wonder, has prayer any power at all?⁵⁵

Thus she shaped her thoughts on that October afternoon while the sunlight ebbed in turn from England, from France, from Spain, and from the show-places of human destiny, Corunna, Lisbon, Cadiz, and the headland of Cape St Vincent.

But if indeed, as some aver, suns and stars have their own vision and consciousness, then of all the spots upon which the sun's eye blinked, there remained longest imprinted upon that huge retina the picture of a wide bay in which masts grew like trees and fell as trees fall, where torn rigging wreathed the stumps, and smoke hung thick as Spanish moss in a Florida swamp, and parted to reveal half-killed ships fleeing through the grey confusion, or floating inert and captive, or fire-ripe for burial. Sardonic-ally that red eye dwelt, or so a prisoner might fancy, upon the great ship *Tonnant*, built at Toulon, captured from her makers, and now terrible in destruction against them: upon the saucy *Téméraire*, her helpless prizes tethered to her helpless sides, and her sister ship the *Dreadnought*, her masts cut

with shot, her maintop sail-yard gone: upon the great *Britannia* with her hundred guns, and the huge bulk of the *Prince*: on the *Neptune*, with her nine shots between wind and water, and the *Spartiate*, with the Spanish *Neptune* for prize. It looked upon the *Mars*, as with due courtesy she received defeated Villeneuve: upon the *Colossus* and the fighting-cock: upon Scotland's darlings, *Defiance* and *Defence*, the *Leviathan* with the *San Augustin* lashed to her port side, and the laurelled *Conqueror*: on the *Belleisle*, her ensign fluttering from the stump of a mast, and the rest of the battered seventy-fours, the *Revenge*, *Achilles*, *Swiftsure*, *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Thunderer*, with the *Minotaur*, knighted at the Nile by Nelson's thanks, and the *Bellerophon* with 'Death or Glory' still chalked upon her guns. It blinked upon the bold and busy *Africa*, and the *Polyphemus*, her heaviest duty still ahead of her, and the *Agamemnon*, 'the finest sixty-four in the service', staunching her deep wound: upon the *Royal Sovereign*, her main-mast and mizzenmast shot away, her foremast stripped of its rigging, and, nearby, the *Euryalus* frigate, waiting upon honour and Collingwood; while, busy as water-boatmen on an agitated pond surface, the little ships the *Naiad*, the *Sirius*, the *Phoebe*, the *Entreprenante* and the *Pickle* sped upon their errands of mercy and duty, carrying orders, transferring officers and wounded men, or swerving after heads which bobbed, invincible as the Plymouth porpoises, in the sun-reddened, fire-reddened, blood-reddened waters.

Last of all the great eye overlooked the *Victory* herself, battle-broken, with her mizzenmast lost, her foretopmast struck, her figure-head in part carried away, and her admiral's light unkindled, while from the *Euryalus* frigate those brother lights shone level and cold.

All this, and the fringed shawl of the coming hurricane, was observed by that scarlet dropping eye before it closed upon the rocks, the shoals and the immortal doom of Trafalgar.

CHAPTER IV

Six days later, at six in the morning, the *Euryalus* frigate signalled the *Pickle* schooner to pass within hail, and by nine the latter's captain, Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotiere, was looking up at the rising and falling sides of the larger vessel. There was a swell on, and it had been hard pulling for the eight oars of the jolly-boat, wet work, but commonplace. The captain, like his men, bore the soaking with an indifference which deceived everyone but himself, and even to himself he would hardly acknowledge his dread of the hoarse influenzas which, with sea-sickness, usually overtook him at the height of an activity. It did not occur to him to link these ailments with bouts of overwork, but he did think to himself, as the boat came alongside the *Euryalus* and he swung himself up, that he could not afford a chill just now, though he felt uncommonly like one, light-headed, feverish and bemused.

Except that he swayed occasionally and very slightly as he stood in talk, there was fortunately nothing to show that the guard set upon his consciousness had slackened, that the secret waters of his mind had been invaded by innumerable thoughts and counter-thoughts. Yet there they were, whole squadrons and fleets of them, skirmishing, attacking, fighting their set battles and running away to fight again, for what seemed like years. But when he roused himself from these spectral engagements he would find that his feet had taken but two steps, his mouth given but one order, that these lapses of consciousness which so frightened him were but a momentary double life of the mind, as if each thought connected with his duties as commander of the *Pickle* schooner set simultaneously a whole series of thoughts travelling in the inner time of his private consciousness. In the ten minutes that it had taken to obey the C.-in-C.'s signal he had wondered to himself in the most natural manner whether it meant that he had committed some blunder, or whether it was merely the question of a new errand; for the *Pickle* had been running errands ever since the

engagement ceased—carrying prisoners, assisting disabled ships, and fishing the drowning in hundreds out of the sea. But concurrently he had been overwhelmed by all manner of thoughts and visions engendered by the recollection of these errands. In particular the remembrance of the hundreds saved returned to him again and again, warming him like a tot of rum, till, as his foot touched the deck of the *Euryalus*, he muzzily saw imposed upon sails, rigging and intervening sky an immense vision of faces—wives', sweet-hearts', children's faces, all gold-tinged with gratitude for his rescue-work, and in their centre he recognized quite clearly the infant features of his own baby daughters. These were two charming and unreal heads of angels with cherub-feather collars. They melted incessantly away into clouds, but were easy to recall.

When, however, he tried to conjure up the face of the young wife whom he would never see again, the picture would not form, and his unstable attention was caught by another drift of cloud in the shape of Miss Mary Ann Graves, slipping away through the rigging like a fish slipping through the meshes of a net. A catch! A catch! But interference had spoiled the catch. 'Husband-hunter!' The unjust phrase, in female voices, had produced a momentary chill. He had been deflected, and other arms had been open, clinging arms. But Mary Ann was his first love, and Mary Ann would be his last, Mary Ann, not that sweet other one whose clinging arms death had quickly loosened, whose name slipped through his mind and escaped like a darting fish. Nor—he pounced upon himself—was that thought new. He had just re-thought it, as if obsessed by this notion of a fish slipping through a net.

Now why? He was in the most important week of his life. He had survived an experience that would keep his name alive while English history was read. Events were whirling importantly about him, or, to phrase it better, to phrase it more modestly, he was bobbing about in the thick of great events much as the *Pickle* had bobbed about in the battle a week ago. Yet his sanity pointed out to him with indignation and alarm that, at this supreme moment of

going to Collingwood, there arose in his stupid mind ('stupid mind', his sanity repeated viciously) no picture of what was to come, no quick, instinctive review of actions to be defended, no premonition of orders to be received, none of that. He had in him none of the alert attention to duty demanded by duty.

Instead, as he took and gave salutations, smiled, chatted and enquired, there arose in his mind the picture of the harbour at Ilfracombe and the long pier with green weed furring it over. He remembered the cold feel of the stone post on which he perched, the sight of his fishing-tackle, the rod flung down awkwardly, its tip straightening under the faraway pull of the float, and himself with a wriggling fish in his hands. Then he heard in his ear the voice of seventeen-year-old Mary Ann saying: "Throw it back! Throw it back!" He would not, and so they had their first quarrel, and as they bickered the fish slipped through his fingers and down into the blue. With the tail of his eye he saw it slip cleanly in and dart away. Mary saw this also; for there was at once another quarrel about losing the fish, and then yet another quarrel about his quarrelsomeness. His inner ear heard simultaneously the ghostly twitterings of all their quarrels, like bird-chatter heard through sleep. Then, a thunderclap dispersing the twitterings, he heard the beginning of the fatal quarrel, and, as always, his mind refused to repeat that memory, jumped it with: 'Over! Over! All that is over. Forget all that! Begin again! Come to the letter and the making-up!'

It was a kind letter, the letter which Mary Ann wrote him when his wife died, a generous letter, a gentle letter. It had opened his heart, and familiar love, so long curtailed out, had flooded him with new sunshine. It had been a blessed comfort to write again to Mary Ann, to relax himself in the warmth of her affectionate common-sense. For Mary Ann had recognized from the beginning of their correspondence that a naval lieutenant without private means but with two daughters to support must, and quickly, find a kind stepmother for his babies, but also a wealthy stepmother. Mary Ann was as poor as he, and so, though

they might be friends, they could not be, in her pathetic phrase, 'anything more'. If it had not been for the babies he could have waited for a better ship and prize-money: there was no hope of fame and fortune in the *Pickle*. Oh, to be Blackwood and have Collingwood making your cabin his headquarters! Oh, to be Blackwood of the *Euryalus* and know privately, (but half the Fleet knew it also,) that Nelson had promised to send you home with the dispatches when the time came and the victory was won! That would mean promotion for fortunate Blackwood. Promotion, monetary rewards, honours, all desirable good things awaited the man who brought home the news: and of course Collingwood would fulfil Nelson's promise. But would he though? He had ignored the command to anchor. 'Anchor, Hardy! Anchor! While I live I'll anchor.' But Collingwood had said: 'Anchor? It is the last thing I would have thought of.' Was he right? Was he wrong? Sides had been taken already. 'Are you for our Nel, or for dear Coll?' Yes, there was division at last in the Band of Brothers.

But the controversy had nothing to do with the captain of the *Pickle*. The opinion of Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotiere was of no importance to anyone. The *Pickle* was a mere ferry-boat, when she was not a temporary prison for defeated French and Spanish importancies, and he thought that he knew well enough what Collingwood now wanted of her, though he dreaded to hear it. If he could get his thirty-five fellows one full night's sleep they would do well enough; but no-one could go on running errands for ever without a proper night's sleep. He must himself have been nodding into unconsciousness as he crossed the deck, for suddenly he felt his foot slip from under him.

"Hold up, sir!" said a midshipman. Wasn't it young Robinson?

"Thank 'ee!"

"Hurt yourself, sir?"

"Thank you, no bones broken!"

Bad! Bad to stumble while youngsters like Robinson and Bayley watched him, and worse to hesitate as if he did

not know his way. 'Walk straight, you fool! You are going to see Collingwood. Collingwood is in Blackwood's cabin, and you are going to him now!'

"You did not knock your head, did you sir?" said young Robinson.

Lapenotiere smiled at him. It was a good-tempered, slight smile which took away the years, which made him again a handsome, high-nosed boy of twenty instead of a quiet lieutenant, thirty-five, commanding the least important ship in the Fleet.

"Not much sleep since the twenty-first," said he.

"You're right, sir, we're all tired out," the other agreed. "I got three hours last night and thought myself lucky."

"I got half an hour," said Lapenotiere, and left him.

"There goes a sick man," said young Robinson sagely.

"Pooh, he's only dead beat!" said the other. "He and the *Pickle* have had their work cut out."

"I'll never forget *Pickle* on the morning of the engagement," said Robinson, "that tiny thing, trying to look fierce and threatening. The confidence of her!"

"I know." The other laughed. "The way she took station between those stately lines of towering two- and three-deckers, cleared for action fore and aft in absurd imitation of them——"

"With her small boarding-netting triced up, and her four-pounder popguns double-shotted and run out! Ludicrous!"

"Well, she made herself useful, scuttling back and forth, give her that! She's fast, too. Blackwood himself owned it, a bit sourly."

"Yes, he is sour about her."

"Wonder why!"

"Because she's fast."

"What of it?"

"Well, we all know what he wa

"I don't," said the younger boy.

"Then you're a gawney. He wants to take home the dispatches. Everyone knows that Nelson promised him——"

"—and he's earned it, by Christ!"

"We have, you mean. But that doesn't say the C.-in-C. will send us. It would mean shifting his flag again, and then there's Villeneuve to find a home for."

"As to Villeneuve, I don't like his being with us, not even as a prisoner."

"I agree. That Frenchman's got no luck in his veins. All the men are saying: 'We've got a Jonah with us.' Mark my word, we shan't take home the dispatches."

"Who will, then?"

"Ask Collingwood!"

CHAPTER V

COLLINGWOOD, fifty-five years in the world, forty-four years at sea, and six days Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, was sitting at a desk roughly knocked together, a mere broad shelf with a rack above it, and on it an ink-pot, quills, papers, a candle, sealing-wax, letters, and an hour-glass. The cabin was as cramped as a prison cell, a stage-waggon or a henhouse, but it was scrubbed bone-clean, and had oddly acquired the placid look of Mrs Collingwood's drawing-room; for the Admiral was a family man, and neat besides. His coat was blue, old-fashioned in cut, but well brushed. Its gold braid was untarnished, its long skirts lifted and hanging to right and left of the chair to save crumpling. His shoe-buckles were bright and his silk stockings unwrinkled. One was certainly drawn over a lump of bandages, and stiffened and discoloured by a watery discharge as big as a half-crown; but this was the only blemish on his inhuman tidiness.

The admiral was growing bald; but his fringe of hair was so carefully powdered that no grain of flour dulled the square top of his head, and his unremarkable face had recently been closely shaved. It seemed, however, as if it were not yet smooth enough for him, for with one dumpling hand he worried at the bristles which still lurked within the cleft of the chin, and as the door opened he took out a

pocket-glass, dreamily examined the defect, felt over his whole jaw with one hand, then put the glass away again, lit a candle and sealed a fat packet with his own ring before turning to his visitor. All this he did with an air of such indifference that a stranger might have felt himself snubbed; but Lapenotiere knew the man and his ways, and knew that he must ever be neatening himself. That order had been given by the brain to the body at birth, and would always be obeyed; but it had nothing to do with the conscious cerebrations of Vice-Admiral Collingwood.

'He has not changed,' thought Lapenotiere. 'Not even Trafalgar can change him. He is not reachable, not touchable. His face is smooth, his eye remote. After such a week his hand as he seals the packet of letters does not shake. Now Nelson—one knew when Nelson had been through something. He used to flap his fin. But you cannot tell anything with Collingwood. I wonder how much Collingwood feels.'

"The captain of the *Pickle*, sir, to see you." said the escort at his elbow, and retired, closing the cabin door.

Collingwood turned, and with the quick change of expression the smooth face was suddenly and deeply scored with lines, as if an invisible knife were rapidly cutting into wax. As the light caught the admiral's face Lapenotiere noted also that the eyes looked out from between bruised and puffy lids, and the northern voice as it uttered a "Humph!" of greeting was reedy with fatigue. Then Lapenotiere thought: 'What a fool I am to think he's not changed! Why, he has aged seven years in the last seven days, and I do not blame him! At worst I have gone short on a week's sleep. What is that to this man's sleeplessness and its causes? Here's his best friend gone, half his prizes scattered or scuttled, his decisions taken and still to take. He bears a world-weight of responsibility, and on top of it all he has to follow Nelson. That must be the real nightmare, having to follow Nelson. But then he does not have nightmares, because, quite clearly, he does not sleep. Well, well, who would be king of any castle? Better be me, with daily orders and my tiny *Pickle*.' But aloud he said:

"You wished to see me, sir?"

"Ah!" Collingwood looked up with a certain air of relief. It seemed to Lapenotiere that he had entered the cabin of a man in doubt, and that his own entrance had precipitated a decision. He said nothing, however. He was there to take orders.

"None of your people hurt?"

"No, sir."

"No other damage done?"

"No, sir. We have been lucky."

"She is fast, the *Pickle*. *Pickle* has done excellent work."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Then there are your prisoners. You had better discharge them all into the *Revenge*."

"Oh? Ay, ay, sir! I will see to it at once."

"Yes, see to it at once!"

There was a long wait; then Collingwood turned to his desk and picked up the fat packet. It was bound round with tarpaulin, neatly stitched down and sealed.

"Are you well found?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, sir."

"Want for nothing?"

"No, sir."

"Humph!" He began to pace to and fro, then stopped suddenly wincing, and put out his hand for support. Lapenotiere was ready, and lowered him back on the rickety stool.

"My leg," said Collingwood with an air of apology.

"I know, sir. I am very sorry."

"It was a splinter, a pretty severe blow." He smiled grudgingly, but his whole face was lightened by the rare change of expression. Almost it had charm. "I had a good many thumps, one way or the other. One on the back was, I think, the wind of a great shot, for I never saw anything that did it. This scratch is a damned nuisance. It will not heal."

"You have had little time to rest, sir, which is **what that** sort of wound needs."

"I daresay, and later on **I** will. **But** not now. **You know**

that nearly all were killed on the *Royal Sovereign's* quarter-deck but myself and my captain and Mr Cosway. I have cause to be thankful."

"Yes, sir."

"But it all makes work, though we have not done so badly, gale or no gale."

"One of the fellows, sir, told us what the Spanish flag-captain said as he was taken up to you."

"Eh, what was that?"

"Well sir, he asked one of the men the name of the ship that had beaten them. And when they told him it was the *Royal Sovereign* he said: 'I think she should be called the *Royal Devil*:' "

"Humph! Did he? That never reached me. Quite good! The *Royal Devil*, hey?" Then the smile vanished. "Well, I think you once saved my life. No doubt you remember the occasion."

"You are very good, sir, to put it that way."

"I told you then that if ever I had the opportunity I would do you a service."

Lapenotiere flushed. "There was no need, sir. I was proud to serve you. It was good fortune for me to have the chance."

"You took it." Again a pause lengthened. Collingwood regarded his sealed packet as if he hated to let it go. "It is six days since the battle, and this is the first opportunity the weather gives me of getting off my dispatches."

"There is a lull, sir, certainly."

"It will not last. Hear the wind! So you must do what you can in the way of speed."

"I, sir?"

"You are to take these dispatches to England."

Lapenotiere stared, silent, wary, unbelieving. Once more Collingwood conceded him another smile.

"Yes, you! Take them! You are to carry them to the Admiralty. They will give you five hundred pounds as a reward and your commander's commission. Now I have kept my word. Good day to you! Mention, if you please, as you go out, that Mr Cosway is to come to me!"

He turned back to the rough desk and its papers, and the dazed captain of the *Pickle* realized that he no longer existed as a person, that he was an invisibility occupying space needed for the admiral's secretary. If he said anything in thanks he never remembered it. His memory jumped always to the fresh breeze which met him as he came on deck, cooling him like a pail of water dashed over his head, making him aware of his happiness. Then the seas danced a jig, the deck lifted to meet him, and the clouds signalled that behind them, hidden but faithful, was sunshine.

"He has had a wiggling," said Bayley in fascinated contemplation of Lapenotiere's re-emergence and lightning departure. "Never saw a fellow in such a hurry to get away. If you ask me, the old man pounded him like a tough steak, sliced him into small pieces, and fried him for dinner."

"Think so? You can! But I am going to make up a packet of the letters I have written home,"⁵⁵ said his more observant companion.

"What do you mean?"

"And get it across to the *Pickle* within the hour."⁵⁵

"You don't think——?"

"Think! I know. Didn't you see that bulge in his coat? Dispatches! Little *Pickle* is taking the dispatches home. I half guessed what was in the wind when the lull came and we signalled her. Why else should she be wanted in such a hurry? Yes, the saucy *Pickle* is off to England after a four weeks⁵ outing."⁵⁵

"Less than four," said Bayley. "She only joined from Plymouth on the first, remember. What do you think of it?"

"It don't worry me."

"It does me then. I hate the unfairness of it."

"Well yes, I see what you mean about that."

"I call it giving with one hand and taking away with the other," said Bayley. "The *Euryalus* was promised the job."

"Only by Nelson."

"You have said it." Bayley flushed suddenly. "Only!"

Nelson does not count any more. That is what I cannot bear."

"You will have to. And anyway I won't hear a word against *him*" and Robinson jerked with his elbow in the direction of Collingwood's cabin.

"What does he care? It gives him his rise. There's always room at the top."

"I tell you what, you are a prize fool. You don't know anything at all. Did you not hear what happened when they were closing-up on the *Santa Ana*? 'What would Nelson give to be here?' says he to Rotherham. And I will tell you another thing. I saw the tears in his eyes when the boat hailed and said my lord was gone. Because he is quiet and pale, and smooth, and as gentle as an old aunt, you think—pooh, I don't know what you think, and I don't care. But I tell you this, because I know: Collingwood is a royal lion. He had only one equal, and now he has none, more's the pity."

"Equal?"

"I said 'equal'.';

"Allright! Allright! But you never served under Nelson, not in the same ship. You were never one of his children."

"I am glad I was not, or I should be sitting about and blubbering at a word, like all the rest of you soft toads. I have seen you at it. But if you can love a man you have never known, I think I did love the little fellow." Then he added, with a glance at the dancing, dwindling boat: "I wonder how soon the *Pickle* will get away. I'd best look out my letters home."

"I give them two hours, myself. Two and a half at most."

"Three. They'll have to discharge their prisoners—into the *Revenge*, I'd say at a guess."

"Lay you anything to one that they are gone by noon."

CHAPTER VI

LISBON, in the mild October of 1805, was a city of blue skies and greening oranges, a winter-burking, lotus-eating city

of delight. To Captain Sykes, who had come out from England through gales, roaring seas and the anger of a hurricane, the interlude in the garden of the Legation was a glimpse of paradise pure.

He was not a man for scenery or the antique. For the view of Lisbon and the Tagus he cared nothing: he was not overawed by the mountains, nor much enchanted by the velvet patches of distant forest: and the climb through the old town had been to him no romantic retreat into history, but a smelly and sweaty fulfilment of duty. He was a dutiful young officer, keen, energetic, well-liked by his superiors and his fellow captains, a man living for, and in, his profession.

But he was in private life a passionate gardener, and had in the years of his service brought home seeds and cuttings from most quarters of the globe to the sheltered plot where one who shared his tastes coaxed a surprising portion of them to survive. In his dreams he forecast the coming of the day when he would settle down in the elegant cottage at the entrance to a deserted quarry, which formed a natural conservatory for his sub-tropical plants. Moreover he had but to run up the steps he had cut in the quarry-wall to be upon a chalk tableland designed by Providence in the beginning to nourish the hardier plants of his collection. Yes, his should be the finest small man's garden in England, and should look, when in growth, not unlike this Lisbon dream. It should have just such autumn saffrons, plants of gromwell and yucca, cistus, such magnolias, geraniums and mock-privets. It should have even its oranges and lemons, and perhaps pomegranates—he had the right corner for them—with a thousand other unEnglish herbs and delights growing higgledy-piggledy as they did here, though the paths should be weeded and the beds better kept. There must be glass also, for such stuff as needed winter care.

Thus he dreamed, the balsamic smell of cistus in his nostrils, as he walked up and down the terrace beside the young, the charming, the poetical, the twenty-four year old peer who was Secretary of the Legation, and as he

answered questions and assented to opinions his gardener's hand automatically twitched off any new pod or seed-vessel within reach and transferred it to his pocket. Yet in spite of these preoccupations he showed himself torn by pride and grief, wrought out of his calm, and stammering-mad for action. While his hand fumbled with saffrons and myrtle-haws, he trumpeted out the list of prizes taken, and his eyes were unashamedly wet at every reference to the admiral of all time, beloved and unique. His companion was sympathetic. These two were old acquaintances, and Captain Sykes had been for a year or two the younger man's hero.

"Nelson dined here once, d'you know," the young Viscount told him, "and none of us could resist him. But nobody could resist him. I heard Wellesley say as much, and Wellesley could resist anyone. They only met once, and Wellesley owned that he was not prepared to like him, because of the Hamilton stories. There were plenty, you know. Elliot saw to that, or at least his sister did—Mrs St George. Wellesley knows her, and he listens to pretty women with tongues, so he was prepared to find Lord Nelson vain and silly."

"My lord!" Sykes stopped dead in the path. His voice held fury.

"Wait a bit! Let me finish! You need not ruffle up. Your Nelson wins. They met at the War Office—or was it the Colonial Office? Ay, the Colonial—both of them shown into the little waiting-room on the right, both wanting to see the Secretary of State. Sir Arthur recognized Nelson, of course—the eye, the arm, unmistakable—but Nelson did not know Wellesley by sight. However he started a conversation in his Tom-Dick-and-Harry style, not at all the style that an army man would understand. So Wellesley was not chatty. Nelson could not make it out."

"I understand that. His lordship was accustomed to be listened to with affection and—and with delight, my lord. But no-one who was privileged to know him took advantage of that cordial manner of his—or misunderstood it. I may

say, to play on the word 'cordial', he was himself a cordial to every man."

"Well, cordial or not, up in the air went Wellesley's nose, that Shakespeare's Cliff of a nose, eh Captain? Remember the gull's nest half-way up Shakespeare's Cliff?"

"That is a long while ago."

"'Ninety-two."

"You have a good memory, my lord." Sykes relaxed with a laugh. He had taken the other on many a bird-nesting, plant-hunting expedition when he himself was a youngster, and the small boy's worship had been pleasant to him. Their paths had separated, and on their rare encounters Sykes prided himself on never recalling the early intimacy; but it pleased him uncommonly when the other did. He continued more cheerfully: "Well, my lord, what did Lord Nelson do? He would do something, and in the heat."

"Oh yes! He went out of the room on some excuse or other, and found out, as Sir Arthur put it, who he was——"

"Who said Vain'?" muttered Sykes.

"Chut, chut! Respect the military mind!"

"Well?"

"Oh, Nelson comes back and, according to Wellesley, his manner has completely changed—much stiffened, we guess! He begins to talk, again according to Wellesley, 'like an officer and a statesman'. No more playfulness, I daresay!"

"My lord, you have hit it. His playfulness was the charm. He won you over because he was so gentle, so easy."

"I wonder how he won over the British Army; because that is what he contrived to do. They talked for nearly an hour, and Sir Arthur owned that he had never found a conversation interest him more."

"Yes," said Sykes with satisfaction. "His lordship had taken Sir Arthur's measure, and the rest followed. Sir Arthur would not have understood that he could be comprehended at sight, and humoured. Sir Arthur Wellesley is a great man, no question; but I have heard that his men are mere numbers to him. He uses them in the service of the country as he uses horses and mules; but Nelson's men

were his children. There's the difference. Forgive me, my lord, but I served under him, and the recollection is precious to me."

"Very creditable!" the other murmured, for he was at the age to find emotion embarrassing. "Very proper!"

Sykes was quick to take the snub. "This is wasting your time, my lord. I will only say that I did not turn back after meeting the *Pickle* for sentimental reasons. It appeared to me absolutely necessary to report in the first case to the Consulate, and Mr Gambier felt that I should return to England with the news, but insisted that I should first apply to you."

"Quite right!"

"News so important——"

"Important? I should think it is important. It is the end of Bonaparte, do you realize that? It may take years, probably will, before we seem to chase him out of Europe; but the actual work is now done."

"You think *so*?"

"Lord Robert thinks so, which is much more to the point. He said to me while you were drinking your sherry: 'Take a winkle and its shell and a pin,' he said. 'The battle of Trafalgar is the pin. The pin has wrenched out the body of the creature. The tail is left, certainly, but only to rot away.' Nelson and the rest of you have this week made an end of Bonaparte."

"I wish the *Nautilus* had a right to be included in your lordship's praise. But we are a week too late. We have missed the ambition of a lifetime."

"Yes, you had bad luck."

"I daresay your lordship can imagine what it meant to us to sight the *Pickle*. The Commander, Lapenotiere, is an acquaintance. He signalled the news that he was racing to England with Collingwood's dispatches. I had to decide whether my orders from his late lordship—I have them here—permitted me a change of plan. The fact is, my men were so much shaken by the news that I was doubtful as to my course. I have never seen such grief, my lord, amid such joy. My fellows are tough. I have seen some of them

face the operating-table, and, while an arm is sawing off, have their jokes with the surgeon. They are the same under punishment."

"Not a nightingale among 'em, eh?"

"Exactly! And when the news of the victory spread they were mad with delight——"

"I can believe it."

"—but when, quick on it, came the shock of our loss, then, my lord, you might say without exaggeration that the whole ship groaned. Not a man who had served under him—and most of them had—but was in tears. They were sobbing like children. As I say, it was partly the state of feeling among the men, the misery, the lassitude, which decided me to turn back and run into Lisbon."

"You did right. The Minister approves heartily. What sort of a ship is the *Pickle*?"

"A schooner of eight guns, my lord."

"Lieutenant Lapenotiere, is he a man of presence?"

"A quiet fellow, well liked."

"Initiative?"

"I could not say."

"The *Pickle* is fast?"

"Very fast."

"But the weather, Captain Sykes, the weather! On your own showing you had a rough passage out. What will this small vessel make of it? You are the seaman. Give me your opinion! The Minister wishes for it."

"Well, my lord, he'll have a hard beat against a head wind by the looks of it. And in the Bay—anything may happen in the Bay."

"Ah!"

They paced on. Sykes fell to nibbling and smelling at a green and fragrant lemon which he had pulled from a branch overhead. The Viscount thrashed at the bushes with his stick.

"I think," said he at last, "that the Minister will advise the Consulate to send you back to England."

There was a spark in the captain's eye as he said meekly: "Very good, my lord."

"Twenty ships taken! It is the victory of all time. Well then, how dare we let the news reach England from tainted sources? Think what rumours the French may put about! I understand very well why the *Pickle* is sent—small and fast, very reasonable—but suppose she should founder, suppose she should be intercepted, suppose she should be obliged to fight? The Minister is amazed that the Admiral should have trusted such news to one vessel."

"He is short of frigates, my lord."

"Maybe—but one must not put all the eggs in one basket. I wish the *Pickle* luck; but I—but the Minister agrees with Gambier that you should follow her. He will give you letters home. How soon can you leave?"

"Sunset?"

"Very well. You will put in at Plymouth, I suppose, and go over land?"

"Yes."

"It would be a great thing for you, Sykes, if you should bring home the news."

"Indeed, yes!" He laughed.

"You are furnished with money?"

"Oh yes!"

"Well, the letters will be ready for you in half an hour. Shall we go into the house?"

"I would as lief wait out here if it is the same to you."

"But you will take some refreshment?"

"Thank you, my lord, nothing."

"As you please. But rest yourself! You have a furious journey ahead of you. Take the sun while you can!"

Smiling, vivid, delightedly a part of the great event, the speaker hurried into the house, while Sykes wandered down the path again to the wall which overhung the steep descent to the harbour. Abstractedly he drew towards him a whip of broom, and began stripping off the pods, while his eyes surveyed the harbour, the estuary, the strips of coast-line, and beyond them studied the colour and texture of the Atlantic. At that height the sea appeared dappled like an opal by its northward-hurrying waves. But the long-sighted eyes were not deceived. Once she was in the Bay,

the *Pickle* was in for trouble. Sykes was sorry for her, and sorry for Lapenotiere; but not at all sorry for himself. He stared down upon his water-world, determined and intent. He had never thought of himself as an ambitious man; but now he knew that within him, roused by the double shock of loss and victory, ambition was wide awake.

CHAPTER VII

THE Mayor of Falmouth was being cosy with his wife. The coach had brought him in as late as nine that morning; but even so he had not gone straight home, but had first paid a surprise visit to his civic headquarters to see if the clerks were punctual in his absence, to read over the letters, and jot down the main of what had gone wrong in the twenty days of his absence, though, as he admitted to her in some disappointment, very little had. Then he ate a slice of pasty, drank Madeira, wound the neglected clock, and remarked with immense satisfaction that at any rate her relations were off his mind for another year.

"I wish you would sit down, my dear," she returned placidly; for it was the Mayor's habit to eat his snacks standing at the mantelpiece and screening the fire from her, and his wife's habit was to complain against the deprivation. Then he would tell her not to nag him, and she would protest against the injustice, and so they continued together very happily.

But today the Mayor broke through this routine, because he had so much news for her. He had to tell her how Falmouth had profited by his travels, how far behind Plymouth was in enterprise, and that London was dirty, Andover short of fish, and how, on visiting Salisbury, he had thanked God that Falmouth was not a cathedral town. No, there was no news of Nelson, and very little of Bonaparte. Then he told her how clever he had been in purchasing from waiters at every stop of every journey 'The Times' of today or yesterday or the day before, and how he had saved them all for her to line the

kitchen drawers, and how travelling at such short stages did expose you to sharing bed and board with queer customers. He had run into a young French fool of a balloonist and a companion with no more sense than a Londoner, who had a broken arm and was an M.P., Heaven help us! With them had been a dog that went for him when he and the young fool tried to lift the old one. He had left them at Salisbury, "where I called to see your cousin, and, by the way, the sherry she gave me was fit for cleaning plate, but for nothing else. She made up a party to go to the play. A good company."

"Are they coming to Falmouth?"

"How should I know? They were moving on, east or west, I forget which, at the end of the week. I met in the coach another young fool with red hair who seemed to know, but what he said I can't remember."

"What was the name of the play?"

"I forget."

"If it comes to Cornwall we must see it," said his wife placidly.

"And what about the Methodist vote?"

"What does it matter when you are not going to stand again?"

"Who says I am not going to stand again?"

"You said so yourself, my love, before you went away. Do you not remember?"

"No, I do not."

"Well, we need not talk about it now. I wish you would sit down to your luncheon. There are crumbs all over the rug."

"I wish you would not nag."

"It is not fair on the servants. Did you run into the storm?"

"What storm?"

"Oh, then you missed it. It has been terrible here this last week, on and off you know, and the day before yesterday the most violent hurricane. The Fortescues had their gazebo blown into the sea."

"I do not believe you."

"Well, it's true, and Mrs Fortescue's work-basket and her parasol were inside."

"I wish she had been inside."

"Do sit down!"

"Well, what *else*?"

"The Fortescues suffered most; but the Thomasines had the roof off and two stacks of hay swept away entirely. Oh, and you know the odd new tree they were so proud of—what do you call it?—the boughs are like iron ruffles."

"The araucaria."

"That is the name. They say it is the only one in Cornwall. Well, it is not even half a one now, for it was twisted almost round and split to the roots. That will teach them. We had no trouble with our evergreens. It is very odd, though, that quite a lot of the grass and shrubs turned black. It is a sort of withering. The gardener says it must be the effect of sea-water blown in upon them. Some of our cabbages were blackened too; but I said to Betsy: 'Let us strip off the outer leaves and cook the hearts before your master comes home!' and they have pickled so well. Truly, it was the most dreadful storm! Have you finished with the pasty?"

The Mayor strode to the window. "There is a stiff easterly breeze still."

"Open the window!" said his wife joining him, his plate in her hand. As he obeyed she leant out a little and began scattering scraps to the guinea-fowl which came racing across the neat lawn, adding: "They say there is a ship standing in with news."

"What?" He squeezed her aside and leant out. "Where? I do not see her."

"The coast-watchers have had an eye on her ever since she passed the Lizard."

"How do you know?"

"Because one of them rode in to find you an hour ago."

"Why has no-one told me?"

"Why, my dear, there was such a lot to tell you. He is in the kitchen. They think it is news from the Fleet."

"Have him up! They never said a word at the office."

Where is my spy-glass? I wish Betsy would not move my spy-glass. Yes, I see her now, and a boat from her coming ashore. How you could sit there and let me eat! I must go down at once. Where is my coat?"

"On you, dear love."

"Where is that fellow? In the kitchen? Then where is Betsy? Betsy, what have you done with that fellow in the kitchen?"

"If you please, sir——" The pretty maid was flushed and breathless, yet with an air of independence about her that made the Mayoress give her a suspicious look.

"Answer your master!" said the Mayoress sharply. Independence meant followers, and followers meant marriage, and servants were hard to get in Falmouth.

"Yes, ma'am. If you please, sir, he went to the Red Lion to see if he could catch up with you there."

"You did not say that you had gone to the Red Lion before coming home," said the Mayoress to the Mayor.

"It was where the coach put me down. You would have liked it, I daresay, if I had come home with a two days' beard and no powder on my hair? What did he want with me, Betsy?"

"If you please, sir, it's one of the Volunteers. They have had the news passed along. It will be the *Pickle*, sir, and there is a great crowd down on the beach watching her, and they say she has come in with dispatches."

"From the Fleet?"

"From Lord Nelson, sir, my cousin says."

"Your cousin? I must go down at once. No, don't pester me! I don't want my hat. What cousin?"

"A Sea Fencible, sir."

"You cannot go without your hat, my dear. Fetch it, Betsy! There it is, you see, all brushed and ready. Why are you such an impatient man? And then, Betsy, you may fetch my bonnet and mantle. I shall come down after you, my dear."

"You had much better not. Out of my way, all of you!" and he went pounding off down the steep hill, vowing vengeance, whenever he stumbled, on the quarry-men who

had not yet brought home the needed stones for the pot-holes, and so on at a fat man's slow gallop across the sand to the foreshore, where a crowd, momentarily enlarging, was cheering itself hoarse. Through this the Mayor pushed his way, shouldering like a bull, and was hailed at the water-edge by his own Town Clerk.

"A victory!" shouted the Town Clerk against the wind.

"How do you know?"

"Everybody says so."

"But how do they know, the fools? They can't tell a victory by the way men row, can they?"

But the Town Clerk was watching a boat and the weary rowers, and the man who sat in the stern in his square-shouldered uniform; but it was too far off for him to identify the rank, and his eye wandered to the *Pickle*, rocking at anchor.

"They have had a bad time," was his summary. "We know that because we know what the gale has been like. Did you hear about the Fortescues' gazebo? If those fellows come from the Fleet, wherever it is, they have come up through the Bay. They have worried home like a dog through a quickset hedge. You can see it by the looks of the *Pickle*."

"She is the *Pickle*, is she?"

"So they say. You've better eyes than I have, Mr Mayor. But eyes or no eyes, battered or not battered, if you cannot tell a victory by the way men row, I can. Here they come. Hurrah! Hurray!" and, abandoning the Mayor, he rushed forward with the rest of the fishermen, townsfolk, long-shore-men and country people as they dashed down over the granite sand and crunched upon the pebbles.

Their common desire was to catch hold of the boat as she ran up upon the shingle, and overwhelm the crew with questions. Yet, as the officer jumped out and, without regarding them, turned with a last command to the rowers, the same cheerful crowd backed away, awestruck, as if they had waited for some domestic beast to leap over the gunwale and be among them, and instead there had sprung down a lion.

The boat backed and turned. The clear shore-water rocked and widened, and the officer still stood where he had landed, the wet beach draining away from under his heels. The crowd backed yet further. Not a lion but a lion-tamer was among them. The cheering ceased. The easterly wind blew across the shore with a whistle, and three men out of four caught at their hats. The Mayor stepped forward.

"Glad to see you, sir. You bring news? Commander of the *Pickle*, eh? Yon is the *Pickle*, surely? Well? Do not keep us waiting! What is the news? From the Fleet, are you? Bringing dispatches? Tell us starving men the news!"

He broke off, and now the crowd was very quiet. A gull screamed overhead, an urgent wave beat upon Lapenotiere's heels, and he stepped forward to the crowd, ashore, into England.

"I——" he began, and turning suddenly cast a look at the boat, now quite a distance from the shore. "I — I must get away as soon as possible. I had better see the Mayor."

"I am the Mayor." The fat man pressed forward. "I am here to be of assistance. You are Captain——?"

"Lapenotiere. Lieutenant. And you are the Mayor of Falmouth? Yes, I see. Can they get me a post-chaise? I am in a hurry for London."

"What's your news?"

"We have gained a great victory."

"My God! A victory, eh? And the enemy fleet?"

"There is no enemy fleet. But——"

"How many prizes?"

"Twenty."

"Great God! Twenty ships? How many have we lost?"

"None."

"None lost and twenty ships taken!" He swung round upon the crowd. "Do you hear that, my souls? Ring the bells! Ring the bells! Ring the bells! My orders! The Mayor's orders!" And as wild cheering drowned his voice he rounded upon the Town Clerk. "See to it, you Sampson! Call your ringers together! Let's have a merry peal, a victory peal for a glorious victory!" Then, as the burgess

addressed turned and began to battle his way through the crowd, the Mayor raised his voice above the happy confusion. "Make way now, can't you? Let him get through the press to St Charles! He is going to ring in the victory. Join up with him, you over there—Rashleigh, Toup, Moyle! The rest of you make way! The captain here is in a hurry. Run ahead to the Red Lion, if you want to help, and tell 'em he's off to London, off to see the King, off to bring him news of the great victory! Tell 'em to put-to the horses! Let 'em take my chaise. He wants it quick. Cheer all you like, my lads, but make way for the captain!" Then, as the crowd reluctantly divided to form a path, he turned again to Lapenotiere. "This way, Captain! We'll make it easy for you. We'll get you off within half an hour, if I have to lend you my own horses. Very wise to come ashore with the wind getting up again. You will save days. If we get you off by noon——"

"Before that," said Lapenotiere. "It is barely eleven."

"But you will take refreshment?"

"I thank you, no. I must get off at once. I should like to be away in twenty minutes. Can it be done?"

"Can it be done? It shall be done, if we have to pull you across Cornwall with ropes, for the roads are bad, ruts as high as the carriage wheels when I came over the moor. Jolt you to death, but not so bad as the Bay, eh? You'll be all right when you get beyond Exeter. What is today? The fourth? You should be in London two days from now, and get a welcome, too, bringing such news. I never thought to hear it. Well, we all expected it. We know Nelson. We know the Fleet. But twenty prizes!"

"Some were lost later, and many scuttled."

"But we have beaten the French, eh? Nothing else matters. And you were in it?"

"I was present."

"Then you're a hero, by God you are! I'm sorry you won't dine. What else can I do for you?"

"Nothing, Mr Mayor, except to see that I get off immediately. I am sure that if you say the word——"

"Say the word? I should think I will say the word."

I am coming with you. I shall see you get attention, or know the reason why, and what is more, you shall take my own carriage through to London. Twenty ships! By God, I call that a victory! And one in the eye for Boney, one in each eye, a knock-out blow, as you might say. That Corsican devil can do what he likes with the rest of Europe, but he can't touch us, not without a fleet, eh? Not without a fleet!"

The crowd, wrought up by the Mayor's eloquence, began once more to drown his voice. He expostulated.

"Enough, good souls! Enough! Let the captain through! Cheer him all you've a mind to, but make room!" and he continued to shove and elbow through the press, his hand familiarly on Lapenotiere's arm.

Then, as the crowd, half mad with delight, broke in front of them, raced ahead of them, moved with them, a motley guard of honour, across the Strand, the air was suddenly filled with the noise of bells, deafeningly clear, joy made audible in the middle air, re-echoing from the house-fronts, drowning the persistent surge. The Mayor laughed aloud.

"Quick! They have been quick. They are the best ringers in Cornwall. But you will get that behind you all the way to London. The news will be up into the hills already. Ah, you will see—hear! They will tell you the news before you can tell them, at least till you are out of the Duchy. This way! Here we are. Here is the Red Lion. But you know your path. You have been here before. Well, I will say that for you, you are fast. You could out-walk any of us. Look, they have got out the chaise! I say Captain, do you see that? They have stuck it all over with laurel, and given you their best horses and Jem Toop to ride 'em. They had my message, you see."

Lapenotiere turned suddenly to the burly man beside him, looking down upon him from his greater height with a frown, then slowed to a halt as he said:

"Mr Mayor!"

The Mayor stopped also, looked up at him sideways.

"Why, what is the matter, Captain? Not ill, are you? Nothing amiss?"

"Mr Mayor, we have gained a glorious victory——"

"And not lost a ship!"

"No, not a ship."

"Well then, why are you so grave? What more do you want? You sea-gentlemen are too much in earnest."

"You had better know it. We have lost Lord Nelson."

"Lost Nelson?" The Mayor blinked and looked about him muzzily, like a man awakened from sleep, and, though Lapenotiere's words had been inaudible to the crowd, not one of its members but was aware of their effect. Almost instantly the cheering died down to a mutter and a buzz; then each man began to crane forward and still his neighbours, till there grew up a hedge of human silence about the two men. The bells' persistent pealing lost its quality of joy and became a comment upon that silence, an inquisition, a harsh, shifting searchlight of sound.

"What did you say to me?" said the Mayor at last. "I mean, Captain, what did you say to me? Lord Nelson? Did you say Nelson?"

"This is a sad business, Mr Mayor." As he spoke Lapenotiere moved on again towards the entrance to the inn. The landlord, the landlady, the maids, the boots and ostlers were in the doorway, but nobody stepped forward. A horse tossed its head and sent the foam flying, and mechanically the Mayor put out a hand to its muzzle as he said timidly:

"Lord Nelson? You cannot mean his lordship, Captain? Not Lord Nelson himself?"

"He was shot through the backbone. He lived an hour or two. He died at sunset."

"Sir, sir, it can't be! We can't do without him, Cornwall can't. I mean, not without Nelson. What is England going to do?" Suddenly the Mayor began to blubber. "Captain, what is the good of your twenty ships if we have lost him?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE Mayor of Falmouth was proved a true prophet. 'Victory!', 'Victory!' and 'Victory!' rang the bells of Charles

King and Martyr as Lapenotiere drove out of the town, and it seemed to him that all the villages of Cornwall had taken Falmouth's hint, though the peal of pure jubilation did not last long. It had been agreed between him and the Mayor that, though it was impossible to keep the news of its great gain from the public, the news of its great loss should not be known till Lapenotiere was well on his way. "Lest some Daddy-long-legs steal a march on us all," said the Mayor. "You have the Lion's best horses and my carriage: nevertheless, if a fellow took a short cut over the moors, you might ride into London and find he'd blown the gab. We will keep the bad news quiet till you're out of the town."

The intention was admirable; but Lapenotiere's arrival was too public for secrecy. The shore-boats were bobbing round the *Pickle* even as the Mayor was speaking, and, before the carriage passed out of hearing, on the heights behind the town there mingled faintly with the glorious chimes the deep and solemn tone of the passing-bell.

The ringing accompanied him mile after mile, and in Truro, and again at Lostwithiel, actually preceded him, so that the victory was being rung before he rode into the town with the news of it. But though, in the thirty-one years of life remaining, he could not hear a cry of bells without emotion, Lapenotiere could never very distinctly recall other happenings in those first stages of his journey to London. Perhaps it was because he was passing over a road too familiar to startle his attention.

As the post-chaise climbed up out of Falmouth he had at once flung himself back in a corner, instantly and instinctively attempting to recapture energy now that the nine-days' battle with the cross-purposes of the sea was ended: and his mind was soon filmed over by an unconsciousness light as hoar-frost on a window-pane. Its effect was that of a dram on an empty stomach: he relaxed and was happy, nevertheless his mind could not sincerely rest. His slumbers were dream-shot, and he never lost the feel of the oil-skin package hot between his skin and his shirt.

The roads, as the Mayor had warned him, were bad,

patched in places, but in others mere jumbled chunks of granite sunk in the mud, sloughs of despond, beds for the heather-springs and coursing hill-runlets, so that the progress of the post-chaise reminded his half-sleeping mind of the *Pickle's* progress over the water-hills and down the water-valleys of the Bay. The rocking, the jolting, the perilous all-but-over-turns, the drag downhill, the funereal climb, the sudden accelerations when the road proved passable for a mile or twain, these sensations edged his exhausted consciousness backwards along the groove of his own life, till he dreamed that he was living over again the last nine days, and fighting time and the elements in each of them.

First he dreamed that the post-chaise-Pickle—for it was at once carriage and ship—was tussling northwards. Then, between half-shut lids, he sighted a church-tower, which instantly became the *Nautilus*; but, when he dropped down from the *Pickle's* deck into the jollyboat in order to visit her, he found himself landing with a stagger on the cobbles of the inn-yard at St Austell.

He stayed awake long enough to swallow a hot drink, munch a sandwich, and confirm the news already spread by the post-boy to mobs of anxious womenfolk. Then the chaise was off again, and he, slouched in a corner, composed himself to doze away another two uneasy hours.

Again, as the hilltop passed across his glazed vision, he saw Cape Finisterre through spume and mist. The gale grew, and he was again ordering the guns overboard to ease the labouring ship. And as each overbalanced and dived, he found himself in turn overbalancing and diving from the seat on to the floor, with straw on his coat and in his hair, and the broken window letting in blinding slants of rain.

Again he roused, again he composed himself to watch the sunset chill into green twilight, dozed again, and dreamed that he was confronting those passionate Nelsonians, Captain Keats and his *Superbs*, knowing that the one hope of the whole ship had been to join the Fleet and Nelson before the battle was fought. He heard himself

repeating the glorious, cruel formula of victory and loss, and saw the change in the ship's countenance. The outcries and the weeping brought such pricking tears to his own eyes that he opened them and found that he was not standing on the deck of the *Superb*, but in the familiar courtyard of Webb's Hotel at Liskeard, light blazing out upon him from the uncurtained windows. Even then the visual impression of a ship's deck faded slowly. He could scarcely believe that the dark ocean rising and falling beyond the deck was no more than the dark house-roof dipping and lifting as he rocked on his feet, while the horses steamed beside him and the post-boy shouted to the ostlers.

He looked at his watch. It was just half-past eight, and he had travelled forty miles of his two hundred and sixty-six.

An old friend's voice sounded in his ear, and the landlord's hand was shaking his. "Why, Mr John, it's you sir, it is indeed!" Then, over his shoulder: "It's himself, folk! It's the lieutenant himself. Why, your good father will go mad with joy. Now come in and rest yourself while I get the news off to him and bid him send in the pony-carriage for you. But while you wait you must dine, Mr John, and at my cost."

"Very good of you, but I cannot wait. Must hurry on to London."

"A nip of brandy there!" The landlord's voice changed. "Quick, lass! Get it from the bar! Now, Mr John, drink this up! You are soaked to the skin, and coughing. Never saw such a brown ghost of a fellow! Not wounded, are you? Not hurt? You come from the Fleet, eh? Dispatches, eh? I could have told you that. Good news, eh? But no sir, no, no! Never try to tell us till you've drunk this down!"

"It is a victory!" shrilled a woman's voice. "Look at the laurels stuck about the post-chaise windows!"

"Is it victory, sir? You may tell us so much."

"A victory," he muttered. "Twenty ships!" and heard the cheering as one hears the roar of the sea, while fire ran down his gullet, and he was for an instant warmly, irrationally happy. Then the half-dreams, half-illusions which

had clogged his mind since he landed passed away from him like morning mists, and he was wide awake and completely himself again, Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotiere of the Navy, carrying dispatches from Collingwood. He was in his home town. He was not two miles from the door of his father, Lieutenant Frederick Lapenotiere of the Navy, son of yet another Lieutenant Lapenotiere of the Navy, who was the son of the great man of the family, Colonel Frederick de la Penotière of the Army.

"Lapenotiere! Huzza, Lapenotiere! Lapenotiere!" His name rang round the yard triumphantly coupled with the word "Victory!": and he heard it with a pride which yet further stiffened him in his perception of immediate duty. He had no right to think of his father, nor long to see him, even for a moment. He must think solely of reaching London as speedily as roads and horse-flesh would permit.

So he smiled at the landlord, told him he would be glad of a bowl of broth, and that the kitchen might make him up a package of bread and beef, but that he would not delay his journey to dine. Next he called for pen and paper, and wrote a brief message to his father telling him of the victory and his own errand, and promising to return as soon as he got leave. This he gave to the landlord to be dispatched, regardless of eager bystanders, and told him at the same time the Trafalgar news, which at once sent a string of lanterns bobbing down the byways. Then brooking no further delays he returned to the carriage, and was whisked away again into the darkness.

The landlord had added a last-minute tribute in the shape of a pint of sherry in a case-bottle, and by the frail shine of the lantern which swung from the ceiling of the carriage he ate and drank thankfully. Then he fell asleep again, a sleep without dreams, a sleep that knew nothing of the darkness, the bad roads, the halts at the turn-pikes, or even the change of horses at Tavistock and again at Moreton Hampstead.

But at Exeter, when the horses bowled into the yard of the New London Inn, he woke up fit as a fiddle, and though it was not yet day he hired a room, washed, changed

linen, and got himself shaved, while in the kitchen the postillion breakfasted hugely and told the news to the yawning household. He told it at rich length, with so many embroideries that when Lapenotiere hurried down again he found an audience of hero-worshippers overwhelming him with pleasant services. The head-waiter in his shirt-sleeves was laying a breakfast-tray on the forward seat of the carriage with the inn's compliments, and the captain must not trouble himself about returning the crockery. It would come back in due course from the next halt. The maids in yawns and curl-papers, and hastily-aroused guests with blankets about them thronged the inn galleries to watch him go, while at the last moment the driver of an accommodation coach bundled down from his box-seat and waddled across to warn the post-boy of a landslide on the Honiton road, and give instructions as to the best way round it, "to save the Captain's time, God bless him and all our gallant lads at sea, and down with the French!" Then, turning with desperate eagerness to Lapenotiere, who was tucking the rug about himself, he asked civilly:

"Twenty-five ships taken, sir? Is that the count?"

"Twenty."

"Well sir, I have told your fellow the way to go. Lucky you met me. The fall of rock would have delayed you an hour or more. No, no, Captain, no money! Kindly meant, but I will not take it. But if you would tell me, sir—did the *Conqueror* come through all right? I've a boy in her. Price is the name."

"Price? Price? Smart young fellow, red hair."

"Him, sir! That is him."

"Well then, you should be a proud father. The *Conqueror* took the French admiral's flag-ship. That is a feather in the cap for all Cornwall."

"And Captain Pellew?" demanded the coachman.

"Badly hurt, I am afraid."

"Well, I am sorry for that. Israel Pellew is as good a captain as a man could want, my son says. I suppose you would not know anything else about my son, sir?"

"Well yes I do, Price, as it happens. He has made the

Fleet chuckle, though I fear he lost his leg doing it."

"Pooh, what's a leg? Nel has lost an eye and an arm. Is my boy dead, sir?"

"Alive and kicking with the other leg, and told the purser he would live now half as cheap as before, for one pair of stockings would last him twice as long."

"Ah, like his mother, always saving and contriving! Well sir, thank you sir, must not keep you!" He slammed to the post-chaise door, then, hopping up on the step again, thrust his great face in at the window. "Lieutenant—Captain—Sir! Not true, is it, about our Nel?"

"Yes, Coachie, it is true."

"True, is it? I drove him to Portsmouth once. Breaks a man's heart, don't it? Twenty ships—that is poor pay for his lordship. Did he go quick, sir, and easy?"

"Not easy, no. He was shot in the spine. He lived out the battle, and died at sunset."

"I see. Thank you, Captain! Well, God bless you!" and the coachman went off into the darkness, his knuckles to his eyes like a schoolboy.

The carriage edged out into the High Street, turned right and steeply down Paris Street and on to the London road, and, as the dawn ran round the horizon with a smile, set out at a spanking morning pace for Honiton.

CHAPTER IX

THE sun rose through gold tissues and shone upon Miss Mary Ann Graves, who sat, as her habit was on butter-making mornings, beside the pump in the yard. For the yard was sheltered, and the trough of pump-water preserved the proper evenness of temperature. Mary Ann asserted that her butter, made in the open air, had a flavour and sweetness which Fawnia's dairy butter never achieved.

Mary Ann enjoyed the whole process. She enjoyed polishing the dipper and skimming the dark yellow blankets of clotted cream off milk still rich even after such skimming, still primrosy against the greenish glass of the enormous

shallow milk-pan. She enjoyed settling herself in comfort with the cream-filled earthenware bowl on a board laid cross-wise on the trough of the pump. Above all she enjoyed plunging her hand, bright pink from scalding, in the cream itself and beginning to stir it with a slow, flat, circular movement of the stiffened palm. Round it went. Round, round, round it went, smoothly dragging the cream with it, while with the left hand she picked up 'Evelina', which opened of itself at the Holborn chapter, turning the pages with her thumb and delighting in the female fool's adventures, till she dropped the book again because the morning was so bright, the sky so gay, the distant trout-stream so musical, the plovers strutting over the slope of the field so amusing, because a heron was fishing in full view of the yard, or because the cream was thickening to butter already, clogging her fingers and sweating out its butter-milk with little splashes.

But these were summer joys. On this dusk morning, with her nephew shouting: "Please to remember the fifth of November!" from the nursery, the sky was dull, the air timid and muggy, the plovers' play-ground was submerged by the stream's overflow, and the cream, after half an hour's careful stirring, was still a thick liquid with a whitish look of obstinacy which even Mary Ann's patient and equal obstinacy recognized and respected. It was no good. The butter was sleepy and would not come. There was nothing to be done but put the bowl back in the dairy and wait till the air cleared.

Cross enough, she dragged the cream off her fingers, gathered up the bowl and took it back to the dairy, washed her hands, put away the laid-out salt and the butter-patters, returned to fetch in chair and book, and then turned to the breakfast-parlour where her sister and her sister's husband sat over the ended meal.

"Tea or coffee?" said Fawnia. "They are both cold."

"Coffee, please!"

"Why are you late?"

"The butter would not come."

"How odd! It always comes for me."

"I do not think it would this morning. The air is sodden. Look how the walls are running, even here in a room with a fire."

"I like a fire. After all, it is November."

"I like a fire too, Fawnia. I am glad you have lit one. The day is close, all the same, which accounts for the butter."

"It is very inconvenient, with the Miss Croziers coming to tea. I am always ashamed when I give a guest bought butter."

"Well, I am sorry. Where is little Tom?"

"He was late again." Tom's other parent turned from the window. "He will have no notion of manners if he is allowed to sleep late whenever the fancy takes him."

"I will not have a child doctored of its sleep," returned his wife.

"Well, I am sorry for him when we send him to sea, if he is always to choose his own hours."

Fawnia tilted back in her chair and called ceilingward: "Thyrza! Your master wants you to hurry Master Tom." Then, letting the legs down with a click, she turned again upon her sister. "You are not very smart to go into Axminster."

Mary Ann laughed good-humouredly. "I was your dairymaid this morning. I brought my old muslin on purpose. I will change when I have had some porridge."

"Oh, your porridge! I forgot to tell them about your porridge. Will you have an egg? It takes some minutes to boil. It is really time Thyrza cleared away."

"Give me some toast, then!"

"I can easily boil you an egg."

"Toast! Did you plan to go into Axminster? I thought it was your morning with the house-keeper."

"Well, so it is; but if we have no butter someone must go into Axminster before the Miss Croziers come."

"Nobody," said the brother-in-law with decision, "can go into Axminster this morning, because I need the horses. I am to meet the Squire beyond Kilmington at ten."

"Mary Ann can walk," said Fawnia with disdain, and

then hastily: "You can walk, sister, can't you? You love a walk. You always say that you are so much better when you stay with me than anywhere else because I see to it that you get a daily walk."

"She cannot go into Axminster," repeated the brother-in-law.

"Why cannot she go into Axminster?"

"Look for yourself!" said her husband, making room for her at the window. But it was Mary Ann who rose and came to stand beside him, and this pleased him, for he was fond of his sister-in-law, and would say to himself sometimes as he compared the two domestic figures upon his hearth that it was a mistake to make a mistake. There had been a likeness between the sisters, as there is between two young cherry-trees in bloom, but Fawnia had been the prettier, softer, friendlier, had the finer complexion, had liked him better and had shown it. He had not really hesitated for more than a week between her and Mary Ann. Yet here, after eight years, was Fawnia grown into a commonplace woman, her young-moon quality translated into plumpness and heat, her gait heavy, and her temper always at a vigorous and uncompromising fret.

Now Mary Ann had still her light, pretty figure, and had gained placidity as Fawnia lost it. She was restful in the house, because, though she did not let herself be put-upon, she was disdainful of small rights and a guest's privileges. A good girl, Mary Ann! He was very fond and proud of Fawnia, and the boy was healthy and plump. Nobody could say that Fawnia was not a good mother, nor that she had not grieved herself sick and sober over the deaths of little Henry and the baby. Oh no, he had no real complaint; but it was a fact that his mother thought he had chosen the wrong sister. It was not true; but he wished his mother had not chosen the night before his marriage to tell him so, for such a phrase lies in a fellow's mind like a gorse-prickle in the pad of his thumb. It does no harm, but he cannot get it out, and when it is pressed the place is tender.

Mary Ann was at his elbow, slipping an arm through his,

She rested one knee on the low seat, dipped her head to look out from under the deep valance of the myrtle, and exclaimed: "But this is a lake!"

"Rain in the hills all last night," said he. "By dawn the whole valley was flooded out. I heard the change in the voice of the stream before I rose, so I knew what we had to expect. Yarty water comes down at such a pace that we flood far quicker than the Axe meadows. After such a pelting twenty-four hours, though, the Axe will certainly overflow also. Then we shall have a proper flood."⁵⁵

"I never saw anything like it as it is. I must go up to the top of the farm to see how far the waters stretch."⁵⁵

"You need not. I can tell you exactly. Below the fairway there will be a six-mile pond which spreads down to the sea. Now you see why you cannot go into Axminster."

"But of course she can go into Axminster." Fawnia's voice interrupted him. She rose and joined them at the window. "You have never been here in November before, Mary Ann, though I have asked you often enough, or you would not make such a fuss about a little flooding. If you had had eight years of it as I have had, with the pastures flooded whenever there is the least spot of rain in the hills, you would think nothing of it, except for the damp. Oh, the damp! I have roused in the middle of the night and found myself not knowing where I was for the mist. Yes, white mist round my bed, and billowing about me till I thought it was ghosts, except that Walter snores so. It is a wonder I am not a rheumatic cripple. I suppose it is because my blood is so clean. You know how quickly a cut heals with me. But what the damp does to my muslins you would never believe: it dissolves the starch into a sort of paste, and I do so greatly dislike limp muslins. But otherwise I never let a flood trouble me. I had better not, for we have rain when all the rest of south England is bone dry. Nobody regards it hereabouts. I assure you the Miss Croziers will call this afternoon, flood or no flood, and I shall have no thin bread-and-butter to roll."

"But will they get through the overflow?"

"Why not? The London road is high above the water

meadows. But Walter fusses so. There is nothing to prevent you from going into Axminster."

"The dip between the bridge and the town will stop your sister, I am afraid. It fills up first of all," said Walter reasonably.

"And drains off just as quickly! You know that. You have said yourself a hundred and fifty times, you are always saying that our land is the best land, as everyone knows, in the whole valley, better pasture and carries more cattle, all because, though the Yarty is always spilling over, it drains away again so quickly that we are never water-logged. My dear Mary Ann, unless there is more rain every drop of water will have seeped away by luncheon. And it is not merely a question of butter. They will have matched my patterns by now at Young's: and I thought, if Tom rides in beside you on his pony, as he is longing to do, you could tie the parcel on to the saddle."

"If Mary Ann is really going," said Walter, veering, "she may as well bring me back my 'Times'."

"She had better hurry, then," said his wife. "I have told old Harry to have the pony round by quarter past nine, because if Walter is going to Kilmington he will have to take eggs with him, which means that old Harry cannot be kept hanging about."

But she spoke to the air. Mary Ann had already slipped away, and was at that moment pinning up the skirts of her walking-dress under her pelisse. Then she hunted out her galoshes, though she disliked walking in clogs, gathered her purse and pocket, pulled on her closest bonnet, and hurried into the yard. There she found Tom in a shout of excitement on the back of the fat pony, with his father railing at him for ill-management of the reins, while old Harry, an unreliable of thirty years' standing, displayed to his mistress a hat with a clutch of eggs in it. These, he asserted, were all that could be gleaned from the whole of the docky-field, its haystacks, cowsheds and hen-houses. He advanced rats, withdrew them hastily, and in turn propounded gypsies and lack of clover; while Fawnia asserted that Hunthay eggs, always recognizable by the recurrent

stain on the products of the speckly hen, had been seen piled up last market-day on the stall kept by Harry's natural granddaughter. She broke off only to take a joint promise from Mary Ann and Tom that Aunt Mary should hold the leading-rein so soon as they reached the high-road.

"Mother talks," said Tom as soon as they were well away.

"That is enough!" Mary Ann repressed him.

"Can I canter?"

"You mean, may you."

"Why do I mean may I?⁵⁵

"Grammar, unless you mean that you do not know how to canter."

"I do know how to canter. I will show you. Can I?⁵¹

"As long as you wait for me at the end of the lane. You must not go on to the high road by yourself. I promised your mother.⁵⁵

"What shall we do if the dip by the Axe is flooded?⁵¹

"Turn back.⁵⁵

"But Aunt Mary, I won't turn back. I want to buy squibs and crackers for the Guy. Old Harry has made a fine one of Boney with Papa's old cocked-hat, and he is lending me his gun to shoot at it, and he and the men from Phillips's farm have built a great bonfire at the cross-roads by the white owl's tree, and father has given a piece of real Wiltshire bacon, only Mother does not know, and you must not tell. So you see I must have crackers. Come up, Whitey!" and he cantered off chanting:

"My brave lads remember,
The fifth of November,
Gunpowder, treason and plot.
We will drink, smoke and sing, boys,
And our bells they shall ring, boys,
And here's health to our king, boys,
For he shall not be forgot."

He was soon out of sight in the next field, while Mary Ann, chuckling, for she liked her nephew when she could get him away from his mother, picked her way along the

rough track, pausing now and then to wonder at the complete transformation in the landscape which one small, furious stream could produce.

In summer the Yarty valley and the hills beyond were blue, soft and sweet, and diversified with pollards and neat trees. The scene might have served as background for a Perugino Madonna. The stream, for it was no more though it called itself a river on the maps, ran zig-zagging down from the hills with an air of temper, clawing away at the soft banks, and piling up the sifted stones and pebbles, till below the farm its eastern verge was a thirty-foot bluff of orange gravel, its turf overhanging and dropping away in tussocks the size of footstools, and sometimes the size of table-tops. Thus the rich grass-land was incessantly plundered, while the Yarty's bed grew ever broader, rushier and more gravelly, till its own greed had piled up barriers high enough to check its course, so that it was forced to seek a new outlet, and then another. There were never less than three obstinate currents running from the beginning of the bluff across the water-meadow to the bridge.

These streamlets scooped out deep pools for the salmon which were making their way to the ladder two miles higher up; but between the pools there were stretches of water so shallow that the farmhands forded them, jumping easily from patch to patch of dry shingle, or walking through the inch-deep trickles. Here land-flowers grew, greedy of the moisture, among the water-weed. In spring every moist stretch was thick with white ranunculus, and every dry stretch gold with buttercups: in summer the meadowsweet, the loosestrife, the watercress, the pimpernels and the peppermints encroached upon the river-bed, and down by the bridge the burdock-leaves, big as dresser-plates, gave the dreaming river the look of a tropical stream. Many a passing stranger admired the calm pools of water and the unhurried movements of the cattle crossing from one runlet to another and jotted down in his notebook accurate but misleading observations as to the sleepiness of the Devon countryside, the slow charm of the Devon peasantry, and the peace that for ever brooded upon the west of England.

That would be in July. These travellers seldom encountered, thought Mary Ann, the pleasures of living by a Devonshire stream in winter. She contemplated with excitement its metamorphosis, and followed the pulsations of the vast, bright lake into which it had changed over night as if she were retracing it in the courses of her own life. One current, the strongest, was furiously undercutting the bluff upon which she stood, while three other pulsings overwhelmed the beds of gravel and low-lying fodder-land through which they had trickled during the months of summer. Each was repeatedly held up by a sand-bank, a tuft of reed, sapling alders, the trunk of a dying willow, or some bunched wreckage of boughs, till, on a mighty heave of the current, the obstruction collapsed and was swung along in the rushing waters, a dissolving part of them, to collect again and become a barrier at the piers of the little humped bridge, only to be broken up anew and whirled under the bridge or round it, but never over it, and so on to the sea six miles away.

Thus ran the river Yarty in ruthless obliteration of spring and its own history. Thus, she thought, love and pride had rushed all-destroying through her quiet life.

She reached the slope of the bluff where it ran down among seedling gorse-bushes, whose roots clawed the unsuitable soil like young birds clinging to false holds of reeds. Then she turned left, keeping on the higher land. She fastened after her the gare which young reckless could never be trained to snick, and picked her way along the footpath muddy and full of cow-pocks, nipped over the stile, dropped down into the path between the ruts of mud, and swung on lightly to the junction of lane and road. There, indeed, her nephew was waiting for her; but he had no intention of being caught. As she came within hailing distance he waved an 'All's well!'⁵ and trotted on again, out into the dangerous high-road where any half hour or so you might meet a post-chaise or a coach.

CHAPTER X

HONITON, dear little place, provided Lieutenant Lapenotiere with an admirable breakfast. The chocolate was remarkably good and remarkably hot. There was a well-cooked dish of kidneys. There was fresh butter. Also there was privacy; for in that blond, red-checked town nobody observed him, nobody asked him questions, and, though the post-boy talked to the people of the Golden Lion, the carriage was half-way up the hill before the news penetrated from the kitchen, through the bar-parlour and out into the street.

Thus relieved of any need to recall his mission to his mind, Lapenotiere's spirits rose, and for the first time since he had left the Bay of Cadiz he began to think of the private goal of his journey, Miss Mary Ann Graves, who had been put out of his mind for a fortnight now, because if she belonged anywhere in his universe it was ashore and behind the scenes. Tomorrow would be time for Mary Ann. Now, however, and with her own characteristic unexpectedness, Mary Ann had made a re-appearance. Honiton was ten miles from Axminster, and in the letter which had caught him at Plymouth she wrote that she would be staying with her abominated sister that autumn. So she was placed in his mind, for he had once visited the pleasant farm between Axminster and Kilmington. He was only nine miles away from it, for the horses were doing very well, and his spirits rose higher still as he began to recognize the sights of the road.

Each hamlet, church-tower, copse, milestone and single tree was now a known landmark. During that brief visit in which he had been an acknowledged suitor, Mary and he had delighted in scandalizing the relations by unseemly expeditions on foot to Kilmington, Wilmington, Colyton, Colyford, Northleigh, Southleigh, Shute and Farway Street. The pair had clambered up hills and down into all the secret valleys between the London road and the coast, losing themselves five times in a morning, but generally emerging at last from some lane or other upon this very

track. In the hedge on his right foxgloves had grown seven years ago, and on yon bank one summer evening they had found glow-worms.

How well the horses were running! At this rate he would loon be in Kilmington, where he and Mary Ann had gone to church on the last Sunday of his visit. But it was all too long ago. Seven years is too long ago.

He reckoned that he was now within two miles of his old love. But however much he might wish it he must not steal an extra ten minutes of time in order to visit her, though by so doing he might alter for the better the whole course of his life. He thought that if he could meet her at this moment, with glory behind him and recognition ahead, he would be able to abate any resentment, conquer all resistance. He knew that the former burned in her breast, and he knew how stubborn she could be; but he also knew that she took a pride in him which he had sometimes found terrifying. Now was the moment to exploit her dear, female pride in the interests of their common future; but, O cross, O fortune, he could spare neither the mileage nor the time!

Reluctantly he relinquished his idea of encountering her by chance upon the road. Twice he had seen her, and had craned out of the window, ready to shout "Stop!" to the postillion, and twice, turning, she had dissolved into another woman. Inanimate things which he could not punish, a bonnet, a scarf, a colour, had mocked him. As the horses spanked down the Kilmington hill, the northern range of heights came into view and the zig-zags of the upper Yarty, and at last the thatch of Hunthay farm snuggling into elms and orchards on a green breast of hill. Then hope renewed. But when the flooded lowlands showed themselves he hoped no longer. No errand would bring a sane, tidy woman out on such a day, through such waterlogged meadows and along such oozing highways.

The horses rocketed over the Yarty bridge, and in another two minutes had whipped by the Hunthay turning. There was no more reason to look out of the window. He was being drawn out of the orbit of Mary Ann.

Yet he could have sworn that she was **near. Invisible,**

she fretted him like the humming of a wind in the shrouds, like the first February warning of change, like the cicada's noon-song in the grass. He could hardly bear his senses' acute knowledge of her presence when his sense told him so plainly that with every revolution of the wheels he was withdrawing from it. His eyes began to prick and his throat to swell. His mind and body were weakened as by churchyard terrors. He thumped his knee with his hand, ashamed and aching.

The carriage drew up, and the cessation of movement was his rescue. He roused himself, reflecting that he had seen what overwork, lack of sleep, grief and worry could do to other men. These strains and stresses were the cause of his trouble, not Mary Ann. This was not the time to think of Mary Ann. He must be thankful that fortune had been superficially against him, but in reality for him, so that no encounter with Mary Ann had been permitted to distract him from the purpose of his journey.

He stared out over the renewed floods pulsing forth from the second river of the valley, spreading glassily south to the sea, and saw, as he brought in his gaze to the hedge, that the Axe had overflowed the road itself for some twenty yards between its eastern bank and Axminster hill. The postillion had dismounted and stood at the road-edge by a clump of young ilex, shouting something which he could not hear. Simultaneously there came a tapping on the window. He turned, and knew before he saw her that, from the half-circle of upturned bonnet, the bright face of Mary Ann would be gazing in upon him, a portrait seen dimly through mud-splashed glass.

He looked, and steadied. He became happy. He was quite cool. He had no uncomfortable emotions. He flung open the door and jumped out without waiting for the steps to be let down.

"Coincidences do happen, whatever the books say," announced Lieutenant Lapenotiere. "My dear Miss Graves, though you may not believe it, I was at that moment thinking of you."

CHAPTER XI

"C A N you help me?" said Mary, giving him her hand without any air of surprise. "That naughty child has run away from me."

"What child?"

"Tom, my nephew, Fawnia's little boy. He has ridden his pony right through the flood. I promised my sister to hold the lead so soon as he reached the high-road, but he is immensely disobedient. He had no notion of waiting, and knew I could not ford this overflow."

This she said with great determination; but Lapenotiere observed that she had been in the act of reefing up her skirts, and that now, unobtrusively, she was letting them slip down again. He noticed, also, that in spite of the state of the road neither her petticoat nor her stockings were splashed, and remembered with admiration that she had always been a neat walker.

"You would have forded it, though, if I had not driven up," he observed, smiling.

"I should have been forced to try. My sister would be in frenzies if I did not follow him. The Axminster streets, you know, are always full of carts, and he knows very little about riding."

"Will you get in then?" and he beckoned the boy.

"Yes, I will." She let him help her. "Thank you!"

"Can we get through?" Lapenotiere shouted to the post-boy against the wind.

"Get through? Why, it is nothing, sir. Not more than three foot deep. Better pull down the blind on the broken side, though! Splash you a bit else."

"Yes, of course. Take this seat, Miss Mary!" and he cleared away the wallet and papers that were piled up beside him on the blue cloth cushion, and, passing her, pulled down the blind. "Now you can drive on," he called to the boy, and to her: "Are you comfortable?"

"What does it matter?" she said sharply. "It is only as far as the town. It is not long——"

"—to be together? No," said he, quickly completing her thought, and sat down in the opposite corner, feeling the passage of the wheels through the flood precisely as he might have felt, when walking, the changing surfaces of the road through the soles of his shoe. Agate fountains spurted up higher than the windows; then the carriage, released, rolled out and up the slope.

"We are Israelites!" Mary Ann watched the water sluicing down the panes on her left.

"Oh, your allusions! You are quite unchanged."

"I mean Jordan parted for them. Do you not remember, in the Bible?"

"No."

"It does not matter. May the blind be put up now? I must watch for Tom. I will cover this side. Will you look out at the other?"

"He would not ride on the right of the road, would he?" said he, but he put up the blind as he spoke.

"That child would do anything forbidden. It is not his fault. He has been indulged till the poor little thing has no notion of obeying anyone."

"But he is to go to sea, I think you told me once? That will cure him. How old is he?"

"Ten."

"Time he packed his chest."

"Oh no! I do not agree with you. Twelve years old is soon enough."

"I went at ten."

"Too, too soon. I have often thought— " She broke off, reddening; then, as some sound caught her attention, she half rose in the labouring carriage. "Ricky, did you hear a scream? It could not be Tom?"

"Were there not once a couple of peacocks in that garden beyond the wall?"

"Of course! It is the peacock screaming. Yes! The hen has died, and the poor thing is melancholy. So you remember Mrs Wynne's peacocks, do you?"

"I remember every detail of my visit to Axminster."

"It was a long while ago."

"Yes, but I remember it very well."

"Could you say where we are now?"

"When we have topped this hill we pass the parish church, and are at once in the market-place. There is a very steep lane on the left running down to the river, and on the right another runs past the church and along the Axe valley to Axmouth and the sea, and the little villages of Seaton and Beer. The market, as you cross, divides into two lanes, and the right hand one passes the George, and runs on and up towards Lyme. There!"

"Shall you change horses?"

"Not here. Not till Crewkerne. I must be in London tonight."

"Tonight! London? It cannot be done."

"It must be done, Miss Graves. I have changed horses eight times already. I am carrying dispatches to the Admiralty. Lord Nelson engaged the Combined Fleet three weeks ago and destroyed it. There has never been such a victory."

"Victory?" She was dazed. "Victory at last? Is it true? After such waiting! After such fears! Victory, Ricky? Oh!" She began to take it in and be joyous. "Ricky, this is the greatest news!" Her tone changed. "Quick! There is Tom. He has had a tumble, I think. Can you stop the chaise?" Then in swift aside as the carriage halted: "How many prizes? Tell me quickly!"

"Twenty!"

"Does it help you?"

"I have not had time to think of prize-money," said he, untruly, as he put his head out of the window.

The chaise had drawn up in the bottle-neck. Here a couple of carts and a small crowd of foot-passengers were gathered in front of the greengrocer's shop. The baskets of vegetables set up on a trestle outside the shop-window were over-set, and sprouts and apples lay scattered on the cobbles. In the centre of the mess stood the deplorable Tom, very muddy, very angry, without a hat.

Somebody let down the steps, and Lapenotiere jumped out. Mary followed so quickly that she stumbled against

him, and as the little crowd made way for her she called out angrily to her nephew:

"Tom, Tom, why do you do such things? Are you hurt?"

"Not hurt a bit!" Tom was as angry as she. The spark in his hazel eye matched hers. "And it was not Whitey's fault, neither. He only nosed the baskets, and at once the fool hit him."

"Tom, you must not speak so of Mr Turner. Excuse him, Mr Turner!"

"No need to take on, Miss Mary." The greengrocer added himself to the group. "No harm done."

"You are most kind. Tom, are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Do not fuss me, Aunt Mary!"

"You must let us pay for the damage, Mr Turner."

"Should not dream of it, ma'am. What's a cabbage?"

But she fumbled in her purse, for the first time not perfectly collected, for Lapenotiere was whispering in her ear: "I must say goodbye to you now, Miss Graves," while Tom clamoured: "Aunt Mary, my pony has gone!"

The greengrocer was re-assuring him with: "It will find its way home, Master Tom, never fret!" when his ear was caught in turn, and he wheeled about, demanding: "What has come over the Square?"

A murmur, a buzz, a shouting answered him; for the postillion had not wasted his time. He had news, and he enjoyed telling it. With the naval gentleman fully occupied he could let himself go to the loungers, and his words, caught up and repeated, ran about the market-square like a heath-fire. Windows were flung up, doors flew open. Out of the draper's and the grocer's and the chemist's the pelisses, pattens, shawls, bonnets, calashes and stuff gowns of the district came flocking, while from the lanes and the two inns there hurried forth the draymen, ostlers and Spanish-looking lads with their trays of fish. To these were added shopkeepers, apprentices, children with blackened faces and fifth of November masks, the verger from St Mary's, and a couple of volunteers. All these pressed round the chaise, the men throwing up their hats,

the women snatching at the laurels which adorned it, in the wildest demonstrations of joy.

"I must get on," continued Lapenotiere in the girl's ear. "I have delayed too long already. Goodbye, Miss Mary."

"No, not goodbye!"

"Yes!"

"But we cannot meet and then part again so—so emptily."

"It is my unlucky fate. I believe there will always be these preventions. But I shall try to come back. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand, but Mary Ann, without touching it, without a word to him, engaged the greengrocer in a whispered conversation. Lapenotiere, surprised and hurt, turned back to the carriage.

"Are you ready, sir!" cried the post-boy, his voice drowned in a sudden clash of bells.

"What? I cannot hear you. Yes, I am ready."

He clambered in, and found to his amazement that Mary Ann had turned and was following him. Then she was in the carriage with him. Then she was sitting down in the left-hand corner-seat. Then the door slammed, and they were off.

"What notion is this?" demanded the invincible captain of the *Pickle* schooner. "You must get out, dear. We cannot talk now."

She said serenely, as the carriage wheels began to quicken: "I can get a chaise back from Chard or Crewkerne."

"Mary, fifty people have seen you get in."

"Yes, I know. What do I care? Oh, the bells, the bells! Are they not glorious? They carry me up to heaven with their 'Halleluia! Halleluia! So it is victory? Complete victory! Twenty prizes! John—Ricky—I could turn Quaker and bear witness to the goodness of God in any company!"

"But the little boy?"

"Do not trouble about Tom. I have given him into Mr Turner's keeping. He will take him home. Listen! 'Halleluia! Halleluia!' The war is over and the *Pickle* is home."

"The war is not over. The *Pickle* will return in a very

few days with letters from the Admiralty to Collingwood, or so I hope. Do you suppose the Navy's work is done, or ever will be? We have the Mediterranean to hold. So——"

"Well?"

"I do not know. You distract me. I do not know what I was going to say."

"Oh!" She laughed shortly and said no more, and the silence between them endured for quite half a mile. Mary Ann sat upright. Her cheeks were crimson, her eyes sparkling, her lips compressed. She clasped one hand over the fingers of the other tightly, as if she were holding a fan. She might have been a wallflower at a ball, angry and unadmired.

Lapenotiere, however, watched her with admiration, and also with amazement. Mary Ann was not, in his opinion, a woman to defy conventions. She was a gentlewoman. She was mild and sane. Then what was she doing here, alone with him in a travelling-chaise? But of course he knew very well what she was doing. She was burning her boats. He wondered what she would say next. This Mary Ann would say anything.

What she did say was: "My sister will never forgive me. Poor little Tom!"

"I am sorry for your sister's concern; but I should not waste pity upon Tom. He will come to no harm."

"No, I am not really concerned about him. It was in order to say something, for——" she was embarrassed, "I suddenly find that now I am here with you I have nothing to say; but when I saw you I could not let you go. I had wanted to see you for a long while."

"My case also, Mary Ann."

"Did you get my letters? I numbered them."

"Yes."

She said defiantly: "And did you read them?"

"Again and again."

There was another silence, and this time he knew **that** it was **a** hostile one. Between them the ghosts of the last five years were rising; but her ghosts were uglier than his. He saw **a** young and kind-eyed phantom who bade him be

happy if he could; but hers were the bitter-spoken **ghosts** of wakeful nights and forsaken days.

"I cannot hear the bells any longer," she said.

"I am glad of it. I have heard too many. They have followed me from Falmouth."

"I very much want," she said, trying to keep the conversation alive, "to hear your adventures."

"No, Mary Ann. Not now."

"Why not?"

"Neither you nor I at this moment care a fig about my adventures."

She shrugged. The excitement was fading out of her cheeks, leaving her white and not so pretty. She stared at her hands as she talked, while he gazed into the opposite corner of the carriage. It was as if they had a secret agreement never to look at each other.

Again the pause lengthened like the straight road behind them. To his left the blue and purple counterpanes of Dorset billowed away over the bones of a lake-bottom, across a valley, and up to heights which were dominated by a knot of pines, blue-black as a storm. The rest of the slopes were russet flecked with gilt, and the whole landscape was softened by mist which steamed up and evaporated in a sky beginning to be sunny.

"As you are here we had better talk," he said at last. "There is much to discuss."

"Yes."

"Did you get the franked packet from me?"

"With the ring in it? I did. Here it is." She ripped back her glove and slipped the ring from her finger.

"Do not take it off!"

"Of course I must give it back to you." She leant forward and laid it in his palm. "I do not know why you entrusted it to me in the first place."

"I wanted it to be in your charge—if anything happened **to** me—with all my other belongings."

"The children?"

"Yes."

"I thought you meant as much. **I should have taken**

care of them in any case. Well, you are safely home, so take it!"

He stared at the beautiful gewgaw lying on his palm, spilt upon it like a drop of blood, and let it roll slowly to and fro to the rhythm of the wheels.

CHAPTER XII

"I THOUGHT you would be glad to see me," he said at last.

"I thought so too," she said unhappily.

"But you are not."

"Are you glad to see me?"

"I thought that I should be. I was, in the first breath."

"So was I."

"Then what is the matter with us?"

"I suppose," she said slowly, "that we both have—'grievances' is too little a word."

"I have nothing against you," he said. "Nothing, at least, that is not long oudenved."

She studied the back of her hand, thinking that it looked like a map. The veins were the rivers and streamlets, the knuckles and the bones the hills. The skin had exquisite, infinitesimally small variations of colour, like a strawy field pale with convolvulus flowers. She turned over this pale hand and studied the lines of the palm. A scar like a miniature moon cut through the heart-line. She had not thought of that scar since she was a child, but instantly, as if it had been made within the week, she recalled the cause of it. She was a little girl again with a string of horse-chestnuts, and as she bored a hole in one of them suddenly the bradawl slipped and dug into her palm. She saw again, amid pain and fright, the beauty of the great nut, and how its gloss, colour and texture were enhanced by the splash of crimson. Then she recalled her brother's freckled face with the soft, open mouth, and, as he bent over her hand, the queer rusty patch in his fair hair just below the parting. She looked up again at the canopy of the chestnut-tree above them, with blue autumn sky shining through the

thinning leaves. The picture of that vivid moment of life had been framed for twenty years in the little white scar.

Thus prompted, she was able to answer him: "Nothing can be outlived."

"Do not be so sure!"

"But I am sure. When I have been hurt I still puzzle over the hurt, though the blow was given——" for the first time she lifted her head and looked at him, "—five years ago."

He was lying back in the far corner, his face in dark shadow, for he had pulled the blind down against the wind. Under his tan he was colourless. His eyes, so blue in her memory, now shone black, for the irids had enlarged in the darkness. She thought: 'It is still a noble face. It is stronger than it used to be. The complexion is more weather-beaten. The bones are wonderful. But it is not a young man's face. Seven years ago he was a boy; but that look of youth has fled. I miss it so monstrously, that lost expression. I am half afraid of him. I think I hate him. But I am here with him, by my own will, and I must see the business out.'

"Well?" said he.

"It is for you to begin, I think."

"I can only tell you that I am sorry for our ancient quarrel, but——" he hesitated, "—as regards what followed it, as regards my sudden marriage, there will never be anything to say, except that I mourn and shall always mourn my dear wife."

"Do you suppose," she asked him in a voice of outrage, "that it could be in my mind to pry into your secrets——?"

"No, no, Mary Ann! I did not mean that."

"—to speak of her, of your wife at all; or——" she went on, her eyes once again on her hands, "—if I did speak of her, to speak with anything but——" she found words difficult, "—but sisterly regard and respect? I never met her. But she loved you, and she is dead. How can I be anything but grieved for her misfortune in losing her life so soon and her two babies, and—and you? I am not so mean, I am not so inhuman. What opinion must

you have of me, that you warn me to be careful of what I say?"

"I did not warn you."

"What else was it but a warning?"

He made no answer.

She spoke again. "This is what I must know. I ask no other question. What turned you against me before you met her? Why did it all happen? Do you know?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I suppose I know. Since my wife died I have thought about it again. I would not while she lived; but in the last year I have thought of little else, when I have had time to think at all of my own affairs, and——"

"And?"

"Why yes, Mary, I suppose I do know how it happened. But is it worth discussing? It is so long ago. Is it not better to speak of the future? Since your letter came I think only of the future, of you in my life again, and of myself in yours. I have wondered if a shared life may be possible. Your letters encouraged me to think it possible. I shall never forget the comfort brought me by your first letter of condolence. It was kind, it was generous, it blotted out so much. It was dear Mary Ann of—of our first meetings, speaking to me from the pages. Everything that made for happiness became, without disloyalty to—to the dead—possible. But now that we talk together I am unsure again. You would not be here with me in this carriage unless your wishes were my wishes; but—but you are so hostile."

"Was it——" she began to ask, but then broke off.

"What? What do you want to know?"

"After the first day at Liskeard you were never the same."

"I know."

"And the day after the ball you went away."

"That is true."

"Because you heard something against me? They told you something which—spoiled me for you. Was it that? Something changed you, and I know the word for it, I think. Was it——" she brought it out with extraordinary bitterness, "'husband-hunting?'"

"No, no!"

"But I think it was. Be honest!"

"You are too crude."

"But it was?"

"I suppose, in a special sense, yes."

"I thought so. I knew it. I guessed it long ago. Fawnia talked to you, and you listened to her, and you never came to me for my side of it. I can never forgive you, I know that."

"You are so wrong. You have no perspective. You will wreck everything again."

"Again?"

"Yes, again. I have a temper too," and he leaned forward and put up the blind, then, fixing his attention on the sliding landscape, continued: "Let me tell you what happened."

"I know what happened."

"My part of it, then. My memory is at least as good as yours."

"Is it, Ricky? Is it? I wonder."

"I remember our first meeting at Ilfracombe, when you were sixteen."

"Seventeen."

"What? Can you be twenty-seven?"

"Twenty-seven, and you are thirty-five. It has been a great waste, has it not, of—of life? When you wanted to marry me at once I should not have opposed you. There you were right and I was wrong, I own that. But I tried to play fairly by you, indeed I did. They all said that for a young officer to marry—oh, but you know what they all said!"

"I do. That I could not keep you in comfort. You listened to them."

"It was not the being poor. But to be told that I should be a drag on you—I could not face it. Well, I was wrong."

"Yes, you were wrong. How long did we wait? Five years! Well, you see, that is a long time for a man to wait. But I did wait, and I never thought of anyone but you, though——"

"Though?"

He hesitated. "Well, you know, there are always women——"

"Who hunt for husbands!"

"Mary Ann, why be so bitter? Have I not equal cause?"

"Have you?"

"For five years I never wavered."

"Nor did I."

"No, but you refused to be engaged."

"I would not tie you, and there I was proved right."

"It is not fair to say that. I wanted to be tied. But you—you preferred to be free. I resented it."

"Because I did not make it worse for you, you resented it? This is the most unfair word you have spoken yet."

"Well, I did resent it. Then there were your letters, always full of amusements, gaieties, balls. I thought to myself: 'She certainly does not pine.' No, do not interrupt me!"

"I will interrupt you. I must. If you make such a statement and I do not challenge it, why then it is acquiescence, and I do not for one moment acquiesce. If I had paper and pencil here to make a list of all the unjust things you say, then that would be another matter. Then I would wait to refute them. But as it stands I am obliged to interrupt. Here is the answer to your stricture. If I wrote to you gaily and cheerfully, and told you all my small doings, it was to entertain you."

"I never asked you to entertain me, Mary."

"Were my letters to be one long moan? You were away at sea. It was my duty to be cheerful. But you should see the letters I never sent."

"I wish I had."

"You say that now, but you would have been ennuyé soon enough."

"For that matter, I was bored when I came home and found you——"

"What? Found me what?"

"Why, Mary Ann, very full of engagements."

There was a long silence; then she said: "Oh, I have been a fool! I was so unhappy, and I meant so well. I was afraid that if I seemed too joyful at seeing you it might be thought—by you, by you—that I was throwing myself at your head. Ricky, I had no ring. We were not engaged."

"But we were in love."

"I was, yes."

"So was I, Mary Ann, so was I. But I thought you cold. Each time I came home it seemed to me that you were colder in your manner. You were becoming a lady of fashion."

"I? A lady of fashion? Say that to a fashionable woman and she would laugh at you. And each time you came I was cold and busy? Is that it? But you only came three times, and the last time was misery."

"It was misery," said he, fumbling with the leather flap of the window, "because you made it misery. When I came to Liskeard on that last visit I never saw you two minutes alone. Always a captain or a major at your elbow! Never saw such a townful of redcoats."

"You are intending, I suppose, to make me very angry?"

"I am sorry to make you angry. I am trying to tell you the cause of the breach between us."

"But to say 'redcoats' in that tone, with that laugh——!"

"Look at it fairly, dear! Certainly there was no promise between us; but there was an understanding that you would wait for me. I too was ready to wait. But when I come home and see you——"

"Well?"

"I am trying to find a phrase that will not offend you."

"Do not try! Tell me the truth—or at least, for it will not be true, what seemed to you the truth!"

"Well then, I found you allowing every man's admiration——"

"Did you want me to label myself 'old maid to be rescued'?"

"Mary!"

"Yes! That was being said, until I stopped it."

"All I saw was that, instead of being promised to me as

I had fancied, you were still making your choice. And when, on that last disastrous night, you deliberately danced with me in silence——"

"Only after we quarrelled."

"I do not care! It was marked to the point of insult; for with every other man in the room you were all gaiety. It was open dismissal. Then your sister——"

"What did Fawnia tell you?"

"Nothing refutable. She painted a picture of your matrimonial prospects, and told me how lucky I was in such a way that it was a luck I suddenly disdained."

"Then you escorted your mother home, I remember. On the way she let fall some word or other, did she not?"

"Yes."

" 'Husband-hunter'?"

"There, you see! That offended me in you, that indelicate recklessness when you are angry. My mother could never have used such a phrase."

"Even if she thought it?"

"Even if she thought it."

Mary Ann pulled her glove on to her shaking hand and buttoned it with such decision that the little pearl was wrenched off and fell in the straw. Neither of them stooped to find it.

"It is all just as I guessed," she said.

The carriage slowed down, and Lapenotiere opened the window to let the sun-warmed air flush the stuffy box which held so much anger and unreason and distress. Then, looking up at her, he smiled brilliantly. "Now you?" said he.

"No," she said. "I have not anything to say. I thought I had, but I have not. Ricky is gone for ever. Why should I expose myself to a hectoring stranger? We are slowing down. A turnpike?"

"A long hill.

"I pray God there will be a chaise at Crewkerne."

"Mary Ann, do not be so violent!"

"I want to get away from you."

The slowing chaise stopped, and before Lapenotiere

could put down the window the postillion was at it, letting down the steps.

"Very sorry, sir, but this is the bad bit of hill where Dorset and Somerset meet, and neither county will mend it. They have had law-suits going on these three years. 'Twill be hard enough to get the horses and the chaise along without your weight added, and the lady's. And so, sir, if you and your lady would be kind enough to get out——"

"I will certainly," said Lapenotiere. "But the lady——"

"It will do me no harm to walk," said Mary Ann, overhearing. "I have strong shoes. I should like the air," and she slipped down between the two men and was off across the road, springing over the ridges of the ruts.

There was on the left, the northern side, a path which children had made hunting the early strawberries. It ran irregularly up and down and round the brambles and eglantines, sometimes dropping down to the ditch and breaking away at the roots of the oaks. This path she chose, and Lapenotiere strode after her, though he did not follow her in the track itself, but walked level with her in a near furrow where a brake had skidded out a smooth path. They did not hurry themselves, and the carriage soon drew ahead.

"Now listen to me," said Mary Ann, a little breathless, her cheeks reddening again as she pressed forward upon the mild wind. "It will not take long. One sentence. I have never held anyone in the core of my heart but you."

"Mary Ann!"

"But not this you. You have become another person."

"You are wrong."

"Let me speak, let me speak! I let you speak. But whatever sort of a person John Richards Lapenotiere is today, however overbearing, jealous, vindictive——"

"I am not one of these things."

"No? Well, I cannot tell, for I do not know your mind any more. But the other Ricky, the young Ricky, I carry here in my heart, always. There!" She paused. "I have no more to say in the way of sentiment. But to justify myself is still necessary, so listen! I have been taught, and I have not learned to unbelieve it, that a lady has to

play the proper parlour-game with her life and her surroundings. You, as a man, are not asked to play a parlour-game. Yours is a game of life and death, and I know, Ricky, that you have played it very well. The way you hold yourself, the way you look, the lines round your eyes, the way you bear yourself to underlings and children, and to me, all these things show me that you have learned to play your game as it should be played. But you did not always know so much. You were strange and moody as a young man. Very often I did not know in the least how to behave to you. So I thought that to become acquainted with other men would help me to be—correct—with you. Therefore I tried to play the parlour-game as well as any young woman in the county, and I think, this is not immodesty, that I succeeded. But, you see, when you came home, as you say, only three times, I was so cruelly in love with you—no, no, no, let me speak !"

" I am letting you speak. But you will slip, my darling girl. Here is a great smear of mud where some fox's hole——"

"A rabbit-burrow—you do not suppose a fox would use the highway? There, I am over it! Thank you!" She relinquished his hand as if it burnt her. "I tell you I was bewildered, embarrassed, frightened by the strength of my feelings for you. Therefore the social engagements, the dances, other men about me, the women jealous, the whole parlour-game of life in a country-town, was security, was my background as the Navy is yours. When one is in love one is so—so unsupported, and I needed help because, you see, you—you—you changed. You say I grew cold. No, Ricky, no! Never! You grew cold. You were as bleak sometimes as your own profile. Well then, of course I flirted with everyone who asked me, in order to reassure myself. Cold? I? Because I did not come to you and say: 'We planned not to marry till you had a competency; but I cannot wait. I would rather marry you at once.' How could I say that to you? In the first week or two when we were so close and so happy I could have said it; but not after all those years. Then—no, let me finish!—on that night at the ball when

things were so desperately wrong between us, I decided that, the very next day and at all costs, I must and would break through to you. All night as I danced—in silence, I admit the silence—I was planning how, in what phrases, I should say to you: 'What has come over us both? Let us be more careful or we shall wreck our happiness!' Well, next morning I come down to breakfast, and Fawnia says to me: 'So Lapenotiere is leaving us today!' You see, you had told Fawnia and you had not told me. That was hard, was it not? I protected myself and you by saying: 'Yes, he is coming in later to bid me goodbye.' But that was a lie too, and she guessed it, and when you did not come, how she laughed! Of course I told everyone else that you had been called back to Plymouth in a hurry, and was so convincing that they believed me. Then I thought: 'At least he will write, if only to break it off.' But I never heard from you, never any more, never a word."

Lapenotiere broke in: "I waited to hear from you. When I told you, at the beginning of my visit, that I might have to go off at a moment's notice, you said: 'Where shall I write? Will it be the former address?' So I waited for a letter."

"I waited for a letter. It was for you to write to me.

"No, not in the circumstances. You had said that you would write. It lay in your hands to write. A word from you would have recalled me."

"What, to Liskeard?"

"To you, Mary. But you did not write. And matters were at such a pass between us that I took your silence as ending the entanglement. What, after all, was there to be said? You had so obviously lost interest in me."

"Was that how it struck you?" she wondered.

"That is how it struck me."

"Well, this is how it struck me, Ricky. After receiving—affection—years of affection, you go away without saying good-bye to me, without troubling to ask: 'What has come between us?' And three weeks later, only three weeks, I hear that Lieutenant Lapenotiere has consoled himself.

Was I to write and make polite enquiries? It was true, was it not? You had forgotten me."

"I have never forgotten you."

"But you married. Behold your faithfulness!" She slowed down, panting, for the hill was very steep, and the little path had ended in a decaying tuft of wild parsley. She put out her hand. "Will you help me down, please?"

He was close to her in a moment, and she floated down, thin and light.

"If you will step in this rut," he said anxiously, "I think you will not soil your shoes too badly."

"But you?"

"I shall do well enough in the middle track." Then, as they continued to climb the hill: "You may not believe me, Mary Ann, and from your point of view I see no reason why you should, but I am counted an honest man, and I give you my word that I was convinced of being forsaken. Pride if you like, anger if you like, prevented me from enquiring further. There was my mistake: I see it: I acknowledge it; but—I could not bring myself to ask for confirmation of what I already knew. As for consoling myself, let me say this. But no, I will not. I end this conversation as I began it, by telling you that, with all of myself that did not belong to you, I loved my wife. The whole of me was grateful to her. I mourn her, and always shall."

"And I say, as I said to you at the beginning of our conversation—but no, let us not go round and round like a wretched squirrel in a cage! What a long hill this is! What has happened to the chaise?"

"It seems to be stuck in a bog."

She said, in a high voice thickened by tears: "It looks like a wasp struggling out of jam. There, it is through! I suppose it will meet us at the top of the hill."

They ploughed on between the ruts in a silence that lasted till they reached the bog through which the carriage had been floundering. On either side of the road were sloping fields, and behind the gates the cows had so plodded and nulled in the soft, dark earth that on either side of the gates there was a pond of liquid mud, and each pond

prolonged itself to the centre of the road, and there met its fellow. Coaches, carriages and cattle had floundered across during the wet autumn, spreading the damage, until the whole road for a matter of fifteen yards was a cloddish sea. Mary Ann stopped in dismay.

"I cannot walk through this. Could we cross into the field and make a round?"

"There are ditches on either side," said he. "I had better carry you. Make yourself light!"

To lift her, he thought, was like picking a sprig of heather. He felt her arm about his neck firm and warm, while he, judging distances and tussocks with success, achieved the crossing without discomfort and with both their dignities unimpaired. But he thought as he set her down that she looked white and very tired, and reflected on the years that had passed since he had complimented her on her powers of walking.

"Perhaps you should take my arm," he suggested.

She took it in silence. In silence they climbed the rest of the hill, in silence re-entered the post-chaise, and so continued till they drove into the courtyard of the 'Golden Lion'. Then he spoke.

"We must not wait here long. This climb has delayed me twenty minutes."

"Will you enquire about a conveyance for me?" she said implacably.

He looked blank, reddened, and his manner hardened; then, implacable as she, he smiled his acquiescence.

"Your conveyance? Oh, certainly! I will speak to them at once. Will you wait in the chaise? It will be more comfortable for you, I think. I shall not be gone five minutes."

CHAPTER XIII

THE five minutes passed like sluggish waves crawling up a beach to drown a woman stranded at the cliff-foot. They moved so slowly that when, after long periods of thought,

she looked at her watch, there was still a minute's respite. Nevertheless the end of life was very near. Life, indeed, was in a sense already over for her, for she had of her own free will broken finally with the only creature who had ever invaded and entirely possessed her soul. But, she thought, though a woman is in appearance dead, the dispossessed spirit still hovers until the coffin is nailed down, the corpse borne out of the house and started on its last road. Even then some accident may still occur. The hearse may overturn, the lid break open, the dead flesh may be jolted out and, lying in the sunlight, may offer the excluded spirit its chance of return. Not till the ropes are paid out into the grave, not till the ashes are sprinkled on the coffin and the clods of clay follow, is the last hope gone.

She heard his footsteps returning over the mucky yard, and the sound was indeed that of clods falling upon her buried heart. She looked at her watch again. He had been gone exactly five minutes.

She thought: 'When a hare couches, too paralysed to move because the hounds are upon her, she feels as I feel now. When a criminal hears the unlocking of the guillotine, he feels as I feel now. Cold! The sole sensation is one of cold. Well, let death come! I am brave. I can endure. But why could I not have died when the blow fell for the first time? Why must I agonize twice?' Then she looked up and half rose as Lapenotiere returned and spoke to her through the window, smoothly.

"I very much regret the inconvenience to you," said he, "but it is impossible to get a conveyance for you. There are no spare horses."

"Oh!"

"And I do not choose that you should be alone here for an unspecified length of time. The inn is not fit for you. It is very rough."

"Oh!"

"So it would be best, I think, if you accompanied me to Yeovil, and if we have no luck there I shall certainly be able to get you attention and a suitable conveyance at Shaftesbury."

As he prepared to get in, not waiting for her answer, footsteps sounded behind him. Clod footsteps in the muddy yard? No! The tread of Oberon's feet weaving a circle of relenting and release. 'Jack shall have Jill, naught shall go ill,' muttered Mary Ann on a sob, and swallowed it hastily with a self-warning. 'Above all things I must not get hysterical.' Then, looking out, she saw that the newcomer was no ætherial intervener, but a red-cheeked, weather-beaten, middle-aged gentleman in a black velvet hunting-cap.

"I'll ask you to forgive me," the stranger accosted them in a strong Norfolk accent, "but we are working the stream across the pasture, and a young fellow just ran to us with the rumour of a naval gentleman with dispatches asking for horses. So I took the liberty of warning the landlord that you were to have the best in his stables, and you shall have 'em, for I picked 'em out myself."

Lapenotiere stiffened and did not look at Mary Ann as he muttered a "Much obliged!" and turned again to urge haste upon the ostler. But into her heart bliss shot arrow after arrow till her whole breast was one wound of joy. He had lied. There were horses in the stable. He had lied to her in order to keep her with him.

"Nay, don't draw in your head!" the stranger was shouting. "Is it news from the Fleet? Your post-boy says a victory. Can it be true?"

"Sir, it is true."

"A proper victory?"

"I think it is the greatest in all our history. It is greater than Copenhagen, greater than the Nile."

"Good God!"

"But you will forgive me, I must not linger."

"Forgive you anything, Captain—Commander——?"

"Lieutenant Lapenotiere, at your service."

"I'm at yours, I'm at yours. How many ships taken?"

"Twenty." And Lapenotiere, with exclamations of apology, hurried to the horses' heads to see what was delaying the grooms.

'Twenty! Why, it's finer than Rodney. It beats Blake.

It is Armada over again. Ah, Drake and Blake, never was any to touch 'em, till Nelson came! I am an old acquaintance of his lordship's, you see. But he is the greatest of 'em all. I say, I have said it for ten years—he is the greatest of 'em all. He is the father of his country, I say, more than all these statesmen. Pitt! I have voted against Pitt all my life. What is a Pitt without a Wellesley and a Nelson, tell me that? I used to shoot with Lord Nelson up in Norfolk in the year 'ninety-one, not that he is what you call a shot. He'd take his gun in both hands and run at the horizon, while the rest of us scattered for fear of a peppering; but a more sporting fellow you never saw. Please God I have the honour and glory of entertaining him here one day. Had an estate left me by a great-aunt, and very strange I feel, I can tell you, among all these Somerset bumble-bees. I am Norfolk reed-thatch, like his lordship. He sings in his nose, just as we all do. Have you noticed that in him? We missed him, I can tell you, when he got his ship at last. The *Agamemnon*, I think, a sixty-four. Ay, the *Agamemnon*. He was halfmad with joy to get her. His father read aloud his letter. That was in 'ninety-seven, and I have never set eyes on him since; but when he comes home with his fresh branches of laurel, Spanish, Egyptian, Danish laurel—a regular shrubbery he's planted, hey?—I never fail to write and felicitate him. It pleases him, I daresay; for we had the most civil note to my wife only six weeks ago about a nephew of hers whom he helped, to pleasure me, the kind little fellow—I mean his lordship. My wife's in love with him. So are my girls. What? What's wrong?"

Lapenotiere turned back to him from a muttered consultation with the post-boy. "I beg your pardon! It is put right, thank you. I must bid you farewell. I am in great haste to be off."

"Just so, just so, and I am not keeping you. Would not dream of it. But just tell me a word of his lordship to spread about the county."

"As to that, you will have a sad task."

"What say? A little deaf! Try the other ear!"

"Sir, about two hours after the battle began his lordship

was wounded in the shoulder and carried below. At four-thirty, a victory having been reported to him, he died of his wound. I am sorry to be the bearer of such bad news."

The other's ruddy face slowly paled. "Died of his wound? His lordship?" His hand stole up to his forehead and he took off his cap. "The little fellow gone? Horatio! Horace, we used to call him. Captain of the *Agamemnon*. Such a bad shot! Such a wonderful little fellow! O my God, O my God, O my God!"

The other put out his hand. It was seized and shaken, "Of course, you have got to go, Captain—Lieutenant—what is your name? I am not keeping you. But you see, I thought of him as a friend of mine. He was, too. I have not had such a blow since my boy—that is neither here nor there. But it is such a blow, you see, that I do not know what I am saying."

"It is a stunning blow to us all, sir, to his officers and men, to the whole Fleet, to the whole country."

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Goodbye, then!"

"God bless you, and goodbye!"

They shook hands, and Lapenotiere got in. Instantly the red face appeared at the window. "I must ask you—did he know he was dying?"

"Yes, he knew."

"Just so! He would. One thing more, sir! May I tell my neighbours? It is no secret?"

"No secret. Good day to you!"

"Good day to you! Good day!" He turned away with a final: "O my God!"

"Anything wrong, Sir Charles?" The landlord came hurrying up in some anxiety as the carriage drew out of the yard. "No bad news, I hope?"

"Yes, Cooper, yes, the news is very bad. Dreadful news! O my God! O my God! Send down to the stream and call them all home! No more hunting today! Great news, too, Cooper! We are free of the French. We have won a great victory. But Cooper—he's killed."

"Not his lordship?"

"Yes, Cooper! Yes, Cooper! It's his lordship. It's Lord Nelson, Nelson himself. He would never take precautions. Cooper, I have seen him take his gun in both hands and go charging across the stubble field till my heart was in my mouth for fear he'd slip. Twenty times I have warned him."

"Killed!"

"Killed! What the country's going to do without him Almighty alone knows."

CHAPTER XIV

THEY were out of the town and long past the Yeo bridge before they spoke to each other; then he asked her if she would prefer the window up or down, and she told him that it was just as he pleased. So he left the window down, and the air that flowed in was sweet and charmed by its freshness. Silence was preserved until midday, when they rattled into Sherborne, scattering the luncheon schoolboys in the High Street, and once again changed horses. This time, however, Mary Ann made no enquiry about a chaise but sat quietly in her corner while Lapenotiere got out, gave the necessary supervision, and returned. The carriage drove on over an improving road-surface, but it was not till they were once more in Dorset that she said gently:

"I suppose your next change will be Shaftesbury?"

"Yes."

"Sixteen miles?"

"Thereabout."

At that she stripped off her gloves, untied her bonnet-strings, loosened her pelisse, spread her belongings, took possession of the chaise-corner and made it a habitation, made it a home. All this she did neatly and quietly.

"You had better have a meal at Shaftesbury," she said.

He roused himself. "I am sorry. Would you have liked something to eat at Sherborne? I should have asked you."

"I want nothing, no; but you will certainly need a proper meal. You have a very heavy twenty-four hours ahead of

you, and behind you—yes, I realize now something of all that is behind you. I was a selfish fool. But I did not know, Ricky. How could I know the other half of it? You said a victory——"

"Well, and it is a victory," he answered her sullenly.

"Yes, I know, and joy-bells make one light-headed. Well, leave that!" She began to smooth out her bonnet-ribbons. "But you must have meals."

"Well, we will."

"Yes. When do you expect to reach London?"

"By midnight, I hope."

"It will be a record if you do."

"Well then, it must be a record. There has been too much delay already. The news should have been sent off next day; but the gale—the gale! The confusion it caused after the battle was a heart-break. What with the heavy swell and the darkness, there was no order. There could be none. First the week of storm. I did not leave till the twenty-seventh, nine whole days ago. Too long! But you know, we nearly foundered in the Bay. The guns had to go overboard. I did not think myself that we should survive. We only sighted two vessels, the *Nautilus*, at the mouth of the Tagus, and the *Superb* when we were nearly home."

"They were joining the Fleet, I suppose?"

"Yes, but I own I have a sort of fear—it is an unworthy fear, for what matters at this moment the fortune of an individual?—but still I have it, this fear that somehow my sorry piece of good luck will be snatched from me. The Commander-in-Chief said, do you see——"

"Collingwood?"

"Ay!"

"Oh, you saw him, did you?"

"Well, of course. I had his orders to bring home the dispatches, and he said that it would mean promotion, and—and a sum of money."

"Ricky!"

"Can you imagine how stunned I was? We all thought the *Euryalus* would be sent. Blackwood counted on it. Well, there is that sum to reckon on, and there will be prize-money

in any case. But, do you see—now this is what haunts me—suppose Sykes should decide to turn back? Or suppose they have sent others after me? *Pickle* is such a battered little ship that I know Sykes doubted whether we should get across the Bay, and we were in a much worse case when we met the *Superb*. I tell you, I was so fearful of being stopped or prevented that I contrived not to see her signals till she had chased us some hours."

"But Ricky, you could be broke for that."

"God, I had a right to my blind eye in *his* service! However, we were at last compelled to heave-to. Keats received me. It was an odd thing how it was known that I brought great news, though we had told them nothing. Nan, there was such a silence that I was conscious of the heave and slap of the waves, as if they were voices speaking in a familiar foreign tongue. The sea gabbled, I tell you. But the humans were all silent. They felt, they foreknew the event, and waited for me to reveal it. The officers were in groups, watching Keats and myself, and the men were edging in everywhere on a pretence of work."

"Go on! Go on!"

"Well, Keats and I walked apart, and in six words I told him the best and the worst. Poor Keats! He went scarlet. He was like a man in a fit, choking and stamping in his grief and rage. He walked up and down twice, then turned on me and cried: 'We have sold our birthright for mutton and potatoes!' "

"Mutton? What did he mean?"

"Oh, that was the Admiral's doing. They had all hoped that Duckworth would have his flag in the *Powerful*; but no, he had begged off. He has Lord Barham's ear, and the *Acasta* not being ready his choice was the *Superb*. So she had first to put in at Plymouth to pick him up; for he had hurt himself a little before, slipping on the new horse-road. His temper was no better for it, and, as we know, he is a man for his comforts. So the next thing was he would have them wait another three days for supplies from Cornwall—mutton and potatoes. They would have missed the battle anyway; but Keats did not think of that. He

thought only that the victory of all time had been won, that Nelson was dead, and that he and his *Superb* had had no part in the glory and the grief. He was as near insubordination as I have ever seen a man. He let the Admiral send for him twice before he went down to his cabin, and then only, I think, because I begged him to intercede for me that I might be allowed to hurry on. What passed between them I do not know; but Duckworth himself came up at last, in a great perturbation, rating me for having disobeyed his signal, and breaking off to question me, and I answering only 'yes' and 'no'; for I was in such a rage at the delay, and so knocked about besides, and so weary that I did not care for anything. I was not alone in that: the whole ship was mutinous with grief and discontent, and Duckworth knew it. I heard a man sob, and so did he; but he said nothing. Then there came little whispers from all quarters: 'Nelson! Nelson! Nelson!'⁵ Or perhaps I dreamed it, and it was but the hiss of the waves. I was so sleepy that I could hardly stand. At last the Admiral dismissed me, I forget in what terms, and as I got away I heard him order all sail to be set."

"How long did the business delay you?"

"Not more than two hours, I suppose. But who knows what that two hours may not have lost me, and that this journey from Falmouth to London may not be entirely superfluous? The news may have already reached the Admiralty."

"But not the dispatches!"

"No, not the dispatches! Comfortable Mary Ann!" He smiled at her, and the smile eased her sore heart. She did not return it, but she relaxed and at last allowed her feeling for him to irradiate her whole presence. Let him know it now, that pent-up passion of affection! Let it flow over him, mild and strong, like the autumn wind flowing through the opened window! Let him be sunwarmed by late love! Let him feel, if he could, the invisible caress!

Thus she felt rather than willed; but she said nothing. Some unconscious communication, however, there must have been between them, for almost immediately he rose

and took the place beside her. Then he slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out the watch that, she knew, was his inseparable companion and treasure.

"Do you remember it?" he said.

"Yes," she said.

"His lordship's gift to me."

"Of course I remember it,"

Lapenotiere turned to her with an expression which she had never seen before and never forgot, steady, full of tenderness and grief.

"Ricky, what is it?"

"Look!"

He had opened the lid and, there, fitted into it, the edges curled to follow its golden shape, lay a piece of soft, flattened paper. This he took out, opening it with such care that she wondered how his big fingers could be so delicate in movement. The tissue relaxed, and smoothing it yet further he showed her, pinned to a scrap of red ribbon, a wisp of hair. It was brown hair streaked with grey.

She looked up at him in awe. "His?"

He nodded, his eyes full of tears.

"Tell me, Ricky!"

"I don't know what to tell you. I do not think, dear, that you could understand the course of a battle."

"I know it is another language, but translate!"

"Well, do you see, Nelson joined the Fleet on the twenty-eighth."

"Of October?"

"No dear, don't be foolish! The twenty-eighth of September."

"Yes, yes, of course!"

"Well—now—how to put it simply?"

She thought: 'Dearest, I am sure I can follow all you are likely to tell me, but still I will let you put it simply.' Aloud she said: "Go on!"

"Well, on the morning of the twenty-ninth—this is hearsay, for the *Pickle* only reached Trafalgar later in the day—Nelson took command from the Vice-Admiral and made his dispositions, the Fleet being in very good shape

and everyone in the wildest spirits. Well, and then he calls a meeting of all captains. When they are gathered in his cabin he expounds his plan for roasting the French frogs and Spanish chestnuts. He had reasoned it out at Merton while he was said to be taking his ease. Then, when he had finished, the whole council of captains, so they tell me, went mad—shouted, cheered, blubbered. Yes, some of them were in tears! Nelson himself told Blackwood afterwards that it was as if he had given them an electric shock. Pascoe heard and told me, Pascoe the lieutenant of signals. His lordship called it the 'Nelson touch'."

"Oh! But——" she began, stopped and rephrased. "Lord Nelson is so great. Why did he say things that in another world would be so vain?"

"But he meant the Nelson motto: 'Touch and take!' "

"Oh! Oh, now I understand!"

"If people would listen, enquire, find out how things were said and why things were said before they judged——"

"I only meant——"

"Yes, but you do not know how it enrages us Nelsonians, this injurious nibbling at his greatness by the ignorant and the light minds, by the party men, and, so strangely ungrateful, by those who are first to make their profit out of his exertions. They are the worst, you know. But all are impudent. We who served under him, *we* say that there was no-one like him. It should be enough that we say it. Who can know as we know?" and he took the paper away from her and sat gently touching the lock of hair.

She said softly: "And the plan? Why was it an electric shock?"

"Well, do you see, Nelson attacked in a new way. To be clear I should draw out his plan for you, as I will one day. He formed a double line, with non-combatants like the *Sirius* and the rest of us in attendance."

"Oh, the *Pickle* did not fight?"

"No, no! We were the errand-boys. There is risk, of course, from accident and chance fire; but we are not attacked unless we attack. In the same way we respect the enemy small fry. The *Victory* led the van, bearing down

on the enemy's centre, and the *Royal Sovereign*, Collingwood's flagship, you know, led the lee-line, bearing down on the enemy's rear."

"I cannot quite——"

"Oh, I am sorry. Well—imagine a dance, my dear, with the dancers two and two——"

"'Sir Roger?'"

"Or 'Oranges and Lemons'! Only instead of the leading couple dancing down the middle to the bottom place, imagine them dancing forward and on, and the other pairs following. Imagine a line—crescent—of sitters-out who face them. The partners—the *Victory*, the *Royal Sovereign* and their following ships—drove upon this line in two places and broke it."

"How far apart were the *Victory* and the *Royal Sovereign*?"

"A matter of two miles, I daresay. Lord Nelson had telegraphed, do you see: 'I intend to push through the end of the enemy's line to prevent them getting into Cadiz.' That was signalled just a quarter of an hour before the great message."

"What message, Ricky? You have said nothing of any message."

He roused himself and stared at her. He was as remote as a bird in the sky.

"Of course! You do not know. I forgot that as yet nobody in all England knows. It is most strange to me that England should not yet know of her own salvation, and that all Nelson's deeds and our deeds under him upon the twenty-first of October are as yet unpictured by any mind. Most of it, I daresay, will never be pictured. Why, Mary Ann, Nel signalled to the Fleet, (chuckling, Pascoe told me, and saying that it was time that he gave us a fillip): 'England expects that every man will do his duty.' Ten minutes later he was racing Collingwood into battle. Those two were like schoolboys now and again."

"Who won that race?"

"Well, by sheer luck, Collingwood," admitted Lapenotiere sourly. "He passed between the stern of the *Santa Ana* and the bows of the *Fougeux*, and so the fight began. The

Royal Sovereign ought to have been sunk, of course—there were at least five other ships firing into her—but the *Belleisle* relieved her by engaging four of them at once, and then the rest of the line came up one after the other, encircled the enemy rear, and took them all."

"But the *Victory*, the *Victory*?"

"Well, the *Santissima Trinidad* and others besides began shooting at her, but on she went."

"Straight forward?"

"No, no! First she hauled to port, then back to starboard, taking unheard-of risks. His purpose was to feint against the French van, so as to keep them as long as possible from tracking back to help their centre. Well, she reached Villeneuve's flagship—the two scraped each other's sides, or so they say, for remember, I am telling you what I heard afterwards, not what I saw. Consider the size of the battlefield! One could no more tell what was occurring all over that huge stretch of water than those boys with the *Guy* yonder——" he peered out of the window, "—can tell you what is happening on the farther side of their bonfire, Look at Bonaparte going up in smoke, bless their loyal hearts! Well, do you see, such bonfires are spread over miles of water, and each ship is the centre of its own obscuring clouds. The apparent confusion is beyond belief. A Nelson or a Collingwood can divine what is happening, but most of us fight blind. However, I do know this for certain—in the few minutes that the *Victory* took to pass the *Bucentaure* the enemy lost four hundred men."

"Not credible!"

"But it happened. The *Victory*, of course, was unbelievably battered; for before long the whole van was firing into her. Never in history has a ship had to bear so much, except the little *Revenge*. Not that the others were far behind in audacity. As Blackwood said, it did almost seem as if all were inspired by the one common sentiment of 'conquer or die'. But I can never give you any idea of the general feeling. It was a quality in the air, like frost or heat. Well, by that time——"

"What time?"

"A little after one o'clock, I should say—the action had become general, and our fellows superhuman in exertion. I will own, though, the enemy were cool enough. One must honour them for the way they fought. I shall be obliged always to say so in future when anyone abuses the French. But there it is, do you see, they had the finest fleet since the days of the Armada, but we have proved to the world that no fleet has yet learned enough to cope with the English at sea. We took nineteen sail of the line and twenty thousand prisoners, and another ship, the French *Achille*, which blew up. We rescued a number of men from her. Indeed, pulling men out of the water was the half of our work."

"What was your work, Ricky, apart from rescue?"

"Oh well, we kept close to the enemy, taking care, of course, to keep out of gun-range, and scuttled back and forth reporting movements. Later we were kept busy assisting disabled ships."

"I cannot imagine what assistance a small ship like the *Pickle* could be. What stores had you?"

"Oh, very few, very few! We acted as ferry, you know. We carried spare rope-blocks and spars, and so forth from undamaged to damaged ships, and transported riggers and sail-makers, and carpenters to plug the shot-holes, and the plugs, of course. There were endless opportunities to be useful, even during the battle, which did not end, do you see, till sunset. At about half-past four the enemy ceased firing, except four ships which were trying to escape to windward, and were attacked by two of ours. But they got away. The rest struck—except, as I say, the *Achille*, which took fire and blew up. Then it was out boats to save the men. Ours did not return till six, but we saved at least a hundred and twenty. All the while the weather was hazy, and what with that and the darkness and the beginning of the gale, our work was not easy, and we scarcely knew what we had won or lost. Nelson's death had been signalled, Pascoe told me later, but we did not see it. Well, I had standing orders from Nelson to report for instructions at the end of the action. So at midnight I went on board the

Victory. I asked where I should find the C.-in-C, and then, only then, was told—'Nelson is dead.' "

"O Ricky, O Ricky!"

"You know, many wounded men tell you that they felt nothing when the ball struck, though it carried off an arm or a leg. So it was with me at that moment. I felt nothing. I was not even stunned. Pascoe told me quickly what had occurred. It was partly his lordship's own gallantry. He would not shelter behind the hammocks. They could have been piled higher, but it would have spoiled his view, so he would not have it done. He remained in sight of their sharp-shooters throughout the action, and then, do you see, the stars on his coat made him conspicuous. There are four which he always wore, his Bath, and St Ferdinand and Merit, and then the Crescent, and St Joachim."

"But was it sane to go into battle thus exposed? After all, to wear red when you cross a meadow with a bull in it——"

"I believe they tried to make him change his coat, but all he would say was: 'Yes, yes! It may be seen, but this is no time to be changing coats.'⁵ I can hear him saying it. But for that matter, Mary Ann, any man who has a decoration knows that it is not to be ripped off at a word. It is embroidered on the coat itself though it be but an old, undress uniform, which is what his lordship wore. What was he to do? Cover his honours? Fight in his shirt-sleeves? Say to the Fleet: 'The Admiral is nervous'? Pooh, you do not know Nelson! Besides, I think, all the Fleet thinks, that he knew his time was come. Anyhow he was struck in breast and shoulder, and then he was willing enough, for fear of alarming the men, to cover his stars with a handkerchief. Oh, what a man! While they were carrying him down to the shambles——"

"What do you mean, Ricky?"

"I mean the cockpit, a place of horror. I could not describe to you the cockpit, it would not be fit for you to hear. However, as they took him down he noticed that the tiller-ropes were not replaced, and at once he beckoned to one of the midshipmen and sent him to tell Hardy. He

died in four hours. But, oh Mary, he was never more himself, never more Nelson than during those four hours. When he was laid down in the cockpit against the knee of the ship's side, close by the midshipmen's berth, there was nearby a poor fellow already dying. Well, in getting to Nelson someone trampled on him, and Nelson found his voice for a moment and terrified all concerned, nearly killing them in his anger at such inhumanity, as he called it. And when they had slit his coat off he had them roll it up and give it to poor Westphal, who was also lying near, for a pillow. Young Westphal is an acquaintance of mine, and when I went down to see him he told me of it. He told me other things, Mary, told me of words which he heard Nelson say that—that would break any man's heart. He heard him say: 'Doctor, I am not a *great* sinner.'⁵ Yes, he said that. He spoke of the little girl—and of her."

"Of Lady Hamilton?"

"Ay! He committed them to the care of the country, and what will the country care? He talked with Hardy, and twice he bade Hardy kiss him farewell. He lingered until victory was certain, after which——"

Lapenotiere's voice failed without warning, and he began to weep chokingly, putting out his hands to feel for hers, his head and shoulders falling forward upon her lap, while he slipped off the seat on to the straw of the coach, and so half-knelt, half-lay, a heavy weight upon her, shoulders shaking, while she steadied him with her hand, not speaking to him, but letting him free himself in his own way of all that had been pent up in his heart for the last three weeks. She did not even look at him for fear of breaking his privacy, but, holding him firmly, herself stared out of the window, her eyes wet, her lips tremulous. She had no love for him at that moment. They were as intimate and impersonal as two fellow travellers who survive an earthquake and have lost in it all but their lives. Each was flesh and blood, warm, and could be clutched and supported. There was no more to it.

The miles lolloped by, russet and green. Hedges, trees, cattle, cottages which she saw without recognition, were a

hazy pattern; for her whole life had narrowed to that which her arms enclosed. The blue-cloth shoulder, the bowed head of brown hair thinning on the top, this was her world. The rest was unreal as a picture-book, its leaves turning over quickly.

After a while she said softly: "Did you see him? Did you see him, my darling?"

He raised his head and felt for his handkerchief, mopping his eyes as he answered: "Ay, Beattie took me to him. They had moved him from the cockpit by then. Let me get up! Let me sit by you! Move those duds! That is better." He slipped his arm through hers. "Yes, I saw him. He was laid in his own cabin with a book under him for a pillow. There was a lantern which threw a brownish light. He did not look like a dead man. He looked like a man asleep, and he was smiling. I asked for a lock of his hair, and Beattie gave it me. Poor Beattie was completely overcome. Yes, I looked at Nelson and said goodbye to him. With the lids closed you would never guess that anything had ever marred his face. He looked like his youngest brother."

"Go on!" she said softly.

"There is no more to be said. There it is, my Mary! Life is over. Now, I suppose, we begin life again. I am glad you are here. Do you see, even in his death he looked after me. He always looked after poor fellows. They will give me five hundred pounds, and then we can marry. I suppose, when the weeks have gone by and the effects of this have worn off——"

She said softly: "Wounds heal. That is nature."

"Ay, wounds heal! I know that better than you do, my patient Mary," and he turned and looked her full in the eyes.

She thought: 'This is his amend to me. This is all I shall ever be given; but it is enough.'

Something of her thought must have shown itself in her face, for his brightened into a beauty which ravished her senses. There was a sunrise of the spirit in his countenance. It lightened the world.

"So we are reconciled," he said.

She nodded with parted lips, and at once felt herself drawn close and enfolded. They kissed as friends kiss, but their clinging was an unspoken promise. Through the sensations which overwhelmed her like flood-waters there pulsed the central thought: 'This is the beginning of happiness.'

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN SYKES, that prudent young mariner, congratulated himself not only on the swift arrival at Plymouth of the *Nautilus*, lucky in her weather, but also on the fact that he had come ashore and sent back the boat without allowing the men to land. His second-in-command had orders to continue along the coast to Portsmouth. Then, though there the telegraph was working, it would be too late for the men's chatter to affect their captain's plans. There had been no news of the *Pickle*, and she might well be at the bottom of the Bay. In that event, who had a better right than Captain Sykes to the glory awaiting the bringer of great news to the first city of the world? If, however, Lapenotiere and the dispatches had already arrived it would not be to Sykes's advantage to put himself forward. Then he would deliver his Legation letter and be off again.

There was, however, a third alternative to be considered. Suppose the commander of the *Pickle* had arrived in England and was travelling a few miles behind? What then? Surely, argued the Captain of the *Nautilus*, his duty, his sole duty, was still to bring in the news as soon as might be. He had no desire to cheat Lapenotiere, but if he out-travelled him, well, that was the luck of the game.

Thus he reasoned at the beginning of his journey, the more resolutely because he did not in fact see his way with perfect clarity between duty, ambition, his sense of fair play and his wistful realization of all it might mean to him to be the naval Mercury; but as the miles and the hours passed he put aside these nice problems and devoted himself

to holding his tongue and speeding his journey. He was tempted to use the great news to get horses out of turn, yet if he had to furnish details of the victory every time he changed horses he would only delay himself, so he decided in the end that he would not tell what he knew so long as his luck held.

It held pretty fairly. Horses were to hand, and out of Exeter the roads improved and he made such excellent time that he thought himself justified, once Salisbury was reached, in allowing himself an hour for a meal and a bottle of burgundy. His old wound was hurting him from the jolting of the chaise, and he reckoned that as he could not be in London before midnight it might as well be one o'clock.

His meal was over, and he was paying the extortionate charge, grumbling a little, when suddenly the cathedral bells began to ring, though it was twenty to five, too late for the afternoon service and too early for evensong. He would, however, have thought little of it had not he seen the face of the waiter change from professional boredom to surprise, and then to quivering excitement.

"Excuse me, sir!" The waiter dropped the salver with a clatter to the table, letting the coins of the gratuity jump into the air and drop to the floor unheeded. "Just a minute, sir! Think I'm wanted."

"Wait! Wait! You have dropped your money. You will not get drink-money twice out of me for the same bill."

"All right, sir! Let the money lie! Who cares? Don't you hear the bells ringing for the victory? Excuse me——"

"Victory? What victory?" An elderly gentleman, his arm in a sling, rose from the next table and came towards them, a small terrier following him on an invisible lead, while the young, dark foreigner, his companion, started and stared. The waiter, gratified by the interest of his audience, was less in a hurry to go.

"There has been a rumour of victory this half hour, sirs. I didn't believe it, not me—heard too many. I thought it was the Guy Fawkes nonsense. But if they are ringing the cathedral bells there must be truth in it. So if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I will find out for certain."

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" The elder man, a prosperous merchant by his looks, detained him. "What rumour have you heard?"

"Twenty ships taken!"

"French ships?" Sykes caught the waiter by the arm. "Explain yourself! What have you heard? Who brought the news?"

The young foreigner closed in on the waiter's other side, and the terrier, scenting emotion, whined.

"If you could excuse me," said the foreigner, and at once was revealed as a Frenchman, "is it a sea-victory, or have they fought on land? And who are the fighters? Is Buoitaparte trapped? Tell me, please, quickly!"

"I'm not the town-crier." The waiter, cornered, turned upon them, coarse in his anger, but was instantly quenched by Sykes's authoritative:

"No impertinence! Tell us what you know!"

"Why, sir," the waiter dropped on his hands and knees and began picking up the coins, "there's rumours all over the town, and they all come from the George. A naval officer and lady changed horses there—a private carriage—and it was stuck about with laurel. Well, their post-boy let fall a few words about Nelson's great victory, and how the Combined Fleet is sunk or taken: and, what's more, Mr Dean himself was in the coffee-room and spoke with them both, and no sooner had they driven away than he went off in a great hurry, and they say that it was because of what the officer told him that they are ringing the bells. Ay, that would be Mr Dean's orders. Hark at 'em!"

And indeed the noisy chimes came pealing into the room through the half-open window like delighted swallows in their thousands preparing for a flight. Thus the bell-notes wheeled and dived in the air above Salisbury, following gloriously upon each other.

"An officer and a lady?" Sykes looked relieved.

"A couple running away?" said the elderly gentleman on a note of questioning.

"Might well be. Very likely!" With a stiff bow Sykes hurried out of the room and into the yard where passengers,

ostlers, townsfolk and apprentices gathered in excited groups which broke and reformed and broke again to watch him as he sighted his own postillion, dug him out of a group of ostlers, and chivied him to the chaise.

"It's a sea-captain!" shrilled a voice. "Look at his blue coat! Have you come from Plymouth, sir? What tidings of the Fleet?"

"Now then, let me through!" Sykes elbowed his way till he reached the chaise steps, realizing that all eyes were upon his uniform and that he was to be the hero of the news whether he would or no. A way was made for him respectfully through a chorus of: "Let the Captain speak! Does he come from Nelson? Where was the battle, sir? Is it true we downed thirty ships?"⁵⁵

He would not answer them. He was aware of Lapenotiere already on the high-road to London and fortune. He could hear the hoof-beats, his heart duplicated them: and because he saw his chance slipping away he hated the good-natured tag and bobtail as fiercely as he hated Frenchmen. He would not waste time nor breath on the fools who held him back from the race of a lifetime, and he elbowed his way so roughly that the mob's excitement changed to anger, and a great fellow caught at his coat-tails crying:

"Nay, you shall answer! Give a civil answer to a civil question!"⁵⁵

Sykes, in a rage, rounded, caught the countryman by his smock, and bunching it in his hands, shook him to and fro, then slung him, amazed, back upon the bystanders, shouted to the postillion to get away, clambered in, and slammed-to the doors, while an ostler, jealous for the honour of the house, bundled up the steps, and the postillion gathered up the reins. The horses, over-fresh and scared by the press of people, tossed their heads, pranced, and tried to rear.

Sykes thrust his head out of the window. "Drive on, can't you!"

The mob yelled at him: "Is it victory, sir? Is it true? Why not tell us?"

"Better tell 'em, sir, if you know!" cried the post-boy over his shoulder.

"Are you all mad?" cried Sykes. "Is what true? **Drive** on! I am pressed for time,"

"Now then!" cried the post-boy, reacting instantly to the voice of authority. "Clear away! You'll be trodden down. Out of the way! Out of the way!" and he slashed at the nearest shoulders as he got his horses in motion, missing disaster by a miracle, and eased them through the narrow archway. The equipage banged out into the High Street, scattering the passengers and shaving the wheels of the incoming coach, then rattled off; while, as if to heighten the effect of the departure, the joy-bells ceased suddenly, the air quivered, and a passing-bell began to toll. Upon this came gasps, whispers, questions, and a name flew from mouth to mouth.

Meanwhile from the inn-parlour the young Frenchman and his elderly companion watched the turmoil in the yard, till the waiter returned with the tea-equipage. The young man continued to stand, but the elder sat down, his terrier between his ankles, and with his unhurt arm took off the cover of the dish of muffins and lifted the scorched and soggy delicacy to his mouth. The butter dripped down his fingers unheeded as he munched and listened to his companion, who, wrought up with excitement into a still heat, was once more cross-questioning the waiter.

"This is the first time," the young Frenchman was saying, "that I have met such wild incivility in your country. Yet it was a captain of your polite Navy, was it not?"

The waiter was apologetic for the popular uniform. "Yes sir, but they had angered him. He was in a great hurry."

"Not in too much of a hurry to eat and drink."

'Well sir, have a heart! He only left Plymouth yesterday, and he has come from Lisbon in Portugal as fast as the seas would let him. He must be in London tonight, so the postillion told us. No, not the Captain! The Captain **kept** his mouth shut. We all think he is so crammed with news good or bad that he dare not open it till government's heard all."

"From Portugal?"

"Yes sir, in a manner of speaking; for the **Fleet** lies

somewhere off Portugal, we all know that. It is a hard, long way to come, sir, with the weather as it has been, and he did not bait at Plymouth, the boy said, but jumped ashore, collared a chaise-and-four, and was off."

"But why could he not tell the news?"

"Why sir, in the kitchen we worked it out this way. He has come in casual with picked-up news, as it were; but the gentleman at the George has come from Nelson himself. He was travelling in the Mayor of Falmouth's chaise, for one thing—we all know the Mayor, for he stays here when he passes through, and it was his chaise right enough. Well, and laurel branches were stuck round the window, they tell me, and the post-boy let fall as how there had been a great victory. Only poor Lord Nelson—" the waiter's face took on an extraordinary expression of pride in bad news and grief at it, "—well sir, they say he's killed."

"What? Sir Nelson? The great admiral?"

"A lie! Down, Toby! Well, have it then!" and in an angry abstraction the older man fed his dog the last muffin while he continued to shout at the waiter: "What sort of lie is this? Nelson? Nelson will be safe enough. Why, his people in the *Victory* would see to it. He would not be allowed to risk himself, halfblind and a cripple. We want his head-piece, not his valour. What could we do without Nelson's brains and spirit? No, no, no! No harm could come to Nelson these days. Why, this fellow here, this surly brute, he said nothing of hurt to Nelson. Quiet, Toby!"

"Well sir, no, he was not for talking; but I watched him, and I think he knew something. And hark to the passing-bell! Who's it for? Who is big enough to get the cathedral-bell tolling? Now it is changing again, do you hear, back to the merry peal? Mr Dean's a sober man, not a man to be stampeded. The passing-bell is for Nelson, you may be sure of that, and now the peals—they are for victory and the end of the Combined Fleet."

"Say that again!" said the young Frenchman.

"The end of the Combined Fleet. Great news, sir, eh?"

"We'll have brandy," said the older man suddenly, his

eyes on the Frenchman. "Get it, will you! Bring a bottle!" Then, as the waiter hurried away, his one good arm was seized and violently shaken, deep-set eyes blazed at him, and white lips said:

"You are a great people, you English, and you do not know it. The end of the Combined Fleet? It is more than that. It is the end of a regime, end of a tyranny, end of Buonaparte."

"We must order a chaise. Quiet, Toby! If there is any truth in this news I have got to get back to the works."

"Business! You are all stuffed with sawdust. What is business when the destruction of Buonaparte begins?"

"Very good, very good! And when he is finished and swept away with all his works, to whom will you turn to put the world straight again? To me and my likes, to business and affairs. We shall be supplying half Europe. Ah, here comes the brandy! Drink it now, at a toss! You are a violin-string, do you know? You should get more flesh on your bones. Take it quietly, now! The Combined Fleet is ended; but it don't mean that Bonaparte has lost his great army."

"But it is the end, none the less. Oh, Buonaparte can fight on. He will fight on. What are we now? Eighteen hundred and five. I give him five years on land, but in the end he must fall, since he has lost the seas. There is not a man nor a woman nor a child in France who at heart will not know it so soon as the news reaches them. Some will shut their eyes and not want to believe, and some will not dare to believe. It is according to their view of him, whether it is hate or love. But I, people like me, exiles, emigres, on this news our lives have changed. We shall be creeping back. No more ballooning——"

"Oh, you will fail me, will you, after all I've put into that wild-cat scheme?"

"No, no! That was good while it lasted, and it is profitable for you, for I will leave you my drawings, my designs. All my knowledge I have deposited with you. Well, it is yours as payment for much kindness. Proceed! You can do

as well without me as with me; but I must go back to France.⁵⁵

"Better not be a fool. You've got no passports. You are proscribed."

"I shall go back to France, to France, to France! We proscribed have our ways of going to and fro. You know that, sir, for you profit by them. No, you do not approve of smuggling. Oh no, not in Parliament! But you are drinking now with relish this brandy which has never paid duty. Smell it! Do not swallow it so quickly! Breathe it in! Roll it round in a glass and let the perfume rise! The fume of France—this is precious stuff. And now, listen to me! I am magician, I can tell you whence this drink comes. I can tell you the very vineyard and the names of the wine-pressers, and the overseer. Of coincidences life is composed, like the patchwork quilt on my bed. This came from Juillat-le-Coq, from my mother's brother's vineyard. And he never sold it, never, to any merchant or money-maker. It was for the family. Well, we have been despoiled, and he is dead on the guillotine, but in the cellars of the chateau there are secret portals which lead to passages where much can be hidden away. I think this brandy has been smuggled and sold by the faithful for the support of my mother. It may be, I do not know. But I do know that this is my own fine champagne that I drink. It is mine by inheritance; for he had no son, my uncle. So now watch me! Listen to me! I will be in a delicious intoxication by means of my own property, and you shall drink with me! So we shall say goodbye, you my benefactor, and I who have benefited. I toast you in the potency of France.⁵⁵

"Now, now, now! You mustn't get fuddled. This is very good brandy, but don't tell me—"

"I tell you that I acclaim it as mine. I have a palate, have I not, and a memory?"

"Well, well! Have it your own way! But I think you have drunk enough."

"I shall go back to France, to France, to France! I shall lie hid in a smuggler's vessel, and as the rats creep ashore along the ropes so, in the night when the world is quiet

and only the sea makes a noise, I shall crawl into a little boat and lie under the let-down sails, cold sails, heavy, wet with dew. I shall hear the grind of the keel upon the beach, and still I shall lie quiet, not daring to move, and the boots will tramp away across the pebbles, and the little whistled tune shall mingle with the nightingale songs in the woods, for the cove I know is woody down to the beach. Then I shall throw back the wet covering, lifting my head cautiously, and there will be the beach, a yard of it, wet-brown in the moonlight where the water has slid over it such a little while ago. Then comes a paler brown streak where it is half dry already, and then the white pebbles of the upper beach, seldom wetted, pink in the dawn, trimmed with the long ridges of—what do you call them?—weeds of the sea, black and dry foliage that is all over little bladders like my poor balloon. Then there will be a cliff and steps cut in it. Above will be the woods. So I come home to France. Still creeping by nights like a rat—they call us over here French rats—I shall make my way southward along underground ways to my own home, so far off, high up in the Pyrenees, where they starve and hate Buonaparte. It is a good place to plot from."

"You should come in from Spain."

"No, no! I will gather news in the north, and I will tramp home through France. I shall see Paris again, and what damage the usurper has done to it, and so southward from farm to farm, from friend to friend. I am the bucket of water handed along the chain. We are not all for Buonaparte in France."

"What about money?"

"I will borrow, or you will give me. For the rest I shall beg, steal—what do I care? I shall be in France, crossing the neat fields and the ordered vineyards. There will be no waste, no despised pastures, no tumble-down orchards with fruit rotting because the peasants are too lazy or too idiot to save themselves from the extreme of poverty. We are poorer than you as a race, but we are never so poor as individuals because we use, use, use our land. How I have hated the wastage in England, and the honest people whom you must

not bribe until you know how to bribe, and the foul bedding——"

"Gome, come! French inns are a disgrace."

"Who sleeps at an inn in France? They are for foreigners. We French are received always by our relations and our friends. Oh, I shall hear my own tongue spoken again, and not be stared at and laughed upon because of an accent or a rhythm! Never again shall I be stared at as you stare at a dancing-bear or a lady's marmoset. I shall not be corrected in my speech with kind patronage, nor be addressed loudly as if I were deaf because I am French. I shall not be told, so kindly, that I might almost be English, when I voice a reasonable sentiment. Think what it will be not to hear ever again the phrase 'you French', nor to be asked if you eat frogs, and why, and if many of your family have perished on the guillotine, and why you are not fighting, although they know that in the British navy and army they will not admit the émigré."

"Yes, yes, that's a mistake."

"Think what it will be not to bear the insults of the lowest class, nor the cold tones of the highest! Think, never again to struggle with speech which is all pictures, so that a man cannot ask his way but he is told: 'Turn left when you come to a hill that is shaped like a dromedary.' Then when you arrive it is not like a dromedary. Do not laugh!"

"I must, when you hit us off."

"Oh, that has been the hardest to bear, never to speak a language that is clear in thought and exact in expression, that is the language of an adult, the language of reason, that is written upon the lines and not between the lines! I will tell you another thing I shall never have to bear again: to smile and bow and be polite when Englishmen and women deceive themselves and think most noble what they do for interest. Why do you English fight Buonaparte? Because he is a tyrant? Because he destroys liberty? Because he has seduced your sweet enemy France? So you say and so you believe, because you are not happy unless you believe what you say. But I tell you, I, a Frenchman, that you do not hate the Corsican for what he has done to us, but for what

he might do to you. You hate him", not because he has /obbed us, but because he might rob you: not because he has made himself our king, but because he has insulted yours. You do not save Europe, you save yourselves. That is common-sense; but it is not noble, like theatre, and of course you must always strike the noble attitude. It is what we call your English cant. Oh, your cant! It has been your diet for so many years that you are like the arsenic-eaters of Transylvania. You must be fed with your poison or you cannot live. So you do noble things for bad reasons, and mean things for the noble reason: for example, your thefts from our culture. You steal even the cry of our revolution: 'Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!', and in the same breath you sing: 'Rule, Britannia! She rules the waves.' "

"Well, it looks like she does, don't it? Fill up your glass, lad! I have wanted to see you drunk ever since we came together, wanted to see what sort of head you had, and now I've seen! Have another good swig, and ease off while I see about packing and a chaise. We'll be getting back to London, eh, you and me and Toby? If all this fine talk means anything, well, I have ways and means to help you. I have business acquaintances in Holland, good friends of mine. I will give you a recommendation to them. When you get into France, by the way, you had better contrive to see the balloonist—what's his name, Gamier—and talk things over with him. Tell him what's in the wind, and that he could share-in with us. Suggest a partnership. On the other hand, you know, you might find it cheaper to buy up his interest in the balloon. If you are right in thinking him out of favour he might prefer the cash. I will leave it to your judgment; but it would be only neighbourly to relieve him. Come along, Toby!"

CHAPTER XVI

ANDOVER'S theatre in Newbury Street was a barn in red brick, so neat and snug that it could be mistaken on a dark

night for a chapel. The portico had two sham pillars, a shuttered window on either side and three above, though the central one, like the fanlight below, had been long since bricked to avoid the window-tax. The gable accommodated a triangular device, the shield of the visiting company, and in the entry, between the portraits of King George and Garrick, space was left for the visiting stage-royalty. Here, on the fifth of November, hung the representation of Mrs Helena Jerningham as Imogen, lent for the occasion by the distinguished young Academy exhibitor, Mr Scipio Cockain Feilding.

Andover looked upon the theatre as a suitable adjunct to the amusements of the May Fair. At other seasons it left theatre-going to its ostlers, servant-maids and street-lads, who were always ready to guy the males of any company, quiz the prettier females, and shame some elderly hack off the stage with turnips and jeers. But occasionally a famous actor visited the town for a night, and then Andover's principal families filled the boxes, if only to show that the town was not to be outfaced by any metropolitan adventurer. Andover, let London remember, was the elder town, and a Parliament had sat at Andover, and kings and queens had resided there long before the Conquest. Even in decay it had been the refuge of an empress, and acknowledged to be a certain and undoubted body politic by Queen Elizabeth herself. Andover, therefore, kept up its reputation by being critical in the boxes and non-committal in the pit, while the gallery was proud to prove itself, as reputed, the noisiest in the kingdom.

On the fifth of November eighteen hundred and five the boxes, pit and gallery were at their fullest, and all classes united in a common resolve against enthusiasm. The company's reputation had preceded it, and Andover was prepared to approve when Salisbury enjoyed, but did not care for certain innovations. It was well enough for performances to begin at two o'clock in the afternoon during the May Fair, otherwise seven o'clock suited everyone, and to call up the curtain at six was disconcerting, though often done in London, it was said. But—and a black 'but'—it

was also said that the change of time was made to suit a London manager who wanted to catch the night coach back to town. Town? What town? Andover was town enough for anyone. As for Mrs Jerningham and her beauty, Andover was not at all sure that it liked the portrait of her in the entrance-hall. Such fair hair and so much of it was extravagant if real. Also she had not appeared in 'Speed the Plough' on the previous night, which proved her proud or lazy.

"And 'Cymbeline' is an odd play to choose."

"Imogen is a good part, they say."

"I fit were Ophelia, now, or Rosalind, or Lady Macbeth—those parts are supposed to be good enough for most actresses."⁵⁵

"Do you say 'Cymbeleen' or 'Cymbelyne'?"

"By Shakespeare, is it? I never knew."

"What is the time?"

"Ten minutes past six."

"Why change the hour and then not be ready?"

"Shall you stay for the after-pieces?"

"Who is that young gentleman in the box?"

"With the red hair?"

"Auburn, my dear—he is a grandson of the Earl of Denbigh.;"

It was, indeed, the elegant shape of Scipio Feilding which hovered at the back of the stage-box. Scipio felt himself not unlike a general who, having selected his battle-ground and drawn up his troops in the face of the enemy, says: 'I can do no more'⁵, and leaves the issue to his Ally above the clouds, without being able to place much reliance upon that Ally, because he is well aware that the opposing general is doing the same thing. It was the more difficult for Scipio because he himself had for many years boasted that he did not believe in his Ally's existence or, at any rate, capacity for controlling human affairs. Yet here he was, feeling himself obliged to send up every five minutes or so demanding, imploring, wheedling, bullying, insinuating, bargaining messages to good, kind, merciful Providence, because it was the night of Helena Jerningham's

great assault upon fame and fortune and no chances must be neglected.

In between the petitions, however, he had to smile over his own absurd situation. He was Scipio Cockain Feilding, artist-about-town, elegant in disorder, well-to-do, care-free, a natural leader of brilliant young fellows and patron of the younger emigres, wearing the nineteenth century like a hat at a new angle, carrying a copy of Tom Paine in one pocket and a Lake poet in the other. Yet he who had dined with Rogers, had sat in Mrs Jordan's dressing-room and when the Duke arrived had been bidden not to move, was now sitting in a shabby box in a petty country theatre, his heart clapping because the dusty curtain showed no sign of parting, making his shoulders supple and wreathing his face in smiles for the sake of Elliston's toady, a fellow whose salute in London he would barely acknowledge, but who now sat in the best place in the box, a little king of his company, because on his word and say-so depended the future of Mrs Helena Jerningham.

'There it is,' thought Scipio. 'Your social favourites can meddle in the affairs of the theatre, and pay money to help their favourites along, and make it a favour to entertain theatre-royalty and in return have the right to murmur recommendable names in royal ears. They can get their plays read and even performed, and can have their private boxes and right of entry, and be popular with stage-door-keepers and dressers, and all the disillusioned, faithful, enduring theatre-personnel. Nevertheless, when it comes to giving a young touring actress her chance in London, when it comes to engaging her for a part in Drury Lane, when, to put it plainly, the actual policy of the theatre is concerned, then the arbiter is the man behind the scenes, the shabby fellow in the shabby office where society never penetrates. Power is with him, and his word prevails.⁵

Power, in this case, had a sharp nose, a boot-cap chin, ferociously sharp eyes and a cockney accent, went by the name of Foxy Foulger, and was, without malice, contemptuously familiar with Mr Scipio Feilding, to whom, in London, he bowed rather eagerly when he saw him in the wings or

hanging on the arm of a member of the Committee. But now Foxy Foulger sat in the box and knew his own strength, and knew also just what anxiety governed Feilding's every word, and drank as much brandy as Feilding cared to order, and was no more moved by the anxiety or the brandy than a business-man should be. Elliston had sent him down to see the young woman, and if she had quality he would be delighted to engage her, for they needed a fresh face at the Lane. But if she had not the quality they needed, if she had not looks and technique and a beguiling way with her, if, above all, she could not control the noisy audience now filling up the seats and fighting for standing-room, then let Elliston get out of his promise to Scipio Feilding as best he could. Power would not engage Mrs Helena Jerningham.

So there they were, all comfortable together. The curtain rose.

It rose upon a set for which Scipio's fancy was responsible, and upon a much re-written presentation of the play 'Cymbeline'. Scipio, who had a nodding acquaintance with scholars, declared to the hack whom he had hired that such shamelessness was in the tradition. He told the hack exactly what Shakespeare himself had done to the Lears and the Hamlets of his predecessors, and maintained that if, out of the ruins of 'Cymbeline' the hack and the company could contrive a vehicle suitable to the genius of Mrs Helena Jerningham, then the play's purpose was fulfilled. Shakespeare wrote for actors, decided Scipio, and proceeded to outline to the manager, Flanders, his schemes for the general good. Flanders should play Cymbeline, and the rest be suited according to their desires, and he, Scipio, would foot the bill for all extravagances so long as Mrs Helena Jerningham—

"Plays Imogen?" said Flanders sharply. "Well, that's what we engaged her to play. If she will but warm a little she will be well enough. Indeed, Mrs Jerningham has only to watch my wife in their scene together and she will acquire all that is lacking. The Queen's part is generally abused as a poor one; but let Mrs Flanders play it in its entirety

and there, my dear sir, you have Lady Macbeth without troubling to visit Drury Lane."

"I agree with you, a fine part. That is why, for this week only, I am anxious that Mrs Jerningham should play it."

"And my wife play Imogen?" The manager brightened.

"I was hoping that Mrs Flanders, knowing our anxiety, and taking into account that I hope to be able to pay her a very special fee——"

"No notion what you are driving at! Mrs Flanders always plays the Queen. She would play Imogen for a change, if you mean that."

"Frankly, Flanders, I mean that it would be an excellent plan for Mrs. Jerningham to double the parts of the Queen and Imogen—for this one week."

"But it cannot be done. Think of the women's scenes together!"

"Those scenes would be re-written."

"But you cannot do such a thing to a part," said Flanders with great heat but no conviction.

"I am convinced that Shakespeare would have no objection, writing as he did with an eye to particular performers."

"I am not talking of Shakespeare, I am talking of my wife. Double the Queen and Imogen? I have never heard of such a thing. What other parts is Mrs Jerningham going to play?"

"Well," said Scipio with, for the first time, a slight blush, "Mrs. Jerningham, as you know, has a very pretty voice——"

"You can't, you cannot give her 'Hark, hark the lark'!"

"I thought of it. The scene has been completely re-written."

"Why then, I wash my hands——"

"My dear Flanders, you do not suppose that I have made the financial situation so very easy for you all without requiring some sort of return. It is a particular wish of mine that all the talents of Mrs Jerningham should be displayed."

"But what will the company say?"

"Mrs Flanders, who has so very generously afforded Mrs Jerningham the protection of family life during her tour with you, will, I hope, continue to protect her from the sort of slander which, as I am well aware, is likely to result——"

"Has already resulted."

"Has already resulted—quite so—from these innovations. I do not very much care for that, for Mrs Jerningham is in a position to refute them. Her residence with you and Mrs Flanders refutes them. But I do insist that her talents are displayed, and this remodelling of 'Cymbeline' seems to me to provide the opportunity. Now, will you talk it over with Mrs Flanders, or shall I?"

"I think I had better bear the brunt, as it were," said the manager sadly.

To his relief, however, his wife acquiesced quite graciously, for the pay was good, and, though Scipio was clearly as mad as a March hare, Helena, hard-working, aloof, and devoted to her child, had managed to convince the two shrewd old barn-stormers of a complete disinterest in anything but her career.

"Her heart's with that ne'er-do-well husband of hers," said Mrs Flanders to her lord. "You may rely on it, Flanders. She is the sort of cold woman who, when she loves, loves a rascal. That poor young fellow will make his name out of her—the new portrait has been sold already, she tells me—but he will never get anything else. Mark me, she'll keep him dancing at her heels ten years, unless a cannon-ball carries off Jerningham. Then, indeed, she might marry him and make a good enough lady-wife; but she does not burn for him, my dear, and never will. When I was a child trampling barefoot across a moor behind the cart with the props, I've seen the sun pour down on a broken bottle. And presently underneath the bottle there is a smoke and a crackle and a small flame that will burn up half a county before they put it out. Well, he is the sun and she is the glass, Flanders, and the fire which he has lighted is Mrs Helena playing a part that suits her; but never call it love! Let her play the Queen! Foulger will

not engage me for London at my time of life; but if Nell speaks the Neptune speech as it should be spoken, and plays Imogen prettily, not deeply, and has the song as well, then she may take London fancy. Oh, she may easily take it, which will do us all good, don't forget! Yes, he understands his Jerningham, that young macaroon, and he understands his theatre, though I'll say to my dying day that he does not understand his Shakespeare, and never will."

Thus good-natured Mrs Flanders, not only abdicating with dignity, but taking so keen a professional interest in the experiment that on the great day she left the box-office to take care of itself and rushed round to the dressing-rooms to give a last twitch to the Queen's robes, thereby earning herself an untasted brandy-and-water and a fierce kiss from Helena as they stood together in the wings. Scipio saw the incident from his box, and Mrs Flanders saw that he saw it, and was sorry for him.

'She is not kissing me, you poor young green-eyes,' she apostrophized Scipio. 'She's a girl in her first childbed holding on to another woman. You will never get her to yourself, believe me lad, and you will never understand why you don't.'

But Scipio, as the curtain rose, was nearer to understanding Helena Jerningham than Mrs Flanders. For he, like Helena, existed for the greater part of his waking life in that strange half-world where the Arts are brothel-keepers, and a man, or a woman for that matter, out of tune with dull, domestic reality, can have pleasure and a fling. In his painting, in his bustling about behind the scenes, above all in his contemplation of his love, not as herself, but as the princess of the Shakespearean fairy-tale, Scipio tasted the emotions which he desired, the sensations which he disdained. He drank, guzzled and was bawdy: he loved and hated, was vicious, desperate, drugged, delighting in a carnal-intellectual orgy which temporarily satisfied him, and left behind it paradisaical memories. Best of all, Helena, as he knew, shared his delights, though he knew also that in their secret world of pleasure the roles were reversed. In daily life he was a violent young man

set upon exercising the rights of all his senses, and she, always excepting her strange obsession about her husband, was properly subservient; but on the stage she was the active partner, as both were aware. He received delight: with her lay all the pleasures of giving. She was too fierce in her giving, that was her main fault. The good folk of Andover, Salisbury, whatever the town was, did not care to be so masterfully handled by any woman, always excepting the tiresome Siddons.

Well, Scipio and the hack between them had done their best about that. The alleged gentlemen who opened the play were scissored out of the dialogue betimes to let Helena, as the Queen, enter with Posthumus. Imogen was missing in the scene, of course; but a slight changing of pronouns had turned it into an effective duologue, and Helena, with her heavy head-dress and cloak of golden-black brocade, looked a handsome devil. But she did not look young, and the audience had barely time to admire her stately entrance and be puzzled by her ambiguities before she was gone again. Scipio craned to catch the whispers in the pit.

"Is that Mrs Jerningham? But she is to play Imogen."

"Oh, she plays both parts, does she?"

"A fine woman! But how can she play Imogen? I thought Imogen was a princess."

Thus it passed from mouth to mouth while stage Posthumus paced up and down with bravura, and the alleged gentlemen whispered the missing lines of that first snipped-out scene.

Then Helena returned as Imogen. No, that was the wrong way to put it. Then came Imogen: then came spring from the south: and Scipio's delight was shot with anger, for she omitted her first sentence and began: "My dearest husband!" Even on the stage, do you see, she must pursue him with talk of her husband.

Then jealousy slept as he listened to the flowing voice, and waited for those lower notes which darkened it to a harsher beauty, and feasted his eyes upon her swift, vehement presence, and hugged himself that he had clothed it as it should be clothed.

Long ago, on the grand tour, he had made a copy of a certain Italian daub, an outlandish view of Spring by—by—he could not remember the artist's name. It was not work that a professional painter could consider seriously; but in spite of his experience it still in recollection charmed him, and he had brought down his sketch of it for Helena to use as a model.

How cleverly Helena had caught the idea, plaiting her love-locks into two slender chains brought together on her breast with a jewel! More plaits were looped about her ears and wound round her head in a princess's coronet, while the rest of her mane hung loose, flowing over her shoulders and down her back in separated locks which undulated as she moved like golden snakes. Then he had urged on her a blue cloak over a yellow muslin dress sprigged with spring flowers.

"Too modern?" she had questioned.

"You do not understand. Imogen, in half-Roman Britain, would wear a classical robe. So you see I am able to follow the styles of the 'Belle Assemblée', which have never been more classical. Thus you will catch the attention of the women in your audience as well."

"As well?"

"As that of the men, Helena, as that of the men."

He had been right. A murmur ran round the house. The gallery quieted, the boxes leaned forward. As he watched her go to the stage-husband he found himself, half-sick with the passion which obsessed him, co-murmuring the words of fustian Posthumus:

"O sweetest, fairest,
As I my poor self did exchange for you,
To your so infinite loss——"

He broke off to cast a sharp glance at Elliston's arbiter. But that gentleman was taking a surreptitious swig from the glass of brandy-and-water, and had missed Helena's look and Helena's smile.

Things went well enough after that for an act. The

audience was not unfriendly, though as usual Helena was less good than she had been at rehearsals, so that he rushed round in the first interval imploring her to: "Cut your stay-laces, my darling!" to the shocked misinterpretation of the dresser. Nevertheless Foxy Foulger, refusing for the moment a third brandy-and-water, admitted that the girl had something about her, upon which Scipio's spirits soared to the gallery. Then, in the gallery in the second act, the trouble began.

The gallery had its reputation to maintain. It enjoyed the wicked Queen, and applauded warmly the switch to Imogen and her distress in view of the fact that these two parts were played by the same actress. But the trunk was too much for the gallery. Iachimo emerged from it amid a hailstorm of enthusiastic advice, and Helena, supposedly asleep, lay at last with clenched fists and scarlet cheeks. Being Helena, her following scene with Cloten was played with such suppressed fury that she lost the audience altogether.

"The girl's a virago," said Foulger, drinking more brandy.

"Wait!" said Scipio, controlling himself with an effort that empurpled him, for he was ready to choke the fool. "Wait! Her big scenes are in the next act."

"But I can't sit through this shilly-shallying of your Posthumuses and Iachimos. They can't act. Hark to the audience guying them! Besides, the coach——"

"The coach does not leave for an hour. If you do not stay for the third act you might as well not have come."

"I must be in town by morning."

"As to that, I will arrange a chaise for you."

"Suppose there is no getting me a chaise?"

"I will get you a chaise," said Scipio between his teeth. "But I should like you to see the third act. I shall take it much amiss if you do not see the third act."

"Now then! No need to be touchy!"

"My dear Foulger," said Scipio clutching at his diplomacy, "I insist upon being touchy, for I had planned supper for us afterwards. A brace of pheasant and a leg of pork.

They do you very well at the Bush. I cannot feast by myself. They have a Macon——"

"Oh well, if you can be sure of a chaise I may. stay. Hullo, what's up?"

"Devils! What devils they are!"

"Pooh, they are not throwing anything. They are only making a noise."

"I cannot hear you. Damn them!"

"This is but good sport," shouted Foulger.

"Sport, do you call it?"

"What have they got at the back of the gallery? By God, Mr Feilding, it is a Guy! Well, now I am sorry for that poor fellow on the stage after all—what's his name? Posthumus! He stands no chance at all against a Guy. Hark at 'em! 'Please to remember——' That Guy of theirs is Boney to the life. Most human! Why, they take as much pride in their Guys as we do in London. I remember once a set of fellows had a bet that in their ward they would have a finer Guy than any other ward in the City. And what did they do but break into the house of a tailor who lived alone in his attic. They bound him and gagged him, put the Guy's clothes on him and carried him round the ward on a chair from ten in the morning till dark."

"Brutes!"

"No, no, just a sporting lot; though indeed they were so thorough that he would have gone into the bonfire, I do believe, if he had not got his gag loose at the last moment and screamed out that he was alive. They were had up before the magistrates for it. Please God these fools don't take it into their heads to have a bonfire here and begin tearing up the benches. criminy, what a riot! Ah, now they are beginning to throw things! Well, Posthumus deserves it; for, sure, he is the worst actor that ever I saw in my life. That was a turnip. Time they rang down the curtain! Ah! Just in time! You will want to go behind. I shall wait for you here, and if you send along another brandy so much the better."

CHAPTER XVII

THE green-room, when Scipio reached it, was a small cauldron of human anger, injury, terror and tears. The Posthumus, one Herriot, stood in the middle of the room shaking with rage and mortification and fright. Mrs Flanders wrung her hands and wept, while Iachimo, teeth chattering, refused to face further trouble.

"If Mr Herriot cannot control them, who can?" he quavered.

Posthumus turned as if stung. "Control? I tell you they've got a Guy in the gallery."

Iachimo backed him up. "Yes, Mr Flanders! They have formed themselves into a sort of choir, and there is a footman conducting with a poker, and three country fellows with hammer and tongs, and a lot of louts with shovels and Jew's harps. You can't hear yourself speak through it. Better stop the play!"

"What, and give back the money?" demanded Cymbeline. "All right, if you want to lose your week's salary."

"I hold you responsible for my salary, Mr Flanders. I have played at Salisbury, at Portsmouth and at Winchester in this very part, and the whole company will bear witness to the applause at the end of my scene. Never had less than three calls. If you ask me, the whole trouble is due to interference with the lay-out of the play. I never heard of the Queen and Imogen being played by the same actress, and nor have the audience, and they do not take it kindly—no offence intended, Mrs Jerningham."

"They are quiet enough in Mrs Jerningham's scene," declared Flanders.

"Oh yes, they took it out of me! It was a protest, not a personal attack, that was plain. But wait till the next act!"

Helena lifted her voice. She was lolling in the green velvet armchair, already dressed as the Queen for the re-opening of the act.

"I am not afraid of them," said she.

"Well, I am," declared Posthumus. "I will not stand on the stage to be guyed,"

"Do not fear that!" said she coldly. "They have one in the audience already."

"Oh, you can be calm, Mrs Jerningham, because you will be wafted through this. You have backers. But I am thinking of my livelihood, my wife and children."

She looked at him a moment, weighing his rage against his fear, then turned to one of the gentlemen.

"I do wish you would fetch Mr Feilding," said she.

"He is just outside, Mrs Jerningham."

She arose and they fell back before her, revealing Scipio in the doorway arguing with the local manager.

"Nothing wrong with the play!" he was declaring.

"Well, they do not like it," said the manager. "If they choose to say so in their own way, all I say is it is no affair of mine."

"You take that Guy out of your gallery, and I will engage for the company's holding the audience," returned Feilding, and raised his voice. "Mr Flanders, do you hear? This gentleman pretends that the disgraceful racket in front is your company's fault. I tell him he should quiet his gallery."

Flanders backed him. "Ay! We engaged to play to a decent audience. We are not prepared to be out-guyed by the rough and tough of a country town."

"No need to insult the citizens of Andover!" returned the manager, furious at his own helplessness.

"I insult no-one. I want you to turn out the riff-raff, that is all."

"Turn them out yourself, then!"

"We are not responsible for the front of the house."

"Is it my fault that the fifth is Guy Fawkes night?"

"Well, I won't ask my company to face a street mob, and drunk at that. Hark to 'em!"

For indeed the stamping and the booing had grown rhythmic, and the building shook as pit and gallery beat out: "See no reason why gunpowder treason——"

with boots, sticks and umbrellas. The boxes, meanwhile, had begun to clap in genteel disapproval because the curtain was late in going up.

"Unless you lift your curtain," declared the house-manager, "I wash my hands of all responsibility."

"And I ask no lady," returned Flanders, "to play Aunt Sally to the sweepings of the town, so put that in your pipe. I do not raise the curtain till the Guy is out."

Helena's voice pierced the confusion. "Mr Flanders, we had better continue the play, I think."

Scipio turned to her. "That's the spirit! Can you face them, though?"

"I would rather face than be out-faced," she said.

"They won't hear a word you say," screamed Herriot.

"I will say my words all the same," she returned. "What can they do? They cannot tear me to pieces, I suppose. They can throw refuse. They can yell and bark and squawl. Who cares? They shall not drive me off the stage."

Scipio observed that her hand shook a little, and that she was white under her rouge. "Helena!" said he, helplessly.

She turned on him. "Make them lift the curtain! I will not be cheated of my chance."

"But Helena——!"

She faced him. "Whip those cowards on to the stage! Raise the curtain! Have it done, Scipio, or I will never speak to you again! I mean it. What, fall back before that mob? I beg your pardon, sir," and she lowered her voice and fell back a little at the sight of a stranger in the doorway.

It was as if in a blue uniform authority had entered the room. The room quieted, so that the distant brawlings were suddenly unnaturally loud, and the stranger, a naval lieutenant with a beak of a nose and weary eyes, bowed to Helena, but addressed the company.

"Forgive me, madam, I am seeking——"

The local manager sputtered. "Can you not read your playbill? No admittance behind the scenes!"

He was ignored. "I understand that a Mr Feilding——"

Scipio turned, stared, gasped. "Wait a minute!" he said. "Wait a minute! I know you, do I not?" then, the words coming slowly: "It is John, is it not? It is John Richards!"

"Cousin Skip!" The other's face lightened. Scipio caught his hand,

"Ah, now you smile I know you! Well, of all the strange meetings! And I was hearing your name, bless my soul, not a fortnight ago. A young lady in the coach, eh? Helena! May I introduce my cousin? Mrs Jerningham—Lieutenant Lapenotiere of the *Pickle*. You remember Miss Graves, Helena, at Salisbury? I pointed her out to you. Hm! Yes, well! This is her acquaintance and my cousin, Lieutenant Lapenotiere." Then, between the bow and the curtsey: "But look here, my dear John, I cannot welcome you in state at this moment. We are in trouble. Hark to the row! But I will meet you at your inn when the play is over. The Bush? We will dine, eh? Oh, damn it—I have a fellow on my hands——"

"I shall be half-way to London by then. I sought you out because I understood from Miss Graves that you are in Andover for a week and I have to ask you to take charge of her for me. She has travelled with me. A series of—but she will explain. I cannot leave her alone in a strange town. May I rely on you? But I must be off in five minutes. I am carrying dispatches."

"Dispatches?"

The two men spoke very quietly; but the word was caught up and ran round the room, and the company ceased to be aware of the thuds and the bangs from the front of the house. It was as if a partial deafness had fallen upon it. The only sound which their ears could hear was the word 'dispatches'.

Scipio repeated: "Dispatches? I will do what I can at once. I will go down to Miss Graves and offer my escort. You and I have relations, you know, out at Weyhill."

"The Canon and his family?"

"Ay! I will take her there tonight."

"Thank you. I hoped so. I knew you would not fail me. Forgive this interruption! Good night!"

"But John Richards, wait! Dispatches? What is the news? Can you tell me?"

"Yes, I can tell you. I had better tell you. The Fleet—

we have won a great victory. We have taken twenty ships—nineteen, at least, and one sunk. The Combined Fleet is destroyed."

"God in heaven, you do not say so!"

Helena struck in. "Our ships? Many sunk of ours?"

"None. Some damage suffered."

"Which suffered most?"

"Well, the *Royal Sovereign*"

"The *Colossus*?" Her painful interest in that one ship was evident.

"The *Colossus* lost most men."

"Ah!" She was white as a sentenced criminal under her rouge.

Scipio broke in: "Twenty ships? I cannot believe it. Why, when you came in I thought somehow—I could have sworn that you were bringing bad news."

"It is bad news. Nelson——"

"Not wounded again?" cried old Flanders. "Why, there is nothing left of him to wound."

"He was singled out by a sharp-shooter, and struck down. At sunset, when the victory was certain, he died. Ay, he died at sunset."

"Great God! But Cousin, wait! Tell us——"

"What else is there to tell? Nelson is dead." He bowed to Helena and was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE front of the house was getting angry. The joke with the Guy was a good joke, and could last out another two acts if only the curtain would rise. But the curtain had been down a quarter of an hour. The noisiest gallery in England outdid itself. It's "Up! Up! Curtain up!" grew in volume and intensity till, as it seemed, the very sound did at last pull apart the shabby red draperies and display the hall in Cymbeline's palace with the King, Queen and court in session and the Roman envoy in a rather dirty

toga giving them an insolent salute. Cymbeline began majestically:

" 'Now say, what would Augustus Caesar with us?' " and the house stilled for the answer.

" 'Tribute, which by thee lately is left untendered.' "

Then Helena broke in, too shrilly, with: " 'And shall be so ever,' " and something in her voice of despairing defiance, or the mere fact that the tone was out of key and inexplicable, angered the gallery as nothing till that moment had angered it. Their noises began again and became a thudding, deafening, ill-natured blanket of sound before which Flanders and the rest turned sick.

"Better ring down, eh?" muttered Flanders to Helena.

She was fixed and white. She would not notice him, let alone assent, but turning to the actor who was playing Cloten she prompted him with: " 'There be many Caesars ere such another Julius——' Go on!"

" I — I cannot!" he gulped, on the turn, and ran from the wall of flaring faces into the wings.

"Ring down! Ring down!" muttered Cymbeline as a bottle came flying and shivered against the throne, an inch from his head. But as he was starting up Helena put a hand on his shoulder and pressed him into his seat, then, herself rising, walked slowly down to the footlights and there stood, a tall, lovely image of contempt and patience.

The noise could not redouble, but at such defiance its quality changed from sheer rioting mischief into outrage, and Scipio, who had returned to the box, counted out the moments by his pulse. The actress, however, was so still a figure, remote as one of the carved caryatids which upheld the proscenium arch, that at last in mere curiosity the noise began to slacken. A voice shouted: "Fair play, now! Let her speak!" and suddenly there was quiet.

"There is news," said Helena, and her voice was small and shaken as a solitary candle-flame. "News from the Fleet! There has been a great victory. We have taken twenty ships. It is quite true. A gentleman has **driven**

through Andover carrying dispatches. He was present at the battle. It is the end of the Combined Fleet."

Silence—a stir—a scream: Scipio in the box counted these manifestations, his eyes darting from corner to corner of the dim hall. Then silence fell again.

"With your permission," said Helena, "we will now continue the play."

But as she turned to meet Cymbeline, who came blindly tottering towards her, the awaited noise struck upon their ears like a seventh wave descending with a roar upon the beach. It was the shout of joy unparalleled, of brute excitement turning into an emotion not quite brutish, an emotion growing with every second more human and more thankful. "Victory!—Victory!—Victory!—Victory!—Victory!—" the mutter rolled round the theatre in drum-taps, thunderous but not loud. Then one voice screamed, shrill as a fife: "Victory! God save the King!" and **with** that suddenly the audience came loudly to life.

"God save our gracious King,
Long live our lord the King,
God save the King!"

roared the audience.

"Send him victorious——"

they were on their feet by now,

"Happy and glorious——"

In the exact centre of the house a woman in a scarlet dress began to laugh and struggle, and was carried out, half-fainting, as the chant concluded:

"Long to reign over us,
God save the King."

Afterwards came the hurrahs, five minutes of **relentless** shouting from full throats, and then, as on one **impulse**, the audience sat down again, the noise died **out rather** suddenly, and all faces turned to Helena as if **she alone** could set the clocks of the theatre ticking again.

As for her, she knew what she had to say, but could not for the moment say it. The personal shock had been too great, and she was no speech-maker. But she was instinctively obedient to the old rule of the theatre—Never be at a loss! Say something! Say anything! But let the show go on!—and, clutching at safety, at the lines of her part, turned to the shaken stage-king with:

"Remember sir, my liege . . . •
The natural bravery of your isle, which stands
As Neptune's park, ribbéd and paled in
With rocks unscaleable and roaring waters,
With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats——"

then faltered as the audience began to applaud softly. She had lost the word, but tricked herself back into the line with:

"Caesar was carried
From off our coast twice beaten, and his shipping—
Poor ignorant baubles—on our terrible seas
Like eggshells moved upon their surges, cracked
As easily against our rocks; for joy whereof——"

Suddenly all sense of the part deserted her. Her fire died. Her arms dropped to her side.

"Go on!" came a voice. "You're doing well."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Helena put out her hand to the friendly murmur, "with your permission we shall ring down the curtain—there is other news. Bad news. Lord Nelson——" The tears began to rain down her cheeks. "Nelson has been killed," said Helena. "He is dead and gone."

She stood a moment, trying to control herself, then, to the accompaniment of a soft cry, as if the whole concourse of people had moaned a little under its breath, the curtains closed upon her.

"Lord Nelson? Is that true?" said Foulger in the box.

Scipio had started up and was half out of it, but felt himself caught by the coat.

"Hey, wait a minute!" muttered Foulger with a hiccup. "I'm coming round with you, I am. Bad news, ain't it? Damned bad news. But it will be good for business, I can tell you that. I must get back to town. I shall have a special scene for tomorrow, written in verse, you know, and a laurel wreath, and a transparency of his lordship, something novel and tasteful. I must be off at once. Can't dine. But I will see the Jerningham. She'll do, you know, the Jerningham. Quite a find! I will come round with you now to her dressing-room, and we'll get something down on paper."

CHAPTER XIX

ANDOVER — Hurstbourne — Whitchurch — Overton — Clerken Green—Worting—Basingstoke—and there are forty-five miles to go. Change horses, (strike out ten minutes!) and on again. Hook—Murrel Green—Hartley Row—Hartford Bridge—and change horses again, but this time with five minutes' wastage only. The heath begins—Bagshot—another change—and there are twenty-six miles to go. Hurry!

But it was not till after Bagshot that hurry demoniacally possessed him. Since that far-off moment, nine-and-a-half days ago, when he parted company with the C.-in-C, Lapenotiere had driven forward upon his journey at the greatest speed possible. None the less he had remained reasonable in his demands even upon himself; for to travel as quickly as he could was only a part of his duty, he was certain of that. Much would be required of him when he arrived at his destination: he would be under cross-examination for days on end; but it was not required of him to act out a melodrama of frothing steed and reeling rider. He was the bearer of dispatches, the Navy's representative, the country's servant. He must keep his dignity, and have his mind clear.

Therefore he had not allowed himself to fret at the inevitable pauses and delays of the road, had even held the

chaise once while he shaved and freshened himself, and during the hours spent beside Mary Ann his mind had known, through its happiness, that the experience was repairing, not impairing his efficiency.

But now, with only twenty-six miles to go, hurry invaded him like a hawk dropping upon the quarry out of a clear sky, like a tempest wringing the neck of a forest, and at once he ceased to sway restfully with the swing of the chaise, but upright on the edge of the seat began to urge speed with his whole body, flailing at the horses with his will, losing all the good rest and peace which his Mary had charmed down upon him, fists and feet keeping time with the clop-clop of the horses' hooves as they hammered out their 'Hurry—hurry—hurry—hurry—hurry!'

'Shrub's Hill—Virginia Water—Egham Hill—leave Surrey, enter Middlesex and cross the river! Close at hand, somewhere between the two banks, lies Runnymede in the Thames as England lies in the sea. Runnymede to Trafalgar is a journey of five hundred and eighty-nine years. Trafalgar to London is a journey of nine-and-a-half days. Thus we crusade, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate us, against John the Enemy of Nature, against Bonaparte the Tyrant of Europe. No freeman shall be fined or bound—England rejects—England expects—hurry!'

A chaise drew up at the Staines toll-gate, and a Lieutenant in uniform thrust out his head and shouted to the little group of foot-travellers: "There has been a great battle, and Lord Nelson is killed."

The white faces, all alike in the moonlight, moved as one hydra. There was outcry. The gates opened. The chaise rolled on. Clop-clop, cloppity-clop—hurry—hurry—hurry! Staines is left behind and there are sixteen miles to go.

'The great thing is to be calm. Just so, my lord! To the south-west of the Scilly Islands we ran into a dead calm. We had to use our sweeps to keep the *Pickle's* head in the right direction. That was on the second of November. Almost immediately, however, we ran into more bad

weather and squalls, which delayed us yet further. Once landed, however, I made good time, or so I flatter myself. I shall be at the Admiralty by one o'clock at latest. I shall out-race the moon-set. I am glad it is such a fine night. I must have a clear head and be ready to answer questions, and how can I see my way clear in the dark? I am talking arrant nonsense. I must be calm. Mary Ann, how does one calm oneself? I will put my head in your lap and go to sleep, I think. Lie and count my sheep, that is the thing to do. What is the order of battle, Captain Lapenotiere? Now Ricky, dearest Ricky, go to sleep! Count your ships and sleep! One ship—two—three—cloppity-clop, cloppity-clop—"Over the mountains and over the waves,"—do you know that song, Mary Ann? "Love will find out the way," Mary Ann, dear Mary Ann. In the weather-line were the *Victory*, *Téméraire*, *Neptune*, *Conqueror*, *Leviathan*, *Britannia*, *Agamemnon*, *Ajax*, *Orion*, *Minotaur*, *Spartiate*, *Africa*. Where are we now? The milestone shines bright: "in such a night as this,"—Turnham Green. Only five miles more!

'Count the milestones again! No, count the ships! I am told that Admiral Collingwood was at first not at all pleased with Lord Nelson's signal. You may depend on it, for I had it from his flag-lieutenant. The Admiral said that he wished his lordship would not trouble him with further signals: that they all understood what they had to do. But when the message was reported to him, then, the flag-lieutenant told me, he let out a chuckle and ordered it read out to the ship's company. "England expects that every man will do his duty," was the message, and the men cheered till they frightened the French. This happened aboard the *Royal Sovereign*. We in the *Pickle* missed it altogether, to the men's lasting regret. Cloppity-clop, cloppity-clop—hurry!

'The lee-line consisted of the *Royal Sovereign*, *Belleisle*, *Mars*, *Tonnant*, *Bellerophon*, *Colossus*, *Achilles*, *Dreadnought*, *Polyphemus*, *Revenge*, *Swiftsure*, *Defiance*, *Thunderer*, *Prince*, *Defence*. That, sir, is how I have it in memory; but I cannot vouch for its accuracy. Accounts do not agree. There was great

confusion. Some say the *Defence* was eleventh in the line. Yes sir, then it would run: the *Defence*, *Swiftsure*, *Polyphemus*, *Dreadnought*, *Prince*. You are quite light, sir, I had forgotten the cruisers. The *Euryalus*, *Phoebe*, *Sirius*, *Naiad*, *Entrepreneur* and the *Pickle*. I am in command of the *Pickle*. I came ashore at Falmouth and drove overland to save time. I have covered two hundred and sixty miles since twelve o'clock of the fourth. Nineteen changes! Good God, already at Hammersmith! Hammering hooves! Is it possible? Past the fourth milestone? There are not four miles to go.'

He passed Kensington Palace: he reached Knightsbridge: he was threading through the pallid night, wide awake again and alert, looking down upon London at last from Hyde Park Corner, in complete realization of all that he was bringing upon the sleeping city of joy and woe. He was—Lapnotiere smiled at the self-glorification—the arrow of destiny shot at the heart of the metropolis, and there's a pompous phrase for you! 'But we are all pompous fellows, thinking of ourselves and our importance. How dare we? How dare any man reflect complacently upon his exertions and even upon his fatigue when he brings such news? And yet, how damned tired I am!'

Lapnotiere turned to stare at the far corner of the coach, where a shade sat impatiently wagging a shadowy stump. 'My dear children, I have long made up my mind never to be tired.' He caught his breath. The sudden memory was more than he could bear, and he stared blinking out of the window muttering resolutely: "Forget him! Forget him! He is dead. Nelson is dead. Forget him!"

The chaise rolled down Piccadilly. 'Is that Devonshire House? There is not a soul abroad in the streets. There must have been a fog to empty the streets so early. What is the time? Ask Nelson!'

For Lapnotiere had pulled out Nelson's watch and was holding it to catch the moonlight. 'And you say forget him! How can he ever be forgotten? I have his watch. It ticks—ticks to the tune of duty. "Thank God I have **done my duty!**" Poor Westphal heard him say it. Where

will they bury him? I wish it need not be underground. I wish he could rest high in air, to watch us for ever as we go about our business. One o'clock! Ah, the Haymarket! Now, when I arrive, shall I dismiss the chaise till morning? Shall I send it round to my hotel? Better do that! I cannot keep the news waiting while I pay the fellow off. My pocket-book? Where is my pocket-book? Where on earth is my pocket-book—my pocket-book with all my money in it and my commission? The dispatches? Ay, they are safe enough. They are here where they have lain nine days. But my pocket-book—what in the devil's name have I done with my pocket-book? It cannot have dropped in the straw. Damn these cursed holes in the road, jolting and jerking one sideways as one scrabbles in the straw! London streets are a disgrace. It is not in the straw, at any rate. Wait a bit! When did I last have my pocket-book in my hand? When was the last stop? Brentford! Brentford—I tipped the ostler at Brentford. I had put down my pocket-book on the seat. I was not out of the chaise four minutes; but it would have been long enough for a thief. Ay, that is where the theft occurred; for it must be a theft. The postillion, who ought to have kept an eye on the chaise, came into the house at the same time, I remember. I told him to get himself a drink while the ostler put in the horses. There were hangers-on, though, gaping and questioning. It is they who have stolen my pocket-book. Christ, my commission is in it—my credentials—and they do not know me at the Admiralty!

Lapenotiere, after a last frenzied feel in the pockets, a last shuffle in the straw, a last thrust of the hands between the wall-cushions and the seats, abandoned the futile search and jumped out.

"I've lost my pocket-book," he muttered to the postillion who was holding open the door. "Have a look, will you?" and turned to face the sea-horses, the anchor and the prows of ancient vessels. Whitehall was a long, empty, silent white street. There was no farther to go. He had arrived at the Admiralty. The adventure was at an end, and oh, the flatness of arrival, the emptiness of

achievement! How far behind already is life, is death, is Trafalgar!

"Not a sign of it, sir," said the man behind him.

At that moment a post-chaise swept into Whitehall from the direction of Cockspur Street, the horses going at such a rate that they nearly overran their destination, and were pulled up by the swearing postillion exactly abreast of Lapenotiere's chaise. The postillion was down in a flash, wrenching at the door, and a second figure in uniform leaped out. Lapenotiere turned, and from his greater height on the pavement looked upon the panting, crest-fallen visage of Captain Sykes.

For an instant neither man spoke, but, as the staring moment lengthened between them, Lapenotiere's mind, naturally so calm, was overwhelmed by a tidal wave of anger. Grimly he took in the situation, recalling his own meeting with Sykes off Lisbon and his unsuspecting communication of the great news. He recalled, as if the whole nine days' journey were a picture to be seen simultaneously in all its parts, the perils and delays of the *Pickle's* homeward passage, how she had been near foundering in the storm, and how he had looked death and failure in the face and outwitted both. He remembered with wonder how little the delays and dangers had fretted him, how much more he had suffered from the hammering of the horses' hoofs and the crashing of the bells in the last two days, how these had been an Inquisition torture of water set to drip incessantly on the same spot of flesh. He remembered how he had hurried, hurried, hurried through the days and nights, neglecting his own father and his own town, and leaving his own Mary in the casual care of a stranger, because he had one duty and one duty only, the delivery of the package lying on his breast. It seemed to him a thing abominable that all the while Sykes should have been behind him, unsuspected by him, menacing the success of his efforts, attempting such a rape upon his right, and that at this peak-instant of achievement he should be forced to lose his human dignity, to behave like an exhausted dog with a bone in its mouth, snarling at the bigger dog who also

wanted the bone. A darkness passed over his face in the moonlight. By day it would have been a blush of rage.

Then, quickly as his anger had risen, it ebbed away again: this because it tickled his humour to see how his rival behaved in character. For Sykes was doggishly self-conscious. It might be said that he wagged an apologetic tail.

"Beaten me, have you?" said the Captain of the *Nautilus*.

"Didn't know you were behind me," said Lapenotiere stiffly.

"I know you did not. I never intended to be—not then. But after I had turned back into Lisbon—I told you I'd do that——"

"Oh yes, you told me you'd do that." Lapenotiere looked at him with the ghost of a smile.

Sykes returned it. He grew easy. He stepped up on to the pavement beside the victor. The fever of the chase was over. He could talk, ruefully and with humour, of his own defeat.

"Come now, you'd have done the same," said he. "Besides, it was the Legation's doing—and Gambier's. They talked it over. They would have me chase after you. The *Pickle* might have foundered, you see."

"Perfectly!"

"Luck of the game, I say!"

"Oh certainly! Luck of the game!"

"Now, can I do anything for you?"

"You can. I am not known at the Admiralty."

"Carrying dispatches, are you not?"

"Yes, but they have thieved my pocket-book—my money and my papers were in it."

"Not the dispatches?"

"Not the dispatches," said Lapenotiere jealously. "I have them here."

"Well then, go in! The dispatches are good enough credentials. I will see to all this."

"Very obliging of you!"

"Nonsense! Where are you lodging? You do not know, I suppose, nor care; but I shall go to the Golden Cross.

Better have your baggage sent there. You can settle with me later. Go in!⁵⁵

CHAPTER XX

THE clock struck, and the First Secretary, still at work in the Board-room of the Admiralty, looked up with a sigh. He was the most conscientious of men, and nightly for ten years now he had felt it his duty to work on after the clerks had gone to bed, checking the piles of letters and working through the returns left over from the day's labour. But he never sat late without witnessing sardonically the nightly tussle between his duty and his pleasure, and not always resisting the temptation to steal one little hour from the routine of his life and devote it, while still some freshness remained to him, to his Grammar and Dictionary of the Malay language.

He had not touched it now for six months, and there looked to be little chance of employment upon it this side of the New Year, with the preliminaries of the Calder court-martial added to his other work, and interviews with Pitt over the ramifications of the Ulm disaster: and now this alarming gap in the stream of communications from Nelson boding more work in the end. The silence surely meant that Nelson was up to something, for the little cripple was a regular and businesslike correspondent, give him his due over that! He fizzed-over sometimes in a champagne of emotion seldom important; but then the English never had any control of their shallow emotions. They talked a deal about hating the French, but it would all end in hand-shakings and patronage once Bonaparte was out of the way. It would be amusing to let himself go on that point in his Memoirs if ever he had time to write them. Oh, there was so much to write, so much to write! There was the long-planned translation of Marco Polo, and the essay on oriental coins, and he had not so much as begun the catalogue of his own library, and would not, certain, until he had left the Admiralty.

But at that notion a pang shot through him, thin and chill as the pencil of moonlight on the floor below the window where the curtains had not met. Leave the centre of the spider-web? No longer feel the thrill of each separate thread quivering along all its length and in to its centre and core here in this room, on this table, at this desk? He saw the spinning world as a ball enclosed in a net-work of communications to William Marsden Esquire, the Irishman who ruled behind the scenes at the Admiralty.

One o'clock already! Time to retire to his private apartments! Yes, but the clock was always slow or fast, anyway unreliable, and he was not in the least weary, and letters answered tonight were out of the way tomorrow. He drew an unused quill down the list he had jotted, and paused among the Ns. There was Nelson's letter about the frigates still unanswered. He rummaged for it.

"I am sorry ever to trouble their Lordships——" But he is for ever troubling their Lordships! "—with anything like a complaint for want of Frigates and Sloops——" The old wail! "If I were an Angel and attending to all the other points of my Command, let the Enemy escape for want of the *eyes of the Fleet*, I should consider myself as most highly reprehensible——" But what, pray, have the angels to do with the Fleet? "Never less than eight Frigates and three good, fast-sailing Brigs should always be with the Fleet to watch Cadiz——" I am sorry, he cannot have them. "At present I have only been able to collect two, which makes me very uneasy——" Yes, well, he must remain uneasy; for I cannot give him the non-existent. Phoo! What a stink! and he reached forward to snuff a candle from which the smoke streamed upward to the lofty ceiling, swelling and spreading in an acrid yellow cloud; for a collection of tallow had risen up against the wick, and the wax was guttering.

'A winding-sheet!' said Marsden, with a superstitious shiver of which he was instantly ashamed, and turned, perceiving that the trouble was caused by a sudden draught. The night-porter had entered round the screen, under orders not to knock, for the First Secretary did not care for it to be known that he was growing a little deaf.

"Well?" said he sharply, and then in reproof: "Bad wax! See to it tomorrow!"

"Yes, sir. The captain of the *Pickle* to see you, sir, with dispatches."

"At this hour?"

"Yes, sir. Important dispatches, he says."

"What name?"

"Lieutenant Lapenotiere."

"Is he outside?"

"Yes, sir.⁵;

"Show him in!" But immediately, before the visitor could appear, he called out in impatient tones: "Come in, sir! Come nearer! Come *to* the table!"

But, as Lapenotiere entered, the First Secretary against his custom found himself rising. Even then the new-comer was so tall that Marsden had to tilt his head before his shallow-lidded Irish eyes could scan the opposed countenance. The candle flared up again. Its sputter was loud in that moment of absolute gravity before the messenger said his say.

"Sir, we have gained a great victory, but we have lost Lord Nelson."

"His lordship?"

The other gave a heavy nod.

"Do you mean he is killed? Good God! In battle?"

Lapenotiere was fumbling in his breast. "Admiral Collingwood entrusted me with his dispatches. They will tell you all." He put the packet on to the Secretary's table-desk and the latter, opening them deftly but with a hand that shook, sank into his chair and raced through them, breaking off only to call out, with the sudden loudness of the deaf:

"Take a chair, sir! Take a chair!"

The clock on the mantelshelf clicked on, reached the quarter, and chimed. The fire fell apart in the grate. Lapenotiere, seated with one elbow on the table, leant his head on his hand and closed his eyes, while Marsden, spectacles on nose, read greedily on, his eyes glued to the page of hand-writing. The clock was whirring up to the

half-hour before he stuffed the papers and their cover together; then he rose, and spoke as if he were addressing a full board.

"I am bewildered—I feel that this is no time for my own feelings. Lieutenant——"

"Lapenotiere."

"Lapenotiere. But consider, I am at this moment the only person informed of one of the greatest events recorded in our history."

Lapenotiere looked up and flicked a glance at him, his face inscrutable. Inwardly he was reflecting on all the hundreds of people who, of necessity, were already informed of the event, and marvelled that Marsden, the all-capable official, should be able to think of himself with pride as the sole holder of the secret. Did he not know how people talked? It shot through the Lieutenant's mind that his own discretion would be impugned by this sharp, powdered fellow. It would never have occurred to Marsden that in any case the men would talk when they reached Plymouth, and that no commands could possibly stop them; for they would know well enough that there was no need for secrecy, and that the innkeeper at Liskeard, the Mayor of Falmouth, the passers-by at the turnpike had a right to instant information concerning their victory and loss. For himself, he despised anyone who, at such a moment in history, could feel superiority because he knew a secret. A pity, he thought, that government must be committed to persons who lived all their lives indoors. Travel the seas for ten years, and you were cured of your itch for secrecy, just as you were cured of your itch for gossip. You held your tongue until the time came to speak; then you spoke. But you had no pride in your special knowledge such as now swelled this fusty, indoor man.

Marsden was pontificating. "However it is my duty to make these matters known with the utmost promptitude. The First Lord must be informed at once. I shall be obliged if you will wait here, Lieutenant Lapin——"

"Lapenotiere."

"Lapenotiere. His lordship will want to see you later.

I will have some refreshments sent in to you. Meanwhile, that sofa is fairly comfortable," and he shuffled out of the room, and, finding the night-porter still in attendance in the passage, he sent him off for sherry and some sort of a meal.

It was not until the man was out of earshot that he realized that he had no idea of Lord Barham's whereabouts. His own special path between board-room and private apartments was well-worn; but it had never been necessary for him to visit the First Lord's bedchamber. He knew merely that the old man had taken a dislike to the quarters assigned him, and had moved a few weeks earlier to a sunnier room. Nor had he any idea of where the clerks and servants slept. So for some fifteen minutes he made his way, candle in hand, along corridors, up flights of stairs and down again, skirting newel-posts and colliding with grim marble busts. At last he saw a door with shoes outside it, and, flinging it open with a great rattling of the handle, confronted tousled heads in nightcaps, and realized that he had reached the dormitories assigned to his own clerks. He had them out of bed, blinking and bewildered.

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Dispatches have arrived. I must beg you to get into your clothes as quickly as possible and come down to the board-room. Tell the others to do likewise! We shall be working all the rest of the night. Now—can you direct me to his lordship's new sleeping-quarters? Ah! I thought not. You are unobservant, all of you. No, no, do not trouble yourselves! I shall find him. Well, come if you choose!" and on he went, properly preceded, down another corridor, dark, cluttered with furniture, and for a fantastic moment his personality turned in upon itself, retracing time, and he was again in Sumatra in the days of his youth, making his way down a tunnel of virgin forest in tiger-weather, with little obedient brown men ahead of him chopping and hacking. Then a clerk reported jubilantly:

"Here, sir, I think! Shall I knock?"

"No, open the door gently! You are right, this will be

his dressing-room. Thanks, I need no further assistance. Dress quickly, and go down!"

The clerk, greatly daring, ventured: "Good news, sir, I hope?"

"I will tell you later."

He left them to their whispering, and cautiously opening the inner door found himself in a squarish apartment filled up by a four-poster. He knew by the lifeless smell of the air that he was in an old man's room, and very gently drew aside the curtain.

Lord Barham, a frail eighty, lay so fast asleep that the flickering light of the candle did not rouse him; but when the First Secretary gently shook him by the shoulder he opened his eyes, stared a moment, then, recognition and a smile conjoining, he held out his hand to be pulled into an upright position, saying with the singular placidity of the aged: "What news, Mr Marsden?"

Marsden hesitated. The small pomposities vanished. He had spoken to Lapenotiere of formal feeling; but now indeed he truly felt. He moistened his lips, then, turning to the bed-table, picked up the jointed metal spectacles.

"Dispatches, my lord! You will like to read them for yourself."

The First Lord glanced down at the letter presented to him.

"*Euryalus* off Cape Trafalgar, on October the twenty-second," he read, and glanced up at the First Secretary. "At Trafalgar still, are they?"

"Read, sir!"

"Hold the candle lower! Thank 'ee! 'The ever to be lamented death of Vice-Admiral Viscount Nelson—' What is this? Who writes?"

"Collingwood."

"Ah! '—Nelson, who, in the late encounter with the enemy fell in the hour of victory—' "

The old man lay down the paper on the sheet. The eyes of the two met.

"Give me the gist of it, Mr Marsden!"

Marsden took back the dispatch. "The sum of it, sir,

is victory. Twenty prizes—nineteen taken, that is, and one sunk. There can never have been such a glorious victory."

"But Nelson? Read!"

" 'His lordship received a musket-ball in his left breast about the middle of the action. He sent an officer to me immediately with his last farewells, and soon afterwards expired——' "

"Great God of our country! Read on!" And he listened attentively and with a concentration extraordinary for a man of his years to the light Irish voice as it rolled out the colourless sentences: and when the whole dispatch had been read through said only: "What are the other papers?"

"Two general orders, and a second letter dated the twenty-fourth."

"Read that next!"

" 'Sir, in my letter of the twenty-second——' "

"Omit the formalities!"

" ' — I detailed . . . proceedings of His Majesty's Squadron on the day of the action, etc. etc., since which I have had a continued series of misfortunes——' "

"Give it to me!" The old man read and muttered. "So they have destroyed the prizes! 'I doubt if I shall be able to carry a ship of them into port.' Then he asks for frigates."

"No, your lordship, permit me—it was Lord Nelson who asked for frigates in his letter of the fifth of October. Admiral Collingwood says merely that whenever the weather permits and he can spare a frigate——"

"Yes, well, we must dispatch reinforcements immediately. Press the bell for my man, will you? Who brought the news?"

"Lieutenant Lapenotiere of the *Pickle* schooner. Your lordship may care to see him."

"No, no! What can he tell me but details? The facts are here. But the King will want him to chatter. Now, what is to be done first, Mr Marsden?"

"These should be copied."

"And the first one sent to the Prime Minister."

"Not to His Majesty?"

"No, no! Send the first to Pitt!"

"Perhaps your lordship will write an accompanying letter to the King?"

"Do you write! I must first concern myself with the question of reinforcements—all we have at Portsmouth and Plymouth. I can write my formal congratulations in the morning. Remind me!"

"A notice should also be sent to the Prince and the Duke of York, and to the ministers."

"And to the Lord Mayor, and Lloyd's, ay!"

"I have ordered my chief clerk to rouse his colleagues, such as are sleeping on the premises."

"Yes, yes, and I will get up at once. My secretary can come to me here while I dress. Frigates! Reinforcements! I am a little stunned, Mr Marsden."

"Indeed, my lord, so am I . "

"Victory! Complete victory! Twenty ships. This will soften the Mack surrender for the Prime Minister. Get the clerks to work at once, if you will be so good, Mr Marsden! I will join you as soon as possible. What is the time now?"

"Nearly two."

"Only two! Mr Pitt's health is so poor that I would choose not to disturb him at this early hour."

"I fear it is entirely necessary."

"Ay, but—have you see Mr Pitt since Sunday—since Ulm?"

"Your lordship means since the news came in of Mack's surrender?"

"Ay, that is what I mean. It has broke him, Mr Marsden, or so Lord Malmesbury thinks. He related to me that the Prime Minister came to him on Sunday with the Dutch news-sheet in his hand, asking his lordship to translate it. His lordship said, when he came to the phrase 'absolute surrender', Pitt cried out like—like a man impaled. He went away with death on his face, Malmesbury told me. The loss of thirty thousand choice troops, Mr Marsden—it is a blow! Lord Malmesbury calls it his death-blow. He thinks he will not last another six months. This news should give him a fillip, however, if it were not for losing Nelson."

Poor, poor Nelson! Twenty ships! Joy and sorrow, joy and sorrow! Had he only lived to taste his triumph! I am eighty, you know, Mr Marsden, though I do not keep my birthday any more; but Lord Nelson was only forty-seven, I think. No older than Mr Pitt! And now Pitt is dying. Half my age, both of them! Boys! Providence is indiscriminate—God forgive me for saying so. O William Marsden, these things are ill-arranged!"

Thus the First Lord; while in another bedroom not three hundred yards away the Prime Minister slept heavily, and in that troubled sleep reviewed the periods of the letter dispatched six hours earlier to the Austrian Government.

His valet, bringing the scarce-dried copies of the news which was to galvanize the dying man into a few more weeks of vigour, found him tossing restlessly, and bending over him heard the word 'Mack' incessantly repeated, and then so loudly, with such coherence that the man for an instant thought him awake and working: "His Britannic Majesty has no doubt of being enabled himself to augment his own active force to not less than sixty thousand men." Then came a sigh, a groan, a turning of the whole weary body, and again the sleeper's mutter of: "Mack! Mack! Mack!"

The listener tiptoed away to the table, and there lit the oil-lamp which he carried. It was his customary way of waking his master, and at once Pitt sat up in the bed. In the flaring, theatrical light the brown hair from which the powder had shifted, the tip-tilted nose and port-wine complexion gave him a dreadful look of stained and impertinent youth.

"Europe is not to be lost by any single man," said Pitt, glaring up at his valet, then, as he took in his surroundings, he became his majestic waking self.

"Dispatches? Give them to me!"

The man obeyed, and watched with intense curiosity as his master read and re-read, covering his scrutiny by a zealous, noiseless ordering of the littered room.

"What is the hour?" said the minister at last.

"Not quite three."

"I will get up. Bring my clothes!"

"But it is not yet three, sir!" The valet was semi-faithful and wholly privileged. "Sunrise is at seven."

Pitt got out of bed, giving him no answer, and the man hurried to him with a dressing-gown, puzzled and not a little alarmed, for, as he afterwards told one of the innumerable spoiled servants, he had never before known his master disturb his rest for dispatches. He was sufficiently concerned to slip up again, unbidden, with hot chocolate and a breakfast-tray.

He found his master dressed and standing at the window. He had pulled back the gold and violet curtains, and was staring into darkness, for the moon was down and the dawn had not yet begun. He drummed incessantly upon a pane of glass. As the awed servant reported it, there was the black of the grave behind him, and he drummed upon nothing.

The man poured out the chocolate into the rattling cup, put it down obtrusively, and then, afraid to stay yet not wanting to go, once more began noiselessly to straighten the disorder of the bed.

"Leave that!" said Pitt. "Pass me my tables!"

The servant ran to obey.

"And my memorandum book! Is today the sixth or the seventh?"

"Morning of the sixth, sir."

"And I am dining with the Lord Mayor—when?"

"Saturday, sir. The banquet is Saturday,"

"Hm!" He scribbled a phrase, and, as if trying it over, addressed the blank spaces of the night. "My Lord Mayor——" then, as the valet ran a bed-curtain along its rail: "Leave those fidgets! Leave me! Go!"

The man fled, and as he went the majestic voice was lifted again.

" — I return you thanks for the honour you have done me, but Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions——"

The door shut upon the unended sentence, and the valet tiptoed away to his own quarters and the company of his

mates. The news had reached them, backstairs-fashion, and they sat together drinking chocolate, whispering, mourning and exulting till dawn broke.

CHAPTER XXI

IT broke upon a London whisperingly aware of the victory, but unwilling to rejoice. Groups had begun to gather at the doors of newspaper offices, in front of the Mansion House and Lloyd's, and each shivering new-comer added his question to the rest: "Is it true about Nelson?" Lapenotiere, roused from his wary snoozing in the board-room and most politely required to accompany the official messenger to Windsor, was taken away by a back-door to the waiting chaise, because, his companion told him, they would never get through the crowds and their questionings. So quickly did the tidings spread that at the first turnpike the toll-keeper called out to them:

"Have you heard the bad news, sir? We have lost Lord Nelson," then, seeing the uniform, would barely let them through, so eager was he in his lamentings.

"He does not ask about the victory," said the messenger as the gates clashed behind them, and Lapenotiere gave him a perfunctory smile of assent. But he made no effort towards further conversation, and the other respected his silence for half an hour before he said:

"It is not fair to press you now; but on the return journey will you answer a few questions? Imagine what it is to sit by one who was at the battle, and ask nothing!"

Lapenotiere nodded good-naturedly. "I can imagine it. But it is all pretty matter-of-fact, in an action."

"Well, I have never been to sea, but I have seen heroic battle-pieces by Vandeveldt, not at all matter of fact, and I have been told that they are very like."

"Oh yes, I daresay they are like—afterwards, you know, when one has time to think about it."

"Your particular work, I understand, was the rescue of our drowning——"

"We had more French than English to pull out of the water."

"You went to the help of the French?"

"And Spaniards, yes!"

"I call it magnanimity! Go on!"

Lapenotiere began to laugh. "Do you know what I call magnanimity? My pocket-book was stolen last night, at the last halt. Well, as I came through the lodge just now the porter restored it to me with the papers intact and a scrawl accompanying them—'Good luck to our brave tars!' It had been handed in an hour before."

"Was the money——?"

"Oh, you could not expect the money! That would be asking too much. But—honour among thieves—they returned me my papers for my profession's sake. That I call magnanimity, eh?"

"Not at all! A most natural sentiment! Can you not understand that you are an event in our lives? You have been in Nelson's battle. Your very coat smells salty."

"Musty, my dear sir! The Mayor's carriage has, I fear, harboured a sitting hen quite recently. I have been picking off the feathers ever since I left Falmouth."

"You put me off."

"No, I assure you. What is it you want to know?"

"Anything you choose to tell me."

"Well—let me see—here is a story for you, a true one. When the *Achille* blew up—the French *Achille*, not ours—we rowed over to her to see what we could do, and took up a hundred and sixty men from her wreck."

"Well, and that is what I mean by magnanimity!"

"My dear sir, in return for our magnanimity our prisoners presently rose upon the crew of the *Pickle*—we are thirty-five all told—intending to throw us overboard, and would have, believe me, if the men had not fought like lions."

"Savages! The French are savages."

"Oh, you must not wonder if they tried to get away! They knew that they would be carried below and battened down; for there would not be room to work the ship with them on deck. Well, you know—and they knew, poor

devils—that what with salt-horse casks and water casks there is not much space in a schooner. Indeed we had to pack them like sardines. You cannot conceive the discomfort—nor the stench."

"But Lieutenant—Lieutenant——"

"Lapenotiere. No-one ever achieves my name. Well?"

The other meditated. "Yes, yes! You are indeed matter-of-fact. And Lapenotiere—is that a Guernsey name?"

"De la Penotière is the old spelling. French."

"Oh, you are French?"

"Remotely." Lapenotiere resolutely closed his eyes. He was going to see the King, and he was only a little less frightened than he had been before the interview with Collingwood, and he was not going to use up the energy left him to satisfy the other's curiosity, however natural and harmless. But the last question stuck in his mind as he watched the sky flushed by the first intimation of morning, and he did find it odd that he, with his enemy name, should be carrying to England the news of such a victory. Then, feeling that he had been uncivil, he opened his eyes again.

"And your name, sir?" he asked abruptly. "I did not catch it."

"Me? My name is Cortis."

"Well, Mr Curtis, if you will forgive me——"

"No, Cortis! C-o-r-t-i-s."

"Unusual spelling! Curtis, Curtiss, Courtice—I meet the forms constantly. But Cortis—odd as Lapenotiere, eh?"

"Yes, we are the only family to spell it in that way. We are the Lincolnshire Cortises. We descend, or so my aunts believe, from some Spaniard out of an Armada ship. He is legendary, my forbear Cortez, but I am rather proud of him. It is pleasant to be a little different."

Lapenotiere nodded and closed his eyes again, once more reflecting upon the strange fact that he, with his remote French ancestry, and this other with his dim flavour of Spanish, should be travelling together to Windsor Castle to bring to the King of Great Britain and Ireland the news of his peoples' victory over the Combined Fleets of France and

Spain. He remembered also the faces of all those who had sped him on his way, and reflected that Collingwood was a Yorkshireman, Marsden a Celt, Barham of Scots-Jacobite descent, Mary Ann Anglo-Irish, and the helpful Falmouth Mayor, of a race so old that it jumbled Celts, Romans and Saxons together as upstarts. Now the journey was ending at Windsor Castle in an interview with a king who spoke English with a Gothic accent, and was descended from Saxon, French, Bohemian, Danish, Scottish, Welsh, Italian, Spanish and Norman as well as English forbears.

But he conceded that this was why George III was a popular king in spite of his obstinacies, his meddlings in politics, his quarrels with his son, his part-responsibility for the loss of the American colonics. For the king of England must be the microcosm of his people, and what were the English people but valiant, foolish, quarrelsome, independent men of all nations, fighters, wanderers, merchants, looters, runaways and saints who, during the last five thousand years, had drifted in from the four quarters of the world and beached upon the shores of Britain in search of security and a home. The motherly island had gathered them in, settled them down, and by and by so fused them that no-one could say for certain: 'I know my stock', but only: 'I know my land'. Yes—the common tie, said Lapenotiere to himself with a sense of discovery, was the tie not of race but of place. Therefore the British accepted as natural, ay, as right and proper, the foreign strains running in the blood of their king; for their blood was as mixed as his. Of the general mixture was born John Bull: of the special one was born, God bless him, Tanner George', and the one held up the flattering mirror to the other. He, the king, epitomized his people's virtues. With relief they recognized in him their own honesty, exuberance, and sense of fair-play, and liked him because he laughed heartily and lived simply, because he depended on his mother, lorded it over his wife, hated his daughters to marry, and outwitted his ministers when he could, but was anxiously kind to anyone in trouble, and concerned himself about the welfare of all his old servants. Nor were they blind

to that noble streak in him which made their other mirror, their oracle, Johnson, pronounce him the finest gentleman he had ever known. Above all they respected his endurance of his special doom, as if his slow decay signified the patient passing of themselves, the old England, to make room for Englands yet unshaped.

'And that,' thought Lapenotiere with his characteristic shrug, 'is how I should see the King in this coming interview if I allowed my romantic British blood to overpower my inherited drop of gall. But I will not. I will approach him without awe. I will see him exactly as I know him to be, a man of sixty-seven, of limited intelligence, subject to fits of insanity, who is growing deaf and has a cataract in both eyes. I shall find him silly and pitiful, I daresay, but I shall never own it, because the authorities are very touchy these days over one's allowance of free speech, and also because one cannot somehow forget that he is the King, the King himself. "There's such divinity doth hedge a——" Did that milestone say Datchet?'

He must have spoken the end of the sentence aloud, for the other roused himself. "What? Did you say Datchet? Yes, that lane leads to Datchet."

"Datchet Lane! Datchet Mead! O blessed England, how she colours us! This, then, is where Falstaff was nearly drowned, 'but that the shore was shelvy and shallow'. Did not they dump him in Datchet Mead? The Warwickshire man must have known his Berkshire just as well."

"I have not an idea of your meaning," said the other.

"I mean our William."

"Oh, Shakespeare! Yes, but you see we are Lincolnshire. He never did anything for Lincolnshire."

"He was twenty-four the summer of Armada, a young lady once told me—she is a great Shakespearean—so, do you see, your ancestor may well have hobnobbed with him, for I suppose the Spanish prisoners would be brought to London. About the same time—no, a few years earlier—my forbears were in Amsterdam mourning the death of *their* William, and hating Spain and all things Spanish. Yet here we are—together!"

"Yes, here indeed we are. This is Windsor."

"I was never here before. I shall see the King. I never thought that I should absolutely speak with the King."⁵⁵

CHAPTER XXII

HE was received by a preoccupied and anxious Colonel Taylor. The gentleman, he learned, was the King's private secretary. By him he was taken to the breakfast-parlour where the King took his early chocolate with his wife and daughters, but on the way was much flustered by the hints and warnings muttered in his ear.

"Be limited in what you tell him, if you please! Watch your words! He must not be harrowed."⁵⁵

He answered stiffly: "I am merely the bearer of dispatches. I have nothing to say."⁵⁵

"Ay, but he may question you. If he addresses you, go very close. He likes to see what he can of a face. Speak slow, and loud!"⁵⁵

The hushed directions had bothered him badly. That was why, on entering, he had looked first at the room as a whole, and then at the Queen, the princesses and the standing courtiers. Only when the pretty youngest girl turned to her father did he let himself lift his eyes to the King's face.

He had fought for this man because he was England. He had also shrugged and privately derided this old fellow who was England. Now, critically, dispassionately, discounting all legends good or bad, he looked upon England, and—he could not help himself—his heart beat fast and he felt a loyal lump in his throat.

The King sat slewed round in his chair, one hand still grasping a fork, a hearty old man in a ridiculous wig. Cataract had misted the bright blue eyes; but he lifted his head high and peered from under their films, patiently questioning like a kind dog in old age. Then, as the silence deepened, his aspect changed and it seemed to Lapenotiere that he was old Neptune rising from the waters, scared by

their bright surfaces, by the dazzling skies, and the approaching ships of men.

"Yes? Yes? Yes? What's this? What's this? What's this?" said King George.

The Queen murmured: "Dispatches from Admiral Collingwood."

"Why not from Lord Nelson? Why not from Lord Nelson?" He halfrose, peering at his daughters, his sallow, anxious queen and his motionless, obsequious court. "Why not from Lord Nelson?"

The private secretary was silent, looking to the Queen, and it appeared to Lapenotiere that he was expected to speak. He hesitated, then knelt on one knee.

"Your majesty——"

"What? What? What? What does he say? What does he say? What does he say?"

Lapenotiere brightened. Deafness he understood. His own dear father was as deaf as a post. He spoke, pitching his voice skilfully, and was rewarded by a delighted smile.

"I can hear you," and then to his dependants: "I can hear him quite well. You see, there is no need to shout. You have only to speak up as he does. Well, and what do you bring me, eh, Lieutenant—Lieutenant—Lieutenant——?"

"I am the bearer of dispatches from Admiral Collingwood, your majesty. I brought them first to the Admiralty. Lord Barham directed me to accompany the messenger to Windsor, to you—to your majesty."

There! That was over! He would not have to say any more. But as he continued to stare, much moved, at the fresh-coloured face with its full, kind mouth, dim eyes and obstinate, receding chin, he became aware of the King's continued attention, and realized that he was expected to elaborate. Well, he could but try, though he had to give a great cough before he could get out the words.

"Your majesty, it is victory. The Combined Fleet has been utterly destroyed by your majesty's fleet. Nineteen ships are taken and one was sunk. If your majesty will be good enough to peruse the dispatches you will know how great a victory it is. It is the greatest of all victories."

He could hardly end for emotion. He was aware of the King rising to his feet and talking excitedly, and was exhilarated and rewarded by the joyous disturbance of majesty, by the babble of gothic speech.

"Is it? Is it? Do you hear what he says? He has brought home victory. Now, now, now, what shall we do for him? You, sir—what is your name?—you must be rewarded for this. You must never forget me, nor I you, because you have brought me the news, the news, the news of our victory over that parvenu——" the gutturals rolled and grated, "—Buonaparte. What is that shining upon the table? Ay! Ay! Ay! Give me that piece of plate! There will be promotion, Lieutenant Lapenotiere, yes, yes, yes, but this cadeau you must have from me now, to keep on your sideboard when you marry, and for your children to keep. Yes, keep it always, because it was here upon my table when you brought me the news!" and he caught up a silver sugar-caster and thrust it upon Lapenotiere, as impulsive as a gift-giving child.

Quickly Lapenotiere glanced at Sir Herbert, who nodded a 'Take it!' Thus instructed he began to murmur acknowledgements, which the King, beaming, swept aside.

"Do not get up! Stay! I will come near to you. If I do not look down, downwards upon people I cannot see them. Going blind—blind—blind! Very sad, eh? Like Milton, eh? Yes, now I see your face better. Well—tell me the story of the battle!"

The Queen's voice interposed: "If your majesty would read the dispatches or have them read aloud——"

"Yes, yes, yes! Dispatches from Nelson! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! Read the dispatches from Nelson!"

Said the Colonel in his ear: "Tell him! It is the moment. But speak softly at first!"

Lapenotiere whispered: "Sir—Lord Nelson is dead."

"Say it again!"

He lifted his voice: "Lord Nelson was wounded early in the engagement——."

"Say it!"

"Lord Nelson was killed, your majesty; but not at once.

He did not die till he was assured of victory."

"Say it!"

"He died at sunset."

"Lord Nelson? Lord Nelson? Lord Nelson?"

"Yes, your majesty, Lord Nelson."

The King, whose hand had been familiarly upon Lapenotiere's shoulder, withdrew it slowly, and the distance widened between him and the kneeling man as it widens between a ship and a quay-side when the warps have been cast off. He receded from his subject's gaze a step or two only in space, but to an infinite and unbridgeable distance as regards the relation between these human beings.

"Lord Nelson is dead?" said the King with wonder.

"Lord Nelson is dead," said the King accepting the statement. "Nelson is dead!" cried the King in anguish, turning his paled eyes from face to face. No-one spoke: no-one dared to speak.

Lapenotiere was suddenly aware of the ticking of innumerable clocks, busily out of time with each other. He began counting the seconds, then the minutes. These lengthened into five before, by act of his will, he lifted his chin and stared at the King, who had sunk into his chair. At that moment he saw, or so he thought, true majesty, denatured, broken, but the majesty of England still, with the slow tears of old age easing down the ruddy cheeks.

The silence continued and became unbearable. Very stiff, Lapenotiere rose at last quietly to his feet. Nobody saw or appeared to see the movement save the Queen, who suddenly, resolutely, held out her hand.

"The dispatches! Give them to me!" She had a pretty, brittle voice without a trace of accent, and her hand also was prettily shaped and well-kept. The secretary, taking the papers from Lapenotiere, went to her, brushing the table as he passed so that the china rattled noisily. 'That is a horrible sound,' thought Lapenotiere. But no other sound broke the etiquette of silence, and the King, alone on his chair, alone as a statue in a desert, sat rigid save for the bright tears which never ceased to flow. The Queen's hand shook and her lip trembled; but she was beautifully

controlled as she opened the sealed package, ran her eye over the contents, and Began to read aloud.

" 'The ever-to-be-lamented death of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson, who, in the late conflict with the enemy, fell in the hour of victory, leaves to me the duty——' "

"Who writes?"

"Admiral Collingwood, sir."

"Come to the battle!"

The Queen's glance slid over the flowing handwriting, and her lips moved inaudibly for a moment. Then she continued, and Lapenotiere, watching her closely, saw that she shortened and simplified as she read.

" 'The Action began at twelve o'clock by the leading Ships of the columns breaking through the Enemy's line, the Commander-in-Chief about the tenth Ship from the van, the Second-in-Command about the twelfth from the rear, leaving the van of the Enemy unoccupied; the succeeding Ships breaking through in all parts, a-stern of their leaders, and engaging the Enemy at the muzzles of their guns, the conflict was severe. The Enemy's Ships were fought with a gallantry highly honourable to their Officers, but the attack on them was irresistible, and it pleased the Almighty Disposer of all events to grant His Majesty's arms a complete and glorious victory.' "

"Come to Nelson!"

"Yes, sir, here it is. 'Such a battle could not be fought without sustaining a great loss of men,' "

"Ah!"

" 'I have not only to lament, in common with the British Navy and the British Nation, in the fall of the Commander-in-Chief, the loss of a hero whose name will be immortal and his memory ever dear to his Country; but my heart is rent with the most poignant grief for the death of a friend, to whom by many years' intimacy and a perfect knowledge of the virtues of his mind, which inspired ideas superior to the common race of men, I was bound by the strongest ties of affection—a grief to which even the glorious occasion in which he fell does not bring the consolation which perhaps it ought: his Lordship received a musket-ball in his left

breast about the middle of the Action, and sent an Officer to me immediately with his last farewell, and soon after expired.' "

The Queen paused imperceptibly with a glance at Colonel Taylor, who, as imperceptibly, nodded. She continued quickly:

" 'The whole fleet were now in a very perilous situation, many dismasted, all shattered, in thirteen fathoms water, off the shoals of Trafalgar: and when I made the signal to prepare to anchor, few of the Ships had an anchor to let go, their cables being shot; but the same good Providence which aided us through such a day preserved us in the night, by the wind shifting a few points and drifting the Ships off the land, except four of the captured dismasted Ships, which are now at anchor off Trafalgar, and I hope will ride safe until those gales are over. Having thus detailed the proceedings of the Fleet on this occasion, I beg to congratulate their Lordships on a victory which, I hope, will add a ray to the glory of His Majesty's crown, and be attended with public benefit to our country. I am, etcetera, G. Collingwood.' "

The Queen put down the letter. She was breathless as from running. Her laces shook, and there was a long pause before she looked at her husband. But the measured reading had steadied him, and though there was agitation in his manner he spoke quietly and without his usual effect of wild and painful hurry.

"I would have given up the victory to save him. Yes, I would indeed. Colonel Taylor, write at once to Admiral Collingwood to express my approbation of the conduct of his gallant fleet! Let it be styled the Battle of Trafalgar! Now we will go to Chapel and return thanks to Almighty God. Colonel Taylor, write to the Prime Minister that in my opinion the body should be laid up in St Paul's. Give me your arm, Colonel Taylor!⁵⁵ Old majesty passed on, his court with him, and in the emotional confusion Lapenotiere was forgotten.

Half an hour later, as he sat once more in the chaise: "You had a long audience,"⁵⁵ said his companion, looking

inquisitively at the silver sugar-caster.

Lapenotiere nodded.

"Did the King——? He was much moved, they tell me." He looked at Lapenotiere, waited, and hummed a tune. Then he sighed and forwent his questions; for the lieutenant seemed to him to be in a dream.

He was right in his surmise. John Richards was dreaming all manner of dreams. As he twisted the caster its intricate surfaces perpetually shot off bright, sharp raylets, and these reminded him of wave-caps sparkling on a grey day when one could see no source of light, yet the waves reflected it. He shifted the caster again, and a prismatic ray shot across his dreaming like the prophetic flash of a sword. A sword! He was to have a sword of honour. So much had been whispered to him already. He would be gazetted next morning. He smiled, and with good right.

Then he sighed, because the adventure for which his whole life had been a preparation was over. He had been present at Trafalgar: he had seen Nelson lying dead: he had brought home the news of victory. What was left for him in life? A man may not twice discover America nor interrogate the Sphinx.

With the money coming his way he would buy the cottage at Roselands. He would marry his dearest, his late-won Mary Ann, and fetch home the little girls to her. She would be kind to them for his sake.

He would see another *ten* years' service, and be posted captain, that was fairly certain; but—he knew his limit—he would then subside into slippers and content, and snuff out altogether in his middle sixties; for the Lapenotieres were a furious-living but not a long-lived race. And then? The eternal oblivion of the grave.

And the purpose of it all? England was saved. Ay, but England had always been saved in the nick of time. Blake, now——! Blake had been the special hero of his boyhood. Less than a hundred and fifty years ago Blake and his errand-boys had saved England; yet who nowadays remembered the deeds of Blake? And who, in another hundred and fifty years, would remember the deeds of Nelson, let

alone the deeds of his errand-boys? 'Time like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away.' Yet O, to voyage for once on that ever-rolling stream instead of on the world's familiar waters! O for eyes to see beyond the known horizons!

Lapenotiere twisted the King's gift round and round in his hand, till all the dazzling facets began to blur, run together and conjoin into a scrying-glass, and, as he continued to stare, he perceived in the dazzle minute but lively figures, and dizzily, in tune with their movements, heard voices. Among them he thought he knew his own little daughter's childish pipe, and yet at the same time it seemed to him to be the treble piping of second childhood.

"By the next morning," quavered the voice, "an unknown hand left a packet at the Admiralty addressed to Lieutenant Lapenotiere of the *Pickle* schooner. Well, and inside was my father's stolen pocket-book, with all his papers untouched. So you see, my dear, even in those days there was honour among thieves."

A second voice took up the tale: "My aunt, Miss Ann Lapenotiere, died in nineteen hundred and ten, ninety-five. She remembered my grandfather Lapenotiere quite clearly. She left me his relics. This sword of honour was given by Lloyd's, and when I am dead it will go to the Naval Museum; for I am the last of the name, though many of Captain Lapenotiere's descendants are still alive. No, I cannot remember my grandmother; but I know they were a devoted couple. They both died in the 'thirties. Think of it! They never even saw Trafalgar Square!"

"Trafalgar Square!" A hurry of young voices swept away the old ones as spring gusts sweep away dead leaves.

"Have you ever been over the *Victory*?"

"They still call rum 'Nelson's blood'."

"The sugar caster is a Trafalgar relic. Lapenotiere's son Lionel gave it to my father."

"Did you notice that they have pasted up 'England expects——' round the plinth of the Nelson column?"

"There have been seven *Pickles* since Lapenotiere's day. The latest is a Fleet mine-sweeper. I had a batch of

delayed letters only last week from her captain."

"What does he say?"

"In the first he says: 'Hectic days—with a possibility of *Pickle* repeating her grandmother's performance.' And in the second: 'History did repeat itself. We went in first and came back first for a few hours on D-day. But I fear the wireless stole all our thunder.'"

"Still, there should be a rumble in Trafalgar Square."

The silver caster fell out of Lapenotiere's hand and was jolted on the straw. He heard himself cry aloud: "Trafalgar Square!"

"What Square?" His companion was shaking him by the arm. "We are nearly at the Admiralty. We are just passing the Mews."

"Trafalgar Square!" repeated Lapenotiere loudly.

"You are still dozing, sir. Well, you have arrears to make up."

Lapenotiere sat with his hands pressed to his eyes.

"I was not sleeping. I was in a confusion. They spoke of his lordship. I thought I saw a column set up. I thought—no—it is gone." And, resentful to the last of the other's scrutiny, he shifted in his seat and stared out of the window. "Back in London already, are we? What's the hour? Noon?"

"I hope not," said his companion anxiously. "I have a noon appointment. Could you oblige me with the time?"

"Oblige you? Yes, I could oblige you."

He ran his hand into his pocket, and drew out—domestic, familiar, serviceable, the token of immortality—Nelson's watch.

Covent Garden.

1943—1944

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FEW stories owe a heavier debt to dozens of total strangers than "He Brings Great News".

The Editor of 'The Sunday Times'⁵ very kindly printed an appeal for information concerning the Captain Lapenotiere who brought home the news of Trafalgar, and this brought me into touch with many friends and connections of the Lapenotiere family, who gave me scraps of information which, added together, provides my fiction with its warp of fact.

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impossible to find out whether Lapenotiere actually reported to the King himself. I am most grateful to Mr Caunter for allowing me to use this information, and for supplying many other details. I also owe much to the help of W. McDowall Esq., who not only drew the *Pickle* for me, but lent me his own notes and his copy of the *Pickle's* log between the 20th and 26th October, when I was not able to get access to the original.

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I have not appended a list of authorities consulted; for I have hunted through such a haystack of volumes in pursuit of my particular needle that if I gave every reference I am afraid the story, which is, after all, not fact but fiction

based on fact, would seem an unduly pompous affair. The principal authorities consulted were Nicolas, Clark and McArthur, Mahan, Clennell Wilkinson's 'Nelson', George Murray's 'Life of Collingwood', Julian S. Corbett's 'The Campaign of Trafalgar', Marshall's 'Naval Biography', 'The Trafalgar Roll' by Colonel R. H. Mackenzie, Fraser's 'The Sailors Whom Nelson Led', 'The Naval Chronicle', 'The Annual Register', 'The Gentleman's Magazine', Paterson's 'Roads', 'Astra Castra' by Hatton Turner, etc.

I have not been able to trace any portrait of Lapenotiere as a young man. There is, however, a picture of him and also a silhouette, painted many years later. Owing to war difficulties, I have not yet seen either; but the colouring has been described to me, and Miss Hannah Pritchard has lent me a reproduction of the silhouette, published in 'The Western Weekly News' on 21st October 1905. On description and outline the present jacket-portrait is based.

