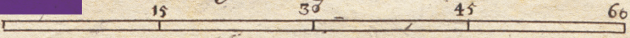
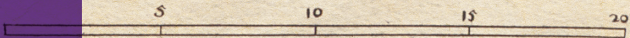


A Scale of Miles



A Scale of English & French Leagues



HAMP  
SH.

C.S.  
FORESTER

WIGHT I.  
London Cast

HORNBLowers  
AND

CHANN  
NEL

CHANN  
NEL

'Vastly entertaining'  
Winston Churchill

Barfleur & Raz  
Ple Revill  
de la Hogue  
Blanchs & Marot  
Grand Vay  
Petit Vay  
Trimeray  
Blavens  
Grand Vay



BE  
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PENGUIN BOOKS

*Hornblower and the 'Hotspur'*

C. S. Forester was born in Cairo in 1899, where his father was stationed as a government official. He studied medicine at Guy's Hospital, and after leaving Guy's without a degree he turned to writing as a career. His first success was *Payment Deferred*, a novel written at the age of twenty-four and later dramatized and filmed with Charles Laughton in the leading role. In 1932 Forester was offered a Hollywood contract, and from then until 1939 he spent thirteen weeks of every year in America. On the outbreak of war he entered the Ministry of Information and later he sailed with the Royal Navy to collect material for *The Ship*. He then made a voyage to the Bering Sea to gather material for a similar book on the United States Navy, and it was during this trip that he was stricken with arteriosclerosis, a disease which left him crippled. However, he continued to write and in the Hornblower novels created the most renowned sailor in twentieth-century fiction. He died in 1966.

Bernard Cornwell is the bestselling author of the Sharpe series of novels.

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# *Hornblower and the 'Hotspur'*

C. S. FORESTER

*Introduction by Bernard Cornwell*



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## Introduction

*Hornblower and the 'Hotspur'* was the last complete novel Forester wrote about Horatio Hornblower. It is the third novel in chronological order but was the tenth to be written and was first published in 1962. During the 1950s Forester wrote just two Hornblower novels, so the patience of his many fans was severely tested. And not just his fans. There is a story that whenever his American publishers found their profits threatened they despatched an envoy to California with orders to stay with Forester until he finally agreed, however reluctantly, to write another Hornblower. We should be grateful to them.

Writing was Forester's life and he was extremely successful at it, but he never talks about writing without using words like 'hard', 'exacting' and 'exhausting'. 'I would rather be in the dentist's chair,' he claimed in *The Hornblower Companion*. After completing his daily quota of words he felt 'sick, weary, flat'. 'There is no pleasure left in life,' he wrote. 'I am drained and empty.' *Hornblower and the 'Hotspur'* was written under even more pressure. By the 1960s Forester was ill, he lost his secretary while the book was being written and the Internal Revenue Service, America's implacable equivalent of the Inland Revenue, audited his accounts – a truly dreadful experience (though in Forester's case it ended happily with the taxman owing *him* money). And to cap it all, the house across the street was being built so his day's work was

interrupted by 'every pneumatic drill, every concrete mixer, bulldozer, and air-compressor in California'.

The book reflects none of this. From the wonderful opening chapter it sweeps the reader along and contains one of literature's great sea-chases, the beat to windward as the *Hotspur* pursues the *Loire*. It is a tale of blockade, and blockade duty was the primary purpose of the Royal Navy throughout the long Napoleonic wars. The French navy was mostly in port and their harbours had to be stopped up, and so through good weather and bad, through summer days and winter gales, the wooden ships of Britain patrolled off the French coast. It was hard, boring duty, and dangerous too, especially for the small ships which beat to and fro just off the rocky approaches to Brest, which were badly charted. The only respite for the crews came if a gale blew up from the west, in which case, to prevent being driven on to the rocks, the blockading fleet would run for Torbay in Devon. It was safe to do that, for the westerly gales that threatened the British ships also kept the French ships safely in harbour, but as soon as the gales abated the British would hurry back to resume the blockade.

Hornblower had been cast on to the beach at the end of *Lieutenant Hornblower*, put there by the Treaty of Amiens that was supposed to bring peace to France and Britain, but the peace has broken down and Hornblower, who had been earning a living as a professional gambler, receives command of His Majesty's sloop *Hotspur*. It comes as a huge relief, not just because a naval officer ashore is an unhappy fellow, but also because Hornblower is escaping his new wife, Maria. The marriage ceremony begins the book and it is exonerating. Maria calls him

'Horry'. Horry! His new mother-in-law, deputized to provide his cabin stores, buys him rotten eggs. In all, Hornblower has just two days of married life before he goes to sea, and two days are sufficient. Not that he can totally escape Maria, for her letters follow him. She is anxious that 'her Hero was not running into danger, and how necessary it was to change his socks if they should get wet'. Poor Maria. She is a harmless, loving creature, and Forester invented her solely to embarrass Hornblower. In many ways Maria is very like Kitty, the first Duke of Wellington's wife. Kitty was much better born, but equally ill-suited for marriage to a warrior. 'She has grown ugly,' Wellington complained to his clergyman brother as Kitty came to the altar, while Maria is charitably described as 'plain'. 'I married her because they asked me to,' Wellington was to write. 'In short, I was a fool.' Hornblower married Maria because he did not know how to escape her cloying affections, and while he commands the *Hotspur* he learns he is to become a father and 'for the life of him he could not tell if he were pleased or not'. This ill-made marriage is a superb portrait, Forester at his glowing best.

Cecil Scott Forester was born in Egypt to British parents in 1899. His real name was Cecil Lewis Troughton Smith and he was raised in Britain, where, as a child, he was an avid reader, usually the first step in the making of a writer. In 1917, before his eighteenth birthday, he volunteered for the British army, fully expecting to fight on the Western Front, but he was rejected as medically unfit. He was a skinny, short-sighted six-footer who enjoyed sports, but the army's physical examination revealed a dangerously weak

heart. So instead of serving as a soldier, Forester entered Guy's Hospital as a medical student – an experience as unhappy as it was unsuccessful. There is something feckless about these early years, but Forester's ambitions were fixed on writing. His first efforts failed, but he persevered and in 1924, with *Payment Deferred*, enjoyed his first success. The filming of that novel introduced Forester to Hollywood and, more crucially, California. During the Second World War he moved to the United States at the request of the British government, who wanted him to produce articles and stories that would encourage American support for the British war effort. It was sophisticated propaganda, and Forester was good at it. He also liked living in the States and most of the Hornblower books were written in California, where, with his second wife, he remained until his death in 1966. By then he had become one of the world's most popular authors with almost sixty novels to his name and, even if he had never dreamed up Hornblower, he would be famous as the author of *The African Queen*, *The Gun*, *Brown on Resolution* and *Hunting the Bismarck*.

*Hornblower and the 'Hotspur'* is full of good things. Who can forget Doughty, the perfect cabin steward, or the moment when Poole saves the *Hotspur* from Hornblower's inattention? Forester, in writing this book, was at the height of his powers, and we can only be grateful that neither the IRS nor every pneumatic drill, concrete mixer, bulldozer and air-compressor in California could keep him from his desk.

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# I

‘Repeat after me,’ said the parson. “‘I, Horatio, take thee, Maria Ellen –””

The thought came up in Hornblower’s mind that these were the last few seconds in which he could withdraw from doing something which he knew to be ill-considered. Maria was not the right woman to be his wife, even admitting that he was suitable material for marriage in any case. If he had a grain of sense, he would break off this ceremony even at this last moment, he would announce that he had changed his mind, and he would turn away from the altar and from the parson and from Maria, and he would leave the church a free man.

‘To have and to hold –’ he was still, like an automaton, repeating the parson’s words. And there was Maria beside him, in the white that so little became her. She was melting with happiness. She was consumed with love for him, however misplaced it might be. He could not, he simply could not, deal her a blow so cruel. He was conscious of the trembling of her body beside him. That was not fear, for she had utter and complete trust in him. He could no more bring himself to shatter that trust than he could have refused to command the *Hotspur*.

‘And thereto I plight thee my troth,’ repeated Hornblower. That settled it, he thought. Those must be

the final deciding words that made the ceremony legally binding. He had made a promise and now there was no going back on it. There was a comfort in the odd thought that he had really been committed from a week back, when Maria had come into his arms sobbing out her love for him, and he had been too soft-hearted to laugh at her and too – too weak? too honest? – to take advantage of her with the intention of betraying her. From the moment that he had listened to her, from the moment that he had returned her kisses, gently, all these later results, the bridal dress, this ceremony in the church of St Thomas à Becket – and the vague future of cloying affection – had been inevitable.

Bush was ready with the ring, and Hornblower slipped it over Maria's finger, and the final words were said.

'I now pronounce that they are man and wife,' said the parson, and he went on with the blessing, and then a blank five seconds followed, until Maria broke the silence.

'Oh, Horry,' she said, and she laid her hand on his arm.

Hornblower forced himself to smile down at her, concealing the newly discovered fact that he disliked being called 'Horry' even more than he disliked being called Horatio.

'The happiest day of my life,' he said; if a thing had to be done it might as well be done thoroughly, so that in the same spirit he continued. 'In my life so far.'

It was actually painful to note the unbounded happiness of the smile that answered this gallant speech. Maria put her other hand up to him, and he realized

she expected to be kissed, then and there, in front of the altar. It hardly seemed a proper thing to do, in a sacred edifice – in his ignorance he feared lest he should affront the devout – but once more there was no drawing back, and he stooped and kissed the soft lips that she proffered.

‘Your signatures are required in the register,’ prompted the parson, and led the way to the vestry.

They wrote their names.

‘Now I can kiss my son-in-law,’ announced Mrs Mason loudly, and Hornblower found himself clasped by two powerful arms and soundly kissed on the cheek. He supposed it was inevitable that a man should feel a distaste for his mother-in-law.

But here was Bush to disengage him, with outstretched hand and unusual smile, offering felicitations and best wishes.

‘Many thanks,’ said Hornblower, and added, ‘Many thanks for many services.’

Bush was positively embarrassed, and tried to brush away Hornblower’s gratitude with the same gestures as he would have used to brush away flies. He had been a tower of strength in this wedding, just as he had been in the preparation of the *Hotspur* for sea.

‘I’ll see you again at the breakfast, sir,’ he said, and with that he withdrew from the vestry, leaving behind him an awkward gap.

‘I was counting on Mr Bush’s arm for support down the aisle,’ said Mrs Mason, sharply.

It certainly was not like Bush to leave everyone in the lurch like this; it was in marked contrast with his behaviour during the last few whirlwind days.

‘We can bear each other company, Mrs Mason,’ said the parson’s wife. ‘Mr Clive can follow us.’

‘You are very kind, Mrs Clive,’ said Mrs Mason, although there was nothing in her tone to indicate that she meant what she said. ‘Then the happy pair can start now. Maria, take the captain’s arm.’

Mrs Mason marshalled the tiny procession in businesslike fashion. Hornblower felt Maria’s hand slipped under his arm, felt the light pressure she could not help giving to it, and – he could not be cruel enough to ignore it – he pressed her hand in return, between his ribs and his elbow, to be rewarded by another smile. A small shove from behind by Mrs Mason started him back in the church, to be greeted by a roar from the organ. Half a crown for the organist and a shilling for the blower was what that music had cost Mrs Mason; there might be better uses for the money. The thought occupied Hornblower’s mind for several seconds, and was naturally succeeded by the inevitable wonderment as to how anyone could possibly find enjoyment in these distasteful noises. He and Maria were well down the aisle before he came back to reality.

‘The sailors are all gone,’ said Maria with a break in her voice. ‘There’s almost no one in the church.’

Truth to tell, there were only two or three people in the pews, and these obviously the most casual idlers. All the few guests had trooped into the vestry for the signing, and the fifty seamen whom Bush had brought from *Hotspur* – all those who could be trusted not to desert – had vanished already. Hornblower felt a vague disappointment that Bush had failed again to rise to the situation.

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‘Why should we care?’ he asked, groping wildly for words of comfort for Maria. ‘Why should any shadow fall on our wedding day?’

It was strangely painful to see and to feel Maria’s instant response, and her faltering step changed to a brave stride as they marched down the empty church. There was bright sunshine awaiting them at the west door, he could see; and he thought of something else a tender bridegroom might say.

‘Happy is the bride the sun shines on.’

They came out of the dim light into the bright sun, and the transition was moral as well as physical, for Bush had not disappointed them; he had not been found wanting after all. Hornblower heard a sharp word and a ragged clash of steel, and there were the fifty seamen in a double rank stretching away from the door, making an arch of their drawn cutlasses for the couple to walk beneath.

‘Oh, how nice!’ said Maria, in childish delight; furthermore the array of seamen at the church door had attracted a crowd of spectators, all craning forward to see the captain and his bride. Hornblower darted a professional glance first down one line of seamen and then down the other. They were all dressed in the new blue and white checked shirts with which he had stocked the slop chest of the *Hotspur*; their white duck trousers were mostly well worn but well washed, and long enough and baggy enough to conceal the probable deficiencies of their shoes. It was a good turnout.

Beyond the avenue of cutlasses stood a horseless post-chaise, with Bush standing behind it. Wondering a little, Hornblower led Maria towards it. Bush gallantly handed

Maria up into the front seat and Hornblower climbed up beside her, finding time now to take his cocked hat from under his arm and clap it on his head. He had heard the cutlasses rasp back into their sheaths; now the guard of honour came pattering forward in a disciplined rush. There were pipe-clayed drag ropes where the traces should have been, and the fifty men seized their coils, twenty-five to a coil, and ran them out. Bush craned up towards Hornblower.

‘Let the brake off, if you please, sir. That handle there, sir.’

Hornblower obeyed, and Bush turned away and let loose a subdued bellow. The seamen took the strain in half a dozen quickening steps and then broke into a trot, the post-chaise rattling over the cobbles, while the crowd waved their hats and cheered.

‘I never thought I could be so happy – Horry – darling,’ said Maria.

The men at the drag ropes, with the usual exuberance of the seaman on land, swung round the corner into the High Street and headed at the double towards the George, and with the turn Maria was flung against him and clasped him in delicious fear. As they drew up it was obvious that there was a danger of the chaise rolling forward into the seamen, and Hornblower had to think fast and reach for the brake lever, hurriedly casting himself free from Maria’s arm. Then he sat for a moment, wondering what to do next. On this occasion there should be a group to welcome them, the host of the inn and his wife, the boots, the ostler, the drawer, and the maids, but as it was there was no one. He had to leap down from the chaise unassisted and single-handedly help Maria down.

‘Thank you, men,’ he said to the parting seamen, who acknowledged his thanks with a knuckling of foreheads and halting words.

Bush was in sight now round the corner, hurrying towards them; Hornblower could safely leave Bush in charge while he led Maria into the inn with a sad lack of ceremony.

But here was the host at last, bustling up with a napkin over his arm and his wife at his heels.

‘Welcome, sir, welcome, madam. This way, sir, madam.’ He flung open the door into the coffee-room to reveal the wedding breakfast laid on a snowy cloth. ‘The Admiral arrived only five minutes ago, sir, so you must excuse us, sir.’

‘Which Admiral?’

‘The Honourable Admiral Sir William Cornwallis, sir, commanding the Channel Fleet. ’Is coachman says war’s certain, sir.’

Hornblower had been convinced of this ever since, nine days ago, he had read the King’s message to Parliament, and witnessed the activities of the press gangs, and had been notified of his appointment to the command of the *Hotspur* – and (he remembered) had found himself betrothed to Maria. Bonaparte’s unscrupulous behaviour on the Continent meant –

‘A glass of wine, madam? A glass of wine, sir?’

Hornblower was conscious of Maria’s enquiring glance when the innkeeper asked this question. She would not venture to answer until she had ascertained what her new husband thought.

‘We’ll wait for the rest of the company,’ said Hornblower. ‘Ah

A heavy step on the threshold announced Bush's arrival.

'They'll all be here in two minutes,' said Bush.

'Very good of you to arrange about the carriage and the seamen, Mr Bush,' said Hornblower, and he thought that moment of something else that a kind and thoughtful husband would say. He slipped his hand under Maria's arm and added – 'Mrs Hornblower says you made her very happy.'

A delighted giggle from Maria told him that he had given pleasure by this unexpected use of her new name, as he expected.

'Mrs Hornblower, I give you joy,' said Bush, solemnly, and then to Hornblower, 'By your leave, sir, I'll return to the ship.'

'Now, Mr Bush?' asked Maria.

'I fear I must, ma'am,' replied Bush, turning back at once to Hornblower. 'I'll take the hands back with me, sir. There's always the chance that the lighters with the stores may come off.'

'I'm afraid you're right, Mr Bush,' said Hornblower. 'Keep me informed, if you please.'

'Aye aye, sir,' said Bush, and with that he was gone.

Here came the others, pouring in, and any trace of awkwardness about the party disappeared as Mrs Mason marshalled the guests and set the wedding breakfast into its stride. Corks popped and preliminary toasts were drunk. There was the cake to be cut, and Mrs Mason insisted that Maria should make the first cut with Hornblower's sword; Mrs Mason was sure that in this Maria would be following the example of naval brides in good society in London. Hornblower was not so sure;

he had lived for ten years under a strict convention that cold steel should never be drawn under a roof or a deck. But his timid objections were swept away, and Maria, the sword in both hands, cut the cake amid general applause. Hornblower could hardly restrain his impatience to take the thing back from her, and he quickly wiped the sugar icing from the blade, wondering grimly what the assembled company would think if they knew he had once wiped human blood from it. He was still engaged on this work when he became aware of the innkeeper whispering hoarsely at his side.

‘Begging your pardon, sir. Begging your pardon.’

‘Well?’

‘The Admiral’s compliments, sir, and he would be glad to see you when you find it convenient.’

Hornblower stood sword in hand, staring at him in momentary incomprehension.

‘The Admiral, sir. ‘E’s in the first floor front, what we always calls the Admiral’s Room.’

‘You mean Sir William, of course?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Very well. My respects to the Admiral and – No, I’ll go up at once. Thank you.’

‘Thank’ee, sir. Begging your pardon again.’

Hornblower shot his sword back into its sheath and looked round at the company. They were watching the maid bustling round handing slices of wedding cake and had no eyes for him at present. He settled his sword at his side, twitched at his neck-cloth, and unobtrusively left the room, picking up his hat as he did so.

When he knocked at the door of the first floor front a deep voice that he well remembered said, ‘Come in.’

It was so large a room that the four-poster bed at the far end was inconspicuous; so was the secretary seated at the desk by the window. Cornwallis was standing in the middle, apparently engaged in dictation until this interruption.

‘Ah, it’s Hornblower. Good morning.’

‘Good morning, sir.’

‘The last time we met was over that unfortunate business with the Irish rebel. We had to hang him, I remember.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Cornwallis, ‘Billy Blue’, had not changed perceptibly during those four years. He was still the bulky man with the composed manner, obviously ready to deal with any emergency.

‘Please sit down. A glass of wine?’

‘No, thank you, sir.’

‘I expected that, seeing the ceremony you’ve just come from. My apologies for interrupting your wedding, but you must blame Boney, not me.’

‘Of course, sir.’ Hornblower felt that a more eloquent speech would have been in place here, but he could not think of one.

‘I’ll detain you for as short a time as possible. You know I’ve been appointed to the command of the Channel Fleet?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You know that *Hotspur* is under my command?’

‘I expected that, but I didn’t know, sir.’

‘The Admiralty letter to that effect came down in my coach. You’ll find it awaiting you on board.’

‘Yes, sir.’ **Copyrighted Material**

'Is *Hotspur* ready to sail?'

'No, sir.' The truth and no excuses. Nothing else would do.

'How long?'

'Two days, sir. More if there's delay with the ordnance stores.'

Cornwallis was looking at him very sharply indeed, but Hornblower returned glance for glance. He had nothing with which to reproach himself; nine days ago *Hotspur* was still laid up in ordinary.

'She's been docked and breamed?'

'Yes, sir.'

'She's manned?'

'Yes, sir. A good crew – the cream of the press.'

'Rigging set up?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Yards crossed?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Officers appointed?'

'Yes, sir. A lieutenant and four master's mates.'

'You'll need three months' provisions and water.'

'I can stow a hundred and eleven days at full rations, sir. The cooperage is delivering the water-butts at noon. I'll have it all stowed by nightfall, sir.'

'Have you warped her out?'

'Yes, sir. She's at anchor now in Spithead.'

'You've done well,' said Cornwallis.

Hornblower tried not to betray his relief at that speech; from Cornwallis that was more than approval – it was hearty praise.

'Thank you, sir.'

'So what do you need now?'

‘Bos’n’s stores, sir. Cordage, canvas, spare spars.’

‘Not easy to get the dockyard to part with those at this moment. I’ll have a word with them. And then the ordnance stores, you say?’

‘Yes, sir. Ordnance are waiting for a shipment of nine-pounder shot. None to be had here at the moment.’

Ten minutes ago Hornblower had been thinking of words to please Maria. Now he was selecting words for an honest report to Cornwallis.

‘I’ll deal with that, too,’ said Cornwallis. ‘You can be certain of sailing the day after tomorrow if the wind serves.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Now for your orders. You’ll get them in writing in the course of the day, but I’d better tell you now, while you can ask questions. War’s coming. It hasn’t been declared yet, but Boney may anticipate us.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I’m going to blockade Brest as soon as I can get the fleet to sea, and you’re to go ahead of us.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You’re not to do anything to precipitate war. You’re not to provide Boney with an excuse.’

‘No, sir.’

‘When war’s declared you can of course take the appropriate action. Until then you have merely to observe. Keep your eye on Brest. Look in as far as you can without provoking fire. Count the ships of war – the number and rate of ships with their yards crossed, ships still in ordinary, ships in the roads, ships preparing for sea.’

‘Yes, sir.’ **Copyrighted Material**

‘Boney sent the best of his ships and crews to the West Indies last year. He’ll have more trouble manning his fleet even than we have. I’ll want your report as soon as I arrive on the station. What’s the *Hotspur*’s draught?’

‘She’ll draw thirteen feet aft when she’s complete with stores, sir.’

‘You’ll be able to use the Goulet pretty freely, then. I don’t have to tell you not to run her aground.’

‘No, sir.’

‘But remember this. You’ll find it hard to perform your duty unless you risk your ship. There’s folly and there’s foolhardiness on one side, and there’s daring and calculation on the other. Make the right choice and I’ll see you through any trouble that may ensue.’

Cornwallis’ wide blue eyes looked straight into Hornblower’s brown ones. Hornblower was deeply interested in what Cornwallis had just said, and equally interested in what he had left unsaid. Cornwallis had made a promise of sympathetic support, but he had refrained from uttering the threat which was the obvious corollary. This was no rhetorical device, no facile trick of leadership – it was a simple expression of Cornwallis’ natural state of mind. He was a man who preferred to lead rather than to drive; most interesting.

Hornblower realized with a start that for several seconds he had been staring his commander-in-chief out of countenance while following up this train of thought; it was not the most tactful behaviour, perhaps.

‘I understand, sir,’ he said, and Cornwallis rose from his chair.

‘We’ll meet again at sea. Remember to do nothing to provoke war before war is declared,’ he said, with a smile

– and the smile revealed the man of action. Hornblower could read him as someone to whom the prospect of action was stimulating and desirable, and who would never seek reasons or excuses for postponing decisions.

Cornwallis suddenly withheld his proffered hand.

‘By Jove!’ he exclaimed. ‘I was forgetting. This is your wedding day.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You were only married this morning?’

‘An hour ago, sir.’

‘And I’ve taken you away from your wedding breakfast.’

‘Yes, sir.’ It would be cheap rhetoric to add anything trite like ‘For King and Country’, or even ‘Duty comes first.’

‘Your good lady will hardly be pleased.’

Nor would his mother-in-law, more especially, thought Hornblower, but again it would not be tactful to say so.

‘I’ll try to make amends, sir,’ he contented himself with saying.

‘It’s I who should make amends,’ replied Cornwallis. ‘Perhaps I could join the festivities and drink the bride’s health?’

‘That would be most kind of you, sir,’ said Hornblower.

If anything could reconcile Mrs Mason to his breach of manners, it would be the presence of Admiral the Hon. Sir William Cornwallis, KB, at the breakfast table.

‘I’ll come, then, if you’re certain I shan’t be unwelcome. Hackett, find my sword. Where’s my hat?’

So that when Hornblower appeared again through

the door of the coffee-room Mrs Mason's instant and bitter reproaches died away on her lips, the moment she saw that Hornblower was ushering in an important guest. She saw the glittering epaulettes, and the red ribbon and the star which Cornwallis had most tactfully put on in honour of the occasion. Hornblower made the introductions.

'Long life and much happiness,' said Cornwallis, bowing over Maria's hand, 'to the wife of one of the most promising officers in the King's service.'

Maria could only bob, overwhelmed with embarrassment in this glittering presence.

'Enchanted to make your acquaintance, Sir William,' said Mrs Mason.

And the parson and his wife, and the few neighbours of Mrs Mason's who were the only other guests, were enormously gratified at being in the same room as – let alone being personally addressed by – the son of an Earl, a Knight of the Bath, and a Commander-in-Chief combined in one person.

'A glass of wine, sir?' asked Hornblower.

'With pleasure.'

Cornwallis took the glass in his hand and looked round. It was significant that it was Mrs Mason whom he addressed.

'Has the health of the happy couple been drunk yet?'

'No, sir,' answered Mrs Mason, in a perfect ecstasy.

'Then may I do so? Ladies, gentlemen. I ask you all to stand and join me on this happy occasion. May they never know sorrow. May they always enjoy health and prosperity. May the wife always find comfort in the knowledge that the husband is doing his duty for King

and Country, and may the husband be supported in his duty by the loyalty of the wife. And let us hope that in time to come there will be a whole string of young gentlemen who will wear the King's uniform after their father's example, and a whole string of young ladies to be mothers of further young gentlemen. I give you the health of the bride and groom.'

The health was drunk amid acclamation, with all eyes turned on the blushing Maria, and then from her all eyes turned on Hornblower. He rose; he had realized, before Cornwallis had reached the midpoint of his speech, that the Admiral was using words he had used scores of times before, at scores of weddings of his officers. Hornblower, keyed up on the occasion, met Cornwallis' eyes and grinned. He would give as good as he got; he would reply with a speech exactly similar to the scores that Cornwallis had listened to.

'Sir William, ladies and gentlemen, I can only thank you in the name of' – Hornblower reached down and took Maria's hand – 'my wife and myself.'

As the laughter died away – Hornblower had well known that the company would laugh at his mention of Maria as his wife, although he himself did not think it a subject for laughter – Cornwallis looked at his watch, and Hornblower hastened to thank him for his presence and to escort him to the door. Beyond the threshold Cornwallis turned and thumped him on the chest with his large hand.

'I'll add another line to my orders for you,' he said; Hornblower was acutely aware that Cornwallis' friendly smile was accompanied by a searching glance.

'Yes, sir?' **Copyrighted Material**

‘I’ll add my written permission for you to sleep out of your ship for tonight and tomorrow night.’

Hornblower opened his mouth to reply, but no words came; for once in his life his readiness of wit had deserted him. His mind was so busy reassessing the situation that it had nothing to spare for his organ of speech.

‘I *thought* you might have forgotten,’ said Cornwallis, grinning. ‘*Hotspur’s* part of the Channel Fleet now. Her captain is forbidden by law to sleep anywhere except on board without the permission of the Commander-in-Chief. Well, you have it.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Hornblower, at last able to articulate.

‘Maybe you won’t sleep ashore again for a couple of years. Maybe more than that, if Boney fights it out.’

‘I certainly think he’ll fight, sir.’

‘In that case you and I will meet again off Ushant in three weeks’ time. So now goodbye, once more.’

For some time after Cornwallis had left Hornblower stood by the half-closed door of the coffee-room in deep thought, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, which was the nearest he could get to pacing up and down. War was coming; he had always been certain of that, because Bonaparte would never retreat from the position he had taken up. But until this moment Hornblower had thought recklessly that he would not be ordered to sea until war was declared, in two or three weeks’ time, after the final negotiations had broken down. He had been utterly wrong in this surmise, and he was angry with himself on that account. The facts that he had a good crew – the first harvest of the press – that his ship could quickly be made ready for sea, that

she was small and of no account in the balance of power, even that she was of light draught and therefore well adapted to the mission Cornwallis had allotted her, should have warned him that he would be packed off to sea at the earliest possible moment. He should have foreseen all this and he had not.

That was the first point, the first pill to swallow. Next he had to find out why his judgement had been so faulty. He knew the answer instantly, but – and he despised himself for this even more – he flinched from expressing it. But here it was. He had allowed his judgement to be clouded on account of Maria. He had shrunk from hurting her, and in consequence he had refused to allow his mind to make calculations about the future. He had gone recklessly forward in the wild hope that some stroke of good fortune would save him from having to deal her this blow.

He pulled himself up abruptly at this point. Good fortune? Nonsense. He was in command of his own ship, and was being set in the forefront of the battle. This was his golden chance to distinguish himself. That was his good fortune – it would have been maddening bad luck to have been left in harbour. Hornblower could feel the well-remembered thrill of excitement at the thought of seeing action again, of risking reputation – and life – in doing his duty, in gaining glory, and in (what was really the point) justifying himself in his own eyes. Now he was sane again; he could see things in their proper proportion. He was a naval officer first, and a married man only second, and a bad second at that. But – but – that did not make things any easier. He would still have to tear himself free from Maria's arms.

Nor could he stay here outside the coffee-room any longer. He must go back, despite his mental turmoil. He turned and re-entered the room, closing the door behind him.

‘It will look well in the *Naval Chronicle*,’ said Mrs Mason, ‘that the Commander-in-Chief proposed the health of the happy pair. Now, Horatio, some of your guests have empty plates.’

Hornblower was still trying to be a good host when he saw across the room the worried face of the innkeeper again; it called for a second glance to see what had caused him to come in. He was ushering in Hornblower’s new coxswain, Hewitt, a very short man who escaped observation across the room. Hewitt made up in breadth a good deal of what he lacked in height, and he sported a magnificent pair of glossy black side-whiskers in the style which was newly fashionable on the lower-deck. He came rolling across the room, his straw hat in his hand, and, knuckling his forehead, gave Horatio a note. The address was in Bush’s handwriting and in the correct phrasing, although now a little old-fashioned – Horatio Hornblower, Esq., Master and Commander. Silence fell on the assembled company – a little rudely, Hornblower thought – as he read the few lines.

*HM Sloop Hotspur*

*April 2nd, 1803*

Sir,

*I hear from the dockyard that the first of the lighters is ready to come alongside. Extra pay is not yet authorized for dockyard hands, so that work will cease at nightfall. I*

*respectfully submit that I can supervise the embarkation of the stores if you should find it inconvenient to return on board.*

*Your obdt servant,  
Wm Bush.*

‘Is the boat at the Hard?’ demanded Hornblower.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Very well. I’ll be there in five minutes.’

‘Aye aye, sir.’

‘Oh, Horry,’ said Maria, with a hint of reproach in her voice. No, it was disappointment, not reproach.

‘My dear –’ said Hornblower. It occurred to him that he might now quote ‘I could not love thee, dear, so much –’ but he instantly discarded the idea; it would not be at all suitable at this moment, with this wife.

‘You’re going to the ship again,’ said Maria.

‘Yes.’

He could not stay away from the ship while there was work to be done. Today, by driving the hands, they could get half the stores on board at least. Tomorrow they could finish, and if Ordnance responded to the prodding of the Admiral, they could get the powder and shot on board as well. Then they could sail at dawn the day after tomorrow.

‘I’ll be back again this evening,’ he said. He forced himself to smile, to look concerned, to forget that he was on the threshold of adventure, that before him lay a career of possible distinction.

‘Nothing shall keep me from you, dear,’ he said.

He clapped his hands on her shoulders and gave her a smacking kiss that drew applause from the others;

that was the way to reintroduce a note of comedy into the proceedings, and, under cover of the laughter, he made his exit. As he hastened down to the Hard two subjects for thought intertwined in his mind, like the serpents of the medical caduceus – the tender love that Maria wished to lavish upon him, and the fact that the day after tomorrow he would be at sea, in command.

Someone must have been knocking at the bedroom door for some time; Hornblower had been conscious of it but was too stupid with sleep to think more about it. But now the door opened with a clank of the latch, and Maria, awakening with a start, clutched at him in sudden fright, and he was now fully awake. There was the faintest gleam of light through the thick bed curtains, a shuffling step on the oak floor of the bedroom, and a high-pitched female voice.

‘Eight bells, sir. Eight bells.’

The curtains opened an inch to let in a ray of brighter light still, and Maria’s grip tightened, but they came together again as Hornblower found his voice.

‘Very well. I’m awake.’

‘I’ll light your candles for you,’ piped the voice, and the shuffling step went round the room and the light through the curtains grew brighter.

‘Where’s the wind? What way’s the wind?’ asked Hornblower, now so far awake as to feel the quickening of his heartbeat and the tensing of his muscles as he realized what this morning meant to him.

‘Now that I can’t tell you, sir,’ piped the voice. ‘I’m not one who can box the compass, and there’s no one else awake as yet.’

Hornblower snorted with annoyance at being kept in ignorance of this information, and without a

thought reached to fling off the bedclothes so as to get up and find out for himself. But there was Maria clasping him, and he knew that he could not leap out of bed in such a cavalier fashion. He had to go through the proper ritual and put up with the delay. He turned and kissed her, and she returned his kisses, eagerly and yet differently from on other occasions. He felt something wet on his cheek; it was a tear, but there was only that one single tear as Maria forced herself to exert self-control. His rather perfunctory embrace changed in character.

‘Darling, we’re being parted,’ whispered Maria. ‘Darling, I know you must go. But – but – I can’t think how I’m going to live without you. You’re my whole life. You’re . . .’

A great gust of tenderness welled up in Hornblower’s breast, and there was compunction too, a pricking of conscience. Not the most perfect man on earth could merit this devotion. If Maria knew the truth about him she would turn away from him, her whole world shattered. The cruellest thing he could do would be to let her find out; he must never do that. Yet the thought of being loved so dearly set flowing deeper and deeper wells of tenderness in his breast and he kissed her cheeks and sought out the soft eager lips. Then the soft lips hardened, withdrew.

‘No, angel, darling. No, I mustn’t keep you. You would be angry with me – afterwards. Oh, my dear life, say goodbye to me now. Say that you love me – say that you’ll always love me. Then say goodbye, and say that you’ll think of me sometimes as I shall always think of you.’

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Hornblower said the words, the right words, and in his tenderness he used the right tone. Maria kissed him once more, and then tore herself free and flung herself on to the far side of the bed face downward. Hornblower lay still, trying to harden his heart to rise, and Maria spoke again; her voice was half muffled by the pillow, but her forced change of mood was apparent even so.

‘Your clean shirt’s on the chair, dear, and your second-best shoes are beside the fireplace.’

Hornblower swung himself out of bed and out through the curtains. The air of the bedroom was certainly fresher than that inside. The door latch clanked again and he had just time to whip his bedgown in front of him as the old chambermaid put her head in. She let out a high cackle of mirth at Hornblower’s modesty.

‘The ostler says light airs from the s’uth’ard, sir.’

‘Thank you.’

The door closed behind her.

‘Is that what you want, darling?’ asked Maria, still behind the curtains. ‘Light airs from the s’uth’ard – that means south, does it not?’

‘Yes, it may serve,’ said Hornblower, hurrying over to the wash basin and adjusting the candles so as to illuminate his face.

Light airs from the south now, at the end of March, were hardly likely to endure. They might back or they might veer, but would certainly strengthen with the coming of day. If *Hotspur* handled as well as he believed she would he could weather the Foreland and be ready for the next development, with plenty of sea room. But of course – as always in the Navy – he could not afford

to waste any time. The razor was rasping over his cheeks, and as he peered into the mirror he was vaguely conscious of Maria's reflection behind his own as she moved about the room dressing herself. He poured cold water into the basin with which to wash himself, and felt refreshed, turning away with his usual rapidity of movement to put on his shirt.

'Oh, you dress so fast,' said Maria in consternation.

Hornblower heard her shoes clacking on the oaken floor; she was hurriedly putting on a fresh mob cap over her hair, and clearly she was dressing as quickly as she could, even at the cost of some informality.

'I must run down to see that your breakfast is ready,' she said, and was gone before he could protest.

He folded his neckcloth carefully, but with practised fingers, and slipped on his coat, glanced at his watch, put it in his pocket and then put on his shoes. He rolled his toilet things into his housewife and tied the tapes. Yesterday's shirt and his nightshirt and bedgown he stuffed in the canvas bag that awaited them, and the housewife on top. A glance round the room told him that he had omitted nothing, although he had to look more carefully than usual because there were articles belonging to Maria scattered here and there. Bubbling with excitement, he opened the window curtains and glanced outside; no sign of dawn as yet. Bag in hand, he went downstairs and into the coffee-room. This smelt of stale living, and was dimly lit by an oil lamp dangling from the ceiling. Maria looked in at him from the farther door.

'Here's your place, dear,' she said. 'Only a moment before breakfast.'

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She held the back of the chair for him to be seated.

‘I’ll sit down after you,’ said Hornblower; it went against the grain to have Maria waiting on him.

‘Oh, no,’ said Maria. ‘I have your breakfast to attend to – only the old woman is up as yet.’

She coaxed him into the chair. Hornblower felt her kiss the top of his head, felt a momentary touch of her cheek against his, but before he could seize her, reaching behind him, she was gone. She left behind her the memory of something between a sniff and a sob; the opening of the door into the kitchen admitted a smell of cooking, the sizzling of something in a pan, and a momentary burst of conversation between Maria and the old woman. Then in came Maria, her rapid steps indicating that the plate she held was too hot to be comfortable. She dropped it in front of him, a vast rump steak, still sizzling on the plate.

‘There, dear,’ she said, and busied herself with putting the rest of the meal within his reach, while Hornblower looked down at the steak with some dismay.

‘I picked that out for you specially yesterday,’ she announced proudly. ‘I walked over to the butcher’s while you were on the ship.’

Hornblower steeled himself not to wince at hearing a naval officer’s wife speak about being ‘on’ a ship; he also had to steel himself to having steak for breakfast, when steak was by no means his favourite dish, and when he was so excited that he felt he could eat nothing. And dimly he could foresee a future – if ever he returned, if ever, inconceivably, he settled down in domestic life – when steak would be put before him on

any special occasion. That thought was the last straw; he felt he could not eat a mouthful, and yet he could not hurt Maria's feelings.

'Where's yours?' he asked, temporising.

'Oh, I shan't be having any steak,' replied Maria. The tone of her voice proved that it was quite inconceivable to her that a wife should eat equally well as her husband. Hornblower raised his voice and turned his head.

'Hey, there!' he called. 'In the kitchen! Bring another plate – a hot one.'

'Oh, no, darling,' said Maria, all fluttered, but Hornblower was by now out of his chair and seating her at her own place.

'Now, sit there,' said Hornblower. 'No more words. I'll have no mutineers in my family. Ah!'

Here came the other plate. Hornblower cut the steak in two, and helped Maria to the larger half.

'But darling –'

'I said I'll have no truck with mutiny,' growled Hornblower parodying his own quarterdeck rasp.

'Oh, Horry, darling. You're good to me, far too good to me.' Momentarily Maria clapped hands and handkerchief to her face, and Hornblower feared she would break down finally, but then she put her hands in her lap and straightened her back, controlling her emotions in an act of the purest heroism. Hornblower felt his heart go out to her. He reached out and pressed the hand she gladly proffered him.

'Now let me see you eat a hearty breakfast,' he said; he was still using his mock-bullying tone, but the tenderness he felt was still evident. Maria took up her knife and fork and Hornblower did the same. He forced

himself to eat a few mouthfuls, and so mangled the rest of his steak that it did not appear as if he had left too much. He took a pull at his pot of beer – he did not like drinking beer for breakfast, not even beer as small as this, but he realized that the old woman could not be expected to have access to the tea-caddy.

A rattling at the windows attracted their attention. The ostler was opening the shutters, and they could dimly see his face for a moment, but it was still quite dark outside. Hornblower looked at his watch; ten minutes to five, and he had ordered his boat to be at the Sally Port at five. Maria saw the gesture and looked over at him. There was a slight trembling of her lips, a slight moisture in her eyes, but she kept herself under control.

‘I’ll get my cloak,’ she said quietly, and fled from the room. She was back in no time, her grey cloak round her, and her face shadowed in her hood; in her arms was Hornblower’s heavy coat.

‘You’re leaving us now, sir?’ piped the old woman coming into the coffee-room.

‘Yes. Madam will settle the score when she returns,’ said Hornblower; he fumbled out half a crown from his pocket and put it on the table.

‘Thank you kindly, sir. And a good voyage, and prize money galore.’ The sing-song tone reminded Hornblower that she must have seen naval officers by the hundreds leaving the George to go to sea – her memories must go back to Hawke and Boscawen.

He buttoned up his coat and took up his bag.

‘I’ll have the ostler come with us with a lantern to escort you back,’ he said, considering.

‘Oh, no please, darling. It’s so short a way, and I know every step,’ pleaded Maria, and there was enough truth in what she said for him not to insist.

They walked out into the keen cold air, having to adjust their eyes to the darkness even after the miserable light of the coffee-room. Hornblower realized that if he had been an Admiral, or even a distinguished Captain, he would never have been allowed to leave with so little ceremony; the innkeeper and his wife would certainly have risen and dressed to see him on his way. They turned the corner and started on the steep slope down to the Sally Port, and it was borne in anew on Hornblower that he was about to start out for the wars. His concern for Maria had actually distracted him from this thought, but now he found himself gulping with excitement.

‘Dear,’ said Maria. ‘I have a little present for you.’

She was bringing something out from the pocket of her cloak and pressing it into his hand.

‘It’s only gloves, dear, but my love comes with them,’ she went on. ‘I could make nothing better for you in this little time. I would have liked to have embroidered something for you – I would have liked to give you something worthy of you. But I have been stitching at these every moment since – since –’

She could not go on, but once more she straightened her back and refused to break down.

‘I’ll be able to think of you every moment I wear them,’ said Hornblower. He struggled into the gloves despite the handicap of the bag he was carrying; they were splendid thick woollen gloves, each with separate thumb and forefinger.

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‘They fit me to perfection. I thank you for the kind thought, dear.’

Now they were at the head of the steep slope down the Hard, and this horrible ordeal would soon be over.

‘You have the seventeen pounds safely?’ asked Hornblower – an unnecessary question.

‘Yes, thank you, dearest. I fear it too much –’

‘And you’ll be able to draw my monthly half-pay,’ went on Hornblower harshly, to keep the emotion from his voice, and then, realising how harshly, he continued. ‘It is time to say goodbye now, darling.’

He had forced himself to use the unaccustomed last word. The water level was far up the Hard; that meant, as he had known when he had given the orders, that the tide was at the flood. He would be able to take advantage of the ebb.

‘Darling!’ said Maria, turning to him and lifting up her face to him in its hood.

He kissed her; down at the water’s edge there was the familiar rattle of oars on thwarts, and the sound of male voices, as his boat’s crew perceived the two shadowy figures on the Hard. Maria heard those sounds as clearly as Hornblower did, and she quickly snatched away from him the cold lips she had raised to his.

‘Goodbye, my angel.’

There was nothing else to say now, nothing else to do; this was the end of this brief experience. He turned his back on Maria; he turned his back on peace and on civilian married life and walked down towards war.

‘Slack water now, sir,’ announced Bush. ‘First of the ebb in ten minutes. And anchor’s hove short, sir.’

‘Thank you, Mr Bush.’ There was enough grey light in the sky now to see Bush’s face as something more definite than a blur. At Bush’s shoulder stood Prowse, the acting-master, senior master’s mate with an acting-warrant. He was competing unobtrusively with Bush for Hornblower’s attention. Prowse was charged, by Admiralty instructions, with ‘navigating and conducting the ship from port to port under the direction of the captain.’ But there was no reason at all why Hornblower should not give his other officers every opportunity to exercise their skill; on the contrary. And it was possible, even likely, that Prowse, with thirty years of sea duty behind him, would endeavour to take the direction of the ship out of the hands of a young and inexperienced captain.

‘Mr Bush!’ said Hornblower. ‘Get the ship under way, if you please. Set a course to weather the Foreland.’

‘Aye aye, sir.’

Hornblower watched Bush keenly, while doing his best not to appear to be doing so. Bush took a final glance round him, gauging the gentle wind and the likely course of the ebb.

‘Stand by there, at the capstan,’ he ordered. ‘Loose the heads’ls. Hands aloft to loose the tops’ls.’

Hornblower could see in a flash that he could place implicit reliance on Bush's seamanship. He knew he should never have doubted it, but his memories were two years old and might have been blurred by the passage of time. Bush gave his orders in a well-timed sequence. With the anchor broken out *Hotspur* gathered momentary sternway. With the wheel hard over and the forecastle hands drawing at the headsail sheets she brought her head round. Bush sheeted home and ordered hands to the braces. In the sweetest possible way *Hotspur* caught the gentle wind, lying over hardly more than a degree or two. In a moment she was under way, slipping forward through the water, rudder balanced against sail-pressure, a living, lovely thing.

There was no need to drop any word of commendation to Bush regarding such a simple operation as getting under way. Hornblower could savour the pleasure of being afloat, as the hands raced to set the topgallant sails and then the courses. Then suddenly he remembered.

'Let me have that glass, please, Mr Prowse.'

He put the massive telescope to his eye and trained it out over the port quarter. It was still not yet full daylight, and there was the usual hint of haze, and *Hotspur* had left her anchorage half a mile or more astern: Yet he could just see it; a solitary, lonely speck of grey, on the water's edge, over there on the Hard. Perhaps – just possibly – there was a flicker of white; Maria might be waving her handkerchief, but he could not be sure. In fact he thought not. There was just the solitary grey speck. Hornblower looked again, and then he made himself lower the telescope. It was heavy, and

his hands were trembling a trifle so that the image was blurred. It was the first time in all his life that he had put to sea leaving behind him someone who was interested in his fate.

‘Thank you, Mr Prowse,’ he said, harshly, handing back the telescope.

He knew he had to think about something different, that he must quickly find something else to occupy his thoughts; fortunately as captain of a ship just setting sail there was no lack of subjects.

‘Now, Mr Prowse,’ he said, glancing at the wake and at the trim of the sails. ‘The wind’s holding steady at the moment. I want a course for Ushant.’

‘Ushant, sir?’ Prowse had a long lugubrious face like a mule’s, and he stood there digesting this piece of information without any change of expression.

‘You heard what I said,’ snapped Hornblower, in sudden irritation.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Prowse, hastily. ‘Ushant, sir. Aye aye, sir.’

There was, of course, some excuse for his first reaction. Nobody in the ship save Hornblower knew the content of the orders which were taking *Hotspur* to sea; nobody knew to what point in the whole world she was destined to sail. The mention of Ushant narrowed down the field to some extent at least. The North Sea and the Baltic were ruled out. So were Ireland and the Irish Sea and the St Lawrence across the Atlantic. But it still might be the West Indies or the Cape of Good Hope or the Mediterranean; Ushant was a point of departure for all those.

‘Mr Bush!’ said Hornblower

‘Sir!’

‘You may dismiss the watch below, and send the hands to breakfast when you think proper.’

‘Aye aye, sir.’

‘Who’s the officer of the watch?’

‘Cargill, sir.’

‘He has charge of the deck, then.’

Hornblower looked about him. Everything was in order, and *Hotspur* was standing out for the Channel. But there was something odd, something different, something unusual. Then it dawned upon him. For the first time in his life he was going to sea in time of peace. He had served ten years as a naval officer without this experience. Always before, whenever his ship emerged from harbour, she was in instant danger additional to the hazards of the sea. In every previous voyage any moment might bring an enemy up over the horizon; at an hour’s notice ship and ship’s company might be fighting for their lives. And the most dangerous time of all was when first putting to sea with a raw crew, with drill and organization incomplete – it was a likely moment to meet an enemy, as well as the most inconvenient one.

Now here they were putting to sea without any of these worries. It was an extraordinary sensation, something new – something new, like leaving Maria behind. He tried to shake that thought from him; as a buoy slithered past the starboard quarter he tried to leave the thought with it. It was a relief to see Prowse approaching again, with a piece of paper in his hand as he glanced up to the commission pendant and then out to the horizon in an attempt to forecast the weather.