

VII. HE GETS TO SEA AND FEELS VERY BAD

Every thing at last being in readiness, the pilot came on board, and all hands were called to up anchor. While I worked at my bar, I could not help observing how haggard the men looked, and how much they suffered from this violent exercise, after the terrific dissipation in which they had been indulging ashore. But I soon learnt that sailors breathe nothing about such things, but strive their best to appear all alive and hearty, though it comes very hard for many of them.

The anchor being secured, a steam tug-boat with a strong name, the Hercules, took hold of us; and away we went past the long line of shipping, and wharves, and warehouses; and rounded the green south point of the island where the Battery is, and passed Governor's Island, and pointed right out for the Narrows.

My heart was like lead, and I felt bad enough, Heaven knows; but then, there was plenty of work to be done, which kept my thoughts from becoming too much for me.

And I tried to think all the time, that I was going to England, and that, before many months, I should have actually been there and home again, telling my adventures to my brothers and sisters; and with what delight they would listen, and how they would look up to me then, and reverence my sayings; and how that even my elder brother would be forced

to treat me with great consideration, as having crossed the Atlantic Ocean, which he had never done, and there was no probability he ever would.

With such thoughts as these I endeavored to shake off my heavy-heartedness; but it would not do at all; for this was only the first day of the voyage, and many weeks, nay, several whole months must elapse before the voyage was ended; and who could tell what might happen to me; for when I looked up at the high, giddy masts, and thought how often I must be going up and down them, I thought sure enough that some luckless day or other, I would certainly fall overboard and be drowned. And then, I thought of lying down at the bottom of the sea, stark alone, with the great waves rolling over me, and no one in the wide world knowing that I was there. And I thought how much better and sweeter it must be, to be buried under the pleasant hedge that bounded the sunny south side of our village grave-yard, where every Sunday I had used to walk after church in the afternoon; and I almost wished I was there now; yes, dead and buried in that churchyard. All the time my eyes were filled with tears, and I kept holding my breath, to choke down the sobs, for indeed I could not help feeling as I did, and no doubt any boy in the world would have felt just as I did then.

As the steamer carried us further and further down the bay, and we passed ships lying at anchor, with men gazing at us and waving their hats; and small boats with ladies in them waving their handkerchiefs; and passed the green shore of Staten Island, and caught sight of so many

beautiful cottages all overrun with vines, and planted on the beautiful fresh mossy hill-sides; oh! then I would have given any thing if instead of sailing out of the bay, we were only coming into it; if we had crossed the ocean and returned, gone over and come back; and my heart leaped up in me like something alive when I thought of really entering that bay at the end of the voyage. But that was so far distant, that it seemed it could never be. No, never, never more would I see New York again.

And what shocked me more than any thing else, was to hear some of the sailors, while they were at work coiling away the hawsers, talking about the boarding-houses they were going to, when they came back; and how that some friends of theirs had promised to be on the wharf when the ship returned, to take them and their chests right up to Franklin-square where they lived; and how that they would have a good dinner ready, and plenty of cigars and spirits out on the balcony. I say this land of talking shocked me, for they did not seem to consider, as I did, that before any thing like that could happen, we must cross the great Atlantic Ocean, cross over from America to Europe and back again, many thousand miles of foaming ocean.

At that time I did not know what to make of these sailors; but this much I thought, that when they were boys, they could never have gone to the Sunday School; for they swore so, it made my ears tingle, and used words that I never could hear without a dreadful loathing.

And are these the men, I thought to myself, that I must live with so long? these the men I am to eat with, and sleep with all the time? And besides, I now began to see, that they were not going to be very kind to me; but I will tell all about that when the proper time comes.

Now you must not think, that because all these things were passing through my mind, that I had nothing to do but sit still and think; no, no, I was hard at work: for as long as the steamer had hold of us, we were very busy coiling away ropes and cables, and putting the decks in order; which were littered all over with odds and ends of things that had to be put away.

At last we got as far as the Narrows, which every body knows is the entrance to New York Harbor from sea; and it may well be called the Narrows, for when you go in or out, it seems like going in or out of a doorway; and when you go out of these Narrows on a long voyage like this of mine, it seems like going out into the broad highway, where not a soul is to be seen. For far away and away, stretches the great Atlantic Ocean; and all you can see beyond it where the sky comes down to the water. It looks lonely and desolate enough, and I could hardly believe, as I gazed around me, that there could be any land beyond, or any place like Europe or England or Liverpool in the great wide world. It seemed too strange, and wonderful, and altogether incredible, that there could really be cities and towns and villages and green fields and hedges and farm-yards and orchards, away over that wide blank of sea, and away beyond the place where the sky came down to the water. And to think of

steering right out among those waves, and leaving the bright land behind, and the dark night coming on, too, seemed wild and foolhardy; and I looked with a sort of fear at the sailors standing by me, who could be so thoughtless at such a time. But then I remembered, how many times my own father had said he had crossed the ocean; and I had never dreamed of such a thing as doubting him; for I always thought him a marvelous being, infinitely purer and greater than I was, who could not by any possibility do wrong, or say an untruth. Yet now, how could I credit it, that he, my own father, whom I so well remembered; had ever sailed out of these Narrows, and sailed right through the sky and water line, and gone to England, and France, Liverpool, and Marseilles. It was too wonderful to believe.

Now, on the right hand side of the Narrows as you go out, the land is quite high; and on the top of a fine cliff is a great castle or fort, all in ruins, and with the trees growing round it. It was built by Governor Tompkins in the time of the last war with England, but was never used, I believe, and so they left it to decay. I had visited the place once when we lived in New York, as long ago almost as I could remember, with my father, and an uncle of mine, an old sea-captain, with white hair, who used to sail to a place called Archangel in Russia, and who used to tell me that he was with Captain Langsdorff, when Captain Langsdorff crossed over by land from the sea of Okotsk in Asia to St. Petersburg, drawn by large dogs in a sled. I mention this of my uncle, because he was the very first sea-captain I had ever seen, and his white hair and fine handsome florid face made so strong an impression upon me,

that I have never forgotten him, though I only saw him during this one visit of his to New York, for he was lost in the White Sea some years after.

But I meant to speak about the fort. It was a beautiful place, as I remembered it, and very wonderful and romantic, too, as it appeared to me, when I went there with my uncle. On the side away from the water was a green grove of trees, very thick and shady; and through this grove, in a sort of twilight you came to an arch in the wall of the fort, dark as night; and going in, you groped about in long vaults, twisting and turning on every side, till at last you caught a peep of green grass and sunlight, and all at once came out in an open space in the middle of the castle. And there you would see cows quietly grazing, or ruminating under the shade of young trees, and perhaps a calf frisking about, and trying to catch its own tail; and sheep clambering among the mossy ruins, and cropping the little tufts of grass sprouting out of the sides of the embrasures for cannon. And once I saw a black goat with a long beard, and crumpled horns, standing with his forefeet lifted high up on the topmost parapet, and looking to sea, as if he were watching for a ship that was bringing over his cousin. I can see him even now, and though I have changed since then, the black goat looks just the same as ever; and so I suppose he would, if I live to be as old as Methusaleh, and have as great a memory as he must have had. Yes, the fort was a beautiful, quiet, charming spot. I should like to build a little cottage in the middle of it, and live there all my life. It was noon-day when I was there, in the month of June, and there was little wind to stir the

trees, and every thing looked as if it was waiting for something, and the sky overhead was blue as my mother's eye, and I was so glad and happy then. But I must not think of those delightful days, before my father became a bankrupt, and died, and we removed from the city; for when I think of those days, something rises up in my throat and almost strangles me.

Now, as we sailed through the Narrows, I caught sight of that beautiful fort on the cliff, and could not help contrasting my situation now, with what it was when with my father and uncle I went there so long ago. Then I never thought of working for my living, and never knew that there were hard hearts in the world; and knew so little of money, that when I bought a stick of candy, and laid down a sixpence, I thought the confectioner returned five cents, only that I might have money to buy something else, and not because the pennies were my change, and therefore mine by good rights. How different my idea of money now!

Then I was a schoolboy, and thought of going to college in time; and had vague thoughts of becoming a great orator like Patrick Henry, whose speeches I used to speak on the stage; but now, I was a poor friendless boy, far away from my home, and voluntarily in the way of becoming a miserable sailor for life. And what made it more bitter to me, was to think of how well off were my cousins, who were happy and rich, and lived at home with my uncles and aunts, with no thought of going to sea for a living. I tried to think that it was all a dream, that I was not where I was, not on board of a ship, but that I was at home again in the

city, with my father alive, and my mother bright and happy as she used to be. But it would not do. I was indeed where I was, and here was the ship, and there was the fort. So, after casting a last look at some boys who were standing on the parapet, gazing off to sea, I turned away heavily, and resolved not to look at the land any more.

About sunset we got fairly "outside," and well may it so be called; for I felt thrust out of the world. Then the breeze began to blow, and the sails were loosed, and hoisted; and after a while, the steamboat left us, and for the first time I felt the ship roll, a strange feeling enough, as if it were a great barrel in the water. Shortly after, I observed a swift little schooner running across our bows, and re-crossing again and again; and while I was wondering what she could be, she suddenly lowered her sails, and two men took hold of a little boat on her deck, and launched it overboard as if it had been a chip. Then I noticed that our pilot, a red-faced man in a rough blue coat, who to my astonishment had all this time been giving orders instead of the captain, began to button up his coat to the throat, like a prudent person about leaving a house at night in a lonely square, to go home; and he left the giving orders to the chief mate, and stood apart talking with the captain, and put his hand into his pocket, and gave him some newspapers.

And in a few minutes, when we had stopped our headway, and allowed the little boat to come alongside, he shook hands with the captain and officers and bade them good-by, without saying a syllable of farewell to

me and the sailors; and so he went laughing over the side, and got into the boat, and they pulled him off to the schooner, and then the schooner made sail and glided under our stern, her men standing up and waving their hats, and cheering; and that was the last we saw of America.