

## THE DEATH SHIP.

## I.

There's a tall, tall ship in the bay,  
She is black as the darkness of night,  
And her cordage and shrouds  
Are as grim as the clouds  
That fold up a tempest's might.  
There is nought of life that the eye can trace  
On her decks above or below,  
No sentinel watch on his lonely round  
To challenge a friend or foe;  
And the murmuring waves as they flow o'er the bar,  
Dash up on her sides with a dismal jar.

## II.

There's a red, red sun in the west!  
And the heavens are crimson and gold,  
And the story of life,  
With its struggles and strife,  
In another short day hath been told.  
And the ship rides still by the bar in the bay,  
Where she rode till the midnight sped;  
When her anchor weigh'd and her pitch black sails  
By invisible hands were spread;  
And the light on the lighthouse tower flash'd blue  
As her shadowy form from the bay withdrew.

## III.

She has gone, gone out to the west;  
Yet never a sail's to be seen,  
Save the fisherman's smack  
That lies in the track  
When the moonlight falls between.  
And I wander alone on the silent shore,  
With the sea-shells down at my feet,  
While a sad, soft wind in sepulchral tone  
Keeps time to my own heart's beat,  
And I wonder if ever a ship were there,  
Or a sun in the west, or a golden air.

## IV.

Oh! the tall, tall ship, and the sun,  
And the sea, were a dream in my brain,  
When the first bright ray  
Of the new-born day  
Flash'd down on my window pane,  
A courier pale and jaded with speed,  
Drew up at my portal door;  
And the news he brought was the death of a friend,  
Whose voice I should hear no more.  
Thus hearts oft feel, through the spell of a dream,  
The quickening touch of events unseen.

HENRY PRINCE.

## A WOMAN'S STRATAGEM.

BY I. RICHARDSON.

## II.

It was a month later, and a truly hot day had brought a pleasant though rather sultry evening.

Teston Court was entertaining a few visitors—the inevitable Mrs. and Miss Sinclair and some more uninteresting friends of Mr. Wills, who were to make the dull place merry for about a week.

Everest Beaucherc was heard to pronounce the merriment a hundredfold worse than the dullness; but perhaps he had become more reconciled to the dullness of late since the new housekeeper had improved everything.

With his cigar alight, he strolled on towards the shrubbery, where he and Miss Smith had met that first evening.

It was a very remarkable thing that they had met there nearly every evening since, and to-night, though the grand piano was shaking and thundering under Miss Sinclair's touch, and though that lady would have been ready and willing to jump up from her operatic performances and accompany Beaucherc had she known that he preferred a moonlight stroll to music, Everest crossed the garden quietly alone, and made for the walk the housekeeper found attractive.

"It is a rest to talk to a woman like Miss Smith after listening to that stupid chatter in the drawing-room," he said, and quickened his steps as he saw the flutter of a gown ahead.

But in another moment he heard the sound of voices, and paused, recognizing Miss Smith's.

She was saying, "Then, if you are quite satisfied with me, sir, we may consider it an arranged thing that I am to stop on. I have tried my best to suit and please you."

"Miss Smith," said the second voice, and the ponderous utterances were Mr. Wills', "I have never been suited as you suit me. My house and everything about it are perfect, I say openly, since you have undertaken their guidance. Let me thank you."

Beaucherc, pressing up behind a tree, saw distinctly his worthy cousin take Miss Smith's small hand, and attempt to raise it to his lips.

"Old rascal!" he muttered.

Miss Smith snatched it away, and put it for safety behind her.

"Clever, sensible girl!" thought Beaucherc, smiling.

"You pay me my wages," said Miss Smith; "that is quite gratitude enough, sir. I will just look after the coffee."

"Miss Smith—ahem!—don't go away yet. I—er—want to talk over—er—a possible contingency with you. You know my cousin, young Everest, is going to be married shortly?"

"I did not know it, sir,"—and there sounded, a faint start in the clear, low tones. "Is it quite—settled?"

"Settled because I choose it shall be. He is going to marry Miss Sinclair. Very nice girl—very nice property. Of course he, dependent on my bounty, does as I bid him, and I am going to direct him to propose to the lady this very evening. That is why I have got her in the house. Well—er—as I was saying, when he is married and settled away—of course I shall settle him away—I shall be rather lonely, Miss Smith—eh?"

He pressed a little closer, and looked about for the small white hand again.

"Don't settle him away, then," recommended Miss Smith, keeping her hands well out of danger, and retreating as her master advanced in a way Beaucherc could not commend sufficiently.

"But I have thought of a way of remedying my loneliness," continued the old gentleman, grinning in the most tender manner.

"Old Cheshire cat!" ejaculated Everest, almost aloud.

"Indeed!" said Miss Smith, very hurriedly. "How dark the moon is to-night—I mean how dark the night is without the moon; is not it?"

"Your eyes are lights I prefer to the moon. Sweeter, fairer orbs by far are they than any world in yonder sky!" began Mr. Wills, with a preparatory clearing of his throat.

"Oh, now you are quoting poetry!" cried the girl, in pretended rapture. "I do so adore poetry! By the way do you chance to know that lovely thing, 'The Old Man to his Evening Toad'?" You're just stepping on a toad; that reminded me of it."

"Toad—where?" ejaculated the old man, darting back; and, taking advantage of the movement, Miss Smith quickly passed him.

But though flight was in her power then, she hesitated a moment to say, in a constrained kind of tone, "You don't suppose that either Miss Sinclair or Mr. Beaucherc will oppose your little plans about them? It is certain to be all settled to-night, I suppose? I ask because, though only a housekeeper, I should not like to be behindhand in my congratulations."

She jerked out the last word as if it had stuck in her throat.

"You are only a housekeeper now, true," said Wills, with the pomposity of an autocrat. You may be only a housekeeper for some little time longer; but, Miss Smith, unless you, by unseemly levity, cause me to change my opinions respecting you—and I hardly think you will be weak enough for that—a grander position floats in my mind for you, my dear." He stepped up, and Beaucherc set his teeth as he saw the old gentleman grinning meaningfully into the clear, surprised gray eyes. "My little dear, how should you like to be mistress of Teston Court? Does that take your breath away, eh?"

"Completely!" she exclaimed.

And, quick as a rabbit, she scudded off down the path to the house.

Old Wills chuckled for three minutes to himself, ejaculated "Pretty dear!" and then, proceeding also to the house, met his cousin.

"Everest," said he, pompously, "you will oblige me by proposing to the lady of your choice—perhaps it may be more correct to say the lady of my choice—without farther useless delay. Miss Sinclair is in the drawing-room, and the evening is clear and balmy. Ask her to circle the garden with you, and arrange all in as graceful a manner as you can. Circumstances have arisen which make me—ahem!—desirous that this marriage of yours should be hastened. Proceed then, my boy."

"To propose marriage, with your fullest consent and approval, to the lady of my and your choice!" said Everest, quietly. "All right, cousin; I will."

Miss Smith, though she had scudded to the house so fleetly, had not gone inside it, after all, nor had she come out again, for Beaucherc, after a very little hunting over lawn and shrubbery, saw her white dress gleaming against the clematis by the study window.

There was no creature nor light in the study. She was leaning against the closed window, with her hands loosely clasped before her, her clear, lovely eyes raised to study the stars; and she just nodded, and did not speak, when she recognized Beaucherc. Presumably she expected him to pass her, and go on to the drawing-room, but he stopped.

"Miss Smith, I feel awfully nervous," he began. "What do you think my cousin just demanded of me?"

"What?" somewhat sharply.

"That, without farther circumlocution or preparation, I shall offer myself in marriage to the lady of my own and his own choice. Now, in your candid opinion, don't you think it is a little precipitate? Or do you think, as he does, it is the very evening for a man to risk his fate?"—lowering his tones softly.

No answer. The white figure seemed to shrink a little more into the shadow of the window, and the hatless, dark head turned away.

"It is the thing of all others I have been longing to do," pursued the young man, coming a step nearer to his silent listener. "I am madly in love with her, Miss Smith, but uncertain of her feelings, and so afraid that she may say no."

"Not likely."

The accents were so indistinct he might have mistaken them; but he caught them, and smiled.

"Not likely! Oh, how kind of you! Say something else encouraging, do!"—coaxingly—before I take the plunge."

"Is it her money or herself that you are madly in love with?"

Miss Smith hazarded a little cynical laugh after that strange question, but her voice sounded unlike itself.

"What an insulting insinuation! Herself, of course."

"Oh, I only inquired because I could not remember having seen much of this mad preference for herself during the short time I have had the pleasure of observing you; but one

never knows. She is very lovable, I daresay. She certainly is not handsome!"—spitefully.

"She is downright plain. But what matters that?"

"What, indeed? Beauty is but skin-deep, and money lasts, doesn't it? Oh, by the bye, though"—in affected remembrance—"you wish it understood that you don't care much for Miss Sinclair's money?"

"I wish it distinctly understood by you"—he smiled as he laid the little emphasis upon the pronoun—"that I loathe Miss Sinclair's money!"

"How nice, and honourable, and all that!"—Miss Smith laughed bitterly—"that sounds, does not it? And you are the most docile of cousins, and the most obedient of heirs! Pray do not let me defer this act of amiability, and this offering of a true heart and a ready hand to the lady you have so obligingly permitted your choice to rest upon. Pass on to the drawing-room, Mr. Beaucherc; I hear Miss Sinclair still thumping on the piano there."

"If I could only be certain that the girl I love cared one straw for me! It is so ignominious to be refused, Miss Smith, I hardly dare venture."

"Oh, you won't be refused. Your cousin has smoothed out a nice easy path for you. Just go up in your calm, unexcited manner, and tell her—"

"Tell her," he interrupted, quickly, laying one hand on her arm, and as she glanced in surprise at the movement her eyes for a moment met his, and she turned white, then flushed crimson,—"tell her that I love her with my entire heart and strength; beg her to have compassion on me, and try to care a little, if she can't care much, for if she won't have me, I swear no other woman on earth shall!"

He hurriedly and passionately he spoke; then checked himself, and went back to his usual mocking, careless accents. "Will something of that sort do, Miss Smith?"

"I think so," replied she, very faintly.

"Let go my arm, please, Mr. Beaucherc!"

"And when I have said so much may I put my arms round her so?"—smiting the action to the word,—may I kiss the dear, sweet lips I love better than any in the world, so?—may I?"

"Let me go, let me go, Mr. Beaucherc! How dare you—how can you insult me like this?" cried the girl with tears in her voice. "It is unmanly, ungentlemanly—shameful!"—struggling to free herself in wrathful pride.

"Shameful to tell you that I love you so dearly that I can't live without you? Nay, you encouraged me to the confession yourself, sweetest, remember; you must listen to it now. You, and you alone, are my choice—and my cousin's, too, for that matter, for himself though not for me—that is the only diversity. I could never have married Miss Sinclair if I had never seen you. Having seen you—oh, we are wasting time in talking like this. Put your arms round my neck, darling, and say that you forgive all my impertinence; and that though you know so little of me you like what you have seen so well that you will take the rest upon trust. And, by the way, what is your Christian name?—for I can't call you Miss Smith after this. You do care for me, don't you, dearest?"

"I love you," she whispered, fondly. "In spite of many resolutions to the contrary, I have been just as helpless in the matter as you. My name is Gertrude; but stop a moment, dear. Before you say anything more—yes, before you kiss me again—listen to just a few words I must tell you."

The murmur of conversation went on in the quiet spot. Miss Sinclair in the drawing-room hammered, and yawned, and wondered where Everest was; and Wills, still in the garden smoking, thought of many things; among them how amenable to reason was Everest, and how pleasant and taking a person Miss Smith, only this latent flippancy just discernible in her must be crushed in the bud. Flippancy was a thing the master of Teston Court abhorred. Surely Miss Smith was too sharp to spoil the grand honour looming before her by flippancy.

The gay week at Teston Court came to an end. The day before the Sinclairs left, Wills whispered to his cousin, with much meaning, "Got through the daring question all right, boy? Will she have you, eh?"

"I took your advice and popped the question straight, and the consequence is we are engaged, she and I." Upon receipt of which good news old Wills went up with many beaming grins to Miss Sinclair, put his hand familiarly upon hers, and said, "I congratulate you, my dear, I do, upon my soul, though perhaps it may not be strictly in my place so to declare myself."

The young lady shrank away from his hand as if it had been a nettle, and drew herself up like a vinegar cresset.

"May I ask what these congratulations so obligingly poured upon me refer to, Mr. Wills?"

"Oh, you coy, playful charmer! What do they refer to? Why, to your engagement with my cousin, Everest Beaucherc, of course. Now don't be cross. He has just told me that he is engaged. Yes, he told me himself, dear Miss Sinclair."

"He did not tell you that I was in that unhappy plight?" Miss Sinclair's eye waxed bright with spite, the colour rose in her cheeks, and she grew almost handsome. "He is engaged right enough. Oh, yes—no mistake about that. But you don't mean to say—you can't mean me to think that you are so dense, so blind, so

blundering as not to know to whom he has pledged his affection and life, such as it is, Mr. Wills?"

"Upon my soul, if it is not to you, I don't know anything about it," gasped the perplexed old gentleman.

"Me? I would not have him. Of course he knew that; but when I found out by mere chance this morning that he had promised to marry one of those nieces of yours that you pretend to hate so, I own I was surprised. I have so often heard you say how you detested those people—how you avoided them."

"What people?" asked poor old Wills, staring.

"Your sister-in-law, Mrs. Wills, and her plain, affected, grasping daughters. I thought you hated them."

"And you thought rightly."

"And yet you have let your cousin and heir promise to marry one!" laughing spitefully.

"Oh, don't you know anything about it? Well, then, I am glad I have told you, for perhaps it is not too late for something to be done. If anyone can do it, of course you can," smiling beautifully upon him. "This morning, by the merest accident, Mr. Wills, I happened to catch a glimpse of a letter Everest had had from Mrs. Wills, saying how delighted she was about his engagement to her daughter Gertrude. Where he met her I can't think. They seemed to me, from what I could not help just catching in the letter, you know (he sat next me when he read it), to have fallen in love with each other from staying together in the same house."

Mr. Wills gasped and snorted, and appeared on the verge of a fit.

"You are sure it was a letter from Mrs. Wills, my sister-in-law, and that it said Everest was engaged to her daughter Gertrude?"

He turned his crimson visage, with its anger and its surprise, to read his companion's, fiercely.

"I am perfectly certain. I saw the postmark, the signature, and as much as I have told you of the inside of the letter. Your cousin Everest is engaged to Mrs. Wills' daughter Gertrude," said Miss Sinclair, truthfully.

Old Wills, rushing frantically about to find the young cousin who had so defied, so betrayed, so surprised him, came upon Miss Smith, sitting in the shade picking currants, and she, noting his hair standing on end with excitement, his hat forgotten, his countenance rainbow-hued, and his features twitching fiercely, naturally enough enquired, "What is the matter?"

He stopped, and she looked so cool, so composed, so pleasant there in the shade, with the crimson-hued fruits about her, that he could not resist the temptation of telling her his troubles—just talking it over with her, because she was so sensible.

She listened most sympathetically, letting her basket of currants flow unheeded over his feet, and, raising her large, clear-seeing eyes to his heated, glaring orbs, and when he had talked himself out for awhile she uttered no semblance of flippancy, only said, sweetly, resting her head the while on her hand, "I think I could do something in this matter, Mr. Wills, if you would employ me on your side. I know these people—these daughters of Mrs. Wills. They are intimate acquaintances of mine."

"You ought to be ashamed of your acquaintances, then! Why was this fact concealed from me? You, Miss Smith, whom I have trusted, on intimate terms with those—those—"

But she stopped his imperious reproach with an imploring glance.

"Now, don't say anything unkind, please. It is a lucky thing for you that I can boast of intimacy with those—those—lucky that I happen to have a certain hold over this particular Gertrude. I suppose a—hesitating, and picking a currant or two—"I suppose, Mr. Wills, you would not object to some little reward if I succeeded in making the girl break off her engagement. You would consider me deserving of some small recompense if through my means a letter from Gertrude renouncing Ernest Beaucherc lay in your hands."

"My life-long gratitude and admiration," he suggested, promptly; and leaning over the currant bush, he stretched forth two large, patronizing hands. "Miss Smith—no, don't shrink away in shyness, my dear; you don't know what reward may be yours. Ahem! Well, perhaps we had best now say only this—that bold ideas, reversals of all my hitherto prejudices, lie seething here," touching his disturbed hair.

"But you do keep house so cosily, your soups and your curries are so splendid, that I defy any man to blame me if my head gets run away with by my heart."

"Or your stomach!" suggested the housekeeper, softly. "Don't let us wander from the subject, Mr. Wills. Will you give me twenty pounds if within a week this disgraceful engagement is broken off?"

"Twenty pounds! Ahem, dear Miss Smith!—twenty pounds is a large sum!"

"Unless the lady herself releases him, no power you can use will have any effect upon Mr. Beaucherc. I know enough of him to be sure of that. If you promise me now ten pounds—a mere fleabite to you—I promise you that girl shall renounce her lover. If she does not renounce him within a week, don't pay me, that is all! Is it worth ten pounds or not to break this engagement off? You were making more than ten pounds worth of over it just now, I think."

"Say five pounds," suggested the rich man, softly.