We did not see much of Aytoun during all that time, as he was professionally engaged from morning to night; and when he came to Vaalafiel his time was chiefly spent with his sister. I scarcely know how it happened that he and I had never had a moment’s private conversation since my engagement became public, and he had never said a word to me about it. But I knew he had congratulated Laurence very heartily, and in doing so had said some pretty words about his pet lamb. I could appreciate praise from lips that never condescended to pay compliments, but I think I was rather glad that I had been spared Aytoun’s personal greetings on the subject. The first time I saw him alone was on the wedding day itself. We had all agreed that the marriage was to be a very quiet affair, with no guests except the Weirs, and this made it easy to dispense with a good many of the ordinary formalities. Little Madge Weir was the solitary bridesmaid, who would accompany me into the drawing-room, where Mr Graeme would perform the simple Scotch ceremony. But I had forgotten that I had no male relation to lead me in, and was waiting to be fetched, in blessed forgetfulness of that portion of the proceedings! I believe, if I had any thoughts about it at all, that I expected that the Lady would send a maid to say I was “wanted,” and I would walk quietly down stairs and be married to my cousin.

But wee Madge was sharper than I – “Who is to give you away?” she cried, as we two sat in my room waiting the summons from the Powers below; and before I had time to reply, or do more than send one lightening thought to the parent upon whose arm I should have leant that day, a knock at the door announced the messenger of Fate. Aytoun came in smiling.

“The Lady has sent me to represent your next of kin, dear child.”

Madge flew to the dressing-room for flowers, &c., which had been solemnly intrusted to her care, and Aytoun said with his usual comic-seriousness.

“Are you quite ready for the sacrifice, pet lamb?”

There seemed something more than jest in his words, for he added hastily in an earnest tone, and in answer to some appeal he read in my face – “I won’t take you down if you don’t want to go.”
I fancied just then that I felt my real, wilful, childish self slip into the “chapelle,”
steal along the vault, reach its “floating retreat,” and glide over the sea slowly
– slowly and silently – to a far land. And if that was the foolish Inga of old (as I
hope it must have been) then some one thoroughly acquainted with the conven-
tionalities took her bouquet from Madge, and disposed fan and gloves with due
propriety. Some one, whose heart had learned the regulation beat, laid a quiet
hand on Aytoun’s arm and composedly entered the drawing-room. Some one
who intended to proceed in the way a woman should go, and knew exactly what
she was expected to do, walked calmly to the side of Laurence, and “before all
these witnesses” pledged herself to be his faithful wife.

The remaining months of that placid northern summer was spent by
Laurence and myself on the sea, for one point of similarity between us was
a passion for marine life. The lazy contemplative existence on board a yacht
during mild weather agreed admirably with his languid invalid habits, and suited
my dreamy metaphysical turn of mind also. I read poetry to Laurence, and he
drew sketches for me, and we never found time on board the “Seamew” hang
heavy on our hands. There was a never-failing source of interest in watching
the changeful face of the deep, whose aspects are more varied, and tenfold
more wonderful, than those of the land, and we drew from that marvellous world
of waters an inexhaustable supply of food for our thoughts. Our conversation
seldom diverged into the interchange of personal confidence, and we were nei-
ther of us demonstrative by nature; yet we were happy in each other’s society,
although our honeymoon possessed none of the sweet madness which gener-
ally characterises that lunar episode so justly dreaded by practical people, so
rapturously anticipated by romantic folk, so wistfully regretted by both when the
wear and tear of long years and burdensome existence have borne those bliss-
ful days of early married life into the Past. I can truthfully affirm, in spite of all my
vague forebodings, in spite of all my doubting fears, that our “wedding trip” was,
what it surely is to everyone, the sunniest, holiest period of young life; and it
was with sincere regret that I saw the autumn skies begin to threaten tempestu-
ous weather, which compelled Laurence to order our fairy-ship to turn for home.