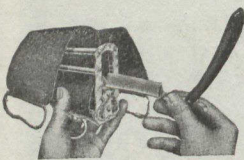


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A LORD OF THE ISLES

(Concluded from page 8.)

year. I have a great friend, the captain of the Penelope; he always sends me word of the r coming."

"It's a grand sight to see twenty big ships perform their evolutions; I think they represent power more than anything I have ever looked at." Sheila was the speaker.

"I should like to see it amazingly," Glendinning remarked. "Of course, I have often seen men of war of various nations, and been over them more than once, but never a whole fleet together."

"It takes your breath away," Sheila cried; "it makes you realize an enormous machine, with its many parts all controlled by one will, answering to an unseen guidance. You realize what it would be if flung suddenly upon an enemy; I dread to think it in one way, and yet in another I love it, for it represents patriotism; it represents all the past, and the present, and future as well." The girl's eyes sparkled.

THEY had arranged that the boats should go together, traversing the three or four miles which would bring them to the entrance of the estuary. Sir Hector Mackown accompanied his daughter in the White Heather. Glendinning took Donald with him in a smaller boat—Martin was laid up with rheumatism at home.

It was the first of October. The sun was scorchingly hot overhead as soon as the morning mist had cleared. The two boats came up alongside, opposite the rock on which Sheila had stood on that never-to-be-forgotten day when John had first seen her. The wind was favourable; there was no need of the oars; the two boats ran along under their white sails.

Cheery words of greeting had been exchanged. Half an hour of tacking in the narrow channel brought them to the flagship at the head of the Fleet. Afterwards they threaded their way between the vessels, Sir Hector, when near enough, explaining to Glendinning the differences of design and armament of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers.

At lunch-time he was brought up alongside of the Penelope, and went on board. The two boats then drew to the land, and their occupants picked on the provisions brought from Uick and the Tower. Mistress Seabright acted the part of servant, assisted by her husband and Donald.

In the afternoon the Fleet executed certain manoeuvres, which Glendinning and Sheila watched with fascinated eyes from an elevated point on the headland. The time slipped by unnoticed. Donald and Seabright came up and saluted. The former spoke:

"There is a mist coming up, sir, which may make the channel dangerous, especially with these big ships on the move."

They descended to the boats, running side by side. Sheila abandoned her reserve; she was full of girl's enjoyment. Her gesture challenged John to run, as on the water she was apt to challenge him to race. He let her gain a little, so that he might look at her—the lithe, graceful form, so shapely and trim, like a young deer. She turned and caught the glance in his eyes, and flushed a deep red to her delicate shell-like ears and down to her throat. John loomed to pick her up in his arms and kiss her, as her hand lingered in his for a moment while he helped her into the White Heather.

THEY started in a few minutes, Glendinning steering his boat, while Sheila held the rudder of the companion vessel. The wind had shifted, as so often happens with the change of tide. By delicate manoeuvring of their sails it would help them on their course.

As they passed vessel after vessel, most of them now stationary once more, long trails of mist shot across the surface of the water. The hulls of the great ships became wreathed in this filmy disguise. Every moment it grew darker. The sun was powerless

to shine through the volume of density which had overspread the whole seascape, coming in with the wind in such rapid fashion.

The two boats kept alongside of one another; only about twenty feet of water separated them. Now the breeze favoured one, now the other, as it was blowing across rather than behind them.

Suddenly, out of the mist, there loomed up the dark, ominous hull of one of the destroyers; it had apparently been the last to find its station, and was just swinging into its appointed place. John's boat was the nearer. Instantly he put his whistle to his lips, and sounded a note of warning with shrill insistence. Had he turned he could have saved himself, but to do so would bring about almost certain collision with the White Heather.

Some moments of thrilling excitement followed. The funnels of the destroyer stood up ominously close, the fog being less dense higher than it was close to the water's edge. The engines were reversed, and every effort was made on board the war vessel to avoid a catastrophe, but time failed to save the result. The little boat was struck in the centre. Donald fell into the water, on the side of the destroyer, and was saved almost immediately by the lieutenant in command, who jumped to his rescue. Glendinning struck his head, and was flung wider. He sank almost instantly.

Sheila uttered a cry. In that instant she knew what he had become to her; knew that her maiden heart had yielded, had responded to the love she had seen in his eyes these weeks past without knowing it.

Glendinning's head appeared once more upon the surface of the waters, but he looked white and lifeless. In the second before Sheila had divested herself of her shoes and her upper skirt; before he could sink again she had plunged into the water, and, flinging her arms about his shoulders, buoyed him up.

FOG enveloped them; it seemed that they would die together, with this pall of mist as their shroud. Sheila was fully conscious that the end was near—how much of thought and feeling can be lived through in a few seconds of time. The waters eddied about them. John's weight was too great; she could not keep him up; they were sinking beneath the surface. The girl struggled bravely, but her strength was not equal to the task.

A boat shot alongside. Strong arms were stretched out. John was taken from her and lifted up first; then she, too, was assisted, dripping, out of the water. They were taken on board the man-of-war. A surgeon took Glendinning in hand. Minutes of suspense followed while artificial respiration was being employed to fight the dread invader who had almost seized and conquered his prey.

Presently John came to himself in a bunk on the destroyer, thankful for his life, thankful to hear that Sheila, too, was unhurt, most thankful of all that she, in that one moment when everything mattered, had been the instrument of his salvation.

He remained on board the destroyer for the next two days. Then, when able to move, he accepted the invitation of Lady Mackown to recruit at Uick. His head was still congested from the blow which he had received. He lay in a hammock under the shade of a tree, a fringe of warm sunlight beyond; through the sunlight into the shade Sheila walked to his side.

He held out both hands. She looked at him, then down.

"What am I to do?" she asked, as he said nothing.

"Give them to me—your hands in mine."

She hesitated. "Will you let them go again?"

"Never! I love you, and you love me!"

She seemed content, putting her hands in his. Then she bent to him, and he kissed her on the lips.

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