

Marshall Saunders



Her Sailor

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A Love Story



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CHAPTER I.

'TIS THE UNEXPECTED THAT OCCURS.

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"I must wear a willow garland,
For my love is on the sea;
He's a gay and gallant rover,
And I 'spect he's false to me."

THE particular weeping willow from which this garland was to be gathered was one of the most pliant and flexible in Rubicon Meadows, and it needed to be so; for many years it had been used as a rocking-horse by the slender, graceful girl swinging on one of its drooping branches.

Up and down she went, seated comfortably on one of the lower limbs. The time was seven o'clock in the morning, the season early July,—the period of greatest greenness, freshness, and delicacy in the New England summer.

The girl was putting in the hour that must elapse before her parents should see fit to descend from their chamber and partake of breakfast; and while she swung, her gaze wandered far out over the meadows toward the distant village twinkling and sparkling in the early morning sun.

It was one of the loveliest spots in New Hampshire, but the river and the meadows and the village were an old story to the swinging girl. At present her thoughts were far from her home and her immediate surroundings; and, closing her eyes, she sang more vivaciously than ever:

"He's a gay and gallant rover,
And I 'spect he's false to me."

"No, he isn't," said a voice, so deep and so sudden that she almost lost her balance, and her hazel eyes flew open

with unwonted rapidity.

“Ah!” she said, drawing a long breath, and clinging closer to her shaggy green steed.

While she had been singing the man had come down the dusty road to the old-fashioned house on the meadows,—a man of medium size, possessing a strongly built, powerful frame, a dark face burnt almost black from the sun, and a peculiar gravity of manner that proclaimed even more loudly than his swarthy complexion some foreign admixture of blood.

The girl in the tree knew who he was. This was the lover of whom she had been singing. He was the offspring of an adventurous Spanish maiden, of Valencia, who had run away from home to marry a love-stricken British sailor; and the girl was American, or considered herself so, and her lover was considerably older than herself. When he removed his hat her eyes went unerringly to his one defect, the unmistakable bald spot in the centre of his thick crop of black hair.

He delighted in startling her. He had crept softly through the gate and under the tree where she was singing; and gazing demurely down at him as he stood with his head a few inches from her face, she remarked, mischievously, “Mr. Owl, do you see the sun? Why did you not wait for the moon?”

He reached up one hand and seized the trembling branch, then with the other gently attempted to draw the light head from its nest of green leaves. It would not come. What an exquisite, waggish, obstinate and altogether

adorable little head it was. Yet it would not lie on his shoulder.

“Come down, chickadee,” he said, longingly.

“Come up, Mr. Owl,” she replied, teasingly.

She was daring him. Both his powerful arms went up to her perch; and, lifting her down, he seated himself on the rustic bench underneath, and smoothed back the fluffy auburn hair from her white forehead.

She sat on his knee with her red lips firmly pressed together. She would not open them. She was obdurate to his appeals for a word, a smile, a caress.

“Go back, then, you obstinate parrot,” he said; and, irritably restoring her to her former position, he stretched himself against the back of the seat, and propped his head on his hand.

She drew aside one of the willow’s pendant arms. “This—at seven o’clock in the morning! I am shocked.”

“I have been up all night,” he replied, sleepily.

“All night,—then you were after no good.”

“No, no good,” he said, uncovering an eye to look at her. “I was drawing out a new will, arranging papers, etc., preparatory to—”

“Suicide?” she asked, in an interested way.

“No, not suicide, matrimony. To-morrow morning at six of the clock I shall cease to be a free man.”

The girl looked him all over; she observed curiously the effect of the little flecks of light playing from his dusty walking shoes up to his dark, smooth face with its heavy black moustache. Then she said, hastily, “I shall not marry you to-morrow, Mr. Owl.”

“I did not ask you to, Miss Parrot,” he said, disagreeably.

The girl resumed her swinging, her eyes this time fixed on the green meadows and the pretty village. For a long time she ignored the presence of her lover as completely as she did that of the huge black watch-dog loitering about the trunk of the tree in expectation of her descent and preparation of his breakfast.

However, she was singing of him, although she did not address him, and as she sang the man’s gloomy expression changed to one of complacency, for he was again her theme.

“I remember the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free,
And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.”

He knew what she was thinking of. Her busy young brain was occupied with its favourite problem, namely, himself. Ever since childhood she had been told that some mysterious link bound her to him; that every particle of food she ate, every scrap of clothing she wore, came from him; that, in short, she belonged to him, and, according to some secret and to her unknown arrangement, her marriage to him was a predetermined, foreordained thing; that if she refused to submit, she might fall victim to some threatening evil, some shadowy calamity. And now he knew that he had puzzled her, for in the face of all this past instruction he had just made her think he was about to marry some other woman.

“What are you crying about, birdie?” he asked, suddenly.

Big tear-drops were quietly rolling down her cheeks and over her white dress; but, without making any effort to wipe them away, she was singing more unconcernedly than ever. This time, however, a different tune and different words.

“He sighed her to death with his sighs so deep,
He drugged her asleep with his bad black eyes,
He tangled her up in his stories steep,
And made her think of him marriagewise.”

“The dickens! What are you reciting, you little recluse?” he inquired, with pardonable brusqueness.

“Something I made up after reading in a book about a deceitful man who inveigled a poor woman into marriage with him,” she replied, not meeting his eyes, and keeping her own fixed on a distant church steeple.

“What are you crying about, birdie?” he repeated again, this time in the softest and gentlest of tones.

“Am I crying?” she asked, innocently brushing a hand over her cheek. “It must be for that poor creature who has to be your wife.”

“Has to be,—she has promised me fifty times over;” and, forgetting his fatigue, he sprang up, and once more laid a hand on the swinging limb.

The girl tried to start it. It would not move, and she exclaimed, imperiously, “Please take your hand off my horse’s bridle.”

The horse was still detained, and, refusing to meet the steady glance of his eyes, she gazed away out over the meadows, and sang, waggishly:

“I’ll not marry you, kind sir, she said, sir, she said, sir, she said,

I’ll not marry you, kind sir, she said,
Because you are too lordly.”

“Lordly,” he muttered, “I am your slave. Look here,” and he cautiously lifted a damp curl from her forehead. “You are bathed in perspiration. So much for being a woman, for jumping at conclusions, and landing in a paroxysm of jealousy.”

The girl was forced to call in her wandering gaze. He would stand there until doomsday if she did not; and, with a provoking uplift of her light brows, she looked down into the two black penetrating eyes that pierced her face like lances.

“It was jealousy,” he said, with satisfaction. “You thought for an instant that I was speaking of some other woman.”

“I was not jealous. I was glad.”

“Yes, you were,” he said, doggedly, “and I am glad you were—and listen. Circumstances have arisen that make it necessary for me to give you the protection of my name. You trust me fully—”

“Not that far!” she exclaimed, measuring off an inch on one of her pink fingers.

He laughed, seized the finger, and carried it to his lips. “I cannot explain, but we must be married at once. It will only be an empty ceremony. You are not ready yet to bow your wilful young neck under the yoke of matrimony.”

“I shall not have a phantom marriage,” she said, indignantly. “Go away, you bad sea-dog.”

“Then let it be a real one,” he said, eagerly. “Give up your will to me. Stop being a wilful spoiled child of a *fiancée*, and become a loving, sensible little wife. You can if you want to. There is nothing but the frail barrier of your will between us. Sometimes I think I would like to break it, but—” suddenly pausing. “What a fool I am! One might as well

rhapsodise to a marble statue as to you, icy, passionless child that you are. Perhaps when you get away from your present dead-and-alive surroundings—”

“Perhaps what?” she inquired, and her beautiful eyebrows again went into the air.

“You will live with me, make a home for me, act sane instead of insane,” he said, shortly.

“What do you mean by getting away from my dead-and-alive surroundings?” she inquired.

“It means that after that ceremony to-morrow, which will make you feel neither maid, wife, nor widow, I want to take you away from here. You would like to travel?”

“To travel,—to see new places, new people? I, who have not even been allowed to go to Boston?” and she stretched out the flowing white sleeves of her gown, like wings. “What a question to ask me!”

“You could not travel,” he said, gloomily. “There were reasons.”

“I won’t believe there were reasons till I know them,” she said, obstinately. “You have kept me shut up here. You,—not poor papa and mamma,—until I am so tired of everything, so sick of the same old roads, the same old people, the same girls and boys, even the same sticks and stones. I began to think I was never to leave it. I was to stay here till I died, died, died.”

“Well, now is your chance.”

“I don’t wish any chance this way. I wish to go alone.”

He released the branch and threw himself down again on the seat. “You are going with me.”

“Am I going to England?”

“Yes.”

“Am I going on the *Merrimac*? Am I really to have a voyage?”

“Yes and yes. Do you think I would let you sail under any other man’s orders?”

She made no reply for a time, and seemed to be fully occupied in following the windings of the serpent-like Rubicon.

“You need not pose as my wife,—that is, you need not occupy yourself with me. Every man in command of a ship is accustomed to have solitary young persons travelling in his charge. I shall not impose my society upon you—not unless you request it,” he added, slowly.

She had traced the Rubicon until it blended with the horizon, and now she looked into his resolved face. “What do you propose to do with me when we reach England?”

“I propose to follow your wishes to the last degree,” he said, with weary gallantry. “If you wish to stay in England I will find some suitable place for you; if you wish to come back with me—” a short satisfied laugh finished the sentence.

“You think I will come back with you,” she said, uneasily.

“I know you will,” he replied, with a conceit so marked that her quick temper was aroused in a flash. “I shall not go one step with you,” she cried, petulantly.

“Why not?” he asked, coolly.

“Because you will make me—make me—” She choked and stammered, and could not proceed.

“Make you what?” he said, gravely. “I shall not force you to be my wife, if that is what you mean. I hope—I want you

to consent to live with me sometime; but I give you my word that, if you do not come willingly, you come not at all."

"It isn't that," she cried, trying to stamp her foot, but only agitating it violently in the unresisting air. "I know I will give in, I know I will go, I know you will make me mind you—you will make me glad to do it. Oh, I am so angry!"

She was indeed angry, and the pink fingers were now raging among the willow leaves, and stripping them from their twigs. "And you don't love me," she went on, furiously, "you only love having your own detestable way."

"So you think I don't love you," he said, meditatively.

"Of course you don't. You never blush when you see me, you never stammer when you talk. You take everything for granted. Other men don't act like that."

"What do I want to blush for? I have done nothing to be ashamed of," he said, doggedly, "and why should I stammer? I have got a straight tongue in my head, and how do you know what other men do?"

"Don't I read books,—don't I see them? There's one boy in Rubicon Meadows turns perfectly purple when he sees me. I don't like having known you ever since I was a baby. I wish you would go away and let me alone," and she sulkily executed a movement on the branch by which her back was turned on him.

"All right; I have dangled about you long enough. Now I will give place to the Rubicon Meadows boys. You have played fast and loose with me about our engagement, and I don't believe you ever intend to marry me. If you don't call me back before I get to that second row of gooseberry-bushes you will never see me again."

“You don’t mean ‘never,’” said the girl, hotly, over her shoulder; “you’re tired and cross, and you’ve lost your last remnant of temper. You’re in a pretty state of mind to come proposing to a girl.”

“Good-bye, Nina,” he continued, calmly. “Tell your next admirer that I said you were a nice little girl, but you have a d— a dragon of a temper.”

“Good-bye, monster,” she called after him, as he took up his hat and strode away. “You’re a nice man, but you’re getting stout and middle-aged, and you’re a great deal older than I am, and the bald spot in the middle of your head is increasing, and I just hate you—I hate you.”

Wincing under the dainty brutality of her personal allusions, the man clapped his hat on his head and quickened his steps. His gravity of manner was all gone. No one in the world had power to stir him as this slip of a girl had.

She watched him going, dashing the tears from her eyes as she watched. He had passed the rose-bush, the ugly rose-bush that never bore anything but worm-eaten roses. She wished that a tempest would come and tear it from its roots. He had stumbled over the big mossy stone by the well, the miserable stone on which every one tripped. She wished he would fall down and break a limb. He had passed the first row of gooseberry-bushes. Why did they not stretch out their thorny arms and tear his clothes?

Now he had reached the second row of gooseberries. “Pirate!” she shrieked, wrathfully, after him.

He would not reply to her. He was fumbling with the fastening of the gate,—the old-fashioned fastening that her

father was always forgetting to have mended. She hoped that he might be detained there an hour. No, a gate would not stop him. He had placed a hand on it, and had vaulted over. Now he had disappeared.

She would run to the gate to see the last of him, and she slipped down the tree-trunk like a lithe little cat. “That stupid fastening!” and she furiously rattled the gate. Then she climbed over. She would follow him just for fun—not with the idea of appeasing him.

For some seconds she trotted silently after him down the dusty road. Then she called gently, “Esteban!”

He did not turn. He had said the second row of gooseberry-bushes, and now he was crossing the Rubicon. And he always kept his word.

“Esteban,” she called, wildly, “come back! You have dropped your pocketbook.”

Again he did not look around, but she saw his hand go up to his side. He must have heard her.

She tried again. “Esteban, I wish to tell you something—something important.”

He would not turn. He did not turn until he heard a heavy splash in the river.

“That tiresome girl,”—and, choking an exclamation, he strode back to the bridge. She had jumped into the river to annoy him. No, she had not gone herself, she had sent the big black dog who was swimming composedly about. The fool—he would do anything she told him. She was in hiding herself,—he could see her brown head under one of the seats of the bridge.

The tired man flung himself down on the opposite seat, and fixed his eyes on the head. How brown, nay, how yellow it looked. He got up and peered down at it. It was not his little sweetheart curled up there. He was gazing at a bunch of yellow flowers.

He turned hastily to the river. There was her cap floating on the water. He became sick and faint. There had been only one splash, yet where was she? Every tender memory of his life, every ambition for the future, clustered around that brown head. He would go and get her. He would search in the grass of the river bank, he would—his head fell on his arm, and a strange, delicious forgetfulness crept over him. He was going to faint for the first time in his life. He struggled against it, first violently, then feebly, then his head fell on his breast and he knew no more.

CHAPTER II. SCHOOLMA'AM AND WIFE, BUT NEVER A MOTHER.

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WHILE the sailor and the young girl were having their conversation in the garden, two people who were intensely interested in their movements were taking their breakfast in one of the back rooms of the plain, old-fashioned house.

One of them was a fat, testy man, with large and prominent watery gray eyes, who was irritably chipping the top from an egg, and varying this occupation by casting frequent and semi-displeased glances through the open window. Mr. Israel Danvers was master of this house, owner of the principal store in the village across the meadows, and husband of the woman with the large, cool, comfortable face, who sat opposite him pouring his coffee.

"I wonder what that Fordyce is up to now?" he muttered, with a whole volley of glances outside.

"I don't know," responded Mrs. Danvers, tranquilly, "but I imagine it's something important. Otherwise he'd wait for lamplight."

"What do you mean by important?"

"I mean marriage."

Mr. Danvers fretfully scattered his egg-shell on the table-cloth. "Nina is too young to marry."

"She is eighteen."

"She is too young, I say. She is nothing but a butterfly."

"She is certainly frivolous," said Mrs. Danvers, with a judicial air.

“Would you have her a suspicious old woman?” retorted her husband. “She’s got the b-best heart and the s-sweetest disposition,—she’s a fine girl,” he concluded, lamely. He could not be eloquent, but he felt deeply, and his prominent eyes watered in a sincere and affectionate manner as he went on with his breakfast.

“Where’s my coffee?” he asked, presently.

Mrs. Danvers started slightly, and passed him the forgotten cup.

“You’ve half filled it with sugar,” he said, “I guess you were dreaming when you poured it.”

Again she said nothing, and quietly poured him another cup; but he persisted, “What was you thinking of, Melinda?”

“I was pondering on the mysteries of the law of mutual selection, if you must know,” she said, calmly.

He surveyed her suspiciously. She had been a school-teacher before she married him, and her education had been greatly superior to his own. Comprehending his state of mind, she went on, kindly: “With regard to Fordyce and Nina. He lands in a state where there are one hundred and fifty thousand more women than men. The most of those women have good eyes, ears, noses, fine heads of hair, yet he comes rushing over the border into New Hampshire.”

“I’ll venture to say there isn’t another Nina in Massachusetts,” said the fat man.

“I agree with you there. She is unique.”

“Do you think she likes Fordyce well enough to marry him?” he asked, anxiously.

Mrs. Danvers became thoughtful, until an impatient movement from her husband forced an opinion from her. “I

don't know, Israel. I guess she likes him better than she pretends to, and you've no occasion to worry about her marrying him. Wild horses wouldn't make her do anything she didn't want to do; but I don't know all her mind about Fordyce. She understands me better than I understand her."

Surprised at this unlooked-for admission, he said, agreeably, "She's a clever little coot."

"Clever,—she's the smartest girl I ever saw. She's too smart. I'm afraid Fordyce will have trouble with her."

"Clever, how clever?" interposed Mr. Danvers, up in arms for his favourite. "You don't mean to say she's sneaky?"

"No, not sneaky," said Mrs. Danvers, in deep thought; "not sneaky, but shy and nervous, and pretending she's got plenty of coolness when she hasn't, and more one for getting her way secretly than openly. And she's full of tricks and moods and quirks of all kinds. You don't understand her, Israel."

Mr. Danvers did not know whether to be gratified or annoyed by his wife's expansive state of mind. She had never before spoken just so freely of their adopted daughter. "I don't try to understand her," he said, doubtfully. "I just take her as she is."

"Fordyce don't. He wants to know every thought in her mind," proceeded Mrs. Danvers, "and thinks he knows them, too, but sometimes he's too sure."

"He's too short with her, too short," observed Mr. Danvers, pettishly. "He ought to take into account that she's got a will of her own."

"He's a primitive man; he'd kill any one that took her away from him. You see he's got nothing but her."

Mr. Danvers was silent. He did not know what she meant by a primitive man.

“He could step right out into the woods and live with savages,” explained Mrs. Danvers; “and if he wanted a woman he’d knock her down with his club and carry her off to his cave with the best of them.”

Mr. Danvers treated her to an exhibition of open-mouthed astonishment and disapproval. “Melinda, are you crazy to talk of such goings-on?”

“Men don’t do such things nowadays,” she said, soothingly, “but there’s a heap of wild nature in a good many of us. I guess you’d like to turn Fordyce out this very minute.”

“You bet your life I would,” said the fat man, with energy, and without premeditation. “I’d send him flying down that road. He’s too old for Nina. Let her marry one of the boys around here.”

“Do you know what she calls the Rubicon Meadows boys?” asked Mrs. Danvers, dryly.

“No, but I know she don’t mean a third of what she says.”

“Giggling colts, Israel. Colts, just think of it. You see Fordyce has a kind of manner of knowing everything, and he’s out in the world. Then he comes stealing in her life like a mystery, and she likes that. I guess we’ve got to let him have her. We couldn’t stop him, anyway. He’ll tame her and she’ll do him good. I expect he’s mortal blue at times.”

Mr. Danvers relapsed into sullenness, tinged with vindictiveness. He understood his wife well enough to know that the burden of her talk was the duty of resignation. “You’ve always been hard on that girl,” he said, irascibly.

“Hard on her, Israel! Seventeen years I’ve had her, and there isn’t a soul in Rubicon Meadows besides you that guesses she isn’t our own child. How’s that for being hard on her?”

Melinda’s eyes were sparkling. She looked ten years younger than she had before their conversation began, and he abruptly drifted into memories of bygone days. So far back did he go that it was some time before he murmured, absently: “Howsomever, you’ve been well paid for it.”

“Paid for it,” she repeated, with asperity, “there are some things money can’t pay for.”

This was a statement he could not deny, yet in some indefinable and inexplicable way he felt that she had been slightly lacking in her duty to the lovable butterfly outside. Melinda did not admire the pretty creature as he did; and at this very instant her unusual outspokenness and animation arose from her acute suspicion that their vivacious charge was about spreading her wings for flight.

She was a good woman, though, this wife of his, and she was only a trifle queer. However, everybody seemed queer but himself, and he sank into bitter and resigned reflection, and muttered, almost inaudibly, “After all said and done, we’ve got to take folks after the pattern they’re made, and not as we’d make ’em over.”

Mrs. Danvers saw that the tide was turning. “Israel,” she said, solemnly shaking her head at him, “no one will ever know what I’ve gone through with that child. When she was laid in my arms a little, motherless babe, and her tiny fingers curled around mine, my heart went out to her. She’s

got it yet, but she's been greatly provoking, and you've made too much of her, Israel, you know you have."

"I'll not deny I've favoured her some," he said, gruffly.

"I've never spoken about it before," she replied, nervously, "and I'll never say it again; but I've been jealous of that girl, Israel, real jealous; and yet, with it all, you'll not miss her as much when she goes as I will. A man gets over things. A woman broods."

Mr. Danvers weakly toyed with a morsel of bread.

"I've got some of the mother spirit," his wife went on, with tears in her eyes. "Enough of it, thank the Lord, to make me sorry to have her go. We've got to be lonely, Israel, real lonely, after she leaves, and I'm glad to have this talk first."

Mr. Danvers was embarrassed, exceedingly embarrassed; and for the first time in his life was willing to acknowledge that possibly he might have done wrong, possibly he might have indulged too much the pink and white gipsy in the muslin frock outside. However, it was not befitting his position as head of the household to eat too large a piece of humble pie at one time, so he said, protestingly, "As for jealousy, how you women run on. You're just like wildfire. Now I've liked that little girl just as if she was my own, but not like you, Melinda. A man's wife is different. I wonder you speak of such a thing, and I a deacon in the church."

"I wasn't speaking of anything but your acting like a foolish father," she said, indignantly. "Of course you'd never think of comparing Nina to me. She's only a baby, and whatever happens, Israel Danvers, I hope you'll remember I am your wedded wife. I know I'm getting old—"

She broke down, and tears finished the sentence.

Mr. Danvers was aghast. He had not seen her cry for twenty years,—not since her mother died. Getting up with difficulty, he waddled to her end of the table, and, gingerly tapping her shoulder, ejaculated, “So, so, there,—so, so.”

Mrs. Danvers wiped her eyes and gave him a slight push. “I’m not a cow, Israel, and go back to your seat. There’s some one coming.”

Nina was quietly slipping in through the window. Approaching the foot of the table, she took Mr. Danvers’s bald head in her embrace and kissed him sweetly and fervently. Then, nearing the head of the table, she pecked at Mrs. Danvers’s cheek in an affectionate but perfunctory manner.

“Here’s your mush,” said Mrs. Danvers, uncovering a small bowl. “Israel, pass the cream; where’s Captain Fordyce, Nina?”

“I left him on the bridge. I think he must be waiting for the moon,” she said, seriously.

Her lips were pale, and there was a nervous expression about her eyes, and Mrs. Danvers said to herself, “They’ve had a quarrel.”

“Ever see him by daylight before, pussy?” asked Mr. Danvers.

“No, daddy.”

“Must look kind of queer.”

“He looks older,” said the girl, with her spoon poised over her mush. She had fallen into a reverie and was gazing fixedly out the window. After a time she roused herself and said: “He had a faint turn on the bridge.”

“He—faint?” said Mrs. Danvers, incredulously.

“Yes,” said Nina, with a queer look, and dropping her eyes. “He has been working hard and not eating much, and the sun shone on his head and made him dizzy. I thought, mamma, you might give him some medicine.”

“I’ll give him some if he’ll take it,” said Mrs. Danvers, grimly, “but he’s not one to be coddled. What is he coming in the daytime for? Does he want anything particular?”

Nina turned quickly and gave her an owlish stare,—a stare so sudden that Mrs. Danvers had not time to avert her own gray eyes shining with so glad a light.

“Would you let him marry me right away, mamma, if he wanted to?”

“Well,” hesitated Mrs. Danvers, “your case isn’t like others. Of course your engagement has been standing a good while.”

“Does he want to marry you right off?” asked Mr. Danvers, sharply.

“Yes, dear daddy,” said the girl, softly, “but you won’t let me go, will you?”

Mr. Danvers tried to speak, but only uttered a low, confused rumble like that of a helpless animal. He could do nothing, and the girl turned to her adopted mother. Her curiously expectant glance was not met. Mrs. Danvers’s head was bent over her plate. There was no protest there. The marriage must take place.

Nina, having fully satisfied herself on this point, reached out her hand for the sugar-bowl; and, carefully dusting her oatmeal, poured cream on it, and proceeded to take her breakfast in silence and composure.

“Why, there’s Captain Fordyce,” said Mrs. Danvers, suddenly. “Come in, come in,” she went on, addressing the sailor, who stood by the low, open window. “You must want some breakfast.”

They were all staring at him, but he looked his usual self, and, with a brief salutation to his host and hostess, he entered the room and seated himself at the table.

“Have some hot drink,” said Mrs. Danvers, passing him a cup. “It will make you feel better.”

His gaze went suspiciously to Nina, and the faintest and most evanescent of blushes passed over his dark face. “I had no dinner yesterday,” he said, gruffly, “and the racket on the wharf was deafening.”

“Did you have a prosperous voyage from England?” asked Mrs. Danvers, amiably.

“Yes.”

“And an agreeable company of passengers?”

“Fair,—I didn’t see much of them.”

“Were there any nice, nice girls on board?” lisped Nina, in her infantine fashion.

“Plenty,” he said unexpectedly, fixing her with an indulgent stare.

She did not address him again during the meal, although she listened attentively to every one of the curt sentences with which he favoured her parents. He was always grave, almost severe with them. Why was he not with them, with the rest of the world, as he was with her? Why at her slightest word did he lose his air of command, soften his tone, and adjust himself to any mood she happened to be in? Was it only because he loved her, or was there some