

Period: THE PRESENT TIME. Place: ENGLAND.

FIRST SCENE - At Sea.

The night had come to an end. The new-born day waited for its quickening light in the silence that is never known on land--the silence before sunrise, in a calm at sea.

Not a breath came from the dead air. Not a ripple stirred on the motionless water. Nothing changed but the softly-growing light; nothing moved but the lazy mist, curling up to meet the sun, its master, on the eastward sea. By fine gradations, the airy veil of morning thinned in substance as it rose--thinned, till there dawned through it in the first rays of sunlight the tall white sails of a Schooner Yacht.

From stem to stern silence possessed the vessel--as silence possessed the sea.

But one living creature was on deck--the man at the helm, dozing peaceably with his arm over the useless tiller. Minute by minute the light grew, and the heat grew with it; and still the helmsman slumbered, the heavy sails hung noiseless, the quiet water lay sleeping against the vessel's sides. The whole orb of the sun was visible above the water-line, when the first sound pierced its way through the morning silence. From far off over the shining white ocean, the cry of a sea-bird reached the yacht on a sudden out of the last airy circles of the waning mist.

The sleeper at the helm woke; looked up at the idle sails, and yawned in sympathy with them; looked out at the sea on either side of him, and shook his head obstinately at the superior obstinacy of the calm.

"Blow, my little breeze!" said the man, whistling the sailor's invocation to the wind softly between his teeth. "Blow, my little breeze!"

"How's her head?" cried a bold and brassy voice, hailing the deck from the cabin staircase.

"Anywhere you like, master; all round the compass."

The voice was followed by the man. The owner of the yacht appeared on deck.

Behold Richard Turlington, Esq., of the great Levant firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca! Aged eight-and-thirty; standing stiffly and sturdily at a height of not more than five feet six--Mr. Turlington presented to the view of his fellow-creatures a face of the perpendicular order of human architecture. His forehead was a straight line, his upper lip was another, his chin was the straightest and the longest line of all. As he turned his swarthy countenance eastward, and shaded his light gray eyes from the sun, his knotty hand plainly revealed that it had got him his living by its own labor at one time or another in his life. Taken on the whole, this was a man whom it might be easy to respect, but whom it would be hard to love. Better company at the official desk than at the social table. Morally and physically--if the expression may be permitted--a man without a bend in him.

"A calm yesterday," grumbled Richard Turlington, looking with stubborn deliberation all round him. "And a calm to-day. Ha! next season I'll have the vessel fitted with engines. I hate this!"

"Think of the filthy coals, and the infernal vibration, and leave your beautiful schooner as she is. We are out for a holiday. Let the wind and the sea take a holiday too."

Pronouncing those words of remonstrance, a slim, nimble, curly-headed young gentleman joined Richard Turlington on deck, with his clothes under his arm, his towels in his hand, and nothing on him but the night-gown in which he had stepped out of his bed.

"Launcelot Linzie, you have been received on board my vessel in the capacity of medical attendant on Miss Natalie Graybrooke, at her father's request. Keep your place, if you please. When I want your advice, I'll ask you for it." Answering in those terms, the elder man fixed his colorless gray eyes on the younger with an expression which added plainly, "There won't be room enough in this schooner much longer for me and for you."

Launcelot Linzie had his reasons (apparently) for declining to let his host offend him on any terms whatever.

"Thank you!" he rejoined, in a tone of satirical good humor. "It isn't easy to keep my place on board your vessel. I can't help presuming to enjoy myself as if I was the owner. The life is such a new one--to me! It's so delightfully

easy, for instance, to wash yourself here. On shore it's a complicated question of jugs and basins and tubs; one is always in danger of breaking something, or spoiling something. Here you have only to jump out of bed, to run up on deck, and to do this!"

He turned, and scampered to the bows of the vessel. In one instant he was out of his night-gown, in another he was on the bulwark, in a third he was gamboling luxuriously in sixty fathoms of salt-water.

Turlington's eyes followed him with a reluctant, uneasy attention as he swam round the vessel, the only moving object in view. Turlington's mind, steady and slow in all its operations, set him a problem to be solved, on given conditions, as follows:

"Launcelot Linzie is fifteen years younger than I am. Add to that, Launcelot Linzie is Natalie Graybrooke's cousin. Given those two advantages--Query: Has he taken Natalie's fancy?"

Turning that question slowly over and over in his mind, Richard Turlington seated himself in a corner at the stern of the vessel. He was still at work on the problem, when the young surgeon returned to his cabin to put the finishing touches to his toilet. He had not reached the solution when the steward appeared an hour later and said, "Breakfast is ready, sir!"

They were a party of five round the cabin table.

First, Sir Joseph Graybrooke. Inheritor of a handsome fortune made by his father and his grandfather in trade. Mayor, twice elected, of a thriving provincial town. Officially privileged, while holding that dignity, to hand a silver trowel to a royal personage condescending to lay a first stone of a charitable edifice. Knighted, accordingly, in honor of the occasion. Worthy of the honor and worthy of the occasion. A type of his eminently respectable class. Possessed of an amiable, rosy face, and soft, silky white hair. Sound in his principles; tidy in his dress; blessed with moderate politics and a good digestion--a harmless, healthy, spruce, speckless, weak-minded old man.

Secondly, Miss Lavinia Graybrooke, Sir Joseph's maiden sister. Personally, Sir Joseph in petticoats. If you knew one you knew the other.

Thirdly, Miss Natalie Graybrooke--Sir Joseph's only child.

She had inherited the personal appearance and the temperament of her mother--dead many years since. There had been a mixture of Negro blood

and French blood in the late Lady Graybrooke's family, settled originally in Martinique. Natalie had her mother's warm dusky color, her mother's superb black hair, and her mother's melting, lazy, lovely brown eyes. At fifteen years of age (dating from her last birthday) she possessed the development of the bosom and limbs which in England is rarely attained before twenty. Everything about the girl--except her little rosy ears--was on a grand Amazonian scale. Her shapely hand was long and large; her supple waist was the waist of a woman. The indolent grace of all her movements had its motive power in an almost masculine firmness of action and profusion of physical resource. This remarkable bodily development was far from being accompanied by any corresponding development of character. Natalie's manner was the gentle, innocent manner of a young girl. She had her father's sweet temper ingrafted on her mother's variable Southern nature. She moved like a goddess, and she laughed like a child. Signs of maturing too rapidly--of outgrowing her strength, as the phrase went--had made their appearance in Sir Joseph's daughter during the spring. The family doctor had suggested a sea-voyage, as a wise manner of employing the fine summer months. Richard Turlington's yacht was placed at her disposal, with Richard Turlington himself included as one of the fixtures of the vessel. With her father and her aunt to keep up round her the atmosphere of home--with Cousin Launcelot (more commonly known as "Launce") to carry out, if necessary, the medical treatment prescribed by superior authority on shore--the lovely invalid embarked on her summer cruise, and sprang up into a new existence in the life-giving breezes of the sea. After two happy months of lazy coasting round the shores of England, all that remained of Natalie's illness was represented by a delicious languor in her eyes, and an utter inability to devote herself to anything which took the shape of a serious occupation. As she sat at the cabin breakfast-table that morning, in her quaintly-made sailing dress of old-fashioned nankeen--her inbred childishness of manner contrasting delightfully with the blooming maturity of her form--the man must have been trebly armed indeed in the modern philosophy who could have denied that the first of a woman's rights is the right of being beautiful; and the foremost of a woman's merits, the merit of being young!

The other two persons present at the table were the two gentlemen who have already appeared on the deck of the yacht.

"Not a breath of wind stirring!" said Richard Turlington. "The weather has got a grudge against us. We have drifted about four or five miles in the last eight-and-forty hours. You will never take another cruise with me--you must be longing to get on shore."

He addressed himself to Natalie; plainly eager to make himself agreeable to the young lady--and plainly unsuccessful in producing any impression on her. She made a civil answer; and looked at her tea-cup, instead of looking at Richard Turlington.

"You might fancy yourself on shore at this moment," said Launce. "The vessel is as steady as a house, and the swing-table we are eating our breakfast on is as even as your dining-room table at home."

He too addressed himself to Natalie, but without betraying the anxiety to please her which had been shown by the other. For all that, he diverted the girl's attention from her tea-cup; and his idea instantly awakened a responsive idea in Natalie's mind.

"It will be so strange on shore," she said, "to find myself in a room that never turns on one side, and to sit at a table that never tilts down to my knees at one time, or rises up to my chin at another. How I shall miss the wash of the water at my ear, and the ring of the bell on deck when I am awake at night on land! No interest there in how the wind blows, or how the sails are set. No asking your way of the sun, when you are lost, with a little brass instrument and a morsel of pencil and paper. No delightful wandering wherever the wind takes you, without the worry of planning beforehand where you are to go. Oh how I shall miss the dear, changeable, inconstant sea! And how sorry I am I'm not a man and a sailor!"

This to the guest admitted on board on sufferance, and not one word of it addressed, even by chance, to the owner of the yacht!

Richard Turlington's heavy eyebrows contracted with an unmistakable expression of pain.

"If this calm weather holds," he went on, addressing himself to Sir Joseph, "I am afraid, Graybrooke, I shall not be able to bring you back to the port we sailed from by the end of the week."

"Whenever you like, Richard," answered the old gentleman, resignedly. "Any time will do for me."

"Any time within reasonable limits, Joseph," said Miss Lavinia, evidently feeling that her brother was conceding too much. She spoke with Sir Joseph's amiable smile and Sir Joseph's softly-pitched voice. Two twin babies could hardly have been more like one another.

While these few words were being exchanged among the elders, a private communication was in course of progress between the two young people under the cabin table. Natalie's smartly-slippered foot felt its way cautiously inch by inch over the carpet till it touched Launce's boot. Launce, devouring his breakfast, instantly looked up from his plate, and then, at a second touch from Natalie, looked down again in a violent hurry. After pausing to make sure that she was not noticed, Natalie took up her knife. Under a perfectly-acted pretense of toying with it absently, in the character of a young lady absorbed in thought, she began dividing a morsel of ham left on the edge of her plate, into six tiny pieces. Launce's eye looked in sidelong expectation at the divided and subdivided ham. He was evidently waiting to see the collection of morsels put to some telegraphic use, previously determined on between his neighbor and himself.

In the meanwhile the talk proceeded among the other persons at the breakfast-table. Miss Lavinia addressed herself to Launce.

"Do you know, you careless boy, you gave me a fright this morning? I was sleeping with my cabin window open, and I was awoke by an awful splash in the water. I called for the stewardess. I declare I thought somebody had fallen overboard!"

Sir Joseph looked up briskly; his sister had accidentally touched on an old association.

"Talk of falling overboard," he began, "reminds me of an extraordinary adventure--"

There Launce broke in, making his apologies.

"It shan't occur again, Miss Lavinia," he said. "To-morrow morning I'll oil myself all over, and slip into the water as silently as a seal."

"Of an extraordinary adventure," persisted Sir Joseph, "which happened to me many years ago, when I was a young man. Lavinia?"

He stopped, and looked interrogatively at his sister. Miss Graybrooke nodded her head responsively, and settled herself in her chair, as if summoning her attention in anticipation of a coming demand on it. To persons well acquainted with the brother and sister these proceedings were ominous of an impending narrative, protracted to a formidable length. The two always told a story in couples, and always differed with each other about the facts, the sister politely contradicting the brother when it was Sir

Joseph's story, and the brother politely contradicting the sister when it was Miss Lavinia's story. Separated one from the other, and thus relieved of their own habitual interchange of contradiction, neither of them had ever been known to attempt the relation of the simplest series of events without breaking down.

"It was five years before I knew you, Richard," proceeded Sir Joseph.

"Six years," said Miss Graybrooke.

"Excuse me, Lavinia."

"No, Joseph, I have it down in my diary."

"Let us waive the point." (Sir Joseph invariably used this formula as a means of at once conciliating his sister, and getting a fresh start for his story.) "I was cruising off the Mersey in a Liverpool pilot-boat. I had hired the boat in company with a friend of mine, formerly notorious in London society, under the nickname (derived from the peculiar brown color of his whiskers) of 'Mahogany Dobbs.'"

"The color of his liveries, Joseph, not the color of his whiskers."

"My dear Lavinia, you are thinking of 'Sea-green Shaw,' so called from the extraordinary liveries he adopted for his servants in the year when he was sheriff."

"I think not, Joseph."

"I beg your pardon, Lavinia."

Richard Turlington's knotty fingers drummed impatiently on the table. He looked toward Natalie. She was idly arranging her little morsels of ham in a pattern on her plate. Launcelot Linzie, still more idly, was looking at the pattern. Seeing what he saw now, Richard solved the problem which had puzzled him on deck. It was simply impossible that Natalie's fancy could be really taken by such an empty-headed fool as that!

Sir Joseph went on with his story:

"We were some ten or a dozen miles off the mouth of the Mersey--"

"Nautical miles, Joseph."

"It doesn't matter, Lavinia."

"Excuse me, brother, the late great and good Doctor Johnson said accuracy ought always to be studied even in the most trifling things."

"They were common miles, Lavinia."

"They were nautical miles, Joseph."

"Let us waive the point. Mahogany Dobbs and I happened to be below in the cabin, occupied--"

Here Sir Joseph paused (with his amiable smile) to consult his memory. Miss Lavinia waited (with her amiable smile) for the coming opportunity of setting her brother right. At the same moment Natalie laid down her knife and softly touched Launce under the table. When she thus claimed his attention the six pieces of ham were arranged as follows in her plate: Two pieces were placed opposite each other, and four pieces were ranged perpendicularly under them. Launce looked, and twice touched Natalie under the table. Interpreted by the Code agreed on between the two, the signal in the plate meant, "I must see you in private." And Launce's double touch answered, "After breakfast."

Sir Joseph proceeded with his story. Natalie took up her knife again. Another signal coming!

"We were both down in the cabin, occupied in finishing our dinner--"

"Just sitting down to lunch, Joseph."

"My dear! I ought to know."

"I only repeat what I heard, brother. The last time you told the story, you and your friend were sitting down to lunch."

"We won't particularize, Lavinia. Suppose we say occupied over a meal?"

"If it is of no more importance than that, Joseph, it would be surely better to leave it out altogether."

"Let us waive the point. Well, we were suddenly alarmed by a shout on deck, 'Man over-board!' We both rushed up the cabin stairs, naturally under the

impression that one of our crew had fallen into the sea: an impression shared, I ought to add, by the man at the helm, who had given the alarm."

Sir Joseph paused again. He was approaching one of the great dramatic points in his story, and was naturally anxious to present it as impressively as possible. He considered with himself, with his head a little on one side. Miss Lavinia considered with herself, with her head a little on one side. Natalie laid down her knife again, and again touched Launce under the table. This time there were five pieces of ham ranged longitudinally on the plate, with one piece immediately under them at the center of the line. Interpreted by the Code, this signal indicated two ominous words, "Bad news." Launce looked significantly at the owner of the yacht (meaning of the look, "Is he at the bottom of it?"). Natalie frowned in reply (meaning of the frown, "Yes, he is"). Launce looked down again into the plate. Natalie instantly pushed all the pieces of ham together in a little heap (meaning of the heap, "No more to say").

"Well?" said Richard Turlington, turning sharply on Sir Joseph. "Get on with your story. What next?"

Thus far he had not troubled himself to show even a decent pretense of interest in his old friend's perpetually-interrupted narrative. It was only when Sir Joseph had reached his last sentence--intimating that the man overboard might turn out in course of time not to be a man of the pilot-boat's crew--it was only then that Turlington sat up in his chair, and showed signs of suddenly feeling a strong interest in the progress of the story.

Sir Joseph went on:

"As soon as we got on deck, we saw the man in the water, astern. Our vessel was hove up in the wind, and the boat was lowered. The master and one of the men took the oars. All told, our crew were seven in number. Two away in the boat, a third at the helm, and, to my amazement, when I looked round, the other four behind me making our number complete. At the same moment Mahogany Dobbs, who was looking through a telescope, called out, 'Who the devil can he be? The man is floating on a hen-coop, and we have got nothing of the sort on board this pilot-boat.'"

The one person present who happened to notice Richard Turlington's face when those words were pronounced was Launcelot Linzie. He--and he alone--saw the Levant trader's swarthy complexion fade slowly to a livid ashen gray; his eyes the while fixing themselves on Sir Joseph Graybrooke with a

furtive glare in them like the glare in the eyes of a wild beast. Apparently conscious that Launce was looking at him--though he never turned his head Launce's way--he laid his elbow on the table, lifted his arm, and so rested his face on his hand, while the story went on, as to screen it effectually from the young surgeon's view.

"The man was brought on board," proceeded Sir Joseph, "sure enough, with a hen-coop--on which he had been found floating. The poor wretch was blue with terror and exposure in the water; he fainted when we lifted him on deck. When he came to himself he told us a horrible story. He was a sick and destitute foreign seaman, and he had hidden himself in the hold of an English vessel (bound to a port in his native country) which had sailed from Liverpool that morning. He had been discovered, and brought before the captain. The captain, a monster in human form, if ever there was one yet--"

Before the next word of the sentence could pass Sir Joseph's lips, Turlington startled the little party in the cabin by springing suddenly to his feet.

"The breeze!" he cried; "the breeze at last!"

As he spoke, he wheeled round to the cabin door so as to turn his back on his guests, and hailed the deck.

"Which way is the wind?"

"There is not a breath of wind, sir."

Not the slightest movement in the vessel had been perceptible in the cabin; not a sound had been audible indicating the rising of the breeze. The owner of the yacht--accustomed to the sea, capable, if necessary, of sailing his own vessel--had surely committed a strange mistake! He turned again to his friends, and made his apologies with an excess of polite regret far from characteristic of him at other times and under other circumstances.

"Go on," he said to Sir Joseph, when he had got to the end of his excuses; "I never heard such an interesting story in my life. Pray go on!"

The request was not an easy one to comply with. Sir Joseph's ideas had been thrown into confusion. Miss Lavinia's contradictions (held in reserve) had been scattered beyond recall. Both brother and sister were, moreover, additionally hindered in recovering the control of their own resources by the look and manner of their host. He alarmed, instead of encouraging the two harmless old people, by fronting them almost fiercely, with his elbows

squared on the table, and his face expressive of a dogged resolution to sit there and listen, if need be, for the rest of his life. Launce was the person who set Sir Joseph going again. After first looking attentively at Richard, he took his uncle straight back to the story by means of a question, thus:

"You don't mean to say that the captain of the ship threw the man overboard?"

"That is just what he did, Launce. The poor wretch was too ill to work his passage. The captain declared he would have no idle foreign vagabond in his ship to eat up the provisions of Englishmen who worked. With his own hands he cast the hen-coop into the water, and (assisted by one of his sailors) he threw the man after it, and told him to float back to Liverpool with the evening tide."

"A lie!" cried Turlington, addressing himself, not to Sir Joseph, but to Launce.

"Are you acquainted with the circumstances?" asked Launce, quietly.

"I know nothing about the circumstances. I say, from my own experience, that foreign sailors are even greater blackguards than English sailors. The man had met with an accident, no doubt. The rest of his story was a lie, and the object of it was to open Sir Joseph's purse."

Sir Joseph mildly shook his head.

"No lie, Richard. Witnesses proved that the man had spoken the truth."

"Witnesses? Pooh! More liars, you mean."

"I went to the owners of the vessel," pursued Sir Joseph. "I got from them the names of the officers and the crew, and I waited, leaving the case in the hands of the Liverpool police. The ship was wrecked at the mouth of the Amazon, but the crew and the cargo were saved. The men belonging to Liverpool came back. They were a bad set, I grant you. But they were examined separately about the treatment of the foreign sailor, and they all told the same story. They could give no account of their captain, nor of the sailor who had been his accomplice in the crime, except that they had not embarked in the ship which brought the rest of the crew to England. Whatever may have become of the captain since, he certainly never returned to Liverpool."

"Did you find out his name?"

The question was asked by Turlington. Even Sir Joseph, the least observant of men, noticed that it was put with a perfectly unaccountable irritability of manner.

"Don't be angry, Richard." said the old gentleman. "What is there to be angry about?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm not angry--I'm only curious. Did you find out who he was?"

"I did. His name was Goward. He was well known at Liverpool as a very clever and a very dangerous man. Quite young at the time I am speaking of, and a first-rate sailor; famous for taking command of unseaworthy ships and vagabond crews. Report described him to me as having made considerable sums of money in that way, for a man in his position; serving firms, you know, with a bad name, and running all sorts of desperate risks. A sad ruffian, Richard! More than once in trouble, on both sides of the Atlantic, for acts of violence and cruelty. Dead, I dare say, long since."

"Or possibly," said Launce, "alive, under another name, and thriving in a new way of life, with more desperate risks in it, of some other sort."

"Are you acquainted with the circumstances?" asked Turlington, retorting Launce's question on him, with a harsh ring of defiance in his brassy voice.

"What became of the poor foreign sailor, papa?" said Natalie, purposely interrupting Launce before he could meet the question angrily asked of him, by an angry reply.

"We made a subscription, and spoke to his consul, my dear. He went back to his country, poor fellow, comfortably enough."

"And there is an end of Sir Joseph's story," said Turlington, rising noisily from his chair. "It's a pity we haven't got a literary man on board--he would make a novel of it." He looked up at the skylight as he got on his feet. "Here is the breeze, this time," he exclaimed, "and no mistake!"

It was true. At last the breeze had come. The sails flapped, the main boom swung over with a thump, and the stagnant water, stirred at last, bubbled merrily past the vessel's sides.

"Come on deck, Natalie, and get some fresh air," said Miss Lavinia, leading the way to the cabin door.

Natalie held up the skirt of her nankeen dress, and exhibited the purple trimming torn away over an extent of some yards.

"Give me half an hour first, aunt, in my cabin," she said, "to mend this."

Miss Lavinia elevated her venerable eyebrows in amazement.

"You have done nothing but tear your dresses, my dear, since you have been in Mr. Turlington's yacht. Most extraordinary! I have torn none of mine during the whole cruise."

Natalie's dark color deepened a shade. She laughed, a little uneasily. "I am so awkward on board ship," she replied, and turned away and shut herself up in her cabin.

Richard Turlington produced his case of cigars.

"Now is the time," he said to Sir Joseph, "for the best cigar of the day--the cigar after breakfast. Come on deck."

"You will join us, Launce?" said Sir Joseph.

"Give me half an hour first over my books," Launce replied. "I mustn't let my medical knowledge get musty at sea, and I might not feel inclined to study later in the day."

"Quite right, my dear boy, quite right."

Sir Joseph patted his nephew approvingly on the shoulder. Launce turned away on his side, and shut himself up in his cabin.

The other three ascended together to the deck.