

***The White Ships
of Judique***

by

Arthur Hunt Chute

Illustrated

by

C. R. Patterson

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The White Ships of Judique

By ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE

ILLUSTRATED BY C. R. PATTERSON

FOREWORD

The morning sun rises o'er Cape Breton Island with a touch of long ago. From Cape North to the Strait of Canso the whole country is still the Dominion of Bonnie Prince Charlie.

The stranger on that coast finds a land of far away, breathing the air of old, forgotten story books. While the bustling world without is intent upon the future, these gaelic glens and valleys dwell within the twilight of the past.

If the cause of the Stuarts had triumphed, the Highlanders who fought their battles would have shared their mundane reward. But through defeat, by higher ordering, they were made heirs of a kingdom not of this modern world, a kingdom of dream and vision.

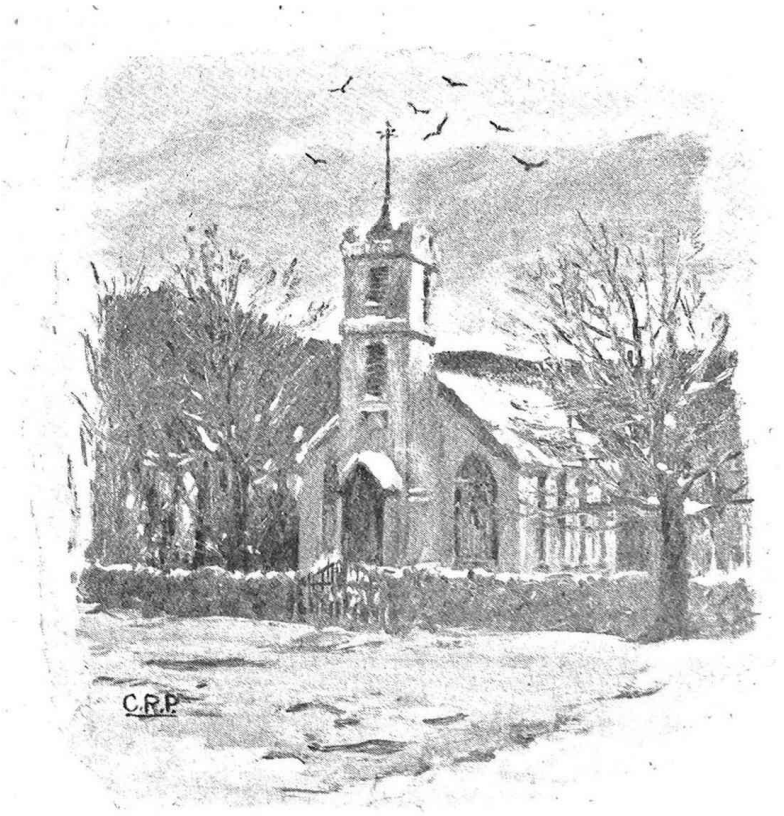
As the monks of old fled from disaster to the silence and the desert, so, from the shadow of Culloden, the men of perished hopes came to this North Shore, to live in exiled solitude, to nurse with Celtic gloom the memory of defeat. Thus was built up a "Land of Lost Cause Heroes."

In far off nestling glens, that smile upon the North Bay and the blue St. Lawrence, there is a world that even yet believes in fairies. The sordid and the shallow speak flippantly of the superstitions of a simple people. But these irreverent ones have not dwelt alone upon great waters, nor have their lives been steeped with awe from the touch of a mighty past as have those of the islanders.

For the Highlands and Islands of North Britain, the glory of the clansmen is departed, while sad lament goes wailing: "The wind has blawn my plaid awa."

But across the sea, in the gaelic-speaking section of Cape Breton there remains a sanctuary for the voice of the pipe and the bard. There even yet may be found "the pretty men of yore, the Heroes of the North." There within the misty corrie and within the golden glen a sheiling song at twilight still keeps in bright remembrance Tir-Nan-Oig, The Land of the Ever Young.

A church tower vexed with wind and fog, companioned by the wheeling gulls, a long street of sombre, scattered houses, a frowning mountain on the one hand, a grim ocean on the other, such is Judique, a Highland parish of the Canadian north.



A church tower vexed with wind and fog companioned by the wheeling gulls.

Could any thoroughfare be more foreboding than the High street on that afternoon of Hallowmas? The town itself appeared grey and drear as its dismal coast.

In Black Danny's rum shop a stranger who had missed the mail boat cursed all ports in the back of beyond, especially the port of Judique. Knocking the ashes from his pipe he stood glowering at the melancholy street.

"I can't get out of this God-forsaken hole too soon."

Just then, around the corner by the church came someone, and in a twinkling what a wondrous place was Judique! Wild, wet breezes swirled about the girlish figure, suggesting winsome mysteries beneath a tartan shawl. She had arrayed herself demurely. But the wind, a bold fellow, displayed unblushingly the hidden charms.

Alexander McEacheren turned stiffly for another look. His crony chided him on ardour incompatible with age.

“May I be dead if I’m ever too old to miss sic a bonnie face and bonnie ankle,” replied the incorrigible Alexander.

“Some trappy lookin’ little piece, eh! Who’s the lass anyway?”

The Highlander behind the bar came of a race that reprehended the familiar. His answer came with a sullen scowl.

“Well, I’ll tell ye, though it’ll do ye nae good fer the knowing. That lass is Mary Cameron, used to be the finest flirt in Judique, kept all the lads guessing, till this very fall she goes and marries Cap’n Johnnie Cameron, and him at sea almost since their wedding day.”

“Of course, ye wouldn’t be around these shores for long without hearing o’ that bonnie dog. T’was him what bust all sailing records to the Western Bank.”

All along the dreary street Mary Cameron brought a reciprocity of smiles. It was something more than beauty that came and went with her; it was a gleam of youth’s unclouded morning.

Even poor Old Margaret-of-the-Laggan was enraptured by her glowing presence.

“Sain us, but it’s her ain sel’ that’s gey glad ta see yon lassie pass. Jest one look frae her, an’ it makes a puir auld body warm in a cauld world.”



Mary stood gazing seaward. A storm was gathering with the winter's night. A sullen sunset forked with fire shot upward from a wicked ocean. Here at last was no friend. Here was the old enemy . . . the sea.

Unconscious of tongues set wagging, Mary passed along through the village. Leaving the road at the end of the clustered houses, she struck the open field, and on a lofty foreland, stood gazing seaward. A storm was gathering with the winter's night. While she was yet absorbed upon that gusty cape, there came premonitory breaking in the west; a sullen sunset forked with fire shot upward from a wicked ocean.

The girl shuddered. This afternoon all the world had seemed her friend. But here of a sudden smiles faded, and the love-light vanished. Here at last was no friend. Here was the old enemy—the sea.

On that Hallowmas evening, there was a waulking frolic, when the women of Judique gathered at the task of thickening homespun, a task made lighter by the clacking of many tongues.

The spacious kitchen where the women gathered looked out on the broad reaches of George's Bay, a lovely enough view to charm the heart, though in the gathering dusk land and sea were rapidly blending in the advancing shadows. Inside all were care-free and light-hearted. Only lovely Mary Cameron sat apart, distraught and anxious. She started at every sound. Her fine eyes were on the door at every footstep, nor could the kindly raillery of her companions convince her that it was not possible for her lover to arrive before the storm abated.

There was another, too, who paid but scant attention to their mirth. Jean MacEagh, the house-keeper of Father Donald, sat silently aloof. She was generally known as Jean of the Mist; and was thought to be acquainted with the spirit world, at home with ghosts and apparitions.

A bitter, misanthropic soul was Jean of the Mist, she had no familiars, and few were the attempts to bring her into the conversation, and even these were silenced by her chilling replies. She sat alone, her presence almost forgotten while the floods of laughter burst about her. The merriment was at its height, when a piercing scream cut across the room, stilling the laughter into a silence like death. Jean sat in her chair, a violent convulsion distorting her plain features. Gazing with terror across the fire, and out through the window that gave on George's Bay, her body grew rigid, pressed back against her chair, as though she would retreat from some appalling spectacle.

Raising herself solemnly she spread her hands before her, sweeping them backwards to left and right, dividing the ring of trembling women, till Mary Cameron stood alone before her. She started, involuntarily, at the recognition, while melancholy and pity mingled on her bitter features.

"Sad it is for me to tell ye," her deep voice broke the silence, and her eyes were fixed on the young bride, "what ye are too anxious to know. Out o' yonder window mine eyes have just beheld the phantom ship o' George's Bay. Well ye know that ship sails only when a Cameron o' Lochiel is about to die.

"Twice I saw that ship, first passing like lightning wi' cloud and fire. Then I heard the dogs barking beyond Stella Maris churchyard, and I saw her again standing stock-still afore the wind, wi' shrouds aflame. Over her bow there flew a sea-gull, the carrier atween the Land-o'-the-Living and the Land-under-the-Wave, and there upon her deck stood the young and pretty John Cameron o' Lochiel."

"My husband! My husband!" shrieked Mary Cameron in anguish, and swooned away in the arms of those who surrounded her.

Jean of the Mist regarded her not. Her voice rose in a wail, that grew almost to a scream. "O Chan-O Chan! He is gone! He is gone! No more shall his warm smile be seen, no more shall he revisit his dear one in the glen. Yet is not all hope lost, for his son shall live after him, and shall bring back anew the image of his father. The son shall be called Duncan, the Dark One of Strength, in him the Cameron shall find increase. Far from his sea-port Clachan, in a world o' cities and o' men he shall become a chieftain o' the rich and great. But ere his day is done, the Dark One of Strength shall return to his ain folk, and to the bield o' his ain bonnie glen."

Jean of the Mist ceased from her prophetic word, while the women were busied about the young Mrs. Cameron who still lay in a deep faint. Some affected to treat the prophecy as an idle dream. But the looks of all betrayed fear of something tragical impending.

The intense blackness that reigned without, the melancholy sound of wind and rain against the creaking, ghostly roof, and the far off thunder of the northern sea; these were elements to heighten dread upon a spectre-coast.

The storm which began on Hallowmas, raged for three whole days and nights with unabated fury. Those exposed along the Northern coast affirmed that, in all their experience, nothing was ever encountered to compare with the fierceness of wind and waves. All were agreed upon the narrow chances of the Judique fleet on the Western Bank, exposed to the bars and shoals of Sable Island. By Saturday night it was still blowing unending gales. Even Danny MacTavish had succumbed. In the rum shop at the back of his general store, Black Danny huddled with a few cronies, the picture of despair.

“I canna see a hope for a single sail,” he wailed, as his last word upon the situation.

But that very night, before the tavern loafers began to leave, the glass was rising, and the wind was hauling.

Sabbath morning rose serene. The storm-wrack had vanished. Everywhere was peace and sunshine beneath a sky of mauve and blue. Only the long and heavy seas told of that great November gale. The bell that rang for worship that Sabbath morning, called o’er a parish vastly changed from a feeling of despair to one of hope.

All the good folks were at Mass, when the first ship of the long expected fleet loomed around the Golden Cape and, tack by tack, began to stand in from the sea.

Just as Father Donald was commencing the “Hail Mary,” there stole up to the sacred precincts the music of a windlass, and the sound of an anchor chain going through the hawse-pipe, with a most unholy singing.

The people of the parish were devout, but flesh and blood could not withstand that call. With one accord they burst out from the church, borne toward the pier-head in delirious excitement.

It was the *Royal Stuart* that had made her moorings first, while in the offing appeared two others, the *Lochaber* and the *Bonnie Prince Charlie*.

From the end of the morning watch until late in the afternoon, ship by ship they beat up against the wind, one long tack, one short tack, then—"Hard down the helm—Drop your headsails—Let go your anchor." With these orders from a score of well-loved, well-remembered voices, the white ships of Judique, like tired birds with fluttering wings, came to rest within the shelter of the hame port.

All the while, the bride of young John Cameron stood on the high hill above the church, watching in vain for her husband's vessel. Late in the afternoon, when the whole of the fleet but one were riding safely at their moorings, the *Pass of Balmaha* was still unsighted.

Angus MacAskill, mate of the *Royal Stuart*, brought tidings that all except Captain John Cameron, had made the haven of Canso just before the storm. Frantic inquiries for news of the missing assailed the crews of each succeeding vessel as they came to anchor, but all alike shook their heads sadly; they had no word to offer.

On the following dawn, before the town was stirring, Mary was stationed far out upon the Golden Cape, gazing with questioning eyes upon the grim, unanswering ocean. There, just after day break, she descried a battered hulk, under jury sail, standing up across the Gulf.

"Yes! Yes!" she cried joyfully, "It's the *Pass of Balmaha*."

Mary started to bound across the rocks, fearing lest her lover might arrive before her. When she came around the corner from the High Street, panting and sorely out of breath, the vessel had already come in and had made fast.

At the pier-head the young bride stopped suddenly, with a bitter cry, for on the short jury-mast, there flut-fluttered a tiny flag. It was the replica of the Fairy flag of the MacLeods, which she had woven with her own fingers and given to her husband on their wedding morn, to be flown by him if ever in distress. And now, this Fairy Flag of her beloved was fluttering at half-mast above what was, but recently, the proudest vessel of the fleet.

When Captain John Cameron was lost off Sable Island, his bride, according to the Highland custom, again changed her name, henceforth to be known as the "Widow John."

As soon as she became aware of her bereavement the girl fled from the town to her home in the Craignish Glen. There she sat while the day waned and the night fell. No tears, no sobbing, here was grief immeasurable as silence.

Some time after darkness a step sounded coming up the glen. It paused for a moment upon the bridge above the waterfall and advanced directly toward the

house. An uncertain rapping followed. The old mother made to answer, but her daughter intercepted, and with expectant hands threw back the door, letting a flood of moonlight cross the darkened room.

Without, it was almost clear as day, there, standing with bared head she descried a gigantic man, clad in sea-boots and blue jersey, carrying a calico-bag from a stick across the shoulder.

Looking at his stolid, kindly face the young widow knew no fear. A giant he might be, but a child would have met him with instinctive trust.

He stood upon the lower step, irresolute, as if unable to gather speech. Then he began to address her in Gaelic, tears welling up into his eyes as he explained.

“My name is Louis Campbell of the *Pass of Balmaha*,” he said. “My master Captain John Cameron gave his life for me. Because he saved me from the sea, I am come to be your slave.”

Now the ocean is a living thing with the Gaels. In terror of its wrath they have a saying: “The Sea will have her own.” To them it was undoubted that if one rescued another from the deep, the sea, angry at thus being robbed, would sooner or later swallow up the rescuer.

“Gang awa out o’ my sight,” screamed the tormented girl. “Ye indeed are the cause o’ all my grief. It is you that have robbed me o’ my lover.”

A look of pain crossed Louis’ kindly face, while he answered: “I would far rather that it had been me, instead of our bonnie Captain. But alas, my mistress, none of us can change our fate.”

With tears welling in his eyes, the pathos of his presence suddenly melted her embittered heart. By that strange freak of nerves, strained and overwrought she came at last to sympathy.

“I did na mean stoor words,” she sobbed. “Wi’ a broken heart I’d lost my head. I can see Louis that ye loved my husband, and that is enough.”

Thus the giant sailor became a member of the household of Craignish Glen.

Toward nightfall, Duncan Cameron burst upon the highest peak of Judique mountain. No matter how headlong his race toward home he always paused upon this eagle’s eyrie, as though commanded to halt by the grandeur of the scene that burst upon him. The mountain road labored upward through a dense forest, then above the tossing tops of pine and hemlock, far-flashing, came the vision of the sea.

To-night there was for the boy, in this outlook of tempestuous twilight, that which was kindred to his own tempestuous soul. His heart rushed out to claim,

as its own, this mountain top of driving cloud, this ocean, restless with the vexing wind. From the chill of these Northern Capes the eye of the lad turned westward to where the sun was sinking, with banks of lurid wind-cloud, upon the bosom of the wave. Over there to the westward was Tir-Nan-Oig, the Land of Youth. Many a fairy tale, many a legend, many a Gaelic song, had spoken to his boyish fancy of that Land of Heart's Desire. Best of all, his mother had often told him about that longed-for country of the west.

Beyond all else, the controlling passion of his boyhood was affection for his mother. That greater love now claimed him and promptly at the expected hour, breathless and flushed, he appeared, rushing pell-mell up the glen.

The Widow John had never completely recovered from the shock of that fateful Hallowmas when the prophecy of Jean of the Mist had found so quick and tragic a fulfilment. It had left her a semi-invalid, and it was this that cast the only shadow across Duncan's care-free existence.

A fine little body was the Widow John, frail and delicate, but with that dignity and refinement that one often meets among Highland women. Sorrow had made its ravages on the young belle whom John Cameron had courted as Mary MacLeod, but beauty still lingered in the sweet expression, the deep dark eyes, the hair of dusky gold. Her face was tinged with the melancholy softened over all by the smile of love. To her, who had once been so frivolous and light-hearted, now belonged that highest title of womanhood, "a great mother." This title she had won in the long hard way of pain and sacrifice. But her compensation was her boy, the end of all her living, her hope and her joy.

As always Duncan came bounding into his mother's arms. After a kiss of fondest welcome, the two went hand-in-hand back towards the light that shone from the cheery kitchen.

Sitting there with his mother, listening to the tales that she wove for him of the glories and strange histories of the past, he became steeped in the legendary lore and proud traditions of his people. Even when he gave himself, at times, to visions of the uncharted ocean of his future, his dreams were colored by these fancies.

Duncan had been making short trips, on business missions, for Mr. MacLehose, of the Caledonia Fish Company. The lad was a protege of Old MacLehose, who frequently entrusted him with errands on his behalf to various fishing ports along the coast. This time he was returning from MacNair's Cove, on the *Pass of Balmaha*.

Just before they arrived at the Golden Cape, the youth and the skipper were standing at the fore-castle head, smiling at that old familiar foreland.

Standing thus Captain Roary said wistfully: "I never kened that I loved the auld heads so much afore. I suppose it's because my daughter will be there to meet me when I come back this time."

So intent was the Captain upon the longed-for shore, that he did not notice the sudden start at his side, and that young Duncan was no longer with him. Duncan was heart free, his young enthusiasm for the sea left no place for womenkind other than his mother. But more than all he hated this girl because of her name. Flora MacDonald was too sacred a name to be used by living mortals.

When the *Pass of Balmaha* had been warped into the pier, Captain Roary looked for him in vain. A sinister shadow passed for a moment across his mind, the haunting memory of the loss of the boy's father, till a knowing hand felt for the painter of a dory that was towing astern, and found it gone, so explaining his strange disappearance.

For the next two weeks there was no sight of Duncan. He played truant continuously for fear of meeting the dreaded Flora. For the same reason, he avoided church, dances, and ceilidh nights, and shunned, like a plague camp, the long valley that opened out beyond his own glen. In that long valley now dwelt the cause of hates and fears.

But Flora MacDonald was not to be so easily avoided. Keeping away from town and church, and school, was not enough to avoid this girl of the great outdoors. Here was no meek and tractable little female, demurely staying at home. Flora was all over the glens and mountains, roaming fearlessly and far, with her companions the wind, the sunshine and the fairies.

Came the inevitable. It was in a distant wooded corrie, that seemed remote enough for safety. Rushing headlong down the course of a dried up stream, Duncan's heart suddenly went "phut," for there below, in the misty hollow, he saw a flutter of white and blue. It was Flora MacDonald wending her way up along the course of the burn!

Duncan knew then the most panicky moment in all his tempestuous career. He dropped into the dense undergrowth, hiding in himself a perfect ague of trembling.

Up the burn, serenely unconscious of lurking fate, came the girl. This time the boy could not help beholding, and there burst before him loveliness such as he had never dreamed. A moment before, he was breathing out threatenings, blindly fighting against a name. But in a flash the scales fell from his eyes.

That old, old miracle, was wrought. The girl simply went by, and unconsciously, without the raising of an eyebrow, she gained that reward of beauty that does not toil nor spin.

At the first sight of Flora, Duncan longed to know more. But a strange shyness kept him at a distance. Many a long trip he took in darkness, to gaze where the light of her window shone forth across the fairy haunted valley. Many a time he crouched beneath the cover, and watched, with bated breath, while all unconsciously Flora swept past with smiles and sunshine. But he continued to worship from afar.

The Widow John had her own ideas of this new birth. With the intuition of a woman she saw the cause, and with the sympathy of a mother she held her peace.

Across the farm-yard of the Craignish Glen, the cheery voice of Duncan Cameron called out, “Bliadha m’hath we dhuit.” (A good New Year to you.) Out of the darkness, came back from Louis Campbell, “Mar sinduit fhein is moran dire,” (the same to you and many of them.) The old, and time-worn wish, but what a freshness with the greeting, spoken in the Gaelic tongue in that early arctic morning.

New Year’s Day in Judique, with the custom of olden time, meant a day for prayer and a day for play. With these faithful people worship and pleasure were not far apart. Above all this was a day for good-will.

Going to church with these Catholic Highlanders of Cape Breton had none of the funeral aspect. Everyone seemed to be in the best of humor, wiping off the miles with blithesome chatter while, horror of horrors to sickly saints, every male of this church-going procession carried with him a shinty stick. The worship ended, play began with the same single-minded devotion to the matter in hand. Young and old alike joined in the game that ding-donged up and down the field till darkness and exhaustion brought it to a close.

Both Duncan and Flora that night were guests in one of the farm-houses of the Craignish Glen. First there was a supper, followed by a whirlwind of Highland reels.

As Duncan waited to see Flora home that New Year’s night, his heart beat both fast and slow. Suddenly he caught a glimpse of the cause of his uneasiness issuing forth with that dainty step which he had come to know so well. Hoping that she would not say no, Duncan approached the little figure, already tripping across the snow.

In the moonlight the girl beheld his discomfiture, and favored him with a reassuring smile.

“May I come with you?” he stammered.

“Yes,” assented Flora. “If you’re sure that it won’t be making you too tired after the awful game that you played to-day.”

“Hoots, that’s nothing,” deprecated Duncan, as he started to walk beside her.

It was one of those wonderful winter nights, with the moonlight shimmering silver on the snow, rippling gold upon the blackness of the distant sea.

With the brooding magic of the white far-shining winter’s night, and the bewitching presence of the girl at his side, Duncan felt like one who had been spirited into a fairy realm.

Of a sudden, he found himself pouring out his heart to Flora, and to his great surprise, her deep blue eyes were fixed upon him with a soft light, as though instead of wishing to run away, she had at last found some attraction in him, and in his words.

“Why did you shun me so much at first?” inquired the girl.

“Because I hated you before I met you.”

The girl merely raised her eyebrows with the slightest puzzling look, while Duncan went on.

“I vowed I would not stay in Judique, if you came back, because I loathed you so.”

Then in soft-spoken questioning. “And why did you hate me, and why did you loathe me, Duncan?”

“Because I thought I did not like your father, and worst of all, because your name was Flora MacDonald.”

“And what happened to change all this?”

“I saw you,” said Duncan, simply, “After I caught a glimpse of you on that first morning I’ve had a name all my own that I have given you myself.”

“What is that name?” The girl smiled up at him with eager interest.

“My name for you is the Little Sister of the Fairies. You always seem to have the wee folk with you, and when you’ve gone I know I’ve heard the fairy piper, playing the dearest, sweetest melodies that one could ever dream.

“And now when I wake up at night, and look out through the little window at the stars. I always think of you, and whisper to myself, The Little Sister of the Fairies, and just as soon as I have whispered your new name, the wee folk will be coming creeping through the keyholes, and clambering down the chimney, and dancing on the floor.

“Whenever I bid the fairies come that way at night, I stay awake for hours, and watch them flitting in the starlight, and wondering if you are watching too.”

They were at their favorite pastime sailing in a dory with the usual leg-omutton sail, steered by an oar over the lee gunwale.

On such expeditions, Flora was captain, Duncan was crew. This morning, with her golden hair in the wind, her cheeks ruddy, her eyes sparkling, the girl appeared a veritable Viking princess.

The little green-painted dory which she sailed, had been given to her by her father. The tiny craft was almost as dear to her as a living thing because it brought her nearer to the most loved ocean.

With a brave north-west wind the dory came galloping down into the deep-blue channel of the Gut of Canso. Past Cape Jack they sped into the calmer waters of the strait, a narrow channel about a mile wide, completely land-locked, whose mountainous shores marched down to the water’s edge with dark forests of fir and spruce. The indigo blue of the channel on this morning was broken by dancing white-caps sparkling in the clear translucent air.

Out from the foreboding shadow of Porcupine the girl steered her course, and there on the left MacNair’s Cove swam into view, a deep “V” shaped estuary, conveniently carved out by nature as a ship’s basin in the midst of the narrow sea.

The Strait of Canso itself was the artery of commerce, between the Atlantic and the Gulf. MacNair’s Cove situated in the midst of that busy passage was an ocean toll-gate.

The port was redolent with maritime flavor, thronged with square-rigged shipping, refitting, or waiting for favoring winds, to make their passage through. The Cove was also a haven of the deep-sea fishing fleets, bound for the North Bay and the Magdalens, or baiting for the Atlantic Banks.

Back and forth the occupants of the little dory threaded their way among the figure heads and soaring bowsprits, gazing in wonder and admiration on the long tapering masts, with lofty yards, and studding sail booms, and labyrinths of blocks and slender threads.

MacNair’s was in its heyday. Its shipyards and sail lofts, docks and marine slips were working continually. Its streets echoed to the deep-sea chanteys, mingled strangely with Jacobite songs. It was a sailor-town of many lights and shades, full of the restless adventure of the men that come up from the deep.

They had come ashore, and holding tightly to Duncan’s arm, tingling at the thrills of this wild fort, Flora passed along the foreshore thoroughfare. The

streets were dense with fishermen and sailormen. Liverpool packet rats from Paradise Alley, wild Newfoundlanders from Bay of Bulls, American Irish from the warrens of East Boston, all kinds that sailed salt water, rubbed shoulders in the streets of gay MacNair's.

Beyond the Fraser House, out by the Sunnyside Bend, Duncan led Flora to a portion of the town where the atmosphere was more serene. Here the Highland Fleet was fitting out for sea.

Of all the sights of that crowded day, there were none that appealed to Flora as the spectacle of the white ships of Judique receiving the finishing touches for the summer on the Banks.

Most wonderful of all, in the eyes of the girl, was what lately had been her father's ship, the *Pass of Balmaha*, the Queen of the Highland fleet.

"Oh! Oh! but isn't she a beauty," exclaimed Flora, dancing up and down, and clapping her hands with glee. "I never saw her looking so lovely before."

As they watched in silent admiration, two figures emerged from the cabin, and stood together on the shining poop.



Alec Campbell, otherwise Red Alec, captain of the "Pass of Balmaha."

They were instantly recognized by Duncan, as Mr. MacLehose, the owner, and Captain Alec Campbell, otherwise Red Alec, who had succeeded Captain Roary MacDonald in command. Red Alec had lost his smuggling vessel the Corsair, and his reputation as a hell driver persuaded Mr. MacLehose to give him command of the queen of the fleet.

As soon as he recognized the boy and the girl standing on the wharf, Mr. MacLehose bid them come aboard with an expression of warmest welcome.

"Why this is an unexpected pleasure," he exclaimed, as he shook Flora by the hand, "the daughter of one of the Captains of the *Pass of Balmaha III*, and the son of captain of the *Pass of Balmaha II*, both coming aboard this way together. Eh Captain, do you know this pair?"

"I ken that harum-scarum of a Duncan," said the captain with a wink, "but his little lady I have not been so fortunate as to see before."

Mr. Charles H. MacLehose was a bluff Glasgow Scotsman, past the prime of life, who enjoyed owning speedy handsome vessels. He was in truth the magnate of Cape Breton. The mines, the shipyards, the foundries, and the Caledonia Fisheries, all were under his control, and went to swell his mighty income. His fast ships were his only extravagance.

“Some that have the money,” he had said, “keep fast women, some keep fast horses, I keep fast ships.” That was his gospel.

He cared for nothing but the best, in design, construction and equipment. He fitted his ships with spare gear, stores, and provisions on the most generous scale, then turned them over to masters and crews from the highlands of Judique. In his white ships, these Jacobites of the North Atlantic, carried down into an age of prose the past glamour of the sea.

There are days that are big with fate. Such a day was this on which Flora and Duncan took their excursion to the roaring town. Sailing home that night Flora could think of nothing but the attractiveness of seafaring. The fire in her was likewise kindled in the breast of her admirer.

“Don’t I wish I were a boy,” she exclaimed looking backward with longing eyes upon the shipping town. “If I were only a boy I’d be a sailor and go to sea.”

“Which would you sooner have me be, Flora, a great business man like Mr. MacLehose, or a great Captain, like your father?”

“Like my father,” answered the girl without the slightest hesitation.

“That settles it then,” said Duncan. “I’ll go to sea this very week with the fleet. Mr. MacLehose just offered me this afternoon a chance in the Caledonia Fish Company.”

“It’s a wonderful chance, Duncan,” the girl said sadly, and then with a half sigh: “If you take it, I think that I shall lose you.”

“There you go, again, some more of your evil fairies,” the boy laughed in high excitement.

“Whatever I do, you can’t get rid of me. But, saying that you were sure that you could keep me, which would you sooner have me be, Flora, the master of a ship, or a rich man with piles and piles of money, who could give you every thing you wanted?”

This time Flora was longer in giving back the answer. Finally she declared, “I’d sooner have the man I loved, a high-line captain, than the owner of all the wealth of Mr. MacLehose—the man with the money could not love so well as the man who went to sea.”

One day, not long after, Father Donald arrived at the Cameron home to find the Widow John alone and in tears.

“Ochan! Ochan!” she wailed, “my laddie has gone away to the dreadful sea.”

That very morning Duncan had marched off for MacNair’s, to join the crew of the *Pass of Balmaha*, outbound for the Atlantic Fisheries on the western Bank.

“I dinna ken why he should have left. I always dreaded the sea; it has robbed me o’ the best my men folk, and I tried to teach my laddie to shun it, and to love the life on land. I thought that he would be after staying ashore, and going into business. And now, in spite all o’ my pleadings, he has gone awa’ to join the fleet.”

“That is why he went,” answered Father Donald, as he pointed to a large picture of a Donald MacKay clipper, that hung upon the wall. The soaring clipper loomed up above that shadowy ben room like some great archangel of the tempest. As the mother and the priest paused before that picture it seemed to speak to them with a living voice of man’s triumphant dominance of the ocean.

The Judique Fleet was due to sail at four o’clock in the afternoon, for the Western Bank. At the wharves along the Sunnyside Bend, there was a merry babel, the clomp, clomp, clomp, of the windlass powl, the Jacobite songs of the Highland crews, the hum of the running gear, reeving through the blocks, and the music of the straining sheaves to last long pulls on sheets and halliards.

The *Pass of Balmaha* was the first to push her nose out into the strait. A half a gale was blowing from the North East and as though to show his respect for the weather, Red Alec immediately began to shake out his top-sails.

“Holy Christopher but watch her go!” exclaimed an open-mouthed admirer, as the queen of the fleet laid into the indigo blue, carving a white and glistening furrow towards the opposite shore.

One by one the others began to pay off into the stream. The *Royal Stuart*, under four lowers was the second to cast her anchor, and lie down in the wake of Red Alec, whose vessel was already standing back.

Soon the whole strait was alive with the snowy wings of the fishing fleet, tearing back and forth in the narrow strait.

“Yes Sir,” declared an onlooking clipper captain, “there’s some fine sail handling out yonder, a dozen eighty-tonners, under all canvas, skyhooting back

and forth in a little puddle, as if the elbow room were measured by miles instead of inches.”

“That’s right,” agreed an old fisherman at his side, “but don’t ye forget them eighty-ton tooth-picks o’ the Judique fleet ’ll turn around on a six-pence. An’ the lads what’s steerin’ ’em, ain’t bin makin’ flying sets in every kind o’ sneezer without learning how to graze the paint off each other.”

As the beautiful schooner swept by, aft on her quarter, Flora MacDonald caught a glimpse of Duncan with several others tugging on the main sheet. With a surge of passion, she felt herself yearning after that arrow-like path in the midst of the blue. She knew that for many months her heart would follow the fate of that vessel. There, for the first time, Flora dared to dream of a day, when after long, long waiting, Duncan, whom she had thought beyond her grasp, would after all come back to her.

“Yes,” she said to herself, “in the far off sometime he must be something great. But surely love is greater still, and in the end I almost believe that love will bring him back to me.”

On board the *Pass of Balmaha* there was scant chance for thoughts of love. It was a custom, that had been instituted by Mr. MacLehose each year, to make a race of it to the Banks. At high tide, which occurred that afternoon at four, the vessels were due to cross the starting line. Two blasts of the foundry whistle was the five minute warning, then one blast, at the half hour, was the signal for the start.

It was now nearly high water, and the tide would soon be running ebb. Most of the fleet were huddled together on the off shore. But Red Alec, the canny fox, was far out of the crowd, well up to windward. In the jockeying for position, it was apparent that his strategy had gained the first advantage.

As the two blasts, of the warning whistle sounded, Red Alec emerged from the companion, an unearthly pallor upon his face, a reckless madness glinting in his eye. He had been drinking Demerara rum in the cabin.

Taking the wheel from Wild Archie, the skipper sent his eye up along the billowy canvas, while the vessel responded to his touch like a thoroughbred to the hand of a master.

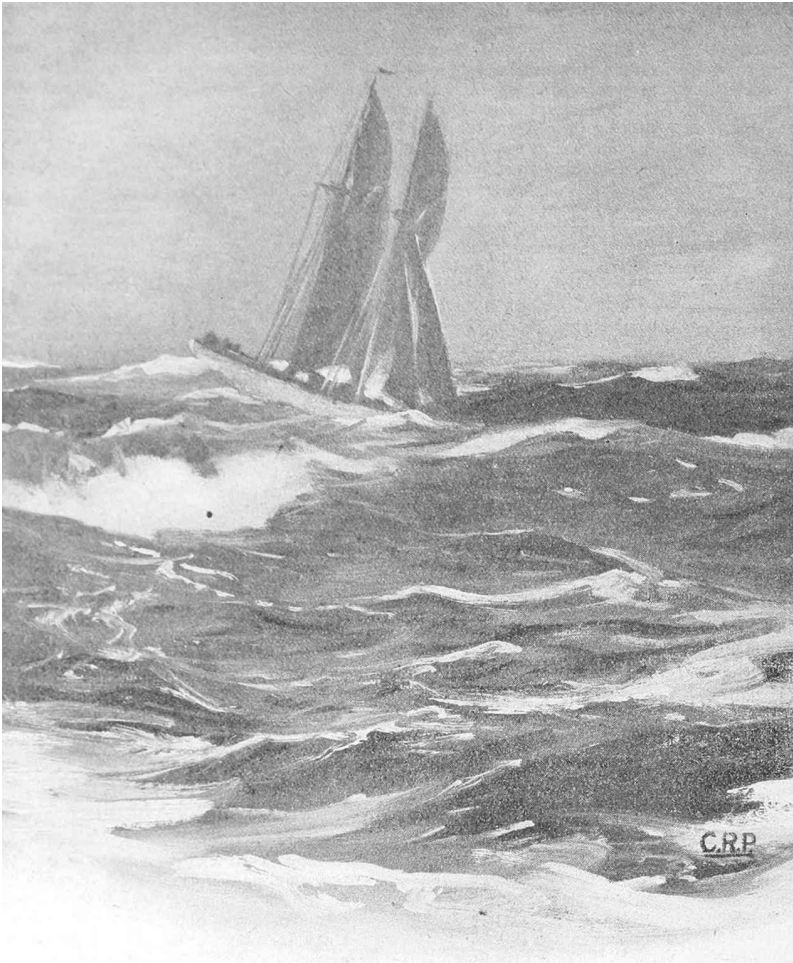
“What’s the record for the run to the Western Bank?” he inquired as he trimmed his wheel.

“Cap’n Hell Fire MacAskill, in *Pass o’ Balmaha the First*, in thirteen hours, Cap’n Johnnie Cameron, in *Pass o’ Balmaha the Second*, eleven hours,” answered Wild Archie.

“All right,” snapped out Red Alec, “fer us it’s Western Bank or Hell in ten hours.”

With a last turn of the wheel, he threw the vessel into the course for the take-off, bellowing as he did so:

“Sheet home yer foretop-s’l, an yer stays’l.” Having made his last gauging of time and distance, with the dash of a born cavalry leader, Red Alec shot like a rock straight down upon the starting line.



One minute after the whistle the “Pass of Balmaha” flashed across the line, her lee-side buried in a smother of foam.

One minute after the whistle, the *Pass of Balmaha* flashed across the line, her lee-side buried in a smother of foam. The *Lochaber*, the *Royal Stuart*, the *Glengarry*, the *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, the *Airlie*, the *Keppoch*, and the *Dundee*,

in the order named, came storming after. Tearing along, wing-and-wing, through the Straits, with every sail drawing, except the jibs, the white fleet sped away before the wind at a tremendous clip. Though the weather looked wild, the glass had not begun to fall, and as yet no one anticipated what was coming.

An hour after the starting whistle, the *Pass of Balmaha* pressed close by the *Royal Stuart*, shot out of the protecting straits into Chedabucto Bay, where she encountered a nasty rolling sea upon her port quarter and began to roll into it like a mad one.

Red Alec lost no time in preparing for bad weather. The dories, nested in the waist, were turned bottom side up, and made doubly secure, and extra lashings were put on spare spars and gear.

By six o'clock that evening, two hours from MacNair's, the *Pass of Balmaha* raised Cranberry light. By this time the weather was looking wilder, and, a still more ominous sign, the glass had begun to fall. With a living gale off shore, the redoubtable Alec respected the weather prospects enough to order:

“Put the top-s'ls in gaskets, and stow away yer stays'l.”

Just before reaching Cranberry Island, he set all hands to put a single reef in the great mainsail.

Red Alec set his course on the inside of Cranberry Island, tearing through the shipping of Canso Harbour, grazing fisherman and storm-stayed coasters, who looked after him aghast, racing thus before the teeth of the gale. In the brief respite of calm, in the lee of the mainland, the crew had a breathing space, while they tussled with reef-points of the slatting mainsail.

Then around by Glasgow Head they struck the full force of the open sea. Down, down, went the careening schooner, with the weight of the wind, and the pressure of the seas.

“Here comes the Atlantic,” yelled Wild Archie, who had taken his place beside the skipper at the wheel. Tugging with might and main, the pair suddenly found themselves in mortal combat.

Through the dangerous waters that lay just off Glasgow Head, with the lead going, Red Alec raced hell-for-leather. Fishermen beating in before the storm, looked askance at the great Judique, outbound into the smother of the howling night.

In the inky blackness, the Atlantic was now fighting them in earnest. The gale from the North East, bucking into the current, kicked up a tide-way sea that was monstrous.

After being relieved at the wheel, Wild Archie came gasping down into the fo'c's'le.

“D’ye think Red Alec’ll club his mud-hook to the lee o’ West Point Light in ten hours?” inquired little Roary.

“Sure thing he’ll make it,” answered Wild Archie, with infallible faith in his skipper. “We lads may take our trick at the wheel, and be relieved, but the skip’ll never leave up there till he’s got his vessel safely berthed at her riding hawser.”

The next watch for duty were just about to get “oiled up” when a voice from the deck shouted down the companion. “Hi there below, rouse out quick, all hands, here’s ice close aboard.”

Tearing along under single-reefed mainsail, whole foresail and jib with the bonnet out, all the sail she could carry, it needed no second alarm, to bring a realization of imminent disaster. Meeting floating ice while running at such a rate meant that, if the vessel struck, her bows would be crushed like an egg shell.

Those below came bursting on deck in frantic haste.

Bare-headed, and in his shirt-sleeves, Duncan jumped for the rigging, and climbed far enough aloft to get a wide view. For over an hour he clung there in the bitter cold, directing the captain how to steer, to avoid collision with straggling floes. Fortunately it was bright moonlight. Hundreds of isolated cakes appeared and realizing the magnitude of the peril, Red Alec jerked out: “Take in the foresail.” It was an order no one was loath to heed; indeed, the crew would have gladly taken in every stitch of canvas, but it was heart-breaking enough for Red Alec to give up his foresail. At reduced speed he threaded his way through the maze of floating ice-pans, any one of which in his own words, would have been sufficient “to send ’em all to—— blazes.”

“Is she all clear ahead?” inquired Red Alec.

“All clear ahead, sir,” came back from Duncan, as the vessel dashed out into open water.

“All right, up again with that fores’l.”

Very gingerly and reluctantly the watch began to obey.

“Come on now! come on now! Put some snap into ye, and git that sail aloft.” Soon again the *Pass of Balmaha* was staggering under an incredible pressure of sail, and with her sheets well off, she went rushing through the darkness like some great black-winged spectre.

As if all this was not enough for a driving gale, Red Alec, who had grown nervous from the time lost in the ice field, sang out: "Get out the stays'l, and bend it on her." A buzz of muttered protestation came from the horrified crew.

"Git that stays'l up I tell ye," came the crisp sharp order.

Red Alec was a man-driver as well as a ship-driver. No one, not even the giant Wild Archie, dared question further authority, and all hands hauled away at the staysail.

Some were finally pausing, as if the job were done, when that whip-lash tongue urged them on.

"Break yer back on that halliard, until she's as flat as a board."

Over and over, went the lee rail, until every roll nigh stopped the heart beat.

"It'll crack the sticks out of her, or run her bows clean under," wailed Jim Campbell.

At the wheel, sometimes buried to the waist in water, Red Alec backed up with Allan MacEacheren, fought like a maniac.

"Ice just behind, and perhaps more ice just afore, and if we strike it going like this," said Little Roary, "we'll vanish as if the finger o' God has touched us."

Anyone of them would gladly have cut the halliard, but the wrath behind the helm, was more dreaded than the wrath of the sea. Fingers ached to ease the sheets, but not a man dared move against the captain's orders.

While all hands were still on deck, Red Alec addressed them from the wheel: "Now then, ye lads what got caught napping, git into yer oilskins, and stay in em, till we've clubbed our anchor. Don't forget that this here hooker's fightin' sudden death, an that means every mother's son of ye on board is fightin' too. Watch on, or watch off, keep oiled up, ready to jump like lightning fer yer lives, at the first call. Those on deck, stand by every minute, to tend sheets, fer we're goin' to be on our berth in ten hours, or we're going to be in Hell."

Once Allan MacEacheren, beside the master, had the temerity to suggest that the staysail was too much, at which the skipper jerked out: "That stays'l is up, and no one this side of 'ell 'll bring it down. Not a rag o' canvas 'll come off this hooker frae now on, unless it's ripped off wi' the hand o' God Almighty."

At the wheel beside the mighty Allan MacEacheren Red Alec was striving with his every breath against his mortal enemy the sea. With cool-headed

daring, not too bold, and not too cautious, he gauged his chances to the utmost limit, and ventured always.

Every minute he kept his watch on deck, fighting like himself, to gain every last ounce of advantage, under singled-reefed, double-reefed, close-reefed mainsail, reefs in and reefs out, with keen and watchful eye, he made use of every lull and slant, to drive his ship across the long fierce-swooping combers.

To look at the howling blackness racing past, was to think of terror. But to look at Red Alec, was a sight to set a Highlander yelling with the joy of battle.

There was hypnotic power in that presence that infused itself through all his crew. As long as they were on deck, the sight of the invincible master was enough to drown out fear. But when they went below, and the magnetism of his presence was withdrawn, cold chills began to gather.

Duncan was completely exhausted from his first real watch at sea. He thought of Flora and his mother, but years instead of hours seemed to have rolled between them. He was glad that he had come to sea, because here he found to its fullness that joy of battle which to him was life indeed. The blind Gaelic terror of the ocean, experienced by some he did not know. The hatred of the sea, which inflamed Red Alec, was also alien to him. So in the bucking, kicking fore-castle, amid un-resting shipmates, he slept as peacefully as though he were in bed in the Craig-Glen.

A blood-freezing yell awakened him from his peaceful slumber. The swinging lamp had gutted out. Through the companion down into the infernal darkness of the death trap, came a Niagara of seething water. While, like a den of lost souls, the imprisoning fore-castle echoed to screaming prayers and imprecations.

The *Pass of Balmaha* was "sprawled out," having been tripped and knocked down, so that her sails were in the sea, and her lee-side completely buried.

Before the gang forward had time to gather their wits, the racing schooner righted herself, and started to come up. The instant she was back on her keel Duncan leaped for the companion. By the time he reached the main hatch the wind struck into her sails. Starting ahead with a rush she drew herself out from beneath the water, under which she was buried from the mainmast aft.

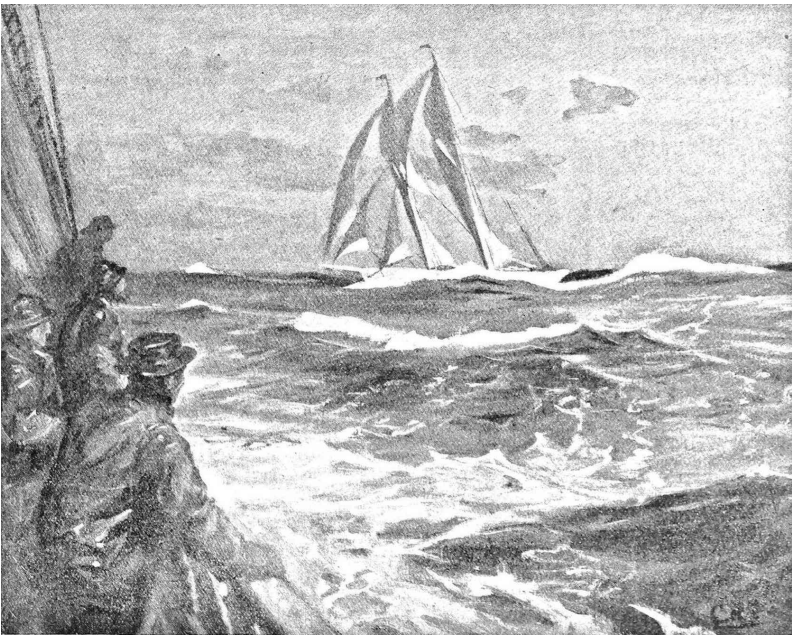
Pale, trembling, panting, like souls redeemed from the bottomless pit, those below came bursting up the companion breathing, with thankful gasps, the fresh air, gazing with new gratitude upon the moon and stars. More than one deep-souled Highlander sent up his prayer of thanks to Mary who had so miraculously saved them from a watery grave, and to Saint Michael, guardian and patron of those upon the sea.

But if the rest of his crew were devoutly thankful for deliverance, no such emotion welled up in the rum-fired heart of Red Alec. Hearing Gaelic “aves” muttered in devoutness by one of the MacEacherens standing near sent him into an insensate rage.

“No Mary, and no Michael will save ye aboard this hooded hooker,” he screamed. “It’s only yer two fists, and the leapin’ lightnin’ in yer heels, that can preserve fer ye the breath o’ life that’s in yer nostrils. If it’s devotions yer wantin’, one gang o’ ye can take it out in sweat and elbow grease on yer prayer handles, cleaning up that bloody mess along the waist. The other gang can haul fer the salvation o’ yer souls on them hitched up sheets an halliards. Now then jump me bullies, and don’t forget that ye are Judique men.”

Such was the potency of that man-driving skipper, that his passion was soon flaming up throughout his crew.

A few moments before, the *Pass of Balmaha* was lying on her beam ends, a lifeless thing, waiting for the one last blow. Now a fire-brand skipper on her poop, had breathed into the lifeless vessel, and into the paralyzed crew, a conquering spirit, mightier than the overmastering ocean.



Hove to under double-reefed foresail, the watch of a coaster saw far off in the fitful moonlight a soaring white ship, tearing on before the gales, like some archangel of the tempest.

Hove to under double-reefed foresail, the watch of a coaster saw far off in the fitful moonlight a soaring white ship, tearing on before the gales, like some archangel of the tempest. While the watch of the coaster looked aghast, they beheld a foretopsail broken out and added to the billowy mass of canvas, which last appeared as nothing less than a blast of contempt for every law of God and the sea.

“Howling Lucifer!” exclaimed a deck-hand. “Did ye ever see the likes o’ that before, ga’in by in full gale, with every stitch cracked on, an summer kited to boot. Do I see right, or am I dreaming? Is that there real timber and canvas, or is it the ghost o’ the Flying Dutchman?”

“That’s real timber and canvas,” answered the coaster’s captain, “but it ain’t going to be real much longer. That’s one of them crazy, wild-driving-hell-roaring ships from Judique, full of Cape Breton Jacobites and Demerara rum. Oh, my Lord! my Lord! but ain’t they drunk!”

Yes, drunk they were, with a wine undreamed of to that mongrel breed upon the coaster’s deck; drunk with the wine of their Highland fighting blood, from their sires the foray leaders and the chieftains of the North.

At the wheel, the spirit of Red Alec was rising with the fierceness of the storm. As though it were a human being, he continued his death-dance of scorn in the face of his arch-enemy.

“Come on and do your damndest, ye blasted seas,” he roared. “Judique is on the floor, and who in the hell will dare ta put her off!”

This was enough to start Wild Archie, and all the rest of that battling breed of MacEacherens into a whooping outburst. Little Roary, the piper, could not withstand the inspiration of such a moment. Leaving his toiling watch-mates on the deck, he went tumbling down into the sodden cabin to loosen his immortal soul upon the sheepskin.

“Ye can na tune yer pipes down there, can ye?” sang out the skipper.

“Aye, aye, I could tune em on the hinges o’ hell, at sic a moment,” answered little Roary, and soon the music of his drones came booming through the cabin skylight shrieking out *The March of the Cameron Men*.

The viking crews that raped the north of the Western Isles, did not take all. They left behind that viking soul, which now lived on in Red Alec, in Wild Archie, in young Duncan, and in those battling clansmen aboard the *Pass of Balmaha*. No wonder that a bunch of ground hogs on a wallowing coaster called them “drunk.” What could they understand? But across the centuries, a crew of

Norsemen would have hailed them as blood brothers from the stormy coasts of Sky.

In their wild, tearing flight even the passage of time seemed to fade. But there was one who did not forget, and finally Red Alec sang out:

“Hi, Duncan, run down into the cabin, laddie, and tell us what’s the hour of night.”

“Eleven o’clock,” came back the report.

“Eleven,” repeated Red Alec. “Seven hours out, and by the log we’re ninety miles frae MacNair’s. Thirty miles yet to go; aye, aye, we’ll make it in ten hours all right, an bent every record o’ the Hielan fleet. Ah lads, but am I no a devil, an a dog o’ a driver!”

The Highlander’s vainglorious song was suddenly cut short by a whirr—rupp—bank!! and the great staysail, torn to ribbons and tatters flapped and slatted away to looard, before a squall of unexpected fury.

Another long ripping crack, and the foretopsail and foretopmast carried away together, while the vessel shuddered as though she had been smitten with the battle-axe of God.

Just at that moment there came an unexpected shout of dismay from Wild Archie, who had been hanging on with might and main to the weather side of the after rail.

Intent only on that before, no one had heeded what might be aft or on the beam. It was a chance look that revealed to Wild Archie with startling suddenness the fact that another schooner was pressing them close, a half-a-mile to windward.

All hands started in surprise while Red Alec, far-seeing, cried out:

“My God! if that there ain’t Ronald Donn, wi’ the *Royal Stuart*, well up to weather, an’ pressing us close for the last lap.”

“Looks bad,” deplored Wild Archie, “jest after our foretopmast carried awa. A pretty mess you’ll put us into when we round the Nor’ West Bar, and start on our thrash to windward.”

“Yea, it do look bad, but dinna ye fear for that, I’ve got a trick that’ll settle wi’ Ronald Donn.”

Heretofore the *Pass of Balmaha* had always been regarded as the fastest schooner of the Fleet. But in certain weather, the *Royal Stuart* under the skilful

Ronald Donn had been known to give her a close run. On this occasion fortune favored the *Royal Stuart*. When Red Alec split tacks and went through Canso Harbor, Ronald Donn held his course steering straight for sea. Thus he had escaped the ice which delayed the other by at least a half hour, and now with his foretopmast intact Ronald Donn was obviously in far better condition for the windward work of the last lap.

Gradually, but none the less surely, the *Royal Stuart* closed down upon the queen of the fleet. For some time both vessels had been taking soundings, and each had their lookout aloft to pick up the first flash of the West Point Light of Sable Island. From the lookout of each vessel simultaneously there came the cry:

“Light on the starboard bow!” With that cry Ronald Donn, sang out: “Ready about. Hard a-lee,” and shifted from port to starboard tack. The next minute steering S.S.W. with wind aft, wing-and-wing, he came bearing down upon Red Alec.

Every hand aboard the *Pass of Balmaha* stood ready to follow suit, waiting for the surely-expected order to jibe. A murderous light glinted in the eye of the undefeated smuggling captain, but not a word escaped him.

The *Pass of Balmaha* had the right of way. But why did she continue on her old course S.E. when every second now she should be driving it S.S.W. to round the dreadful bar, that stretched with wreck and ruin to the westward of the warning light.

Every hand on board Red Alec’s vessel expected their skipper to change his course. Ronald Donn took it for granted that his rival would certainly head off without delay, and so the two vessels came tearing toward each other, the *Royal Stuart* bearing dead upon the other’s weather quarter.

The strain of imminent disaster was too much for Allan MacEacheren, beside the skipper at the wheel.

“Ain’t ye goin’ to come about now, Skip?”

“Hold her to her auld course,” snapped the skipper. “Ours is the right of way, an we don’t veer one single inch for any that tries to crowd us.”

Like mad bulls charging for a finish, the two great racing, tearing schooners, bore straight down upon each other. Red Alec held to his purpose with the determination of grim death, while Ronald Donn, just as sure that the other was bound to jibe at the last minute kept on S.S.W. which brought him fair across the other’s bows. Nearer and nearer they came, the distance closing between the opposing captains, with the crews, pleading in vain, to cease from what promised to be a course of suicidal folly.

At last with every breath bated for the impending crash, it flashed upon the unwilling brain of Ronald Donn that the inexplicable Red Alec proposed holding to his foolish course. Reluctantly he gave the order that brought his vessel's head up to the wind, with an abruptness that buried his lee rail, and threatened to splinter his masts, at the same time the *Pass of Balmaha* went forging onward.

With a sigh of vast relief the two vessels went ranging apart, their respective crews thinking only of their miraculous and unexpected deliverance.

After Red Alec had put a good mile between himself and Ronald Donn he shouted:

“Douse the lights.”

The intended strategy flashed upon the mind of Duncan, while his shipmates stood dazed and wondering, he carried out the skipper's order with a rush.

Looking backward, Ronald Donn suddenly saw the lights of his rival flicker and go out in the darkness.

“God be about us! the *Pass of Balmaha* has gone under,” he shouted. “Might ha' kenned it, the way they were heading. That Red Alec was daft if ever a man was, no use to put about though, it would only be death for us to turn our nose into that uncanny shoal.”

For twenty miles of Sable Island there extends a sandy bar. Straight into the teeth of this most awful menace of its roaring forties, the *Pass of Balmaha*, with lights extinguished went tearing like a bride of the sea, prepared for her dance with death.

The roar of the breakers, that could be heard for many miles, boomed and thundered about the racing schooner like the cannonading of a thousand guns.

Farrard the sounding lead was kept going continually.

“Thirteen”.

“And a half.”

“Twelve.”

“Eleven.”

“Ten.”

With the increasing shoaling, the seas were piling up, until they seemed to scrape the very stars. In brilliant moonlight the spectacle before was wonderful indeed. Wherever the eye was turned, there stretched an endless mass of soaring

tumbling crashing breakers. The heavens were blinded with smoking combers, while the breath of the storm lashed the night with spindrift.

Off to starboard, louder than all other noises, Red Alec heard the bellow of a solitary bar that raised its ugly head above the surf, forming that night a dead lee shoal before the driving North East Gale.

Red Alec as a smuggler in the Corsair had been chased by one of His Majesty's cruisers into this dangerous area. Rather than be captured, he had risked running aground. By that strange fortune that sometimes guards the desperate he tripped upon a navigable channel, and safely made the passage through. After that he had successfully essayed this veritable leap in the dark on several other occasions. Toward this same passage he now set his hazardous course.

"We're shaving corners," he exclaimed, "but I ken a ticklish channel, that'll take us through. By this course we'll cut off, eighteen miles frae our run, and save the windward thrash at the end, which'll put us in our berth at least two hours before the *Royal Stuart*."

They were tearing on at thirteen knots with a living gale abeam.

"By the deep six," yelled back the leadswain, from the sounding repeating the challenge, with a note of nervous apprehension.

"What's coming next, skipper?" inquired Allan MacEacheren.

"Five fathoms is coming next," answered the other and almost immediately a voice shrieked out.

"By the mark, five!"

The moon was flooding with its silver light the gale lashed seas above the shallow bar, where great, dark, shining, shimmering combers went soaring skyward, filling the night with the deep-diapason of their roar. Down in the trough of the waves were valleys of inky blackness, while aloft the breaking crests shone white and glistening like snowy mountain peaks, reflecting themselves in endless tumbling ranges towards the piling cloud banks of a stormy sky.

All this vast and wondrous beauty was there at that moment for the eyes of Duncan Cameron.

"Ye can't go through there," screamed a voice in frantic tones.

"I looked at the chart below, only five fathoms now, then it will be four, then three, then two. How can a vessel drawing fifteen feet go over a bar that at high tide gives only twelve feet of water."

“Ye looked at the chart did ye,” taunted Red Alec. “Well, ye’re sailing wi’ a skipper that kens more about these here channels than any government chart that ever yet was draughted.”

“By the mark four!” The heart seemed to halt at the meaning of that last call, four fathoms, shoaling every minute, and driving thirteen knots an hour before a full gale, toward the most ominous bar in all the North Atlantic. Ahead, astern, on every hand, nothing could be seen but mountains of breaking water. But over all in momentary glimpse the imperturbable skipper caught the flashes of the revolving light. By those flashes he remained master and made his calculations.

When he declared that he knew more than any government chart it was no idle boast, for that shifting bar was nigh as variable as the varying seasons. A sand bank stretching twenty miles to seaward over which currents, changeable and unchartable, were forever working ruin to old landmarks and old soundings. Where once was dry sand, again was deep water. Where once was calm surface, again was breaking shallow. A westward sweep of the Arctic current, varying with the wind, raced and tore across this sandy bottom, carving out amid its shifting shoals, a deep channel whose envired menace was enough to turn grey the hair of the most intrepid navigator.

Suddenly the call came back:

“By the deep eight!”

At the same minute, in the midst of the broken water the racing schooner found the channel. Following the trend of the current, marked out by the smoother surface, that from seaward, appeared like a mammoth boiling cauldron, the *Pass of Balmaha* raced safely past shoals and destruction.

Red Alec ran on for a couple of miles, coming gradually under the lee of the island, then he shot his bows up into the wind and came to anchor with the West Point Light bearing E.N.E., on the pre-arranged point of rendezvous for the fleet.

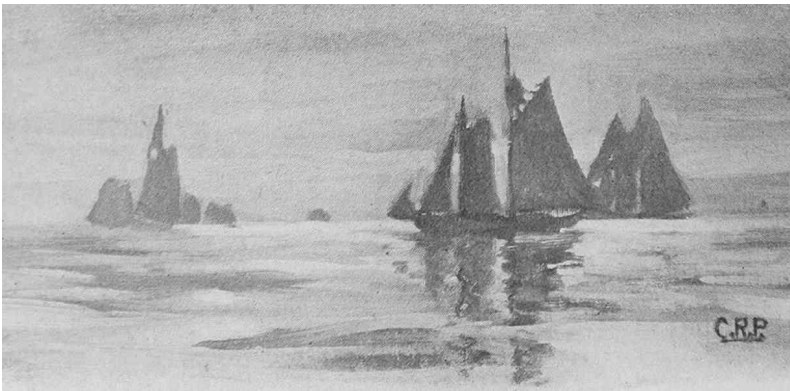
“One o’clock,” he announced triumphantly, as he left the wheel, “nine hours to the Western Ground, and we may say, me lads, that since we hauled up our mud-hook at MacNair’s, last evening, we’ve left more miles of salt water astern than any schooner that iver shot out ta the selfsame banks.”

The *Royal Stuart* leading the remainder of the fleet rounded the western bar in an hour and thirty minutes, then, after two hours beating up to windward, arrived on the pre-arranged berth two hours and a half after Red Alec.

Great was the amazement of Ronald Donn, when he beheld before him two lights, instead of one. He expected the flash of the lighthouse, but not the gleam of a schooner, clubbed down at her riding hawser.

“That can’t be the *Pass of Balmaha*,” exclaimed the captain of the other vessel with consternation. “Surely that can’t be her. She foundered on the other side of the Bar.” As the *Royal Stuart* went ranging past her victorious rival, the unmistakable voice of the Little Roary hailed him through the darkness yelling. “Hi, there, Ronald Donn! Gang hame an git anither chart, before ye match yerself agin a skipper that dinna ha to gang around the world to make a berth on the Western Bank.”

A Judique ship on Sunday morning, who would have dreamed that it was the same wild-driving, hell-roaring schooner, that broke all records to the western ground? Hushed and still, in the calm of the early dawn, the *Pass of Balmaha* lay, with her jib fast to windward, the helm hard down, coming up and falling off, in the long and lazy roll of the Atlantic.



In the calm of the early dawn, the “Pass of Balmaha” lay in the long and lazy roll of the Atlantic.

Through the haze other schooners began to appear, jogging back and forth stringing out their dories for their first catch. But no lines would be baited, no trawls under-run, by the Judique fleet this day.

Little Roary, whose watch was ending, called down the companion.

“Hi there, Duncan, show a leg me lad, five minutes to yer trick on deck.”

Duncan grunted acknowledgement and tumbled out from among his sleeping shipmates. Pulling on his sea-boots, he stood for a moment stretching himself. Then dropping on his knees beside his bunk, he recited fervently the morning prayer.

Coming up on deck, he dropped a bucket overside, and after washing his hands and face in cold water he came aft to where Little Roary was leaning against the lashed down wheel.

“I see the other fleets are out making their sets again.”

“Yea, come day, come Sunday, them ither lads is allus at it. But it’s different wi’ us here in the Hielan fleet. We maun aye remember, as the good Father Donald has told us, that the ocean is the Blessed Mary’s Treasury. For six days we get the gift o’ Her treasures. Why then should we na ha one day fer thanks.”

“Yes, but sometimes I wonder if it pays.”

“Na na, m’ lad, perhaps we dinna gar as muckle as the fleets that toils upon the Sabbath. But we ha far more o’ ither things.

“Dinna ye forget that after sair Culloden, when our sires were starving in the glens, English bribes were a’ in vain. Though they kenned his hiding place, an’ though thirty thousand pounds they’d gie, there was none that would betray Prince Charlie, aye puir we were, an’ puir we maun be, even yet, but there are things in the heart that siller canna buy.”

Suddenly Red Alec, who had come up from below for a look around, burst in.

“Yea an’ yer right Little Roary. Fer a’ that they make more o’ the siller in some o’ them foreign ships off yonder. I believe that wi’ our folk there is a wealth o’ happiness that we’d na barter fer the extra fish the ither gillies filch upon this Lord’s Day.

“I am na far ben in the things a faith, like the rest o’ ye. I am jest the outlaw of a Red Alec, whose name is anathema to Father Donald an’ the guid folk o’ the parish. But fer a’ that, a man’s life is more than the vittles he slings into his belly, is more than the homespun an’ cowhide that covers his carcass. Because our Hielanman still stands by the loyalties o’ chieftains gone, because he still seeks more than siller, I believe he is wiser than some o’ they off yonder.

“Among our ain folk, there may be, here and there, a bad exception, like mesel. But fer a’ me blunderings, I cannot begin to unlearn the beauty that I ha seen as a bairn wi’ me mither inside the high white walls o’ Stella Maris.”

With these unexpected remarks from the wayward Skipper, a silence fell upon the group at the wheel. All hushed and still, the early Sabbath morning lay around them, haunted by the infinite horizons of the sea. These hard fisted mystics, through communings with a mighty ocean, had preserved a faith like that of little children. To them with that unquestioning faith there came a sense of youth blowing through all their days like some fresh breath of morning.

“It’s all mine,” thought Duncan as he gazed about him, “why should I long for any other kind of wealth?” Then his eye caught those low lying clouds upon the rim of the far horizon which denoted land. Under that cloud bank, he thought, is a world of cities and of men full of restless, ceaseless striving for wealth and yet more wealth.

He fell to wondering what was far away in that great world which he had never seen. Would he really, as Jean of the Mist had prophesied and as others had so often declared, become a chieftain of the rich and great in those cities shrouded behind the cloud bank. Then he thought of Flora, and of her fears of the worldly success that was coming to put them asunder.

Thinking of Flora completed for Duncan his dreaming hour. “No,” he said to himself, “I’ve got wealth enough out here upon the sea. Let me have all these treasures from the Blessed Mary’s treasury, and let me have my Little Sister of the Fairies, and there’s nothing more that I would hope for.”

Long before sun-up the following morning, Red Alec bellowed through the forecandle scuttle, “Come on, tumble out from below there, we’re going to make a berth.”

It was pitch dark, and biting cold. The hands came on deck stamping and shivering from that chill which is bitterest at the hour when vitality is lowest.

Aft at the wheel Red Alec swung the vessel up into the wind, singing out:

“Give us a cast o’ the lead there.”

Louis Campbell took the sounding. “One hundred fathom out, and no bottom, skipper,” he yelled back.

“All right, we’ll stand her along a bit further.”

Later the sounding lead was cast again. “Seventy-five fathom and hard bottom.”

“We’ll stand on a bit yet, but the rest o’ ye git yer lines over the side, and see what’s stirrin’.”

Having baited up and cast over, there followed a time of waiting. Bye-and-bye someone began hauling.

“What ye got there?”

“Nothing but a wee snapper.”

“Small stuff,” grunted Red Alec, “no use making a berth here. Perhaps we’ll strike it better ta eastward.”

Day, creeping on apace, revealed the crests of the breaking seas extending farther and farther into the gloom. With the sun at last peeping over the kindling skyline, the cook called, “breakfus! breakfus!”

All hands with the exception of skipper and deck watch, vanished below with an alacrity eloquent of what the tang of a briny dawn can do for appetites.

Around the fo’c’s’le table the talk was mostly about the end of the season’s fishing. Indeed some of the most sanguine in imagination were already booming homeward with a full catch.

“We ought to git all our salt wetted afore the end o’ the week and be in MacNair’s by next Sabbath.”

“Hadn’t a bin for our having to hold up yesterday while that school was still running we might have bin off for home this minute,” complained Duncan, who now begrudged every single hour’s delay that kept him away from Flora.

“Aye laddie,” answered Little Roary. “We a’ ken what’s ailin’ ye, and what makes ye so unholy in yer wishing fer to break the Sabbath. When yer heart would fly like a bird to the one ye love, it’s hard to be prisoned in a boatie. But dinna ye fear, ye’ll see the love-light in her een by anither Sabbath.”

“That’s a long ways yet; and how do we know that we may not strike another school of fish for many an many a day.”

“Dinna ye fear about that, ye can leave it ta the skip to find em now. He’s got the high-line scent ta his nose at last. I was a watching o’ him jest afore I cum below, and I sez to mesel, as he stood to the wheel like one in a trance, he’s after fish all right, he’s a smelling o’ their tails, and followin’ after ’em wi’ all his mind, and wi’ all his soul.”

Red Alec was certainly thoroughly abstracted. As the crowd came up from the morning meal, he saw no one, heard no one.

Each man returned to his handline over the side while the schooner jogged on at a fair clip, before a smart nor’-easter.

Duncan was the first to feel a bite. “Got a real one at last,” he yelled.

In another minute several of the others were also hauling.

“Guess we’re onto ’em, all right,” sang out the skipper. “Give us another go with the lead.”

“Sixty,” came back the hail.

“Sixty fathom, and by the looks o’ what ye lads are now pulling up there’s something better than snappers this time. Bear a hand forrard and drop the

anchor.”

“Give her enough to let her ride easy,” was the order.

For the next hour after the vessel was “clubbed” there was a tattoo of knives all along the quarter, cutting up chunks of herring and baiting trawl hooks. The trawls consisted of tarred cotton lines, fifty fathoms in length, coiled in tubs, three hundred fathoms for a tub. Each dory “set” six tubs, so that a set formed a long string when extended in one direction.

Most of the fishing in the Judique fleet was done in dories with a crew of two men each. The *Pass of Balmaha* carried six dories, and twelve dory-mates. While the rest were out trawling, the captain, cook and boy remained aboard, to attend to the vessel.

When each dory crew had the complement of six tubs of trawls baited up, the skipper ordered:

“Get ready your dories.” This set all hands, alert, especially the MacEacherens and Duncan and Louis Campbell, who were top crews. Their two dories were hoisted over the rail on port and starboard, where they were left to hang until the next were ready when they were lowered into the water.

Dropping aft on the quarter, Louis jumped into his dory, while Duncan handed down to him the complement of trawls and gear.

Having gotten all the gear aboard, Duncan leaped over the side and the pair started off to windward.

As the others were ready, they followed on the course assigned, and the work of setting the trawls commenced, each dory taking a different direction. The vessel thus formed the hub, from which the trawls radiated like the spokes of a giant wheel.

Duncan and Louis having rowed out to the place where they were to commence, Duncan pitched over a buoy with buoy line attached. Before the buoy line was all out, he lifted a tub of trawl on the aft thwart and attached the end of the trawl to the anchor, which he threw overboard. While Louis rowed away he let the trawl go out, hook after hook, so that they should not become fouled. When one tub was out, another was knotted to it, and the performance carried on, until all the trawls were disposed of. When the end was reached Duncan bent the last anchor and buoy, these also being thrown over and the process was complete. This left over a mile of baited line anchored on the bottom, each end marked on the surface by floating buoys. The dory mates then rowed back to the vessel to give the fish time to bite.

After dinner all dories put off again on the outer end of the trawls, guided thither by blackballs, attached to outer buoys, easy enough to pick up in fair weather, but a baffling task with a fog.

In underrunning the trawls Louis stood up clutching the line, and having shipped the roller commenced hauling away. At last, after an endless amount of pulling, the anchor heaved in sight.

“Hullo, here’s luck,” he exclaimed as a good sized cod appeared on the first hook. “All right, me lad, come right aboard here an’ shake hands wi’ yer Uncle Louis, and it’s right glad we are to see ye lookin’ so slick and fat. But I don’t see any more coming though. Yes, here’s a haddock, that’s right, haddock allus come aboard easy, ye ain’t got no kick to ye like some fish I ken.”

“Hi, what ha’ we here! A rock, eh, right up frae the bottom. Well back ye go to the bottom again, and worse luck to ye fer clogging up me trawl. But stop, I feel a halibut tugging away. There he comes in sight.”

“All right I got ’im,” yelled Duncan who had picked up the gaff, and secured him by the head, then with a flap he was in the dory.

“Fits into the bottom as if he was made for the place,” said Louis, opening up again with his remarks, as continuous as the trawl he was pulling in.

“I see one, two, three cod, comin’ along next, jest look how lazy that there fifty pounder rolls up alongside. Yea, I can hear him sayin’, ‘Hip out yer gaff and help me over the gunnale, I’ve bein wearin’ awa’, waiting for ye this long time syne I was forty pound I’ve been homesick for the gravy’. Well come aboard me lad, and ye’ll soon ha’ a cook servin’ o’ ye up in state.

“Now look at that there snapper, jest like Master Duncan, not quiet fer a minute. Kicking all over the bottom, yea, snappers is the bra lads o’ the sea, ye can’t keep em frae kicking their heels as long as there’s a breath left in them.”

So Louis kept on with his endless chain of talk following his endless line.

All the while, Duncan was seated amidships, baiting up the hooks as they came back to him, and passing his fresh baited end of the trawl on again into the sea.

Hauling the vast weight of a trawl line, running inboard at one side, and outboard at the other, required no little skill to prevent the capsizing of the tiny boat. But like a perfect team Louis and Duncan swung into their work with that ease and rhythm of master dory mates.

It was coming on toward dusk, when the last dories came back. Stiff and sore in every muscle Louis and Duncan pulled against a rising sea in the

gathering gloom. By the light of kerosene flares, the crew dressed down the day's catch.

When the last fish had been headed, gutted, split, and salted, Allan MacEacheren bellowed up from the hold.

“No’ much more room here skip.”

“Well, give me anither day, and there ain’t going to be room enough for a louse to kick his heels.”

After the dressing down the mess was cleared away, everything was made shipshape, decks soused, the dories paid up for the stern, swung aboard, and nested in the waist.

With that there was a rush for fo’c’s’le and cabin, everyone was dog tired from the ardours of the day.

Three o’clock in the morning; show a leg, ye drousie body.”

The friendly hand of Louis was shaking his slumbering dory mate back into consciousness. A feat accomplished with no light shaking.

“Believe me, Louis, this here fishing is no holiday when yer really after em, eh?”

“No, it’s drive her, drive her, drive her, wi’ Red Alec, so long as there’s a pinch of salt that ain’t been wetted.”

“Well, I’m dead tired, but I can’t help being happy all the same, let him drive us, let him bend us double, let him break our backs. The harder we work and the faster we drive it, the nearer I am to Craignish Glen, and to someone ashore that I’m dying to see.”

This morning the trawls were already set. All hands pushed off almost as soon as they came on deck. As the tiny dories vanished into the gloom of the starlit ocean, Red Alec pacing the quarter gazed into the black void which had swallowed them up.

“Aye it’s a grand business, is the deep-sea fishing. Twa pair of wee hands, and a wee curragh alone against the giant sea.”

That day under their tireless, slave-driving master, the dory-mates made four underhaulings of their trawls. On the third trip, the aggregate catch was falling off. All hands had been at it ceaselessly for fourteen hours. But the merciless skipper sent them off again, to more of unending toil.

“Well, here she comes,” exclaimed Louis fervently as the *Pass of Balmaha* bore down upon them. “Thank God it’s me last trip this season at underhauling

trawls and cursin' dog-fish."

In another hour the checkerboards were cleared, decks soused, dories nested in the waist, and the *Pass of Balmaha* turned her nose toward home, with over two hundred thousand pounds of fish salted down in the hold, representing a Western Bank, Quereau, and Middle Ground trip of over four months.

It's worth going awa, jest for the sweetness o' comin' back," said Louis, as he and Duncan came in sight of the gleam of their home, nestling in the Glen.

"Every night," said Duncan, "since I left I've been dreaming of this."

With heartfelt yearning, he came up the path, sweet with its scent of honeysuckle, still sweeter to them after long breathing of the pungent brine. He stepped lightly so as not to be discovered. But his mother's heart had been tuned for days, waiting for that step. With preternatural sensitiveness she heard, and suddenly the door burst open with a flood of cheery light.

One cry from the Widow John, and Duncan had dropped his sea-bag, and rushed into his mother's arms.

After the first embrace she stood him off, gazing, as only mothers can, on every cherished line of face and form.

"Ye're so braw, and brown, and bonnie lookin', M'eudeil, I canna think that ye ha' been awa upon the hateful sea. Ye look indeed, my Duncan, as if ye and the sea were gey good friends."

"Aye, and that we are Mumsie."

"Na, na, not wi' the fickle sea. Dinna ye trust her M'eudeil, fer when she smiles the best she hates the worst."

"But I've come to find that the smile o' the sea, like your smile, Mumsie, is a smile of love."

"Tut, tut, I must teach ye again, if ye talk that way, me laddie, fer I taught ye to mistrust the sea. But perhaps I canna call ye laddie, as I did afore, fer ye went awa a lad, an' sure ye've come back a man."

As he stepped into the candle-lit kitchen, filled with friends, Duncan was aware of a clamour of greeting. The womenfolk, who had all been busy, laid aside carding brushes, spinning wheel, and weaving shuttle, to give them welcome.

In the midst of it all, Duncan's cheek suddenly flushed, and paled, every fibre of his heart, every atom of his being, had been calling out for Flora and now Flora herself was approaching. The others present in the kitchen, out of

fine feeling, were too considerate to intrude. Therefore they turned again to their work, while the Widow John busied herself preparing a meal.

With that modesty and shyness which was Flora's chief attraction she dropped into a bench in a shadowy corner. The two sat side by side in breathless agitation neither speaking, each fearful lest the panic in the other's heart should be disclosed. For some time Flora would not even dare to look at Duncan.

To all the world it was perfectly apparent that this adorable girl had given away her heart. Duncan alone, with that blindness that comes with adoration, could not see.

"I've come back to you, Flora."

"Yes, Duncan, but will you always come?"

"Always, always."

"I hope so, Duncan."

"I know so, Flora, the longer I'm away, the more I want to return, just to be with you."

"You say that to-day, but perhaps you cannot say that to-morrow."

Why should you be so hard, and doubt me again so cruelly, right at the very start. I only went to sea, Flora, because of you, ever since I left my happiest thought has been this time when I should return. I tell you, Flora, all I want in life now is a place where I shall be able to pass all my time with you, seeing you only from morning till night, from night till morning."

Duncan spoke rapturously from the depths of his heart, albeit Flora still withstood him. Never before had he seen her looking so lovely, her high color so rich and rare against her flaxen hair.

"Why don't you just let me live to love you, Flora—just live for you alone?"

"Because I know that you were made to do something more than that."

"I couldn't do more now, Flora."

"I've been thinking much about your fate," she said softly, "ever since you went away, and now I think that I shouldn't have told you to go to sea. You might have had so much bigger place ashore. Indeed I know now that I cannot keep you. You must be going to that great place that's waiting for you."

"Yes you can, Flora, yes you can. I'm going to be the Captain of the *Balmaha* because that's what you want me to be."

“No, no, Duncan, neither you or I can change your fate.” There was sadness in her voice as she spoke.

“Well then, Flora, if I must go, won’t you come, too?”

“That could not be, Duncan. Something tells me that I must remain a lass in the hills of Judique, while you are faraway becoming a chieftain of the rich and great, and I fear that there you would not have room enough for fame and love together.”

“Then I’ll come back to you.”

“I hope you may, Duncan.”

It was ceilidh night, as those nights were called, when they all gathered before the kitchen fire for friendly gossip. It was often that they gathered thus at the home of the Widow John, because of her rare gifts as a story-teller. While the women went on with their handiwork, the others gathered about the fire, and brought new charm out of the night as they drank delight from the ancient tales. Here were a people not too wise for fairies. But in that realm of fancy that night Duncan and Flora journeyed farthest. Sitting apart in the corner, just within the dancing light, the black hair of the youth and the golden of the girl bent perilously near.

“Do you know, Duncan,” she whispered, “I don’t believe that we will ever be happier than we are to-night.”

All others were talking of the past. But they of the wonderful age were adventuring in the future. Flora, the little priestess of an ideal, spoke of that highest, purest, form of love, of which she was the true revealer.

In maddest idolatry Duncan listened. Imperious twenty was yearning for her, for her at that very moment. But sweet sixteen was wise beyond the wisdom of the ages. She wanted him not merely now, she wanted him lastingly and forever.

In splendid forgetfulness of all except themselves, Flora and Duncan fought that old battle with silences which were infinite, with bashful looks that were ineffable.

After one of those long pauses, Flora whispered, “The old folks say that the night wish beside the fire will always come true. So let’s make ours.”

“All right, tell me, Flora, what you wish!”

“No, you tell me first.”

“I wish that you would be all mine, forever, and forever. And you?”

“I wish that some day, from the ends of the world, you will be coming back to me.”

So the lovers went on with their romancing, while the old folks went on with song and story, while the swift and silent hours flew by unheeded.

When Flora came to leave, Duncan with that same quickening as before, inquired.

“May I go with you?”

“As far as the lone pine tree.”

“Can’t I go all the way by now?”

“No, you can’t go any farther.”

In the old trysting place, with the moonlit world at their feet, Duncan listened to the very music of the spheres. Something in the spell of the night and in the closeness of the little girl that nestled beside him emboldened him to fold her in his arms. But just as she had done before, with divine unconsciousness, she disengaged herself. This time, however, the ardent lover was not to be put back so easily.

Leaning over with panting lips he pleaded.

“Kiss me, Flora.”

“To-morrow, Duncan.”

“No, to-night.”

“No, no, to-morrow.”

On a rare evening, at that time of year when the air feels softest and the night falls sweetest, Duncan met his dream girl coming at the appointed hour to the appointed place. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes glowing, her dainty tripping figure, her crown of waving golden hair, all these were blended in that indescribable loveliness, which Duncan called the “Flora Touch.”

Breathless, trembling, panting not from exertion but from intense emotion, Duncan advanced with bared head, in instinctive homage.

That very afternoon he had been discussing steel with Mr. MacLehose. The magnate had prophesied, “Someday, Duncan, steel may make you king.”

On the way home that night, those words echoed within, and at the echo, already, he himself was king.

Then there came the sight of Flora, the kingly feelings fled.

“You’d make the greatest man in all the world look mean and cheap,” he said.

But his thoughts would return to his kingly vision.

“Tell me, Flora,” he asked, “which would you sooner have, a man with wealth, or a man poor like our folks up here?”

“I would sooner have a man with wealth and love, if he could keep them both, if he could not keep both, I should throw away the wealth, and hold fast to love, for love, Duncan, I believe, is the greatest thing of all.”

Duncan experienced a sudden sense of injured pride. Flora did not value him at his true worth. If she wanted him without his ambitions, without those things that would make him great, she might as well have any of the unable simpletons of Judique.

“You say some day I’ll come to see your way. I say some day you’ll come to see mine,” he flared out in youthful arrogance. “I believe you don’t ever want me to be anything more than a dirty fisherman. Well, I despise that work.”

The girl paled slightly, “Your father and my father were fishermen,” she said quietly, “and they were no less the sons of manly men because of that.

“I hope, Duncan, you won’t always be too big for Judique.”

The last word was uttered with a slight break in the brave little voice, and with that Flora turned and fled.

Duncan was dazed. There had been many a tiff between this hot head and his equally self-willed sweetheart. But something seemed to tell him that tonight’s breach was pregnant of tragic consequences.

All through the next day he was in a fever of excited dread.

Would Flora come back to meet him that night! If she would only come!

With a heavy heart and heavy step, vastly different from the night before, he climbed to their accustomed trysting place by the lone pine tree. The air was soft and the night was sweet.

In solitary sadness he waited long and in vain, and at length with heavy and unwilling step he turned away.

That summer in the North Bay was an off season. After weeks and months of buffeting and vain toiling, September found the white ships sailing homeward, lightly laden.

What a bitter homecoming was that for the Highland fleet. And above all, at such a time, what vain yearnings for the strong and comforting hand of Father Donald, who had passed away that Spring.

The failure of the season's catch, the necessity of another trip, and the loss of Father Donald, for Duncan, were swallowed up in the greater loss of the little Sister of the Fairies.

All the way from the Magdalens he had been dreaming of Flora. Perhaps she would forget his hasty word. Perhaps she would forgive him and let bygones be bygones. The wish was father to the thought, and as the fleet neared home, he dared to hope that Flora would be there to meet him. "Indeed she must be there," his heart cried out, "nothing should, nothing could keep us apart."

As the vessel neared the shore, Duncan scanned the faces of the waiting crowd, there came the horror of an unspoken dread. The one most longed for in that throng was missing.

He saw the sweet faced Widow John, her frail body looking more frail than ever. But so intent was Duncan upon the absent sweetheart, that he hardly noticed.

When he stepped ashore it was with a feeling of despair. Standing there upon the pier among the sorrowing crews, returning from the bad luck summer in the North, for the first time in his life Duncan began to feel aversion for his native land. If Flora wouldn't come to meet him, if he was to be deprived of her, there remained nothing of attraction for him in the old homeland.

"It's a poor country anyway," he said to himself with contempt. "It's a good land to get out of, there's nothing here."

Tossing in the night watches Duncan still argued within. She would not come to him, but perhaps he might go to her. But no! A rage of proud resentment welled up to still the thought.

Because of the poor summer in the North Bay, it was decided that the Judique fleet should put off again for an autumn trip to the Western Bank.

Duncan hailed the news with gladness. This would bring relief. There was only one sad feature in sailing on the autumn trip, and that was the agony it caused to his devoted mother. With Father Donald gone, with the lure of romance vanished, there only remained the love of his mother to bind him to his homeland.

The frail and trembling little mother was haunted by sad forebodings as she saw her son preparing for the autumn cruise.

“Faith, it was hard enough to part wi’ ye, to let ye gang awa to the hateful sea. But this time it is worse because I canna keep back a memory. It was in this uncanny month that yer bonnie father went awa fer the last time.

“If ye gang ta the Western Bank in this ill-omened November, a voice tells me that I shall never see ye more.”

“No, no, mumsie, ye need not worry like that, it won’t be long that I shall be away, and ye ken the word of Jean of the Mist how she said I was not made for drowning in the sea.”

“I ken that, but I canna help a dreading M’eudeil, for fear o’ the darkness that may arise ta swallow ye frae me.”

“But, mumsie, ye should not worry foolishly like that.”

“Aye, my laddie, but the sea is an evil power, and I may no be here when ye get back.”

Duncan threw his arms about his mother and buried his head against her breast.

“I want to be with you, mumsie. I don’t want to leave you. But I can’ stay ashore, I can’ stay, I must go, there’s something in the sea that calls me.”

Duncan and Louis Campbell were standing watch together.

The *Pass of Balmaha* was under way with Red Alec at the wheel heading for another berth. Forward on the lookout, Little Roary was blowing a horn every minute.

In spite of thick fog, as was his custom, with all canvas cracked on the devil-may-care skipper went tearing through the impenetrable gloom at a nine knot clip.

Duncan and Louis were sitting together on the weather side of the house just by the break of the quarter, talking in subdued tones.

Suddenly the lookout forward cried out, “Hard down your helm. Hard down, fer God’s sake. We’re onto someone!”

At the same minute, out of the fog, loomed up the broadside of a doomed vessel.

It was too late for any deft movement of Red Alec to veer off. Instantaneously the *Pass of Balmaha* struck the other amidships with a grinding crash.

With the fatal crash Duncan and another instinctively swung out and lowered away the top lee dory.

It was blowing a half gale from the north east with a strong tide running to leeward and any attempt to go to the rescue was fraught with peril. But unmindful of serious risk Duncan jumped aboard and was just starting off when Red Alec momentarily halted him.

“Hold on there, git some water an a bit of rodin line; no one goes off frae here in this fog without being ready for the worst.”

The dory stood by while the skipper tossed in a jugful of water, a trawl tub, and a heavy watch-coat.

As Duncan pushed off into the fog again he heard a cry from Louis, who had come on deck and found his young master gone over the side. It was the only time that Duncan had ever gone off without the faithful friend. He was just on the point of turning back to get his dory mate when he heard a piercing scream from the fast sinking wreck.

Without further delay he pulled forward to where the sinking ship was already settling with decks partly submerged. In another moment with a stern dive she was gone, while here and there appeared bits of floating wreckage.

After a half hour's futile searching Duncan turned to struggle back toward the *Pass of Balmaha*. He was pulling with a steady stroke when there came a faint shout, and out of the fog, directly before him, he descried a heavy main-boom, to which a man and a girl were clinging.

Duncan shot his dory up alongside, pulled in his oars, then bending over seized the girl firmly beneath the shoulders and pulled her aboard, just as he might have hauled in a giant cod. She collapsed into the bottom of the dory, still conscious utterly spent from the strain.

The other, a dark, thick-set man about fifty, was already grasping the gunwale. Duncan gave him a hand over the side and he sprawled clumsily on the thwarts, his limbs powerless from the bitter cold.

Duncan wrapped the girl in Red Alec's great watch-coat, then standing up in the dory he tried to descry the lights of the *Pass of Balmaha*, but all about him was the encompassing vapor. Again and again he sent shouts, cat-calls, and whistles through the fog, but got no answering call.

It was about midnight when they had struck. From then until dawn they rowed about in the dense fog sending out every now and again a lusty call. Once he thought that he heard a shout, but all efforts to reach them proved unavailing.

With the morning coming up over the sea the man, who was pulling with Duncan at the oars turned to him.

“We might as well tell you who we are, my young friend,” said the man, “I am Josiah C. Walcott.”

Duncan sensed something of power and dignity in the tone of the speaker, but the name of the great banker meant nothing to him.

“I never heard the name Walcott before,” he said, “we haven’t any o’ that ilk up our way.”

The head of the great banking house only smiled.

“And what is your name,” he asked, “and from what ship?”

“I am Duncan Cameron of the *Pass of Balmaha*.”

There was such a feeling that everyone must know of the queen of the fleet underlying the boy’s tone that the banker smiled again.

“We’re quits,” he said, “you have never heard my name, and I have never heard of your ship.”

“What was your vessel?” Duncan asked.

“The *Tallahasse*, a private yacht from New York. We had been cruising on the coast of Labrador, and were on our way home when we were struck. I’m afraid all my crew will have gone down with the ship, poor fellows! and but for your gallantry my daughter and I would have shared their fate. But I’m afraid, despite your gallant effort the end has only been delayed.”

“No such thing!”

The banker turned sharply at the boy’s impatient words. “Do you mean to say that this little shallop will save us if we don’t have the good fortune to be picked up soon?”

“Sure.”

“Well, I like your faith, Mr. Cameron. Perhaps it is because I am older that I cannot share it. But anyway it will help us to keep a bold face before my daughter. There is no use in alarming her, now, at least.”

“There’s no cause for it anyway. When my crowd come out fishing on these banks we expect to take chances, and when the chance comes we’re ready for it.”

“Well, I must say, sir, I admire your spirit.”

From under the watch-coat Duncan beheld a pair of dark eyes that looked straight at him. The face of the girl, like that of her father's, bore a touch of supercilious pride. Her appearance was striking rather than pretty, the kind of face that having once seen one desired to see again.

The girl had evidently heard her father's last remark, which had focused her dark eyes with searching interest upon the young Highlander who sat on the thwarts just before her. Even in his oilskin and sou'wester, Duncan was a comely figure, his complexion fresh and ruddy, his eyes dancing with fires of boyish exuberance that even that grey melancholy situation could not dim.

With rare intuition Ruth Walcott saw in Duncan Cameron what she afterwards called, "a born chieftain." She also heard her father's word of commendation, enough to stamp the one who sat before her as also a someone.

"Ruth, this is Mr. Duncan Cameron, of the *Pass of Balmaha*, who has risked his life, and rescued us from the sea."

"Anyone would have done it," said Duncan simply. "Besides," he added with a smile, "the least we could do, when we ran you down, was to pick you up."

Later as the girl sat up and stretched herself from her reclining position Duncan was struck by her athletic figure and her out of door appearance.

"Have we got any food, Dad?" she inquired.

"No, dearest, not a thing, not even a drink of water."

"Yes, we have water," said Duncan, "but we'll have to go easy with it, for we don't know how long it will have to last us."

He poured out for the girl a small drink, then offered the jug to Mr. Walcott who declined. Duncan also passed up his portion. The girl looked at him inquiringly as he replaced the jug.

"Don't know how much more I may need it later," he explained.

When the girl was beginning to study with a look of dismay the vast, grim, tossing waste that lay around them, her father suddenly called out.

"Come on, Ruthie, take a hand at the oars here, it will warm you up, and also keep you busy."

The financier already knew a bit about a dory from his boyhood around Cape Anne. This kind of craft, however was new to Ruth, and her father proceeded to give an explanation, which the girl grasped as intelligently as any boy. The mast having been stepped and the sail set, the father began to initiate her in the trick of steering with an oar.

“You’ve got to get after it smartly,” he admonished. “You know there are no passengers aboard here, and we’re expecting you to stand your watch, Ruthie, along with the rest of us.”

So by the spirit of sportsmanship, and camaraderie, the father managed to allay the rising fears of the girl, and to hide his own feelings.

By noon the fog had lifted a little, but there was not a sail in sight. At one o’clock a steamer’s smoke appeared in the far distance, then to their unspeakable dismay went down out of sight across the horizon.

“Well there’s nothing for it, we must turn our nose straight for the shore,” exclaimed Duncan.

“What’s that!” snorted Old Walcott in a tone that bespoke remonstrance.

“We must aim for the mainland, there’s nothing else to do. We may strike a sail here, and we may not. We’ve only just so much time to go without food in this weather.”

“It’s foolish to talk of such a thing. It is over one hundred and fifty miles from here to the coast. This dory could never do it.”

“I tell you it can be done!”

Josiah C. Walcott was too used to giving orders to be answered by a stripling.

“One hundred and fifty miles over the western ocean through November gales in a cockle-shell like this. It’s nothing short of madness.”

“What would you suggest then?”

“To lie off here in the track of the liners, of course, and wait for some steamer to pick us up; one is sure to come very soon.”

“Umph, that sounds well! But if they don’t come by, every hour we’re that much weaker, while every hour heading for the coast, we’re that much nearer home.”

Mr. Walcott refused to see the cogency of this last remark. He was adamant when once he took a position.

A pugnacious set to Duncan’s jaw was his only answer. Bending at the steering oar the younger man swung the dory off before the wind and started on the long one hundred and fifty miles run toward the south shore of Nova Scotia.

An impotent rage took hold of the elder man at this ignoring of his wishes. J. C. Walcott had come to regard himself as a demiurgic figure on the human

stage. To be brooked by a callow fisherman was insufferable.

“Do you mean to defy me?” Walcott was struggling hard for his composure.

“I don’t know what you mean by defying. I’m heading for the Nova Scotia coast for a place to save your skin as well as mine.

“You may be captain down there in that place they call New York, but I’m captain out here on the Western Bank. You’re in my dory. You’ll go where I take you. I don’t care where you think you want to go, I’ll take you the course which I myself know we ought to go.

“Alec Campbell, my skipper, always used to say, if you’re lost in a dory, there are four things to remember; take the biggest chance, keep yer head, trust yourself, and wait. That’s what I’m going to do now, Mr. Walcott.”

Walcott was silent for a while. He was powerless, he knew. Left alone he and his daughter would undoubtedly have perished. Perhaps after all the boy was right. Perhaps, after all, it was their only chance—the biggest chance. Taking the biggest chance was no novelty for him. Only here the counters were different; he was playing it with lives. Well, what of it? the principle was still the same.

“That’s a grand tip for Wall street,” he said, turning toward Duncan. “I don’t know about here, but I’ll trust you, and help you where I can. Here’s my hand on it.”

Ruth sitting quietly by herself was filled with wonder that a man should dare to cross her father. But wonder of wonders! this boy had actually crossed and won. He had not only stood up to her father, but had faced, unflinchingly, something greater—the wintry, North Atlantic, one man single-handed against the naked Ocean.

One minute Ruth was filled with misgiving as she watched the greybeards thundering by. Then the girl looked at Duncan Cameron and thought of something greater even than the wrath of the ocean.

By nightfall the wind began to haul off shore, while the biting North began to show its teeth in the veering blast.

Ruth Walcott, and even her father, were both gazing with wild-eyed terror at the seas rushing by like hungry wolves. But Duncan showed not the slightest sign of perturbation. At length with the storm increasing and the seas rising it was apparent that they could not go further.

“We can’t live long in this.” There was the hint of despair in Walcott’s muffled words.

“Oh, it’s not as bad as that,” said Duncan, “I’ve got a dodge that’ll make us ride easy.”

Taking the spars, sail, and trawl-tub, Duncan lashed all together and cast them off at the bow on the end of the line to act as a drogue. Riding to the drogue the dory eased off, while the sail helped to break the force of the seas from forward.

“There now,” he exclaimed, “we’re snug as a sea-gull sleeping with her head under her wing. To-morrow it will be fine and we will up and off again.”

The girl with a suit of oilskins and a sheepskin mackinaw wrapped tightly over all with the great watch-coat was fairly dry and comfortable.

But the condition of Mr. Walcott was pitiable. He had deprived himself of his warm mackinaw for the sake of his daughter. Possessed of a doughty, thick-set frame, working often at the oars, he had kept himself from being benumbed. But now, lying to, there was no chance to warm up at rowing and already from the lack of food he was beginning to weaken. To add to his wretched condition he had contracted a severe cold and was troubled with such severe shaking of his limbs that he could not sleep.

But to his last breath old J. C. Walcott proved himself worthy of that battling street by Trinity churchyard, where he had spent his life-time in the warfare of bulls and bears. In days of panic he had been known as “Old Die Hard,” and now that he had adapted himself to this primal conflict he became, as truly, “Old Die Hard” grappling with the sea.

The long gray dawn of the third day came on with laggard step as though unwilling to view the darkling, wildering ocean. Black seas, foam-flecked like dogs from Hell, went howling by. The wrath of the North Atlantic was still rising.

Finally the brave little dory plunged into a breaking crest and came out quarter full of water, the two men went to it bailing like mad; when they were clear again, Duncan was obliged to take the watch-coat which covered the girl and lash it over the bows to prevent being swamped by the giant breaking seas.

Hollow-eyed and haggard of face, J. C. Walcott stood grimly to the bailing. Age was telling upon his bodily resistance, but underneath the weakening frame the heart still pounded on.

In a lull between bailing Duncan burst forth in his appreciation of the battling spirit of the older man.

“You are a bonnie fighter, Mr. Walcott, the kind we love up north in Judique.”

“Aye, it’s always better to die fighting than to die wailing.

“Whatever happens to me,” he said, turning to his daughter, “I believe that our young friend, Duncan Cameron, will get through. With him I believe that you too, Ruthie, will be safe. Whatever happens I have never met a man that I would sooner trust you with for such a crisis.

“If you get out alive, Duncan Cameron, there is a place waiting for you in the Banking House of Walcott and Montgomery. I haven’t known you long, but in revelation of character a day like this is worth a life-time.

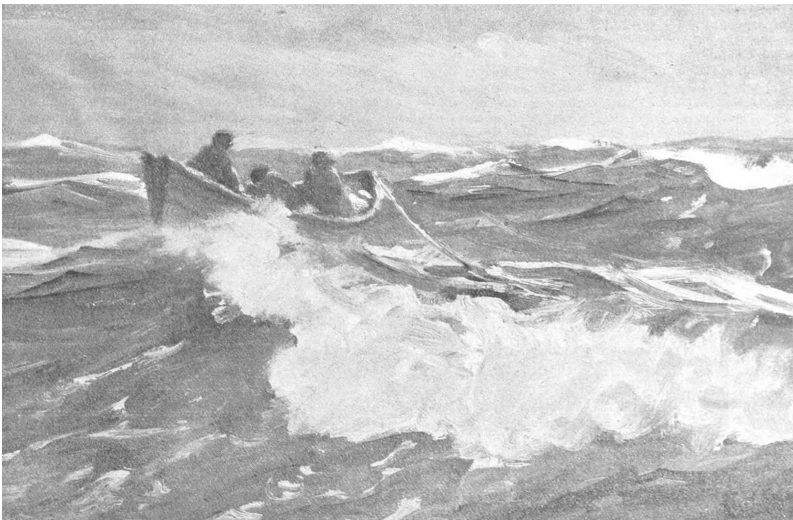
“I am ready to back you and I want you to promise me that if you get through and if I am left behind you will go to New York and prepare yourself for a place in our firm. You have the blood of a leader. And I believe you will be safe in command there as here.

“Promise me, Duncan Cameron, that you will accept this offer?” There was a gruff eagerness in the tone.

“I will accept,” answered Duncan.

“And if you come through, Ruthie, you will be a witness to this agreement.”

“I will,” replied Ruth, in a low voice.



All through that afternoon, all through the night, the dory battled with the raging tempest.

All through that afternoon, all through the night, the dory battled with the raging tempest. Tossed eternally like a chip in a smother of broken water, by some miraculous power the tiny craft still rode on with its suffering human freight.

After his morning's talk with Duncan the old war-horse seemed to find his second wind and with renewed energy he kept at it doing his part at the endless bailing. Only deepening lines around the mouth and an increasing pallor told of the intensity of the struggle waging within.

The fourth day found the storm still raging, the dory still riding at the drogue, the occupants weakening from the unequal contest. Every moment of life now, for each one, was a lengthening misery, especially so to Mr. Walcott, on whom age was falling heavily.

As the dawn of the fourth day was streaking dirty-grey across the darkling seas, another cresting breaker came inboard.

The men as usual started to bail it out, when Mr. Walcott, bending over the side, suddenly pitched headforemost into the black lap of a rising mother-wave.

Ruth with wonderful presence of mind reached forward quickly and grasped him. Then as quickly she loosed her grasp, with the sharp and shocking cry:

“He's dead!”

With the death of her father, Ruth, who had kept up so bravely, began to lose her hold. Pale and motionless she lay in the bottom of the dory, her body numb, her face ashen. Exposure and grief had so dazed her that she now seemed insensible to hope or fear. No matter how the crescendo of the storm might threaten she hardly opened glazed eyes.

Now and again Duncan paused at the bailing, attempting to cheer her, but without avail.

For Duncan the contest had become one of excruciating agony. He had tasted neither food nor water for four days, all the water he had saved for Ruth. The girl at least had the extra protection of a sheepskin mackinaw under her oilskins. During all this time, scantily clad, soaked continually by the freezing spray, Duncan had been exposed to cold that went to his very vitals. But his steadfast eye still shone with unquenchless hope.

At noon of the fourth day the storm began to abate sufficiently to permit taking in the drogue.

“I guess the best thing to do is to make sail and let her run and chance meeting someone,” he said to himself.

By daylight on the fifth morning from far away there came faintly to Duncan's ears an old familiar sound. Through the morning the sound increased, until it was recognized, beyond all doubt as the roar of the surf heard for miles to seaward from the bars and shoals of Sable Island.

Many had shuddered at that frightful roar, which meant the challenge of the graveyard of the North Atlantic. But for Duncan, a denizen of the Western Bank, it was a note of welcome back to life.

With hope he bent over and gathered Ruth in his arms endeavoring by all his power to persuade her to renew her weakening grip on life. As the youth put his arms around her, her fluttering heart seemed to have imparted to it renewed energy from him. For a long time Ruth lay with her wan face resting on Duncan's shoulder, but there was no sign of recognition.

Finally in despair he whispered in her ear, "Ruth, Ruth, you must not die, after we have been through so much and come so far together."

There was something, not in the words, but in the intensity and depth of the appeal, that went strangely to the heart of the prostrate Ruth.

She was too far gone to speak, but her eyes opened, and out of their pain and weakness Duncan read a gathering light of resolution which said as plainly as any words, "I will come with you."

A few hours later a coast-guard on patrol from Lookout Hill with his spyglass sighted a dory tossing far out across the North East Bar. Immediately a boat was despatched to the rescue.

Up till the moment when the life guards lifted Ruth from the tossing dory Duncan retained his mastery. Then suddenly, with the gruelling strain at the end, he collapsed.

Two unconscious bodies were brought ashore by the rescuing crew.

"What you got there," came the challenge from the patrol.

"A fisherman, and a lady."

"That's a funny combination."

"Yes, I guess he must have picked her up from a wreck and then lost track of his own vessel in the fog."

"She's a tony lookin' gal, is the young leddie."

"We'll hustle 'em inside, the young leddy'll be a job for the nurse all right, I reckon a bit of hot broth and a couple of blankets 'll soon fix the other un."

"Certainly not, can't ye see that the gal's a swell, take her up to the Government House."

"And the other?"

"The fisherman, why, leave him down at the shack of course, where d'ye s'pose ye'd take him."

The day after, Duncan was abroad on the shifting dunes, wondering at this new and strange predicament.

Through the stormy months of winter Sable Island was inaccessible. The Government steamer had already made its last call and would not return until spring. Therefore Duncan knew that he and the girl whom he had rescued were due for long imprisonment.

Possessed of no such recuperative power as her rescuer, it was many a day before Ruth Walcott appeared. At length pale and weak she issued forth for her first stroll.

It was late in the afternoon and the early November sunset was flooding the sea in waves of rose and gold. With the wondrous scene that stretched before her Ruth whispered to herself. "It's almost like an enchanted isle. I never thought that it could be so lovely."

Walking aimlessly, her feet led her down to the little cemetery, the last resting place of many a ship-wrecked crew, British, French, Norwegian, American, who slept there with the everlasting moaning of the seas as their requiem.

Standing in that tragic spot Ruth's thoughts turned to her father, and the tears were coming when she caught a glimpse of a brave figure approaching against the skyline. It was Duncan Cameron. Never very deep in her affections, Ruth's grief was drowned in a new attraction.

"That's my young fisherman," she exclaimed with glad tones, starting off in his direction, but in an instant without seeming to notice her Duncan vanished over the farther side of the Hill.

The following day at lunch she spoke to the Governor about having the young fisherman who had rescued her up to dinner.

"No, Miss Walcott, these fishermen stay where they belong down in the shacks. If they come to Government House at all, they come to the servants' quarters."

The Governor, Ian MacEagh, was an old Highlander of noble class sprung from that clan of rovers famous as the Children of the Mist. After an adventurous life, like some old gipsy of the sea, Ian MacEagh had pitched his wandering tent here in this home of the storms where the wintry gales were begotten. But even here in this waste place of the ocean he remained a chieftain, proud, punctilious, careful of social distinctions.

Later the Governor remarked casually, "What was the name of that young fisherman who rescued you?"

“Cameron.”

“What, Duncan Cameron?”

“Yes.”

“Well, why didn’t you tell me that before. Why, God bless my soul, he’s one of the young chieftains of the Hielan fleet, one of my ain people. I know the master of his ship, Captain Alec Campbell, who often drops off here to see me. I knew the lad’s father, Captain John Cameron, who lost his life in a gale right off this self same isle.

“That lad, Duncan Cameron, Miss Walcott, is no ordinary fisherman, he comes from one of the finest families of the north. They had bad luck back in the ‘forty-five,’ and since then his immediate family have been living in humble circumstances, but they possess something that even wealth can’t buy.”

That night at dinner Duncan sat at the Governor’s side and Ruth was struck by his natural gallantry of presence. Whatever he touched he graced. In the proud and fiery spirited young Highlander she saw, beyond doubt, that indefinable, unpurchasable something that stamped him the master.

Duncan and the Governor were both citizens of the same old-fashioned Gaelic world which Ruth had thought of as forgotten history. Listening to their conversation she stepped back into the pages of old storybooks. As the talk flowed on in that strange, sea-haunted house, it seemed to her as though she had strayed back a century. Glancing up at last, she almost expected to catch a glint of broadswords on the wall.

After dinner they repaired to the living-room, lit by a great open fire of blazing logs. Everything about that quaint and shadowy room spoke of wrecks. Taking Duncan and Ruth about, the Governor pointed out these endless souvenirs of nautical disaster.

The cheery hearth was made of sheets of burnished copper. “That copper,” said the Governor, “came from the H. M. S. *Barbadoes*, that met her end off East Flagstaff.

“The carved oak in this ingle-nook is from a fine old packet ship, called the *Undaunted*, that crashed upon the East Bar in a driving gale. That Spanish mahogany desk over in yonder corner is from the Captain’s cabin of the brig *Agamemnon*.

“These teakwood chairs are mementoes of the first years I was here as Governor. They are from the brig *Growler*, and from the *Blooming Youth*, both of which struck the sand near to Old South Side Station.

“The Axminster carpet on the floor is from the saloon of the steamer *State of Virginia*, and the Persian rug below the ingle is from an East Indiaman, the *Ironsides*. That tray of Damascus beaten brass, the china cups, and the pearl and ebony tabaret are from two of the famous Black Ball liners, the *Hannah* and the *Elize*.”

Throughout the evening Ruth felt like one moving in dreamland. This quiet world with its sandhills and its ponies, the endless song of the sea, this great shadowy room with its oaken rafters, reminiscent of unnumbered gallant ships gone to their doom, this untamed old Governor who had never known the restraints of a hedged-in world, all these impressed themselves upon Ruth Walcott. Most of all she was impressed by a dashing young Highlander, Duncan Cameron, who for all his glorious ancestral past was bound so evidently toward a still more dazzling future.

Because the girl was a votary of worldly power she forgot the charm of that far off isle in romancing on Duncan Cameron’s destined greatness.

“Yes,” she said, “he’s got the last essential; he’s got the blood, and as dad said he will be safe in command. He’ll go far.” The rest of her thoughts were very secret.

Chance played a strange caprice in placing Duncan Cameron and Ruth Walcott together on that solitary isle. He at that time was filled with the awakening spirit of ambition. She stood for material power and for that alone.

Ruth’s brain was teeming with tales of “big men” and “big successes.” On that far off isle, morning, noon, and night, Duncan Cameron listened to this fair devotee of Mammon. He heard of lumber kings, of cattle kings, of railroad kings, of shipping kings, of endless lesser oligarchs. He heard of penniless boys coming into Manhattan Island in the steerage, or trudging in barefoot along the Erie Canal; of those same boys later rising to be masters of industry and commerce.

“It’s all very well,” said Ruth, “to talk of the Gentle Lochiel mustering seven hundred broadswords. Before you get through, Duncan, you may be able to muster twice seven thousand on your pay-rolls.”

Listening to this siren voice Duncan began more and more impatiently to pace the sand dunes, and to gaze fiercely at the encircling sea, panting for the day when the Government steamer would set him free.

One morning toward the end of March Duncan was strolling by the West Point Light impatiently complaining against the long duress of the isle. It was

only chance that brought his glance to seaward and revealed to him a white schooner tearing on toward the boiling, troubled waters of the dreaded bar.

It needed no voice to tell him that it was none other than the *Pass of Balmaha* racing where angels dared not tread.

With bated breath he watched that white ship whose life for so long had been his own. Every line of her gallant beauty spoke to him as she tore along in her graceful, daring way. At last out of a welter of foam she found the blue water and glided to safety.

A dory dropped from her side and made for the shore.

“That’ll be Red Alec,” he thought, and a strange conflict of emotions welled up in him at the sight of his one-time dashing hero. He had turned his back on his old world, on his own folk, for a world of stranger folk and greater heroes. But something in him made him loth to meet his friend.

It was the hunger to hear about his mother that led him to a different way of thought.

Coming slowly up the path he met the skipper just leaving Government House. Red Alec rushed forward to meet him with a cry of pleasure. “Thank God, Duncan my lad. Welcome back frae the dead. I never expected to view yer carcass again. We all thought that two o’ the bonnie Camerons were now gone off this cursed shore. I did na ken until the Governor told me this very hour that ye were still among the living.”

“And I never expected to see you here, Captain, especially this season.”

“Well ye never can tell when I’ll be turning up. We’ve bin down Fortune Bay way fer frozen herring.”

The eager question leaped to Duncan’s lips, “How’s my mother?”

“Not dead?” he cried, fearful of the other’s silence.

Red Alec nodded sadly, “As ye ken, her heart was ailing, and the self same day that we made port, she dies frae the shock when Louis came back to her without ye.”

For some moments Duncan walked along beside Red Alec without speaking. There was nothing now that he cared for, nothing else to draw him back to those grim hills of Judique. That much was settled at least.

Finally Red Alec broke the silence.

“There were two in the auld hame port that believed, in spite of what every other body said, that ye were still alive.” He stopped as though waiting for a

question, but no question came. "They were Louis and Flora," he continued slowly. "As soon as your mother's funeral was over, Louis shipped afore the mast in a foreign-going clipper at MacNair's. He thought you were somewhere, and that if he went sailing up and down the world that some day he would surely find you."

Hot tears rose to Duncan's eyes at the memory of the faithful old sailor following his impossible quest, but the memory of his new dreams came to assuage his sorrow. They walked on in silence. Red Alec again seemed waiting for a question that did not come.

"Ye dinna ask," he said, "about the other who believed ye were alive?"

"No," said Duncan abruptly. "I don't ask because I don't care."

Red Alec's face showed surprise. "Ye dinna want to hear about her? Why I canna understand ye lad. I wot afore ye did yersel that she was the little lass that put ye up against life's great west wind drift. She was the one that sent us far out o' our course down here a lookin' fer ye. She believed ye might be here, so she went to Mr. MacLehose and told him about her belief, and the chief, what's he do, but order me to drop in here on the way back frae Fortune Bay and see if we could get a line on ye."

Duncan shook his head. "I'm not going back," he said; "I'm just waiting for the government steamer to take me out into the world."

"You're through with Judique?" Red Alec spoke as though he did not understand. Then of a sudden the canny skipper burst forth with a knowing exclamation.

"Ah, ha, I've got it. There's a lass aboard somewhere. Old Ian told me. Now I remember how ye rescued a high-stepping, tony lassie frae that big place called Noo York. So it's her that's makin' ye to turn yer back upon yer auld hame."

"What if it is?" snapped Duncan, with a tone of defiance.

"What if it is? Why it's naething o' Red Alec's business, lad, but as one o' yer ain that loved ye afore and that loves ye still I was only claiming the right o' me ain."

Duncan, as always, was disarmed by the strong undisguised affection of the other. "I'm sorry Captain," said he in tones of humility. "I did not mean to speak so hastily."

"Nae need ta ask fer pardon; wimmen could git me jest like ye in me wild, warm-blooded days. But as a friend that's talkin' to a friend, Duncan, d'ye think that this other lass is the right one fer ye? Frae what Master Ian MacEagh has

told me, her world and yours are vastly different, and it is a question if ye two will strike it off so well together. In sic a place as this ye could get on wi' almost any woman. But what will it be when ye get ta yon sheltered town they call Noo York and are at peace wi' nature?"

"We'll be just the same there as we are here."

"Na, na," the wise shrewd head was shaking back and forth in strong dissent. "Na, na, Duncan, when man is at war with nature he's generally at peace with his wimmen. But when he's at peace with nature he's generally at war with his wimmen. Sa when ye get to that city place that's where ye're testin' time'll come."

"I'll be all right there." There was a hint of sullenness in the words.

"I'm nae sa sure o' that. If ye love her, that's the real test. D'ye think ye really love her, Duncan?"

"I know that she will help me to get on; that with her I cannot fail, and that's what I care about most."

"It grieves me to hear ye talk that way, lad. I ken that marriage that takes nae thought o' love is built on shiftin' sand."

"I'll trust it."

"Aye, the ignorance o' youth will allus trust."

They had come to the edge of the shore, and as though by mutual consent they stopped. "And what shall I be sayin' to the folks at hame, when they ask me about ye?"

Duncan was silent and Red Alec's ruddy face took on a still graver look. Holding out his hand, he faced the boy.

"Good-bye then, Duncan," he said. There was almost a solemn tone in his voice as he continued, "I fear the day will come when ye will turn in sorrow from that new world that now ye think holds out sic promise just as ye are turning yer back on yer auld world this day. Ye'll live to see, lad, that none o' us can ever cut the painter that binds us ta our past."

Spring came early to New York that year. As Duncan Cameron walked along, from a side street his tired eyes caught the suggestion of bursting buds. It called to his mind the spring. He had not thought of it before; seasons were so easily forgotten amid the city's unchanging landscape of stone and steel. He thought of the miracle of the springtime on the mountains and valleys of Cape Breton, and he sighed for a breath of the great North Bay. Jaded

and weary from the stress of recent panic, the longing for the old scenes came to him with an almost unbearable poignancy.

His success had been the success of youth. It was the pertinacity of youth that brought him safely through the dreadful ordeal upon the Western Bank. It was the resiliency of youth throughout his Wall Street career that enabled him to rise above disaster. His triumphs and his failure had both sprung from this same source.

Failure was not a word that seemed associated with his career. His business associates would have been aghast at such a word. "Failure on this side of forty with such wealth at his command! the thing is unbelievable." But what did they know, that breed, infected with the money-madness, chained right to desk and ticker, what did they know of the blue north, of its dreams and visions, of its Land of Heart's Desire? Had they but known, they would have found a clue to that most dramatic act of Duncan Cameron's career.

The day that Duncan married Ruth Walcott in the little chapel of the Trappist monastery on Sable Island he turned his back upon the faith and fairies of his boyhood.

She had seemed all in all to him while on that island refuge. But as the battle for success surged more fiercely around him with each passing day that vision faded. Immersed in the turmoil of all those new experiences, swayed by new ambitions and newer desires, he drew more and more into himself. In his new life his wife had little part.

Proud and high spirited, this indifference preyed on her mind, but she had other interests, other hopes. The birth of her child gave her for a moment a new hold on him, a hold she fondly hoped would ripen into a bond of love. But day by day his business interests increased, and he gave himself more and more to the absorbing conflict.

Ruth fought against the thought that neither wife nor child could hold his interest; desperately she clung to that last hope, but day by day the hope grew dimmer, and with its passing came the realization that the increasing fame that she had coveted for him was nothing without his heart.

The death of her child, a sorrow that seemed but for a moment to distract him from his absorbing labors, snapped the last bond between them. She had left him for a long stay on the continent, a stay that lengthened into months and years, till her name finally dropped from the social columns of the press, and she became almost a forgotten figure.

At his club that afternoon Duncan found a letter waiting him, bearing the postmark of "Sable Island." It was from his wife. In the same envelope was a brief note from the superior of the monastery that told of her death. It was by chance he read that note first. He sat for a long time staring into the fire, then with a sigh he picked up his wife's letter. It was brief and disjointed.

"This is just a message," she wrote, "that I thought I must write you before the end—When our romance failed, I felt I must return here . . . to this dear place where you took me from the sea . . . where at first we were so happy. You were so full of stories of fairies and of heroes . . . I took them from you, and gave you instead a desire for your present life. . . . It was my fault. Sooner or later, Duncan, you will come to the end of these things you are striving for . . . and finding nothing beyond you will be unhappy. . . . I have one wish for you then, that you may win your way back to the faith and fairies of your boyhood."

In the dancing flames before him there appeared the wave-washed shores of that barren island and, beyond, the blue haze melting into the far horizon. He dropped both letters into the fire and arose wearily and sighed half aloud.

It was only a day or so later that Duncan waiting at the curb for his limousine, beheld the form of an old man in sailor's garb coming down the avenue toward him.

With a startled cry, in which surprise and joy were strangely mingled, the old sailor rushed toward him.

"Duncan, Duncan! Master Duncan!"

Duncan Cameron wheeled abruptly, and there standing before him was Louis Campbell, the companion and guardian of his early years, and later his dory-mate upon the Banks, the man who had vowed to search for him through life.

Surprise held him speechless for the moment, and instinctively the cool reserve that the years had built about him, made him hold out his hand to clasp the sailor's lightly. It was not a conscious action, but the instinctive impulse of his years of conflict made him forestall the warm effusion that he knew would come. Even the fervent Gaelic of his old friend he met with commonplace words in the English tongue. With tears in his eyes the old sailor burst away and vanished in the crowd.

Going down to his office the following morning it came suddenly to Duncan that he was an old man—not yet forty, yet an old man.

After the panic there had come a lull in the financial world. The time of respite served to reveal the strength of his position. Always, before, there had

been with a new day the call of new battle, the lure of greater conquest. This morning there came the poignant consciousness that there was now no greater conquest. He had come to the edge of his skyline. Expectancy had gone. Youth had gone. There remained only the cankering, withering hand of age.

As his limousine stopped intermittently in the congestion of lower Broadway, he looked out and for the first time was struck by the tired, blasé faces in the crowd surging along the pavement. An obese broker thoroughly out of condition, and fed up with existence, paused close by.

Duncan thought of Alexander MacEacheren, father of the fighting breed MacEacheren, at four score years perfectly fit, ready for a furious game of shinty.

One after another the old Highlanders of the North Shore passed before his mind's eye.

“Not a pot-belly in the crowd,” he thought. “We never saw such a creature as that broker on the corner. He's a caricature, a compendium of all that a human being should not look like.”

As never before there came to Duncan the picture of the manhood of his own Northland, old men and young alike, clean of limb and trim of waist line. It was not the style with those Highlanders to apologize and say “I'm getting old.” From the beginning to the end they lived hard and played hard.

Against the hub-bub of the street Duncan thought of the Sabbath mornings calm in the golden-misted Glen, of its freshness and fairness.

Suddenly to him the congestion was oppressive, the grim walls that everywhere closed out the sky, seemed like a giant stifling prison.

There came the call of the ocean. It may have been the sight of Louis and the call of all the long chain of memories that his presence had brought again into being. His tired, jangled nerves found no happiness or comfort in the things around him, but turned back in memory to the infinite ocean where he had known the harmony and joy of life. If Ruth had sought escape in her island, why should he not go back to the green pastures of the sea? With the thought there came to him the boat-song of Little Roary:

All through the day, while he attended various boards and directorates, his mind was constantly turning to that old boat-song of the Highland piper.

In the middle of the afternoon a messenger placed on his desk an early edition of the papers containing the “Wall Street closing prices.” But chance or weariness made him turn to other pages, to scan listlessly their contents. Suddenly his eyes focused on a heading. He read down the page with drawn lips. It told of an old sailor struck down by a lorry, gasping out his breath in

fluent Gaelic, eagerly calling for the last rites of the church between bursts of unexplained and almost uncontrollable grief.

Duncan Cameron never returned to the “Financial Page.” The reading of that brief sketch was the last event of his Wall Street career. He dropped out of sight as suddenly, as completely, as he had years before vanished from his boyhood home of Judique.

The newspaper reporters in the story of his disappearance told how that he was last seen in a morgue on Cherry Street. There before a marble slab, on which was laid an old sailor, he stood with the tears streaming down. A check drawn on the banking house of Montgomery and Cameron, endorsed by the Chief himself, paid for a most costly funeral for the deceased sailor. After that Duncan Cameron was lost in unfathomable darkness.

Several years after the disappearance of Duncan Cameron his former partner, James Montgomery, was on a yachting cruise to the Bras-d-Or Lakes of Nova Scotia.

“It’s very beautiful,” he said, his sweeping arm taking in that glorious arm of gold. He was sitting out on deck looking down the long panorama of lakes and islands. His companion was an elderly man, a chance acquaintance picked up casually during his stay because of his quaint views and his knowledge of the country. “It’s all familiar to you,” Montgomery continued, “so that perhaps you don’t see how beautiful it is.”

“Aye, it’s beautiful,” the elder man answered, “yes, beautiful in its own way, but you should see the North Shore of Cape Breton. Yon’s a man’s country. And there’s more than scenery there; there is a touch of the last frontier remaining on this continent, what you Americans had in the days of your clipper captains and your cattle kings.”

The suggestion piqued the interest of James Montgomery, the hint of something unusual drew him irresistibly. Time was of no particular object, and the place of travel was of his own choosing. On the moment he had made up his mind to visit the place of which his companion had spoken.

On a fair morning in September into the roaring town of MacNair’s came a sleek, cruising steam yacht. She came to and dropped her anchor in the midst of a maze of shipping.

From the bridge looking over the crowded estuary Montgomery was struck by the forest of yards and spars.

“A windjammer’s port, all right,” he exclaimed.

Then his eyes caught a view of a fleet of pure white schooners and he stood silent in awed admiration.

Once ashore, he directed his steps toward the Sunnyside Bend for a closer view of the white fleet. Rounding a corner by Tom Moore's rum shop he swung into the midst of a pretty row. Tom Moore, who had come out of his tavern to observe what he described as "a lovely feight," saw the important looking stranger and volunteered information.

"This here MacNair's ain't what it used to be, but, Mister, whenever them white schooners yonder comes into port, ye can bet yer dead lights ye'll see hell popping."

As he stood there, down the street came a figure dressed in seafaring rig.

Far off, the figure called to James Montgomery's mind some vague recollection. In a moment as the man drew nearer Montgomery stepped forward eagerly. That masterful gaze that he had known so well in the days of panic was turned upon him, and with a flash of recognition he called out, "Duncan Cameron. By all that's holy, Duncan Cameron again."

"Are you sure, Jimmy?" laughed the other.

"Sure? Why I'd know you anywhere. You bothered me a minute with that seaman's disguise, but I'd know you if you were dressed like a Chinese mandarin. I'd know you by that strange mixture of boy and man that shines all over you." The older man's eyes were misty with remembrance. "It was the same when you first joined us. Do you remember?"

"Right you are, Jimmy. I took the heart of a youngster to your city; and I lost it there. Oh, yes, I gained what you had to offer, but after the flush of youth was gone, it was dull as flat champagne."

"Well," he continued, dropping a caressing hand on the older man's shoulder, "I was wiser than the rest of you. When I found it out I chucked it all and went in search of something better."

Together the two friends had drifted into Cline MacDonald's Seaside Hotel, and there, bit by bit, James Montgomery was able to pick up and piece together the scattered threads of the story of Duncan Cameron, since the days of the great panic on Wall Street.

It was a story interlarded with surprised ejaculations from the older man.

It was an old friend to whom Duncan spoke. He was eager to make him understand, oppressed by the idea that the best he could hope for was an incredulous wonder.

“You chaps who knew me in business,” he said, “only knew half of me. I was successful, yes, but perhaps you do not know that outside of business my life was disenchantment. I started in to live without love and found that for me at least it was impossible. You remember the days of the panic, you remember that we had pulled through successfully; that we had tremendous deals ahead. It was a great hour for us, when I should have been full of elation I found that desire had failed and that my heart was old.

“Oh, yes,” he continued swiftly as though to forestall an expected objection, “there was something else, a loss, that while it did not perhaps touch my heart as it might have done, came as a great shock. And then, almost at the same time in the morgue on Cherry Street I stood face to face with the most sacred friendship of my boyhood lost and gone. That was the end. The call of the ocean came back to me, and I had to go.

“I found one of our home fleet, the *Loyal Lochaber*, homeward bound from Demerara and I found a place aboard.”

Duncan stopped speaking, and looked out across the water where white sails were flashing in the sunlight.

“And could you pick up your old life again as easily as that?” James Montgomery’s tone was still incredulous.

Duncan sat quiet for some time, and when he spoke it was more as though following some thought of his own, than in answer to the enquiry.

“When I came again to Judique the white spire of Stella Maris and the white cottages along the shore were there just as I had seen them in the golden haze of boyhood—but when I came up the high street, I knew that I was alien.

“The faces that thronged the pier or that I passed beside their own door-yards were all unknown to me, and, sadder still, I was unknown to them. But in Stella Maris churchyard I found remembrance. There I saw the place where my mother was resting, there also the resting place of Father Donald, of little Roary the Piper, of old Mr. MacEacheren, of Allan, and Wild Archie, and of Captain Roary MacDonald.

“There in the church yard, beneath unpitying stars, I read out one by one the names of those whose love, in days ago, had cast enchantment across my native glen.

“Another vessel was putting out to sea on the following morning, and I was glad to find a place aboard. Bleak and foreboding the grim Judique mountain frowned above as I sailed away. I had come to my own home, and for me it was homeless.”

Montgomery nodded understandingly. “And now,” he said, “you’ll be coming back with me.” But Duncan only shook his head, with a smile.

“In time,” he continued, “because of desperate chances run I came to be the high-line skipper, successor in fame to Red Alec, and to my father Captain Johnnie Cameron. But this meant nothing to me, all I could think of was what might have been.

“One day while my schooner was lying at the Maritime Fish Wharf in Halifax a fire broke out in the pier-head warehouse and a cry came up that some of my men were trapped within. I rushed in to try to save the unfortunate fellows not caring now what should become of me. While I was bearing an unconscious shipmate toward the open, the building collapsed, and in the midst of suffocating fumes my mind went out in darkness.

“I was saved from the burning ruin and carried unconscious to the Catholic Infirmary in Halifax.

“There for many days I lay hovering between death and life. Physically my powers of resistance were strong, but spiritually I was played out, and the recuperative forces of the heart were at the end. So I lay between the sunshine and the grave, the body refusing to go down, the heart refusing to come up.

“Came a time when the physical vigor was too much even for the declining spirit, and for a space I rallied into consciousness.

“It was night when I first stumbled back into the realm of sense. I remember first the darkened ward, white walls, lights dimly burning. I remember someone moving by with a lighted lamp, and then a shadow fell across my cot.

“I was still ‘far ben’ as we Highlanders say, but even so in semi-consciousness, amid a mass of changing fancies. I became aware of magic in the falling shadow.

“From the hazy background of forgotten memory there came a picture of a little boy with his head in the lap of a little girl who was bathing his forehead from the burnside. It was a picture out of my own boyhood, and there I beheld again those same blue eyes gazing into mine, with that same infinitude of yearning. With that shadow falling on my cot I turned away from death.

“It was then that the miracle happened. With Flora kneeling at my bedside, with her tears blending into mine, the ice was melted and there through the mystic power of love I was given back the heart of youth.

“Looking into my face with that faith that could move mountains Flora sobbed through her tears:

“I knew that you’d come back to me.”

Duncan had ended his story. A long time of silence followed while both he and James Montgomery sat gazing across the silver sheen of the Straits.

“And you’re not coming back to Wall Street?” James Montgomery was struggling for understanding.

“No, No! Jimmy. I have come back, came back *here*,” his hand swept out to take in the breadth of the scene before them, “back to the blue haze on the far horizon—to the Land of Youth.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The White Ships of Judique* by Arthur Hunt Chute]