

# SIR WILLIAM'S WILL

"We are going to have a shower," said Clytie cheerfully.

"Yes," he said succinctly. "If you'll be so good as to stand up one moment, I'll help you on with these."

"Oh, but I could not," she protested; "you will have nothing!"

He knelt on the stern-seat and got the tiller between his knees.

"Quick, please!" he said, almost curtly in his anxiety. "It will be upon us in a moment, and you will be wet through."

"And you—?" She hesitated, but he had begun to slip the thick, stiff coat on her, and with a shrug of the shoulders she obeyed. The wind caught the sleeves and blew them away from her, and he had to take her arms and guide them.

"The cap; you must put it on, or your hair will get wet."

Laughingly she took off her hat, the wind blowing her hair almost across his face, and put on the sou'wester.

"There are some strings," he said. "Can you tie them? Will you let me?"

He did not wait for permission, but tied the strings under her chin. His eyes were fixed on the knot he was making, and his lips were drawn tightly, so that he looked almost angry and sullen, and his fingers shook, as, necessarily, they touched her warm, smooth neck.

"Thank you, thank you," she said in a low and hurried voice. "I'm sure I cannot get wet with these things on; it would be impossible."

"Keep her out a bit, please," he said gently, as she sank back and took charge of the tiller again.

"Far enough? How the wind howls!" she said cheerfully. "I have never been on the sea in a storm."

"And I wish you weren't now," he murmured. "I must have been blind not to have seen it coming on!"

"What does it matter?" she said, "excepting that you will get wet through. How dark it has become. It is very—"

As he spoke a wave—the sea was running with almost incredible wildness, considering the short time it had had to get up—struck the boat and sent a heavy spray over her; and the next instant the rain drove across them with the force of a blow. Clytie shook the water from her face and laughed; and she laughed again when the next wave caught them and drenched the boat from bow to stern. Her eyes were sparkling, the rare color was glowing in her face, her lips were apart as if to give free play to the spirit that rose within her, and Jack glanced at her with admiration and surprise.

"You are not afraid?" he said unwittingly.

"Afraid? No!" she retorted, with a smile. "There is no danger, is there?"

Jack responded to her smile. "No, there is no danger—while we keep out here," he said, as quietly as he could in the roar and crash of wind and wave. "Of course, we cannot go in."

"Oh, I understand that," she said; "but it will not last long."

Jack could not refrain from casting a glance at the sky.

"I hope not," he said. As he spoke, he wriggled out of his shooting-coat and wrapped it round her feet.

"No, I certainly will not permit you to do that!" she said, with a sudden rush of color to her spray-wet cheeks. "Please take it back and put it on im-

mediately."

Jack shook his head. "You must keep it," he said resolutely. "It is getting cold, and—and you are not strong."

"Not strong!" She opened her eyes on him and laughed as she thrust the coat away. "Why, I am as strong as a woman could be."

"Mollie says not, and I won't risk it," he said, still more resolutely. "And, besides, what on earth's the use of the thing to me! I am wet through already, as I have been some hundreds of times before. Don't add to my remorse by refusing to take as much care of yourself as you can! I feel bad enough about you as it is, Miss Bramley."

She let him replace the coat round her, and said no more. But even in the stress of the moment she noticed that he had spoken of Mollie without the formal, respectful "Miss."

"I am afraid we shall have to keep her farther out," he said presently. "We're getting the back current of the wind here, and there are some rocks. Quick!" he commanded sharply, but calmly; and he leaned forward and seized the tiller.

Unwittingly his strong hand had closed on hers, and she felt all the force of his as he pressed down on her own. If he had been nervous, which she was not, the strength of the hand that seemed to almost crush hers would have given her confidence. She stretched her fingers when he had released them, with a sense of protection, of assurance, and glanced at his face with a strange light in her violent eyes. There was silence for some time, then:

"Oh, Mollie!" she exclaimed, not loudly, but he heard her.

"That's all right," he said quickly. "They will think we have waited ashore, at the Head, until the storm passed."

"Of course," she assented with a smile. "Besides, she is not nervous, and takes things that would send some girls into hysterics quite calmly."

"The Bramley pluck," he commented absently.

She looked at him with a curious expression.

"Are we far enough out?" she asked.

She had to raise her voice; and its calm, ringing note sang intoxicatingly in his ears. Intoxicatingly, because, like most strong men must be, he was exhilarated by the storm, and her clear unwavering voice was like that of a fellow spirit calling to him, stirring his emotion. He nodded; he could not trust himself to speech. They could not see the coast-line now; the wind-driving rain had blotted it out; nothing was visible but the great waves surging round them and ever and again breaking in white spray, rendered dazzling by the surrounding darkness, over the boat and falling in a sheet of wet down the all-protecting oilskins that enveloped Clytie.

"It is magnificent!" she said, in her full, round voice; "but it is lasting longer than I thought. Where are we going?"

"Toward Labrador!" he replied grimly. "I'm a pretty kind of man to be trusted with a young girl—lady."

"Oh, come!" she retorted, with a laugh, as she dashed the water from her eyes. "You are not Prospero, you know; you didn't raise the storm, Mr. Douglas!"

"No; but I ought to have seen that



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it was coming," he said bitterly. "I ought to know the coast by this time. It's not the first time I've been caught in a sou'wester. Why didn't I look at the sky? Why did I let her come? Are you getting wet?"

"I am as dry as the proverbial bone," she replied cheerfully; "and, if I do get wet, what does it matter? As for you, you must be drenched—Ah!"

The cry was wrung from her by a flash of lightning that, for a moment, made visible the huge waves through which they were plowing.

"That means that it will soon be over," she said, as if apologizing for her involuntary exclamation. "Oh, how wet you look!" She laughed ruefully as she leaned forward, sweeping the water from her eyes.

"The worst is to come," he said, frankly; for he knew that nothing could daunt her spirit. "I must lower the sail, or we shall have it torn to ribbons. Give me the tiller. Your hands must be numb."

He dropped the sail, and seated himself beside her; sheltering her as well as he could from the wind and the driving rain.

"Strange," she said, close to his ear, "but I haven't felt so—so happy for a long time. I suppose we women all like excitement, Mr. Douglas; and this is the most exciting moment I have ever seen, where are we now, I wonder? I fancy—it is only fancy, of course—that we have passed Withycombe."

"No," he said. "We are nearly opposite it. Are you wet? Have the rain and the spray drenched you?"

"No," she replied. "I am sure I am quite dry, but there is a pool of water in my lap. I think I will tilt it out."

And she tilted it out, and presently she was before he could stay her; a huge wave caught the boat, and she was thrown, hurled, against the side. She struck her head on the gunwale, and slid a limp and helpless form at his feet.

Jack caught at her and lifted her to his breast. In doing so, he released his hold of the tiller and the boat swung round broadside to the mountainous waves. For an instant they were in deadly peril; but, with one arm still encircling her, he regained the tiller and put the boat headways to the billows, and the peril was averted. She hung on his arm like a fly, her face pressed against his breast, her eyes closed, her lips apart as if her spirit had passed through them for the last time.

Jack lost his head. He pressed her to him, calling on her name in the accents of the strong man in anguish.

"Clytie! Clytie! I have killed her!" he cried. "Oh, God, I have killed her!"

A faint thrill ran through her; the crush of his embrace sent a still warmer glow racing along her veins. She sighed and, insensibly, nestled closer to him.

"Clytie!" he cried hoarsely. "You are safe. It is all right! I am here—Douglas, Wilfred Carton—oh, my darling, you are hurt—hurt!"

He pressed her to him—it was all he could do—and murmured, still hoarsely, encouragement; and presently she opened her eyes and, with a little shiver, stirred in his arms.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Are we—wrecked?"

"No, no," he responded fervently, eagerly. "We are all right. A wave caught you—you were hurt. Oh, Clytie!"

She moved slowly, not too readily, until she had slid—there is no other word that will adequately describe the movement—from his arms, and sank into the seat.

She was silent for a moment, while he watched, devoured, her with his ardent, anxious eyes. She could see them through the mist, the darkness of the raging storm.

"—I must have fainted," she said. "Something hit me."

"You fell against the side of the boat," he said, hoarsely. "Are you hurt—in pain? If only I had some brandy!"

"I am all right," she said, in a very quiet, still voice.

"Thank God!" he breathed, devoutly. "I was afraid—no, I'll take the tiller. Sit there." He placed the cushion for her at the bottom of the boat. "The storm is passing; there is a streak of light in the west. You are sure that you are not hurt?"

"Quite," she said; and she lay almost at his feet, her head pillowed on her arm. He could not see her face; if he had been able to do so, he could not have failed to have seen the ex-ting; her breath—and how he listened to it!—came as regularly, as softly, as a child's.

The moments passed, and with them the storm—one of the most sudden and wild that even that coast had ever experienced. The sky grew clearer, the waves sank, the rain ceased and the wind dropped to a moderate breeze. Jack raised the sail and made for Withycombe. Clytie lay quite quiet; she seemed to be sleeping; her breath—how he listened to it!—came as regularly, as softly, as a child's.

It was not until they swept into Withycombe harbor that she stirred, and, sitting up, said:

"Are we there?"

"We are," he said, almost gruffly; what words had he allowed to escape him in that moment of anguish, that moment of dread? "Here we are, and here are Lord Stanton and Miss Mollie," he added, as those two persons rushed down to the boat.

"Oh, you poor dear!" exclaimed Mollie, as she flung her arms round Clytie. "You wicked girl! And you, Mr. Douglas! How could you let her go to sea in such a storm?"

"Yes; it was my fault, Miss Mollie!" said Jack, remorsefully.

"By George, we were on tenterhooks!" said Lord Stanton. "We came on here by the road."

"Get her—get Miss Bramley home as soon as you can," broke in Jack, grimly, commandingly. "She is wet—cold."

As Clytie turned, with Mollie's arm round her, she looked over her shoulder at his drenched figure, but she said nothing.

She was silent until they reached the farm. As Mollie slipped the oilskins from the slim figure, she exclaimed:

"Oh, you poor dear Clytie! Such a storm! You must have been terrified out of your life! Now, don't tell me you weren't afraid!" for Clytie had laughed strangely.

"Yes," she responded, with a little shiver; but with her eyes lowered, as if she feared Mollie's loving scrutiny. "I was afraid; and—and I am afraid still!"

"No wonder!" exclaimed Mollie. "It was awful! There, get into bed! They—the fishermen—were saying that Jack Douglas must have been a marvel to have faced such a storm and lived through it. Does your head ache?"

"No," said Clytie, but she might have added that her heart did.

For certain words, spoken, cried amid the roar of the storm, still rang in her ears.

### CHAPTER XV.

He loved her!

He had not realized the fact until he had held her in his arms, had felt her heart faintly beating against his,

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