up to the hilt, I need not say. What I am anxious to tell you must be your secret."

"It will be strange," said I, smiling, "if I have not already guessed it."

He viewed me inquiringly.

"I will ask the question, to be answered or not, as you please: Does your secret concern Miss Primrose?"

He started and stared at me, his fine eyes glowing with astonishment and alarm. "Good heavens!" he cried faintly, "is it known that I am on board?"

He was about to put twenty other questions. I interrupted him: "*Of course* it is known that you are on board. How on earth could it be otherwise? Here are you waited on every day by one of the stewards; then you tell me the doctor visited you, and then—"

"No, no," he exclaimed, with a change of countenance, "you misunderstand me. But how is it possible you should comprehend my meaning since you know nothing whatever of my story? But—Miss Primrose! What," he exclaimed, fixing his keen and burning gaze upon me, "caused you to associate *her* with my secret?"

"For the life of me I could not tell you," I answered. "The melancholy and beauty of her face interested me, I suppose, and then, I dare say, whilst in some hour lightly speculating about your reason for keeping in hiding, it might have dimly occurred to me that Miss Primrose was one reason, at all events, for your self-banishment from the light of day."

"Have you suggested this suspicion to any one?"

"To no one."

"Well, Captain Swift," he exclaimed, with a glance round, as though fearful of the very walls of the cabin, "I may frankly tell you that you have anticipated the point of the story I intend to relate. In three words I may say that Miss Primrose and I are betrothed, and that, unknown to her father, and even at this moment unknown to herself, I am accompanying her to India."

I composed myself to listen, and perhaps not without some small emotion of disappointment, for in truth I had expected a larger, a more gallant and dramatic disclosure, something to lift

the impassioned commonplace of love for which I was prepared to a heroic height.

"First of all," he proceeded, "I must tell you that my name is not George Pellew. These sounds I assume for the purpose of the voyage. My real name is Charles Wortley Cunningham. My father, who died four years ago, was Sir Stuart Wortley Cunningham, knight, for many years Governor of——" and he named one of the West India Islands.

He paused as though awaiting some exclamation of surprise; but I sat quietly listening, nor did I think proper to tell him that even in this little article of his confession I had been ahead of him, since, from the moment when he had first pronounced the name of Pellew I had instinctively suspected it false.

"Eight months ago," he continued, "I met Miss Primrose at a dance at Bath. She and her father were then in lodgings in Pulteney Street. I fell in love with her, and with her father's full consent we became engaged. He exactly knew my expectations: that I am an only son, that on the death of my mother I inherit an estate in Suffolk and fifteen hundred

a year, that my antecedents are as unimpeachable as his own, though it would be impossible for any man to have a higher opinion of his descent than Sir Charles Primrose. He seemed perfectly satisfied—you must know the General is a widower—and his daughter and I," he went on, with a new light of beauty coming into his face with the flush that was now on his cheek, and with the brilliance of emotion that was now in his eyes, "were happy—happy indeed, in our love. The marriage was fixed to take place on the 14th of last month. The General returned with his daughter to London—his house was in Hanover Square; I followed, and day after day Geraldine—Miss Primrose, I mean—and I were together. But Sir Charles was a man desperately hard to get on with. His temper is incredibly bad, his vanity enormous, and his capacity of insulting people whom he dislikes or who venture to oppose his quite commonplace view of things—for he is a very stupid man, the stupidest man I know, though professionally distinguished—his talent of affront, I say, is so exceptional that I used to wonder he had ever been spared to see his

present years—that he had not been shot out of or kicked out of or cudgelled out of existence long ago.

"What I am about to say you will be slow to believe. I was dining at his house; he and his daughter and two or three others were present at the table. The sickening, the intolerable topic of politics was started. An assertion was made: I opposed it, but without the least temper. Sir Charles thundered some mortifying, almost insulting expression at me. It was not in flesh and blood to keep silent, and I rejoined. And how did that argument end?" he cried, springing erect in his wrath and towering over me as I sat looking up at his flushed face whilst with his right fist he seemed to menace some object behind me. "He ordered me to leave the table—to leave the house! He sprang from his chair, black in the face with rage, and could scarcely make himself intelligible to his butler, whom he told to open the door and see me out! I was so astounded, so dumbfounded by the fellow's extravagant insolence, that for some moments I could only stare at him, believing him raving mad. On

"ON THIS HE STEPPED TO THE DOOR, WHICH HE PULLED WIDER OPEN, THRUSTING HIS BUTLER ASIDE TO DO SO, AND ASKED AS THOUGH HE WERE CHOKING, WHETHER I MEANT TO GO OR NOT."

this he stepped to the door, which he flung wide open, thrusting his butler aside to do so, and asked, as though he were choking, whether I meant to go or not. I then lost all control; but for his daughter being present, I believe I should have flogged the fellow round his own inhospitable table. I was too mad with temper to know what I said."

He resumed his seat, breathing fast, and seemed at a loss as though his mind had been hurried away from its subject by the angry tide of memory. Then rising afresh, he stole to the door and looked out into the passage betwixt the cabins. He was cool when he returned to his seat, and exclaimed with a smile that he hoped he had not greatly raised his voice whilst speaking.

"I do not think so."

"Well," continued Mr. Cunningham, as I must now call him, addressing me in soft but firm accents with the flush gone out of his cheeks, his eyes cold again, and his features as composed and resolved as ever they had shown at any time within these ten days, "you will suppose after this that so far as General Sir

Charles Primrose was concerned, my engagement to his daughter was at an end. I sent him a letter of humble apology. I was a contemptible rascal to abase myself so! but I wrote for Geraldine's sake, and the letter was returned to me in halves with the seal unbroken. I called—perfect fool that I was—;" he bit his lip to the memory of some insult which he could not find it in him to communicate. "Geraldine wrote to me; I was to forgive her father; he had suffered from sunstroke in India; there were times when he was not responsible for his behaviour. But she wrote as if with a broken heart, and though she prayed me to have patience, to continue to love her, to preserve my faith in her devotion, yet there was a tone of hopelessness in her letter impossible to miss. The reply I addressed to her came back to me torn, with the seal unbroken as in the case of my letter to her father. I then found out that she had been sent into the country, but in what part she was I could not discover; till one day I received a note from her saying that her father was under orders for India; that he was sailing on such

and such a day, and that she was to accompany him. She would have written to me every day —every hour she said, but she was so closely watched that she could not take a pen in her hand without being challenged; it would have been equally impossible for her to receive a reply from me, and the letter that she was now sending, which in fact I was reading, she feared might never reach my hands, though she had heavily bribed a housemaid to steal with it to the post." He glanced at his watch. "I fear now that I have gone far enough and that I am beginning to bore you," said he.

"Not in the least. I am exceedingly interested. Besides, I have seen enough of Sir Charles to know exactly how to sympathize with you."

"Well, to make an end. I adored Miss Primrose, and had not the least intention of losing her; but I stood the chance of losing her if she sailed to India and left me behind in England. Knowing the date on which they were to start, I looked through the shipping lists and found this vessel named for that day. To make sure of them, I called at the office of the owners and

ascertained that cabins had been taken for Sir Charles Primrose, Miss Primrose, and her maid. I at once booked a passage for myself, but found the ship was so full that I must be content to share a berth. I gave my name as George Pellew, and joined the ship in the dusk of the evening at the East India Docks. The General and his daughter, I ascertained, came on board at Gravesend."

Finding him silent, I exclaimed—hardly indeed knowing what else to say—"You have embarked on a queer adventure."

"Miss Primrose and I are together," said he, with a flash in his eyes.

"But," said I, lighting the stump of my cigar, "what do you hope that India will do for you? The General will proceed to his station or district. He will of course carry his daughter with him. If you follow, your presence will be quickly discovered—and what then?"

He merely smiled, eying me steadfastly and knowingly.

"The climate of India," said I, laughing, "does not improve the temper. Mere dislike

in the cool latitude of London may easily become consuming hate in a country of curry, mosquitoes, brandy pawnee, and vertical suns."

"Miss Primrose and I are together," he repeated.

"Yes, you are certainly in the same ship," said I.

"Well, Captain Swift," said he, with an air that made me see he had no intention to submit his programme to me, "I hope I have fully satisfied you as to my motives for keeping in hiding here?"

"Fully."

"And now will you do me a favour? It will indeed be an act of singular kindness."

"I shall be most happy to oblige you."

"To this moment Miss Primrose is in ignorance that I am on board. I have no means of communicating with her. I dare not trust the fellow who waits upon me—no, though I should tip him ten pounds for every letter he delivers to her. The first letter!—the first intimation!—consider the tact such a delivery must require to guard against astonishment and alarm

betraying her. Will *you* hand her a note from me?"

"You must know I have not yet had the pleasure of making her acquaintance."

"But on board ship there is no ceremony. One addresses whom one pleases. I beg you to understand that having obtained this very great favour at your hands, I should not dream of again troubling you. I am only now desirous that she should know I am on board."

"I shall be very happy," I exclaimed, "to give your letter to her."

He rose and grasped me by the hand, thanking me warmly.

But though, after a swift debate in my mind, I had consented to serve him—my disposition to oblige, or, in other words, my good-nature, scarcely suffering me to consider seriously how far I should be discreet in bearing any, the most insignificant, part in this questionable shipboard drama upon which the curtain was about to rise—I was also secretly resolved that the first step I took in it should be my last. Indeed, as I sat musing over his story whilst he continued to address me, I could hardly per-

suade myself that he had given me the whole truth. It seemed incredible that Sir Charles should have acted with the unspeakable insolence, the brutal discourtesy, that Mr. Cunningham had affirmed of him. And yet I was forced to admit that quarrels of a much more violent sort than had happened between these two men originated in arguments. Even the worthy old Vicar of Wakefield was, as we all know, quite ready to sacrifice the happiness of his son George and Miss Arabella Wilmot to his opinions on the subject of monogamy.

Until hard upon midnight, I think it was, did we sit talking in that cabin. Our quarters were sunk deep in the ship, and never a sound penetrated to us from the deck. No other noises broke the stillness than the sobbing and yearning wash of water along the ship's side, the creaking of the cargo in the hold, and the straining of bulkheads and the lighter fittings as the vessel rolled. People were sleeping on either hand of us and opposite, but saving now and again when angry recollections forced a note of vehemence into Mr. Cunningham's articulation, his speech had been low and soft, with

a melody of its own that was like singing, and that rendered what was affecting in his references singularly plaintive and pathetic, whilst it enriched even to nobility every utterance of scorn, or contempt, or indignation. There was no cause to fear then that a syllable of our talk had been overheard.

The longer I conversed with him the more I found myself fascinated by his beauty and individuality. There was never anything striking in what he said, yet his most trivial expression was made memorable by his manner, his grace, his dignity, by his speaking eyes, by the twenty physical charms my recollection carries. All reserve was now gone; he asked me question after question about Miss Primrose—what I thought of her—how she looked—if she appeared well—if she associated with the other passengers—her father's treatment of her so far as I could judge, and so on, and so on.

It was whilst endeavouring to deal with this lover-like fusillade that cocking my thumb up at the ceiling of the cabin I said: "By the way, I should have told you that you and Miss Primrose are separated by a few planks only."

He looked upwards, and exclaimed in a low voice: "Do you mean that her cabin is overhead there?"

I nodded.

"Do you know for certain?" he cried, sending a glance at the porthole as he spoke, whilst his face took an odd expression of mingled enthusiasm and incredulity.

"For certain," I replied, and I repeated to him the observation I had made of her cabin that afternoon.

He bit upon his underlip, was silent for some moments, and his countenance lost its glow.

"You say she is the only occupant of the cabin?" said he. "Where does her maid sleep?"

"I do not know. Somewhere down here, I fancy. Once in the saloon I saw her emerge by the steps which conduct to these parts."

He slightly smiled, and again glanced at the porthole. I looked at his square shoulders and involuntarily laughed, immediately adding (that he might know *why* I laughed): "You will never be able to squeeze through that hole."

"No," he answered. "Nor is it to be enlarged, unfortunately."

"But even were you slim enough to crawl through it," said I, "you could not communicate with the cabin window above. Consider the wide spread of channel platform; and whilst you were clinging to one of the iron bars which hold it to the ship's side, a spray might come and wash you away, as Dibdin's song says of some poor Jack." I ended the sentence with an irrepressible yawn.

"I believe you are right," said he, looking at his watch, and we forthwith "turned in."