

mistake not, Commander Penshurst is just the man for such a task."

"Commander Penshurst!"

"Ay, cousin to the proprietor of this estate; he commands his Majesty's sloop of war *Curlew*, just arrived at Port Royal. He will be here to-morrow, and I think it not unlikely that he may obtain you a midshipman's warrant."

I jumped on my feet, and clasped my hands with ecstasy. "My dear father! do you really think so?"

"Why yes, I know him well, and I think he would even strain a point to oblige me. I see by the papers that he has had a smart boat affair with an armed Spanish slaver off Cuba, in which several of his crew, including a middy, have lost the number of their mess. The prize has been sent into the Havana for adjudication by the Mixed Commission there, and he has brought three of her hands,—Englishmen, and said to be deserters,—to Jamaica. The *Curlew* will remain here ten days or a fortnight, some repairs being necessary. You are aware, Tom," he added, gravely, "that she is attached to the African Slave Squadron?"

Certainly, I was aware of that; but when did a madcap greenhorn, eager for novelty and adventure, stop to calculate the danger of the course he was bent upon pursuing. I was entranced by the sudden brilliancy of the prospect opening before me. As to Mademoiselle Virginie, my dominant thought, I remember, with regard to that terrestrial angel, was one of exultation at the mortification and regret she must infallibly experience when, dazzled with my new uniform, she became aware what a promising young Nelson she had slighted and passed over for a rascally slave-monger!

Commander Penshurst was punctual to his appointment, went over the plantation, and expressed himself extremely pleased with the condition of his relative's estate. This was a favourable opening, and my father made the request agreed upon. Captain Penshurst was a fine-looking, dashing officer, in the early prime of life; and, as my father spoke, his dark hawk-eye measured me from head to foot, in a way that sent the hot blood to my toe and finger-ends in a gallop. "Humph! by no means an ill favoured young fellow, Sutcliffe, this son of yours, though it's rather late in the day with him for a start in naval life: I can, however, give him an acting warrant, which I dare say the admiral will confirm; the sooner, therefore, he gets his sea-togs on, and reports him self on board, the better."

These words decided my destiny, and three days afterwards I stepped, handsomely rigged out, upon the *Curlew's* deck. I was kindly received by Lieutenant Armstrong, a strict disciplinarian, but a kind-hearted gentlemanly man, though he did in sailor-phrase, come in at the hawse-holes. The *Curlew* was a powerful vessel of her class, carrying eighteen guns, four of which were carronades, upon a flush deck, besides a long nine-pounder brass swivel gun about midships, and had a prime crew of one hundred and seventy-five men and boys. The required repairs were nearly completed, and but a few days would elapse, I was informed, before we again steered for the south-west of Africa. The *Fair Rosamond* was

still at her moorings, at no great distance from the *Curlew*, but quite ready for a sudden start, having cleared at the Custom-House some days previously for the Cape Verde Islands, and thence to the Gambia and Rio Grande, in quest of palm oil,—a common dodge of slavers in those days, because affording them an excuse for taking on board a large number of empty casks destined to hold the water necessary for the crowd of human beings they expected to bring off. Keen eyes on board the sloop were frequently bent upon the *Fair Rosamond*; and it was the opinion of most of the old hands that they had seen the brigantine before, though not within such easy speaking distance, and when not painted in quite fashionable style as at present. We saw very little of Captain Penshurst—business or pleasure kept him almost constantly ashore,—but the service of the ship was carried on with order and despatch by the lieutenant in command, and the *Curlew* was reported ready for sea some time before it was expected she would be. I obtained leave to go on shore for the purpose of bidding my friends good-by, and on reaching home I was not a little surprised to find my father, togged smartly off for a grand dinner-party at the Tollenmaches, and that I was to accompany him. He almost laughed out, as I, on hearing this, fizzed up my hair with my fingers, and glanced complacently at my new uniform, in a mirror opposite. "You silly jackanapes," he pleasantly broke out, "what chance, think you, can a headless stripling, like you" (this was a libel as regards beard) "have against a man wearing two gold epaulettes?" I made no reply to this courteous speech,—one reason being that I did not comprehend it,—but a short time after setting foot in Vale Ledge it was perfectly intelligible. Captain Penshurst was there; and it was plain as daylight that he and the enchanting Virginie were acknowledged, contracted lovers,—so rapid is the growth of sentiment and passion in those hot, tropical climes. Mr. and Madame Tollenmache were also evidently aware of, and gratified with, their daughter's important conquest,—the captain of the *Curlew* had wealth as well as social rank to bestow. Whilst I, for more reasons than one, was exceedingly ill at ease. How about the moonlight meeting with the skipper of the brigantine beneath the palm-trees? Ought I not to inform Captain Penshurst of that significant circumstance? "Virginie," I bitterly egotized, "Virginie is a vain, heartless coquette, and it is my duty, therefore, to ——" "Don't make a fool of yourself, Tom," broke in upon my reverie, from my father's voice, carefully pitched in an under tone. I was standing, at the moment, in a window-recess, apart from the company. "Don't make a fool of yourself, Tom: I know what you are muttering about, quite well: a mere gillish caprice, depend upon it, that could not for a moment be expected to survive the addresses of a *bona fide* captain of the royal navy. Be silent, therefore, upon matters that concern you not."

I deferred to this parental counsel, and as quickly as possible took my leave of the very agreeable party. This was on a Sunday. On the Tuesday we were to sail; and, late on the previous evening, we were surprised by the captain's hail from a shore-boat nearly alongside,—he not being