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Yr Ynys Unyg The Lonely Island

Julia de Winton

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INTRODUCTION.

Dear Friend,

I enclose you the manuscript of which you have so long desired possession. You have permission to do what you like with it, on one condition, which is, that you alter all the names, and expunge anything like personality therein; for, as you are aware (with two exceptions) each character mentioned in the story is now alive, and so few years have elapsed since the events recorded took place that it would not be at all difficult for a stranger to recognize the heroes and heroines therein mentioned. Having settled that business, I now proceed to say, that as the narrative begins very abruptly, you will find it necessary to have some little personal account of the parties concerned, which I will lose no time in giving you. The mother of the party you know so well I need say nothing further of her than that she was about 27 when these events occurred; what her age is now, I must be excused telling, inasmuch as it has nothing to do with the story, [iv] and it is her own concern, and it will too certainly expose the time of the narrative and other things she wished left in obscurity. Mrs. E., the little mother, as she is called by every one, was the second in command. A greater contrast to her cousin could not exist. Short, and rather stout, she trotted by the side of her companion, as the little hippopotamus by the side of the giraffe. Both their eyes were dark, but the mother's were soft, and the little mother's so brilliant when she fixed her eyes on you, you must tell what you thought, as they penetrated into the heart. Her broad forehead showed the prevalence of the intellectual powers, and the reliance on her own sense and judgment. To be sure some people called her very masculine, and it is true that, when equipped in her riding gear, and ready to get into her second home (the saddle), she certainly slaps her tiny boots with her whip, walks round her horse, examines his legs, and questions her groom as to the throwing out of curbs, and other mysteries, known as stable lore. The horse has his nose twitched that she may get into the saddle before the usual kicking scene commences; once there, he may do what he likes, she is part of her horse, and enjoys his gambols as much as himself. When in female garments, though somewhat brusque in manners and blunt in speech, she is a true woman, and as feminine in heart as the fairest and most [v] delicate among the sex. Madame, the

governess, must occupy our attention the next. She was the kindest, best, most loving guardian over her flock, and seemed to have but one unhappiness in the world, and that was her utter inability to keep in order and understand one rebellious pupil among them. But I will not tell tales out of school. Sybil and Serena were the mother's young sisters, 13 and 14 years of age, innocent, gay, and happy creatures, blessed with beauty and sense above the common lot. Gertrude, or Gatty, was the child of an old and valued friend. She was about 12, with the wit, the quickness, the sense of 20, and I had almost said the size, for so large a proportion of flesh, blood, and bones rarely fall to the lot of male or female at that age. She was alternately the soul of fun and merriment or the plague and torment of every one about her. She had the judgment of mature age and the nonsense of the greatest baby in her. The mother alone obtained unlimited obedience from her. I am afraid I have discovered the "unruly one," but all the characters shall speak for themselves. The mother's own children were three in number. Oscar, a fine tall active boy, with a grave quick demeanour, but the open brow and frank sweet smile won him the love of every one. Lilly, the little girl, was about 6, a little, loving, winning thing, with eyes like [vi] violets, and long dark rich curls floating all round her, from the middle of which was uplifted a little rosy face, almost perfect in its childish beauty. Felix, the youngest boy and child, was a little, delicate, spoilt fellow, whose face seemed made up of naught but eyes and eyelashes. They were all three quick and clever children; and it was partly for the improvement of the little boy's health the voyage took place, the incidents of which are mentioned in this book. Zoë and Winifred were two little nieces. The former a grave, little, quiet picture of a sweet Madonna, and the latter a little, sparkling, merry pet, with the quick action and grace of a fairy. Madame does not know it, or think we guess it, but Winny is certainly her pet. Mrs. Hargrave, the lady's maid, and Jenny, the little pet nurse, concluded the females; while a fine, tall, handsome, athletic gamekeeper formed their only male attendant. Now, having said my say, I leave you; but you must be answerable for the faults of this journal if you will publish it; nothing could be more irregular and hasty than its compilation. With this burden on your shoulders, dear friend, believe me, thine in all pity and affection,

A FRIEND.

[7]

CHAPTER I.

On the 3rd of May, 183—, we embarked on board our pretty yacht, "La Luna," the crew of which included all the party mentioned in the preceding pages, besides those necessary to work her. These consisted of a captain, two mates, a boatswain, fourteen seamen, a cook, a steward, and my son's gamekeeper. Captain MacNab was a remarkably nice, active, bluff, plain-spoken man. It was easy to be seen that he was not too much pleased at commanding a company composed so entirely of women and children; neither do I think he would have undertaken the charge had we not expected Sir Walter Mayton, my children's guardian, and Mr. B., their tutor, to make part of the live stock. The former was prevented accompanying us by domestic matters; the latter from his father's death. But we made arrangements for both to join us at Madeira, for it was not deemed advisable to wait the month it would take Mr. B. to settle his father's affairs and provide a home for his sisters. The weather was so beautiful it was thought we could easily spend a month in the Mediterranean, previously to extending our voyage across the Atlantic; besides I was anxious to see the promised roses restored to my little son's face, and, without being foolhardy or presumptuous, I could not entertain the [8] least idea of danger. Our first mate, Mr. Skead, was not only extremely skilful, but the nicest merriest person on board, being quite as ready to be the boys' play-fellow as they could be to have him. Mr. Austin was the second mate, a grave religious person, who kindly acted chaplain for us. Of the seamen I need say nothing, but that they were all picked men. Alas, when I recall that day, and see so vividly before me all their rough but honest manly faces, and remember the close intimacy that, being sharers in one common home, participators in all things alike, engendered, I cannot but mourn over each face as I recall it to memory. In the few months we were together each seemed a part of the family, and in the sudden severing of our lives and fates mournful thoughts will arise as to what can have been the fate of those in whom we were so interested. But I must not anticipate, and, moreover, my

task is a long one, and I have no time to spare lingering over the past. Our cook was a black man, called Benjie, which rather disturbed the peace of the little girls. They could not think the white rolls were really made by his black hands, and only his extreme good nature and willing activity caused them to be in any degree reconciled to having a black man for a cook. He was a very good one however, and willingly would we, many years after, have hailed his black face and white teeth with the joy of a dear friend. Smart, the gamekeeper, was a fine, tall, handsome man, of Gloucester make and tongue; he was quite a character in his way, and the contrast between his fear of the sea, his illness at the [9] least gale, his utter ignorance of anything nautical was very great, when we thought of his courage, strength, and skill on shore, in his own vocation. Under his care he had two large dogs, half blood hounds half St. Bernard, their names were Bernard and Cwmro. But I must describe our vessel: — La Luna had been built expressly for her present purpose, in the river Clyde; she was of nearly 200 tons burden, three-masted, beautiful and elegant in her appearance, and nothing could exceed the convenience and comfort, combined with strength, with which she was fitted up; we had a deck house, surrounded with windows, so that we were shaded from sun and sheltered from breeze, and could see in every direction each pursuing his or her favourite occupation, and yet losing none of the beauties and wonders of the ocean; near the deck house were two berths, one for Captain MacNab, the other for Mr. Austin; down stairs we had a saloon, the length of which was the width of the vessel, and about twelve feet across; on the upper end a smaller saloon, or drawing room, the sofas of which made up four berths; the three girls used this room, and it opened into the stern cabin, where Jenny and the three younger girls slept, and through which the rudder came; at the other end was a double cabin, which served for my cousin and me, opening into the bath room, beyond that was the boys' cabin, and on the left hand side of the stern cabin was Mrs. Tollair's cabin; in the other part of the vessel were four other cabins, a steward's or servant's room, besides the seamen's berths, here also were two very excellent deck [10] cabins for our two gentlemen whenever they joined us. We had fitted up the whole of the saloon with book-cases, of which one was devoted to the children's school books, drawing materials, and everything of that sort they might require.

Our travels were at present not only indefinite as to time, but equally so as to place. We had a piano and a small hand organ, which could be carried on deck.

It would be impossible to convey any idea of the bustle, the noise, the confusion, the pleasure, the novelty that possessed everybody and everything the few days before we sailed. The leave-takings were the most painful, for having the care of so many who left the nearest and dearest ties behind them, on a voyage, the singularity of which invested it with a certain degree of mysterious danger, the nature of which no one could define, and which I now for the first time felt. All this gave a degree of sadness to the feelings of the whole party as we watched the English coast fading from our sight. I sat on the deck until a late hour recalling the happy and cheerful "God speed you" that my mother gave us, the more grave and solemn farewell of my father, whose foreboding mind looked farther than ours did. And then I recalled the parents of those with me; the hearty and oft-expressed wish of Gatty's father, high in honours and public esteem, to accompany us, the tearful farewell of her mother, dear Winny's merry and light-hearted mother, while her father bid her remember, during her long absence, the lessons of [11] goodness and high principle he was always so anxious to inculcate in her. My brother and sister-in-law had been prevented coming to wish Zoë farewell, on account of the illness of one of her brothers. I could not but think this as well, for her mother's delicate nerves could never have borne the parting from a child so beloved, and Zoë's leave to come would have been rescinded at the last moment. Poor child! I know not whether to wish it better to have been so or not. Dear uncle P. came to wish his daughter, my cousin, good bye, and to promise once more a father's and mother's care over her two little children during her absence. I could not help being amused at his sometimes expressing a wish to go with us, and the next minute scolding us for doing anything so mad. Well, we were off! the last adieus were said, the last looks given, the last words spoken. We were off! The die is cast, and it seemed strange to me that now and only now did fearful doubts, and vain regrets, and sad forebodings oppress my heart, and take possession of my mind. With striking vividness I recalled how, mainly to please myself and amuse my mind, I had projected and finally carried out this expedition; how I

had covered my own private wishes and thoughts under the plea of the good it would do my little boy, the benefit it was to all young people to enlarge their minds by travelling and experience, the novelty of the adventure, and the sort of certain uncertainty which was to attend our steps and ways during the next eight months, thus giving the charm of novelty and singularity to the whole scheme. I know not how [12] long I should have dwelt on these circumstances, had not the children come to wish me their wonted good night. Schillie declared I had moped enough, the girls were eager that together we should take our last view of England, for the breeze that carried us now so fast through the water bid fair to take us soon out of sight of land. The young soon lose the painful feelings of parting; besides, they were so delighted at being really off, they had been so fearful lest anything should occur to prevent one or all going, so as to destroy the *unity*, if I may so call it, of the party, that unmitigated pleasure alone pervaded them. This buoyancy of their feelings had as yet prevented any symptoms of illness, and I don't think there was a pale face amongst the party, save the little invalid and Smart, the gamekeeper. He sat silent and amazed between his two dogs, and, could we have analyzed his feelings, I have no doubt we should have been privy to most curious and contradictory ideas. Qualms were coming over him of various kinds, equally foreign to his nature. Probably, for the first time, he was experiencing fear and sickness at the same moment, and quite unable to understand the symptoms of either. The boys had not yet found out what made their dear Smart so dull and unlike himself, when they were so joyous and delighted. We all rose up, and went together to watch the fading land. Various exclamations proved how much our thoughts dwelt on that beloved shore, and long after my short sight had deemed it passed from view did my dear girls exclaim, "they yet saw it; there were still lights." [13] But Captain MacNab wanted his deck to himself, so with cheerful good nights, the moon being up, we descended to take our first meal on board, and use those narrow couches at which we were so much amused, and which the children had been longing to try from the moment they came on board. Such a noisy tea never was, interrupted now and then by a lurching of the vessel, which was such a new thing to us that all started, some in fear, some in fun, and some, I must own, with other feelings not very agreeable. The oddity of having nothing steady on

our swinging table, the laughing at the pale looks that flitted across the faces of others, the grave determination with which little Winny declared "that now she was really a sailor, she would only eat ship biscuit," caused intense merriment. But ere tea was over one or two of our party disappeared, and when twelve o'clock arrived Captain MacNab had La Luna all to himself and his men, for the feminine crew were deep in slumber, caused by the, to them, unusual motion of the sea, and the unwonted excitement of the day.

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CHAPTER II.

May 4.—The next morning there were many defaulters, myself amongst the number. In lieu of the laughter and joy of the preceding evening, there were groans, and moans, and beseechings for tea or a drink of water. Sybil, Gatty, and Serena all rose valiantly; Gatty scornfully repudiating the possibility of being ill. But it was in vain, "the loftiest spirit was lowliest laid." The little girls rather courted the notion. Being ill in bed of course precluded the idea of lessons, with which a certain portion of every day had been threatened, and as they lay in bed thus they discoursed:—

Zoë.—"I really do not think it will be pleasant if we are to be like this all the time."

Lilly.—"Oh, Zoë, I am so snug, I have got a nice book to read, and there will be no playing on the piano to-day."

Winny.—"Oh! I am very sorry for that. If I did not feel so funny, I should like to go and play very much. But I am glad we are to have no French. Jenny says Madame is very ill indeed, and I think I heard her groan once."

Zoë.—"Groan, did you? then she must be very bad. I don't wish her to groan much, but I don't mind if she is sick always from ten until two. You know mother [15] promised we should do no lessons after two. Here is Jenny. Why, Jenny, what is the matter with you?"

Jenny.—"Indeed, Miss, I don't know; but just as I was fastening Miss Sybil's dress, I felt so queer, and I was so ashamed, I was obliged to sit down before all the young ladies."

All the little girls at once exclaimed, "Ah, Jenny, Jenny, you know you are sea-sick." "No, indeed, young ladies," exclaimed Jenny, vehemently, "I am sure it is no such thing; but Master Felix would have some cold beef with Worcester sauce for his breakfast, and that gave me a turn, it has such a strong smell." But ere Jenny had well got the words out of her mouth, nature asserted her rights, and after an undeniable fit, she reeled off to bed, and was a victim for three days. Hargrave, my maid, being of a stolid, determined, sort of stoical character, announced her intention of not giving way; and though a victim, or rather martyr, she never suffered a sign to appear, or neglected one thing that she was asked to do, or showed the smallest feeling on the occasion beyond a general sense of dissatisfaction at all things connected with the sea. But of all our sufferers none equalled my poor cousin. Not a word was to be got out of her, but short pithy anathemas against everybody that came near her, everybody that spoke to her, every lurch the ship made, every noise overhead; an expression of pity caused an explosion of wrath, a hope that she was better a wish that she was dead, and an offer of assistance a command to be gone out of her sight. Neither of the boys suffered [16] in the least. And now the increased motion of the vessel, the noise overhead, and various other signs told us that the lovely smooth ocean, on whose bosom we had trusted ourselves, for some cause unknown to us was considerably disturbed, internally or externally. It was impossible for any land-lubbers to stand; it was equally impossible to eat in the form prescribed by the rules of polite society, food being snatched at a venture, and not always arriving at the mouth for which it was originally intended. One or two were pitched out of their cots, and a murmuring of fear that this should be a tempest, and that we were going to be wrecked, caused a message to be sent to Captain MacNab to know whereabouts we were, for no one liked to be first to acknowledge fear or expose our ignorance to the Captain, who had good-humouredly rallied some on what they would do and say in case of bad weather. Therefore the question of whereabouts are we seemed a very safe one, likely to obtain the real news we wanted without exposing our fears to the captain. In answer, we received a message to say we were near the Bay of Biscay and as there was a very pretty sea, we should do well to come up and look at it. "Come up and look at it?" that showed at once that no shipwreck was in contemplation. But how to get up?

that was the question. The message, however, was dispatched round to the different berths, with the additional one, "that the mother was going immediately," that being my title amongst the young ones, and the little mother being the title of my cousin. [17]

On deck we were received by the captain, who welcomed us with much pleasure, an undisguised twinkle in his eyes betraying a little inkling into the purport of our message. To our amazement, he and the sailors seemed quite at their ease, walking as steadily as if the vessel was a rock, and as immovable as the pyramids. But what a sea! I looked up and saw high grey mountains on all sides, and ere I could decide whether they were moveable or my sight deceptive, they had disappeared, and, from a height that seemed awful, we looked down upon a troubled, rolling, restless mass of waters, each wave seeming to buffet its neighbour with an angry determination to put it down. In the midst of all this chaos, one monster wave rose superior to all the rest, and rolling forward with giant strength and resistless impetuosity, threatened instant destruction to the vessel. A cry, a terrific roll, a shudder through the vessel, and again we were in the valley of waters; and during the comparative lull the captain roared in my ear, "Is it not a pretty sea, Madam?"

We can now laugh at our fears, and the awe-struck faces we all presented, but it was many hours ere some of us recovered ourselves, and for this show of timidity Gatty scolded Sybil.

Gatty.—"How can you be such a goose, Sybil? Why, you are trembling now."

Sybil.—"No, I am only a little cold; but you know, Gatty, that was such an awful wave, if we had stretched our necks ever so high we could not see to the top." [18]

Gatty.—"Well, and what did that matter? It was a glorious wave, a magnificent fellow, I dare say a tenth wave. If we had been walking on the sea shore we should have counted and known."

Sybil.—"But I could not tell how we were ever to get to the top. I thought we must certainly go through it, or it would go over us."

Gatty (laughing).—"Serena, do come here, Sybil is talking such splendid stuff, and, moreover, she is frightened out of her wits, and I do believe wishes herself at home."

Serena. — "Oh dear! I am so ill; going on deck has quite upset me, and I am worse than I was."

Gatty. — "Now, whatever you do, don't go and be so foolish, *Serena*. I shall have no pleasure at all if *Sybil* is frightened and you are ill. Get up, and eat a lot of roast beef with heaps of mustard and you will be quite well."

A little small voice called to *Gatty*, and also asked for beef and mustard. "I am sure, quite sure, *Gatty*," said the little speaker, *Winnie*, "it will do me a great deal of good." "Ah," said *Lilly*, "I wish I was out of this place. Do, mother, ask the captain to stop and put me down somewhere." This little idea caused infinite amusement. Time, however, went on, and cured us all. We had lovely weather, and began to keep regular hours, and have allotted times of the day for different things. All attending, whatever might be our occupations, to the captain's summons; for when anything new was to be seen, any wonders of the ocean, [19] any curious bird resting its weary wings on the only haven in sight—our little vessel, any furling of sails, or any change, so did the good-natured captain send for us, and we joyfully obeyed the summons, listening to all his wondrous tales, watching the rolling of the porpoises, and the wondrous colours of the sea. As we approached a hotter climate, everything became, in our eyes, objects of new and strange interest. In this manner we reached Gibraltar, and landed for the first time, having been thirteen days at sea.

[20]

CHAPTER III.

May 16. — Gibraltar. — I, for one, was very glad to land, for somehow on board ship one never seemed to be able to finish one's toilette with the degree of niceness necessary, a lurch of the ship very often caused an utter derangement, a rolling sea made it a matter of great difficulty even to wash one's face, and as for tidying the hair that had been given up, and those who did not wear caps enclosed their rough curls in nets. We therefore migrated to the principal hotel, leaving the two boys, at their own request, on board, under the care of *Jenny* and *Smart*. The three elder girls were to wait on each other, and each take a little girl in their charge, while *Hargrave*

waited on the three elderly ladies. We were objects of great curiosity, and many people supposed our party to consist of a school. They were more surprised at hearing that La Luna belonged to the school. The visitors on board of her became innumerable, causing the good-natured captain a world of trouble. Every day he came and reported himself, as he called it, to his commanding officer, meaning myself and brought an account of the boys, or one with him; and it was most curious to see this great rough captain take each little girl up in his arms and kiss her quite gently, always expressing a hope to each that they [21] were not getting too fond of the land, but would soon return to their ocean home, as he was quite dull without them. Whatever misgivings he might have had on starting, they had all given way to an interest and affection for us all, that made it quite a pleasure to us to communicate with him.

We took advantage of our first landing to write letters home, which, having been preserved with sorrowful care, have now become agreeable memorials of our adventures, and may be interesting, as their own letters will best explain the individual character of each of those who were now on their way towards adventures strange as unexpected. The letters of the elder portion of our party contained but a description of Gibraltar, which is well known to most people. Sybil's letter was as follows:—

"Gibraltar, May 16, 18—

"My dearest Mamma and Sisters,

"Here we are safe on dry land again, and who would have believed a fortnight ago that we should have been so glad to get out of our dear La Luna. But we don't make half such good sailors as we expected; and how Em would have laughed could she have seen all the queer looks and sad faces which possessed the merry party she had so lately seen. But here we are really on dry land, and at Gibraltar, at the summit of all our present hopes, and charmed enough to make us forget all the horrors of the sea, and [22] even think we could undergo them twenty times for such a sight. We came into the harbour last night, and landed as soon as we could collect our wits, and mother collect us; Madame has been at Gibraltar before, and so ought to have had the use of hers, but knowing her propensity to lose her way, we made Hargrave look after her, while we three

elder girls each took a little child. Both the mothers looked after our things. The boys and Jenny were left behind. So we landed just before gun fire, passing through the long rows of houses, which looked so strange to our wondering eyes, piled one above the other, and as we were passed and stared at by numbers of odd queer-looking people, we quite fancied ourselves in a dream, or realizing the Arabian Nights. At last we halted at our hotel. Our sailors deposited our boxes, and seemed to wish us good night with sorrow. We had a famous tea, if I may so call such an odd mixture of eatables, and went to bed, hardly believing we could be in Gibraltar. This morning we were awoke by some little voices round our beds — 'Oh, auntie, dear auntie, do get up; this is such a lovely place, and so odd. There are such rocks, and oh, auntie, such queer people. I saw a man in a turban, and there is a black man in the house, and — —' 'Hush, little nieces, how are aunties to get up, if you chatter so? rather help us to dress, that we may see the wonderful things too.' We found our two mothers in the pretty drawing room. Three large windows looked out upon the busy town and blue sea below. The little mother was out in the balcony, in a perfect [23] ecstasy of delight. A call to breakfast was obeyed, though we could hardly eat, the chicks jumping up every minute to look at something new and strange going on below, and the aunties quite wishing that they might commit such a breach of decorum. We were startled out of all propriety at last by a well-known voice sounding under the windows, and a remonstrance which drew us all there. Looking down, we beheld Felix seated on the top of a most extraordinary vehicle, the driver of which he had superseded, and was trying to persuade the lumbering old horse to get on. Smart was behind vainly endeavouring to persuade his young master to come down. A glance at the drawing-room windows effected what Smart's entreaties had failed to do, and the young pickle was soon at high breakfast, and had demolished a pretty considerable quantity ere his steady elder brother appeared.

"We have just returned from our first expedition so charmed, even our excited imaginations came not up to the beautiful reality. The town is a very curious one. A long street composes the principal part. Almost all the houses are painted black, with flat roofs. The shops open to the street. But the rock itself! My dearest sisters,