



## CHAPTER III.—Continued.

The young girl came along the path looking bright and handsome as if pleased with herself and all the world. When she reached the door she quietly stooped and kissed the old man on his forehead and wrinkled forehead.

"Sam has decided to stay at home this trip, father."

"That's why you're so smiling round the mouth."

"Yes, I'm very glad. It's so pleasant to have him at home."

"Who took Sam's place?"

"I do not know. I'm not exactly sure that he has not sailed; yet I feel sure from what he said that he meant to stay at home this trip, if he could find a substitute."

"Haven't seen anything of that Mister Yedick to-day. Seemed to be powerful interested in whaling and things. Kinder clever sort of man and seems to want to know 'bout things."

"It must be nearly supper time, father. Are you ready for it?"

"Oh, I'm ready. Suppose it's gettin' long to 'tend o'clock."

She entered the house, and in a few moments returned and found the old man still seated in his big chair and the blond giant his son standing before him, apparently wrapped in deep thought.

"Oh, Sam! I thought you would stay at home. I set a plate for you. Come; supper's ready."

The young man looked at her and smiled, and then said to his father—

"I can afford it by that time, and it is better to fix a day than to drift along not knowing exactly the bearings of things."

"Mebby you're right, Sam. Mebby you're right."

What if the Cape Cod turkey, cooked in one of the most charming styles in which that gracious bird ever appears, formed the staple of that simple meal? What if the sea was green and the broad yellow with 'twinkling lights' when the sun was down, the plainest fare a feast. For the old man there was the peace and contentment of a secure and quiet home with his two children beside him. There was the son, a man worthy of him. There was the late-comer daughter, as dear as any child of his heart. For the young people it was enough that they were together at home and all the world shut out.

The simple meal finished, the Captain went off up the tower to trim and light his magnificent lamp, that its light might enlighten the home-come and all that went down to the sea in ships in those waters.

As for the lovers, it was enough that it was the gloaming, with curious calm born of a fishing schooner's cabin, helped her put away the supper things, and she, with her half-sister, made the housewife task a bit of 'lovers' sport. Then they sat in the cool of the evening and watched the twinkling lights in the town and the summer village along the beach. There was a faint sound of music from the hotel, and the sleepy waves broke a tinkling murmur on the rocks behind the house seemed to make a solemn obligato to their vows. Together since childhood their love in a quiet, happy way had grown up like a plant in summer weather, knowing nothing of storms or the strength that comes from them. The sea, save for the slow, smooth rollers, was quiet, and the two young people were asleep. True, there was an area of depression at the hotel, but, unfortunately, there is no signal service in lovers' skies.

Capt. Beece Johnson found much to do in the light-house tower, and did not disturb them till nearly 8 o'clock. As he observed to himself, "Sparkin's generally most comfortable if it dole keep away. It ain't often that Sam's at home with Mai, and, as he says, 'it's 'bout time we got the bearin's o' things.'"

As for other interruptions, there were none. Nobody in the hotel came near the light, to the lovers' great satisfaction.

"I guess, Mai, he got wind of my being at home."

Half an hour later Beece Johnson sat before a smouldering fire of driftwood, that in its curious fashion had sent long green and yellow flames up the big chimney. He had lighted the fire himself, though it was hardly needed.

"I like it, Mai. It sets me a-thinking to see those old sticks from some wreck a-burnin'. Where's Sam?"

"He said he would go down and see Capt. Glass about painting his boat. Sam's been so busy with Mr. Manning his boat hasn't been put in the water yet, and he may want to go for bluefish by and by."

"It's strange, Mai, how that driftwood always comes ashore."

"Everything comes ashore, father—at some time."

"I do, Mai. I've noticed it often. Even the wrecks that are abandoned and left adrift come to land at last."

"I suppose the land attracts them."

"Mebby it does. Shouldn't wonder. I've seen wrecks that didn't seem to be proper wrecks anyway—ships that just sailed and went to pieces of their own accord."

He paused, and sat thoughtfully looking into the dying fire, as if heating on the brink of some secret. He shook his head thoughtfully, but said nothing.

It may have been the silence in the room, the thought-compelling fire, and the suggestion of wrecks and storms it held out in its vivid green flames. It may have been the secret love and gratitude in his heart. Something drew her to the old man, and with her drew her his neck she kissed his gray hair.

"What is it, girl? Sam been scoldin' ye?"

"No! Sam loves me. It is those green fires. Why do they always blaze from the old drift-wood?"

"It's wreck-wood. I suspect it's the old copper in it that burns that way, or the salt from the sea."

"That salt burns yellow, father, but those green fires seem to cry out, if I have ever speak except to him, about some memory they would keep green. Tell me about it, father. Tell me about it again."

"Tell you what, Mai?"

"About the wreck?"

"You've heard it once, Sam's been scoldin' me, and if I only knew I could love him more. No, I don't mean that."

"Sirs—I had such a severe cough that my throat felt as if it were a red-hot iron. With a few drops of this I found the first dose gave relief, and the second bottle completely cured me. Mrs. A. A. Downey, Mansfield, Ont.

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"You mean you wish you knew who you was?"

"Yes. It is that. That's the only thing that ever makes me unhappy; and it seems so unfair to Sam to come to him without a name."

"It ain't much to tell. Lemme see. It's sixteen, no—"

"Seventeen years, father."

"Yes. Seventeen years come this September—the 10th it was—when we had that southeast gale. It had blown hard all night, and the morning broke wild with the surf breakin' all over the point. Luke Somers was light keeper at the time, and he often told me how the salt spray drove in that windy and spilt a new carpet on his wife just paid 70 cents a yard. I was livin' with mother in the same house Capt. Glass has now, and 'bout noon we got the news of the wreck on the beach. Anyway, we all stood on the shore and what we could. It was 'fore the day of the Life Savin' Service, and all we had was a whale boat. Deacon Smith brought over on his harp rigger. It was used to see those poor critters away before we could get at 'em. All we saved was four of the passengers, and the colored stewardess, and two colored girls, children 'bout 6 and 7 years old."

"That was the Savannah steamer, bound for Providence?"

"Yes. It never got there, nor the folks aboard. It was lost on the coast, and it was a week before the steamer came back to New London on the steamer a week after, except those two girls, and they settled here. It was just as well, for they hadn't a cent of money, nothing but the wet clothes on their backs, and some one took 'em in, and they stayed here for a long time, and then kinder drifted off to some hotel on the mainland."

"But the wreck, father?"

"I'm comin' to that. Well, after the people got ashore, and those that were drowned laid out in Seth Glass's fish-house, some of us came along the shore to see how Luke was gettin' on at the light. The sea-wall was broke up considerable by the seas in the night, and we were standin' lookin' at it, when some one saw the wreck driftin' in. It was a bark, and she was waterlogged and staggerin' in the sea as if they couldn't keep her head to the wind. Then she seemed to keel over broadside to the sea, and she struck on the shoals, for it was most low tide. We gave word to Luke, and he hung out a red table cloth from top of the light to rouse the folks, and we came back to get a boat. I was among the first to reach the wharf and help launch a wharf-boat, but, Lor! it wasn't any use. It seemed to blow harder than ever, and 'twice, and squalls we saw that the folks on board had got out a boat and was tryin' to come ashore. They didn't get far, for when a big wave laid the boat from sight, we never saw it again. Then, just as we were dartin' whether we'd better risk it to get out to the ship, another boat was put off from under the mainland. It wasn't no use. I never come ashore."

"Not a soul escaped?"

"Just one. The seas were a-lyin' in all directions, and it was almost dark. That night it shifted to the west and blew a gale, and the next day was as calm and pretty a day as ever you see. We didn't go to bed that night, and 'bout daylight we and I'm Larkin and Jack Heston and me or two others went out to the wreck. It was 'most gone to pieces. Only the aft part was standin' away from the shore, and we climbed up the wreck and the first on the deck, though it was fast fast in. The cabin door was shut, but I kicked it open, and there in a berth in the cabin was you—a little girl not big enough to speak. It was no use, you and the boys agreed you naturally belonged to me."

The girl came nearer to him and kissed him on the cheek.

"Dear father?"

"It was strange you lived through that night. Mebby you were too young to be caught. It made a great time bringin' a young baby wrecked from a wreck. Mother had lost her boy, 'cept Sam, more'n six months, and when I put you in her arms he heaved right up and said you should be her baby."

"And you never learned the name of the ship, nor where she came from?"

"No. The boats came ashore completely smashed to pieces, and not a soul was saved. I told a telling except you and you were a baby. The excitement o' findin' you made us forget everything. We rowed right ashore, and you should be the baby. I got you to mother. Nobody thought of anything 'cept the girl baby found in the cabin. Folks came for miles to see you and to see where the ship was wrecked. It wasn't more than an hour after we took you away when the wreck just quietly broke up and sunk. Not a trace of a paper or a name was found on the broken name-board."

"Yes. That was all. It was found by Caleb Bate's boy more'n a month after, wedged in the rocks on the shore. Just a broken piece of board with three letters carved on it. I've got it now somewhere. Nothing on it but three letters, M and A and a 1—Mai, the name I gave you."

For a few moments not a word was said. She had heard the story many times before. Never before had it made such an impression on her. But for this old man she was she? Where was she born? And where was her father—her mother? Were they living? She could not think that her mother could have been in the ship. She would not have abandoned her. She would have stayed on the wreck to die with her. Then the ship's captain—dead and silent forever—was he her father? She could not think that. He would not have left her on the wreck to die alone, even if only an infant. At least he must have known her mother or something about her. And he was dead—like the poor unknown ship with the broken name—silent forever.

Now she was to take with love a new name. Could she take it? Yes. Love accepts love unasked, unthinking. Yet—

The old man seemed to guess her thoughts.

"Haven't I been a good father to you, Mai?"

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"The best—the best that could be. But, father, did you never make search for any ship with a name having those three letters?"

"She had never thought of this question before in all her life. Her girlhood had been so peaceful and happy it had never come into her heart to think of it. She was his daughter by the adoption of love and care. She had never thought to ask more."

"No, Mai. I never did. We didn't think of it. You were only a baby, mother was sick and died, and there were so many things to think of I took you as a little girl just sent out of heaven for me to love, and I didn't do anything. I s'pose we ought to have done something 'bout it, but we were plain folks, and we didn't think. It wasn't just right."

"It's no matter now, father. Sam does not care."

"No, Sam does not care. He loves you, and I guess he's contented. I be, so long as you stay near me."

Then they fell into silence for a few moments. The old man was twice tempted to speak, but he did not. There was more to tell—something he had never mentioned to any, except to his dead wife, and she was dead. He kept it always a secret, and he had promised her.

"Mother was right," he said in his heart. "It would break the girl's heart if she knew. There was no use in her knowing now."

"And the