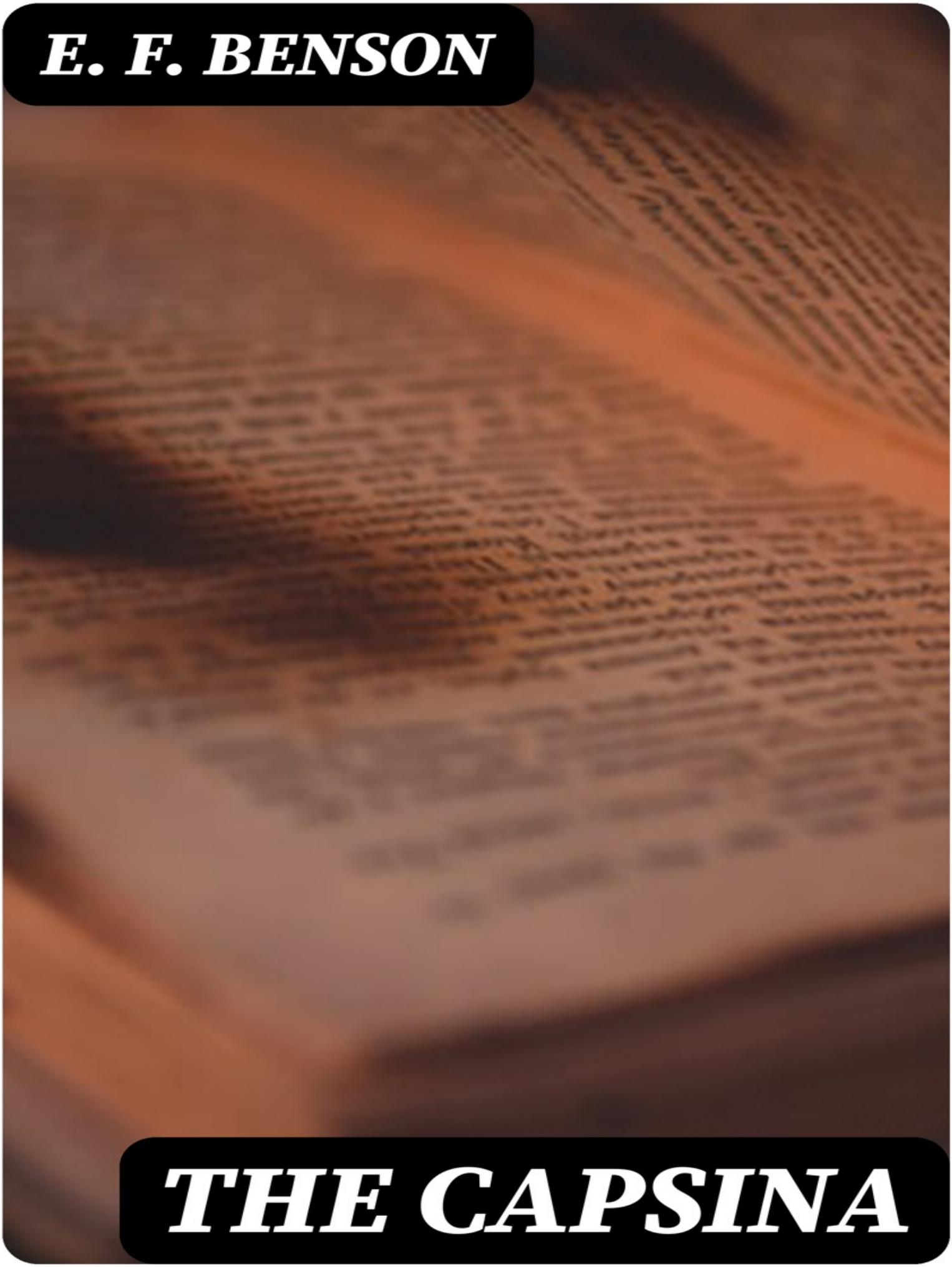
E. F. BENSON
THE CAPSINA

E. F. Benson

The Capsina

An Historical Novel

EAN 8596547331537

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

Cover
Titlepage
Text

"HE RAISED THE MUSKET TO HIS SHOULDER"

CHAPTER I

The little town of Hydra, white-walled and trailing its skirts in the Ægean, climbs steeply up the northeastern side of the island from which it is named, and looks towards the hills of Argolis on the mainland and the setting of the sun. Its harbor sheltered from the northern and southern winds, and only open towards the west, where the sea is too narrow ever to be lashed into fury by gales of that quarter, was defended in the year 1819 by a very creditable pier and a good deal of swift and rakish shipping. The inhabitants lived a life somewhat sequestered from their oppressed and down-trodden countrymen, supporting themselves by enterprises of fishing and the humble sort of commerce, and the hand of the Turk, then as now lustful, cruel, and intolerable, lay but lightly on them, for the chief products of the island itself were only stones and cold water, untaxable goods. But something of the spirit of stones and cold water, something of the spirit, too, of that quickly roused sea, soon made furious, soon appeased, but always alive, had gone to the making of the men of Hydra; and they were people frugal and hardy, resourceful and industrious, men of the wave and the mountain. Of its various clans—and its regime was highly feudal—that of Capsas was the wealthiest and most influential; but just now, a tragic prologue to this tale, a blow so direful had fallen on those much-esteemed men, and in particular on Christos Capsas, a youth of about two and twenty, that the clan generally, and Christos in particular, were in a state of paralyzed inaction strange to such busy folk. It had happened thus:

The head of the clan, Nicholas Capsas, had died some nine months before, leaving an only daughter, Sophia, henceforth officially called the Capsina, just nineteen years of age. The clan all remembered that they had warned each other that trouble would come on account of the Capsina, and they found to their unspeakable dismay, and without a grain of pleasure in the fulfilment of their prophecy, that their gloomy forebodings were completely accomplished. Sophia was a girl of much greater force of will than it was at all usual to look for in a woman, for the most refractory women, so the clan believed, chattered and scolded, but obeyed. The Capsina had struck out a new and eminently disconcerting line in following her own desires in silence, deaf to remonstrance. The beginning of trouble had been a very stormy scene between her and her father when, following the invariable law of clan etiquette, she had been betrothed on her eighteenth birthday to her cousin Christos, on whom now so paralyzing a consternation had fallen. She had submitted to the ordeal of formal betrothal only on condition that she should marry Christos when she thought fit, and at no other time. Such an irregularity was wholly unprecedented, but Sophia declared herself not only ready, but even wishful to throw the betrothal wreaths into the fire sooner than marry Christos at any time not fixed by herself, and the ceremony took place only on this understanding. Three months later her father had died suddenly, and when Christos on this morning, one tremble of timorousness, but conscious of the support of the entire clan, went to the Capsina, offering his hand and heart, to be taken by her with the greatest expedition that mourning allowed, she

looked him over slowly from head to heel and back again, and said, very distinctly, "Look in the glass." This her betrothed had rightly interpreted as a sign of dismissal.

Sophia, after hurling this defiance at her family, gave Christos time to retreat, and then went about her daily business. Her mother had died some years before, and since her father's death she had had sole management of the house and of all his business, which was ship-building. But she had been accustomed from the time she could walk to be in and out of the building-yards with him, and the outraged clan, even in the unequalled bitterness of this moment, would have confessed that she was quite capable of managing anything. She was tall and finely made, and the sun had joined hands with the winds of the sea to mould her face with the lines of beauty and serene health. Her eyes and hair were of the South, her brow and nose of her untainted race, her mouth firm and fine. She watched Christos out of the gate with all the complete indifference her great black eyes could hold, and then set off down to the ship-yard where a new brig was to be launched that day.

There she stood all morning among the workmen, bareheaded to the sun and wind, directing, and often helping with her own strong hands, and though it would have seemed that she had her eyes and all her mind at the work, she yet found time to glance through the open gate on to the pier, where she could see a talking knot of her clan gathered round the rejected Christos; and, in fact, her mind was more given over to the difficult question of what step she should next take with regard to the question of marriage than to the work on hand. For, indeed, she had no intention

of marrying Christos at all. Since her father's death her work and position had become more and more absorbingly dear, and she did not propose to resign her place to a somewhat slow-minded cousin, whom, as she had candidly declared on her betrothal, she loved only as much as is usual among cousins. The question was how to make this indubitably evident.

The ship was to be launched about mid-day, and, as the time drew near, Sophia began to wonder to herself, not without a spice of amusement, whether the clan would think it consistent with the correct attitude of disapproval to attend the launching to which they were as a matter of course invited. After the barrel of wine, in which the success of the new ship would be drunk, had been hoisted on deck, she even delayed the event a few minutes to give them time if they wished still to come. But it was evident that she had offended beyond forgiveness, and she stood alone on the ship when she hissed stern foremost, true to an inch, into the frothed water. Sophia, ever candid, was not at heart ill-pleased at the absence of the clan, for as she was godmother so also she was peculiarly mother to the new ship, departing therein from certain formulated rules as to the line of the bows and the depth of the keel, which, so she thought, if made deeper would enable her to sail closer to the wind, and she loved her great child more than she loved her betrothed. She had even, which was unusual with her, spent several intent and sleepless hours in bed at night when the ship was yet on the stocks, her mind busy at the innovations. Surely the ships that others built were too high in the water, especially forward; a sudden squall always

made them sheer off into the wind, losing way without need. A less surface in the bows was possible. Again, a longer depth of keel would give more grip on the water and greater stability, and it was with much tremulous hope and frequent misgivings lest this new departure should involve some vital and unforeseen error that she had laid down the lines of the ship in a manner perfectly new to the shipwrights of the island.

And as the building progressed and the timbers of the hull rose to their swifter shape, her hopes triumphed over misgiving, and she felt that this new ship was peculiarly hers—hers by the irresistible right of creation, not shared with any.

She stayed on board till a late hour that evening, seeing to the hoisting of the tackle by which the masts should be raised the next day, absorbed in the work, and dwelling with a loving care on the further details, and it was nearly dark, and the workmen had gone ashore an hour already when she rowed herself back to the yard. Not till then did her mind return to the less enticing topic of Christos, which she had left undetermined, and she walked home slowly, revolving the possibilities. Her great, stately watch-dog, a terror to strangers, and not more than doubtfully neutral to friends, received her with the silent greeting of a wet nose pushed into her hand, and when she had eaten her supper, the two went out on to the veranda. That was the companionship she liked best, silent, unobtrusive, but sensitive, and she took the great brute's fore-paws and laid them on her lap, and talked to him as a child talks to its doll.

"Oh, Michael," she said—the adoption of a saint's name to an animal so profane had greatly shocked the clan, but the Capsina remarked that he was a better Christian than some she knew—"oh, Michael, it is an impossible thing they would have me do. Am I to cook the dinner for Christos, and every evening see his face grow all red and shiny with wine, while he bids me fetch more? Am I to talk with the other women as sparrows twitter together in a bush? Am I to say I love him? Oh, Michael, I would sooner stroke your hair than his. Then what of the cousins? They will call me an old maid, for many cousins younger than I are married. But this I promise you, great dog, that unless I love I will not marry, and what love is, God knows, for I do not. And if ever I love, Michael—yes, they say I am fierce, and of no maiden mind. So be it; we will sail together in the brig *Sophia*, for so will I name her—you and I and she. And if some one, I know not who, comes from the sea, all sea and sun, some one not familiar, but strange to me and stronger than I, you shall be his, and the ship shall be his, and I shall be his, all of us, all of us; and we all, he and I and you and the ship, will go straight up to heaven."

She laughed softly at herself, and buried her face in the dog's shaggy ruff. "Oh, Michael," she whispered, "the cousins are all saying how queer a girl I am. So perhaps am I, but not as they think. I should be the queerer if I married Christos, and yet to their minds my queerness is that I do not. Why did you not bite him when he came here this morning? for so he would have run away, and this thinking would have been saved. Yet you were right, he is a familiar thing, and we do not bite what is familiar. Perhaps, when the

strange man comes, I shall hate him, although I do nothing else but love him. Yet, oh, I am proud, for we are prouder, as the proverb says, than the Mavromichales of Maina. But, Christos, he is slower than a tortoise, and less amusing than a mule; oh, well enough no doubt for some, but not for me. Perhaps I shall marry none; that is very likely, for the men I see here, for instance, are not fit things to marry, and so, I make no doubt, they think me. And there is always the ship-building. Oh, we will get very wise, Michael, and sail our ship ourselves, and see strange countries and over-sea people. There must be some one in this big world as well as I, and yet I have not seen him, but we will do nothing without thinking, Michael, unless it so happens that some day we no longer want or are able to think. Perhaps that—there, get down, you are heavy."

She pushed the dog's paws off her lap, and, rising from her chair, went to the end of the veranda to look out upon the night. The full moon swung high and white among the company of stars, and the sea was all a shimmer of pearly light. A swell was rolling in soft and huge from the south, and the end of the pier was now and again outlined with broken foam. Beneath the moonlight the massive seas looked only a succession of waving light and shadow, and the rattle of the pebbles on the shingly beach outside the pier in the drag of the swell came rhythmical and muffled. The Capsina, in the unrest and ferment of her thoughts, was unwittingly drawn towards that vastness of eternal and majestic movement, and slipping her embroidered Rhodian hood over her head, she whistled softly to Michael, and went down through the strip of garden towards the shore.

She passed along the quay and out beyond the harbor; all the wandering scents of a night in early summer were in the air, and the rough strip of untrained moorland which lay beyond the town was covered with flowering thyme and aromatic herbs, rooty and fragrant to the nostrils. She walked quickly across this and came down to the shingly beach which fringed the promontory. All along its edge the swell was breaking in crash and flying foam, for the south wind of the day before had raised a storm out to sea, and several ships had that day put in for shelter. Far out she could see a pillar of spray rise high and disappear again over a reef of rock, gleaming for a moment with incredible whiteness in the moonlight. Michael snuffed about in rapturous pursuit of interesting smells among the edge of rough herbs that fringed the beach, making sudden excursions and flank movements inland, and grubbing ecstatically among the tussocks of cistus and white heath after wholly imaginary hares. By degrees Sophia walked more slowly, and, coming to the end of the promontory, stopped for a moment before she began to retrace her steps. No, she could not marry Christos; she could not cut herself off from the thrill that her large independence gave her, from working for herself, from the headship of the clan. For her she thought was a wider life than that of the women of her race. How could she limit herself, with her young, strong body, and the will which moved it, to the distaff and the spinning-wheel? Christos! He was afraid of Michael, he was afraid of the sea, he was afraid of her. But how to make this clear to demonstration to the clan was beyond her.

Moreover—and the thought was like a stinging insect—there lay at home the deed of her betrothal to her cousin.

She whistled to Michael and turned back into the town. Several groups of men were scattered along the length of the quay, and the Capsina, walking swiftly by, saw that Christos was among them. She hung on her step a moment, and then, with a sudden idea, turned round and called to him.

"Christos Capsas," she said, "I would speak to you a moment. Yes, it is I, Sophia."

Christos disengaged himself from the group a little reluctantly and followed her. He was a somewhat handsome-looking fellow, but rather heavily made, and slow and slouching in his movements. The Capsina, seeming by his side doubly alert, walked on with him in silence for a space, and then stopped again.

"See, Christos," she said, "I have no wish to offend you or any. If what I said this morning was an offence to you, please know that to me now my words were an offence. Yet I will not marry you," and on the word she suddenly flared out—"oh! be very sure of that! And I have something to say to the clan. Be good enough to tell them that I expect all the men to dinner with me to-morrow, when I will speak to them. You will come yourself. Yes? Let me know how many will be there to-morrow early. Good-night, my cousin. Michael, be quiet, and come with me."

The clan signified their intention of accepting the Capsina's invitation in large numbers, for they too felt that their family affairs must come to a crisis, and that something explicit was needed. The Capsina, they were

sure, would supply this need. As the day was warm, she gave orders that the dinner should be served in the veranda, and that the barrel of wine which had been put on board the brig should be brought back, for it was her best. All morning she attended to the things for their entertainment, first going to the market to buy the best of the freshly caught mullet and a lump of caviare, wrapped up in vine leaves, and choosing with care a lamb to be roasted whole over the great open fireplace; then, returning to see that the *pilaff* of chicken was properly seasoned, that the olives were dried and put in fresh oil, and herself mixing the salad, flavoring it with mint and a sprinkling of cheese and garlic. After that the rose-leaf jam had to be whipped up with cream and raw eggs for the sweets, and another pot to be opened to be offered to the guests, with glasses of cognac as an appetizer; cheese had to be fetched from the cellar, and dried figs and oranges from the store cupboard. Then Michael, to whom the hot smells were a tremulous joy, must be chained up, and in the midst of these things there arrived a notary from the town, who, at Sophia's dictation, for she had but little skill at writing herself, drew up a deed and explained to her where the witnesses should sign or make their mark. By this time it was within an hour of dinner, and she went to her room to dress, and think over what she was going to say.

Sophia had an inbred instinct for completeness, and she determined on this occasion to make herself magnificent. She took from their paper-wrappings her three *fête* dresses, one of which had never been worn, and looked them over carefully before deciding between them. Eventually she

fixed on the new one. This consisted of three garments, a body, a skirt, and a long sleeveless jacket reaching to the knees. The body was made of fine home-spun wool buttoning down the side, but the whole of the front was a piece of silk Rhodian embroidery in red, green, and gold, and a narrow strip of the same went round the wrists. The skirt was of the same material, but there was stitched over it a covering of thin Greek silk, creamy-white in color, and round the bottom of the skirt ran a trimming of the same Rhodian stuff. Before putting the jacket on she opened a box that stood by her bed, and took from it four necklaces of Venetian gold sequins, one short and coming round the neck like a collar, and the other three of increasing size, the largest hanging down almost as far as her waist. Then she put on the jacket, which, like the other garments, was bordered with embroidery, and draping her hair in an orange-colored scarf of Greek silk, she fastened it with another band of Venetian gold coins, which passed twice round her head. Then, hesitating a moment, she went back to the box where her gold ornaments were kept, and drew out the great heirloom of her clan, and held it in her hand a moment. It was a belt of antique gold chain, more than an inch in width, each link being set with two pearls. The clasp was of two gold circles, with a hook behind, and on each of them was chased the lion of Venice. Scroll-work of leaves and branches, on which sat curious archaic eagles, ran round it, and eight large emeralds were set in each rim. Sophia looked at it doubtfully for a moment or two, and then fastened it round her waist, inside her jacket, so as to hide the joining of the body and skirt.

Her guests soon began to arrive, the first of them being Christos, the father of her betrothed, with his son. The old man had determined to be exceedingly dignified and cold to Sophia, and as a mark of his disapproval had not put on his *festa* clothes. But the sight of that glorious figure, all color, walking out from the shade of the veranda into the brilliant sunlight to meet them, took, as he said afterwards, "all the pith" out of him.

Sophia received him with a sort of regal dignity as befitted the head of the clan: "You are most welcome, Uncle Christos," she said, "and you also, cousin. I was sorry that your business prevented your being able to come to the launching of the new boat, but perhaps you will like to see her after dinner."

Uncle Christos shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"I had no idea you would be so grand, Sophia," he said, "and I have come in my old clothes. Christos, too, you slovenly fellow, your shirt is no fresh thing."

The younger Christos's *fustanella* was as a matter of fact quite clean, but he smoothed it down as if ashamed of it.

"But, Sophia," went on the old man, "they will not be all here yet. I will run to my house and be back in a moment," and he fairly bolted out of the garden.

Christos and Sophia were thus left alone, but Sophia was quite equal to the occasion, and spoke resolutely of indifferent things until the others arrived. By degrees they all came, the elder Christos the last, but in the magnificence of all his best clothes, and they sat down to dinner. And when they had finished eating and the pipes were produced,

Sophia rose from her place at the head of the table and spoke to them that which she had in her mind.

"It is not my wish," she said, "to hurt the feelings of any one, but I will not violate my own. As you perhaps have heard"—and the slightest shadow of a smile passed over her face, for she knew that nothing else had been spoken of for the last four-and-twenty hours—"my cousin Christos has asked me to fulfil my betrothal to him, and I wish to make my answer known to you all. You understand me, then: I will not marry my cousin, either now or at any other time. I have here"—and she took up from the table the deed of the betrothal—"I have here that which is witness of my betrothal to Christos Capsas. With the approval of my family and clan I will tear it up and burn it. If there is any one here who objects to this, let him say so, and I will tell you what I shall then do. Without his approval, and without the approval of any one else, I shall send to the town for the notary, procure witnesses, and sign my name to this other deed. I am no hand with the pen, but so much I can write. In it I bequeath all my property, to which I am sole heiress—for my father, as you know, died without a will, suddenly—not to my clan, nor to any one of my clan, but to the priests."

A subdued murmur of consternation ran round the table, and the elder Christos called gently on the names of five or six saints, for the clan were not on good terms with the church, and the Capsina herself had threatened to loose Michael on the first priest who set foot uninvited in her house. A paralyzed silence succeeded, and Sophia continued her speech.

"See," she said, "I am perfectly in earnest. We are prouder, as our proverb says, than they of Maina, and, being proud, I for one do not threaten things which I am unable or unwilling to perform. Perhaps marriage seems to me a different thing from what it seems to you. But that is no reason that I am wrong or that you are right. My betrothed I believe to be an admirable man, but I am so made that I do not choose to marry him, nor, at present, any other man. And now the choice is with you. I destroy in your presence and with your consent both these papers, or I will sign in your presence and without your consent that which only needs my signature. I will leave you here for half an hour, and when I return, Christos Capsas, the father of Christos, my betrothed, will tell me what you have decided. Uncle Christos, you will please take my place here and tell the servants to bring you more wine when you want it. You will find the white wine also very good, I think."

And with these paralyzing words the Capsina dropped her eyes, bowed with a wonderful dignity and grace to the clan, who rose to their feet despite themselves at the beauty of the girl, and marched into the house.

At the end of half an hour she returned, and standing a moment in her place turned to the elder Christos.

"You have decided," she said, and taking up the two deeds in answer to a nod from her uncle, she tore them across and across. Then she gave the pieces to a servant.

"Burn them," she said, "there, out in the garden, where we can all see."

Certainly the Capsina had a sense for the dramatic moment, for she stood quite still where she was in dead

silence until a puff of wind dispersed the feathers of the ash. Then she turned briskly and filled her glass.

"I drink prosperity to him who was betrothed to me," she said, "and wish him with all my heart a better wife than I should ever have made him. And here," she cried, unbuckling the great gold belt, "take your wife to-morrow, if you will, or when you will, and here is my gift to the bride."

And she handed the gorgeous thing across to her cousin, clinked glasses with him, and, draining her own, flung it to the ground, so that none other should drink from it.

Then sitting down again:

"This is a fortunate day for you, Christos, if only you knew it, and for you all. For here am I, a free woman, who knows her trade, and will give all her time and energy to it, and indeed I am not lazy, and so double the riches of the house, instead of sitting at the distaff and picking up the olives. For, in truth, I do not think that I am of the stuff that wives are made of. You have often told me, uncle, that I should have been a man, and, before God, I think you were right. And you, dear Christos, some day I should have tried your patience beyond all bearing, and you would have raised your hand to strike me, and then, perhaps, you would have felt my fists rattling about your face, or maybe, if I really was angry, for I do not think I could take a blow from any man, I should have set Michael at you. And then, if you were wise, you would have run away, for I think Michael would kill whomever I told him to kill, for he is greatly obedient, and a fine thing it would have been for the folk to see the head of the clan running from a four-legged dog, while his wife hished the beast on from the threshold."

A roar of laughter greeted this, and Sophia looked up, smiling herself. "So we are friends again, are we not?" she said; "and we will never again give others cause to say that they of the clan are of two minds among themselves. And now, cousins, if you have smoked and drunk what you will, let us go down and see the new brig, for indeed I think she will have no luck unless you all come. To-morrow the masts are hoisted; this morning I have had no time to attend to my business."

The brig was duly inspected, and though some of the elder men shook their heads over this new-fangled keel, and the somewhat egoish name of *Sophia* for the Capsina's ship, the general verdict was satisfactory. To celebrate this day of her emancipation she let all the workmen go home, giving them half a day off work, and returned alone to her house towards evening. She went at once to loose Michael from his unaccustomed confinement, and stood for a moment with her hand on the dog's neck.

"Michael," she whispered, "does it not seem to you that Christos desired the money more than he desired me? Yet, perhaps, it was the others who urged him, for, in truth, he looked a little downcast. But that a man should consent to that! Well, I am too happy to-day to find fault with any one."

For that year and the next Sophia worked with unintermittent energy in her ship-yard. Sometimes it seemed to herself that a kind of frenzy for ships and the sea had possession of her, and, busy with open-air thought, she never even noticed the glances which men cast on her. Her fame, the stories of her wonderful knowledge of ships, her fiery beauty, her utter unconsciousness of men, had passed

beyond the island, and sailors who had put in at Hydra would wait about on the quay to catch a glimpse of her, or speak to her, for she would always have a word for sailors. She was not content to know that her ships were truly built and seaworthy, but she cruised about, mastering the individuality of each; for, as she said, a ship, like a horse, would obey one master when it would not obey another, and her own brig, the *Sophia*, turned out a miracle of speed, and could sail, it seemed as by magic, into the teeth of a gale. She commanded it herself, directing its course with an apparent recklessness, really the result of knowledge, through the narrow channels and swirling currents of the close-sown islands, through passages where rocks were ranged like a shark's teeth, row on hungry row, and the green water poured over them with the speed of an autumn gale, or beating about, close-hauled, past the reef of wolves which lie waiting off Methana. Sometimes she would charter herself to a merchant, and carry trading produce as far as the Asiatic coast, or to Alexandria; but for the most part she seemed possessed merely by the desire for the sea, an instinct of her race, but coming to flavor in her, for the fierce battling of skill calculated against the brute force of the incalculable elements, for the hundred tactics which nothing but practical intimacy can teach. To her clan she became a sort of cult, the more so as she had left all her property, if she died unmarried, to Christos, who, in point of fact, took to himself a wife within six months of the final rejection.

In 1821, when she was now near the end of her twenty-first year—alert for adventure—came the stinging news of the outbreak of the revolution.

To Hydra, that small and frugal island, tales of Turkish cruelty, greed, and lust, and the inchoate schemes of vengeance, had come only as echoes vague and remote, and the news of the outbreak was like the bolt out of the clear sky. For the Turks had formed a sufficiently accurate conception of the character of those dour islanders, and while there were women, and to spare, in the other places, and it seemed that on the mainland, peopled, so they considered, with richer and softer folk, taxation might be indefinitely increased, it was not for a fattened pasha to procure with trouble and fighting what an indolent order given over his pipe could bring him. Sophia, on the eve of her return from a prolonged and prosperous cruise, interviewed the captain of a caique who had put in with the news of the taking of Kalamata, and heard a tale to make the blood bubble and boil—how the rising had run like fire through summer-dry stubble from north to south and east to west, how that Greece was to be free, and pull no longer under an infidel yoke. Tale followed tale; the man had seen with his own eyes free-born Greeks, man, woman, and child, treated as an unmerciful master will not treat his beast; he had tales of torture, followed at the last by death, lingering and painful, but welcome as the end of pain—of things unnatural and bestial beyond word or belief. There had been a cousin of his living near Nauplia. He had come back from the fields one day to find his wife dead and abominably mutilated on the threshold; his two daughters had been carried off—with them his two younger sons; the elder lay stifled by his mother. They had—And Kanaris stopped, for the thing could not be told. It was on the quay, within half

an hour of her landing, that the Capsina heard the first news, and in her brusque way she whisked the man up to her house and gave him wine and tobacco, and listened while he talked. Others of the clan were there to welcome her, and stayed to hear, old Christos among them, and the tales were stopped and pointed with exclamations of fierce horror and curses on the Turk. Sophia sat in dead silence, but her eyes were black flames, and more than once her lip trembled at some story of hideous outrage on women and children. She only asked one question—"They are Greeks, to whom the devils do such things?" And on the answer, "And we too are Greeks," she said, and her hand clinched.

Her foreman had been waiting for orders as to the unloading of the brig, and when the tales were over, she sent for him.

"Begin the unloading now, at once," she said, "and let the work go on all night. Oh, man, are you a stuffed bird, that you stare so at me? Do you not understand the tongue of your fathers, or shall I speak Turkish? I will be down there in an hour. Unload at once." Then turning to the captain of the caique, "You will sup with me," she said, "and you too, Christos. By-the-way, what is your name?"

"Constantine Kanaris."

"That is a good sea-name. Do you hate the Turk, and can you handle a boat?"

"The one as thoroughly as the other."

"I offer you a birth in the *Sophia*, directly under me. I command my own ship."

"And I, too," said Kanaris, "as my father and grandfather have done before me."

"You accept the post?"

Kanaris looked rather bewildered.

"Capsina," he said, "you are one of few words, and so am I when work is to be done. I have told you of Nicholas Vidalis, who is among the first movers of this revolution. Him I have promised to serve, in the cause of the war. I cannot go back from that."

The Capsina frowned, and struck the table impatiently.

"Do you not understand?" she said—"that his work is my work? Oh, Uncle Christos! what is the matter with you? Has the sky fallen, or do you hear the trumpet of the archangel? God in heaven! for the present there is no more trading for me. Do you not see that there must be a fleet, or these devils will keep on sending more arms and armies into the country? Are you a Greek, man—are you anything but a fiend from the pit, that you can wonder at me, when you hear how they treat other clans, free-born and scornful as ourselves, like slaves and beasts? That I should be busy like a mule carrying silk stuff, when such things are going on! There must be a fleet, I tell you, and the *Sophia* is the first ship of that fleet. By God! but I have found my work at last! It was not for nothing that I have built ships, and learned how to sail them, and take them where the devil himself would be afraid to trust to his luck. Now quick," she said to Kanaris—"do you take this berth or not? I want a man something like you, who hates and works and is silent. You will suit me, I think."

"Our purpose is war on the Turk and no other purpose?" asked Kanaris.

"That is better," said the Capsina—"we are getting to business. Yes, only war on the Turk. War? Extermination, rather, for that is the only business of Christians with regard to them. And you shall be no loser, if we prosper; and if we do not prosper, I pay you still the wage of the captain of a brig."

Kanaris flushed.

"Why do you say that?" he asked. "Is it for that that Nicholas—God be thanked for him!—and those like him serve?"

"I was wrong," said Sophia, "but you were a stranger to me till this moment, but you are no stranger now. You will come?"

"I will come," he said.

With that they fell to supper, and when supper was over Sophia and Kanaris went down to the harbor. The brig was lying close in unlading, and returning boats were passing to and fro from it to the shore. Two great resin flares on the deck showed them a crowd of men working at the crane by which the freight was conveyed from the hold and swung over the side to the barges that received it. The cargo was of silk from the Syrian coast and was for Athens and Salonica; but the foreman, in blind obedience to Sophia's instructions, was unloading it and storing it in her shed on the quay. They found him there when they got down, and she nodded approvingly when she saw what progress the work had made.

"Have we another ship in?" she asked.

"Yes, the *Hydra*, but she is due to sail to-morrow to Syria," said he.

The Capsina stood for a moment thinking.

"May the Virgin look to Syria!" she said. Then, "What is your caique doing?" she asked Kanaris.

"Picking up chance jobs."

"Here is one then, and Syria is all right. Will you undertake to deliver the silk to Athens and Salonica?"

"Before what date?"

"This day three weeks. My men shall do the freighting for you, and you can sail to-morrow night. You will carry it easily; it is only a quarter of the *Sophia's* cargo, for we have discharged at Crete and Melos. Also it is the season of south winds."

The matter was soon arranged, and the two went on board the *Sophia*, that Kanaris might see the ship. To him, as to the Hydriots, the build of the vessel was new, but she had acquitted herself too well on her previous cruises to allow of any doubt as to the success of what had been an experiment, and Kanaris, who had more than once been on board English and French cruisers and men-of-war, talked with Sophia as to the guns she should carry. They could obtain these, he told her, at Spetzas, where the revolutionists had formed a secret arsenal. It would be better, he suggested, to delay any alteration in the bulwarks and disposition of the ship till they saw what guns were to be got.

At the end of an hour or so they went on shore again, Kanaris to his caique, Sophia back to her house. The night was still and windless, and from her room she could see the flares on the *Sophia* burning upright and steady in the calm air, and the rattle of the gear of the crane was audible. She

felt as if her life had suddenly burst into blossom, and the blossom thereof was red.

Chapter II

Next day came news that Spetzas had openly joined the insurrection, and two proselytizing brigs put into Hydra, to try to raise, if not more ships, at any rate recruits. They both carried the new Greek ensign, white and blue, and bearing the cross of Greece risen above the crescent of Turkey. The tidings that the Capsina was going to join the revolutionists with her ship had already spread through the town, and when next morning she went down to the quay to speak with the captains of the Spetziot vessels, she was like the queen bee to the swarm, and the people followed her, cheering wildly. Their voices were music and wine to her, and the thrill of exultation which belongs to acts of leadership was hers.

Fierce and fine too was the news from Spetzas: the people had risen, and after an immense meeting held on the quay had chosen a commander, and broken open the treasury in which was kept the annual tribute to the Ottoman government. The taxes had just been got in, and the treasury was full. With this money eight brigs were being armed and manned, and would set sail to Melos, at which island, as they knew, were several Ottoman vessels making their annual cruise of conscription for raising sailors. In such manner was the vintage of the sea to begin.

Round the Capsina and the Spetziot captains the crowd surged thickest. One of these, Kostas Myrrides, had a certain loud and straight-hitting gift of oratory, and the crowd gathered and swayed, and hung on his words. There had been erected for him a sort of rude dais made of a board

placed upon two barrels, and from there he spoke to the people.

"The wine is drawn!" he cried; "to the feast then! Yet indeed there is no choice. Greece is up in arms, and before long the armies and fleets of the infidels will be on us. What will it profit you to stay still and watch? Do you think that the Turks will sit in justice and examine whether this man is an insurgent and the other is not? Is that their way of dealing? The justice of the Turk! You have heard the proverb and know what that means. The fire of war leaps from cape to cape and mountain to mountain. Kindle it here. Already has one of you, and that a woman whose name will not be forgotten, thrown in her lot with a glorious cause—Greece, the freedom of Greece!"

The shout rose and broke in waves of sound, only to swell and tower afresh when the speaker unfurled the new-blazoned flag, and waved it above them. Truly, if the Turkish ship of conscription had come in sight, there would have been short shrift for those on board.

The government of Hydra was in the hands of twelve primates, who were responsible to the Ottoman government for the annual tribute in specie (in itself but small), and also for the equipment and wages of two hundred and fifty able-bodied seamen yearly to the Ottoman fleet. To raise this more considerable sum a tax of five per cent. was levied on the income of every man in the island. Now the ship-owners were more than the bulk of the tax-payers, and it was clearer than a summer noonday that if they joined the revolutionists, unless the island revolution became general, or their ships met with immediate success, the Ottoman

fleet would descend on the Hydra, and the Shadow of God would have a word for the primates, and a rope. Thus it came about that while the uproar was still growing and fermenting on the quay, the primates met together, and found grave faces. The Capsina, they considered, was primarily responsible for this consternating stroke, but to try to guide the Capsina back into the paths of peace, they feared, was like attempting to lead the moon with a string, and to quarrel with her was to quarrel with the clan, to whom she was as a god, eccentric, perhaps, but certainly unquestionable. The responsibility of debate, however, was not granted them, for before they could devise any check on the Capsina, a new and tremendous burst of cheering caused the president, Father Jakomaki Tombazes, to rise and go to the window. Three vessels were leaving the port, two being the Spetziot vessels, with the Greek flag blazoning its splendor to heaven, and as for the other, there was no mistaking the build of the *Sophia*. Tombazes gasped, then returned to the others.

"The Capsina has gone," he said. "And, by the Virgin," cried he, rising to the heroical level of the event, and striking the table with his fist, "she is a brave lass, and Hydra should be proud of her!"

This straightforward statement of the duty of Hydriots was not less abhorrent to the assembled primates. The Capsina had gone, the clan were shouting themselves hoarse on the beach, and, where an action of the Capsina was concerned, it was not less idle to argue with the clan than to employ rhetoric to a mad bull. The only courses open were to fly for safety to the mainland, join the