

# “So Unnecessary!”

By W. Clark Russell

In 1851 (he began—and who it was that began will quickly appear) I was in command of a small but well-known East Indiaman. She was loading for Bombay in the West India Docks in the month of August, and on returning home one afternoon I found a letter from an old friend whom I had not set eyes on for above three years. His name was Mills—Captain Francis Mills.

He had just heard (he wrote) that I was in command of the *Hecla*, and that she was to sail for Bombay in the middle of September. He wanted to send his daughter to India in charge of a trustworthy friend. Would I dine with him and talk the matter over?

I was then living in Shadwell, and Mills hailed from the other end of London. However, I promised to dine with him on the following Sunday, and with the help of the Blackwall railway and omnibuses I kept my word.

Mills was about sixty years old, a white-haired, red-faced man; he had used the sea for above thirty years, had built, owned, and commanded ships, and was now moored in a plain, comfortable house out of Westbourne Grove. His wife had long been dead. He had one child, a daughter, to whom I had supposed him so deeply attached, that I was surprised on reading his letter to find him willing to part with her. I recollected her as a pretty girl; but after three years of ocean and travel one's memory of a person grows dim.

Miss Minnie Mills was not at home when I arrived. The old skipper and I found many things to talk about before we came to the point; by-and-by he said—

“My daughter—do you remember her, Cleaver?”

“I do.”

“She is engaged to be married. She got in tow with a parson two years ago. He was home from India, and we met him at the house of a clergyman whose church we attend. He's chaplain at Junglepore, in a corner of the Punjaub, and is now ready to marry her. He's come into a trifle of money, and I want to send her out to him.”

“I wonder you can part with her.”

“Why, yes, and so do I wonder. But I'm getting on in years. I wish to see her settled with some one to look after her before my life-lines are unrove. She has no mother. Then, again, I don't mind owning she's a bit uneasy, and she makes me so too; hankers a trifle too much after pleasure; wants to go to the theatre when there's nobody to take her; pines for a few friends when I don't feel well. She's young, and her animal spirits run high, and custom, I dare say, is beginning to sicken the sympathy in her,” said he, looking at his left hand, which was rugged with gout, every finger with a “list to port.” “Parting with her will be like parting with half my heart; but it's for her good, and the man she's going to is as worthy, sober, straight-headed and pious a person as the most anxious parent could wish to see his daughter in charge of.”

“You want to send her out by the *Hecla*?”

I want to send her out with you.”

“I suppose you know I'm a bachelor?” said I.

“Pah!” he exclaimed, grinning. “An old ape bath an old eye. You are to windward now, Cleaver. Keep so, my lad, keep so.”

“I was never commissioned in this way before,” said I; “but I shall be happy to oblige you in anything. If your daughter goes as passenger in my ship, she shan't lack care and kindness. No

man better than you knows a skipper's duties. A captain's eyes aren't like a cod's. He can't see round corners without a shift of nose—scarcely more than straight ahead, mostly. But I'll do my best, and that best shall be a pleasure to me.

We shook hands. Soon after this Miss Minnie Mills came into the room. I stood up and bowed to as handsome a young creature as ever flashed an eye at a man. Indeed, the instant impression of her beauty was disheartening; it flung a sudden weight into my obligation, and I bowed a little nervously over the hand I held. At seventeen she had been pretty merely, slight in form, reserved in manner; now she was a woman, very handsomely clothed with her sex's charms. Her face was full of life vivacity and spirit were in every turn and move of her. She had dark brown eyes, deep, bland, and eloquent with light; her hair was a dark red, like bronze, and she had plenty of it; her complexion was of a charming soft whiteness, tinged with color, as though either cheek reflected the shadow of a rose; and my bachelor eyes found a particular beauty in a very delicate spangling of golden freckles—they gave a summer sunny look to her beauty, ripening it till somehow you thought of orchards, and a prospect of corn fields reddened with poppies.

At dinner our talk was mainly of India and the voyage to it, of Junglepore and the duties of the Reverend Joseph Moxon. Miss Minnie did not flush, nor did her eyes sparkle, nor did she manifest any particular emotion of any sort when we talked of India and Mr. Moxon. I thought she tried to divert the conversation from those topics: she asked me what theatres I had been to since my arrival in England; if I did not love dancing; for her part she adored it, she said—dancing and music. Old Captain Mills stuck stoutly in his talk to India and Moxon. When I asked Miss Minnie how she liked the notion of a residence in India she pouted her lips kissingly, and glanced at her father, but not wistfully.

“You'll get plenty of dancing out in India,” said I. “At most of the stations a man, I understand, has little more to do than cut capers.”

“Moxon won't have it,” said Captain Mills.

“He shan't prevent me from enjoying myself,” exclaimed the girl, with a note of mutiny.

Captain Mills, with one eye closed, viewed me steadfastly with the other over the top of the wine-glass he poised.

It was arranged that he should bring his daughter to the ship on the following Tuesday to look at the vessel and choose a cabin. I turned the fancy of her marriage over in my head from time to time till she came to the ship with her father, wondering that the old skipper did not see what would be plain to everybody:

I mean that he was sending the girl out to be married to a man she had no liking for, who did not dance and would not allow his wife to dance; who did not sing, and possibly objected to profane music; who, as my imagination figured, and as, indeed, I had gathered from what Mills had let fall, was just a plain, homely clergyman of decided views, without title to a bride of beauty and gaiety. His choice would have been well enough in a captain of Dragoons; in a parson it was highly improper. I suppose Mills counted upon association doing the work of sentiment. It might end in the girl making a devoted wife, and in the clergyman looking coldly upon her. I had sailed with some romantic commodities in my time, and had lived to see more than one surprising, unexpected issue.

Father and daughter came to the ship, and I was on board when they arrived. The *Hecla* was a comfortable, handsomely equipped vessel. She carried a cuddy, or saloon, with sleeping-berths on either hand; the furniture and fittings were of the old-world sort; strips of mirror panelled the bulkheads; the shaft of mizzenmast was hand-painted; a pianoforte was secured to the back of it; the skylights were large and handsome.

I had supposed that the girl would take some interest in, or show some pleasure at, the sights about her. She glanced languidly, and exhibited a spiritlessness of manner, as though the thought of leaving her father was beginning to sit very heavily upon her heart.

I observed, however, that, whilst she barely had eyes for the ship, she did not neglect to look at the chief mate, Mr. Aiken, who stood at the main-hatch superintending some work that was going on. He was a good-looking man, and it was therefore intelligible that the girl should notice him. He was a smart officer, and understood his duty, and continued to shout orders and sing down instructions to the fellows in the hold, insensible of our presence. Aiken was about thirty years of age; his face was colored by weather into the manly hue of the ocean calling; he had white teeth, a finely chiselled profile, an arch, intelligent, dark grey eye. Captain Mills looked at him whilst we stood on the quarter-deck after coming out of the cuddy, but seemed more struck by the smartness of his demeanor and general air than by the beauty of his face. The old salt was full of the ship, and could think of little else. All sorts of memories crowded upon him now that he was in the docks.

I wouldn't go to it again," he exclaimed in a broken voice; "yet I love the life—I love the life!"

Miss Minnie chose a berth on the port side. I asked if she meant to bring a maid with her.

"No," says Captain Mills. "She can do without a maid. What scope of purse, Cleaver, do you suppose I ride to?"

"If I can do without a maid on shore," said Miss Minnie, "I can do without one at sea."

A note of complaint ran through her sentences, as though she had a mind to make a trouble of things.

"A maid," said Captain Mills, "will be seasick till you're up with the Cape, and idle and useless and carrying on with the steward for the rest of the time till you go ashore, and then she'll leave you to get married."

As we went to the gangway the mate made a step to let us pass. Miss Minnie looked at him again, and went over the side holding her father's arm with a sudden life in her movements, as though the sight of a handsome man had worked up the whole spirit of the coquette in her.

I felt rather sorry for the Reverend Joseph Moxon as I followed the couple on to the quay, hugely admiring the fine floating grace of the girl's figure, the sparkle of her dark eye as she turned her head to look at the ship, the rich tinge her hair took from the sun. In fact, I seemed to find an image of the Reverend Joseph Moxon in old Mills' square, lurching figure alongside the sweet shape of his daughter; and *that* set me thinking of well-bred, jingling, handsome young officers at Moxon's station, where life would provide plenty of leisure for looking and for sighing.

We towed down to Gravesend on a wet morning. Nature is incapable of a gloomier exhibition of wretchedness than the scene she will paint you of the Isle of Dogs and Bugsby's Reach and the yellow stretch of water past Woolwich on a wet day. We had convict hulks moored in the river in those times, and they fitted the dark weeping weather as though they were creations of the spirit of the stream in its sulkiest and most depraved temper of invention. Their influence, too, as a spectacle was a sickness to the soul of the outward bound, whilst the decks streamed and the scuppers gushed and the rigging howled to the whipping of the wet blast, and the greasy water washed into the wake in a sort of oily ironic chuckling, as though the filthy god of the flood was in tow, and laughing under the ship's counter at the general misery aboard.

We moored to a buoy off Gravesend in the afternoon, and next morning, whilst it was still raining, the passengers arrived. Amongst the first to mount the gangway ladder were Captain Mills and his daughter. I received them and took them into the cuddy, and did my best to cheer

up the old man, but to no purpose. He broke down when the three of us were by ourselves, and sobbed in a strange, dry-eyed, most affecting manner, often turning to his daughter and bringing her to his heart and blessing her in tones which I confess made my own vision dim. She was pale with weeping.

She cried out once when he turned to fondle her—“Father. I don’t want to go! I don’t love him enough to leave you. Let me remain with you; we will return home together. It is not too late. Captain Cleaver will send my baggage ashore.”

This, I think, served to rally the old chap somewhat. He pulled his faculties together, and in a trembling voice bade his daughter remember that the man she was going to loved her, and was worthy to be loved in return. He himself was getting old, he said, and his closing days would be miserable if he believed he should die and leave her without a protector. A year is quickly lived through: she would soon be coming on a visit to England; or perhaps—who could tell?—he might himself go out the next voyage in this very identical ship, with his friend Cleaver, if he then commanded her.

When he was gone I called to the stewardess and bade her see to Miss Mills’ comfort in every direction of the cabin life. The rest of the cuddy passengers arrived quickly from Gravesend. I forget how many they were in all. I believe that every cabin was occupied. The people were of the usual sort in those days of the voyage to India by way of the Cape: a colonel and his wife, the colonel a black-faced man, with gleaming eyes that followed you to the extremities of their sockets; the wife a vast, shapeless bulk of a woman, her head covered by a wig of scarlet curls and her fingers with flashing rings, sheathing them to the first joints several military officers of various ages; a parson; two merchants of Bombay; five or six ladies, and as many children.

We met with heavy weather down Channel. In this time I saw nothing of Miss Mills. though I was constant in my inquiries after her. She was not very ill, the stewardess told me. She ate and drank, but she chose to keep her cabin. One morning, when the ship was flapping sluggishly over a wide heave of swell, clothed to the trucks in misty sunshine, which poured like pale steam into the recesses of the ocean, the girl came on deck. She was charmingly attired (I thought); her dark red hair glowed like bronze under the proudly feathered hat. Her complexion was raised; her eyes shone; the Channel dusting had done her good. and I told her so, looking with helpless admiration into her beautiful face as I gave her my arm for a turn.

After this she was punctual at table and constantly on deck. I then considered it fortunate for the Rev. Joseph Moxon that our military passengers should be, without exception, married men; the two or three who were going out alone were either leaving or joining their wives: hence the attention the girl received was without significance. They hung about her; they ran on errands; they were full of business when she hove in sight, so as to plant a chair for her and the like: but it never could come to more than that. The wives looked on, and were civil and kind in a ladylike way to the girl; but I guess she was too pretty to please them; her looks and coquettish vivacity were too conquering; whenever she spoke at table there was an eager sweep of moustache, a universal rounding of Roman and other noses in the direction of her chair. I don’t think the wives liked it; but, as I have said, they were all very kind in a genteel way.

I had made up my mind, judging from the glances the girl had directed at the handsome mate Aiken in dock, that she would, though perhaps without losing her heart, yield to the influence of his manly beauty, and be very willing to carry on an aimless flirtation when I was out of sight and the man in charge of the ship. I had also made up my mind if I caught the mate attempting to fool with the girl to bring him up with a “round turn.” In fact, I chose to be a taut hand in those matters, quite irrespective of private feelings. Apparently, however, I was to be spared the

trouble of bidding my handsome mate keep himself to himself and his weather-eye lifting for the ship and his duties only. Day after day passed, and I never caught him speaking to her.

Once only, and this was at some early date, when she and I were pacing the deck together, and Aiken was standing at the head of the weather-poop ladder, she asked me to tell her about him. Was he married? I said I believed not—I happened to *know* he was not. Who and what was his father? How long had he been at sea? When was he likely to get command? The subject was then changed, and afterwards, though I watched them somewhat jealously, I never detected so much as a glance pass between them.

The long and short of it was—I am bound to confess it—before we had struck the Canary parallels, I—myself—I—Captain Cleaver, commander of the ship *Hecla*—was seriously in love with the girl, and making my days and nights uneasy by contemplation of a proposal of marriage based on these considerations: first, that I was in love with her; next, that she was not in love with the Rev. Joseph Moxon; third, that I could give her a home in England; and then, again, her father was my friend, one of my own cloth, and I had no doubt he would be delighted if I brought her home with me as my wife.

No good, in a short yarn like this, to enter into the question of what was due from me to Joseph Moxon. Enough that I was in love with the girl, and that I had quite clearly discovered she had no affection for—she did not even like or respect—Joseph. I was eight-and-thirty years of age, and a young man at that, as I chose to think; yet somehow Miss Minnie, by no means unintentionally, as I *now* know, contrived to keep sentiment at bay by making me feel that in taking the place of her father whilst we were at sea I had become her father. Never by word of lip did I give her to know that I was in love with her; but I saw she was perfectly sensible that I was her devoted admirer, and that something was bound to happen before we should climb very far north into the Indian Ocean.

One night at about eleven o'clock—six bells—I stepped on deck from my cabin to take a look round. The ship's latitude was then about 25° south. It was a cool, very quiet, dark night, with a piece of dusky-red moon dying out bulbous and distorted in the liquid blackness northwest; a few stars shone sparely; the canvas rose pale and silent; saving the lift of the fabric on the long-drawn heave of the swell, all the life in her was in a little music of ripples, breaking from her stem and tinkling aft in the noise of a summer shower upon water.

I looked into the binnacle, and not immediately seeing the officer of the watch, went a little way forward, and perceived two figures to leeward standing against the poop rail. I walked straight to them quickly. One was Mr. Aiken and the other Miss Minnie Mills. She laughed when I stepped up to her, and exclaimed, "No scolding. I beg. I was disturbed by a nightmare. and came on deck to see if I was really upon the ocean instead of at Junglepore. Mr. Aiken has reassured me. I shall be able to sleep now, I think. So good-night to you both," and with that she left us and disappeared.

I was angry, excited, exceedingly jealous. I guessed I had been tricked, and that a deal had passed between these two, for many a long day gone, utterly unobserved by me. I gave Mr. Aiken a piece of my mind.

Never had I "hazed" any man as I did that fellow as he stood before me. He said it was not his fault; the girl had come on deck and accosted him: he was no ship's constable to order the passengers about; if he was spoken to, he answered; I expected he would be civil to the passengers, he supposed.

I bestowed several sea blessings on his eyes and limbs, and bade him understand that Miss Minnie Mills was under my protection; if I caught him speaking to her I would break him for

insubordination. He was mate of the ship, and his business lay in doing his duty. If he went beyond it, he should sling his hammock in the forecabin for the rest of the voyage.

I was horribly in earnest and angry; and when I returned to my cabin, I paced the floor of it as sick at heart as a jilted woman with jealousy and spleen. However, after a while I contrived to console myself with believing that their being together was an accident, and that it might have been as Aiken had put it. At all events, it made me somewhat easy to reflect that I had never observed them in company before, never even caught them looking at each other—that is, significantly.

She was in a sullen and pouting temper all next day.

“Why mayn’t I go on deck at night if I choose?” said she

“Your father would object,” said I. “You are under my care. I am responsible for you.” I added, with a tender look.

“Would you prohibit the other lady passengers from going on deck at night?”

“You shall have your way in anything that is good for you.” said I.

She flashed an arch, saucy glance at me, then sighed, and seemed intensely miserable on a sudden. I believe but for having caught her in Aiken’s company I should then and there have offered her my hand.

For a week following she was so completely in the dumps it was hard to get a word from her. Sometimes she looked as if she had been secretly crying, yet I never could persuade myself that the appearance her eyes would at such times present was due to weeping. She moped apart. Some of the passengers noticed her behavior and spoke to me about it, thinking she was ill. The ship’s surgeon talked with her and assured me privately he could find nothing wrong save that she complained of poorness of spirits.

“She seems to hate the idea of India,” said he, “and wants to go home.”

And so she shall (thought I), but she must arrive in India first, where she may leave it to me to square the yards for her with the Reverend Joseph Moxon.

We blew westwards round the Cape before a strong gale of wind. One morning, at the grey of dawn, I was aroused by a knocking on my cabin door. The second mate entered. He was a man named Wickham, a bullet-headed, immensely strong, active seaman, the younger son of a baronet: he would have held command at that time but for “the drink.” He grasped a woman’s hat and handkerchief, and exclaimed—

“I’ve just found these in the port mizzen chains, sir. I can’t tell how they happen to have come there. It looks like mischief.”

I sprang from my cot partially clothed, as I invariably was on turning in, and taking the hat in my hand, and bringing it to the clearer light of the large cabin window, I seemed to remember it as having been worn by Minnie Mills. I snatched the handkerchief from the man, and saw the initials M. M. marked upon it. This sufficed. I swiftly and completely clothed myself and entered the saloon.

My first act was to send the second mate for the stewardess. The woman arrived out of the steerage, where she slept. I said—speaking softly that the people in the berths on either hand might not be disturbed—

“Go and look into Miss Mills’ cabin, and report to me if all is well there.”

She went, vanished, was some little while out of sight, then reappeared and approached me, pale in the ashen light that was filtering through the skylights.

“Miss Mills’ cabin is empty, sir.”

I was prepared for this piece of news; yet my heart beat with a fast sick pulse when, without speech, I went to the girl's berth, followed by the stewardess. The bunk had been occupied—the bed-clothes lay tossed in it. My eye traveling rapidly over the interior was quickly taken by a note lying upon a chest of drawers. It was addressed to me, and ran thus:—

“I am tired of life, and have resolved to end it. The thought of living even for a short while with Mr. Moxon at Junglepore has broken my heart, and you are as tyrannical and cruel to me as life itself. Farewell, and thank you for such kindness as you have shown me, and when you see my father tell him that I died loving him and blessing him.”

“Good God? She's committed suicide,” cried I.

The stewardess shrieked.

I felt mad with amazement and grief. I read and re-read her letter, and then looked round the berth again, wondering if this were not some practical joke which she intended should be tragical by the fright it excited. I then went to work to make inquiries. I roused up Mr. Aiken, and showing him the girl's note asked him if he had seen her on deck during his watch—if he himself had at any time foreboded this dreadful thing—if he could help me with any suggestions or information. He read the letter and stared blankly; his handsome countenance was as pale as milk whilst he eyed me. I seemed to find the ghastly mildness of a dead man's face in his looks. He had nothing to say. No lady had come on deck in his watch. He had not exchanged a sentence with Miss Mills since that night when I threatened to break him if I found him in her company.

The men who had steered the ship throughout the night were brought out of the fore-castle: no man had seen any lady jump overboard or slip into the mizzen-chains—not likely! Wouldn't the helmsman, seeing such a thing, yell out?

The morning was now advanced. The passengers came from their berths, and it was quickly known fore and aft that the beautiful young girl who had been moping apart for three weeks past as though slowly going mad with melancholy had committed suicide by jumping overboard. The doctor and I and the two mates spent a long time whilst we overhung the mizzen-chains in conjecturing how she had managed it. The cabin windows were small: she had certainly never squeezed her fine ripe figure through the porthole of her berth; therefore she had come on to the poop in some black hour of the night by way of the quarter-deck, passing like a shadow to leeward till she arrived at the mizzen-rigging, where the deep dye flung upon the blackness by the mizzen—for it had been a quiet night, the ship under all plain sail—completely shrouded her. The rest would be easy, and if she dropped from the chains, which, through the angle of the deck, were depressed to within a few feet of the water, her fall might have been almost soundless.

The blow to me was terrible, and for some days I was prostrated. So unnecessary, I kept on saying to myself. Good heavens! For weeks I had been on the verge of proposing to her. The offer of my hand would have saved her life. I could not reconcile so enormous an act with the insignificance of the occasion for it. Old Mills was no tyrant. He had not *driven* her to India. She had consented—with an ill grace perhaps, not caring for the man she was going to; but there had been an acquiescence on her part too, enough of, it at all events, to make one wonder that she should have destroyed herself. How should I be able to meet the old captain? Where was I to find the spirit to tell him the story?

The stewardess, to satisfy herself, thoroughly searched the after part of the ship. It came to my ears that she did not believe that the girl had committed suicide, having neither cause nor courage for such an act. She fancied that one or another of the passengers had hidden her. But for what purpose? The fool of a woman could not answer *that* when the question was put to her.

What end would the girl's hiding achieve? She was bound to come to light on our arrival at Bombay. What motive, then, could she have for concealing herself, for denying herself the refreshment of the deck in the Indian Ocean, ultimately to be shamefully revealed as an imposter capable of the most purposeless and idiotic of deceptions?

The beauty was overboard and dead, and my heart, what with disappointed love and grieving for her and sorrow for her poor old father, weighed as lead in me when I thought of it.

We were within a fortnight's sail of Bombay, when there broke a dawn thick and dirty as smoke, with masses of sooty vapor smouldering off the edge of the sea in the west and darkening overhead till the trucks faded out in the gloom. Yet the glass stood high, and I made nothing of the mere appearance of this weather. It lasted all day, with now and again a distant groan of thunder. A weak, hot breeze held the canvas steady, and the ship wrinkled onward holding her course, but sailing through a noon that was as evening for shadow.

We dined at seven. The deck was then in charge of the second mate, Wickham. Before going below I told him to keep a bright lookout, and took myself an earnest view of the sea. The dusk lay very thick upon the cold, greasy, gleaming surface of the ocean, there was not a star overhead, and maybe a man would not have been able to see a distance of half a dozen ships' lengths.

About the middle of dinner I heard a great bawling, a loud and fearful crying out as for life or death. The mate, Aiken, who sat at the foot of the long cuddy table, caught the sound with a sailor's ear as I did, and sprang to his feet, and we rushed on deck together. I had scarcely passed through the companion hatch when the ship was struck. She heeled violently over, listing on a sudden to an angle of nearly fifty degrees, and a dismal, loud, general shriek rose through the open skylight, accompanied by the crash of timber overhead. Along with this went a wild hissing noise and an extraordinary sound of throbbing.

I rushed to the side, and saw that a large steamer had run into us. She was a big black paddle-boat, one of the few large side-wheel steamers which formerly traded betwixt England and the East Indies by way of the Cape. The sky seemed charged with stars from the spangles of fire which floated along with the thick smoke from her chimney. She was full of light. Every cabin window looked like the lens of a flaming bull's-eye.

I sprang on to the rail, and, hailing the steamer, asked him to keep his stem into us till we found out what damage he had done, and then roared to the mate, but obtained no reply. I yelled again, then shouted to Wickham to tell the carpenter to sound the well. The passengers came crowding on to the poop. I told them there was no danger, that though it should come to our leaving the ship the steamer would stand by us and take all aboard.

The well was sounded, and two feet of water reported. On this I instantly understood that the ship was doomed, that to call the hands to the pumps would be to exhaust them to no purpose; and, hailing the steamer afresh as she lay hissing on our bow, with her looming stem-head overshadowing our fore-castle, I reported our condition, and told him to stand-by to pick us up.

We immediately lowered the boats and sent away the women and as many men as there was room for; a second trip emptied the *Hecla* of her passengers. Meanwhile the steamer, at my request, kept her bows right into us. At this time there were seven feet of water in the hold. It was very black, and we worked with the help of lanterns. The mate appeared amongst my people now, and I asked him with an oath, out of the rage and distress of that hour, where he had been skulking. He answered, he was from the fore-castle. I told him he was a liar, and ordered him whilst the ship swam to take a number of the hands into the cabin and save as much of the passengers' effects as they could come at.

Not much time was permitted for this: every minute I seemed to feel the ship settling deeper and deeper with a sickening, sullen lift of her whole figure to every heave of the swell, as though she rose wearily to make her farewell plunge. Now the vessels were disengaged, and the steamer lay close abreast. I lingered, almost heart-broken, scarcely yet realizing to its full height this tragic disaster to my ship and my own fortunes; and then, hearing them calling to me, I got into the mizzen-chains, thinking as I did so, of Minnie Mills, wishing to God I was at rest and out of it all where she lay, and entered one of the boats.

The commander of the steamer received me in the gangway. The decks were light as noontide with lanterns. He was a grey-haired man, tall and somewhat stately, dressed in a uniform after the pattern of the old East India Company's service. When he understood I was the captain he bowed, and said—

“It's a terrible calamity, sir. I hope to live to see the day when they will compel all masters, by Act of Parliament, to show lights at sea at night.”

A lantern was sparkling on his fore-stay, but our ship was without side-lights, and when I turned to look at her the roar of her bursting decks came along in a shock hard as a blow on the ear, and the whole pale fabric of canvas melted out upon the black water as a wreath of vapor dies in the breeze.

The steamer was the *Nourmahal*, Bulstrode commander. She was half full of invalided soldiers and other folks going home, and when our own people were aboard she was an overloaded craft, humanly speaking; but after a consultation with me the captain resolved to proceed. He was flush with water and provisions, and had the security besides of paddles, which slapped an easy ten knots into the hull. And then again she lifted the yards of a ship of twelve hundred tons, and showed as big a topsail to the wind as a frigate's.

All that could be done was done for us. Men turned out of their cabins to accommodate the ladies and children, and a cot was slung for me in the chief officer's berth. But I needed no pillow for my head that first night. There was nothing in laudanum short of a death-draught that could have given me sleep.

But to pass by my own state of mind, that came very near to a suicidal posture. At eight bells next morning, the mate whose cabin I shared stepped in and exclaimed, “Did you know you had a woman dressed up as a man amongst your passengers?”

“No!” I exclaimed, “not likely. I should not permit such a thing.”

“It's so, then,” said he: “our doctor twigged her at once, and handed her over to the stewardess, who has berthed her aft. She's a lady, and a develish pretty woman,—mighty pale, though, with a scared, wild blind look, as though she had been dug up out of darkness, and couldn't get used to the light.”

“What name does she give?” said I.

“I don't know.”

I wished immediately to see her. An extraordinary suspicion worked in my head. The mate told me she was in the stewardess's berth, and directed me to it. I knocked. The stewardess opened the door, and I immediately saw standing in the middle of the berth, with her hands to her head, pinning a bronze tress to a bed of glowing coils, Miss Minnie Mills!

I stared frantically, shouted “Good God!” and rushed in. She screamed and shrank, then clasped her hands, and reared herself loftily with a bringing of her whole shape, so to speak, together.

“So,” said I, breathing short with astonishment and twenty conflicting passions. “and this is how they commit suicide in your country, hey?”

The stewardess enlarged her eyes.

“I don’t mean to marry Mr. Joseph Moxon,” said the girl.

“In what part of the ship did you hide?” I exclaimed.

She made no answer.

“Was Mr. Aiken in the secret?”

Still no reply.

“Oh, but you should answer the captain, miss,” cried the stewardess.

The girl burst into tears, and turned her back upon me. I stepped out and asked for Captain Bulstrode. He received me in his cabin, and then I told him the story of Miss Minnie Mills.

“I never would take charge of a young lady,” said he, half laughing, though he was a good deal astonished, “after an experience I underwent in that way. I’ll tell it you another time. Let’s send for your mate, and see what he has to say for himself.”

Presently Mr. Aiken arrived. He was pale, but he carried a lofty, independent air; the fact was, I was no longer his captain. The ship was sunk, and Jack was as good as his master. I requested, representing Captain Mills as I did, that he would be candid with me, tell me how it stood between him and Miss Mills, if he had helped her in her plot of suicide, where he had hidden her in the ship, and what he meant to do. I thought Bulstrode looked at him with an approving eye. I am bound to repeat he was an uncommonly handsome fellow.

“Captain Cleaver,” he said, addressing me with a very frank, straightforward face and air, “I am perfectly aware that I have done wrong, sir. But the long and short of it is, Miss Mills and I are in love with each other, and we mean to get married.”

“Why didn’t you tell me so?” I said.

He looked at me knowingly. I felt myself color.

“Well,” said I, “anyhow, it was so confoundedly unnecessary, you know, for her to pretend to drown herself, and for you to hold her in hiding.”

“I beg your pardon—you made it rather necessary, sir—you will remember that night—”

“So unnecessary!” I thundered out in a passion.

“Where did ye hide her?” said Captain Bulstrode.

“I decline to answer that question,” replied Aiken. And the dog kept his word, for we never succeeded in getting the truth out of him, or the girl either; though if she did not lie secret in the blackness of the after-hold, then I don’t know in what other part of the ship he could have kept her: certainly not in his own cabin, which the ship’s steward was in and out of often, nor in any of the cuddy or steerage berths.

To end this: there was a clergyman in the ship; and Bulstrode, who, without personal knowledge of Captain Mills, had heard of him and respected him, insisted upon the couple being married that same forenoon. They were not loth, and, the parson consenting, they were spliced in the presence of a full saloon. I shook the girl by the hand when the business was over, and wished her well; but from beginning to end it was all so unnecessary!