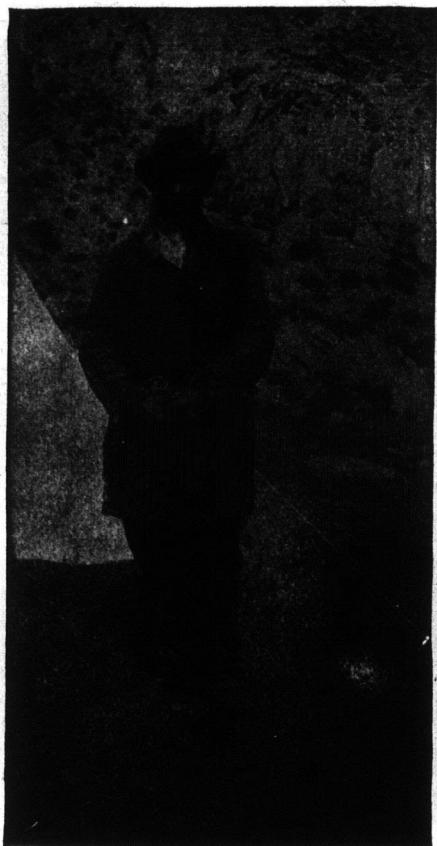


Ships that Pass

By Margaret Scott

Nearly everyone on board called him the Little Colonel. That was because his father was a real Colonel, tall and broad-shouldered, and the child was remarkably like him—a soldier in the miniature. He was an affable little fellow, and had not been on board the "Vulture" for more than a couple of days before he had made friends with everyone from the captain down to the boy in the kitchen who washed the dishes, and to each in turn he confided all the most important details concerning his childish life. They all knew that his daddy was Administrator for Antigua, and lived in the Government House on the Island. "Whenever the Governor comes to the Island, he stays with us," he used to say to people quite seriously, "but I'll tell you a secret. The Governor is really rather afraid of Daddy, and so he does not often come. Then sometimes Daddy gets leave, and we all go home to England for a while. I've got a brother in England. He's quite big—more than twelve, and he's at boarding school. Next time we go to England I'm going to be left behind at boarding school too."



A Well Known Official Packer for Mountain Climbers

They were on their way back from England to Antigua on board the "Vulture"—he and his Mummy and Daddy and Cousin Mildred, who was quite grown up. The child's black nurse was also with them, but she was ill most of the voyage, and so the little fellow, when not out walking on the deck hand in hand with his father, or sitting looking at pictures with his mother and Cousin Mildred was free to run about and make the acquaintance of all the people on the boat. There were three other children among the passengers, with whom he often played, Molly and Tommy and Violet, and it was one day when he was romping with them that an officer came up and spoke rather sharply to them because they were jumping about on a deck chair, pretending Basil was Father Christmas and the other children his fairies, and the chair of course was the sleigh. "You must find something else to amuse yourself with," the officer said, and walked away leaving the four small people looking rather disconsolately at each other, for Father Christmas was such an exciting game. "Shall we have soldiers?" suggested the Little Colonel at length. He was generally pioneer in all sports. "Soldiers is only a boy's game," grumbled Molly, and so he tried to think of something else, for he was too much of a little gentleman to insist on any

game to which a small girl objected, but all the same it was rather hard to manufacture ideas just at once.

And then someone else appeared on the scene. She was a girl too, but quite grown up. Indeed she was fearfully old. She must have been at least twenty-five and she wore a ring on her wedding finger, and was dressed all in black. She stood looking down at the small people as though she felt interested in them. Then finally she spoke.

"Who would like a game of hide and seek?" she asked, and at first the children were so much surprised at her question that they never answered a word. Then Basil as usual found his tongue.

"Would you play with us?" he enquired, and his little fair face flushed up sensitively, for he somehow fancied it was not usual for grown-up girls to like hide and seek, and yet some instinct told him that it would be more polite to ask her to join them when she had suggested it like that.

"I should love to play with you," the big girl answered, and quite suddenly Basil went up beside her and slipped his little hand into hers.

"Can I hide with you, please?" he whispered, still rather shyly, and then he looked up in her face and smiled divinely, and from that moment the friendship between them was sealed.

They played hide and seek for the rest of the morning—Basil and the big girl and the other three children, and towards lunch time when the Colonel came up on deck to look for his little son, he found him very rosy faced and bright eyed, romping round the place with the big girl after him, and he smiled to himself, but did not disturb the game.

That afternoon Molly and Tommy and Violet were sent off to bed to sleep, and Basil feeling rather lonely, came suddenly upon the girl again, and fancied she looked lonely too. So he slipped up to her with a smile, and the result was that that afternoon, which he had fancied would be such a long one, passed very quickly away, for he and his big friend paced the sunlit deck together, hand in hand, and he chattered while she listened, and before tea time she knew all there was to know about him, and had fallen a victim to his charms just as everyone else on board had also done. Though Basil himself never realized that he was any different from other children, and in his innocence, if ever he troubled about it at all, he thought it was very good of people to be so kind to him.

"I like being just alone with you," he informed the big girl frankly when at last the winter afternoon was drawing to its close. "Shall we be together again to-morrow just like this? I know we could tell each other stories, just you and I—no one else."

Then that pretty instinct which always made him thoughtful of other people's feelings, prompted another suggestion.

"Praps you don't want a little boy like me, though," he half faltered, "Praps you'd rather be with someone else."

"No. I should like to be with you," she told him truthfully, and he looked up into her face with wondering blue eyes.

"Haven't you a Mummy or a Daddy on the boat with you?" he enquired compassionately. "Are you here all by yourself?"

"Yes," she answered laughingly. "I am married you know. I have a Mummy and Daddy, too, but they are in England. My husband is in Canada, and I'm going out to him. So just at present I'm all alone, and I like to talk with you."

At which his dear little face quite lit up.

"I didn't think you were married," he said so simply. "I thought you were just a big girl."

Then a pause, and a delighted little smile.

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