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Author: Harry Collingwood

Illustrator: E. S. Hodgson

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MIDDY IN COMMAND: A TALE OF THE SLAVE SQUADRON \*\*\*

Harry Collingwood

"A Middy in Command"

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## Chapter One.

### Our first prize.

The first faint pallor of the coming dawn was insidiously extending along the horizon ahead as H.M. gun-brig *Shark*—the latest addition to the slave-squadron—slowly surged ahead over the almost oil-smooth sea, under the influence of a languid air breathing out from the south-east. She was heading in for the mouth of the Congo, which was about forty miles distant, according to the master's reckoning.

The night had been somewhat squally, and the royals and topgallant-sails were stowed; but the weather was now clearing, and as "three bells" chimed out musically upon the clammy morning air, Mr Seaton, the first lieutenant, who was the officer of the watch, having first scanned the heavens attentively, gave orders to loose and set again the light upper canvas.

By the time that the men aloft had cast off the gaskets that confined the topgallant-sails to the yards, the dawn—which comes with startling rapidity in those latitudes—had risen high into the sky ahead, and spread well along the horizon to north and south, causing the stars to fade and disappear, one after another, until only a few of the brightest remained twinkling low down in the west.

As I wheeled at the stern-grating in my monotonous promenade of the lee side of the quarter-deck, a hail came down from aloft—

"Sail ho! two of 'em, sir, broad on the lee beam. Look as if they were standin' out from the land."

"What are they like? Can you make out their rig?" demanded the first luff, as he halted and directed his gaze aloft at the man on the main-royal-yard, who, half-way out to the yard-arm, was balancing himself upon the foot-rope, and steadying himself with one hand upon the yard as he gazed away to leeward under the shade of the other.

"I can't make out very much, sir," replied the man. "They're too far off; but one looks like a schooner, and t'other like a brig."

"And they are heading out from the land, you say?" demanded the lieutenant.

"Looks like it, sir," answered the man; "but, as I was sayin', they're a long way off; and it's a bit thick down to leeward there, so—"

"All right, never mind; cast off those gaskets and come down," interrupted Mr Seaton impatiently. Then, turning to me, he said:

"Mr Grenville, take the glass and lay aloft, if you please, and see what you can make of those strangers. Mr Keene"—to the other midshipman of the watch—"slip down below and call the captain, if you please. Tell him that two strange sail have been sighted from aloft, apparently coming out from the Congo."

By the time he had finished speaking I had snatched the glass from its beackets, and was half-way up the weather main rigging, while the watch was sheeting home and hoisting away the topgallant-sails and royals. When Keene reappeared on deck, after calling the skipper, I was comfortably astride the royal-yard, with my left arm round the spindle of the vane—the yard hoisting close up under the truck. With my right hand I manipulated the slide of the telescope and adjusted the focus of the instrument to suit my sight.

By this time the dawn had entirely overspread the firmament, and the sky had lost its pallor and was all aglow with richest amber, through which a long shaft of pale golden light, soaring straight up toward the zenith, heralded the rising of the sun. The thickness to leeward had by this time cleared away, and the two strange sail down there were now clearly visible, the one as a topsail schooner, and the other as a brig. They were a long way off, the topsails of the brig—which was leading—being just clear of the horizon from my elevated point of observation, while the head of the schooner's topsail just showed clear of the sea. The brig I took to be a craft of about our own size, say some three hundred tons, while the schooner appeared to be about two hundred tons.

I had just ascertained these particulars when the voice of the skipper came pealing up to me from the stern-grating, near which he stood, with Mr Seaton alongside of him.

"Well, Mr Grenville, what do you make of them?"

I replied, giving such information as I had been able to gather; and added: "They appear to be sailing in company, sir."

"Thank you, that will do; you may come down," answered the skipper. Then, as I swung myself off the yard, I heard the lieutenant give the order to bear up in chase, to rig out the port studding-sail booms, and to see all clear for setting the port studding-sails—or stu'n'sails, as they are more commonly called. I had reached the cross-trees, on my way down, when Captain Bentinck again hailed me.

"Aloft there! just stay where you are for a little while, Mr Grenville, and keep your eye on those sail to leeward. And if you observe any alteration in the course that they are steering, report the fact to me at once."

"Ay, ay, sir!" I answered, and settled myself down comfortably for what I anticipated might be a fairly long wait.

For a few minutes all was now bustle and confusion below and about me; the helm was put up and the ship wore short round, the yards were swung, and then several hands came aloft to reeve the gear, rig out the booms, and set the larboard studding-sails, from the royals down. We rather prided ourselves upon being a smart ship, and in less than five minutes from the moment the order was given we were sliding away upon our new course, at a speed of some five and a half knots, with all our studding-sails set on the port side, and all ropes neatly coiled down once more. But ere this had happened I had returned to my former post on the main-royal-yard, for I quickly discovered that the shift of helm had caused the head-sails to interpose themselves between me and the objects which it was my duty to watch, and this was to be remedied only by returning to the royal-mast-head.

The skipper, in setting the new course, had displayed what commended itself to me as sound judgment. We were at such a distance from the strangers of whom we were now in chase that even our most lofty canvas was—and would, for some little time longer, remain—invisible from their decks. This was highly desirable, since the nearer we could approach them without being discovered, the better would be our chance of ultimately getting alongside them. The only likelihood of a premature discovery of our proximity lay in the possible necessity, on the part of one or the other of them, to send a hand aloft; but this we could not guard against. Captain Bentinck, therefore, hoping that *no* such necessity would arise, had shaped a course not directly for them, but at an intercepting angle to their own course, by which means he hoped not only to hold way with them, but also to lessen very considerably the distance between them and ourselves before the sight of our canvas, rising above the horizon, would reveal our unwelcome presence to the two slavers, as we believed the strange craft to be. It was also of the utmost importance that we should have instant knowledge of their discovery of our presence in their neighbourhood, and of the action that they would thereupon take; hence the necessity for my remaining aloft to maintain a steady and careful watch upon their movements.

I had been anticipating—and, indeed, hoping—that my sojourn aloft would be a lengthy one, for I knew that, so long as the strangers continued to steer their original course, it would mean that they remained in ignorance of our proximity to them. But this was not to be, for I had but regained my original position on the royal-yard some ten minutes, when, as I kept the telescope steadily fixed upon them, I saw the brig bear up and run off square before the wind. The schooner promptly followed her example, and both of them immediately proceeded to rig out studding-sail booms on both sides.

"Deck ahoy!" hailed I. "The two strange sail to leeward have this instant put up their helms, and are running square off before the wind; they are also rigging out their studding-sail booms on both sides."

"Thank you, Mr Grenville," replied the skipper. "How do they bear from us now?"

"About four points before the beam, sir," answered I.

"Very good. Stay where you are a minute or two longer, for I am about to bear up in chase, and I want you to tell me when they are directly ahead of us," ordered the skipper.

"Ay, ay, sir!" shouted I, giving the stereotyped answer to every order issued on board ship; and the next instant all was bustle and activity below me, as the helm was put up and preparations were made to set our studding-sails on the starboard side. As I glanced down on deck I saw the captain step to the binnacle, apparently watching the motion of the compass-card as the ship paid off, so I at once directed my gaze toward the strangers, and the moment they were brought in line with the fore-royal-mast-head I sang out:

"Steady as you go, sir; the strangers are now dead ahead of us!"

"Thank you, Mr Grenville; you may come down now," replied the captain. And as I swung off the yard I saw the skipper and the first lieutenant, with their heads together over the binnacle, talking earnestly.

Meanwhile the wind, scant as it was, seemed inclined to become more scanty still, until at length, by "six bells"—that is to say, seven o'clock—our courses were drooping motionless from the yards, the maintop-sail was wrinkling ominously, with an occasional flap to the mast as the brig hove lazily over the long low undulations of the swell—and only the light upper canvas continued to draw, the ship's speed having declined to a bare two knots, which gave us little more than mere steerage way. And loud was the grumbling, fore and aft, when, a little later, as the hands were piped to breakfast, the breeze died away altogether, and the *Shark*, being no longer under the control of her helm, proceeded to "box the compass"—that is to say, to swing first this way and then that, with the send of the swell. Our only consolation was that the strangers to leeward were in the same awkward fix as ourselves; for if we had no wind wherewith to pursue them, they, in their turn, had none wherewith to run away from us.

Nobody dawdled very long over breakfast that morning; for, in the first place, the heat below was simply unbearable, and, in the next, we were all far too anxious to allow of our remaining in our berths while we knew that every conceivable expedient would be adopted by the captain to shorten the distance between us and the chase. It was my watch below from eight o'clock until noon, and I was consequently off duty; but although I had been on deck for eight hours of the twelve during the preceding night, I was much too fidgety to turn in and endeavour to get a little sleep; I therefore routed out a small pocket sextant that had been presented to me by a friend, and, making my way up into the fore-topmast cross-trees—from which the strangers could be seen—I very carefully measured with the instrument the angle subtended by the mast-head of the brig and the horizon, so that I might be able to ascertain from time to time whether or not that craft was increasing the distance between her and ourselves. I decided to measure this angle every half-hour; and, having made my first and second observations without discovering any appreciable difference between them, I employed the interval in looking about me, and watching the movements of two large sharks which were dodging off and on close alongside the ship, and which were clearly visible from my post of observation. At length, as "three bells"—half-past nine-o'clock—struck, I cast a glance all round the ship before again measuring my angle, when, away down in the south-eastern quarter, I caught a glimpse of very pale blue stretching along the horizon that elsewhere was indistinguishable owing to the glassy calm of the ocean's surface.

"Deck ahoy!" shouted I; "there is a small air of wind creeping up out of the south-eastern quarter."

"Thank you, Mr Grenville," replied the captain, who was engaged in conversation with Mr Fawcett, the officer of the watch. "Is it coming along pretty fast?" he continued.

I took another good long look.

"No, sir," I answered; "it is little more than a cat's-paw at present, but it has the appearance of being fairly steady."

"How long do you think it will be before it reaches us?" asked the second luff.

"Probably half an hour, at the least, sir," I answered.

I noticed Mr Fawcett say something to the skipper; and then they both looked up at the sails. The captain nodded, as though giving his assent to some proposal. The next moment the second lieutenant gave the order to range the wash-deck tubs along the deck, and to fill them. This was soon done; and while some of the hands were busy drawing water from over the side, and pouring it into the tubs, others came aloft and rigged whips at the yard-arms, by means of which water from the tubs was hoisted aloft in buckets and emptied over the sails until every inch of canvas that we could spread was thoroughly saturated with water. Thus the small interstices between the threads of the fabric were filled, and the sails enabled to retain every breath of air that might come along. By the time that this was done the first cat's-paws of the approaching breeze were playing around us, distending our lighter sails for a moment or two, and then dying away again. But light and evanescent as these cat's-paws were, they were sufficient to get the brig round with her jib-boom pointing straight for the chase once more; and a minute or two later the first of the true breeze reached us, and we began to glide slowly ahead before it, with squared yards. The men were still kept busy with the buckets, however, for, in order that the sails should be of any real service to us, it was necessary to keep them thoroughly wet, and this involved the continuous drawing and hoisting aloft of water, for the sun's rays were so intensely ardent that the water evaporated almost as rapidly as it was thrown upon the canvas.

The breeze came down very slowly, and seemed very loath to freshen; but this, tantalising though it was to us, was all in our favour, for we thus practically carried the breeze down with us, while the two strange sail away in the western board remained completely becalmed. Of this latter fact I soon had most satisfactory evidence, for, without having recourse at all to my sextant, I was enabled, in that atmosphere of crystalline clearness, to see with the naked eye that we were steadily raising them, an hour's sailing having brought the bulwark rail of both craft flush with the horizon at my point of observation. By this time, however, the breeze had slid some three miles ahead of us, its margin, where it met and overran the glassy surface of the becalmed sea ahead, being very distinctly visible. At last, too, the wind was manifesting some slight tendency to freshen, for, looking aft, I saw that all our after canvas, even to the heavy mainsail which was hanging in its brails, was swelling out and drawing bravely, while the little streak of froth and foam-bells that gathered under our sharp bows, and went sliding and softly seething aft into our wake, told me that we were slipping through the water at a good honest six-knot pace. With this most welcome freshening of the wind the necessity to keep the canvas continuously wet came to an end; and the men, glad of the relief, were called down on deck to clean up the mess made by the lavish use of the water.

Another half-hour passed, and the strange craft were hull-up, when the captain hailed me from the deck in the wake of the main rigging.

"What is the latest news of the strangers, Mr Grenville?" he asked. "Has the breeze yet reached them?"

"No, sir; not yet," I answered; "but I expect it will in the course of the next half-hour. They are hull-up from here, sir; and I should think that you ought to be able to see the mast-heads of the larger craft—the brig—from the deck, by this time."

Hearing this, the skipper and Mr Fawcett walked forward to the fore-castle, the former levelling the telescope that he carried in his hand, and pointing it straight ahead. Then, removing the tube from his eye, the captain handed over the instrument to the second luff, who, in his turn, took a good long look, and returned the telescope to the captain. They stood talking together for a minute or two; and then Captain Bentinck, glancing up at me, hailed.

“Mr Grenville,” said he, “I am about to send this glass up to you by means of the signal halyards. I want you to keep an eye on those two craft down there, and report anything particular that you may see going on; and let me know when the breeze reaches them, and whether they keep together when it does so.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” I answered. And when the telescope came up I made myself comfortable, feeling quite prepared to remain in the cross-trees for the rest of the watch.

The breeze, meanwhile, continued steadily to freshen, and when at length it reached the two strange sail ahead of us we were buzzing along, with a long, easy, rolling motion over the low swell, at a speed of fully nine knots, with a school of porpoises gambolling under our bows—each of them apparently out-vying the others in the attempt to see which of them could shoot closest athwart our cut-water without being touched by it—and shoal after shoal of flying-fish sparking out from the bow surge and streaming away to port and starboard like so many handfuls of bright new silver coins flung hither and thither by Father Neptune.

As the strangers caught the first of the breeze they squared away before it; but I presently saw that, instead of steering precisely parallel courses, as though they intended to continue in each other’s company, they were diverging at an angle of about forty-five degrees, the brig bringing the wind about two points on her port quarter, while the schooner, steering a somewhat more northerly course, held it about two points on her starboard quarter. Thus, while they were running almost directly away from us, they were also rapidly widening the distance between each other, and it would therefore be very necessary for the skipper to make up his mind quickly which of the two craft he would pursue—for it was clear that, by this manoeuvre on their part, they had rendered it impossible for us to chase them both.

I was in the act of reporting this matter to the skipper and the second lieutenant, who were walking the quarter-deck together, when Mr Fawcett—who, with the captain, had come to a halt at my hail—suddenly reeled, staggered, and fell prone upon the deck with a crash. The skipper instantly sprang to his assistance, as did young Christy, a fellow mid of mine, who was pacing fore and aft on the opposite side of the deck, and three or four men who were at work about some job in the wake of the main rigging; and between them they raised the poor fellow up and carried him below. I subsequently learned—when I eventually descended from aloft—that the surgeon had reported him to be suffering from sunstroke, which was complicated by an injury to the skull sustained by his having struck his head upon a ring-bolt in the deck as he fell.

Meanwhile, during the temporary confusion that ensued on deck in consequence of this untoward incident, I employed myself in the careful measurement of the angle made by the mast-heads of the two strange sail with the now sharply defined horizon, and noting the result upon the back of an envelope which I happened to have in my jacket pocket. I had scarcely done this when the skipper hailed me, asking whether we seemed to be gaining anything upon the strangers, or whether I thought that they were running away from us. I replied that the breeze had reached them too recently to enable me to judge, but that I hoped to be in a position to let him know definitely in the course of the next half-hour. I then explained to him what I had done, and he was pleased to express his approval. Meanwhile we continued to steer a course about midway between that of the two strangers, by which means it was hoped that we should be able to keep both in sight, in readiness to haul up for that one upon which we seemed to be most decidedly gaining.

The breeze still continued to freshen upon us, to such an extent that when my watch told me it was time to re-measure my angle, we were bowling along at the rate of nearly twelve knots, and the sea was beginning to rise, while our lighter studding-sail booms were buckling rather ominously. I took my angle again, and, rather to my surprise, found that we were slightly gaining upon the schooner, while the brig was fully holding her own with us, if indeed she was not doing something even better than that. I reported this to the skipper, who seemed to have made up his mind already as to his course of action; for upon hearing what I had to say he instantly gave orders for our helm to be shifted in pursuit of the schooner. Then, seeming suddenly to remember that it was my watch below, he hailed me, telling me that I might come down.

Having reached the deck, I at once trotted below to make my preparation for taking the sun’s meridian altitude, for it was now drawing on towards noon.

When, a little later, I again went on deck, I found that the wind had continued to freshen, and was now blowing a really strong breeze, while the sea had wrinkled under the scourging of it to a most beautiful deep dark-blue tint, liberally dashed with snow-white patches of froth as the surges curled over and broke in their chase after our flying hull. Our canvas was now dragging at the spars and sheets like so many teams of cart-horses, the delicate blue shadows coming and going upon the cream-white surfaces as the ship rolled with the regularity of a swinging pendulum. Every inch of our running gear was as taut as a harp-string, and through it the wind piped and sang as though the whole ship had been one gigantic musical instrument; while over all arched the blue dome of an absolutely cloudless sky, in the very zenith of which blazed the sun with a fierceness that made all of us eager to seek out such small patches of fugitive shadow as were cast by the straining canvas. The sun was so nearly vertical that our bulwarks, although they were high, afforded us no protection whatever from his scorching rays.

The two strange sail were by this time visible from our deck, and it was apparent that, in the strong breeze which was now blowing, we were rapidly overhauling the schooner, while the brig was not only holding her own with us, but had actually increased her distance, as she gradually hauled to the wind, so as to allow us to run away to leeward of her.

The pursuit of the schooner lasted all through the afternoon, and it was close upon sunset when we arrived within

range of her, and plumped a couple of 24-pound shot clean through her mainsail, whereupon her skipper saw fit to round-to all standing, back his topsail, and hoist Spanish colours, only to haul them down again in token of surrender. Whereupon Mr Seaton, our first lieutenant, in charge of an armed boat's crew, went away to take possession of the prize, and since I was the only person on board possessing even a passable acquaintance with the Spanish language, I was ordered to accompany him.

Our prize proved to be the *Dolores*, of two hundred tons measurement, with—as we had suspected—a cargo of slaves, numbering three hundred and fifty, which she had shipped in one of the numerous creeks at the mouth of the Congo on the previous day, and with which she was bound for Rio Grande. Her crew were transferred to the *Shark*; and then—the second lieutenant being ill and quite unfit for service—I was put in command of her, with a crew of fourteen men, and instructed to make the best of my way to Sierra Leone. My crew of fourteen included Gowland, our master's mate, and young Sinclair, a first-class volunteer, as well as San Domingo, the servant of the midshipmen's mess, to act as steward, and the cook's mate. We therefore mustered only five fore-castle hands to a watch, which I thought little enough for a schooner of the size of the *Dolores*; but as we hoped to reach Sierra Leone in a week at the outside, and as the schooner was unarmed, Captain Bentinck seemed to think that we ought to be able to manage fairly well. By the time that we had transferred ourselves and our traps to the prize it had fallen quite dark. The *Shark* therefore lost no time in hauling her wind in pursuit of the strange brig, which by this time had run out of sight, and of which the skipper of the *Dolores* professed to know nothing beyond the fact that she was French, was named the *Suzanne*, and was running a cargo of slaves across to Martinique.

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## Chapter Two.

### Captured by a pirate.

When, in answer to the summons of our 24-pounders, the captain of the *Dolores* rounded-to and laid his topsail to the mast, he did not trouble his crew to haul down the studding-sails, for he knew that his ship was as good as lost to him, and the result was that the booms snapped short off at the irons, like carrots, leaving a raffle of slatting canvas, gear, and thrashing wreckage for the prize crew to clear away. Thus, although we at once hauled-up for our port upon parting company with the *Shark*, we had nearly an hour's hard work before us in the dark ere the studding-sails were got in, the gear unrove and unbent, and the stumps of the booms cleared away, and I thought it hardly worth while to get a fresh set of booms fitted and sent aloft that night. We accordingly jogged along under plain sail until daylight, when we got the studding-sails once more upon the little hooker and tried her paces. She proved to be astonishingly fast in light, and even moderate, weather, and I felt convinced that had the wind not breezed up so strongly as it did on the previous day, the *Shark* would never have overtaken her.

During the following two days we made most excellent progress, the weather being everything that one could desire, and the water smooth enough to permit of the hatches being taken off and the unfortunate slaves brought on deck in batches of fifty at a time, for an hour each, to take air and exercise, while those remaining below were furnished with a copious supply of salt-water wherewith to wash down the slave-deck and clear away its accumulated filth. It proved to be a very fortunate circumstance that Captain Bentinck had permitted us to draw the negro San Domingo as one of our crew, for the fellow understood the language spoken by the slaves, and was able to assure them that in the course of a few days they would be restored to freedom, otherwise we should not have dared to give them access to the deck in such large parties, for they were nearly all *men*, and fine powerful fellows, who, unarmed as they *were*, could have easily taken the ship from us and heaved us all overboard.

The *Dolores* had been in our possession just forty-eight hours, and we were off Cape Three Points, though so far to the southward that no land was visible, when a sail was made out on our lee bow, close-hauled on the larboard tack, heading to the southward, the course of the *Dolores* at the time being about north-west by west. As we closed each other we made out the stranger to be a brig, and our first impression was that she was the *Shark*, which, having either captured or lost sight of the craft of which she had been in chase, was now returning, either to her station or to look for us and convoy us into Sierra Leone; and, under this impression, we kept away a couple of points with the object of getting a somewhat nearer view of her. By sunset we had raised her to half-way down her courses, by which time I had come to the conclusion that she was a stranger; but as Gowland, the master's mate, persisted in his assertion that she was the *Shark*, we still held on as we were steering, feeling persuaded that, if she were indeed that vessel, she would be anxious to speak to us; while, if she should prove to be a stranger, no great harm would be done beyond the loss of a few hours on our part.

The night fell overcast and very dark, and we lost sight of the stranger altogether. Moreover the wind breezed up so strongly that we were obliged to hand our royal and topgallant-sail and haul down our gaff-topsail, main-topmast staysail, and flying-jib; the result of the freshening breeze being that a very nasty sea soon got up and we passed a most uncomfortable night, the schooner rolling heavily and yawing wildly as the seas took her on her weather quarter. We saw no more of the stranger that night, although some of us fancied that we occasionally caught a glimpse of something looming very faint and indefinite in the darkness away to windward.

Toward the end of the middle watch the weather rapidly improved, the wind dropped, and the sea went down with it, although the sky continued very overcast and the night intensely dark. By four bells in the morning watch the wind had died away almost to a calm, and with the first pallor of the coming dawn the clouds broke away, and there, about a mile on our weather quarter—that is to say, dead to windward of us—lay the stranger of the preceding night, black and clean-cut as a paper silhouette against the cold whiteness of the eastern sky, rolling heavily, and with a number of hands aloft rigging out studding-sail booms. The brig, which was most certainly not the *Shark*, was heading directly for us, and I did not like the look of her at all, for she was as big as the sloop, if not a trifle bigger, showed nine guns of a side, and was obviously bent upon getting a nearer view of us. We lost no time in getting our studding-sails aloft on the starboard side, bracing the yards a trifle forward, and shaping a course that would give us a chance ultimately to claw out to windward of our suspicious-looking neighbour; but she would have none of it, for while we were still

busy a ruddy flash leapt from her bow port, a cloud of smoke, blue in the early morning light, obscured the craft for a few seconds, and a round shot came skipping toward us across the black water, throwing up little jets of spray as it came, and finally sinking less than twenty yards away.

"Well aimed, but not quite enough elevation," exclaimed I to Gowland, who had charge of the deck, and who had called me a moment before. "Now, who is the fellow, and what does he mean by firing at us? Is he a Frenchman, think you, and does he take us for a slaver—which, by the way, is not a very extraordinary mistake to make? We had better show him our bunting, I think. Parsons," to a man who was hovering close by, "bend on the ensign and run it up to the gaff-end."

"There is no harm in doing that, of course," remarked Gowland; "but he is no Frenchman—or at least he is not a French cruiser; I am sure of that by the cut of his canvas. Besides, we know every French craft on the station, and Johnny Crapaud has no such beauty as that brig among them. No; if you care for my opinion, Grenville, it is that yonder fellow is a slaver that is not too tender of conscience to indulge in a little piracy at times, when the opportunity appears favourable, as it does at present. I have heard that, in contradiction of the adage that 'there is honour among thieves', there are occasionally to be found among the slavers a few that are not above attacking other slavers and stealing their slaves from them. It saves them the bother of a run in on the coast, with its attendant risk of losses by fever, and the delay, perhaps, of having to wait until a cargo comes down. Ah, I expected as much!" as another shot from the stranger pitched close to our taffrail and sent a cloud of spray flying over us. "So much for his respect for our bunting."

"If the schooner were but armed I would make him respect it," I exclaimed, greatly exasperated at being obliged to submit tamely to being fired at without the power to retaliate. "But," I continued, "since we cannot fight we will run. The wind is light, and that brig must be a smart craft indeed if, in such weather as this, we cannot run away from her."

The next quarter of an hour afforded us plenty of excitement, for while we were doing our best to claw out to windward of the brig she kept her jib-boom pointed straight at us, and thus, having a slight advantage of the wind, contrived to lessen the distance between us sufficiently to get us fairly within range, when she opened a brisk fire upon us from the 18-pounder on her forecastle. But, although the aim was fairly good, no very serious damage was done. A rope was cut here and there, but was immediately spliced by us; and when we had so far weathered upon our antagonist as to have brought her fairly into our wake, the advantage which we possessed in light winds over the heavier craft began to tell, and we soon drew away out of gunshot.

So far, so good; but I had been hoping that as soon as our superiority in speed became manifest the brig would bear up and resume her voyage to her destination—wherever that might be. But no; whether it was that he was piqued at being beaten, or whether it was a strong vein of pertinacity in his character that dominated him, I know not, but the skipper of the strange brig hung tenaciously in our wake, notwithstanding the fact that we were now steadily drawing away from him. Perhaps he was reckoning on the possibility that the breeze might freshen sufficiently to transfer the advantage from us to himself, and believing that this might be the case, I gave instructions to take in all our studding-sails, and to brace the schooner up sharp, hoping thus to shake him off. But even this did not discourage him; for he promptly imitated our manoeuvre, although we now increased our distance from him still more rapidly than before.

Meanwhile the wind was steadily growing more scant, and when I went on deck after breakfast I found that we were practically becalmed, although the small breathing, which was all that remained of the breeze, sufficed to keep the little hooker under command, and give her steerage way. The brig, however, I was glad to see, was boxing the compass some three miles astern of us, and about a point on our lee quarter.

It was now roasting hot, the sky was without a single shred of cloud to break its crystalline purity, and the sun poured down his beams upon us so ardently that the black-painted rail had become heated to a degree almost sufficient to blister the hand when inadvertently laid upon it, while the pitch was boiling and bubbling out of the deck seams. The surface of the sea was like a sheet of melted glass, save where, here and there, a transient cat's-paw flecked it for a moment with small patches of delicate blue, that came and went as one looked at them. Even the flying-fish seemed to consider the weather too hot for indulgence in their usual gambols, for none of them were visible. I was therefore much surprised, upon taking a look at the brig through my glass, to see that she had lowered and was manning a couple of boats.

"Why, Pringle," said I to the gunner, whose watch it was, "what does that mean? Surely they are not going to endeavour to tow the brig within gunshot of us, are they? They could never do it; for, although there is scarcely a breath of wind stirring, this little beauty is still moving through the water; and so long as she has steerage way on her we ought to be able—"

"No, sir, no; no such luck as that, I'm afraid," answered the man. "May I have that glass for a moment? Thank you, sir!"

He placed the telescope to his eye, adjusted it to his focus, and looked through it long and intently.

"Just as I thought, Mr Grenville," he said, handing back the instrument. "If you'll take another squint, sir, you'll see that they're getting up tackles on their yard-arms. That means—unless I'm greatly mistaken—that they're about to hoist out their longboat; and that again means that they'll stick a gun into the eyes of her, and attack us with the boats in regular man-o'-war fashion. But they ain't alongside of us yet, and won't be for another hour and a half if the wind don't die away altogether—and, somehow, I don't fancy it's going to do that. No, what I'm most afraid of is"—and he took a long careful look round—"that in this flukey weather the brig may get a breeze first, and bring it down with her, when—ay, and there it is, sure enough! There's blue water all round her, and I can see her canvas filling to it, even with my naked eye. And there she swings her yards to it. It'll be 'keep all fast with the boats' now! If that

little air o' wind only sticks to her for half an hour she'll have us under her guns, safe enough!"

It was as Pringle said. A light draught of air had suddenly sprung up exactly where the brig happened to lie; and by the time I had got my telescope once more focused upon her, she was again heading up for us, with her weather braces slightly checked, and quite a perceptible curl of white foam playing about her sharp bows. But it only helped her for about half a mile, and then left her completely becalmed, as before, while we were still stealing along at the rate of perhaps a knot and a quarter per hour. The skipper of the brig allowed some ten minutes or so to elapse, possibly waiting for another friendly puff of wind to come to his assistance, but, seeing no sign of any such thing, he hoisted out his longboat, lowered a small gun—to me it looked like a 6-pounder—into her, and dispatched her, with two other boats, in chase of us. The dogged determination which animated our pursuers was clearly exemplified by their behaviour; they made no attempt to cross with a rush the stretch of water intervening between us and them, but settled down steadily to accomplish the long pull before them as rapidly as possible consistent with the husbanding of their strength for the attack when they should arrive alongside. As they pushed off from the brig she fired a gun and hoisted Brazilian colours.

"The affair begins to look serious, Pringle," I said, as I directed my telescope at the boats. "There must be close upon forty men in that attacking-party, and we do not mount so much as a single gun. Now, I wonder what their plan of attack will be? Will they dash alongside and attempt to carry us by boarding, think you; or will they lie off and pound us with their gun until we haul down our colours, or sink?"

"They may try both plans, sir," answered Pringle. "That is to say, they may begin by trying a few shots at us with their gun, and if they find that no good I expect they'll try what boarding will do for them. But they won't sink us; that's not their game. It's the slaves they believe we've got in the hold that they're after; so, if they bring their boat-gun into play you'll find that it'll be our top-hammer they'll aim at, so as to cripple us. They'll not hull us if they can help it."

"Well, they shall not set foot upon this deck if I can help it," said I. "Pass the word for the boatswain to come aft, Pringle, if you please. He will probably be able to tell us whether there are any boarding-nettings in the ship. If there are, we will reeve and bend the tricing lines at once, and see all clear for tricing up the nets."

"Ay," assented the gunner. "I think you'll be wise in so doing, sir; there's nothing like being prepared. Pass the word for the boatswain to come aft," he added, to the little group of men constituting the watch, who were busy on the forecastle.

The word was passed, and presently the boatswain came along.

"Boatswain," said I, "have you given the spare gear of this craft an overhaul as yet?"

"Well, sir, I have, and I haven't, as you may say," answered that functionary. "I knows, in a general sort of a way, what we've got aboard of us, but I haven't examined anything in detail, so to speak. The fact is, seeing that the trip was likely to be only a short one, and we've been kept pretty busy since we joined the hooker, I've found plenty else to do."

"Well, can you tell me whether there are any boarding-nettings in the ship?" I asked.

"Boarding-nettings!" answered the boatswain. "Oh yes, sir; I came across what I took to be a pile of 'em down below in the sail room, yesterday."

"Good!" said I. "Then let them be brought on deck at once, and see that all is ready for tricing them up, should those boats succeed in getting dangerously near to us."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the man. And away he hurried forward to attend to the matter.

Then I turned to the gunner.

"Mr Pringle," said I, "have the goodness to get the arm-chest on deck, and see that the crew are armed in readiness to repel those attacking boats."

"I hope it may not come to that, Mr Grenville," said the gunner; "if it does, I'm afraid it'll be a pretty bad look-out for some of us, considerin' our numbers. But, of course, it's the only thing to do." He took a look round the horizon, directed his gaze first aloft, then over the side, and shook his head. "The sun's eating up what little air there is," he remarked gloomily, "and I reckon that another ten minutes 'll see us without steerage way." And he, too, departed to carry out his instructions.

There seemed only too much reason to fear that the gunner's anticipations with regard to the wind would prove true; but while I stood near the transom, watching the steady relentless approach of the boats—which were by now almost within gunshot of us—I suddenly became aware of a gentle breeze fanning my sun-scorched features, and the slight but distinct responsive heel of the schooner to it; and in another minute we were skimming merrily away at a speed of quite five knots under the benign influence of one of those partial breezes which, on a calm day at sea, seem to spring up from nowhere in particular, last for half an hour or so, and then die away again. In the present case, however, the breeze lasted nearly two hours before it failed us, by which time we had left the brig hull-down astern of us, and had enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing the boats abandon the chase and return to their parent ship.

These partial breezes are among the most exasperating phenomena which tax a sailor's patience. They are, of course, only met with on exceptionally calm days, and not always then. They consist simply of little eddies in the otherwise motionless atmosphere, and are so strictly local in their character that it is by no means uncommon to see a ship sailing briskly along under one of them, while another ship, perhaps less than a mile away, is lying helpless in

the midst of a stark, breathless calm. Or two ships, a mile or two apart, may be seen sailing in diametrically opposite directions, each of them with squared yards and a fair wind. Under ordinary circumstances the fickle and evanescent character of these atmospheric eddies is of little moment; they involve a considerable amount of box-hauling of the yards, and cause a great deal of annoyance to the exasperated and perspiring seamen, very inadequately compensated by the paltry mile or so which the ship has been driven toward her destination; and their aggravating character begins and ends there.

But when one ship is chasing, or being chased by, another, it is quite a different matter; for the eccentric behaviour of these same partial breezes may make all the difference between capturing a prize, and helplessly watching the chase sail away and make good her escape. Or, as was the case with ourselves, it may make precisely the difference between losing a prize and retaining possession of her. Thus we felt supremely grateful to the erratic little draught of air that swept us beyond the reach of the pursuing boats; but we piped a very different tune when, some two hours later, we beheld the brig come bowling along after us under the influence of a slashing breeze, while we lay becalmed in the midst of a sea of glass and an atmosphere so stagnant that even the vane at our mast-head drooped motionless save for the oscillation imparted to it by the heave of the schooner over the swell. We had, of course, long ere this, got the boarding-nettings up and stretched along in stops, with the tricing lines bent on, and everything ready for tricing up at a moment's notice; but, remembering the number of men that I had seen in the boats, I felt that, should the brig succeed in getting alongside, there was a tough fight before us, in which some at least of our brave fellows would lose the number of their mess; and I could not help reflecting, rather bitterly, that if the breeze were to favour us instead of the brig, a considerable loss of life would be avoided. But that the brig would get alongside us soon became perfectly evident, for she was already within a mile of us, coming along with a spanking breeze, on the starboard tack, with her yards braced slightly forward, all plain sail set, to her royals, the sheets of her jibs and stay-sails trimmed to a hair, and every thread drawing perfectly, while around us the atmosphere remained absolutely stagnant.

I looked for her to open fire upon us as soon as she drew up within range; but although her guns were run out—and were doubtless loaded—she came foaming along in grim silence; doubtless her skipper saw, as clearly as we did, that he had us now, and did not think it necessary to waste powder and shot to secure what was already within his power. His aim was, apparently, to range up alongside us on our port quarter, and when at length he had arrived within a short half-mile of us, with no sign of the smallest puff of wind coming to help us, I gave orders to trice up and secure the nettings, and then for all hands to range themselves along the port bulwarks in readiness to repel the boarders. It was now too late for us to dream of escape, for even should the breeze, that the brig was bringing down with her, reach us, we were by this time so completely under her guns that she could have unrigged us with a single well-directed broadside.

Anxious though I was as to the issue of the coming tussle, I could not help admiring that brig. She was a truly beautiful craft; distinctly a bigger vessel than the *Shark*, longer, more beamy, with sides as round as an apple, and with the most perfectly moulded bows that it was possible to conceive. She was coming very nearly stem-on to us, and I could not therefore see her run, but I had no doubt that it was as perfectly shaped as were her bows, for I estimated her speed at fully eight knots, and for a vessel to travel at that rate in such a breeze she must of necessity have possessed absolute perfection of form. She was as heavily rigged as a man-o'-war, and her canvas—which was so white that it must have been woven of cotton—had evidently been cut by a master hand, for the set of it was perfect and flatter than any I had ever seen before. She was coppered to the bends, was painted black to her rails, with the exception of a broad red ribbon round her, and was pierced for eighteen guns.

When she had arrived within about half a cable's-length of us she suddenly ran out of the breeze that had helped her so well, and instantly floated upright, with all her square canvas aback in the draught caused by her own speed through the stagnant atmosphere; and now we were afforded a fresh opportunity to gauge the strength of her crew, for no sooner did this happen than all her sheets and halyards were let go, and the whole of her canvas was clewed up and hauled down together, man-o'-war fashion. And thus, with her jibs and stay-sails hauled down, and her square canvas gathered close up to her yards by the buntlines and leech-lines, she swerved slightly from her previous course and headed straight for us, still sliding fast through the water with the "way" or momentum remaining to her, and just sufficient to bring her handsomely alongside.

"Now stand by, lads!" I cried. "We must not only beat those fellows off, but must follow them up when they retreat to their own ship. She will be a noble prize, well worth the taking!"

The men responded to my invocation with a cheer—it is one of the most difficult things in the world to restrain a British sailor's propensity to cheer when there is fighting in prospect—and as they did so the brig yawed suddenly and poured her whole starboard broadside of grape slap into us. I saw the bright flashes of the guns, and the spouting wreaths of smoke, snow-white in the dazzling sunshine, and the next instant felt a crashing blow upon my right temple that sent me reeling backward into somebody's arms, stunned into complete insensibility.

My first sensation, upon the return of consciousness, was that of a splitting, sickening headache, accompanied by a most painful smarting on the right side of my forehead. I was lying prone upon the deck, and when I attempted to raise my head I found that it was in some way glued to the planking—with my own blood, as I soon afterwards discovered—so effectually that it was impossible for me to move without inflicting upon myself excruciating pain.

My feeble movements, however, had evidently attracted the notice of somebody, for as I raised my hands toward my head, with some vague idea of releasing myself, I heard a voice, which I identified as that of the carpenter, murmur, in a low, cautious tone.

"Don't move, Mr Grenville; don't move, sir, for all our sakes. Hold on as you are, sir, a bit longer; for if them murderin' pirates sees that you're alive they'll either finish you off altogether or lash you up as they've done the rest of us; and then our last chance 'll be gone."



"What has happened, then, Simpson?" murmured I, relaxing my efforts, as I endeavoured to collect my scattered wits.

"Why," answered Chips, "that brig that chased us—you remember, Mr Grenville?—turns out to be a regular pirate. As they ranged up alongside of us they poured in a whole broadside of grape that knocked you over, and killed five outright, woundin' six more, includin' yourself, after which of course they had no difficulty in takin' the schooner. Then they clapped lashin's on those of us that I s'pose they thought well enough to give 'em any trouble; and now they're transferrin' the poor unfortunate slaves, with the water and provisions for 'em, from our ship to their own. What they'll do after that the Lord only knows, but I expect it'll be some murderin' trick or another; they're a cut-throat-lookin' lot enough in all conscience!"

Yes; I remembered everything now; the carpenter's statement aided my struggling memory and enabled me to recall all that had happened up to the moment of my being struck down by a grape-shot. But what a terrible disaster was this that had befallen us—five killed and six wounded out of our little party of fifteen! And, in addition to that, we were in the power of a band of ruthless ruffians who were quite capable of throwing the quick and the dead alike over the side when they could find time to attend to us!

"Who are killed, Simpson?" I asked.

"Hush, sir! better not talk any more just now," murmured the carpenter. "If these chaps got the notion into their heads that you was alive, as like as not they'd put a bullet through your skull. They'll soon be finished with their job now, and then we shall see what sort of fate they're going to serve out to us."

I dared not look up nor move my head in any way, to see what was going on, but by listening I presently became aware that the last of the slaves had passed over the side, and that the pirates were now transferring the casks of water and the sacks of meal from our ship to their own, which—the water being perfectly smooth—they had lashed alongside the schooner, with a few fenders between the two hulls to prevent damage by the grinding of them together as they rose and fell upon the long scarcely perceptible undulations of the swell. About a quarter of an hour later the rumbling of the rolling water-casks and the loud scraping sound of the meal-sacks on the deck ceased; there was a pause of a minute or so, and then I heard a voice say in Spanish:

"The last of the meal and the water has gone over the rail, señor capitan. Is there anything else?"

"No," was the answer, in the same language; "you may all go back to the brig. And, Dominique, see all ready for sheeting home and hoisting away the moment that I join you. There is a little breeze coming, and it is high time that we were off. Now, Juan, are you ready with the auger?"

"Quite ready, señor," answered another voice.

"Then come below with me, and let us get this job over," said the first voice, and immediately upon this I heard the footsteps of two people descending the schooner's companion ladder. Some ten minutes later I heard the footsteps returning, and presently the two Spaniards were on deck. Then there came a slight pause, as though the pirate captain had halted to take a last look round.

"Are you quite sure, Juan, that the prisoners are all securely lashed?" asked he.

"Absolutely, señor," answered Juan. "I lashed them myself, and, as you are aware, I am not in the habit of bungling the job. They will all go to the bottom together, the living as well as the dead!"

"Bueno!" commented the captain. "Ah, here comes the breeze! Aboard you go, Juan, amigo. Cast off, fore and aft, Dominique, and hoist away your fore-topmast staysail."

Another moment and the two miscreants had gone.

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## Chapter Three.

### The sinking of the "Dolores."

As the sound of the hanks travelling up the brig's fore-topmast stay reached my ear I murmured cautiously to the carpenter.

"Is it safe for me to move now, Chips?"

"No, sir, no," he replied, in a low, strained whisper; "don't move a muscle for your life, Mr Grenville, until I tell you, sir. The brig's still alongside, and that unhung villain of a skipper's standin' on the rail, holdin' on to a swifter, and lookin' down on our decks as though, even now, he ain't quite satisfied that his work is properly finished."

At this moment I felt a faint breath of air stirring about me, and heard the small, musical lap of the tiny wavelets alongside as the new breeze arrived. The brig's canvas and our own rustled softly aloft; and the cheeping of sheaves and parrals, the rasping of hanks, the flapping of canvas, and the sound of voices aboard the pirate craft gradually receded, showing that she was drawing away from us.

When, as I supposed, the brig had receded from us a distance of fully a hundred feet, the carpenter said, this time in his natural voice:

"Now, Mr Grenville, you may safely move, sir, and the sooner you do so the better, for them villains have scuttled us,

and I don't doubt but what the water's pourin' into us like a sluice at this very moment. So please crawl over to me, keepin' yourself well out of sight below the rail, for I'll bet anything that there's eyes aboard that brig still watchin' of us, and cast me loose, so that I can make my way down below and plug them auger-holes without any loss of time."

I at once made a move, with the intention of getting upon my hands and knees, but instantly experienced the most acute pain in my temple, due to the fact, which I now discovered, that the shot which had struck me down had torn loose a large piece of the skin of my forehead, which had become stuck fast to the deck planking by the blood which had flowed from the wound and had by this time dried. To loosen this flap of skin cost me the most exquisite pain, and when at length I had succeeded in freeing myself, and rose to my hands and knees, so violent a sensation of giddiness and nausea suddenly swept over me that I again collapsed, remaining insensible for quite ten minutes according to the carpenter's account.

But even during my unconsciousness I was vaguely aware of some urgent, even vital, necessity for me to be up and doing, and this it was, I doubt not, that helped me to recover consciousness much sooner than I should have done but for the feeling to which I have alluded. Once more I rose to my hands and knees, half-blinded by the blood that started afresh from my wound, and crawled over to where the carpenter lay on the deck, in what must have been a most uncomfortable attitude, hunched up against the port bulwarks, with his wrists lashed tightly together behind his back and his heels triced up to them, so that it was absolutely impossible for him to move or help himself in the slightest degree.

As I approached him the poor fellow groaned rather than spoke.

"Thank God that you're able to move at last, Mr Grenville! I was mortal afraid that 'twas all up with you when you toppled over just now. For pity's sake, sir, cut me loose as soon as you can, for these here lashin's have been drawn so tight that I've lost all feelin' in my hands and feet, while my arms and legs seems as though they was goin' to burst. What! haven't you got a knife about you, sir? I don't know what's become of mine, but some of the men'll be sure to have one, if you enquire among 'em."

Hurried enquiry soon revealed the disconcerting fact that we could not muster a solitary knife among us; we had all either lost them, or had had them taken from us; there was therefore nothing for it but to heave poor Chips over on his face, and cast him adrift with my hands, which proved to be a longer and much more difficult job than I could have believed, owing, of course, to the giddiness arising from my wound, which made both my sight and my touch uncertain. But at length the last knot was loosed, the last turn of the rope cast off, and Chips was once more a free man.

But when he essayed to stand, the poor fellow soon discovered that his troubles were not yet over. For his feet were so completely benumbed that he had no feeling in them, and when he attempted to rise his ankles gave way under him and let him down again upon the deck. Then, as the blood once more began to circulate through his benumbed extremities, the pricking and tingling that followed soon grew so excruciatingly painful that he fairly groaned and ground his teeth in agony. To allay the pain I chafed his arms and legs vigorously, and in the course of a few minutes he was able to crawl along the deck to the companion, and then make his way below.

Meanwhile, taking the utmost care to keep my head below the level of the bulwarks, in order that my movements might not be detected by any chance watcher aboard the pirate craft, I cast loose the three unwounded men—the carpenter being the fourth of our little band who had escaped the destructive broadside of the pirates—and bade them assist me to cast off the lashings which confined the wounded. We were still thus engaged when Simpson came up through the companion, dripping wet, glowering savagely, and muttering to himself.

"Well, Chips," said I, "what is the best news from below?"

"Bad, sir; pretty nigh as bad as can be," answered the carpenter. "They've scuttled us most effectually, bored eight holes through her skin, close up alongside the kelson, three of which I've managed to plug after a fashion, but by the time I had done them the water had risen so high that I found it impossible to get at t'others. I reckon that sundown will about see the last of this hooker; but by that time yonder brig 'll be pretty nigh out of sight, and we shall have a chance to get away in the boats, which, for a wonder, them murderin' thieves forgot to damage."

"There is no hope, you think, of saving the schooner, if all of us who are able were to go below and lend you a hand?" said I.

"No, sir; not the slightest," answered Simpson. "If I could have got below ten minutes earlier, something might have been done; but now we can do nothing."

"Very well, then," said I; "let San Domingo take two of the uninjured men to assist him in getting up provisions and water, while you and the other overhaul the boats, muster their gear, and get everything ready for putting them into the water as soon as we may venture to do so without attracting the attention of the brig and tempting her to return and make an end of us."

While these things were being done, the wounded men assisted each other down into the little cabin of the schooner, where I dressed their injuries and coopered them up to the best of my ability with such means as were to hand; after which, young Sinclair, whose wound was but a slight one, bathed my forehead, adjusted the strip of displaced skin where it had been torn away, and strapped it firmly in position with sticking-plaster.

Meanwhile, the breeze which had sprung up so opportunely to take the brig out of our immediate neighbourhood not only lasted, but continued to freshen steadily, with the result that by the time that we had patched each other up, and were ready to undertake the mournful task of burying our slain, the wicked but beautiful craft that had inflicted such grievous injury and loss upon us had slid away over the ocean's rim, and was hull-down. By this time also the water had risen in the schooner to such a height that it was knee-deep in the cabin. We lost no time, therefore, in

committing our dead comrades to their last resting-place in the deep, and then proceeded to get the boats into the water, and stock them with provisions for our voyage.

Now, with regard to this same voyage, I had thus far been much too busy to give the matter more than the most cursory consideration, but the time had now arrived when it became necessary for me to decide for what point we should steer when the moment arrived for us to take to the boats. Poor Gowland was, unfortunately, one of the five who had been killed by the brig's murderous broadside of grape, and I was therefore deprived of the benefit of his advice and assistance in the choice of a port for which to steer; but I was by this time a fairly expert navigator myself, quite capable of doing without assistance if necessary. I therefore spread out a chart on the top of the skylight, and, with the help of the log-book, pricked off the position of the schooner at noon that day, from which I discovered that Cape Coast Castle was our nearest port. But to reach it with the wind in the quarter from which it was then blowing it would be necessary to put the boats on a taut bowline, with the possibility that, even then, we might fall to leeward of our port, whereas it was a fair wind for Sierra Leone. I therefore arrived at the conclusion that, taking everything into consideration, it would be my wisest plan to make for the latter port, and I accordingly determined there and then the proper course to be steered upon leaving the schooner.

The *Dolores* had by this time settled so deeply in the water that it was necessary to complete our preparations for leaving her without further delay. San Domingo had contrived to get together and bring on deck a stock of provisions and fresh water that I considered would be ample for all our needs, and Simpson had routed out and stowed in the boats their masts, sails, oars, rowlocks, and, in short, everything necessary for their navigation. It now remained, therefore, only to get the craft themselves in the water, stow the provisions and our kits in them, and be off as quickly as possible.

The boats of the *Dolores* were three in number, namely, a longboat in chocks on the main hatch, a jolly-boat stowed bottom-upward in the longboat, and a very smart gig hung from davits over the stern. The longboat was a very fine, roomy, and wholesome-looking boat, big enough to accommodate all that were left of us, as well as our kits and a very fair stock of provisions; but in order to afford a little more room and comfort for the wounded men I decided to take the gig also, putting into her a sufficient quantity of provisions and water to ballast her, and placing Simpson in charge of her, with one of the unwounded and two of the most slightly-wounded men as companions, leaving six of us to man the longboat.

Simpson's estimate of the time at our disposal proved to be a very close one, for the sun was within ten minutes of setting when, all our preparations having been completed, I followed the rest of our little party over the side, and, entering the longboat, gave the order to shove off and steer north-west in company. There was at this time a very pleasant little breeze blowing, of a strength just sufficient to permit the boats to carry whole canvas comfortably; the water was smooth, and the western sky was all ablaze with the red and golden glories of a glowing tropical sunset.

We pulled off to a distance of about a hundred yards from the schooner; and then, as with one consent, the men laid in their oars and waited to see the last of the little hooker. Her end was manifestly very near, for she had settled to the level of her waterways, and was rolling occasionally on the long, level swell with a slow, languid movement that dipped her rail amidships almost to the point of submergence ere she righted herself with a stagger and hove her streaming wet side up toward us, all a-glitter in the ruddy light of the sunset, as she took a corresponding roll in the opposite direction; and we could hear the rush and swish of water athwart her deck as she rolled. She remained thus for some three or four minutes, each roll being heavier than the one that had preceded it, when, quite suddenly, she seemed to steady herself; then, as we watched, she slowly settled down out of sight, on a perfectly even keel, the last ray of the setting sun gleaming in fire upon her gilded main truck a moment ere the waters closed over it.—“*Sic transit!*” muttered I, as I turned my gaze away from the small patch of whirling eddies that marked the spot where the little beauty had disappeared, following up the reflection with the order: “Hoist away the canvas, lads, and shape for Sierra Leone!”

Five minutes later we were speeding gaily away, with the wind over our starboard quarter and the sheets eased well off, the gig, with her finer lines and lighter freight, revealing so marked a superiority in speed over the longboat, in the light weather and smooth water with which we were just then favoured, that she was compelled to luff and shake the wind out of her sails at frequent intervals to enable us to keep pace with her. Meanwhile, the pirate brig, which, like ourselves, had gone off before the wind, had sunk below the horizon to the level of her lower yards. I had, between whiles, been keeping the craft under fairly steady observation, for what Simpson had said relative to the behaviour of her captain, and the attitude of doubt and suspicion which the latter had exhibited when leaving the *Dolores*, had impressed me with the belief that he would possibly cause a watch to be maintained upon the schooner until she should sink, with the object of assuring himself that none of us had escaped to tell the tale of his atrocious conduct. As I have already mentioned, the *Dolores* happened to founder at the precise moment of sunset, and in those latitudes the duration of twilight is exceedingly brief. Still, following upon sunset there were a few minutes during which the light would be strong enough to enable a sharp eye on board the distant brig, especially if aided by a good glass, to detect the presence of the two boats under sail; and I was curious to see whether anything would occur on board the brig to suggest that such a discovery had been made. For a few minutes nothing happened; the brig's canvas, showing up clear-cut and purple almost to blackness against the gold and crimson western sky, revealed no variation in the direction in which she was steering; but presently, as I watched the quick fading of the glowing sunset tints, and noted how the sharp silhouette of the brig's canvas momentarily grew more hazy and indistinct, I suddenly became aware of a lengthening out of the fast-fading image, and I had just time to note, ere they merged into the quick-growing gloom, that the two masts had separated, showing that the brig had shifted her course and was now presenting a broadside view to us. That I was not alone in marking this change was evidenced a moment later when, as we drew up alongside the gig, which had been waiting for us, Simpson hailed me with the question:

“Did ye notice, sir, just afore we lost sight of the brig, that he'd hauled his wind?”

“Yes,” said I, “I did. And I have a suspicion that he has done so because he had a hand aloft to watch for and report

the sinking of the schooner; and that hand has caught sight of the boats. If my suspicion is correct, he has waited until he believed we could no longer see him, and has then hauled his wind in the hope that by making a series of short stretches to windward he will fall in with us in the course of an hour or two and be able to make an end of us. He probably waited until we had been lost sight of in the gathering darkness, and then shifted his helm, forgetful of the fact that his canvas would show up against the western sky for some few minutes after ours had vanished."

"That's just my own notion, sir," answered Simpson, "I mean about his wishin' to fall in with and make an end of us. And he'll do it, too, unless we can hit upon some plan to circumvent him."

"Quite so," said I. "But we must see to it that we do not again fall into his hands. And to avoid doing so I can think of nothing better than to shift our own helm and shape a course either to the northward or the southward, with the wind about two points abaft the beam; by doing which we may hope to get to leeward of the brig in about two hours from now, when we can resume our course for Sierra Leone with a reasonable prospect of running the brig out of sight before morning. And, as she was heading to the northward when we last saw her, our best plan will be to steer a southerly course. So, up helm, Simpson, and we will steer west-south-west for the next two hours, keeping a sharp look-out for the brig, meanwhile, that we may not run foul of her unawares."

We had been steering our new course about an hour when it became apparent that a change of weather was brewing, though what the nature of the impending change might be it was, for the moment, somewhat difficult to guess. The appearance of the sky seemed to portend a thunderstorm, for it had rapidly become overcast with dense masses of heavy, lowering cloud, which appeared to have quite suddenly gathered from nowhere in particular, obscuring the stars, yet not wholly shutting out their light, for the forms of the cloud-masses could be made out with a very fair degree of distinctness, and it would probably also have been possible to distinguish a ship at the distance of a mile. It was the presence of this light in the atmosphere, emanating apparently from the clouds themselves, that caused me rather to doubt the correctness of the opinion, pretty freely expressed by the men, that what was brewing was nothing more serious than an ordinary thunderstorm, for I had witnessed something of the same kind before, on the coast, but in a much more marked degree, it is true; and in that case the appearance had been followed by a tornado, brief in duration, but of great violence while it lasted. I therefore felt distinctly anxious, the more so as it was evident that the wind was dropping, and this I regarded as a somewhat unfavourable sign. I hailed Simpson, and asked him what he thought of the weather.

"Why, sir," replied he, "the wind's droppin', worse luck; and if it should happen to die away altogether, or even to soften down much more, we shall have to out oars and pull; for we must get out of sight of that brig somehow, between this and to-morrow morning."

"Undoubtedly," said I. "But that is not precisely what I mean. What is worrying me just now is the question whether there is anything worse than thunder behind the rather peculiar appearance of the sky."

He directed his glance aloft, attentively studying the aspect of the heavens for a few moments.

"It's a bit difficult to say, sir," he replied at last. "Up to now I've been thinkin' that it only meant thunder and, perhaps, heavy rain; but, now that you comes to mention it, I don't feel so very sure that there ain't wind along with it, too—perhaps one of these here tornaders. And if that's what's brewin' we shall have to stand by, and keep our weather eye liftin'; for a tornader'd be an uncommon awk'ard customer to meet with in these here open boats."

"You are right there," said I, "and for that reason it is especially desirable that the boats should keep together for mutual support and assistance, if need be. You have the heels of us in such light weather as the present, and might very easily slip away from and lose sight of us in the darkness; therefore I think that, for the present at all events, in order to avoid any such possibility, you had better take the end of our painter and make it fast to your stern ring-bolt. Then you can go ahead as fast as you please, without any risk of the boats losing sight of each other."

This was done, and for the next two hours the boats slid along in company, the gig leading and towing the longboat, although of course the towing did not amount to much, since we in the longboat kept our sails set to help as much as possible.

It was by this time close upon three bells in the first watch, and notwithstanding the softening of the wind I came to the conclusion that we must have slipped past the brig, assuming our suspicion, that she had hauled her wind in chase of us, to be correct. I therefore ordered our helm to be shifted once more, and our course to be resumed in a north-westerly direction.

Half an hour later the wind had dropped to a flat calm, and Simpson suggested that, as a measure of precaution, in view of the possibility that the brig might still be to the westward of us, we should get out the oars and endeavour to slip past her. But I had for some time past been very anxiously watching the weather, and had at length arrived at the conclusion that, if not an actual tornado, there was at least a very heavy and dangerous squall brewing away down there in the eastern quarter, before which, when it burst, not only we, but also the brig, would be obliged to run; and, since she would run faster than the boats, it was no longer desirable, but very much the reverse, that we should lie to the westward of her. I therefore decided to keep all fast with the oars for the present, and employ such time as might be left to us upon the task of preparing the boats, as far as possible, for the ordeal to which it seemed probable that they were about to be subjected.

I was far less anxious about the safety of the longboat than I was about that of the gig, which, being a more lightly built and much smaller craft, and excellent in every way for service in fine weather and smooth water, yet was not adapted for work at sea except under favourable conditions; and in the event of it coming on to blow hard I feared that in the resulting heavy sea she would almost inevitably be swamped. I therefore turned my attention to her in the first instance, causing her to be brought alongside the longboat and her painter to be made fast to the ring-bolt in the stern of the latter, thus reversing the original arrangement; my intention being that, in the event of bad weather, the

longboat should tow the gig. This done, I caused Simpson to unstep the gig's single mast and lay it fore and aft in the boat, with the heel resting upon and firmly lashed to the small grating which covered the after end of the boat between the backboard of the stern-sheets and the stern-post, while the head was supported by a crutch formed of two stretchers lashed together and placed upright upon the bow thwart, the whole being firmly secured in place by the two shrouds attached to the mast-head. Thus arranged, the mast formed a sort of ridge pole which sloped slightly upward from the boat's stern toward the bow. The lugsail was then unbent from the yard, stretched across the mast, fore and aft—thus forming a sort of tent over the open boat for about two-thirds of her length from the stern-post,—and the luff and after-leach of the sail were then strained tightly down to the planking of the boat outside, by short lengths of ratline led underneath the gig's keel. The result was that, when the job was finished, the gig was almost completely covered in by the tautly stretched sail, which I hoped would not only afford a considerable amount of protection to her crew, but would also keep out the breaking seas that would otherwise be almost certain to swamp her.

So pleased was I with the job, when it was finished, that I determined to attempt something similar in the case of the longboat. This craft was rigged with two masts, carrying upon the foremast a large standing lug and a jib, and a small lug upon the jigger-mast. These latter, that is to say the jigger-mast and the small lug, we stretched over the stern-sheets of the longboat in the same way as we had dealt with the gig, leading the yoke lines forward on top of the sail, so that the steering arrangements might not be interfered with. And finally, we close-reefed the big lug and took in the jib, when we were as ready for the expected outfly as it was possible for people in such circumstances to be.

That something more than a mere thunderstorm was impending there could now be no possible doubt. The strange light of which I have spoken, and which had seemed to emanate from the clouds, had now vanished, giving place to a darkness so profound that it seemed to oppress us like some material substance; and the silence was as profound and oppressive as the darkness—so profound, indeed, was it that any accidental sound which happened to break in upon it, such as the occasional lap of the water against the boat's planking, the scuffling movement of a man, or the intermittent flap of the sail as the longboat stirred upon a wandering ridge of slow-moving swell, smote upon the ear with an exaggerated distinctness that was positively startling to an almost painful degree. I accounted for this, at the time, by attributing it in part to the peculiar electrical condition of the atmosphere, and partly to the fact that we had all been wrought up to a condition of high nervous tension by the conviction that something—we did not quite know what—was impending, for which we were all anxiously on the watch, and that, in the Cimmerian darkness which enveloped us, we were obliged to depend for adequate warning, upon our hearing alone, which caused us to resent and be impatient of all extraneous sounds. That this was to some extent the case was evidenced by the fact that, our preparations finished, we had, as with one consent, subsided into silence, which was broken only in a low whisper if anyone felt it necessary to speak.

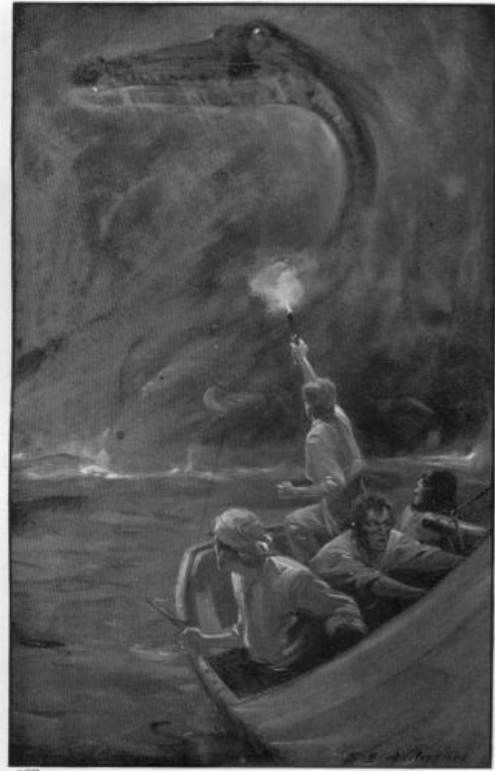
Suddenly, as we all sat waiting for the outburst of the threatened storm, a long-drawn, piercing cry pealed out across the water, apparently from a spot at no very great distance from us. It was, although not very loud, the most appalling, soul-harrowing sound that had ever smote upon my ears, and a violent shudder of horror thrilled me from head to foot, while I felt the hair bristling upon my scalp as I listened to it. Three times in rapid succession did that dreadful, heart-shaking cry come wailing to our ears, and then all was silence again for perhaps half a minute, when the men about me began to ask, in low, tense whispers, whence it came, and from what creature. To me, I must confess, the sounds seemed to be such as might burst from the lips of a fellow-creature in the very uttermost extremity of mortal terror. But that could scarcely be, for how could mortal man have approached us within a distance of some two hundred yards in that breathless calm, unless, indeed, in a boat—of which there had certainly been no sign in any direction half an hour before. And if one were disposed for a moment to admit such a possibility, whence could a boat come? The pirate brig had been the only craft in sight when darkness fell, and it was scarcely within the bounds of probability that anything then out of sight beneath the horizon could have drawn so near to us during the succeeding hours of darkness. Or again, admitting such a possibility, what dreadful happening could have wrung from human lips such blood-curdling sounds? We were all eagerly discussing the matter, some of the men agreeing with me that the sounds were human, while others stoutly maintained that they were supernatural, and boded some terrible disaster to the boats, when our discussion was abruptly broken in upon by the sound of rippling water near at hand, as though a craft of some kind were bearing down upon us at a speed sufficient to raise a brisk surge under her bows, and the next instant the voice of San Domingo pealed out in piercing tones, eloquent of the direst terror:

“Oh, look dere ebervbody! Wha' dat?” And with a howl like that of a wild beast he rose to his feet and made a frantic dash aft for the stern-sheets, fighting his way past the other men, and trampling over the unfortunate wounded in the bottom of the boat, quite beside himself with fright.

And indeed there was some excuse for the negro's extraordinary behaviour; for, intense as was the darkness that enveloped us, the water was faintly phosphorescent, and we were thus enabled to discern indistinctly that, less than a hundred yards distant from us, a huge creature, which, to our excited imaginations, appeared to be between two and three hundred feet long, had risen to the surface and was now slowly swimming in a direction that would carry it across the bows of the longboat at a distance of some fifty feet. I frankly confess that for a moment I felt petrified with horror, for the creature was streaming with faintly luminous phosphorescence, and thus, despite the darkness, it was possible to see that it was certainly not a whale, or any other known denizen of the deep, for it had a head shaped somewhat like that of an alligator—but considerably larger than that of any alligator I had ever seen—attached to a very long and somewhat slender neck, which it carried stretched straight out before it at an angle of some thirty degrees with the surface of the water, and which it continually twisted this way and that, as though peering about in search of something. Suddenly it paused, lifted its head high, and looked straight toward the boats, and at the same moment a whiff of air came toward us heavily charged with a most disgusting and nauseating odour, about equally suggestive of musk and the charnel-house. Its eyes, distinctly luminous, and apparently about two feet apart, were directed straight toward the longboat, and the next instant it began to move toward us, again stretching out its neck.

Instinctively I sprang to my feet and whipped a pistol out of my belt, cocking it as I did so.

“Out pistols, men, and give it a volley!” I cried; and the next instant a somewhat confused pistol discharge shattered the breathless silence of the night. My own fire I had withheld, waiting to see what would be the effect of the men’s



GRENVILLE FIRES AT THE HUGE SEA MONSTER

fire upon the monster. Whether any of them had hit it or not I could not tell, but beyond causing the creature to pause for an instant, as though startled by the flashing of fire, the volley seemed to have had no effect, for the horrid thing continued to approach the boat, while the disgusting odour which it emitted grew almost overpowering. It must have been within ten feet of the boat when I aimed straight at its left eye, and pulled the trigger of my pistol. For an instant the bright flash dazzled me so that I could see nothing, but I distinctly heard the “phitt” of the bullet, felt a hot puff of the sickening stench strike me full in the face, and became aware of a tremendous swirl and disturbance of the water as the huge creature plunged beneath the surface and was gone.

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## Chapter Four.

### The boats in a tornado.

We had scarcely begun to settle down again, and regain the control of our nerves after this distinctly startling adventure, when the dense canopy of black cloud overhead was rent asunder by a flash of lightning, steel-blue, keen, and dazzlingly vivid, that seemed to strike the water within a dozen fathoms of us, while simultaneously we were deafened by a crackling crash of thunder of such appalling loudness and violence that one might have been excused for believing that the very foundations of the earth had been riven asunder. So tremendous was the concussion of it that I quite distinctly felt the longboat quiver and tremble under its influence. And the next instant down came the rain in a regular tropical, torrential downpour, causing the sea to hiss as though each individual drop of rain were red-hot, and starting us to work at once in both boats with the balers, to save our provisions from being ruined. I happened to be looking away in a westerly direction when the flash came, and despite its dazzling vividness I caught a momentary glimpse of the pirate brig in that direction, and not more than a mile distant from us. None of the others in the boats appeared to have seen her, for no one said a word; and I only hoped that no eye on board her had happened to be turned toward us at the moment, or they could not have failed to see us; and she was altogether too near for my liking. I said nothing, for it seemed unnecessary to disturb the men by informing them of her whereabouts; and I comforted myself with the reflection that when the squall should come—as come it now must in a very few minutes,—she, like ourselves, would be compelled to scud before it; and as she would run two feet to our one, she would soon run us out of sight.

We had not long to wait. After the deluge of rain had lasted some three minutes it ceased as abruptly as it had begun, and for the space of perhaps half a minute there was no sound to be heard save the trickling and dripping of water from the drenched sails of the boats. Then, far away to the eastward there gradually arose a low moaning, and a sudden fierce puff of hot air struck us for an instant, filling the sails of the longboat with a loud flap and leaving them hanging motionless again.

“Here it comes, lads,” cried I. “Out with your starboard oars, and get the boat’s head round. That will do. Lay them in again; and one hand tend the mainsheet here aft.”

The moaning sound rapidly grew in intensity until it became first a deep roar, like the bellowing of a thousand angry bulls, and finally a deafening shriek, while away to the eastward a long line of white, foaming water became visible, rushing down toward us with incredible rapidity. The next instant the squall struck us, and the white water boiled up high over the sterns of the boats, burying us so deeply that for a moment I thought it was all over with us, and that, despite our precautions, we must inevitably be swamped. But the good canvas of which the longboat’s sails were

made fortunately withstood the strain, as also did the stout hemp rigging which supported the mast, and as the furious blast swooped down upon us we gathered way and were the next moment flying to the westward before the hurricane, our bows buried deeply in the boiling surge. And now we had good reason to congratulate ourselves upon the fact that we in the longboat had taken the gig in tow, for the strain of the smaller boat kept the longboat's stern down, and in a great measure counteracted the leverage of the mast which tended to depress and bury our bows, but for which I feel convinced that the longboat, stout craft though she was, would have been driven under by the tremendous force of the wind and swamped by an inrush of water over the bows.

The outfly was accompanied by a furious storm of thunder and lightning, the illumination of which was most welcome to us, for it enabled us to see where we were going, and incidentally revealed to us our enemy, the pirate brig, scudding away to leeward under a goose-winged fore-topsail, and with her topgallant-masts struck.

We now had reason to congratulate ourselves upon the foresight which had suggested to us the idea of partially covering in the boats with their sails as a protection against the inroads of the sea; for within ten minutes of the outburst not only was the air full of flying sheets of spindrift and scud-water that, but for the precaution referred to, would have kept us busily baling, but in addition to this a short, steep, tumultuous sea was rapidly rising, which at frequent intervals rose above the boats' gunwales, and would have pooped us dangerously had the boats been left in their ordinary unprotected condition. As it was, beyond a pint or so of water that occasionally made its way inboard despite all our precautions, and needed to be baled out again, we had no trouble.

The first fury of the squall lasted about a quarter of an hour. During that time the thunder and lightning were incessant, but afterwards they gradually died away, while the wind moderated to a steady gale; and it was by the illumination of the last flash of lightning that we caught sight of the brig hove-to on the starboard tack, under a storm-staysail, with her head to the northward. The sight of her thus was a great relief to me, for it seemed to indicate that we had been fortunate enough to escape detection, and that we need have no great fear of interference from her, since the fact of her having hove-to so early indicated a keen desire on the part of her captain to remain as near as possible to the coast.

As the night wore on the sea rapidly became higher and more dangerous, our difficulties and embarrassments increasing in proportion. Our chief difficulty arose from the necessity to keep the gig in tow, for with the rising of the sea this speedily became more dangerous to both boats, from the frequent fierce tugs of the painter that connected the two boats together. The rope was a new and stout one, and there was not much fear that the boats would break away from each other, but the strain set up by the alternate slackening and tautening of the painter, as first one boat and then the other was urged forward by the 'scend of the sea, was tremendous, and strained both craft to a positively dangerous degree. Yet it was not possible for us to cast the gig adrift, for, had we done so, we should at once have run away from and lost her in the darkness; that is, unless she had set her own sails, and this, of course, could not have been done without depriving her of the protection of them as a covering against the breaking seas, which would have resulted in her being instantly swamped. But at length matters became so serious with us both that it was evident that something must be done, and that very quickly too; for some of the drags were so violent that they threatened to tear the stern out of the longboat, which was by this time leaking badly. After considering the matter, therefore, most carefully, I decided upon a course of procedure that I hoped might better our condition somewhat. It happened that among the stores which we had hurriedly stowed away in the longboat when preparing to leave the schooner was a drum of lamp oil, which we intended to use in our binnacle lamps at night, and which we thought might perhaps also prove very useful for other purposes as well, and this I now ordered the men to find for me. Fortunately it was easy to get at it, and it was soon produced. It was a full can, and had never been opened; therefore I gave instructions that, instead of drawing the bung, it should be punctured with a sufficient number of holes to allow the oil to ooze through pretty freely. This done, I instructed the men to clear away the longboat's painter and to bend it securely round the boat's oars in such a manner as to make a sort of sea-anchor of them, leaving about a fathom of the end of the painter clear to which to bend on the oil-can. Then, when everything was ready, I shouted to Simpson in the gig, telling him what I proposed to do, and giving him his instructions, after which we in the longboat hauled down the jib, and, watching our opportunity, rounded-to, threw overboard our sea-anchor, with the oil-can attached, and took in our remaining canvas. This business of rounding-to was a very delicate and ticklish job, for had the sea caught us broadside-on we must inevitably have been capsized or swamped; but we were fortunate enough to do everything at precisely the right moment, with the result that the two boats swung round, head-on to the sea, without accident, and without shipping very much water.

The oars, lashed together in the middle, and kept squarely athwartships by means of a span, afforded, after all, only the merest apology for a sea-anchor, and barely gave just sufficient drag to keep the boats stem-on to the sea without appreciably retarding their drift to leeward; but it was none the worse for this, since, with their drift scarcely retarded, they rode all the more easily; and presently, when the oil began to exude from the can and diffuse itself over the surface of the water, there was a narrow space just ahead of us where the seas ceased to break, with the result that in the course of ten minutes we were riding quite dry and comfortable, except for the scud-water that came driving along. This, however, we soon remedied by converting our mainsail into a kind of roof, strained over the lowered mast, similar to the arrangement in the gig, after which, save for the extravagant leaps and plunges of the boats, which were very trying to the wounded, we had not much to complain of.

The gale reached its height about four o'clock on the following morning, at which hour it was blowing very hard, with an exceedingly heavy and dangerous sea, in which the boats could not possibly have lived but for the precautions which had been taken for their preservation; and even as it was, we repeatedly escaped disaster only by the merest hair's-breadth, and by what seemed to be more a combination of fortuitous circumstances than anything else. Taken altogether, that night was one of the most tense and long-drawn-out anxieties that I had ever, up to then, experienced. About two bells in the morning watch the gale broke, and from that moment the strength of the wind moderated so rapidly that by eight bells all danger had passed, the boats were riding dry, and we were able to get breakfast in peace and comfort—all the greater, perhaps, from the fact that when day dawned the pirate brig was nowhere to be seen. By nine-o'clock the wind and sea had both moderated sufficiently to enable us to resume our voyage. I therefore, with some difficulty, secured an observation of the sun for the determination of our longitude,

and we then proceeded to re-bend our sails, step the masts, and get under way, steering to the northward and westward under double-reefed canvas. Finally, about noon, we were able to shake out our reefs and proceed under whole canvas, the sea by that time having almost completely gone down, leaving no trace of the previous night's gale beyond a long and very heavy swell, in the hollows of which the two boats continually lost sight of each other.

But although, by the mercy of Providence, we had weathered the gale, we had not by any means escaped scathless, for when we had once more settled down and had found opportunity to overhaul our stock of provisions, it was found that, despite our utmost precautions, an alarmingly large proportion of them had become damaged by rain and sea water, to such an extent, indeed, that about half of them had been rendered quite unfit for use, and we therefore threw that portion overboard, since there was obviously no advantage in wasting valuable space in the preservation of useless stores. And I did this the more readily, perhaps, because I calculated that, despite this heavy loss, we should still have enough left to carry us to our destination—provided that we were not detained by calms on the way.

We made excellent progress all that day, our reckoning showing that at three o'clock that afternoon we had traversed a distance of just forty miles since getting under way that morning, which distance was increased to fifty-eight by sunset. Moreover we had done well in another way, for the wounded had all been carefully looked after, and their hurts attended to as thoroughly as circumstances would allow, with the result that at nightfall each man reported himself as feeling distinctly better, notwithstanding the night of terrible hardship and exposure through which all had so recently passed.

The sunset that evening was clear, promising a fine night, while the wind held steady and fair. We were consequently all in high spirits at the prospect of a quick and pleasant passage to Sierra Leone. But as the night advanced a bank of heavy cloud gradually gathered on the horizon to the northward, and the wind began to back round and freshen somewhat, so that about midnight it again became necessary to double-reef our canvas, while the sea once more rose to such an extent that the boats were soon shipping an unpleasant quantity of water over the weather bow. Moreover the wind continued to back until we were broken off a couple of points from our course; so that, altogether, it finally began to look very much as though we were in for another unpleasant night, though perhaps not quite so bad as the one that had preceded it. It is true that we were not just then in any actual danger, for, after all, the strength of the wind was no more than that to which the *Shark* would show single-reefed topsails. But it was more than enough for us, under the canvas which we were carrying, and I had just given the order to haul down a third reef when one of the men who was engaged upon the task of shortening sail suddenly paused in his work and gazed out intently to windward under the sharp of his hand. The next moment he shouted excitedly:

"Sail ho! two points on the weather bow. D'ye see her, sir? There she is. Ah, now I've lost her again; but you'll see her, sir, when we lifts on the top of the next sea. There—now do you see her, sir, just under that patch of black cloud?"

"Ay, ay, I see her," I answered; for as the man spoke I caught sight of a small dark blur, which I knew must be a ship of some sort, showing indistinctly against the somewhat lighter background of cloud behind her. She was about two miles away, and was steering a course that would carry her across our bows at a distance of about a quarter of a mile if we all held on as we were going; and for a moment I wondered whether it was our enemy the pirate brig again putting in an appearance. But an instant's reflection sufficed to dissipate this idea, for, according to all the probabilities, the pirates ought by this time to be well on toward a hundred miles to the eastward of us, while the stranger was coming down, with squared yards, from the northward.

"We must contrive to attract the attention of that craft and get her to pick us up," I cried. "Have we anything in the boat from which we can make a flare?"

A hurried search was rewarded by the production of a piece of old tarpaulin that we were using as a cover and protection to our stock of provisions; and a long strip of this was hurriedly torn off, liberally sprinkled with the oil that still remained in the drum, twisted tightly up, and ignited. The flame sputtered a bit at first, probably from the fact that sea water had penetrated to the interior of the drum and mingled to a certain extent with the oil; but presently our improvised flare burst into a bright ruddy flame, which lighted up the hulls and sails of the boats and was reflected in broad red splashes of colour from the tumbling seas that came sweeping steadily down upon us.

All eyes were now eagerly directed toward the approaching ship, of which, however, we entirely lost sight in the dazzling glare of our torch. But when, after blazing fiercely for about a couple of minutes, until it was consumed, our flare went out and left us once more in darkness, there was no answering signal from the stranger, which was coming down fast before the steadily strengthening breeze.

"Make another one, lads, and light it as quickly as you can," I cried. "We must not let her slip past us. Our lives may depend upon our ability to attract her attention and get her to pick us up. But what is the matter with them aboard there that they have not seen us? Their look-outs must be fast asleep."

"She's a trader of some sort, sir; that's what's the matter with her," answered one of the men. "If she was a man-o'-war, or a slaver, there'd be a better look-out kept aboard of her. If I had my way them chaps what's supposed to be keepin' a look-out should get six dozen at the gangway to-morrer mornin'."

"Hurry up with that flare, lads," I exhorted. "Be as quick with it as you like."

"Ay, ay, sir! we shall be ready now in the twinklin' of a purser's lantern," answered the man who was preparing the torch. "Now, Tom, where's that there binnacle lamp again? Shield it from the wind with your cap, man, so's it don't get blowed out while I sets fire to this here flare."

The man was still fumbling with the flare when the stranger, which was now about half a mile distant, suddenly exhibited a lantern over her bows, which her people continued to show until we had lighted our second flare, when the lantern at once disappeared. A couple of minutes later she was near enough for us to be able to make her out as



a full-rigged ship of some seven hundred tons; and presently she swept grandly across our bows, at a distance of about a cable's-length, and, putting her helm down, came to the wind, with her main-topsail to the mast, finally coming to rest within biscuit-toss of us to windward.

As she did so we became aware of a man standing on her poop, just abaft the mizzen rigging, and the next moment a hail through a speaking-trumpet came pealing across the water.

"Ho, the boats ahoy! What boats are those?"

"We are the boats of the slaver *Dolores*, captured by the British sloop-of-war *Shark*, and subsequently attacked and destroyed by a pirate," replied I. "We have been in the boats nearly thirty hours, and several of our people are wounded. We hoped to make our way to Sierra Leone, but narrowly escaped being swamped in a gale last night. I presume you will have no objection to receive us?"

The ship being apparently British, I naturally expected to receive an immediate and cordial invitation to go on board; but, to my intense surprise, and growing indignation, there ensued a period of silence as though the man who had hailed us was considering the matter. I was just about to hail again when the individual seemed to arrive at a decision; for he hailed:

"All right; bring your boats alongside."

We accordingly doused the sails, threw out our oars, and pulled alongside.

As we approached the lee gangway, which had been thrown open to receive us, and about which some half a dozen men were clustered, with lighted lanterns, the man who had hailed us before enquired:

"Will your wounded be able to come up the side; or shall I reeve a whip with a boatswain's-chair for them?"

"Thanks," I replied, "I think we may be able to manage, if your people will lend us a hand."

"How many do you muster?" asked the stranger, presumably the master of the vessel.

"Ten, all told," I answered, "of whom six are more or less hurt. We were fifteen to start with, but five were killed by the fire of the pirate."

"I'm afraid you've had a bad time, takin' it all round," said our interlocutor. "Stand by, chaps, to lend the poor fellers a hand up over the side."

"What ship is this?" I asked, when at length I went up the side and found myself confronted by a very ordinary-looking individual, attired in a suit of thin, rusty-looking blue serge, with a peaked cap of the same material on his head, who extended his hand in cordial welcome to me.

"The *Indian Queen*, of and from London to Bombay, twenty-three days out, with passengers and general cargo," he answered.

"Well," said I, "I am exceedingly obliged to you for receiving us; for, to tell you the truth, after the experiences of last night, I am very glad to find a good, wholesome ship once more under my feet. Open boats are all very well in their way, but they are rather ticklish craft in which to face such a gale as we had last night."

"By the by," he said, "are those boats of yours worth hoisting in?"

"Yes," I said, "they are both very good boats, and it would be a pity to send them adrift if you can find room for them."

"Oh, I dare say we can do that," he answered. "Besides, the skipper might have a word or two to say about it if we was to turn 'em adrift. By the way, Mr—er—"

"Grenville," I prompted, continuing—"I must apologise for not having sooner introduced myself. I am senior midshipman of the *Shark*, and was prize-master of the slaver *Dolores*, which I had instructions to take into Sierra Leone."

"Just so; thank'e," answered the man. "I was going to say, Mr Grenville, that—well, our skipper's a very queer-tempered sort of a man—he was second mate when we left home—and as like as not he may kick up a row about my receivin' you aboard—indeed it wouldn't very greatly surprise me if he was to order you all over the side again; so I thought I'd just better give ye a hint, so as you may know what to expect, and how to act."

"Indeed, I am very much obliged to you for your timely warning, Mr —" said I.

"Carter's my name—Henry Carter," was the reply. "I'm actin' as chief mate now, but I was third when we left London."

"I understand," said I. "But this captain of yours—he is an Englishman, I presume, and I cannot understand the possibility of his raising any objection to your receiving a party of distressed fellow-countrymen aboard his ship. And how comes he to be in command, now, if he was only second when you left home?"

"Well, sir, it's like this," answered Carter, starting to explain. Then he interrupted himself suddenly, saying:

"Excuse me, sir; I see that the hands are about to sway away upon the tackles and hoist in the boats. I'll just give an eye to them, if you don't mind, and see that they don't make a mess of the job."

With the assistance of the *Shark's* people the boats were soon got inboard and stowed, after which my boats' crews were bestowed in the forecabin and the steerage, there happening by good luck to be just sufficient vacant berths in the latter to accommodate the wounded. This matter having been attended to, the mate remarked to me:

"There's a vacant cabin in the cuddy; but the stewards are all turned in, and it would take 'em some time to clear it out and get it ready for you; so perhaps you might be able to make do with a shakedown on the cabin sofa for to-night; or there's my cabin, which you're very welcome to, if you like, and I'll take my watch below on a sofa."

"Thank you very much for your exceedingly kind offer," said I, "but I couldn't think of dispossessing you of your own cabin, even for a single night. The sofa will serve my turn admirably, especially as I had no sleep last night, and not much during the night before. But, before I go below, I should like to hear how it comes about that the man who was second mate of this ship when she left England is now master of her. To bring about such a state of affairs as that you must have lost both your original skipper and your chief mate."

"Yes," answered Carter, "that's exactly what's happened. We've had what the newspapers would call a couple of tragedies aboard here. First of all, the skipper—who looked as strong and healthy a man as you'd meet with in a day's march—was found dead in his bed, on the morning of the fifth day out; and, next, the chief mate—who of course took command, and was supposed to be a total abstainer—was found missin', as you may say, when the steward went to call him, one morning—he'd only been in command four days, poor chap; and the mate—that's our present skipper, Cap'n Williams—gave it out that he must have committed suicide, while in liquor, by jumpin' out of the stern window—which was found to be wide-open, on the mornin' when poor Mr Mowbray was reported missing."

"Very extraordinary," commented I, stifling a prodigious yawn. "And now, Mr Carter, with your kind permission I will go below and lie down, for I feel pretty well tired out."

"Ay, that I'll be bound you do," agreed Carter. "This way, Mr Grenville, and look out for the coamin'—it's a bit extra high."

And, so saying, he led the way into a very handsome saloon under the ship's full poop.

The craft was not a regular Indiaman—that is to say, she was not one of the Honourable East India Company's ships,—but, for all that, she was a very handsome and comfortable vessel, and her cuddy was most luxuriously fitted up with crimson velvet sofas, capacious revolving armchairs screwed to the deck alongside the tables, a very fine piano, with a quantity of loose music on the top of it, some very handsome pictures in heavy gold frames screwed to the ship's side between the ports, a magnificent hanging lamp suspended from the centre of the skylight, with a number of smaller lamps, hung in gimbals, over the pictures, a handsome fireplace, with a wide tiled hearth, now filled with pots of plants, a capacious sideboard against the fore bulkhead, a handsome carpet on the deck, and, in fact, everything that could be thought of, within reason, to render a long sea voyage comfortable and pleasant. The saloon occupied the full width of the ship, the sleeping cabins being below.

With pardonable pride Carter turned up the flame of the swinging lamp—which was the only lamp burning at that hour of the night—to give me a glimpse of all this magnificence.

I quite expected that, having, as it were, done the honours of the ship, Carter would now turn down the lamp and leave me to myself; but he still lingered in an uncertain sort of way, as though he would like to say something, but did not quite know how to begin; so at length, to relieve his embarrassment, I said:

"What is it, Mr Carter? I feel sure you want to tell me something."

"Well," said he, "it's a fact that I have got something on my mind that I'd like to get off it; and yet I dare say you'll think there's nothing in it when I tells you. The fact is, our present skipper's a very curious sort of chap, as I expect you'll find out for yourself afore many hours has gone over your head. Now, I want you to understand, Mr—er—Grenville, that I'm not sayin' this because he and I don't happen to get on very well together—which is a fact; I'm not jealous of him, or of his position, because I couldn't fill it if 'twas offered to me—I'm not a good enough navigator for that,—but I think it's only right I should tell you that, as like as not, he'll not only blow me up sky-high for pickin' you and your men up, when he finds out that you're aboard, but, maybe—well, I dunno whether he'll go quite so far as that, but he may refuse to let you stay aboard, and order you to take to your boats again. Now, if he should—I don't say he will, mind you, but if he should do any such thing, take my advice, and don't go. I don't know how he may be to-morrow. If he kept sober after he turned in he'll be all right, I don't doubt; but if he took a bottle to bed with him—as he's lately got into the habit of doin'—the chances are that he'll turn out as savage as a bear with a sore head; and then everybody, fore and aft—passengers and all—will have to stand by and look out for squalls!"

"Thanks, Mr Carter, very much, for mentioning this," I said. "You gave me a pretty broad hint as to what I might expect, out there on deck, just now, and you may rest assured that I shall not forget it. And you may also rest assured that, should he so far forget what is due to humanity as to order me to leave the ship, I will flatly decline to go."

"Of course, sir, of course you will, and quite right too," commented Carter. "But I'm glad to hear ye say so, all the same. It'll be a great comfort to me—and to the passengers too—to feel that we've got a naval officer aboard, if things should happen to go at all crooked. And now, Mr Grenville, havin' said my say, I'll wish ye good-night, and hope you'll be able to get a good sound sleep between this and morning."

And therewith Carter at length took himself off. But before he was fairly out on deck I was stretched at full length on the sofa, fast asleep.

## Chapter Five.

### Some strange happenings.

I was awakened by the entrance of the stewards, who, at six bells on the following morning, came into the saloon to brush and dust up generally, and lay the tables for nine-o'clock breakfast. The head steward apologised for waking me, and informed me that there was no need for me to disturb myself, also that Carter had informed him of my presence, and commended me to his care. But I had slept like a log, and felt thoroughly refreshed; I therefore went out on deck, and betook myself forward to the eyes of the ship, where I stripped and indulged in the luxury of a shower-bath under the head-pump.

It was a most glorious morning, the sun was shining brilliantly, with a keen bite in his rays already, although he was but an hour high; and there was a strong breeze blowing from the northward, under the influence of which the ship was reeling off her ten knots, under a main topgallant-sail. But I was greatly surprised to see that, instead of steering south, we were heading in for the coast, on a south-westerly course. I made some remark upon this to Carter, who again had the watch, to which he replied:

"Well, you see, sir, it's a fancy of the skipper's. He's got some sort of a theory that, by hugging the coast close, and takin' advantage of the sea and land breezes, as they blows night and mornin', we shall do rather better than we should by thrashin' to wind'ard against the south-east trade. I don't know whether there's anything in it myself, but it's the first time that I've ever heard of the notion. But there he is—and in a blazin' bad temper, too, by the looks of him! Shall I take you aft and introjuce you to him?"

"Certainly," said I. "If we are to have any unpleasantness, let us have it at once, and get it over."

There was, however, to be no unpleasantness—just then, at all events—except in so far as poor Carter was concerned; for when he and I went aft to where Captain Williams—a tall, powerful-looking, and rather handsome man in a barbaric sort of way, with a pair of piercing black eyes, and an abundant crop of black, curly hair, with beard and moustache to match—was standing on the quarter-deck, just outside the entrance of the saloon, the captain stepped forward, and, extending his hand, bade me welcome to his ship with every sign of the utmost friendliness. But he gave poor Carter a terrific wiggling for not having called him when the boats were first sighted, and for receiving us on board without first consulting him.

"For how could you know, Mr Carter," he said, "that the boats were not full of pirates? Less unlikely things than that have happened, let me tell you; and when you come to know this coast as well as I know it, you will be rather more chary of receiving a couple of boats' crews professing to be distressed seamen."

"Oh," said I, "as to that, Mr Carter took pretty good care to satisfy himself as to our *bona fides* before permitting us to come alongside! At all events he made sure that we were British, and I think there are very few Britons who take kindly to piracy."

"Perhaps not, sir, perhaps not; at least I hope that, for the credit of our countrymen, you are right," answered the skipper. "At the same time there are many foreigners who speak English well enough to answer a hail, and I want to impress upon Mr Carter the fact that it was his duty to call me, under the peculiar circumstances, and to allow me to decide as to the advisability of admitting two boat-loads of strangers aboard my ship. Please don't do it again, sir."

Whereupon poor Carter promised to be more circumspect in future, and slunk away with very much the aspect and manner of a beaten dog. I felt very sorry for the man, for, even admitting that the skipper was right—as he certainly was—I thought it would have been in very much better taste if he had taken an opportunity to point out to his subordinate, in private, the imprudence of which he had been guilty, instead of administering a reprimand in the presence of a stranger. Apart from that it appeared to me that there was not very much wrong with the man, and the question arose in my mind whether, despite the protest that Carter had thought it necessary to address to me, he might not be to some extent prejudiced against his skipper. And this feeling was somewhat strengthened when, as, in compliance with Captain Williams's request, I gave him an account of our recent adventures, he informed me that the ship carried a doctor, and at once sent a messenger to that functionary, informing him that some wounded men had been taken on board during the night, and requesting him to give them his best attention forthwith.

As the skipper and I stood talking together, the passengers, who had learned from the stewards that we had been picked up during the night, came hurrying up on deck, one after another, full of curiosity to see the individuals who had joined the ship under such interesting circumstances; and I was duly introduced to them. To take them in what appeared to be the recognised order of their social importance, they were, first, General Sir Thomas Baker, his wife, Lady Hetty Baker, and his rather elderly daughter, Phoebe, returning to India from furlough; Mrs Euphemia Jennings, the young wife of an important official, who had just left her only boy—a lad of five years of age—with friends in England, for his health's sake, and with her a niece of her husband—a Miss Flora Duncan, a most lovely girl of about sixteen. Then came Mr and Mrs Richard Morton, people of some means, who were going to India to try their fortune at indigo planting, under the auspices of a friend and former schoolfellow of the husband, and who had sent home glowing accounts of the great things that might be done in that way by a man of energy with a reasonable amount of capital; and with them went their three children, Frank, Mary, and Susie, aged respectively eleven, eight, and six years. And finally, there were Messrs Fielder, Acutt, Boyne, Pearson, and Taylor—five young men ranging from seventeen to twenty-one years of age, who were going out to take up appointments in the Company's service. All these people were very kind and nice to me, but I could not help being secretly amused at the fiery energy with which the general denounced what he characterised as "the criminal carelessness" of Captain Bentinck in turning me adrift in an unarmed schooner with a crew of only fourteen hands.

"By Jove, sir, I call it little short of murder," he shouted. "The idea of asking you—ay, and expecting you—to take a fully-loaded slaver into port with only fourteen men to back you up, and no guns! The man ought to be ashamed of

himself! But it is just like you navy fellows; you are constantly asking one another to do things which seem impossible!"

"Yes, sir," I said demurely, "and not infrequently we do them."

"Do them!" he exploded. "Yes, I will do you the credit to admit that you never know when you are beaten; and that, I suppose, is why the blue-jackets so often succeed in performing the apparently impossible. But that in no way weakens my contention that your captain was guilty of a piece of most culpable negligence in sending you away without furnishing you with a battery of guns with which to defend yourself and your ship!"

Fortunately, at this moment the breakfast bell rang, and, the general and his wife leading the way, we all trooped into the saloon and seated ourselves at the elegantly furnished and bountifully provided breakfast tables.

During the progress of the meal I of course had a further opportunity to observe the behaviour of the skipper, and when I rose from the table I was obliged to confess to myself that I was puzzled, for I had been quite unable to arrive at any distinct impression of the character of the man. For while, on the one hand, his manner to me was cordial, with the somewhat rough and unpolished geniality of a man of a coarse and violent temperament striving to conquer his natural disposition and render himself agreeable, I could find no fault with the arrangements he proposed to make for my own comfort and that of my men. And his expressions of sympathy with us in our misfortunes were everything that could be wished for; but, somehow, they did not ring true. Thus, when in the course of the conversation—which, as was very natural under the circumstances, rather persistently dwelt upon my little party and our adventures—Captain Williams chose to express his gratification at having fallen in with us and rescued us from a distinctly perilous situation, while his words were as kind and sympathetic as could have been desired, the expression of his countenance seemed to say, almost as plainly as words could speak: "I devoutly wish that you had all gone to the bottom, rather than come aboard my ship!" And I continually found myself mentally asking the question: "Which am I to believe—this man's words, or the expression of his eyes? Is he sincere in what he says, and is he the unfortunate possessor of an expression that habitually gives the lie to his words; or is he, for some sinister purpose of his own, endeavouring to produce a false impression upon us all?" It was quite impossible to find a satisfactory reply to these questions, yet I found a certain amount of guidance in the manner of the passengers toward him; I noticed that every one of them, with the exception of the general, seemed to quail beneath his gaze, and shrink from him. As for the general, despite his somewhat boisterous manner, he was a gentleman, a soldier, and evidently a man who knew not what fear was, and it appeared to me that he was distinctly distrustful of Captain Williams.

At length, by patiently watching, I succeeded in finding an opportunity to divert the conversation from myself and my party; I saw the skipper glance upward toward the tell-tale compass that hung in the skylight, and as his gaze fell again it encountered my own. Instantly a most malignant and ferocious expression swept into his eyes. Undeterred by that, however, I composedly remarked:

"I see, Captain, you are heading in toward the coast; and Mr Carter informs me that you propose to test practically a rather interesting theory that you have formed as to the advantages of the alternate land and sea breezes over those of the regular trades."

"Yes," he growled, "I do. But Mr Carter has no business to discuss my plans or intentions with anybody. I have warned him more than once to keep a silent tongue in his head; but the man is a fool, and will get himself into very serious trouble some day if he doesn't keep his weather eye lifting!"

"Well," I said, "you must not blame him in this case, for the fault—if fault there has been—was mine. I observed the alteration in the ship's course as soon as I stepped out on deck this morning, and remarked upon it, and it was merely in reply to my remark that Mr Carter explained your intentions."

"Well," he answered, "it is a rather fortunate thing for you that I happen to have such intentions, for it affords you a chance to get transhipped into one of your own craft, instead of having to go on with us to Capetown, as you would almost certainly have been obliged to do if I had followed the usual plan and stretched away over toward the South American coast."

"Quite so," I agreed; "it certainly has that advantage, as occurred to me the moment that Mr Carter explained your theory. And it has the further advantage that, should you find you do not make quite such good progress as you hope, you will be well to windward when you eventually decide to stretch offshore into the trade wind."

"Then you think my idea has something in it?" he demanded.

"Something—yes," I agreed; "but I doubt very much whether, taking everything into consideration, you will find that the advantages are worth consideration."

The skipper did not agree with me, and forthwith plunged into a fiery defence of his theory which lasted until some time after we had all risen from the table and adjourned to the poop. In fact, he so completely monopolised my attention up to tiffin time that I was scarcely able to find time to go forward and enquire into the condition of the wounded, and had no opportunity at all to improve my acquaintance with the passengers.

After tiffin, however, the captain retired to his cabin, instead of going on deck again, and as I stepped out of the saloon on to the quarter-deck I felt a hand slide into my arm, and, turning round, found the general alongside me.

"Am I right," said he, as he linked his arm in mine, "in the impression that you do not think very highly of Captain Williams's rather peculiar theory concerning the advantage of 'keeping the coast aboard'—as I believe you sailors term it—rather than following the usual rule of making the most of the south-east trade wind? You are pretty well acquainted with this coast, I suppose, and your ideas on the subject should be of value."

"Well," said I, "the fact is, Sir Thomas, that I do not think very highly of the captain's theory. In theory, no doubt, the idea appears somewhat attractive, but in actual practice I should be inclined to say that the uncertainty of the weather close inshore will probably be found to tell against it. If the sea breeze could be absolutely depended upon to blow every day and all day long, and the land breeze to blow every night and all night long, there would undoubtedly be something in it. But my experience is that these phenomena are not to be depended upon. It often happens that when, according to all the rules, either the sea or the land breeze should be piping up strongly, there is an absolute, persistent calm. Nevertheless, from a purely personal point of view, I am glad that the skipper intends to test his theory, because it will afford me the opportunity to shift myself and my party into one of the ships of the slave-squadron, some one of which we are pretty certain to fall in with before long."

"Ah!" remarked the general, with a curious indrawing of his breath. "I was rather afraid that such might be the case." He paused for a few seconds, and then, taking a fresh grip of my arm, continued: "Do you know, my young friend, I am rather hoping that we shall not fall in with any of the ships of the slave-squadron, and that consequently you and your men will be obliged to go on with us at least as far as Capetown. It is, perhaps, a bit selfish of me to entertain such a wish, but I do, nevertheless."

"Indeed!" said I. "May I ask why, general?"

"Of course you may, my dear boy," he answered. "It is a very natural question. Well, the fact is that certain very curious happenings have taken place on board this ship since she sailed out of the Thames." And he proceeded to repeat to me the story that Carter had already told me as to the disappearance of the original captain and his successor. "Now," he continued, "Captain Matthews's death may have been a perfectly natural one. I don't say that it was not, but up to the hour of his death he looked strong and healthy enough to have lived out the full term of his life. Moreover, he was a most temperate man in every respect. I have, therefore, found it very difficult indeed to discover a satisfactory explanation of his very sudden demise. And, between you and me, although Burgess, the ship's surgeon, has never said as much in words, I firmly believe that the occurrence puzzled him as much as it did me; indeed, his very reticence over the affair only strengthens my suspicion that such is the case. But, puzzling as were the circumstances connected with Captain Matthews's death, I consider that those associated with the death of Mr Mowbray, who took command of the ship in place of Captain Matthews, were at least equally so. Mr Mowbray was a man of some thirty-five years of age, very quiet, unassuming, and gentlemanly of manner; a married man with, as I have understood, a small family to provide for, and consequently very anxious to rise in his profession; ambitious, in his quiet, unassuming way, and evidently a thoroughly steady and reliable man, for I understand that he had served under Captain Matthews for several years. No one of us ever saw him touch wine, spirits, or drink of any description; yet only four days after he had attained to what we may consider the summit of his ambition, by securing the command of this fine ship, he was missing. Williams, our present skipper, offers us the exceedingly improbable explanation that the poor fellow jumped out of his cabin window, and was drowned, while intoxicated. I do not believe it for a moment, nor do any of the rest of us. For my own part I very strongly suspect foul play somewhere, and the very extraordinary explanation which Williams offers of the occurrence only strengthens my suspicion that—well, not to put too fine a point upon it, that he knows more of the matter than a perfectly honest man ought to know. And, in addition to all this, Williams is a secret drunkard, and a man of most violent and ungovernable temper, as you will see for yourself ere long. You will therefore not be very greatly surprised to learn that since he took the command there has been a great deal of uneasiness as well as unpleasantness in the cuddy; and I, for one, am rejoiced to find a naval officer and a party of man-o'-war seamen on board. For I know that after what I have said you will keep your eyes and ears open, and will not hesitate to interfere if you see good and sufficient reason for so doing. You navy fellows have a trick of cutting in where you consider it necessary without pausing to weigh too nicely the strict legality of your proceedings. And if perchance you occasionally step an inch or two beyond the strict limits of the law, you are generally able to justify yourselves."

"What you have just told me, general," said I, "was also told me briefly by Carter last night, and he, too, seemed to consider it necessary to warn me that the skipper is a somewhat peculiar man. Naturally, after such a warning, I have been keeping my eyes and ears open, and I confess that I find the man something of a puzzle. Carter quite led me to anticipate the possibility that Williams might order us down the side into our boats again, instead of which, so far as words, and even deeds, are concerned, I have not the least fault to find. But all the time that he was saying kind things to me this morning, his eyes and the expression of his face belied him."

"Aha! so you noticed that, did you?" observed the general. "Yes, it is quite true; you have very precisely expressed what we have all noticed at one time or another. His eyes belie the words of his lips very often, that is to say when he chooses to be civil, which is not always. When I saw him this morning I quite believed we were in for a particularly unpleasant day, for he had all the appearance of a man in a very bad temper, but for some reason he has seen fit to behave himself to-day. But never fear, you will soon have an opportunity to see what he is like when he chooses to let himself go. His behaviour is then that of a madman, and I am sometimes inclined to believe that he really is mad. But suppose that he should do as Carter suggests he may, and order you and your men to quit the ship, will you go?"

"Most certainly not," said I. "I will only leave this ship when I can transfer myself and my men to some other by means of which I can speedily rejoin my own ship."

"That's right, that's quite right, my boy," approved the general. "Well, I am glad that I have had this little talk with you, for it has eased my mind and put you on the alert. And now, come up on the poop, and make yourself agreeable to the ladies; they will not thank me for monopolising so much of your time and attention."

I took the hint, and followed him up to the poop, where the whole of the cuddy passengers were assembled, the ladies occupied with books, or needlework, or playing with the children, while the men lounged in basket chairs, smoking, reading, or chatting, or danced attendance upon the ladies. I first paid my respects to Lady Baker and her daughter, as in duty bound, and then drifted gradually round from one to another until I finally came to an anchor between Mrs Jennings and her niece, Miss Duncan. But I observed that in every case, whatever the topic might be upon which I started a conversation, the talk gradually drifted round to the subject of the skipper and his

peculiarities, from which I arrived at the conclusion that, after all, Carter and the general must have had some grounds for the apprehensions that they had expressed to me.

Now, of our party of ten who had been received on board the *Indian Queen*, six of us were wounded, and of those six three were so severely hurt as to be quite unfit for duty, and the other three, of whom I was one, were able to do such deck duty as keeping a look-out, taking a trick at the wheel, and so on, but, excepting myself, were scarcely fit to go aloft just yet. But I did not think it right or desirable that those of us who were in a fit state to work should eat the bread of idleness. I had therefore seized the opportunity afforded by my talk with the skipper that morning to suggest that my four unwounded and two slightly-wounded men should assist in the working of the ship; as for myself, I said that I should be very pleased to take charge of one of the watches, if such an arrangement would be of any assistance to him. This, of course, was quite the right and proper thing for me to do, and although the ship carried a complement of thirty hands, all told, I was not in the least surprised that Williams should accept, quite as a matter of course, my offer of the men, three of whom he placed in the port watch, and three in the starboard, the latter being under the boatswain, a big, bullying, brow-beating fellow named Tonkin. But he declined the offer of my personal services, saying that he could do quite well without them. This arrangement having been come to, I made it my business to speak to the boatswain, into whose watch the two slightly-wounded men had been put, informing him of what had passed between the skipper and myself, and requesting him not to send the wounded men aloft, as I did not consider that they could safely venture into the rigging in their partially disabled condition. And I also cautioned the men not to attempt to go aloft, should the boatswain happen to forget what I had told him, and order them to do so, taking care to give them this caution in Tonkin's presence and hearing in order that there might be no mistake or misunderstanding.

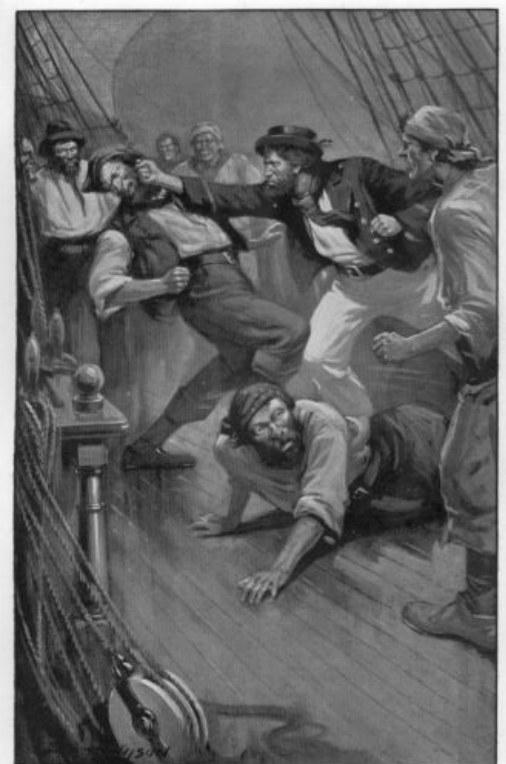
I was therefore very much surprised, and considerably annoyed, when, as we were all gathered together on the poop that same evening, during the first dogwatch, I heard the sounds of a violent altercation proceeding on the fore-deck, and, on looking round, discovered that the disputants were one of my own men and the boatswain, the latter of whom was threatening the other with a rope's-end. Without waiting to hear or see more I instantly dashed down the poop-ladder and ran forward, pushing my way through a little crowd who had gathered round the chief actors of the scene; and as I did so I became suddenly conscious of the fact that the men among whom I was forcing my way were a distinctly ruffianly, ill-conditioned lot, who seemed more than half disposed to resent actively my sudden appearance among them.

"Now then, Martin," I said sharply, "what is all this disturbance about, and why is the boatswain threatening you with that rope's-end?"

"Why, sir," answered Martin, who was suffering from a grape-shot wound in the leg, "I understood you to say this morning as none of us as is wounded is to go aloft; yet here's this here bo's'un swears as he'll make me go up and take the turn out o' that fore-to'gallan' clew, instead of sendin' one of his own people up to do it. I couldn't climb the riggin' without bustin' this here wound of mine open again—"

"Of course not," I answered. "I thought I had made it clear to you, Tonkin," turning to the boatswain, "that I do not wish any of my wounded men to be sent aloft. That man is in no fit condition to go up on to the topsail-yard."

"Ain't he?" retorted the boatswain in a very offensive manner. "While he's in my watch I'm goin' to be the judge of what he's fit to do, and what he's not fit to do; and I say he's quite fit to do the job that I've ordered him to do. And he's goin' to do it too, or I'll know the reason why. And, what's more, I won't have no brass-bound young whipper-snappers comin' for'ard here to interfere with me and tell me what I'm to do and what I'm not to do; and I hope that's speakin' plain enough for to be understood, Mr Midshipman What's-your-name. Now then," he continued, turning to



1853 "SIMPSON DASHED IN AND CAUGHT THE BOATSWAIN A TERRIFIC BLOW"

Martin again, "will you obey my orders, or must I make yer?" And he took

fresh grip upon the rope's-end with which he was threatening the man.

"Drop that rope's-end at once, you scoundrel!" I exclaimed angrily; for I saw by the man's manner, and by the approving sniggers of the men who surrounded us, that he had been deliberately and intentionally insulting to me, and that unless I took a firm stand at once the ship would speedily become untenable to my men and myself. "You must surely be drunk, Tonkin, or you would never dream of—"

"Drunk am I?" he exclaimed savagely, wheeling suddenly round upon me. "I'll soon show you whether I'm drunk or not," and he raised the rope's-end with the manifest intention of striking me across the face with it. But before the blow could fall there was a sudden rush of feet; the sniggering loafers who hemmed us in were knocked right and left like so many ninepins, and, with a cry of "Take that, you dirty blackguard, as a lesson not to lift your filthy paws again against a king's officer," Simpson, our carpenter's mate, an immensely strong fellow, dashed in and caught the boatswain a terrific blow square on the chin, felling him to the deck, where he lay senseless, and bleeding profusely at the mouth.

"Put that man in irons!" bellowed a furious voice behind me; and, turning round, I beheld the skipper glaring like an infuriated animal past me at the carpenter's mate, who was standing with clenched fists across the prostrate body of the boatswain.

"For what reason, pray, Captain Williams?" demanded I indignantly. "I do not know how long you have been here, for I did not hear you approach, but unless you have but this instant come upon the scene you must be fully aware that it was your boatswain who started this disgraceful brawl. His behaviour was absolutely brutal, and—"

I got no further; for while I was still speaking the villain suddenly seized me round the waist, and, being much more powerful than myself, pinned my arms close to my sides. "Here," he exclaimed to one of his own people standing by, "just lash this young bantam's arms behind him, and seize him to the rail, while I attend to the other." And before I well knew where I was I found myself securely trussed up, and saw Simpson, Martin, and another of my men, fighting like lions at bay, finally overborne by numbers and beaten senseless to the deck.

"You will be very sorry for this outrage before you are many days older, Captain Williams," I said as the fellow presently came and planted himself square in front of me.

"Shall I, indeed?" he sneered, thrusting his hands deep in his trousers pockets, and balancing himself on the heaving deck with his legs wide apart. "What makes you think so?"

"Because I will report your conduct to the captain of the first man-o'-war that we fall in with on the coast, and you will be called upon to give an account of yourself and your behaviour."

"And supposing that we don't happen to fall in with any of your precious men-o'-war, what then?" he demanded.

"Why," said I, "it will merely mean that your punishment will be deferred a few days longer until we arrive at Capetown; that is all."

"Ah!" he retorted, drawing in his breath sharply. "But supposing you should happen to go overboard quietly some dark night—"

"Like poor Mowbray, for instance," I cut in.

"Mowbray," he hissed, turning deathly white. "Mowbray! Who has been talking to you about Mowbray? Tell me, and I'll cut his lying tongue out of his mouth!"

"Brave words," I said, "very brave words, but they would not frighten the individual who told me the history of poor Mr Mowbray's mysterious disappearance through the stern window."

"Tell me who it was, and what he said?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No," I answered him. "I will reserve that story for other ears than yours."

"Very well," he said. "Then I promise you that you shall not live to tell that story." And turning to one of the men who were standing by, he said:

"Cast this young cockerel loose, take him down to his cabin, lock him in, and bring the key to me."

And two minutes later I found myself below in a very comfortable cabin that had been cleared out and prepared for me, locked in, and with no company but my own rather disagreeable thoughts.

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## Chapter Six.

### Stranded!

What were Williams's ultimate intentions toward me I found it quite impossible to guess, for, beyond the fact that he kept me carefully locked up in the cabin that he had assigned to me, I suffered no further violence at his hands, a steward bringing me an ample supply of food when the meal hours came round. I tried to ascertain from this fellow how my men were faring in the forecabin; but my attempt to question him caused him so much distress and terror that, at his earnest request, I forebore to press my enquiries. And as soon as the man had taken away the empty plates and dishes that had contained my dinner, I stretched myself out on the very inviting-looking bed that had been

made up in the bunk, and, being exceedingly tired, soon fell asleep. I slept all night, and did not awake until the steward entered next morning with my breakfast.

I rather expected that, after a night's calm consideration of his exploit, Williams would have come to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valour, and would have taken some steps toward the patching up of a truce; but he did not, and I spent the whole of that day also locked up in the cabin, and seeing no soul but the steward who brought my meals to me.

It was somewhat late that night when I turned in, as I had slept well all through the previous night and did not feel tired; and even when I had bestowed myself for the night I did not get to sleep for some time, for I felt that we must by this time be drawing close in to the coast; and supposing we should fall in with a man-o'-war, how was I to communicate with her if this man was going to keep me cooped up down below? True, I might succeed in attracting the attention of those on board such a ship by waving my handkerchief out of my cabin port if we happened to pass her closely enough for such a signal to be seen, and if she happened also to be on the starboard side, which was the side on which my berth was situated; but I was very strongly of opinion that, after what had happened, Williams would take especial care to give an exceedingly wide berth to any men-o'-war that he might happen to sight.

At length, however, I fell into a somewhat restless sleep, from which I was awakened some time later by sounds of confusion on deck—the shouting of orders, the trampling of feet, the violent casting of ropes upon the deck, the flapping of loose canvas in the wind, the creaking of yards, and the various other sounds that usually follow upon the happening of anything amiss on board a ship; and at the same time I became conscious of something unusual in the “feel” of the ship. For a moment I was puzzled to decide what it was; but by the time that I had jumped out of my berth and was broad awake I knew what had happened. The ship was ashore! Yet she must have taken the ground very easily, for I had been conscious of no shock; and even as I stood there I was unable to detect the least motion of the hull. She was as firmly fixed, apparently, and as steady, as though she had been lying in a dry dock.

I went to the side and put my face to the open porthole. I saw that the night was clear, and that the sky overhead was brilliant with stars; and by twisting myself in such a way as to get a raking view forward I fancied I could see in the distance something having the appearance of a low, tree-clad shore. I also heard the heavy thunder of distant surf; but alongside the ship the water was quite still and silent, save for a soft, seething sound as of water gently swelling and receding upon a sheltered beach.

I seated myself upon the sofa locker, and strove to recall mentally the features of the several rivers that we had visited, but could fit none of them to the dimly-seen surroundings that were visible from the port out of which I had looked. The one thing which was certain was that we were in perfectly smooth water, and the entire absence of shock with which the ship had taken the ground was an indication that she was certainly in no immediate danger; but beyond that the situation was puzzling in the extreme. The snug and sheltered position of the ship pointed strongly to the assumption that we had blundered into some river in the darkness; yet when I again looked out through the port the little that I was able to see was suggestive of beach rather than river, and that we were not very far from a beach was evidenced by the loud, unbroken roar of the surf. Then there was the puzzling question: How did we get where we were? What were the look-outs doing? What was everybody doing that no one saw the land or heard the roar of the surf in time to avoid running the ship ashore?

As I continued to stare abstractedly out through the port it struck me that the various objects within sight were growing more clearly visible, and presently I felt convinced that the dawn was approaching. And at the same moment I became aware that a broad dark shadow that lay some fifty yards from the ship's starboard side, and which had been puzzling me greatly, was a sandbank of very considerable extent, so considerable, indeed, that, for the moment, I could not make out where it terminated. Meanwhile the hubbub on deck gradually ceased, and I surmised that the canvas had been taken in.

The transition from the first pallor of dawn to full daylight is very rapid in those low latitudes, and within ten minutes of the first faint heralding of day a level shaft of sunlight shot athwart the scene, which became in a moment transfigured, and all that had before been vague and illusory stood frankly revealed to the eye. The sandbank now showed as an isolated patch about two hundred yards wide and perhaps half a mile long, with what looked like a by-wash channel of about one hundred yards wide flowing between it and the mainland, the latter being a sandy beach backed by sand dunes clothed with a rank creeper-like vegetation, and a few stunted tree tops showing behind them. As the ship then lay with her head pointing toward the south-east, I was able, with some effort, to get a glimpse of a mile or two of the shore; and now that daylight had come I could see the surf breaking heavily all along it, and also upon the seaward side of the sandbank upon which we appeared to have grounded.

Feeling quite reassured as to the safety of the ship, I sat down on the sofa locker and endeavoured, by recalling the courses steered and the distances run since we had been picked up, to identify the particular spot on the coast where we now were. But it was no use; my memory of the charts was not clear enough, and I had to give up the task. But I felt convinced that we were somewhere in the Gulf of Guinea.

As I sat there on the locker, thinking matters over, and wondering what would be the outcome of this adventure, I became so absorbed in my own thoughts that I gradually lost all consciousness of my surroundings, and was only brought back to myself by the sounds of a sudden commotion on deck, loud outcries—in which I thought I recognised the voice of the skipper,—a great and violent stamping of feet, and finally an irregular popping of pistols, followed by a sudden subsidence of the disturbance. This, in turn, was followed by sounds of excitement in the cabins on either side of the one which I occupied, and in the distance I could hear the general shouting at the top of his voice. I gathered that the passengers were only now beginning to realise that something was wrong with the ship, and were turning out and dressing hastily. A few minutes later I heard the sounds of cabin doors being flung open, and hurried footsteps went speeding past my cabin toward the companion way which led up to the main-deck. Then the general's voice breezed up again, from the saloon above, in tones of angry remonstrance, followed by a tremendous amount of excited talk, amid which I thought I once or twice caught the sounds of women's sobs. It was evident that something



very much out of the common had happened, and I came to the conclusion that it was high time for me to be at large again and taking a hand in the proceedings; I therefore whipped out my pocketknife, and without further ado proceeded to withdraw the screws that fastened the lock to the door. Five minutes later I found myself in the main saloon, and the centre of an excited and somewhat terrified group of passengers.

"Ah!" exclaimed the general, as I made my appearance. "Now, perhaps, we shall get at something practical. Here is young Grenville, who, being a navy man, may be supposed to know how to deal with an awkward situation. Here is a pretty kettle of fish, sir," he continued, turning to me. "The ship is ashore! The captain has blown his brains out—so they say! And, last but not least, the crew, headed by the boatswain, has mutinied against the authority of Mr Carter—whom they have thrust in here among us—and absolutely refuse to listen to reason in any shape or form! Now I ask you, as an officer in his Most Gracious Majesty's navy, what is to be done, sir; what are the proper steps to be taken to extricate ourselves from this infernal predicament?"

"The first thing, general," said I, "is to let me hear Carter's story, which will probably give me a fairly accurate idea of the precise situation of affairs. Where is he?"

"Here I am, Mr Grenville," replied the man himself, edging his way toward me through the crowd.

"Now," said I, "please tell us precisely what you know about this very extraordinary affair."

"Well, sir," was the answer, "I really don't know so very much about it, when all's told; but I'm not very greatly surprised. The way that things have been going aboard this ship, ever since poor Cap'n Matthews died, has been enough to prepare a man for anything, mutiny included. I had the middle watch last night, and, as you know—or perhaps you don't know—it was very overcast and dark all through the watch, so it's not very surprisin' that I saw nothing of the land, even if it was in sight—which I doubt, seein' that it's low—and Cap'n Williams, who ought to have known that we was drawin' in close upon the coast, never gave me any warning of the ship's position, or said anything about keepin' an extra good look-out, or anything of that sort. Consequently, when the bo's'un relieved me at four o'clock this mornin', I didn't pass on any particular caution to him. As a matter of fact I hadn't a notion that we were anywhere near the land! Consequently, when the commotion of haulin' down and clewin' up awoke me, and when, upon rushin' out on deck to see what was the matter, I found that the ship was ashore, I was regularly flabbergasted! But I hadn't much time for surprise, or anything else either, for the skipper was on deck and in charge; and I must confess that the cool way in which he took everything made me think that he wasn't nearly so surprised at what had happened as by rights he ought to have been.

"Well, we hauled down, clewed up, and furled everything, by which time the daylight had come, and we were able to get a view of our whereabouts. So far as I could make out we seemed to have blundered slap into the mouth of some river, and to have grounded on the inner side of a big sandbank that had formed right athwart it at a distance of about a quarter of a mile to seaward of the general trend of the shore line. We couldn't have managed better if we'd picked the berth for ourselves; for we're lyin' in perfectly smooth water, completely sheltered from the run of the surf; and nothin' short of a stiff on-shore gale would be at all likely to hurt us.

"The skipper said something about lightening the ship, and ordered the bo's'un to clear away the boats and see all ready for hoistin' 'em out, and directed me to go down into the fore-peak and rouse out all the hawsers I could find down there, and send 'em up on deck. I was busy upon this job, with half a dozen hands to help me, when suddenly we heard a terrific rumpus on deck, and the sounds of pistol firing; and when I jumped up on deck to see what all the row was about, there was that villain Tonkin, with a pistol still smokin' in his hand, talkin' to the men and tellin' 'em that as the ship was ashore, and the cap'n gone, all hands were free to please themselves as to whether they'd stick to the hooker or not, and that, for his part, he meant to have a spell ashore for a day or two before decidin' what next to do.

"Just at that point I interrupted him by askin' what he meant by sayin' that the cap'n was 'gone'; to which he replied that the skipper had shot himself and then jumped overboard—which I don't believe, Mr Grenville, not for a moment, for if I'm not very greatly mistaken I saw the scoundrel wink at the men as he told me the yarn. And he added that, that bein' the case, every man aboard was his own master, and free to do as he pleased; and if I had anything to say against that, I'd better say it then.

"And I did say it; I told him and all hands that, as to everybody now bein' his own master, that was all nonsense; for if the skipper was indeed dead—and it would be my business to find out just exactly how he died—the command of the ship devolved upon me, and I intended to take all the necessary steps to get her afloat again and to carry her to her destination. I thought that that would settle it; but it didn't, by a long chalk, for Tonkin turned to the men and says:—

"'Look here, shipmates all, I for one have had quite enough choppin' and changin' about of skippers in this hooker,' he says; 'and,' says he, 'so far as I'm concerned I don't want no more. I've nothin' to say again' Carter there, but I'm not goin' to acknowledge him as skipper of this packet, and I don't fancy as how any of you will, either. Of course,' he says, 'if there's any of you as is anxious to have him for skipper, and wants to go heavin' out cargo and runnin' away kedges, and what not, under his orders, instead of goin' ashore with me into them woods, huntin' for fruit, he's quite at liberty to do so, I won't say him nay; but you may as well make up your minds now as any other time whether you'll stick to him or to me; so now what d'ye say, shipmates—who's for Carter, and who's for Tonkin?'

"And I'll be shot, Mr Grenville, if every mother's son of 'em didn't declare, right off, without hesitatin', for him! Whereupon he ordered me in here, and told me not to dare to show my nose out on deck again until I had his permission, or he'd have me hove over the rail. And I was to tell the passengers that they might go up on the poop if they liked; but that if e'er a one of 'em put his foot on the main-deck he'd be hove overboard without any palaver. Now, what d'ye think of that, sir, for a mess?"

"Have any of them been drinking, think you?" asked I.

"Well, yes, sir, I think they have," answered Carter. "That is to say, I think that most of 'em have been pretty well primed—just enough, you know, to make 'em reckless. But there was none of 'em what you'd call drunk; not by a long way."

"And were any of my men among them?" I asked.

"Oh no!" was the answer. "Your men—but I forgot—you don't know what's happened to them. The whole lot of 'em, sound and sick alike, are locked up in the steerage—Simpson, Martin, and Beardmore bein' in irons."

"And what about the steerage passengers?" I asked. "Where are they?"

"Why," answered Carter, "there are only five of them, all told. Two of them—Hales and Cruickshank—both of whom are thoroughly bad characters—have chummed in with Tonkin and his lot; while Jenkins, with his wife and daughter, are in their own cabins in the steerage. Mrs Jenkins and her daughter, Patsy, have been busy acting as nurses to your wounded men, under Dr Burgess's instructions, ever since you came aboard us, and they are doing very well."

"That is good news," said I, "and I will see that the two women are properly rewarded for their trouble. Now let us see how we stand. How many do the mutineers muster, all told?"

"Twenty-five, or twenty-seven if we count in Hales and Cruickshank," answered Carter.

"And how many do we muster on our side?" said I. "Let me just reckon up. First of all, there are nine of my men and myself, that makes ten. Then there is yourself, Mr Carter—eleven. What about the stewards?"

"Oh, they are all right, and so is the cook. They'll all do their work as usual," answered Carter.

"Ay, no doubt," answered I; "but what about their fighting qualities, if we should be obliged to resort to forcible measures with the mutineers?"

"Ah," said Carter, "if it comes to fighting, that's another matter! The stewards are youngsters, with the exception of Briggs, the head steward, and would stand a pretty poor chance if it came to a fight with the fore-castle hands. But Briggs—well, he's in the pantry, perhaps we'd better call him and hear what he has to say for himself."

The head steward was a man of about thirty-five, well-built, and fairly powerful; and upon being questioned he professed himself willing to place himself unreservedly under my orders, and also to ascertain to what extent we might rely upon his subordinates. That brought our fighting force up to an even dozen, to which were speedily added the general and Messrs Morton, Fielder, Acutt, Boyne, Pearson, and Taylor, all of whom professed to be eager for a scrimmage, although, in the case of the last-mentioned five, I had a suspicion that much of their courage had its origin in a desire to appear to advantage before Miss Duncan. However, that brought us up to nineteen—not counting the three under-stewards—against twenty-seven mutineers.

The next question was as to weapons. The mutineers were each of them possessed of at least a knife, while it was known that Tonkin and some six or seven others had one or more pistols, and it was also speedily ascertained that they had secured all the pikes and tomahawks belonging to the ship. Moreover, there were such formidable makeshift weapons as capstan-bars, marline-spikes, belaying-pins, and other instruments accessible to them at a moment's notice. If, therefore, it should come to a hand-to-hand fight, our antagonists were likely to prove rather formidable.

On our own side, on the other hand, I possessed a brace of pistols, with five cartridges, and my sword. My men also had had their cutlasses and pistols, together with a certain quantity of ammunition; but these were not to be reckoned upon, for I considered it almost certain that, after putting my three men in irons, Tonkin would take the precaution to secure the arms and ammunition belonging to all of them. Then the general also had his sword and pistols, while each of the other men possessed at least a sporting gun—and, in the case of three of them, pistols as well,—but unfortunately all these were down in the after-hold among their baggage, and could not be got at so long as Tonkin and his gang were in possession of the deck. Thus the only weapons actually available for our party were my own, and it needed but a moment's consideration to show that ours was a case wherein strategy rather than force must be employed.

"Well, then, gentlemen," said I, when we had all become agreed upon this point, "it appears to me that the situation resolves itself thus: The mutineers have expressed their determination to go ashore, and until they have done so we can do nothing beyond holding ourselves ready for action at a moment's notice. And meanwhile we must all wear an air of the utmost nonchalance and unconcern; for if we were to manifest any symptoms of excitement or interest in their movements, there are, no doubt, some among them who would be astute enough to observe it, and thereupon to become suspicious. Let them leave the ship, as many as may please to go—and the more the better; and as soon as they are fairly out of sight I will release my men, and we will then set to work to get your firearms up out of the hold, and take such further steps as may be necessary to subdue the mutineers upon their return, and bring them once more under control. Probably we shall only find it necessary to get Tonkin into our hands to break the neck of the revolt and bring the rest of the men to reason. And now I think it would be a very good plan if a few of you were to go up on the poop and take a quiet saunter before breakfast, just to let the men see that you do not stand in any fear of them, and at the same time you can take a good look round, with the object of reporting to me what you see. As for myself, I shall keep below for the present. There is nothing to be gained by reminding Tonkin of my presence in the ship, and if he were to see that I was at large and among you again, he might so far modify his arrangements as to make matters even more difficult for us than they are at present."

"Quite right," approved the general. "I agree with every word that our young friend here has said. He appears to have got a very good grip of the situation, and his views accord with my own exactly. We shall doubtless be obliged to come to fisticuffs with those scoundrels forward before we can hope to extricate ourselves from this very awkward

situation. But it would be the height of folly to precipitate a fight before we are fully prepared. And now, gentlemen, I am going up on the poop. Come with me who will; but I think that, for the present at least, the ladies had better remain below."

And thereupon he and the five young griffins made their way up on deck at short intervals, while Mr Morton and I did our best to comfort and encourage the weaker members of the party. Not that they needed very much encouragement—I will say that for them,—for, with the exception of poor little Mrs Morton, who was very much more anxious and frightened on behalf of her children than on her own account, the ladies showed a very great deal more courage than I had looked for from them; while, as for Mrs Jennings and Miss Duncan, they very promptly came forward to say that if there was any way in which they could possibly render assistance I was not to hesitate to make use of them.

While we were all still talking together in the saloon, Briggs, the chief steward, entered in a state of great indignation, and, addressing himself to Carter, informed him that the men demanded fried ham and various other dainties from the cabin stores for breakfast, and upon his venturing to remonstrate with them had darkly hinted that unless he produced the required provisions at once, together with several bottles of rum, it would be the worse for him.

"What do you say, Mr Grenvile?" demanded Carter, appealing to me. "Shall we let them have what they ask for?"

"Certainly," I said, "seeing that at present we are not in a position to refuse them and make good our refusal. Let them have whatever they ask for, but be as sparing as you possibly can with the grog; we do not want them to have enough to make them quarrelsome, or to render them unfit to go ashore."

"It goes mightily against the grain with me to serve out those good cabin stores to such a pack of drunken loafers as them, sir," remonstrated Briggs.

"Never mind," said I. "We are in their hands at present, and cannot very well help ourselves. You shall have your revenge later, when we have got the rascals safe below in irons."

So they had what some of them inelegantly described as "a good blow-out" that morning in the fore-castle, while we were having our own breakfast in the cabin; and, so far as drink was concerned, Tonkin was wise enough to see to it that, in view of their projected trip ashore, no man had more liquor than he could conveniently carry.

And while we sat at breakfast the gentlemen who had been on deck gave us the result of such observations as they had been able to make from the poop, which, after all, did not amount to much, the only conclusion at which they had arrived being that we were ashore on the inner edge of a sandbank which had formed athwart the mouth of a river, the extent of which could not be seen from the ship in consequence of the fact that there were two points of land, one overlapping the other, which hid everything beyond them. These two points, the general added, were thickly overgrown with mangroves, and the land immediately behind was low and densely wooded, coconut trees and palms being apparently very plentiful, while a few miles inland the ground rose into low hills, from the midst of which a single mountain towered into the air to a height of some five or six thousand feet.

We were still dawdling over breakfast when we heard sounds of movement out on deck, and presently Briggs, who had been instructed to reconnoitre from the pantry window, which commanded a view of the main-deck, sent word by one of the under-stewards that some of the mutineers were getting tackles up on the fore and main yard-arms, while others were employed in clearing out the longboat, which was stowed on the main hatch; and a few minutes later the cook came aft with the intelligence that he had received imperative orders to kill and roast a dozen fowls for the men to take ashore with them, and also to make up a good-sized parcel of cabin bread, butter, pots of jam, pickles, and a dozen bottles of rum, in order that they might not find themselves short of creature comforts during their absence from the ship. This seemed to point to the fact that they intended to undertake their projected excursion in the longboat instead of taking the two gigs—a much greater piece of luck than I had dared to hope for,—and also suggested an intention on their part to make a fairly long day of it. I did not hesitate to instruct Briggs to see to it that their supply of grog should on this occasion be a liberal one, for the longer they remained out of the ship, the more time we should have in which to make our preparation.

The weather was intensely hot, and the mutineers manifested no inclination to exert themselves unduly. It was consequently almost eleven o'clock in the forenoon ere the longboat was in the water alongside, and another quarter of an hour was spent over the making of the final preparations; but at length they tumbled down over the side, one after another, with a good deal of rough horseplay, and a considerable amount of wrangling, and pushed off. The general and three or four of the other passengers were on the poop, smoking under the awning—which they had been obliged to spread for themselves,—and observing the movements of the men under the cover of a pretence of reading; and when the longboat had disappeared the general came down to apprise me of that fact, and also of another, namely, that the steerage passengers Hales and Cruickshank, and two seamen, armed to the teeth with pistols and cutlasses—the latter at least, in all probability, taken from my men—had been left behind for the obvious purpose of taking care of the ship and keeping us in order during the absence of the others.

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## Chapter Seven.

### What befell the mutineers.

This was rather serious news, and none the less vexatious because it did not take me altogether by surprise. The general opinion had been that all hands were bent upon going ashore, and that the ship would be left at our mercy; but this had certainly not been my own view, for I could not believe that a man of Tonkin's intelligence—realising, as he must, the enormity of his offence in not only himself breaking into open rebellion against lawful authority but in inciting others to do the same—would be so rashly imprudent as to leave us free, for a period of several hours, to

release my men and to take such other steps as might occur to us for the suppression of the mutiny. I had felt quite certain that somebody would be left on board to keep us under supervision and restraint, but I had calculated upon the mutineers considering two men sufficient—and also a little, perhaps, upon the difficulty that would be experienced in inducing more than two, at the utmost, to forego the anticipated enjoyment of a run ashore. But here were four recklessly unscrupulous men, powerful, determined fellows, fully armed, left behind to be dealt with by us; and the only weapons that we could muster among us were my sword and pistols. True, we might be able to lay our hands upon a few belaying-pins; but to attack with such weapons four men armed with pistols meant that somebody would almost certainly get hurt, and that I was most anxious to avoid, if possible. Besides, if it came to a fight, there was always the possibility that the reports of the pistols might be heard by some of the party who had gone ashore, and cause them to hurry back before we were ready to receive them fittingly. Upon enquiry I learned that the four men had arranged themselves, two in the waist—one of them on each side of the ship—and two forward near the fore-rigging, where they could command the entrance of the steerage quarters.

The general, who was brimful of courage, was fuming with indignation at what he termed “the confounded impudence” of the men in presuming to mutiny, strongly advocated an immediate attack with such weapons as came to hand, but I deprecated that step for the reasons already mentioned, and suggested that quite possibly a little consideration and discussion might enable us to hit upon some plan involving rather less risk.

Carter at once suggested that we should try the experiment of plying the men with drink, in the hope of making them intoxicated; and as I considered that this was a case wherein the end justified the means, the plan was at once adopted, Briggs undertaking to carry out to the guard a bottle of especially strong brandy for their delectation. But although they looked at the liquor with very longing eyes, their suspicions at once became aroused, and they roughly ordered him to take it away. And when, instead of doing this, Briggs put down the bottle and left it within their reach, one of them immediately took it up and flung it overboard, where, it may be incidentally mentioned, it was instantly dashed at and swallowed by a shark, to the no small astonishment of those who witnessed the occurrence.

This scheme having failed, another was suggested, this time by the ship’s surgeon. Briggs, the chief steward, had thus far not had his freedom in the least degree interfered with. It was understood that in the discharge of his duty he must necessarily pass to and fro at frequent intervals between the cabin and the cook’s galley—the occupant of which, it may be mentioned, though a surly sort of fellow, and as discontented with everything as ships’ cooks generally are, had declared himself absolutely neutral,—and up to the present he had been allowed to do so without let or hindrance. The doctor’s plan, therefore, was that he was to go forward to the steerage, as though on a professional visit to the wounded men, and Briggs was at the same time to go forward to the galley to discuss with the cook the arrangements for the cuddy dinner that evening. Then, as soon as they were fairly forward, Carter and I were to sally forth together and grapple with the two men in the waist, at the same time whistling to apprise the doctor and Briggs, who, upon hearing the signal, would rush upon and grapple with the two men on the fore-castle. The idea was, not to provoke a fight, but to overpower and secure these four men without giving them an opportunity to create an alarm by firing their pistols. We four, therefore, were simultaneously to pinion and hold them until others, coming to our assistance, could help us, if necessary, to secure and disarm them. This plan, we at once decided, was quite promising enough to be worth a trial; and accordingly we forthwith proceeded to put it into execution.

First of all, as arranged, the doctor sallied forth, with a number of bandages and other materials in his hands, and demanded admission to the steerage, which, after some slight demur, was accorded him. Then Briggs, who had been watching the progress of events from the pantry window, sauntered casually forward and stood by the door of the galley, where he proceeded to discuss with the cook the advisability of killing a pig. And finally Carter and I, having allowed a minute or two to elapse, walked calmly out on the main-deck together, smoking a cigar apiece, and laughing and talking as though we were acting in pure absent-mindedness. Our perfect coolness, and apparent want of the slightest appearance of concern, so completely staggered the two guards in the waist that they allowed us to get within a couple of fathoms of the one on the port side before it dawned upon them to interfere; and then Cruickshank, the man on the starboard side, dashed across the deck to the support of his companion, at the same time shouting to us in very bellicose accents:

“Here, you two, get back, d’ye hear? What d’ye mean by settin’ foot on this part of the deck against Mr Tonkin’s express orders? Now hook it, sharp, or—”

The moment that the fellow was fairly clear of the hatchway, and on the port side of the deck, I raised my hand to my lips, spat out my cigar, and sent a single shrill, but not loud, whistle along the deck, and then sprang straight at my immensely powerful antagonist, while Carter manfully tackled his own man. And at the same instant the doctor and Briggs sprang upon the pair who were keeping guard on the fore-castle. As arranged, none of us attempted to do more than just pinion each his own particular antagonist and prevent him from drawing his weapons, trusting to the others to help us to master and secure them. And gallantly those others backed us up, for at the sound of my whistle, young Acutt—a fine, athletic young giant—dashed out of the cabin and, without paying any attention to the writhing and struggling quartette in his way, dodged us and rushed forward to the galley to prevent Cooke from interfering, while Fielder, Boyne, Pearson, and Taylor—the other four young griffins—rushed with equal celerity to the support of the doctor, Briggs, Carter, and myself. My own particular man struggled savagely in his endeavour to free himself from my grasp, and, being a much heavier and more powerful man than I was, pinned me up against the rail and threw his whole strength into a determined effort to break my back, in which effort he would have very speedily succeeded had not Boyne quickly felled him to the deck and stunned him by a well-directed blow from an iron belaying-pin. To disarm and securely bind the fellow was the work of but a minute or two, and then, breathless with our exertions, and, so far as I was concerned, in considerable pain, Boyne and I stood up and looked about us to see how the others were faring. Looking, first of all, near home, we saw Hales pinned up against the rail, with young Pearson taking his weapons away from him, while Carter was busily engaged in seizing him up, the general meanwhile standing by and pointing my drawn sword at his throat to discourage him from any ill-advised attempt at resistance; while the doctor and Briggs, with the assistance of Fielder and Taylor, were also busily engaged in securing their respective men. The ship was ours! and now it only remained for us to take promptly such steps as

were necessary to retain possession of her when the other mutineers should see fit to return.

The first thing to be done was to release my own men from confinement, and this we instantly did, when I had the great satisfaction of discovering that, thanks to the skill of Doctor Burgess, and the assiduous nursing of Mrs Jenkins and her daughter Patsy, all our wounded, except two, were so far convalescent as to be quite fit for ordinary duty, while the other two were also doing so favourably that they could be made useful in a variety of ways provided that they were not called upon to undertake any very severe physical exertion. Thus I very soon found myself at the head of a little band of nine armed and resolute men, each of whom was prepared to do my bidding to the death if called upon.

We now lost no time in hustling our four prisoners down into the fore-peak, where they could do no harm, and where, after being securely clapped into irons, they were bade to make themselves as comfortable as they could on top of the ship's stock of coal, while one of my men who, from the comparatively severe character of his wounds, was least likely to be of service to us in other directions, was stationed in the fore-castle above, fully armed, to keep an eye upon them, and see they got into no mischief. This little matter having been satisfactorily arranged, we next got the hatches off the after hatchway, and roused the passengers' baggage on deck, from which the respective owners at once proceeded to withdraw such weapons and ammunition as they possessed; after which we struck the various packages down into the hold again and put on the hatches.

We now mustered seventeen armed men, all told, each of whom was provided with a firearm of some kind, while my own nine men, myself, and the general boasted sidearms as well. Carter had no weapons of his own, neither had the doctor nor Briggs, but three of the youngsters possessed a brace of pistols each, which they were quite willing to lend; and with these Carter, the doctor, and Briggs were promptly armed. This brought our number up to twenty against the twenty-three away in the longboat; and since we possessed the advantage over the mutineers that we had the ship's deck as a fighting platform, I thought that we might now regard ourselves as masters of the situation. Nevertheless I did not feel disposed to neglect any further advantages that we might happen to possess—for not all of our party were fighting men, and I did not know how the civilians might behave in a hand-to-hand fight. I therefore at once began to look round with the object of ascertaining what further means of defence the ship afforded. She was pierced for twelve guns—six of a side; but the only artillery that she actually carried was a pair of 6-pounder brass carronades, the carriages of which were secured one on either side of the main-deck entrance to the saloon. I suspected that these pieces had been put on board by the owners more for the purpose of signalling than as a means of defence, but I now gave them a very careful overhaul, and came to the conclusion that they were good, reliable weapons, and capable of rendering efficient service. But when I came to question Carter about ammunition he could tell me nothing, as he had not been aboard the ship when her cargo was stowed. However, at my suggestion he now took possession of the skipper's cabin, and proceeded to give it a thorough overhaul, with the result that in a short time he reappeared with a key in his hand, attached to which was a parchment label inscribed "Magazine". This was strong presumptive evidence in favour of the supposition that a magazine existed somewhere aboard the ship, and a little further search resulted in its discovery abaft the lazarette. With all due precautions we at once proceeded to open this receptacle, and found, to our very great satisfaction, that it not only contained a supply of signal rockets, but also a liberal supply of powder cartridges for the signal guns, and a dozen stands of muskets, together with a goodly number of kegs, some of which contained powder, while the remainder were full of bullets. This was a most fortunate discovery indeed, especially in so far as the muskets were concerned, for the possession of them at once gave us a definite and very decided advantage over the mutineers. The muskets were forthwith conveyed on deck, together with a supply of powder and three kegs of bullets, and also a dozen cartridges for the guns. The afternoon was by this time well advanced, and we might look for the return of the mutineers at any moment. We therefore loaded the carronades with five double handfuls of musket balls apiece—about a hundred bullets to each gun—in place of round shot, and, running them forward, mounted them on the topgallant fore-castle as being the most commanding position in the ship. Then we loaded the muskets and placed them in the rack on the fore side of the deck-house, which completed our preparations. And now all that remained was to keep a sharp look-out, and, while doing so, determine upon the policy to be pursued when the returning longboat should heave in sight.

Having personally seen that our preparations were all as complete and perfect as it was possible to make them, and having also posted Simpson and Martin, two of my own men, armed with muskets, as look-outs, on the fore-castle, I at length went aft to the poop, where all the passengers were now gathered, and where I saw the general and Mr Morton engaged in earnest conversation with Carter. As I made my way leisurely up the poop-ladder the general beckoned to me to join the little group, and then, as I approached, Carter turned to me and said:

"Mr Grenville, the general, Mr Morton, and I have been discussing together the rather curious state of affairs that has been brought about aboard this ship by this unfortunate mutiny; and we are fully agreed that, as matters stand, you are the most fit and proper person to take charge until things have been straightened out. Of course I don't forget that, in consequence of the death of Cap'n Williams, I'm now the cap'n of this ship; but, as I've just been tellin' Sir Thomas and Mr Morton, here, I've never had any experience of fightin' of any kind, and as like as not if I was to attempt to take the lead, where fightin' is concerned, I should make a bungle of it. Now, you seem to be quite at home in this sort of thing, if you'll excuse me for sayin' so; you knew exactly what was the right thing to be done, and have really been in command the whole of this blessed day, although you've pretended that you were only helpin', as you may say. Then you've got nine trained fightin' men aboard here who'll do just exactly what you tell 'em, but who wouldn't care to have me orderin' them—to say nothin' of you—about. So we've come to the conclusion that, so far as the fightin' and all that is concerned, you are the right man to be in command, and I, as cap'n of this ship, hereby ask you to take charge and deal with the trouble accordin' as you think best." I bowed, and then turned to the other two, saying: "Sir Thomas and Mr Morton, it occurs to me that you two, in virtue of the fact that you are in a sense doubly interested in this matter—since it not only involves you in your own proper persons but also in the persons of your wives and families—are entitled to express an opinion upon this proposal of Captain Carter's, and that I, as a naval officer, ought to give your opinion my most serious consideration. Am I to understand that you are in full and perfect agreement with Mr Carter in this proposal which he has just made to me?"

"Most assuredly we are, Mr Grenville," answered the general. "Captain Carter is a merchant seaman, and no doubt a

very excellent man in that capacity; but he now finds himself face to face with a difficulty such as merchant captains are, fortunately, very seldom called upon to face, and naturally he feels somewhat at a loss. You, on the other hand, are, by your whole training, well qualified to deal with the situation, and, in view of the important interests involved, Captain Carter—and we also—would like you to assume the command.”

“Very well,” said I, “I will do so, and will use my utmost endeavours to extricate ourselves from this difficulty. I already have a plan for dealing with the mutineers when they return, which I think ought to prove successful, and that, too, without any need for fighting; but I shall require the assistance of the gentlemen passengers to enable me to make an imposing display of force.”

“That is all right, my boy,” answered the general cordially; “we will willingly place ourselves under your orders without reserve; so tell us what you would have us do, and we will do it.”

“Well,” said I, “we may now expect the mutineers to return at any moment, and we must be ready for them when they appear. I will therefore ask you all to have your weapons at hand; and when the longboat heaves in sight the ladies must immediately go below, out of harm’s way, while you distribute yourselves along the bulwarks, with your firearms levelled at the boat. You must arrange yourselves in such a manner that the mutineers may be able to see that you are all armed, and prepared to fight if necessary. By this means I hope to overawe them and bring them to reason.”

I then completed all my arrangements, being careful to take Carter into my full confidence, and treat him in every respect as master of the ship, assuming for myself rather the character of his first lieutenant than anything else—and then all that remained for us to do was to sit down and patiently await the return of the mutineers. But the time sped on, the hour of sunset arrived, and darkness fell upon the scene without any sign of the longboat, and I began to feel somewhat uneasy as to the safety of the absentees, for we were in a lonely, and, so far as my knowledge went, an unfrequented part of the coast; and I had heard some rather gruesome stories as to the doings of the natives, and of the treatment that they were wont to mete out to white men—shipwrecked sailors and others—who happened to be so unfortunate as to fall into their hands. And as the hours drifted past without bringing any news, I at length grew so anxious that I began to consider very seriously the advisability of sending away a boat in search of the missing men. After fully discussing the matter with Carter, however, I came to the conclusion that our first duty was to take care of the ship and her passengers, and that the mutinous crew must be left to look after themselves. Finally, having set a strong anchor-watch, I went below and turned in.

Daylight arrived, noon came, and still there was no sign of the absentees, and in a fever of anxiety I made my way up to the fore-royal-yard, from which lofty elevation I made a careful survey of the inland district. But there was very little to see beyond a two-mile stretch of a broad, winding river dotted with tree-grown islets here and there. The country itself was so densely overgrown with bush and trees that nothing upon its surface was to be seen. As to the longboat, she was nowhere visible; but I was not much astonished at that, because, from the glimpse that I was able to catch of the river, I had very little doubt that its characteristics were precisely those of all the other rivers in that region, namely, a somewhat sluggish current of water thick with foul and fetid mud, swampy margins overgrown with mangroves, and numerous shallow, winding creeks, mangrove-bordered, discharging into it on either side; and it was highly probable that, failing to find a firm bank upon which to land along the margin of the river itself, the mutineers had proceeded in search of such a spot up one of the creeks. There were no canoes to be seen on that part of the river’s surface which was visible from my look-out, and the only suggestion of human life anywhere in the neighbourhood was to be found in what I took to be a thin, almost invisible, wreath of smoke rising above the tree tops at a spot some two miles distant. That wreath of smoke might, of course, indicate the position of the mutineers’ bivouac; but, on the other hand, it might—and I thought this far more likely—indicate the location of a native village; and if the latter suspicion should prove to be correct I could not but feel that the situation of the mutineers was one full of peril.

Having taken a careful mental note of everything that I had seen, I descended the ratlines, and, making my way aft, invited Carter, the general, and Mr Morton to join me in the main saloon, which happened just then to be vacant. When we arrived there, I told my companions what I had seen, and what I feared, and then laid before them a proposal that I should take the ship’s galley—a very fine six-oared boat—and, with my nine men, and one of the carronades mounted in the bows, go in search of the missing men. But neither the general nor Morton would hear of this for a moment. They were quite willing that a boat should be dispatched to search for the longboat and her crew if the matter could be arranged, but they very strongly protested against the idea that I and all my nine fighting men should leave the ship, which, they pointed out, would be at the mercy of the mutineers if we were to miss them and if they were to get back before us; or, possibly, which would be still worse, open to an attack from hundreds of savages should the natives by any chance have discovered us and observed our helpless predicament. I was pointing out to them that this stand which they were taking rendered the idea of a search impossible, since I considered it neither wise nor prudent to dispatch a weak search party, and that I could not dream of ordering any of my own men away upon such an expedition in the command of anyone but myself, when I heard a call on deck, and the next moment Simpson presented himself at the entrance of the saloon to say that the longboat was in sight, pulling hard for the ship, but that, so far as could be made out, there were only five men in her! Whereupon, with one accord we all dashed out on deck and made the best of our way to the topgallant-forecastle, which afforded a good view of the approaching boat. It was now a few minutes past three o’clock, ship’s time.

Arrived on the fore-castle, I snatched the telescope from the hands of the look-out as he flourished the instrument toward the boat, with the remark:

“There she comes, sir, and the buckos in her seem to be in a tearin’ hurry, too. See how they’re makin’ the spray fly and the oars buckle! They’re workin’ harder just now than they’ve done for many a long day, I’ll warrant.”

Levelling the instrument upon the approaching boat, I saw that, as Simpson had informed me, there were only five men in her, who, as the look-out man had observed, were pulling as though for their lives. The boat, although a

heavy one, was positively foaming through the water, and the long, stout ash oars, which the men were labouring at, bent and sprang almost to breaking point at every stroke.

"There is something very seriously wrong somewhere," said I gravely, "and those fellows are bringing the news of it. Let them come alongside, Simpson; but muster the *Sharks* at the gangway to disarm those men as they come up the side, should they happen to have any weapons about them."

Two minutes later the longboat dashed alongside, and as the men flung in their oars, the man who had been pulling bow sprang to his feet and yelled:

"Heave me a line, mates, and for God's sake let us come aboard. We want to see Mr Carter, quick!"

"All right, my bully boy," answered Simpson. "Here's a line for ye; look out! But don't you chaps be in too much of a hurry now; the orders is that you're to come up the side one at a time. And if you've got any such little matter as a knife or a pistol about you, just fork it over. Thank'e! Next man," as the man climbed inboard and without demur drew an empty pistol and his knife from his belt and handed them over.

"Now then, my lad," said I, as the fellow faced round and confronted me, "where are the rest of the men who left this ship yesterday? Out with your story, as quick as you please."

"Where are the rest!" he repeated, with white and quivering lips, while his eyes rolled and his voice rose almost to a scream. "Why, some of 'em are dead—lucky beggars! and t'others are in the hands of the savages, away there in the woods, and are bein' slowly tormented to death, one at a time, while t'others is forced to look on and wait their turn. At least that's how I reads what I've seen."

"And how come you five men to be here?" I demanded. "Have you managed to escape from the savages, or were you not with the rest when they were taken?"

"Why, sir," answered the fellow, "it's like this here—"

"Stop a moment," I interrupted him. "Tell us your whole story, as briefly as possible, from the moment when you pushed off from the ship's side yesterday. Then we shall get something like a clear and coherent account of what has happened."

"Yes, yes, that's right, Grenville," agreed the general as he stood beside me, very upright and stern-looking, his lips white, but the eager light of battle already kindling in his eyes. "It will be a saving of time in the long run."

"I certainly think so," said I. "Now, my man, heave ahead with your yarn."

"Well, sir," resumed the man, "we shoved off from the ship's side—three-and-twenty of us, as you know—but, beg pardon, sir, I forgot—you wasn't on deck—"

"Never mind about that, my lad," interrupted I; "go ahead as quickly as possible. You shoved off from the ship and pulled away into the river. What happened then?"

"Nothin' at all, sir," was the reply. "We just pulled into the river, and as soon as we was fairly inside we started to look round for a spot where we could get ashore; but, try where we would, we couldn't find nothin' but soft mud that wouldn't have bore the weight of a cat, much less of a man. But while we was huntin' for a place we came across a narrer creek, just wide enough for us to pull into; and Tonkin up's hellum and says as we'll try in there. So we pulled along for a matter of nigh upon a mile, when all at once the creek comes to an end, and we find the boat's nose jammed in among a lot of mangrove roots. Then pore Jim Nesbitt ups and volunteers to try and scramble along the mangroves and see if he can find a spot firm enough for us to land upon; and when he'd been gone about a quarter of a hour he comes back again and says he've found a place. So, actin' upon Tonkin's orders, each one of us grabs a fowl, or a bottle, or what not, and away we goes in pore Jim's wake; and presently out we comes at a place where the mangroves stopped and the bush began, and where the mud was hard and firm enough to walk upon, and a little later we comes upon a sort of path through the bush, follerin' which we presently comes into a little open space where there was nothin' but grass, with big trees growin' all round it, and there we brought ourselves to an anchor, and cried 'Spell ho!'

"Then we had some grub and a drop or two of grog, and a smoke, and then some of us stretched out on the grass to have a snooze; but the ants and creepin' things was that wishious and perseverin' that we couldn't lie still for two minutes on end; so we all gets up and starts huntin' for fruit. But the only fruit we could find was cokernuts, and they was to be had, as many as we wanted, just for the trouble of shinnin' up the trees. So we ate nuts and drank the milk—with just a dash of rum in it now and again—until we didn't want any more; and then we laid ourselves down again, and in spite of the ants and things some of us had a good long sleep. I felt just as sleepy as the rest, but I couldn't get no peace at all on the ground, so I looked round and presently made up my mind to go aloft in a big tree that was standin' not far off. That tree to look at was as easy to climb as them there ratlins, but somehow it took me a long time to shin up it and find a comfortable place where I could get a snooze without fallin' from aloft; but by and by I came athwart a branch with a big fork in it, reachin' out well over the open space where the other chaps were lyin' about, and, wedgin' myself into the fork, I was very soon fast asleep.

"When I woke up it was pitch dark, exceptin' that somebody had lighted a big fire in the middle of the open space, and there was our lads all lyin' round fast asleep. I felt cold, for the night had turned foggy, and I was tryin' to make up my mind to climb down and get a bit nearer to the fire when a most awful yellin' arose, and the next second the place was chock-full of leapin' and howlin' niggers flourishin' great clubs and spears, and bowlin' over our chaps as fast as they got up on to their feet. A few of our people managed to get up, hows'ever, and they got to work with their pistols and cutlasses, and I let fly with my pistol from where I sat up aloft among the branches, and bowled over

an ugly, bald-headed old chap rigged in a monkey-skin round his 'midships, and carryin' a live snake in his hand.

"The loss of this old cock seemed to have a most astonishin' effect upon the other niggers, for whereas the minute afore they'd been doin' all they knew to kill our chaps, no sooner was this old party down than all hands of 'em what had seen him fall stops dead and yells out 'pilliloo' to t'others, when, dash my wig if the whole lot of 'em didn't just make one jump upon our people—them that was still alive I mean—and beat their weapons out o' their hands, after which they lashes 'em all together, with their hands behind 'em, and marches 'em off into the bush, some twenty or thirty of 'em stoppin' behind to make sure that all of our lads as was down was also dead. And d'ye know how they did that, sir? Why, by just choppin' off their heads with great swords made of what looked like hard wood!

"Seven of our pore chaps lost the number of their mess in this way, and then the savages cleared out, carryin' the heads away with 'em, and leavin' the bodies lyin' scattered about the place. I waited up in my tree until the murderin' thieves had got clear away, and then I starts to climb down, intendin' to foller 'em and find out what they meant to do with the white men as they'd took away alive with 'em, when, as my feet touched the solid ground once more, dash my wig if these here four mates of mine didn't drop out of some other trees close at hand. They'd been worried wi' the ants and what not, same as I was, and, seein' me shinnin' up a tree, they'd gone and done likewise, and that's the way that we five escaped bein' massacred.

"Then the five of us goes to work and holds a council o' war, as you may say; and we agreed that two of us should foller up the savages to find out what game they was up to, while t'other three should go back to the boat and take care of her. But, seein' that away from the scattered embers of the fire it was so dark that you could hardly see your hand before you, we agreed that 'twas no use attemptin' to do anything until daylight; so we got up into our trees again, and held on where we were in case any o' them savages should come back. And a precious lucky thing it was that we thought of doin' so, for—it's the solemn truth I'm tellin' you, gen'lemen—we hadn't very much more'n got settled back on our perches when back comes about a dozen o' them savages, creepin' out from among the trees as quiet as cats, and starts searchin' the whole place up and down as though they'd lost somethin'. My mates and me reckoned it up that them niggers had seen us and counted us some time yesterday, and had found, after the massacree, that we wasn't all accounted for, and so they'd come back to look for us. It was a fort'nit thing for us that we was pretty well hid by the leaves, also that the niggers didn't seem to think of lookin' for us up in the trees, and by and by, just as the day was breakin', they took theirselves off again.

"When they'd got fairly away out o' our neighbourhood I climbed down again, and the others follered suit; and Mike, here, and I made sail along the path that the niggers had gone, while the other three topped their booms for the boat, the onderstandin' bein' that they was to get her afloat and swung round all ready, and then wait till Mike and me j'ined 'em.

"Well, Mr Carter, sir, and gen'lemen, Mike here and me follered along the path that the savages had took, for a matter of a couple o' mile, when we hears a tremenjous hullabaloo of niggers shoutin', and tom-toms beatin', and dogs barkin', and what not, so we knowed that we was pretty close aboard a native village, as they calls 'em, so we shortened sail and got in among the bushes, creepin' for'ard until we could see what was happenin'. And when at last we was able to get a pretty clear view, the sight we saw was enough to freeze a man's blood. They'd got all our chaps lashed to stakes set up in a clear, open space in front of the village, and one of the pore unfort'nit fellers was stripped stark naked and bein' tormented by a crowd o' niggers what was puttin' burnin' splinters between his fingers, and stickin' 'em into his flesh, and pourin' red-hot cinders into his mouth, what they'd prised open by thrustin' a thick stick in between his jaws; and the shrieks as that unhappy man was lettin' fly was just awful to listen to; but the savages seemed to enjy 'em, for they just yelled with delight at every shriek. Mike and me we turned as sick as dogs at what we seen; and presently Mike grabs me by the hand and says: 'Let's get back to the ship, mate, and report. P'rhaps the skipper'll forgive us for what we've done, and persuade the navy gent to fit out a hexpedition to rescue the others.' So away we came as fast as we could, but when we got to the boat she was aground, and we had to wait a long time until she floated. But here we are, sir; and oh, gen'lemen, for the love o' God do somethin', if ye can, to save them pore chaps what's bein' tormented to death over there."

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## Chapter Eight.

### The rescue.

For a few seconds after the close of the man's harrowing account there was a dead silence among us. Then the general, wiping the perspiration from his face, turned to me and said:

"Grenville, my friend, this is a situation for you to grapple with, and a very difficult situation it is, I confess. For, on the one hand, those unhappy men must be rescued at all hazards, while, on the other, it is equally imperative that the ship and those in her should be protected from a possible, not to say very probable, attack by the savages. Now, what is to be done? Of course you will understand that I am ready to play any part that you may assign to me, but I may be permitted to suggest that I should probably be more useful in leading the shore expedition than in any other way."

"Thank you, general. Yes, no doubt you are right, but it is a very difficult situation, as you say, and I must have a moment or two to think it out."

Then, turning to the five horrified seamen who had returned in the longboat, I ordered them to go forward and get the cook to give them something to eat and drink, for I should be in need of the services of all of them sooner or later, while one of them would have to come with me in the boat as a guide.

The five men whom I addressed—all thoughts of mutiny having by this time been most effectually frightened out of their heads—turned and slouched away forward as meekly as lambs; and the moment that they were gone I was



surrounded by an excited crowd of passengers, all of whom had come down from the poop to listen to the story of the five returned seamen, and every one of them had some more or less unpractical suggestion to make. It was rather unfortunate that they had all heard what had passed, for the very graphic narrative, told by an eye-witness, of the gruesome happenings of the past night, and the powerful suggestion of what was probably taking place at that moment away yonder in the woods, had so acted upon the vivid imaginations of the women that one or two of them were visibly upon the very verge of hysterics, while all were more or less in a state of mortal terror as to what might be their fate should the natives take it into their heads to attack the ship. For, that the presence of so many white men as they had encountered would suggest to the astute native mind the idea that a ship was somewhere near at hand was so exceedingly likely that it might almost be accepted as a foregone conclusion. But, terrified though the women were, they behaved marvellously well, and quietly retired when I requested them to do so in order that we men might be left free to discuss details together. But, even while the chatter was raging round me at its most excited pitch, my mind was busy upon the details of the only plan that was at all feasible. Our entire available fighting force, counting in the whole of the male passengers, the surgeon, Briggs and his three assistants, Jenkins the steerage passenger, the cook, and the five men who had escaped from the savages, amounted to thirty. It was, of course, quite impossible to form, from the account of the five escaped seamen, anything like an accurate estimate of the numbers of the savages, but I believed I should be quite safe in setting them down at not less than three hundred. There were also the four prisoners; but I reflected that as they had not suffered the harrowing experience of the five escaped men, they would probably be still in much too insubordinate a frame of mind to be of any use, and I therefore determined to leave them where they were for the present. I reckoned, however, that not a man would leave the village, either to attack the ship or for any other purpose, until the gruesome sport upon which they were at that moment engaged had been played out to an end; and I therefore came to the conclusion that I should be quite justified in throwing the balance of strength into the land expedition. I accordingly divided my force into two equal parts, placing Simpson in charge of the ship and entrusting him with her defence, with a small crew composed of the surgeon, the four stewards, the cook, Jenkins the steerage passenger, Messrs Morton, Fielder, Acutt, Boyne, Pearson, and Taylor, and one of my own men named Sharland, whose wounds rendered him useless for arduous land service, although he might be made very useful at a pinch aboard the ship. This left, for the landing expedition, the general, Carter, myself, and seven *Sharks*, and the five men who had escaped in the longboat. Thus each force consisted of fifteen men. But I considered that the landing force was far the more formidable of the two, since we numbered among us nine trained fighting men; while, in the improbable event of an attack upon the ship, the party left on board her would have the advantage of the deck as a fighting platform, and, if hard pressed, the saloon and deckhouses to which to retreat. I also left them all the muskets and boarding pikes, as well, of course, as their own personal firearms, and the two brass carronades. As for us, the general and I each had a sword, the *Sharks* carried a cutlass apiece, and every man of us also had a brace of pistols in his belt, and a pocketful of cartridges. But what I most trusted to for the creation of a good, wholesome panic among the savages was a dozen signal rockets which I had found in the ship's magazine.

Our arrangements being now complete, the general bade a hasty good-bye to his wife and daughter, who bore themselves very bravely upon the occasion, and we all tumbled down over the side into the longboat—into which Briggs had already, with commendable forethought, passed a large basket of provisions for the sustenance of ourselves and such of the mutineers as we might be fortunate enough to rescue. It was nearly two o'clock in the afternoon when we shoved off.

It took us but a few minutes to reach the river entrance, passing through which we presently found ourselves in a broad, lagoon-like expanse of water, some two miles long by about a mile wide, dotted here and there with small, tree-clad islands, some of which might have been as much as ten or twelve acres in extent, while others were mere heaps of mud just large enough to support a clump of half a dozen or so of coconut trees and a tiny thicket of bamboo. The greater part of this lagoon was evidently very shallow, for dotted about here and there were to be seen partially submerged trunks of trees and other débris that appeared to have been swept down into their present position by some bygone flood, and had ultimately grounded on the mud; but there was just sufficient current and wind to reveal a deep-water channel of about two hundred yards wide, running in a fairly straight line through the lagoon toward its most distant extremity. There were numerous objects dotted about the surface of the lagoon, which, at a distance, had all the appearance of floating logs, but which, when we drew near to them, proved to be, in almost every instance, the heads of basking alligators. And before we had been in the river ten minutes we were startled by a huge black bulk breaking water close alongside the boat, which turned out to be a hippopotamus.

"Now, Higgins," said I, "whereabout is this creek of yours? I see no sign of it thus far."

"Oh, it's some way on ahead yet, sir!" answered the man. "Keep her straight up through the deep-water, sir, please. I'll tell you when we comes in sight of it."

That the unfortunate mutineers had penetrated some distance into the country soon became evident, for we traversed the entire length of the lagoon and fully a mile of the river after it had narrowed down to about a quarter of a mile in width ere we sighted a break of any kind in the thick entanglement of mangrove trees that lined the margin of the stream. But even this, so Higgins informed us, was not the creek of which we were in search, and which he believed lay nearly a mile farther up the stream. Of the one actually in sight he denied any knowledge, and I soon became convinced that it had escaped the notice of the mutineers.

The break in question was on the northern bank of the river—that is to say, on the same side as the creek of which we were in quest; and when first sighted it was about a quarter of a mile distant. As we drew nearer to it I saw that a deep-water channel led straight to it from the main deep-water channel, at a point about half a cable's-length distant; and I kept my eye upon the spot, as the creek gradually opened out, for I could not help thinking that it presented an almost ideal spot wherein a slaver might conceal herself. And, as I watched, I suddenly saw a column of thick smoke shoot up above the tree tops at a point that I estimated to be not much more than two hundred yards from the mouth of the creek, and in the direction toward which the latter seemed to be trending, while at the same moment the blare of horns and the dub-a-dub-dub of tom-toms was borne faintly to our ears by the fitful breeze.

"Oars!" cried I sharply. "Silence, fore and aft, and listen all of you!"

The men instantly laid upon their oars, and as the boat went surging along with the "way" that she had on her, we all distinctly heard, above the quiet lap and gurgle of the water against her planking, the sounds of which I have spoken, with an occasional swelling of the sound which conveyed the idea of many human voices raised in a monotonous kind of chant.

"How much farther do you say this creek of yours is, Higgins?" I demanded.

"Why, sir," answered the man, "I should say as it's the best part of a mile higher up. Ain't it, Mike?"

"Ay, about that, I should think," answered Mike, swinging round on his thwart and shading his eyes with his hand as his gaze searchingly swept the river bank. And the other three escaped mutineers expressed a like opinion.

"And what was the general trend of the direction which you took when you followed the savages?" asked I.

"Why," answered Higgins, instantly catching my meaning, "it was westerly, sir; wasn't it, Mike? Don't ye remember that the run of the creek itself was some'at down-stream? And when we went a'ter the savages we kept on bearin' away towards the left, didn't we? Depend on't, sir, that there smoke is where the village lies, and that row that we hears is made by the savages doorin' the tormentin' of one of our pore unfort'nit shipmates!"

I was of the same opinion myself. That creek away on our port bow appeared to lead so nearly in a direct line toward the point from which the smoke was rising, and seemed to offer such a temptingly short cut to the village where the diabolical work was undoubtedly going forward, that I determined to take the slight risk of being mistaken, and make for it forthwith. I therefore gave the coxswain orders to starboard his helm a bit and feel his way cautiously in over the mud, and the oarsmen to give way and keep strict silence.

In another minute, or less, we had passed out of the main deep-water channel, and were gliding through the shallow water that covered the flat mud-banks on either side of the stream, the men dipping their oars deep at every stroke to get timely warning of our approach to water not deep enough to float the boat.

"No bottom yet, sir," reported the stroke-oar at frequent intervals; and at each report the coxswain starboarded an extra half-point or so, until at length the boat's nose was pointing straight for the mouth of the creek, and at every stroke of the oars the fiendish uproar of horns, tom-toms, and shouting—or chanting, whichever it was—seemed to come to our ears more distinctly, and with more ominous import.

At length the boat entered the creek, or canal, and I at once gave orders for all hands who had cutlasses to draw them, and for every man to look carefully to the priming of his pistols. This having been done, we pulled ahead once more, and now the rapidity with which the mingled sounds that were guiding us increased in volume told us that we were quickly approaching the scene of action. And presently, as though to dissipate any doubt that might still be lurking in our minds, we distinctly heard, at frequent intervals, the piercing scream of a man in mortal agony!

"Do you hear that, Grenville?" whispered the general through his set teeth. "Why, man, those cries make one's blood run cold to listen to them! How much farther do you mean to go before landing?"

"I shall go on until we bring the sounds abeam of us," I whispered back. "We are moving very much faster here than we should ashore, especially when it comes to creeping through those mangrove tree roots; so I will get as close to the place as I can before landing. Oars!"

For at that moment we swept round a rather sharp bend in the stream, and I caught a glimpse, at no great distance ahead, of what I thought looked very much like the stern of a canoe projecting from among the trees on our port. I held up my hand for silence. We were so near to the scene of action now, that, had we raised a shout, we should instantly have attracted attention and, maybe, have temporarily suspended whatever operations might be proceeding. But my party was altogether too weak to justify me in incurring any risks; there appeared to be but one life in immediate jeopardy ashore there, whereas any premature alarm might result in the loss of several of the rescuing party, and possibly the complete failure of the expedition. No, my strongest hope lay in the possibility of effecting a complete surprise; so I hardened my heart, held up my hand to enjoin the most perfect silence, and whispered the coxswain to sheer the boat a little closer to the port bank. Then, as the boat seemed to have plenty of "way" on her, I ordered the "stroke" to pass the word to lay in the oars noiselessly, and for those in the bows to stand by with the boat-hook and the painter.

These orders had just been obeyed, and we were gliding along in absolute silence, when, a short distance ahead, I caught sight of a break in the mangroves that looked wide enough to admit the boat, and I signed to the coxswain to point our stem for it. A few seconds later we slid into a kind of cavern, formed of the overarching branches of a belt of mangroves, and, gliding along a narrow canal of about sixty feet in length, we finally brought up alongside a good firm bank of soil, on which there was room enough for us all to land. Our movements were effectually masked by a thin belt of scrub, which appeared to be all that intervened between us and the three or four hundred yelling and chanting natives who were now making the air ring and vibrate within a short hundred yards of us. At the same time I became aware that the agonising shrieks, as of one in mortal agony, had ceased.

The din of discordant sounds was now so tremendous that there was no very especial need for the observance of any great amount of caution on our part, yet we disembarked with scarcely a sound, and I drew our little party up in two lines, the *Sharks* being placed in the front rank, and the others immediately behind them.

"Now, men," said I, "I have just one last word of caution to give you before we attack. Remember that we have not come here for the express purpose of fighting the natives, but to rescue our fellow-countrymen; therefore my orders are that as soon as this is accomplished a retreat is to be at once made to the boat, no man pausing except to

support a comrade who may be in difficulties. I propose to begin the attack by discharging the whole of these rockets as rapidly as possible into the thick of the crowd of natives, and then to charge upon them with sword and cutlass, reserving our pistol fire for emergencies. I hope by this plan to scatter the savages and cause their retirement for at least a few brief minutes, during which we must dash in, cut loose the prisoners, and retire with them to the boat. There must be no more fighting than is actually necessary to enable us to accomplish our purpose."

The general patted me approvingly on the back. "Excellent, my lad, excellent," he whispered. "There spoke the prudent commander. I foresee that you will do well in your profession. And now, let us get on."

"One moment, general, if you please," said I. "I want to reconnoitre before advancing into the open."

"Right," he answered. "And I'll go with you."

I nodded consent, and at once led the way toward the screen of bush that interposed between ourselves and the village. The distance to be traversed was merely some sixty or seventy yards, and to cover this we were obliged to make our way through some sparsely-scattered mangroves. It took us less than a minute to accomplish the journey, and then we found that the bush was much less dense than it had appeared to be, since we were enabled without the least difficulty to penetrate it to a spot where our whole party could comfortably stand, and where the intervening screen was so tenuous that, ourselves unseen, we could see everything that was happening in the village. This was so obviously the proper spot from which to make our attack that the general at once went back to bring up the men, while I remained to make such few observations as the brief time at my disposal would permit.

I found that we were on what might be termed the right front of the village, which was a tolerably important place, consisting of some two hundred roomy huts, constructed of wattles and sun-baked clay, and thatched with palm leaves. The huts, however, had no interest for me now; it was the scene that was being enacted in the wide, open space in front of the village that riveted my attention. This space was occupied by a crowd of fully a thousand blacks—men, women, and children—most of whom were practically naked, and all of whom were slowly circling in a weird kind of dance round a small area, in the midst of which were planted eleven stout stakes at distances of about fifty feet apart. These stakes were, of course, upright, and stood about ten feet high. It was therefore easy enough to count the stakes, but owing to the dense crowd which surrounded them it was exceedingly difficult to distinguish whether or not anything, or anybody, was attached to them. But I found no difficulty in arriving at a tolerably accurate surmise as to the purpose of these stakes, for four of them were charred quite black, as though by the action of fire, while a thin wreath of pale brownish-blue smoke still eddied and circled about one of the four. The tone of the chant now being sung by the savages was very different from that which had reached our ears while in the open river; it was more subdued, and did not convey that suggestion of savage exultation that had been the dominant note of the other, and I also now noticed that the deafening clamour of horns and thumping of tom-toms had ceased. The idea conveyed to my mind was that one act in a drama of absorbing interest had closed and that another was about to open. But I had no time for further observation, as the general now came up with the men, and we at once proceeded to make our final arrangements for an instant attack.

"Now, lads," said I, "you see those hundreds of dancing savages. I want you to plant your rockets in such a manner that they will rake through the whole crowd; and if they should finish up by setting fire to the huts, so much the better. Fire the rockets, one after another, as rapidly as possible, and the moment that the last rocket has been fired we will spring out into the open and make a dash for those posts, to which I believe we shall find the missing men secured. Use your cutlasses as freely as may be needful, but reserve your pistols for an emergency. Then, having cut our men loose, we must all retire in a body to the boat, and get out of the creek as quickly as possible. Now, are you all ready? Then begin to fire the rockets."

With a preliminary sizzle, and a strong odour of burning powder, the twelve rockets tore, weirdly screaming, in rapid succession, out of the clump of bush into the thick of the crowd of dancing savages, ricocheting hither and thither as they encountered some obstacle, scattering showers of fire in every direction, and finally exploding with a loud report many of them having previously embedded themselves in the dry thatch of the huts. The effect of the discharge was tremendous and cumulative! As the first rocket plunged into the throng a sudden silence ensued, and every savage stood death-still, gazing with eyes of horror upon the hissing fiery thing as it darted hither and thither inflicting painful burns and bruises wherever it went. Then, long before the first had run its course, the second was also among them, playing similar antics, and working havoc like the first; and then out swooped the third at them, driving the whole party crazy with terror, and producing a state of utterly indescribable confusion. As the fourth rocket tore out of the midst of the belt of bush a general yell of dismay arose, and then ensued a regular stampede, the natives knocking down and falling over each other in their frenzied efforts to escape from the onslaught of the fiery monsters. Before the last rocket had sped there was not a savage to be seen, the whole swarm of them, down to the children even, having somehow managed to make their escape into the adjacent bush, from which their cries of terror could still be heard proceeding, while several of the huts were already bursting into flame. In the midst of the deserted open space the eleven upright stakes were now plainly visible; four of them, alas! black and half-consumed with fire, with great heaps of still smouldering and faintly smoking ashes—in the midst of which were discernible the calcined fragments of human skeletons—around their bases, while to each of the other seven was bound the naked body of a white man!

"Now, forward, lads!" cried I, dashing into the open with drawn sword in my hand. "Cut loose those seven men, and then form up ready for a retreat to the boat. If we are quick we may do all that we came to do before the savages return."

It was but a run of a few hundred yards from the bush to the posts, and in another minute we were around them, cutting and hacking at the multitudinous coils of tough creeper which bound the prisoners to the posts; and in another couple of minutes the last man had been released. Dazed and speechless at the suddenness of their deliverance from a lingering death of frightful torment, such as they had beheld inflicted upon four of their unfortunate companions, the rescued mutineers were being hurried down to the boat. To bundle them in pell-mell,

scramble in ourselves, and shove off was the work of but a few brief minutes; and presently we found ourselves once more in the creek, with our bows pointed river-ward, and eight men straining at the oars as we swept foaming past the interminable array of mangroves, with their gaunt roots, like the legs of gigantic spiders sprawling out into the black, foul-smelling water.

“Well,” exclaimed the general, taking off his Panama hat and mopping his perspiring head and face with a huge red-silk handkerchief, “that is a good job well done, and without the loss of a man, too—except, of course, the unfortunate four that we were too late to save. You have managed the affair exceedingly well, young sir, as I shall be happy to bear witness at another time and place. I have somehow—I don’t quite know why—had a sort of prejudice against the navy; but a service which trains youngsters like yourself to do such work as I have seen done to-day can’t be wholly bad.”

“Bad, sir!” I exclaimed. “The navy bad? Why, on the contrary, although perhaps it is not absolutely perfect, it is the most glorious service that a man can possibly enter, and I am proud to belong to it. (See note.) But we must not crow yet over our success. Those savages will probably be rallying by this time, since they find that they are not being pursued, and if they should choose to follow us along the banks of the creek they may yet make us smart for our boldness.”

“Ay,” agreed the general, “they may; but somehow I don’t fancy that they will. Those rockets seemed to frighten them pretty well out of their skins, and I don’t believe that they will get over their terror in a hurry. By Jove, sir, that was a brilliant idea of yours—those rockets!”

Meanwhile the rescued men were crouching in the bottom of the boat, silent, some of them with their faces buried in their hands, some lying back as though dazed, with their eyes closed. And one of these last, I noticed, had the fingers of his two hands locked together, and his lips were moving, as though he prayed, or were returning thanks to God for his deliverance. Presently he opened his eyes, and his gaze met mine full. I noticed that he flushed slightly, as though ashamed at having been detected, so I nodded to him and said:

“No need to be ashamed, my good fellow, if you were thanking God for His mercy. We have, every one of us, abundant reason to be thankful to-day.”

“Yes, sir,” said he, “and I even more, perhaps, than the rest. They was makin’ ready to begin upon me when you broke in upon ‘em.” And therewith he burst into a violently hysterical passion of tears, the result, doubtless, of the reaction arising from his sudden and unexpected rescue from the horrors of a death from protracted torment, such as he had witnessed in the case of the other four. For it now appeared that—without harrowing the reader’s feelings by entering into unnecessary details—the sufferings of one or two of the unfortunate men must have been prolonged to the extent of quite three hours. The ringleader, Tonkin, had been, singularly enough, the man who had been subjected to certain peculiar refinements of torture which, while inflicting what one could readily conceive would be the most excruciating agony, were not of a nature to produce death save by the long-drawn-out process of physical exhaustion. We spoke such comforting words to the poor creatures as we could think of, at the same time not forgetting to administer a little much-needed stimulant and food. The production of the latter reminded us all that we felt atrociously hungry and thirsty, and as soon as we were safely clear of the creek and once more in the main channel of the river, we fell to upon the basket of provisions that Briggs had so thoughtfully provided for our refreshment.

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Note: What would Grenville have thought of the much more perfect service of the present day, I wonder?—H.C.

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## **Chapter Nine.**

### **A night attack.**

We arrived safely alongside the ship just as the sun was dipping beneath the western horizon, to the great relief and joy of those whom we had left on board, and we learned with much satisfaction that nothing whatever of an alarming character had transpired during our long absence. The occupants of the cuddy were very naturally anxious to be furnished with the fullest details of our afternoon’s adventure; but I left the telling of that to the general, and retired below to indulge in the luxury of a good wash and a complete change of clothing before sitting down to dinner.

That the tragic occurrences of the day had put an effectual end to the mutiny was, of course, a foregone conclusion, and I was not at all surprised to learn that, within a quarter of an hour of our return, the men—having doubtless consulted together in the fore-castle—had come aft in a body to express to Carter their contrition for their insubordinate behaviour, and to request that they might be allowed to turn-to again, at the same time giving the most elaborate assurances of good behaviour in the future. As a matter of fact it soon became perfectly clear that there would never have been a mutiny at all but for Tonkin, who was its sole instigator, as well as the murderer of the unfortunate Captain Williams, who had provoked the turbulent boatswain to the highest pitch of exasperation by his alternations of jovial good-fellowship with truculent arrogance of demeanour. Poor Carter seemed to find it a little difficult to make up his mind how to deal with the matter, as he confessed to me somewhat later that same evening; but I pointed out to him that, the chief offender having been removed, there was exceedingly small likelihood of any recurrence of insubordination, especially as the men had really nothing to complain of, either in their treatment or in the matter of their food. Looked at after the event, the outbreak wore very much the appearance of an impulsive act on the part of the men, skilfully engineered by Tonkin for some evil purpose of his own, now effectually frustrated. I therefore advised Carter to let them resume duty, with the distinct understanding that upon their own behaviour during the remainder of the voyage would it depend whether or not they were called to account for their disastrous act of insubordination. These arguments of mine, coupled with the hint that we should need the services of all hands to protect the ship—should the natives take it into their heads to attack her—and also to get her afloat again,

convinced him; and he at once had them aft and spoke to them in the terms which I had suggested.

But although the ugly and awkward incident of the mutiny was ended we were by no means "out of the wood", for the ship was still hard-and-fast aground—having apparently run upon the sandbank on the top of a springtide—and it looked more than likely that it would be necessary to lighten her considerably before we could hope to get her afloat again. Meanwhile there were the savages to be kept in mind. Had our lesson of the afternoon brought home to them a good, wholesome realisation of the danger of meddling with white men? or had it, on the other hand, only inflamed them against us, and made them resolve to wreak a terrible revenge? The question was one which we felt it impossible to answer, and meanwhile all that we could do, while in our present helpless condition, was to keep a bright look-out, night and day, and to hold ourselves ready for any emergency.

Needless to say, Carter and I both took especial care to see that there was no slackness or negligence on the part of the anchor-watch that night, the whole of the duty being undertaken by my own men, while I was up and about at frequent intervals all through the night. But the hours of darkness passed uneventfully, and when dawn appeared there had been neither sight nor sign of savages anywhere near the ship.

At six o'clock that morning the usual routine of duty was resumed on board, the hands being turned up to wash-decks and generally perform the ship's toilet before breakfast, and I noticed with satisfaction, as I went forward to get my usual shower-bath under the head-pump, that Carter had caused the four prisoners to be released from the fore-peak. I believed that the rest of the hands might now be safely trusted to keep that quartette in order.

Immediately after breakfast in the fore-castle the hands were again turned up, and a good stout hawser was bent on to the kedge anchor, which was then lowered down into the longboat and run away out broad on the ship's port quarter. The other end of the hawser was then led forward along the poop and main-deck to the windlass, which we believed would be better able than the capstan to withstand the strain that we intended to put upon it. This done, the hawser was hove taut, and the main hatch was then lifted and a quantity of cargo was hoisted out and deposited in the longboat alongside, all the other boats also being lowered into the water. By the time that the longboat was as deep as she would swim it was close upon high-water, and the men were then sent to the windlass with orders to endeavour to get another pawl or two. This they succeeded in doing, the ship's quarter being by this time slewed so far off the sandbank that she now lay, with regard to the general run of it, at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees; and then the windlass positively refused to turn any further, even to the extent of a single pawl. The men therefore left it, as we felt that nothing was to be gained by snapping the hawser, which was now strained to the utmost limit of its endurance. The fully-loaded longboat was now dropped astern, and the longboat of the *Dolores*, in which we had been picked up, and which, it will be remembered, Carter had felt impelled to hoist inboard—was brought alongside in her place, and she, too, was loaded as deeply as it was safe to venture. It was noon by this time, the tide had turned, the ship remained immovable, and the men's dinner-hour had arrived; the second longboat was therefore dropped astern, and the hands knocked off for their midday meal.

In addition to her longboat the *Indian Queen* carried a jolly-boat, a dinghy, and four very fine, roomy gigs, two of which hung in davits in the wake of the mizzen rigging while the other two were supported on a gallows that stood abaft the mainmast. It will be seen, therefore, that, even apart from the longboat and gig of the *Dolores*, this ship was very well supplied with boats, only two of which—the two longboats—were thus far loaded. The gigs, although they were of course of much smaller capacity than the longboats, and having fixed thwarts were not so adaptable for the purpose of temporarily receiving cargo, were nevertheless capable of being made very good use of, and in the afternoon they were brought alongside and loaded one after another, until all four of the ship's own gigs were as deep in the water as it was prudent to put them, when they also were dropped astern, leaving only the dinghy, and the gig of the *Dolores*, unutilised. The dinghy, of course, was too small to be of any use as a temporary receptacle of cargo, and I felt that it would be unwise to deprive ourselves of the services of the remaining gig for other purposes. I therefore decided, in conjunction with Carter, that if it should prove necessary to lighten the ship still further, we would discharge the two longboats on to the sandbank—a considerable area of which remained dry even at high-water—and then strike another cargo down into the empty boats. But as it was by this time within half an hour of sunset, and the men had been working very hard all day, we arranged to let them knock off and, after clearing up the decks and replacing the hatches, to take a good rest, in view of the possibility that we might be obliged to call upon them during the night, should the savages elect to become troublesome.

Night fell calm and gracious upon the scene, the air breathless, and the sky without a cloud, but with a thin strip of new moon hanging in the western sky in the wake of the vanished sun. The anchor-watch was set, and by the time that I had taken a bath and changed my clothes the dinner-hour had arrived, and we all gathered round the "hospitable board" which Briggs and his satellites had prepared for us. Everybody was in the best of spirits, for the men had not only worked well but had also displayed a very manifest desire to eradicate, by their behaviour, the bad impression that had been produced by their recent lamentable lapse from the path of rectitude. Excellent progress had also been made in the task of lightening the ship, and, finally, the savages had shown no disposition to interfere with us. There was consequently a good deal of lively chatter during the progress of the meal, and when it was over the piano was opened and we had some very excellent music. The ladies having retired, I rose to go out on deck and take a final look round ere I turned in; but before I went I thought it desirable to say a word or two of caution.

"Gentlemen," said I, "we have just come to the end of a very delightful evening, and I hope that you will all enjoy an unbroken night's rest. There is no reason, so far as I can see, why you should not; but we must none of us forget that, so long as the ship remains where she now is, she is exposed to the possibility of attack by the savages. Therefore, while I do not ask you to keep a watch, or even to remain awake, I strongly urge you to keep your weapons beside you, ready loaded, so that if, by any unfortunate chance, it should be necessary for us to call upon you to assist in defending the ship, you may be able to respond without delay."

"Umph!" grunted the general. "Better tell us exactly what you mean, Grenville. We are all men here, so you can speak quite plainly. Have you observed anything to-day indicative of a disposition on the part of the natives to attack us?"

"No, general, I have not," said I, "and I know of no reason why we should not have a perfectly quiet and undisturbed night's rest as we did last night. I merely thought it advisable to give you a word of warning, because I know the natives all along this coast to be treacherous in the extreme, and very much given to doing precisely what you least expect them to do. Beyond that I see no cause whatever for uneasiness, believe me. Good-night, gentlemen, sound sleep and pleasant dreams to you."

When I stepped out on deck I found that the character of the weather had changed during the three hours or so that I had spent in the cuddy. The young moon had, of course, set some time before; the sky had grown overcast and seemed to be threatening rain; the clouds were sweeping up from about south-south-west, and a light breeze, that seemed likely to freshen, was blowing from that direction, driving great masses of chill, wet fog along before it of so dense a character that it was scarcely possible to make out the foremast from the head of the poop-ladder. Altogether it threatened to be a distinctly unpleasant night for the unfortunate men whose duty it would be to keep a look-out through the hours of darkness. Carter, in a thick pilot-cloth jacket, was walking to and fro on the poop, with a short pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth, when I joined him.

"Hullo, Carter," I said, "this is a change of weather with a vengeance! When did it happen?"

"Why," answered Carter, "the fog closed in upon us just after sunset, the same as it has done every night since we've been here; but the breeze has only sprung up within the last half-hour. Looks as though 'twas going to freshen too."

"So I think," said I. "How is it coming? Broad off the starboard bow, isn't it?"

"Yes; about that," agreed Carter.

"And the tide is rising, is it not?" I continued, the freshening breeze having suggested an idea to me which I in turn wished to suggest to my companion.

"Ay, risin' fast," answered he. "It'll be high-water about midnight, I reckon."

"Just so," I agreed. The idea which I wished to suggest to him had clearly not yet dawned upon him—although it ought to have done so without any need of a hint from me,—so, without further beating about the bush, I said:

"Now, don't you think, Carter, that, with this nice little breeze blowing from precisely the right direction, it would be quite worth while to loose and set the square canvas and—"

"Throw it all aback," he cut in as at last he caught my idea. "Why, of course I do, Mr Grenville, and thank'e for the hint. It'd be a precious sight more helpful than the kedge, and I'll have it done at once." And he started to go forward to call the men.

"What about your cables?" said I. "Have you got them bent and an anchor ready to let go if she should happen to back off the bank?"

"No," said he, coming to a halt again. "We've been so busy with one thing and another, you know. But I'll have it done as soon as we've got the canvas on her."

"Better do that first, hadn't you?" I suggested. "I wouldn't trust the kedge to hold her in a breeze with all her square canvas set."

"N-o, perhaps not," he agreed dubiously. "Well, then, I'll get the port cable bent and the anchor a-cockbill ready for lettin' go before touchin' the canvas. How would that be?"

"Much the safest, I think," said I. "But let us both go for'ard and see what is the exact state of affairs there. And what is the state of the hawser? Ah, still quite taut!" as I tested its tension with my foot.

Arrived upon the fore-castle we found both anchors stowed inboard and the cables below; but, all hands being called, including the *Shark's*, we made short work of the business, for while one gang went below and cleared away the cable, another roused it up on deck and rove it through the hawse-pipe, ready for bending, and a third got the anchor outboard. Then, while Jones, the *Shark's* boatswain's mate, and his party bent the cable and got everything ready for letting go, in case of need, Carter's men climbed into the rigging, and, beginning at the topgallant-sails, loosed all the square canvas, overhauled the gear, and saw everything clear for sheeting home and hoisting away. To set the canvas and trim the yards aback was now the work of but a few minutes, and it was soon done, with the immediate result that the ship, from having a slight list to starboard, came upright, with just the slightest possible tendency to heel to port.

"Now, Mr Carter," said I, "the ship's bilge is no longer bearing upon the sand. I think, therefore, that if I were you I would send all hands to the windlass, and let them endeavour to get another pawl or two. That canvas is doing good work up there, and it may be that if we helped it a bit with a pull on the hawser she would come off."

"Ay," agreed Carter; "so she might, and we'll try it. Man the windlass, lads, and see if you can move her at all. Half an hour's work now may get the ship afloat, and so save ye a good many hours breakin' out cargo to-morrow."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the men, cheerfully enough, considering that they had been awakened out of a sound sleep and dragged out of their warm bunks to come up and work in the chill, pestilential fog after having worked hard all day. "Tail on to the handles, my bullies, tail on and heave. Heave, and raise the dead!" shouted the man Mike, who had been one of the lucky five to escape capture by the savages.

They got their first pawl easily enough, then another, and another, by which time the hawser was once more as taut as a bar. But, as I lightly rested my foot upon it, to test its tautness, I felt it very gradually slackening, which meant

one of two things, either that the kedge was coming home—which I thought improbable—or that the ship was very slowly sliding off the bank. So I cried to the men, who had desisted from their efforts for fear of parting the hawser:

“There she gives! Heave away again, lads, and keep a steady strain on the hawser. It wants half an hour yet to high-water.”

The men again threw their weight alternately upon the levers, and once more the great pawl clanked once, twice, thrice; then a long pause and another clank, then a further pause. But my foot was still on the hawser, and I felt that it was steadily, although very slowly, yielding, and there was a moment when I could almost have sworn that I felt the ship jerk ever so slightly sternward. So I ventured to stimulate the men a little further.

“Hurrah, lads,” I cried, “there she moves! Hang to her! One complete turn of the windlass and she’s all your own! Heave again.”

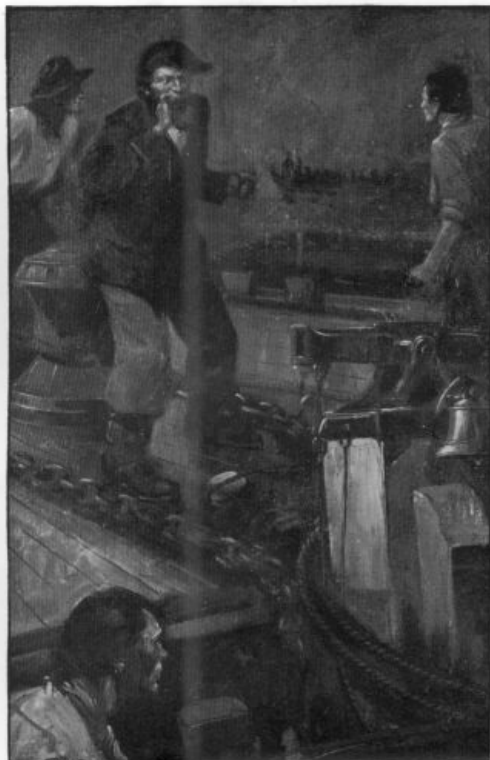
“Heave!” responded the men hoarsely, flinging their whole weight upon the elevated lever, while those opposite grasped the corresponding depressed handle, and, gripping the deck with their naked toes, bent their backs and bore upward until every muscle in their straining bodies cracked again; and “clank-clank” spoke the pawl again, and yet again “clank”. Then, after another long, heaving and straining pause, “clank” again, a shorter pause and again “clank—clank—clank”; and then, as the men struggled and fought desperately with the stubborn windlass, the ship jerked perceptibly twice, the pawls spoke in quicker succession, the ship surged again, and with a wild hurrah from the men, as the levers suddenly yielded to them and began to leap rapidly up and down, the *Indian Queen* gathered way and slid off into deep-water.

“Well there with the windlass!” cried Carter delightedly. “Let go your to’gallant and topsail halyards and sheets; man your clewlines; fore and main clew-garnets. Stand by to let go the anchor!”

“Ay, ay, sir!” was the response from the topgallant forecastle. “All ready with the anchor. Stand clear of the cable!”

Meanwhile the merchant crew were clewing up and hauling down to the accompaniment of the usual cries. What, therefore, with Carter’s commands, the seaman’s calls, and the violent flinging down of ropes upon the deck, there was a very considerable uproar going on upon deck, and I was not at all surprised when the general, clad in a dressing-gown, emerged from below with his sword in one hand and his pistol in the other, to enquire what all the racket was about.

I explained the situation to him, and he was expressing his great gratification at the fact that the ship had been got afloat again, when Carter gave the order to let go the anchor.



“THERE’S A WHOLE FLEET OF CANOES CLOSING IN ROUND US, SIR.”

“All gone, sir,” answered Jones as a heavy splash sounded under the ship’s bows, instantly followed by a yell of:

“A large canoe—two of ’em—three—four—there’s a whole fleet of canoes closing in round us, sir.”

“Where away?” demanded I, unceremoniously breaking away from the general and dashing forward to the topgallant forecastle, up the ladder of which I scrambled with considerable loss of shin-leather.

“There, sir, d’ye see ’em?” responded Jones, sweeping his arm in a wide circle as he pointed into the fog wreaths that were whirling round us.

The fog and the darkness together rendered it extremely difficult to see anything, but by dint of peering I at length

distinguished several shapeless dark blotches at a distance of about fifty fathoms from the ship, arranged apparently in the form of a wide semicircle on the side of her opposite to that on which lay the sandbank. Jones, however, was not quite right in his statement that they were closing in upon us, for they appeared to be lying quite stationary, or at least were only paddling just sufficiently to avoid being swept away by the sluggish tide that was running. But there was very little doubt in my mind that we had very narrowly escaped an ugly surprise, and I was by no means certain that we might not yet look to be attacked. My view of the situation was that the natives had gathered about us in the hope that, in the fog and darkness, they might be able to steal alongside and climb aboard in such overwhelming numbers as to secure possession of the deck and overpower us by taking us by surprise, and that they had been restrained from making the attempt only by the sounds of bustle and activity that had accompanied our endeavours to get the ship afloat.

“Lay down from aloft all hands at once!” shouted I, sending my voice pealing up through the fog to the figures that were to be dimly-seen sprawling on the yards and dragging at the heavy festoons of canvas. “And you, Jones, find me a musket as smartly as you can.”

“Musket, sir? Ay, ay, sir! here’s one,” answered the man, fishing one out from some hiding place and thrusting it into my hand. Lifting the piece to my shoulder I levelled it in the direction where the canoes seemed to be congregated most thickly, and, aiming so as to send the bullet flying pretty close over the heads of the savages, pulled the trigger. I distinctly heard the “plop” of the bullet as it struck the water, but beyond that all was as still as death. Meanwhile, at my call, the men aloft had come sliding down the backstays and were now mustering on the fore-deck awaiting further instructions. And at the same moment the general came forward to announce that he had quietly called the men passengers, who would be on deck in a moment, bringing their firearms with them.

“I will place myself at their head, Grenville,” he said, “and if you will tell me how we can most helpfully assist you I will see to the details of any task that you may assign to us.”

“A thousand thanks, general,” answered I. “You, perhaps, cannot do better than muster your men on the poop, and if you detect any disposition on the part of the canoes to close in upon the ship, fire into them without hesitation. This is no time for half-measures; we must deal decisively and firmly with those fellows, or we shall find ourselves in a very awkward predicament.”

“Right; I agree with you there, and you will not find us wanting, I hope,” responded Sir Thomas, as he turned to walk away aft.

“Simpson, San Domingo, and Beardmore, come up here on the topgallant fore-castle,” called I; and at the call up came the men, with the inevitable answer of “Ay, ay, sir!”

“Simpson,” said I, “I want you and San Domingo to take charge of this port carronade, while you, Jones and Beardmore, attend to the starboard one. The ship has now swung to her anchor, and is lying fairly steady; so when once you have trained the pieces they will not need much alteration. Run them both close up to the rail, and depress the muzzles so that the discharge will strike the water at a distance of about fifty yards, which will afford room for the charge to spread nicely. If a canoe approaches within that distance, fire upon her. I will arrange for more ammunition to be sent to you at once.”

I then descended to the main-deck, and, finding Carter, arranged with him that he should descend to the magazine with one of my men, who could be trusted to be careful, and send up an ample supply of ammunition. This done, my next act was to range the crew of the ship along the main-deck, port and starboard sides, with muskets in their hands, giving them strict injunctions to fire upon any canoe that they might see attempting to approach the ship.

All these arrangements, which have taken a considerable time to describe, really occupied but two or three minutes, during which not a sound of any description had come from the canoes, which, however, could occasionally be caught sight of, dimly showing when the mist wreaths thinned for a moment. Meanwhile, our own dispositions being complete, a tense silence reigned throughout the ship, broken only by an occasional low muttered word from one man to another.

Suddenly a shrill whistle pealed out from somewhere in the fog away on our port hand, followed, the next instant, by a thin, whirring sound in the air all about the ship, accompanied by sharp, crisp thuds here and there along the bulwarks, and a thin, reedy pattering on the decks. An object of some sort fell close to my feet, and, upon groping for it, I found that it was an arrow. At the same moment a loud, fierce, discordant yell burst out all round the ship, and the rattling splash of innumerable paddles dashed into the water, reached our ears.

“Here they come; here they come!” cried the men, and a musket flashed out of the darkness down in the waist of the ship.

“Steady, lads; steady!” cried I. “Don’t fire until you can see what you are firing at, and take good aim before you pull the trigger!”

But at that moment a whole host of canoes came dashing at us out of the fog and darkness, and a sharp, irregular volley of musketry rattled out fore and aft, in the midst of which bang! bang! rang out the carronades, almost simultaneously. The discharge was immediately followed by a most fearful outcry of shrieks and groans, and two large canoes, which had received the contents of the carronades, paused in their rush, and went drifting slowly past us on the tide, heaped with the motionless bodies of their crews, and in a sinking condition. But this in nowise checked the rush of the other canoes, which came foaming toward us, with half their crews plying their paddles, while the other half maintained a fierce fire with their bows and arrows.

“Reload those carronades on the fore-castle,” cried I, “and then train them to rake the main-deck, fore and aft. Half of you in the waist retreat to the topgallant fore-castle, the other half to the poop, and defend those two positions to the



last gasp. Let me know when those carronades are ready, and be careful so to depress their muzzles that none of the charge will reach the poop.”

So saying I made a dash for the main-deck entrance of the saloon, which I locked, slipping the key into my pocket. Then I followed the rest of the party up on to the poop, and bade them pull the two poop-ladders up after them. The poop and topgallant fore-castle thus formed two citadels, of a sort, capable of being pretty fairly defended, except in the face of an overwhelming force.

“Now, lads,” cried I, “load your muskets again, and pepper the savages as they swarm in over the bulwarks; and if we cannot turn back the rush by that means, I look to you, Simpson and Jones, to sweep the main-deck clear with the carronades. But do not fire them until you see that it is absolutely necessary in order to save the ship. Here they come; now, lads, stand by!”

As the last words left my lips the leading canoes dashed alongside, and the next instant some thirty or forty savages could be seen scrambling over the bulwarks and leaping down on the main-deck. They seemed somewhat disconcerted at finding no one to oppose them, and paused irresolutely as though not quite knowing what to do, and perhaps fearing a trap of some sort. Meanwhile others came close upon their heels; while the general and his volunteers suddenly found their hands full in repelling an attack upon the poop by way of the mizzen chains. As for that part of the crew that had retired to the poop at my order, I formed them up along the fore end of the structure; and now, as, one after another, they reloaded their muskets, they and their comrades on the topgallant-fore-castle opened a brisk, if somewhat irregular, fire upon the multitude of savages who came pouring in over the bulwarks into the waist of the ship. By the light of the musketry flashes I saw several of the savages throw up their arms and fall to the deck—so many of them, indeed, in proportion to the number of shots fired, that I felt convinced many of the bullets must be doing double or triple duty. But for every savage who fell at least half a dozen fresh ones came in over the bulwarks to take his place, and I soon recognised that such musketry fire as ours must be absolutely ineffectual to deal with the overwhelming odds brought against us. And how warmly I congratulated myself that I had not been foolish enough to attempt anything like a systematic defence of the waist of the ship. Had I done that we should have all been exterminated within the first minute of the attack. As it was we were doing very well—at our end of the ship, at all events; for although the savages quickly recovered themselves after the first moment of astonishment at finding nobody on the main-deck to oppose them, and began to pour in a hot fire of arrows, not one of our party—who were somewhat scattered, and were all lying down, most of them behind some sort of shelter—was hit.

By the time that the attack had been raging some five minutes, however, there must have been quite three hundred savages crowded on the main-deck, between the poop and the topgallant fore-castle, and the affair began to wear a very serious aspect for us defenders; for by this time the blacks were making desperate efforts to climb up on to the poop and carry it by escalade, and a few of us had sustained more or less serious hurts in resisting them. The critical moment, when we must either conquer or go under, was close upon us, and I was about to call to Simpson to ask whether they were ready on the fore-castle with the carronades, when his voice rose above the din, hailing:

“Poop ahoy! Look out there, aft, for we’re goin’ to fire. We can’t hold out here another half a minute.”

“Very well,” I answered, “fire as soon as you like; the sooner the better!” And I then added:

“Jump to your feet, everybody on the poop, and run as far aft as you can, or shelter yourselves behind the companion or skylight—anywhere, until they have fired the carronades!”

We had just time to make good our rush for shelter—leaving the natives who were endeavouring to storm the poop evidently much astonished at our sudden and inexplicable retreat—when the two carronades barked out simultaneously; and the terrific hubbub of shouts and yells down in the waist ceased as though by magic, to be succeeded the next instant by surely the most dreadful outburst of screams and groans that human ears had ever listened to. The carnage, I knew, must have been terrific, but it would not do to trust to the effect of that alone, we must instantly follow it up by action of some sort that would complete the panic already begun; so I shouted:

“Hurrah, lads; now down on the main-deck, all of us, and drive the remainder of the savages over the side before they have had time to recover from their dismay!” And, seizing hold of the first rope that came to hand, I swung myself off the poop down on the main-deck, and began to lay about me right and left with my sword, the remainder of our party, fore and aft, instantly following my example. For a few seconds the savages who still stood on their feet—and how very few there seemed to be of them!—appeared to be too completely dazed by what had happened to take any steps to secure their safety; they even allowed themselves to be shot and struck down without raising a hand to defend themselves! Then, all in a moment, their senses seemed to return to them, and the panic upon which I had reckoned took place; they glanced about them and saw, that, whereas a minute before the deck upon which they stood had been crowded with a surging throng of excited fellow savages all striving to get within reach of those hated white men, it was now heaped and cumbered with dead and dying, with only a stray uninjured man left here and there; and incontinently, with shrill yells of terror, they made for the bulwarks and tumbled over them, careless, apparently, whether they dropped into a canoe or into the water, so long as they could effect their escape from that awful shambles. Many of them, of course, dropped into the canoes, and made good their escape; but the splashing and commotion alongside, and the frequent shrieks of agony, told only too plainly that many of them, in their haste, had missed the canoes and fallen into the water, where the sharks were making short work of them. As for us, as soon as the panic set in, and the retreat was fairly under way, we held our hands, allowing the poor wretches to get away without further molestation; and in two minutes from the moment of that terrible discharge of the carronades not a native remained on the deck of the *Indian Queen* save those who were either dead, or too severely injured to be able to escape.

## I rejoin the "Shark."

As soon as all the savages who could leave the ship had gone, we roused out as many lanterns as we could muster, lighted them, and hung them in the fore and main rigging, or stood them here and there along the rail, preparatory to going the rounds of the deck and beginning the gruesome task of separating the dead from the wounded. And, while this was doing, the general, who claimed to possess some knowledge of surgery, retired to the main saloon, and having roused out Mrs Jenkins and her daughter Patsy, and impressed them into his service as assistants, proceeded to help Burgess to attend to the wounded of our own party, of whom I was one, an arrow having transfixed me through the left shoulder so effectually that the barbed point projected out at my back. I had received the wound a moment before the discharge of the carronades, and had been scarcely conscious of the hurt at the moment; but a man cannot plunge into the thick of a mêlée with an arrow through his shoulder and not know something about it, sooner or later; and the hurt had quickly become very painful and inflamed. The doctor declared that mine was the worst case of all, and insisted that I should for that reason be the first treated; I therefore submitted, with a good grace - for there were many matters calling for my immediate attention; and in a few minutes the head of the arrow was carefully cut off, the shaft withdrawn from the wound, and the wound itself carefully washed and dressed. Then, with my arm in a sling, and my jacket loosely buttoned round my neck, I went out on deck to see how matters were proceeding there.

Only seventeen living bodies were found among the prostrate heaps with which the decks were cumbered. These seventeen, after Burgess had done what he could for them, we placed in one of the many empty canoes that still remained alongside the ship, and towed the craft into the river, where we moored her in such a position that she would be likely to attract the attention of the natives, and thus lead to an investigation of her, and the rescue of her cargo of wounded, which was as much as we could do without exposing ourselves to very grave—and, to my mind, quite unnecessary risk. This, however, was not done until the return of daylight enabled us to see what we were about.

The dead having been got rid of, and our own wounded attended to, all hands turned in to secure a little very necessary rest, the deck being left in charge of an anchor-watch consisting of Messrs Acutt, Boyne, Pearson, and Taylor, who very kindly volunteered to see to the safety of the ship during the few remaining hours of darkness, pointing out that it would be perfectly easy for them to rest during the day, while the crew of the ship were engaged in doing what was necessary to enable us to make an early start from the spot which had brought so much adventure into the lives of all, and had been so disastrous to some of our little community.

At daylight all hands were called, and the first work undertaken was the removal, as far as possible, of all traces of the preceding night's conflict. By dint of hard labour we at length succeeded in so far effacing the stains that the ordinary eye would scarcely be likely to identify them as what they really were, which was, at all events, something gained. There were other marks, however, which it was impossible to obliterate, such as the scoring of the deck planks and the pitting of the mahogany and maple woodwork forming the fore bulkhead of the poop by bullets which had formed part of the charges of the two carronades when they were fired to rake the main-deck; and these we were obliged to leave as they were.

Having succeeded in thus far straightening up matters that the lady passengers could venture on deck without too violent a shock to their susceptibilities, the hands knocked off to go to breakfast. The meal over, the kedge was weighed and stowed, and then the boats were brought alongside, one after another, and the process of striking cargo back into the hold was vigorously proceeded with. This work was of course done by the ship's crew under Carter's supervision, and I and my own little party of men thus had an opportunity at last to treat ourselves to a much-needed rest. Indeed, so far as I was concerned, Burgess insisted that I should at once turn in, and remain in my bunk until he should give me leave to rise, or, in such a climate as this, he would not be answerable for my life! As a matter of fact I had already begun to realise that, with the pain of my wounded shoulder, and exhaustion arising from want of sleep, I could not hold out much longer; and I felt more than thankful that, after the hot reception we had given the natives, there was not much probability of any further fighting. I therefore gladly retired to my cabin and, having swallowed a composing draught which Burgess mixed for me, slept until the following morning, when I felt so much better that the worthy medico rather reluctantly consented to my rising in time to sit down with the rest to tiffin. That same evening, by dint of hard work, the crew succeeded in completing the stowage of the last of the cargo, securing the hatches, and hoisting in the boats before knocking off; and somewhat later, that is to say about three bells in the second dogwatch, Carter availed himself of the springing up of the land breeze to lift his anchor and stand out to sea under easy canvas.

On the following morning, when I went on deck, the *Indian Queen* was out of sight of land and standing to the southward under all plain sail, with nothing in sight but the heads of the topsails of a brig which, hull-down in the south-western quarter, was stretching in toward the coast, close-hauled on the port tack. We took very little notice of this craft at the time, for she was then too far distant to show much of herself, even when viewed through the ship's telescope, while her yards were so braced that only the edges of her sails presented themselves to our view; but, remembering our recent experiences with a brig at a spot not very far distant from where we then were, I strongly advised Carter to keep a wary eye upon her movements. The land breeze was then fast dying away, and I thought it quite possible that we might have an opportunity to see a little more of the stranger when the sea breeze should set in.

That same sea breeze set in while we in the cuddy were sitting down to breakfast; and when, after the meal was over, we all adjourned to the poop, I found Carter regarding the stranger with some little uneasiness through the telescope. As I joined him he handed me the instrument, saying:

"Just take a squint at her, Mr Grenville, and tell me what you think of her. To my mind she seems to be steering in such a way as to close with us, and I should like to have your opinion upon her."

I accordingly took the instrument, and soon had the stranger sharply focused in the lenses. She was then broad on

our starboard bow, and was still hull-down, but she had risen just to the foot of her fore course, which was set, while the mainsail hung in its clewlines and buntlines, and was running down with squared yards, but had no studding-sails set. And, as Carter had remarked, she seemed to be steering in such a manner as to intercept us. She was a brig of about the same tonnage as the *Shark*, of which craft she somehow reminded me sufficiently to invite a closer and more detailed scrutiny, and presently I was able to make out that she flew a pennant; she was consequently a man-o'-war. It is true that the *Shark* was not the only brig on the West African station: the British had two others, and we knew of three under the French pennant; but the craft in sight was not French—I could swear to that—and the longer I looked at her the more firmly convinced did I become that she was none other than the dear old *Shark* herself. I could not be absolutely certain of her identity until her hull should heave up clear of the horizon, but that jaunty steeve of bowsprit and the hoist and spread of those topsails were all very strongly suggestive of the *Shark*. As I lowered the glass from my eye I happened to glance forward, and caught sight of Jones and Simpson seated forward on the topgallant forecastle, smoking their pipes as they animatedly discussed some topic of absorbing interest, and, catching their eyes, I beckoned them to come aft to the poop.

“Take this telescope, Jones, and have a good look at that brig,” said I, as they climbed the poop-ladder, hat in hand; “then pass the instrument to Simpson, and let him do the same. Then tell me what you both think of her.”

The two men took the instrument, one after the other, and ogled the stranger through it with the greatest intentness; but I could see clearly that, even before Simpson took over the instrument from the boatswain’s mate, the latter had already arrived at a pretty definite conclusion with regard to her.

“Well,” said I, when at length Simpson had ended his scrutiny and handed back the instrument to me, “what do you think of her?”

“Why, sir,” answered Simpson, “if she ain’t the *Shark* she’s own sister to her; that’s all I can say.”

“And you, Jones, what is your opinion?” I asked.

“Why, just the same as the carpenter’s, sir,” answered Jones. “She’s the *Shark*, right enough. I knows the steeve o’ that bowsprit too well to be mistook as to what that brig is. She’s the *Shark*; and we shall have the pleasure of slingin’ our hammicks aboard of her to-night!”

“I verily believe you are right,” said I. “At all events we shall know for certain in the course of another half-hour; and meanwhile you can do no harm by going forward and passing the word for the *Sharks* to have everything ready for shifting over, should our surmise prove to be correct.”

“So you really think that yonder brig is your own ship?” remarked Carter, when the two men had gone forward again. “Well, if it should prove to be so, I shall be very sorry to lose you, and so will all of us.”

“Lose! Lose whom? I hope we are not going to lose anybody. We have already had losses enough, this voyage, goodness knows!” exclaimed the general, emerging from the companion at that moment.

He had evidently caught a word or two of what Carter had been saying, and wanted to know all about it.

“Why, Sir Thomas, Mr Grenville believes that brig yonder to be his own ship, the *Shark*,” answered Carter. “And if it turns out that he’s right, of course he and his men will be rejoinin’ directly. And I was just sayin’ that we shall all be very sorry to lose him.”

“Sorry! by George I should say so!” cut in the general. “It would have been a precious bad job for everybody in this ship if we had not been lucky enough to pick up him and his men. Why, sir, we should, every man jack of us, have been dead as mutton by this time. So you think that craft yonder is your ship, do you?” he continued, turning to me. “Well, if she is, you will have to join her—that goes without saying. But Carter here speaks no more than the truth when he says that we shall all be very sorry to lose you—I know that I shall be. And if it should be that we must say good-bye to you now, that must not be the end of our acquaintance, you know; that will never do. You and I have fought side by side, my boy, and I shall expect you to write to me from time to time to let me know how you are getting on; and I will write to you also, if you can give me an address from which my letters can be forwarded on to you. This will be my address for the next year or two, probably.” And, producing a card, he scribbled something upon it and handed it to me.

“And now,” he continued, “about rejoining this ship of yours. Would it be possible for me to accompany you on board? I should like to make the acquaintance of your captain, and have a little talk with him.”

I very clearly understood that the kind-hearted old fellow wished to do me a good turn by making a much more favourable report of my conduct than it would be possible for me personally to make; and I was not so foolish as to regard lightly or neglect any help of which I could legitimately avail myself in my professional career. I therefore said:

“Oh yes, Sir Thomas, I have no doubt that it can be very easily managed; and I am quite sure that Captain Bentinck will be delighted to see you. You can go aboard in the same boat with us, and your return to this ship can be afterwards arranged for.”

“Right! Then that is settled. Now I will leave you, for there is a little matter that I wish to attend to before you and your people leave the ship.”

And with a very kindly smile and nod the old gentleman turned and left me, and presently I noticed that he was deep in conversation with first one and then another of the passengers who were now mustering on the poop.

Meanwhile the breeze was freshening and the two craft were nearing each other fast, the brig gradually edging a

little farther away to the southward at the same time, by which means she by this time presented so nearly a perfect broadside view of herself to us that we could see the end of her gaff, to which we presently saw the British ensign run up. And now there was no longer any doubt as to her being the *Shark*, for her figurehead—consisting of a gilt life-size effigy of the fish after which she was named—could be distinctly made out, glittering under the heel of her bowsprit. In reply to her challenge we of course lost no time in running up our own ensign; but beyond doing that there was no need for further signalling, for it was by this time clearly evident that she intended to speak us. And presently my little party of nine came marching aft, bag and baggage, to the lee gangway, where they stood waiting in readiness to go down over the side, San Domingo depositing his kit temporarily in the stern-sheets of the longboat while he hurried down into my cabin to get my few belongings together.

The negro had just returned to the deck with these when the *Shark*, ranging up within a biscuit-toss of us, hailed:

“Ship ahoy! what ship is that?”

“The *Indian Queen*, of and from London to Bombay, with passengers and general cargo,” replied Carter. “We have an officer and nine men belonging to you on board, sir. Will you send a boat for them, or shall we lower one of ours?”

“Is that Mr Grenville that stands beside you, sir?” asked a voice which I now recognised, despite the speaking-trumpet, as that of Captain Bentinck himself.

“Yes, sir,” replied I for myself; “and I have nine men with me, the survivors of the prize crew of the *Dolores*.”

I saw the skipper turn to Mr Seaton, who stood beside him, and say something, to which the other replied. Then the former hailed again.

“Very glad to find that you are safe, Mr Grenville,” he shouted. “You had better take room and heave-to, and we will do the same. You need not trouble about a boat; we will send one of ours.”

Carter flourished an arm by way of reply, and then gave the order: “Main tack and sheet let go! Man the main clew-garnets and trice up! Lay aft, here, to the main braces, some of you, and stand by to back the mainyard! Down helm, my man, and let her come to the wind!”

At this moment Sir Thomas came up to me and said:

“Grenville, my lad, come down on to the main-deck with me a moment, will you? I have a word or two that I should like to say to your men before they leave the ship.”

“Certainly, Sir Thomas,” said I; and down we both trundled to where the little party of *Sharks* stood lovingly eyeing the movements of their ship, and, as is the manner of sailors, abusing her and all in her the while.

“My lads,” said the general, as they faced round at our approach, “you are about to leave us and return to your own ship, where I doubt not you will receive a warm and hearty welcome from your messmates. But before you go I wish, on behalf of myself and the rest of the passengers of the *Indian Queen*, to express to you all our very high appreciation of the splendid manner in which you have conducted yourselves while on board this ship, and, still more, of the magnificent services which, under the leadership of your gallant young officer, Mr Grenville, you have rendered not only to the owners and crew of the ship, but also to us, the passengers. There can be no manner of doubt that, under God, and by His gracious mercy, you have been the means, first, of rescuing the bulk of the crew from death of a nature too horrible to contemplate, and secondly, ourselves, the passengers, from a fate equally horrible. By so doing you have laid us all under an obligation which it is utterly impossible for us adequately to requite, particularly at this present moment; but it is my intention to go on board your ship to express personally to your captain my very high opinion of the conduct of each one of you. And meanwhile the passengers as a body have deputed me to invite your acceptance of this bag and its contents, amounting to ninety sovereigns—that is to say, ten pounds each man—as a very small and inadequate expression of our gratitude to you. I wish you all long life and prosperity.”

“Thank’ee, Sir Thomas, thank’ee, sir; you’re a gentleman of the right sort, you are—ay, and a good fighter too, sir; we shan’t forget how you went with us into that village, away yonder, to help save them poor ‘shell-backs’,” and so on, and so on. Each man felt it incumbent upon him to say something in reply to Sir Thomas’s speech, and, still more, by way of thanks for the handsome gift that had come to them through him.

By the time that this pleasant little ceremony of the presentation was over, the two vessels were hove-to, and Carter, who of course saw and heard what was going on, must needs come down and have his say also.

“Mr Grenville, and men of the *Shark*,” he began, as soon as the general’s back was turned, “I’ve been very pleased to see what’s just been done, and I’m only sorry that I’ve no power to do as much on my own account. But, whereas I’m now cap’n of this ship, I was only third mate when we hauled out of dock at London, consequently I’ve no money of my own for makin’ presents, and such money as is in the ship belongs to the owners, and I’ve no power to spend it otherwise than in certain ways, as I dare say you all understand. But I agree with every word that the general said about your splendid conduct, and savin’ the lives of my crew and passengers, and all that, and when we get back home I will of course see the owners and report everything to them, and if they’re the men I take ‘em to be they’ll be sure to do the handsome thing by you. As for me, I can only thank you all very heartily for all the help you’ve given me.”

The *Shark’s* boat came alongside just then, and the men passed down their “dunnage” into her amid a brisk fire of good-humoured chaff from their shipmates, and such enquiries as: “Hello, Jim, haven’t you got so much as a monkey or a parrot to cheer us up with?” and so on. Then they followed their belongings down the side, and stowed themselves away in the boat, while I was busy saying adieu to the occupants of the poop, all of whom expressed their deep regret at parting with me. Then I sprang down into the boat, the general followed, and we shoved off amid

much cheering from the fore-castle, and much waving of hats and pocket handkerchiefs from the poop.

The pull from the ship to the brig was a short one, and in a few minutes I had the satisfaction of finding myself once more standing on the deck of the *Shark*.

"Come on board, sir," I reported, touching my hat to the captain, who, with the first lieutenant, was standing on the quarter-deck near the gangway as I entered.

"You have taken us rather by surprise, Mr Grenville," remarked the skipper, gravely acknowledging my salute. "I quite expected that you would be at Sierra Leone by this time. I see that you are wounded, and you appear also to have lost some men. These circumstances, coupled with the fact of your coming to us from yonder ship, lead me to fear that matters have gone very seriously wrong with you and your prize."

"They have indeed, sir, I am sorry to say," answered I. "But before I tell you my story, sir, will you permit me to introduce to you General Sir Thomas Baker, one of the passengers aboard the *Indian Queen*, who has expressed a desire to have some conversation with you."

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Sir Thomas," remarked the skipper, exchanging salutes with the general, and then offering his hand. "Perhaps you will do me the favour to step below to my cabin with me, and we can then have a chat together. Meanwhile, Mr Grenville, if one may judge from your appearance, the sooner you report yourself to the surgeon the better it will be for you." And, as I touched my hat and retired, he led the way below, closely followed by the general.

"Well, Grenville, here you are," exclaimed Morgan, as I entered his cabin. "I have been expecting you, for I saw you come up the side. What is the extent of the damage, and what have you done with the *Dolores*? Which is the worse, your shoulder or your head? Shoulder, eh? Well, let me help you off with your jacket and shirt. Easy does it! There, now sit down in that chair and make yourself comfortable, while I cooper you up. Have they a surgeon aboard that ship? This shoulder of yours appears to have been attended to very passably. Now, spin your yarn while I give you an overhaul."

I gave a brief account of myself and of what had befallen us since leaving the *Shark*, while Morgan patched me up, and his work and my yarn came to an end about the same time.

"Well," said he, as I rose to leave the cabin, "I don't think the skipper will have much fault to find with you when he hears your story. You couldn't help the loss of the schooner, and, upon the other hand, there seems to be very little doubt that you saved the *Indian Queen* from destruction, and her passengers and crew from a very terrible fate. I expect that jolly old buffer, General what's-his-name, has come aboard with the express purpose of making a confidential report to the skipper upon your conduct, and if his story at all bears out your own it ought to do you some good. Now, I'm going to put you on the sick list for a day or two; you have been worked quite hard enough of late, and wounded too. You must take care of yourself for a little while. You need not stay below, you know, but you must not go on duty, for you are not fit for it; that shoulder of yours needs looking after, or it will give you a good deal of trouble. Come to me again at eight bells this afternoon."

From the surgeon's cabin I made my way to the midshipmen's berth, where I received as boisterously hearty a welcome as mid could desire; but I had been there scarcely five minutes when San Domingo, who had already installed himself in his former berth, popped his head in at the door and said, with a broad grin:

"Mistah Grenville, sah, de first leutenant wishes to see you on deck, sah."

Leaving my shipmates itching with curiosity to hear the yarn which I had just begun to spin, I made my way up to the quarter-deck, where I found Mr Seaton in charge, both ships still remaining hove-to.

"Ah, here you are, Grenville!" exclaimed the first luff as I stepped up to him and touched my hat. "I am anxious to hear the story of your adventures since you left us, but I understood that the captain had sent you below to the surgeon. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, sir," said I; "I have been with him for quite half an hour, while he dressed my wounds. He has put me on the sick list, sir."

"Which is about the best place for you, I should think, judging from your looks," answered my companion. "And, of course," he continued, "the wily old Welshman availed himself of the opportunity to extract your story from you—trust Morgan for that! However, he has only weathered on me to the extent of half an hour or so, and I'll get even with him yet before all's done. Now, heave ahead, my lad, and give me the whole yarn, from clew to earing."

Whereupon I had to go through my story a second time, and when I had come to the end I began to reckon up mentally how many times more I might reasonably be expected to tell it, for the fact was that I was already becoming a little tired of it.

"Thank you, Grenville," said Mr Seaton, as I brought my yarn to a conclusion. "A most interesting yarn, and an exceedingly exciting experience. Of course it is not for me to mete out praise or blame in my official capacity, that is to say, it is for the captain to do that; but, unofficially, and merely as a friend, I may perhaps venture to say that so far as I can see you have nothing with which to reproach yourself and have much to be proud of. It is unfortunate that you should have lost five of your number, and I am particularly sorry that Mr Gowland should have been among them, for Mr Gowland was a particularly trustworthy and reliable navigator; but no one could possibly have foreseen that you would have been attacked by that piratical slaver. Ah, here come the captain and your friend the general! What a fine-looking old fellow the general is!"

They came straight toward where the first luff and I were standing; and as they approached, Captain Bentinck said:

"Well, general, since you are quite determined not to stay to lunch with us, let me at least introduce my first lieutenant to you before you go." Sir Thomas very courteously expressed the pleasure that it would afford him to make Mr Seaton's acquaintance, and the introduction was duly made. Then the captain said:

"Sir Thomas has been giving me a very full and detailed description of everything that has happened since you joined the *Indian Queen*, Mr Grenvile, and the recital has afforded me a great deal of pleasure. You appear to have handled an extremely difficult situation with equal courage and discretion, and I may as well say at once that, so far as that part of your adventure is concerned, I am quite satisfied. Sir Thomas has also had something to say about that part of your adventure which relates to the loss of the *Dolores*"—and here I thought I detected a twinkle of amusement in the skipper's eye, brought there possibly by a repetition of the General's frank criticism of my commanding officer's conduct in turning us all adrift in an unarmed vessel—"from which I gather that you were in no way to blame for that unfortunate occurrence."

"I think you will be confirmed in that opinion, sir, when you have heard Grenvile's own version of the occurrence, as I have," said Mr Seaton. "The whole affair appears to have been just one of those that no one could possibly have anticipated."

"Well, I must bid you all adieu," said the general, "for I have kept poor Carter waiting a most unconscionable time, and I see him marching to and fro upon his poop yonder in a state of terrible impatience. Good-bye, my dear boy, and God bless you, for you are a downright good lad in every way! Don't forget to write to me, and keep me posted as to how you are getting on. Good-bye, Captain Bentinck! I am delighted to have had the very great pleasure of making your acquaintance, and I am much obliged to you for listening to me so patiently. Good-bye, Mr Seaton; good-bye, good-bye!" And the old gentleman bustled away, beaming benignantly upon all and sundry, and made his way down into the boat, which meanwhile had been hauled-up to the gangway. Five minutes later the boat returned to the *Shark*, and was hoisted to the davits, and the two craft filled away upon their respective courses, with mutual dips of their ensigns, and much waving of white pocket handkerchiefs from the poop of the *Indian Queen*.

That I should be called upon to relate my story yet once again—this time to the captain—was, of course, inevitable; but he was considerate enough to defer the recital until dinner-time that evening, when the second lieutenant, the master, and myself were guests at his table. He was very kind and sympathetic in the matter of the loss of the *Dolores*, which he admitted was inevitable under the circumstances, and warmly reiterated his expressions of satisfaction at everything that I had done aboard the *Indian Queen*.

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## Chapter Eleven.

### A successful boat expedition.

That same evening we made the land from the mast-head just before sunset, and four hours later came to an anchor off the mouth of a river, the bar of which had too little water on it to permit of the passage of the *Shark*. Our visit to this spot was the result of certain information which the skipper had acquired a few days previously from the master of a palm-oil trader hailing from Liverpool, upon the strength of which he rather hoped to be able to take by surprise an especially notorious slaver which had long eluded our cruisers, but which was now stated, upon fairly reliable authority, to be somewhere on the coast, and was believed to have entered this particular river.

The canvas having been snugly furled, the boats, under the command of the first lieutenant, the master, the boatswain, and the gunner, were manned, armed, and dispatched into the river, the whole expedition being, of course, under the command of Mr Seaton, in whose boat went Peter Christy, one of the midshipmen, while young Keene, another midshipman, contrived to smuggle himself down into the master's boat. Of course I applied for leave to go with the expedition, but, being on the sick list, was peremptorily forbidden even to dream of such a thing, for Morgan, our surgeon, declared that in my run-down condition I was utterly unfit to face the risks of exposure to the fever-laden fog which would certainly be encountered in the river. The night was not especially favourable for an expedition intended to take ships by surprise; for although the sky was somewhat cloudy, it was by no means sufficiently so to obscure very materially the light of the moon, which was then in her first quarter. But she would set shortly after midnight, and meanwhile her light would facilitate the passage of the boats across the bar, after the accomplishment of which the plan was to endeavour to discover the position of the vessel that we were after—or, failing her, any other craft that might be in the river—and then ambush the boats until the moon had gone down. We gave the boats a cheer as they pulled away, and watched them until they vanished in the shadowy obscurity inshore; after which, as we expected to see nothing more of them until daylight, the watch was piped down, and going below I turned in. The night, however, was intensely hot, and the atmosphere of the midshipmen's berth intolerably stuffy. I therefore slept but poorly, and was up and down, at intervals of about an hour, all through the night, listening for the sound of firing, and hoping that perchance the reflection of gun-flashes on the clouds might indicate that the boats had found their quarry. Once or twice, about three o'clock in the morning, some of us who, like myself, were on the *qui vive*, thought we caught the muffled sound of distant firing coming off to us on the damp night breeze, but the everlasting thunder of the surf on the sand a mile away was so loud that we might easily have been deceived. That something important, however, was happening ashore was evident, for about this time we saw the reflection of a brilliant glare in the sky which lasted nearly an hour, and then gradually died down.

At seven o'clock the next morning all our doubts were set at rest by the appearance of two craft—a slashing brig and a very smart-looking little schooner—coming out over the bar with the *Shark's* boats in tow; and ten minutes later they rounded-to and anchored close to us. We now had an opportunity to take a good look at our prizes, and it needed no second glance to assure us that both were perfectly superb examples of the shipbuilder's art. Long, low, and extraordinarily beamy, they carried spars big enough for craft of twice their tonnage, upon which they spread an

area of canvas that made some of us stare in amazement, and which, combined with their exquisitely perfect lines, gave them a speed that enabled them to defy pursuit. The *Doña Inez*, as the brig was named, was a craft of three hundred and eighty-six tons register, and drew only ten feet of water aft; while the *Francesca*—the schooner,—on a tonnage of one hundred and twenty, drew only six feet. That they had been built for the express purpose of slave traffic was apparent at the first glance; and they were, moreover, completely fitted for that traffic, for they had slave-decks, and had manacles, meal, and water on board, but no slaves.

The report of Mr Seaton, the first lieutenant, who presently came aboard, was eminently satisfactory. The expedition had succeeded in locating the two ships on the previous night before the setting of the moon, and had then lain in ambush behind a point only some two cables lengths from their prey until about two o'clock the next morning, when, with muffled oars, they had pulled alongside the two craft simultaneously, boarded them without resistance, surprised and overpowered the anchor-watch, and secured the crews under hatches. This having been done, and prize crews having been placed in charge of both vessels, the remainder of the party, led by Mr Seaton, had landed and captured an extensive slave factory, the occupants of which were evidently preparing for the reception of a large coffle of slaves, and set fire to it, burning the whole place to the ground. And all this had been accomplished at the cost of only two men slightly-wounded. The expedition had thus been completely successful, for the *Doña Inez* was the craft the capture of which had been its especial object, while we had secured in addition a second prize and had destroyed a factory.

Immediately after breakfast the captain proceeded to make his arrangements with regard to the prizes. First of all, the crew of the *Francesca*, were transferred to the *Doña Inez*, and, with the crew of the latter vessel, safely confined in her hold; then the prize crews were strengthened; and, finally, the brig was placed under the command of Mr Fawcett. Then the captain sent for me.

"Mr Grenville," said he, "I am going to prove to you, by placing you in command of the *Francesca*, that the loss of the *Dolores* has in no wise shaken my confidence in you. I remember, of course, that you are on the sick list; but I have consulted the surgeon relative to my proposed arrangement, and he assures me that a few days at sea will be far better for your health than remaining on the coast aboard the *Shark*. Your duties will be easy, for I intend to send with you Jones and Simpson, the boatswain's and carpenter's mates, who were with you in the *Dolores*, and a rather stronger crew than you had in that craft. You may also have Mr Keene to keep you company. You will sail in company with the brig, which will be under the command of Mr Fawcett, and since I learn that both craft, contrary to the ordinary usage of slavers, are heavily armed, you are not likely to suffer molestation this time on your voyage to Sierra Leone."

"Thank you, sir!" said I. "I am very much obliged to you for your continued confidence in me, which you shall find has not been misplaced; and, as to my health, I really think I shall get well quicker at sea than I should by remaining here on the coast. May I have San Domingo again as cabin steward, sir?"

"Why, yes, certainly, if you like, Mr Grenville," answered the captain good-naturedly. "The fellow is rather a good man, I believe, and he appears to have taken a particularly strong fancy to you. By the way, there is one thing that I omitted to mention, Mr Grenville, and that is that you will have to be your own navigator should you and the brig by any chance part company, for Mr Freeman will accompany Mr Fawcett in the brig. But the master tells me that you are a very reliable navigator; you therefore ought not to have any difficulty upon that score. And now you had better run away and turn yourself over to your three-decker."

I dived down into the midshipmen's berth, and found my shipmate, Keene, there also, although really he ought to have been on deck.

"Pass the word for San Domingo," said I to the sentry on duty outside. And as the man duly passed the word, I turned to Keene and said:

"Now, then, young man, hurry up and get your kit ready as fast as you please. You are to come with me in the *Francesca*."

"No!" exclaimed the youth with incredulous delight. "You don't really mean it, do you, Grenville? You're only having me on."

"Indeed I am not," answered I. "The skipper has just told me that I may have you. He thinks that a little real hard work in a small vessel will do you a lot of good, and there I fully agree with him," I added grimly.

"Oh, hard work be hanged!" exclaimed the lad joyously. "I'm not afraid of hard work, as you very well know, Dick. And it will be simply glorious to get away from the taut discipline of the *Shark* for a little while, to say nothing of the possibility of another such adventure as your last. But a pirate won't have it all his own way this time if he attempts to meddle with us, I can tell you, for the schooner mounts eight long nines, and carries a long eighteen on her fore-castle. I say, Grenville, can't we manage to have a little cruise on our own account? The skipper would forgive us, I'm sure, if we were lucky enough to take in a prize or two."

"Not to be thought of, my friend," answered I severely. "We are to make the best of our way to Sierra Leone—the best of our way, do you understand? Besides, the brig and we are to sail in company; and Fawcett won't stand any nonsense, even if I were disposed to listen to your suggestion."

At this moment San Domingo came along. "You want me, Mr Grenville?" he asked.

"Yes, San Domingo," said I. "Get the kits of Mr Keene and myself ready, and also your own, as quickly as possible. We are all to go aboard the schooner."

"Yes, massa, sartinly. I hab um ready in nex' to no time," answered the negro, with an expansive smile of joy

irradiating his face. "P'rhaps we hab anoder adventure! Who can say?" he muttered to himself.

It was getting well on toward noon when, both prizes having been thoroughly overhauled, and such deficiencies as were discovered made good from the stores of the *Shark*, Mr Fawcett and I formally took over our own respective commands, and the three craft weighed and made sail in company.

I confess that I felt in exceedingly buoyant spirits, and the pain of my wounds was completely forgotten as, with young Keene beside me, I stumped fore and aft on the short quarter-deck of the schooner and keenly compared her behaviour with that of her bigger companions. The sea breeze was piping up strong, and there was enough sea running to render the advantage all in favour of the two brigs; yet, notwithstanding this, we were able to spare the *Shark* our topgallant-sail and still keep pace with her. But, good as was the schooner, the *Doña Inez* was better; so much better, indeed, that, in order to avoid running away from us, Fawcett was obliged not only to furl both topgallant-sails, but also to take a single reef in both topsails, while, even then, the brig persisted in creeping ahead, and had to be constantly checked by keeping the weather leaches of her topsails a-shiver. She was undoubtedly a wonderful craft, and doubtless Fawcett was extremely proud of her. I fear that poor Captain Bentinck felt somewhat disgusted at the indifferent figure that the *Shark* was cutting, compared with the other two craft, for he quite unexpectedly made the signal to part company, fired a gun, and went in stays preparatory to bearing away on a southerly course. A few minutes later San Domingo emerged from the companion with the news that luncheon was ready.

"Very well," said I. Then to Simpson, who had charge of the deck: "Keep your eye on the commodore, Mr Simpson, and if he should signal, let me know. And, by the way, you might set the topgallant-sail; I think she will bear it."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Simpson with a grin at the "Mr" which I had given him. "Away aloft there two hands and loose the to'ga'nt-sail. Cast off the clewlines and buntlines, and see all ready to sheet home and hoist away!"

Followed by Keene I dived through the companion, descended the ladder—which was in reality a staircase,—and entered the little vessel's main cabin. This was the first time that either Keene or I had been below, and as we passed through the doorway giving access to the apartment, and looked round it, we began to understand the meaning of the negro's ecstatic grin as he stood aside to permit us to enter. The cabin was a very roomy one for so small a vessel, being about fifteen feet long, and about the same width at the fore end, tapering away aft, of course, in accordance with the shape of the vessel. It was not, however, the size of the cabin so much that arrested our attention as the general effect of extreme elegance which the apartment presented. The man who was responsible for its fitting up must have been an individual of distinctly sybaritic tastes. To begin with, the lockers that ran fore and aft on either side were luxuriously soft and comfortable to sit upon, and were upholstered in rich crimson velvet, with thickly-padded backs of the same material, carried high enough to afford a soft cushion for the back of the head of the sitters to rest upon. They were wide enough to form a most comfortable couch, and were evidently intended to serve that purpose, for at each end they were furnished with a great pile of richly embroidered silken cushions. The lining of the cabin above these couches, or lockers, was of bird's-eye maple, highly polished, and divided up into panels by pilasters of polished satinwood, the centre of each panel being occupied by a large circular port or scuttle of very thick, clear glass, set in a stout gun-metal double frame so arranged that the ports could be opened for the admission of air. Above these ports handsome rods of polished brass, with ornamented ends, were screwed to the panelling, and from these rods depended miniature curtains of crimson velvet, fringed with bullion, which could be drawn when necessary to exclude the too ardent rays of the sun. On one side of the door in the fore bulkhead stood a very handsome sideboard of polished satinwood, surmounted by a mirror in a massive gilt frame worked into the semblance of a ship's cable, and on the other stood an equally handsome bookcase, well filled with—as we afterwards ascertained—beautifully bound books—romances, poems, and the like—in the Spanish language. The after bulkhead was adorned with a very fine trophy, in the form of a many-rayed star, composed of weapons, such as swords, pistols, daggers, and axes. The skylight was very large, occupying nearly half the area of that part of the deck which was over the cabin, and in the centre of it hung a large and exceedingly handsome lamp of solid silver, suspended by massive chains of the same metal, while one end of the skylight was occupied by a barometer hung in gimbals, and the other by a tell-tale compass. Such an elegant little apartment naturally demanded that all its appointments should correspond, and so they did, for the table—which we afterwards found to be made of solid walnut, polished to the brilliance of a mirror—was covered with an immaculate tablecloth of snowy damask, upon which glittered a table equipage of solid silver, cut glass, and dainty porcelain, with a handsome silver centrepiece filled with recently cut flowers, apparently gathered no later than the previous day in the flower-clad forest on the margin of the river which we had just left.

We gasped with amazement—as well we might—at the sight of this little interior, glowing and sparkling with its evidences of almost palatial luxury, and seated ourselves in silence, for words completely failed us, although it is not a very easy matter to reduce a British midshipman to a condition of speechless astonishment. Nor indeed did we long remain in that abnormal state, for, after gazing about him for a moment with open mouth and protruding eyes, Keene burst out with:

"Here, you, San Domingo, you black villain, don't stand there grinning until the corners of your mouth reach back under your ears, but come forward and explain yourself. Where did you find all these things, eh?"

"Massa Keene," protested the negro, "it not right dat young gentleum should call deir faithful servant a 'black willain' after him hab work hard to make um conf'ble and keep um bert' tidy aboard dat dirty old *Shark*. Mos' ungrateful to call black gentleum a willain after all dat I has done for you. You has hurt my feelin's, sah!"

"Have I?" said Jack. "Well then, I'm sorry, San Domingo, and apologise most profoundly and profusely and perpetually and peremptorily and—all the other 'pers' and 'pros' that you can think of. Now, how is that for a salve to your wounded feelings, eh?"

"Dat all right, sah," answered the black. "Quite proper dat one gentleum should 'polergize to anoder. I accep's your



'polergy, sah, mos' gratefully, and will say no more 'bout it. But it not pleasant, sah, for to be called 'black willain' after I hab take de trouble to do all dat"—waving his hand toward the table—"for de pleasure and satisfaction ob—"

I thought it time to interfere and put a stop to the negro's garrulity; so I cut in with:

"Yes, that is all right, San Domingo; but Mr Keene has apologised most fully and handsomely, so we may now regard the incident as closed. At the same time I would remind you that you have not yet replied to Mr Keene's question as to where you found all these gorgeous table appointments."

"Yes, sah, dat quite true, Mistah Grenvile," replied our sable attendant. "Well, sah, I find dem all in de steward's pantry—where else? Ah, gentleum, dis is verry different from de appearance ob de table in de midshipmen's berth aboard de *Shark*, eh? No tin cups and plates here, sah; no rusty old bread barge; no battered old coffeepot; no not'ing ob dat sort. And I t'ink, gentleum, dat if you is pleased wid de table 'pointments dat you will be equally so wid de grub dat I shall hab de honour to place before you. Dis luncheon is not'ing much, just a fresh-cut ham"—lifting a dish-cover—"and a cold boiled tongue"—lifting another. "But dere is fine white biscuit, such as you nebber see aboard de *Shark*, and on dat sideboard I hab a prime cheese—"

"Yes, everything is most excellent, San Domingo," said I, again interrupting the fellow. "Now, Keene, what do you say? Will you have some ham, or some tongue, or a little of both?"

"Thanks!" answered Jack. "I will take a great deal of both if you don't mind, for somehow I've managed to find an enormous appetite."

Having finished our meal, we went on deck again. We found that during our absence below the breeze had moderated very considerably, to such an extent, indeed, that Simpson had just sent a hand aloft to loose the royal and main-topmast staysail, and another to cast loose the gaff-topsail. He was moved thereto, no doubt, by the fact that the brig, which had fallen somewhat astern of us, was also making sail. We had acquired the habit of regarding the *Shark* as a decidedly fast ship, but the manner in which the *Doña Inez* and our own little schooner slid through the water was a revelation to us all, especially when the wind fell quite light, as it did toward the close of the afternoon. Then, indeed, when our speed had dwindled to about four knots, and our canvas collapsed at every roll of the vessel for lack of wind to fill it, we were able to hold our own with the brig; while still later, when the wind had fallen so light that the horizon had become invisible and the oil-smooth surface of the ocean showed scarcely a wrinkle in its satin-smooth folds to indicate that there was still a faint movement of the atmosphere, we gradually drew ahead of our consort, at the rate of about half a knot per hour, and even contrived to retain command of our little barkie, and keep her head pointed the right way, when the brig had begun to box the compass.

It continued calm until shortly after midnight that night, when a faint breathing came creeping up to us from the eastward, to which we spread our studding-sails, and, an hour later, we were bowling merrily along at a speed of nine knots. The wind not only held through the night, but freshened with the sunrise, and throughout that day and the succeeding night our speed never fell below eleven knots, while for an hour or so, when it breezed up especially strong, our log showed that we were doing close upon fourteen.

With the dawn of the third day after we had parted company with the *Shark* we found ourselves about two miles distant from our consort, both vessels steering to the north-westward, with the wind well over our starboard quarter, and our starboard studding-sails set. The wind was blowing a moderate breeze, there was a long but very regular sea running, and we were doing ten knots very comfortably, the little *Francesca*, sliding over the long liquid hills and down into the broad valleys as easily and buoyantly as a sea gull. We in the schooner were showing every rag we could spread, but the brig had her royals stowed, in order that she might not run away from us.

At seven o'clock San Domingo entered my cabin with a cup of chocolate, informed me as to the state of the weather, the whereabouts of the brig, and so on, and intimated that it was time for me to turn out if I wished to indulge in my usual luxury of a salt-water bath under the head-pump. I accordingly tumbled out, and, going on deck, made my way forward along the heaving planks into the eyes of the little vessel. I was just about to place myself under the clear sparkling stream of salt-water that gushed from the spout of the pump when the sound of a loud snap overhead caused me to look aloft, and I saw that the royal halyard had parted, and that the yard was sagging down with its own weight, and the sail bellying out with the pressure of the wind in it. Jones, the acting boatswain, who had charge of the deck, instantly observed the trifling mishap, and shouted an order for the sail to be temporarily clewed up, and for a hand to go aloft and bend the halyard afresh. Meanwhile I proceeded to take my bath, and was giving myself a vigorous towelling afterwards, when the man who had gone aloft hailed the deck with the cry of:

"Sail ho! about two points before the starboard beam."

"What does she look like?" demanded the boatswain.

"She's a tidy-sized brigantine or schooner, sir, for I can see the head of her topgallant-sail and gaff-topsail. She's steerin' pretty much the same way as ourselves, by the look of her."

"Very well, that'll do. Look alive with that royal halyard there. We don't want the commodore to signal, askin' us how long we're goin' to take over the job."

"I'll have all ready to sway away in less than a minute, sir; it's been rather a awk'ard job," answered the man.

"Mr Jones," I shouted, "be good enough to signal the commodore that there is a strange sail in the northern board, will you?"

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Jones; and he dived below for the signal book, which was kept in the main cabin. A minute later we had temporarily hauled down our main-topmast staysail, to permit a clear view of our flags, and were busily

exchanging signals with the brig. Meanwhile, having dried myself, I went below to dress.

Presently a heavy footstep sounded on the companion ladder and a bunch of horny knuckles rapped at my state-room door. "Come in," I cried, and as the door opened Jones poked his head in.

"Commodore's signalled us to haul our wind half a p'int, sir," he reported.

"Very good, Mr Jones; have the goodness to do so," I said, and the boatswain vanished.

Upon returning to the deck after the completion of my toilet I found that the brig had, like ourselves, hauled-up half a point, and set her royals, with the result that she was slightly increasing her distance from us. This change, slight though it was, in the course of the two vessels, caused the stranger and ourselves gradually to approach each other on lines that converged at a very acute angle, and I surmised that Fawcett had set his royals with the twofold object of increasing the speed of his approach toward the stranger, and of avoiding the awakening of any suspicion on the part of that stranger which the sight of a ship with her royals stowed in such moderate weather might be likely to arouse.

By midday we had raised the stranger sufficiently to enable us to see the whole of her royal and just the head of her topgallant-sail from the deck, while from our royal-yard the whole of her canvas was visible down to the top half of her foresail; we were therefore in a position to pronounce not only that she was a brigantine, but also that she was a slashing big craft, probably quite as big as the *Doña Inez*. As the afternoon wore on, however, we seemed to be raising her no higher, and I came at length to the conclusion that, like ourselves, she had slightly hauled her wind, thus manifesting a distinct if not very strongly marked desire to avoid any closer acquaintance with us, which, in its turn, went far to confirm me in a suspicion which had already arisen within my mind that she was a slaver, probably from the Bonny or the Gaboon, with a cargo of "black ivory" on board. All the afternoon I maintained a close watch upon the commodore, with the aid of the splendid telescope which we had found aboard the schooner, momentarily expecting him to make some signal which would indicate that he shared my suspicions; but none came, and at length it dawned upon me that he was purposely abstaining from holding any communication with me, lest by doing so he should strengthen any suspicion which the stranger might be entertaining as to our character. But I noticed that at eight bells in the afternoon watch he again altered his course, hauling up another point; and without receiving any signal from him I promptly did the same.

That we were gradually overhauling the chase was evident from the fact that we were slowly raising her, while she was unable to head-reach upon us; and at sunset we could see the foot of her topsail from the deck while she had not altered her bearing from us by so much as a quarter point since we had last hauled our wind. And if we in the *Francesca* were gaining upon her, the *Doña Inez* was doing so in a still more marked degree, that craft being, at the time last-mentioned, quite eight miles ahead of us, and about two points on our weather bow. The question now arose in my mind whether she would endeavour to dodge us during the night? She would find it exceedingly difficult to do so, for there was now a good moon in the sky, affording sufficient light to enable a man with keen eyes to keep a craft at her distance from us in sight without very much trouble; but, on the other hand, there was a very heavy mass of cloud banking up to windward and fast overspreading the sky. This would obscure the moon later, and perhaps for a time cut off enough of her light to give the stranger a chance, should he wish to avail himself of it. I therefore sent one of the keenest-sighted men I had with me up on the topsail-yard as soon as it began to grow dusk, with instructions to keep his eye on the stranger and immediately report to me should he happen to lose sight of her. For we knew, both from hearsay and experience, that the slavers were as wily as foxes, and were in the habit of adopting all sorts of queer expedients to evade pursuit. Not content, therefore, with sending a hand aloft to watch the stranger, I maintained an almost continuous watch upon her myself from the deck with the aid of the *Francesca's* excellent telescope, which was both a day and a night glass.

Meanwhile the cloud bank continued steadily to overspread the heavens, and at length obscured the moon, shutting off so much of her light that it immediately became difficult in the extreme to discern the chase any longer, even with the assistance of the telescope; and I was not in the least surprised when, a minute or two later, the look-out aloft hailed to say that he had lost sight of her. But I had not; I could still see her through the glass, although with momentarily increasing difficulty as the pall of cloud crept onward across the sky, ever cutting off more and still more of the moon's light; and at length the moment arrived when I also was compelled to admit to myself that I could no longer see her. I removed the telescope from my eye for a minute or two to give my strained and smarting eyeballs a rest, and closed my eyelids in order to completely exclude from them even such dim and uncertain light as still remained; then, knowing exactly where to look for the stranger, I once more pointed the instrument in that direction, searching the horizon closely and carefully for the smallest blur that might betray her. But the effort was useless; she had vanished.

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## Chapter Twelve.

### An exciting chase.

Now arose the question: What has become of the chase; had we simply lost sight of her in the growing obscurity, and was she still steering the same course as when last seen, or had her captain availed himself of that obscurity to put in practice some trick in order to give us the slip?

I brought the telescope to bear upon the *Doña Inez*, in the hope of gathering from her actions some clue as to whether or not she still held the chase in view; she was carrying on, holding to her original course, and the inference to be drawn from this was that those aboard could still see the stranger. But, even as I looked, a string of lanterns soared up to her peak, from which position they were hidden from the chase by the intervention of the brig's headsails, and when the signal was at length complete I found, as I had quite expected, that it was a question as to

whether we still held the stranger in view. This signal I answered in the negative, by means of a whip from the lee lower yard-arm, keeping the lanterns quite low, in the hope that they would thus escape the observation of the chase, and I then got a second signal from the commodore, which read:

“Steer as at present for one hour, then, failing further orders, haul wind to north-east.”

This signal I acknowledged in like manner as the first, and, while doing so, saw that the brig had taken in her studding-sails and hauled her wind. I noted the time, and found it to be close upon seven o’clock. Half an hour later, while Keene and I were below at dinner, the faint boom of a distant gun came floating down the open skylight to our ears, and Simpson, who had charge of the deck, poked his head down through the opening to make the report:

“Commodore signalling again, sir!”

Snatching the signal book from the locker upon which it had been thrown, I dashed upon deck, and presently, by the light of the binnacle lamps, deciphered the signal as follows:

“Tack to south-east.”

“Right!” said I, “answer it. In studding-sails, Mr Simpson, and then heave about on the port tack. Keep your eye on the commodore, and also keep a bright look-out to windward for any sign of the chase.”

By the time that I got below again, and was once more seated at table, the schooner was in stays, and immediately afterwards the long, easy, floating and gliding movement of a vessel running off the wind was exchanged for the quick, violent, jerking plunge and heavy lee lurches of the same craft driven under a heavy pressure of canvas into a high and steep head-sea. Ten minutes later I was again on deck.

“I was just thinkin’, sir, of takin’ in the to’garns’l,” remarked Simpson as I joined him on the weather side of our tiny quarter-deck, where he was engaged in a futile endeavour to avoid the heavy showers of spray that were now flying over our weather bow and as far aft as the mainmast. “She’s got a good deal more than she can comfortably carry, and there’s nothin’ to be gained by whippin’ the sticks out of her. I believe she’d travel quite as fast, and a good deal easier, if that to’garns’l was stowed, sir.”

“Any sign of the chase yet, Mr Simpson?” said I.

“No, sir, not when I looked last, there wasn’t,” answered the carpenter. “The mischief of it is that there’s no knowin’ where to look for her, and it’s as much as a man can do to make out the commodore in this murk.”

“Where is the commodore?” demanded I.

“Out there, dead to wind’ard of us, and about four mile away,” answered Simpson. “Better take in the to’garns’l, hadn’t we, sir?” he continued, cocking his eye aloft to where in the dim light the spar could be faintly seen whipping and buckling like a fishing rod at every mad plunge and heave of the sorely-overdriven little vessel. That she was being overdriven was perfectly evident, not only from the tremendous quantity of water that she was shipping forward at every furious dive into the head-sea, but from the steep angle of her decks, which sloped at an inclination of fully forty-five degrees with every lee roll, and from the cataracts of green water that poured in over her lee rail upon every such occasion; her decks, indeed, to leeward were so flooded that no man could have passed along them to leeward without imminent risk of being washed overboard.

“Yes,” said I at last, “clew up your topgallant-sail, Mr Simpson, and the topsail also while you are about it. You are right, the ship is being over pressed, and I believe that what we may lose by taking the square canvas off her will be more than made up to us by our gain in weatherliness. She will look up nearly a point higher under her fore-and-aft canvas only, and go along very nearly as fast.”

Simpson needed no second bidding. He thought as I did on the matter, and the result proved us correct, for while there was no perceptible diminution in the schooner’s speed due to the loss of her square canvas, she looked higher and went along much more easily and comfortably than she had done before, “Now for a look at the commodore,” said I, when we had snugged down the little vessel, and I took the telescope from the beackets in which it hung in the companion way.

Yes, there she was, dead to windward of us, driving along, as I could just make out, under her main topgallant-sail; but all was perfectly dark on board her, and there was no sign of the slaver that I could see. But I presumed that they had her in sight from the brig, or we should have heard something from the latter. For it was at this time very dark, and blowing strong, and the conditions generally were such that the matter of as little as even two or three miles might make all the difference between seeing and not seeing the stranger.

Eight bells came, the watch was called. Jones, the boatswain, relieved Simpson, and the latter, bidding me good-night, went below. I explained to Jones our reasons for taking the square canvas off the ship, and he was graciously pleased to express his approval.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “I believe you’ve done the right thing. Even now the little hooker have got all that she can comfortably carry, and if you was to pile more on to her you’d do no good, but only strain her all to pieces, and open her seams. The fact is, Mr Grenville, that these here shallow, beamy craft ain’t intended to sail on their sides; bury ‘em below their sheer-strake and they begins to drag and to sag at once. We’re doin’ quite as well as can be reasonably expected in such a sea as this, as is proved by the way that we’re keepin’ pace with the commodore. I’ll just take his bearin’s, for the fun of the thing, and see how much he head-reaches on us durin’ the next hour.” Saying which he trotted aft to the binnacle and very carefully took the bearings of the brig, which we both made to be exactly east-south-east.

The hour sped, with no sight or sign of the chase to cheer us, and then Jones and I went to the binnacle to take the bearings of the *Doña Inez* once more. The boatswain was a long time getting the bearing to his satisfaction, for the little vessel was leaping and plunging most furiously, and the compass-card was none too steady in the bowl; but at length he stepped back from the binnacle with an air of triumph, exclaiming:

"There, Mr Grenville, what d'ye make of that, sir?"

Whereupon I, in turn, stepped up to the binnacle, and with equal care took the bearing.

"I make it east and by south, half south," said I.

"And east and by south, half south it is!" answered Jones exultantly. "Which means, sir, that we've head-reached on the brig to the extent of half a p'int within this last hour, and that, too, in a breeze and a sea so heavy that the brig ought to walk away from us hand over hand. Well, I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself; but seein' is believin', I have heard say. And more than that," he continued, taking up the glass and levelling it at the *Doña Inez*, "I'm blest if I don't believe as we're weatherin' on her too. Take this glass, Mr Grenville, and tell me whether you don't think as we've drawed up a bit closer to the commodore since eight bells struck."

To humour the fellow I took the telescope, as requested, and certainly when I got the brig focused in the lens her image appeared to be more distinct and also perceptibly larger than it had been when I last looked at her.

The hours sped on without change of any sort, except that when at length midnight arrived there was no longer any room to doubt that, since we had taken in our square canvas, and thus relieved the overdriven little hooker, we had steadily, if somewhat slowly, head-reached and weathered upon the commodore; and then, as there seemed to be no prospect of any further news from our consort that night, I went below and turned in, leaving instructions that I was to be called at once, without fail, should anything occur to render necessary my presence on deck, or should the commodore exhibit any further signals. In less than five minutes I was fast asleep.

I was awakened next morning by the loud knocking of the steward at my state-room door.

"Six bells, Mistah Grenville, sah; and here is your coffee," announced San Domingo, as he stood balancing the cup and saucer in his hand and swaying to the still lively movements of the schooner, although it struck me at once that she was not nearly so lively in her motions as she had been when I turned in at midnight. I raised myself in my bunk and peered through the closed scuttle that was let into the side of the ship. The little craft was still lying over far enough to cause the sea to wash up over the glass and obscure the view occasionally, but there were nevertheless intervals of quite long enough duration to enable me to note that the morning was overcast and lowering, with a decided thundery look in the sky, and that the sea had gone down very considerably while I had been lying asleep.

"Well, San Domingo," I said, "are there any signs of the chase? And where is the commodore?"

"De chase, sah, am about four mile to wind'ard ob us, bearin' about half a point abaft de beam, and de commodore am 'bout a mile and a half astern of us."

"Astern of us—the commodore astern of us, did you say?" exclaimed I incredulously.

"Yes, sah," answered the black, quite unmoved, "dead astern ob us. We hab both weadered and head-reached on him durin' de night."

"Has he made any signals since I came below?" asked I.

"Not dat I am aware ob," answered the fellow. "But, if massa wish, I will go on deck and ask Mistah Simpson."

"No, never mind," said I. "No doubt Mr Simpson would have called me had such been the case. What canvas are we under?"

"All plain sail, to de royal, sah."

"Very well, that will do," said I, taking the cup and draining it. "Find me my bath towel, San Domingo, and then you may go."

A minute later I was on deck, still in my sleeping rig, and looking about me. The weather was pretty much as I had judged it to be from the glimpse that I had caught through my state-room port. As San Domingo had said, the *Doña Inez* was about a mile and a half so dead astern of us that her two masts were in one, while, in the precise position which the negro had indicated, there lay a fine, spanking brigantine thrashing along under a perfect cloud of canvas to her royal, which, by the way, appeared to have as much hoist, and nearly as much canvas on it, as our topsail.

"Nothing to report, sir," said Simpson, coming up to me as I emerged from the companion. "We made out the chase about two bells this morning; but I did not call you, sir, as she showed no signs of shiftin' her helm. And the commodore haven't said a word all night. I reckon he'll be a bit surprised when he sees where we are."

"To tell you the truth, Simpson, I am 'a bit surprised' myself," said I. "She is a wonderful little craft to have beaten the *Inez* as she has done, and that, too, in a strong breeze." And, turning away, I went forward and took my usual salt-water bath.

"Now," I meditated, as I took up a position beneath the spout of the head-pump, and signed to the man in charge to get to work, "the rule in chasing when one is abreast, but to the leeward of the chase, is to tack. I don't like to tack without instructions from my superior officer, because I don't know what his plans may be, and he may have some scheme of his own for the circumventing of our friend yonder; but if I do not hear anything from him by the time that

I am ready to go below and dress I will just take the small liberty of asking for instructions. For of course the brigantine is quite aware by this time that the brig and we are running in couples, therefore there need be no further squeamishness on my part as to an interchange of signals between the brig and myself."

My douche at an end, I walked aft again, and, pausing at the head of the companion ladder, said to Simpson:

"Mr Simpson, be good enough to get out the flags and—"

The carpenter was balancing himself upon the dancing deck as I spoke, with the telescope at his eye, looking at the brig, and I had got so far in my speech when he interrupted me with the exclamation:

"Signal from the commodore, sir!"

"What is it?" I asked.

He read out the flags to me, and I said:

"All right! acknowledge it." And I dived below into my cabin, where I at once turned up the signal in the code book. It consisted of the one word "Tack!"

Hastily closing the book again, I dashed up the companion ladder and shouted to Simpson:

"Mr Simpson, 'bout ship at once, if you please. And when you are round upon the other tack, and have coiled down, let the men clear away the long gun on the forecastle and get up a few rounds of ammunition. We may perhaps get a chance to have a slap at that fellow a little later."

"Ay, ay, sir! Hands 'bout ship!" roared Simpson. And as I descended again to my state-room to dress, I heard him give the order to "down helm". The next moment the little hooker rose to an even keel, with a terrific slatting of canvas and whipping of relaxed sheets as she came head to wind; then, after a vicious plunge or two, head-on, into the long seas, she paid off on the opposite tack and heeled over to port. The shivering and slatting of the canvas, with the accompanying tremor of the hull, ceased, and the long, easy, floating plunges and soarings were resumed as she again settled easily into her stride.

"Long gun all ready, sir," reported Simpson when at length I stepped out on deck fully dressed. "Shall we try a shot?"

"Too far off," said I; "we should not get anywhere near her. Still, yes, you may waste a charge just by way of letting the fellow understand that we are in earnest. Give the muzzle a good elevation, and so aim that he may see that we want to pitch a shot across his forefoot. And at the same time let him see the colour of our bunting."

The shot was accordingly fired and our ensign hoisted; but, so far as the former was concerned, we might as well have saved our powder, for the ball, although very well aimed, fell a long way short. But it had the effect of causing her to show her colours, which proved to be French. We fired no more, for there was nothing to be gained by wasting ammunition, and it was quite clear that the stranger had no intention of heaving-to until absolutely compelled to do so. We held on, therefore, uneventfully, until we were fairly in the brigantine's wake, and then tacked again, without waiting for orders from the commodore. It was by this time eight o'clock; the watch was called, the boatswain came aft to relieve Simpson, and San Domingo appeared, with the announcement that breakfast was ready. Before going below, however, I ordered young Keene to bring up my sextant, with which I very carefully measured the angle between the brigantine's main-topmast head and the top of her transom. When I had secured this I clamped the instrument and laid it aside for reference later. Then I instructed Jones to pick out the best helmsman he could find in his watch and send him aft to the tiller, explaining my reason for so doing.

"After our performance of last night," said I, "I think we need have no fear as to our ability to overhaul that brigantine. But I want to do more than that; I want not only to overhaul her, but also to eat out to windward of her, so cutting off her escape in that direction. And, to accomplish this, and thus bring her the sooner to action, if she means to fight, we must have a thoroughly good man at the tiller, one who will let her go along clean full, yet at the same time coax and humour the little barkie every inch to windward that he can."

"Yes, sir, I perfectly understands," answered the boatswain. "I knows exactly what you wants, Mr Grenville, and I've got the very man for the job. I'll see to it, sir." And he took the tiller rope out of the hands of the man who was steering, giving him instructions to "send Bill Bateman aft."

I found young Keene in high feather at the prospect of a tussle with so formidable an opponent as the brigantine promised to be, and we dispatched our breakfast in double-quick time, after which my lighthearted companion got out his pistols and proceeded to clean and load them carefully in anticipation of the moment when they might be needed. And when this was done he went forward to supervise personally the sharpening of his sword by the armourer. Meanwhile I took my sextant on deck, and had another squint through it at the chase. It was satisfactory to find that we were overhauling her rapidly. Then, having secured an observation of the sun for the determination of our longitude, I gave orders to clear for action, an operation which, in the case of so small a hooker as the *Francesca*, was a very simple matter. We had just completed all our preparations comfortably when Jones called my attention to the fact that the commodore was in stays, and presently she was round on the other tack and heading well up for us. But so far had we gained on her that, when at length we crossed her hawse, there was quite two miles of clear water between us. I commented upon this singular fact to Jones, remembering that when we parted company with the *Shark* the *Doña Inez* was distinctly the better sailer of the two, while now we were beating her in her own weather.

"It's not very difficult to understand, sir," answered Jones. "The fact is that then we didn't know this here little beauty, and how to get the best out of her, while now we does. That's all that there is about it."

And, as I could not otherwise understand the phenomenon, I was obliged to accept that explanation, and be satisfied with it.

Six bells arrived, by which time the commodore was once more in our wake, having tacked again, while we had clawed out about half a mile to windward of the chase, and drawn so close to her that I determined to try the effect of another shot from the long eighteen upon her. The gun was accordingly reloaded, carefully trained, and the schooner luffed sufficiently to bring the gun to bear clear of our head gear. At the proper moment the gunner, who was squinting along the sights, gave the order to fire. The linstock was applied, the gun exploded, shaking the little vessel to her keel, and as the helm was put up to keep her away again, all eyes were strained to note the effect of the shot. It struck the water fair and true close astern of the chase, but without doing any damage, so far as we could see. But it was soon apparent that it had fallen too close to her to be pleasant, for the next moment her fore-rigging was alive with men, who swarmed up on to her yards as she put her helm up and kept away upon a south-westerly course, with the wind well over her port quarter. And that her skipper was a taut hand, who kept his men well up to the mark, was immediately afterwards evidenced by the wonderful man-o'-war-like rapidity with which they rigged out their studding-sail booms, and set a whole cloud of studding-sails on their port side.

"Up helm and keep her away!" I shouted as I saw what the brigantine was at. "Away aloft there and out booms—get the larboard stu'n'sails upon her as quick as you please, lads. Steady as you go," to the man at the helm. "How's her head?"

"Sou'-west and by west, half west, sir," answered the man.

"Keep her at that," said I. The course which we were then steering was about half a point higher than that of the brigantine, and by following this I hoped to drop into her wake again in due time without losing any ground.

We were now once more running off the wind, and the quick, jerky motions of the schooner had given place to a series of long, easy, buoyant, floating movements, much more conducive to accurate shooting than those which had preceded them. I therefore resolved to try the effect of at least one more shot from the long gun, especially as it became apparent that the brig had at last found herself upon her best point of sailing, and was gradually creeping up to us, while I was anxious to have to myself the honour and glory of bringing the brigantine to action without the assistance of the commodore. I therefore gave orders to reload the forecastle gun, and to aim high, with the object of disabling the chase aloft, and so clipping her wings. The gun was accordingly made ready and, at the proper moment, fired, the gunner waiting until a surge had swept under the little vessel and she was just settling into the trough in the rear of it, with her stern down in the hollow and her bows pointing skyward. Again came the flash, the jarring concussion, the jet of white smoke; and a moment later young Keene, who, in his excitement, had scrambled half-way up the fore-rigging, to note the effect of the shot better, gave a cheer of exultation.

"Hurrah!" he yelled; "bravo, Thompson! well shot—clean through his topsail, and a near shave of clipping the topmast out of her."

We presently fired again, this time cutting the royal stunsail sheet and setting the sail violently flapping, with the result that it had to be taken in before the sheet could be spliced. But we were not to be allowed to have matters all our own way very much longer, for while we were reloading the long gun a jet of flame, followed by a puff of white smoke, like a little wad of white cotton wool, suddenly leaped from the brigantine's stern port, and a 9-pound shot came whistling overhead, neatly bringing down our fore topgallant-mast, with all attached, on its way. We were now in a very pretty pickle, forward, for it was our wings that were clipped, much more effectually than we had clipped those of the chase; and now, too, the commodore came romping up to us, hand over hand. We were, however, not yet beaten, by a long way, and while a good strong gang was at once sent aloft to clear away the wreck, we on deck kept up a brisk and persistent fire upon the chase with our long gun. But whether it was that Thompson's hand had lost its cunning, or that the flapping and banging of the wreckage overhead disconcerted him and spoiled his aim, certain it is that we made no more hits just then.

By the time that our wreckage had been cleared away, and everything made snug aloft once more, the commodore had forged ahead of us, and had begun to open fire, the brigantine returning his fire briskly from one stern port while she peppered us from the other. And presently a further misfortune, and this time a very serious one, overtook us, it happening that we both fired at the same instant, and while our shot clipped off the brigantine's topmast-studding-sail boom like a carrot, close in by the boom-iron, his shot passed through our topsail, so severely wounding the topmast on its way that, before anything could be done to save the spar, it snapped short off about half-way up its length; and there we were again, hampered with a further lot of wreckage to clear away.

Meanwhile the commodore, profiting by the damage that we had inflicted upon the brigantine, rapidly overhauled her. The two craft maintained a brisk fire upon each other until, the *Doña Inez* having ranged up alongside the chase, they both took in their studding-sails and went at it, hammer and tongs, broadside to broadside. This continued until, the brig's fore-topmast having been shot away, she broached-to and ran foul of the brigantine, to which she promptly made herself fast by means of her grappling irons. And the next moment the cessation of the gun fire, the flashing of cutlass blades in the sun, and the popping of pistols told us that the boarders were at work.

"Avast there with the long gun!" I cried. "Boarders, stand by! Mr Keene, have the goodness to take charge. Stand by your halyards, men, and be ready to settle away everything, fore and aft, as we range alongside. Stand by also with your grappling irons. Mr Keene, we will range up on the brigantine's port side."

"Oh, Dick, you might let me go with you, old chap; I've got my sword sharpened and my pistols ready expressly for the purpose of boarding!" pleaded Jack.

"Can't possibly, my dear boy," answered I. "Somebody must look after the schooner, and you're that somebody; so please say no more about it. Now, lads," I continued, "we must make short work of this business; for if these craft lie

alongside each other for ten minutes, in this sea, they will grind each other to pieces, and we shall all go to the bottom together. So strike, and strike hard, the moment that you find yourselves on the enemy's decks. Mr Jones, tell off six men to remain in the schooner with Mr Keene."

Five minutes later and we were within half a cable's-length of the brigantine, on the decks of



"THE NEXT INSTANT WE WERE LEAPING DOWN ON HER DECKS"

which a fierce and stubborn conflict was still raging; and it appeared to me that the commodore and his party were finding all their work cut out to avoid being driven back on the deck of their own ship.

"Settle away fore and aft," I cried. "Main and fore halyards, peak and throat; jib halyards, let go; man your downhauls; and then muster in the waist, starboard side. Steady, Jack, starboard you may; steady, so. Now stand by your grapnels—heave! Hurrah lads, follow me, and take care that none of you drop between the two hulls!"

The next instant we were all leaping and scrambling, pell-mell, in over the bulwarks of the brigantine and leaping down on her decks, which were already slippery with blood and cumbered with killed and wounded. Fortunately, by boarding on the brigantine's port side, as we did, we took her crew in their rear, which so greatly disconcerted them—while our appearance imparted fresh courage to the commodore's party—that after vainly striving to stand against us for nearly a minute, some flung down their weapons and cried for quarter, while the remainder made a clean bolt of it forward and darted down the fore scuttle, which we promptly closed upon them.

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### Sierra Leone.

The brigantine was ours, and, my first thought being for the safety of all three of the craft, I at once gave orders for the grappling irons to be cast loose, and for the brig and schooner to haul off to a safe distance. Then, looking round the deck of the brigantine, I noticed Freeman, the acting master of the *Doña Inez*, away aft, with his coat off, and one of his own men binding up the wounded arm of the officer. I hastened aft.

"Not seriously hurt, Freeman, I hope?" said I.

"Hullo, Grenville, that you?" he returned. "No, thanks; rather painful, but not very serious, I hope. By Jove, but those Frenchmen fought stubbornly; if you had not come up in the very nick of time it would have gone pretty badly with us, I can tell you. You seem to have come off scot free, by the look of you."

"Yes, I am all right, thanks—not a scratch," said I. "But where is Mr Fawcett? I don't see him aboard here."

"No," answered Freeman, "poor chap! he is below, aboard the brig, and I am afraid it is a bad job with him. The last broadside that this craft fired into us was at pretty close quarters, as you perhaps noticed, and the skipper was very severely wounded by a large splinter—abdomen torn open. Hamilton, the assistant surgeon, is greatly afraid that it will go badly with him."

"By Jove," said I, "I am awfully sorry to hear that! Could he see me, do you think?"

"I really don't know," answered Freeman; "Hamilton is the man of whom you must ask that question. Your best plan, I think, will be to go aboard as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I suppose you will take charge and make all necessary arrangements."

"Certainly," I said. "You, of course, will take command of the brig, and Keene must take command here, with just enough men to enable him to handle the ship, which, by the by, has a full cargo of slaves aboard, I perceive." There could be no possible doubt as to this last, for there was a thin, bluish-white vapour of steam curling up through the gratings which closed the hatchways, the effluvia emanating from which was almost unendurable.

"You," I continued, "had better get back aboard the brig and set your crew to work to repair your damages aloft as quickly as possible—all other damage must remain until we arrive at Sierra Leone. I will do the same as soon as I have seen the prisoners properly secured. Our own damages are but slight, and as soon as I have put matters in train aboard the schooner I will send Simpson and a party aboard here to see to things, while I go aboard you to hear what Hamilton has to say. But we shall have to use the brigantine's boats, I expect, to get back to our own craft. I have not left enough hands with Keene to enable him to send a boat."

This arrangement we duly carried out; but, owing to one delay and another, it was nearly three o'clock that afternoon when I was able to pay my promised visit to the brig, by which time Hamilton had coopered up all his most serious cases and was able to spare me a moment.

"Ah, Grenville," he exclaimed, as I descended into the brig's cabin, which, by the way, was almost as sumptuously arranged as that of the *Francesca*, and which the medico was then using as a surgery. "I am glad to see you and to learn that you don't need any of my delicate attentions! The skipper is very anxious to see you, poor chap, but he would not signal for you to come aboard, as Freeman told him that you intended coming as soon as possible, but that, in the meantime, you had your hands pretty full looking after things in general. This affair has been as sharp a thing of its kind as I have ever known, I think."

"And how is he now, Hamilton? Do you think he can see me without detriment to himself?" I asked.

"Certainly, if he is not asleep, as to which I will investigate," was the reply. "It will not harm him to see you," continued Hamilton; "on the contrary, it may do him good. For I fancy that he wishes to arrange certain matters with you, and when he has done that he will perhaps be able to compose himself and give himself a chance. Not that I think there is much hope for him; I tell you that candidly. But for pity's sake don't let your manner to him betray the fact that we are taking a very serious view of his case. If we can get him ashore, and into the hospital alive, he may perhaps pull round; so pray shove ahead with your repairs as fast as possible, and carry on like fury when you fill away again."

"Trust me," said I. "If 'carrying on' will *get* him ashore alive, I'll do it. And now perhaps you had better ascertain whether I can see him or not, for the sooner I am free again to look after matters the sooner shall we be able to make a start."

Without further loss of time Hamilton tiptoed to the door of the skipper's state-room, and, having very gently turned the handle and looked in, beckoned me to enter.

"Mr Grenville to see you, sir," said the surgeon, ushering me in.

"Ah, Mr Grenville, come in; I am glad to see you," said the poor fellow, extending his hand to me. "Make room for yourself on that sofa locker there; never mind my clothes, pitch them down anywhere, I shall never want them again."

"Oh, I don't know, sir!" said I, affecting to misunderstand him, as I took the garments one by one and hung them upon hooks screwed to the bulkhead. "This coat, for instance," said I, holding it up, "will clean very well, I should think, but the waistcoat and trousers—well, I'm afraid you will need new ones, for these seem to be past repairing."

"You misunderstand me, Grenville," he said. "But never mind, we'll not talk about that just now; I have other and more important matters that I wish to speak about. And first of all, as to our losses, I fear they have been very heavy, have they not?"

"No, sir," said I. "On the contrary, they are very light indeed, compared with those of the enemy. We have lost only five killed and eleven wounded, your case being the most serious of the latter, and Hamilton tells me that he hopes to have all hands of you up and as hearty as ever within the month."

"Does he—does he really say that? God be thanked for that good news!" exclaimed the poor fellow with more energy than I could have expected from a man presenting such a ghastly appearance as he did. For his cheeks were sunken, and white as chalk, and his lips were quite blue. "The fact is, Grenville," he continued, "that I don't want to die yet, if I can help it; not that I am not prepared to die, if it be God's will to take me, for, thanks be to Him, I am ready to go at any moment, if the call should come, as all men should be, especially soldiers and sailors, who are peculiarly liable to receive their summons at a moment's notice. No, it is not that, but I should like to live a little longer, if it might be so, for—for many reasons, the chief of which is that I have a wife at home—whose—whose heart—"

The dear fellow was getting a little excited, I saw, and that, of course, would be bad for him, so I cut in:

"Never fear, sir," I exclaimed cheerily. "You will ride this squall out all right, I've not a doubt of it. You must not judge by your present feelings, you know. Just now you are exhausted with loss of blood and the pain of your wound, but I intend to carry on and get you ashore and in hospital within the next three days, please God, and once you are out of this close cabin, and in a nice airy ward, with proper nurses to look after you, you will begin to pull round in a way that will astonish you. You are in no danger, sir; Hamilton told me so, and I should think he ought to know." It was useless to lie unless it were done boldly, and I inwardly prayed that my pious fraud might be forgiven.

"Well, well, I hope so," the poor fellow gasped. "At all events I will try to hold on until we arrive, and then perhaps I may get my step. If I got that—"



"Get your step, sir?" I cut in again. "Of course you will get it! I only wish I were half as certain of getting the ten thousand a year that my uncle has promised to leave me when he dies. Get your step? Why, sir, it is as good as in your pocket already."

"You think so?" asked he doubtfully. "I wish I could feel as sure of it as you do, my boy—ay, I wish I could feel as sure of it as I am that you will get your commission—for get it you shall, if anything I can say will help you to it. And that reminds me, Grenville, that I wish to say how perfectly satisfied and highly pleased I have been with your conduct and gallantry in this affair. You handled your schooner with the very best of judgment, and indeed, but for you the fellow might have slipped away from us altogether. I will take care to make that quite clear to the commodore in my report to him."

I thanked him very heartily for his exceedingly kind intentions toward me, and then we passed on to the discussion of certain other matters, with the details of which I need not weary the reader; and when I left him, an hour later, Hamilton assured me that his patient, although exhausted with his long talk, was none the worse, but rather the better, for my visit. "You have taken him out of himself, diverted his thoughts into a more cheerful channel, and it has done him good. We must play up that 'step' business to the very last ounce," he concluded.

When I went on deck, upon leaving poor Fawcett, I was gratified to find that the making good of damages aboard the brig was progressing apace, and that Freeman would be ready to make sail about sunset, while aboard the prize they were all ataunto again, with the damaged sails unbent and sent down, and fresh ones bent in their place. The schooner also had sent up and rigged a new topmast, set up the rigging, got the yards across, and the topsail set, with topgallant-sail and royal all ready for sheeting home. I therefore at once proceeded on board my own little hooker and packed Master Jack off, bag and baggage, to take charge of the prize, to that young gentleman's ineffable pride and delight. Then, as soon as all was ready we made sail in company, and, carrying on day and night, arrived at our destination without further adventure early in the afternoon of the third day after our engagement with the slaver.

I had, of course, during the passage, made frequent enquiries each day as to the progress of poor Fawcett, but the best news that they could give me was that, while he seemed to be no worse, he was certainly no better. As soon, therefore, as the anchors were down I went alongside the brig, and having dispatched a messenger ashore in the schooner's gig with a message to the hospital authorities, proceeded with the difficult and delicate job of conveying the invalid ashore. To facilitate this the carpenter of the brig had, under Hamilton's supervision, prepared a light but strong framework, somewhat of the nature of a cot, with stout rope slings attached thereto, and when all was ready for the patient's removal this was placed on the cabin table, and six stout fellows then entered the state-room, and, carefully lifting the wounded man, bed and all, out of his bunk, gently carried him into the main cabin and laid him, just as he was, on the cot or stretcher. This we fortunately accomplished without seriously discomposing our patient, and the surgeon then administered a soothing draught, the effect of which was to put the sufferer to sleep in a few minutes. Hamilton having foreseen that it would be practically impossible to convey the stretcher and its burden up on deck by way of the companion ladder without injury to the patient, had caused some planks to be removed from the fore bulkhead, thus making a passage into the main hold, through which we now carried the stretcher, laying it gently down on the slave-deck immediately beneath the main hatch. Then the slings of the concern were hooked on to a tackle which had been lowered down the hatchway, and our patient was next not only hoisted up through the hatchway, but also slung over the side and lowered down into the stern-sheets of a boat waiting alongside to receive him. The rest was easy; we pulled ashore, lifted our burden—still on the stretcher—out of the boat, and carried him up to the hospital, where he was at once placed in a bed that had been made ready to receive him. And all this without awaking him, so that when at length he opened his eyes it was to find himself comfortably settled in a fine, light, airy ward, with one of the hospital surgeons re-dressing his wound. The change did him immediate good, and before I left the building I had the satisfaction of learning that there was a possibility of his recovery, although very little likelihood that he would ever be fit for active service again. Meanwhile the rest of the wounded, or rather such of them as it was deemed advisable to place in the hospital, had also been taken ashore, and I was free to attend to other matters.

It is not necessary to describe in detail the conduct of all the business that I found it would be necessary for me to transact. Suffice it to say that I had a most satisfactory interview with the commodore of the station, at the end of which he complimented me very highly upon what he was pleased to designate as "the sound judgment and great gallantry" with which I had played my part, not only in the capture of the brigantine, but also in the affair of the *Indian Queen*. And, as a crowning mark of his approval, he presented me with an acting order as lieutenant, with an assurance that I might trust to him to see it confirmed. Emboldened by this favourable reception on the part of the great man, I ventured to hint that I believed poor Fawcett's recovery would be greatly hastened if he could be reasonably assured of getting his promotion, to which the old fellow very kindly replied:

"Leave that to me, my lad, leave that to me; I am not so very old yet that I am not able to remember how you youngsters feel in the matter of promotion, or to sympathise with you. I shall probably be seeing Mr Fawcett to-day, and I venture to hope that my visit will do him more good than all the doctors in the hospital. Come and dine with me to-night; I want to hear the story of that *Indian Queen* affair in a little more detail, and there are other matters upon which I may have something to say to you. And bring your shipmate—what did you say his name is? Keene—ah, yes, bring Mr Keene with you!"

Full of elation at the good news that I felt I had to communicate to Fawcett, I hurried to the hospital, and found, to my regret, that he was not quite so well, having exhibited some symptoms of a relapse, and the doctor therefore seemed at first somewhat disinclined to let me see him. But upon explaining to him that I had a little bit of very good news to communicate, he said:

"That, of course, makes a great difference. Yes, you may see him, for five minutes, which I suppose will be long enough to communicate your good news, and then come away again. You know your way up. Look in here on your return, and let me know the result of your interview."

I went up, and found the poor fellow looking very haggard and ill, but he brightened up somewhat upon my entrance; perhaps he read good news in my jubilant expression.

"Well, what is it, Grenville?" he said. "You look as though you have something good to tell me."

"I have," said I, pretending not to notice his altered looks. "I have, although perhaps I am not acting quite fairly by the commodore in forestalling him. He is coming to see you, sir, and, although he did not absolutely state as much in so many words, I have not the slightest doubt that he intends to give you your step. He has given me an acting order, and he therefore cannot, in common fairness, withhold your promotion from you. But naturally he would not take me into his confidence and categorically state his intentions toward you before mentioning the matter to you. But I feel as certain that you will get your step as I do that I am at this moment sitting by your bedside."

"Well, that is good news indeed, and I thank you for so promptly bringing it to me," exclaimed the invalid. "And I must not forget to congratulate you, Grenville, upon your good luck, which, I tell you plainly, I think you fully deserve. But, although an acting order is an excellent thing in its way, you will have to pass before you can get it confirmed, you know. Have you served your full time at sea yet?"

"Yes," said I; "completed it last month. But it is rather awkward about having to pass, though. I fear there is very little likelihood of my being able to go for my examination here."

"That is as may be," returned the lieutenant. "Anyhow, you cannot get away from here just yet; and it may be—I don't say it will, but it may be—that an opportunity may occur before you leave. How did the commodore treat you; did he seem fairly favourably disposed to you?"

"Yes, indeed," said I. "'Fairly favourably' hardly describes his manner to me. I should have spoken of it as 'very favourably'."

"Well, I am right glad to hear it, and I congratulate you most heartily. You say that the old boy is coming to see me. Now, understand, boy, if I can put in a good word for you without shoving it in, bows first, and knocking the old gentleman's eye out with the flying-jib-boom, I will."

The worthy fellow was now quite a different man from what he had been when I entered the room a few minutes earlier; I therefore thought this a favourable opportunity to top my boom and haul off; so, thanking him very sincerely for his kind intentions in my favour, I shook hands and bade him good day, promising to look in again upon him on the morrow.

Keene and I duly dined with the commodore that evening; and when the cloth had been removed, and the servants had retired, the old gentleman said:

"Well, Mr Grenville, I called upon your friend Fawcett this afternoon, and had a fairly long chat with him, in spite of the doctors. The poor fellow will never be of any further use afloat, I am afraid; but he may yet do good service ashore if those fellows can patch him up sufficiently to enable him to go home. And I think they will; yes, I think they will. He was very much better when I left than when I arrived;" and the old boy's eyes twinkled good-humouredly. "It is wonderful," he continued, "what a little promotion will do for a man in his condition. Talking of promotion, I mentioned to him that I had given you an acting order, at which he seemed greatly pleased; and he said several things about you, young gentleman, which I shall not repeat, but which I was very pleased to hear, since they all go to confirm the good opinion of you that I have already formed. But he reminded me that before your acting order can be confirmed you must pass your examination. Now, do you feel yourself to be in trim to face the examiners at any moment?"

"Yes, sir," said I, "provided, of course, that they don't try to bother me with 'catch questions' of a kind that have no real bearing upon one's practical capabilities. I have worked fairly hard from the moment when I first entered the service; my character will bear investigation; I am a pretty good seaman, I believe; and Mr Teasdale, our master aboard the *Shark*, was good enough to report to the sk—to Captain Bentinck, only the other day, that I am a trustworthy navigator."

"Good enough to take a ship across the Atlantic, for instance, without assistance?" asked the old gentleman.

"Yes, sir," said I. "I would not hesitate to take a ship anywhere, if required."

"Good!" exclaimed the commodore; "I like your confident way of speaking. I like to see a young fellow who believes in himself. Well, well, we shall see, we shall see."

Then he asked me to relate to him the whole story of the loss of the *Dolores* and of the *Indian Queen* incident, "from clew to earing", as he put it; and I told him the complete yarn, as he sat cross-legged in his low lounging chair, with a cheroot stuck in the corner of his mouth, listening, nodding his head from time to time, and frequently breaking in with a question upon some point which he wished to have more fully explained. He also put Master Jack pretty completely through his facings, so that, when at length we rose to go, he had acquired a very fair amount of information relating to us both.

The Mixed Commission sat a few days later to adjudicate upon our prizes, with the result that all three were duly condemned; and we thus became entitled to a very nice little sum of prize money, for there was not only the value of the three craft, but also the head money upon the brigantine's cargo of slaves. Upon the declaration of judgment by the court the three vessels were promptly advertised for sale by auction, and brought to the hammer some three weeks later. As it was well known that all three were exceptionally fast craft the competition for their possession was expected to be particularly brisk, and the event justified the expectation, for upon the day appointed for the sale the attendance was a record one and the bidding remarkably spirited. To such an extent, indeed, was this the case that

many of the knowing ones present hazarded the confident conviction that some of the bidders present would probably be found—if the truth about them could but be ascertained—to be secret agents of slavers, and that the vessels would, at no very distant date, be found to be employed again in their former trade. The brig was the first craft offered for sale, and after a very spirited competition she was ultimately knocked down to a Jew marine-store dealer at a very handsome figure. Then followed the brigantine, which also realised an exceedingly satisfactory price. With the disposal of this craft the competition slackened very considerably, which was not to be wondered at, for the schooner, although a smart little craft, was not nearly so valuable—especially from a slave trader's point of view—as either of the others; yet when she was at length knocked down she went for her full value, and, on the whole, the parties most intimately concerned had every reason to be very well satisfied with the total result of the sale. It was not until the next morning that the fact was allowed to leak out that the *Francesca*, had been purchased into the service. Meanwhile I had practically nothing to do, and I therefore spent most of my time in study, preparing myself for my examination, so that I might be ready to avail myself of the first opportunity to pass that should present itself. I filled in the gaps by visiting Fawcett at the hospital, and I was pleased to find that since the cheering visit of the commodore he had been making very satisfactory progress.

It was on the afternoon of the day succeeding the sale of the prizes that the commodore sent for me.

"Well," said he when I presented myself, "I suppose you are beginning to feel rather tired of kicking your heels about ashore here, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," I said, "I must confess that I am, especially now that Mr Fawcett seems to be progressing so satisfactorily toward convalescence. I had hoped that the *Shark* would have been in ere this; for although I have not been altogether wasting my time, I feel that I am not earning my pay; moreover, I prefer a more active life than I am leading here."

"Quite right, young man, quite right," approved the commodore. "Nothing like active service for an ambitious young fellow like yourself. I understand that you have been working up for your examination lately. Well, to be quite candid with you, I don't think your chances of passing here are very bright—not because I consider you unfit to pass, mind you, but because it may be some time before an opportunity offers. But that is a misfortune which, perhaps, may be remedied. You have heard, I suppose, that your schooner has been purchased into the service?"

"Yes, sir, I have," said I, all alert in a moment, for I hoped that this abrupt reference to the transaction boded good for me. "And I was exceedingly glad to hear it," I went on, "for she is a very smart, handy little vessel, and may be made exceedingly useful in many ways."

"So I thought, and therefore I bought her," remarked the old gentleman. "It was my original intention to have made her a tender to the *Shark*—in which capacity she would no doubt have proved, as you say, exceedingly useful; and I may further tell you that, subject to Captain Bentinck's approval, I intended to have put you in command of her. But certain news which has reached me this morning has altered all my plans concerning her, at all events for the present, and instead of making her a tender to the *Shark* I now propose to send her across to the West Indies with dispatches of the utmost importance. You will therefore be so good as to proceed on board forthwith and take the command, give all her stores a thorough overhaul, and report to me what deficiencies, if any, require to be made good in order to fit her for the voyage across the Atlantic. I have issued instructions for your former crew to be turned over to her from the depot ship, and it will be as well, perhaps, for you to take over half a dozen extra hands from the late prize crew of the brig. I should like to be able to give you Mr Freeman as master, but I can't spare him; so you will have to be your own navigator. By the way, what sort of a navigator is Keene?"

"Oh," I said, laughingly, "he can fudge a day's work as well as most people, sir!"

"Ah," said the old gentleman, "I wonder whether you boys will ever be brought to understand that 'fudging' is no good, except to bamboozle the master! How would any of you manage if by chance it fell to you to take a ship into port, and you could only 'fudge' a day's work? Well, you shall take him with you; but hark ye, my lad, for his own sake you must make him stick to his work and do it properly, so that he may be ready for any emergency that may happen to come along. Come and dine with me to-night, and bring the young monkey with you. I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle, and see if I can't stir him up to a sense of his responsibilities. One word more, my lad. An opportunity to pass may occur while you are over yonder; and if it does, I very strongly advise you to seize it."

"Be assured that I will, sir," exclaimed I. "And—oh, sir, I really don't know how to express my gratitude to you for giving me such a splendid—"

"There, there, never mind about that, boy," interrupted the old fellow hurriedly. "I know all that you would say, so there is no need for you to repeat it. As to gratitude, you can best show that by proving yourself worthy of the trust that I am putting in you, as I have no doubt you will. Now, run along and get aboard your ship, and the sooner you can report yourself ready for sea, the better I shall be pleased with you. Don't forget to-night—seven sharp!"

I was probably the most elated young man on the West Coast that afternoon as I hurried from the commodore's presence and made my way aboard the sweet little *Francesca*, where I found the whole of my former crew, Keene included, already installed.

"Hullo, Grenville, what is the meaning of this?" was his enquiry as I went up the vessel's low side and passed through the gangway. "What's in the wind? Here have we all been turned over at a moment's notice, and there are already rumours floating about that we sail to-night."

"No," said I, "it is not quite so bad as that, but it means that we are bound to the West Indies at the earliest possible moment, and it also means, Jack, you villain, that I have received strict orders from the commodore to work you down until you are as fine and as sharp as a needle. You will hear more about it to-night, my lad, when you and I go to dine with him, so stand by and look out for squalls!"

"The West Indies? Hooray!" cried Jack. "The land of beauty and romance, of solitary cays with snug little harbours, each of them sheltering a slashing pirate schooner patiently waiting for us to go and cut her out; the land of fair women and hospitable men, the land of sugar plantations, lovely flowers, and delicious fruits, the land of—of—"

"Disastrous hurricanes, furious thunderstorms, yellow fever, poisonous reptiles, the horrible mysteries of voodoo worship, and so on, and so on," I cut in.

"Oh, you be hanged!" retorted Jack recklessly. "It's a precious sight better than this pestilential West Coast at all events, say what you will. And as to work, that's all right; I don't care how hard you work me in reason, Dick. I know that I've been an atrociously lazy beggar, always more ready to skylark than to do anything useful, but I'm going to turn over a new leaf now; I am, indeed—you needn't look incredulous; I've wasted time enough, and I intend now to buckle to and make myself useful. And the commodore may 'jacket' me as much as he pleases to-night—I know I deserve it—and I'll say nothing, but just promise to be a good boy in future. He's a jolly, kind-hearted old chap, and I don't care who hears me say so!"

"Well done, Jack!" said I; "I've not heard you talk so much in earnest for a long time. But, joking aside, I am very glad indeed, old fellow, to hear that you are going to turn over a new leaf. As you very truly say, you have wasted time enough; the moment has arrived when, if you wish to make headway in your profession, as I suppose you do, you must begin to take life seriously, and realise that you were not sent into the world merely to skylark, although skylarking, within reasonable limits and at the proper time, is possibly a harmless enough amusement."

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### The pirate brig again?

We duly dined with the commodore that night, and I was able to promise him that he should have my complete requisition before noon the next day, at which he expressed himself much pleased. And after dinner, when the cloth had been drawn and the servants had retired, the dear old gentleman gave us both a very long and serious talking-to, which did us both a great deal of good, and for which I, at least, and Jack, too, I believe, felt profoundly grateful. We were a pair of very sober lads when at length we bade him good-night and made the best of our way aboard the saucy little *Francesca*. Jack and I got to work at daylight next morning, and by dint of really hard labour I was not only able to keep my promise of the previous night to the commodore, but to do rather better, for it was barely eleven o'clock when I entered his office and handed him my requisition. He read it very carefully through from beginning to end, asked me if I felt quite certain that it embodied the whole of my requirements, and, upon my replying that I was, at once signed it, bidding me to be off at once to get it executed and then to report to him. I saw that he was very anxious for me to get away as quickly as possible, and I therefore went straight from him to the various people concerned, and badgered them so unmercifully that the bulk of my requirements were alongside that same evening, while by breakfast-time on the following morning the last boatload had come off, and I felt myself free to go ashore, leaving Jack in charge, and report myself ready for sea.

I was at the office even before the commodore that morning, and he expressed himself as being much gratified at the expedition with which I had completed my preparations. Then he unlocked his desk, and, extracting two packets therefrom, said, as he handed them to me:

"There are your written instructions, and there are the dispatches, which I charge you to take the utmost care of and guard with your life, if necessary, for they are of the most vital importance. So important, indeed, are they that I tell you frankly I should not feel justified in entrusting them to so youthful an officer as yourself, had I anybody else that I could send. But I have not, therefore I cannot help myself, and I have every confidence that you will do your very utmost to carry out my instructions in their entirety. These are, that you proceed to sea forthwith, and make the best of your way to Kingston, in Jamaica, carrying on night and day, and pausing for nothing—nothing, mind you, for this is a matter in which hours, ay, and even minutes, are of importance. If you should happen to be attacked you must of course fight, but not otherwise, remember that! And if there should be any prospect of your being captured, wait until the last possible moment, until all chance of escape is gone, and then sink the packet. Remember, it must on no account be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. And upon your arrival at Kingston you are at once to make your way to the admiral, let the hour be what it will, day or night, and place the packet in his own hands. There, I need say no more now, for you will find all these matters fully set out in your written instructions. And now, good-bye, my boy, and God speed you safely to your destination! I know not what may lie before you on the other side, or whether we shall ever meet again in this world; but remember that in me you will always find a friend ready to help you to the best of his ability, and who will always be glad to hear of your welfare. Good-bye, lad, and God bless you!" And, with a hearty grip of his honest old hand, he dismissed me.

Half an hour later we were under way and beating out to sea, showing every rag that we could stagger under, toward the belt of calm that separated the sea breeze from the trade wind that was blowing briskly in the offing. And so profoundly impressed was I with the urgency of the matter that had been entrusted to me that when at length we shot into the calm belt, rather than lose time by waiting for the trade wind to work its way inshore to the spot where we were lying, I ordered out the sweeps, and, turning the little hooker's nose to the westward, swept her out until we caught the true breeze. Then it was "out studding-sails to windward", and away we went again at racing speed. Luckily, nothing had been done by the Government people to spoil the little beauty's sailing qualities; she was precisely as she had been when engaged in her original nefarious trade, except that her slave-deck had been taken out of her; and long before sundown we had run the African coast clean out of sight, to the joy of all hands, fore and aft.

We had but one adventure, if indeed it could be called such, on our passage across the Atlantic, and that occurred on our eighth day out from Sierra Leone. Up to then we had sighted nothing, and had had a very fine passage, the trade

wind blowing fresh enough all the time to enable us to maintain an average speed of nine knots throughout the passage. But on the day of which I am now speaking, about six bells in the afternoon watch, we sighted a large sail ahead, and, some ten minutes later, another, following in the wake of the first. Both were, of course, hull-down when we first sighted them, and broad on our port bow, standing to the northward close-hauled on the starboard tack, but as they were carrying on heavily, and we were travelling fast, we rapidly rose each other, and it then became evident that the second craft, a very fine and handsome brig, was in pursuit of the other, which was a full-rigged ship, apparently a British West Indiaman. This surmise of ours as to the nationality of the leading ship was soon confirmed, for as we rushed rapidly down toward the two we hoisted our colours, in response to which she immediately displayed the British ensign, following it up by hoisting a series of signals to her mizzen royal-mast-head which, when completed, read:

“Stranger astern suspected pirate.”

Here was a pretty business indeed, and a very nice question for me to decide on the spur of the moment. What was my duty, under the circumstances? On the one hand, here was a British merchantman, doubtless carrying a very valuable cargo, in imminent danger of being captured and plundered, and, possibly, her crew massacred, for the brig was overhauling the Indiaman hand over hand; while on the other were the explicit and emphatic instructions of the commodore to pause for nothing. It was certain that unless I interfered the Indiaman would be captured, and every instinct within me rose up in protest against the idea of leaving her to her fate, while the words of the commodore were: “If you should happen to be attacked, fight, but not otherwise”. I reflected for a moment or two, and then decided upon my course of action. If we went on as we were going we should pass very close to the Indiaman, but if we shifted our helm about a point to the southward we should pass quite close to the brig. I therefore determined to make that very slight deviation from my course, and see what would happen. I could not hope to divert the brig from her chase of so valuable a prize as the ship, but it was just possible that I might, by opening fire on the pursuer, be lucky enough to bring down a spar or otherwise damage her sufficiently to afford the Indiaman a chance to escape. I therefore ordered the helm to be shifted, and gave instructions for the crew to go to quarters, to double-shot the broadside batteries and to open fire on the brig with our long eighteen the moment that we should come within range. That moment was not long deferred, and presently Thompson, the gunner, shouted:

“I think we can about reach him now, sir.”

“Then fire as soon as you are ready,” replied I. “And aim at his spars. It is far more important to shoot away a topmast than to hull the fellow.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” answered Thompson, and I saw him stoop behind the gun, directing the gun’s crew with his hands as he squinted along the sights of the weapon. Another second or two, as the schooner rose over the back of a swell, he fired. The aim was a splendid one, but the elevation was scarcely sufficient, for the shot struck the craft’s weather bulwarks fair between the masts, making the splinters fly.

“Excellent!” I exclaimed. “Admirable! Don’t alter your elevation, Thompson, for we are nearing him fast. Try again, as quick as you like.”

The gun was reloaded, and again fired; but this time, whether due to over-eagerness or some other cause, the gunner made a bad shot, the ball striking the water astern of, and some distance beyond, the brig. Then, while the men were reloading, nine jets of flame and smoke leapt simultaneously from the brig’s side, and nine round shot tore up the water unpleasantly close under our bows.

“How would it do to train the guns of the port broadside forward, and return his compliment?” asked Keene, who was standing close beside me.

“No, Jack, on no account,” said I. “I am saving up those two broadsides for a possible emergency, and if we were to fire now there would be no time to reload before we are down upon him. But go you, my hearty, and see that the guns of the starboard broadside are so trained as to concentrate their fire on a point at about fifty yards’ distance.”

At this moment our Long Tom spoke again, and the next instant a loud cheer broke from our lads, for the shot had taken the brig’s fore-topmast just below the sheave of the topsail-tye, and away went the fore-topsail, topgallant-sail, and royal over to leeward, while the flying and standing jibs and the fore-topmast staysail collapsed and drooped into the water under her forefoot, with the result that she instantly shot up into the wind.

“Well done, Thompson!” I cried. “That will do with the long gun. Now stand by the starboard battery, and, as we pass under her stern, slap the whole broadside into her.”

The pirates, if such indeed they were, for the brig showed no colours, proved themselves to be a remarkably smart crew, for the wreckage had scarcely fallen when her fore-rigging and jib-boom were alive with men laying out and aloft to clear away the wreck. The Indiaman was now safe, for she would be away out of sight long before the brig could repair damages sufficiently to resume the pursuit, and if the skipper of the ship were as smart as he ought to be it would be his own fault if he allowed the brig to find him again. But I wished to make assurance doubly sure, and therefore, as we swept close past the disabled craft, at the imminent risk of being dismasted by her broadside, which, however, her people were too busy to fire, we slapped our starboard broadside right into her stern, with the extremely satisfactory result that a moment later her mainmast tottered and, with all attached, fell over the side, while the screams of the wounded rent the air. We must have punished her very severely indeed, for all that we got in reply was one solitary gun fired out of her stern port, which did no damage; and a quarter of an hour later we were out of her reach and not a ropeyarn the worse for our encounter. But I took very particular notice of the brig while we were near her, and although she was differently painted, having nothing now in the way of colour to relieve her jet-black sides save a narrow scarlet ribbon, I could almost have sworn that she was the identical brig that had destroyed the *Dolores*.

We made the island of Barbados shortly before noon on the following day, and passed its southern extremity, soon after four bells in the afternoon watch, at the distance of about a mile, getting a peep into Carlisle Bay as we swept past without calling in. There were several men-o'-war and a whole fleet of merchantmen lying at anchor in the bay, off Bridgetown, which led me to conjecture that a large convoy had either just arrived from home or was mustering there for the homeward passage. The trade wind still favouring us, and blowing a brisk breeze, we sighted Saint Vincent that same afternoon, and passed its northern extremity about midway through the second dog watch; and finally, on the fourth day after passing Barbados, we made the island of Jamaica, and anchored off Port Royal just as eight bells of the afternoon watch was striking.

The moment that the anchor was down I jumped into the gig and, leaving Jack in charge, pulled ashore, in the hope of finding the admiral in his office, although I feared that the hour was rather late. By the luckiest possible chance, however, it happened that, being exceptionally busy just then, he had deferred his departure for Kingston, and I caught him just as he was about to leave. The old gentleman seemed a good deal put out at finding that he was still to be further delayed and, with a gesture of annoyance, broke the seal of the packet containing the dispatches and began to read the first one, standing. Before he had read much above a dozen words, however, his look of vexation gave place to one of astonishment, and that, in turn, to one of intense satisfaction. "Well, I'll be shot! Most extraordinary! Aha! I begin to see light. Yes, yes, of course... Capital! splendid! I know how to checkmate 'em. Only just in time though, by Jove!" I heard him mutter as he read on, at first almost inaudibly, but louder and louder as his excitement grew, until he had completed the perusal of the principal document. Then he turned it over again and looked at the date, looked at it as though he could scarcely believe his eyes. Finally he turned to me and said:

"On what date were these dispatches handed to you, young gentleman?"

I told him.

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you have made the passage across in a fortnight?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir," I said. "But we happened to be exceptionally favoured in the matter of weather, and I have carried on day and night; in fact the studding-sails have never been off her from the moment when I squared away until I took them in for good about an hour ago."

"What is your name, young man?" was the next question, for as yet he had only read the dispatch, leaving the covering letter and other documents for perusal at his leisure.

"Very well, Mr Grenville—good name that, by the by—excellent name—name to be lived up to," he remarked when I had answered him. "Come and dine with me at the Pen to-night. I should like to have a little further talk with you. Seven o'clock sharp."

Returning on board, I found that during my absence the health officers had been off, and had at first manifested a very decided disposition to make things exceedingly unpleasant for me because I had gone ashore before receiving pratique. However, the explanation afforded by Jack, that I was the bearer of important dispatches for the admiral, coupled with the fact that we had a clean bill of health, had mollified them, and as a matter of fact I heard no more about it.

Having effected a change of clothing, I hailed a shore boat to come alongside, and in her proceeded to Kingston. The Admiral's Pen is situated some distance up the hill at the back of the town, and as I had no fancy for walking so far I decided that, if possible, I would hire some sort of conveyance to take me there. The question was: Where was I to obtain one? for although there were plenty of vehicles in the streets I could see no sign of the existence of such an establishment as a livery stable anywhere. At length, after I had been searching for nearly half an hour, I decided to enquire, and, looking about me for the most likely and suitable place at which to do so, I saw a large two-story building, the lower portion of which seemed to consist of offices, while, from the mat curtains which sheltered the balcony above, and the tables and chairs which stood therein, I guessed that the upper floor was the private part of the establishment. A glazed door giving access to the ground-floor part of the building bore upon it in gilt letters the words:

"Todd & McGregor, General Merchants."

I decided to enter. I found myself in a large warehouse-like place reeking of many odours, those of sugar and coffee predominating, while whole tiers of bags containing these commodities were stacked against the side walls, a huge conglomeration of miscellaneous goods and articles lumbering the remainder of the floor. Picking my way through these, I reached the back part of the building, which I found partitioned off to form an office, wherein a number of men, some in gingham coats and some in their shirt sleeves, were busily at work writing letters or inscribing entries in ledgers and day books. At my entrance one of them glanced up and then came forward, asking what he could do for me. I stated my difficulty, upon which he said:

"There certainly are livery stables in Kingston at which you could hire a vehicle to convey you to the Pen; but I think it will be quite unnecessary for you to do so upon the present occasion, for I happen to know that our Mr Todd is engaged to dine with the admiral to-night—indeed I believe he is at this moment dressing, upstairs. And I am sure he will be delighted to give you a seat in his *ketureen*. If you will be good enough to give me your card I will take it up to him at once."

"Oh but," said I, "it is quite impossible that I can thus trespass upon the kindness of a total stranger!"

"Not at all," answered my interlocutor. "Mr Todd will be only too pleased, I assure you. And as to 'trespassing upon his kindness', this must surely be your first visit to this part of the world, or you would not talk like that. Have you been long in?"

"I arrived this afternoon only, with dispatches from the West Coast," said I.

"And you have never been in the West Indies before? Ah, that accounts for it! Now, if you will kindly take a seat and let me have your card, we can arrange this little matter in very short order."

What could I do, under such circumstances, but hand over my card, still protesting? Two minutes later my new acquaintance reappeared with an invitation for me to walk upstairs. I was ushered into a large room, with the light so greatly dimmed by the closed jalousies, and the bare floor polished to such a glass-like slipperiness by the daily application of beeswax that I first ran foul of a chair, and then very nearly foundered in the endeavour to preserve my balance. I thought I caught a sound somewhat like that of a suppressed titter, but could not be certain. I, however, heard a very gentle and musical voice say:

"How do you do, Mr Grenville? I am very pleased to make your acquaintance. Lucy, dear, please throw open the jalousies. We are so dark here that Mr Grenville cannot see where he is."

Then, as the jalousies were flung back and the evening light streamed into the apartment, I became aware of a rather stout lady—very pale, but still good-looking, although she had probably passed over to the shady side of forty—standing before me with outstretched hand, waiting patiently for me to take it, while a young woman of about twenty years of age was advancing upon me from the window. With easy grace the elder lady introduced herself as Mrs Todd, and the young lady as her daughter Lucy. Then she invited me to be seated, explaining that her husband was dressing and would join us in the course of a few minutes. As a matter of fact it was about twenty minutes before Mr Todd—a typical Scotsman from head to heel, and speaking as broadly as though he had just arrived from 'Glesca' instead of having been a resident in Kingston for a quarter of a century—made his appearance. But I certainly did not regret the delay, for those twenty minutes were among the most pleasant that I had ever spent in my life. Mrs Todd soon proved herself to be one of those gentle, kindly-mannered, sweet-dispositioned women with whom one instantly finds oneself on the most friendly and cordial terms, while Miss Lucy with equal celerity revealed herself as a sprightly, high-spirited maiden without a particle of artificiality about her, bright and vivacious of manner, with plenty to say for herself, but at the same time thoroughly sensible. As for Mr Todd, he was, as I have said, a typical Scotsman, but I ought to have added "of the very best sort", for from beneath his superficial businesslike keenness and shrewdness the natural kindness and geniality of his disposition was constantly peeping through. As an instance of this I may mention that within five minutes of my meeting him he was insisting upon my making his house my home for as long a time as I might be on the island, which invitation his wife and his daughter were seconding with an earnestness that left me no room to doubt its absolute sincerity. And I may as well say, here and now, that when I subsequently put the hospitality of this delightful and warm-hearted family to the proof, so far from the performance falling short of the promise, I could not have been treated with greater kindness and consideration—ay, and I may even add, affection—had they been my own nearest relatives.

We—that is to say, Mr Todd and myself—arrived at the Pen a few minutes before seven o'clock, and were forthwith ushered into the drawing-room, where we were received in most hospitable fashion by Sir Timothy and Lady Tompion, and where we found already assembled several captains and other officers from the men-o'-war then in harbour, with a sprinkling of merchants from Kingston and planters from the neighbouring estates, all very genial, jovial characters in their several ways. Having first introduced me to Lady Tompion, and allowed me a minute or two to pay my respects to her, Sir Timothy very kindly made me known to the officers and other guests present. Dinner having been announced, we all filed into the dining-room and took our places. The dinner was a distinctly sumptuous affair, and included many very delicious dishes and viands with which I then made my first acquaintance. But I need not dwell upon this part of the entertainment. Let it suffice to say that I enjoyed myself amazingly, the more so, perhaps, from the fact that everybody, from Lady Tompion downward, seemed to be vying with each other to put me at my ease and make me feel comfortable. Later, however, I found that I was mistaken as to this. People were not making any special effort in my behalf, but were simply exhibiting that remarkable geniality and friendliness of feeling that appears to be engendered by breathing the air of this lovely island.

At length the moment arrived for us to make our adieux and go; but when I stepped up to Lady Tompion to say good-night she exclaimed:

"Oh, but you are not going back to your ship, or to Kingston either, for that matter, to-night. Sir Timothy intends you to sleep here, and I have already made all the necessary arrangements. The fact is," she explained in a lower tone of voice, "that he wants to have a long chat with you, so Mr Todd will have to excuse you for this once. I see that he has already made up his mind to carry you off prisoner to his own house, but he must defer that until next time." This with a most charming smile to Mr Todd, who was standing close by waiting to say good-night.

The guests having departed, Sir Timothy led the way into his study, and, having invited me to make myself comfortable in a cane lounging chair, while he settled himself in another, said:

"Since parting from you at Port Royal this afternoon I have found an opportunity to read the private letter from the commodore which accompanied his dispatch, and what he said therein respecting yourself has greatly interested me; I have therefore arranged for you to sleep up here to-night in order that I may have the opportunity for a quiet chat with you. I may tell you, young gentleman, that the commodore's report of your conduct upon certain occasions has very favourably impressed me, so much so, indeed, that I am more than half-inclined to keep you here, instead of sending you back—but we shall see, we shall see. Now, just give me a detailed account of your entire services from the time when you first entered the navy, and tell it me as you would to any ordinary friend, for this conversation is not official; it is not a report from a midshipman to an admiral, but just a friendly chat between an elderly gentleman and a young one."

Thus encouraged I got under way and spun my yarn as best I could, Sir Timothy interrupting me from time to time to ask a question or to elicit from me an explanation of some point which I had not made quite clear. We sat there talking until close upon three o'clock in the morning, and when at length we rose to retire to our respective rooms,

Sir Timothy remarked:

“Well, Mr Grenville, I have listened to your story with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction, and what you have told me has fully confirmed me in my half-formed determination to keep you here on the station for the present. Come to me at my office down at Port Royal, at—let me see—yes, say three o’clock to-morrow, or, rather, this afternoon, and I shall then have something more to say to you. Oh, and there is another matter upon which I intended to speak to you! I understand, both from the commodore and yourself, that you are anxious to pass, so that your acting order as lieutenant may be confirmed. Now it happens, very luckily for you, that an examination of midshipmen has been arranged for next week; it will take place aboard the *Achilles*, and I would strongly recommend you to send in your papers at once, for, from what you have told me to-night, I have no doubt that you will be able to pass without the slightest difficulty. And now, good-night! Breakfast will be on the table at eight o’clock sharp.”

On the following afternoon I landed on the wharf at Port Royal, and entered the admiral’s office at the moment when “six bells” were being struck aboard the flagship. The old gentleman was busy at the moment signing a number of papers, but he paused for a moment to wave me to a seat, and then resumed his labours.

Presently, having completed the signing of the papers, Sir Timothy delivered them to the secretary, who was waiting for them, and then, unlocking and opening a drawer in his desk, he withdrew a somewhat voluminous bundle of documents, which he placed on the table before him.

“These,” he said, “are letters and dispatches from merchants here in Kingston, as well as Bristol, Liverpool, and London; underwriters; and the Admiralty at home, all drawing my attention to the fact that of late—that is to say, during the last three or four months—certain ships, both outward and homeward bound, have failed to arrive at their destinations. It is suggested that, since during that period there has been no weather bad enough to explain and account for the loss of these well-found ships, their failure to arrive may possibly be due to the presence of a pirate, or pirates, operating somewhere among the islands, or perhaps in the waters of the western Atlantic. A very considerable amount of exceedingly valuable property has thus mysteriously disappeared, and strong representations have been made to Whitehall that vigorous measures should be taken to solve the mystery, with the result that I have been ordered to investigate. These orders arrived about a week ago, but up to the present I have been quite unable to obey them, for the very good and sufficient reason that every ship at my disposal is needed for work even more important than the hunting down of hitherto merely supposititious pirates. Your adventure, however, with the *Indiaman* and her mysterious pursuer, goes to prove that there actually is a pirate at work, and I must take immediate steps to put a stop to his activity.

“And this brings me to my most serious difficulty. I have no vessel available for the service excepting your schooner, and no officer, except yourself, whom I can place in command of her. You must not feel hurt, young gentleman, if I say that, under ordinary circumstances, I should as soon think of attempting to fly as of confiding so difficult and dangerous a service to a mere midshipman. But what the commodore has written concerning you, supplemented by what I heard last night from your own lips, encourages me to hope and to believe that, young as you are, you may yet prove worthy of the confidence that I have decided to repose in you. You appear to be one of those rare young men who carry an old head upon young shoulders; you have proved yourself capable of thinking for yourself, and of possessing the courage to act upon your own responsibility; you exhibited very sound judgment and resource in that affair of the *Indian Queen*, and also in the affair of the *Indiaman*, which you certainly saved from capture. I am therefore going to take upon myself the responsibility of giving you a roving commission to hunt down and destroy that pirate.

“Your greatest difficulty will of course be to find her. Fortunately for everybody concerned, you clipped her wings so effectually that she will be unable to do any more mischief until she has refitted; and, to do this, she will have to go into port somewhere. Your first task, therefore, will be to endeavour to discover the whereabouts of that port, and I therefore advise you to spend a few days, while your schooner is renewing her stores, overhauling spars and rigging, and so on, in making diligent enquiry among the craft arriving in port, with the object of ascertaining whether any of them happen to have sighted a disabled brig, and, if so, where, and in what direction she was steering. In the event of your securing a clue by this means, you will at once proceed to the port toward which she would appear to be steering, and continue your investigations there. If you should in this way be fortunate enough to get upon her track, you will of course follow up the clue, and act as circumstances seem to direct; but if not, you will have to prosecute your search and enquiries until you are successful. The service is an exceedingly difficult one to confide to so young a man as yourself; but, young as you are, you seem to possess the qualities necessary to ensure success; and, should you succeed, the achievement will tell heavily in your favour.

“Now, that is all that I have to say to you at present, except that you had better get to work forthwith. Report progress to me here from time to time, and let me know when your schooner is again ready for sea. You had better allow yourself a full week for enquiries here, and if at the end of that time you have failed to learn anything, we must consider what is the next best thing to be done. And do not forget your examination.”

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### We sail in search of the pirate.

Having received my dismissal from the admiral, I returned to the *Francesca*, and, summoning the purser, gave him instructions to overhaul his stores and prepare a requisition for everything necessary to complete for a two months’ cruise. Then, sending for the boatswain, gunner, and carpenter, I in like manner instructed them to overhaul the hull, spars, standing and running rigging, and the contents of the magazine, and to report to me all defects or shortage of stores in their respective departments, and, generally, to prepare the little craft in every way for the task that lay before her. Then, there still remaining a couple of hours of daylight, I jumped into the gig again and pulled aboard



four vessels that had arrived during the day, for the purpose of enquiring whether any of them had sighted or fallen in with the disabled brig. As was to be expected, I met with no success, but I was not in the least disappointed, for I had anticipated no other result; indeed I calculated that the ordinary slow-sailing merchantman who might perchance fall in with the pirate could scarcely be expected to reach Kingston until at least three or four days after the *Francesca*. Then, availing myself of the very pressing invitation that I had received from my new friend Mr Todd, I made my way to his house, where I spent a most delightful evening with him and his family. Upon learning that I expected to remain a full week in port, these good people at once proceeded to plan for my benefit a number of pleasure jaunts to places of interest in the neighbourhood; but I was far too profoundly impressed with the importance of the task assigned to me, and the responsibility that rested upon my young shoulders, to avail myself of their very great kindness further than to spend an evening or two with them.

I divided my time pretty evenly between the schooner—personally seeing that no detail was overlooked in preparing her for her important task—and the various craft that arrived in the port from day to day. Keene, eager to assist, undertook to penetrate, in mufti, the lower and more disreputable parts of the town, and to haunt the wharves upon the chance of picking up some small item of information relating to the mysterious brig which might prove of service to us. But all our efforts availed us nothing, for on the eighth day after our arrival we were no better off than we had been at the beginning. I contrived, however, to filch the few hours that were necessary to enable me to go up for my examination, with the result that I passed with flying colours, so the examiners were kind enough to say. My good friend Sir Timothy at once confirmed my acting order and presented me with the commission which bestowed upon me the rank of lieutenant in his Most Gracious Majesty's navy.

On the evening of the eighth day after our arrival at Port Royal I went ashore to report to the admiral the discouraging fact that I had failed utterly to obtain any information whatever from any of the inward-bound ships relative to the piratical brig, for none of them, apparently, had sighted the craft. Moreover, Jack Keene's enquiries were practically as unsuccessful as my own; for although he had encountered one or two doubtful characters frequenting the low taverns near the wharves, who seemed to have some knowledge of such a vessel, it was all vague hearsay, and quite valueless. But although we had failed so entirely to obtain any information, the ship's company had been kept busily at work, with the result that the schooner was now as perfect in every item and particular of hull and equipment as human hands could make her. I therefore wound up my report with the statement that we were ready for sea, and could sail at literally a moment's notice.

"So much the better," remarked the admiral, "and, since there is nothing to be gained by further delay, you had better make a start forthwith, so that you may be able to work your way out through the channel and secure an offing before nightfall. Now, have you formed any plans for the conduct of this cruise?"

"Only those of the most general character, sir," replied I. "According to my reckoning the brig is by this time very nearly, if not quite, at the rendezvous, where she will refit. I fear, therefore, that there is not much likelihood of my falling in with her for some time to come—until she has refitted and is once more at sea, in fact. But, in order that I may not throw away a possible chance, my idea is to stretch out toward the middle of the Caribbean, and, having arrived there, to work to windward over the track that the brig would have to follow if she were making her way toward the head of the Gulf. Then, if I fail to fall in with her, it may be worth our while to overhaul the Grenadines—there must be several small islands among them well adapted as a rendezvous for a pirate, and there is just a possibility that we may find her there. Failing that, I do not see that I can do anything else than work out clear of the islands and haunt the ground where the tracks of the inward- and outward-bound trade meet, since it seems to me that that is the spot where we are most likely to find the brig when she resumes operations."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the old gentleman, approvingly. "You have thought out the identical scheme that suggested itself to me, and I hope that by following it you will succeed in laying the fellow by the heels. Speak every craft that you may fall in with, make enquiries whenever you have the chance, and perhaps you may be lucky enough to pick up a slaver or two, and so make the cruise a profitable one in a double sense; for if that surmise of yours should happen to be correct, that this pirate brig is the identical craft that stole the slaves from your prize—the *Dolores*—and afterwards destroyed her, the fellow may have played the trick on other slavers, in which case they will be glad enough to give any information that may lead to his capture. And now the sooner that you are off the better, for you will have none too much daylight in which to work out clear of the shoals. So, good-bye, my lad, and good luck to you! Take care of your ship, your crew, and yourself, and bring the fellow back with you as a prize."

So saying, with a hearty handshake the old gentleman dismissed me, and a quarter of an hour later the saucy little *Francesca*, in charge of a pilot, was turning to windward on her way out to the open sea.

The sea breeze lasted us just long enough to enable us to clear the shoals and handsomely gain an offing of about three miles. Then it died away and left us wallowing helplessly in the heavy swell that was running. Meanwhile the sun sank beneath the horizon in one of those blazes of indescribable glory of colour which seem to be peculiar to the West Indies. The darkness closed down upon us like a shutter, and the stars leapt out of the rapidly darkening blue overhead with that soft, lambent, clarity of light which is never beheld save in the tropics. Then, after tumbling about uncomfortably for nearly an hour, we felt the land breeze, and, squaring away before it, soon ran off into the true breeze of the trade wind.

The following three weeks passed uneventfully in carrying out the first part of the programme upon which Sir Timothy and I had agreed, including a very careful but fruitless search of the entire group of the Grenadines, between Grenada and Saint Vincent. After this we proceeded toward the spot which was to be our cruising ground, and called at the little town of Kingstown, in the latter island, for a few hours, in order to replenish our supplies and lay in a stock of fruit.

Thus far we had been favoured with splendid weather, but on the fifth day out from Saint Vincent I observed that the barometer and the wind were falling simultaneously, and by sunset the trade wind had died away to nothing. The western half of the sky looked as though it were on fire, and the horizon in that quarter was piled high with great

smears of dusky, smoky-looking cloud, heavily streaked with long splashes of vivid orange and crimson colour. As a spectacle it was magnificent, but the magnificence was gloomy, sombre, and threatening beyond anything that I had ever beheld. Nevertheless, I had seen skies not altogether unlike it before, and my experience had taught me that such gorgeously lurid displays of colour always portended the approach of bad weather, very frequently of the hurricane type. Furthermore, my "Sailing Directions for the West Indies" warned me that we were now in a part of the world which is subject to such terrific outbreaks of atmospheric strife. I therefore resolved to take time by the forelock. Fortunately in such small craft as schooners the amount of work involved in the operation of "snugging-down" is not great, and in less than half an hour we had got our yards and topmasts down on deck and the whole of our canvas snugly stowed, with the exception of the foresail, which, having been close-reefed, remained set, so that we might retain some sort of command over the vessel.



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"A CRY OF ASTONISHMENT AND ALARM BROKE FROM THE WATCH  
ON THE FORECASTLE HEAD"

Meanwhile the calm continued, but although the regular swell showed some disposition to subside, a heavy cross-swell was rapidly rising, which caused the schooner to plunge and roll in a jerky, irregular manner, and with such violence that at length it became almost impossible to stand without holding on to something, while to attempt to move about became positively dangerous. To add still further to the unpleasantness of the situation, the little hooker was constantly shipping water so heavily over her rail, bows, and taffrail that we were frequently up to our knees in it, although all the ports had been opened to allow it to run off.

We contrived to complete all our preparations before it became too dark to see; and it was well for us that we did so, for when the darkness came it was a darkness that might be felt, for it was as though we were hemmed in by great black walls which might be touched by merely stretching forth one's hand, while the heat of the stagnant atmosphere was so oppressive as to cause the perspiration to pour from us in streams. This disagreeable state of affairs continued without break of any kind until about five bells in the first watch, when a cry of astonishment and alarm broke from the watch on the forecandle-head at the sudden appearance on the bowsprit of a ball of light of a sickly greenish hue, which I immediately recognised as a corposant, although I had never seen one before, but had frequently heard them spoken of and described. It was certainly a weird and uncanny sight to behold under such circumstances, and was well-calculated to strike awe into the minds of superstitious seamen, both from the suddenness and the mystery of its appearance, and from its ghostly and unnatural aspect as it poised itself out there on the end of the spar, clinging tenaciously thereto, and alternately flattening and elongating as it swayed in unison with the violent movements of the schooner. And while the men were still gaping at it, open-mouthed, its sickly radiance faintly illuminating their faces and causing them to wear the horrible aspect of decomposing corpses, two others appeared, one on each of the lower mast-heads. For perhaps two minutes, or it might have been a little longer, these last two ghostly lanterns swayed and lengthened and contracted with the wild plungings of the little craft. Then the one on the forecandle-head let go its hold and went drifting away astern until it was lost to sight, while the one on the mainmast-head came gliding down the spar until it reached the flooded deck, and vanished as though extinguished by the washing of the water. While this was happening, the corposant on the bowsprit-end also let go its hold and came floating inboard along the spar, causing a regular stampede of the watch, who incontinently came rushing aft as far as the mainmast, to get out of the way of their uncanny visitor, which, however, vanished as it reached the knighthead.

"Ah," remarked the gunner, who had charge of the watch, "that means that we're in for a heavy 'blow', sir! I've seen them things often enough afore, and I've always noticed that when any of 'em comes inboard, like them two, extra bad weather is sure to foller. I partic'larly remembers a case in p'int when I was up the Mediterranean in the old *Melampus*. We was—"

"Listen!" I broke in unceremoniously, as a low, hoarse murmur became audible above the voice of the gunner, the

monotonous swish and splash of the water across the deck and in over the bulwarks, and the creaking and groaning of the ship's timbers. "Surely that is the wind coming at last!"

At the same moment a gust of hot air came screaming and scuffling over us, square off the starboard beam, causing the foresail to fill suddenly with a report like that of a gun, and careening the schooner to her covering board.

"Hard up with your helm, my man; hard up, and let her pay off before it!" I shouted to the man at the helm, while the sound that I had heard increased rapidly in volume, and a long line of white foam, rendered luminous by the phosphorescent state of the water, appeared broad on our starboard beam, sweeping down upon us with appalling velocity. Fortunate was it for us that a preliminary puff had come to help us, for it lasted just long enough to permit the little hooker to gather steerage way and partially to pay off, far enough, that is to say, to bring the onrushing hurricane well over her starboard quarter. Indeed, had the gale happened to strike us square abeam, and with no way on the ship, I am convinced that she must have inevitably turned turtle with us. As it was, when, a few minutes later, the wind swooped down upon us with the fury of a famished wild beast leaping upon its prey, and with a mad babel of terrifying howls and shrieks that utterly baffles description, the little vessel heeled down beneath its first stroke until her lee rail was buried, and the water rose to the level of her hatchway coamings; and but for the fact that she was at that moment not only forging ahead, but also paying off, there would have been an end of all hands, then and there. For what seemed to be, in our anxious condition, a veritable age, but which was probably no more than a brief half-minute, the little vessel lay there, quivering in every timber, and seemed paralysed with terror, as though she were a sentient thing. The wind yelled and raved through her rigging, and the spindrift and scud-water—showing ghostly in the phosphorescent light emitted by the tormented waters—flew over us in blinding, drenching showers. Then, with a sudden jerk the schooner rose almost upright and, with the water foaming about her bows to the level of her head rails, she sped away to leeward at a pace that seemed absolutely impossible to even so swift a craft as she had proved herself to be.

We scudded thus before the gale for nearly an hour, when, availing ourselves of a temporary lull in its fury, we brought the schooner to the wind and hove her to on the starboard tack; but, even then, so tremendous was the force of the wind that, although she showed to it nothing but a close-reefed foresail, the little vessel was buried to the level of her rail.

So violent was the first swoop of the hurricane that the surface of the ocean was as it were crushed flat by it, and the slightest irregularity that presented itself was instantly torn away and swept to leeward in the form of spray. Thus for the first hour or so it was impossible for the sea to rise. At the end of that time, however, the tormented ocean began to assert itself, and, although their crests continued to be torn off by the violence of the wind, the seas steadily rose and gathered weight, until by midnight the little *Francesca*, was being hove up and flung about as violently as a cork upon the surface of a turbulent stream. And now another of the schooner's many good qualities revealed itself, for, despite the furious violence of both wind and wave, the little craft rode the raging seas as buoyantly and as daintily as a sea gull, and shipped not so much as a spoonful of water, excepting, of course, such as flew on board in the form of spray. Even of that small quantity we had very little after the schooner had been brought to the wind, for the tremendous pressure of the gale upon her spars and rigging, and upon the small area of her close-reefed foresail laid her over at so steep an angle, and caused her to turn up so bold a weather side, that most of the spray flew clean over her and was swept away to leeward.

The temporary lull in the gale, of which we had taken advantage to heave-to the schooner, lasted only just long enough to enable us to accomplish that manoeuvre. It was well for us that we availed ourselves so promptly of the opportunity, for no other occurred; on the contrary, after that brief lull the gale seemed to increase steadily in fury to such an extent, indeed, that at length I felt that I should not have been in the least surprised had the schooner been blown bodily out of the water and whirled away to leeward like an autumn leaf.

Needless to say, that night was one of intense anxiety to me, for the responsibility for the safety of the schooner, and all hands aboard her, rested entirely upon my shoulders. I had already done all that was possible in the way of precaution, while I felt that, despite the magnificent behaviour of the little craft, an exceptionally heavy sea might at any moment catch her at a disadvantage and break aboard her, in which event she would most probably founder out of hand. So great, indeed, was my anxiety that I found it impossible to quit the deck for a moment, although my subordinates were thoroughly steady, trustworthy men, and had far more experience than myself. With the men forward it was totally different. Their minds were thoroughly imbued with the seaman's maxim: "Let those look out who have the watch," and those whose watch it was below turned in without the slightest hesitation or qualm of anxiety, trusting implicitly to those in charge of the deck to do everything that might be necessary to ensure the safety of the ship.

To me it seemed as though that terrible night would never end, and even when at length the hour of dawn arrived there was no perceptible amelioration in the conditions. The darkness remained as intense as it had been at midnight, and it was not until eight bells—in this case eight o'clock in the morning—that a feeble glimmer of daylight came filtering through the opaque blackness of the firmament over our heads, dimly revealing the shapeless masses of flying cloud and scud, and permitting us to view our surroundings for a space of about a quarter of a mile. But, contracted as was our view, it was more than sufficient to impress us with a deep and overwhelming sense of the impotence of man in the presence of God's power as manifested in this appalling demonstration of elemental fury. Now, even more than during the hours of darkness, did we appear to be constantly on the point of being lifted out of the water by the terrific strength of the wind. As often as the schooner was hove up on the summit of a sea, and thus exposed to the full force of the hurricane, we could feel her tremble and perceptibly lift when the wind struck her beneath her upturned bilge. As for the sea, I had never seen anything like it before, nor have I since. When people desire to convey the idea of an exceptionally heavy sea they speak of it as running "mountains high". In the case of which I am now speaking the expression appeared to be no exaggeration at all, for as wave after wave came sweeping down upon us with uplifted, menacing crest, looking up to that crest from the liquid valley in front of it seemed like gazing up the side of a mountain which was threatening to fall upon us and crush us to atoms. Indeed, the wild upward sweep of the schooner, heeling almost to her beam ends as she was flung aloft upon the breast of

the onrushing wave, was an experience terrifying enough to turn a man's hair grey. Yet, after watching the movements of the schooner for about half an hour, and noting how, time after time, when the little barkie seemed to be trembling on the very brink of destruction, she unfailingly came to in time to avoid being overwhelmed, I grew so inured to the experience that I found myself able to go below and make an excellent breakfast with perfect equanimity.

It was about five bells in the forenoon watch, and it had by that time grown light enough for us to discern objects at a distance of about a mile, when, as the schooner was tossed aloft to the crest of an exceptionally gigantic wave, Simpson—whose watch it was—and I simultaneously caught sight for a moment of something that, indistinctly seen as it was through the dense clouds of flying scud-water, had the appearance of a ship of some kind, directly to windward of us. The next instant we lost sight of it as we sank into the trough between the wave that had just passed beneath us and that which was sweeping down upon us. When we topped this wave soon afterwards, we again caught sight of the object, and this time held her in view long enough to identify her as a large brigantine, hove-to, like ourselves, on the starboard tack, under a storm-staysail. Unlike ourselves, however, she had all her top-hamper aloft, forward, and seemed to be making desperately bad weather of it. The glimpses that we caught of her were of course very brief, and at comparatively long intervals, for it was only when both craft happened to be on the summit of a wave at the same moment that we were able to see her. Yet two facts concerning her gradually became clear to us, the first of which was that she was undoubtedly a slaver—so much her short, stumpy masts and the enormous longitudinal spread of her yards told us,—the second was that she was steadily settling down to leeward at a more rapid rate than ourselves, as was only to be expected from the fact that she was exposing much more top-hamper to the gale than we were. It would not be long, therefore, before she would drive away to leeward of us, probably passing us at no very great distance.

Now, although we were fully convinced that the craft in sight was a slaver, yet we had no thought whatever of attempting to take her just then, for the very simple reason that to do so under the circumstances would be a manifest impossibility. In such an awful sea as was then running we could only work our guns at very infrequent intervals and with the utmost difficulty, while, if we were to hit her, we would do so only by the merest accident. And even if we could contrive by any means to compel her to surrender to us, we could not take possession of her. Our interest in her was therefore no greater than that with which a sailor, caught in a heavy gale, watches the movements of another ship in the same predicament as his own.

Meanwhile, by imperceptible degrees she was steadily driving down toward us, until at length she was so close, and so directly to windward of us, that I almost succeeded in persuading myself that there were moments when I could catch, through the strong salt smell of the gale, a whiff of the characteristic odour of a slaver with a living cargo on board. Nor was I alone in this respect, for both Simpson and the man who was tending the schooner's helm asserted that they also perceived it. But now a question arose which, for the moment at least, was even more important than whether she had or had not slaves aboard, and that was whether she would pass clear of us or not. She had settled away to leeward until she had approached us to within a couple of hundred yards, and as the two craft alternately came to or fell off it alternately appeared as though the stranger would pass clear of us ahead, or fall off and run foul of us. The moment had arrived when it became necessary for one or the other of us to do something to avert a catastrophe; and as those aboard the brigantine gave no indication of a disposition to bestir themselves I ordered Simpson to have the fore-staysail loosed and set, intending to forge ahead and leave room for the other craft to pass athwart our stern. The fore-staysail sheet was accordingly hauled aft, and four men laid out on the bowsprit to loose the sail. This was soon done, and then, when we next settled into the trough of the sea, and were consequently becalmed for the moment, the halyards were manned and the sail hoisted. The brigantine was by this time so dangerously near to us that, even when we were both sunk in the trough of the sea, it was possible for us to see her mast-heads over the crest of the intervening wave, and I now kept my eye on these with momentarily increasing anxiety, for it appeared to me that we were in perilous proximity to a hideous disaster. And then, as the schooner swept upward on the breast of the oncoming wave, I saw the spars of the brigantine forging slowly ahead as the ship to which they belonged fell off, and my heart stood still and my blood froze with horror, for it became apparent that the two craft were sheering inward toward each other, and that nothing short of a miracle could prevent the brigantine from falling foul of and destroying us. For as her spars rose higher into view I saw that her people, too, had set their fore-staysail, and that the two craft, impelled by their additional spread of sail, were rushing headlong toward each other.

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“THEN ENSUED A BREATHLESS, HAIR-RAISING FIFTEEN SECONDS”

## Chapter Sixteen.

### Some vicissitudes of fortune.

“Hard up with your helm,” I shouted, “hard over with it; we must take our chance of being swamped. Better that than that both craft should be destroyed.” And, dashing aft, I lent my assistance to the man who was tending the helm.

Then ensued a breathless, hair-raising fifteen seconds, during which it seemed impossible for the schooner and the brigantine to avoid a collision—in which case they must have sunk each other out of hand. Then, when the two craft were not more than fifteen feet apart, the schooner’s head fell off, she turned broadside-on to the sea, and, our people smartly hauling down our fore-staysail, the brigantine drew slowly ahead and clear of us, our bowsprit-end missing her mainboom by the merest hairbreadth, and the danger was over. But during that minute or so of frightful suspense, which the stranger’s crew had spent in rushing madly and aimlessly about the decks, execrating us in voluble Spanish, an opportunity had been afforded us to ascertain that the brigantine was named the *San Antonio*, and that she was beyond all question a slaver, with a cargo on board.

We contrived to avoid her without shipping so much as a drop of water, thanks mainly to the fact that the brigantine had served, at the critical moment, as a floating breakwater for us. Putting our helm down again the moment that we were clear of her, we came safely to the wind again on her weather quarter. Had we allowed matters to remain as they were before our narrow escape, the *San Antonio* would soon have parted company with us, for, as I said before, she was driving to leeward much more rapidly than we were. Now that would not suit me at all, for since I had made certain that she was a slaver, I was determined to capture her as soon as the weather should moderate sufficiently to allow us to do so. Therefore, when she had drifted about half a mile to leeward of us, I gave instructions that the helm should be eased up as often as opportunity permitted. The result of this was that we contrived to make our own lee drift amount to about the same as hers, thus maintaining no more than a bare half-mile of water between us.

Shortly after noon the gale broke, the sky quite suddenly cleared, and an hour later we were able to set the fore-staysail and shake a reef out of the foresail in order to steady the ship. Although the sea was still running too high to permit of our bearing up and running down to the brigantine, we managed to edge down a little nearer to her, so that by eight bells in the afternoon watch we had reduced the distance to something like the eighth part of a mile. At this distance we were able to maintain a pretty close watch upon the craft, and half an hour later we detected signs indicative of a determination on the part of her crew to make sail. Evidently they distrusted us as a neighbour, and were desirous of putting a little more water between us and themselves. Seeing this, I took a long look round to ascertain what our chances might be should we attempt to bear up and run down to her. There was still a very high, steep, and dangerous sea running, to attempt to run before which would be hazardous in the extreme; for should we happen to be pooped by even a single one of them, the least that could happen to us would be that our decks would be swept, and very possibly we should lose several men overboard, to save whom would be impossible in that mountainous sea, while it was quite on the cards that the schooner might be swamped out of hand and go to the bottom with all the crew. But I remembered that among our stores there was a quantity of lamp oil, and I believed that a few gallons of this, towed astern in a porous bag, would smooth the water sufficiently to prevent the seas from breaking aboard during the short time that we should need to enable us to run down to the brigantine, and I gave orders to have such a bag prepared and dropped over the stern.

Meanwhile the crew of the brigantine had not been idle, for scarcely had I given the order to prepare the oil bag when her people proceeded to set their jib, close-reefed topsail, and double-reefed mainsail, with the evident determination of escaping from our neighbourhood with as little delay as might be. I thereupon ordered our colours to be hoisted

and a shot to be fired across her forefoot as a gentle hint for her to remain where she was. To my surprise—for slavers do not often fight when they find themselves opposed to a superior force—the brigantine promptly replied to our single shot by letting drive at us with her starboard broadside of four 9-pounders, none of which, however, came near us, for the sea was altogether too high to allow of accurate shooting. For this reason I refrained from firing a second time, but replied to our antagonist by making sail, for it now appeared as though she had some hope of escaping to windward by outsailing and weathering upon us. Evidently her people did not know the little *Francesca*! The first quarter of an hour of the chase sufficed to prove that the *San Antonio* could not possibly escape us in the manner that her people had evidently believed would be successful. Not only did we outsail her, but we also contrived to edge down upon her to within about a cable's-length, when her skipper deliberately opened fire upon us with his broadside guns, apparently with the hope that a lucky shot would knock away a spar or two aboard us, and thus compel us to abandon the chase. But this was a game that two could play at, and since the rascal seemed determined not to yield without a fight we cleared away our Long Tom and proceeded to return his compliments. To shoot with any degree of accuracy in such a sea was impossible, and I was particularly anxious to avoid hulling the fellow, for I knew that this would mean the killing of several of the unfortunate slaves in her hold. I therefore gave instructions to the men working the gun to exercise the utmost care, and to fire only when they could be reasonably certain that their shot would not strike the brigantine's hull. By observing this precaution we at length succeeded in shooting away his fore-topmast, and thus rendering him helpless to continue his flight. Whereupon, like a sensible fellow, he ran the Spanish flag up to his gaff, allowed it to flutter there for a moment, and then hauled it down again in token of his surrender.

Our chance encounter with the brigantine thus ended satisfactorily enough, so far as we were concerned. However, it was not until the next morning that the weather had moderated sufficiently to enable us to take possession of our prize, when we found that we had captured a very smart vessel of two hundred and sixty-five tons measurement, with a cargo of three hundred slaves on board, bound for Havana. I lost no time in turning her over to Jack Keene, with a prize crew of twelve men, with instructions to take her into Port Royal for adjudication, and to await there the arrival of the schooner. Before parting company I seized the opportunity to question the crew of the *San Antonio* as to the brig of which I was in search, but they professed to know nothing whatever of her.

By midday all signs of the hurricane had disappeared, the sea had gone down, and the trade wind had returned, blowing briskly out from about east-north-east.

It was therefore a fair wind for the prize, and half an hour after I had secured a meridian altitude of the sun for the determination of our latitude Master Jack bore up, dipped his colours, and squared away.

Now ensued a fortnight of uneventful and wearisome cruising along the parallel of 21° north latitude, and between the meridians of 62° and 74° west longitude, that being the line upon which I thought it most likely that I might encounter the pirate, or at least gather some news of him. During that period we sighted and spoke not far short of forty sail, of one sort and another, both outward and homeward bound, but learned not a word that would furnish us with a clue to the whereabouts of the craft that we were so anxiously seeking. I was beginning to fear that our quarry had betaken himself to some other cruising ground altogether, when one morning, at dawn, Simpson, who had charge of the watch, sent down word to say that there was a brig in sight that he would very much like me to come up and look at, as he seemed to recognise her. Accordingly, without waiting to dress I tumbled out of my bunk and made my way up on deck. We were on a bowline under short canvas at the time, to the eastward of the Silver Bank, the tail of which we had cleared about an hour before, while the stranger was apparently hove-to dead to windward of us, and hull-down from the deck.

There was not much to be learned by looking at the stranger from the level of the deck. I therefore slung the glass over my shoulder and made my way aloft as far as the main cross-trees, from which a full view of her was to be obtained. But before so much as taking a single look at her through the telescope, her behaviour assured me that she must be either a ship of war, or a craft of decidedly suspicious character. For no ordinary trader would be lying hove-to, just where she was; the inference therefore was indisputable that, if not a man-o'-war, she must be lurking just off the entrance of the Windward Passage for some unlawful purpose. If by any chance the craft in sight should prove to be the one that we were after, I believed that I should be able to recognise her upon my first glimpse of her through the telescope. When I got aloft and brought my instrument to bear upon her, I found, however, that she was just in the very thick of the dazzle of the newly risen sun, and it was not until I had been aloft quite a quarter of an hour that I was able to see her at all distinctly. Even then I could discern no details of painting; I could not make out whether her hull was painted black or green, whether she had painted ports, or merely a narrow ribbon, or had neither. She showed against the strong light of the eastern horizon simply as a dainty jet-black silhouette, rising and falling lazily upon the long swell. But after looking long and steadfastly at her I came to the conclusion, in the first instance, that she was not a man-o'-war, and, in the next, that her general shape and style of rig were sufficiently familiar to justify me in the belief, or at least the suspicion, that I had seen her before. At all events it was my obvious duty to get near enough to her to enable me to ascertain what business she had to be lying-to just where we had happened to find her, and I accordingly gave Simpson instructions to make sail, and then see all clear for action.

It was evident that, whatever might be the character of the stranger, those aboard her were fully as wide awake as ourselves, for no sooner did we start to make sail than she did the same, with a celerity, too, that would not have disgraced a man-o'-war. Within five minutes of my having given the order to make sail, both craft were thrashing hard to windward, under all plain sail to their royals. And then we were not long in discovering that, fast as was the *Francesca*, the stranger appeared to be nearly if not quite as fast, although we in the schooner seemed to be rather the more weatherly of the two. This, however, might simply mean that the skipper of the brig was intentionally allowing us to close very gradually with him, in order that he might have the opportunity to get a nearer look at us, and so be enabled to form a better judgment regarding our character, while making his own preparations, if indeed he happened to be the craft for which we were looking. And of this I became increasingly convinced as we gradually neared the brig; for although she was now painted dead black to her bends, without any relief whatever, of colour, there were certain little details and peculiarities of shape and rig that I felt convinced I had seen before.

At length, about three bells, that is to say half-past nine-o'clock, in the forenoon watch, the skipper of the brig seemed to have made up his mind to a definite course of action, for he suddenly put up his helm, squared away, and came running straight down for us. Whereupon we in the schooner at once went to quarters, cast loose the guns, opened the powder magazine, and got a good supply of ammunition up on deck, at the same time hoisting our colours. The stranger, apparently, was not quite so willing as ourselves to display the hue of his bunting; at all events we saw none. But this might have been due to the fact that his gaff-end was obscured from our view by the spread of his topsails. When about half a mile to windward of us the brig, which we could now see was a most beautiful craft, suddenly rounded-to, clewed up her courses and royals, hauled down her flying-jib, and, throwing open her ports, let fly her whole broadside of 9-pounders at us, the shot humming close over our heads and considerably cutting up our rigging. And at the same instant a great black flag went soaring aloft to her gaff-end!

"So," said I to Simpson, who was standing close beside me, "that clears the ground and enables us to know just where we are. With that black rag staring us in the face there is no possibility of making a mistake. Return his fire, lads, as your guns come to bear, and be careful not to throw a single shot away. Aim at his spars first; then, when we have crippled him, we will close and finish him off."

But in talking thus I was reckoning without my host, for the brig carried more than twice our weight of metal in her broadside batteries, and a long thirty-two on her forecastle as against our own long eighteen. In a word, I soon found that I had caught a Tartar, for her crew were quite as nimble as our own, and quite as good shots, which was worse. Thus, when it came to playing the dismantling game, which seemed to be the object of both craft, we soon found that we were suffering much more severely than our antagonist. The skipper of the brig saw this quite as clearly as we did, and presently, believing that he had us completely in his power, he bore up and ran down toward us, with the evident intention of boarding.

"Mr Simpson," said I, "that fellow looks very much as though he intended to lay us aboard. That ought to suit us a great deal better than playing at long bowls, so please have both broadsides and the long gun double-shotted, and we will give him everything we can as he ranges up alongside, and then board him in the smoke, instead of waiting for him to board us."

"An excellent plan, sir, I think," answered Simpson. "Boardin' and bein' boarded are two very different things; and although them chaps may be ready enough to follow their skipper on to our decks, it'll take a good deal of the fight out of them if they finds that we're beforehand with 'em, and that they've got to defend their own ship instead of attackin' us. I'll go and see everything ready to give 'em a warm reception when they comes alongside."

We were not long kept in suspense, for, to do the pirates justice, they came on to the attack with every symptom of perfect fearlessness, and we had only just sufficient time wherein to make our preparations when, taking a broad sheer, the brig rounded-to and shot alongside us. At the moment when she was within about a fathom of us, her bulwarks lined with swarthy, unkempt-looking desperadoes, holding themselves in readiness to fling themselves in upon our decks, I gave the word to fire, and the whole double-shotted broadside—with a charge of canister on top of it, which Simpson had quietly ordered to be rammed home on top of the round shot—went crashing into her, making a very pretty "general average" among her crew, and among her spars and rigging. The crew of boarders seemed to have been swept out of existence, and so severely wounded were her masts that the shock of her collision with the schooner, a moment later, sent both of them over the side, fortunately into the sea instead of across our decks; and there she lay, a sheer hulk, secured to us by the grappling irons which our people had promptly hove, and quite unable to escape.

"Hurrah, lads," I shouted, "we have her now; she cannot escape us! Boarders, follow me!" And away we all went, helter-skelter, over our own bulwarks and those of the brig into the thick cloud of smoke that hung over the brig's decks, completely obscuring them and everything upon them.

I quite expected to find that our final broadside, in addition to bringing down the brig's masts, had swept her crew practically out of existence. I was therefore most disagreeably surprised to discover that, despite the havoc which we had undoubtedly wrought, and the evidences of which became clearly visible as the breeze swept the smoke away, the pirates still numbered at least two to our one, and were apparently in nowise dismayed at the havoc which that last broadside of ours had wrought; on the contrary, they received us with the utmost intrepidity, and in an instant we of the *Francesca* found ourselves hemmed in and pressed so vigorously that, instead of sweeping the decks and carrying the brig with a rush, as I had fully expected we should, it was with the utmost



“FOR TEN LONG MINUTES THE FIGHT RAGED MOST FURIOUSLY”

difficulty that we were able to hold our ground at all. The pirate captain, easily distinguishable among the rest by his good looks and the smartness of his dress, was here, there, and everywhere apparently at the same moment, urging on and encouraging his men in fluent Spanish, while he defended himself from the simultaneous attack of three of our people with consummate ease. He fought cheerfully, joyously, like a man who enjoys fighting, with a reckless jest on his lips, but with a ferocity that was terrible to behold. Twice I crossed swords with him. On the first occasion I had hardly engaged when I was so severely jostled that I suddenly found myself completely at his mercy, and gave myself up as lost, for his sword was descending straight upon my defenceless head as his eyes glared tiger-like into mine, when, apparently through sheer caprice, he diverted his stroke, and, instead of cleaving me to the chin, as he could easily have done, vigorously attacked the man next to me; while on the second occasion, which occurred a minute or two later, he contented himself with simply parrying my thrust, and then permitted himself to be separated from me by a rush of our men. For ten long minutes the fight raged most furiously on the brig's deck, fortune sometimes favouring us for a moment and then deserting us in favour of the pirates. The battle occasionally resolved itself for a moment into a series of desperate single combats, during which men savagely clutched each other by the throat and stabbed at each other with shortened weapons, and then merged again into a general mêlée in which each man seemed to strike recklessly at every enemy within reach, regardless of his own safety. And then, while the fight was still in full swing, I suddenly received a terrific blow on the top of my skull and fell senseless upon the deck. My last conscious sensation was that of being trampled remorselessly under foot by a furious rush of men.

When at length I recovered my senses I found that I was lying, undressed, in a cot, suffering from a nerve-racking headache of so violent a character that I could scarcely endure to open my eyes to the brilliant sunlight that flooded the cabin of which I was an occupant. For the first minute or two after my recovery my senses were so utterly confused that I found it impossible to recall anything that had happened save that, somehow, I had been struck down in a fight. Gradually, as I lay there wrestling with the state of confusion in which I found myself plunged, my memory returned, and I recollected everything up to the moment when I had been struck down on the deck of the pirate brig. Then I began to look about me, with the view of ascertaining where I was. I found that the exceedingly roomy and comfortable cot in which I was lying was slung from the beams of an equally roomy and luxurious cabin which was furnished with a degree of mingled elegance and comfort that was seldom found afloat in those days, and indeed is very far from being common even now. The whole of the after end of this cabin was occupied by a series of windows of semi-elliptical shape, beyond which the sparkling sea could be seen, and through which a delicious, balmy, refreshing breeze was blowing. A broad locker arrangement, handsomely worked in choice mahogany, stretched right athwart the cabin immediately beneath the stern windows, and upon this stood several beautiful flowering plants in pots of elaborately hammered brass, this locker forming the top of a long sofa, or divan, upholstered in crimson velvet, which also stretched across the full width of the cabin. The interior paintwork of the apartment was a rich, creamy white, imparting a deliciously cool and bright appearance to it. The furniture which it contained, and which consisted of, among other less important matters, a table of elaborately carved mahogany, a large bookcase full of books, many of which were in sumptuous bindings, a rack containing about a dozen charts, four chairs, each one of different pattern from all the others, and a very fine, thick carpet, was all exceptionally good. The only fault that I could find with it was that it lacked uniformity of design, and suggested the idea that it had been acquired in a more or less haphazard way and at different times and places.

By the time that I had completed my survey of the cabin in which I lay I had sufficiently regained the control of my senses to realise that I was certainly not aboard the *Francesca*; and, that being the case, where was I? Undoubtedly aboard the pirate brig, on the deck of which I had been struck down senseless. And then arose the question, what had become of the schooner and my shipmates? Had they been captured, sunk, or driven off? That the fight was over, and had probably been over for some time, was evident; for although there was a sound of much movement on the deck overhead, with the jabber of many voices in Spanish, intermingled with frequent calls and commands, the



stir and bustle were of that quiet and orderly character which conveyed to my practised ear the suggestion that the people on deck were engaged upon the task of repairing damages. For a moment the idea presented itself to me that we might possibly have proved the victors, and that the brig was in our possession, but it was dispelled the next moment by the reflection that, had such been the case, the speech on deck would have been English, not Spanish, and I should probably not have been left unattended. As my mental balance gradually recovered itself, so did my anxiety touching the fate of the *Francesca* and my comrades intensify, until at length I felt that I could endure the suspense no longer, but must turn out and investigate for myself. I accordingly made an effort to raise myself in my cot, but instantly sank back with an involuntary groan, for not only did the effort result in an immediate and severe attack of vertigo, but I also became aware of the fact that, in addition to the injury to my head, I had received a very painful hurt in the left breast, close above my heart. To get up and dress, as I had intended, was obviously impossible, and the only thing to be done, therefore, was to remain where I was until somebody should come to me.

I lay thus for perhaps a quarter of an hour longer, fretting and fuming at my helplessness, and still more at my ignorance of what had happened to the schooner, when the door of the cabin opened softly, and a rather good-looking young Spaniard approached my cot on tiptoe. Seeing that my eyes were open, and probably detecting a look of rationality in them, he smiled as his fingers closed gently upon my wrist to feel my pulse.

“So, señor,” he said, “you have recovered your senses at last! There was a moment when I almost began to fear that you would slip through my fingers.”

“And pray, señor, who may you be, and where am I?” I asked.

“To reply to your questions in their regular order, señor,” answered the Spaniard, “I am Miguel Fonseca, the surgeon of this brig, the name of which is the *Barracouta*; and you are the prisoner, or the guest, I am not quite sure which, of her commander, Captain Ricardo.”

“Captain Ricardo!” repeated I. “What is his other name?”

“Ah, señor, that I cannot tell you! We know him only as Captain Ricardo,” answered my companion.

“Thank you very much for your information,” said I. “But there are one or two matters of much greater importance to me than your captain’s name. Can you tell me, for instance, what has become of my schooner and her crew?”

“Assuredly, señor,” answered the surgeon. “We beat her off, with great loss, and, taking advantage of the fact that you had dismasted us with that last venomous broadside that you poured into us just as we ran alongside you, your people made good their escape. But I doubt very much whether they will ever reach a port; indeed it is most probable that they have all gone to the bottom by this time, for the schooner was terribly cut up, and appeared to be making a great deal of water when she hauled off and made sail.”

“They will get in all right, señor,” said I. “I have very little fear of that. If they managed to get from under your guns without being sunk, they will somehow contrive to keep the schooner afloat until they reach a port. And now perhaps you can tell me how it is that I happen to be here. Does your captain take care of his wounded prisoners and nurse them back to health, as a rule?”

“By no means, señor,” answered Fonseca with a grin. “His usual practice, after a fight, is to fling the wounded and dead alike to the sharks, while the unwounded are afforded the option of joining us or—walking the plank. Why he has made an exception in your case, señor, is more than I can tell; it is a mystery which I will not attempt to fathom. Nor should I care to hazard a guess as to whether his action bodes you good or evil; all I know is that he happened to be standing by when, after the retreat of your schooner, our people were clearing the decks of the dead and wounded, and that when you were about to be thrown overboard he suddenly interposed and ordered you to be taken below and placed in his own cot, my instructions being to attend to your hurts at once, before attending to even the most seriously injured of our own people.”

“Um! that is rather queer behaviour, isn’t it?” I commented. And, as Fonseca nodded, I continued: “And pray, when did this happen?”

“About five hours ago, immediately after the fight,” was the answer. “I have been attending to our own wounded during the interval, and have only just finished with them. I am afraid I shall lose a good many of them. Your men fought like fiends, and struck some very shrewd blows; indeed there was a moment when I began to think that Captain Ricardo had made a serious mistake in determining to run down and lay you aboard. For a minute or two it looked very much as though our people were about to give way before you, and indeed I believe they would have done so but for the fact that your men grew discouraged and gave way when you fell. But this will not do at all; here am I talking to you when it is of the utmost importance that you should be kept perfectly quiet. Now, not another word, if you please, but allow me to dress your wounds afresh.”

And so saying he softly opened the cabin door and said something in a low voice to someone who was apparently waiting outside. Then, closing the door again, he returned to the side of my cot and began, with very gentle fingers and a light touch, to remove the bandages that were wrapped about my breast and shoulder.

“This,” he said, “is your most serious injury—a pike wound; when did you get it?”

“I have really not the slightest idea when or how I got it,” I answered. Then I stopped suddenly, for, as I spoke, I suddenly remembered that when I sprang aboard the brig, at the head of the boarders, I was conscious for a moment of having received a violent blow on the chest, the memory of which, however, had instantly vanished in the excitement of the fierce struggle that promptly ensued. “Yes,” said I, “that must have been it.” And I related the occurrence just as it had happened.

Just then a low tap came on the cabin door, and in response to Fonseca's bidding a young mulatto lad entered, bearing a large basin of warm water, towels, bandages, lint, and other matters.

"Good! Now stand you there, François, and hold the basin while I foment the wound," ordered Fonseca, who forthwith proceeded to bathe and patch me up in the most careful and skilful manner.

"There!" said he, when he had at length attended to my hurts and made me tolerably comfortable. "I think you will do pretty well now for an hour or two. The wound in your breast looks very much inflamed, but that is only to be expected from the character of the weapon with which it was inflicted. But I have applied a lotion which ought to allay the inflammation somewhat, and I will prepare you a nice, soothing, cooling drink, of which you may take as much as you please; and when you have finished it, François, who will remain here to look after you, will bring you a further supply. But what you now need more than anything else is sleep; so, if you should experience the slightest inclination that way, please yield to it without hesitation. And now, señor, I will bid you *adios* for the present, but will come and have another look at you before dark."

And, so saying, he withdrew from the cabin as quietly as he had come.

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### Ricardo the pirate.

I must have slept for at least three hours, and probably much longer, for when I awoke, with a start, I discovered that night had fallen, the cabin lamps were lighted, and a man whom I at once recognised as the pirate captain was leaning over me and gazing at my face with an intentness that was doubtless the cause of my abrupt awakening. As I opened my eyes he started back as though detected in some act of which he felt ashamed; then, recovering himself, he again bent over me, and, to my astonishment, said, in perfect English:

"Well, young gentleman, I hope you are feeling all the better for your long sleep?"

"Thanks, yes," I said. "At least the intolerable headache from which I was suffering a few hours ago has almost entirely passed away, but this wound in my breast is still exceedingly painful, more so, I think, than when your surgeon patched me up."

"Ah," he said, "I am sorry to hear that! Fonseca must come and look at you again. He told me that it was likely to prove troublesome, but if we can avoid gangrene until the ship gets in, I think we shall pull you through all right."

"It is very kind of you to concern yourself as to my welfare, and also somewhat inexplicable that you should do so," said I. "You are the captain of this ship, are you not?"

"Yes, for the present," he answered. "For how long I may be permitted to retain that position is quite another affair. I am given to understand that the men are extremely dissatisfied that I should have spared your life—our motto, you must know, is: 'Dead men tell no tales', and we have acted in strict accordance with it thus far, which doubtless accounts for the immunity that we have so long enjoyed. Yours is the first life that I have ever spared."

"Thank you!" I said. "I suppose I ought to feel very much obliged to you, but somehow I do not. This disaster has absolutely ruined my prospects in the service, so you might just as well have killed me outright. And, by the way, why have you spared me? Your surgeon informed me that you spare only those who join you. I hope you don't anticipate the possibility that I shall join you?"

My companion laughed heartily, yet there was a slight ring of bitterness methought in his laugh. "No," he said, "I have not spared you in the hope that you will join us; we have managed thus far to do fairly well without your assistance, and I am sanguine enough to believe that, even should you decline to throw in your lot with us, we shall continue to rub along after a fashion without it. No, that was not my reason for sparing you. By the by, what is your name, if I may presume to ask? It is rather awkward to be entertaining a guest whose name, even, one does not know."

"My name," I answered, "is Grenville—Richard Grenville, and I am a lieutenant in his Britannic Majesty's navy."

"Quite so!" remarked my companion caustically, "I guessed as much from your uniform. You bear a good name, young sir, a very good name. Are you one of the Devon Grenvilles?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am Devon all through, on both sides. My mother was a Carew, which is another good old Devonshire family."

"Ah!" ejaculated Ricardo, as he called himself, with a quick indrawing of his breath, as though what I had said had hurt him, though how it should have done so was quite inexplicable. "I could have sworn it! Lucy Carew! Boy, you are the living image of your mother! I recognised the likeness the moment that we came face to face, when you boarded us; and I have three times spared your life on that account—twice while the fight was in progress, and again when my people would have heaved your still breathing body to the sharks!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "is it possible that you can ever have known my mother?"

"Ay," answered Ricardo, "extraordinary as it may appear to you, I once knew your mother well. However," he broke off hurriedly, "this is not the moment in which to become reminiscent; your wound is troubling you, I can see. I will call Fonseca to dress it afresh; meanwhile, be under no apprehension as to your safety. I will protect you with my own life, if necessary, although I do not think it will quite come to that."

And, so saying, he left the cabin, to return a few minutes later, accompanied by the surgeon and his assistant, François, the mulatto boy. With the utmost care on the part of Fonseca, and to the accompaniment of sundry maledictions in Spanish, muttered under his breath by Ricardo as I involuntarily winced now and then during the process, my wound was laid bare and carefully examined. It was by this time terribly inflamed and horribly painful, and I seemed to gather, from the grave and anxious look on Fonseca's face, that he regarded it as somewhat serious. He said nothing, however, but gave it a very thorough fomentation, dressed it, and carefully bound it up again. This done he administered a sleeping draught, and left me in charge of François, to whom he gave certain whispered instructions which I could not catch. When he presently retired, Ricardo followed him out of the cabin, and I saw him no more that night, for the sleeping draught, though somewhat long in operating, had its effect at last, and I sank into a feverish, troubled sleep, in which I was vexed by all sorts of fantastic fancies, in some of which my mother and the man Ricardo seemed to be associated together most incongruously. Then there were moments when I seemed to awake to find Ricardo and Fonseca bending over me anxiously, and others in which I appeared to be sitting up in my cot and talking the veriest nonsense to François, who, on such occasions, seemed to be entreating me, with tears in his eyes, to lie down again and remain quiet. Then ensued further phantasmagoria of the most extravagant description, of which I subsequently remembered little or nothing save that I seemed to be consumed with fever, that liquid fire was rushing through my veins instead of blood, and that I was continually tormented by an unquenchable thirst.

This state of discomfort endured for ages—apparently; in reality, however, it lasted only a week, at the end of which period I emerged from my delirium to find myself comfortably, nay, luxuriously, disposed upon a large bed in a spacious room overlooking an extensive garden, gorgeous with strange and brilliant-hued flowers and fragrant with their mingled perfumes, which sloped very gently down to a sandy beach, beyond which was visible, through the wide-open casements of the apartment, a wide stretch of landlocked water, in the centre of which floated the hull of a vessel that I had no difficulty in identifying as the *Barracouta*. The room which I occupied was elegantly furnished. Its walls were decorated with several oil paintings that, to my uneducated eye at least, appeared to be exceedingly good, and dotted about the room here and there were little tables upon each of which stood a vase of magnificent flowers. This was the scene upon which my eyes opened as I awoke from the first natural sleep that had visited me since that disastrous day when I had been struck down upon the deck of the pirate brig, and I lay for some minutes motionless, drinking in the beauty and the delight of it all, and revelling lazily in the sensation of relief from pain and fever that I was now enjoying.

Then, as I unconsciously sighed with excess of pleasure, I became aware of a slight movement beside the bed, and, glancing round, I perceived a middle-aged negress bending over me and looking anxiously into my eyes.

"*Bueno!* The señor is himself again at last!" she exclaimed in accents of great satisfaction as she placed her cool hand upon my brow for a moment, and then proceeded to smooth my rebellious locks with a tenderness that was almost caressing. "Yes," she continued, "the fever has quite gone, and now the señor has nought to do save to get well and strong again as soon as possible." She spoke in Spanish, and her accent and manner were those of one who had been accustomed all her life to associate with cultured people.

"Who are you, pray?" I demanded in the same language, "and where am I?"

"I am Mammy," she answered, "the old nurse of the señorita, and Señor Ricardo's housekeeper. And you are now in Señor Ricardo's own house—ay, and in his own room, too! What is the young English señor to Señor Ricardo, I wonder, that he should be cared for thus?"

I scarcely knew whether this last remark was in the nature of a soliloquy, or whether I was to take it as a question addressed to me, but I treated it as the latter, and replied:

"I really do not know, Mammy, but—stop a moment; let me think—yes—I seem to remember—or did I dream it?—that Captain Ricardo said he—had—once known my mother! But, no, that cannot be possible, I must have dreamed it—and yet—no—that part of it scarcely seems to be a dream!"

"No matter, no matter," answered Mammy musingly; "we shall doubtless know the truth sooner or later. Now, señor, it is past the time when you ought to have taken your medicine, but you were sleeping so peacefully that I could not bring myself to wake you. Take it now; it is a sovereign remedy for all kinds of fever; I never yet knew it to fail; and then, if you are thirsty, you may have just one glass of sangaree!"

I took the potion and swallowed it obediently; it had an intensely but not altogether disagreeable bitter taste; and then I quaffed the generous tumbler of sangaree that the old lady handed me. Oh, that sangaree! I had never tasted it before, and though I have often since then drunk the beverage I have never again enjoyed a draught so much as I did that particular one; it was precisely my idea of nectar!

"Aha!" quoth the old woman as she watched the keen enjoyment with which I emptied the tumbler, "the señor likes that? Good! he shall have some more a little later. Now I must go and see to the making of some broth for the señor; it is his strength that we must now build up."

And, so saying, the old nurse glided softly out of the room, leaving me to enjoy the glorious scene that was framed by the wide-open window at the foot of my bed.

I had lain thus for perhaps five minutes when the door of the room again opened, and there entered a young girl of some sixteen years of age—that was her actual age, I subsequently learned, but she looked quite two years older,—who came to the side of the bed and stood looking down upon me with large, lustrous eyes that beamed with pity and tenderness. Then, as she laid her cool, soft hand very gently upon my forehead, she said, in the softest, sweetest voice to which I have ever listened:

"Oh, Señor Grenville, it is good to see you looking so very much better. You will recover now; but there was a time—"

ah, how long ago it seems, yet it was but yesterday!—when we all thought that you would never live to see the light of another day. It was Mammy, and her wonderful knowledge of medicine, that saved you. Had not the captain realised your critical state, and driven the men to incredible exertions to get the ship into harbour quickly, you could not have lived!”

“Señorita,” said I, “how can I sufficiently thank you for the kind interest you exhibit in an unfortunate prisoner—for that, I suppose, is what I am—”

“No, señor, oh no; you are quite mistaken!” interjected my companion. “At least,” she corrected herself, “you are mistaken in the character of your imprisonment. That you certainly are a prisoner, in a sense, is quite true; but I hope—that is, I—do—not think—you will find your imprisonment very intolerable.”

“All imprisonment, whatever its character, must be intolerable, it seems to me,” I grumbled. Then, checking myself, I exclaimed: “But do not let us talk about myself. Do you mind telling me who you are? Your face seems familiar to me, somehow, yet I am certain that I have never before seen you. Are you, by any chance, Captain Ricardo’s daughter?”

The girl’s face clouded somewhat as she answered: “No; oh no, I am not Captain Ricardo’s daughter! I am an orphan; I have never known what it is to have either father or mother, and I am a prisoner—like yourself, yet I do not find my state by any means intolerable. Captain Ricardo has been kindness itself to me, indeed he could not have been more kind to me had I really been his daughter.”

“Ah,” said I, “I am glad to hear it, for your sake! He seems a strange man, a very curious commingling of good and evil traits of character—kind and gentle to you—and, thus far, to me—yet relentlessly cruel and bloodthirsty in the prosecution of his accursed calling. And your name, señorita, will you not tell me that?”

“Oh, yes, certainly! Why should I not?” answered my companion. “I am called Lotta—Carlotta Josefa Candelaria Dolores de Guzman. And your name is Dick, is it not?”

“Why, certainly it is!” I exclaimed. “But how in the world did you know that?”

“Because,” she answered, “when you were brought ashore yesterday, Captain Ricardo sent for me, and said: ‘This young fellow is Dick Grenville, the son of a once very dear friend of mine; and I want you, Lotta, and Mammy, to do your utmost to nurse him back to health and strength again.’”

“And you and Mammy have been doing so with marvellously satisfactory results,” said I. “And that, I suppose, accounts for the fact of your face seeming familiar to me; I probably saw you once or twice during my delirium?”

“Yes,” she admitted, “you certainly did see me—once or twice.”

“Well, Lotta—I suppose I may call you Lotta, may I not? Señorita sounds so very formal, does it not?” I suggested.

“Oh, yes, certainly!” assented my companion. “And I may call you Dick, may I not? Señor sounds so very formal, does it not?” Her quaint mimicry of my earnestness of manner was irresistibly droll.

“Of course you may,” I agreed eagerly. “Well, Lotta—now, let me remember—what was it I was about to say? Oh, yes, of course—how came you to be a prisoner in the power of this man Ricardo?”

“Very simply, yet in a manner that you would scarcely credit,” was the reply. “You must know that my mother died just after I was born, my father when I was just two years old. Up to then Mammy had looked after me, but when my father died his estates were taken in charge by some people whom my father had appointed to look after them—what do you call those people—?”

“Trustees, we call them in England,” I suggested.

“Yes,” assented Lotta, “they were my father’s trustees, and my guardians, empowered to look after my interests and manage the estates until I should arrive at the age of eighteen. When I was seven years of age the trustees decided to send me over to Old Spain to be educated, and I accordingly went, in charge of the wife of one of them, with Mammy to look after me. I was educated at the convent of Santa Clara, in Seville, where I remained until my fourteenth birthday, when I was taken out of the convent and placed on board a ship bound to Havana, my guardians having decided that I had received as much education as was necessary, and that the time had arrived when I ought to return to Cuba and take my place as mistress of my household and owner of the vast estate of which I was the heiress. Then a terrible misfortune befell us: the ship on board which I was a passenger caught fire, and was utterly destroyed, and everybody was obliged to take refuge in the boats. Then, to add still further to our misery, a gale sprang up, and the boats became separated. We suffered dreadfully during that gale, and were several times in the greatest danger of being drowned. Then, when the gale was over, the sailors in our boat knew not in which direction to steer, and so we went drifting aimlessly hither and thither, not knowing where we were going, but hoping, day after day, that a ship would come in sight and pick us up. And very soon our food and water became exhausted, and our sufferings intensified to such an extent that some of the men went mad and threw themselves into the sea. As for me, I became so weak at last that I lost consciousness, and did not again revive until I found myself on board the *Barracouta*, with Mammy looking after me. We arrived here before I was well enough to walk, and here I have remained ever since, that is to say, nearly two years.”

“Well,” I exclaimed, “that is a most extraordinary story, extraordinary not only from the fact of your having been the heroine of such a terrible adventure, but even more so from the circumstance that you were rescued and have been taken care of ever since by Ricardo. One would have thought that it would have been the most natural thing in the world for him to have callously left you all to perish. How many of your boat’s crew were alive when he picked you up?”

"Only two sailors, and Mammy, and myself," answered Lotta; "and I afterwards heard that the sailors had joined Ricardo."

"And have you never had any desire to escape and seek the protection of your guardians?" demanded I.

"Only at very rare intervals, and even then the feeling was not very strong," was the extraordinary answer. "You see," Lotta explained, "I am perfectly happy where I am. This is a most lovely spot in which to live, the most lovely that I have ever seen; and Ricardo is kindness itself to me during the rare periods when he is 'at home', as he calls it. I have never expressed a wish that he has not gratified, I have every possible comfort, and, what with my guitar, my garden, my morning and evening swim, and making clothes for myself, I find so much occupation that I do not know what it is to have a wearisome moment. And, now that you have come to be a companion to me, I cannot think of anything else to wish for."

The charming *naïveté* of this remark fairly took my breath away; but I was careful that the girl should not be allowed to guess, from my manner, that she had said anything in the least remarkable. Before I could reply, the sound of approaching footsteps became audible, and Lotta remarked:

"Now, here comes Fonseca, and I suppose I shall have to go. But I will come back again when he leaves you."

As she rose to her feet the door opened, and the Spanish surgeon entered.

"Good morning, señorita!" he exclaimed. "How is our patient? Vastly better, Mammy tells me. I see she is busy preparing some broth for Señor Grenville, but he must not have it until I have thoroughly satisfied myself that it would be good for him. Well, señor," as he seated himself on the side of the bed and laid his fingers upon my pulse, "you are looking rather more like a living being than you were twenty-four hours ago. Mammy's medicines are simply marvellous, I will say that for them, although the old witch will not tell me of what they are composed. Um! yes; eyes bright—almost too bright—pulse strong but decidedly too quick. You have been talking too much. That will not do. The señorita"—she had slipped out of the room by this time—"must either stay away, or not talk to you. Now, let me look at your wound." And he proceeded very carefully to remove the dressings.

This, it appeared, was progressing very satisfactorily, so he re-dressed it—my broken pate had healed itself, and needed no further looking after,—administered a sleeping draught, and then retired, after informing me that I could have Mammy's broth later, but that, in the meantime, sleep was of more value and importance to me than food. He had not been gone ten minutes before I was fast asleep.

Several days elapsed, and I never saw Ricardo, although I was told by Lotta and Mammy that he had frequently looked in upon me while I slept. Thanks to good nursing, I was making very satisfactory progress, although still far too weak and ill to be able to rise from my bed. Meanwhile I was able to see, by simply looking out of my bedroom window, that the *Barracouta* was being rapidly refitted—so rapidly, indeed, that I conjectured Ricardo must have made a point of always keeping an entire spare set of masts, spars, rigging, and sails on hand, in readiness for any such emergency as that which had arisen in connection with his fight with the *Francesca*.

At length, when I had been ashore nearly a fortnight, I noticed that the brig was once more all at aunto and apparently ready for sea. That same night Ricardo entered my room, and, having made exhaustive enquiries as to the state of my health, took a seat by my bedside, with the air of a man who purposed to indulge in a long chat.

"This last fortnight has done wonders for you," he said. "Thanks to the unremitting care of Lotta and Mammy, I think you will now be able to pull round without any further attention from Fonseca. And that reminds me to tell you that we go to sea at dawn to-morrow, and of course Fonseca goes with us. But he assures me that you now need nothing but good nursing and good feeding to restore you completely, and those Lotta and Mammy will be able to give you. You will not mind my leaving you in their charge, I hope?"

"Oh, no," I said, "not at all! Indeed, I have to thank you for quite an extraordinary amount of kindness. You could scarcely have done more for me had you been my father."

"You think so?" he said. "Good! I am glad to hear you say that, because—ah, well, it is useless to think of that now! By the way, is your mother still living?"

"She was when I last heard from home," said I, "and I hope she will live for many long years to come."

"I say amen to that," answered this extraordinary man. "When next you see her, say that Dick Courtenay saved your life—for her sweet sake. And tell her also that, despite everything that was said against me, I was innocent. She will understand what I mean and will believe me, perhaps, after all these years. Ah," he continued, springing to his feet and striding up and down the room, "if she had but believed me at the time, I should never have become what I now am! Had she had faith in me, I could have borne everything else—shame, disgrace, dishonour, ruin—I could have borne them all. But when to the loss of those was added the loss of her esteem, her respect, her love, it was too much; I had nothing left to live for—save revenge; and by heaven I have had my fill of that!"

"Do you actually mean to say that you were once my mother's lover?" I gasped.

"Ay," he answered bitterly, "her accepted lover. And I should have been her husband but for the accursed villainy of one who—but why speak of it? The mischief is done, and is irremediable."

"Surely you do not pretend to suggest that my father—?" I ejaculated.

"No, certainly not!" he replied quickly. "Do not misunderstand me. It was not your father who was my enemy, oh no! He was my rival for a time, it is true, but he was also my friend, and the very soul of honour. Oh no! the loss of your

mother's love was merely one of many results of a piece of as consummate villainy as ever dragged the honour of a British naval officer in the mire. But, pshaw! let us speak of other things. I suppose you have wondered what are my ultimate intentions toward you, have you not? Well, I will tell you. You once reproached me with having ruined your professional career. My dear boy, have no fear of anything of the kind. It was your misfortune, not your fault, that we were too strong for you, and if Sir Timothy Tompion—oh yes," in answer to my look of surprise, "I know Sir Timothy quite well, and he knows me, or thinks he does!—if Sir Timothy had only known that he was sending you out to fight the *Barracouta*, he would have given you, if not a bigger ship, at least twice as heavy an armament, and twice as strong a crew. So, when he comes to hear your story, he will not blame you for failing to take me; have no fear of that. Therefore, because I feel convinced that your ill-success in your fight with me will in nowise prejudice your professional prospects, it is my intention, all being well, to take you to sea with me next trip, and either put you ashore somewhere whence you can easily make your way to Port Royal, or else to put you aboard the first ship bound for Kingston that we may chance to fall in with.

"But to provide against any possibility of your fortunes going awry, I have decided to make you my heir; therefore—stop a moment, please; I think I can guess what you would say—that you positively refuse to have anything whatever to do with wealth acquired by robbery and murder. Quite right, my dear boy, it is precisely what I should expect—ay, and wish—you to say. But when I was an Englishman I sometimes used to hear people say that 'circumstances alter cases'; and this is one of them. The wealth that I propose to bequeath to you has not been acquired by me through any objectionable practices, it came to me through the merest accident, and nobody is aware of its existence save Lotta and myself. If it is indeed a pirate hoard, as is not at all unlikely, there is nothing to prove that such is the case; nor, assuming for the moment that it is so, is there anything to tell us either the name of the pirate who got it together, or the names of those from whom he took it. And, in any case, if it is the spoils of a pirate gang, they must have operated about a hundred years ago; and since they are now all undoubtedly dead and gone, as also are those from whom it was taken, you have as much right to it as anybody, and may as well have it. Lotta will show you where it lies concealed; and, since I shall never make use of it, you are at liberty to help yourself to the whole of it as soon as you please.

"There is one thing more that I wish to say to you. It is about Lotta. By the way, what do you think of Lotta?" he interrupted himself to enquire.

"I think she is the sweetest, most charming, and most lovely girl that has ever lived!" I exclaimed enthusiastically, for I had fully availed myself of my opportunities for making her acquaintance, and had fallen over head and ears in love with her, although I have hitherto refrained from saying so, because this is not a love story, but one of adventure.

"Ah!" exclaimed Ricardo grimly; "yes, I see the inevitable has happened! Well, well, I have nothing to say against it, nor will your mother, unless she has greatly altered since I knew her. However, to revert to Lotta, I am afraid that, without in the least intending it, I have done that poor girl a very serious wrong. We fell in with the boat in which she, Mammy, and two Spanish sailors were starving, just as a light air of wind had dropped to a dead calm; as a matter of fact we drifted right up alongside the boat, so that it became impossible to avoid taking those who were living out of her. Even pirates have their gentle moments occasionally, and the sight of those four, perishing of hunger and of thirst, in a craft that had literally drifted alongside us, was more than we could endure; therefore we hauled them up out of the boat, brought them round, cared for them—and they have been inmates of my house ever since. Lotta seemed quite content to remain; she never murmured, never expressed the slightest desire for a life different from that which she was living ashore here. And where Lotta was content, Mammy was supremely happy; therefore—well, I got fond of the child, and resolutely refused to allow my thoughts to turn in the direction of sending her away from me. But your coming has altered everything, I can see that. When you go, she will have to go too; she would never be happy here again without you, that is certain. Moreover, my eyes have been opened of late to the great wrong that I have been doing her. She is a rich heiress, and ought now to be in possession of her property. Therefore, when I return—by which time you will doubtless be quite well again—I will give you the charge of Lotta and Mammy, and ask you to see that the former is safely placed in the care of her guardians. While I am away this time I will arrange a plan by which these matters can be brought about, and will explain everything to you upon my return. And now I think I have said everything that I had to say, and will therefore bid you good-night, and good-bye, since we shall sail at daybreak, and all hands, myself included, will sleep aboard to-night. I hope that when I return, which will probably be in about a month from now, I shall find you quite well and strong again."

And as Ricardo pronounced the last words he rose, with the evident intention of going.

"One moment, please," I said hastily; "pray do not go just yet. You have been doing all the talking thus far, now I wish to say a word or two."

"By all means," he answered with a laugh, as he resumed his seat. "Say on. I promise you my very best attention."

But, now that it came to the point, I suddenly found myself hesitating; I had spoken upon the spur of the moment, with a very definite purpose in my mind, but quite unexpectedly I found myself entirely at a loss for words. At length, seeing Ricardo's look of surprise at my hesitation, I plunged desperately *in medias res*.

"Look here," I stammered, "I—that is to say—oh, hang it, I find it very difficult to know how to begin! I want very particularly to say something to you, and I want to say it, if I can, without hurting your feelings—"

Ricardo laughed grimly. "Say on, without fear," he remarked; "don't stop to pick and choose your words. In my time I have been compelled to listen to words that have seared my very soul, words that drove me desperate, and made me what I am. You can scarcely have anything to say that will hurt me more keenly than I have been hurt already; moreover, I have now grown callous, so say on without fear."

The intense and concentrated bitterness with which he uttered those last few words gave me courage; moreover, I felt certain that my companion would recognise the kindly feeling which actuated me, so without more ado I

proceeded:

“What I wish to say is this. You have somehow contrived to convey to my mind the impression that you are a very deeply injured man, that you have been driven to the adoption of your present mode of life by some great and terrible wrong; moreover, you have been kind to Lotta, and especially kind to me; and, lastly, your references to your former friendship with my mother have been such that it has been impossible for me to avoid feeling very deeply interested in you. Now, why should you not abandon your present mode of life? You say that you possess treasure which has come into your possession by perfectly honest means, and to which, to use your own words, you have as much right as anybody. Why not take that treasure then, and go away to some part of the world where you are not known, and there begin life afresh?”

“Ah!” said Ricardo, “I have asked myself that question more than once without obtaining a satisfactory answer to it. I should like to do so, were it possible, for I am very heartily sick of the life that I am now leading. There was a time when, soured and embittered by as cruel a wrong as man could inflict upon his fellow man, I believed that I could find consolation, if not actual happiness, in the wreaking of my vengeance upon every Englishman whom I could get into my power, or whose wealth I could take from him by force; but that time has long passed, the revenge which I believed would be so sweet has turned to dust and ashes in my mouth, and now I am so weary of life that the bullet or steel that should rid me of it would be more welcome than any other earthly thing. When it is too late, I have begun to realise the full depth of my villainy, and to see what a contemptibly cowardly creature I have been in permitting myself to seek such an ignoble method of revenge as piracy. But, as I said, it is now too late, yes, too late —”

“Surely not,” I broke in. “Have you forgotten the homely old adage that ‘It’s never too late to mend’? What you have done can never be undone, it is true, but it can be repented of, and reparation can be made, if not directly to the persons injured, yet by doing good to others where you have the opportunity. Will you not think the matter over again, and this time with the determination to arrive at a right decision?”

“I will think it over, certainly,” he said. “As to arriving at ‘a right decision’, that is as may be. If I can see my way to such a decision it may be that I shall take it. I will consider the matter while I am at sea, and I promise you that no wrong shall be done during the progress of this cruise if I can possibly help it, and I think I can. For I always make a point of confining the navigation of the ship strictly to myself; nobody aboard ever knows where we are until I choose to tell them, and it will therefore be easy for me to take the brig to some spot where there is little or no chance of our falling in with other craft. Then, perhaps, if we can cruise for a month or six weeks without taking a prize, the men may be content to accept their share of the booty, and disband, especially as I should tell them that they may divide my own share between them. And now, good-bye, with many thanks for your sympathy!”

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## Chapter Eighteen.

### The treasure cave.

When I awoke, rather late, the next morning, after a somewhat troubled and restless night, traceable, no doubt, to my long conversation with Ricardo, the *Barracouta* had vanished, and nothing remained to mark her late anchorage save the buoy to which she had been moored.

And now ensued a period of almost perfect bliss to me, for I had by this time reached that precise stage of convalescence where all danger is past, yet in which the patient is still so very far from being well that he must be waited upon, hand and foot, and tended with as much solicitude as though he were an utterly helpless babe; and such attention I was afforded in its most perfect and acceptable form by Lotta and Mammy. Small wonder is it, therefore, that my progress toward recovery was rapid, and that in just a month from the day on which the *Barracouta* sailed I should find myself strong enough to admit of my rising from my bed and donning my clothes for an hour or two. I was now practically myself again, save that I was so weak as to need support whenever I attempted to stand; but, with Lotta on one side, and Mammy on the other, I was soon able, not only to totter from one room to another, but even to get into the garden for a few minutes, and sit there in a comfortable basket chair, drinking in renewed health and strength with every breath of the soft, warm, deliciously perfumed air.

We now began to look daily, nay hourly, for the return of the brig, and I ventured to indulge in the hope that, when she came, I should have the satisfaction of learning that my last conversation with Ricardo had borne good fruit, and that he had decided to abandon piracy, and to devote the remainder of his life to doing good, as some sort of atonement for the countless shocking crimes of which he had been guilty. Meanwhile my strength came back to me fast from the moment when I was able to get into the open air, and within another fortnight I was practically my former self again.

It is scarcely needful to say that during this long and tedious period of my convalescence I had enjoyed many a long and confidential chat both with Lotta and with Mammy, and sometimes with both together; thus, by the time that even Lotta was fain to pronounce me once more quite well, and in no further need of nursing, we had very few secrets from each other, and I had confided to her all my earnest hopes regarding Ricardo, in which hopes she cordially joined me. I also told her what Ricardo had said as to my becoming his heir, and taking possession of his private hoard of treasure, which naturally led to an arrangement being made for an early visit to its hiding place. This hiding place, it appeared, was situated in a large natural cavern in a secluded spot on the shore of the bay, and was the spot wherein Ricardo had originally found it hidden. To me, this had a sound of very great insecurity; but Lotta informed me that, so far was this from being the case that, well as she knew the locality of the cavern, she was often greatly puzzled to find the entrance.

At length, on a certain afternoon we two set off to find this mysterious hiding place and inspect the treasure, which,

according to Lotta's description, promised to be of absolutely fabulous value. We passed down through the garden for almost its entire length, then bore away through a side path to the left, in order, as my companion explained, that we might avoid the "shipyard" and, more particularly, the men working therein. Ricardo had most rigorously enjoined Lotta, on several occasions, never to expose herself to the view of these men, or in any wise remind them of her presence in the settlement. But, to speak the truth, I am very strongly inclined to believe that, at all events on this particular occasion, Lotta was very much more anxious for my safety than she was for her own. Be that as it may, we avoided the shipyard by the simple process of passing along the back of it, through Ricardo's private garden; and I am compelled to say that I was astonished beyond measure at the completeness of the establishment, as I then saw it for the first time. It was a perfect dockyard in miniature, with warehouses, capstan-house, mast house, rigging shed, sail loft—in fact every possible requisite for keeping not only one but as many as three or four craft in perfect order. And, from what I saw in passing, I judged that there must be at least fifty men regularly employed about the place! No wonder that the *Barracouta* was a busy ship, and her depredations of the most extensive character; they would need to be to maintain adequately such an establishment in working order.

Upon leaving the precincts of the garden we plunged into a wood that completely veiled our movements from the men working in the yard, and upon emerging from it we found ourselves at the edge of a low cliff, down the face of which a path zigzagged to the beach. The yard now was completely hidden from us—and we from it—by a jutting shoulder of the cliff. Descending to the beach, we found ourselves on a narrow expanse of firm, white sand, the whole of which it was evident was covered at high-water, and which was now so hard that we scarcely left any indication of our footprints upon it. Traversing this for about a quarter of a mile we entered a sort of labyrinth of huge masses of sandstone that had fallen to the beach from time to time, from the steep and now lofty cliff that impended overhead. Here we were most effectually sheltered from prying gaze by the enormous masses of rock between which we wound our devious way for perhaps a hundred yards, until Lotta stopped with the remark:

"Now, Dick, we have reached the end of our journey. Look about you and see whether you can find the entrance to the cave which we have come to visit."

I looked diligently round me, this way and that, but could see absolutely nothing that in the least degree resembled an opening in the rock, and at length somewhat impatiently said so.

"Neither do I," laughed my companion; "I shall have to look for it, as usual. It is somewhere about here," she continued, pointing to a series of horizontal ledges that ran along the face of the cliff just opposite where we stood. Moving forward, I saw Lotta stoop down to examine the ledges; then she moved slowly along the cliff face for a distance of a few yards, when, to my amazement, she suddenly vanished before my very eyes. I sprang forward until I reached the spot at which she had disappeared, but was still unable to see anything of her.

"Lotta!" I cried anxiously, "where are you? what on earth has become of you?"

"I am here, Dick," answered the girl, her voice seeming to issue from the ground at my feet. Then, for the first time, I noticed that there was what appeared to be a slight dip in the inner edge of the ledge, but which, upon closer inspection, proved to be a fissure, just wide enough for a man to squeeze through, and it was into this fissure that Lotta had dropped. I promptly followed her, and presently, when my eyes had become accustomed to the dim twilight of the place, I found that we were in a small, cave-like hollow of the rocky cliff, measuring about eight feet in each direction, and floored with very fine, dry sand. But of the treasure there was no sign that I could discover, in any direction—unless it were artfully concealed in one or more of the many small holes or recesses that I saw here and there in the rocky walls. Lotta observed my perplexity and laughed heartily.

"Well, Dick, where is the treasure?" she banteringly demanded. "Surely it is not so very difficult to find, now that you have been told of its existence?"

"Oh, I'll find it, never fear, young woman!" I answered; "but I confess that it is so ingeniously concealed that I doubt whether anyone ignorant of its existence would find it, except by the most extraordinary accident." And therewith I proceeded to grope and feel about in the various fissures and cavities with which the rocky walls of the small cavern were honeycombed, but without success. At length, to my great chagrin, I was obliged to abandon the search and confess myself beaten.

"Yet it is very simple—when you know!" remarked Lotta, in high glee at my discomfiture. "Follow me!" And, dropping upon her hands and knees, she proceeded to crawl into one of the cavities that I had been searching, and which I should have declared was not nearly capacious enough to receive a full-grown man. Nevertheless Lotta completely disappeared within it, and I after her. When I had fairly entered the cavity I found that what had appeared to be its back wall, and which gave it the appearance of being only about two feet in depth, was really one of two side walls, a narrow passage turning sharp off to the right, just wide enough and high enough to travel through comfortably on one's hands and knees. It wound round in what seemed to me to be about a half-circle of about fifty yards in diameter, and its inner end gave access to an enormous cavern, very roughly circular in shape, and about four hundred feet across in either direction.

It was a most extraordinary place. One of the peculiarities was that, instead of being pitchy dark, as one would naturally expect it to be in such a place, the whole interior was suffused with a very soft greenish twilight, quite strong enough, when one's eyes became accustomed to it, to permit one to see from one end of the cavern to the other with quite tolerable distinctness. Where the light came from it was impossible to say, for the roof of the cavern appeared to be formed, like the walls, of solid rock; but from the fact that shafts of light were plainly visible overhead, issuing from the walls and roof, I conjectured that the light entered the cavern through rifts in the rock, and that its greenish tinge was imparted to it by the foliage through which it filtered prior to its passage through the rifts. Greater surprise was in store, for presently I discovered that the walls were literally covered with sculptured figures of men and animals, done in high relief, and about life-size. The sculptures appeared to be records of hunting and fighting episodes, and were executed with great vigour and skill. In reply to my astonished enquiries, Lotta



informed me that Ricardo attributed this work to the original Caribs, and very probably he was right.

The treasure was all neatly arranged in a recess near the narrow passage by which we had entered the cavern, and a pretty careful inspection of it soon convinced me that Ricardo had been only speaking the truth when he assured me that, although it was probably the booty of some dead-and-gone gang of pirates, he had certainly had no hand in its accumulation. For everything bore unmistakable evidence of having lain where it was for a great many years—probably at least a hundred, if one might judge by the dates on a few of the coins which I examined, and which formed part of the treasure. The man who accumulated the store must have been an individual of a very enterprising nature, for there were great piles of strong, solid wooden cases packed to the brim with doubloons and pieces-of-eight; two hundred and eighty-five gold bricks, weighing about forty pounds each, every brick encased in the original raw-hide wrapper in which it was brought down from the mines, now hard and dry and shrivelled; quite a large pile of rough, shapeless ingots of gold and silver, conveying the suggestion that at various times large quantities of gold and silver plate and jewellery had been run through the melting pot; and, finally, a leather bag containing not far short of a peck measure of gems of every conceivable description, all of the stones being cut, and evidently taken from pieces of jewellery of various kinds that had probably been broken up and melted. I had not the most remote idea of the value of the whole, but I was convinced that it must be something fabulous, and I afterwards learned that I was right.

We spent nearly two hours in the cave, partly because there was so much of interest there to engage our attention, and partly because of its delightfully cool temperature, which was a positive luxury after the extreme heat of the house, both by day and by night. Before we left the cave to return to the house, Lotta half-jestingly proposed that we should stock the place with provisions, and use it as a place of abode whenever the heat became unduly oppressive. Although the suggestion was made more in jest than in earnest, the idea became so attractive, when we proceeded to discuss it further, that on the following day we actually took steps to carry out the proposal. We spent the best part of the day in stocking the cavern with provisions, rugs, and so on, to such an extent that we could easily have endured a week's siege there, had it been necessary, for a good supply of excellent water had been found percolating through the rock in a small side passage off the main cavern. And thereafter we regularly spent a great part of each day in the cavern, always making it a rule to take with us a little more of everything than we really needed.

At length, when a period of two full months had elapsed since the sailing of the *Barracouta*, with no sign of her return, I began to feel somewhat anxious. I was now practically as well in health as I had ever been in my life, and I began to pine for a return to active service. I was also desirous of seeing Lotta safely removed from her present dubious and somewhat dangerous surroundings into that position which was hers by right. To achieve these two results it was necessary that I should get away from where I was, either by the fulfilment of Ricardo's promise to me, or by some other means. To get away from where I was! As that expression occurred to me I suddenly remembered that I had not the faintest idea where I was; and, since Lotta was as ignorant as I was on the subject, I determined to ascertain by some means exactly where this little paradise of a spot was situated. And, as a first step toward this, I ascertained roughly the latitude of the spot, by means of a quadrant that I found in Ricardo's room, as a result of which I discovered that I was undoubtedly somewhere on the island of Cuba. Since there were only two spots on the coast line of the island that could possibly have this precise latitude, I very soon managed, by reference to one of Ricardo's charts, to determine that the rendezvous was on the north side of the island; nay, I was able without difficulty to identify the precise spot on the chart.

Another week passed, still with no sign of the return of the *Barracouta*, and my impatience to get back to civilisation and friends grew so acute that I was seriously entertaining the idea of stealing a boat from the dockyard and making my escape in her. The only consideration which caused me to hesitate was, that as I fully intended to take Lotta and Mammy with me, I did not care to expose them to the perils and discomforts of a boat voyage until every other resource had failed.

A few more days had passed, when, about two o'clock one morning, I was rudely awakened by some individual who had entered my room and was roughly shaking me by the shoulder. I started up in bed and, quickly gathering my confused wits together, recognised the voice that was addressing me as that of Fonseca, the surgeon of the *Barracouta*!

"Hullo, Fonseca," I exclaimed, "where in the name of fortune have you sprung from? Is the *Barracouta* in?"

"Yes, Señor Grenville," he answered, "we have just arrived. At the peril of my life I took advantage of the bustle and confusion, attendant upon her coming to an anchor, to slip quietly over the side and swim ashore, in order that I may warn you to rise at once and make your escape while you may, taking the señorita and the old woman with you, if you would save their lives, or that which is perhaps even dearer than life to the señorita!"

"Why," I ejaculated, as I sprang out of bed and started groping for the materials with which to strike a light, "what has happened, then, that it should be necessary for us to fly for our lives? Ricardo? Is he—?"

"Stop!" exclaimed Fonseca, laying his hand upon my arm as I was about to light a candle; "don't do that! You must dress and make your preparations in darkness; for should Dominique see the house lighted, as he could scarcely fail to do, he would leave everything and come ashore at once rather than that you and the señorita should slip through his fingers. Yes, Ricardo is dead. We have sighted nothing in the shape of a sail from the time that we left here; as a result of which the men rapidly grew discontented. Dominique and Juan, who have long been jealous of Ricardo and envious of his power, took advantage of this and incited the crew to mutiny. The precious pair made their way to Ricardo's cabin and murdered him in his sleep; then, when his dead body had been first exhibited to the men and afterwards tossed overboard, Dominique offered himself as captain in place of Ricardo, and, as he happened to be the only reliable navigator among us, he was chosen, with Juan as his lieutenant. That done, it was decided to abandon the cruise forthwith and bear up for the rendezvous, in order to lay in a fresh stock of necessaries before undertaking another cruise. But I soon discovered that, so far as Dominique was concerned, the restocking of the

ship was only a pretext to enable him to return here at once for quite another purpose, namely, to put you effectually out of the way by drawing a knife across your throat, and to possess himself of the señorita. Now, Dominique is a villain without a single redeeming trait of character; there is no love lost between him and me; and therefore, since I have taken something of a fancy to you, and have no desire to see Señorita Lotta the victim of such a consummate scoundrel and blackguard as Dominique, I determined to give you a word of warning, if possible; and here I am. Now I don't know where you and the señorita can hide yourselves, but hide you must, and that forthwith, for friend Dominique may turn up at any moment; and if he finds you and the lady here, no earthly power can save you. I think that perhaps if you were to take to the woods for a time, it would be your best plan; and I would help you, so far as lay in my power, by—"

"You are a good fellow, Fonseca," interrupted I, grasping his hand, "and I will not forget what you have done to-night. I know of a place where, I think, we can hide safely for a day or two, and I will take the señorita and Mammy there with me. And, look here, why should you not join us? You must surely be quite tired of leading such a life as this, and —"

"Tired!" he broke in; "tired is not the word to express my loathing of it! I never liked it; would never have had anything to do with it if I could have helped it, but I was compelled by Ricardo to join, and I have never since had a chance to escape."

"Well, you have one now if you care to join us," I said. "While you have been talking my brain has been working, and I have already thought of a scheme for getting away from here. Will you join us?"

"Most willingly, señor," answered Fonseca. "I will stand by you through thick and thin; and should you succeed in enabling me to escape, my eternal gratitude will be yours."

"Very well then," said I, "that is settled. Now if you have any valuables among your personal belongings in your quarters ashore here, that you particularly wish to take away with you, be off at once and get them, and then rejoin me here. As for me, I must go and call Mammy at once, and direct her to arouse and warn the señorita. Now be off with you, and return as quickly as possible."

So saying I hustled him out, and forthwith hastened away to the little room which I knew was occupied by the negress. This I entered without ceremony, and, arousing the old creature, acquainted her as briefly as possible with the situation of affairs, and directed her to arouse Lotta forthwith. Then I returned to the room which I had been occupying—and which was actually Ricardo's own sleeping apartment—and busied myself in collecting together some half a dozen charts which were scattered about the room, and which, I thought, might be useful, as well as Ricardo's quadrant and a copy of the current *Nautical Almanac*. By the time that I had got these and one or two other matters together, Fonseca had returned, and a few minutes later Lotta and Mammy appeared, the latter loaded with a huge bundle of wraps and spare clothing belonging to her beloved mistress. Having enquired whether they were now ready for instant flight, and received a prompt affirmative reply, I gave the word to evacuate the premises, and we forthwith filed out into the garden, shaping a course for the treasure cave, which I had determined should be our place of refuge until we could perfect our plans for effecting an escape. As it happened, we were not a moment too soon, for we had traversed little more than half the length of the garden when the sound of voices in somewhat boisterous conversation not far ahead first brought us to an abrupt halt, and then caused us to retire precipitately from the path to the shelter of some coffee bushes close at hand, behind which we silently crouched until the speakers had passed on up the path. They were Dominique and Juan, both somewhat the worse for drink, and consequently speaking in a considerably louder key than was in the least degree necessary. As they passed us and pursued their way up toward the house it was not at all difficult to divine from their conversation the fate which they had planned for Lotta, as well as for me.

The moment that they were far enough beyond us to permit of our doing so with safety, we again emerged upon the path, down which we pursued our way, silent as shadows, arriving, some ten minutes later, at the point where it became necessary for us to turn off through the wood on our way toward the cave. At this point I paused for a moment to look back at the house, and as I did so I noticed a faint light suddenly appear in one of the rooms. Our friends Dominique and Juan had evidently arrived there and were lighting up the place, prior, as they doubtless fondly anticipated, to giving us a pleasant little surprise. As I continued to watch, the light suddenly grew brighter; they had found a lamp and lighted it, and were now in the room which I had been wont to occupy. A minute later the light vanished from that particular room, and almost immediately showed from the window of another, which, from its position, I conjectured must be that which Lotta had occupied. That our flight had by this time been discovered seemed pretty evident, for the house was rapidly lighted up in every room, and it was not difficult to conjecture that the two half-drunken ruffians were prosecuting a heated and vigorous search for the missing ones. And that this was actually the case soon became evident from the fact that the French casement of the room that had been mine suddenly flew open, and a man, whom I presently identified as Juan, came staggering and stumbling down the path at a run, alternately yelling curses at us, the missing ones, and shouting to some person or persons unknown to come up to the house forthwith "as the birds had flown!" Whereupon I swung quickly upon my heel, and, plunging into the wood, hastened after my companions, whom I overtook just as they were about to enter the cave. Arrived at our destination we lighted a candle for a few minutes to enable us to make such hasty preparations as were absolutely necessary, and then, stretching ourselves out upon the soft, sandy floor, composed ourselves to finish the slumbers that had been so rudely interrupted.

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## Chapter Nineteen.

### An audacious scheme.

It seemed that I had scarcely closed my eyes ere I was aroused by Mammy, who informed me that it was broad

daylight, and that breakfast was quite ready, whereupon, starting to my feet and shaking the fine sand from my clothing, I looked at my watch and was amazed to discover that it was nearly eight o'clock. I accordingly hurried away to the spot at which the spring gushed out of the rock, hastily performed my ablutions, and returned to where the others awaited me before falling upon a most appetising meal which Mammy had prepared from the various viands with which we had so luckily stocked the place. Everything was cold, of course, for now that our flight was known it would never have done to risk lighting a fire for the mere pleasure of having hot chocolate for breakfast, lest some errant wreath of smoke should betray the locality of our hiding place, and lead to a search that might possibly result in our capture. But, cold though the meal was, it was none the less welcome; and when we had finished I rose to my feet with the announcement that I intended to go forth upon a reconnoitring expedition. Against this decision Lotta at once protested most vigorously, in which protest she was joined by Fonseca, who very generously offered to go in my stead. He declared that in the untoward event of an unavoidable encounter with any of the men, the consequences to me would certainly be fatal, while for him they would probably amount to nothing worse than a somewhat severe cross-questioning as to how he managed to get ashore without using a boat, and what were his reasons for such extraordinary haste. These questions he believed he could answer satisfactorily without difficulty. But I was anxious to get all my information at first hand, to see everything with my own eyes, in order that I might be able to frame my plans with certainty. I therefore put aside their objections, and, forbidding any of them to leave the cave until my return, sallied forth, observing every possible precaution against being seen or being taken unawares.

Upon emerging from the entrance to the cave, after having first taken a most careful look round, I made my way, with much circumspection, to the crown of a high knoll or ness, jutting out a little way into the bay, from which I believed I should be able to get a good view of the "yard", and ascertain, in the first instance, what might be happening in that direction. The crest of this knoll was crowned with a thick and tolerably extensive clump of bushes, screened by which I hoped to be able both to see and hear anything that might happen to be transpiring among the various sheds, and at the same time to keep an eye upon the brig where she lay at her buoy, about half a mile from the shore. When, however, I reached my hiding place I was disappointed to find that I was considerably farther away from the wharf and the buildings than I had expected; and that while I could see pretty well what was happening down there, as well as command an excellent view of the brig, I could hear nothing save an occasional shout; and it was even more upon what I should hear than upon what I should see that I depended for the necessary information upon which to base my plans. But there was a spot at some distance down the front of the slope which I thought would suit my purpose admirably if I could only reach it without being seen, and I at once determined to make the attempt. It was a somewhat peculiarly shaped outcrop of rock with a hollow in the middle of it, and I believed that if I could but gain its shelter without discovery I should be able to see from it nearly as well as from where I was, while I should certainly be able to hear very much better. The only question was how to get there. And after very carefully examining my surroundings from the shelter of my screen of bushes I came to the conclusion that my only plan would be to descend to the beach again by the way that I had come, enter the wood as though I intended to return to the house, and skirt it until I came very nearly to its far end, when, by concealing myself in a thick and extensive bed of ferns, I might reasonably hope to gain the desired spot without any very great difficulty or danger. Accordingly, having first carefully looked about me to assure myself that I need not fear being seen, I cautiously emerged from my hiding place, and as cautiously made my way down to the beach again, from which it was easy to gain the shelter and concealment of the wood. Another ten minutes found me, heedless of the danger of snake bites, painfully wriggling my way through the bed of ferns, lifting my head above the fronds occasionally to make sure that I was steering a straight course; and twenty minutes later saw me safely ensconced in my hiding place, from which I could both see and hear distinctly without being seen.

For nearly an hour it appeared as though I had had all my trouble for nothing, for the people on the wharf and in the sheds seemed to be going about their regular daily business with that perfect deliberation and entire absence of hurry which is so characteristic of the Spanish seamen. I was beginning to consider seriously the question whether, after all, it might not be advisable for me to endeavour to approach the house, and even perhaps enter it, in my quest for information, when I saw Dominique and Juan suddenly appear upon the wharf and enter a small dinghy, in which they pulled off to the brig. Then, as the tiny craft approached the *Barracouta* a few figures appeared on deck, and by the time that the dinghy reached the brig's side all hands seemed to have mustered on deck. Evidently they had been taking matters easy aboard her to celebrate their return to harbour. Almost immediately after the arrival of the new captain and his lieutenant on board, the boatswain's whistle sounded, and a minute later both gigs and the cutter were lowered, and all hands apparently got into them and gave way for the shore. Ten minutes later they landed on the wharf and drew themselves up into some semblance of rank and file. I noticed that every man carried a brace of pistols, as well as the usual long, murderous-looking knife, in his belt. Then Juan stepped forward and started to ring a large bell that was suspended from a gallows-like arrangement, and immediately a number of men came swarming out from the various sheds and formed up facing their comrades, who had just come ashore from the brig. I carefully counted these last, and found that, including Dominique and Juan, they mustered forty-two. The others totalled up to fifty-six.

When the last man appeared to have presented himself, Dominique gave the order:

"Call over the roll, if you please, Señor Juan."

And therewith Juan, drawing the roll from his pocket, proceeded to call each man by name. Each briefly responded by declaring himself to be "Present!" Then, every man apparently having been accounted for, Dominique stepped forward and said:

"My lads, I have called you off from your regular work this morning to engage in a man hunt, or rather a hunt for two women and two men. You will not need to be reminded by me that one of our chief and most recent causes of dissatisfaction with Ricardo was his extraordinary behaviour in connection with that young sprig of a naval officer whom we captured when we engaged the British war schooner *Francesca*. Instead of heaving the young cub overboard to the sharks, as he ought to have done, our late chief, for some extraordinary reason which he never condescended to explain to us, chose to keep the young fellow alive, and not only so, but also to give the surgeon the strictest injunctions to nurse him back to health. This was so totally at variance with his usual practice that, as I

have already explained to some of you, there could only be one reason for it, and that reason, I have never had the slightest doubt, was that he had formed a plan to betray us all into the hands of the British. By saving the young officer's life he hoped not only to use him as a channel of negotiation with the British authorities, but also to purchase immunity from punishment for himself. And having secured this, he would seize the earliest opportunity after our execution to return here and quietly possess himself of the immense hoard of treasure that we have accumulated by years of toil and peril. It was because I was thoroughly convinced of this that I did away with Ricardo; for it was his life or ours that hung in the balance. But it was not sufficient to put Ricardo out of the way of doing us a mischief; the young English officer remained, and still remains, and until he also is removed there can be no safety for any one of us; and it was this knowledge that caused me to abandon our cruise and return here.

"And now, what do I find? Why, that he, the Señorita Lotta, and the old nurse have disappeared! Now, I want you to note particularly the significance of this last fact, that not only have those three disappeared, but so has Fonseca! What does this mean? Why, without doubt it means that the surgeon also was in the plot with Ricardo against us, and that we have him also to reckon with. How or when he disappeared I cannot tell you, but we know that he was with us in the brig when we executed Ricardo. He must therefore have slipped ashore in some mysterious manner immediately upon our arrival, and have warned the Englishman, who thereupon must have taken to flight, carrying off the girl, her nurse, and Fonseca with him.

"It is these four persons that I want you to hunt down and bring back to the rendezvous. They cannot have gone very far, and they cannot get away, for, as some of you are aware, it is impossible to make one's way very far inland from here; we are completely shut in on the landward side by inaccessible cliffs. But the Englishman does not know this, and I am by no means certain that either the girl or the surgeon knows it. I am therefore of opinion that they will all be found endeavouring to make their way into the back country by way of False Gap. I want you all, therefore, to spread yourselves in such a way that some one or another of you must inevitably find them, either by overtaking them, or by intercepting them on their return when they find it impossible to escape landward. I will go with you, but as a measure of precaution, Juan, with half a dozen men, will secrete themselves in the house yonder, in order that, should we by any strange chance miss the fugitives, they may be taken when they return to the house, as they must, sooner or later, in search of food. And one man will remain here on the wharf, as a watchman and look-out; not that I think there is the slightest likelihood of the fugitives coming this way, but it is good generalship to take every possible precaution. And if you, José, who are to remain here, should chance to sight any of the runaways, just ring the yard bell, and wait for those in the house to join you.

"Now, men, I hope you understand me; those four persons must be found and brought back to me; the Englishman, alive or dead. The other three must be brought back to me alive, and, the girl at least, absolutely uninjured; and remember that in the case of Fonseca, the less he is injured the more acutely will he suffer from the punishment that I intend to inflict upon him for his treachery! Now, forward all; to the house first, and from there spread yourselves over the country in the direction of False Gap. March!"

Thereupon the whole party, with the exception of one solitary individual, whom I took to be José, who was told off to keep watch and ward upon the wharf, filed off along the wharf and up the pathway that led to the house from which we had fled but a few hours before. It took them some twenty minutes to reach the bungalow, and ten minutes later I saw a mob of men issue from it and disappear inland. For a few minutes their shouts could be heard as they called to each other, and then a dead silence fell upon the scene, broken only by the chirping and "chirring" of the myriads of insects that haunted the bushy growth with which the whole face of the country was covered, and the occasional call of a bird. As for José, his first act, upon being left to himself, was to scrutinise carefully the whole face of the visible country, under the sharp of his hand, and then seat himself in the shadow of the capstan-house, light his pipe, and abandon himself to the soothing influence of the "weed."

Now the happenings of the last hour had set me thinking hard. First of all, there was Dominique's remark about the impossibility of anyone escaping inland. During the period of my convalescence I had seen enough of the country, while wandering about in Lotta's company, to convince me that this statement might be quite true, although Lotta had never said a word to lead me to believe that she was aware that it was so. And if there was no possibility of escaping landward, the only alternative was to escape by going out to sea. But a boat voyage was an undertaking not to be rashly entered upon, especially where a woman was in the case; the inconvenience and discomfort, to say nothing of the danger, of such an attempt were such as to make me pause long and consider the matter very seriously in all its bearings before determining to engage in such a venture. Yet something must be done; we could not continue to inhabit the cavern indefinitely; a way of escape must be found; for after what had fallen from Dominique's lips while addressing his men, I felt that there was no such thing as safety for any of us while we remained within arm's reach of that miscreant. The most serious feature of the case, so far as a boat voyage was concerned, was that even the biggest of the available boats, which was one of the *Barracouta's* gigs, was much too small to justify me in the attempt to make the passage to Jamaica in her; for should the breeze happen to pipe strong, the boat could not possibly live in the boisterous sea that would at once be knocked up. If, on the other hand, the brig's longboat had happened to be in the water, or some other craft big enough to accomplish the voyage in safety—I pulled myself up suddenly, for a distinctly audacious idea had at that moment occurred to me as well worthy of consideration. Why not take the brig herself? True, she was a big craft for two men to handle, but if she could but be got safely out to sea, and beyond the reach of pursuit by boats, she could be sailed under such short canvas that one man could take care of her for a whole watch without very much difficulty. The trouble would be to get aboard her, get her under way, and take her out to sea without being detected and pursued, unless—and here I pulled myself up again, for another audacious idea had occurred to me.

I looked at José—he appeared to be in a distinctly drowsy condition, if indeed not already asleep, overpowered by the heat, and lulled to slumber by the unwonted quiet of his surroundings. Then I looked carefully around me to see whether I could detect any traces of the man-hunters, but saw none; they were all undoubtedly well out of the way by this time. I pulled myself together and braced myself up for immediate action, for it suddenly dawned upon me that I was never likely to have a more favourable opportunity to carry my bold scheme into effect than that which at that moment presented itself to me. I quietly emerged from my place of concealment and, once more crouching low

among the ferns, crept slowly and with infinite caution toward the somnolent José, gradually working my way round until I could just see him clear of the corner of the capstan-house. Some twenty minutes of this work brought me right up to the gable end of the building, from which position I again reconnoitred José. He was unmistakably fast asleep, and therefore practically at my mercy. But as I had no intention of killing the man, if I could possibly avoid so extreme a measure, I must have the wherewithal to bind him securely, and that could undoubtedly be obtained in the capstan-house. I therefore removed my shoes and, carrying them in my hand, stole on tiptoe round the corner of the building, keeping a wary eye on the sleeper as I did so. Presently I slipped noiselessly in through the open door, and found myself in a long, spacious apartment abundantly stored with ponderous hempen cables and hawsers, anchors of various sizes, piles of sails neatly stopped up, quantities of chain of various kinds, coils of rope, sufficient, it appeared to me, to fit a new gang of running rigging to a dozen ships like the *Barracouta*, bundles of blocks, single, double, threefold, and sister, dangling from the beams—in fact almost every conceivable article that could possibly be needed in the fitting out of a ship. There was part of a coil of brand-new ratline close to my hand, which would serve my purpose admirably, I therefore whipped out my knife and cut off as much as I required, seized a double handful of oakum and a belaying-pin with which to form a gag, cut off a length of marline with which to secure the gag in place, and then, having made a running bowline in the end of my length of ratline, I stole, still in my stocking feet, to the door, and very cautiously peered out at José. The man was sound asleep, seated on the ground with his back propped against the wall of the capstan-house, his legs stretched out straight in



GRENVILLE MAKES JOSÉ A PRISONER

front of him, his arms hanging limply at his sides with the backs of his

hands resting on the ground and turned palm upward, his head sunk on his breast, and his pipe, fallen from his mouth, lying in his lap.

Silently and stealthily I crept toward him until I stood by his side; then, without pausing a moment, I dropped the noosed ratline over his shoulders, at the same moment grabbing him by the collar and dragging him forward to allow the noose to drop to his middle, hauling it taut as it did so, and thus confining his arms to his sides. Then, as he opened his mouth with the evident intention of letting out a yell, I popped the belaying-pin wrapped in oakum into his mouth, at the same time hissing into his ear: "Be silent as you value your life!" Then, turning him over on his face, I rapidly trussed him up in such a fashion that I felt confident he would never get free again, unaided; and finally I dragged him inside the capstan-house, adjusting the gag in such a manner that, while not interfering unduly with his comfort, it would effectually prevent him from raising an alarm. And then, having assured myself that I had nothing to fear from him, I hurried off and made the best of my way to the cave, where I found its occupants suffering the greatest uneasiness in consequence of my prolonged absence.

A few hasty words from me sufficed to put them in possession of my plans, and then, gathering up such few personal belongings as we had brought with us, we left the cavern and hurried away to the wharf, which we managed to reach unobserved, and temporarily concealed ourselves in the capstan-house, where José was found still safely trussed up. Then, leaving Lotta, Fonseca, and Mammy in the building, I sallied out to make my final arrangements, which I hoped to do without interference, since that part of the wharf where I was operating was not visible from the house. But there was, of course, the risk that those in the house might at any moment take it into their heads to come down to the wharf to see how José was faring, and it was therefore of the utmost importance that what I had to do should be done quickly.

I walked to the edge of the wharf and looked over. The two gigs and the cutter of the *Barracouta* were lying alongside each other at a flight of steps about half a dozen fathoms away, the only other boat which I could see afloat lying just astern of them. But there were several boats hauled-up high and dry on the wharf, and these would need thinking about with reference to the scheme that I had in my mind. Slipping down the landing steps, I cast adrift three out of the four boats, and re-moored them in a string, one to the stern of another, so that by manning the leading boat, we could tow the others after us. Then I returned to the capstan-house and proceeded to look for a carpenter's maul, which I quickly found. I was now ready for what I fondly hoped would prove to be the last act in our little drama, and

was about to give the word to march, when Fonseca, who appeared to have been speaking to José, stayed me.

“Señor Grenville,” he said, “I have just been exchanging a few remarks with our friend José here, who has made certain representations to me that I think demand your consideration. He quite understands, of course, that we are about to attempt to escape, and he fully recognises that he has no power to prevent us. But he contends that if we go off and leave him here, Dominique will certainly torture him to death as a punishment for permitting himself to be taken by surprise; and from what I know of Dominique, I am afraid poor José has only too good reason for his apprehension. That being the case, he implores us to take him with us, even if we afterward deliver him up to the authorities, since he would infinitely rather be hanged than remain here at the mercy of Dominique. What say you, señor; do you feel inclined to accede to his request?”

I looked at José. The poor wretch was evidently in a paroxysm of terror, and was muttering eagerly behind his gag, while he gazed up at me with eyes that were eloquent with pleading.

“Take the gag out of his mouth,” said I, “and let me hear what he has to say. But upon the first attempt to raise his voice, brain him with the belying-pin. We must have no trifling now.”

Fonseca at once removed the gag, and José instantly burst forth with a perfect torrent of prayers for mercy, intermingled with the most earnest and graphic representations of what would happen to him if left behind.

“I would take you with us willingly, José,” I said, “if I could be assured that you would be faithful to us; but—”

“Oh, señor, do not doubt me, I implore you! Take me with you, señor; and if you feel that you cannot trust me, put me in irons when we get on board. But I swear to you, señor, that I will indeed be faithful to you. Take me, señor, and try me!”

“Very well,” I said, “I will. But you must not expect me to trust you too much at first. Therefore, Fonseca, put the gag back into his mouth, for the moment, and then cast his feet adrift, so that he can walk down to the boats instead of being carried. And while you are doing that, I will take a final look outside, and attend to a certain little matter before we leave.” And, so saying, I picked up the maul and walked out of the building.

A careful look all round satisfied me that there was nobody in sight; and as for the party up at the house, it was about time for their midday meal, and they were probably getting it. I therefore made my way to the spot where the hauled-up boats were lying, and deliberately smashed in two or three of the bottom planks of each, thus rendering them quite unserviceable for the moment. Then, returning to the capstan-house, I gave the word to march, and the whole party, now five in number, including José, filed across the wharf and down the steps into the leading gig; the painter was cast off, and Fonseca and I taking an oar apiece, we pushed off and, with the other three boats in tow, made our way slowly toward the brig.

And then, suddenly, a dreadful apprehension seized me. “By Jove, Fonseca,” I exclaimed, “I have never thought of it until this moment, but what is going to happen if there are any people left aboard the brig? I have been quite taking it for granted that all hands came ashore this morning, but of course I cannot be at all sure that they did.”

“I presume you did not by any chance notice, señor, precisely how many men landed, did you?” demanded Fonseca.

“Yes,” said I, “I did. And, including Dominique and Juan, they numbered forty-two.”

“Forty-two!” repeated Fonseca. “Now, just let me think.” He considered for about a minute, and then said:

“So far as I can remember, señor, forty-two should include all hands. But, all the same, it will not be amiss to approach the ship warily, and get aboard, if possible, noiselessly. Then, once aboard, we can soon ascertain whether anyone is there. And if perchance there should be, it cannot be more than one or two at most, whom we can probably overpower if we once get a footing on deck.”

A few minutes later we opened out the house clear of the wood, and I kept my eye on it, wondering how long it would be ere we should attract the attention of Juan and those with him. They must have seen us almost immediately, for in less than a minute we saw half a dozen men rush out on to the gallery that ran all round the building, and stand staring straight at us, evidently talking excitedly together the while; then, as with one accord, they set off racing down the path at breakneck speed toward the wharf, shouting to us and gesticulating wildly as they ran. But we took matters very quietly, knowing that there was not a boat left that would swim, or, as we believed, that could be made to swim without a couple of hours' work being done upon her. Then I turned my gaze toward the brig; for I argued that since their cries reached us quite distinctly, they must also reach the brig, and if anyone had been left aboard her those cries would soon create an alarm, and we might expect to see some movement on board her. But we saw nothing, the craft maintained the appearance of being absolutely deserted, and five minutes later we stole up alongside and quietly scrambled aboard her by way of the main chains.

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## Chapter Twenty.

### How the adventure ended.

As I dropped in over the rail and alighted upon the deck, I flung a quick glance along it, fore and aft, in search of some trace of occupation, but there was nothing to indicate that anyone had been left on board. I stole forward and listened intently at the fore scuttle, but there was no sound of movement down in the forecabin, nor could I catch any suggestion of deep breathing or snoring, as would probably have been the case had an anchor-watch been left on board, and, ignoring its responsibilities, gone below and turned in. But, determined to make quite sure, I swung

my legs over the coaming and quietly dropped down into the close, pungent-smelling place. For a moment I could see nothing, for the only light entering the fore-castle came down through the hatch, and my eyes were dazzled with the brilliant light of the outer world; but presently my sight came to me and I saw that all the bunks and hammocks were empty, and that the apartment contained nothing more dangerous than a heterogeneous assortment of clothes, boots, oilskins, and other articles common to seamen. I therefore made my way on deck again and ran aft, where I encountered Fonseca just emerging from the cabin, where he, like myself, had been on an exploring expedition, which, like mine, had proved fruitless. As we met and exchanged news my eyes wandered away shoreward, and I noticed that Juan and his companions had reached the wharf, and seemed to be busying themselves about one of the upturned boats which I had taken the precaution to stave. Upon getting the ship's glass I had no difficulty in discovering that they were busily engaged in an attempt to patch up and make her serviceable, with the evident intention of coming in pursuit of us.

"By Jove, Fonseca," I exclaimed, "we must bestir ourselves or those fellows may nab us after all. Jump down into the gig, cast José adrift, and bid him come aboard instantly; we have not a moment to lose."

And as I spoke I made a dash at the trysail brails, cast them off, and proceeded to drag upon the fall of the outhaul tackle. Presently Fonseca returned with José, and both lent a hand with a will, the latter seeming to be quite as anxious as any of us to avoid being taken by his former companions. Then, rushing forward, I laid out on the jib-boom and cast loose the inner jib, which Fonseca and José at once proceeded to hoist. Then, hauling the jib-sheet over to windward, we cast off the slip by which the brig was, as usual, secured to her buoy, and I then ran aft and put the helm hard down. The brig was now adrift, and with stern way on her; but with the helm hard down she soon paid off, when we hauled aft the lee jib-sheet, and she at once began to forge ahead. But, unfortunately for us, it was almost a dead beat of nearly two miles out to sea, with not very much room to manoeuvre in. If, therefore, the people ashore happened to be specially handy with their tools they might yet get their boat repaired in time to give us trouble; for, smart ship as the *Barracouta* undoubtedly was, the small amount of sail which we now had set was only sufficient to put her along at about two knots in the hour, or barely to give her steerage way. But she carried a main-topmast staysail which was a fine big sail, the stay reaching from the main-topmast cross-trees down to the foremast within about ten feet of the deck, and this sail we now got on her, with great advantage, her speed at once increasing to nearly four knots. But under this canvas I soon found that she griped rather badly; that is to say, she required an undue amount of weather helm to hold her straight to her course. We therefore loosed and set the fore-topmast staysail, after which she not only practically steered herself, but further increased her speed to not far short of five knots. We had now as much canvas set as we three men could very well manage, and quite enough to keep us going so soon as we should get outside. My only anxiety was lest we should have trouble with the people before we could pass out clear of the heads into the open ocean. Once there I knew that we could easily run away from any rowboat that they could launch. And that reminded me that we had no less than four boats towing behind us, and that they retarded our speed to a quite perceptible extent. Summoning Fonseca and José to my assistance, therefore, and showing Lotta how to manipulate the helm in such a manner as to keep the brig going through the water, we hauled-up first one gig and then the other, and succeeded in hoisting them to the davits. The other two we also hauled alongside, and, dropping a couple of cold shot through their bottoms cast them adrift.

By the time that all this was done we had drawn well over toward the southern shore of the bay, and the moment had arrived for us to heave in stays. I was just a little anxious as to this manoeuvre, having my doubts as to whether the brig would stay under such short canvas as that which she now had set; but upon putting the helm down all my apprehensions were at once set at rest, for she came round like a top. But I was fully confirmed in my conviction that it would be unwise to attempt to get any more canvas on the vessel, for although the trysail worked itself the two stay-sails and the jib proved to be quite as much as we three men could well manage.

Having made a long "leg" across the bay, we now had to make a short one; and no sooner were we round than I took another look at Juan and his party through the telescope, just to see how they were getting on. To my amazement they appeared to have already executed some sort of repair of the boat that they had been working upon, for as I brought the glass to bear upon them I saw that they had turned her over and were carrying her down to the water's edge, with the evident intention of launching her; and while I stood watching they actually got her afloat. Then, while one man got into her and immediately started baling, the remaining five hurried off to the wharf, and, disappearing into one of the sheds, presently reappeared, carrying oars, boat-hook, rudder, bottom boards, stretchers, and other matters of boats' furniture. These they carried down to where the boat was lying, and having placed them in position, jumped in and pushed off.

"By Jove, Fonseca, they are after us already!" I exclaimed. "Now if they have managed to make a good repair of that boat they will overhaul us before we can get clear of the bay. And that will mean a fight, for I certainly do not mean to give in if I can help it; and if we can muster half a dozen muskets and a few rounds of ammunition we ought to be able to keep those fellows from coming alongside, we having the advantage of the deck to fight from. See, they know well what they are about; they are not attempting to follow us, but are pulling straight for the entrance, keeping close under the lee of the land."

"Yes, I see," answered Fonseca as he took the telescope from me and applied it to his eye. "But I see also, señor, that one man is kept busy baling with a bucket, so it is evident that the boat leaks badly; and it may be that before they can overtake us they will be obliged to give up and go back to save the boat from swamping under them."

"Possibly," I agreed. "Nevertheless I think it would be only wise of us to take every reasonable precaution. Therefore I shall feel obliged if you will be good enough to go below and look out a dozen muskets—you will doubtless know where to find them—and, having found them, load them with ball and bring them up on deck to me."

"Certainly, señor; there will be no difficulty about that," assented Fonseca. "I will go at once." And he forthwith vanished down the companion way. A quarter of an hour later he returned with six loaded muskets in his arms, which he deposited upon the stern-grating, and then went below for the remaining half-dozen.

Meanwhile we had been slipping quite nimbly across the bay, and by the time that Fonseca had returned with the second lot of muskets we had neared the land sufficiently to render it necessary for us to heave about again. By the time that we had tacked and were full again the boat had neared us to within about a mile, and it became a practical certainty that, unless something quite unforeseen occurred, we should be obliged to fight our passage out to sea. But we were now making a "long leg" again, leaving the boat almost astern of us, and going at least as fast through the water as she was, if not somewhat faster. Then, as I stood at the wheel steering, with my thoughts wandering away into the past, an idea suddenly entered my head, and I said to Fonseca:

"By the way, Fonseca, can you tell me whether this is the brig that, some six months ago, attacked a little schooner called the *Dolores* over on the Guinea coast, and, after taking a cargo of slaves out of her, scuttled her in cold blood, leaving the survivors of her crew to go down with her?"

The man looked at me in consternation. "Why, how on earth did you come to know of that rascally transaction, señor?" he demanded.

"Because," said I, "I happened to be in command of the *Dolores* at the time, and was one of those who were left to perish in her. She was a prize, and I had been given charge of her, with orders to take her to Sierra Leone."

"How extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "And, pray, how did you manage to escape, señor?"

I told him the whole story, concluding by saying: "I have had a rod in pickle for this brig ever since. I vowed then that I would find and take her; and, having succeeded thus far, I am not going to allow myself to be baffled by half a dozen men in an open boat."

When we next went about I saw that we were heading well up for the narrow passage which formed the entrance of the bay; but the boat had made such good progress that it was quite an open question whether she or the brig would first reach it. I believed that if we could reach it with a lead of even so little as a quarter of a mile we could get out without coming to blows; but should the boat succeed in approaching us any closer than that, I foresaw that she must inevitably overtake us in "the narrows", which would be the very worst place possible for us, since we were beating out against the trade wind, and the spot that we were now approaching was so exceedingly narrow that there was scarcely width enough for even so smart a vessel as the *Barracouta* to work in it. We should no sooner be about and nicely gathering steerage way than down the helm would have to go again, and we should have our hands quite sufficiently full in looking after the ship just there without the additional worry of being obliged to drive off a boat. I therefore determined that should there presently prove to be any doubt about the matter I would edge away down upon the boat and have it out with her while we still had room in which to manoeuvre the ship.

The brig and the boat were now approaching each other on courses that converged at about right angles, the boat being on our lee bow, but drawing ahead at a pace which threatened to bring her unpleasantly near us if it did not actually carry her across our forefoot. But as we drew nearer I noticed that, despite the continuous baling that was going on aboard the boat, she had settled so deeply in the water that she could scarcely hope to keep afloat another half-hour, and the idea came to me that if I could avoid her for that length of time I need fear no further trouble from her, for she would simply swamp with her crew and leave them to swim for their lives. I carefully examined the shore through the telescope to see whether there was a spot on which our pursuers could beach their boat and get rid of the water by the simple process of turning her over and pouring the water out of her, but I could see no such spot; the whole shore, right out to the narrows, was steep-to, with a confused fringe of great masses of rock upon which it would be quite impossible to haul up a boat.

As the two craft drew close together it became increasingly doubtful whether we should be able to avoid the boat unless by the adoption of some especial measures, and at length I saw that when the time should arrive for us to heave in stays our pursuers would have actually cut us off. I therefore stood on until we had arrived within about a hundred yards of them, by which time they were dead ahead of us, and lying upon their oars, waiting for us to endeavour to pass them, when I calmly put the brig's helm hard up, instead of down, and we wore round on the other tack, going back over pretty nearly the same ground that we had traversed a few minutes before, to the intense disgust and disappointment of Juan and his companions, who had evidently quite made up their minds that they had us fairly caught. The moment that our manoeuvre had so far developed as to be understood, the occupants of the boat sent up a yell of execration, and began to shout all manner of dreadful threats at us, while they frantically strove to get their crazy boat round in order to come after us in chase. But it soon became apparent that, the boat being in a waterlogged condition, and the oarsmen almost worn out with fatigue, our pursuers had not a ghost of a chance of overtaking us. They, as well as we, recognised this when it was all but too late. Then it dawned upon them that we might evade them with the utmost ease, for practically as long as we chose, by simply repeating our last manoeuvre until their boat should sink under them—an event, by the way, which they could not much longer defer. After pursuing us, therefore, for nearly a mile, they suddenly abandoned the chase, and, turning the boat's head in the direction of the wharf, devoted their efforts to the successful accomplishment of their return. We did not wait to see how they fared, but, as soon as they were fairly out of our way, tacked again, and half an hour later found ourselves fully employed in negotiating the exceedingly difficult navigation of the narrows, which we successfully accomplished after several exceedingly close shaves of the rocks that border the passage on either hand. Half an hour of this work sufficed to take us clear, when we emerged into another funnel-shaped channel leading into the open water of the Bahama Channel. It was close upon eight bells of the afternoon watch when we finally went out clear of everything, by which time we were all quite ready for the appetising meal that Mammy, arrogating to herself the duties of cook, had prepared for us in the ship's galley.

Under our short canvas it took us the best part of three days to beat up to Cape Maysi, the easternmost extremity of Cuba, which we safely weathered about four bells in the forenoon watch on the third morning after our escape. Then, the weather being fine, with the wind well over our port quarter for the run through the Windward Channel across to Morant Point, we ventured to get a little more canvas on the craft, setting both topsails, which quickened up our speed to close on seven knots. The weather continuing fine all through that day and the succeeding night, we sighted



the broken water on the Formigas Bank the next morning at breakfast-time, and passed it a quarter of an hour later. At noon of that same day we sighted Morant Point, the easternmost extremity of the island of Jamaica, and rounded it two hours later. A pilot boarded us about six bells, off Yallahs Point, and finally we entered Port Royal harbour, and let go our anchor, on the very last of the sea breeze, just as the bell of the flagship was striking four in the first dog watch.

Now that we had actually arrived I could see that Fonseca and, still more, José felt a considerable amount of anxiety as to what was likely to befall them in consequence of their connection with so notorious and formidable a pirate as Ricardo, but I was able pretty well to reassure the surgeon, at least, for he had told me his story, and I believed it would not be very difficult for him to satisfy the authorities that he had been compelled to join the pirates, and had never been permitted the least chance to effect his escape on those rare occasions when the *Barracouta* had been obliged to call at an ordinary port. Further, there was the fact, to which of course I could bear personal testimony, that he had warned Lotta and myself of the fate designed for us by Dominique and the rest, after the death of Ricardo, and had most loyally aided us to effect our escape. So far as José was concerned I did not feel quite so sure of being able to screen him, but I told him that I believed I could at least ensure that his punishment should not be more severe than that involved in his compulsory entry on board a British man-o'-war—for he, too, had loyally done his fair share of work on the passage round to Port Royal. The fellow, however, took care to leave nothing to chance, for some time during that same night he contrived to entice a boat alongside, and in her made his way to Kingston, where he vanished.

I made no attempt to go ashore or otherwise communicate with the admiral on the night of our arrival, for I had been on deck practically the whole time of our passage, snatching an hour or two of sleep when and how I could, and I felt that now I was entitled to, and should be all the better for, a thorough good night's rest. But the next morning I was up betimes, and, having breakfasted, went ashore in a shore boat and presented myself for admittance at the admiral's office, so as to catch him as soon as the old fellow should arrive from Kingston. Prior to this, however, I had sighted and identified the little *Francesca*, lying about half a mile farther up the harbour, looking as smart and saucy as though she had never been mauled by a pirate. There were very few people moving so early in the morning, and I hastened to take shelter in the office, as I was anxious to avoid meeting any of my former friends or acquaintances until I had first had an interview with Sir Timothy.

It was getting well on toward eleven o'clock when at length his barge dashed up alongside the wharf, and he came bustling along toward his office, smartening up this, that, and the other person who did not seem to be infusing a proper amount of energy into his work as he came along.

As he entered I heard the office messenger say something to him in a low tone, to which he responded:

"What? Nonsense! you must be mistaken, Mooney, or else you have been drinking this morning."

"Not a drop, your honour, has passed my lips this mornin'," I heard the man answer. "And furthermore, sir, the gentleman's inside this minit, waitin' to see ye."

The next moment Sir Timothy entered, and I rose to my feet.

"Well, I'll be shot, so it is!" he gasped. Then he grasped me by the hand and shook it heartily, exclaiming: "Welcome back to Port Royal, my boy, welcome back! And now, sit down and tell me in half a dozen words, for I'm frightfully busy this morning, where you have been, and what you have done with yourself."

Thereupon I resumed my seat, and spun my yarn, not in half a dozen words exactly, but as briefly as possible, confining myself to the statement of just the leading facts and incidents, and reserving the details for a more suitable occasion. But I mentioned Lotta, and ventured to ask Sir Timothy's advice as to how I should proceed in the matter of procuring her lodgment and so on until her trustees could be communicated with and she could be restored to their charge.

"Oh, as to that," answered Sir Timothy, "there need be no difficulty at all! You must dine with me at the Pen to-night, of course, so that you can give me your yarn at full length, and you had better bring the young lady with you. Lady Mary is the best person to decide what to do with her."

Accordingly, that afternoon I took Lotta ashore with me, and, having looked in upon the Todds on our way, and, needless to say, received a most hospitable and friendly welcome, hired a ketureen and drove her up to the Pen, where Lady Mary, having been previously prepared by her husband, forthwith took possession of her and carried her off to her own private room, from which she reappeared no more until dinner-time, when to my amazement Lotta was led forth to be presented to the assembled company, attired in a rig which Lady Mary and her maid had devised upon the spur of the moment, and in which the señorita looked so surpassingly lovely that the sight of her fairly took my breath away.

Sir Timothy, with that inherent kindness of heart which was one of his most pronounced characteristics, took care that I was the hero of the evening, making me spin my yarn in detail to him and his guests; and at the end thereof awarding me a great deal more praise than I was in the least entitled to. Lotta and I slept at the Pen that night, and after all the guests had left, we four, that is to say Sir Timothy, Lady Mary, Lotta, and I, resolved ourselves into a sort of council. It was ultimately arranged that Lotta was to remain at the Pen as the guest of Lady Mary and Sir Timothy until her trustees could be communicated with, and arrangements made with them for her to return and take possession of her home and property, and that I, meanwhile, was to resume command of the *Francesca*, and in her proceed to the pirate rendezvous and destroy the place utterly, making prisoners of all who should be found about the place, and, of course, taking care to bring back whatever booty the pirates might have been found to have accumulated. It is proper to say here that I did not consider it necessary to mention to Sir Timothy anything about Ricardo's private store of treasure hidden in the cave. I felt that Ricardo had been perfectly right when he said that I

had as good a right as anybody to that, and I was quite determined that it should be Lotta's and mine, to bring about which result I felt that my best plan would be to keep the whole matter to myself.

It happened that the *Francesca* was quite ready for sea, and there was therefore nothing to wait for except a few necessary articles of clothing for myself. Accordingly, within forty-eight hours of my arrival in Port Royal, aboard the *Barracouta*, I was at sea again in the schooner, on my way to demolish the lair of the pirates. Carrying on heavily we arrived in the bay on the afternoon of the second day out, and anchored in such a position that not only the wharf and the various sheds, but also the bungalow, were within range of the schooner's guns. Then, while one-half of the crew remained on board to take care of the vessel, and guard against the possibility of the pirates playing off my own trick upon me and stealing the schooner, the other half, armed to the teeth, accompanied me ashore and proceeded to collect and convey to the schooner all the booty of every kind that we could find, and which seemed worth carrying off. Not a pirate appeared to say us nay; indeed, a little investigation soon made it apparent that my act of running away with their brig had caused them to take the alarm and make their escape in certain of the boats which I had damaged. Plain evidence was discovered of the fact that they had hurriedly repaired four of their boats and had gone off, carrying away with them all their portable booty in the shape of coin, bullion, jewellery, etcetera, and leaving only that which was too bulky to be stowed in their boats. We found sufficient of the latter, however, in the shape of valuable merchandise, to load the schooner very nearly down to her covering board; having stowed which safely away, we set fire to the whole place, and never left it until every building, including the bungalow, had been utterly destroyed. And thus ended my long and persistent pursuit of one of the most pestilent and formidable gangs of pirates that had haunted the Atlantic and West Indian waters for many years.

There is very little more left me to say. Sir Timothy was good enough to award me a great deal more praise for my conduct over this affair than I felt that I at all deserved, although my conscience was not tender enough to cause me to refuse the promotion that soon afterwards followed.

Lotta remained with Sir Timothy and Lady Mary for nearly two months, during which I was afforded ample opportunity to enjoy her society and bask in her smiles; and at the end of that period her guardians came over from Cuba and took her back with them for the purpose of placing her in possession of her magnificent estate, which comprised several thousand acres of the finest tobacco-growing district in the island. But before she went an arrangement had been come to between her and myself that we were to marry as soon as I had attained my post-captaincy, which occurred within a couple of years, thanks to the interest which Sir Timothy was good enough to take in me, and the opportunities which he constantly afforded me for gaining step after step "up the ratlines". Needless to say I took an early opportunity to pay yet another and a final visit to Ricardo's rendezvous for the purpose of securing the treasure which he had bequeathed to me, and which I cautiously, and bit by bit, as opportunity offered, converted into money, which I safely invested in the public funds.

As for Fonseca, I was able to make such representations on his behalf as secured him complete immunity from prosecution for his connection with the pirates; and a firm friendship rapidly sprang up between us which ended in his establishing himself as a medical practitioner in Cuba, in the district in which Lotta's estates were situate; and he is now one of the most popular and prosperous physicians in the island.

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