

## CHAPTER IV

### A Chat In The Clouds

The Skyeman seemed so earnest and upright a seaman, that to tell the plain truth, in spite of his love for me, I had many misgivings as to his readiness to unite in an undertaking which apparently savored of a moral dereliction. But all things considered, I deemed my own resolution quite venial; and as for inducing another to join me, it seemed a precaution so indispensable, as to outweigh all other considerations.

Therefore I resolved freely to open my heart to him; for that special purpose paying him a visit, when, like some old albatross in the air, he happened to be perched at the foremast-head, all by himself, on the lookout for whales never seen.

Now this standing upon a bit of stick 100 feet aloft for hours at a time, swiftly sailing over the sea, is very much like crossing the Channel in a balloon. Manfred-like, you talk to the clouds: you have a fellow feeling for the sun. And when Jarl and I got conversing up there, smoking our dwarfish "dudeens," any sea-gull passing by might have taken us for Messrs. Blanchard and Jeffries, socially puffing their after-dinner Bagdads, bound to Calais, via Heaven, from Dover. Honest Jarl, I acquainted with all: my conversation with the captain, the hint implied in his last words, my firm resolve to quit the ship

in one of her boats, and the facility with which I thought the thing could be done. Then I threw out many inducements, in the shape of pleasant anticipations of bearing right down before the wind upon the sunny isles under our lee.

He listened attentively; but so long remained silent that I almost fancied there was something in Jarl which would prove too much for me and my eloquence.

At last he very bluntly declared that the scheme was a crazy one; he had never known of such a thing but thrice before; and in every case the runaways had never afterwards been heard of. He entreated me to renounce my determination, not be a boy, pause and reflect, stick to the ship, and go home in her like a man. Verily, my Viking talked to me like my uncle.

But to all this I turned a deaf ear; affirming that my mind was made up; and that as he refused to accompany me, and I fancied no one else for a comrade, I would go stark alone rather than not at all. Upon this, seeing my resolution immovable, he bluntly swore that he would follow me through thick and thin.

Thanks, Jarl! thou wert one of those devoted fellows who will wrestle hard to convince one loved of error; but failing, forthwith change their wrestling to a sympathetic hug.

But now his elderly prudence came into play. Casting his eye over the boundless expanse below, he inquired how far off were the islands in question.

"A thousand miles and no less."

"With a fair trade breeze, then, and a boat sail, that is a good twelve days' passage, but calms and currents may make it a month, perhaps more." So saying, he shook his old head, and his yellow hair streamed.

But trying my best to chase away these misgivings, he at last gave them over. He assured me I might count upon him to his uttermost keel.

My Viking secured, I felt more at ease; and thoughtfully considered how the enterprise might best be accomplished.

There was no time to be lost. Every hour was carrying us farther and farther from the parallel most desirable for us to follow in our route to the westward. So, with all possible dispatch, I matured my plans, and communicated them to Jarl, who gave several old hints--having ulterior probabilities in view--which were not neglected.

Strange to relate, it was not till my Viking, with a rueful face,

reminded me of the fact, that I bethought me of a circumstance somewhat alarming at the first blush. We must push off without chart or quadrant; though, as will shortly be seen, a compass was by no means out of the question. The chart, to be sure, I did not so much lay to heart; but a quadrant was more than desirable. Still, it was by no means indispensable. For this reason. When we started, our latitude would be exactly known; and whether, on our voyage westward, we drifted north or south therefrom, we could not, by any possibility, get so far out of our reckoning, as to fail in striking some one of a long chain of islands, which, for many degrees, on both sides of the equator, stretched right across our track.

For much the same reason, it mattered little, whether on our passage we daily knew our longitude; for no known land lay between us and the place we desired to reach. So what could be plainer than this: that if westward we patiently held on our way, we must eventually achieve our destination?

As for intervening shoals or reefs, if any there were, they intimidated us not. In a boat that drew but a few inches of water, but an indifferent look-out would preclude all danger on that score. At all events, the thing seemed feasible enough, notwithstanding old Jarl's superstitious reverence for nautical instruments, and the philosophical objections which might have been urged by a pedantic disciple of Mercator.

Very often, as the old maxim goes, the simplest things are the most startling, and that, too, from their very simplicity. So cherish no alarms, if thus we addressed the setting sun--"Be thou, old pilot, our guide!"