

CHAPTER V
THE HURRICANE

THEY descended into the service-room.

"Let me see," said Enid; "it will be nineteen years on the 22d of next June, since you found me floating serenely towards the Gulf Rock in a deserted boat?"

"Yes, if you insist on accuracy as to the date. I might cavil at your serenity."

"And I was 'estimated' as a year old then? Isn't it a weird thing that a year-old baby should be sent adrift on the Atlantic in an open boat and never a word of inquiry made subsequently as to her fate? I fear I could not have been of much account in those days."

"My dear child, I have always told you that the boat had been in collision during the fog which had prevailed for several days previously. Those who were caring for you were probably knocked overboard and drowned."

"But alone! Utterly alone! That is the strangeness of it. I must be an American. Americans start out to hustle for themselves early in life, don't they?"

"Certainly, in that respect you might claim the record."

Brand had not told her all the facts of that memorable

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June morning. Why should he? They were not pleasant memories to him. Why cumber her also with them? For the rest, he had drawn up and read to her, long ago, a carefully compiled account of her rescue and the steps taken to discover her identity.

"I entered on an active and useful career with no such halo of glory," broke in Constance. "I am just plain English, born in Brighton, of parents not poor but respectable. Mother died a year after my birth, didn't she, dad?"

"You were thirteen months old when we lost her," he answered, bending over the clock-work attachment of the fog bell to wipe off an invisible speck of dust. Since his first term of service on the rock the light had changed from an occulting to a fixed one.

"She is buried there, isn't she," the girl went on. "How strange that, amidst our many journeyings, we have never visited Brighton."

"If I were able to take you to her grave-side, I would not do it," said Brand. "I do not encourage morbid sentiments, even of that perfectly natural kind. Your mother, to you, Constance, is like Enid's to her, a dear but visionary legend. In a degree, it is always so between loved ones lost and those who are left. Truth, honor, work, these are the highest ideals for the individual. They satisfy increasingly. Happy as I am in your companionship, you must not be vexed when I tell you that the most truly joyful moment of my life was conferred when my little friend here first responded accurately to external influences."

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He laid his hand on an object resting on a table by itself. It looked like an aneroid barometer, but the others knew it was the marine auri-scope to which he had devoted so many patient hours.

"Is it in working order now?" asked Constance instantly, and Enid came nearer. Together they examined the small dial. It was equipped with an arrow-headed pointer, and marked with the divisions of the compass but without the distinguishing letters.

These three understood each other exactly. By inadvertence, the conversation had touched on a topic concerning which Brand was always either vague or silent. Both girls were quick-witted enough to know that Constance's mother was never willingly alluded to either by the lighthouse-keeper or by the elderly Mrs. Sheppard who looked after them in infancy, and was now the housekeeper of Laburnum Cottage.

Constance was annoyed. How could she have been so thoughtless as to cause her father a moment's suffering by bringing up painful reminiscences. But he helped her, being master of himself.

He adjusted a switch in the instrument.

"I had no difficulty in constructing a diaphragm which would intercept all sounds," he said. "The struggle came when I wanted an agent which would distinguish and register a particular set of sounds, no matter what additional din might be prevalent at the same time. My hopes were wrecked so often that I began to despair, until I chanced one day to read how the high-tension induction coil could be tuned to dis-

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regard electrical influences other than those issued at the same pitch. My anxiety, until I had procured and experimented with a properly constructed coil, was very trying, I assure you."

"I remember wondering what on earth it was," volunteered Enid. "It sounded like a mathematical snake."

"And I am sorry to say that even yet I am profoundly ignorant as to its true inwardness," smiled Constance.

"Yet you girls delight in poets who bid you hearken to the music of the spheres. I suppose you will admit that the ear of, say, Ben Pollard, is not tuned to such a celestial harmony. However, I will explain my auri-scope in a sentence. It only listens to and indicates the direction of foghorns, sirens, and ship's bells. A shrill steam whistle excites it, but the breaking of seas aboard ship, the loud flapping of a propeller, the noise of the engines, of a gale, or all these in combination, leave it unmoved."

"I remember once, when we were going from Falmouth to Porthalla in a fog, how dreadfully difficult it was to discover the whereabouts of another steamer we passed *en route*," said his daughter.

"Well, with this little chap on the bridge, the pointer would have told the captain unerringly. I don't suppose it will be thick whilst you are here, or you would see it pick up the distant blasts of a steamer long before we can hear them, and follow her course right round the arc of her passage. It is most interesting to watch its activity when there are several ships using their

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sirens. I have never had an opportunity of testing it on more than three vessels at once, but as soon as I could deduce a regular sequence in the seemingly erratic movements of the indicator, I marked the approach and passing of each with the utmost ease."

"Would that stop collisions at sea?"

"Nothing will do that, because some ship's officers refuse at times to exercise due care. But with my instrument on board two ships, and a time chart attached to the drums, there would be no need for a Board of Trade inquiry to determine whether or not the proper warning was given. To the vast majority of navigators it will prove an absolute blessing."

"You clever old thing!" cried Enid. "I suppose you will make heaps of money out of it."

"The inventor is the last man to make money out of his inventions, as a rule," said Brand. "I suppose I differ from the ordinary poor fellow inasmuch as I am not dependent for a livelihood on the success of my discovery."

"There's not the least little bit of chance of there being a fog tonight?" queried Enid, so earnestly that a wave of merriment rippled through the room.

"Not the least. In any event, you two girls will be in bed and sound asleep at ten o'clock."

"Perish the thought!" cried Constance. "Bed at ten, during our first and only night on a lighthouse!"

"You will see," said her father. "You cannot imagine how the clock dawdles in this circumscribed

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area. Work alone conquers it. Otherwise, men would quit the service after a month's experience."

"Ship ahoy!" screamed Enid. "Here comes the *Lapwing* round Carn du. Mr. Lawton must have lent her to bring the relief. How kind of him."

"The *Lapwing* cannot approach the rock," said Brand. "I will signal 'Landing impossible today.' It will save them a useless journey."

He selected the requisite flags from a locker, the phrase he needed being coded. Soon the strong breeze was trying to tear the bunting from the cordage, and though they could not hear the three whistles with which the little yacht acknowledged the signal, they could easily see the jets of steam through their glasses.

Constance happened to overlook the table on which stood the auriscope.

"This thing has actually recorded those whistles," she cried in wonder.

"What sort of whistle has the *Lapwing*?" asked Brand.

"A loud and deep one, worthy of a leviathan. It was a fad of Mr. Lawton's. They say his siren consumes more steam than his engines."

Her father laughed.

"Anyhow, he is sticking to his course," he announced. "I may as well take in the decorations."

Undauntedly, but much flurried by a sea ever increasing in strength as the force of the ebb tide encountered the resistance of the wind, the *Lapwing* held on. With wind and sea against her she would have made

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slow work of it. As it was, there was help forthcoming for both journeys unless the wind went back to the north again as rapidly as it had veered to the southwest.

She would not be abreast the rock for nearly an hour, so Brand left the girls in charge of the lookout whilst he visited the oil-room. A wild night, such as he anticipated, demanded full pressure at the lamp. If the air became super-saturated, breakage of the glass chimneys might take place, and he must have a good stock on hand. Water and coal, too, were needed; the double accident to Bates and Jackson had thrown into arrears all the ordinary duties of the afternoon watch.

Naturally, the pair in the lantern found the progress of the yacht exasperatingly slow.

"A nice *Lapwing*," said Enid, scornfully. "I will tell Mr. Lawton he ought to rechristen her the *Bantam*. All her power is in her crow."

When Brand joined them matters became livelier. More accustomed than they to the use of a telescope, he made discoveries.

"The two supernumeraries are there," he announced, "but I cannot see Lawton. Indeed, so far as I can make out, she is commanded by Stanhope, dressed in Ben Pollard's oil-skins."

"He has left Lady Margaret!" cried Constance.

"He never went home!" essayed Enid.

"Poor chap! He was going to take us for a drive tomorrow," said Constance.

"To Morvah," explained Enid, with a syllabic emphasis meant for one pair of ears.

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"It is very nice of him to struggle on and have a look at us," said Brand. "He can come close enough to see us, but that is all. Our small megaphone will be useless."

Indeed, the *Lapwing* dared not approach nearer than the Trinity mooring buoy. By that time the three, protected from the biting wind by oilskin coats, were standing on the gallery. The reef was bellowing up at them with a continuous roar. A couple of acres of its surface consisted of nothing more tangible than white foam and driving spray.

Stanhope, resigning the wheel to a sailor, braced himself firmly against the little vessel's foremast and began to strike a series of extraordinary attitudes with his arms and head.

"Why is he behaving in that idiotic manner?" screamed Enid.

"*Capital* idea — semaphore — clever fellow, Jack," shouted Brand.

Abashed, Enid held her peace.

The lighthouse-keeper, signalling in turn that he was receiving the message, spelled out the following:

"Is all well?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Bates and Jackson reached hospital. Bates compound fracture. If weather moderates will be with you next tide."

"All right," waved Brand.

The distant figure started again:

"L-o-v-e t-o E-n-i-d."

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Enid indulged in an extraordinary arm flourish.

"A-n-d C-o-n-s-t-a-n-c-e."

"That spoils it," she screamed. "It ought to be only kind regards to you, Connie. I believe you are a serpent, a —"

"Do stop your chatter," shouted Brand, and he continued the message:

"Weather looks very bad. Little hope for tonight. *Lancelot* due at six. Will see personally that no chance is lost. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," was the response.

The *Lapwing* fell away astern from the vicinity of the buoy.

"Why is he doing that?" asked Constance, close to her father's ear.

"He is too good a sailor to risk turning her in that broken water. A little farther out there is greater depth and more regular seas.

They watched the yacht in silence. At last her head swung round towards the coast. When broad-side on, a wave hit her, and the spray leaped over her masts.

"That gave them a wetting," cried Brand, and his calm tone stilled their ready fear. Indeed, there was greater danger than he wanted them to know. But the *Lapwing* reappeared, shaking herself, and still turning.

"Good little boat!" said Brand. The crisis had passed. She was headed, at full speed, for the Bay. And not too soon. 'Ere she reached the comparative

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shelter of Clement's Island she was swept three times by green water.

Inside the lantern, their faces ruddy with the exposure, their eyes dancing with excitement, the girls were voluble with delight. Could anything be more thrilling than their experiences that day!

"That semaphore dodge is too precious to be lost," cried Enid. "Connie, you and I must learn the alphabet. You shall teach us this very evening, dad. Fancy me signaling you the whole length of the Promenade: 'Just look at Mrs. Wilson's bonnet,' or 'Here come the Taylor-Smiths. Scoot!' Oh, it's fine."

She whirled her arms in stiff-jointed rigidity and mimicked Stanhope's fantastic posing.

"Why should you scoot when you meet the Taylor-Smiths?" asked Brand.

"Because Mrs. T.-S. hauls us off to tea and gives us a gallon of gossip with every cup."

"I thought your sex regarded gossip as the cream?"

"Sex, indeed! Old Smith is worse than his wife. He doesn't say much, but he winks. One of his winks, at the end of a story, turns an episode into a three-volume novel."

"It seems to me I must teach you the code in my own self-defence," he replied. "And now for tea. Let us have it served here."

They voted this an admirable notion. The girls enlivened the meal by relating to him the doings and sayings of current interest ashore during the past two months. By a queer coincidence, which he did not