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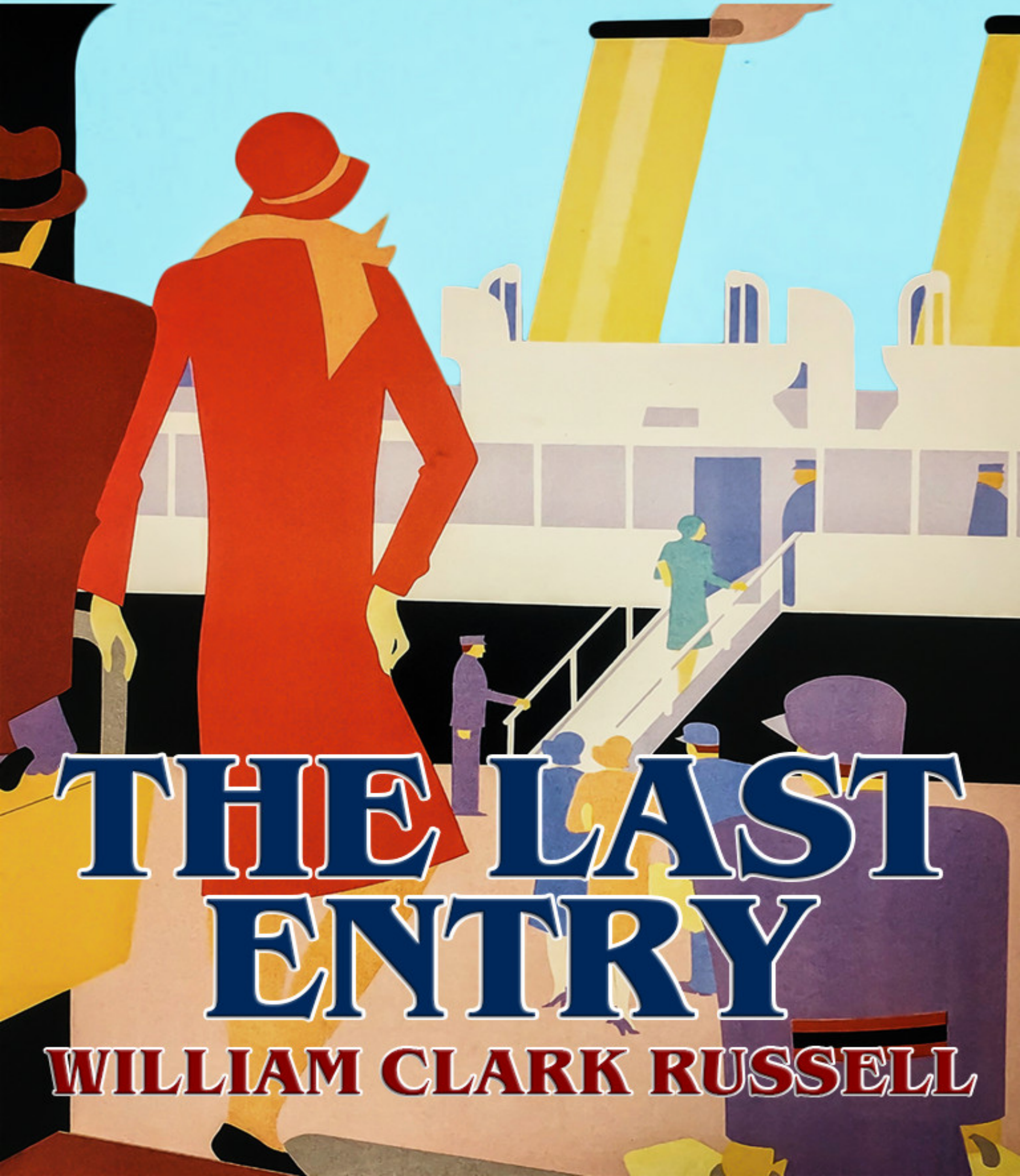

THE LAST ENTRY

WILLIAM CLARK RUSSELL

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CHAPTER I.
MR. AND MISS VANDERHOLT.

This story belongs to the year 1837, and was regarded by the generations of that and a succeeding time as the most miraculous of all the recorded deliverances from death at sea.

It may be told thus:

Mr. Montagu Vanderholt sat at breakfast with his daughter Violet one morning in September. Vanderholt's house was one of a fine terrace close to Hyde Park. He was a rich man, a retired Cape merchant, and his life had been as chequered as Trelawney's, with nothing of romance and nothing of imagination in it. He was the son of honest parents, of Dutch extraction, and had run away to sea when about twelve years old.

Nothing under the serious heavens was harsher, more charged with misery, suffering, dirt, and wretchedness, than seafaring in the days when young Vanderholt, with an idiot's cunning, fled to it from his father's comfortable little home. He got a ship, was three years absent, and on his return found both his father and mother dead. He went again to sea, and, fortunately for him, was shipwrecked in the neighbourhood of Simon's Bay. The survivors made their way to Cape Town, and presently young Vanderholt got a job, and afterwards a position. He then became a master, until, after some eight or ten years of heroic perseverance, attended by much good luck, behold Mr. Vanderholt full-blown into a colonial merchant prince. How much he was worth when he made up his mind to settle in England, after the death of his wife, and when he had disposed of his

affairs so as to leave himself as free a man as ever he had been when he was a common Jack Swab, really signifies nothing. It is certain he had plenty, and plenty is enough, even for a merchant prince of Dutch extraction.

Besides Violet, he had two sons, who will not make an appearance on this little brief stage. They are dismissed, therefore, with this brief reference—that both were in the army, and both, at the time of this tale, in India.

Violet was Vanderholt's only daughter, and he loved her exceedingly. She was not beautiful, but she was fair to see, with a pretty figure, and an arch, gay smile. You saw the Dutch blood in her eyes, as you saw it in her father's, whose orbs of vision, indeed, were ridiculously small—scarcely visible in their bed of socket and lash. An English mother had come to Violet's help in this matter. Taking her from top to toe, with her surprising quantity of brown hair, soft complexion, good mouth, teeth, and figure, Violet Vanderholt was undoubtedly a fine girl.

The room in which they were breakfasting was imposingly furnished. The pictures were many and fine. One in particular took the eye, and detained it. It was hung over the sideboard, which glittered with plate; it represented a schooner, bowed by a sudden blast, coming at you. The white brine, shredded by the shrieking stroke of the squall, hissed shrilly from the cut-water. The life and spirit of the reality was in that fine canvas. The sailors seemed to run as you watched, the gaffs to droop with the handling of their gear. She came rushing in a smother of spume right at you, and, before delight could arise, you had felt a pleasurable shock of surprise that was almost alarm. Such is the effect produced by Cooper's bull as, with bowed head and eyes of fire, and horns of death, it looks to be bounding with the velocity of a locomotive out of the frame.

Mr. Vanderholt and his daughter conversed for some time on matters of no concern to us who are to follow their fortunes. Presently, after helping himself to his second bloater—for his wealth had neither lessened his appetite nor influenced his choice of dishes: he clung, with true Dutch courage, to solid sausage; he loved new bread, smoking hot; he was wedded to all the several kinds of cured fish, and often drank a pint of beer, instead of coffee or tea, at his morning meal—he took his second herring, and, whilst his gray beard wagged to the movement of his jaws, an expression of pensiveness entered his face as he fastened his gaze upon the picture of the rushing schooner.

'How beautifully she is painted!' said he. 'It is the greatest of the arts. How with the pen could you make that vessel show as the brush has?'

'It could only be done by suggestion,' said Miss Vanderholt, looking up sideways at the picture. 'It is the hint that submits the pen-and-ink sketch.'

'So that, if a man has never seen a schooner, you might hint and suggest all your life, and the death-bed of that man would still find his mind a blank as to a schooner?'

'True,' said his daughter.

'I am going to tell you what I have made up my mind to do.'

'Yes, and there she is,' interrupted the girl, with a sweep of her hand at the picture. 'And pretty wet they are; and a fine handsome sea is going to run presently, till the yacht shall swoop into the cataracts like a wreck—veiled—strained! She is too small.'

'You consider one hundred and eighty tons too small? What would Columbus have thought of you? Do you know that Mynheer Vanderdecken is battling with the storms of the

Cape of Good Hope at this very hour in something under one hundred and eighty tons?'

'But I really don't think, father, that you need such an extensive change.'

'My doctors are of my opinion. I require nothing less than three months of the sea-breeze, and all the climates that I can pack into that time.'

'And George?' said Miss Vanderholt, her voice a little coloured by vexation. 'He may arrive home and find us absent, and there will be nobody in the world to tell him where we are—whether we are alive or dead, and when we may be expected back.'

'George won't be home till June next.' said Mr. Vanderholt. 'There is no chance of it. Meanwhile, I mean to escape the winter by heading direct for the Equator and back.'

'I'm afraid it is likely that George will not be able to arrive in England before the end of June,' exclaimed Miss Vanderholt. 'But if he should return sooner, it would drive me mad to hear that he had come and found me absent.'

'We shall be back by February,' said Mr. Vanderholt, in that sort of voice which makes you feel that the man who speaks is used to having his way.

'Shall you take any friends with you?'

'Not even a dog,' answered Mr. Vanderholt.

'Then it will be dull!' exclaimed his daughter. 'Nothing but sea and sky and novels. Why not ask Mr. Allan Kinnaird? He is a very amusing man.'

'I do not agree with you. Kinnaird is amusing for about half an hour. Kinnaird and I never could get on at sea, locked up

together as we should be. He is always objecting to what I say, and he listens to my jokes merely with the intention of enlarging upon their points so as to defraud me of the laugh.'

'Will you carry a doctor?'

'I have thought over that. No; we will ship a medicine chest instead, and a book treating of every disease under the sun. We do not go to sea to be ill. A doctor will be in the way. He will be neither with us nor of us. He might begin to bore you with his attentions, and you would only think of him as a man who believes that he is under an obligation to be agreeable.'

'But the *Mowbray* has not been afloat for two or three years,' said Miss Vanderholt.

'She has been well looked after. I have always liked the boat, and would not sell her, though I have not used her of late,' said Mr. Vanderholt, leaning back in his chair to contemplate to advantage the beautiful picture over the sideboard. 'She is French built, and about twenty years old. The French are better ship-builders than the English—infinitely more choice in their lines and curves, and so scientific that you seldom hear of a disaster in their experiments. Look at that vessel as she rushes at you. How perfect is her entry! How insinuating the swell of her bow, running into a beautiful roundness and plumpness of sides instead of the up-and-down walls which the British yachtsman, who loves to admire his yacht from the shore, conceives to be the one element which gives a vessel stability! The more they narrow, the more they blunder. You must have stability if you want seaworthiness. And in all the years that I was at sea I never knew a crank ship a fast ship.'

It was easily seen by the expression of Miss Vanderholt's face that she was thinking of George. Finding her father had ceased to speak, she exclaimed:

'Who will be the captain?'

'I shall ask my friend Fairbanks to recommend a man to me. He, of all the shipowners that I am acquainted with, is certain to know of a good man.'

'Will he belong to the Royal Navy?'

'No.'

'Then, he will not be a gentleman?'

Vanderholt looked at her intently. His face relaxed. He combed down his beard, and said:

'He will be a sailor; and if he is a sailor, he will be a man. Combine these two things, and you produce an illustration of human existence beyond the achievement of the most illustrious lineage and the most ancient college.'

Miss Vanderholt was used to her father's views, and continued her breakfast with a distant, listening air, which promised no further expression of opinion upon this proposed voyage to the Equator. A stranger listening at that table to Vanderholt would have guessed that he was a man of hot temper, a Dutchman at root in his views and prejudices, not a man, perhaps, of many friends, spite of his wealth. He fixed his little eyes upon his daughter, and, after gazing at her for some time, with a look of anxiety, he said:

'You know, Vi, I should not care to go without you.'

'No, father; nor should I wish to be left alone at home.'

'You will be happy in the old *Mowbray*. We will lay in a stock of good things. We will make a fine holiday jaunt of it.

Perhaps I shall be able to show you some of the wonders of the deep. We will teach our crew to sing litanies to break the spell of that demon the waterspout. We will hook on to a whale, and thunder through it with foam to the figure-head, with the velocity of the meteoric storm. We shall be at liberty to shift our course as often as we please, and settle some marine problem for good and all; not the sea-serpent—no. Who would defraud the newspapers of that joke? But I am strongly of opinion that there is a distinct difference between the dugong and the mermaid. The old idiots of the fifteenth century no doubt confounded them; and the mermaid, shocked by the hideous misrepresentation—for think of comparing some golden-haired angel of an English girl with a New Zealand native woman, frightful with the hues of her sky, and horrible with devices of the needle!—I say the disgusted mermaid may have sunk into the ooze, resolved never again to give man a sight of her face. Best of all, Vi, the voyage will do me good, will do you good, and delightfully shorten the time of your waiting for George.'

'It is the only feeling I have in the matter,' answered the young lady.

And now, having breakfasted, they arose and quitted the table.

Miss Violet Vanderholt, being acquainted with her father's character, and knowing that he rarely changed his mind, went to her room, where in peace she occupied a full hour in writing a long letter to George.

And who was George? One had but to peep over the girl's shoulder to discover. 'My own darling George,' she began; and this sort of thing is commonly accepted as the language of love. Captain George Parry was an officer in the Honourable East India Company's service. When he was last at home he had met Miss Violet, haunted her closely, and

exhibited himself in a variety of ways as deeply in love with her. Wonderful to relate, Mr. Montagu Vanderholt took a fancy to the young man, and when Ensign Parry called to ask his leave to consider himself engaged, he was astounded by the cheerful 'Certainly, with pleasure, if you are both satisfied,' which greeted him. A few questions and answers followed. Mr. Vanderholt knew very little about the army, though he had two sons in it. How long would Ensign Parry have to wait for his promotion? How long was the engagement going to last? For his part, he did not like long engagements: they made people ill. Many girls were hurried to their graves by procrastination—that thief of sleep, the ice-cold 'lubbar fiend' that bestrides women's hearts and keeps them shivering.

The interview terminated to the satisfaction of both gentlemen. In due time, Ensign Parry returned to India, and now, as Captain Parry, he was expected home in June; but in one or two of his letters to Violet he had expressed a hope that he would be able to get home by an earlier date. It had been settled that they should be married soon after his arrival in England. And this was the posture of affairs as regarded Captain Parry and Miss Vanderholt. The young lady, seating herself, dipped her pen and wrote.

She wrote fast, and often with a flushed cheek when she underlined, or doubly underlined, a word or a sentence. Her letter consisted mainly of endearing expressions, such as, when read aloud in court after a couple have quarrelled, excite merriment. She informed her sweetheart in this letter that her father had made up his mind to go on a cruise for his health as far as the Equator, in the old *Mowbray*. She was going with him alone. George would know where she was, therefore, until her return to England, which could not be delayed beyond February. She dared not hope that George would arrive before the *Mowbray* reached England.

If this should happen, then he might, perhaps, never receive this very letter which she was writing. To provide against this, she said that before she sailed she would write a second letter, and leave it with the housekeeper.

On the afternoon of this same day Mr. Vanderholt entered his carriage and drove into the City. He alighted at the offices of a firm of shipowners in Fenchurch Street, and was immediately confronted by the very person he had called to see. They shook hands.

'I want ten minutes with you, Fairbanks.'

'As long as you please, Mr. Vanderholt. Always happy to be of service to you.'

It was plain that Mr. Vanderholt was not a skipper or a mate in search of a situation on board one of the ships owned by this firm. They walked through an office full of scribbling clerks; the walls were decorated with pictures of ships in full sail, and odd configurations on glazed yellow cloth, signifying cabin accommodation—first, second, and 'tween decks. They reached a small back-room, and when Mr. Fairbanks closed the door they were private.

Mr. Vanderholt was rendered a little uneasy by Mr. Fairbanks' look of expectation, and began somewhat in a hurry, lest his friend's anticipation should grow.

'It is a very trifling matter I have called to see you about, Fairbanks. It concerns a skipper for my boat, the *Mowbray*. For some time past I have been out of sorts, and have resolved to get clear of England during the winter. I have a fine boat laid up in the Thames. She is 180 tons, and I calculate, counting the cook and the fellow for the cabin, that a skipper, a mate, and eight hands will suffice me. Do you know of a good skipper?'

Mr. Fairbanks brought his fingers together in an attitude of prayer, and said he thought that by dint of inquiry he might be able to find one.

'What pay?' said he.

'Ten pounds a month,' answered Mr. Vanderholt. 'I want a good man.'

'Do you take any company with you?'

'Only my daughter.'

'Then,' said Mr. Fairbanks, 'the skipper must not drink, and must not swear. He must be a man of cleanly appearance, of considerable experience, and able to hold his own in conversation.'

'So,' said Mr. Vanderholt.

'I believe,' said Mr. Fairbanks, 'that I know the man for you. He had charge of a ship of ours, the *Sandyfoot*. It was but yesterday I nodded to him outside these offices. If you take him you will carry a romance in pilot-cloth to sea with you. This fellow—you will not believe what I am going to tell you after you see him—was in love with a girl. He broke with her in a quarrel, and went to sea, and by a homeward ship wrote to ask her forgiveness and keep her heart whole for him, as he would shortly return. He was swept overboard in a storm, picked up floating on a buoy by a three-masted schooner, and carried to China. On his arrival home, he found his sweetheart had gone out of her mind. She recovered by degrees, under his influence, and they were to be married. They proceeded together to church, and at the altar she went mad again. Of course, the parson refused to officiate, and a few weeks later the poor thing died.'

'What is the name of our friend?' inquired Mr. Vanderholt, who had listened without much interest to this romantic

story.

'Thomas Glew.'

'Originally a nickname, meant to stick,' said Mr. Vanderholt dryly. 'Send him to me. You will oblige me by doing so.'

'I'll endeavour to find him this afternoon, and you shall see him to-morrow,' answered the other. 'And you really enjoy the prospect of a cruise to the Equator and home?'

'Would I go if I did not?'

'But is not such sailing like running to and fro between wickets when there's nobody bowling?' said Mr. Fairbanks, placing a decanter of old Madeira and a box of cigars on the table.

Mr. Vanderholt brimmed a deep-hearted wineglass, and lighted a cigar, saying betwixt the puffs:

'If there is no good in the pursuit of health, you are right.'

'Well,' said Mr. Fairbanks, 'for my part I never could contemplate a voyage of any sort without associating it with a port and business.'

'Thank the North Star,' said the gentleman of Dutch extraction, 'with me that time has passed!'

'But to think of the Equator as a port of call!' exclaimed Mr. Fairbanks; and they both began to laugh.

The term 'port of call' set them conversing about trade, how matters went in the City. Mr. Vanderholt talked fluently on all affairs connected with shipping. After enjoying his cigar and his chat, he re-entered his carriage, and was driven away.

Next morning, at about eleven o'clock, he was in his study, writing some letters. His daughter sat with him, reading a

newspaper. A man-servant opened the door, and said that a seafaring gentleman was in the 'all, and had called by request. On a silver salver lay Mr. Fairbanks' card, and Mr. Vanderholt, after glancing at the card, told the footman to show Captain Glew in.

There entered soon, with a quick, resolved, quarter-deck stride, a short but powerfully-built man, shell-backed by ocean duties, with a face that might have been cast in light bronze, that might have served as a ship's figure-head in that metal, so roasted had it been in its day, so hard set was it, as though fresh from the pickle of the harness-cask. The flesh of the countenance had that sort of tension which does not admit of much, or perhaps any, play of emotion. The man might expel a laugh from his throat, but was he physically equal to a smile? He held a round hat, and was soberly attired in blue cloth. He looked swiftly and lightly around him, but seemed unmoved by the splendour of the apartment. He sent a keen, gray, seawardly glance at Miss Vanderholt, and fastened his gaze with an expression of attention upon her father.

Miss Vanderholt viewed him with curiosity and disappointment.

'Captain Glew?' said Mr. Vanderholt.

'That's my name, sir,' answered the captain, in a voice as decisive as his walk and air. 'I was asked to call upon you by Mr. Fairbanks.'

'Right. Sit down. I had a good many years of it myself, but did not reach the quarter-deck,' said Mr. Vanderholt. 'My end was plumb with the fore-top.'

The captain seated himself, but did not smile, nor did he look as if he wanted to.

'Many years at sea, Captain Glew?'

'Thirty, sir.'

'Did you run away, as I did, from home?'

'No. I was put apprentice by my father, who had charge of a Bethel, and was a man of education.'

'Did Mr. Fairbanks explain what I wanted to see you about?'

'Yes, sir. I believe you'll find me a suitable man. I confess I'd like the job. I know the *Mowbray*.'

Mr. Vanderholt's face lighted up.

'I was off her in a wherry not above a fortnight ago, and we stopped to admire her. I never saw prettier lines.' Here he raised his eyes to the picture over the sideboard, as though observing it for the first time, but his face discovered no marks of enthusiasm or admiration whilst he let his sight rest for a moment on that square of splendid, spirit-moving canvas. 'My uncle was a shipbuilder,' he continued, 'and I have some knowledge of that trade. The finest examples of seaworthy craft are, in my opinion, the Baltimore clippers—some of them, at all events. The *Mowbray* might be the queen of that fleet, sir.'

Mr. Vanderholt glanced at his daughter, as if he should say, 'This is our man.' He then rang the bell. A footman quickly appeared.

'Wine,' said Mr. Vanderholt.

'Not for me, if you please,' said Captain Glew, lifting his hand, and bowing with a motion that made his refusal emphatic.

'What will you take?' said Mr. Vanderholt.