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THE SEA OFFICER



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The Sea Officer

by

SHOWELL STYLES

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Author's Note to the Reader

All the chief events in this story have actually happened. All the characters have had actual existence. In attempting to bring to life men who lived and fought three lifetimes ago I have only filled in the gaps between the bare bones of history with material indicated or suggested by the facts. To the descendants of the valiant Dead I offer my apologies for crediting their ancestors with thoughts and words at which even the cleverest historian of today can only make a doubtful guess.

PROLOGUE

Outside the Great Hall with its painted ceiling the wind was rising under a night sky, the growing fury of each gust producing a multitudinous vibration from all the hundreds of candles that shone from the enormous pendant chandeliers. It was a north-easter, moaning across the dark Essex marshes and the ruffled quarter-mile of Thames to raise a louder voice in duet with the tall old man who was speaking —an apt duet, for those two voices had chimed together through sixty years of storm and sea-fight. The speaker, erect and massive in his blue coat and breastplate of glittering medals, seemed not to hear the increasing thunder of the gale; his harsh tones carried effortlessly to the furthest corners of the hall, mastering easily the noises of the wind and the politer rustlings of the big audience. But the plain and podgy man who was soon to be King of England heard it and commented thickly to the man sitting next to him :

"Sounds like a salute of cannon, Codrington. Eh?"

It was for His Royal Highness the Duke of Clarence, heir-presumptive to his brother George IV, that this dinner of the Navy Club was given. The Sailor Prince (he had served in the Navy, without distinction, for ten years) wore his uniform as Admiral of the Fleet, and in front of him the lines of other uniforms, gold-epauletted, flanked the narrowing perspectives of snowy tables twinkling with cut-glass and silver. Two hundred assembled admirals and captains gave their attention to the speaker of the evening. Admiral the

Right Honourable Edward Pellew, G.C.B., first Viscount Exmouth, might not command their affection—it had never been his gift to do so—but he claimed their respectful hearing, for no one had yet disputed his reputation as "the finest sea officer of the age". For all his seventy-two years and inclination to stoutness that aura still clung to the hard-faced, white-haired old man, lately appointed Vice-Admiral of England, who thundered platitudes at them. With left hand on hip, right shoulder advanced, handsome head flung back, he was a heroic figure still.

The younger captains especially admired that carelessly dramatic pose. To them he was a legendary hero, Pellew of the *Indefatigable*; a man who—though not a romantic idol like Nelson—had been a better seaman and a less erratic servant of Admiralty than the hero of Trafalgar. But there was one among his listeners who smiled to himself when the Admiral struck that familiar attitude. Louis de Bergeret, Contre-Amiral in the French Navy, knew Edward Pellew better than any of the British officers—his late enemies—who sat at table with him. His smile was affectionate with a hint of cynicism, and it broadened a little as Lord Exmouth approached his peroration.

"—a life, a career, as arduous as any that man can choose. Your Royal Highness, as a sea officer, will bear witness that I do not exaggerate. Nothing less than complete integrity and devotion to duty can carry a sea officer through the countless labours, perils, and temptations of his calling to reach the summit of his profession." The Admiral paused and drew breath, tautening his heroic attitude. "For my part, I make bold to ascribe my success to no other thing but my own unceasing efforts. I have never known what fortune meant. I never chose my station, never had a friend but the King's pennant. I have always gone where I was sent and done what I was ordered to do, seeking favour of

no man. Therefore to you, many of you young men, to you I say——"

He checked himself involuntarily in mid-sentence. A phenomenally violent gust of the gale had slammed against the big windows with a detonation that made nearly every man in the room turn to glance with raised brows at his neighbour. Louis de Bergeret, the cynical-affectionate smile still on his lips, continued to look at Edward Pellew, who remained motionless for a breathing-space with his right hand raised in the gesture of his peroration. The Admiral's sunken brown eyes had narrowed as though he looked far beyond the Great Hall; as though that cannon-boom of wind had echoed some salvo of an epic sea-duel of his past.

It was indeed an echo from the past that had made Lord Exmouth pause. The sudden dull explosion of the gale had mimicked exactly the sound of a gun fired more than half a century before, and in that moment he had slipped back through the years into the skin of Mr. Midshipman Pellew at the first crossroads of his sea career.

ONE

I

"Whores an' mistresses," said Captain Stott, "is two separate an' distink matters."

As though to put a period to this aphorism, the noon gun boomed across the anchorage from the Marseilles citadel, its report carried on a gust of the mistral so that it sounded startlingly loud in the main cabin of the *Alarm*. To the two young midshipmen who stood before the captain's table, one tall and broad-shouldered and the other short and slight, it seemed a signal of doom. Ned Pellew and Frank Cole both knew their captain too well to be misled by his affectation of well-bred suavity. Stott was in a mood to order a punishment out of all proportion to their silly crime; behind them the wooden-faced master-at-arms waited to execute it.

Captain Stott had been Admiral Boscawen's boatswain, and he looked it—big, brawny and red-faced, a bull in a blue coat. Boscawen had found him a good sailor and a better disciplinarian, and had brought him forward in the Service until now he commanded His Majesty's ship *Alarm*, thirty-two guns. Promotion had given him one privilege which none of his previous ranks had afforded : the privilege of talking whenever he felt inclined. And even on this solemn occasion, when he was feeling especially vindictive, he indulged himself with loquacity, for one of the qualities that had brought him up from the lower deck was the ability of controlling his temper until he was ready to release it.

"Mistresses," he continued didactically in his slow thick voice, "is proper to a cap'n's station in life. King's Reggerlations forbid him to take his wife to sea an' he don't disgrace his rank by runnin' after the Dolly Mops ashore, but there's naught to say he shan't carry his mistress aboard if he chooses. Likewise, King's Reggerlations allows him to flog or dismiss his young gennlemen at will, they bein' of no partickler account to their Lordships at the Admiralty." His little eyes glinted dangerously at the two boys in front of him. "Why do I tell you all this, says you, when you knows it a'ready? Why, so's you'll see I'm actin' accordin' to said Reggerlations, fair an' above-board. Now, then!"

With his eyes still upon them he picked up a sheet of paper from the table. Young Cole, fifteen years old, hung his head. Pellew, three years his senior, flushed darkly to a deep crimson that did not harmonise with his carroty-red hair, but he kept his chin tilted defiantly and his sullen brown eyes did not falter in their stare.

The captain held up the paper for an instant. It was a perfectly recognisable caricature of Madam, as Mrs. Bottomley, Captain Stott's mistress, was politely called. Frank Cole's malicious pencil had somewhat exaggerated the bulbousness of massive breasts and the expanse of an enormous bottom (across which, that there might be no mistake, Frank had inscribed the letters LEY), but the sketch was true enough to its subject. The captain ripped it across, crumpled it between his ham-like hands and flung it into the spitkid that occupied a corner of the cabin.

"That's what I do with producks of that kind!" he declared, his voice rising to a roar. "And, by God, it's what I'd like to do to you! Young gennlemen! Pah!" He made as if to use the spitkid for its customary purpose but thought better of it. "You, Mister Pellew! Two ships you've sailed in with me and I expected better of you than gigglin' over a

dirty drawin' with a junior midshipman! You, Mister Cole! The son of a clergyman! Insultin' your commandin' officer, by God—an' not for the first time! Oh, I'm not deaf or blind, y'know! I've heard whore an' other nasty words bandied about in the gun-room—an', by God, I'll not pass this over, beggar me if I do!"

"S-sir," stammered Frank Cole bravely. "If I was to ap-apologise to Madam——"

"To Madam!" Stott roared at him. "If she'd seen this, it'd have been the cat for both of you. It's me you've insulted, and, by God——"

He restrained himself and cleared his throat noisily. Resuming the cold and nonchalant manner he had previously affected (modelled on Boscawen's own way with offenders) he drew towards him a calf-bound book and dipped pen in ink. During the pause while he considered what he should write, the *Alarm* rolled slightly at her moorings under an errant gust and the two midshipmen swayed sideways and back again, without noticing the movement or removing their anxious gaze from Captain Stott as he began laboriously to write, reading aloud as he wrote.

"Thirteen November seventeen-hunner-an'-seventy-five—Mister Midshipman Pellew an' Mister Midshipman Cole—dismissed the ship for insultin' behaviour to commandin' officer—put ashore at Marseilles by me James Stott captain."

Midshipman Cole gasped but said nothing. Midshipman Pellew merely looked a degree more sullen. Captain Stott glared at them with a trace of disappointment in his scowl.

"Well?" he demanded. "Haven't you nothin' to say?"

"I have, sir." Pellew's harsh young voice sounded odd coming from between clenched teeth. "You rated me master's mate——"

"What of it?" Stott roared. "You're disrated now, ain't

you? Don't try to come the sea officer over me, Mister Edward Pellew! If I made you master's mate, that doesn't say I can't turn you out of my ship when an' where I please, by God!"

"I care nothing for that, sir. I ask merely that your entry in that book shall state my proper rating."

Captain Stott glared, snorted, and banged the book shut.

"You've fifteen minutes to lash up your dunnage," he snapped. "Master-at-arms! Pipe the launch's crew—and see these *young gennlemen* is set ashore an' left there."

"Aye aye, sir."

The master-at-arms opened the cabin door and stood aside. Pellew and Cole knuckled their foreheads in salute, turned about, and left the presence of Captain Stott for ever.

Half an hour later they were standing together on the wet stones of the quay with a thin, cold rain driving at them, while the launch pulled away back to the ship. The *Alarm* was invisible in the greyness and the receding boat faded swiftly like a boat's ghost on the mottled green of the harbour waters. Pellew turned his back on the sea and fastened the collar of his pea-jacket.

"I've a sovereign and a crown piece," he announced shortly.

"And I've two golden guineas, Ned," said Frank Cole, trying to sound cheerful. "Mr. Decies pushed them into my hand. He was always a good friend to me. What shall we do?"

Pellew picked up his duffel bag. "Shelter," he said. "And wine. Come on!"

Heads lowered against the piercing gusts of the mistral, they splashed across the puddled quay towards the alleys that opened between the grey warehouses of Marseilles.

II

Edward Pellew had been an orphan from the age of eight. It was possibly his upbringing in his grandmother's tiny but spotless cottage at Penzance that had made him fastidious about dirt and stink, or it may have been his five years at sea with Captain Stott, who was accustomed to order twenty lashes for any man who spilled tobacco-juice on the scrubbed planking of his decks. Whatever its origin, this daintiness made him drag his companion past the scores of *cabarets* behind the waterfront, where the smell of stale wine was lost in far less pleasant odours, to a respectable tavern in the upper town. The place had not the shine and freshness of an English inn; the coffee-room in the George at Portsmouth was a palace compared to it. But the floor was sanded, a bright fire blazed on the hearth, and the few men who sat at their wine in the long, panelled room were dressed like gentlemen.

Three years of intermittent cruising in the Mediterranean had given Pellew some small facility in the French tongue. He ordered wine from the white-aproned drawer who approached them and then flung his big athletic body into a chair at one of the small tables, where he sat staring sullenly at his fingers. Cole took a chair opposite him, his thin face anxious and his gaze fixed spaniel-like on his senior. He was wondering how Pellew would react to this blow of fate.

These two were hardly friends. In all his time at sea Edward Pellew had made no friend among the young gentlemen of the gun-room; his sulky aloofness had kept him from friendship, and his exceptional size and strength had prevented the bullying and practical joking which would otherwise have resulted from his resolute unsociability. Young Cole, a good-looking boy, had been protected

from outrage by Pellew's heavy fist and thereafter had regarded him with a hero-worship undeterred by discouragement. No youngster of eighteen, however, can be idolised without feeling some softness towards the idolater. Pellew insensibly allowed his carefully-cherished loneliness to be invaded, and Frank Cole, who was precocious in his assessment of others, discovered much about the senior midshipman of the *Alarm* that others had failed to see. For instance, Frank had found a mordant humour beneath the sullenness —hence his incautious display, for Pellew's amusement, of the caricature of Mrs. Bottomley. And he had perceived a fact of which Pellew himself was not aware. The idol was a *poseur*; he posed to himself. Some innate sense of the dramatic gripped Edward Pellew when emergency demanded action, so that he saw himself as the hero and centre of the moment even though the responsibility for action was not his own. Thus, in a gale off Ushant, he had raced aloft past a dozen experienced topmen to rescue a newly-pressed man who had fallen from the topsail footropes and was hanging by one hand. Thus, too, he had dramatically claimed the responsibility for an error in reckoning which had in reality been made by the master. Frank saw his gloomy face now and forgot his own dismay at being marooned in a foreign port.

"I say, Ned," he said impulsively, "I'm deuced sorry. I was a fool to come up and show you that rotten drawing while you had the deck watch. I might have known old Stott would come creeping in those rope-soled slippers of his—but who'd have thought he'd crack down on us like this? It was savage to cut us adrift——"

He stopped as the drawer set a tall bottle and glasses between them and accepted Pellew's crown piece with a shrug and a smile. Since the Peace of Paris a dozen years ago English sea officers were no strangers in French ports

and their money had currency. The drawer only glanced cursorily at the silver coin to see that it had not been clipped and then moved away to attend the orders of three French gentlemen who sat at the next table. Pellew poured a glass for Cole and himself and emptied his own glass before speaking.

"Captain Stott was within his rights, Mr. Cole. It wasn't your fault. He never loved me and his dislike is now visited upon us both." He threw back his head and set his jaw. "It's the end of all for me—dismissed my ship and set ashore, a penniless beggar. No fortune, no interest at the Admiralty. Not a friend in the world."

Frank perceived that he saw himself now as the tragic victim of circumstance, bereft of all save his courage. He decided to play upon that theme.

"Anyone but you would be sunk, Ned," he nodded solemnly. "You're going to show old Stott, though, ain't you? Wasn't it Lord Falmouth's being Admiral Boscawen's brother and a connection of your family that got you your first berth? You could apply to him again, when we get home."

"He won't get me another after this," returned Pellew, doggedly gloomy. "Besides, how are we to get home on three guineas?"

Frank refilled his glass. "Walk," he suggested. "We could make some money as we go—you as strong man and me as the fellow who holds your clothes and spins the yarns. Unless," he added daringly, risking the jest, "you're set on staying here and studying to be a tragical actor—Eduardo Pellorio in *Sunk To The Bottom.*"

Pellew glanced up angrily, reddening a little. He met Frank's glance. Slowly his grimness relaxed and the corners of his mouth twitched and at last he laughed outright.

"Damn you, Frank," he said without rancour. "But it's

no jest, all the same. The Frogs may be at peace with us, but they'll not be over-eager to help a couple of penniless reefers from an English ship."

"It'd be deuced good fun to tramp overland, though."

"In winter?" Pellew laughed shortly. "It's two hundred leagues if it's an inch. We'd be lucky to make Havre in two months. No—our way is to look for a ship. Deckhands on a French wine brig, if there's any sailing for England at this season." He poured himself more wine and sipped it reflectively, the dramatic pose forgotten. "They make the passage in a fortnight—and if we want to see real service the sooner we get home and apply for fresh berths the better."

"Service?" repeated Frank, pricking up his ears. "D'you mean against the rebels in America?"

"I mean just that. Didn't you hear the first lieutenant telling Mr. Decies they've elected a sort of parliament that opposes ours? That means a small army and a squadron to teach them sense, depend upon it."

"I don't know that I care about fighting the colonists," muttered Frank, frowning at his glass.

"Then you're a young fool," Pellew said shortly. "Any fighting's better than none if you want promotion and prize-money. Besides, the American colonists are a damned ungrateful set of scoundrels. They were too busy quarrelling among themselves to raise an army when the French in Canada were threatening 'em, and cried out for help from England. Didn't we send an army three thousand miles to do the trick? Didn't General Wolfe get killed saving Canada for 'em? Now the French can't bother them any more they reckon they don't need our help and needn't pay their share of the expenses. I'm ready to give 'em the lesson they need, Frank!"

"All the same, Ned, I'd rather fight the French any day."

Pellew drained his glass and nodded paternally at him.

"I shouldn't wonder but you'll get your wish," he said, his harsh tones perhaps a little louder than was wise. "We ought not to take long dishing up the colonists, but if the French don't take a chance at us when our army's on t'other side of the ocean I'll swallow my dirk. That's their game, depend upon it—jump on our backs when we aren't looking. Give 'em odds of three to one, and I'll lay a hundred to one they'll curl their moustachioes and——"

He stopped abruptly. The scrape of a chair hastily pushed back had heralded the brusque *tap-tap* of silver-buckled shoes as one of the three men from the adjacent table came to stand above him.

"Monsieur is English?" he snapped, speaking that language clearly but with a marked accent.

Pellew rose slowly to confront him. He saw a youth no older than himself, as tall but lacking his breadth, slim and taut in black satin breeches and wide-skirted coat. Powdered hair tied at the nape with a black ribbon graced a narrow head, a thin and sensitive face with two dark eyes darting fire at him. He answered gruffly.

"I am. What then?"

"This, monsieur—that I demand a retraction of the lie you have this minute uttered."

The midshipman observed that the young Frenchman's hand was clenched on the hilt of the smallsword that hung at his side. Edward Pellew was not a fool, and he had never worn or used a sword in his life.

"I spoke to my companion, monsieur," he returned peaceably. "I was not aware that you were listening to our private conversation."

The young man flushed angrily. "It was accident that I overhead. You defamed France with a lie!"

"I'm not accustomed to lie, monsieur."

The Frenchman stamped his foot like a child. "Ah, bah!"

he cried. "You said that Frenchmen jumped on their enemies' backs—that we would only fight with three against one. Those were lies. You will please to retract them."

Pellew glanced beyond him at his companions. One of them, a youngish man, handsomely dressed in dark crimson and wearing a sword, was at the shoulder of the youth in black satin; his round pock-marked face was carefully expressionless. The other, a stout elderly man in a plain brown coat, was standing in the background looking worried. At the end of the room a group of gentlemen had turned to look for the source of this altercation, and a large pale face that peered apprehensively through a doorway presumably belonged to the *tavernier*. He restrained his temper, which was beginning to smoulder.

"If I've offended you, monsieur," he said, trying to make his harsh voice placatory, "it was not by intention. As to jumping on backs, there's a proverb that all's fair in love and war. Any general, English or French, would attack, I take it, if he found his enemy at a disadvantage."

The young man's stare held contempt and a certain disappointment. He turned on his heel.

"*Nous voyons, alors,*" he said loudly to his crimson-clad supporter. "*Ce sont les Anglais qui sont les poltrons.*"

Edward Pellew's big hand fell on his shoulder and swung him round, none too gently.

"*J'ai compris, monsieur,*" he said, and swung his left fist.

The pair were too close for the blow to be damaging, but it hurled Black Satin against Crimson and brought them both to the floor in an undignified heap. The younger man was up at once, pale but smiling.

"*Canaille!*" he said quietly. "You will afford me satisfaction now, I hope?"

"Surely monsieur. When and where?"

"Now. There is a room—but you have no sword?"

"Not I."

"De Sorgues shall lend you his."

Frank, a horrified spectator, jumped up and grabbed Pellew's arm as the Frenchman turned away.

"You c-can't, Ned!" he stammered. "You've no notion of fence—you'll be run through!"

Pellew grinned at him. "Spitted by a Frog? Keep your head, Frank. You'll have to second me. Lord knows what sort of drill the Frogs have for that."

Even through his apprehension Frank noted that his idol was taking the rôle of the bluff Englishman contemptuous of foreign fol-de-rols. It was better, he told himself, than acting the dashing swordsman—but there was little chance of its saving Ned from the Frenchman's sword.

"Good God!" said Pellew. "What a shindy!"

A clatter of tongues had risen with the extraordinary swiftness peculiar to the French race. The pock-marked man whose name seemed to be De Sorgues was protesting about something or other, the stout man in brown was booming throatily, the *tavernier* had emerged from his doorway in full cry, and the rest of the customers provided a chorus to the trio. The young man Pellew had knocked down quelled the tumult with a fierce *"Taisez-vous!"* and turned a red face to his adversary.

"I apologise, monsieur, for this vulgar *tapage*," he said with dignity. "In the circumstances I must ask your name. Mine is Louis de Bergeret, and I am nephew to the Vicomte de Bergeret."

"My name's Pellew," said the tall midshipman with English heartiness. "Edward Pellew, at your service."

"I believe you are a connection of the Lord Falmouth, monsieur?"

"I'm a Cornishman, monsieur."

Louis de Bergeret appeared satisfied. "Please to follow me."

He went quickly towards the door at the end of the room, brushing aside the agitated *tavernier* as he made to intercept him. De Sorgues followed with a shrug, and Pellew and Frank Cole brought up the rear. De Bergeret led them a few yards along a dingy passage and opened a door on the right, beckoning them into a big room empty of furniture except for a heap of piled benches at one end and a small stage, piled with oddments of theatrical properties, at the other.

"A playhouse by the look of it," remarked Pellew, aside to Cole. "Your talk of tragical actors was near prophecy, Frank."

De Bergeret shut the door in the *tavernier's* face and locked it.

"Here is the room used for the diversions of the *Société de Vignerons* of Marseilles," he said indifferently. "We shall not be interrupted. *Dépêche-toi, Raoul, s'il te plaît.*"

He turned his back; the affair, according to the code, was in the hands of the seconds. De Sorgues bowed to Midshipman Cole and addressed him in courtly French. Frank, who only understood one word in ten, looked helplessly at his principal.

"I'm devilish sorry, M. de Bergeret," said Pellew, repressing a grin, "but Mr. Cole can't speak your lingo. We'd better arrange matters ourselves."

De Bergeret turned reluctantly, biting his lip with annoyance. "It is most irregular," he protested.

"I dare say, but if you want to fight you'll have to lump it." Pellew jerked a thumb at De Sorgues. "Tell your friend to lend me his bodkin and I'll do what I can."

The Frenchman shrugged irritably and spoke to De Sorgues, who seemed disposed to argue. Pellew understood

him to object that the seconds would have no weapons, a deficiency which would place the forthcoming encounter on a level with a common brawl. Espying a silvery glitter among the heaps of properties on the stage, he walked across and discovered a bundle of stage weapons, among them two imitation halberds made of broom's-tails and painted wood. He took two and presented one to Frank and one to De Sorgues, who waved it away disgustedly.

"Come on, man—rig a jury sword for once," said Pellew.

De Bergeret spat an impatient oath, forced the halberd into his friend's hand, and fairly snatched his sword from him.

"You are content, monsieur?" he snapped as he handed the weapon hilt-first to his opponent.

"In a manner of speaking, yes, monsieur."

"*En garde*, then!"

De Bergeret slid out his own sword and poised himself gracefully with blade and foot advanced. Pellew stood squarely, weighing De Sorgues' weapon in his fist. A spatter of raindrops drove against the cobwebby windows in the brief pause. Frank, who had placed himself halberd in hand to one side of the duellists in imitation of De Sorgues, sneezed loudly.

Pellew, still in his rôle of blunt no-nonsense Englishman, considered whether he should toss his sword aside, charge down De Bergeret's point, and hurl him to the boards in a wrestling fall. It would not do. The Frenchman would consider himself doubly insulted, and if news of the affair were to get about his action might be considered dishonourable. Yet, if his adversary had the least skill of fence, he must expect to be severely hurt, for of guards and parries he had no idea whatsoever. Edward Pellew was never troubled with physical cowardice, but he felt some apprehension at the thought.

"En garde!" cried De Bergeret again, impatiently.

Pellew advanced his sword until the forte clinked against the Frenchman's blade. At sight of his clumsy attitude De Bergeret's eyes widened and he looked puzzled. He beat aside Pellew's blade and feinted, his point menacing the midshipman's breast. Pellew made his decision in that moment. He swung his sword in a wide parry and then dropped his point, exposing his whole body. De Bergeret's recovery and swift riposte were automatic, but Pellew's action disconcerted him. He deflected his point at the last moment, so that it ran into Pellew's right arm above the elbow.

Frank let out an exclamation. Pellew, who had involuntarily let go of his sword, bent to pick it up but found that the fingers of his wounded arm were nerveless. He took it up in his left hand.

"I'll try the port side, monsieur, since I'm out of action on the starboard," he announced coolly.

De Bergeret was standing with his mouth open and his point dropped.

"You—you do not defend!" he stammered angrily. "Is it that you cannot use a sword?"

"You may be right. I've never tried before."

"Dieu-de-dieu! Why did you not say so?"

"I wasn't asked." Pellew waggled the sword in his left hand experimentally. "Shall we to it again?"

De Bergeret slammed his smallsword into its sheath. "I cannot fight you, monsieur," he announced loudly. *"Peste!* Would you invite death?"

Pellew looked down at the blood that trickled across his right hand and then up at the Frenchman. The shock of the wound had driven the colour from his face but there was a twinkle in his brown eyes.

"You were so devilish thirsty for my blood, monsieur," he

said, "that I saw I must give you some. I'll not deny that I relied on your chivalry not to take more than a pint or so from a defenceless adversary."

De Bergeret stared at him, between anger and amazement. Before he could speak Frank Cole seized what he conceived to be his opportunity.

"Honour is satisfied!" he squeaked at De Sorgues, stepping between the duellists and brandishing his absurd weapon. "Hey, mossoo—*honneur! Satisfait! Oui?*"

De Sorgues looked at his friend in pathetic appeal. De Bergeret suddenly burst out laughing. He advanced on Pellew with outstretched arms.

"*Embrasse-moi!*" he cried, tears of mirth in his eyes. "I am not fond of Englishmen—but you, *mon ami*, I could love!" He caught sight of the blood that dripped from Pellew's fingers and in a moment was all concern. "*Dieu-de-dieu!* I am *imbécile!* A surgeon—bandages—monsieur, assist your friend, I beg!"

The protesting Pellew was hustled to the door between De Bergeret and Frank, relinquishing his sword to De Sorgues who snatched it disgustedly and thereafter took the first opportunity of removing himself from their company. The opening of the door revealed a small crowd of excited persons headed by the *tavernier*, all instantly and deafeningly vocal. Somehow the clamour resulted in Pellew's having his wound—a clean one—washed and bandaged, and shortly afterwards he found himself sitting at a table in a private room drinking excellent wine commanded by De Bergeret. This volte-face he accepted with the imperturbability proper to a British seaman, not unmixed with relief: that deflected thrust had been a close thing.

The reconciliatory party numbered four. De Sorgues had vanished, but the man in brown joined them, his big, tanned face beaming. De Bergeret introduced him as Captain

Trillot of the trading brig *Norine*, and the captain himself volunteered the information that he had traded for many years to Looe and Fowey and other western channel ports—hence, he added, his ver' much good English. Louis de Bergeret, interrupting himself frequently to inquire whether Pellew's wound was paining him, described the duel to Trillot, ending with a strict admonition to keep the story to himself.

"If ever it were known that a De Bergeret was principal in such an affair—the seconds armed with *accessoires de théâtre*, his adversary a novice with the sword—then, *dieu-de-dieu!* I am undone, as they say in England!"

Captain Trillot swore himself to secrecy and then, turning to Pellew, demanded whether he was related to a certain Samuel Pellew whose acquaintance Trillot had made eleven years earlier as commander of the Falmouth packet.

"My father, monsieur," returned the midshipman.

Whereat the good captain slammed a fist on the table and called for another bottle. The party became convivial. Frank took it upon himself to explain their presence in Marseilles, laying stress on the absurdly excessive punishment meted out to them, and De Bergeret, as swift in sympathy as he had been to take offence, at once offered his help. Trillot was sailing for Falmouth three days hence with a cargo of wine, the produce of the Vicomte de Bergeret's vineyards. (It was clear that Louis was at the tavern on business connected with this cargo, though his aristocratic pretensions did not allow him to admit that he was his uncle's agent.) The Englishmen should sail in the *Norine*—as passengers, that was understood—and until their departure they were the guests of Louis and his widowed mother.

"Madame has a remedy that will heal that prick of a pin in twenty-four hours, *mon ami*," he promised.

And so it was arranged. The three days at the snug villa on the outskirts of Marseilles passed all too quickly, and at the end of them Pellew's injured arm was sufficiently recovered for him to return Louis's parting handgrip on the deck of the *Norine*.

"It may be, Edouard," said De Bergeret solemnly, "that we shall one day meet as formal enemies. Next year I am to join my ship as *enseigne de vaisseau*."

Pellew grinned at him. "In that case, Louis," he said, "we can settle our little difference with cannon instead of bodkins."

III

Edward Pellew made but two lifelong friends and one of them was a Frenchman. Friendship was not his *métier*. But the incidents at Marseilles in this winter of 1775 seem to mark the first interventions of another whose friendship, sought by many, is given to few and then by no conjuration of the chosen ones—the Goddess of Luck. That lady, who was to stand staunchly at his side through all Pellew's sea career, had selected Captain Stott as her first agent in his behalf.

The captain's vindictive punishment had all the appearance of ill-fortune for his victims. In fact, it was—for Pellew at least—the golden opportunity. Had he not been sent ashore at Marseilles he would have remained on the Mediterranean station and missed his chance of distinction in the campaign that was about to open; he would not have found what he most needed—a hero on whom to model his half-formed character; and he would not have met Susan Frowde.

The brig *Norine* entered Carrick Roads at first light on December 1st, passing a two-decker King's ship—H.M.S.

Isis—that was anchored there, and came to her moorings in St. Just's Pool. Edward Pellew and Frank Cole lost no time in taking a cordial farewell of Captain Trillot and getting ashore. It was the first time in nearly two years that either of them had set foot in their native land, and after the summer blaze and winter mistral of the Mediterranean lands the mild grey English morning was a delight. At the King's Tavern in Falmouth market square the two midshipmen pledged each other in English ale and separated, Frank taking the morning coach to Truro, whence he would make his way to Exeter and so to his home at Honiton, and Pellew to await the post-cart that would take him the twenty miles to Penzance. Louis de Bergeret's generosity had left Pellew with money in hand, so after seeing Frank off—a cheerfully waving figure on the swaying roof of the stage-coach—he ordered the midday ordinary at the King's and strolled about the little port savouring the English sights and smells. He was in a hopeful frame of mind. The news at the inn had been of impending war. Already, it was said, the rebel colonists were laying siege to Quebec, the key to Canada and New England, and King George's ministers were making extraordinary efforts to prepare a fleet and an army for the relief of Quebec and the putting-down of the rebellion. There were ships to be manned and experienced seamen were in demand.

Alongside the quay, whither his feet insensibly led him, a naval cutter was lying, presumably from the *Isis*. He stopped to watch her hoist sail and make away towards the outer roadstead. She had not gone two cable's lengths from the quay when there sounded behind him a clatter of hooves and a grinding of wheels on the cobbles and a hooded chaise pulled up, the rider on one of its two horses swearing as his steeds slithered on the stones. A stout gentleman with the look of a country squire sprang nimbly down and rushed to

the edge of the quay, followed by an anxious-faced youth whose new jacket, cocked hat, and shining dirk all proclaimed to Pellew's eye a midshipman joining his first ship.

"Damme, she's too far!" barked the stout gentleman, and raised his hoarse voice in a vain attempt to reach the receding cutter. "Hi! Come back here! Hi!"

The boat held on. Pellew stepped forward and hurled across the quarter-mile of water the bull's bellow he had learned at sea.

"Cutter ahoy! Officer for *Isis*!"

He had discovered the carrying-power of his naturally loud voice in the South Atlantic gales on a voyage to the Falkland Islands, and he gave it the incisive authority of a brass-lunged first lieutenant. The man in command of the cutter evidently heard and recognised the inflexion of command, for the boat luffed up and came about, foaming towards the quay again. The stout gentleman nodded briefly at Pellew and turned to intercept the cocked-hatted youth, who was advancing on Pellew to tender his thanks.

"Your baggage, Alex! Look sharp, boy! Damme, Susan, what are you about?"

Pellew glanced quickly at the chaise. The gentleman's last words had been addressed to the girl who had just descended from it and was lugging out a heavy sea-chest. He saw her flushed face as she turned smiling to give up the chest to the boy and her father (the family likeness was unmistakable) and his heart missed a beat. She was a little beauty. Dark ringlets dangled from beneath her travelling bonnet to frame a small heart-shaped face—big, grey eyes, a nose slightly tip-tilted, cherry-red mouth with a provocative dimple at one corner. It was chiefly the girl Pellew looked at as, standing back a little, he watched the three go to the quay's edge, where the cutter was already coming smartly alongside. The sea-chest was lowered into the boat

and the stout gentleman hastily but affectionately grasped the boy's hand. The girl put up her delightful mouth for him to kiss—the watcher suffered a pang of jealousy at that —and the prospective midshipman of the *Isis*, very red in the face, sprang clumsily into the cutter, which shoved off at once and sped away. The girl and her father stood waving after her as long as she remained in sight.

Pellew had started to move away, but found himself astonishingly reluctant to go from the quay while the grey-eyed beauty was still there. He had halted two-score paces away, and so was watching as the two turned to go up to the waiting chaise. The girl said something to her father, who shrugged impatiently and urged her towards the chaise. She broke away from his arm and came running towards Pellew with small gloved hands holding up her voluminous skirt. He whipped off his hat as she halted a yard or two away.

"My father, Squire Frowde, wishes to thank you, sir," she said breathlessly. "The *Isis* sails with this tide. But for you, my cousin might have missed her."

Pellew's tongue felt too big for his mouth and he could only stand like a fool looking into those big, grey eyes—grey that was surprisingly dark, surprisingly soft and friendly. That look was to give him a memory that troubled him often during the next eight years. The girl coloured faintly under his silent regard, and the dimple at the corner of her mouth deepened. Then she smiled frankly up at him, bobbed in the slightest of curtsies, and ran to catch up with her father.

Pellew stood hatless and unmoving for some moments after the chaise had wheeled and disappeared up the steep lane above the quay. Not until the chime from the church of St. Charles the Martyr reminded him of the midday meal did he recover himself sufficiently to curse his hobble-

dehoy behaviour, with an extra hearty curse for the folly that had missed the opportunity of finding out where she lived. Frowde was not a Cornish name, nor a Devon one so far as he knew. Susan Frowde—he spoke the name aloud as he made his way back to the King's Tavern, and thought it the prettiest name he had ever heard.

The meat puddings of the tavern ordinary dulled this first impact of love. But the dark grey eyes of Susan Frowde looked at him again that night, when he lay sleepless in the little room under the eaves of his grandmother's cottage, on the narrow bed that was now a foot too short for him.

IV

Old Mrs. Pellew gave her grandson a sufficiently warm welcome; but she had reached an age when even family affection grows dull, and his homecoming was a quiet one. Except for an aged servant, there was no one else at the cottage. Edward's elder brother Samuel was in London studying medicine and his younger brother Israel was at sea, a midshipman by Lord Falmouth's favour like himself. His two sisters were living with an aunt in Padstow. Had he felt any inclination to stay at home, there was no inducement here. He spent the greater part of his first day at the cottage in writing the necessary letter to Lord Falmouth, humbly desiring his patron's interest in procuring him another berth as soon as convenient, and when it was finished and dispatched he spent the ensuing days in a state of unease and impatience, unable to set his mind to any pursuit.

For Edward Pellew was a halfling, a man who was still a boy. With his nineteenth birthday still five months ahead he was a man in strength, with more than a normal man's agility, and a tried seaman; Captain Stott, who had never

liked him, had been sufficiently impressed by his proficiency in all branches of seamanship and determined progress in navigation to rate him master's mate. But he had left school at the age of thirteen to join his first ship, and in his lack of a philosophy, his need for guidance in the shaping of aims and morals, he was that same gawky youngster who had been rapt early away from Truro grammar school. He himself was unconscious of his need, but the odd habit (which Frank Cole had perceived) of acting himself into the part of hero, tragic or epic, when confronted with challenging emergency had grown upon him insensibly as a defence against this youthful uncertainty of purpose. The favour of the Goddess of Luck was never more clearly shown than when she brought him under the influence of Captain Philemon Pownall of His Majesty's frigate *Blonde*, thirty-six guns.

The letter requiring Mr. Edward Pellew to report on board the *Blonde* at Chatham did not come until early in the New Year. It took him four bitter winter days of travelling to reach Chatham from Penzance by stage-coach, and on the twelfth day of January a wherry took him out across the Medway to where the frigate lay at moorings. It was a cold morning of an abnormally cold winter, with blinding sleet flying across the grey water, but even so his first sight of the vessel he was to join warmed Pellew's heart. The *Blonde* was French-built and beautiful to his seaman's eye, though she was only half rigged and her decks were littered with the stores she was taking on board. Of her captain he knew a little by hearsay, for Captain Pownall had won considerable fame by taking the richest prize of the war with Spain—the *Hermione*, the sale of whose cargo had provided him with a fortune of £64,000; and he was known as a stern disciplinarian.

Pellew climbed on board and dodged through the groups

of brawny, fur-capped men who were hustling casks and cases down the hatches. A young officer in a tarpaulin coat approached him.

"Mr. Edward Pellew? The captain's orders were to bring you to him as soon as you reported on board."

He led the way to the main cabin aft. Pellew entered, doffing his hat and stooping beneath the low deckhead.

"Mr. Pellew, sir, just come aboard," said the officer.

"Very good, Mr. Dacres. Good morning, Mr. Pellew."

"Good morning, sir."

Pellew met the level gaze of a pair of very keen blue eyes. Captain Pownall was tall, slim and elegant, sitting very upright in his chair behind the table. He had a long, lean face, with a wide and sensitive mouth which could set itself in unrelenting sternness.

"Your last ship was the *Alarm*, I believe," he continued in level tones.

"Yes, sir."

"You left her at Marseilles?"

"Yes, sir. Captain Stott——"

"I have knowledge of the circumstances, Mr. Pellew, thank you. They are unlikely to be repeated in this vessel. You have considerable sea experience, I understand."

"Nearly five years, sir." Pellew hesitated. "I was rated master's mate in *Alarm*——"

"But disrated," interrupted the captain with a slight frown. "Please to attend, Mr. Pellew. In this vessel no man who does his duty has anything to fear. He who neglects his duty has much to fear. I endeavour to do my duty, which is to be just, and spare not the offender. Remember that, and you will find your place in my ship's company." He picked up his pen to make a note in the book that lay open before him. "Young gentlemen joining this ship are rated able seaman, and as such you will be rated, Mr. Pellew.

That is all, thank you. Mr. Dacres, you'll oblige me by showing Mr. Pellew the midshipmen's berth."

From that first interview Edward Pellew went away smouldering. Five years of sea service, and he was treated like a raw boy joining his first ship—placed on a level with that gawky youngster who had nearly missed joining the *Isis* at Falmouth! If Captain Pownall prided himself on being just, where was the justice in this? He began to see himself as an injured innocent. Pownall had given him no chance to explain that business at Marseilles, had taken a dislike to him from the first. Very well! Pownall should see that he was no lickspittle to fawn and run to win the captain's favour.

During the weeks that followed Pellew thrust this iron deeper into his soul. In the midshipmen's berth, where half a dozen youngsters all with less experience than himself shared a gloomy recess eleven feet by seven, his sullen taciturnity won him dislike. On deck, when there was work to be done, he did it unwillingly and with deliberate clumsiness. If he was the only rebel in the ship he was determined to make that plain. Even the news which ran like wildfire round the ship—that the *Blonde* was to sail for the St. Lawrence before very long, convoying the transports with the army of General Burgoyne—did not alter the part he had set himself to play, nor did the exceptionally hard weather.

It was the hardest winter for half a century, it was said. Four days after Pellew joined the *Blonde* there was ice floating down the Medway in great pieces, and a week later the river was frozen completely over, locking the frigate in a prison of ice. By the end of January they were bringing stores from the dockyard across the solid ice. At this time the *Blonde* had finished rigging and repainting, but she was as yet only half manned and her new canvas had not

come from the sailyard. She was still in this condition when the thaw came.

It came with catastrophic suddenness in the night of February 4th, a warm southerly gale rising at nightfall and setting the vast sheet of ice creaking and groaning. Captain Pownall ordered sea watches to be kept by his incomplete crew, and his forethought was justified. At first light of the morning, with the gale at its height, the ice began to break up and go down the river with the strong ebb of a spring tide behind it and the furious wind urging it on. Alongside the frigate as she tossed and strained alarmingly at her moorings the thick green floes rasped and battered as they raced past, now lifting their splintered sides clear above the rail, now bumping savagely below the gunports. The boatswain's whistle turned up all hands—a shivering and motley collection of newly-pressed landsmen with a sprinkling of experienced seamen. Captain Pownall, who had been on deck all night, consulted briefly with Mr. Dacres, the second lieutenant, and ordered precautionary measures : the stream anchor hove up and slung at the catheads, its cable laid free, the men divided into parties each headed by a capable seaman and placed in sheltered spots about the heaving deck.

Midshipman Pellew (he was styled midshipman and addressed as 'Mr.' despite his rating) viewed these precautions with grudging approval, though it appeared to him that the captain was being almost too careful. The *Blonde* was moored fore and aft, with her bows pointing upstream and into the eye of the wind; in that position she was as snug as she could be in the circumstances. But the circumstances became more uncomfortable yet. Instead of lightening with the morning the low skies grew darker. The gale, pouring through the gap in the North Downs that lies just south of Chatham and Rochester, increased in violence as the ebb-tide gathered strength. The ice from the upper

river came racing past the frigate's sides in greater fury of whirling blades and flailing green tongues, and with it now came boats and the wreckage of boats—barges that had snapped their moorings, lighters that had been trapped in the ice and now seemed to revel in their freedom. One heavy lighter came leaping down upon the massive sheer-hulk that had been used for stepping the *Blonde*'s masts and was still moored thirty fathoms away on her starboard side. Pellew saw the lighter crash into the blunt bows of the sheer-hulk and hang there for some seconds before grinding slowly round to wallow swiftly downstream with her side stove in and the grey-green water pouring into her. The hulk had a sound mooring if she could stand a strain like that, he told himself. The sullen mood of weeks was passing from him and exhilaration was taking its place, a wild exhilaration born of the racing purple clouds, the savagery of the leaping tide, the uproar of wind and water and crashing ice.

Captain Pownall came for'ard with Mr. Dacres, passing the foot of the foremast where Pellew crouched with the little group of seamen headed by Brown, the master's mate.

"The wind has backed half a point, Mr. Dacres," Pellew heard him say calmly. "I'll strike the topgallant masts, if you please."

The *Blonde*'s bows were no longer pointing straight into the gale. The fury of the wind was striking her on the port bow, jerking her repeatedly off to starboard until her tall masts groaned again. It was wisdom to send down the top-gallant masts and their rigging that caught the strongest thrust of the gale, Pellew knew—but in such a wind, with a half-trained crew, a devilish tricky business. Brown, a stocky young man with long ape-like arms, echoed Dacres' yell.

"Aloft with you, my boys! Follow!"

As he leapt into the weather shrouds Pellew was beside

him. No topman in the *Alarm* had been able to beat him in a race to the foretop, and he passed Brown before the master's mate was half-way to the topgallant yard. Men were already swarming in the upper rigging of the main-mast. Dacres himself, with two men, ran up to the mizen-top to cast off the main topgallant stays. Pellew, struggling with cordage that slackened and whipped taut again as the foremast jerked, saw the tossing ice and spume of the river directly beneath him and very far below. The wind was tremendous up here, with gusts of increased velocity every half-minute or so. The frigate tugged and strained and the masts seemed to be trying to flick the toiling men from them.

They had the fore-topgallant mast in slings now. Brown was bellowing till his voice cracked, trying to stir into action two untrained men who should have taken over the falls. The men were clinging to the shrouds with closed eyes, sick and dizzy. A voice like the rasp of steel on steel cut through the clamorous air and the men, like mechanical figures wound up and released, stirred instantly into action. Pellew saw that it was Captain Pownall who had shouted. The captain was poised well out on the main topsail yard, hatless, his long hair streaming in the wind. There was a smile on his lean face and even at that distance the midshipman could see the flash of his blue eyes. In that moment Pellew knew that this man was the man he would like to be. And in that moment came catastrophe.

A gust of extra violence struck the frigate. She strained fiercely away to starboard. Her bow mooring cable lifted clear above the tossing waters, straight as a bar, and then snapped with a report that could be heard above the tumult of the gale. At once her bows swung away across the race of the tide, the wind pushing her hull to starboard, and she was borne against the bows of the moored sheer-hulk.

Pellew was almost shaken from his perch astride the yard by the impact. He heard a thin high shriek as one of the landsmen flew outward like a stone from a catapult, the black dot of his falling body lost instantly as it struck the foaming waters. He had expected the hulk to break from her moorings under that shock of collision, but she held fast, and the *Blonde*, with her bows wedged against the hulk and her stern moored, lay broadside-on to the angry thrust of wind and water. She began to heel.

To cast off the stern mooring would save her—but adrift without sails she would race to doom. Pellew saw that in a flash, and saw too the only hope for the frigate. Characteristically, it did not occur to him that anyone else would see these things or act upon them. He flung himself down the shrouds, passing Brown (who yelled something inaudible at him) and launched himself at the forestay, locking arms and legs about the rope for the swift slide down it. He had performed the feat often enough in the *Alarm*, and now he flew down with a speed that left his flesh seared where the friction had scorched it through his clothing. There were hand-axes in the rack beneath the rail. He grabbed one as soon as his feet touched the tilting deck and in an instant was overside where the hulk bored its heaving nose against the frigate's bows. From the corner of his eye he saw Captain Pownall at the rail above him, and spared a second's thought to hope that the captain would let go the stream anchor in time to supplement the single mooring left to his ship. Then he was striking with his axe at the thick cable where it passed from the hulk's bitts.

It took a dozen blows to sever the cable. The moment it parted the hulk flew astern, and at the same moment the bows of the *Blonde* came leaping and grinding across, sliding rapidly clear. Pellew was too late to jump for the rail. He ran across the jolting, slippery deck of the hulk and leaped

for the martingalestay below the bowsprit. Icy water broke from a wave-top and drenched him as he clawed his way inboard, hanging from arms and legs back-downwards above the surging flood. He clambered, gasping, over the round of the bowsprit and on to the *Blonde*'s deck.

"Capstan aft, Mr. Pellew!" Mr. Dacres yelled at him.

He stumbled aft to join the men who were at the after-capstan bars, veering the cable of the stream anchor which had been let go the moment before.

Two hours later, when the *Blonde* was riding snugly stern-first to the rapidly moderating gale, Mr. Midshipman Pellew was sent for to report to the captain's cabin. He found Captain Pownall sitting in his chair reading; the title of his book, as Pellew noted before he put it down, was *The Natural History of Religion*, by someone named Hume. He looked thoughtfully at Pellew and spoke as if they were already in the middle of a conversation.

"But suppose, Mr. Pellew, that I had not been able to let go the stream anchor before the strain came upon her after mooring. With that way upon her, might she not have parted her cable?"

With something of a shock, Pellew realised that in using his own initiative and acting without orders he had been as apt to endanger the frigate as to save her. He flushed and found nothing to say. The captain kept those steady blue eyes of his on the midshipman and spoke again, reflectively and on the same conversational note.

"You are reported to me as slow, clumsy, no seaman, sullen to the point of insolence. My own observation has not led me to quarrel with these reports. Today you have shown yourself quick, deft, seamanlike. Pray, Mr. Pellew, can you explain yourself?"

Again Pellew could make no answer. He was afraid, now, of making a fool of himself before this man whose good

opinion he had suddenly come to desire above all things. Captain Pownall leaned forward across the table.

"Mr. Pellew," he said quietly, "I will take the risk of offending you, together with the small chance of helping you. I fancy you have not read the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus? He was a pagan author, but not to be despised as a guide to the behaviour of a man and a Christian. He has this advice to young men—'Set before yourself the highest character you can conceive of, the man you would wish to be, and thereafter act always, in every circumstance, as that one character would act.' I commend that advice to you." He smiled, and the smile lit his stern face almost to beauty. "In some ways, I think, it will be easier to follow than your present mode of allowing your feelings to dictate the part you shall assume."

Pellew was puzzled, but since that moment of recognition at the foremast-head he would accept anything that Philemon Pownall commended. "Thank you, sir," he said.

"I shall not force Epictetus down your throat," the captain went on, "but I have him among my books. When we are at sea and my library is unpacked, you are free to borrow what you will. It is in my mind," he added, "that with the addition of a little reading in philosophy you may have the qualities of a master's mate. That is all."

The *Blonde* sailed into Portsmouth Harbour on February 18th, saluting the vice-admiral's flag with thirteen guns. By the beginning of April the fleet of transports with the Army of America, mostly Brunswick troops, was ready, and transports and warships sailed for Quebec on April 5th. The *Blonde* carried on board Generals Burgoyne and Phillips, with several other army officers. Four days out from St. Helen's, Midshipman Pellew, to his great satisfaction, was rated master's mate.

TWO

I

Mr. Midshipman Pellew sat on a crag above the Richelieu river and mopped his brow with a ragged kerchief. Beside him squatted a Mohawk Indian, naked save for a girdle of leather, his thin body daubed with soot and his face painted with vermilion. In spite of the distance they had travelled and the heat of the July noon there were no streaks of sweat on the soot-plastered body. Pellew, in trousers and shirt and unbuttoned blue coat, envied his guide.

Thirty feet below them the wide river flashed between curving walls of forest, foaming northward on its way to Chambly and the St. Lawrence. Those green walls were the edges of hundreds of miles of virgin forest, undulating on either hand to faraway mountains, trackless except for the Indian trails and haunted by savages of many tribes—Algonquins, Micmacs, Abenakis, Cayugas, Onondagas and others whose outlandish names had become familiar to Midshipman Pellew during the past weeks. As he sat there with the hot rock beneath him and the hot air throbbing round him Pellew was conscious of an intense longing for the empty horizons of the sea. Here in this lush wilderness of woods and rocky rivers he felt stifled, hemmed in, out of his element. Chambly, where lay the *Blonde* and Captain Pownall, was less than ten miles away, but beyond Chambly there was a hundred miles of river to Quebec and then another two hundred miles down the St. Lawrence before

the open waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence could be gained. The sea seemed hopelessly far off from the sweltering crag in the forests of the Richelieu, and the narrow reaches of Lake Champlain were a very poor substitute for it, though it was upon these reaches that he expected to sail before autumn. It was a devilish odd campaign, reflected young Mr. Pellew, that set a budding sea-officer tramping the American forests with a painted savage. He wriggled impatiently on his baking seat and at last hoisted himself to his feet.

"We go on, yes?" he said to the Mohawk; these savages seemed to understand you, though they spoke very little English themselves.

The Indian turned his head slowly to look up at him. The narrow, black eyes, the flattened and shaven skull with its black scalp-lock lying in a streak across it, gave him the look of a humanised snake. He made a series of gestures, deliberately and with a sort of tolerant patience; hands extended, then one hand to his ear, a finger pointed to the rocky bank of the river below, finally folding his arms and returning his expressionless gaze to the river.

"You can hear 'em coming?" Pellew demanded incredulously.

The Mohawk bent his head. Pellew strained his hearing above the chatter and fuss of the river. There was the hum of insects near at hand, the scolding of a squirrel somewhere in the trees behind him, the faraway tuneful note of a bobolink—nothing else. It was difficult for Edward Pellew to believe that any man could hear something he could not hear himself, but he decided to allow a further ten minutes' wait on the chance that the Indian spoke the truth. He sat down again on the unshaded rock, avoiding the green coolth of the trees a few yards away partly because he would not yield to a savage in endurance of discomfort and partly

because the rock commanded a view of the way by which the party from the *Isis* must come, if they were coming at all.

It was Captain Charles Douglas of the *Isis*, acting commodore of the squadron that had convoyed the army to Quebec, who was indirectly responsible for Mr. Pellew's present situation. Captain Douglas had scoured his half-dozen ships for officers with some knowledge of shipbuilding and carpentry, and Lieutenant Dacres of the *Blonde* was among those chosen. Dacres had named Brown and Pellew, master's mates of the *Blonde*, as his assistants; and the three had journeyed up the unnavigable River Richelieu with fifty seamen to the settlement of St. John's on the northern end of Lake Champlain, where a makeshift dockyard had been constructed. For Captain Douglas proposed to build a fleet of His Majesty's warships to gain the mastery of that vital hundred-and-twenty miles of navigable lake.

Pellew considered that epic plan admiringly as he sweltered on his hard, grey seat. To build a squadron, he knew, was essential; and it looked like being a race against time. The siege of Quebec—it had been rather a static blockade than a siege—had been raised by the arrival of General Burgoyne's army in May. Burgoyne had lost no time in pursuing the retreating rebels southward towards their fortified base of Ticonderoga and there had been a victorious skirmish with them in which the rebel General William Thompson and three hundred men had been captured. But there the advance of the King's forces ended. Ticonderoga was at the southern end of ninety-mile-long Lake Champlain, on the narrows between that lake and the smaller Lake George, and the whole one hundred and twenty miles of this inland waterway was controlled by an enemy fleet. Benedict Arnold, that most enterprising of rebel commanders, had seized control of the lakes at the

beginning of the war, and now had three schooners and twelve gunboats, all heavily armed, to resist any attempt at transporting an army from St. John's at the northern end to lay siege to Ticonderoga. And that transportation had somehow to be effected. Burgoyne's men by tremendous efforts had dragged their guns and stores overland to avoid the twelve miles of rapids that made the Richelieu unnavigable, but they could not drag them one hundred and twenty miles and more through the trackless tangle of rock and forest that flanked the two lakes. Arnold had been a seaman in his time and his little fleet had to be taken seriously; it must be destroyed before the army could advance. And since warships could not be taken overland, the timbers for them must be carried up the Richelieu and the warships built and launched at St. John's.

Captain Douglas had set about this task with enormous enthusiasm and capability. Pellew saw again his lean red face and eager glance as he outlined his plans to his little staff of shipbuilders. There were to be three large warships built: a ship of one hundred and eighty tons (bought in Quebec, where she had already commenced building) to be armed with eighteen twelve-pounders, and two schooners carrying six-pounders. There was also to be a big raft armed with twenty-four pounders, and twenty smaller gunboats which would carry single guns. Four hundred 'battoes', flat-bottomed boats for transporting the troops, would be brought up the Richelieu later, being hauled overland past those twelve miles of rapids as the timbers and keels of the new ships would be. It was a prodigious task. And all the donkey-work of haulage would have to be done by British seamen, for Burgoyne's six thousand men were now encamped at St. John's, covering the dockyard work with their numbers and cannon against any raid by Arnold's squadron.

They could do it, thought Pellew, forgetting his heat and impatience in the consideration of events to come. The ships could be built and superior force and seamanship must inevitably drive Arnold from the lakes. The army could be transported and the rebels in Ticonderoga must inevitably be killed or captured. His idol, Captain Pownall, who had become very friendly with the amiable and cultured 'Gentleman Johnny' Burgoyne on the voyage, had devoted an hour to explaining to his midshipmen the strategy of the campaign in which they were engaged, and it seemed incapable of failure. Lord Howe's army would march northward up the line of the Hudson river from New York, and when the junction with Burgoyne's northern army had been effected New England would be completely surrounded and the rebellion would be at an end; British ships would be on the eastern seaboard, on the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the north, on the Long Island Sound in the south, while the western side from Montreal to New York would be held by the armies. The colonists, deprived of their chief food-producing provinces and with their territory cut in two, would have no alternatives but defeat or surrender. The one uncertainty in this programme was Time.

Lieutenant Schanck, the senior lieutenant and genius of the dockyard operations, had confided this doubt to Pellew, whose extraordinary energy and tirelessness had won Schanck's approval and friendship. The Canadian winter set in about the beginning of November, and no army—particularly, said Schanck, an army like Burgoyne's, with no experience of living in a frozen wilderness—could hope to survive unless it reached winter quarters in Quebec or New York. If the defeat and dispersal of the rebels had not been completed by November the campaign would have failed and the armies would have to retreat to shelter—while the rebels would have six months' grace in which to

gather and train their forces into a much more formidable army. Pellew realised with something of a shock that there was at least a possibility that the retention of the American colonies might depend on the launching-date of the ships he was helping to build.

Schanck had no doubt realised the urgency of his task, and that was why he had sent Pellew on this scouting expedition. The builders were held up by lack of futtock-timbers for the *Inflexible*, as the one hundred and eighty-ton ship was to be called. The party bringing these up the river was two days overdue, and Schanck, fearing that some mishap had befallen them, had dispatched his assistant by way of a short-cut through the forests known only to the Mohawks, to trying and locate the hauling party. They could hardly have got lost. They might have been attacked by an Indian war-party, for some of these savages were known to be in the pay of the rebels——

"*Um!*" grunted the Mohawk suddenly, stirring for the first time in ten minutes.

Pellew sat up and peered down from his perch. Below him the trail ran beside the river and he could see a hundred yards or so of it intermittently. Six weeks earlier thousands of men, with artillery and baggage, had passed up that trail, felling trees and levering up boulders to make their passage possible, and since then naval carrying-parties had used it often, but even so the wild was swallowing it up again. Great masses of tall flowers, golden-yellow and purple, covered the fallen trunks, and long veils of moss and creeper hung from the branches overhead as if to hide the half-healed scar. Between the dapple of the leaves Pellew made out the movement of advancing men, and simultaneously their voices and the noise of their progress came to his ears. He got to his feet and scrambled down to the trail, the Mohawk following less hastily.

There were fifty seamen, stripped to the waist and sweating as they lugged huge pieces of hewn timber, one piece between four men, carried on rope slings. Two men carried the provision bags and a couple of muskets. Ahead of the panting column marched, or rather staggered, a midshipman whose somewhat bulky figure seemed vaguely familiar to Pellew as he approached. The newcomer's face was ghastly—a greenish-white with two brilliant spots of scarlet on the cheeks—and he shambled along as though only the chances of balance kept him from falling on his face at every other step. Pellew did not recognise him; there had been little opportunity for fraternising with other young gentlemen of the squadron at Quebec.

"Pellew of the *Blonde,* midshipman," he announced shortly when the other was ten paces away; Schanck had hinted that some display of annoyance at the late arrival of the futtocks would not be out of place. "You've been expected at St. John's these forty-eight hours, sir."

"I'm Broughton, *Isis,*" said the midshipman, his voice coming slow and thickly from between cracked lips.

He halted, swaying on his feet. His eyes were wide and vacant, and seemed unable to focus themselves. Behind him the seamen had stopped and lowered their burdens, and one of them, a grizzled and brawny fellow, stepped forward knuckling his forehead.

"Beggin' pardon, sir," he said to Pellew, "Mr. Broughton 'ere, 'e's nigh dead on 'is feet with fever, sir. 'E can't 'ardly talk. These 'ere futtocks, sir, weren't finished only this mornin'. Them bastards of Quebec carpingters downed tools on us for more pay, an' we couldn't leave until——"

Here Mr. Broughton of the *Isis* gave a groan and collapsed in a heap. Pellew and the seamen bent over him to help him up, but he was completely helpless, limp and

muttering incomprehensibilities. Pellew straightened himself and scratched his head irritably.

" 'E *would* start, sir," said the grizzled seaman apologetically. " 'Im bein' the senior officer in charge o' party, we couldn't very well make 'im see——"

"No. You're bos'n, aren't you?"

"Yessir."

"You're in charge here. You'll make St. John's in two hours by following this trail. Do it in less than two hours and Mr. Schanck will want to know the reason why. You, there!" He pointed to the more muscular of the two men carrying the bags. "Pass your bag and musket to your mate. You'll help me carry Mr. Broughton. Axes?"

Several of the seamen had hand-axes slung from their leather belts. Pellew had two saplings cut and trimmed, nine feet long and as thick as his wrist. They got Broughton's coat off him, passed the saplings through the sleeves, and did the same with Pellew's. With the coats buttoned across they had a practicable stretcher. Broughton had to be rolled on to it; he was all but unconscious, and could hardly be got to drink the water they fetched from the river.

"We'll take him by the Indian trail," Pellew decided aloud, and made explanatory gestures to the Mohawk.

Two men carrying a stretcher could pass by that narrow trail, though the futtock carrying-party must keep to the river with their burdens. The muscular seaman took the after handles and Pellew lifted the for'ard pair.

"Give way, there!" he shouted over his shoulder.

The carrying-party shouldered the rope slings of the timbers and stumbled on. With the Mohawk leading the way, the stretcher-bearers clambered up the bank above the river, not without accident. Near the top of the short ascent the seaman stumbled and the half-conscious Broughton was pitched out and only saved from sliding down through

the thickets by Pellew's lightning grasp at his shirt. When they were getting him back on the stretcher Pellew noticed a hard bulge in the coat which supported the fever-stricken midshipman's head, and halted the operation while he drew out this uncomfortable object from an inner breast pocket. It was a leather wallet. He was stuffing it into the pocket of his breeches when something round and hard fell out of it. He picked it up : and for a full half-minute thereafter stood motionless, staring at it.

He knew, now, why Broughton's shambling figure had seemed not unfamiliar when he had first seen him on the trail. He was the youth who had so nearly failed to board the *Isis* at Falmouth seven months ago—the newly-joined midshipman to whom the girl named Susan Frowde was cousin and maybe something more. For he held in his hand a framed miniature, perfectly executed, of a smiling girl, dark-ringleted and grey-eyed, who had given him her thanks on Falmouth quay.

II

During the next two months Edward Pellew and Alexander Broughton developed the friendship which was to last their lifetime. On Pellew's side it was at first a reluctant growth. Broughton, very ill of a fever which the army surgeons at St. John's could not diagnose, lay on his back for many weeks in the log hut that served as hospital, and there his fellow-midshipman visited him when he could, more—let it be admitted—in the hope of learning something about Susan Frowde than out of sympathy for the sufferer. Himself immune to disease and fatigue, he always felt a certain contempt for those less gifted in this respect; it was one of the characteristics that was to lose him the affection that would otherwise have accompanied admiration for his remarkable powers. But as their acquaintance

grew and Mr. Pellew and Mr. Broughton became Ned and Alex their respect for each other grew also. Pellew was everything that young Broughton wished to be—strong, capable, skilled in seamanship, gifted with that mysterious 'power of command' which Alex would never possess. Broughton, the only son of a wealthy landowner, had been expensively educated and was familiar with a classical lore and literature which Pellew had only recently discovered from his privileged excursions into Captain Philemon Pownall's library. He was totally unsuited for a sea career. Constitutionally weak, loving peaceful study, he had yet struggled to fit himself for the rôle of fighting seaman; that insistence on starting with the carrying-party when he was half-dead with fever had been only one of many battles between incapable flesh and desperately resolute spirit. Pellew soon realised that the battle was vain, but he could appreciate that it was also heroic. His contempt faded in respect and affection.

Of Susan Frowde he learned much from these brief bedside colloquies. She was the daughter of Squire Frowde of Knowle, in Wiltshire, a near neighbour and relative of Broughton's father. At eighteen she was already (according to Alex) the belle of three counties and besieged by countless suitors. Alex, as he confessed when he and Pellew had reached the stage of Christian names, was head over ears in love with her, though he had not yet found courage to tell her so. Not without a pang or two, Pellew put aside certain half-formed visions that had lingered in his mind for half a year. Broughton, he foresaw, would not stay long in the navy, free as he was to live the life of a cultured gentleman of leisure when he wished. He would go home and marry Susan and he, Pellew, might perhaps meet her in years to come as his friend's wife. Jealousy was not one of his faults and these reflections made no difference to his

growing friendship with Alex, but he did not lose the disturbing memory of a girl's face lifted to his, of big grey eyes that were both laughing and kind.

The visits to Broughton's sick-bed took place whenever Pellew could spare the time from his pressing duties at the dockyard, which was not often. As August wore on into September the opportunities became less frequent still, for all hands were working like demons under the furious driving of Lieutenant Schanck to get the *Inflexible* and the two schooners launched. Of General Arnold and his enemy squadron nothing was seen, though news brought in by the Mohawks showed that he cruised more than once within twenty miles of the narrows where the British at St. John's were so busily at work. Captain Douglas came up several times from his base at Quebec to see how the work was progressing, and always emphasised the importance of keeping news of it from reaching Arnold; when the British squadron at last sailed, its strength was to come as a surprise to the rebel general. Lieutenant Schanck confided privately to Pellew (who was increasingly his chief assistant and confidant) that this was nonsense.

"A thousand to one Benedict Arnold knows as much of our progress here as Captain Douglas, Ned," he declared, his big, round face quaintly rueful. "These Mohawks that get paid for the information they bring us draw a double salary, depend upon it. They tell Arnold how we're preparing to smash him."

"Why doesn't he risk a raid, then?" Pellew wondered. "If he knows that much——"

"If he knows that much," Schanck took him up, "he knows we keep a good watch and a strong guard against a raid overland. If he tried to come by water Johnny Burgoyne's cannon on both sides of the narrows would blow him to splinters."

"I'd try it all the same if I were Arnold."

The lieutenant's little eyes twinkled at him. "No doubt," he said dryly. "You're a tactician, Ned, not a strategist. Arnold knows full well he's little chance of defeating us. He'll try, all the same—and—mark this—he knows Lake Champlain and we don't, and he's a seaman. He may have a trick up his sleeve. But if he can delay us, hold us here on the lakes until it's too late in the year for Gentleman Johnny's troops to begin operations against Ticonderoga, that's his object achieved. He'll have won this year's campaign, Ned, even though we knock his fleet to pieces."

This conversation was held in the log hut near the building stocks which was used by Schanck and Pellew for their hasty midday meal. Pellew sat frowning for a moment after the lieutenant had finished speaking. Then he crammed the last of his rye-bread and Canadian cheese into his mouth and rose to his feet.

"By your leave, sir, I'll get my lads working at clamping those knees under the deck-beams," he said, and strode out into the September sunshine.

Slowly the three vessels grew in their makeshift stocks at the water's edge, and day by day more small craft appeared at the wooden wharves of St. John's, lugged up the Richelieu by team after team of swearing, jesting seamen. Twenty gunboats and four longboats which would carry field-pieces or howitzers were being got ready for the battle of the lakes, and with twenty other longboats and the increasing number of transport 'battoes' made an impressive show. The Governor of Canada, Sir Guy Carleton (who had handed over his army command as general to Burgoyne), arrived with General Burgoyne himself to see the launching of the *Inflexible* at the end of the second week of September. They were, in fact, an hour or so too late, for the indefatigable Schanck had refused to hold up the launching a minute

after all was ready. The big wooden hull had taken the water without mishap, and as soon as she was safely at moorings Pellew and his men had set about rigging the sheerlegs for the stepping of the mainmast. When the Governor and General Burgoyne came on the scene with their scarlet-and-gold retinue the mast was already being stepped, dangling in the block at the apex of the tripod of enormous pine-trunks that had been erected on the deck of the newly-launched *Inflexible.*

"A deuced unstable-looking contrivance, that," commented Sir Guy, watching the operations with interest. "I wouldn't care to be in the place of that individual who is perched on the extreme tip directing operations. Who is he, Mr. Schanck?"

Schanck, who had donned his best white breeches and silk stockings to welcome this distinguished party, mingled enthusiasm with deference in his reply.

"That's Mr. Midshipman Pellew, Your Excellency—I would commend him to Your Excellency's notice as a young officer of great energy and ability."

"Then it's a great pity, sir," cut in General Burgoyne, between consternation and amusement, "because—there goes Mr. Midshipman Pellew!"

A tremendous splash followed on the heels of his last word. The rickety sheerlegs had collapsed. Pellew, mainmast, sheerlegs and all had vanished overside into the lake.

"Good God!" cried Schanck. "Poor Pellew's gone at last —pray excuse me, Your Excellency!"

He hastened away, and presently was seen waving frantically by the lake shore. The Governor and the General waited until it was reported that the vanished midshipman had been got out alive and then moved on to inspect the schooners *Maria* and *Carleton.* When they returned half an hour later they were in time to see the *Inflexible*'s mast

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edged cautiously into the hole in the deck and settled neatly into place from the re-erected sheerlegs.

"A damned pretty job," Burgoyne remarked to Lieutenant Schanck, who had come up to meet them again. "That fellow on top of the—how-d'ye-call-'em—sheerlegs handled it well. I see you found another smart lad for the task."

"No, sir," returned Schanck with satisfaction. "That's Mr. Midshipman Pellew again."

It was two days after this incident that Alexander Broughton was declared by the surgeons well enough to travel back to Chambly. He and Pellew took a brief farewell of each other and agreed to exchange letters. Thereafter for the space of fifteen days Pellew forgot all about his new friend, and hardly spared a thought for Susan, in the ordered turmoil of rigging the *Inflexible* and equipping her for sea—or at any rate for Lake Champlain. At the end of that time Captain Douglas wrote a report for Their Lordships at the Admiralty:

". . . I, on the 4th October, saw, with unspeakable joy, the reconstructed ship now called the *Inflexible*, and commanded by Lieutenant Schanck, her rebuilder, sail from St. John's . . ."

Lieutenant Schanck's joy was not so great, though he was delighted to be given the command of a warship carrying eighteen twelve-pounders. It was in his mind that October 4th was at least one month too late for victory.

As for Pellew, he had ceased to concern himself with the strategical importance of the date. He had been placed third in command of the schooner *Carleton*, whose twelve six-pounders were manned by seamen from the *Blonde*, with Lieutenant Dacres as captain, and Brown, master's mate, as second. There was bound to be action, and his one

desire was so to bear himself that report of his meritorious services should reach the ears of Captain Philemon Pownall.

III

The white mist-wreaths lifted slowly from the wooded shore as daylight grew. The ships anchored off the point of Grand Island emerged from their veils of vapour one by one—three small ships of war, the *Thunderer* gun-raft, a gun-carrying barge, and twenty gunboats. A hoist of signal-flags from the schooner *Maria* heralded a general bustle on board every vessel; canvas drooped from the yards, cables rumbled in the hawse-pipes, bare feet drummed on wooden decks as the braces were manned. As the sails took the faint breeze the little ships turned slowly and gathered way, heading towards the open lake. It was October 11th. The hour of Benedict Arnold and his rebel squadron had struck.

The second officer of the schooner *Carleton* turned from supervising the coiling-down of the anchor cable to survey the shores of Grand Island, now falling back into the blue haze of the autumn morning. The woods were ablaze with colour, crimson and yellow, scarlet and orange; for once, thought Midshipman Pellew, even the foolish red coats of Burgoyne's soldiers might elude an enemy glance among all that gaudiness of autumn leaves. It was a splendid sight, but he was glad when the coastline dropped back and the flotilla emerged into the wider waters beyond, where a fitful north-easter filled the sails and the schooner leaned over and began to snore through the water. It was very satisfactory to be at sea again, and a lake ninety miles long and fifteen wide provided at least a fair imitation of an ocean when you were well out upon it. It was satisfying, too, to be rated a temporary lieutenant under the command of Lieutenant Dacres, whom he liked, and to be cruising to seek

out the enemy and bring him to battle. One thing only was not particularly pleasing, and Pellew was not the only one who thought so: the appointment of Captain Pringle to command the squadron.

Pringle was Captain Douglas's choice, probably because he had a reputation for stubborn courage. He had also a reputation for stupidity (he was 'Pudding-head Pringle' to those who knew him best) and was scarcely the commander to set against an adversary so cunning as Benedict Arnold. The band of brothers who had worked together at the St. John's dockyard could not avoid feeling some resentment, and Pringle's conduct of the squadron so far had done nothing to remove it.

Brown, the acting second-in-command, came for'ard and stood beside Pellew, his long arms folded.

"I suppose Pringle thinks he's only to sail down the lake to find Arnold," he murmured, not loud enough for the seamen to hear. "Doesn't he know there are half a dozen islands, and Arnold may be hiding behind any of 'em?"

"Perhaps he knows where Arnold's fleet is," suggested Pellew.

"Not he, Mr. Pellew. Mr. Dacres confided to me before we sailed that Captain Pringle hasn't sent a single scout to find out the enemy's situation. When we anchored last night between Long Island and Grand Island Arnold might have been lurking in the channel behind Long Island for all our pudding-headed friend knew. I only hope——"

"Mr. Brown!" Lieutenant Dacre's voice interrupted him. "I'll have one reef in fore and main, if you please!"

"Aye aye, sir!"

As Brown sprang away, roaring at the hurrying hands, Pellew noted that the north-easterly wind had freshened on the quarter. Even on this course the *Carleton* sailed faster than either of her consorts, and on a wind—as they had

proved yesterday—she could give three knots to the *Maria* and leave the square-rigged *Inflexible* standing. Now she had to take in a reef in order to keep her station astern of *Maria.* Captain Pringle had chosen to sail in *Maria,* with Sir Guy Carleton as a passenger; she carried fourteen six-pounders, and was thus slightly more heavily armed than the smaller *Carleton.* Arnold's three schooners and his fleet of galleys and gondolas carrying eighteen-pounders were more than a match for the British schooners and gunboats, but the *Inflexible* was considered to give the newly-built squadron an overwhelming preponderance of force. She was foaming along majestically astern of *Carleton* now, and Pellew could admire the spread of canvas on the masts and yards he had borne the chief part in fitting. Beyond her he could see the twenty gunboats, each with its squat cannon in the bows and its rhythmic flicker of oars. With the breeze to help them the oarsmen were just managing to keep their station in the flotilla. Not so the gun-raft *Thunderer,* which was far astern with Lieutenant Longcroft's flat-bottomed 'gondola' or barge armed with seven nine-pounders. Those clumsy craft were far too slow for a cruise of this kind, as Pellew had suspected from the first. However, if Arnold should appear out of the blue-grey haze ahead and show fight, he would have no vessel capable of standing up to a broadside from the *Inflexible,* even though he was superior in total gun-power and man-power, as was reported.

Another hoist of flags fluttered from *Maria*'s improvised signal-halyards, and Dacres's shout interpreted the order.

"Mr. Pellew! Clear for action. Have the guns run out."

At Pellew's echo of the words the *Blonde*'s men hauled on the train-tackles of the twelve six-pounders, grinning and winking at each other as they handled weapons so much lighter than the twelve-pounders of their own frigate. The guns were run up until their muzzles protruded into the

square, open gunports on either beam. The rumble of their trucks on the deck-planking brought an unfamiliar thrill to Midshipman Pellew. He had heard that stirring sound many times before, but always it had been the prelude to gunnery practice or the firing of ceremonial salutes; this was the first time any ship he had served in had shown her teeth in earnest. The thrill repeated itself as he realised that he was likely to face his baptism of fire that day.

Captain Pringle must be expecting to sight Arnold's fleet at any moment, for they were thirty miles south of St. John's now and nearly a third of the way down Lake Champlain. On the port bow the coast of Grand Island was a thin blue line on the horizon and on the starboard bow the wilderness shore that rose to the foothills of the Adirondack mountains was out of sight, so that the illusion of being at sea was complete. Pellew became aware of an argument carried on in low voices among the gun's crew nearest him.

"I tell ye we're a clear hundred foot above sea-level, Barney—I heerd Mister Brown say so."

"Begob, then, 'tis why I'm feelin' dizzy this minut'."

"Pipe down, there!" Pellew snapped at them.

There was no reason why they should not talk. But there was a reason for Pellew's stopping them : he thought it was what Captain Pownall would have done.

Pellew had taken to heart Captain Pownall's advice that he should choose the character he would wish to have and act always according to that character; and the model he had chosen was Captain Pownall himself. Philemon Pownall was a disciplinarian, never withholding severity or relenting in punishment when an offence was proved. Pellew, then, would be a disciplinarian. Captain Pownall was a religious man and invariably held Sunday service on deck when at sea. Pellew was resolved to do the same if ever he had a ship of his own. Pownall did not spare himself or

stand aside when there was need for him to work with his men in emergency. His disciple—already strongly disposed to be foremost in every action—was thereby strengthened in his determination to lead men personally, to be able and ready to do everything any officer or man under him could do, and do it better. What he had not realised was the true personality behind these outward signs. Captain Pownall's reprimands, and his not infrequent floggings, were never administered for the sake of maintaining a reputation as a martinet; he was scrupulously fair and reasonable, and his men, many of them little better than animals except for their worship of courage and fair play, loved him for that even while their backs still smarted from the cat. His Sunday 'church' was no mere display for the benefit of his crew but the product of a genuine religious feeling. And though he might work side by side with the seamen when the occasion called for it—as in the winter gale in the Medway—he knew that to usurp the proper duties or dangers of any man under his command was no part of a captain's character.

Perhaps, excusably, young Mr. Pellew had just failed to grasp the whole point of his idol's behaviour. But in modelling his own upon it he had at least chosen as well as he could. In the year 1776 there was no sea officer in the British Navy who showed more promise of winning honour and renown—perhaps of becoming the greatest admiral his country had ever seen—than Philemon Pownall.

As the squadron held southward under the grey skies in search of the enemy fleet—a fleet representative of that rebellion which had been declared by Captain Douglas 'the most insolent, the most ungrateful, that ever reared an opprobrious head against an indulgent parent state'—Pellew was wishing that Captain Pownall, not Captain Pringle, had held the command. His admiration for the captain of the *Blonde* persuaded him that Benedict Arnold

would have been found and defeated by now if Pownall had been in charge of operations; at least, Pownall would not have gone sailing blindly along on a vast lake which had been held by the enemy fleet for eighteen months, as if it was the Channel and they were hunting a smuggling brig. Arnold and his men must know every creek and shoal by now, and he had heard Dacres say that the British charts of the lake were incomplete.

"Land on th' stabb'd bow, sir!"

Lieutenant Dacres had placed a man at the schooner's fore-masthead and he was hailing the deck. Pellew searched his memory of the chart hastily. This must be Valcour Island, half-way down the lake and close to the western shore. In the breast-pocket of his reefer jacket was a small but good spy-glass, a parting gift from his grandmother, and as the island grew out of the choppy water he scanned it carefully. The passage between the mainland and Valcour Island was little more than a mile wide if the entrance was anything to go by, and both island and mainland here fell to the water's edge in cliffs of considerable height, with the forest and undergrowth above them flaming red. The *Maria* held straight on without altering course; evidently Captain Pringle was not going to investigate Valcour Island, though its nature and position made it a most likely shelter for the rebel fleet.

The island slowly came abeam and began to pass astern. Another five hours' sailing with this wind, reflected Pellew, would bring them to Crown Point at the beginning of the narrows leading to Ticonderoga and Lake George. Gates, the rebel general, was reported to have nine thousand men there and Crown Point was held by him as an advance post. Arnold might have withdrawn his fleet to Crown Point, of course—but that would mean that he had abandoned the

lake to Burgoyne, and Gentleman Johnny would be able to bring up his troops from St. John's and——

"Deck there!" The look-out's yell was an excited screech. "Vessels in sight—stabb'd quarter! Two—no, three schooners and plenty small craft in the crick yonder!"

The boom of a gun followed on the heels of his shout. *Maria* was altering course and calling attention to the fact. She was going about, heading for the southern entrance to the passage between Valcour Island and the mainland. Lieutenant Dacres roared orders that sent the hands racing to man the braces. *Carleton* spun on her heel, leaned far over to port, and then righted herself and went foaming towards the island close-hauled.

"Mr. Pellew! Masthead, if you please, and see what you make of the enemy."

Pellew raced up the ratlines of the foremast and shinned up the creaking spar above like a monkey. Perched precariously with the white-flecked water racing past far below and directly underneath him, he steadied his glass on the dark gap between the cliffs of mainland and island. There they were, right enough—a large schooner and two smaller schooners, with a sloop and a dozen other craft, all apparently anchored in line. As he watched, trying to hold the blurred vision in the circle of his purview, he saw that the enemy craft were in some sort of confusion—some of them at least had been moored head-to-wind, presenting their sterns to the British squadron, and were endeavouring to reverse their positions. Before sliding down to the deck he spared a glance for the rest of the attacking fleet. *Carleton* was already overhauling *Maria*, who sailed very ill close-hauled, and *Inflexible* was lumbering slowly on the best course she could maintain, which was well away from *Carleton*'s; the raft *Thunderer* and Lieutenant Longcroft's armed barge were far away astern. Only the pulling-boats

were gaining advantage from this sudden turn into the wind, and they were cutting off the corner and heading straight for the enemy. Those gunboats would be in action before the larger warships could come up.

Dacres heard his breathless report with a grim face, and then clapped his own spy-glass to his eye to read the signal hoist that streamed from *Maria*'s halyards.

"Captain Pringle orders a general attack," he observed reflectively, lowering his glass.

"Then we've got 'em, sir!" Pellew exclaimed, taking advantage of his position as a deck officer. "They'll never beat to windward out of that narrow channel and get away."

"And maybe, Mr. Pellew, we'll never beat to windward into that narrow channel and get 'em," rejoined the lieutenant dryly. "I'd lay a hundred to one," he went on as the midshipman stood silent and somewhat crestfallen, "that Arnold took it for certain that we'd find out where he was before going after him. I'll lay the same odds there's a shoal inside the northern entrance to that passage—that's why he anchored his gunboats and vessels with their guns pointing northward. He thought we'd come straight in, run on the shoal—some of us, at any rate—and be pounded at will. Captain Pringle has confounded him by sheer stu—ahem!"

"But at least Arnold can't retreat, sir, if there's a shoal behind him. If *Inflexible* gets within range——"

"She won't," interrupted Dacres shortly. "And if this craft can do so she'll have to sail better than this. Get for'ard—and see those jibs are trimmed exactly as I order.

As Pellew ran for'ard he saw that *Carleton*'s bowsprit was pointing farther to the left of her objective than it had been a minute before. The wind had shifted a point to northward. A vessel attempting to make for the narrows where Arnold's fleet lay would have the wind dead ahead.

III

The irregular *bang-bang-bang* of cannon sounded deafeningly loud as the wind carried it to the ears of those on board the schooner, though the orange flashes under the drift of dark smoke were at least a mile away still. There in that smoke-cloud the twenty British gunboats were attacking the enemy alone, twenty guns against the seventy or eighty of the rebel squadron, while the *Carleton* tacked desperately to and fro against the head-wind that streamed with redoubled force from between the tall cliffs of the island channel. Pellew, like everyone else on board, kept glancing from the scene of battle to the mainland shore and its marks—a crimson tree on the cliff-top, a craggy little headland, an oddly-shaped rock at the water's edge. The schooner's fight against the wind was a hard one and those marks were falling astern very, very slowly. Lieutenant Dacres was striding impatiently about the deck with his head tilted back to watch the draw of the sails, altering the set every few moments to catch a slight variation of wind.

Pellew had had half an hour in which to learn the truth of Dacres's prophecy. The British squadron, unable to beat up against that inimical stream of air, was scattered now, *Inflexible* hopelessly far astern and drifting to leeward, *Maria* tacking valiantly back and forth but gaining no ground and a good half-mile astern of *Carleton*, whose better sailing qualities gave her alone a chance of getting within striking distance of the rebels.

"They're coming out!" yelled Brown suddenly. "Look at her—that's their big schooner, the *Royal Savage*!"

Out from the ragged veil of smoke a vessel was drifting towards them, her sails half set and her course uncertain.

But Brown was wrong. No other craft followed her, and the *Royal Savage*, clumsily handled, turned along the southern end of Valcour Island. Pellew guessed that she had broken from her moorings and had been blown to leeward. He saw Dacres turn his glass on *Maria* and noted that the little flagship was shaping a course to intercept the *Royal Savage*. Beyond, appearing slowly round the point, was Lieutenant Longcroft's gun-barge. They could deal with the escaping schooner between them, as Lieutenant Dacres no doubt decided, for he did not interrupt his fight to edge the *Carleton* to windward.

They were creeping up to the narrows little by little—not a doubt of it. The wreckage of a gunboat drifted past with its gun unshipped and wounded men lying asprawl on its thwarts. The acrid smell of the powder-smoke was in Pellew's nostrils now, and the uproar of cannon-fire made Dacres's orders difficult to hear. A white fountain of water rose astern of them—they were being fired on from those motionless vessels whose spars appeared now and then above the smoke, less than half a mile away. The *Carleton* came about for the fortieth time and began to speed across the front of the enemy line behind the irregular rank of British gunboats.

"Stand by to let go!" screamed Dacres above the din.

He had already given orders for a spring to be bent to the anchor-cable. Pellew summoned his party with a gesture.

"Let go anchor!"

The cable roared through the hawse-pipe. The schooner's sails came hissing down as she turned into the wind, checked at the cable's pull, and lay rocking. A moment later she was being brought round by the spring, to lie with her starboard broadside fronting the enemy. As this was being done the thunder of the guns was superseded in Pellew's ears by an eldritch shriek that grew out of the air overhead and ended

in human cries and splintering crashes. The *Carleton* lurched and shuddered. One of the six-pounders leaped in the air and fell over backwards, crushing two men to red pulp. Pellew, steeling himself to appear calm, turned to shout to Brown, who had been a few paces away.

"If this is rebel gunnery, it's devilish good——"

He checked himself with a gasp. Brown lay in the scuppers. At least—that quivering heap of bloody rags must once have been the stocky master's mate. . . .

"Mr. Pellew! *Pellew!*" He became aware that Lieutenant Dacres was yelling at him, that he was standing agape and idle. "Open fire—independent fire!"

Now that Brown was out of it he was in charge of the guns. He dashed along the line of five cannon which now formed the schooner's starboard broadside, urging each gun's crew into furious action. Powder had been brought up while the *Carleton* was approaching the enemy, and six-pounder balls were ready to hand in the neat lockers which the carpenters at St. John's had fitted so recently. The seamen from the *Blonde* proved now that Captain Pownall's rigid insistence on gun-drill day after day had not been wasted. Stripped to the waist and working like automatons, they loaded, rammed, fired, sponged, and reloaded —three shots to every one that the less disciplined gun-crews of the rebels could fire. Only when his guns were all in continuous action could Pellew spare a glance for their situation.

More by luck than judgement the *Carleton* had anchored right opposite the centre of the enemy line and within two hundred yards of the two schooners, one of whom was jetting flame and smoke from her broadside while the other tried clumsily to drag herself round so that her guns would bear. On both sides of the schooners smaller craft—row-galleys and barges—were moored in ragged line, their single

guns roaring intermittently: as far as he could see through the rolling smoke, about a third of these were out of action. This was the work of the British gunboats, who had anchored close in and were banging away with their single cannon mounted in the bows. *Carleton*'s guns were firing over their heads now, and firing too low. He raced along the deck again, dodging the whirling muscular bodies of the crews to get at the elevating screws and adjust them.

Almost at once his action bore fruit. The mainmast of the schooner that had been trying to warp herself round crashed overside and hung there by its rigging. There was a hoarse cheer from the men of the *Carleton*, followed instantly by a chorus of shrieks as a ball from the other schooner ploughed its way through a group of seamen who were engaged in dragging the wounded men from the wreckage of the overturned gun.

"Mr. Pellew!" Dacres was at his elbow, screeching to overtop the uproar. "Shorten that spring! I want all guns bearing on the other——"

A rush and a crash cut him short. The *Carleton*'s top-mast, shot clean away, dived like some giant bird of prey from overhead, felling Dacres and enveloping Pellew and the nearest gun's crew in a tangle of cordage. Pellew struggled free and yelled at Craddock, the boatswain, who came running up.

"Axes—clear the deck. See to Mr. Dacres. Three hands with me to haul on the spring."

A gap in the smoke-cloud gave him opportunity to sight along the barrel of a gun. Two fathoms shorter on the spring and she would bear on the schooner that was making such good target-practice. As they were hauling, another flight of six-pounder balls screamed close overhead but did no damage—and now all five guns were thundering at the active schooner as fast as they could be loaded and run out.

In the first minute he saw a section of the rebel schooner's rail fly into the air, and almost simultaneously a tongue of flame licked upwards from the foredeck of the other vessel.

"Sir!" Craddock pulled at his sleeve. "Mr. Dacres, he's knocked out—dunno if he's killed. Chips is tyin' up his head."

"Very well."

Only then did he realise that he was in command of the *Carleton*. And the *Carleton*, as a glance showed him, was suffering heavily. Her five guns were still firing furiously, but the men who served them were not the same as those who had formed the crews at the outset of the fight. A score of men at least lay still or moved feebly, groaning, on the deck. The wreckage of the fallen topmast had been dragged amidships, but the starboard rail was knocked to splinters in half a dozen places and missing altogether in others, and the foremast shrouds had been shot away. It was hard to think at all amid the infernal din of eighty or ninety cannon all banging away as fast as their crews could load. The fire from the enemy schooner was slackening, that was certain —the rapid and orderly fire from *Carleton*'s guns was taking effect. As for the second schooner, there was nothing to be feared from her unless they cut her adrift, for she was on fire and her men had their hands full in trying to get the flames under control. *Whump!* The deck beneath him reeled and shuddered as if *Carleton* had been struck with a giant hammer. That was an eighteen-pounder ball from one of the rebel galleys; it was time to shift target.

By the time he had assisted two sweating seamen to slacken off the spring so that his guns would bear on the galley nearest to him, Craddock was beside him to report, blood from a splinter wound coursing down his craggy face.

"Holed us amidships, sir, that last one. Maybe a foot above the water-line. Will I take a party to plug it?"

"No. Stand by here to man the spring. I can't spare men for repairs."

Pellew dashed along the line of guns again, adjusting each to a lower elevation that would send the six-pounder balls to their new target. It needed four men to work a six-pounder with the maximum speed and efficiency, and the schooner's little crew was already so depleted that he would soon have no reserve left to take the places of the gunners who were dropping dead or wounded every minute or so. Musket-balls were doing that. Two hundred yards was long range for a musket, but among Arnold's men were trappers and hunters who were the best shots in the world. They were taking toll of the gunboat crews, too.

The deafening voices of the *Carleton*'s guns broke out again, and he nearly shouted his satisfaction aloud as he saw, peering through ragged gaps in the whirling smoke, that he had gauged the range correctly; some of the shots were falling a trifle short of the galley but others were striking home. Those galleys carried two eighteen-pounders and ten smaller guns, and if he could sink one of them the storm of enemy fire would again be materially decreased. But it was long odds against the *Carleton* surviving to do much more damage. One of the two other galleys was firing slowly and with light cannon only—the gunboats had scored a hit or two there, evidently—but even so, and admitting the rebel gunnery to be less accurate than the British, the attacking force was heavily out-gunned. Arnold had at least fifty guns still in action, including the eighteen-pounders, against the five six-pounders of the British schooner and the fifteen or sixteen field-pieces and howitzers in the gunboats —four at least of the gunboats were sunk or drifting with their crews out of action, and the rest were being subjected to a hail of musketry as well as a pounding from the cannon-fire. As officer commanding the schooner he was

now in command of the whole attacking flotilla. Between them, longboats and schooner had virtually smashed Arnold's force, if the *Royal Savage* had met her fate at the hands of the rest of the squadron. Should he stay longer endeavouring to inflict still more damage, or should he give the order to retire? What would Captain Pownall do in these circumstances?

He swung round to stare out of the narrows towards the open lake, lurching as he did so with the shock of two more hits on *Carleton*'s hull. *Maria* was in sight, still beating to and fro a mile or more away; *Inflexible* was a faraway smudge on the grey water beneath the darkening afternoon sky. No help was likely to reach him. The orange glint of flames caught his eye in the windy gloom—*Royal Savage*, aground on the point of Valcour Island, was on fire. This was the end of the rebel fleet, then. Lake Champlain was cleared of rebel obstruction and the way to Ticonderoga was open for the army.

Pellew's problem was solved when he remembered that Captain Pringle's last order had been to attack. Philemon Pownall would never have retired on his own initiative while such an order was in force. He turned to face the belching smoke and flame in the narrows, his head thrown back defiantly—and his heroic attitude (for once unconsciously adopted) changed ludicrously to annoyance as his hat was whipped from his head by a musket-ball. It was a musket-ball, too, that had killed Craddock. The boatswain lay close to the shattered rail with a ragged hole where one eye had been.

Pellew gulped and roared encouragement to his gunners.

"Work, men, work! Give 'em their bellyful!"

They had put paid to the account of that galley, he saw. She was listing, evidently badly holed. As he looked she heeled slowly right over, men leaping from her into the

littered water and guns bursting from their tackles to crash through her sides. A new target—he must haul in on the spring again. He looked round him for men; there were none. The twenty men of the gun-crews, the quartermaster still at his station by the helm, were all that remained—except little Moore, the fifteen-year-old lad that Dacres had appointed signal midshipman. Here came Moore now, scuttling and dodging between the reddened bodies on the deck.

"Bear a hand here!" Pellew snapped at him. "We can get this spring in if we haul together."

"S-signal, Mr. P-Pellew," Moore stuttered at him. "From *Maria*—it's the recall."

Recall. Pellew had to adjust his thoughts to that. He ran aft for the speaking-trumpet Dacres had kept hung under the rail, but rail and trumpet had gone overside. He shouted with all the force of powerful lungs to the nearest gunboat, half a cable's length away.

"Retire! *Retire*!"

Someone in the boat heard him above the din and waved an arm. He raced for'ard, shouting as he went.

"Cease fire! Hands to braces—number one gun's crew to the capstan. Barber, cast off that spring. Jump to it!"

Carleton swung head to wind as the pull of the spring was released. Bows-on to the enemy, she was a narrower target; but it seemed as if the enemy fire redoubled as the schooner's guns fell silent. In particular, the musketry of Arnold's marksmen appeared to be concentrated on her. With the anchor a-cockbill and the jib hoisted, Pellew hurried aft to the helm. The foresail halyards were shot away, but he could hoist the mainsail as soon as she paid off under the pressure of the jib. But the schooner refused to pay off. The jib flapped furiously and she made a trifle of sternway, but still her bowsprit pointed defiantly at the

half-shattered line of enemy craft from which came a storm of lead and iron.

"Push the jib over to windward!" Pellew yelled. "Get on the bowsprit!"

One man ran to obey. He was climbing on to the rump of the bowsprit when he was hit. He pitched down over the bows into the water. Pellew dashed for'ard and sprang on to the bowsprit, his red hair streaming in the breeze, to stand there poised precariously with one long arm thrusting the tugging canvas out against the wind. A musket-ball slapped into the wood of the spar beneath him, and a fountain rose suddenly close under the schooner's bows and drenched him from head to foot as an eighteen-pounder ball narrowly missed its target. Slowly the rank of enemy vessels with their gun-flashes piercing the smoke-cloud began to revolve before his anxious gaze. The *Carleton* was paying-off at last.

Five minutes later, with her mainsail up and a bone in her teeth, she was running before the wind and out of range of Arnold's remaining guns. It was then that a white-faced man with his head bound in bloodstained rags, who had raised himself painfully from where he had been lying below the after rail, spoke quietly.

"I saw that, Mr. Pellew. It was very well done. I shall not fail to report it."

"Thank you, Mr. Dacres," said Pellew.

Unconsciously he omitted the 'sir'. Perhaps the battle had gone to his head a little. He was, after all, only nineteen; he had just fought his first sea-fight in command of a ship of war, dealt the enemy a crippling blow against odds, and brought off his vessel under heavy fire. And he knew that Captain Philemon Pownall would hear of it.

IV

On October 14th the Governor of Canada, Sir Guy Carleton, wrote his dispatch from Crown Point, where the British squadron was awaiting the arrival of General Burgoyne's redcoats in their fleet transports. It began: "The rebel fleet upon Lake Champlain has been entirely defeated." In fact, Benedict Arnold, having abandoned or burned his remaining ships, had taken to the woods and was no doubt with the rest of the rebel army in Ticonderoga by now. But Carleton's dispatch ended with these words: "The season is so far advanced that I cannot yet pretend to inform your lordship whether anything further can be done this year."

The season was far advanced indeed. On the day before this dispatch was written Captain Pownall had taken the *Blonde* down the Richelieu to the St. Lawrence, as a preliminary to escaping from the river before the first ice rendered it impassable. In a few weeks an army at Crown Point would be cut off by the overwhelming forces of Winter and unable to maintain contact with its base. Lake Champlain itself would be frozen over well before the end of November. It was eventually decided to withdraw the army into winter quarters at Chambly and Quebec, leaving a small force at St. John's, and renew the campaign in May of the following year. Benedict Arnold had won the first round. And (though he did not know it) he had won, by his delaying presence on Lake Champlain, the war for the American Colonies.

Midshipman Edward Pellew, the hero of the moment, foresaw no such disaster. He had received a letter from the naval officer commanding, Captain Charles Douglas of the *Isis*:

Isis, *Quebec, Oct. 30, 1776.*

Sir—The account I have received of your behaviour on board the Carleton Schooner, in action with the Rebels on the Lakes, gives me the warmest satisfaction, and I shall not fail to represent it in the strongest terms to the Earl of Sandwich and also to my Lord Howe, and recommend you as well deserving a Commifsion for your Gallantry; and as Lieutenant James Dacres, your late Commander, will no doubt obtain rank for his conduct when he reaches England I am desired by General Sir Guy Carleton to give you the Command of the Schooner in which you have so bravely done your duty, as a mark of his approbation.

I am, etc., etc.,
CHARLES DOUGLAS,
Capt. of H.M. Ship *Isis.*

And as if that were not glory enough, Captain Pownall had further flattering news for him.

Pellew went down the Richelieu with those of the naval detachment who were departing from St. John's, and reached Quebec on the first day of November—a journey as long as going from Penzance to Brest. The weather was now bleak and cold; there were those who said that November 10th, the date of *Blonde*'s departure for England, was dangerously late, that the St. Lawrence would begin to freeze before she got clear. Captain Pownall, when Pellew reported to him in his cabin on board the frigate, was disappointingly sparing in his praise, though he had heard from Lieutenant Dacres himself of Pellew's doings. He remarked gravely that he hoped Mr. Pellew had rendered thanks to the Almighty for his fortunate escape without a scratch, when more than half his shipmates in the *Carleton* had been killed or seriously wounded. Then he noticed his

subordinate's slightly crestfallen expression and his stern face relented.

"You did well," he went on. "You did your duty in the manner expected of an officer in His Majesty's Navy, and that is something that not all of us can do. Continue to do your duty in all circumstances, Mr. Pellew—deal honestly with yourself and with your ship and with your men—and you may rise, if God spares you, to be a great sea officer." Then he added something that Edward Pellew was never properly to comprehend. "But if you would be a truly great man, Mr. Pellew, you must somehow contrive to do your duty to God and man, as well as to the king. And that is something that very few of us indeed can do."

He lowered his keen blue eyes, which for an instant had dwelt very penetratingly on the midshipman's face, and took up a letter from among the papers on his table.

"Sir Guy Carleton has requested that you should remain in Canada. He designs you for a special command in the campaign of next spring. There is to be a naval detachment to march with the army as pioneers, and the Governor wishes Mr. Midshipman Pellew to be in charge of it." The blue eyes had a twinkle in them as they saw the flush of pleasure that greeted his words. "I would remind you, Mr. Pellew, that you will receive immediate promotion to lieutenant's rank if you sail for England with me. By undertaking this task—it will certainly be a most laborious one, and probably hazardous in the extreme—you will forfeit a year's seniority."

The midshipman's hesitation was apparent. Captain Pownall fingered his long chin and spoke as though to himself.

"Doubtless the Governor of Canada chooses those whom he conceives will best serve King George in the coming cam-

paign," he murmured. "It might be considered an officer's duty to undertake the Governor's——"

"I choose to do my duty, sir," Pellew broke in, tilting his head back. "I'll stay, by your leave."

Captain Pownall smiled that singularly beautiful smile of his and rose to his feet, extending his hand.

"Then I wish you God-speed, Mr. Pellew," he said. "In a future year, should a vacancy for an officer occur in a ship under my command, I trust you'll not decline an offer from me."

"That I won't, sir," declared Pellew fervently, grasping his hand.

So they parted—Philemon Pownall with paternal affection and a growing respect for his tall disciple, Edward Pellew with increased determination to deserve the approval of his chosen model.

But Mr. Pellew (though he was perhaps unaware of it) had not dealt entirely honestly with his captain. It was not the pursuit of Duty alone that had resolved him to stay in Canada. In his pocket was a letter from Alexander Broughton, who had gone home in the *Stag* some weeks previously. Midshipman Broughton announced his decision to leave the service when he arrived in England, and to 'lay my Heart and Fortune at the feet of You Know Whom'.

Susan Frowde still haunted Pellew's thoughts, and Broughton's letter had put an end to any vague hope he might have entertained of laying his own heart—and his lack of fortune—at that young lady's feet. That was one reason, if not the chief one, why Midshipman Pellew remained in North America to play his part in the fatal campaign of 1777, which was to end in the surrender of General Burgoyne's army to the rebels at Saratoga.

THREE

I

Man that is born of woman
Has very little time to live;
He comes up like a foretopmast-stays'l
And down like a small flying-jib.

The sailor's paraphrase of Job's words was a familiar saying from Penzance to Plymouth, and Lieutenant Edward Pellew recalled it more than once during the two years following his promotion. It appeared to him that the metaphor of stays'l and jib applied itself too often to the career of a sea officer as capable and experienced as he felt himself to be at twenty-two.

General Burgoyne, a gentleman to the last, had sent Pellew home with dispatches after the Saratoga disaster; a mark of distinction even in the circumstances of defeat. The Governor of Canada presented him with a letter of recommendation to the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, describing him as 'a young man to whose Gallantry and Merit during two severe Campaigns in this Country, I cannot do justice'. But in England, three thousand miles away from the vast lakes and forests of America, his reputation shrank to nothing and his commendations from commanders whose own reputations were somewhat tarnished carried little weight. He was promoted lieutenant—that had been decided a year ago—but he was

immediately appointed fourth officer in the *Princess Amelia* guardship, which never left the water of Spithead from one year's end to the next. This was to come down like a small flying-jib with a vengeance. He, who had commanded a schooner in action with the enemy—he, who had been a sort of commander-in-chief when he was in charge of the naval pioneers with Burgoyne's army—was now a routine drudge in a vessel that afforded not the least chance of gaining distinction. Though he pestered Lord Falmouth and the Admiralty with letters asking for exchange into a more active vessel, they had no effect; and not until France and Spain, by signing treaties of alliance with the American rebels (who now called themselves the United States of America) became the enemies of England did he find more congenial employment. This was as second lieutenant in the frigate *La Licorne*, Captain the Hon. Thomas Cadogan. His year's service in the *Licorne* gave Pellew nothing except an extension of sea experience, for a two-months' cruise in the Channel resulted only in the taking of two small prizes, and the frigate was then sent on convoy duty to Newfoundland.

Since his return from Canada he had received only one letter from Alexander Broughton (now no longer in His Majesty's service) and that had been a brief one. In it Broughton referred to letters previously addressed to Pellew at Quebec—which had presumably gone astray—and said merely that the proposed Continental tour he was to have made had been put off because of the war with France and that they were journeying through Denmark and the Germanies instead. There was no mention of Susan. Pellew was left to guess whether Mrs. Broughton was accompanying him. Somewhat to his surprise, the thought reawakened those troublesome visions of Susan Frowde which he had thought gone for ever. It was nearly four years since his only meeting with her, and then she had been under his gaze for

fifteen minutes at most; yet on the long voyage home from Newfoundland, in the night watches when the *Licorne*'s tall masts swayed in ceaseless rhythm against the wheeling stars, a lovely heart-shaped face would sometimes come between the second lieutenant's gaze and the star whose elevation he was endeavouring to compute.

Lieutenant Pellew was not happy in *La Licorne*. She was ill-found, ill-manned, and none too well commanded. Above all, she seemed fated to pursue a dull and unadventurous round of service. When she returned to Spithead in December of 1779 she was declared in urgent need of a complete refit and sent to Sheerness, where the dockyard officials seemed perfectly content to have her on their hands for the next few months. Pellew was in despair. Only his resolution to keep Captain Pownall's admonitions in mind prevented him from sinking into one of those sullen fits which had been too frequent in his youth. But that most invaluable friend of his, the Goddess of Luck, was already working for him, contriving that a particular frigate should spring foremast and bowsprit while cruising off Cape St. Vincent and arranging that her first lieutenant should fall sick of a fever. The frigate put into Plymouth for repairs at the end of March; and within a few days Lieutenant Pellew was reading a letter addressed to him from *'H.M. Frigate* Apollo, *alongside Chichester Hulk in Barn Pool'*. It offered him the post of first lieutenant in the *Apollo*, and was signed 'PHILEMON POWNALL, CAPTAIN.

II

"Deck! De-e-ck!" hailed the look-out from the mainmasthead. "Chase showing English colours!"

"Hell and damnation!" observed the first lieutenant of the *Apollo* with feeling, and stalked aft along the reeling

deck to where Captain Pownall paced up and down beside the helmsman.

"Never mind, Mr. Pellew," said the captain, with that twinkle of blue eyes which was always more conspicuous when there was some prospect of action. "Better fortune next time. Masthead, there! Can you see the squadron?"

"Naw, sir—nary sign of 'em," came the answer high-pitched like a seagull's cry.

"Take a turn with me, Mr. Pellew, if you please," said Captain Pownall.

Side by side, the two paced up and down the frigate's narrow quarterdeck, balancing with unconscious perfection on the steep slant of the planking. This exercise *à deux* with his first officer was a frequent habit of the *Apollo*'s captain, as Pellew had discovered in the two months he had served in the frigate. Sometimes Pownall would walk in silence, and then any attempt at conversation by his companion would terminate the companionship abruptly; at other times he would talk on many subjects, and at such times Pellew could marvel at the range of his knowledge and the depth of his thinking. In Philemon Pownall's company he felt himself exalted, a better man. He had never in his life been so happy as he was during those two months, though they had not been eventful.

The *Apollo*'s first cruise, off Cherbourg, had produced only one incident of note, the chase of a French frigate which eventually ran aground under the guns of the Cherbourg forts. After that she had been ordered to cruise in the North Sea, one of a squadron of four frigates of which the senior officer was the captain of the *Cleopatra*, in hope of catching one or two of the French privateers and frigates which were reported to be preying on the English collier brigs. For ten days they had scoured the sea from Ostend to the Texel, and every strange sail they had sighted and

chased had turned out to be either a neutral vessel or an English brig.

"Thy spirit, Independence, let me share," murmured Captain Pownall abstractedly. "Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye——" He broke off, with a humorous side-glance at his first lieutenant. "You don't write verse, Mr. Pellew?"

"Not I, sir, thank the Lord."

"No, it is not in your character as it was in Tobias Smollett's, who wrote the 'Ode to Independence' from which I was quoting. Poor Smollett! He was surgeon's mate in the old *Cumberland* under Admiral Vernon until his evil temper got him his discharge." Pownall shook his head as they turned at the rail. "I call him poor Smollett—and yet, Pellew, he may be remembered when I am long forgotten. He died nine years ago, but here am I repeating his words, and you've read, I know, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*. But I was thinking of the pleasures of independence, which a frigate captain has more opportunity of enjoying than other commanders. You are with me there, I fancy."

"It's pleasant to have *Cleopatra*'s signal-halyards well below the horizon, sir," said Pellew bluntly.

Pownall smiled faintly. "Precisely. We must rejoin in due course, but for the moment I shall keep on as we are. When we sight the steeple of Ostend church, Mr. Pellew, we will go about and head westerly."

"Aye aye, sir."

The captain halted at the weather-rail, setting both hands on it and staring out across the white-ridged expanse of waters, deep blue beneath a June sky across which tiny clouds like bits of carved ivory raced before a strong westerly gale. It was a perfect sea day, sea and sky alive and brilliant, the spray that flew in showers across *Apollo*'s bows dazzling the eye like a fountain of diamonds and glowing

every now and then with the broken arc of a rainbow. Philemon Pownall drew in his breath deeply.

"I thank God," he said in a low voice, "that my lot has been cast for the sea-life. On such a day as this, Pellew, we who love the sea would find the world very difficult to leave, for it's impossible for our minds to conceive a heaven more beautiful than——"

"Deck, there! Sail, fine on the port bow!"

The hail from the masthead broke in upon them and Pellew's mind flew at once to the possibility of action.

"Shall I see what I can make of her, sir?" he demanded eagerly.

"Do so, if you please."

Pellew clambered swiftly up beside the look-out and steadied his glass on the distant sail. The white speck on the eastern horizon resolved itself into two—a frigate's topsails. The speed with which the gleaming canvas rose above the sea's blue line showed that *Apollo* was fast overhauling her. He stayed a few minutes longer before racing down to report.

"She could be the privateer that was reported off Blankenburg two days ago, sir," he added. "Twenty-four guns."

"Very good, Mr. Pellew. I'll have the staysails set, if you please."

With all sail set the frigate, one of the fastest in the service, gained upon the strange vessel hand over fist. It was half past ten in the morning when she was first sighted, and by half past eleven she was hull-up from the deck.

"Steeple of Ostend church in sight, sir—sou'sou'-west and about four leagues distant," reported Pellew gravely, echoing the look-out's last shout.

"But only from the masthead, Mr. Pellew," returned Captain Pownall with equal gravity. "Moreover, I am inclined to think your twenty-four-gun privateer is a frigate of thirty-two guns at least."

The captain was right, as was proved half an hour later. They were then little more than a mile astern of the enemy and closing her fast, and Barford, the second officer, recognised her as the *Stanislaus* frigate, thirty-two. *Apollo* was to have an opponent of equal strength—if the Frenchman could be brought to action. It was plainly her captain's intention to run for Ostend, where he would be safe in the protection of a neutral port.

"Clear for action, Mr. Pellew, if you please."

Apollo's decks vibrated to the rumble of the twelve-pounders being run up to the open gunports. On the quarter-deck at the same time Captain Pownall and one of his junior midshipmen were calmly taking the noon sights with their sextants. The *Stanislaus* had her gunports open now, but she held on her course with every sail drawing; if there was to be an action it would be a running fight until she could be disabled. Slowly the space of white-flecked blue water between the two ships lessened, while at the guns the seamen waited, naked to the waist and muttering low-voiced jests. *Apollo* was approaching her quarry at an angle. Pownall was taking her across the wake of the French frigate and in a few minutes her starboard guns would bear on the enemy's stern.

"There goes her bunting," Barford muttered as *Stanislaus* hoisted her colours. "She'll die game, anyhow."

"Stand by to open fire, Mr. Barford," Pellew snapped, with one eye on the tall figure of Captain Pownall.

A short cable's-length from the Frenchman's stern, the frigate's forefoot thrust into the foam of her wake.

"Fire as your guns bear," called Pownall.

One after the other, the sixteen twelve-pounders roared out at Barford's command. The cannon-smoke cleared at once, whipped away to leeward by the strong breeze, and it could be seen that rents had appeared in the mizen sails, but

no other damage was apparent. Captain Pownall, unperturbed, spoke quietly to the man at the wheel and *Apollo* came a point nearer the wind, forging up on *Stanislaus*'s port side and on a parallel course.

"Get those staysails in, Mr. Pellew, if you please."

"Aye aye, sir."

To hold the same speed as the slower *Stanislaus*, the English vessel would have to take in some sail. Before the topmen had scrambled down from obeying the order the two frigates were almost alongside and a bare hundred yards apart, the French ship a beautiful sight as she ploughed the glittering water with the noon sun lighting her straining sails. Then her gaudy black and yellow sides and their crimson line of gunports vanished in a bellying cloud and *Apollo* leaped like a spurred horse as the hurtling balls thudded into her hull. The heel of the two ships, with *Apollo* to leeward of *Stanislaus*, meant that the Frenchman's broadside would be aimed low while Pownall's guns would fire into the other's rigging; and this was what he wanted. If he could bring down a mast she would be forced to stand and fight a close action. But it exposed his own hull to the fire of *Stanislaus*'s port broadside.

The first exchange of fire did little damage, for those balls that struck *Apollo* either merely splintered the tough heart-of-oak or holed her well above water-line. And there was no time for more, because *Apollo* had drawn ahead—she was still sailing too fast.

Captain Pownall ordered the royals got in and hands to the braces ready to spill wind from the courses if required, at the same time allowing his vessel's head to pay off. The *Stanislaus*, finding her foe slackening speed to wait for her, could only hold on with all sails drawing. In ten minutes the broadsides of both vessels were bearing and continuous action began. Almost at once the weather-side braces and

clew-garnets of the *Apollo* were shot away, and one shot of that second enemy broadside crashed into the hands manning the braces, killing one and wounding three more. The smoke from the French guns drifted across in a blinding cloud. When it had cleared the effect of the British response could be seen—the main course of the *Stanislaus* was in rags, the strips of canvas jerking and flapping in the wind.

"Mr. Pellew! I'll have the main topgallant in," Pownall shouted.

Pellew's 'aye aye, sir' was lost in the double crash of the third exchange of broadsides; the French discharge, he noted, was a second later than the British, which was satisfactory in that it showed that the *Apollo*'s gun-crews were working their guns faster than the enemy. Before leaving Plymouth Captain Pownall had received an addition to his crew of thirty-seven men described in his Log entry as 'from the Cambridge and Fanny Tenders being Old, Lame and Almost Blind'. Some of these were members of gun-crews now, and Pellew and Barford between them had given them their training. That third French broadside seemed to have done little damage, though whizzing splinters from a twelve-pounder ball that had skimmed the weather-rail testified that they were firing at maximum elevation to counteract the thirty-degree heel of their vessel.

The boatswains were hounding the laggards aloft with blows of their short thick 'starters' as the trained topmen, already up on the yards, began to take in the main topgallant sail. Pellew hurried aft to the quarterdeck to see that the work was properly performed. He was backing a step, his head tilted far back to peer up at the top of the mainmast, when his heel struck against something soft and he nearly fell over the obstruction. He turned, and his glance fell on an epaulette of gold thread. An epaulette on the

right shoulder of a gold-braided coat; the left shoulder and all the left side of the body was a crushed and crimson mass.

Philemon Pownall's face was untouched. It wore in death the same faintly-smiling abstraction it had worn when he had spoken those words three hours ago : 'On such a day as this . . . we who love the sea would find the world very difficult to leave.' It seemed, thought Pellew dully, as if he had not found it so hard to leave after all.

He stood motionless, staring down at the dead man, unheeding of the crash of the guns and the whiplash crack of a parted stay somewhere overhead. The din and danger of the running fight had only exhilarated him, but this happening turned his stomach to water and left him dazed and helpless. It was as if the solid deck had given way beneath him—as if the bottom had fallen out of his life. A blur of red, white and blue came between him and the serene face of the dead. They were covering Philemon Pownall with an old flag, dragging him away where the sight of their captain dead would not lower the spirits of his men.

"Makin' water fast, sir—four foot with the soundin'-rod a-ready."

The carpenter was reporting to him. To him. He was in command of *Apollo* now. Again the guns thundered deafeningly, and he noticed as in a dream that they were not firing in unison now.

"We're drawing ahead, sir—for'ard guns aren't bearing." It was Barford at his elbow now. Barford had his cocked hat in his hand; he dashed the other hand across his eyes as the flag with the human wreckage it concealed was dragged away leaving a wet red trail glistening in the June sunlight. Pellew came back with an effort of will to the instant demands of the moment.

"Mr. Merriman!" he snapped at the second lieutenant,

who was gaping at the spot where Pownall had fallen. "Get the topgallants off mizen and fore."

"Aye aye, sir!"

Merriman sprang away yelling orders. Pellew went to the weather-rail and stared at the French frigate. Her guns went off irregularly as he looked—they were firing wildly, for *Apollo* had drawn clear ahead and no shot came near her. *Stanislaus* was wearing a tattered look. Her fore and main topsails had been shot to rags and the foretopmast was leaning over drunkenly.

"Land dead ahead!" came from the masthead of *Apollo*.

They were fast nearing Ostend. Unless *Apollo*'s gunners could bring down a mast the Frenchman might yet escape her. The taking-in of the remaining topgallants was slowing her a little but not enough.

"Lee braces, Mr. Merriman!" he shouted. "Slacken off!"

That was better. *Stanislaus*'s bowsprit and jib were creeping up alongside again. Now they were beam-to-beam and once again the guns were in action. The whirling drift of smoke and the menace of screaming shot, the blue glitter of sea and sky and the creaming wakes spreading like troughs of spilling snow astern of the racing frigates, should have exhilarated a man like young Edward Pellew; but he could feel no excitement now, only a grim resolution to pursue the battle to the end as Captain Pownall would have done. Barford was dancing up and down behind the long line of guns, waving his hat and cheering on the hundred men who strove and sponged and rammed and fired. Pellew approved his enthusiasm but could feel none of it himself. He noted that *Stanislaus* had no longer a main course—the sail had been shot clean away. And there, at that last broadside, went her mizen course. She checked and began to fall astern; under foresail, mizen topsail and main-topgallant sail—all she had left that were drawing—she was making

less than half her normal speed. And still she held on desperately for the neutral haven of Ostend. The pale line of the land was in view from the quarterdeck now. Pellew hurried below to Captain Pownall's cabin, where the chart lay spread on the table, weighted down as he had left it. Now that the guns had ceased firing it was strangely silent here, only the familiar ship-noises of creaking timber and lopping water—which were hardly noises in his accustomed ear—breaking the quiet. He scanned the chart quickly. They were rapidly approaching shoal water, and in another half-hour, unless *Stanislaus* could be dismasted or *Apollo* gave up the chase, both frigates must run aground. He raced on deck again, interest in the problem confronting him renewing his spirits a trifle. Already they were five or six lengths ahead of the Frenchman, and he could not slow up his ship any more : without the clew-garnets and buntlines that had been shot away early in the fight his remaining sails—the main courses—could not be hauled up. There was no time for knotting and splicing now, with Ostend only a few miles away. He took the only course open to him.

"We shall cross her bows, Mr. Barford, and then go about. See that the port broadside is ready."

"Aye aye, sir." Barford hesitated. "The water's shoaling, sir, judging by the colour——"

"I know. Hands to the braces, Mr. Merriman!"

Under the steady pressure of the helm *Apollo* came as close to the wind as she would lie, heading now across the course of the oncoming *Stanislaus* at a sharp angle. Round she came again, while Merriman screeched at his men, and after a moment of hesitation leaned over on the other tack, swinging until the wind was on her quarter. Pellew, gripping the rail, gauged speeds and distances. They were racing back to cross in front of the French frigate again,

this time presenting their port beam to her. It would be a close thing.

"Fire as your guns bear!" he snapped at Barford.

They crossed half a cable's length ahead of *Stanislaus*'s thrusting bowsprit, the twelve-pounders roaring in turn as the gunlayers sighted along their barrels and found the narrow mark offered to them. Holes appeared in the straining foresail, but no shot found the mast.

"Wear ship!"

He would repeat that manœuvre again—but would he have time to do it more than once? Overside the water, which had changed its deep blue colour some time ago for a palish green, was taking on a tinge of yellow. He would risk one more broadside, his last chance of bringing down a mast. *Apollo* foamed round in a welter of sea and headed across the Frenchman's bows again. Barford was loudly offering five guineas to the gun-crew that should bring down her foremast. The guns went off in quick succession and Pellew stared hopefully at the towering mast of the vessel as they rushed across her path. Again the foresail was holed in many places, but the mast was unhit.

Unconsciously he had been holding his breath, and now he let it out in a great sigh. There was the steeple of Ostend (the sight of it reminded him sharply of Philemon Pownall) and the grey roof-tops of its houses, only a mile or two across the tossing yellow water. And it was half-ebb.

"We'll bring her to, Mr. Merriman," he said.

Apollo came round off the wind and lay tossing gently with her sails shivering while the French frigate rushed on. The guns of *Stanislaus* fired raggedly, a last and ineffective broadside, as she passed nearly half a mile away. Hardly had the smoke blown clear when she checked suddenly as though an invisible hand had grasped her stern. The *Apollo*'s men heard the loud crack of her foremast, which

fell in a tangle of cordage and canvas to pitch overside. *Stanislaus* was hard aground on an ebb-tide, and if Pellew cared to risk a similar fate he could send away his boats and board her. But even as the thought crossed his mind there came sharp and clear across the water from the town the reports of cannon-fire—three shots at exact intervals of time. This was the signal that *Stanislaus* was protected by the neutrality of the port of Ostend, and he could not disregard it. It was a victory, if an unsatisfactory one. Pellew had not taken his prize, but she was lost to France.

He dipped his colours to the stranded enemy who had won her race at the cost of freedom and turned away for home. It was no easy matter to win to the Nore. *Apollo* had been holed a dozen times between wind and water and was making water at the rate of two feet in an hour, so that all available hands had to work the pumps in watches. And there were the five dead and twenty-six wounded men to be dealt with, rigging to be spiced, shot-holes to be plugged and torn rails to be carpentered into some sort of shipshape until the dockyard could take her in hand.

It was as well that there was much for Edward Pellew to do. The work kept him from thinking too much about the dead captain who lay now beneath the faded flag on his bunk; the man whose passing had been the sharpest bereavement he had ever suffered, leaving him a disciple without a master.

II

Admiralty, 18th June, 1780.

Sir—After most sincerely condoling with you on the lofs of your much-lamented Patron and Friend Captain Philemon Pownall, whose bravery and services have done so much honour to himself and his Country, I will not delay

informing you, that I mean to give you immediate promotion, as a reward for your Gallant conduct upon this occasion as well as many others which entitle you to Consideration.

I am, etc., etc,.

SANDWICH.

This letter from the First Lord, which reached Lieutenant Pellew at Sheerness whither he had taken *Apollo* for repairs, did little to counteract his grief at the death of Philemon Pownall. The letter meant that he would be a 'Master and Commander' at the age of twenty-three, it was true, but he knew he would not be given command of *Apollo*; junior officers such as he were given small and often old or unseaworthy ships for their first command. When he learned that he was to go to the *Hazard*, a ten-gun sloop cruising on the north-east coast, the sullenness into which he was falling deepened.

Pellew was feeling very much alone in the world just now. In the navy, even at the Admiralty, he had been known as Pownall's follower. Pownall had been his 'Patron and Friend', Pownall had recognised his qualities and had wanted him as first lieutenant; in the ordinary course of events Pownall would have become an admiral and Pellew would have become his flag captain. Now he had no patron and other captains and admirals neither knew nor cared about his qualities. But there was other reason for his depression, though he did not admit it to himself. Besides the Earl of Sandwich's letter, one from Alexander Broughton was waiting for him at Sheerness. As with the last communication Pellew had received from his friend of Canadian days, this one assumed that Broughton's recent doings were well known to him. It began by reproaching Pellew for writing so infrequently, and then burst into a paean: 'The Darling of my Heart has consented at last! You may

imagine, Ned, my Joy. I really believe I am the happiest Man alive! We are to be joined in Matrimony in a month's time, and I wish, if you cannot be at the Wedding to share my happiness, that you will visit us as soon as you are able. Leek in Staffordshire is a mighty Distance from the sea, but we shall both hope . . .' and so on. Ned retained sufficient affection for Alex to feel some pleasure at his friend's raptures. The news, he told himself angrily, should not have added to his depression—it was merely confirmation of what he had long expected. But it was in a mood of sullen despair that he jolted along miry roads in stinking, swaying coaches to take over his new command at Bridlington.

Hazard was worse than he had anticipated. Ancient, cramped, slow and unseaworthy, she made a mockery of the new uniform and cabin outfit he had purchased in London. Only the fact that Vigurs, the tailor in Southampton Street, was also a Cornishman had allowed him to obtain that sorely needed new outfit, for his meagre pay as lieutenant had been insufficient and Vigurs had given him credit. In this dirty little hog of a ten-gun sloop whose only business was chasing smugglers he could have managed without gilt buttons and new white breeches. When his lieutenant, Broadbent, informed him that the Yorkshire smuggling craft were fast well-manned cutters carrying valuable cargoes to the Continent and usually armed with sixteen guns, his disgust knew no bounds. It was justified when he met his first smuggler off Flamborough Head. She was a fine big cutter wearing English colours, and instead of running away when the sloop fired a peremptory gun she waited for *Hazard* to come wallowing up within range before sending two balls through her sails and then going unconcernedly on her unlawful way, with the furious Pellew trying ineffectively to give chase.

In the six months he commanded her Pellew came to

know *Hazard* as well and as unwillingly as a man knows his besetting vices. There was no craft on the coast that could not outsail her in a fair breeze, and in a gale she was dangerously unmanageable. She was well known in those waters and most smuggling cutters simply ignored her. Week after week he gave chase to them, and time after time he scribbled furiously in his Log the words '*Left off Chace*'. In the autumn gales it needed all his skill and that of his hardened crew to keep afloat, let alone sail in pursuit of other and more seaworthy craft. The climax came on November 6th off Robin Hood's Bay, when a heavy sea from the north-east swamped the *Hazard* and he only saved himself and his ship by heaving all his guns overboard to lighten her. Forced into Bridlington Bay by hard gales and snow, he yet beat doggedly out again on November 10th—after reading the Articles of War to his crew to remind them that *Hazard* was still a warship in His Majesty's service. He was rewarded by another bout with tremendous seas which rolled *Hazard*'s maintopmast overboard, carrying two seamen with it. Pellew went overboard after them and fished them out, one after the other. The crew of the sloop swore frightful and admiring oaths in their wet and stinking quarters. They did not love this grim young man who kept them at sea in the foulest weather in the vain pursuit of his duty, but they could not but admire him. There was something superhuman about him—tireless, undrownable, unbreakable in resolution. He had all the harder British virtues to an extent they had never seen before, but showed none of the softer ones; and a hero must have human weaknesses to be loved by his fellows.

But even Edward Pellew had had enough of *Hazard*. Unarmed and dismasted, she was fit for nothing but the shipbreakers' hammers. He sailed her back to Sheerness and arrived there on January 10th, 1781.

The dockyard lieutenant who came aboard to examine *Hazard* was sympathetic. He was a stout, red-faced man with a countrified way of speech.

"By Gaaard, Muster Pellew!" said he. "She'll be condemned, never fear. And Oy'll put in my report that 'twas by a miracle o' seamanship ye got her into port at arl."

Pellew thanked him curtly and then, remembering his manners, invited him into his gloomy little cabin to take wine. The dockyard lieutenant became talkative. He came, it transpired, from Wiltshire; and Pellew's heart jumped foolishly at mere mention of the countryside where the girl who had for so long haunted his dreams, the girl who was lost to him, had once had her home.

"Wiltshire," he repeated hesitantly, feeling himself ridiculous but unable to resist a question. "You would not, I presume, be acquainted with one Squire Frowde, of Knowle in that county?"

"Would I not!" retorted the lieutenant, setting down his empty glass and smacking his lips. "Neighbour o' my father's, sir. Aald Pepper Frowde—whoy, everyone knaws him. Aye, and the laavely Susan. By'r leave, sir." He reached for the bottle and filled both glasses. "We'll drink to her—toast o' the county, toast of all admoyrers o' the fair! Miss Susan Frowde!"

Pellew took a sip of his wine and found that his lips were dry.

"But surely," he said, steadying his voice, "the Miss Frowde you speak of is now Mrs. Alexander Broughton? I heard——"

"What, marry young bookworm Broughton?" The lieutenant laughed a trifle loudly. "Hem—your pardon, sir. I knaw the Broughtons. Neighbours, again. 'Twas but a few months ago young Broughton married Fanny Something-or-other—from Staafordshire, as I understand. The laavely

Susan remains single, sir, for the taarment of arl bachelors, among whom, by Gaaard, I'd count myself were I not arlready wed to a cursed shrew who——"

But Pellew was no longer listening. He wanted to sit quietly and realise this news. He got rid of the dockyard lieutenant as soon as he could and sat for two hours in the darkness of his cabin before he reached a decision.

It was three weeks before he could put that decision into effect, for *Hazard*'s crew were not transferred to another ship, the *Magnanime*, until January 22nd. Two days later, having learned that he was not to be employed again immediately, Commander Edward Pellew left London by the Reading coach with the few guineas that remained of his back pay in his pocket. He wore the new coat and breeches which, by good fortune, he had donned only twice since taking over the command of the *Hazard*. He was glad of that. He was bound for Wiltshire.

III

"So you propose, Captain Pellew, to reside with your elder brother until such time as their Lordships appoint you to another ship?" said Mr. Frowde, eyeing his guest over a half-empty glass of port.

"That is my purpose," agreed Pellew; he seized the opportunity of getting in some more information about himself. "My parents are dead, sir, and my younger brother Israel—more fortunate than myself—is at sea. Brother Samuel is the learned man of the family. He's a surgeon, in practice at Truro."

They had supped in the big panelled dining-room of Knowle Hall, and now the candles lit a cleared table and brought ruby gleams from glass and decanter. Pellew, arriving in a hired gig late in the afternoon, had been made

welcome by the Squire and bidden to stay for the night. His disingenuous statement that he had been passing through from Reading and had interrupted his journey to pay his respects to the uncle of his old friend Alexander Broughton had been accepted without comment; Squire Frowde's hospitality was not of the cavilling kind. He had not seen Susan. Mr. Frowde, not unconscious of this unexpected arrival's questing glances, explained that she had driven away early with her aunt to attend a ball at Devizes.

"Truro's a damnable long way from Sheerness, sir," the Squire remarked now.

Pellew agreed.

"And I wouldn't have gone to Truro through Wiltshire myself, or by way of Reading," continued his host, passing the decanter.

Pellew glanced at him quickly. Squire Frowde, with his ample paunch and old-fashioned red coat, might have a bucolic air but his little eyes were remarkably shrewd. There was a twinkle in those eyes as they met his, and the late commander of the *Hazard* felt rather more at ease.

"We of His Majesty's navy, sir, have often to tack to achieve our true course," he returned gravely.

The Squire laughed and bade him fill his glass and not let the decanter rest.

"Damme, sir, it's a rare pleasure to entertain a sea officer. Landsman I may be, but I've a brother first lieutenant in *Triton* and I know something of the sea myself. You notice, I hope, that I address you as 'Captain'? Not many landsmen, I fancy, know that a commander with a ship of his own is entitled to that courtesy."

Pellew murmured suitable congratulations. Mr. Frowde refilled his glass for the fifth time. A widower with an only daughter and an elderly and somewhat strict sister to keep

house for him, he looked forward to a convivial evening in their absence.

"Miss will be late, I don't doubt," he said, "but you shall see her in the morning. Makes my life a misery, damme, wondering if she's going to run off with one or other of the turnip-headed young bucks who're always after her—twenty-two she is now, sir, and nigh as pretty a girl as her mother was at that age. She'll be delighted to see you, Captain Pellew."

"You think so, sir?" He could not keep the eagerness from his voice, and felt himself reddening. "I—er—it's five years since I had the pleasure of first seeing your daughter—and yourself—and then it was only for a moment."

Mr. Frowde sipped his wine absently. "Five years—is it that long since I took nephew Alex down to Falmouth quay? By heaven, sir, I was never more disappointed in my life than when the young fool left the service. Married now, damme, and gone to live in Staffordshire."

"I fear Miss Frowde will not know who I am," persisted Pellew, who was not at the moment interested in the doings of Alexander Broughton.

"Not know——" The Squire drained his glass and set it down something too forcibly. "Bless you, she's got your ships and dates and actions off by heart. Ever since Alex came back from Canada and told us how he'd met you and who you were and so forth the girl's been scanning the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Gazette* whenever she can lay hands on 'em. Cuts out the paragraphs and sticks 'em in a book with flour-and-water paste. Champlain, Saratoga—bad business, that, by the bye. The Government's bungling the American war, sir. Sir Henry Clinton, now. Might have done all right under Marlborough, but a damned bad choice for America. Cornwallis, now——"

Pellew concealed his impatience until he could bring him back to more important matters.

"I am most flattered by Miss Frowde's interest," he got in at last.

"There's a-many lads round here would think so, sir," chuckled his host. "Fill up—fill up. And send the bottle back. Aye, we heard of your chase of *Stanislaus*, and poor Pownall's death. No tears from Susan for him, though. When you brought *Apollo* back and were gazetted—a damned well-merited promotion, sir—there was more to-do in this house than when the news of Rodney's victory reached us."

By now the thoughts of Edward Pellew were in a kind of pleasant chaos. His resolve to go to Knowle had been made in a spirit of desperation; Susan would not remember him, but at least he would find some way of seeing her again, at most—in the luckiest of circumstances—he might contrive means whereby he could see her more than once. Now, he found that she not only knew him by repute but took (as it seemed) a most encouraging interest in his doings. It was far more than he had dared to hope for, and what with Squire Frowde's port and the prospect of meeting Susan on the morrow he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. There were in fact two reasons for his precipitate journey to Knowle, neither of which he admitted to himself. The first, which to him appeared foolish, was that he was deep in love with the memory of Susan Frowde, a girl seen for a few minutes five years ago. The second, which could not have occurred to him, was that he was in sore need of some human being to whom he could transfer the allegiance he had given to Philemon Pownall.

He became aware that the Squire, who had been led into a slightly muddled disquisition on Admiral Rodney's tactics at Cape St. Vincent, was pushing the decanter at him.

Pellew was fond of good wine but (a phenomenon among his fellows) disliked taking too much of it. He managed to feign the pouring of a bumper, having noticed that Mr. Frowde was past the stage of clear observation of his guest's glass, and thereafter by cunning mention of Sir Harry Clinton launched the Squire on an elucidation of the American campaign which presently declined into grunts and head-shakings and then into snores. The clock chimed midnight. Squire Frowde slumbered peacefully with his head on his arms.

Pellew rose and pulled the bell for a servant, and a grizzled butler, summoning a footman to assist him, conveyed his master to bed. The guest went to the big windows and threw them open, admitting the chill air of a clear winter night. The clump of hooves and the rattle of an approaching vehicle came to his ears. His heart leaped so suddenly that he gulped. This would be Susan returning from the ball with her aunt. It took him a moment or two, after that, to realise that his situation—an unexpected stranger alone in the Frowde dining-room—was a little embarrassing; and by the time it had occurred to him to leave the room, cross the hall, and go up to the bedchamber that had been assigned to him, it was too late. The carriage had stopped and a servant's footsteps hastened across the hall to the front door.

Pellew still stood by the open window. He heard voices.

"To bed directly, my girl. No posset tonight."

"But indeed, aunt, I must bid papa good-night—there are lights in the dining-room."

"Very well." A stifled yawn. "I shall go at once to my room."

The voices were in the hall now, and there followed murmured good-nights, slow steps mounting the stairs, the

retreating footsteps of the servant. Then the dining-room door opened and she came in.

His first thought was that she had not changed since his previous sight of her, his second that she had grown more beautiful than any vision of his long night-watches. She had taken off her wraps and was in her white ball-dress, her small vivid face flushed and her eyes shining, dark hair—unpowdered in the latest mode—falling in ringlets on her neck. The candles that flickered in the cold wind from the open windows gleamed on slim white shoulders and drew fire from the little diamond spray at her bosom. She halted, motionless, as she saw the tall, dark figure by the window.

"Who——?" she began.

Pellew stepped forward, bowing rather awkwardly. "Your pardon, ma'am. Your father has retired, and I must introduce myself as a guest whose arrival——"

"Mr. Pellew!" she exclaimed; and surely there was pleasure as well as surprise in her glance and smile. "I mean —Captain Pellew. I'm not mistaken?"

"I am Edward Pellew, Miss Frowde."

"Then—then you are very welcome to Knowle, sir."

The light in her eyes set his heart on fire. She was holding out one little hand to him. The other hand hung against the flowing folds of her gown, and Pellew, scarce knowing what he did, grasped both of them. His were warm and hers were cold, and as he grasped them her dark grey eyes looked up into his. For a long moment—or an aeon—they stood thus, while the candle-lit room and Knowle Hall and the rolling countryside under the night sky fled away and they seemed alone together above the world. The crimson colour that flooded slowly into her face brought Pellew to himself.

"You—you are cold," he stammered. "Pray forgive me."

He dropped her hands and dashed to the open windows, bungling the closing of them sadly because of his trembling

fingers. When he turned and came to her again the colour still tinged her cheeks but she was smiling faintly.

"I am but this moment returned from a ball, sir," she said quickly, "and if I linger now Aunt Julia will wish to know why. Is your stay with us to be a long one?"

Pellew hesitated. His desires bade him extend his visit at all costs; but it would be ill-mannered in the extreme for him, a stranger to the family, to thrust himself upon them any further—for this time, at least.

"I must go on tomorrow by the noon coach from Wilton," he told her, and rejoiced at the disappointment that showed instantly in her face. "It's my fondest hope," he added, looking deep into her eyes, "to find myself welcome when I venture another visit."

Miss Frowde moved a little away from him. The dimple of five years ago, he noted, was still there.

"At Knowle, sir, we breakfast at nine," she said sedately. "Until then, we must take our leave. Unless——"

"Unless?" he echoed eagerly.

"It's my custom to ride before breakfast." The colour was deep in her cheeks and her eyes avoided his. "I cannot suppose that it is also yours, but——"

"It is, invariably," he assured her gravely.

The dimple deepened. Then came a voice from the stairs.

"Susan!"

"Aunt Julia," she whispered swiftly. "Good night, Captain Pellew—I will leave orders for Shepperson to have the bay saddled at half past seven."

She was gone with a rustle of skirts, leaving behind a sea officer transported to the very gates of Paradise.

Edward Pellew did not lie wakeful that night. His was the gift of immediate sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow, and even the thought of Susan Frowde lying in her warm bed a few yards from him could not change his habit.

But he was awake and stirring at six the next morning, and well before half past seven was walking the bay horse (a quiet mount, as he observed with considerable relief) up and down the gravelled drive before Knowle Hall. It was a morning of grey and frosty air, the new-risen sun a great red ball behind the trees that stretched a network of bare branches against the eastern sky. For Pellew, that day's sun rose when Susan Frowde ran down the steps to set her little foot in the hand of Shepperson, the groom, and settle herself in the saddle. She wore a dark green habit, full-skirted, the coat cut military style with gold-braided lapels, and a round hat with a scarlet feather. Her greeting to him was of the curtest, and she urged her black gelding to a trot immediately.

Somewhat disgruntled at not having got in the neat little speech he had prepared for her, Pellew followed as best he could. Once outside the gates of the drive Susan swung left-handed through a gap in a wall and they were on open downland, where she kicked her mount to a canter and rode for a belt of woodland half a mile away across the rime-silvered turf. The sea officer, rocking and pitching in his saddle, gave chase. The gallop that followed came near to ending his morning ride ignominiously, but somehow he kept his seat, only to see with dismay the black gelding soar easily over a low fence that stood a little in front of the trees. Susan reined in her horse and sat watching him. Pellew had never jumped a fence on horseback in his life, but he had no thought of drawing rein. He kicked the bay with his heels and gripped hard as the ground dropped away beneath him, realising a moment later, with intense surprise, that he had not been thrown off. More by the inclination of his mount than by his own volition, he found himself after the leap halted a few yards from Susan, who was smiling at him.

"Your horsemanship doesn't equal your seamanship, Captain Pellew," she cried.

"In both, ma'am, experience makes perfect." He climbed out of the saddle and moved towards her, leading the bay. "I galloped a pony on the sands a dozen years ago. I've seen little of horses since then."

Her small face changed instantly. "Oh, I am sorry!" she said remorsefully. "I did not think. Now you will think me more than ever a minx."

Pellew was close to her, his eyes looking up into hers.

"I think you're the loveliest thing I ever saw," he said in a low voice. "For your part, you will think me rude and abrupt—I can't help that. I've little time to speak and pretty speeches were never my study. I've loved you since that day on Falmouth quay five years ago, and I swear I'll never love another woman."

"Sir!" The word was gasped; her eyes were like stars.

He caught the gauntleted hand that had half-raised itself in protest.

"Susan—may I come again to Knowle? I'll not rest until I see you again."

The grey eyes were misted now, and her lips were tremulous. Gently he drew the glove from her hand, she not staying him, and pressed his lips to her fingers.

"I'm not a fool to expect an answer now," he went on swiftly, "but when next I come to Knowle—my love—I shall ask if you'll marry me."

Their glances met and clung. The girl drew in her breath and released it in a little sigh—a happy sigh.

"May I come, Susan?" he whispered.

Susan seemed to wake from a dream, her mood changing in a flash. She struck her heels into the gelding's sides and started away from him.

"To breakfast, sir—yes!" she called over her shoulder, and was away for Knowle Hall.

Pellew flung himself into the saddle and followed. Luckily the bay knew what was expected of him, for his rider hardly noticed when he leaped the fence a second time.

Squire Frowde's astonishment when his guest, before taking his leave, sought a momentous interview with him in his library was perhaps partly feigned. A copy of Minott's *Landed Gentry of England* lay half-concealed on his desk. His surprise at Captain Pellew's precipitate methods was at least understandable. To Pellew's relief, however, he appeared to accept as reasonable the excuse that an active sea officer must seize his chances when he was as desperately and finally in love as Edward Pellew, and showed himself not unwilling to have him for a son-in-law if Susan was favourably disposed. There was, it seemed, only one obstacle.

"Your family, my boy, is unexceptional. But damme"—the Squire was plainly embarrassed—"you've no fortune, sir, if you'll pardon the liberty."

"I know, sir," Pellew returned steadily. "I've yet to make it. As a post-captain—if I'm made—I'd at least be on the high road to it."

"Ha!" Mr. Frowde nodded emphatic agreement. "I like your common sense, sir. Return here a captain on the post list, and damme! I'll not stand in your way. Good luck to you!" He rose and held out his hand. "And, believe me, no man wishes you that more wholeheartedly than John Frowde."

IV

A man may honestly love with his whole heart more things than one if only one of them is a woman. Edward Pellew's love for the sea, which to him was synonymous with his career, was partly responsible for his desire to reach Truro. To his brother's address there would come—if it came at all—his next appointment. He had already urgently petitioned Their Lordships for another command, and now he lost no time in soliciting the help of the family patron, Lord Falmouth. The mills of politics and bureaucracy grind slowly. Two months passed and he heard nothing. He exchanged letters with Susan, ardent on his part, sedate but not unencouraging on hers, and tried to control his impatience. At the end of March his appointment came at last —and a lowering of his always sanguine hopes. He was to command a vessel scarcely larger than *Hazard* of unhappy memory, the *Pelican* sloop, twenty-four guns. It seemed unlikely, to say the least, that any deed that would bring his name into the list of post-captains would result from this command.

It was perfectly possible for an officer to remain a mere 'Master and Commander' until his retirement. The importance of the step up to post-captain was that once he gained the coveted place on the post list his promotion became a matter of seniority; he would rise, if he survived, from the bottom of that list to the top, the death or retirement of senior officers determining the speed of advancement, to become an admiral. A post-captain, especially if he commanded a frigate, was likely to have a goodly portion of prize-money in addition to his pay. Philemon Pownall was reputed to have received £64,000 as his share in the prize-money accruing from his capture of the *Hermione*, the

richest prize of the war with Spain. Edward Pellew's avowed ambition was to emulate Captain Pownall.

But if *Pelican* was a disappointment he was not this time reduced to sullen dejection. The thought of Susan Frowde upheld his spirit now as the desire to win Philemon Pownall's commendation had upheld it before. He was on board his new command, overhauling her and setting her to rights with his martinet enthusiasm, at the earliest moment. On April 17th he sailed out of Plymouth Sound to cruise independently in the Channel.

Pellew never believed in luck; the fact that he was repeatedly lucky merely strengthened his belief in himself—thereby, doubtless, increasing his favour with the Fortunate Goddess. She showed her beneficence on the very first day of *Pelican*'s cruise, for they had hardly put the Eddystone astern before he sighted and pursued a fast French privateer of fourteen guns. Compared with *Hazard* Pellew's new ship was a racing yacht, and she gained on the chase until both ran into a region of dead calm where the yards slapped uselessly to and fro as they rolled on the long, glassy seas. Pellew got out the sweeps and urged his sweating oarsmen to such effect that they came within four-pounder range, cracked the privateer's mast at the first broadside, and took her. He was back in Plymouth with his prize that same evening.

This was small beer enough, but it added to his reputation as well as to his prospective capital. Young Cap'n Pellew—out and back in a day with a French prize, admired the West Country. Wiseacres who remembered Lake Champlain and *Stanislaus* said 'twas only to be expected; Ned Pellew was born for great deeds.

He sailed again on April 24th, resolved to raid to the very shores of France, and four days later was off the Bass Roads a league or two from the privateer rendezvous of Roscoff on the Britanny coast. It was a squally April day,

clear between the rain-squalls. Six vessels anchored in the Roads between the Isle of Bass and Roscoff harbour challenged the predatory beak of the *Pelican* and she stood in, hoisting her colours; whereat the six ships—three privateers and three merchant vessels—slipped their cables and ran for the entrance of the big natural harbour. Pellew sailed boldly in after them, to find the privateers hove-to inside the entrance with their broadsides fronting him. Beyond them were the merchantmen. *Pelican* ran the gauntlet of three broadsides of a dozen guns each, her own gun-crews working furiously to return the fire and doing some damage, and sailed on after the merchant ships, harrying them into the shallows away from the port. All three of them ran aground. Round came the little raider to tackle the privateers, but they had made all haste to get close under the guns of the battery on Roscoff cliffs, which opened fire on the intruder. Firing with every gun that would bear, *Pelican* ran the gauntlet a second time and made out to sea with only two of her men wounded, and those not seriously hurt.

The material results of this piece of daring impudence were three small merchantmen forced aground in an enemy harbour and some little damage to one or two privateers. The result to the fortunes of the captain of the *Pelican* were more considerable, due to the lucky timing of his exploit. Politics, for the first time but not the last, took a hand in his career.

Lord North's administration had just discovered itself in a parlous state. The American War was going badly, for an American general, by name Nathanael Greene, had—incredibly—driven all Lord Cornwallis's troops out of South Carolina and Georgia and in so doing had won the southern campaign. Criticism of Government for bungling the conduct of the war was becoming loud and dangerous; and Government was ready to seize on anything that could be

claimed as a triumph, especially if it turned attention to their success against the enemy across the Channel. *Pelican*'s dashing raid into Roscoff harbour came at exactly the right time and was widely advertised as a sign of English supremacy on the seas. Its originator had also to be rewarded.

Admiralty Office, May 25, 1782.

Sir—I am so well pleased with the reports I have received of your Gallant and Seaman-like Conduct in the sloop you command, in your spirited attack on three privateers inside the Isle of Bafs, and your succefs in driving three vefsels on Shore, that I am induced to bestow on you the rank of a Post-Captain, in the service to which your universal good Character and conduct do Credit; and for this purpose I have named you to the command of the Suffolk, and will give you a frigate whenever I can find one . . .

I am, etc.,

KEPPEL.

Viscount Keppel, the new First Lord of the Admiralty, was a Whig of the Rockingham following, a political opponent of Pellew's patron Lord Falmouth who supported the Tories. To promote the protégé of a political enemy was, in the politics of Pellew's day, a remarkable piece of magnanimity, and but for *Pelican*'s well-timed fillip to Government prestige he would almost certainly have remained a commander.

Edward Pellew neither knew nor cared about these matters. Two days after Lord Keppel's letter reached him he was on his way to Knowle and Susan.

They were married in the spring of the following year. And the fact that Susan bore her husband a child in each of the three years that succeeded may be attributed partly

to world events. For the American War ended in 1783 with the surrender of Lord Cornwallis's army at Yorktown; peace with France and Spain followed; and the greater part of the Navy was then disbanded. Captain Pellew was consequently ashore on half-pay during those three years.

FOUR

I

In the tap-room of the King's Tavern at Falmouth there was excited uproar; not an uproar of contention but of unanimity. The news had come to Cornwall that forenoon. King Louis of France had been publicly murdered by the Sansculottes in Paris and they had followed this atrocity by declaring war on Great Britain and Holland. No man in the crowded tap-room was at all dismayed or greatly surprised. For three years the news from across the Channel had been of horror and degradation—of nuns scourged naked through the streets, of little children playing football with human heads, of paid murderers butchering the Royalist prisoners in their cells. The seamen of Falmouth were arguing not as to whether a blow could or should be aimed at the revolutionaries but as to how, and how soon, it could be struck.

"Cross and at 'em wi' the first offshore wind!" shouted one burly tar-jacket, waving his tankard. "One West-Countryman can trounce three o' they dirty Jacobins—aye, and moore, if they've no breeches!"

"Right, fay!" roared another. "They've not a ship ready to meet ourn, boys. Strike home now, say I!"

A tall fellow with a weather-darkened face and gold earrings spat aside and raised a harsh voice.

"Fools, sons o' shotten herrings! Not ready, says you? They'm as ready as we are—and that's saying little enough."

There were calls for silence. "Cap'n Tregay! He'm the knowing one! What's the buzz in the Trade, Cap'n?"

The smuggler tossed back his mug of rum, and looked round the ring of flushed, tanned faces portentously.

"We've had peace at sea for ten years, ha'n't we? D'ye think the fleet can sail full-manned right away? As for the French, I've been in and out of every French port 'twixt Havre and Ploudalmézeau these two years, on the Trade, as ye well know, and I've seen what I've seen."

"What, Cap'n? Let's hear."

"Frigates." Tregay held out his mug to be refilled. "They've been building, and I don't need to tell you the French can build sweet sailers. Why, they've been planning to get at the Dutch for a year or more, and they're no fools to think they can beat the mynheers without ships. I was in St. Malo last May and saw the beauty they've built there—*La Cleopatre*, the damned heathens call her. Forty guns, carries nigh four hundred men, fast as our best and a crack ship as ever I see."

There was a short and disgruntled silence.

"Let be they've fair ships, we've the men to beat 'em," muttered someone.

"Aye, and the captains." The speaker was an oak-faced elderly man with his scanty grey hair twisted into a pigtail at the back. "Cap'n Pellew, to Flushing yonder, he'm the man for anything the Frogs can float."

"Aye—if the fat fools at the Admiralty give him a ship," growled Tregay into his mug.

The pigtailed seaman disregarded him.

"Bosun in the *Winchelsea* I was, Newfoundland station, six year ago," he continued. "A full gale blowin', there was, an' Cap'n Pellew, he stands on the quarterdeck an' roars for the main topsail to be reefed. There was good topmen in her that v'yage, but what think ye Cap'n Pellew does? Jumps to

it hisself, soon as the order's out, an' up on the yardarm afore any other man could reach it. How? Why, by climbin' like a Barbary ape to the topmast-head an' then slidin' down the tops'l lift!"

There was a buzz of admiration, almost of awe. Not a man in the stuffy lamp-lit room but could appreciate the remarkable, almost incredible, nature of this feat of agility. Once voice raised itself doubtfully.

"I've heered tell the cat was hard at work that v'yage, bos'n."

The pigtailed seaman rounded on the speaker. "Well, and what o' that? Don't a cap'n need a taut hand with the jail-birds an' gin-soakers he has to take to sea with him? 'Bout cap'ns who hands out eighty an' a hundred lashes I'm not sayin' nothin'. With Cap'n Pellew 'twas forty at most, an' more often a fair dozen—for drunkenness or stealin' as often as not. Give me a fine seaman, feared o' nothin' as can befall him, an' I'll not grudge him the use o' the cat."

"They do say the Frogs won't have no flogging aboard their ships o' war," put in a young seaman.

"The more fools they," retorted the bos'n. "There's plenty as don't need the cat to make 'em seamen, and plenty as does, my lad. I'm for Cap'n Pellew when he sails again, an' may it be soon. Did I ever tell you what he did when we reached St. John's in Newfoundland? Commodore Elliott was there in the harbour and Cap'n Pellew was set to report to him the same evenin' we made our landfall. Well, the wind was contrary an' *Winchelsea* couldn't get through the entrance—narrow it is, with rocks. What's the cap'n do, think you? Why, orders away the boats to lay anchors to windward an' warp her in. Nine hours they was at it afore we got a hawser rove through the ring on what they call the Chain Rock, an' when the hawser was to be cast off there was no boat handy to do it. Pitch black it was, but Cap'n

Pellew, he goes down the hawser hand over hand, casts it off, an swarms back on board up the hawser, soused an' dripping—an' grinnin', too. Salt water's nigh as tasty as air to Ned Pellew."

He buried his face in a mug of ale, and the young seaman who had spoken before seized the opportunity.

"The pore fellows as had been lugging at the oars for nine hours weren't grinning, I'll lay," he muttered.

"An' that ain't all," continued the bos'n, wiping his mouth and ignoring the interruption. "An hour afore dawn we was anchored neat by the flagship, an' the cap'n orders every man—both watches, mark ye—to bed. But does he take a dose himself? Not him! On deck until dawn, was Cap'n Pellew, ready to fire the salute at daybreak. That's the stuff as'll beat the No-Breeches, *Cleopatres* an' all. An' I'll lay," he ended, "as Cap'n Ned Pellew's got his dunnage clewed up an' ready for sea at this moment, lads."

He was wrong. At that moment Captain Pellew was stalking up and down the parlour of his rented house in Flushing, a mile away across the dark harbour waters, while his wife Susan sat placidly knitting.

At thirty-five Susan Pellew was a good deal changed from the slim, dark-haired beauty Edward Pellew had married ten years ago, though to some eyes—and her husband's were among them—she seemed no less beautiful now than then. The bearing of four children had left her figure the admiration of all the matrons of the West Country, but Mr. Alexander Broughton on his last visit with his wife had secretly thought her more of a Juno than the Diana he had once loved. Her heart-shaped face had a serene beauty that had been lacking in the girl of Knowle Hall; and there was a new firmness about her mouth and chin. As for Pellew, ten years had made his tall figure a little broader, his angular face a little harder and more leathery, the lines of his

features more deeply graven, especially the two vertical furrows between his eyebrows. Susan suspected, however, that he was no older in spirit than he had been when she had first seen him on Falmouth quay more than seventeen years earlier. At the moment he was behaving more like a midshipman than a post-captain.

Pellew checked his pacing and pulled a crumpled letter from his breeches pocket, to scan it disgustedly and then fling it into a corner.

"By heaven, Susan, it's intolerable!" he exclaimed, loudly and exasperatedly. "It's not that Falmouth can't help me—he won't. Seven months ago I told him Pitt couldn't avoid war. He could have got me a ship then and he didn't. Here am I, a capital burgess and alderman of Truro—he knows I'm bound to vote for his party and the Boscawen interest——"

"Do, please, my dear, recall who is above us," interrupted Susan firmly.

She glanced up at the ceiling as she spoke, and he at once nodded and fell silent. Susan was a deeply religious woman; but her words and glance referred not to the Deity but to four small humans sleeping soundly upstairs. There was eight-year-old Emma, Pownall (his father's pride) a year younger, Julia aged six, and little Fleetwood Broughton Pellew aged three.

"Pray sit beside me, my love," begged his wife, laying aside her knitting and patting the sofa.

Pellew shrugged and obeyed, sitting gloomily hunched forward and twiddling his fingers. Susan gently took one of the big, restless hands in both of hers.

"It's unreasonable in you to be so impatient, Edward," she said. "Only a week ago Lord Falmouth promised you faithfully he would see Lord Chatham in person. There's much time yet for his request to take effect."

"Time!" echoed her husband bitterly. "Time's gone by. They're manning the first-rates as fast as they can. Every seaman worth his salt has been swept up by the press already. Even if Falmouth gets me *Nymphe* or *Thalea* as I asked him, where will I find two hundred men?"

"You'll find them somehow," she told him soothingly.

After ten years of marriage she understood him well enough to feel no resentment at his preoccupation. That he was eager and chafing to leave her and the children, to plunge into the multitude of dangers that war and the sea must bring, roused no bitterness in her. This tall, hard husband of hers could think only of one thing at a time, and just now she had no place in his thoughts and desires. She loved this single-mindedness in him; indeed, it had lately disturbed her to discover that other things beside his duty as a sea officer might influence his career, and that he was increasingly aware of them.

"I wish," she said suddenly, and stopped.

Pellew looked at her in frowning inquiry, and she went on steadily.

"I wish you didn't have to consider other people's influence, my love. That you would make your way with your eyes fixed only on—on glory, and leave lesser men to meddle in politics."

He rubbed his jaw and looked faintly sheepish.

"Would that I could!" he said, not very convincingly. "But what can I do, my dear? I've no patron in the service —I must rely on Falmouth's favour, and in return it's only fair to do what I can in support of his political interests."

"Yet you find him slow to——"

"Besides," he went on quickly, "it may mean great things for us both later on. I want you to be My Lady—by heaven, Susan, if I can make you a Countess it's less than my desire for you. And my sons——"

A knocking on the outer door interrupted him. Pellew sprang up to answer it; a half-pay post-captain could only afford daily servants and there were none in the house to-night. The man who stood outside with a packet in his hand was well known to him—it was Anderson, his brother Samuel's factotum.

"Mr. Samuel sent me post-haste from Truro, sir, with this. It was delivered from the late coach to our address."

Pellew snatched the packet from him and glanced at the seal in the dim light from the candle on the hall table. A second later he had tossed the man a crown piece and was striding back to the parlour. Susan rose and came to him as he ripped open the packet with savage eagerness and peered at the document it contained.

"It's *Nymphe*!" he roared joyfully, waving the letter aloft. "They've given me *Nymphe*!"

Susan clung to his arm, turning a smiling face to him; but her eyes were suddenly wet. That shout had made the rafters ring, and now it was echoed by a wail from the room above.

"Fleetwood," said Susan, and rustled swiftly towards the stairs.

Her husband, stuffing his appointment into his pocket, followed her, the first realisation of what he must leave behind dawning upon him. Fleetwood Pellew slept in his parents' bedroom and was protesting loudly at his rude awakening. It was Pellew who gathered the three-year-old boy into his arms, and at once the child stopped crying and fondled his father's rough chin with contented chuckles. Pellew held him for a few moments and then laid him gently in his cot. Fleetwood stuffed two chubby fingers into his mouth with another alongside his snub nose, pulled his blanket up to his chin with the other tiny fist, and grunted himself asleep again.

Husband and wife stood together looking down at him in silence, their hands linked but not their thoughts. She was thinking: if this war makes him fatherless, what is to become of him—and the others? He spoke his thought aloud.

"By God!" swore Edward Pellew. "I'll make a seaman of him!"

Susan said nothing. She was glad, though, that he had said 'seaman' and not 'baronet'.

II

There were no tears from Susan Pellew at their parting, and the children were only old enough to find pleasure in seeing their big father in his splendid blue coat with gold epaulettes and the shining-hilted sword at his side. *Nymphe* was at Portsmouth, two hundred and fifty miles away, and Susan could not go with him. An hour after he left the house at Flushing he had forgotten her in devising means for manning his new command.

It was January 15th, a grey morning, when he first saw the craft that for a short twelve months was in some sort to take Susan's place in his affections. As he was rowed out to her he eyed her with increasing approval; though there was only her hull to look at, for her masts had yet to be stepped. *Nymphe* was French-built. She had been taken prize in the last war, and her origin showed in her graceful lines and her flush deck. Above the copper sheathing, new-scraped and gleaming dully across the grey water of the harbour, she was painted with a broad band of black with a band of yellow above it at the level of the gunports, which were deep red. Her upper works were navy blue on the outboard and red on the inboard side. Plainly the dockyard intended her to be a credit to them.

When he clambered on board he was met by an elderly, stocky man who presented himself as Mr. Thomson, the master. Thomson had been sailing-master in *Nymphe* on her previous commission, and loved her so well that he had come on board to watch over her refitting without waiting for an appointment. Pellew liked him at sight and their first conversation increased the liking.

"When are these masts to be stepped, Mr. Thomson?"

"The dockyard folk say in a fortnight's time, sir."

"I must have 'em stepped in a week."

"They'll do that or I'll know the reason why, sir. Twelve carronades they're going to mount, twenty-four-pounders. They talked of eight on the quarterdeck, four on the fo'c'sle, sir."

"Nonsense. Six fore and six aft with guns of that weight."

"Exactly, sir. I took the liberty of telling them so, and I trust you'll confirm that."

"Any hope of getting her manned here, Mr. Thomson?"

"If you get half a dozen, sir, it'll be a marvel. The place is swept bare for the ships of the line. Our only hope's convoy duty."

Pellew smiled grimly. "Just so. Come below, Mr. Thomson. I want to know all you can tell me about this vessel."

Between them, Pellew and the master badgered the dockyard into its utmost activity. On the 22nd *Nymphe*'s masts were stepped alongside the Sheer Hulk, by the 30th her twenty-six twelve-pounders and the twelve carronades were mounted—the latter where Pellew wanted them—and her rigging was complete. By February 6th she was alongside the jetty and ready for sea; ready, that is, except for a crew.

Captain Pellew had proved Thomson's prophecy to be correct. Energetic combing of the Portsmouth stews had brought him five men of sea experience and no more; thirty-two marines and their lieutenant, Ripley, had

reported for duty in the *Nymphe*. He had for his first lieutenant one Amherst Morris, who had gained some little knowledge of sea warfare in the last war, but the second and third lieutenants had none and were not men he would have chosen. *Nymphe*'s proper complement was two hundred and twenty—and he had in all forty-two men and three boys. Pellew was at his wit's end when a letter from his brother Samuel informed him, *inter alia*, that the bread shortage after last year's bad harvest had so affected the Cornish miners that hordes of them were roaming the streets of Truro and Falmouth in search of sustenance. Pellew wrote instantly begging his brother to collect these men and tell them of the bountiful food and hope of glory that awaited them on board the *Nymphe*. Samuel carried this out so successfully that eighty men were enlisted and sent to Portsmouth by the *Lizard* frigate, arriving just in time. On February 12th *Nymphe* ran out of Portsmouth Harbour with just over half her proper complement on board—only one quarter of them used to the sea and three-quarters of those soldiers.

The tin-miners proved to be worse than useless. Most of them were too ill to be trained or bullied into any kind of task at sea and spent their time groaning horribly in the lee scuppers or lying helpless below. There were not six men capable of taking the wheel in the whole ship, and Pellew himself was at the helm constantly during the long passage down Channel. Slower progress had never been made by a fast frigate. With calls at every port in search of more men —vain efforts—he was not off Falmouth until March 7th. Here good news awaited him : he was to escort a convoy to the Downs. There was barely time for his brief visit to Susan and his family, but he was able to put into practice a simple but ingenious plan he had matured for getting rid of the useless majority of his ship's company. He offered a

week's shore leave to such of the Cornish tin-miners who wanted it. Two-thirds of them jumped at the chance of getting clear of the *Nymphe* altogether and vanished into the wilds of inland Cornwall to hide themselves from the penalties of desertion. They need not have bothered. *Nymphe* sailed almost at once, with her lower deck cleared ready to provide quarters for one hundred and fifty seamen her captain hoped to impress from the convoy ships. The ex-miners who had remained on board of their own free will became handy seamen, as Pellew had anticipated.

That English merchant ships passing along English coasts should have to sail in escorted convoy was a sign of the daring activities of enemy privateers and frigates. Big frigates like *Revolutionnaire*, *Pomone*, and *La Cleopatre* had been in commission for weeks now and had done considerable damage. Pellew had plenty of information about them, especially *La Cleopatre*, a vessel regarded as the crack frigate of the new navy of Revolutionary France. She was commanded by Captain Jean Mullon, one of the few captains of the old régime who had accepted the new order in France and retained naval command; his reputation as a fine seaman and a stout fighter was well known to Pellew, who hoped some day to find himself board-and-board with *La Cleopatre*—not, however, until he had gunners to fire his guns and hands to man tackles and braces. These he proposed to get himself forthwith.

No sooner had *Nymphe* taken charge of her convoy of eleven small merchantmen than she proceeded to prey upon them, legitimately and in accordance with the custom of the service. At the beginning of a war the only seamen available for the expanding navy were those in the merchant ships, and it was better that a merchant ship should go short-handed than that a frigate should lack fighting men. So away went all Pellew's boats in charge of lieutenant or

midshipman, the red coats and white crossbelts of three marines in the sternsheets of each, their muskets well displayed. Their orders were to press the prime seamen, leaving the bare minimum of hands to work the vessels up-Channel.

Pellew himself boarded one of the convoy, the *Venus*. He found the captain ill in his bunk and the ship in charge of the mate, a big, lithe man who stood by without protest while the frigate captain selected the best men from his little crew. Pellew turned to him when he had finished.

"I'm sorry for this deprivation, Mr. Mate, but it's urgently necessary."

"I know it," returned the mate stolidly : he seemed to be a man of some culture, for he added : "In the circumstances, I must say, with Sir Philip Sidney, 'Thy need is greater than mine'."

Pellew nodded. "Your name, sir?"

"John Gaze."

"I need a good officer, Mr. Gaze. I can't press you, but if you'll enter the service I'll place you on the quarterdeck as fourth lieutenant and look after you."

Gaze looked long into the brown eyes in the hard, brown face and liked what he found there.

"Very well, sir," he said quietly at last. "I'll take service with you."

Altogether, *Nymphe* took a hundred and forty-seven men from that little fleet, every one of them a seaman. Her complement was made up. Pellew's acquisition of a very competent officer from the *Venus* was an important addition to his ship's company; but he could not have realised its importance in another aspect. John Gaze, who was to remain his devoted follower until the very end of his sea career, had a literary gift and the habit of recording his adventures and impressions. It was Gaze who was to pre-

serve for posterity the intimate details of Pellew's actions. In particular, he was soon to record the story of the most significant and resounding frigate battle of the long war with France.

III

Throughout April, May, and the beginning of June, the frigate *Nymphe* pursued convoy and other duties in the Channel, uneventfully except for the capture of a privateer brig, the *Sans Culotte*. The brig put up no resistance in the face of a vessel so greatly superior in force, but the capture had its value in Pellew's eyes because it was his crew's first contact with the enemy and a successful one.

In those ten weeks his crew was his main preoccupation —especially the training of gun-crews. Under the imprecations and occasional thwackings of his bos'ns, led by Jacob Penberthy (the pigtailed bos'n who had served under him in *Winchelsea*) the volunteer miners were fast becoming handy seamen and learning a tongue considerably different from their native Cornish language. The preponderance of experienced sailors from the merchant ships gave him one of the most efficient crews he was ever to sail with, as far as seamanship went. But to train thirty-eight gun-crews until they were able to sponge, load, ram and run out the guns at maximum speed and without hitch or error—to do it, moreover, almost automatically, so that those actions would be continued unfaltering through the smoke and din of battle and with men being torn to bloody fragments all about them —this could only be done by hard and continuous drill. And that drill the selected men were given, hour after hour. Pellew did not spare them or himself. Lieutenant Morris, though a good sea officer, had no experience of gunnery work and his other lieutenants had hardly seen a cannon before joining the *Nymphe*; Edward Pellew, who was never

slow to tackle other tasks beside his own, drilled them according to his own methods. He would keep them at the drill until they were weary and then race along the row of guns striking a man here and there on the back—a sign that he was deemed to be killed or badly wounded. Then the sweating gun-crew had to carry on with their drill a man short, and then, perhaps, two men short as their indefatigable captain came racing and striking down the line again.

So he gradually hammered his miners and merchant seamen into fighting gunners. But still he lacked a gunnery officer—someone who had some knowledge of ballistics, who could direct accurate fire. Broadsides were well enough, but Pellew knew that a single ball well directed, by chance or by good aim, could turn the scales in a sea-fight before the broadsides began. Much as he would have liked to take charge of every operation himself, he was aware that in a duel with a French frigate of equal strength he must be as free as possible to concentrate on manœuvring his ship. It was then that he bethought himself of his younger brother Israel.

In the Pellew family, it had once been said, madness went by degrees of age. Elder brother Samuel's sedateness showed little trace of it; Edward's boldness carried more than a touch of it; but young Israel was as reckless-mad as his flaming red hair tended to indicate. Edward regarded Israel with a kind of exasperated affection. More by luck than good conduct or seamanship, Israel had gained the rank of Commander, but his violent temper and irresponsibility had put him in the Admiralty's black books to such an extent that neither his own nor his brother's applications had so far got him appointed to a ship.

Israel had one point in his favour, however : he knew the theory and practice of gunnery at sea. Gunnery was the

only study to which he had applied himself since he had joined the navy. Before the outbreak of war he had journeyed to Ireland (induced thereto, it was rumoured, by reports of the beauty and frailty of that country's female population) and as far as Edward knew was still there tasting the pleasures of Cork. Seizing the chance of orders to escort a convoy off the Lizard, Captain Pellew ran over to Cork, found Israel resting in his dingy lodgings after some debauchery or other, and took him on board. He could not appoint his brother to hold rank in the *Nymphe*, but Israel —ever ready for any kind of violent adventure—willingly joined him as a volunteer.

Pellew's orders were to head for Portsmouth after his convoy duties were accomplished, and he followed them to the extent of sailing along the English coast until he was off the Start. It was then nine in the evening of June 18th; and at that hour (as John Gaze piously confided to his journal) it was as though Captain Pellew received a Heavenly Premonition. He called the officer of the watch, Lieutenant Dobson, and said to him: "Steer to the southward under easy sail, Mr. Dobson, for the chance of seeing something. We shall reach Portsmouth soon enough."

An observer less pious than Mr. Gaze might have considered that the Goddess of Luck was once more watching over her darling. For at daybreak next morning the masthead look-out reported a strange sail to the south-east, and when *Nymphe* had made sail and overhauled her within three miles she was recognised as *La Cleopatre.*

At the back of his mind Edward Pellew had a vague realisation that the coming encounter—the first big single-ship action at the beginning of a long struggle between nations—was likely to be of great importance, but he had neither time nor inclination to picture himself as a champion of England standing forth in front of his country's armed

array to try conclusions with the champion of France. His first act on giving chase was to send the hands to breakfast by watches; he might work them hard, even cruelly hard on occasion, but he was never careless of their stomachs. At half past five the marines' drums beat to quarters and the redcoats then stationed themselves on quarterdeck and fo'c'sle while the gunners took up their stations at the guns and the powder canisters were brought up from the magazine. By now *Cleopatre* was less than two miles away across the ruffled blue-green of the sea, swaying gracefully along beneath the grey morning skies under easy sail. She had held her course away from the English frigate only to give herself time for preparation.

"I'll have silence on deck, Mr. Morris, if you please," Pellew said, not taking his eyes from the enemy vessel. "And hoist the colours."

The buzz of talk and jest died away at Morris's order. A scrap of red, white and blue fluttered up to *Cleopatre*'s yardarm—the new flag of France. *Nymphe* was closing her fast now, and in half an hour they would be in action. A loud yawn at his elbow startled him and he turned to find his brother there. Israel had just risen from his bunk and was cramming his hat on his disordered thatch of red hair.

"Well, Ned," he observed lazily. "Here's your chance and I wish you luck. Where's my station, pray?"

"I wish you to take charge of the after guns on the main deck, Mr. Pellew," returned the captain with a slight frown. "And for God's sake, Israel," he added in an undertone, "call me 'sir' when we're on the quarterdeck."

"Aye aye, sir," chuckled Israel, unperturbed.

"I intend to cross astern of her. I shall have my hat in my hand. When I put it on, you may open fire. Try for her mizen-mast—if you can bring that down I'll believe your claims to be a gunner."

"Why not her wheel?" demanded his brother. "I'll give you a hundred to one in guineas I'll smash it in three discharges."

Pellew hesitated. It would be an advantage to have the Frenchman's helm out of action, but to hit so small a mark required gunnery of a very high order indeed.

"I'll not take your wager," he said, "but you can try your three shots. If you don't succeed, you're to aim at her masts."

"Very good—I mean aye aye, sir," responded Israel jauntily, and went to his station on the after deck.

Pellew concentrated his attention on *Cleopatre*. A narrow shaft of morning sunlight pierced the clouds and lit her graceful hull and towering pyramids of canvas as she moved smoothly through the water scarcely a mile ahead of him. She was a lovely sight, and even Pellew—no sentimentalist—felt a touch of compunction at the thought that he was about to try and reduce her to a mass of splintered and bloody wreckage. Still, she was preparing to do the same to *Nymphe*. She carried almost exactly the same armament as his own frigate, he knew, and it was very probable that she had on board at least a hundred men more than *Nymphe*; the French were always inclined to overman their ships.

In strangely peaceful silence the two vessels sailed on, the space of water that separated them fast diminishing. Pellew broke the silence by ordering the staysails in; there was no need for them now that he had come up with his opponent and he could manœuvre better under plain sail. On they crept, the *Nymphe* coming up fine on the Frenchman's starboard quarter, into cannon range and then inside it, and still that queer silence was unbroken save for the hiss of the waves and the creaking of sail and cordage. The mass of people on *Cleopatre*'s deck could be seen as separate figures now, the men at the quarterdeck carronades standing

tense and ready. For'ard on his own deck the gunners were half-crouching like runners waiting for the starting signal; he hoped their few weeks of discipline would keep them like that until the word was given.

Now they were within hailing distance. He muttered a reminder to the man at the helm, ran for'ard, and sprang on to the foredeck rail, holding on by the shrouds.

"Captain Mullon!"

His shout carried easily across the shortening distance. A broad figure in a gold-laced coat mounted the quarterdeck rail of *Cleopatre* and doffed his hat. Pellew pulled off his own hat and roared cheerfully in his execrable French.

"Bonjour, M. le Capitaine! Comment allez-vous?

"Assez bien, je vous remercie," came the shouted response. *"Assez bien pour vous vaincre, monsieur!"*

Pellew rarely smiled, but he smiled now—a broad grin. He turned to face his main deck.

"Hands to man the shrouds!"

In a few seconds the fore, main and mizen shrouds were thronged with seamen clinging like swarming bees.

"Long live King George the Third!" Pellew made that ring. "And three cheers!"

Two hundred voices gave three lusty shouts, and as the last died away there came across the water the cry of *"Vive la Nation!"* and three answering yells from the French.

"Quarters!" snapped the captain of the *Nymphe*, his hat still held aloft.

The shrouds emptied as if by magic. A single carronade boomed from *Cleopatre*'s quarterdeck and the ball, passing wide by ten feet of *Nymphe*'s port bow, sent the sharp wind of its passing against Pellew's face as he balanced on the rail. There were no following shots; so much the better—the single shot meant some lack of discipline on board Captain Mullon's ship. No doubt he proposed to wait until

the English frigate drew level with his starboard broadside. But Pellew had no intention of coming up on that side. *Nymphe* was close to *Cleopatre*'s quarter when he extended his left hand holding his hat. The helmsman swung the wheel and *Nymphe*'s bows came round to port. She began to cross *Cleopatre*'s wake a short musket-shot astern of her. As her forefoot cut into the white foam and she made a right-angle with the fore-and-aft line of the French vessel Pellew clapped his hat on his head.

At once the guns of the starboard broadside began to thunder in rapid succession. *Cleopatre*'s quarterdeck carronades answered together; thirty-six-pounders those were, thought Pellew as he sprinted aft behind the toiling gunners. He was almost level with the mainmast when the air immediately in front of him seemed to burst apart and a large piece of wood flew past his head. One of the thirty-six-pounders had scored a hit on the foot of the mainmast, making a huge ragged gash in the timber. Breathing a prayer that the Portsmouth riggers had dealt honestly with her mainmast stays and shrouds, he dashed on, dodging past two writhing seamen wounded by the flying splinters. As he reached the quarterdeck he caught a glimpse of Israel's wild red head bent low to sight along the breech of a gun and wheeled swiftly to watch his brother's boasted shooting. He was in time to see the white splinters fly from the foot of *Cleopatre*'s mizen-mast.

"Devil blast me!" Israel yelled, and ran to the next gun aft.

His second shot carried away the quarterdeck rail within a foot or two of the wheel and killed three men. Again, raving oaths, he dashed to another gun. This time the ball crashed directly into the frigate's wheel, killing the helmsman. Israel swung round and waved triumphantly at his brother.

But Pellew was too intent on watching his own ship and

the enemy's to notice him now. *Cleopatre* had started to swing up into the wind, but her captain was prompt and a good seaman. Down came both jibs like lightning—a party on the quarterdeck, working like furies, had some sort of steering-tackle rigged in a moment—her sails filled again even as they fluttered.

The check in her onward course, however, had balanced the way he had lost by crossing her stern. *Nymphe* was drawing level on her port beam.

"Broadsides, Mr. Luke!" he shouted. "Mr. Pellew! Take your time from Mr. Luke!"

He heard Israel's impudent "Right you are, Ned!" before the piercing voice of Luke, the second lieutenant, took charge.

"Cock your locks—take your aim——"

Pellew thought for a moment that the starboard guns had fired prematurely, but it was *Cleopatre*'s broadside that roared first. He felt the shock of impact shake the deck beneath him before it was shaken again by the louder explosion of *Nymphe*'s broadside. Some of the French guns were firing high—above him the mainsail showed half a dozen holes and rents. There were dead men rolling in their blood on the deck amidships, though——

Another deafening roar, and another and another. The acrid smoke rolled in great bellying clouds between the two frigates. The breeze was dropping; the distance between the rows of vomiting cannon was too small, the rate of discharge too fast, to allow the smoke to clear, and he could see little or nothing of the *Cleopatre*. On and on went the head-splitting din. Sometimes, in the brief interval after a French broadside, he could hear other noises—the clatter of falling spars and the twang of parting stays, the screams and loud groans of wounded men. Were his own guns doing as much damage?

Through the smoke a man came running. He recognised the master's mate, a Falmouth man by name Richard Pearse.

"Muster Thomson's compliments, sir," Pearse gasped out, "and mizen an' topmast stays is gone, likewise the foremast's hit bad——"

The crash of a French broadside would have drowned the rest of his report, but Richard Pearse was no longer there. The bundle of red rags flung against the port rail had been Richard Pearse.

Pellew swore to himself in impatience. All he could see from the quarterdeck was a few yards of deck littered with bits of cordage and human bodies, a smoking twelve-pounder flung over on its side, a little stream of blood that twisted down the slope of the planking. He peered anxiously into the blinding smoke to starboard. Beside him the marines were stolidly loading and firing, aiming blindly into the swirling cloud.

Here was a gap at last—and framed in it part of a mast. The mast was bowing, falling, finally lost again in the smoke-cloud. *Cleopatre*'s mizen-mast, he thought it was. A moment afterwards he was roaring at the helmsman to keep her away to port—so close had they steered that the falling mast was dropping right across *Nymphe*'s deck. Then he saw that the big black spar that had suddenly appeared in the thick yellow fog overhead was moving forward into his rigging, not downward. It was *Cleopatre*'s bowsprit. She was bows-on to *Nymphe*'s broadside, and Mullon must intend to board.

"Hands to repel boarders!"

As his great voice cut across the din he felt the shock and grind of *Cleopatre*'s bows against the frigate's side. Lugging out his sword, he ran to head the men who were gathering below the loom of the enemy's bows. Amherst Morris was

there, and Luke—the second lieutenant's face was ghastly white and his left arm hung limply, streaming blood.

"Stand by!" rapped Pellew as more seamen ran up, cutlass in hand.

The stream of Frenchmen he had expected to pour over on to his deck did not come. Nothing at all happened—except that the smoke was clearing with the cessation of gunfire, and through it he saw that *Cleopatre*'s mizen-mast was dragging overside in a great tangle of canvas and rigging. It was that, then, not Captain Mullon's order, that had brought her round to ram the *Nymphe*. Even so, it was odd that the French had not boarded. But here was his own chance!

"We'll board, lads!" He had taken a hasty step forward before he remembered that he must remain on board his own ship. "Mr. Morris! Away boarding-party!"

In a medley of cheers and yells a wave of men surged over on to *Cleopatre*'s foredeck, the first lieutenant leading the way and the wounded Luke struggling up behind him gamely enough. Pellew ran aft to get a clearer view from the quarterdeck. Through the dingy haze that was all that remained of the battle-smoke he saw the *Nymphe*'s seamen rushing in a crowd along the Frenchman's deck. There was no clash of cutlasses or snapping of pistols; no resistance, it seemed. Had his broadsides killed every man on board?

A single British cheer rose and was instantly taken up in a great roar of cheering. At the same time Pellew saw the *Cleopatre*'s colours hauled down by one of his own men. The day was his.

Ten minutes later he was receiving from Lieutenant Morris his report and the sword of Captain Jean Mullon, who was lying dead on the quarterdeck of his vessel.

"Decks like a butcher's yard, sir," Morris panted

excitedly. "Sixty dead at the least, and a hundred or more wounded. Egad, you've fairly dished 'em up, sir!"

Pellew, with an eye on *Nymphe*'s damaged mainmast, frowned.

"Even so, there should have been a hundred men to oppose the boarding-party. Where were they?"

"Run below!" Morris crowed exultantly. "Couldn't stand our fire. Monsieur Raffé—her second captain, sir—he's nigh in a frenzy with chagrin. Wishes to speak with you urgently."

"He'll have to wait," snapped Pellew. "Look at that main-yard."

In running aboard *Nymphe* the French frigate had entangled her leech-rope with the yard of the mainmast; with every lurch of the two vessels under the influence of wind and wave the *Nymphe*'s mainmast—shot half through and with its stays dangling useless—bowed and creaked, ready to come down at any moment.

"Two men aloft to cut that leech-rope, Mr. Morris. "Stay!" he added quickly as Morris turned. "You'll please to keep Captain Mullon's sword, since it was to you he rendered it."

The first lieutenant reddened with pleasure as he took the sword and strode for'ard along the stained and littered deck. Pellew watched keenly as he gave his order. It was not instantly obeyed; naturally enough, weary seamen hesitated to launch themselves aloft on a tottering mast that might well hurl them to doom as they edged out along the yard. With a growled oath, Pellew snatched a clasp-knife from the helmsman beside him and sprang into the rent and ragged shrouds, to swarm like some huge blue-coated monkey on to the straining yard and out along it until he could slash the taut leech-rope. Released from its tension, the yard jerked upwards and all but threw him off, and for

an instant he thought the raucous groan of the mast was the prelude to its collapse. But the rigging held. The danger was averted for the moment. The seamen who cheered him as he slid down to the deck again looked more than a trifle sheepish.

That was only the first in a long list of urgent tasks. A party to rig new shrouds and stays, another to fish a big spar to the foremast (which had also been badly damaged by shot) and another to clear and swab the deck; the damage to *Cleopatre* to be assessed—her wheel and her mizen-mast gone, most of her rigging shot away—and repaired sufficiently to make her manageable; prisoners to be dealt with, a prize crew to be put aboard—*Nymphe*'s own casualties to be learned. Pellew braced himself as he saw Thomson, the master, approaching with a paper in his hand.

"Main, mizen and topmast stays all gone, sir. Mainsail shot away, lower rigging badly——"

"Very well," he rapped. "But the men?"

"We've twenty-three dead, sir, including two midshipmen, Pearse, master's mate, the boatswain——"

"Penberthy?" Penberthy was a Falmouth man.

"The same, sir. Wounded, twenty-nine. Mr. Luke's been carried below. Both the other two midshipmen are wounded, not serious though. We've fished the foremast, sir, and it'll take a jury rig."

Pellew drew in his breath deeply and turned away. A total on both sides of more than eighty dead and a hundred and twenty wounded would increase his reputation enormously in the public eye, but that thought did not enter his head now. Pearse and Penberthy and God knew how many other men of Falmouth and the West Country—it would be for him to break the news to their widows and sweethearts. . . .

"Mr. Thomson," he said without turning his head. "You'll command the prize. Get your crew on board her—and ask Mr. Morris to come aft, if you please."

Nymphe and *Cleopatre* had fallen alongside of each other, the French frigate on the lee-side of her late opponent, and neither could be sailed clear. Pellew solved that by letting-go his small bower anchor to hold *Nymphe* while the light wind carried *Cleopatre* clear of him. Only when both vessels were under way with their improvised rigs and limping northward in company did Captain Pellew find time to listen to the almost hysterical Raffé, second captain of the *Cleopatre.*

Raffé, a thin hatchet-faced man whose quite good English was made almost unintelligible by his excitement, gulped the glass of claret Pellew offered him in his cabin and plunged into wordy beseechings. Raffé did not fear death in battle—no, not he, as witness the fight of *La Cleopatre*—but death at the hands of the executioner was another matter. It was what Captain Raffé had to expect, when he returned to France and when the Convention learned that *Nymphe*'s boarding-party had not been opposed. The gallant officer who boarded would certify that all the *scélérats* had carried themselves below decks, leaving Captain Raffé with but six men to resist the boarding. Would M. Pellew of his charity provide a signed document confirming that? Better still, would M. Pellew contrive that Captain Raffé should be kept a prisoner in England and not return to France at all?

Pellew gave him a curt assurance that he would report the fight truthfully and with full justice to M. Raffé. It was interesting information, he reflected, and valuable to Mr. Pitt's Government, that French crews could mutiny under fire and that French captains could be killed for it by their rulers.

"Your late senior officer, Captain Mullon, was perhaps too strict a disciplinarian for the sons of Liberty?" he inquired with faint sarcasm.

Captain Raffé shrugged. He appeared reassured by Pellew's reply to his entreaties.

"Jean Mullon was of the old school of the sea captain," he said. "He was De Mullon before he embraced the Revolution, monsieur, and *les ci-devants* have difficulty in accepting the principle of Equality. But many of them are very good seamen," he added quickly. "Captain Mullon was such a one, and Captain Bergeret is another."

"Bergeret?" Pellew repeated, pricking up his ears.

"Perhaps you have heard of him?" There was a gleam of malice in Raffé's narrow eyes. "It was Bergeret who led the squadron of our fleet which blockaded your army in America and caused the surrender of your Lord Cornwallis. He was De Bergeret then—Louis de Bergeret."

The captain of the *Nymphe* was momentarily transported back through the years; eighteen years ago he had met and fought and sworn friendship with Louis de Bergeret in Marseilles. They had exchanged one letter, and then, with the carelessness of youth, had let the acquaintance drop. But he would like to meet Louis again—even if it must be in formal enmity.

"Captain Bergeret is at sea?" he questioned.

"And in La Manche," Raffé nodded. "He commands *La Virginie*, of forty-four guns."

Pellew would have liked to pursue the matter, but he had no time to spare and got rid of Captain Raffé as quickly as possible. At the moment his concern was to get two battered frigates safe into harbour—and to write his report.

On June 21st *Nymphe* sailed slowly into Portsmouth Harbour with her prize in company, and every ship in the harbour manned the shrouds and cheered her as she passed.

IV

At the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden they were presenting the 'Semiramis' of Herr Gluck. The florid music was much to the taste of His Majesty, whose podgy hands led the applause from the Royal box and whose enthusiasm was responsible for more than one encore. In the middle of a spirited *tutti* the King was seen to be receiving a package from the hands of a gentleman who had entered the box. A moment later he had risen and was standing at the front of the box, a letter in one hand and the other raised for silence. The singing died away comically, the orchestra scraped itself to a standstill. King George's loud, hoarse voice read out the letter, which was from the Earl of Chatham informing His Majesty of the glorious victory—and accompanying carnage—whereby His Majesty's frigate *Nymphe*, Captain Edward Pellew, had fought and taken the crack frigate of the Revolutionary Convention, *La Cleopatre*, in a sea-fight lasting only fifty minutes. When he had finished, the whole audience (spontaneously, said the reports, but in fact spurred on by a conductor who knew how to seize his moment) rose to its feet and loosed unoperatic discord in a vociferous rendering of 'God Save Great George our King'.

Perhaps, had the encounter ended differently, its symbolic nature would not have been perceived. As it was, the whole country greeted the omen with wild enthusiasm. Britain's best had met the best of Revolutionary France and beaten it to smithereens in less than an hour. God save the King! Long live Mr. Pitt and his Government! Long live Sir Ed'ard!

For King and Government made haste to display their gratitude, which was reported in the West Country papers:

London, Saturday, June 29th. The King held a levee at St. James—Captains Edward and Israel Pellew were Yesterday introduced to the King at the Levee by Lord Chatham, when the honour of Knighthood was conferred on the former, and the latter kissed His Majesty's hand on being promoted to the rank of Post-Captain.

It was perhaps fortunate that the little red-faced man who ruled England was in genial mood that morning, for Edward Pellew was not. With the affairs of dead and wounded to see to and a sordid dispute about prize-money already on his hands, knighthood seemed to him an empty honour. George the Third remarked his grim unsmiling countenance as he approached to receive the accolade.

"Come, sir," said he, with his amiable grin, "a knighthood's not distasteful to you? Eh? You're not unwilling to be Sir Edward? What?"

Pellew answered him bluntly. "It's not lack of appreciation of the honour, sir, but lack of the means of upholding it, that troubles me. I've a wife and four children——"

"Four!" The King, who had been frowning slightly, guffawed. "I've nine, sir—nine! What? What? However"—he jerked his head at a gentleman in black who stood a pace or two behind him—"Menzies! The Privy Purse, eh? Annuity—Lady Pellew. Hundred and fifty. And now, Captain Pellew——"

He waggled the dress-sword which a gentleman-in-waiting had handed to him. Captain Pellew knelt, was tapped on the shoulder, and arose Sir Edward.

So Susan became Lady Pellew, with a hundred and fifty pounds a year to help her with the demands of housekeeping and a growing family. She had not been present at the levee, of course, but had come up to London with her husband and was waiting for him when he came out after

the ceremony. Her dark grey eyes were proud and happy as she clung to his arm, urging him towards their hired carriage. But they were not to have their moment alone together. The Earl of Chatham, gaunt, smiling, and as uncompromising as his younger brother, the Prime Minister, was waiting for them. He had ventured to place his own carriage at Lady Pellew's service—would she and her gallant husband honour him? They could not but accept, and as they drove slowly across St. James's Park towards the Golden Lion in Rochester Row, where the Pellews were lodged, Lord Chatham talked at large of the conduct of the war, Mr. Pitt's future policies for it, and finally of the terrible danger to England should the present Government fall.

"You are, I fancy, a connection of Lord Falmouth's?" he added absently.

Pellew, who very well knew that the First Lord had known this for the past dozen years at least, admitted it.

"Ah!" The Earl sighed his pleasure. "Then you are already in our camp, Sir Edward. We shall look to see you take up arms for us—not the cutlass or the cannon, but a seat in the House. The Admiralty, sir, is poorly represented in the Lower House."

"I hardly think, my lord," said Susan quickly, "that an active sea officer will have much time for politics."

"And no sea officer is more active than your gallant husband, ma'am," rejoined Chatham, bowing ingratiatingly in his seat. "Nevertheless, there are times when a short and seamanlike speech in the House from a man like Sir Edward is of more value to the par—hem!—to the nation, ma'am, than even such a glorious victory as that of *Nymphe* over *Cleopatre*. But we are arrived, I see, and you, Sir Edward, are not unexpected."

Rochester Row, into which the carriage had just turned,

was thronged from side to side and from end to end with a seething, shouting mass of people. At sight of Pellew's blue coat, epaulettes, and cocked hat the noise became terrific. A cheering mob of seamen, most of them half drunk, drove a way through the crowd with the obvious intention of relieving Lord Chatham's elegant carriage of its horses and towing it themselves, but their hero's huge voice raised itself in very unamiable protest and they abandoned the project. Pellew had to stand in the vehicle (the cheering swelled deafeningly as he did so) and clear a way to the inn portal with his quarterdeck tones.

Before he and Susan descended the First Lord found opportunity for a final swift remark in Pellew's ear.

"When—I will not say if—you take your seat in the House, Sir Edward—you will find that there are richer rewards on shore than at sea."

Then they were pushing through the yelling enthusiasts towards the haven of the Golden Lion's door. Someone thrust a sheet of paper into Pellew's hand as it stretched to protect Susan from the throng. Five minutes later, having run the gauntlet of bowing waiters and curtsying chambermaids, they were alone in their room.

Pellew turned from locking the door and took Susan in his arms, and for a long moment they kissed.

"And you are 'my lady' at last," he said, releasing her. "I vow there was never a lovelier."

As she laughed and dropped him a curtsy she seemed little changed, after all, from the girl of Knowle Hall.

"La, Sir Edward, I fear you're a sad flatterer!" Then she was serious. "Edward, I hate that man—the First Lord. What he said to you when we got out sounded like a threat."

"It was meant to be a promise, I fancy, my love," he told her somewhat abstractedly. "I wonder—I'm approaching

middle-age, Susan, and there's the future of our children to think of. The post list's a long one——"

"You'll not leave the sea, Edward!" she broke in between anxiety and indignation.

"Not I, not I," he soothed her quickly. "But a seat in Parliament might be the beginning of greater things."

Susan caught at his arm, her grey eyes almost stern in their earnestness.

"Don't trust them, dear!" she begged him. "The straighter path is the way for you—and the sea is clean, at least. What's this?"

He held in his hand the crumpled paper that had been thrust into it as they entered the inn. Now they looked at it together. It was a broadsheet, ill-printed and smudgy from the press, headed 'An Excellent new BALLAD of the NYMF and the CLEPATRE by A Seaman'.

Pellew's brow cleared and he chuckled as he scanned it. "Listen to this," he said, and read two of the verses aloud.

Her colours being struck, my boys, she then became our prize
And our young ship's company subdued our enemies;
Altho' they were superior in metal and in men.
Of such engagement you may seldom hear again.

And now in Portsmouth Harbour our prize is safely moor'd.
Succefs to all brave sailors that enter now on board;
A health to Captain Pellew, and all his sailors bold,
Who value more their honour than misers do their gold.

He laughed as he finished reading. But Susan nodded gravely.

"Yes," she said. "I like that better than my Lord Chatham. That's honest, Edward."

FIVE

I

Had Sir Edward Pellew needed any proof of the incompatibility of politics with honest fighting, he had but to look about him during those three opening years of the war with Revolutionary France. As always, he was too preoccupied with action to consider the intrigues below the surface of war, but if he could have turned his hot, intolerant brown eyes on the Government of England he would probably have perceived that there were only two honest men concerned in it: Edmund Burke, an Irishman, and George William Frederick, grandson of a Hanoverian princeling and King of England. For the rest, the Government of England pursued the war with its tongue in its cheek, talking loudly of Freedom against Tyranny when its thoughts were of Whig against Tory.

The Prime Minister, who had always thought the war wasteful and unnecessary, was making continuous overtures of peace to the rulers of the new France; and his pitiful endeavours were only brought to nothing by the circumstance that those rulers were usually guillotined to make room for another clique before any agreement could be reached. When Burke denounced any such approach as an attempt to deal with the Devil, Mr. Pitt declared his conviction that "from the necessary progress of human affairs, it is impossible that such a system can be of long duration". Half-heartedly, hoping for safety without having to fight

for it, the leaders of England yielded to public demand and strengthened the navy and the army. The army fell straightway under the claws of the politicians. The rich merchants who swayed so many Tory votes feared for their source of wealth, the West Indian islands, where neighbouring French possessions threatened the capture of English colonies. King George's commonsense assertion that the army should be sent at once to aid the Austrian and Prussian armies who were struggling vainly against victorious Revolutionary forces was ignored. It was sent to the West Indies, where forty thousand English soldiers perished between 1794 and 1796, most of them from typhus.

But Pellew was never a statesman or even a strategist. He was impatient only with the incompetence immediately beneath his eyes—the looseness of the blockade which could have sealed off the French coasts and strangled the growing strength of Jacobin France at the outset.

The Western Squadron was part of that blockade, five frigates—*Flora, Arethusa, Melampus, Concorde,* and *Nymphe*—based on Falmouth and commanded by Commodore Sir James Borlase Warren, a Cornishman like Pellew and therefore strongly approved by him. Pellew had applied for a faster and more powerful ship and had been transferred, with all his ship's company, to the command of the *Arethusa.* His new frigate carried forty-four guns, including twenty-eight eighteen-pounders, but proved to be a slower sailer than he had hoped.

And now began three years of a curious mode of life, though to Edward Pellew himself it seemed satisfactory enough; the alternation of brief periods ashore with Susan and the children and longer periods afloat in chase of French merchantment or in fierce action with their frigate squadrons. One day he might be in his house at Flushing playing with his baby son (George, his fifth child, had been

born in 1793) and the next day beyond the southern horizon seeking the flame and smoke of battle. Susan had a hard task to reconcile herself to this recurrence of dreaded parting and return, but she consoled herself with the thought that her husband was doing the duty which he was better fitted to do than any other man in his profession—and with no underthought of currying favour with the jobbers in Parliament.

The jobbers had not forgotten Edward Pellew, though. His name had stuck in the public memory after the duel between *Nymphe* and *Cleopatre* and his exploits with the Western Squadron kept it there, so that he was a public figure of unguessable influence worth wooing against a time of possible Government need. There was the running fight with the French frigate squadron, wherein *Arethusa* took prize the forty-four-gun *Pomone* after only thirty-five minutes of furious action. There was the battle with *L'Espion* and *Alert*, both (as Pellew wrote to his friend Broughton) 'compleately dished' and driven on the rocks. There were the two West Indiamen full of stores for the Revolution taken and brought in as prizes. There was the miraculous way in which not only Pellew himself but also the men who served with him came off almost unscathed in these encounters; as when, in the fight with *Pomone*, the French lost forty killed and fifty wounded while *Arethusa* had but three killed and five wounded despite the damage done by *Pomone*'s guns. And there was the prize-money. After the defeat of the French squadron, five of the 'Harrythusers' bought a Plymouth coach, horses and all, stowed it full of tobacco and grog to such an extent that there was only room for the owners on top—'with a fiddler for'ard and an organ-grinder abaft'—and drove to and fro between Plymouth and the dockyard all the time they were on shore.

These things advertised to the world, and not only the world of the West Country, that Captain Sir Edward Pellew was a fine seaman, a fighter of exceptional courage, and a successful commander. He was well on the way to being a national hero by the end of 1795. Captain Horatio Nelson of the *Agamemnon*, though noted by Their Lordships as a zealous officer, had as yet neither resounding sea-fight nor high-life scandal to endear him to the people of England. Commodore Warren, as commander of the Western Squadron, reaped the official acclamation and red ribands. Pellew's reward, besides his considerable share of prize-money and commendation, was the choice of any frigate he cared to ask for. He chose the *Indefatigable*.

As 'Pellew of the *Indefatigable*' he was to figure in naval memory and in old salt's tales; and, though he came to love her, she nearly broke his heart at first. What he coveted was the fastest and most powerful frigate available, and in *Indefatigable* he came close to his desire. She was a *razée*, a sixty-four-gun battleship cut down by one deck, and her lines were for speed. The Dockyard were proceeding to fit her with smaller masts in accordance with her new rating, and Pellew (who wanted the biggest sail-area compatible with seaworthiness) had to fight the Dockyard and the Admiralty to get what he wanted. He had to fight for the armament he wanted, too, and the irascible letters he penned from week to week would have ended the career of a sea officer less high in official favour. That he obtained everything he wanted was the more remarkable in that the Earl of Chatham had been superseded as First Lord by Earl Spencer, an able man who had less concern for the political value of heroic post-captains. *Indefatigable*'s tall masts and big sails made her exceptionally fast, and she carried twenty-six twenty-four-pounders, fourteen eighteen-pounders, and two twelve-pounders—a weight of metal in which

Pellew, ever aware of the value of gun-power, rejoiced exceedingly. Less than a week after he first set sail in her she ran upon a sunken rock three miles off Cape Finisterre, and was with difficulty brought back to Plymouth for repairs which were likely to take a long time.

But even in this misfortune Pellew's guardian Goddess found him opportunity for distinction. While he was in Plymouth watching over the repairs to *Indefatigable* the East Indiaman *Dutton*, crammed with troops bound for the West Indies, was wrecked in a gale on the rocks at the foot of the Hoe, beneath the Citadel. As soon as he heard of it Pellew hastened to the spot and found that a rope had been rigged from ship to shore whereby the soldiers (many of them ill of a malignant fever) were being drawn ashore one by one. Perceiving that the *Dutton* must go to pieces before a third of them were rescued, he had himself hauled on board the doomed ship and managed to get two more pulley-ropes rigged, after which he stood with drawn sword controlling those of the soldiery who had got at the spirit-store and were drunk with gin and terror, until every man on board except the *Dutton*'s officers were safely ashore. Then he himself was pulled back through the surf, severely bruised and with his back injured from violent contact with a fragment of the *Dutton*'s mainmast. She rolled over and went to pieces twenty minutes after the last of her company was pulled to safety.

For a week after this incident Pellew was unable to walk. And he was in bed (and suffering the enforced idleness with impatience) when Susan brought him a letter sealed with the 'foul anchor' of the Admiralty. He opened it and read it aloud.

Dear Sir

I did not fail on the earliest opportunity to state in the

manner it deserved to His Majesty your conduct in afsisting the Dutton E. Indiaman, and I have the sincerest satisfaction in having an exprefs Command from His Majesty to signify to you his very marked approbation of it. His Majesty has been further pleased to add an offer to you of the Rank & Title of a Baronet of Gt. Britain as a more publick testimony . . .

Pellew looked up from his reading with a chuckle.

"By God, Susan, this cures my back!" he declared. "A baronetcy! Sir Edward Pellew, Baronet, of—it had better be 'of Treverry'. It's a good Cornish name and my grandfather used to own the farm. What say you, my love?"

"I'm very glad for you, Edward."

His wife's tone was a little cold, her smile a little unreal. Pellew, who had turned over the page of Earl Spencer's letter, noticed neither.

"His lordship asks me to let him know by return of the post the place of my most usual residence," he remarked. "Susan, this little house is very well for a sea officer, but we must consider something better. A baronetcy goes with property, or with money, at the least."

"You have not much of either," Susan said rather sharply. "Especially after throwing away two-thirds of your prize-money in pensions to widows and orphans."

"Trefusis is for sale," he went on, unheeding. "The Manor House of Flushing should suit very well, and we can just afford it. A baronet—and if I keep the favour of the nabobs up at Westminster who knows what may follow? Do you realise, my love, that young Pownall is now the heir to a baronetcy? Sir Pownall Pellew of Treverry——" He stopped, aware at last of her lack of response. "What's the matter? You're not happy about this, it seems."

Susan looked away from him. "I think I fear the Westminster nabobs more than the French cannon," she said.

The vertical furrows between Pellew's brows deepened. The ill-temper resulting from his bed-ridden state woke again.

"You think this reward was unmerited—is that it?" he demanded abruptly.

"No, Edward. They'd bribe you with something greater if they dared, I'm sure of it. There'll come a day when they'll ask you for some service which a man of honour——"

"By God, this is too much!" roared her husband, red with anger. "Bribes! Honour! I'll not have such talk even from you, my lady!" He gave rein to his resentment. "My lady—aye! Haven't I made you that? And much gratitude I——"

"I was lady enough before I married you!" she flung back at him, stung to anger in her turn.

"Ha! And a dozen years of marriage makes you my conscience, I suppose! Give me leave, ma'am, to conduct my affairs as I wish, and keep your strictures for the nursery. His Majesty chooses to honour me, and I choose to believe him honest, by God—despite unworthy insinuations from my wife!"

Susan closed her lips tightly on the retort that sprang to them and went swiftly from the room.

So they quarrelled. It was their first quarrel since their marriage, and the more bitter in that the seeds had been some time growing. A week or two later, when Pellew put to sea again in *Indefatigable*, they parted coldly.

This time Pellew commanded a squadron on special and secret duty. With five frigates and a lugger, he was to give support to the five 'armies' of the Chouans in Britanny who were in revolt against the newly-formed Republic, and distribute the arms and ammunition with which one frigate

was loaded equally among them. So far as the harrying of French shipping on that coast was concerned he was successful, nine vessels being taken or destroyed. But the landing of the stores proved well-nigh impossible. As usual, the Government's action had been taken too late. A truce with Austria had released the Republican armies for action in other places, and young General Bonaparte (he who had saved the Directorate from the mob of Thermidor) was urgently pointing out how they should be used. Pellew found the places where the stores were to be landed already in the possession of Republican troops, while three of the five partisan commanders were dead or vanished into hiding; but he made contact, with great difficulty and risk to himself, with 'General George' Cadoudal, the rebel commander-in-chief, and managed to get the greater part of the supplies into his hands before Cadoudal was driven inland by the encircling armies of the Republic, who were shortly afterwards to overwhelm him and take for themselves the excellent arms and stores so kindly supplied by Mr. Pitt.

Pellew's observations of the situation in Brittany had left him with little or no hope of Cadoudal's success. Somewhat disheartened, he resolved to cruise with his squadron off Ushant for a week in search of more satisfying work. On April 13th he was rewarded by the capture of the frigate *L'Unité*, who struck her colours to superior force after a brief exchange of shots. On the 20th fortune brought him an encounter he had long desired.

'These 24 hours strong breezes & hazy, all sail set in chase, at 4 the Concorde & Amazon a great distance astern, at 6 the Chase hoisted french Colours. We hoisted the same, at ½ pt. 6 saw a Ship in the West stand'g to the South'd, at 9 lost sight of the Squadron, at ½ past 11 in Royals & Stdding Sails ¾ pt 11 the Chace hoisted French Colours (again) we

hoisted English & gave 3 cheers, a.m. ½ pt 12 the Chace began firing, at 1 our Gaff & Mizen topmast were shot away, at ½ past 2 she struck, proved La Virginie National french frigate of 44 guns & 339 men, four days out of Brest.'

Thus, laconically, the Log of *Indefatigable*. The two hours of fighting were hot enough, though *La Virginie* was heavily outgunned and her captain was aware that at least two other English frigates were below the horizon and coming up as fast as they could. 'The *Indefatigable* . . . hove all aback and received in that position two broadsides which cut his gaff, his Mizen Topmast and Crossjack yard,' he wrote in his report (which Pellew had copied and translated); and 'I was myself obliged to use the hatchets to clear away the Wreck of the Masts'. And Captain Bergeret, who had forty-three men killed and wounded, ended his report in these words: 'People will not easily be persuaded that for all the damage suffered by the *Indefatigable* she has but one man wounded.'

The crew of the *Indefatigable*, many of whom had served with their captain in *Nymphe* and *Arethusa*, were not surprised by their good luck in coming off so lightly in the way of casualties; with Pellew, they had come to expect it. What did surprise them was the sight of their commanding officer embracing the handsome captain of *La Virginie* on the littered quarterdeck of the French frigate.

"Louis!" Pellew was shouting joyously, perhaps a little too joyously in the circumstances. "This is well met indeed!"

Captain Bergeret eyed him somewhat morosely and proffered his sword, hilt-first.

"To you the deserved victory, *monsieur le capitaine*. I know not," he added, "how many of our people are dead, but I think a score at the least. And my wounded——"

"They shall be seen to at once." Pellew waved away the sword "Pray keep that, my friend. Twenty years ago I

dropped mine and you let me pick it up." He took Bergeret's arm. "Leave this gallant vessel of yours and come to my cabin—my throat's full of powder-smoke and I don't doubt yours is too."

In the main cabin of *Indefatigable* over a glass or two of excellent claret (taken from one of Pellew's prizes) Captain Louis Bergeret thawed considerably. When his host and captor had assured him that no captain afloat could have made a more gallant fight against odds—which was no more than true—he was ready to express his own pleasure at the meeting, violently though it had begun. There was reminiscence of that long-ago duel in Marseilles, and before long Pellew's comments on that affair had him smiling.

At thirty-nine Louis Bergeret was a striking figure. The aquiline nose and the fierce dark eyes gave him the look of an exceptionally handsome eagle, and he wore his light blue coat and white silk breeches with an air that Mr. Brummell himself could not have equalled. His gestures and movements were invariably so graceful that they might have been called effeminate but for the brown masculinity of his features. He was devilish good-looking, reflected Pellew, and would cause a sensation in West Country society; it was just as well that Emma, only twelve but already impressionable, was away at the academy in Blackheath.

"You'll be my guest and Lady Pellew's, of course, until your exchange is arranged," he said. "Assuming, that is, that you'll give your parole?"

"*Naturellement*, my friend. I cannot decline so generous an invitation. And to my meeting with Lady Pellew," Bergeret added, "I look forward with the most extreme impatience."

"That's good. *Indefatigable* will have to refit after standing the fire of your admirable gunners, so we shall probably

take a house in Plymouth until she's fit for sea again." Pellew rose and clapped him on the shoulder. "The sooner we make our repairs, the sooner your impatience will be satisfied. Shall we go on deck?"

As he went up the companionway behind his prisoner his face wore a frown. For the first time for some days he had remembered that all was not well between Susan and himself.

II

The long dining-room at the Pope's Head in Plymouth was thronged with notabilities and their ladies, eating and drinking and laughing under the blaze of two hundred candles. 'The dinner,' reported the principal West Country newspaper, 'was served up in the first style of elegance, and the wines were of the first quality.' The wines were indeed the best that French vineyards could supply, for they were provided by Captain Sir Edward Pellew, Bart., who was giving the dinner, and they represented the cream of the excellent cellar he had acquired from his many prizes.

That morning at the Guildhall Sir Edward had been sworn in as a Freeman of the ancient Borough of Plymouth, while the bells of the two churches rang a peal for the occasion. Now, with the Mayor and the Court of Aldermen and their ladies as his chief guests, he was required to sit between His stout Worship and His Worship's even stouter wife; a situation much less conducive to gaiety (as he could not fail to notice) than that of his wife and Captain Louis Bergeret, who were seated together some little distance from him at the same long table.

In the six weeks he had been the Pellews' guest on parole, Captain Bergeret had become a personage, even something of a hero, in Plymouth society. His good looks, his elegant

figure, and his very French turn for pretty speeches had won him a welcome at a dozen great houses in the neighbourhood. He was liked and admired wherever he went—and he went nearly everywhere, as often as not escorting Lady Pellew. It had been assumed almost as a matter of course that as her husband was not available Susan should be partnered by Louis at the Pope's Head dinner-party.

Pellew was unconscious of his slight frown as he watched them now, Bergeret chatting animatedly to Susan with his handsome head close to hers, she laughing at his talk with a liveliness and high colour that were lacking when her husband was beside her. Even though he thinks her still beautiful, a husband of thirteen years' standing can forget that his wife may be attractive to other men. Pellew had only recently had this fact brought home to him. From the day when she had first welcomed his prisoner to the pleasant house they had taken on Citadel Hill, Bergeret had conceived a strong admiration for Susan, as he declared very openly to Sir Edward. Pellew had been delighted. Susan's welcome to him had been warm enough, but the constraint between them was still there (he imagined that she grudged him even this honour Plymouth was doing him) and he was not sorry to find constant occupation in the dockyard where *Indefatigable*'s repairs were taking an unconscionable time. Lately he had been less pleased about this friendship and the way Susan gallivanted about showing off the handsome Frenchman to all her acquaintances, as he put it to himself. His old liking for Louis had been strengthened by the renewal of their acquaintance; he admired Bergeret's cool bearing in circumstances which would have galled him unendurably had he been in the French captain's place. But he found himself hoping that his prisoner-guest's exchange would not be long in taking place. It was proposed, he knew, to approach the Republican Government

with an offer to return Captain Bergeret in customary exchange for a captain of approximately equal importance —to wit, Captain Sir Sidney Smith, at present in a Paris prison. On the whole, it was a pity that business had not been put in hand earlier. Then Louis might be on his way to France by now, and Pellew would not have to put to sea tomorrow, as he was going to, leaving Louis and Susan——

Applause broke in on his troubled thoughts and made him aware that someone had just finished making a speech. Everyone was looking expectantly towards him; evidently he was to reply. He rose and lifted his glass. They should have it short and seamanlike.

"My thanks, good friends. And now I'll give you a toast. Here's confusion to the King's enemies and a slice of humble pie for every bragging Frenchman!"

It was said hastily and without forethought. He had been thinking of Louis Bergeret a second or two before, but rather as a source of trouble in his domestic affairs than as one of the wordy villains who defied King George. The fact that Bergeret remained seated while the gentry of Plymouth stood to drink the toast with acclamation brought Pellew's tactlessness home to him. Bergeret's lean face had reddened slightly, but there was a faint smile on his lips and his dark eyes regarded the speaker with a mixture of amusement and reproach. Beside him Susan had risen, glass in hand and crimson with indignation; the glance she threw at her husband was furious. Pellew, annoyed at his own carelessness, was also annoyed with them.

He took no pleasure in the rest of the evening's entertainment, in which, as the newspaper recorded, 'several loyal and constitutional toasts were given, and the day ended with the uttermost harmony and festivity'. In the carriage that conveyed him and Susan and Bergeret back to the house on Citadel Hill he hummed tunelessly to himself and

stared out of the window while Susan chattered rather feverishly to the Frenchman. Once Bergeret interrupted their conversation to turn with a smile to Pellew.

"You will forgive me, *mon ami,*" he said, "that I was unable to drink your toast?"

"Of course," he answered shortly.

It would be ridiculous, even dishonest (he told himself) to make any apology. If Bergeret didn't like it he must lump it. As a prisoner in a hostile country it was the sort of thing he had to expect. And Susan's anger—he could feel it beneath her flow of animated talk—was yet another sign of her foolish partiality for Louis.

When they reached the house he excused himself and went up to the bedroom he shared with Susan. In addition to the great bed there was a truckle-bed in one corner, set there so that he could creep into it without disturbing her when he returned in the small hours from long supervision of the work on *Indefatigable.* From the big windows there was a wide view—darkling now—over the Sound, and he stood for a long time looking out on the waters where *Indefatigable* would sail away tomorrow on the first of the ebb. She was lying in Cawsand Bay now, and the first part of his voyage would be along the coast to Falmouth where the rest of his squadron awaited him: *Amazon, Concorde, Revolutionnaire, Phoebe,* and the *Duke of York* lugger. His orders were to cruise between Ushant and the Lizard with a particular eye to Brest where the main body of the French fleet was known to be lying. The alliance now being concluded between France and Spain would make this service more hazardous; Spanish ships and Spanish ports would henceforth be hostile.

That turned his thoughts from the sea to the situation of England in this coming autumn of 1796—increasingly alone against the foe a hundred miles away across the Channel.

Austria and Italy were broken reeds cowering to defeat beneath the blows of the young Revolutionary general Bonaparte; the Dutch and the Spanish navies were now allied with France; Portugal was the only friend left to England on the seaboard of Europe. And in Ireland violent rebellion had broken out. There were folk who maintained that the French would land in Ireland and threaten England from there, and if that happened there would be the devil to pay indeed.

"Damn and blast Bridport!" Pellew said to himself fervently.

If Admiral Lord Bridport, commanding the Grand Fleet, would allow some of his ships of the line to strengthen the blockade there would be no possibility of a French fleet dodging out from its bases at Brest and L'Orient and Rochefort to land an army in Ireland. But Bridport—a pompous man whom Pellew detested—believed in keeping his fleet safely in Spithead, in the conviction that its mere existence was enough to hold the French battleships useless in their harbours, while his frigates watched continuously over Brest and the stormy seas off Ushant. But if the French did come out, reflected Pellew exasperatedly, the Grand Fleet —two hundred and fifty miles away—could never get out in time to prevent anything the ships of the Republic wanted to do, while frigates could do nothing against them; a single broadside from a French seventy-four was sufficient to put a frigate completely out of action. Even *Indefatigable*'s long carronades, which had just been mounted on new slides of special design, could do only negligible damage to the massive hull of a two-decker.

The thought of the new slides brought his meditations back to Louis Bergeret again. A week or so ago Lady Pellew had paid a call on the Commissioner's lady at the Gun Wharf, escorted as usual by Captain Bergeret. For Bergeret,

a prisoner on parole, to enter the Gun Wharf at all was a flagrant breach of the regulations, the more so as *Indefatigable*'s carronades were being fitted there at the time and were a sight forbidden even to the loyal civilians of Plymouth. If any report of this breach had come to the Port Admiral it would have resulted in Bergeret being deprived of his parole and put into close confinement. That had not happened, and the only result had been that Pellew had lectured his wife severely on her imprudence and had thereby widened still more the gulf between them. Pellew, of course, knew very well that Louis Bergeret was a man of honour first and a Republican a long way second; he was incapable of taking advantage of any such opportunity while on his parole. And by the same token Pellew would have considered himself incapable of doing the thing he was to do within the next five minutes.

For into his reflections, as he stood at the window gazing gloomily out into the twilight, stole the murmur of voices—Bergeret's and Susan's. There was a narrow garden below him, its end wall overlooking the falling ground above the edge of the sea cliffs, and on this wall they were leaning in intimate talk, the two dark figures close together. As he watched he saw the taller figure turn and raise his companion's hand to his lips. Immediately after that the two shapes seemed to merge into one dark blur; but before he could be sure of what had happened they were moving slowly up the garden path arm-in-arm.

Pellew swore deeply. All the buried jealousy and resentment of the past months surged like a flood into his mind. He strode across to the little writing-desk where the candle flickered uneasily and dashed off a brief letter to the Port Admiral, respectfully recommending him not to lose sight of Captain Bergeret, prisoner on parole, who was known to have made a recent unlawful visit to the Gun Wharf. He

sanded it, sealed it, and rang for a servant to deliver it at once. If he knew his man, the Port Admiral would have Bergeret safely under lock and key within a dozen hours.

When, half an hour later, Susan Pellew came up to bed, she found Sir Edward already undressed and apparently asleep in the truckle-bed. It was their last night together—for many months, perhaps—and she had come upstairs resolved to end their estrangement somehow in spite of his boorish behaviour at the Pope's Head.

"Edward?" she called softly.

The only answer was a snore, to Susan's ear blatantly artificial. She blew out the candle and stood for a moment in darkness, biting her lip to keep it from trembling. Then she went lonely into the great bed.

Next morning *Indefatigable* sailed. There was a sea-mist in the Sound, and Lady Pellew, watching from the Citadel Hill, saw only the pale ghost of a ship moving westward and vanishing swiftly in the grey vapours.

III

"God, it's cold!" said the first lieutenant of the *Indefatigable* for the dozenth time, slapping blue hands across his chest. "How in the name of Providence *he* can stand it up there I'm damned if I know." He jerked his head at the patched and weather-stained canvas that creaked overhead. "How long's he been aloft?" he added.

"Three hours and a half, Mr. Thomson," returned Gaze, the second lieutenant. "And three hours and a half we've been standing off and on. Sooner or later they'll catch us, sir."

"They'll never catch Sir Ed'ard, Mr. Gaze," declared Thomson with complete assurance. "Stand by to go about again."

It was the forenoon of December 16th, and bitter cold. A scant two miles across the grey water that creamed under *Indefatigable*'s forefoot the shores of Camaret Bay stretched purple-green beneath the clouded winter sky, and in front of those shores was something that looked like a forest of bare trees growing at the water's edge. The trees were the masts and spars of nearly forty ships, more than half of them ships of the line. The French fleet was ready for sea.

For months now the Admiralty in London had known that a big French naval expedition was preparing. Sir Edward Pellew had seen to that. His little band of fast frigates, holding their station through some of the worst autumn gales in living memory, had pried and sallied repeatedly into the very jaws of the bays and harbours on the Britanny coast until nothing that went on in Brest, Rochefort and L'Orient was unknown to them. Not a Republican look-out on that coast but could recognise *Indefatigable*'s patched topsails as soon as they hove above the horizon. Not a gunner in the twin batteries of La Goulette but had seen Pellew's impudent frigate sweep into the anchorage of Brest, dodging the fire from the batteries, and sweep out again untouched. His reputation was as well-known to the French—though in a somewhat different aspect—as to the English. And second to *Indefatigable* in daring impudence were *Amazon* and *Revolutionnaire,* the former commanded by Reynolds, a fine seaman well-loved by his men, and the latter by Christopher Cole, brother to the Frank Cole (now dead) who had been put ashore with Pellew at Marseilles by Captain Stott.

What their incessant reconnaissances had revealed was both significant and puzzling. '. . . 18 or 19 sail of the line are getting forward in repairs and fitting; 7 of them have sails bent . . .' Then, many weeks later—'Heard several Guns from the NW at 8 a.m., saw 8 strange sail to windw'd,

made all sail in chace, proved to be 5 line of Battle ships and 3 frigates standing in for Brest with french Colours hoisted . . .' That was Richery's division from the Isle d'Aix joining the already strong concentration; had Bridport risked the battering of the gales the Grand Fleet could have snapped them up.

But the Admiral was forced to take notice, and action. His action was to send Vice-Admiral Sir John Colpoys with ten sail of the line to take station off Ushant, well out to sea; a half-hearted and practically useless measure, since Colpoys had no orders to attack and in any case ten battleships and a squadron of frigates could hardly be expected to tackle a French fleet of more than twice their strength, much less inflict the crushing defeat that was needed.

Pellew was exasperated, particularly as Admiral Colpoys was an officer he disliked and suspected of equalling Bridport in half-heartedness. But he redoubled his close watch on the French, using his frigates to send report after report to Colpoys as the latter cruised up and down at the rendezvous far out to sea beyond the Isle of Ushant. On December 12th he sent the *Amazon* with an urgent report for Admiralty: '. . . There is now in Brest 21 sail of the line appearing ready for sea, 2 of them three-deckers, and 2 other three-deckers with yards and topmasts down . . . We were so near in as to be fired at from both sides of the Goulette and could most distinctly see everything in the port. The ships appear all clean painted . . . It is much to be regretted that this fleet could not be intercepted . . .'

On this very plain hint Admiralty acted, though Pellew was not to know it until afterwards. Bridport was ordered to sail, and did sail on Christmas Day; but by that time it was too late.

Meanwhile, Pellew had only *Revolutionnaire* with him on that morning of December 16th. Bidding Cole stand by

at the entrance to the bays and passages between the islands which shelter Brest, he had sailed right in with the first light of dawn, himself going up to the masthead as soon as it was light enough to see. He was still there at eleven, so stiff with cold that he could scarcely hold his glass to his eye.

Endurance of hardship for its own sake, unnecessarily (unless it can be counted a necessity continually to prove oneself a man of iron) and obstinately, had always been a habit of Edward Pellew's; of late he had indulged it more frequently than usual, to the uncomprehending admiration of his crew. He gained a kind of savage comfort from driving his body to its utmost limits and forcing it to undergo rigours of exposure which would have killed a landsman, in weather cold enough to require shortened tricks at the wheel for more than one tough seaman of the *Indefatigable.* The numbing and exhaustion of his body could be brought to a pitch whereat his mind also became numb, so that the nagging memory of Susan and Louis Bergeret ceased to trouble him. And the elements helped him in this. The autumn and winter of 1796 were the stormiest within the memory of the oldest seaman on board. It was not so much the violence of the gales as their persistence. With a cold, wet fury they had blown throughout October and November, westerly for the most part, placing the English squadron on a lee-shore but making it well-nigh impossible for the great ships of the French fleet to get out through the narrow westerly entrance of Bertheaume Bay. Then, in mid-December, had come the sudden shift of wind to the east—a fair wind for vessels leaving Brest—and the redoubling of Pellew's daring reconnaissances. He had come in so close that he had been able to see the troops embarked, as many (he thought) as twenty thousand, with horses and artillery. The expedition must surely take advantage of this fortunate wind to sail; but where was it bound for? For Portugal, was

Pellew's own conviction. That lonely ally of England, with its long seaboard half-way between England and the Mediterranean so invaluable to the ships of the blockade, would be a most useful prize for the Republic, and a sudden landing to seize Lisbon was far from impossible. He would have confirmation of his guess as soon as the French sailed, for if their fleet was bound for Lisbon they would head southward through the passage between the Isle of Saints and the mainland. That was one reason for his ceaseless watch at the masthead: the fact that they had come out into the outer anchorage in the bay of Camaret showed that they were going to sail at any moment. The other reason was to rid himself of the intolerable ache at his heart —compounded of jealousy, sorrow, and angry impotence— that had made the night-watches miserable.

He had not been very successful in this latter purpose. Even now, as he clung stiffly and painfully to his eyrie while the *Indefatigable* plunged and bucketed round to resume her patrol on the other tack, he could not keep Susan out of his thoughts. Twice since July he had put into Falmouth to take in supplies and replace spars shattered by the gales, but he had not seen her. She was no doubt still in Plymouth, for Trefusis (their new residence at Falmouth) was not yet ready for occupation. There had been no letter from her; but the second time there had been a parcel, delivered by one of Samuel Pellew's servants. It contained a thick woollen jersey of Susan's making.

Pellew had been first touched and softened by that, and then angry. No doubt Susan had knitted a similar jersey for Bergeret, who was probably having his life in prison much eased by gifts from Lady Pellew. He tried to find satisfaction in the thought that Bergeret in prison was almost as effectively separated from Susan as he was himself; but at the bottom of his mind was always the uncomfortable

remembrance that he had procured that unjust imprisonment for Louis.

He hunched himself round in the cramped space of the foretop to level his glass on the distant ships from the new angle. At once Susan and Bergeret were banished from his mind as if they had no existence. The fleet was making sail at last! No—not the fleet, but a squadron, five frigates and one ship of the line. Morard de Galles, the French Admiral, was sending out an advance guard to chase off the insolent frigate that had pried into his doings for so long. That was a certain sign that De Galles was going to sail, but *Indefatigable* could stay on her post of observation no longer. Pellew clambered stiffly down to the wet slant of his quarterdeck.

"We'll run for it, Mr. Thomson," he told his first lieutenant, forming the words laboriously with half-frozen lips. "There's half a dozen sail coming out after us. I'm going below. Call me the instant you sight *Revolutionnaire*."

"Aye aye, sir."

As his captain stalked heavily away Thomson roared orders that set *Indefatigable* spinning round to race away from the six distant towers of canvas, pale against the purple-grey land, that pursued her. Then he turned to the second lieutenant; his usually stolid red face was alight with excitement.

"They're coming out, Mr. Gaze! The main fleet'll not sail till afternoon, with the ebb, I'll wager. If only the Admiral could bring his ships as far as the Saints by dusk we could make a fine hash of 'em!"

"But he won't, Mr. Thomson," returned Gaze unemotionally. "Sir John? With ten sail of the line against twenty-one? It's in my mind that we've seen the last of the French fleet this voyage."

But Mr. Gaze was wrong. By noon *Indefatigable* had

spoken the waiting *Revolutionnaire* and Captain Cole was racing away to find Sir John Colpoys and tell him that the French fleet were coming out. Captain Pellew, having sent off the news, beat back against the easterly gale towards Brest. Whatever his private opinion of Colpoys's character, he was bound to assume that his Admiral would make at once for Brest; but he was not going to wait for him. Besides, he had yet to learn in which direction Morard de Galles would sail.

The early dusk of a stormy winter day was already falling when *Indefatigable* came creeping in behind the black shape of the Isle of Saints and thrust her prying bows round it into the entrance of Douarnenez Bay. There was scarcely any need for caution. The bay was full of ships—thirty-six of them at least, plunging and wallowing on the wind-whipped waters as they struggled to conform to the signals from the flagship. Even in the fast-gathering darkness Pellew's keen gaze, from the masthead, showed him that many of them were being very inexpertly handled; that was only to be expected with the ill-trained and inexperienced crews they must have on board. But they were undoubtedly heading southward to pass through the Passage de Raz, between the Saints and the rocky southern headland of Douarnenez Bay. It would be dark before they were all in that narrow strait, and there were rocks at the entrance . . .

Captain Pellew was smiling when he reached the deck and strode up to Thomson.

"We'll make up within half gunshot of their flagship, Mr. Thomson," he said cheerfully.

Thomson gulped. "Sh-shall I c-clear for action, sir?" he inquired hesitantly.

"No." Pellew considered for a moment. "Have two guns cleared away and manned. Rockets and flares brought up

to the quarterdeck. Pipe all hands—and I'll want her handled neat and quick, Mr. Thomson."

Out into the squally dusk ran the *Indefatigable*, unobtrusively making one more in the dark throng of vessels heading clumsily for the Passage du Raz. And if she was observed, no one thought of identifying her with the solitary English ship that had been chased over the horizon that morning.

And so began, for Admiral Morard de Galles, a period of tribulation. He had trusted to a code of rockets and cannon-shots for signalling to his fleet by night, possibly without considering that even if the signals were correctly interpreted his multitude of vessels might not be able to obey them efficiently. His first taste of trouble came when he decided to form his fleet into two lines preparatory to entering the Passage du Raz. He fired a gun to call attention and let off two rockets, the agreed signal. The rockets were blown sideways by the easterly gale which was whistling across Douarnenez Bay from the coast, and passed close above one of the frigates—a frigate carrying no lights and close on the flagship's lee. At once, as if she had been startled into life, this frigate fired a cannon and sent three rockets soaring into the night.

Morard de Galles cursed the idiot of a captain who (doubtless intending to repeat his signal) had given the signal for forming three lines, but his curses were of no avail. Thirty-six vessels, plunging and heeling in the windy darkness, began to tack and cross each other's courses, some trying to take up their appointed position in line of two and some in line of three, while many who had seen no signal at all held straight on. Even above the noise of wind and sea the furious screeching from ships that had narrowly missed collision could be heard on board the *Indefatigable*.

"Lovely, sir—lovely!" Thomson was saying, hardly able

to speak for laughing. "Shall I give 'em another gun and a few more rockets?"

"Wait," Pellew told him, peering ahead beneath the loom of the main course. "We're nearly in the mouth of the Passage. Bear up and bring her round to windward of the flagship."

He must preserve his incognito as long as possible. If De Galles had a suspicion and let it grow into certainty he might chance a broadside in the dark and end *Indefatigable*'s mischief-making for ever. There was a full moon somewhere behind the hurrying wrack of clouds overhead and the black shapes of the ships were clearly visible on the paler water. So was the rocky nose of the Pont de Saints on the starboard bow. The leading vessels, somehow avoiding collision, were already entering the gap between that nose and the cliffs of the Bec du Raz opposite it.

"Try two guns," ordered Pellew, "and four rockets."

Two reports boomed out followed by the four brilliant streaks of the rockets. The result was such as to make Thomson dance with glee and Gaze slap his thigh. Apparently the signal was the code for going about on the opposite course, for all over the luminous space of tossing sea vessels began to wallow round, most of them tacking into the wind but a few—forced to it by their position too near another ship—wearing round in the other direction and in so doing adding to the growing confusion. There was particular confusion near the Bec du Raz, where several ships of the line had come too close together in their endeavour to keep well to windward of the Saints.

"By all the devils!" yelled Gaze, who had sprung into the shrouds to peer ahead. "One of 'em's aground!"

It was true enough. There was a seventy-four fast aground in the entrance, having run on one of the rocks.

Above the roar of breakers, which was now plainly audible

over the tumult of wind and wave, came the sound of a British cheer.

"Stop that!" bellowed Pellew angrily. "Mr. Thomson, reef topsails. I want to drop astern."

Cautiously, *Indefatigable* fell behind the flagship; she had been instrumental in destroying an enemy seventy-four, and at odds of thirty-six to one she could hardly hope to do more. Besides, there was urgent need to make contact with Sir John and tell him which way the French were heading so that he could cut them off. But there was still a chance of making further nuisance of himself, as Pellew saw when the doomed seventy-four began sending up rockets and firing guns—signals of distress—while the flagship was trying to establish control by firing her own guns and rockets. To this frenzied display the *Indefatigable* added her own contribution of meaningless bangs and flashes with an occasional flare thrown in for good measure, as she steered her somewhat perilous way between the looming shapes of big French ships tossing at all angles to wind and tide. The last sight Captain Pellew had of the Passage du Raz, while *Indefatigable* slipped happily away to westward, was of a disorderly huddle of ships and lights with guns flashing and rockets flying in all directions. If only Colpoys could have gone in now with his ten sail—or even intercepted the French as they came out through the Passage in disorder! Even now, if the Admiral had made sail as soon as he received Pellew's message, it was not too late.

But though he began burning flares as soon as he reached waters where Colpoys might be expected, there was no answering signal. He reached the rendezvous off Ushant before dawn. The fleet of ten sail was not to be seen, though he cruised all that morning in a fever of anxiety. It was *Revolutionnaire* who came over the horizon at last, to report that she had searched since noon of the previous day for the

Admiral, to deliver Pellew's message, but had failed to find him. Colpoys had left the rendezvous.

Pellew would not at first believe that his commanding officer had gone. He spent another twenty-four hours looking for him in the storm-tossed seas off Ushant, firing guns and burning flares by night, and at last came to the conclusion that some unforeseen happening had forced Sir John to take his ships back to Falmouth. He took his own ships back, therefore, reaching Falmouth on December 19th. Falmouth had neither seen nor heard anything of Admiral Colpoys.

And still Pellew could not believe that a British Admiral would run away from his rendezvous into the Atlantic rather than face a French fleet, however superior. It seemed to him that Colpoys must have come to the same conclusion as himself—that the French were sailing to attack Portugal —and have gone south in chase of them. He sent off a long dispatch to the Admiralty setting forth what had happened and his own deductions therefrom, and was off to sea again a day later. He had with him *Revolutionnaire* and *Amazon,* and he left the former to keep watch at the rendezvous off Ushant while the other two frigates sailed on down the coast. In a fortnight and more of terrible weather they battled their way south as far as Corunna and saw nothing of Colpoys—or of the French fleet. Off Corunna there was no news of any attack on Lisbon or the Portugal coast; but there was news (if it was true) that told Pellew just how wrong his guess had been.

A Portuguese brig that had been forced nearly into Dunmanus Bay on the Irish coast by south-westerly gales reported passing a great fleet of ships heading north on Christmas Day, a league or two south of Mizen Head.

Ireland! Morard de Galles and his ships and soldiers had been bound for the invasion of Ireland after all—that start

to the southward must have been a ruse to mislead impertinent observers like himself. And what had happened in Ireland now? More than a fortnight had passed since Christmas Day. It was not impossible that the invasion of England by a combined French and Irish force was already being attempted.

Indefatigable and *Amazon* sailed northward at once, *Indefatigable*'s captain almost beside himself with impatience and anxiety. He had never considered the possibility of an invasion of England before, and he was surprised to find that his first anxious thought was for Susan. On January 13th, 1797, the two frigates were some fifty leagues south-west of Ushant when, at forty-five minutes after noon, a very large ship was seen ahead on the same course, steering under easy sail for France. Her size indicated that she was a seventy-four of the line; later he was to identify her as *Les Droits de l'Homme.*

Captain Pellew had now to make a difficult decision. He was consumed with impatience to reach England and learn the result of the French expedition—and to assure himself that Susan was safe and well. A seventy-four was admittedly too powerful a warship for two frigates to attack; no man would accuse him of cowardice if he merely noted her course and distance in his Log and went on his way. On the other hand, he was Edward Pellew. The decision was not really difficult or ever in doubt.

'The wind was then at West blowing hard, with thick hazey Weather. I instantly made the signal to the Amazon for a General Chace & follow'd it by the signal that the Chace was an Enemy.'

IV

As often as one of the wallowing green sea-mountains lifted *Indefatigable* skyward Pellew saw the enemy. The huge vessel was almost within twelve-pounder shot on his starboard bow, rolling like a giant whale as she rose on the Atlantic rollers or with her decks and lower masts hidden from him as she sank deep in the trough. Those decks, when he could see them, showed a packed crowd of men, green coats and blue and grey—soldiers of the French Republic; that made him guess what he only learned for certain later, that the Irish landing had failed and this was a laggard warship returning from the abortive attempt. It was after half past five in the afternoon and fast darkening towards night. Five hours' strenuous chase before a violent westerly gale had brought him up with his quarry, but he was alone. *Amazon*, a sluggish sailer, was out of sight seven or eight miles astern. '. . . the ships at this time going 11 or 12 knots, blowing very hard & a great sea.'

But for that 'great sea' *Indefatigable* would have been shattered by the big Frenchman's broadside of thirty-six guns by this time. As it was, no broadside could be accurately aimed in such weather except at very close quarters, and the seventy-four had had to close the gunports of her lower deck to prevent the sea from surging in. It was this latter fact that resolved Pellew to go in and attack without *Amazon's* assistance. It was extremely risky to do so—the big guns of the seventy-four's main deck could do far more damage to *Indefatigable*'s hull than his own broadside could do to hers; but if he could shoot away her spars or bring down a mast there was a faint chance that she could be held in play until *Amazon* came up.

"Starboard, handsomely." There were two men at *Indefatigable*'s helm to see that the tugging wheel was brought over smoothly. "Meet her—steady."

With his hands gripping the wet and heaving rail, Pellew stared through the flying spindrift for the next glimpse of the Frenchman. He had been soaked to the skin for hours now, but he was past feeling cold. There she was—her fore and main topmasts had carried away in the last gust and he was overhauling her fast.

"Mr. Thomson!" he roared. "Beat to quarters!"

The guns had not been run out until now because of the incessant crash of spray on the deck. Now the gleaming, pitching deck was filling with men, the gun-crews racing to their stations, clad in a variety of rigs from tarpaulins to a pair of duck trousers. Pellew found time to grin as he saw those naked torsos; there were men in the *Indefatigable*, he knew, who liked to show their captain they were as tough as he. He turned to face his second lieutenant. Gaze (unlike his senior officer, who still wore white breeches and blue coat) was dressed from top to toe in glistening tarpaulin.

"Mr. Gaze," said Pellew, "I want the first broadside aimed high. Fire on the lift and not on the 'scend. After that, independent firing until I give the word."

"Aye aye, sir." Gaze hesitated. "Er—shall I send a hand below for your tarpaulin, sir?"

"In due course, Mr. Gaze," returned Pellew pleasantly; in less strenuous circumstances he would have snapped Gaze's head off for that suggestion. "You can, however, send one aft here to hoist the colours."

The three cheers of *Indefatigable*'s men as her colours soared up were carried away by the gale. The Frenchman's *tricouleur* was flying next time Pellew caught sight of her, and she was so close that he could see individual figures on her quarterdeck. There were certainly vast numbers of troops

on board and he could expect to be harrassed by musketry if, as he proposed, he came to close quarters. Climbing and falling on the huge following seas, driven along at twelve knots before the following gale, the frigate and the great ship drew closer together. The fury of the wind swept the sound of the seventy-four's first shots away so cleanly that Pellew only knew she had fired by the jets of flame and smoke from her side. It was already dark enough for those cannon-flashes to look dazzlingly bright. She had fired her quarter guns as a chance roll brought them to bear, and scored no hit. But a few minutes later, when *Indefatigable* was almost beam-to-beam and so close that the Frenchman's side seemed to tower over her deck, a ragged broadside whistled through the frigate's rigging, cutting her reefed topsails to shreds and sending a block or two clumping down on the deck. Gaze loosed off his broadside in reply—and too soon. Pellew smote the rail with his fist as the guns vomited their shot into the thrashing water between the vessels. And before they could carry the fight further the seventy-four had sheered away, by accident or design, and the frigate had drawn too far ahead.

Again Pellew brought her to close range; again the ragged uproar of cannon sounded above the gale. The larboard braces of *Indefatigable*'s main topmast were partly shot away in that exchange, while there was still no perceptible damage to her foe. But the captain of the *Droits de l'Homme* showed himself of a mind to end this running fight quickly. Before Pellew could realise what the seventy-four was about he saw her vast bows almost overhead and whirling down upon him. She had suddenly altered course and was about to run him on board.

He could only wait, gripping the traffrail, while the huge wave-borne Juggernaut of oak rushed down. The bowsprit seemed a gigantic club aimed at his head, and he ducked

futilely and involuntarily. There was a splintering crash and he forgot his temporary panic in anxiety for his ship. It was the spanker-boom—the seventy-four's bowsprit had thrust clean across the quarterdeck and torn the sailless boom from its fastenings. As it fell he saw the wall-like side of the French ship rushing past a mere three fathoms from him—but falling farther and farther astern as the frigate's speed carried her away from that most narrowly escaped doom. A noise like thorns crackling in a big fire came to his ears and bullets sang and hissed about him; the soldiers were using their muskets, to little effect.

"Mr. Thomson! I'll have the topgallants handed!"

Even in the stress of that past moment he had noticed that the seventy-four's mainyard was flying wildly about. He must lessen his own speed in order to let her come up again at her reduced rate of knots.

"*Amazon*'s hull-up, sir, astern!"

An undersized midshipman, green-faced, was reporting to him.

"Very well. Mr. Baldwin, go and tickle your throat in the scuppers. You'll feel better after it."

It was nearly dark, but the fourteen hours of night could still be used for fighting. There was the Frenchman, right away to larboard astern and struggling back on to his course —and there, seen in a fleeting glimpse as she rose, was *Amazon* coming to his aid. Captain Reynolds was making to get on the Frenchman's other quarter—good luck to him! It remained to clear away the wreckage of the spanker-boom and return to the attack.

So began the hounding of the *Droits de l'Homme*. '. . . As soon as we had replaced some necefsary rigging & the *Amazon* had reduced her sail, we commenced a second attack, placing ourselves . . . upon each quarter & this attack, often within Pistol shot was by both ships unremitted

for above 5 hours, when we sheer'd off to secure our Masts . . .'

It was while *Indefatigable*'s men, working like demons in the roaring darkness, were reeving new braces in this respite that Pellew suddenly became aware of exhaustion. He was no fool. He knew that for every man there is a limit to his endurance of a midwinter gale at sea when he is drenched to the skin and with no protective clothing. He dashed below to his cabin, where dry clothing and tarpaulins swung from their hooks in a cupboard. As he was fumbling among them his hand fell on a parcel. It was the thick woollen jersey Susan had knitted for him. For a moment he stood stark naked in the swaying cabin, a prey to the unfamiliar emotion of remorse. Then he pulled the garment on over his head, the rough wool comforting his cold skin, and got into kerseymere breeches, leather seaboots, and tarpaulin jacket. Half an hour later Susan was forgotten again in the renewal of the fight. But in Edward Pellew's heart the embers of first love were glowing again and ready to burst into flame.

All that night the intermittent fight went on, while the three vessels drove on and on towards the French coast and the storm grew in violence. Though the night sky was overcast with racing clouds there was a half-moon aloft, and the two slim frigates that hung on the flanks of their massive quarry like hounds worrying a bull were never in danger of losing him. The guns of all three thundered whenever there was a chance of scoring a hit, and though many a shot went short or high or wide there was some execution done. About two o'clock the Frenchman's mizen-mast was shot away and went overside, her people clearing the wreckage before the gathering seas could poop her. *Indefatigable*'s main topmast crosstrees were gone, her main courses almost in rags, half her rigging flapping in the gale, and six of her guns

out of action. There were bodies and fragments of bodies rolling and sliding about her deck, too; musketry had accounted for some and cannon-shot for others, but the fury of the storm had taken its toll. '. . . the sea was high, the People on the main Deck were up to their middles in Water, some Guns broke their Breechings four times over, and some drew the ringbolts from the sides . . .' The seamen who survived that action would never forget the nightmare of those murderous masses of iron careering in darkness on the tilting deck, crushing more than one man to jelly against the bulwarks before they could be captured in a network of ropes and hauled to their places again. Pellew was always there to bring a kind of order out of the chaos. He seemed to be everywhere throughout that night. In the cockpit, where a smoky swinging lantern lit an indescribable shambles where horribly wounded men screamed and were flung against each other and screamed again, the surgeon was trying vainly to deal with a leg crushed by a falling spar—in a reeling, dim-lit sty with water swilling calf-deep all about him; Pellew, appearing from nowhere with a coil of line, lashed him to a stanchion, lashed his half-conscious patient to another, and bade him go on with the amputation.

But these visits to the 'tween-decks were rare and short, for Pellew dared not leave the deck for long. His lieutenants were sturdy and courageous enough, but neither Thomson nor Gaze had the imagination and promptness that a good sea officer must possess, and neither had much notion of navigation. Pellew knew that the coast of France must be very near now, but with no observations to help him he had no idea what part of that coast they were approaching. The French seventy-four, he thought, would know where she was heading for, but with her mizen gone and her fore and main yards unmanageable she was steering wildly and might well be off her course. The best he could do was to

place Bell, the master, on the fo'c'sle-head in the hope that he would see rock or shore before the frigate struck. As for *Amazon*, by four in the morning the noise of her guns had ceased and she had vanished into the roaring waste of waters.

Indefatigable, with her cannon still thundering whenever the gun-captains caught a glimpse of the enemy reeling through the towering seas, hung grimly to the flank of the *Droits de l'Homme*, whose guns replied defiantly. Pellew was receiving a report of grave damage on the water-line from the master's mate when Bell came staggering aft, waving his arms and shouting.

"Land—dead ahead!"

Pellew, forgetting his utter fatigue, sprang past him to roar orders.

"Cease fire! Hands to the braces!"

Hardly had he got the words out when the half-moon, gleaming suddenly through a rift in the clouds, showed plainly the white line of surf right ahead. *Indefatigable* sheered round, rearing and tossing. All her masts had been damaged, her main topmast was completely unrigged, and she was close in on a lee-shore. There could be no more pursuit of the enemy now—the fury of the sea had to be fought with every ounce of strength and seamanship Pellew and his men possessed.

That was a battle that lasted for three hours. All the time they were hauling and striving, edging the wounded frigate little by little away from death—the thunder of the tremendous surf thrummed in their ears more threateningly than had the guns of the Frenchman. Of her there was nothing to be seen—until seven o'clock in the morning. At that time there was light enough for Pellew to recognise his whereabouts, light enough to see that he had fought his ship clear of danger by the narrowest of margins. He was in

Audierne Bay, ten leagues south of Brest, and weathering the rocky teeth of the Penmarcks by a bare half-mile. *Amazon* was nowhere to be seen; not until a fortnight later was he to learn that she had gone ashore farther up the coast, Reynolds and his crew being taken prisoner. But *Droits de l'Homme* was there. The great ship, with all her masts gone, was lying on her beam-ends a mile offshore, fast on a sandbank with the grey-green mountains of water battering her and the giant fountains of surf flying right over her. Pellew could see men like swarms of ants on her sides—there for an instant, then swept into eternity by a mighty wave. There was no hope of saving them, no possibility that one of those two thousand men could escape with their lives.

He clutched the wet rail, staring with bleared eyes at the pitiful end of the chase, while the battered *Indefatigable* limped away through the grey morning to the safety of the open sea. He was more tired than he had ever been in his life, too tired to feel triumph or relief—so tired that he could feel the death agonies of the drowning Frenchmen, the torture of the wounded men on his own decks . . .

With a great effort he dragged himself back to the realisation that he was a sea officer with a badly-damaged vessel to bring back to port. There was much yet to be done and there could be no rest for him until it was accomplished. He pulled his wet clothing closer about his body, and felt the rough wool of the jersey against his chilled flesh. Susan had knitted the thing for him. There was comfort in that.

V

While *Indefatigable*, tattered and splintered, was working into Carrick Roads two days later a brown-sailed fishing-boat came bucketing out to her through the silver squalls of

rain. The frigate had spoken a fast lugger forty miles south of the Lizard, and she would have brought to Falmouth the news of *Indefatigable*'s return, but Pellew would not let himself believe that the woman discernible on the lugger's deck was his wife. But it was indeed Susan who was pushed up the side by the lugger's men and hauled on deck by two brawny seamen, to stand panting and gazing anxiously at her husband.

She saw him gaunt and unshaven, in creased and stained clothing, his face pale and lined with fatigue. He saw only the love and compassion in her grey eyes. A moment later she was in his arms and they were kissing passionately, oblivious of the grinning tars and the politely turned backs of Gaze and Thomson. There was no need of words between them then; and it was later in his cabin, when *Indefatigable* was at anchor, that Pellew asked after Louis Bergeret.

"Captain Bergeret?" Susan said without interest. "His exchange came through the day after you sailed, Edward—I thought you'd have known that."

"He went back to France? He was not in prison here?"

The relief in his voice made her look at him in some surprise.

"He went to France then, to exchange for Sir Sidney Smith. But—oh, Edward, poor Captain Bergeret!" There was more amusement than sorrow in Susan's tone. "They sent him back again! The French wouldn't let Sir Sidney go. So Captain Bergeret was shipped back in October and put in Stapleton jail."

"In jail!" repeated her husband. "Is he still there?"

Susan nodded. "I believe so. I haven't seen him, of course. Father was taken ill and I've been at Knowle for much of the time."

"Louis in jail—by God, I'll have him out of that or know

the reason why! A captain and a man of honour—they've no conceivable right——"

He stopped as Susan caught his hand in hers. She was smiling at him, though her eyes were moist.

"And yet, Edward," she whispered, "you were jealous of him, were you not? I wanted to make you jealous because—oh, because you were being so silly and obstinate, and he was so convenient and so ready to flirt. I suppose I was a fool. I—I'm sorry, Edward."

Pellew pulled her on to his knee. "I was the fool, my love," he told her. "You were just a woman."

Susan's arms were soft about his neck, her lips close to his ear.

"Tonight," she whispered, "you'll find me woman enough for you, my dear."

SIX

I

Impetueux, Torbay Sep. 1st 1799.

My dear Friend,

. . . I very much wish to know how you are as well as what you are doing and how Mrs. B. does and all the Cubs. My Susan is here as round as a barrel. I hope we shall not throw doublets but she is excefsively large and lays in next Month—this is rather a take in after a lapse of six years . . . Our eldest Daughter Emma comes from School this Xmas so you see if you had waited a few years I might have had you for my Son as well as my friend—but perhaps you thought you would not be able to wait so much time and I can tell you she would have tormented your Rheumatism a little. We are expected to sail the first fair wind, but I would not have you expect much from the Fleet—we are made up of blundering old Women . . .

So wrote Captain Sir Edward Pellew to his friend Alex Broughton. He was forty-two; a little past the prime of life by contemporary standards but still as phenomenally youthful in spirit and active in body as ever. The years had not failed to bring him their customary offerings of good things and evil, among the first a renewal of happiness with Susan (soon to present him with a third son) and among the second a thickening of the torso, which in so large a man was hardly to be called a paunch. They had also brought a

trifle more of a quality which he badly needed—the quality of philosophical resignation to unalterable circumstance. For if his domestic life went as pleasantly as it could, his professional life had for the past four years been all annoyance and frustration.

The matter of Captain Louis Bergeret had settled itself very satisfactorily. Pellew had done his best to obtain his friend's release from Stapleton Prison, but the Government order that had put him there with one hundred and fifty other prisoners-of-war was not to be gainsaid, and he could only arrange for Bergeret to have good food and such other comforts as the prison authorities would allow. However, the irrepressible Sir Sidney Smith (originally intended as an 'exchange' for Captain Bergeret) escaped from prison in Paris and reached London in May of 1798, which gave the Government the opportunity of making a gesture both generous and disdainful by releasing Captain Bergeret. Bergeret, partly to Pellew's regret, was gone; but Admiral Lord Bridport remained. Sir Edward's dislike of his commanding officer was returned, the more so when it became plain that the captain of the *Indefatigable* had gained in reputation with the Admiralty and the public while Lord Bridport had lost. Everyone knew now that it was the mercy of God (or His weather) that had saved England from a surprise attack by combined French and Irish forces; Bridport's laggardly ways and the apparent pusillanimity of his protégé Colpoys had made the boasted blockade a laughing-stock. Only Sir John Jervis's great victory over the Spanish fleet off Cape St. Vincent on St. Valentine's Day (wherein Commodore Nelson had much distinguished himself) had restored the Government's prestige. Captain Pellew, on the other hand, had got into the middle of the invasion fleet in his single frigate and managed to run a French seventy-four aground, afterwards fighting another enemy ship of the line

at great odds and destroying her—such, at least, was the public's view. Bridport took his revenge.

His first move was to bring Pellew more closely under his command, depriving him of the independence which (as his lordship well knew) was the prime ingredient of that officer's success. His offer of a ship of the line came next, and was politely declined; Pellew knew the sort of ship Bridport had in mind for him. But the Admiral's second offer, reinforced by orders from the First Lord, could not be refused. He was forced to leave his beloved *Indefatigable* and take command of *Impetueux,* seventy-four, a fine enough vessel but manned by the most unruly, mutinous crew in the service. His application to have with him the men who had served under him in *Nymphe, Arethusa* and *Indefatigable* was refused. He was not even allowed one reliable officer from those vessels. The inevitable mutiny took place (it was, perhaps, the last savage wave of the great mutiny at the Nore) and Pellew quelled it with his drawn sword in his hand and the bayonets of a few marines to support him. He was not a man to be trifled with by law-breakers, however valid their excuse.

'A.M. at 9 Sam. Sydney, Will Jones and Thos. Harrop (Seamen) were hanged at the yard Arm and at 10 their Bodies were Committed to the Deep. Read the Articles of War etc.'

Thus with the three ringleaders. Six others were flogged with five hundred lashes. And if Edward Pellew's new crew did not love him the more, at least they knew where they stood. As he wrote to Alex Broughton, 'so ended our fight, ever since which we understand each other, they think to find me always on my post—an act of oblivion has passed and we are as quiet as lambs'.

Impetueux played her undistinguished part in the fiasco which ended in the escape of the French fleet from Brest

into the Mediterranean under the very nose of 'old lady Bridport'. It was the last of that dilatory Admiral's efforts. To the great joy of Captain Pellew and everyone else in the Channel Fleet, Earl St. Vincent (as the veteran Sir John Jervis had now become) superseded Bridport in command. Susan Pellew rejoiced also; Lord St. Vincent was a hater of politicians and an enemy of corruption, a man whose main concern was to see that the tasks of war were given to the men best fitted to carry them out. She did not doubt that her husband would find opportunity for distinguishing himself under an admiral who recognised his peculiar merits. And she was right. St. Vincent sent for Pellew on May 30th, 1800, and put him in command of the squadron destined to carry out the first of several descents in force on the enemy coasts. Four thousand soldiers were to be landed in Quiberon Bay to join the Royalist Chouans, who were reported to have gathered an army again. Pellew planned every detail of the landings and operations himself, foreseeing every possible eventuality except one—that the army of the Chouans did not, in fact, exist. With no support from the Royalists, the Quiberon plan had to be abandoned; but Pellew, with the support of St. Vincent, proposed at once to attack and take the strongly-fortified Belle Isle, in Quiberon Bay. Again his masterly and detailed plan was brought to nothing, this time by a circumstance that he could not possibly have foreseen—the folly of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Dundas. When all was ready for an attack which could hardly have failed, a dispatch arrived from Dundas ordering all the troops to sail at once for Minorca.

It was ten weeks later when Captain Sir Edward Pellew confronted Admiral the Earl St. Vincent in the latter's cabin aboard his flagship. Jervis's rugged face, with its long nose and heavy brows, was frowning.

"Sir Ed'ard," he said abruptly, "there's another expedition toward. Ferrol's the objective. Take the town, burn the Spanish squadron there, then go on and do the same at Vigo and Cadiz."

Pellew's eyes gleamed. "Will they give me ships and men enough, my lord?"

"Fifteen thousand troops. Seven of the line, seven frigates." The Admiral cleared his throat gruffly. "Sir John Warren will command the squadron."

Pellew blinked and swallowed; his disappointment showed itself before he could conceal it. Then he threw back his head.

"I shall be happy to serve under Sir John, my lord," he said.

St. Vincent nodded, a glint of approval in his hard blue eyes. He knew by now how Pellew disliked being second-in-command to anyone; not that the likes and dislikes of his junior captains carried much weight with him, but he was well aware that Pellew in full command was capable of great things while Pellew as a subordinate could never be at his best. He rose to his feet and went over to lock his cabin door, his rolling gait and immense breadth of shoulder making him look like a grizzled ape in a blue coat. He came back and stood opposite Pellew with his hands on his hips, staring up at him.

"The First Lord wants a rear-admiral in command," he growled. "Lot o' nonsense—and yet there's sense of a kind in it. There was hell to pay about you having the command at Quiberon, Sir Edward. A dozen captains senior to you have been grumbling to the Admiralty about it. I'm speaking in confidence, d'ye hear? Keep your mouth shut, even to that lovely wife o' yours."

"Aye aye, my lord," said Pellew dutifully.

Jervis took a turn up and down his cabin and halted with his back to the captain, staring out of the stern window.

"Warren doesn't know that coast as you do, Sir Ed'ard. Nor is he the man for inshore work. I'm counting on you to second him with your guts as well as your brains. D'ye hear?"

"You may count on me to the uttermost, my lord."

"Yes." Jervis went on growling, half to himself. "General Pulteney—Sir James—commands the troops. Mr. Dundas's choice. Not mine, sir. They've given him fifteen thousand when five would have done. His proper name's Murray—Scotch—and no Scotch general was good for anything except defending walled towns. That's why they've given him three times the troops. It won't serve. Know Dundas, Sir Ed'ard?"

"I never had the honour of meeting the Secretary for War, my lord."

The Admiral snorted. "Another Scot. Cautious is a complimentary word for him. The orders he'll give Pulteney will be so worded that if Pulteney succeeds Mr. Henry Dundas gets the credit, and if he fails General Sir James Pulteney gets the blame. Lawyer he was and still is. Damn the politicians." He swung round. "If I know Warren he'll give you the inshore work to do, Sir Ed'ard. He don't like to take his ship within a league of a rock. This is the biggest blow we've struck at 'em, and if it succeeds—pray God it does!—I'll see you get full credit for it."

He clapped Pellew on the shoulder as he unlocked the door.

Captain Pellew was rowed back to his own ship, his thoughts torn between two emotions. The Admiral's obvious pessimism about the outcome of the Ferrol expedition had somewhat damped his enthusiasm; on the other hand, a military and naval blow of the first importance was to be

struck—as important, if it succeeded, as the Battle of the Nile which had made Rear-Admiral Nelson the hero of England two years ago—and even as second-in-command he would have his share of glory. By the time he was climbing through the entry-port of *Impetueux* he was considering the best place for a landing to take Ferrol.

II

Below the white curve of *Impetueux*'s main course the hills of Galicia showed pale brown across the flat blue summer sea. Through his glass Pellew could make out the headland of Cape Prior, and a mile or two to the right of it the narrow arm of the sea which made Ferrol the finest naval base in Spain as well as (in theory) one of the most strongly fortified of her ports. Pellew, who knew something of Spaniards and had looked into Ferrol when he was seeking Admiral Colpoys three years earlier, had his doubts about those fortifications. He was ready to wager that they had been allowed to fall into decay, and that even if the walls still mounted big cannon those cannon would be rusty, ill-served, and wildly aimed.

To leeward of *Impetueux* the fifteen ships of the convoy sailed, their pyramids of canvas scarcely leaning before the faint northerly breeze and keeping well together. Admiral Warren had given Pellew charge of the transports which carried the troops and artillery, while he sailed on ahead with General Pulteney in his flagship *Renown* to examine the place the general had selected for anchorage and landing. Warren had notified Pellew of the proposed plan, which was to land the troops in Betancos Bay, and Pellew had been horrified. Betancos Bay was some miles to the south of Ferrol, separated from the naval base by a rocky peninsula and the width of that arm of the sea on the north side of

which Ferrol stood. To Pellew's mind a landing by going straight up the harbour would have had a very good chance of complete success. But if Sir James Pulteney feared to risk that, there were at least two excellent landing-bays north of the harbour, unprotected by forts and with roads leading through fertile country (provisions there for the taking) whereby the artillery could be got very easily right up to Ferrol walls, if walls there were. Why in the name of all the devils must Sir James choose to put a barren mountain and a wide strait between himself and his objective?

Pellew abandoned that insoluble problem and glanced up at his masthead for comfort. There flew his broad pendant, white swallow-tail with red cross, to show that he was a commodore, not by courtesy of commanding a squadron but by rank and title. Warren had conferred that distinguishing flag on him when they had met at the rendezvous off Quiberon Bay before sailing south, and had appointed him to take charge of the landing operations. If he was to be in charge of the landing and therefore to some extent responsible for its success, reflected Commodore Pellew wrathfully, they might at least have asked his opinion of the place they had chosen.

"Masthead reports *Renown*, sir, fine on the larboard bow," said Conyngham, the first lieutenant.

"Very good. Signal to convoy 'Alter course' and 'Prepare to anchor'. Haul to the wind a point and fetch *Renown*."

He had brought his charges to the objective dead on time, with the exception of the three transports from Ireland carrying the Guards and Holmetsch's Hussars, which had failed to arrive at the rendezvous; he had satisfied himself by personal visits to each ship that the redcoats were one and all spoiling for a fight, preferably a glorious assault with sword and bayonet; he had the evidence of a Spaniard who was serving as a seaman in *Impetueux*, one Linners (his

proper name was Llinares) who had been born within gunshot of Ferrol, that there was a good road from Cape Prior Bay round to the landward side of Ferrol, where there were no defences worth the name. It was his duty, as well as his moral right, to have his say in the selection of a landing-place.

With the convoy hove-to in the lee of Cape Prior, Commodore Pellew had himself rowed across to *Renown*. The boatswain's pipes shrilled their salute and white-belted marines presented muskets as he came up the flagship's side to salute the quarterdeck and be greeted by Warren's flag-captain, Hood.

"Weather set fair and all in our favour, sir," remarked Pellew as they touched hats to each other.

Hood, a stocky man with a brown inexpressive face, looked sideways at him.

"Ye-es," he said non-commitally. "Sir John's in his cabin with the general officers, Sir Edward. He'd like you to join them."

As they walked to the companionway Pellew's glance sped shoreward to where the long, sandy beach of Cape Prior Bay stretched southward to a rocky headland, beyond which appeared part of the even longer sands of Dominos Bay. The low, barren hills showed no sign of life except one or two wooden shacks near the shore and there was not a human being in sight.

"By God, sir," he said, "if we landed forthwith we could have the troops and guns at Ferrol by dawn tomorrow. There's the road, going up by the huts yonder——"

"Just so." Hood laid a hand on his arm. "I've said all that to the Admiral, Sir Edward. Do you say it to General Pulteney."

"I will, depend upon it."

Below in the main cabin Pellew found six scarlet coats

and one blue. Sir John Borlase Warren introduced him to General Sir James Pulteney and his staff. Sir James was thin and long-headed, with a face which in repose was oddly reminiscent of an aged sheep but which he habitually rendered fierce by sticking out his lower lip and opening his watery blue eyes very wide. Seated with him at the cabin table were Generals Morshead, Coote, and Lord Cavan, Colonel Maitland, and Major McHerris of the Engineers. To Pellew's mind, perhaps prejudiced by Captain Hood's oblique hints, the three generals all looked like counterfeits of their commanding officer; Maitland, stout and resolute-looking, and McHerris with his rugged humorous features, impressed him more favourably.

"Sit down, sit down, Sir Edward," Pulteney said affably. "You come opportunely. The plan for the landing is complete and needs only your—ha—approval."

He spoke with an attempt at jocularity, but Pellew seized his opportunity.

"The landing, sir—yes. I'd like a word on that matter." He glanced at the Admiral, who pursed his thin lips and nodded reluctantly; Pellew went on quickly. "All's quiet ashore and it's safe to assume the Dons will be taken by surprise. Speed of action is what we need next. Sidere Bay, to northward, would take too long to reach—but we've Cape Prior Bay here, which is almost as good. Not a single defence, and a good road over the hills to Ferrol in five miles. A Spaniard in my crew assures me there are farms en route where the troops can find provision and shelter if need be. There's a fort in Dominos Bay—eight twenty-four-pounders, thinks my seaman—so it would be better to land all the men here rather than spread the transports along the coast into Dominos. The fort taken in rear, a night march by the road could bring us to assault at dawn——"

"Commodore Pellew!" The general, who had several

times tried ineffectually to break in, slapped his open hand on the table. "I had thought, sir, it was made plain to you that I shall land in Betancos Bay."

"Yes, sir," said Pellew doggedly, "but from Betancos you've a mountain and four miles of water to cross to get at Ferrol. Even from Dominos Bay there's a rocky hill to get the cannon over—whereas here in Cape Prior Bay there's every advantage, with a road, shelving beach, and at this moment a flat calm."

Pulteney sighed and placed his hands akimbo on the table.

"Permit me to remind you, sir," he said with an affectation of weary tolerance, "that this is a military operation and that I command it. It seems you would have me march my army upon a strong and important fortified town at double-pace, without reconnaissance, without due consideration of the appearance of things, notwithstanding the fact that a proportion of my force has failed to join me."

"By your leave, sir," Colonel Maitland put in, "it's credibly rumoured that the troops in Ferrol are not above five thousand in number, against which we can place twelve thousand——"

"Rumours!" Pulteney snapped at him, suddenly working himself into a rage. "What have I to do with rumours? I'll see the appearance of things for myself, sir, before I risk the thousands of precious lives placed by His Majesty in my charge!"

"The sentiment does you credit, sir." Pellew's attempt at placation was not very convincing. "But you'll perhaps allow me to point out that the best way of saving lives is to attack before the Dons have time to prepare for us. I'll wager my commission Ferrol hasn't yet heard of our arrival on the coast. In your place I'd land the Rifle Corps and artillery first and get them on the road at once. Teams of

seamen can pull your guns nigh as fast as your troops can march. I would have the guns covering the town by first light, deploy the regiments——"

"*You* would!" spluttered Sir James. "Damnation, sir, what you would or would not do is no concern of mine! Sir John"—he turned to the Admiral—"Commodore Pellew is second-in-command of the—ha—naval part of this expedition, is he not? He has, I believe, no—ha—military training?"

Generals Morshead, Coote, and Lord Cavan nodded gravely to each other; that, they seemed to say, was, after all, the decisive argument. Sir John Warren, looking worried, bowed his head.

"Sir Edward," he said, with a touch of apology in his tone, "your remarks, though not without point, are out of place at this juncture, since our decision is already taken." He took up a packet and held it out. "The detail of landing troops and cannon is here in full. I have prepared it myself with Captain Hood's assistance. Your comments on that, if you have any, would be welcomed."

The emphasis on *that* was slight but unmistakable. Pellew bit back the further remarks he had been on the point of uttering; exasperated as he was, he saw that nothing he could say would have any effect on this obstinate old ewe of a general. He took the packet and rose to his feet.

"I'm confident, sir," he said stiffly, "that there could be no possible improvement on your arrangements."

"Very well. Then we shall make sail at two o'clock precisely, Sir Edward."

"Aye aye, sir."

He came into the hot sunshine of the flagship's quarterdeck with a grim and tight-lipped face. Hood, coming to meet him, raised one eyebrow interrogatively.

"Betancos," said Pellew shortly.

As they walked towards the rail together he could not restrain his pent-up feelings any longer.

"By God!" he burst out. "It's infuriating, Hood! Military training or no military training, a child of ten could see the way to attack Ferrol better than that old—than General Pulteney. Why in the name of heaven——"

"Just so." Hood laid a soothing hand on his arm, halting him a little short of the waiting line of sideboys and marines. "But—a word in your ear—did General Pulteney say anything about attacking Ferrol, may I ask?"

"No. He talked about seeing the appearance of things."

"Yes. It's a little fancy some of us have got into our minds, Pellew. General Pulteney wishes to see the appearance of things at Ferrol. General Pulteney wishes to find Ferrol too strong for him. General Pulteney—in a word—has no intention of attacking Ferrol or anything else."

Pellew stared at him, aghast. "You're mistaken, Hood. You must be. He's a fool, and no more."

"He's a Scot, sir, and Scots aren't fools." Hood coughed and urged him gently towards the side. "We sail at two, I believe. *Hasta la vista*, as the Dons say."

Back on board *Impetueux*, Pellew ran quickly through the plans for the landing. They were exemplary in every way; Sir John Borlase Warren, whether St. Vincent's criticism of him was true or not, had no fault as an organiser. Sir Edward's spirits began to recover a little from their damping. At least there should be no slackness in carrying out those plans—and if he could carry them out rather more speedily than Pulteney expected he might rush the general into the swift and determined attack which (according to Hood) he was anxious to avoid. But—Betancos! With a mountain and an estuary to cross before reaching Ferrol! For one moment the captain of the *Impetueux* forgot his preoccupation with the striking of a great blow at the enemy

and remembered the glory he had hoped to reap from its success. The chance was being taken from him, it seemed, by the insensate folly of one man, and in a surge of wrath as savage as it was short he longed to see the body of Sir James Pulteney swinging from his yardarm as the bodies of those three mutineers had swung. Then reason returned—and with it the recollection of St. Vincent's words to him; he was to second the Admiral 'with his guts as well as his brains'. His brains being declined without thanks, it remained for him to interpret Warren's orders with all the energy he possessed.

The captains of the transports, summoned to *Impetueux* for a hasty council, were handed their orders with Pellew's most forcible injunction to obey them to the letter. Sir Edward added an instruction of his own.

"And you'll please to see that every man-jack of the lobsters gets ashore without wetting his feet. Wet feet don't take the spirit out of a seaman, but a soldier in wet breeches takes a day to get his heart back."

An hour later the invasion fleet was heading southward down the coast, keeping well out to round the little cape separating the beaches of Cape Prior and Dominos. Pellew had scarcely taken up his position to seaward of the transports and in sight of the flagship when a signal midshipman hurried across the quarterdeck to him.

"From the flagship, sir—'Prepare to alter course'. And—by y'r leave, sir, she's signalling again—'Course west by north', sir."

Pellew smote his fist into his palm. His eyes were gleaming. By God, Pulteney had seen sense at the eleventh hour. He was going to make into Cape Prior Bay after all. But the northerly breeze had freshened now and the beat to windward was going to be a long job for some of the transports. Evidently Pulteney, no doubt advised by the Admiral,

realised the difficulty, for there were more signal hoists and the somewhat disordered fleet eventually headed in for Dominos Bay.

Well, that was a hundred times better than Betancos, even if they had to face the fire from the squat, grey fort now coming into sight on a knoll above the beach. He rapped orders and *Impetueux*'s boats were made ready. One of them, the cutter, was sent away almost instantly, for a very small fishing-boat had made its appearance round the cape to southward—evidently putting out from the Ferrol inlet—and Pellew wanted news. The three grinning fishermen who were brought on board provided him with it. They seemed more pleased and excited by the advent of the English ships than frightened, and told Pellew—through the medium of the Spaniard Llinares—that no one in Ferrol knew about the arrival of the fleet, that they thought a night attack would find the garrison asleep, and that there were five French sail of the line and four frigates in Ferrol Harbour. The troops in the town, they added, numbered three thousand only. There seemed no doubt at all that these genial innocents were telling the truth; the very fact that they had put out from Ferrol to fish showed that the port was unaware of the proximity of an enemy fleet.

With renewed enthusiasm Pellew set about the business of getting the army ashore. With all sail set, *Impetueux* overhauled the rest of the fleet and led the way into Dominos Bay, while out on the horizon behind him Sir John Warren with two ships of the line kept watch. General Pulteney had elected not to be put ashore to take command until the landing had been effected.

From his quarterdeck Pellew could see the long curve of sandy beech—not even the slightest surf there—and the barren, thorn-dotted hillside rising behind it, offering an easy climb for the soldiers but a difficult obstacle over which

to drag heavy guns. Teams of seamen had already been told off for the gun-hauling in accordance with the original plan for the escalade of the mountain behind Besancos Bay, and there were track-ropes, skids, and handspikes in their equipment. His attention focused on the fort. With his glass he could see plainly some activity there, men in green coats and white breeches hurrying to and fro along the walls where no doubt the eight twenty-four-pounders were being trained on the English ships. They should be nearly within range now——

As the thought came into his mind the grey oblong, a third of the way up the hillside, seemed to blossom into white flowers,, exotic blooms that grew rapidly, merged, and shredded away as the ragged booming of the reports reached his ears. Before that, though, he had marked the fall of shot —one ball splashing a dozen fathoms away on *Impetueux*'s starboard beam, the rest raising short columns of white water well ahead of the leading ships of the incoming fleet. The Spanish gunners had fired too soon or without enough elevation. Next time they might do some damage.

"A quarter less ten!"

The voice of the leadsman in the chains made itself heard. With his eye darting from the fort to the ships and his own voice giving orders for taking in sail, Pellew listened to the chant that told of the depth of water beneath his keel.

"And a half nine . . . by the deep seven . . . by the mark six . . ."

That would do. As the signal ordering the transports to anchor fluttered up to the yardarm he saw why that second discharge from the fort had never come. Up the hillside above the fort hurried a pack of green-and-white figures; the gunners had merely fired their pieces and run for it. There would be no need to storm the fort now, but in a

little more than an hour those gunners would be in Ferrol with the news of impending attack.

"Mr. Conyngham! Make the general signal 'Proceed with landing as arranged'. And have my barge ready, if you please."

"Aye aye, sir. You're going ashore now, I take it?"

"I am. You'll take charge according to plan."

Within twenty minutes Sir Edward Pellew, the first to land on a shore which now showed no evidence of being a hostile one, climbed over the side of his barge and waded ashore. Within forty, the first boatload of redcoats had come off from the anchored transports. It was four o'clock of a brilliant afternoon with enough breeze to cool the sun; the cheerfulness with which the soldiers formed line and column and marched to their positions might have been due to the bright weather or to the fact that they were all dry-shod—having been carried from the boats by brawny seamen, not without a deal of jesting.

Pellew himself was everywhere along that half-mile of beach, it seemed, infusing everyone with his enthusiasm and taking charge whenever there was a hitch in the landing of an artillery piece or a problem of getting some awkward case of stores ashore. He had rarely been in better humour, for he had in effect partly gained his point with regard to the landing-place, and there was once again a very good chance of success for the expedition.

By eight o'clock that evening twelve thousand soldiers, with twenty guns, ammunition, scaling-ladders, entrenching tools, sandbags, provisions, and hospital staff, had been landed on Spanish soil and bivouacs had been set up. The last two of those four hours were spent by Commodore Pellew up to his waist in water, lifting man after man ashore; the lighter soldiers he threw bodily on to the sand.

General Pulteney and some of his staff, who now landed

from *Renown*'s boats, took up quarters for the night in the abandoned fort. Pellew had thought it too much to hope that a march on Ferrol would be made that night, the more so that here there was no road for cannon as there was at Cape Prior Bay, so he was more resigned than disappointed. He took his three captured fishermen up to the fort, where they were questioned separately in the general's presence and repeated their encouraging reports. After that McHerris, the Engineer major, invited him to share his quarters in one of the little stone rooms, where Colonel Maitland and he had made themselves comfortable with blankets. Crowded though his thoughts were with plans and details for the morrow, Pellew's gift of instant sleep came to his aid as usual. About midnight he was awakened by low voices.

"Colonel Maitland?"

"Here, Sir James. What is it? Am I wanted?"

"No, no. Merely a word with you. I wish you to know, Maitland, that I don't—I do *not*—like the appearance of things here. That is all."

The door closed.

"Good—God!" muttered Colonel Maitland.

III

In the cool of the morning of August 26th the brown mountainside above Dominos Bay was transfigured. A scarlet flood rose up its rock-strewn flanks as twelve thousand men toiled and scrambled to gain the crest, where one hundred and fifty men of the 52nd Regiment—the newly-formed Rifle Corps—had been all night. Commodore Pellew had been up there with them since daybreak, having climbed up ostensibly to find a route whereby cannon could be manhandled to the top but in reality to see for himself how things stood in Ferrol. His reward for this piece of zeal

had been the witnessing of an exchange of fire between the men of the Rifles and some thousand or more Spaniards, who had crept up the hillside and attacked the outnumbered vanguard with vivacity until a company of the 23rd reached the crest and assisted the riflemen to drive them down to the harbour. There they were now—an hour later—getting into little boats and escaping to Ferrol at their leisure. General Pulteney had sent orders that there was to be no pursuit.

In spite of his exasperation at seeing a thousand enemy soldiers getting clear away from certain capture, Pellew could appreciate the beauty of the scene below him, lit as it was by the level rays of the climbing sun.

It was a toy harbour and a toy fortress, seen from this height above it and at less than two miles distance. Below him, as he stood on a flat rock with the ranks of redcoats lining the hill-crest on either side of him, the wide inlet stretched between its fertile shores. Its nearer shore was deeply indented by a narrow minor inlet whose western side was directly at the foot of the hillside beneath him; it was on the quays here that the Spanish skirmishers were embarking, doubtless wondering at the inexplicable generosity of the invaders. The inlet was Ferrol Harbour, and on its other side rose the tiers of brown houses clinging to the rocky eminence, the crumbling ravelins and bastions, the Citadel of Ferrol itself. Every detail was miniature but crystal-clear, a picture from Lilliput. On the Citadel a tiny figure was attempting without much success to hoist a tiny flag to the top of the flagstaff. Other tiny figures swarmed among the houses on either side, apparently pulling down the more ruinous buildings to make improvised ramparts. The narrow streets of the place were crowded with men and women surging up and down in seeming confusion. Down on the left the road from Cape Prior Bay came winding out of the hills to run round the inner end of the

harbour and pass close to the foot of the rocks which made a plinth for the fortress; that road was completely undefended, and the French ships of war which had been lying in the harbour basin had been towed away into another creek, above the town, where they were helpless to present any resistance to a march on Ferrol. There were no less than ten sail of the line in that creek and he could see another ship half-built on the stocks; there were eight frigates afloat and two building. The destruction of that fleet would be as great a blow at France and her First Consul Bonaparte as Nelson's victory of the Nile—Warren's reputation would be made and so would Edward Pellew's. All that stood in the way was a tumbledown Spanish town and a sheep-witted British general. In all military history, thought Pellew exasperatedly, no objective had presented itself to an attacking army with such odds in favour of success.

He left his look-out rock to hurry across the crest and look down on the seaward side of the ridge. Nearly all the twelve thousand soldiers were now on the crest and only a few stragglers still laboured up the steeps below—steeps which, as he had feared, were in one place too abrupt for the passage of cannon without special apparatus of block and tackle and iron post. He had overcome that difficulty to some extent by ordering three of the guns to be taken to pieces, and now the three parties of seamen who were heaving and shoving and dragging the lumps of metal were nearly at the crest. He scrambled down to them to lend encouragement of word and action, but was interrupted in this by the distant sound of musketry on the Ferrol side of the hill. Dashing up again and over the crest between the masses of waiting soldiery and impatient officers, he was in time to see a detachment of redcoats down at the foot of the hill chasing a fleeing company of Spaniards almost to

the quays. There they formed in line and appeared to have taken some prisoners.

"Someone," remarked an ironical voice beside him, "has acted without orders."

Pellew turned to find Colonel Maitland, massive and imperturbable, standing with folded arms surveying the scene.

"In heaven's name, Colonel," he cried, "can't you give orders?"

"We must await the general, sir."

"And where the devil *is* the general?"

"That, sir, is precisely what I wish to know." Maitland spoke without looking at him. "Sir James has appointed no headquarters. We can't find him. It is to be presumed he is examining the appearance of things, and no doubt——"

"Look at that, sir!" snapped Pellew, pointing to the harbour.

The boats taking off the escaping Spaniards had made two trips without the slightest molestation. Now they had calmly returned and were taking in tow a brig that had been lying at the quay—while within half-musket-shot of them the line of English soldiers stood and squatted without interfering, without orders to do anything. Pellew clapped his glass to his eye.

"One of your redcoats, sir," he said between his teeth, "has rested his musket against the wall of that long building yonder, at the end of your line. You see it? That is the Arsenal, sir—the Arsenal! The building next to it is the Victualling Store. Perhaps you know that?"

"I know it, Sir Edward," returned the colonel stolidly. "And so, I imagine, does General Pulteney."

Pellew looked from Maitland's large expressionless face to the half-ruined Citadel and the confusion in the town below; then at the thousands of red-coated men drawn up

on the rocky crest on either hand—a double line of glittering accoutrements and eager faces, a mile and a half in length. The emotions within him were too strong for words, but his feelings would have expressed themselves in an outburst if a sweating seaman had not trotted up to him at that moment.

"Mr. Hawtrey's respecks, sir, and where'll we take the guns?"

Pellew hurried away with him, glad to seize the opportunity of some sort of action. He had already noted a practicable way of descent where skids could be used with track-ropes fitted as brakes. He had the dismantled cannon brought to the spot and reassembled there, the ropes and skids secured to them, the teams standing by ready to run their massive charges down the hill as soon as the signal was given. That was all he could do until General Sir James Pulteney arrived to give orders for the advance to begin. As he strode back again to his look-out rock the sun smote down at him from a brassy sky, its noontide zenith almost reached; the redcoats had been on the hill-crest now for the better part of three hours. Little wonder that they were grumbling and blaspheming! It was this very same poison —the suspicion that their leaders were baulking at attacking the enemy—that had run through the fleet and caused the mutiny of 1797.

Maitland had gone when Pellew, almost beside himself with fury and impatience, regained the flat rock, but a lean officer in a torn coat and rather dirty breeches was coming up the hillside towards him. He was Major McHerris of the Engineers. McHerris's angular face was glistening with sweat but there was a twinkle in his deepset eyes.

"Will ye have seen the general, Sir Edward?" he cried as he approached. "I've a wee confession to make to him."

"Your general, sir, appears to have vanished off the face

of the earth," returned Pellew tartly. "Is that, pray, a characteristic of the modern army officer?"

McHerris did not take offence. "It's aye been a wish of mine," he continued, "to draw my sword and take a run at the enemy with it. I've had my wish, sir, and the lads below the brae there followed me prettily."

"It was you, then, who chased the Spaniards just now?"

"And without orders," nodded the major. "Sir James may break me for it, but here's one dog that's had his day. Forbye we took thirty prisoners, one of 'em an officer. He told us the poor loons in the Citadel were well prepared to surrender long ago—they'd thought we'd be under their rubble of walls by dawn. They had a corporal of the Hibernian Brigade polishing up the keys ready to hand 'em over ceremonially. Small use that, says this officer, for the gates of the place won't shut, let alone lock." He mopped his brow with a bandanna handkerchief. "I'm wishing, now, I'd gone on with those hundred lads and taken Ferrol. Colonel, your servant, sir. Have you seen the general?"

Colonel Maitland had come up to them somewhat hastily. He did not at once answer the major's question.

"McHerris," he said solemnly, "what do you think of the appearance of things?"

"Well, sir, I'm thinking that if some wee proportion of these lads in scarlet can manage a walk of two-three miles, we can sup in Ferrol before sunset."

Colonel Maitland nodded and handed a sealed paper to Pellew.

"From Admiral Warren, I believe," he said. "A seaman brought it a moment ago." He turned to the major again. "McHerris, the general's off."

"Good God!" exclaimed McHerris, shaken from his quasi-humorous pose. "You don't say so!"

"I do, sir. The general does *not* like the appearance of

things." Maitland coughed and lowered his voice. "If you care to tell him what you've just told me, here he comes."

Sir James Pulteney, with Generals Morshead and Lord Cavan, had appeared on the hill-crest some fifty paces away. Pulteney was pointing with his cane to various details of the sunlit town below them while Morshead and Cavan, one on each side of him, nodded continuously like a pair of red-coated mechanical dolls. McHerris swung round and stumped towards his general without a word to the others.

Pellew looked up from reading his message. It was from the Admiral, a hasty scrawl begging Sir Edward to wait on General Pulteney, who seemed to intend a withdrawal, and offer to land seven hundred marines who (under Pellew's command) would assault and take the outer forts of the harbour so that Warren's ships could come up and destroy the eighteen enemy warships.

"Can he be turned, think you?" he asked in a low voice.

Colonel Maitland's heavy features twitched. He turned his head away.

"Do what you can, Pellew," he said in a muffled voice. "God knows I've done my best."

In a species of daze Pellew stepped down from his rock and went towards the little group of red-coated officers. The thing had the incongruity of a dream. The hot, sleepy sunshine and the ceaseless whirring of cicadas among the rocks; the mile-long ranks of sweating and impatient soldiers; the toy harbour and town, hazy now in the noon heat, awaiting its inevitable doom below; and the three dull-gleaming cannon which by superhuman exertions his men had carried up the mountainside. He reached the cluster of redcoats just as McHerris was turning away; the Engineer major's face wore a dazed look that corresponded with Pellew's feelings. He looked aside as Maitland had done from the naval officer's glance.

"By your leave, sir!" said Pellew loudly, thrusting between Morshead and Lord Cavan. "A most urgent request from the Admiral."

General Pulteney listened to the request, sighed gently, and wagged his head.

"Sir John Warren has not had the opportunity of seeing the appearance of things, I fear," he began sadly.

"But I have, sir!" Pellew let his powerful voice ring. "And I congratulate you on being practically in possession of the town of Ferrol. Already your vanguard has taken the Arsenal and awaits orders to destroy it, as no doubt Major McHerris has informed you. Not only the fortress, but twenty-one enemy warships also, are at your mercy. Never before in the seven years of this war has the opportunity of so great a triumph——"

"That will do, sir!" squeaked Pulteney furiously; his usually sallow face was purple. "Am I to listen to your ravings at this solemn moment? Decision is in my hands, let me remind you, and I have decided that Ferrol appears too strong to be taken without grave loss. Do you expect me to lay siege to a fortress without guns?"

Pellew pointed a trembling finger to the three cannon poised on their skids a hundred paces away. He was controlling himself with difficulty.

"My men have three field-pieces in readiness, sir. Major Cookson of the Artillery has found some carts and waits to convey the rest of the guns along the beach to the Cape Prior Road."

The general blinked and recovered himself quickly. "You are mistaken, Sir Edward. Major Cookson has by now received my order to prepare the artillery for re-embarkation. I believe you may take those three guns back again."

"But——"

Pellew could get out nothing but that hopeless mono-

syllable. What was the use? He glanced at Morshead and Cavan; their scarlet-clad backs were turned to him.

"You will oblige me, Sir Edward," Pulteney was continuing with maddening cheerfulness, "by proceeding immediately with the embarkation of all the artillery and stores as quickly as possible. It would be well, I believe, to destroy the fort above Dominos Beach—but pray do not blow it up, sir, for fear of making a noise."

He waved a hand and walked away with his two subordinate generals at his heels.

Pellew could not bring himself to touch his hat in salute. For a moment he stood there in the blazing sunshine trying to make himself believe that this was no more than a bad dream. Then he turned away to obey his orders.

It was remarked by those who saw Sir Edward Pellew at work that afternoon that there was something almost savage in the tremendous energy with which he threw himself into the task of getting an army, with all its guns and stores, back aboard the ships.

IV

'A more rapid Manoeuvre, I believe, by an Army was never executed, a Landing in great force, a March to the spot of Action, a retreat and embarkation was all performed in 32 hours; that it was not more honorable to the performers and more profitable to the Nation, I shall never cease to regret . . .'

So, bitterly, wrote Commodore Sir Edward Pellew to the First Lord of the Admiralty on September 1st, 1800. The letter ended as follows :

'I troubled your Lordship from Quiberon, and lamented my being deprived of the Command; as matters have turned

up, I have cause to be thankful. I wrote also on the subject of promotion talk'd of. I hope if my letters are importunate your Lordship will throw them aside, they are induced by the generosity of your conduct towards me, upon so many occasions, and their remembrance will be cherished, with gratitude, in the heart of your Lordships most truly obliged and Most faithful

and attached Servant

ED PELLEW.'

He had indeed cause to be thankful. Sir James Pulteney, having reported to the War Office the prudence and sagacity which had enabled him to withdraw a large army intact from under the very nose of a formidable enemy force in an impregnable fortress, was congratulated and hurried into comfortable oblivion. Sir John Warren relinquished command and applied for leave of absence as soon as his squadron reached Plymouth. He was a bitterly disappointed man. Unjustly, if naturally, the public found in the naval commander of a seaborne expedition the scapegoat for its abject failure. Pellew's reputation, on the other hand, had not suffered in the public eye, nor was it lowered with the Admiralty or his immediate senior officer, Earl St. Vincent. The damage the Ferrol fiasco had wrought in Edward Pellew was graver and more lasting than a mere blow to his reputation would have been.

Pellew had given his utmost to the task and he knew well that he had deserved success. He had been cheated of fame and honours—his hard work flung carelessly aside—his unquestioned merit rendered useless. Those thoughts deepened and rankled in him. The insinuating hint in the termination of his letter to the First Lord was in reality a desperate attempt to find a salve for the wound to his self-respect; promotion to flag rank would satisfy himself and a

critical world that he was still one of the first sea officers in Britain.

But there was no promotion. The best St. Vincent could do for his protégé was to find him immediate employment in the kind of duty for which he was best fitted. Once again, after *Impetueux* had undergone a two-months' refit, Pellew was given a squadron and charged with the blockading of Rochefort. That he had only two ships of the line and two frigates with which to keep watch on Admiral Willaumez's five sail of the line and three frigates added some zest to this task, and through the autumn and winter gales he kept his storm-tossed station off the Biscay rocks, penning the French Admiral in port and capturing every brig and schooner that ventured to make a dash along the coast. He carried out the long and arduous work the more cheerfully in that he felt he had set in position a second ladder by which he might climb faster to fame and fortune than by the post list—he had become, against his wife's wishes, a candidate for Parliament.

'I have as you saw offered myself at Barnstaple [he wrote to Alex Broughton]. They invited me and if I don't find it too expensive I shall probably succeed, but I will not contest it at any greater expense than a few hundred, if I thought it would cost me a thousand I should be off. . . . Poor Susan detests this Parliamentary plan and is indeed very angry and irreconcilable—What are your sentiments on the subject—I declare I am rather puzzled but I think it may be useful in pushing the boys in Life and myself too . . .'

The letter to Broughton was sent from his ship off Rochefort in the summer of 1801. Three months later the war ended with an armistice; the persistence of the secret negotiations made by the Government's envoys had succeeded at last. At the Peace of Amiens that followed,

England, forgetting every card in her hand—Nelson's victory at Copenhagen, Abercromby's capture of Alexandria, the navy's iron blockade, her successful struggle alone against the whole of Europe—gave the astute Bonaparte his opportunity to recoup his losses and strengthen his armed forces during a peace that was to last for one uneasy year.

To Edward Pellew the news brought surprise and some disgust, but to him it also gave opportunity. Relieved of his blockading task at last, he threw himself into the hurly-burly of a Parliamentary election. Including the customary bribes, it cost him nearly two thousand pounds; but he was elected. He was Sir Edward Pellew, Bart., Member of Parliament for Barnstaple, supporter of Mr. Addington's Government, on friendly terms with the Earl of Chatham and a follower of Earl St. Vincent. He was in a position to give himself 'a push in Life' where popularity and friends in high places counted for more than merit.

Lady Pellew became reconciled to her husband's determination to enter politics, but her disappointment in him, if concealed, took long to fade away. They were settled now in Trefusis, the big manor house of Flushing. On a day in February of 1803, a month after the election at Barnstaple, Pellew was frowning over some political correspondence in the room he had made his study, while Susan in the next room packed away some of the miscellaneous lumber he had brought ashore from *Impetueux*. She came in with a paper in her hand; a little stouter now, the hair under her neat cap a little greyer, but still with a beauty of feature that belied her forty-six years.

"I found this, Edward—it seems to be a poem in the French tongue. Don't tell me some charmer in Rochefort conceived a grand passion for you!"

Pellew's frown cleared away and his hard features softened as he took the paper from her.

"It was the French Admiral at Rochefort, Willaumez, who sent me this, my dear," he said, eyeing the flowery handwriting with pleasure. "When I heard of the armistice I wrote him a polite letter regretting that we had been unable to cross swords. He replied with a verse, perhaps somewhat flattering. Listen—

Au favori du dieu du mer
Au marin, cher à la victoire
Qui n'éprouva aucun revers
A Ed. Pellew, salut et gloire."

He looked up at his wife with a smile. "A pretty tribute from an enemy, eh?"

"Yes," said Susan, and made herself smile back.

But there was sadness in her dark-grey eyes. To her, the lines were an epitaph. The epitaph of a sea officer.

SEVEN

I

Commodore Sir Edward Pellew, Bart., awaited the pleasure of Earl St. Vincent in one of the smaller waiting-rooms at the Admiralty. The May sunshine flooding through the tall dingy windows fell on the table which with two or three chairs made up the furnishings of the room, and glinted on two handsome naval swords that lay there. The cocked hats of the owners of the swords, who were presumably closeted with the First Lord, were also on the table, placed on a small pile of out-of-date newspapers. Sir Edward, growing impatient, rose and took one of the newspapers from the pile and opened it at random. It was the *Morning Post* of April 16th, 1803—a month old—and the first thing to strike his eye was a sonnet in the middle pages; a poem by some obscure poet from Westmorland. He recognised it because Susan had called his attention to it earlier.

> *. . . In our halls is hung*
> *Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:*
> *We must be free or die, who speak the tongue*
> *That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold*
> *Which Milton held . . .*

At the time he had thought those last three lines might be effective in a speech in the House, but the speech had not been made. Now the words sank deeper, addressing

themselves not to the Member for Barnstaple but to the patriot and the sea officer. In the weeks that had elapsed since that sonnet was printed events had moved with increasing swiftness towards the climax that now all London and most of England anticipated: the war with the dictator of France was to begin again.

Pellew had been spending a great deal of his time in London during the uneasy peace, occasionally taking his seat in the House but more often busying himself in obtaining the favour of the Addington Administration. Henry Addington, the complacent 'Doctor' who would have to lead England in the new fight against French tyranny, was a politician who inspired contempt in many people besides Edward Pellew; but Pellew had made his acquaintance at Court in 1793 when he had gone there to receive his knighthood and now cultivated that acquaintance assiduously. Mr. Addington had confided to him that Earl St. Vincent was making himself a nuisance to the Government with his attempts at reform of the navy—well-intentioned attempts, no doubt, but dangerous at a time when England was on the brink of another plunge into a life-and-death struggle. Sir Edward had received the impression that he might at some time be called upon to oppose those reforms; a prospective division of loyalty between his political patrons and his naval leader which he did not like to contemplate. Even Mr. Addington's specious phrases could not hide the fact that the Government was conscious of its deplorable shortcomings in naval preparations and expected an Opposition attack on that score. Other Cabinet Ministers with whom he dined confirmed that fact, in their various oblique ways, and Pellew, while he was flattered by their confidences, had a suspicion that he was being prepared for some special commission in this new and furtive warfare of politics. However, that could be allowed to pass from his mind now,

with real war looming nearer every day and the prospect of clean fighting opening before him again. He even felt a twinge of conscience in his own neglect of his new command, H.M.S. *Tonnant*, eighty guns, to which he had been appointed in March. He had left the commissioning of the new ship to the first lieutenant, Warren, since he himself was so busy with the politicians in London; and Susan—who still disapproved of his new rôle and had marked her disapproval by refusing to stay in London with him—had been angry about that.

Well, he would soon be at his old work again. The summons to Whitehall could only mean that he was to be given sailing orders. At thought of that he flung the *Morning Post* into a corner and began to pace up and down as if the stuffy room was his quarterdeck. By God, it would be fine to leave the oppressive air of London and smell the salt again!

The door of the waiting-room opened and a lean man in blue uniform coat and epaulettes came hastily in, to greet Pellew abruptly and with little amiability. Sir Edward had some acquaintance with Commodore Sir Thomas Troubridge and did not like the man. Troubridge was a good sea officer and of proved courage, but his career came before all else; since Pellew and he were next to each other on the post list and they were both baronets, Members of Parliament and followers of St. Vincent, he made it plain that he regarded Pellew as a rival.

"I have just seen the First Lord, with Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson," he said stiffly after their brief interchange of greetings. "I believe Lord St. Vincent is to see you after the vice-admiral."

His tone hinted that Sir Edward, being admitted alone instead of in company with a famous vice-admiral, was thereby placed finally in some lower category. Pellew was too eager for news to take offence.

"Is it war, Troubridge?" he demanded. "Are we going for them straight away?"

"No doubt the First Lord will tell you what he thinks fit on that point, sir. Good day."

Troubridge took his sword and the less dingy of the two cocked hats from the table and stalked out. Pellew resumed his pacing. Before he had traversed the room twice the door burst open and a slight, short personage with a mop of untidy white hair fairly flew in through it. He had grabbed his hat and sword before he noticed Pellew, but Sir Edward had recognised him instantly. Even had there been no empty right sleeve, no green shade covering the right eye, the extraordinary radiation of energy that proceeded from this shrunken little man would have identified him as Vice-Admiral Viscount Nelson, Duke of Brontë, hero of the Nile and Copenhagen and the talk of the fashionable world on account of his open liaison with the widow of Sir William Hamilton. At one formal occasion only had Nelson seen the man before him, yet he was not at a loss for a moment.

"Sir Edward!" he cried. "Well met indeed—and at such a moment!"

His little claw-like left hand shot out, to be grasped by Pellew's big paw. Nelson's good eye was sparkling and dancing with delight. His manner was that of a boy unexpectedly granted a holiday from school.

"Pellew, we're honest men again, thank heaven! This hypocritical peace is finished and we're going to meet the French with ships and guns instead of supplications."

"It's really true then, my lord?"

The Admiral nodded. "Lord Whitworth is recalled. As soon as he's safely back our declaration goes out. I'm commander-in-chief on the Mediterranean station," he added with undisguised satisfaction, "and I depend upon it, Sir

Edward, that Bonaparte will make an early move in those waters. I shall be ready for him, never fear."

"Not a man in England but knows that, my lord."

Pellew found himself unable to take his eyes from the strangely attractive face, almost monkey-like in its wizened thinness. The dancing light in the one visible eye seemed the half-remembered ghost of a light he had seen and followed long ago, when he was a boy.

"Would that I might serve under your lordship!" he said earnestly, moved by an impulse that had nothing to do with reason.

Nelson smiled at him; and the smile woke in Pellew emotions he had not experienced since his hero-worship of Philemon Pownall.

"Their Lordships rule us all, Sir Edward," he said. "And, by the bye, the First Lord awaits you even now. As for me, I must fly—I'll not get to sea before three days are gone, and that's an age. Godspeed you, sir—and Godspeed England!"

He was gone, bounding out of the door with a boyish scamper that should have been ridiculous when allied to his white hair and heavily-braided coat but somehow was not. Pellew was left staring at the closed door, conscious that the room seemed suddenly dingier and darker; conscious, too, that he, who had always chafed at serving under a senior officer on active service, had actually wished to be one of Nelson's captains. Slowly, as one waking from a dream, he went out into the big hall with its tessellated floor and was at once taken in charge by an usher who bore him to Earl St. Vincent's room.

The First Lord, grim and grizzled as ever, confirmed Nelson's joyous news. Bonaparte, with the new Russian alliance to strengthen him, had become outrageous in his demands. It was known that he had for long been preparing for an invasion of Britain—special craft were being built in

every port from the Scheldt to Biscay. Lord Whitworth, the British Ambassador in Paris, had been recalled and should be in London by tomorrow, Saturday, May 14th, and it was certain that the British declaration of war would follow at once.

"And my part, my lord?" asked Pellew eagerly, to add immediately, "If I might serve under Lord Nelson with the Mediterranean Fleet——"

"Out of the question," growled St. Vincent. "*Tonnant* is to join Admiral Cornwallis off Brest. Your old cruising-ground, Sir Edward." His hard blue eyes narrowed as he glanced quickly up at the big man before him. "May I ask if you saw Lord Nelson just now?"

"For a few moments, my lord."

"Did he—h'rrm—indicate he wished you to serve under him?"

"No, my lord."

St. Vincent lowered his gaze and nodded. Pellew swallowed hard; he understood. If Nelson had wanted him he could have had *Tonnant* under his command for the asking. But Nelson had not wanted him. Was it that he, Edward Pellew, was becoming known as an officer who put politics before his career as a sea officer?

"How soon can you put to sea, Sir Edward?" the First Lord was asking.

Pellew had to think hard to recall the last report he had received from Lieutenant Warren, and was ashamed that he had to do so.

"A fortnight, my lord. She's in Cawsand Bay, fifty short of complement as yet. And there are the stores to be got aboard."

"A fortnight will do. You'll sail with *Mars* and *Spartiate* then and report to Sir William Cornwallis off Brest. You'll be Senior Captain. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, my lord. And thank you." Pellew managed a smile. "It's the blockade again, I take it?"

"Just so. And information. Remember we must know where the Spanish squadrons are and how they move. Spain's neutral at present and there's to be no taking of Spanish prizes—yet. Not even treasure ships from the Americas, Sir Edward."

"I understand, my lord."

The First Lord leaned back in his chair, his keen gaze fixed once more on Pellew's face.

"You're a thoroughgoing parliamentarian lately, Sir Edward. So am I. Damn the Cabinet—leaves me no time for work on the navy reforms. You've heard what Addington and his friends think of 'em, no doubt. Eh?"

"They think you're a nuisance, my lord," Pellew said bluntly; St. Vincent, he well knew, loved bluntness.

Jervis nodded appreciatively. "I *am* a nuisance to 'em—and by God I'll be a worse nuisance yet. There's not a ship being built, sir, but is farmed out to jobbers who pay some Government knave for the privilege and give us shoddy instead of heart-of-oak." His gnarled fists clenched themselves on the table before him. "D'ye hear? We're given shoddy to fight the French. And another thing. The good timber's in the hands of a ring of dirty rogues who put the price up against the Government. But I'll circumvent 'em! I'll thwart the damned rascals if I have to cancel every contract and have ships built in India of teak—of teak, sir!"

His face, which had been working with fury, settled suddenly into its customary wrinkled grimness. He spread his hands flat, palm upwards.

"I talk too much. 'Tis the effect of mixing with Addington and his squirts. Anything further you wish to ask, Sir Edward?"

"Only this, my lord. I'd like my son Pownall to sail in

Tonnant with me. Pownall's seventeen now, holds a lieutenant's commission, has the makings of a good sea officer——"

"Take him," said St. Vincent shortly. "And, Sir Edward —keep the lad out of Parliament. D'ye hear?"

Pellew went out into the May sunshine of Whitehall frowning. Was it possible that even Earl St. Vincent thought his incursion into politics meant a lessening of his capacity as a sea officer? If that was so, then by heaven they should see they were mistaken!

On June 2nd His Majesty's eighty-gun ship *Tonnant* sailed for the rendezvous off Brest in company with *Mars* and *Spartiate*. In her, as third lieutenant, sailed Pownall Pellew, handsome, reckless, but idolising his father as his father had idolised Captain Philemon Pownall a quarter of a century ago.

II

Admiral Cornwallis had a difficult and divided duty. His immediate task was to blockade the French squadrons in Brest and Rochefort and in the neutral Spanish ports of Ferrol and Corunna, to prevent them getting out and making junction with the big French fleet at Toulon. For this he had as always insufficient ships. But also, in the not unlikely event of one or other of the squadrons slipping past him when an easterly gale had driven him off the coast and made a fair wind for the French, he had to be prepared instantly to give chase; the enormous fleet of invasion barges which was to transport the Grande Armée across the Channel was likely to make its attempt as soon as the First Consul could muster enough warships to act as convoy. Pellew was given a squadron of six vessels and ordered to cruise off Ferrol and Corunna, in waters which he knew better than any man in the British fleet.

It was the old task again. He was to run every kind of risk and endure every sort of discomfort without the slightest chance of credit or profit. Admiral Gourdon with five French sail of the line and several frigates was in the port of Ferrol; Admiral Bedout with four French ships and two Dutch was in Corunna. Spain being neutral (though with very strong leanings towards the French side) Pellew could not attack them or take any offensive action likely to endanger the precarious relations between England and Spain; all he could do was to beat up and down in the dangerous Biscay seas to see that they did not come out. If he succeeded in this he had done his bare duty. If he failed —if gales scattered his ships, if the Toulon fleet of eleven ships should come up the coast to drive him off—then he was a ruined man. Yet he went at the task with all his old enthusiasm and skill. If it was tedious work, it was at the same time continuously dangerous, and—best of all for him —he was no longer a man competing with other men but a man fighting the sea, his old friend and enemy.

For three months there was little action; far too little to please seventeen-year-old Pownall Pellew. A vain chase of two Dutch sail of the line, fogs, summer gales, the ceaseless watch on the two ports, made the third lieutenant of *Tonnant* a trifle impatient. He could still, however, admire the unrelenting vigilance and patience of his father. Pownall, who knew that he himself would have yielded to the temptation to disobey orders and attempt some damage to the French (and in doing so, as he realised, risk bringing Spain in on the side of Bonaparte) was more than ever convinced of the rigid perfection of his father's character.

At intervals, when the weather was clear and calm, Sir Edward would invite officers from his other ships to dine on board *Tonnant*; and at these informal and frugal parties Pownall was often present, a listener to the opinions and

prejudices of his seniors. The conversation was always upon naval matters and nearly always critical of them.

"Not half the ships we want, and no building going on at home." Thus Captain Harper of the *Ardent,* blunt-spoken as always. "What in God's name are the Admiralty about? Don't they know Boney's building as fast as he can lay timbers together?"

Pellew nodded, frowning. "I'm in full agreement with the First Lord that reform's needed, but this isn't the time for it. Damme, we're going to need every man and every ship we can get if we're to beat the French this time—whether the ships are built by jobbers or not. You'll hardly credit this, gentlemen, but the last I heard from England they were putting aside the proposal for a fleet of gunboats to attack the invasion fleet. Putting aside the one obvious measure for preventing attack!"

"But the Channel fleet," began the young captain of the *Malta* hesitantly.

"We're sitting in the only well-found ship among 'em," Harper grunted.

"And *Tonnant* wasn't caulked when she commissioned," added Sir Edward. "If Admiral Cornwallis can muster thirty-six sail, it's the most he'll have, and look at the coasts he has to blockade with them—four thousand miles, gentlemen! How's he to deal with a cross-Channel invasion as well?"

The captain of the *Spartiate* added his voice to the general complaint.

"And I've never had a worse crew. The Channel fleet's very ill-manned—and why? Because when the men were discharged a year ago at the signing of that cursed treaty there was scarcely one of 'em who wouldn't have died sooner than enter again."

There was a chorus of gloomy agreement. Captain Harper

raised a finger, his heavy features grimly humorous in the light of the lantern swinging from the deckhead.

"That's true. I've a crew of Irish, niggers, Lascars and jailbirds. There's a Greek and a Finn among 'em, not to mention two Frenchmen and three Spaniards. All the same, I'll back *Ardent* against any two of the Toulon ships—if they come through the Strait after us."

His glance went to the commodore as he spoke. It was known that the commander of the squadron expected the Toulon fleet to break out. Sir Edward nodded.

"The Admiral informs me there are eighteen of the line lying in Brest road. They won't get past him. But here's five in Ferrol and six in Corunna, with half a dozen of us penning them in. If either of those squadrons ventures out we can deal with them, singly or in turn, and they know it. What's their only hope, then? Why, for Villeneuve's eleven Toulon ships to come out and rescue them."

"Surely Lord Nelson won't permit that," ventured *Malta*'s captain.

"Nelson!" Harper laughed shortly. "Nelson's very well as one of your dashing admirals, but he hasn't the patience for our sort of game. Ten to one he'll be ranging up and down the Mediterranean, to Naples as like as not, seeing what he found there before——"

"The port, Captain Harper," interrupted Pellew sharply. "The bottle stands with you. I'll hear no word against Admiral Nelson," he continued as Harper filled his glass and pushed the bottle on, "but the fact remains that he has but nine ships of the line and six of those may be called decrepit. Admiral Villeneuve, moreover, is Boney's best sea officer. If he doesn't seize a chance and bring his ships out of Toulon I'll turn over my command to Lieutenant Pellew here!"

Pownall, listening intently to this high strategical talk, started and grinned sheepishly.

"If Nelson's as short as we are of frigates," commented the captain of the *Spartiate* thoughtfully, "he may find it hard to keep proper watch on Villeneuve."

Harper, who had been drinking freely, smote the table with his fist.

"Short of frigates!" he echoed loudly. "By God, we're short of everything—supplies, men, ships, everything! Our enemy's not so much the French as damned pettifogging mismanagement at home. Saving your presence, Sir Edward, I'd raise my glass to the early fall of this squirting pitiful Government!"

"Pitt's the man we want," agreed *Spartiate.*

"I'll not say you're wrong, gentlemen." Sir Edward rose. "Bear in mind, though, that while it's not in our power to change the state of things at home, it *is* in our power to do our duty to the utmost. We are not short of courage, I hope, and it will be tried to the full during the winter gales to come. We shall not relax one jot of our close vigilance. We shall hold Messieurs Gourdon and Bedout tight in their snug harbours at His Majesty's pleasure—and if Monsieur Villeneuve comes to their aid, as I hope and pray, we shall leave him with naught but a few splinters to carry back to Boney."

That brought them to their feet with gruff cries of approval. And Pownall Pellew glowed with pride in his father. Great was his contempt for the place-seeking politicians at Westminster, men beside whom (it seemed to him) Sir Edward Pellew was as a god in his single-minded pursuit of his true duty.

And the close blockade went on, until in late September *Tonnant* was forced by shortage of food and water to return to England to take in stores. A week with his vessel

anchored in Cawsand Bay gave him little time with Susan, less still with his daughter Emma who was about to marry; and he had also to fit in a dash up to London, whither he had been summoned by a most urgent letter from the Prime Minister himself.

It was not Mr. Addington who received him. Two suave members of the Cabinet saw Sir Edward in a stuffy room of a house in Downing Street. It took them some time and a deal of circumlocution to get to their point, which was that the Government was in danger. An attack was brewing which might well send the admittedly weak administration to its doom if it could not be countered. It was not known precisely when the Opposition would launch this attack, but it had been ascertained by judicious bribery that it would be aimed at the Government's naval policy. Now except for old Captain Markham there was no one in the House of Commons who could speak with authority from the naval officer's point of view——

"Earl St. Vincent," began Pellew at this point.

"Is in the House of Lords," pointed out one of his interlocutors swiftly. "It is in the Commons that we stand or fall. Sir Edward, there is no one whose support would carry more weight than your own. I would go further. With your great credit with the public, your known—if I may say so—integrity and straightforwardness, it would not be too much to say that you could save the Government."

"I will do what I can, of course. But I am on active service. The blockade of Ferrol and Corunna is my responsibility."

"You could be recalled at need, Sir Edward. Mr. Addington——"

"Has Earl St. Vincent approved such a course?" Pellew broke in coldly. "I'm a sea officer, sir, and subject to Admiralty orders, I'd have you remember."

The suave gentlemen glanced at each other and away again.

"The First Lord, as you are aware, Sir Edward," replied the spokesman of the pair, "entertains an almost rabid dislike for the necessary workings of the political system. The order for your recall would come from the highest source—from the Prime Minister himself. Does not that show where your duty lies?"

"It is certainly your duty, Sir Edward," chimed in his companion. "And it involves nothing more than speaking what you know to be true from your vast experience of naval matters. Yet the service you would do the Government would be most valuable—and well deserving of reward."

"Your mere appearance in the House on the Government side would strengthen us enormously," said the other hastily; he knew his man and judged that the hint of bribery would be unacceptable. "Consider—a famous sea officer comes directly from contact with the enemy to refute the baseless allegations of the Opposition, with the brine, as it were, still upon his coat. That alone will sway a dozen votes to our side."

Pellew hesitated for a moment. As a supporter of the Government he supposed he had a duty to it—and after all the matter might never arise. If it did, of course, a telling speech in the House, well reported on such an important occasion, might be the means of giving him that 'push' he needed for the establishment of his position in life and the advancement of his sons. Perhaps, later, a seat in the Cabinet, even the post of First Lord before very long——

"I shall hold myself ready," he said stiffly. "And now, gentlemen, pray excuse me. My present duty is to get to sea again as quickly as may be."

When he had gone the two suave gentlemen heaved a double sigh of relief, as at a difficult barrier surmounted.

"I never thought he'd take it," said one. "Pellew's St. Vincent's man and a martinet for duty. What won him to it?"

The other laughed shortly. "Ambition, Hal. By that sin fell the angels. Is Sir Edward Pellew better than an angel?"

III

All through the autumn and winter of 1803 Pellew's squadron kept stormy watch over Ferrol, battered by gales almost as fierce and continuous as those of the memorable winter of 1797. There was not so much as a single-ship action to relieve the long monotony of beating to and fro, to and fro, in sight of those familiar headlands—Cape Prior, Ares Point, Cape Corunna—although there were one or two false alarms and one or two small captures of incautious coastal brigs. Then, at the New Year, came four days of excessively violent gale followed by 'a great swell from the Westward . . . Squally with Thunder, Lightning, and Hail'. *Tonnant*'s sails were torn to shreds, *Ardent* lost her mainyard, and there was such a tale of broken spars and leaking seams that Sir Edward resolved at all costs to find sheltered anchorage for his ships. It was one thing to brave winter gales with the confidence of matchless seamanship, quite another to risk losing his precious charges. But the sheltered anchorage had to be such that while he gained its advantages he did not lose any advantage of the offshore blockade—if he could not keep watch on Gourdon's prisoned squadron from it, then he would not use an anchorage.

As it chanced, he knew of the very spot, ideally placed and most suitable in every way except one. This was

Betancos Bay, that fine wide inlet south of Ferrol on whose beach General Pulteney had wanted to land for the assault of Ferrol. The one way in which Betancos Bay was unsuitable was that it was a death-trap for ships; or so the Spanish charts and sailing directions had for a century declared. There was no holding-ground there, they asserted, and in a westerly gale nothing could prevent any vessel caught in the bay from going on the rocks. Pellew, who knew something of Spaniards, had his doubts about this. In his mind's eye he could picture the typical Spanish official finding it easier to report Betancos Bay unsafe without bothering to take soundings or observe the effect of gales. As soon as that savage gale blew itself out in the first days of 1804 he took his squadron there and spent four days in his cutter exploring the bay and taking soundings, with the result that he pronounced it safe and entirely suitable to his purpose. In fact, it could not have been better. In easterly winds he could anchor across the mouth of the bay in full view of the entrance to Ferrol, thus keeping it under the fullest observation, while no vessel could pass from Corunna to Ferrol without his permission. In westerly gales he would have to anchor closer in, under the lee of the land and out of sight of the Ferrol entrance, if he wanted his ships to be perfectly safe; but this objection was overcome almost at once, and—indirectly—by the quick observation of Lieutenant Pownall Pellew.

On the second day after the squadron's arrival in Betancos Bay Lieutenant Pellew was on duty on the quarterdeck. It was January 10th, a brisk clear morning with wintry sunshine warming the seamen's limbs as they clambered aloft refitting a new mizen-yard under the critical eye of their captain. Inland, across the short space of steel-blue water, the rocky hillside climbed steeply to a crest whereon stood a windmill. Lieutenant Pellew had been alternately viewing

this windmill through his telescope and scowling, for some time before he stalked to where his father stood.

"Sir!" he barked in the voice that was so like Sir Edward's.

"Well, Mr. Pellew?" returned the captain of the *Tonnant.*

"That windmill yonder, sir. I've had it under observation. There's someone there spying on us—I saw the flash of the sun on his glass. I'll stake my commission he's a French officer, sir!"

"Indeed." Sir Edward concealed amusement. "What do you expect me to do about it, pray?"

"Give me leave to land and go up there, sir," said Pownall eagerly, "and I'll give the rogue such a dusting that he'll not dare try it again!"

"Provocative action on Spanish territory, Mr. Pellew? When we have every need to conciliate the Governor of Ferrol so that he'll allow us to provision from his market? Certainly not."

As he spoke Pellew's gaze was fixed reflectively on the windmill. The French squadron in Ferrol was barely three miles away from him, in a straight line through that craggy hill taken directly beneath the windmill. The mill itself was right on the crest and must almost certainly command a fine view of Ferrol Harbour.

"Wait," he said as the disgruntled Pownall was turning away. "You shall go up to the mill, Mr. Pellew. But not to fight. You will greet the Frenchman courteously, and if there is a window on the other side of the mill you will use your telescope to advantage and bring back a report of the situation in Ferrol Harbour. An excellent neutral watch-tower can be used by us as well as by Monsier Gourdon."

"B-but if the Frog officer shows fight?" demanded the astonished third lieutenant.

"He will not. If he does, we'll make an international

incident of it and demand that Gourdon's ships be denied harbourage in Ferrol."

Pellew was grinning as he spoke. It was the kind of jest he liked. His son, who was at an age when enemies are enemies wherever they are met and the conventions of neutrality a silly farce, saw nothing funny in the situation. He scowled as he touched his hat and went to obey orders.

So began a more comfortable and somewhat comical phase of the blockade of Ferrol. Pellew established contact with the Governor, Contador, after the latter had sent a protest against a belligerent squadron anchoring so close to Ferrol as Betancos Bay. Pellew replied to this that he 'occasionally anchored in easterly winds to prevent being blown off and in westerly winds to prevent being ship-wrecked upon the coast'; which glimpse of the obvious either soothed the Governor or amused him, for he granted the English commodore's request that he might send a boat into Ferrol to buy provisions. As for the windmill, it proved to be a perfect coign of vantage for the observation of Gourdon's fleet. Pellew described the situation in his report to Admiral Cornwallis :

'. . . We are upon the most friendly terms with the Dons, who visit me all day from Ferrol. Monsieur Gourdon comes frequently to the Beach to see us (he says) driven on shore, and most excessively angry he is. We are not permitted to go near their ships, but our look-out Lieuts meet at a Wind-Mill on a hill between the two Ports—out of one Window my Lieut. spys them, out of the opposite one their officer upon us . . .'

He did not think fit to mention that bottles of wine found their way up to the windmill, there to be shared amicably between an officer of Bonaparte's navy and an officer of His Majesty King George.

Though he endured this odd method of blockading with philosophy and even with amusement, Sir Edward was as anxious for decisive action of some kind as the openly impatient Pownall. And in the middle of February came news, brought by one of the frigates that acted as messenger between the Ferrol squadron and Admiral Cornwallis, that seemed to show that action was imminent. He was informed from a sure source (wrote Cornwallis) that Lord Nelson was not so much holding the French in Toulon Harbour as trying to lure them out, offering the French Admiral every opportunity to put to sea. Nelson's stubborn conviction that Bonaparte intended to seize Naples made him blind to the possibility—which Cornwallis accounted a certainty—that the Toulon fleet would strain every nerve to liberate the squadrons in Cadiz, Rochefort and Ferrol the instant it got to sea. Sir Edward was requested and required to be in constant readiness for a grand engagement.

Great was the rejoicing when *Tonnant*'s captain passed on this information to his officers, Pownall Pellew among them. Pownall's admiration of his father, heightened by Sir Edward's intrepidity and masterly seamanship through the fearful gales of the New Year, had been a trifle lowered by the levity (so it was in Pownall's opinion) with which he had treated the 'windmill blockade'; he wished to see his father in the rôle of fighting seaman, the rôle which a junior lieutenant most aspired to fill.

Scarcely had the topsails of the messenger frigate vanished below the horizon when a ship of the line hove in sight. Her captain came aboard *Tonnant* to hand Pellew another message from the Admiral.

Dear Sir Edwd

I have received orders to send Captain Sutton to

relieve you . . . your good services, I should think, are very much needed . . .

Sir William was evidently puzzled by this peremptory recall of his most valuable captain at such a time. But Pellew knew the reason. This was the summons to the aid of Government—the summons of which he had been warned nearly six months ago and whose arrival he had come to regard as improbable. Well, he had told the Cabinet he would answer it and there was nothing for it but to obey.

He had ripped open the letter as soon as it was handed to him on deck, thinking that it might contain news of the actual putting-to-sea of the Toulon fleet; and it chanced that Pownall Pellew was standing near him as he did so, eagerly watching his father's face with the same anticipation. Sir Edward's expression of annoyance—but not of surprise—did not escape the boy. When the commodore had greeted Captain Sutton (an officer of known efficiency and a protégé of Nelson's) and presented his first lieutenant to him, Pownall seized the chance of a question.

"You're recalled to England, sir?" he muttered.

Pellew frowned annoyance at him. "Yes. It appears the Government require me, confound them."

"You expected the recall, though," persisted his son with an answering frown.

Sir Edward turned his shoulder to him. "Mr. Pellew!" he said loudly. "Be good enough to conduct Captain Sutton below, to my cabin."

By the first days of March Pellew had handed over the blockade to Sutton and *Tonnant* was speeding back to Plymouth, carrying with her a father impatient with and half-ashamed of his mission and a son suspicious for the first time of his father's loyalty to his Service. Pownall knew by now that Sir Edward had been recalled so that he might

speak in a debate in the House, and that alone seemed to the young man a piece of shocking levity at so momentous a time in the naval war. That his father had known of the impending recall, that the astonishment and indignation he publicly displayed were feigned, Pownall tried not to believe.

At this time Sir Edward Pellew wrote two letters, one to Sir William Cornwallis and one to his old friend Alexander Broughton. In the first he wrote : 'I feel it very awkward to be removed at this moment but . . . like others I must fall in my ranks and obey.' And in the second : 'I find, my dear Alex, that I am older than I was and cant get to the Mast Head so well as I used. I want to be an Admiral for I am tired of Squaring the Main Yard.'

A man of forty-six years who has not perfected the comfortable art of self-deception is a human oddity. Perhaps Edward Pellew knew, when he wrote those words, that they were disingenuous; but by the time he was on his way from Plymouth to London he had managed to translate pretence and excuse into fact. Long ago Midshipman Pellew had possessed the faculty of seeing himself as the hero of every difficult situation. Now, in some sort, that faculty returned. The big, grim-faced man in the coach hastening eastward between greening hedgerows was one on whom the fate of a Government hung—a sea officer sacrificing inclination to the duty owed to his leaders—a saviour (it might be) of his country. The underthought that such a man might reap a well-deserved reward could be admitted without scruple in such circumstances.

So Sir Edward Pellew, Member for Barnstaple, came to Westminster.

IV

Though the mid-March day was gloomy, the candles in the great chandelier hanging from the ceiling of the

Chamber had not been lit, and the faces of the men crowded on the benches on both sides of the long room were in semi-darkness. Lieutenant Pownall Pellew, from his place in the packed gallery above, could only just make out his father's dark angular features under the loom of the opposite gallery, so poor was the light from the three tall windows that illuminated the proceedings of the House. In a raised chair in front of a kind of tombstone bearing the Royal Arms sat a gentleman wearing a tricorne hat on top of a great flowing wig; Pownall surmised irritably that he was called the Speaker because he did little or no talking. Below him sat two solemn persons at a draped table loaded with books, brass-bound boxes, and an enormous mace. The place was unbearably stuffy. Only the confident eloquence of the long-nosed and sickly-looking gentleman who was addressing the House kept Pownall from thrusting his way out for a breath of air.

Mr. Pitt had opened the debate for the Opposition. Everyone knew that Pitt was determined to return to power, to resume leadership of the nation at all costs; he had formed alliance with his enemy Fox, given his support to anyone who would help him bring down the tottering Addington administration. The Admiralty—at once the chief feature of Addington's ministry and its chief weakness—was the obvious target for the destructive hammering of the Opposition, and Mr. Pitt was wielding the hammer with terrible effect.

Despite the diffusiveness of the long speech Pownall was far from being bored. There were laboured antitheses, windy periods; but every so often there emerged a telling indictment of inefficiency that struck like a thunderbolt. Pownall found himself glowing with indignation as shaft after shaft sped to its target. Accounts of the strength of the navy showed that in this hour of urgent need it was weaker

than it had been at the commencement of the war. As the threat of invasion increased the means for repelling it had decreased. Why were there not enough ships? Why were none being built in the contractor's yards? Where were the gunboats that could have shattered the enormous invasion fleet now concentrated in Boulogne? The Admiralty had failed utterly to respond to any one of the urgent calls upon it. The naval policy of the present Government was completely futile and deserving of the strongest censure.

Pownall was hearing again, dressed in different but no less violent language, the very complaints he had listened to in the cabin of *Tonnant*; complaints that his father had agreed with and voiced himself.

Mr. Pitt reached his conclusion and sat down amid an uproar of cheers and groans that shocked the serious-minded young lieutenant. A stout man with a cheery red face rose from the front bench of the Government side to reply. Pownall asked his neighbour, a shrewd-looking man with the appearance of a lawyer, who this was.

"Tierney—treasurer of the navy," was the whispered reply. "Bemuse 'em with figures. That's the usual defence."

He was right. Mr. Tierney reeled off long lists of figures —numbers of ships of this category and that, in commission and out, in port and at sea; numbers of men, amounts expended, expenditure proposed. At the end of it all Pownall was no wiser, nor (to judge by their dimly-seen faces) were the Honourable Members below him. Mr. Tierney, however, roundly declared that his figures were a complete refutation of the charges brought by the Right Honourable Gent, whose speech on the point of ships not being built by contractors, he added unpleasantly, smelled to him of a contract. He concluded with a eulogy of Earl St. Vincent, a First Lord whose absolute integrity must be known to all present.

An old man, thin and erect, rose on the heels of the storm of noise that followed the Navy Treasurer's speech.

"Admiral Berkeley," muttered the lawyer at Pownall's side. "On half-pay, but honest at least."

Admiral Berkeley's high and rather quavering voice bluntly accused Mr. Tierney of juggling with his statistics. Mr. Tierney had counted his marines twice over and included in his numbers of ships everything that could float, whether it was seaworthy or not. That kind of mis-statement could not help England in this hour of desperate need. The Admiral demanded a most rigorous inquiry into the Admiralty's conduct and ended with a peroration almost pathetic in its earnest sincerity. "I beg this House to remember that I warned them of it—that if the present system is pursued, whoever may be at the Admiralty, if this system is not immediately changed, the most dreadful, the most fatal calamity that ever happened to this country may be expected."

This speech, Pownall noted, made more impression even than Mr. Pitt's. The Opposition applause was less noisy than the cheers that had greeted Pitt, but the Government counter-cries sounded uneasy and half-hearted. Members were turning, nodding, exchanging whispered comment. The Speaker's voice rose above the buzz and shuffling of feet.

"The Right Honourable and gallant Member for Barnstaple has the floor."

A glint of watery sunlight showed Pownall his father's big, blue-coated figure standing forth in the gloom below the gallery, his brown face resolute. His presence and his harsh yet expressive voice alike commanded attention.

"Sir, as I very seldom trouble the House, I hope I may be permitted to make a few observations on a subject of which,

from the professional experience I have had, I may be presumed to have some knowledge . . ."

Pownall closed his eyes and clenched his fists. He could guess what was coming—could guess at the priming that had been given to the Member for Barnstaple so that he should say precisely what the Government wanted him to say. Dimly he heard his father's forceful and convincing phrases. *"I do not really see in the arrangement of our naval defence anything to excite the apprehensions even of the most timid among us . . . the gunboats which have been so strongly recommended, this mosquito fleet, are the most contemptible force that can be employed . . . I know, Sir, and can assert with confidence, that our navy was never better found, that it was never better supplied, and that our men were never better fed or better clothed . . . Are we not able to cope, anywhere, with any force the enemy dares to send out against us?"*

It was not a long speech, but when Sir Edward sat down the Government benches were vociferous in applause and the Opposition were clearly crestfallen.

"That's saved the day or I'm a Dutchman," said Pownall's neighbour.

Pownall scarcely heard him. At seventeen the discovery that one's idol has feet of clay is a tragedy. In a sort of miserable dream he sat through the other speeches. There was a member named Sheridan who seemed slightly tipsy ("Sherry's always bosky at this time of day," commented the lawyer) but spoke very flatteringly of Sir Edward. "In that speech, which applied as forcibly to the heart as the understanding, the honourable Baronet manifested not only that sincerity and frankness which is the general characteristic of that profession but also a considerable share of acuteness and judgement." There was another Member named Wilberforce who spoke very badly and at incredible

length against the Government. Then it seemed there was to be division and voting. Pownall learned at last that the Government had a majority of seventy-one. When the House rose he saw his father the centre of a smiling crowd of Government supporters who clapped him on the back and shook his hand in congratulation.

The third lieutenant of the *Tonnant* shouldered his way out into the cloudy March weather and drew in a long breath of air; it was stale air compared with the Atlantic breezes but clean and fresh after the stuffy hypocrisy of the House. In his heart was a gnawing misery which fed on sorrow and resentment. It seemed to Pownall Pellew that his father, the famous sea officer of his hero-worship, was lost to him for ever by this sordid perversion of the truth for political gain. He was unfair, of course, with the terrible narrow-mindedness of youth. He did not see that in supporting the Government Edward Pellew supported Earl St. Vincent against the jobbers and parasites who clamoured to make their fortunes out of England's need; he had no idea that a great part of his father's defection (as he thought of it) came from a desire to see his sons placed on the road to success. He saw only that his father had lied.

A month later Sir Edward Pellew was made Rear-Admiral of the White, missing an intermediate step of promotion. Pownall Pellew (at his father's request to St. Vincent) was appointed to the command of a sloop bound for Jamaica. Addington and the First Lord, with the inevitable doom of Pitt's victory fast approaching, had made haste to reward their supporter.

It is a reflection at once saddening and comforting that the righteous wrath of youth can be turned away as surely as the scruples of age, by the bestowal of some coveted honour. Captain Pownall Pellew of His Majesty's Ship the *Fly*, of ten guns, had unexpectedly achieved a height which

he had hardly aspired to in his wildest daydreams : at seventeen years old he was in command of his own ship. Nothing could alter the fact that he owed this entirely to his father's influence with the First Lord, and outraged conscience did not last long in the battle with gratitude and natural affection. When he sailed for Jamaica in the *Fly* Pownall's relations with his father were as affectionate as ever they had been, though based now on understanding rather than respect on the boy's part. Sir Edward himself felt at first no twinge of conscience, being able to tell himself that even if he was made Admiral for his political services his naval services and capacity fully merited that rank. But it may be guessed that all was not well between Admiral Pellew and his better self a month later, for he wrote to the one man he knew who would not have stooped to secure promotion by the method Pellew had used. That letter—perhaps beseeching, perhaps stiffly offering to serve—is lost. But the reply to it remains.

I am truly sensible of the honor you do me in expressing a wish to serve under me, but you have always my dear Sir Edward proved yourself so equal to command a fleet that it would be a sin to place you in any other situation, and my services are very nearly at an end for in addition to other infirmities I am nearly blind—however I hope to fight one more Battle and then unless my health and sight mends, which is not very likely, I expect perhaps to lay down the cudgels . . . believe me ever my dear Sir Edward your much obliged friend and Servant,

NELSON AND BRONTË.

V

On a November afternoon of the year 1805, eighteen months after his promotion, Rear-Admiral Sir Edward

Pellew sat fidgeting at his desk in Admiralty House in Bombay, in a most evil temper. The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station, was rarely in a good humour these days, and the cause of his irritation was always the same: Troubridge. Troubridge stood between him and contentment with his lot—a lot that should have contented any ambitious officer, for the India Command was the most coveted of the prizes in the world of high naval politics. Through all these long, hot months of worry and responsibility, with little naval action beyond the movement of ships to keep the French possessions in India continually under observation, Troubridge had opposed and thwarted him on every possible occasion. They had not been on speaking terms for a year. When Troubridge sent a report or a message it was always couched in the language of veiled insult, like the one that lay before him on the table now.

Pellew suspected, and with good reason, that Mr. Pitt (who never forgave his enemies) had purposely devised this impossible situation. Hardly had he reached India to take up his new command when Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Troubridge had been sent out with Pitt's orders to take the eastern half of his command from him. The East Indies command was to be a joint one. The situation was impossible because Pellew was senior on the list of Admirals and at once informed Troubridge that he proposed to take him under his command, to which Sir Thomas replied with the most violent protests. There were other causes of dissension, too. The two men had never liked each other—and the flagship which Sir Edward had been given was the *Culloden,* which Troubridge had commanded at the Nile. Harrassed by continual bickering as well as by the thousand problems of high command, Pellew had never been less happy.

The windless humidity of the last few days had given place to a fresh breeze, and the ruffled blue water that

could be seen from his window beyond the crowded masts of the harbour reminded him of a blowing day off Ushant. The sudden fierce longing seized him to be back again there, beating offshore against the westerly wind, spray-drenched, master of himself and his ship, with only the familiar sea and the French to contend with. In *Impetueux,* perhaps, or the old *Indefatigable*—yes, he would be plain Edward Pellew of the *Indefatigable* again if some good fairy appeared at that moment to grant his dearest wish. Luck had stood his friend; but the Goddess, powerful though she be, has no power to bring back the past.

In one thing only did Edward Pellew count himself fortunate of recent months. In February one of his ships, the *Fiorenzo*, had fought and taken the French frigate *La Psyche* after a fight in which half the frigate's complement had been killed or wounded. *Psyche*'s captain, who escaped uninjured, was Louis Bergeret. There had been a moving reunion between the French captain and the English Admiral on *Culloden*'s quarterdeck a few days later, and Pellew had arranged for his old friend a comfortable residence in the Ile de France on parole.

But it was November now and all the intervening weeks had been full of frustration and petty worries. The pile of papers on his desk represented the worries of this day—the work of a commander-in-chief, not of a sea officer. He came back with a sigh from the vision of a frigate ploughing splendidly through the sparkling seas of a faraway Channel. He was middle-aged now, and there was Lady Pellew in her big new residence of Hampton House and Emma and her husband and the boys and little George—adventures were over for him and there remained only the maintenance of his position and the advancement of his family. He placed the heap of papers before him and had opened his mouth to call Locker, his secretary, from the adjoining office when

Locker knocked and entered. There was an odd expression, dismay and something more, on the secretary's pale face.

"Captain Wright, sir, of the *Trusty* sloop," he announced in a lowered voice. "He has—news, sir."

Captain Wright gave his news briefly and without preamble. There had been an engagement between the Mediterranean fleet and the combined French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar on October 21st. The combined fleets had been utterly defeated, eighteen of the enemy ships being destroyed or taken. In the moment of victory Lord Nelson had been killed.

Captain Wright, proceeding to give further details, thought he was speaking to a deaf man, so fixed and grim was Sir Edward's expression. He began to raise his voice more loudly. Pellew turned slowly, his unseeing gaze passing the captain.

"Thank you," he said. "You may go."

"Sir, I have a further——"

"Go!" repeated the Admiral in a terrible voice.

Captain Wright went.

Only Alexander Broughton was to have a hint of Edward Pellew's emotions at this moment. He wrote to Alex many months later.

. . . an Admiral, a Commander in Chief, a Col. of Marines, a Baronet, and a man with a purse weighing fifty thousand pounds—And yet . . . I would freely give back the Whole for such a day as Trafalgar.

Perhaps his guardian Goddess heard that cry from the heart. For Pellew was to have his day, though not until a dozen years had passed and the war was at an end.

EIGHT

I

"*Mais mon dieu,* Edward!" cried Contre-Amiral Louis de Bergeret impatiently. "You had five sail of the line—why did you not pound the place into dust? All the world knows that Algiers is a nest of pirates with the Dey for their *scélérat* of a captain!"

Baron Exmouth of Canonteign, Admiral of the Blue, poured himself half a glass of port and passed the decanter to his friend with a nod and a grin.

"Orders," he replied shortly. "I exceeded them as it was, by threatening the Dey." He sipped his wine with appreciation. "If Castlereagh doesn't read me a lecture on my temerity when I get to London I shall be surprised, Louis."

It was a pleasant summer evening almost exactly a year after Waterloo and the two friends who had been at formal enmity for twenty-two years were sitting after dinner in the small dining-room of West Cliff House—the ugly residence overlooking the tiny harbour at Teignmouth, which was Lady Exmouth's favourite dwelling—in the soothing light of the westering sun and the equally soothing certainty that they would never meet as enemies again. The fact that Lord Exmouth had sent to invite a French rear-admiral to stay with him so soon after the conclusion of hostilities had excited some unfavourable comment in Teignmouth, but that attitude would soon pass. De Bergeret's criticism was directed at an expedition from which the Admiral had

returned only two days ago, a semi-peaceful mission to the Bey of Tunis and the Dey of Algiers; and now, as they sat at ease facing the open windows and the gold of the calm sea far below, Lord Exmouth explained to his guest the true import of that expedition.

In his sixtieth year he was not greatly changed from the Edward Pellew of a dozen years before. "Grey as a badger and fat as a pig," he had described himself to Alex Broughton two years after Trafalgar, but the stoutness was no disfigurement in his magnificent height and breadth, and if the grey hair was now almost white it still framed a hard, brown face in which the brown eyes sparkled as youthfully as ever. Beside him De Bergeret looked ten years older with his thin face lined and wrinkled like crumpled parchment. Defeat had not changed his gay bearing, for he had had no scruples about returning his allegiance to the Bourbons and was Monsieur le Comte nowadays.

"It was all a matter of politics," said Pellew; he threw a twinkling glance at his friend. "You'll not understand that, Louis, but here in England we find our motive for everything in politics. I didn't go to Algiers to burn a nest of pirates but to arrange the liberation of all the Christian slaves on the Barbary Coast."

"Et puis?" De Bergeret raised his brows. "That was surely a crusade, *mon ami*, not a political move."

The Admiral wagged his fine white head contemptuously. "Can you conceive our Foreign Minister initiating a crusade? I don't like Castlereagh, but he's the best we've ever had in that post, Louis—and the duty of a Foreign Minister, I take it, is to put his country's interests before all else. There's policy behind this generous anxiety to wrest Christian slaves from the clutches of the Turks."

He explained. The overwhelming weight of public opinion had at last forced England to repudiate the slave trade; that

was to say, the politicians, now that the war was over, had seized on the slavery question as a major political issue. Public (and political) indignation that other European countries had not heeded England's righteous example had followed as inevitably as night follows day. Lord Castlereagh had been required to demand of the Powers at the Conference in Europe that Negro slavery should be abolished by all of them; whereat the other Powers, not unnaturally, had scented yet another English hypocrisy. Why only Negro slaves, they asked? The Barbary States on the north coast of Africa were founded on slavery of the worst kind. For centuries their economy had consisted of a ruling race of pirate Turks and Moors who lived by the sword while the entire manual labour of the country was done by hundreds of thousands of slaves, many of them Christians. Why did not the foremost naval power of Europe propose to abolish white slavery in North Africa?

"*Eh bien*—why not?" put in De Bergeret here.

"Our good Castlereagh couldn't very well answer that question," said Pellew, "but I can—for your ears, Louis."

"Admitted, as you are, to the secrets of high policy," said the Frenchman with faint derision.

Lord Exmouth frowned and then laughed.

"Perhaps I enjoy being the confidant of statesmen. Well—of course we have always maintained treaties with Tunis and Algiers. In time of war, what other ports were likely to supply our ships in the Mediterranean with food and water and harbourage? My country—and yours too, Louis—has alternately threatened and bribed the corsairs, and on the whole they've left our ships well alone and preyed on others. So Castlereagh was not concerned to root out the pirates. All he wanted was to negotiate for the purchase of all the Christian slaves, so that when the voice of England—the politicians, that is—forced him to press again for general

abolition of slavery, he could point to our philanthropic action and say, 'We at least are blameless, gentlemen.' And that, Louis, is what I was doing. My orders were to buy back all Christian slaves. I had five ships of the line merely because my lords in council opined that a display of force would lessen the expense. Pray fill your glass."

"*Merci.*" De Bergeret let the port stay in his mouth a moment before he swallowed it. "Your politics produce an unpleasant taste, Edward. I have much fear you are become a cynic."

"I'm older and wiser than I was—but perhaps not wise enough yet for a politician. The Bey at Tunis was in such consternation at my visit with a squadron that I decided to go farther when I reached Algiers. Omar Pasha, the Dey of Algiers, is a man of parts, Louis—a Greek and a rogue who knows his strength. My efforts to bully him into giving an undertaking that he'd take no more Christian slaves made him lose his temper and nearly lost me my head, but I succeeded in buying back what slaves he had and won a treaty from him. He's to send an Ambassador to England to treat on the whole question of white slavery."

"Pouf!" exclaimed his friend disdainfully. "A treaty with a pirate! What worth is that?"

"Little enough, perhaps," Pellew admitted. "But in obtaining even that I exceeded my orders. The gentlemen at Westminster will be annoyed with me, no doubt. We must not annoy our useful friend the Dey."

He took up the half-empty decanter, weighed it consideringly for a moment, and poured himself a final half-glass of port. De Bergeret scowled at him beneath lowered brows.

"And you, *mon ami*?" he demanded. "Do you hold the same opinion as your masters the politicians?"

"I?" Lord Exmouth looked up; the smile that lit his craggy features was not greatly different from the grin Louis remembered from forty years ago. "If I had the say I'd blow Algiers and Omar Pasha to hell and end piracy and slavery in the Mediterranean for ever. Or I would try. For, believe me, Louis, it wouldn't be easy. Algiers is the strongest fortified place in the world—Omar's seen to that. Your own people reckon it impregnable. Four hundred and fifty cannon, eighteen and twenty-four-pounders, can fire on any attacking squadron. Look here, now." He seized knives and forks and made a diagram on the table. "An island here—here's the landward forts that can fire out over the town—this knife's the mole and the decanter the lighthouse battery. On the island, more than two hundred guns arranged in tiers. Every emplacement, Louis, is built not of stone as in a common fortress but of a stuff they call concrete, of which these Turks have the secret from the Romans who taught 'em. Cannon-balls can only smash it at close range—bomb-vessels would be needed. And no vessel can come near the inner batteries without passing through the zone of fire from the lighthouse and mole batteries. To reduce Algiers would be devilish expensive in ships and men."

"It appears you have made some use of your visit to the place, after all," remarked the Contre-Amiral, smiling.

"Well, of course. Captain Warde took soundings while I was there and we made careful notes of the defences. Some day the information may be useful—but not to me, I fear." Pellew set down his empty glass with a sigh which was not altogether one of satisfaction. "My day is done, Louis. I sink peacefully into oblivion, like the fat old sun yonder. If ever we try a blow at Algiers it will be some younger fellow with his reputation to make who'll command."

"So I should hope, indeed!" said a new voice from the doorway.

Susan Pellew came in, followed by a servant in livery. The high waistline of her flowered muslin gown made her look taller, and with her comfortable figure and handsome features she made a not unimpressive Baroness; but her dark grey eyes as she smiled fondly at the two warriors held their old soft brilliance.

"I've allowed you to exceed your customary time over the port," she continued, "and the table must be cleared. Louis, I hope you've not been encouraging Edward to attack those Algerian savages?"

"Madame, he encourages himself," returned De Bergeret, rising to place a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Not a bit of it," Pellew said hastily. "I was telling Louis what's plain enough even to our shilly-shally rulers—Algiers is too strong to be reduced by a naval force. Besides, my love, didn't I tell you I'm most unlikely to serve again? My flag was hauled down at Spithead two days ago and there's an end of it."

"Of—how many years?—forty-five years as a sea officer," nodded De Bergeret. "And a glorious record, Edward."

They moved towards the door, the Baroness on the French Admiral's arm.

"Glorious or not," said Pellew, "I'm ready for the beach. My floor-timbers are getting shaky, and the First Lord knows it. No, Susan. They'll send for me to London, I'll be mildly reprimanded, mildly complimented, and mildly appointed Port-Admiral at Plymouth."

In which prophecy the Admiral was greatly mistaken.

II

The Prime Minister was sitting at the table frowning over a sheaf of reports when Lord Castlereagh was

announced, and the Foreign Secretary, gaunt and cadaverous of feature, stalked in a moment later. Lord Liverpool eyed him apprehensively, noting the furrows of irritation that creased Castlereagh's dead-white face; like most of his followers in the Administration, he disliked the Secretary while admitting his extraordinary ability—an ability which had been largely responsible for the crushing of the Emperor Napoleon.

"He should be here in ten minutes' time, if he is punctual," Castlereagh said when they had exchanged curt greetings.

"The Admiral is usually punctual," responded the Earl of Liverpool; it was his chief characteristic always to be an echo of his colleague's initial statements.

Castlereagh sat down in the chair opposite him. The two men were almost the same age and oddly alike in dress and appearance; the sombre coat and breeches, the long, ungainly form, the thin, arrogant face, was there in both of them. But Lord Liverpool's shifting, blinking eyes and weak chin gave the key to the difference in their characters. Castlereagh's eyes were narrow and glittering like a snake's, with a snake's cold ruthlessness, and his thin, cruel lips and jutting chin revealed the man who had matched Bonaparte's own iron resolution and smashed it.

"Where is that report, sir?" he demanded now.

The Prime Minister shuffled through his papers twice before he found the report and handed it over. Castlereagh glanced at it cursorily.

"We will begin with this," he announced. "With a man like Pellew it's better to win his sentimental adherence at the outset."

Lord Liverpool looked a trifle shocked. "I had thought," he ventured, "that it would be sufficient to give Lord Exmouth his new orders."

"Orders!" repeated the Secretary disdainfully. "What orders can be as effective as a man's own conscience when it is properly awakened? Consider, sir. We are sending Exmouth to execute the hardest task ever given to a naval commander. We may be sending him and most of his force to their deaths. Algiers, as you know, has been let alone by more nations than ours, who would dearly have liked to see its infamies wiped out for ever. Why? Because it is too strong. Omar is a remarkable man. He has so fortified the place that it is said to be impregnable."

"Just so," agreed Lord Liverpool worriedly. "And if Lord Exmouth fails to——"

"I have no doubt," pursued Castlereagh, ignoring him, "that Pellew would obey a mere order, especially if backed by the offer of a Viscountcy. But the man has a kind of genius as well as ambition. Old as he is, there is not a better sea officer in the navy—nor a man more vain of his own daring and resolution. How much better, I say, if he can be brought to offer his services! For thus he must undertake the responsibility and use his capabilities to the full, whereas if we order him to a task which many would consider impossible his full heart would not be in it."

The Prime Minister nodded doubtfully. "I see your point. Yet he will require some reason, I think. Lord Exmouth is not ignorant of politics."

The Secretary threw himself back in his chair, his thin lips twisted in a contemptuous smile.

"The whole art of the politician, sir," he said, "consists in getting men to do from righteous indignation what has to be done from political expediency. We could tell Pellew the truth. We could tell him that the Whigs and half our own side are furious at our action in making a treaty with—as they say—the ring-leader of a *banditti* of corsairs. We could tell him that the Powers have insisted on stronger action

against Algiers as proof of our honest intention to abolish all slavery. We could tell him that if English blood is not shed to good purpose in this cause your administration will face disaster. Would that, think you, have half the effect of this?"

He held up the sheet of paper Lord Liverpool had given him. The Earl blinked and shook his head.

"Doubtless you are right as usual, my lord," he mumbled. "I did not contest your reasoning, but merely wished——"

"You shall see that I am right." There were footsteps outside the door. "Admiral Lord Exmouth is punctual to the minute."

A servant threw open the door and announced the Admiral. Pellew strode in with his assured step and halted to bow to the rulers of the State. Formal greetings were exchanged and the newcomer bidden to a seat at the table. Castlereagh looked at the Prime Minister.

"Shall I proceed, sir?"

Lord Liverpool bowed his head solemnly. The Admiral, glancing keenly from one stern face to the other, felt a momentary uneasiness. It was always possible that his severity in wresting a treaty from the Dey instead of merely bargaining with him for slaves, for which he expected some slight reprimand, was to be made into a grave offence to further some move in the tortuous game of politics. Well, they could not break him now. His career was over, his position secure.

"My lord," Castlereagh said portentously, "we have sent for you in a matter of great urgency. This report, whose authenticity is quite beyond doubt, reached us two days ago." He displayed the paper. "On Ascension Day, the twenty-third of May, two hundred fishermen from Corsica and Sicily went ashore at Bona for the purpose of hearing Mass. Bona, as you know, is the centre of the coral-fishing

industry on the Barbary Coast. It is also part of the domain of the Dey of Algiers. On that day, my lord—four days after Omar Pasha had signed your so-called treaty—the two hundred fishermen were massacred by Turkish soldiers acting under the Dey's orders."

He threw down the paper and sat back with a side glance at the Prime Minister. Pellew sat for a moment as if stunned. Then the colour surged into his face and he smote both fists on the table. If he had felt an instant's surprise and relief at escaping censure, it had been immediately swamped by the flood of wrath.

"By God!" he roared. "The lying, murdering heathen! I had his oath that Christians should be safe from him! Fool that I was, to trust the word of a damned thief and pirate!"

Castlereagh coughed gently and sat silent, waiting. In the Admiral's brown eyes the red smoulder of anger flamed suddenly into fierce resolve. He sprang to his feet.

"You can't pass this over, my lord!" he flung at the Prime Minister. "It's rank defiance—a crime of such magnitude merits the heaviest possible punishment!"

"Er—precisely," said Lord Liverpool, looking at the Foreign Secretary.

Pellew saw the look and addressed himself to Castlereagh.

"My lord," he said eagerly, "give me leave to finish the work I've begun! Give me ships and men and I'll show Omar Pasha what it means to defy King George!"

Castlereagh's thin lips twitched slightly at mention of the King. George the Third was blind and mad, shut up in Windsor Castle, and 'Prinny' with his huge belly and his retinue of pimps and dandies was Regent; the real ruler of England was Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh. He composed his vulturine features to grave concern.

"This is a most hazardous business you propose," he said. "Your lordship must be aware that Algiers is reckoned

unassailable. Its batteries are proof against the cannon of a ship of the line and its guns will have a range greater than a ship's guns. Moreover, the town is built of stone or concrete and cannot be burned."

The Prime Minister regarded his colleague in some dismay; to argue thus against the proposal when Exmouth had already shown such enthusiasm was going too far. But Castlereagh always knew what he was doing. His objections merely made the Admiral more urgent in his demand.

"The whole fleet of these pirates lies within the Mole," he declared persuasively. "They'll burn, at least. As for the guns and batteries, I'd bring my ships in so close that no stone or concrete would resist their broadsides. You may not know, my lord, that Captain Warde, at my orders, took soundings of the whole harbour and anchorage at my last visit, by night. It's no boast to say no sea officer knows more about Algiers than I do."

"That I do not doubt." Castlereagh looked at the Prime Minister, frowning. "My lord, if Lord Exmouth's offer, which does him credit, should be put into practice, it must I fear lead to much loss of life and material in our force, whether the attack is successful or not."

"Yet, as Lord Exmouth has said himself, we cannot let the dastardly crime pass unrevenged," returned Lord Liverpool, taking his cue.

Pellew turned eagerly to face him. "Right, my lord! And I beg you to consider that any lives that are spent—mine too, if need be—will be the means of saving other lives in the future. These pirates have plied their trade too long. What need have we now of friends on the Barbary Coast? Let us put an end to piracy and slavery together, once and for all!"

The Foreign Secretary rose to his gaunt height and went round the table to Lord Liverpool.

"By your leave, sir," he said to the Admiral, and to the Prime Minister, "A word with you, my lord, if you please."

The two walked solemnly together to the farther end of the apartment, to exchange a sentence or two in low voices. Pellew caught one phrase of Castlereagh's, spoken loud enough to reach his ears: "If anyone can do it, Exmouth can." The statesmen returned, approaching him with heroic resolve.

"My lord," said Castlereagh, "we have decided to accept your proposal and confide this grave responsibility to your care. You shall have *carte blanche* in choosing your ships."

"I thank your lordships," Pellew replied with sincerity; he threw back his head with its impressive mane of silver hair. "For the responsibility, I will shoulder the whole of it. For the ships, you must allow me a little time to make my plans. A week, perhaps."

"Gladly, sir, gladly," nodded the Prime Minister. "In this, the last Crusade as we may call it," he added, attempting oratory, "the country is fortunate indeed to have a commander of spotless integrity and courage to—h'm—advance our banners against the heathen."

After that they spoke for a little longer, of possible aid from other nations and of a rear-admiral to second Lord Exmouth in the enterprise. Pellew named Admiral Penrose, who was a proved fighting seaman and already in the Mediterranean. When he left—in haste, as he explained, to put matters in train without delay—the two men who between them ruled England sat down again, Lord Castlereagh with satisfaction and Lord Liverpool with relief.

"'Fore God!" observed the Prime Minister. "You managed him neatly, Castlereagh—but I feel nigh as sorry for Exmouth as for those two hundred massacred fishermen. Think you he will succeed?"

The Foreign Secretary looked up from a note he had begun to make on a sheet of paper.

"I think it most unlikely," he replied coolly. "But he will fight a battle, and that is what we want to establish our position with the Powers—a battle. And the bloodier the better."

III

It was not to be expected that the Government should keep the proposed expedition a secret. France and Austria and Russia had to be made aware of England's readiness to prove her good faith, of her resolve to spend—if need be—her best and bravest in a crushing blow at the last stronghold of slavery. The people (and the newspapers) of England had to be shown that Government was the enthusiastic servant of popular opinion. As a measure of prudence, it was also made known that Admiral Lord Exmouth had proposed the expedition himself and was to plan and execute it entirely on his own responsibility. The result was that Edward Pellew found himself, after some years of lofty semi-obscurity, once again a popular hero.

This he found inconvenient in more ways than one. It was pleasant enough to be greeted with waving hats and scattered cheers whenever he appeared in the streets; amusing to recall that a little earlier the newspapers that now eulogised him had sneered at his dealings with the Dey of Algiers and hinted that he was an elderly poltroon who ought to be retired on half-pay. But the flood of correspondence that poured in on him was a serious problem. Most of the letters were from reformers and Evangelical leaders praising him for his Christian determination to end the evil of slavery, and he was astonished at the weight of opinion behind them. Others—and they were not a few—were from eccentric ladies who professed themselves eager

to reward his chivalry with amatorial joys. There was an enormously long epistle from William Wilberforce which amounted to a pamphlet on Slavery and Antichrist. And there were hundreds of letters from young naval officers who, realising that the Algiers Expedition was their last chance of distinction in a warlike operation for many years to come, wished to serve under him. In dealing with this and with the voluminous plans, lists of stores and ammunition, and the scores of other matters that now enlisted every ounce of his great energy, Pellew was vastly assisted by two old friends—Louis de Bergeret, and John Gaze, once mate of the coaster *Venus* and now Captain Gaze, Master of the Fleet to Admiral Lord Exmouth.

De Bergeret threw himself into the work with tremendous enthusiasm, for to him this was indeed the last of the great Crusades. Pellew would have taken him on the expedition and given him a command if that had been possible, but Admiralty forbade it. Gaze lent invaluable aid in the hardest problem that faced the Admiral—the finding of men to man the ships. In requiring a week in which to make his preparations Pellew had given himself the minimum possible time. When he had struck his flag at Spithead it had meant the end of sea service for all the men in his fleet; the war was concluded and every seaman was legally entitled to his discharge. Only by asking for volunteers could he obtain the four or five thousand men he required, and if all the crews of his old squadron had volunteered he could have manned the Algiers fleet instantly. He went on board *Boyne* and *Bombay*, *Ajax* and *Montagu*, but only two or three men from each ship volunteered in response to his appeal. Nor could many new recruits be persuaded to join.

For the first time Edward Pellew realised two things : that he was a survival from the previous era, and that—apart

from a handful who were devoted to him—he did not command the affection of his men. His gallant record as a frigate captain was almost forgotten now; his last famous exploit had taken place in the boyhood of most seamen, in the distant past, and he had borne no part in the great sea-fights which had taken place since. Gaze solved the problem of manning the flagship by offering a bounty of two months' pay to volunteer seamen, but the rest of the squadron had to be composed of ships commissioned since the peace, whose crews had no option. There was no shortage of volunteer officers, but Pellew refused to take with him any of his relatives or followers—no one for whom he had any personal regard (except the indispensable Gaze) was to share the perils of what Pellew, no less than Lord Castlereagh, regarded as an extremely dangerous operation. Even his flag-captain, Brisbane, was a stranger to him. He had always loved independence and shunned placing responsibility on others, and now, in this last fighting command, he was to be more alone than he had ever been before.

When he presented his demands to the Admiralty they were greeted with dismay. Lord Liverpool was aghast when he was informed of them and even Castlereagh was perturbed. For Lord Exmouth wanted only five ships of the line, four frigates, and four bomb-vessels, and was adamant when pressed to take a stronger force. His plans, he declared, had been made exactly and to the last detail, and in the limited sea-space in which he proposed to carry out the attack more ships would be worse than useless. It was only under protest that he agreed to take five frigates supplied by the Dutch Government as their contribution to the effort. To the Foreign Secretary, who required an explanation, he revealed the mainsprings of his plan.

"If I'm not mistaken, my lord, I am required to accomplish two things in particular. First, to inflict a sufficient

punishment on the Dey. Second, to convince the Algerines that their fortress is not impregnable. Only thus shall we frighten them into submission and end their trade of piracy. For the first I must destroy their navy and knock down part of the town, using my bomb-vessels for the purpose. For the second, at least some of the batteries must be silenced, and that can only be done by accurate broadsides from ships of the line at close range." He spread a plan before Castlereagh's frowning gaze and stabbed enthusiastically at its details with a forefinger. "The town and its hillside batteries —the island and lighthouse batteries—the mole connecting island to town. Your lordship observes how I've shaded in the zones of fire from the batteries?"

"Are you certain the zones of fire are thus?"

"I am certain," returned the Admiral. "Captain Warde and I used our eyes when we were ashore there in May. Pray note this, my lord." He indicated a small blank space on the plan, close to the southern end of the fortified island. "Here are the single-tier batteries defending the fleet that lies inside the harbour. The heavier batteries cannot fire on the space of dead ground, as I may call it, and there is just room for three ships of the line to lie there and deliver their broadsides. A three-decker here, at the harbour entrance, can engage the three-tier batteries from the flank and command the vessels in the harbour. My fifth ship will engage the fort, here, while the frigates manœuvre to draw the fire from the northern batteries. Your lordship will see from this that any additions to my fleet could only take up effective positions by anchoring in the zones of heavy fire, by which they would be sunk or gravely damaged before they could deal any blow at the enemy. Hence my request for five ships only."

"Yet your five ships must pass through that zone of fire

before taking up their positions," mused Lord Castlereagh. "That is bound to mean heavy casualties, I think?"

His narrow grey-green eyes met Pellew's quick glance and looked away. In that moment the Admiral knew that the Foreign Secretary did not expect him to succeed—that great ships were to be battered into wrecks and men blown to fragments for an end almost purely political—that heavy casualties would be as welcome to the Government as the massacre at Bona had been. Something of contempt sounded in his cold tone.

"Has your lordship any further instruction?"

If Castlereagh heard the contempt he ignored it. He was concerned with the attitude of nations, not of individuals.

"Only this," he said. "You will first present an ultimatum to the Dey requiring the total abolition of slavery, the abandonment of all piracy, and the repayment of those moneys paid to him in May."

Pellew nodded. He knew that the ultimatum would be rejected; piracy and slavery were the two chief props of the Algerine state, and without them it could no longer exist.

"And I would suggest," Castlereagh added, "that you do not open fire until the enemy has fired first. The importance of that in impressing world opinion might be considerable." He held out his hand. "My lord, I wish you Godspeed."

His hand in Pellew's grasp felt like the claw of a dead fowl.

After that it was a relief to be back in the house at Teignmouth working night and day on the final details, with De Bergeret and Susan at his side. For the Baroness Exmouth was supplementing the work of his secretaries with her pen and her quick wit. If there had been a time when her husband's ambitions had led to a breach between them, it was long ago forgotten; to Susan, increasingly devoted to the Evangelical cause, Edward's last mission was as much a

crusade as it was to De Bergeret. She knew that he did not see himself as a crusader, as a Christian warrior going into battle for the defence of Christ's followers, as she saw him. She knew that Edward Pellew, in his sixtieth year, was once again—and for the last time—a sea officer, planning only for victory in the most difficult and dangerous battle of his career. That defeat and death were possible, even more than possible, she knew also; but not until long after their parting, when she was clearing out his desk, did she find the letter that told her how the Admiral himself had reckoned the odds against him.

The letter was written from his flagship, the *Queen Charlotte,* and dated July 20th, 1816. It began: 'My very dear Pownall: when this reaches you the Father who loves you will be no more . . .'

IV

"Two o'clock, my lord," said Captain Brisbane in a voice that shook slightly.

"Very well," returned Admiral Lord Exmouth. "I shall wait, however, until the boat signals from the mole."

On the deck of the great flagship all was so quiet and orderly that it might have been a Sunday afternoon with nothing but routine duties and 'make-and-mend' to come. Only the double row of upper-deck guns whose breeches twinkled dully in the hazy sunshine showed that there was more deadly business toward, for those guns were run out and the gun-crews stripped to the waist and ready beside them. In line astern, hove-to like *Queen Charlotte* under topsails only, were the other ships of the squadron—*Minden, Suberb, Albion, Impregnable,* and the big fifty-gun frigate *Leander.* Farther out to sea the English and Dutch frigates tacked desultorily back and forth like yachts waiting to cross

the starting-line of a race, passing and repassing the three bomb-vessels that were already anchored in position half a mile offshore. A scant half-mile to westward of the flagship was Algiers itself—the long island with its great fortresses of masonry in front hiding the harbour, the white town climbing steeply up the hillside behind with more great forts frowning down above it. The muzzles of five hundred big cannon peered out of the tiers of casemates, as ready for the signal as the guns on board the English ships. Lord Exmouth had four hundred and fifty guns, but the majority of them were twelve-pounders. They had to be fired from the protection of wooden bulwarks or with no protection at all, whereas the eighteen-pounders and twenty-four-pounders of the Algerines would fire from the protection of masonry. 'Wooden walls against stone' had been the pessimistic catchword that had gone through the squadron on its way from England, and when the Admiral heard of it his brow was dark indeed.

It was not dark now, however. Captain Brisbane marvelled at the carefree cheerfulness of the white-haired man who had seemed to take no rest during the whole outward voyage, so continuously and energetically had he occupied himself with the training of gunners, the checking of details, the estimation of powder-charges for an explosion vessel and a thousand other matters.

"He appears to trust no one but himself," the captain had complained in private to the Master of the Fleet.

"At least, sir, we can all trust *him*," Captain Gaze had replied stolidly.

Captain Brisbane glanced surreptitiously at his watch again. Two-fifteen. The three hours allowed for the Dey's acceptance or refusal of the ultimatum had expired a quarter of an hour ago. He wished the Admiral would open the battle, without waiting for a signal from the boat that

was lying off the mole under a flag of truce. This waiting must be trying the nerves of a thousand others beside himself. But the Admiral seemed to have no nerves—he was even now chatting with his Master of the Fleet, pointing out landmarks in the distant port as if this was a sight-seeing cruise instead of the tense moment before an engagement. And in such a rig! Undress uniform coat without epaulettes, white cravat and waistcoat, nankeen trousers with gaiters, and a round black hat—more like a country squire at a race-meeting than an Admiral of the Blue. But perhaps (reflected Brisbane) he was wise to leave off his epaulettes and braid. The mole and the quays were black with musketmen; the Turkish soldiers with auxiliaries and sailors were known to number about fifteen thousand and it had been reported that the Moorish chieftains of the interior had brought in some thirty thousand armed tribesmen to reinforce the garrison. Musketry was as much to be feared as cannon-balls at the short range the ships would use, and the glitter of full uniform would make an Admiral a choice target.

In fact, this consideration had not entered Edward Pellew's thoughts. At dawn that morning, as the attacking fleet was drawing in towards a white town beautiful against the red-and-green hills, he had discarded the stiff uniform and tight breeches of his rank and put on more comfortable attire.

"I must be at my ease today, John," he had said to Captain Gaze in a rare burst of confidence. "It will be a hot day and hot work. I shall do the work better if I'm in my jog-abouts."

Captain Brisbane was about to consult his watch for the third time when the Admiral turned to him.

"What's the hour now, sir?"

"Twenty-five minutes past two, my lord."

"Thank you."

Pellew raised his glass to look at the cutter lying off the mole. There was no signal-flag at her masthead, and while he kept the telescope at his eye his inward vision showed him other pictures: Susan with misted eyes but firm lips, bidding him good-bye; Pownall, who would be his heir, on the quarterdeck of a ship of the line in the Channel fleet; poor Fleetwood, who had turned out something of a failure; Emma and Julia—both of them mothers now—and young George, a Fellow of All Souls. They were all provided for, thank God. And for himself, it would be no bad ending if a Turkish bullet——

Two flags were creeping up to the cutter's masthead.

"The cutter's signalling, my lord!" said Brisbane excitedly in the same instant. " 'No answer has been given'. And she's making sail back to us."

Pellew closed his telescope with a snap. "Very good. Pray make the general signal 'Are you ready?' "

Signal midshipmen raced away at Brisbane's order, flags floated up to the yardarm. In the short interval before the reply, the Admiral considered the moderate northerly breeze reflectively. If his luck held, that breeze would hold; it would give his ships exactly the way he required of them.

"Every ship replies 'Ready', my lord."

"Very good. Hoist 'Annul the truce' and then, Captain Brisbane, pray hoist the jib and follow the course I have instructed you."

As the *Queen Charlotte* paid off and stood slowly towards the mole Pellew watched the following ships with some anxiety. At the last moment Rear-Admiral Milne had been substituted for his own choice, Penrose, and he had no high opinion of Milne, who was in *Impregnable* and fifth in the line. By God, the fool had taken in his topsails—and that

meant he would not be able to keep close up to *Albion*. *Superb*, too, was keeping too far to port.

Ignoring Brisbane, he rapped orders to a signal midshipman near him.

"Make this to *Impregnable*—'make more sail'. This to *Suberb*—'keep to starboard'."

Damn them! Didn't they realise, after all his lectures, that the one hope of victory lay in keeping station exactly as he had ordered?

"Lighthouse bears nor'-west by west, my lord."

That was Gaze reporting the bearing as he had been ordered. When that bearing was north by west on this course, the *Queen Charlotte* would have crossed the imaginary line which was the side limit of the zone of fire from the triple-tiered battery in the centre of the island.

The English ships were bearing down steadily on the southern flank of the island. The noise of defiant screaming and shouting from the dense crowd massed there sounded very loud, but not a shot had yet been fired.

"Why don't they open fire?" Captain Brisbane muttered to himself, loud enough for the Admiral to hear; he was on tenterhooks and didn't care who knew it.

He was answered by a voice from the maintop, where a twelve-pounder and its crew were stationed.

"Deck, there! Galleys inside the harbour—forty or more —ready manned and crammed with troops!"

Pellew's mind jumped to the obvious conclusion. Of course these pirates would prefer to board if they could—that was their usual mode, the sea warfare at which they were the world's greatest experts. They were waiting until the great vessels anchored and the hands ran aloft to furl the sails; then the many-oared galleys would dart out upon the helpless ships—helpless because they could not manœuvre or bring their guns to bear—and throw their

thousands of Turkish soldiers into the fight, perhaps five hundred attackers to every English ship. That was doubtless why the Dey had not opened fire : he hoped for the capture of the ships and the slaughter of every man aboard. Or (Pellew smiled grimly at the thought) it could be that Omar Pasha, as cunning a scoundrel as any English politician, wanted the English to open fire first—'the importance of that in impressing world opinion might be considerable'. In any case, the Dey was not going to profit by the absence of gun-crews from their stations while they went aloft, because the Admiral's luck was holding as the northerly breeze had held, and his anticipation that they would lose that breeze just as they came to their appointed positions had been fulfilled. Every ship would anchor without furling topsails.

"Bearing nor'-west," said Gaze; and now came the chant of the leadsman in the forechains.

"By the mark ten . . . quarter less nine . . ."

The Admiral knew Warde's chart by heart but he was taking no chances. Closer they came to the long fortress of masonry, with its rows of grinning casemates like blue-black spots on the pale stone.

"Come *on* !" muttered Brisbane nervously, watching the Admiral from the corner of his eye.

"Lighthouse bearing north by west, my lord," called Gaze from his post by the binnacle.

The flagship was beyond the zone of fire from the triple battery now. She had to face only the fire from the single tier of casemates ranged along the southern end of the island and defending the harbour mouth—and several thousand muskets. As she slowly neared the island, approaching at an acute angle with her starboard side presented to the enemy, the people who crowded all the space between the casemates and even stood and gesticulated on top of them could be seen clearly and in detail. White robes and

yellow-and-red uniforms, brandished muskets, swords flashing aloft in the hazy afternoon sunshine. There were hundreds among them who seemed to be civilians. They yelled and screamed unceasingly, and one or two shots were fired at random. The line of great warships moved on in silence, closer and closer.

"My lord," said Brisbane suddenly, "if the soldiery there open fire the gun-crews will suffer from the musketry. Shall I order the men to lie down until we anchor?"

"If they do open fire," returned Pellew, "they can lie down, sir. But I don't think there will be any orderly firing until a cannonade begins."

He had no time now to explain about the galleys and the Dey's plain intention to try and board. If Brisbane couldn't work that out for himself he would have to marvel at his Admiral's prescience.

"Deep nine . . . and a half eight . . ."

Gaze was conning her in nearer and nearer to the rocks of the island shore. The light breeze was fading away now, just as he had anticipated.

"Mr. Brisbane," said Pellew, "stand by to clew up."

"Aye aye, my lord," returned Brisbane jumpily.

"To clew up, you understand—not furl," emphasised the Admiral; he had no high opinion of his flag-captain's intelligence. "The men are not to leave the guns."

The leadsman's chant came again: "And a quarter seven . . . deep six . . ."

It sounded loudly, because the yelling on the island fortifications was dying away. The *Queen Charlotte,* moving very slowly now, was no more than a hundred yards from the enemy shore. Perhaps it was the very proximity of the enormous ship, towering over them with her three rows of grinning gunports, that awed the Turks into a silence as tense as that of the nine hundred men on board the flagship.

For a few seconds it was as if all human activity was arrested by some invisible power, while only the vast masses of wood and canvas and metal glided on at ever-decreasing speed with their accompanying sounds—the flap of an idle sail, the creak of timber and cordage, the rustle of the pale green water along the ship's side.

In that queer little pause, when each of those few seconds could have released a storm of death from the waiting guns, the scene impressed itself on Pellew's mind with singular vividness. A hundred yards of water—the yellowish-white masonry of wall and casemate—the massed ranks of white robes, coloured uniforms and dark faces; behind, beyond the hidden harbour where those forty galleys lay in ambush, the close-packed white houses of the town climbing the steep hillside to the forts on the skyline; over all the hazy blue of a Mediterranean sky on an August afternoon. It was all deceptively peaceful.

"... And a half five ..."

The leadsman's voice brought him back to the reality of war with a start. *Queen Charlotte* had little more than a fathom under her keel now. She was right opposite the mole at the end of the island and so near that he could actually see the eyes of the people who crowded there.

"Mr. Brisbane! Anchor, if you please."

Brisbane had been waiting anxiously for that. The splash and the thrumming roar of the cable followed immediately. While the flagship checked and came to, the Admiral glanced at the ships astern. *Superb* was still too far out—the wind had not been sufficient for her to regain her proper position. *Impregnable* was hopelessly far astern of her. Unless Milne or his captain, Brace, had the sense to keep on, she would be in the centre of the zone of fire from the three-tier batteries. The rest were behaving as he had planned. Here came *Leander* moving past on the flagship's

port side to take up her position commanding the harbour entrance—the Dutch frigates coming up provocatively to draw fire on that side—the English frigates manœuvring away out to northward. It was only partly satisfactory (if only he could have handled every ship himself!) but it would have to do.

A waft of heat and stench from the shore came to his nostrils as the *Queen Charlotte* came to rest eighty yards from the batteries. Those hundreds of fools on the mole—they'd be torn to fragments at the first discharge. Lord Exmouth, to the amazement of those on the flagship's quarterdeck, leaped agilely on to the rail and gestured violently with his round hat.

"Get away!" he bellowed at the crowd of Algerines. "Get away, damn you!"

Gaze supplemented this with a shouted word more likely to be understood. *"Imshi,* you there! *Imshi!"*

The crowd made no move; but as though in answer to the shouts there came a puff of smoke from the battery and the hiss of a shot passing close on the flagship's starboard side. Almost before the boom of the twenty-four-pounder had reached their ears Captain Brisbane spoke.

"Shall I open fire, my lord?"

"Wait."

Pellew's glass was at his eye. Rear-Admiral Milne—the fool!—was anchoring without closing up the gap between him and *Superb. Impregnable* would be dead in the centre of the zone of fire. Thank God for Paterson of the *Minden,* who had seen the gap and was taking station in it! But *Impregnable*'s ninety-eight guns would not do the damage he had hoped for, a quarter of a mile from her target——

The scream of a second shot from the batteries passed very close overhead. Pellew closed his telescope and turned to his flag captain. Those who saw the smile on his lips could not

guess that he was thinking of Castlereagh and the importance of impressing world opinion.

"You may fire away now, Mr. Brisbane," he said.

As if by the effect of telepathic communication, the whole line of forts and batteries exploded into cataclysmic action simultaneously with the flagship's broadside of fifty guns. The twelve-pounders in *Queen Charlotte*'s fore and main tops, which were loaded with grape, swept the mob of Turks from the mole as if they had been mown with a scythe. The big vessel jerked and shuddered as the iron balls flung from a range of eighty yards crashed into her, and blocks and severed cordage came hurtling down from overhead. One of her upper-deck guns, struck by a lucky shot from a twenty-four-pounder, leaped in the air and fell back, crushing three men of its crew. The sound of its fall, the screams of agony, were unheard amid the fearful uproar of the bombardment —an uproar that grew in intensity and never ceased for an instant. Forts, town, blue of summer sky, were all blotted out by the great clouds of cannon-smoke that never cleared.

When the first broadside was fired it was precisely one minute to three.

V

At half past seven in the evening Mr. Salamé recovered consciousness. He discovered himself to be unhurt, huddled against the flagship's port rail within a few feet of a ragged gap torn by enemy shot. A yard or two away lay a dead seaman; indubitably lifeless, because he had no head. The blood had meandered its way to where Mr. Salamé was lying and had soaked his drab pantaloons. He was too relieved to find himself alive to feel sick.

Mr. Salamé was the Jewish interpreter who had conveyed the Admiral's ultimatum to the Dey of Algiers five hours

ago. He had not been rendered unconscious by a blow, but by the joint effects of fright and a continuous fulmination, an unbearable hammering of sound, that beat upon his ear-drums hour after hour until eventually his senses had left him altogether. Now, as he sat up and clapped a hand to his aching brow, he was aware that the noise was still going on but at a distance and intermittently. The flagship was no longer firing. Was the battle ended? Had the Admiral achieved——

His thoughts checked there, for he remembered now that Lord Exmouth could not be alive to know whether his purpose had been achieved or not.

That remembrance brought back to his slow-waking mind a series of terrifying pictures. Mr. Salamé was not a fighting-man and the scenes of battle had stamped themselves indelibly on his memory, one or two particularly vivid incidents standing out against a general background of horror—a background of smoke and flame and blood, of men torn to red fragments or writhing in agony, of sound so fearful and intense that it was almost visible. He saw again the sudden sally of the forty big galleys loaded with Turkish troops to board the *Queen Charlotte,* a futile attack in which twenty-three of them had been sunk by cannon-fire and the rest put to flight. He saw the mustering of launches and gunboats for the dash into the harbour which should end the existence of the Algerine corsairs' fleet; glimpsed through a momentary clearing of the dense smoke the battered *Impregnable* still firing on the batteries though her masts and spars were gone and her starboard side riddled with shot-holes. He saw the flagship's men falling beneath a hail of musket-balls and heard Lord Exmouth's loud, calm voice: "Mr. Lane, you see we are a good deal troubled by those fellows firing from the mole. Pray see if you can dislodge them with a few eight-inch shells from the

howitzer in the launch." A moment later Lord Exmouth had been running for'ard with an agility remarkable in a man of sixty years, to direct the putting-out of a fire started by enemy shells hitting the fo'c'sle. Mr. Salamé remembered him returning less hastily with musket-balls whistling all about him, blood running from a gash on his cheek but smiling none the less. Just after that had come the last thing he remembered—the crash of a twenty-four-pounder ball through the rail a yard or two from where the Admiral was standing, hurling all who stood near, including the Admiral, to the deck in a welter of blood. It was then that Mr. Salamé, unhurt but half-stunned, had dragged himself to this nook under the rail to crouch there in miserable stupor for he knew not how long.

Mr. Salamé's curiosity overcame his fear and his splitting head and he raised himself to peer over the rail. He saw that the power of Algiers was ended.

A hundred yards away the row of batteries on the island mole had vanished. In their place was a mass of broken masonry mingled with heaps of red-and-yellow—the bodies of the Dey's Turkish soldiery. Away on his right the higher forts of the island were a jagged ruin from which a few guns still fired at intervals. On his left, drifting from the harbour mouth before the northerly breeze, the blazing remnant of the Algerine frigates came slowly out beneath a pall of brown smoke. Smoke was rising from the distant houses of the town, weaving up in dense clouds to where the forts on the hillside fired slowly and (it seemed) wearily. It was the brightness of the orange flashes from their guns that made Mr. Salamé aware that it was evening, with dusk fast approaching.

The interpreter staggered to the poop-rail, averting his eyes from the reddened corpses that littered the deck and the busy gangs of men engaged in carrying the wounded

below. As he gained the quarterdeck the first person he saw was Lord Exmouth—not dead, indeed, but oddly transfigured from the neat elderly gentleman of five hours earlier. Lord Exmouth's face was black with powder-smoke and his hands were stained red; amid the grime on one cheek the caked brown blood of a wound showed. A flap of cloth hung down from the thigh of his nankeen trousers, revealing the raw, red gash made by a flying splinter. Mr. Salamé was to recall that moment when he came to write his memoirs.

'When I met his Lordship, on the poop, his voice was quite hoarse, and he had two wounds, one in the cheek, and the other in his leg. Before I paid him my respects, he said to me, in his usual gracious and mild manner, "Well, my fine fellow Salamé, what think you now?" In reply I shook hands with his Lordship, and said, "My Lord, I am extremely happy to see your Lordship safe, and I am so much rejoiced with this glorious victory, that I am not able to express, in any terms, the degree of my happiness." It was indeed astonishing to see the coat of his Lordship, how it was all cut up by musket balls, and by grape; it was behind, as if a person had taken a pair of scissors and cut it all to pieces. We were all surprised at the narrow escape of his Lordship.'

Perhaps Edward Pellew, too, was surprised at his narrow escape. Of the six thousand five hundred men in his fleet, eight hundred and eighty-three had been killed, and fifty-eight of those were officers. He was not ungrateful. His first act when his battered ships withdrew out of range of the few guns still firing from Algiers was to order, "No officer or man to rest until the middle deck is cleaned up and every wounded man in his cot"; his second was to gather John Gaze and a few other officers in his cabin, where the flagship's chaplain offered up prayers of thanksgiving.

He had done what he had set out to do. The Dey had

submitted to the terms imposed upon him. With his impregnable fortress half in ruins, his fleet totally destroyed, his overwhelming superiority in position and guns and men proved a delusion, he had no alternative. One thousand and eighty-three slaves were liberated next morning and put on board the transports; a thousand more waited cheering and yelling on the mole. In the gun-room of the *Queen Charlotte* a lanky midshipman with poetic ambitions was scribbling a ditty to be sung to the tune of 'Hearts of Oak' :

Amid the dread conflict which Exmouth sustain'd
When o'er the Barbarians a vict'ry he gained
Humanity wept at the carnage awhile
Then sweetly bestow'd on her Champion a smile!
(Chorus, in which All may join)—
And when on the Foe the loud thunder was hurl'd
His hopes quickly vanish'd
His chains were all banish'd
For, Britain gives Freedom and Peace to the World!

. . . . .

Between the dark wastes of the sea and the cloudy sky a darker line grew and lifted as the *Queen Charlotte* beat her slow way to north-eastward. England. Edward Pellew sniffed the breeze as he stood with his big hands gripping the weather-rail and his eyes fixed on the distant coast. He could smell the land, and there was autumn in the air.

He thought of Susan and their home and his grandchildren. They would make up his life now, for it was autumn for him too. Never again would he stand as he was standing now, with the wet deck heaving beneath him and the wet salt wind bringing the breath of youth and freedom to his nostrils. Forty years as a sea officer lay behind him and for the first time in that forty years he felt weary of the sea;

weary of the fighting and planning, the strenuous discomforts he had once enjoyed, the driving of men and the slaughter of men. When he hauled down his flag this time it would be for ever. He felt suddenly very old and sad.

He remembered the dead, nearly nine hundred of them; all overside now, with the service duly read over them and their shrouding hammocks weighted with shot. Nine hundred. That was sixteen per cent of his total force gone—at Trafalgar the losses had only been nine per cent. At Trafalgar, too, the odds had not been so great against the victor. Yet he knew, in a flash of prescience, that the names of Nelson and Trafalgar would be remembered in years long afterwards when the name of Pellew and the Battle of Algiers were forgotten. Well, it was too late now to make himself or his life other than they had been. And Castlereagh and the Prime Minister would be pleased—especially by those nine hundred dead men. . . .

They would probably make him a Viscount.

EPILOGUE

"—therefore to you, many of you young men, to you I say—go thou and do likewise."

The Vice-Admiral of England sat down, and the young men of England thundered their applause. The Duke of Clarence, his epaulettes glittering in the light from the chandeliers, rose to compliment the Hero of Algiers; a battle which—fifteen years after it was fought—was already nearing oblivion in the public mind. Edward Pellew was not listening to the royal stultiloquence. He was still seeking to grasp and hold those fast-fleeting scenes of his career as a sea officer, scenes blown back into his thoughts by the cannonade of the gale outside; men and ships now rotting and forgotten while he lived on.

Frank Cole and old Stott and the *Alarm*; *Carleton* facing the rebel squadron alone; Philemon Pownall dead on the deck of *Apollo* : the well-loved *Nymphe* and the better-loved *Indefatigable*, whose names would die only when his own name was forgotten; *Impetueux* rocking in the Ushant rollers and *Queen Charlotte* hurling broadside after broadside at the Algerine batteries. Men and ships, ships and men. Gone, and he soon to follow. What would they say of him afterwards?

"—to the greatest sea officer of our age," ended His Royal Highness.

He asked no better epitaph. The wind volleyed fiercely against the windows of the Great Hall. Again it sounded like a salute of cannon.