

**Side: Louisa, Frederick, Admiral Croft, Charles, Mrs. Croft**

**LOUISA:** (*Having found the Navy Lists, to Frederick*) Now, your first ship was the Asp, I remember. We'll look for the Asp.

**FREDERICK:** You won't find her in the lists. The Admiralty entertain themselves now and then, Miss Musgrove, with sending a few hundred men to sea in a ship not fit to be employed.

**LOUISA:** (*Aghast*) Really?

**FREDERICK:** Even then she was hardly fit for service and now she's broken up.

**ADMIRAL CROFT:** Phoo! What stuff these young fellows talk! There never was a braver sloop in her day, and twenty better men than you applying for her.

**FREDERICK:** I felt my luck, Admiral, I assure you. It was a very great object with me at the time to be away at sea. I wanted to be doing something.

**ADMIRAL CROFT:** To be sure. If a man hasn't a wife, he soon wants to be afloat again.

**LOUISA:** But, Captain Wentworth, how vexed you must've been to see what an old thing they'd given you.

**FREDERICK:** Perhaps. I knew that she'd be the making of me, or that we'd go to the bottom together.

**LOUISA:** Oh, no! How dreadful – but how exciting! Tell us more. What was your next ship?

**FREDERICK:** Here, I'll show you. (*Taking the Navy Lists*) The Laconia. One of the best friends man ever had. How

fast I made money in her! We took privateers enough in the Indian Isles, and had the good luck to fall in with the very French frigate I most wanted. That's when I was with Harville, sister, off the Indies. You know how much he wanted money, for he had a wife.

**ADMIRAL CROFT:** If you'd been a week later at Lisbon you'd have been asked to give a passage to Lady Grierson and her daughters.

**FREDERICK:** I'm glad I wasn't a week later then. No ship under my command shall ever convey ladies anywhere if I can help it.

**ADMIRAL CROFT:** Phoo. Hear that, Sophie? There's want of gallantry for you.

**FREDERICK:** My gallantry comes rather from feeling how impossible it is to make the accommodations on board a fighting ship such as women ought to have.

**CHARLES:** But you brought Mrs Harville and her sister from Portsmouth to Plymouth.

**MRS CROFT:** Indeed? Where was this superfine, extraordinary sort of gallantry of yours then?

**FREDERICK:** All merged in my friendship, Sophia. I'd bring anything of Harville's from the world's end if he wanted it.

**MRS CROFT:** Well, I've crossed the Atlantic four times and been once to the East Indies, and I can tell you, women may be as comfortable on board a man-of-war as in the best house in England, as long as it's not engaged in any action. I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, as if women were all fine ladies instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days.

**CHARLES:** But when he's got a wife, he'll sing a different tune.

**ADMIRAL CROFT:** Aye, when he's married, we'll have 'im very thankful to anybody that'll bring 'im his wife then.

**MRS CROFT:** Aye, that we shall.

**FREDERICK:** When once people begin to attack me with, 'You'll think very differently when you're married', I can only say, 'No, I shan't', and then they say, 'Yes, you will', and there's an end of it.

**LOUISA:** Who wants to dance? Do let's dance.