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# UNDER ENEMY COLOURS

AN EPIC NOVEL OF NAVAL ADVENTURE

SEAN THOMAS RUSSELL

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by  
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1793



## *One*

A hard gale blew in off the Atlantic at dusk, west by south, raising a steep, breaking sea. All through the first watch pale crests surged out of the darkness, lifted in ghostly rumblings, then boomed against the forward quarter, staggering the ship.

Just before eight bells a thin, angular man emerged from the aft companionway, crouched precariously on the slippery planks, and looked anxiously about. Perceiving a cascade of water break along the deck, he made a reeling dash to the windward shrouds just as water spun about his knees. The frigate, deeply laden and labouring, rolled heavily to leeward and a blast of wind struck the man, Griffiths, wetly across the face.

“Is that you, Doctor?” a voice sounded over the wind.

A timely flash of lightning illuminated the sailing master, not two feet before him, face pale and streaming, hat clamped down to his eyebrows and bound tightly in place by a length of blue cotton.

“I must have more hands,” the sailing master shouted almost into Griffiths’ ear.

“I have given you all who can walk, Mr Barthe,” the surgeon responded in like manner. “Those remaining are too ill to stand.”

“Is it the yellow jack, then? That is what men are saying.”

“It is not, Mr Barthe. It is acute poisoning from some substance ingested—likely the pork served this very day. But I have never seen it so

severe. Men cannot stand, and have disgorged more fluids than their bodies can bear. It was my hope that you could spare men to aid *me . . .*”

“I cannot, Doctor. I have been reduced to sending boys and reefers aloft, where they should not be. I can spare no one.”

The ship rolled again, and water sluiced across the deck, slopping about them. The doctor felt Mr Barthe’s hand grasp his shoulder to preserve him from harm. The master began to speak again, but a gust devoured all human sound.

In the distance, lightning branched down into the sea, illuminating, for an instant, the chaotic waters, the spider-work of rigging. Four men wrestled the wheel, their eyes sunken, faces faintly blue.

A boy struggled toward them, crabwise, hand over hand along the lifeline. In the flare of godly light, he slipped and fell, then dragged himself up on the taut line. He reached them, breathless, dismayed.

“Mr Barthe!” he shouted. “We have lost Penrith.”

“What in hell do you mean, you’ve ‘lost’ him?”

“He went aloft with us, but no one saw him climb down. We do not know what became of him.”

“Did you not number off the men as they reached the deck?”

A second of hesitation. “No, sir.”

The master cursed. “Has he taken ill and repaired below?”

“Williams made a thorough search. We fear he’s gone overboard, unseen.”

“Damn this night! Have Mr Archer go down to Captain Hart!” The master began to struggle forward but turned back to the doctor. “Will you take yourself below, Doctor? There is naught you can do here, and I should be happier knowing you were below in such weather.”

Griffiths agreed, and scrambled toward the companionway, his last view of the gale, Barthe, and some others in the waist, gazing up at the yards—stark, angular, gone. He backed down the companionway stair, which moved with the ship, describing a long, irregular arc. Finding the deck, he stepped aside and let the few men ascend who could stand watch. As the last man went cursing up into the moaning night,

the off-watch came slipping and thumping down, throwing spray about them, glistening in the smudge of light from a stained lamp.

Down again they went, to the berth-deck, and as they descended there ensued some shoving at the bottom of the stair so that one man tumbled down the last steps. Voices were raised in anger.

“You men!” Griffiths shouted down. “Do I need to call Mr Landry?”

Several *No, sirs* came floating back up and the shoving and cursing stopped. The hands went muttering forward as Griffiths descended.

“They’ve done for Penrith,” the surgeon thought he heard one man say. “The fucking blackguards. Penrith!”

## *Two*

Philip Stephens had been First Secretary of the Admiralty for thirty years. Previous to that, he had been Second Secretary. Through his delicate hands passed the correspondence of admirals and captains, First Lords, ministers, and spies. Lieutenant Charles Hayden was well aware that no one in the offices of the Admiralty was more intimate with the details of the Navy and her distant fleets than the little man who sat, mostly hidden by a writing-table, before him. That he should be aware of the existence of one Lieutenant Charles Saunders Hayden, however, was still something of a surprise.

The First Secretary bent over a letter, his spectacles refracting the dull London sunlight from the nearby window into a faint prism on his cheek. The most prominent features of the man's face were inflamed arteries that spread, crimson, over his bulbous nose. They meandered onto his cheeks and branched into deltas beneath the rainbows from his spectacles. It was not so much a face, Hayden thought, as a landscape.

"Captain Bourne holds you in high regard," Stephens rasped, his voice throaty and thick.

"An honour I strive to deserve."

Stephens seemed not to hear this, but put the letter down upon his tidy table, removed his spectacles, and rather directly took Hayden's measure. Too easily trespassed against, the lieutenant felt heat flush into

his face. It was, however, not the moment to take offence; that anyone in the Admiralty building had noticed him was an opportunity not to be squandered.

Hayden had come to think of the Admiralty as a court. The First Lord was sovereign, the Lords Commissioners his ministers, all men of rank. Below him, the courtiers in their tiers, admirals, vice admirals, rear admirals, captains both high and low on the list. Far below these influential personages waited the lowly lieutenants, all desperately hoping to be appointed governor of that tiny outpost of empire known as a ship of war. Those possessing family interest and the skills of a courtier tended to rise. Certainly, the Admiralty would always need a few gifted functionaries, like Philip Stephens, to keep things running smoothly; a handful of stouthearted, fighting captains; an admiral or two who could manage a fleet action; but for the most part the courtiers succeeded and everyone else bowed their heads, smiled charmingly when noticed, and hoped to find a patron who might advance their cause. Hayden was not, by nature, a courtier, but he did his best to appear receptive and amiable, all the same.

Stephens did not seem to notice. "I have a position for you, Lieutenant."

Hayden took a long breath and released it slowly into the small room. "I should be forever in your de—"

The First Secretary did not allow him to finish. "It is not the sort of position that puts you forever in another's debt. Captain Josiah Hart has need of a first lieutenant." A grim, little smile flickered across the pale lips. "I see by your face that you had hoped for a command . . ."

Hayden considered a tactful response, but then gave in to exasperation and perhaps disappointment. "I had hoped, by this time, to have earned greater consideration than a first lieutenant's position . . . But I will not refuse it," he added quickly.

The little man made a humming sound, produced a pocket handkerchief, and began to clean the lenses of his spectacles. "Captain Hart has at his command a new-built frigate, the *Themis*, in which he has been cruising the French coast . . . to damned little effect."

Hayden feared his eyes widened at this utterance.

“Five weeks ago he lost a seaman in a gale,” Stephens continued, the linen being worked back and forth by the quick cocking of a wrist. “Man fell from the mainsail yard by night. Never found. Not an entirely uncommon occurrence, one must say. But on the morning next, when the course was set, this dropped from the bunt.” The Secretary reached down behind his table and produced a glass jar, stoppered and sealed with wax. In murky, amber fluid, a thick worm lay suspended, washing slowly forth and back. And then Hayden saw the nail.

“It is a finger!” the lieutenant blurted.

“Severed, cleanly, by a blade—or so the ship’s surgeon concluded. He saw it freshly fallen from aloft, so I must give way to his opinion. As everyone aboard had their full complement of digits, except for three men who were known to have parted with theirs sometime earlier, it was assumed that the lost man had left his second finger behind.” Stephens returned his gaze to Hayden, as though expecting a response.

“But severed by a blade, sir . . .”

“Yes—hardly misadventure. The unlucky man was seen that very day in dispute with a landsman known to be of evil disposition. A knife in a bloody sheath was found rolled up in the landsman’s hammock. He denies all, of course. Says he butchered some poultry—unfortunate bugger. He sits in Plymouth awaiting his date with the courts-martial.”

“Surely he will not be convicted on such evidences as that?”

Stephens shrugged. Apparently the man’s fate did not affect him overly.

“And what was a landsman doing aloft, if I may ask?”

“Half the crew were down with some malady—rancid pork, the surgeon posits. They sent boys and midshipmen aloft that same night.” Stephens waved his hand, as though brushing aside this line of conversation. “Do you know Captain Hart at all?”

“I have not had the honour.”

The First Secretary bobbed his head. “He is, how shall I say . . . ? A man of some influence through Mrs Hart’s family.”

It was the lieutenant’s turn to nod. *Interest* was something he under-

stood well—due to his utter lack of it. In the court of the Admiralty, having a wife related to a “minister” counted for any number of successful actions at sea.

“There is some concern about this affair on the *Themis*. Her first lieutenant invalidated out at the end of the cruise. He claims to know nothing of the matter, and we pray that is so.”

Hayden felt himself straighten a little in his chair. “If there are malcontents aboard Hart’s ship, why not exchange them elsewhere?”

Stephens meticulously adjusted the position of a tidy stack of papers on his desk. “And suggest that Captain Hart cannot manage his own crew? I don’t think that would answer in this case.” He glanced up at Hayden. “But then you have dealt with a discontented crew before—most ably, I am given to understand.”

Apparently the First Secretary knew Hayden’s service record intimately. “When I was job-captain aboard the *Wren* . . .”

Stephens nodded once, but then a crease appeared between his meagre eyebrows. “Are you certain, Lieutenant, that you know nothing of Captain Hart? You are not being disingenuous?”

“I had not heard his name before entering this room.”

Stephens gazed at him a moment, as though gauging the truth of this statement. “Hart’s connexions within the Admiralty are of the highest order . . . It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that I have received a request to place a lieutenant with . . . *bottom* aboard Captain Hart’s ship—after all, even the most skilled captain has need of such an officer from time to time. Do you not agree?”

“What captain would argue against competent officers?”

The First Secretary indulged another grim little smile. “What captain, indeed. It was my intention to find such an officer to serve aboard the *Themis* . . . but I am looking for something more. I tell you this in the strictest confidence, Mr Hayden. Is that understood?”

Hayden nodded, liking this conversation less by the moment.

“I require a man who will keep a most accurate record of Hart’s exploits. I’m sure the good captain’s modesty is such that an honest ac-

count of his endeavours has never been made known within these walls.”

Hayden sat forward a little. “I will not take this position, Mr Stephens,” he said firmly, but then added, “though I am not ungrateful of the offer.”

“But you have already accepted. Did I not hear correctly?”

Hayden tried to keep the anger from his voice, with only partial success. “That was before I knew you wished to turn me into an informant. Under such a circumstance I do not feel honour-bound.”

Neither man spoke for a moment, but Hayden feared his voice had betrayed him. Philip Stephens’ face changed ever so slightly; drawn in but a little more, it would have formed a scowl.

“Allow me to be uncharacteristically forthright, Lieutenant Hayden.” The First Secretary sat back in his chair and steepled his fingers before him. “You have little future in the King’s Navy.”

Hayden could not hide his complete and utter surprise at this statement—not because it was in the least untrue, but due to its audacity.

“Your friend . . .” Stephens shuffled through some papers, “the Honourable Robert Hertle, is about to make his post, as would you have, had you half his interest. Despite your manifest abilities—and I am certain Captain Bourne is too shrewd to have misjudged them—you are lodged in your present circumstances with little hope of forward movement. It does not help your cause that we are at war with France and that you are half a Frenchman.”

“I am an Englishman, sir. My mother is French.”

Stephens held up his hands. “Be at peace, Lieutenant. I have recently made the argument that your parentage weighs in your favour, for I am given to understand that you have lived in that country a good many years and speak the language as a native . . .”

Hayden nodded.

“You must understand, Mr Hayden, that I am your advocate, but the prejudice of others is not easily overcome. That is why I am able to offer you only this first lieutenant’s position . . . at this time. It is true that

I am asking you to write an account of your cruise, but certainly you would keep a journal, as a matter of course. Would you not?"

"It is not quite the same thing, Mr Stephens, as you well know."

"It certainly isn't if you choose to believe it is not. And I do admire your loyalty to the captain under whom I have proposed you serve, but sometimes loyalty to one's own cause is not such a terrible evil. Captain Hart, you should know, has a very good understanding of this distinction." He spread a little rectangle of paper on the table. "This is the address of one Thomas F Banks, Esquire. My name should never appear on your letters in any way, but I will receive them all the same."

Hayden eyed the scrap of paper disdainfully but made no move to pick it up.

"That is not just an address resting on my table, Lieutenant. It might be better to think of it as representing your future in the Navy. You may take it up . . . or you may leave it lie. I will allow you the evening to consider, but I shall require an answer by tomorrow, noon. At such time the position will be offered elsewhere." He leaned forward and slid the paper closer to Hayden. "In case you decide in favour of a career in the Navy."

Hayden rose without taking the offered paper, but then found himself hesitating, hovering, as it were, over the table, eyeing the little rectangle of white overwritten in a spare hand. He knew if he left that room without it he would remove his uniform that day for the final time. His career in the Navy would be over—a decision not to be hastily made. His left hand reached out and took up the paper, slipping it quickly into a pocket. Philip Stephens had returned to his papers and appeared not to notice.

## Three

Lieutenant Hayden stood with his back to the hearth, his sodden hose steaming like kettles. The little withdrawing room—Mrs Hertle’s “Chinese Room”—seemed a bastion of warmth and good cheer that night. Outside, a summer rain battered at the pane. A gust rattled the sash. Mindful of the ancient vase, Hayden rested a damp elbow on the mantle, where a small puddle immediately formed.

“This will set you up, Charles.” Robert Hertle passed his friend a steaming glass, the perfume of hot brandy filling the air. “Let me find you some dry hose.”

“No, no, Robert—don’t trouble yourself. The fire will dry me presently.”

Robert appeared unconvinced by this argument, Hayden could see, but kept his peace. The two had known each other while still in the nursery, for their fathers had been close friends. It was, in this case, not an exaggeration to say they were like brothers, though they could hardly have been less alike despite identical years—four and twenty. Hayden was as dark as Hertle was fair.

Hayden raised his glass. “We must have a toast. To Post Captain Robert Hertle.”

Hertle smiled modestly, pleased by his friend’s kindness, and by the

gratifying warmth the words seemed to spread through his entire being. "It is undeserved, as you well know."

"It is richly deserved. Think of all the deadwood that made their post before you—though the Lords Commissioners set them upon the quarterdeck instead of beneath the stern, where deadwood belongs."

Robert laughed. "What I was trying to say was that I am not as deserving as you."

"Well, I won't hear any of that talk," Hayden enjoined, trying, for his friend's sake, to mask his bitterness and disappointment.

"You shall hear it, I fear, and not just from me." Robert gestured to a chair. "Please, Charles, be at ease."

"As soon as I am dry."

Robert rang a little silver bell and a maid hurried in. She curtsied to the gentlemen. "Anne, can you find a blanket to lay over the chair? Lieutenant Hayden was caught by a squall with all his canvas up." He set his sniffer on the mantle and peeled off his friend's coat. "It must be dried," he admonished. "I'll find you a frock-coat for supper."

The dripping coat went out with Anne, and a thick blanket came quickly back to be draped over a chair. Charles settled himself, suppressing a shiver.

"You must tell me all the particulars," Charles said. "What ship have they given you?"

"Just a little brig until a frigate comes off the stocks. My commission will be granted then." He was trying not to sound too pleased with his situation, Charles could tell; no doubt out of consideration for him.

"Now," Robert said, taking the seat opposite, "tell me about your visit to the Admiralty."

"How in this world did you know of that?"

Robert smiled, enjoying this small triumph. "You were observed, sir. Observed ascending to the First Lord's chambers. I have not been still all afternoon in anticipation of good news." Robert waited a moment. "Well, don't keep me in uncertainty," he said when Hayden offered nothing. "Did they give you a ship?"

“No. Nothing like it. A first lieutenant’s position only—aboard a frigate.”

Robert closed his eyes a moment and his face went pale with anger. “How can they treat you so? You’ve had command of a brig-sloop.”

Hayden rose and paced back and forth before the fire. “Yes, well, apparently job-captains are abundant and command little respect in Whitehall Street.”

“Even so, it is unjust. You should have been made Master and Commander—long ago. Tell me what the First Lord said.”

“First Lord? It was the First Secretary with whom I spoke.”

“Stephens?”

“None other.”

This apparently surprised Robert, who leaned forward in his chair, a crease appearing between his eyebrows. “Pray, what did he say you?”

Hayden took a sip of his brandy by way of buying himself a moment to consider. Anger and resentment surfaced again, and he pressed them down. Hayden wanted his friend’s council, but the truth was he felt ashamed of what had transpired, of what Stephens had asked of him—and the shame fuelled a long, simmering resentment.

“Are you familiar with a thirty-two-gun frigate named the *Themis*?” he asked, exerting all his energies to compose himself.

Robert sat back in his chair as though pushed. “Not Hart’s ship?”

“The very one.” Hayden gazed at his friend, unsettled by his reaction. “I am to be Captain Hart’s first. Do you know the man?”

Robert let his gaze flow once around the room, as though it were suddenly unfamiliar. “I have met him once or twice, but his reputation precedes him. I am astonished you have not heard. Among his detractors he is known as ‘Faint Hart.’ The good captain has his command courtesy of Mrs Hart, whose family tree has more than one branch extending into the Admiralty. It would be very charitable to say that he is not held in high regard among his peers in the service.”

Hayden cursed silently. “You are deeper into the Admiralty court than I, Robert. Have you ever heard of any cause for antipathy between Mr Stephens and Captain Hart?”

“I have not, but Hart gave me the distinct impression that he had little charm to spare for those he does not consider useful to his own particular cause. Stephens is a man of immense ability, so it is easily imagined that an officer known as ‘Faint Hart’ might earn his disdain. Men like Stephens have little time for fumlbers. Did the First Secretary give you some indication that he harboured a dislike of Captain Hart?”

“I was left with the impression that someone within the Admiralty was no friend to Hart.”

A small roll of the eyes by Robert. “You’ve not accepted this position, surely?”

Hayden drew in a breath and released it in exasperation. “And what other choice have I, Robert?” he asked, the edge of his anger making itself known. “Mr Stephens was at pains to point out my French parentage and made it clear that within the walls of the Admiralty building no one but he knew my name.”

Robert looked positively alarmed at this intelligence. “Is he aware of your . . . affairs in France, do you think?”

“If so, he was too discreet to mention them.”

Robert did not appear to be reassured by this, but also rose and went restively across the room to the window. “You’ve never told anyone what you told me?”

“No one, though any number of people know I was in France that year, even in Paris. That was never a secret.”

Robert smiled bitterly. “Then your revolutionary past is likely still buried.”

Hayden bridled at his friend’s attempted jest. “It was but a few days, caught up in the moment . . . like everyone there. Once I had witnessed a mob set loose, I was soon back in my right senses. You cannot know, Robert, how much I have come to regret my actions of those days, and I was all but blameless in that place—an innocent.”

“I have noted that you’ve come no nearer forgiving yourself, even so.”

Hayden felt the usual distress wash over him when this subject surfaced. “There are times when it is important *not* to forgive oneself,” he said quietly.

A look of distress crossed his friend's face. An awkward moment, and then Robert said, "I don't suppose Stephens mentioned if Hart had requested some other to be his first lieutenant?"

"He said nothing of it." Hayden was happy to turn away from the subject of his sojourn in Paris.

"Then let us hope Hart did not. Imagine your position if so? I do not like this situation one bit, Charles. I'm not convinced you wouldn't be better to refuse it."

"Then you will not need to return my jacket when dried. I will have no further need of a uniform."

Robert leaned back against the sill, his look pained. "Did Stephens promise you anything if you took this position? a ship, advancement?"

"Nothing. He seemed to suggest that he might be inclined to secure me a better situation in the future . . . but it was clear that success in the offered commission would first be required."

Robert cursed softly. "It is unforgivable that he should offer you a situation—so beneath your gifts—and promise nothing in return."

"That is not the worst of it. There is apparently some discontent among Hart's crew and Mr Stephens seems to believe I will remedy it."

"Blast the man to hell! If Hart has an understanding that you are being sent as his nursemaid you will be made most unwelcome."

"Let us hope he does not comprehend that." Hayden shrugged and placed an elbow on the mantle, finding the small puddle he had left earlier. "Such is the state of my career, Robert, that a refusal will see it ended. So I am for the *Themis*. I see no other course. Perhaps a few successful actions will place me in better circumstances."

But Robert did not even make an effort to agree with this.



"She never retires to her chamber, no matter the hour, but wanders about the house with a pack of dogs in train, and sleeps for two hours, now and again, upon a sofa or ottoman; any place it might please

her. The consternation of the servants, who come to clean the rooms in the small hours, cannot be hidden. When they find the countess asleep amid her pack, they must tiptoe out and leave the room ashamble." Miss Henrietta Carthew laughed; a charming tinkling, Hayden thought, like water in a raceway. "I have come upon her myself, at two of a morning, amid a swarm of candles, her face buried in a book, her feet propped up on a sleeping hound she has christened Boswell." They all laughed at this.

Mrs Hertle glanced Hayden's way and he hastily withdrew his gaze from the fair speaker. They were seated around the table in the Hertles' dining room, the sound of horses' hooves, like dripping water, passing by on the comparatively quiet street outside. The bustle of London was a distant hum, not even remarked by anyone at table—as unnoticed as one's own heartbeat.

Hayden had heard many stories about the charms of Miss Henrietta Carthew, but had never expected to respond to her presence as he did. She should not be called beautiful, if the truth were to be admitted. Or perhaps it would be more true to say he had never met a woman in whom the line between "beautiful" and "peculiar-looking" was so fine. Considered individually, the features of her face were all beyond criticism, but taken as a whole there was something amiss, as though the elements were disparate, dissonant. Her nose, though straight and finely formed, appeared to have been made for a different face. The eyes, brown, bottomless, and flecked with amber, were just slightly too wide apart. But then she would smile, and all that appeared disharmonious would be swept away and he would understand why she was thought so handsome. The overall effect was utterly unknown to Hayden—he struggled not to stare.

"I don't know why you visit that madhouse," Robert observed, breaking into Hayden's reverie.

Henrietta appeared surprised. "There is no place like it. The beauty of the countryside is unrivalled, and you are left to your own devices from morning until dinner, Lady Endsmere arranging no amusements during the day. It is near to Heaven in that alone . . ."

Her voice drew Hayden's eyes back again: pearl-smooth skin, hair the colour of new-sawn mahogany: auburn, chestnut, copper, bronze.

“. . . at night, the same disregard for convention is apparent. The conversation around the dinner table is of politics and art, natural philosophy and poetry. All the ladies take their cue from Lady Endsmere and freely offer their opinions upon any subject. There is no other house like it in all of England, I think. Only the most substantive gentlemen and ladies visit. The table is not decorated with those frivolous 'wits' so valued in London—”

“There is very little wit at our table,” Mrs Hertle interrupted. “Are we fashionable?”

“You are quite the thing, my dear,” Henrietta assured her, a smile like a cresting wave on a sunny day.

Another glance Hayden's way from Mrs Hertle, making him wonder if she realized how Henrietta's voice pierced right to his core. But how could it not? musical, nuanced, assured, able to subtly colour the meaning of words, reveal shades of feeling, or hide them utterly.

In her presence he felt as though he stood upon a cliff edge. The height stole his breath away, his head spun. But even so, he could not will himself to step away from the edge. Some unseen force drew him nearer.

Henrietta lifted a fork to her lovely mouth. “This is exquisite. Have you a new cook?”

“Did I not tell you? Charles found us a French cook who had served a noble family before all the troubles began in that country.”

“I approve of your taste, Lieutenant Hayden,” Henrietta pronounced.

“Charles has many such areas of specialized knowledge,” Robert interjected. “Tell me what you think of the claret, Charles? From Spain, I was assured . . .”

“It is not from Spain, as you well know,” Hayden stated, seeing his friend suppress a smile.

“Where is it from, pray?” Robert asked innocently.

"It is a finely smuggled wine from the French Pyrenees," Hayden said. He turned to the other guest. "Do your family keep a house in London, Miss Henrietta?"

"No longer, though my father did for many years. We are so close to town, it is hardly worth all the trouble and expense. Forgive me for changing the subject, Mr Hayden, but how do you know this claret is from the French Pyrenees and not Spain? Surely the two nations are but a border apart in that region."

Robert's partly suppressed smile blossomed fully. He took a malicious pleasure in making his friend perform.

Hayden took up his glass in resignation. "The style, largely; the French and the Spanish have different ideas about wine. And then each variety of grape has its own distinctive palette." Hayden tasted the wine. "This is a skilful blend of Carignane . . . Teret noir, with perhaps a hint of the Picpoule. But I am no authority. My uncles could tell you who made the wine and precisely where the grapes were grown. They would go on at length regarding the *terrier*, then shake their heads at the backward methods of the rustic wine-makers." He held the glass up to the light. "Where this wine is made the soil is often so thin over the rock that the vineyard owner must use a dibble, an iron bar, to break a depression in the stone into which the vine is planted. Then the vine is allowed to grow over the ground, wherever it will, rather than upon *echalas*—properly constructed wooden frames. They persist in crushing by foot, and refuse to use the press. Scientific methods have not reached them."

Henrietta glanced at her cousin, the look impenetrable to Hayden.

"When this foolish war is over," Mrs Hertle said, "Charles has promised to take us on a tour of France. Until then, I suppose, we must be content with seeing the parts of England we do not know, though I can't imagine when we will manage even that, with Dame Duty always knocking at our door."

"You must come to visit Lady Endsmere with me this summer, Eliza," Henrietta urged, returning to their earlier subject. "Captain Hertle shall be upon his ship, and you will not be disappointed in the countryside."

“Yes,” Robert said, “you must not miss this chance. I want to hear the stories.”

“You see,” Henrietta said, “you will join ‘the menagerie,’ as everyone names it, for there are monkeys and exotic birds and who knows what all around the grounds. Lord Uffington said the only difference between the animals and the humans was that the animals only dressed for supper if they were of a mind to . . . because a monkey once spent most of a meal sitting in Lady Endsmeré’s lap, like a favoured child, eating whatever it fancied from her plate.”

“Now we know you are exaggerating, Henri!” Mrs Hertle laughed.

“You will come with me this summer and see for yourself. Enough stories can be gathered in a fortnight to dine out on the rest of the year.”

The smile suddenly disappeared from Mrs Hertle’s face. “But I shall worry so for Captain Hertle,” she responded softly.

Henrietta reached out and patted her cousin’s hand. “We will pray the war will be over, the radicals all suffering the fate they so readily prescribe others.”

“What do you think, Charles?” Mrs Hertle asked, lines appearing at the corners of her eyes. “You know more of France than anyone in our circle. Certainly this war cannot be as long as the last?”

Charles took a sip of claret. As his glass returned to the table the footman leaned silently forward and recharged it. “So we might hope, but it is my experience that wars often defy predictions of their brevity.”

“But so many of the officers of both the French Army and Navy have resigned their commissions,” Mrs Hertle said. “How will they fight without officers?”

“Recent evidence would indicate quite well,” Hayden said, “in the case of the Army, at least. The Navy has yet to be tested.”

Robert waved a hand. “Charles, you let your sympathies blind you, I think. Surely an entire officer corps cannot be replaced by ill-trained tailors and farm boys and success then expected.”

Charles felt suddenly defensive. “But imagine a navy where promotion was by merit rather than interest. Would not our own service be the better for it?”

“Certainly it would, but if we destroyed the officer class and promoted from the foremost hands, what kind of navy would we have?”

Hayden did not have an answer for that, and when he did not speak, Mrs Hertle said softly, “Then it *will* be a short war . . .”

“Certainly it must be,” Hayden offered, trying to sound reassuring.



“I should be allowed nothing but milk or water,” Hayden said passionately. “Wine makes me too forthright. I do apologize, Robert, I didn’t mean to frighten Mrs Hertle.”

Robert poured two glasses from a decanter. They had retired to the library for after-supper port and conversation. A brief interlude of male association before joining the ladies in the drawing room.

“Don’t apologize. Mrs Hertle is accustomed to hearing the truth, however distasteful. And you know I should rather have a harsh truth than a sweet lie.” Robert pressed a glass into his friend’s hand. Taking up a poker, he crouched and thrust it into the embers, tumbling a small hill of coal in a clatter. “You don’t believe that this conflict will be brief, I collect?”

“I have no special knowledge of the future, Robert, but such pronouncements have often proved frightfully optimistic in the past.”

Robert raked out the coals, then, satisfied with the effect, he stood, leaning a shoulder against the mantle. “What do you think of the situation across the Channel, now?”

Charles walked three paces, and turned, regarding his friend, propped against the mantle, a soft sadness come over him. “It grows more frightening by the day. That is what I think. The Girondins were the voice of moderation, and with them gone . . . I fear what might occur next. You read reports of the prison massacres last autumn. The resentments of the Paris mob are too easily inflamed; they have not done their worst yet, even without Marat to provoke them. I will own this, Robert: thank God for my English common sense or I might be among the mob even now.”

"I am thankful for your English half, too," Robert said. "I cannot imagine having grown up without your friendship."

The two men raised glasses in a silent toast to that bond.

"Perhaps we should both take oaths of temperance," Robert said. "A bit of wine and you become uncomfortably candid, and I am overwhelmed by sentiment."

Charles smiled. He knew what was in his friend's mind, though neither would speak of it. Men went off to war and did not always return. Charles' own father had been lost at sea when his son was only a boy.

As if his thoughts had run in the same path, Robert asked, "How fares your mother, pray?"

"Very well, when last she wrote; life in Boston seems agreeable, her husband adores her. One might think America had been created just for her, so happily does it appear to suit her temperament."

"I am glad to hear it. She deserves happiness. God knows she has had sorrows enough."

Charles did not answer. Truth seemed to be in the air that night. Not the most common thing in London that summer.



"*And* a French mother," Henrietta observed. "That explains much."

Mrs Hertle could not help but note that her cousin had rather adroitly worked the conversation around to her husband's childhood friend, Charles Hayden.

"There is something in his face . . ." a crease appeared between Henrietta's lovely eyebrows—her thoughtful pose.

"Charles always says he inherited his grandfather's Gallic nose," Mrs Hertle responded. "His 'unfortunate nose,' he calls it."

"Though he seems entirely English in his manner," Henrietta offered.

"Indeed he does, but I have come to believe that he is more French beneath the surface than one would guess. One must be wary of these

Navy men, Henri, they are not always what they seem. Both Robert and Charles have been at sea much of their lives—since they were but thirteen—beginning together as midshipmen. Since that early date they have been trained to be very decisive—indeed, irresolution at an inopportune moment might cost many lives aboard a ship. Some Navy men bring this decisiveness ashore with them, where often their understanding is not so great as at sea. I have watched the ill effects of this many times. It is fortunate that Robert does not suffer this defect of character, or from its opposite disability—a chronic indecisiveness upon the land where they are so out of their element. These Navy men take some little study, I have found.”

Henrietta nodded, her attention apparently focussed on smoothing a crease in the skirt of her gown. They perched on chairs in the drawing room, speaking quietly.

Mrs Hertle had noted before that women were almost never neutral in their response to Charles Hayden: they either found his overly serious mind an impediment, or they could not stop speaking of him. She could hardly remember how she herself had felt when first introduced, some four years past. Certainly, she had thought him well made, though thick of thigh, “just shy of a fathom in height” as he said himself. A strong, appealing face, surely—though rather full-featured—inky hair drawn back in a queue. Nose, aquiline—not unhandsome but neither was it modest in proportions; mouth full and pleasant, very used to smiling. His brow, however, could only be termed “heavy,” imparting a certain intensity to eyes that would have been perfectly fine if one had not been blue and the other shading to green.

“The Lords of the Admiralty must be sensible of his parentage?” Henrietta ventured.

Mrs Hertle nodded.

“It is a wonder he has a commission at all.”

“I fear you are right, Henrietta. Robert refuses to see it. In his mind Charles can do no wrong. Though I am sure he is a fine seaman and officer; Robert is not so blind as that.”

“I wonder what will become of him?” Henrietta asked, now examining a fingernail with great attention.

“I believe his future is in America. His stepfather is a very prosperous Boston merchant and has offered Charles command of one of his ships. A few more disappointments and I think poor Charles will finally perceive this proposal differently.”

“But it would be so demeaning—from officer in the King’s Navy to master of a merchantman—an *American* merchantman.”

“Indeed, but in America he would find acceptance, I think. His stepfather is a man of some influence.”

“I should not want to live in Boston. Should you?”

“Whoever asked you to live in Boston, dear Henrietta?” Mrs Hertle said quickly.

“Well, of course, no one did,” Henrietta protested. “And I did not mean *that*, as you well know!”

Mrs Hertle laughed gently at her cousin’s response. “Let us call the gentlemen for tea. The hour grows late.”



She was all long limbs and slim torso, Hayden thought, yet she perched upon her chair with such easy elegance, a look of amused contentment upon her face, that Hayden could not help but think her as lovely as a naiad. Her carriage was erect and proper but not without a hint of sensuality. In truth, Hayden was beginning to think Henrietta’s distinctive appearance perfectly matched her somewhat unconventional disposition.

The Carthews, he knew, were of good family, distantly related to the Russells. Her father was a gentleman of some means, had married well, and spent life riding his own particular hobby horse, which was the matter of education, and the education of women in particular. As he was a father of six daughters, Mr Carthew’s preoccupation with this subject was clearly defensible, and his daughters had been the subject of much experimentation in regards to their own learning,

though it had gained them a perhaps undeserved reputation as blue-stockings.

Mrs Hertle was gently chafing her cousin, teasing about this very subject, as Hayden raised his teacup.

“How many languages do you speak, dear Henri? Come now, don’t be modest.”

“Fluently?” Henrietta asked. Apparently they had played this game before.

“Let us begin with those you speak fluently and pass on to the others presently. Is it five or six?”

“You are evidently more familiar with this subject than I,” Henrietta protested.

“English we shall not count,” Mrs Hertle rejoined. “French, of course.” Mrs Hertle pushed up a slim finger, a glance finding Charles, then returning. “Italian, Spanish, High German—or is it Low?”

“Both,” Henrietta admitted.

“Greek and the Latin . . .”

“Not to be counted, as I read them only.”

“Dutch,” Mrs Hertle continued. “Does it come in High and Low?”

“Mmm . . .” her victim shrugged, pretending not to know.

Mrs Hertle counted off another finger. “Six, or is that seven? And then either Danish or Swedish, I can never remember.”

“Danish, but I am by no means fluent.” Henrietta’s unblemished skin had begun to colour—the object of Mrs Hertle’s cross-examination, Hayden guessed.

“We shall count Danish . . .” Mrs Hertle said, “for you are rather prone to modesty. I will make that eight, or seven if you insist, but we must not forget Russian.”

“By no means, Russian. I am unable to carry a conversation beyond mere pleasantries.”

Mrs Hertle laughed. “Seven, plus one half for Russian, and I’m certain I have missed a tongue or two. It is quite a little catalogue, don’t you think, Lieutenant Hayden?”

“Very impressive. Apparently Mr Carthew’s pedagogical methods were as successful as he claimed.”

“I think, the truth is that dear Henrietta has a genius for language.”

“Rather like me,” Robert declared, to a roll of the eyes from his wife and laughter from the others. Robert’s attempts at French and Spanish were the subject of much teasing within their circle.

“He did manage some striking results with his gifted daughters,” Mrs Hertle said, gazing unselfconsciously at her cousin.

“Charles speaks a number of languages,” Robert noted. “French he had at his mother’s knee and speaks it like a native. Of course, he spent almost half his childhood there. He is also fluent in the argot of Cheapside. The other day he said to me, ‘You’ve dropped your foggie, Robert,’ and I had not a clue what he meant.”

“Pray, what does it mean?” demanded Henrietta. “Or should a lady not inquire?”

“Handkerchief,” Robert told her. “But then many men of fashion speak the *cant* these days.”

“I did not realize you were such a follower of fashion, Lieutenant,” Miss Henrietta observed, her manner a little mocking, Hayden thought.

“In truth, I’m not. I had, for a time, a servant aboard one of my ships who had been an ‘angler’—a thief who used a hooked stick to steal things through gratings and from shop windows. He and a few others aboard spoke what amounted to another language. I’m not sure why, but I found it more than a little fascinating. I even began to compile a lexicon. For instance, ‘balderdash’ is watered-down wine.”

“Tell them what ‘bachelor’s fare’ is . . .” Robert urged.

“Bread, cheese, and kisses.”

The ladies pretended to be shocked, but then Henrietta became quite serious.

“Do you miss it, Lieutenant?” Henrietta asked, almost solicitously. “France, I mean.”

Hayden was not quite sure how to answer. “At times I do, for I am a man terribly divided. An Englishman raised on French food, wine, and their particular variety of conversation. At the same time, I am a French-

man who prefers English order, government, and rationality. The French are passionate, proud, and prone to letting emotions make their decisions—which makes me cherish my English side even more.”

“But if all the ills of France were cured tomorrow and order restored, in which country would you choose to live?” Henrietta regarded him closely, as though the answer to this question were of particular importance.

Hayden was no more given to introspection than many a young man of active temperament, nor were his brief forays into self-awareness productive of great insight, so to be questioned so closely, while wishing so to impress, had the effect of banishing all thoughts. He threw up his hands. “The truth is, when I am in France I feel like an Englishman masquerading as French. When I am here I feel like a Frenchman pretending to be English.”

“Then you are at home in neither country,” Henrietta observed softly. Hayden was about to answer when Robert interrupted.

“He is at home upon a ship—preferably in mid-Channel between his two nations.”

But Henrietta did not smile at this. She merely regarded him gravely a moment, then looked quickly away.

“Henrietta is writing a novel, did you know?” Mrs Hertle said, as though whispering a secret.

“Now, Elizabeth, there really is such a thing as a confidence,” Henrietta chastised her friend, but Hayden thought she was not really sorry this had been brought to light.

“It is about two women,” Mrs Hertle went on mischievously, “one a woman of education—rather like Henrietta—the other of no education to speak of but much social advantage. How does it progress, Henri?”

“Despite my greatest efforts, anything one might term ‘progress’ has ceased.”

“You must keep at it. Art is not made without adversity.” Mrs Hertle turned to Hayden. “I have read a good number of pages, now, and can avouch for the author’s skill, which is very high indeed.” She smiled, including both men. “But there is a matter that cannot be decided by the

authoress and I seem to have very little influence, much to my chagrin. Now, give us your most considered opinion: should not the woman of education have the happier ending? That is what we have been arguing for several months.”

“These gentlemen are not interested in novels!” Henrietta argued.

“I happen to know that Lieutenant Hayden has read Rousseau’s *Emile*,” Mrs Hertle stage-whispered behind her hand, “and Captain Hertle once indulged in a volume of Mrs Richardson’s.”

“Who do you think should have the happier ending, Miss Henrietta?” Hayden asked.

She shook her head, looking genuinely distressed. “First I believe it should be the one, then the other.”

“Certainly it must be the educated woman who achieves the happier life,” Mrs Hertle insisted, “while to the other befalls the unhappy; though, perhaps, not of her making. Not a downfall so much as a stifled kind of complacency. Just what one would expect for a person who had not thought deeply about the time allotted her.”

“But you place so much emphasis upon happiness,” Henrietta replied. “I do realize that the Americans have recently enshrined it in their Declaration, but I am not certain it is mankind’s highest calling. What think you, Captain Hertle?”

“Oh, do not ask *them*,” Mrs Hertle interrupted. “Navy men must all answer that the highest calling is ‘duty,’ like a flock of bleating, blue-coated sheep.”

Robert Hertle did not look perturbed by his wife’s pronouncement. “I do not pretend to have an answer where greater minds than mine have strived and failed.”

“Certainly *lesser* minds than yours have had much to say on the subject,” Henrietta responded. “Come, you are not usually chary with your opinions . . .”

Robert laughed, as though embarrassed. “Happiness is certainly of great import to me, but I am putting my happiness at risk by leaving Mrs Hertle’s side and going off to war, so I must be one of those Navy men who bleat ‘duty’ by day and night.”

Henrietta Carthew considered this a moment, then turned to Hayden. "And do you agree, Lieutenant?"

"I fear a great deal has been accomplished in the world by people who make no claim to happiness or contentment of any form. I am much of two minds as regards this; like Mrs Hertle, I desire nothing more than to be contented and comfortable, and yet I wonder if I should accomplish little under such circumstances. I fear your woman of education may not have the happiest life but might make more of it."

For the briefest second Henrietta met his eye, her gaze quickly withdrawn. "And I fear you are right. Once one has eaten of the tree of knowledge it is out of the garden and into the harsh world for all Adams and Eves."

"You see," observed Mrs Hertle, "there is our thoughtful Lieutenant Hayden, who hides his true nature away. Do you know, Henri, Mr Hayden is a prodigious reader—" But at that moment Mrs Hertle was called away to deal with some domestic matter, and Robert excused himself also, though only for a moment, and Hayden found himself alone with Henrietta. They were, to begin, silent—perhaps awkwardly so—but before Hayden could speak Henrietta broke the silence.

"Who is your favoured author, Lieutenant? Are you a Rousseau man? Elizabeth mentioned you had read *Emile*."

"I suppose if I could take only one book to sea with me it would be Sterne," Hayden answered.

To this, Henrietta appeared surprised but rather approving, he thought.

"Which?" she asked. "*Shandy* or the *Sentimental Journey*?"

"It must be *Tristram Shandy*. Do you know it?"

"I do. It is one of my father's favourites, as well. He knew Sterne a little, but then everyone did. He was an inveterate dinner guest for many years."

"I should have liked to have met him myself. And you, Miss Henrietta, if you will permit me to ask: what is your favoured book?"

"Well, sir, now you are delving into my intimate secrets. I don't know if I shall permit you . . ." For a moment she did not continue, but the

smile on her face assured him that she but teased. “*Don Quixote* is the great novel, I believe. Sadly, not written by an Englishman. Have you read it?”

“My Spanish is not up to it.”

“Motteux has done a credible translation.”

“So I am told, but in my limited knowledge, all translations are failures of one sort or another.”

“That is true, but even second-rate Cervantes is better than no Cervantes at all, I think.”

“Rather like ships,” Hayden said, “a fifth rate is better than no ship at all.”

“He has you talking ships!” Mrs Hertle said as she swept back into the room.

“Not at all. We were discussing the merits and demerits of Cervantes,” answered Henrietta.

“Ah, the Carthew family patron.” Mrs Hertle took a seat. “Did you know that Henrietta’s family gave each other the names of the characters from *Don Quixote*? It was something of a parlour game, wasn’t it, Henri? One had to find the name most befitting the persona of each sister and their father. What name would you choose for Lieutenant Hayden?”

“Don Quixote del Mar,” Henrietta answered without hesitation.

A delighted laugh escaped Mrs Hertle. “Well, there you are, Mr Hayden; you have the principal role. A high honour.”

He caught Henrietta smiling at him, amused, perhaps, at his expense.



Robert put his carriage at Hayden’s disposal after supper, the rattle of wheels over paving stones interrupted, now and again, by a prolonged hiss as they passed through irregular pools, the carriage slowing with a gentle lurch like a boat running up on sand. Darkened streets, greasy with rain, inhabited by linkmen and beau traps.

As the driver checked his team at a corner, swaying torches, smudged by the door-pane, burned through the smoky fog. Canded faces down a narrow alley, hands aloft, a shadowy gathering below. Hayden pressed back into his seat as though to hide, and then the company erupted onto the street—guildsmen upon some progress, gin-ruddy and grinning vapidly.

“*Merde*,” Hayden whispered, the sight too familiar and bearing with it feelings from another place—Paris, a few years earlier.

Visions of that wretched man, Doué, who, for all Hayden knew, had been innocent of all his alleged crimes. Had anyone possessed a crumb of proof that he speculated in the grain market, or that he had really joked the hungry should be fed hay? The mob did not much care for such particulars once they got hold of him.

Hayden had witnessed the man being dragged through the street to the nearest lamppost. A wreath of nettles had been clasped about his neck and a bouquet of thistles thrust into his hand by jeering *sans-culottes*. His mouth forced open and stuffed with hay until he gagged, and then they hanged him, kicking, from the lamppost.

Hayden pressed palms to his forehead. The terror upon the man’s face could never be erased from memory. As he had been dragged past, Hayden imagined that he’d looked at him—*l’Anglais* in his French coat—appealed to him, even as Hayden had heard his own voice calling out to hang the man.

Doué’s son-in-law, who had been some kind of official in Paris—an *Intendant*, perhaps—had been treated much the same, and then their heads had been severed and paraded through the streets on pikestaffs. Every now and then the slack faces had been thrust together and the crowd had called out, “*Kiss Papa. Kiss Papa*,” as though this were some terribly funny jest. Three days later Hayden had been back in England, ashamed of what he’d done, horrified to find out that even he could be drawn into a mob.