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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAIL HO! A BOY AT SEA ***

George Manville Fenn

"Sail Ho!"

Chapter One.

A Boy at Sea.

Many many years ago seem like yesterday, and I hope it will always be the same. For, just to be serious for a moment, what is the full stretch of the oldest man's life to time? Just one star-wink, if the astronomers are right about the passage of light, and that the glitter of stars that we see now are only the rays which started from them away there in space long before we were born.

Don't be frightened, I'm not going to talk astronomy, but about my old ship, the first I ever sailed in, after having a kind of training in my father's little yachts, beginning with the shoulder-of-mutton sail; and next with the Cornish lugger, which he bought at Newlyn, on beyond Penzance, when Penwalloc went wrong, and his two boats with all their gear, and about two miles of drift mackerel and pilchard nets, were sold by auction.

Father bought the *Brine*, and had her decked and newly rigged, and many's the cruise I had with him and old Tom Sanders, we three managing the two big sails well enough. After that came the cutter, when we had to have two men and a boy, for the mainsail was pretty big to manage, and took some hauling and setting in a breeze, and some strength to tackle in one of the squalls that come rushing out of the gullies and combs down along our Cornish coast, where the great peninsula or promontory, or whatever you call it, is scored across and across almost from sea to sea with deep valleys; just as you see a loin of pork cut with a sharp knife before it is put down to roast.

There, I'm not going to talk about Cornwall this time, but my adventures on the high seas in the Burgh Castle.

So to begin:—

"Be-low!"

"Hi! you sirs!"

"Look out! Run!"

Quite a little chorus of warnings, and then—

Spang.

And directly after—

Crash.

One of the yards being hoisted up to its place across the main-topgallant mast of the Burgh Castle lying in the East India Docks, and still in the hands of the riggers, had slipped from the slings, through carelessness, and come down from high, up aloft to strike the deck wick one end, and then fall flat within a foot of where two lads dressed as midshipmen in the merchant service had been standing, but who at the first shout had rushed in different directions, one to stumble over a coil of rope, perform an evolution like the leap of a frog, and come down flat on his front; the other to butt his head right into the chest of a big, burly, sunburnt man, who gave vent to a sound between a bellow and a roar.

"Where are— Hi! aloft there!—oh, my wind! Ahoy there, you—!"

Then followed, as the big burly man recovered his breath, a startling volley of words—expletives and sea terms, in which he denounced the gang of men aloft as sea-cooks and lubbers, and threatened divers punishments and

penalties for their carelessness.

Then he turned to another man who was bigger, burlier, redder, and browner, especially about the nose, and made certain exceedingly impolite inquiries as to what he was about, to allow the owner's tackle to be smashed about in that fashion. To which the bigger and browner man growled out a retort that he'd nothing to do with the gang, as things hadn't been handed over to him yet. And then he grew frantic too, and kicked the fallen yard, and yelled up to the riggers that the said piece of wood was sprung, that they'd have to get another yard, for he wasn't going to sea with a main-top-galn'sl-yard fished and spliced.

Meantime the first brown man had turned to the two lads, and cooling down, nodded to them.

"Come on board then, eh?"

"Yes, sir—yes, sir."

"Lucky for you that you both hopped out of the way, youngsters, or I should have had to send one of you back home with a hole through him, and t'other broke in half."

I was the boy who would have been sent home with a hole through him—I the boy who write this—and the other boy who would have been broken in half, was one whom I had encountered at the dock-gates, where we had both arrived together, that miserable, mizzly morning, in four-wheeled cabs with our sea-chests on the top, and both in mortal dread—and yet somehow hopeful—that we should be too late, and that the good ship Burgh Castle had sailed.

I had been very anxious to go to sea. I loved it, and all through the preparations I was eagerness itself; but somehow, when it came to the morning that I started from the hotel where I had slept for the one night in London, a curious feeling of despondency came over me, a feeling which grew worse as I passed through the city, and then along the water-side streets, where there were shops displaying tarpaulins, canvas, and ropes; others dealing in ships' stores; and again others whose windows glittered with compass, sextant, and patent logs, not wooden, but brass.

Perhaps it was seeing all this through the steamy, misty rain.

"What a while he is!" I said to myself, "and what a dismal place!"

Just then, as we were going down the muddiest street I ever saw, I became aware of a dirty, ragged-looking fellow of eighteen or nineteen trotting along beside the cab, and directly after of one on the other side, who kept up persistently till at last we reached the docks and the cabman drew up.

"Drive on," I shouted.

"Don't go no further," was the reply, and I stepped out into the drizzle to see about my chest and pay the man, just as a sharp quarrel was going on close by, and I saw a lad a little bigger than myself scuffling with two more rough-looking fellows who had seized upon his chest, and insisted upon carrying it.

The next moment I was engaged with the pair who had trotted by my cab, and who had fastened most officiously upon mine.

"You touch it again," came sharply, "and I'll let you know."

"Leave the box alone," I said, "I don't want your help."

"Carry it in, sir. I was fust, sir. Yah! you get out."

"Don't let 'em take it," shouted the lad who was squabbling with the first pair, and I was just beginning to think that I should have to fight for my belongings, when a dock policeman came to our help, the cabmen were paid, and our chests were placed upon a truck, while the cab touts pressed upon us and insisted on being paid for doing nothing.

"You must have got plenty of tin," said my companion in difficulties, after I had compromised matters by giving each of the ragged touts a shilling; "you won't do that next voyage. I did first time I came."

"Have you been to sea before, then?" I said, looking at the speaker with interest.

"Rather. Are you going in the Burgh Castle? Yes, I can see you are."

"How?" I asked, as I saw him glance at my new cap, which I knew was beginning to be soaked by the rain.

"By that," he said, nodding at the embroidered flag and star upon the front. "We're going to be shipmates, then."

"I am glad," I said; but as I uttered the words it did not seem as if I were uttering the truth, for I felt anything but joyful, and my companion did not impress me favourably. For he looked sour, yellow, and discontented as we tramped over the wet stones along by towering warehouses, stacks of chests, and huge buttresses of barrels on one side, and with the great basins of water choked with shipping, all apparently in the most inextricable confusion, till we reached a great loftily masted ship and passed up the sloping gangway on to her deck.

Here every one was busy—officers, sailors, dockmen; hatches were off and bales of lading and stores were being lowered down, and we were just standing together looking out for some one to show us our quarters and to carry down our chests, when the warning shouts came from aloft, and we had so narrow an escape of being laid low.

Chapter Two.

No one paid any more attention to us, and we still stood looking about, with my companion more helpless than myself, in spite of his having been to sea before, still wanting to get out of the rain and save my new clothes, I began to exert myself, with the result that at last I found a sailor who told me where I could find the steward.

That functionary was too busy, he said, but at the sight of a shilling he thought he could spare a minute, and at the end of five we two damp, miserable, low-spirited lads were seated on our sea-chests in a little dark cabin, after doubling up our mackintoshes to make dry cushions for the wet seats.

There was not much room, our chests doing a good deal towards filling up the narrow space, and hence our knees were pretty close together as we sat and tried to look at each other, not at all an easy job, for the round window was pretty close to the great stone wall of the basin, and a gangway ran across from the wharf up to the deck, shutting out the little light which would have come in if the way had been clear.

"Cheerful, ain't it?" said my companion.

"It's such a horrid day," I said.

"Beastly. It always is in London. Ain't you glad you're going to sea?"

"Not very," I said, after a pause. "It'll be better when it's fine."

"Will it?" said my companion, mockingly. "You'll see. I don't know how a chap can be such a jolly fool as to go to sea."

"Why, you went!" I said.

"Yes, I went," grumbled my companion; "but of course I didn't know."

"Did you go out in this ship?"

"Course I didn't, else I should have known where our bunks were. My last voyage was in the Hull."

"Oh!" I said, looking at him as one of great experience; "and did you go your other voyages in the Hull?"

"What other voyages?"

"That you went."

"Who said I went any other voyages? I don't brag. I only went that once, and it was enough for me. She's being new rigged—and time, too. That's why I'm to go out in this boat."

"Then you don't know the captain and officers?"

"I know you," he replied, with a grin.

There was a period of silence, which my companion utilised by biting the sides of his nails, till I said—

"Shall we have to do anything to-day?"

"I d'know. I shan't. Not likely. Don't think much of this ship."

"Don't you think it's a good one?" I ventured to ask, with the deference due to so much experience.

"No. See how that rotten old yard came down. She looks to me like a regular tub. Sort of old craft as would melt away like butter if she touched the sands. I say, how should you like to be shipwrecked?"

"Not at all. Were you ever wrecked?"

"Not yet. Dessay I shall be some day. I say, you're in for it. Sure to be pretty rough going down Channel. You'll have the mully-grubs pretty stiff."

"Oh! I don't know," I said quietly.

"Don't you? Then I do. Oh, Stoard! won't you be bad! Ever seen the sea?"

"Lots of times."

"But you've never been on it?"

"Oh yes, I have."

"And been sick?"

"I was once when we went across to Havre, but that's years ago, when my father had the Swallow."

"Had the what?"

"His first little yacht. The one he has now—the Swift—is four times as big."

"Oh, then you have been to sea?" said my companion, in a disappointed way.

"Dozens of times," I said; "and all about our coast—it's often rough enough there."

My companion stared hard at me. "What's your name?"

"Alison Dale."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen, nearly."

"I'm seventeen," he cried.

"And what's your name?"

"Nicholas Walters; and as I'm senior, you'll have to bustle about a bit. I won't be too hard on you, but you'll have to look sharp and pick up things. I dare say I can put you up to a good deal of seamanship."

"Thank you," I said quietly.

"Of course, I don't know what sort of officers we've got here; but you and I can swing together, and I'll help to make it as easy for you as I can. It's rather hard for a boy making his first voyage."

"I suppose so," I said; "but I shall try not to mind."

"Look here; is your father a gentleman?"

"Oh yes; he was in the army till he was invalided."

"Then he's an invalid?"

"No, no, not now. He was badly wounded in the Crimea, and had to retire from the service."

"Then why didn't you go in the army? 'Fraid of getting wounded in the Crimea?"

"No; I wanted to go to sea?"

"Then why didn't you go in the Royal Navy?"

"Because my father had a better opportunity for getting me in the merchant service."

"Oh!"

I felt as if I should never like Mr Nicholas Walters, for he was rather consequential in his way, and seemed disposed to lord it over me on the strength of having made one voyage. But I consoled myself with the thought that it was hard for any one to make himself agreeable on a day like that; and then as we sat listening to the banging and thumping about overhead, I began to think of my promise to my father, for I had promised to make the best of things all through the voyage, and not be easily damped.

My musings were cut short by my companion.

"I say," he cried, "you seem a lively sort of officer."

"One can't feel very lively just coming away from home amongst strangers," I replied.

"Bosh! You're talking like a boarding-school girl. What do you think of the skipper?"

"The captain? I haven't seen him yet."

"Yes, you have. That was he who let go at the men up aloft. He's a rough 'un, and no mistake. Berriman—I don't think much of him nor of the ship; I shall shift into another line after this trip. It isn't good enough for me."

"I wonder whether I shall talk like that," I thought to myself, "when I've been on a voyage." Then aloud: "Shall we go on deck for a bit, and see if we can do anything?"

"Not likely," was the shortly uttered reply. "What's the good? Get wet through in this mizzling rain. Let's wait for lunch. There'll be a good one, because of the passengers' friends being on board. Some say they'll go down to Gravesend with us. Here, you're all green yet; you leave everything to me, and I'll tell you what to do."

I said "Thankye," and he went on cross-examining me.

"Smoke?" he said.

I shook my head.

"Never mind, I'll teach you; and, look here, if it's fine this afternoon, I'll take you round and introduce you to all the officers and people."

"But I thought you were as strange as I am," I said.

"Well, I don't know the people themselves, but I know which will be the mates and doctor and boatswain, and I can show you all about the ship, and take you aloft, can't I?"

"Oh yes, of course," I said.

"You'll find I can be a deal of use to you if you stick to me, and I can take your part if any of the other middies try to bounce you."

"Will there be any other midshipmen?" I asked.

"P'raps. But it's all gammon calling us middies. We are only a kind of apprentices, you know. It isn't like being in a man-o'-war."

As it happened, a gleam of sunshine tried about half-an-hour after—just as I was growing terribly sick of my companion's patronising ways—to get in at the little cabin-window, and failed; but it gave notice that the weather was lifting, and I was glad to go on deck, where the planks soon began to show white patches as the sailors began to use their swabs; but the bustle and confusion was worse than ever. For the deck was littered with packages of cargo, which had arrived late, with Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand, painted upon them in black letters, and some of these appeared to be boxes of seeds, and others crates of agricultural implements.

Then we were warped out of the dock into the river, a steam-tug made fast to the tow-rope ahead, and another hooked herself on to the port side of the great ship to steady her, as she began to glide slowly with the tide, now just beginning to ebb, along through the hundreds of craft on either side.

I looked sharply round for that monarch of our little floating world—the captain; but he had gone ashore to see the owners again, so my new friend told me, and would come aboard again at Gravesend. But I had a good view of the crew, and was not favourably impressed, for they appeared to be a very rough lot. A great many of them had been drinking, and showed it; others looked sour and low-spirited; and there was a shabby, untidy aspect about them, which was not at all what I had expected to see in the smart crew of a clipper ship, while my surprise was greater still when I saw that four of the men evidently hailed from China, and as many more were the yellow, duck-eyed, peculiar-looking people commonly spoken of on board ship as Lascars.

The mates were so busy and hot, trying to get the decks cleared, and succeeding very slowly with the unpromising material at their command, that we saw very little of them, and I looked eagerly round to see what our passengers were like; but there were so many people on board that it was hard to pick out who was for the other side of the world and who was to stay on this.

The time passed, and I ate as good a dinner as my companion that evening, the first mate taking the head of the table; and that night, when all the visitors had said good-bye, and were gone ashore, and I had retired to my bunk, it seemed as if I had been on board for days. I lay there longing to throw shoes or brushes at Walters, who was lying on his back just under me, and breathing so exceedingly hard, that it was as if he kept on saying *Snork* in a nasty spiteful manner on purpose to keep me awake. And it did keep me awake for some time. At last I dropped asleep for about a minute, as it seemed to me, and then started up and knocked my head against the woodwork.

"Only cold water, lad," said a voice. "I say, you, been to sea, and not know how to tumble out of your berth without knocking your pumpkin."

I was confused for the moment by my intense sleepiness, and the blow I had given my head, so that I could hardly make out where I was. Then as I awoke to the fact that my brother middy was half-dressed, and that he had been holding his dripping sponge to my face, I crawled out, or rather lowered my legs down, and began to dress.

"Look sharp," said my companion; "don't stop to shave."

Chapter Three.

"Well, youngsters!" saluted us as soon as we stepped on deck, and the bluff, brown-faced captain gave me a searching look. "Ready for work?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's right. Well, I don't want you yet. Run about the ship, and keep out of my way. That'll do for the present. Be off!"

He was rather rough, but it was in a good-tempered fashion, and I felt as if I should like the captain in spite of a whisper from Walters which sounded like "boor."

Then feeling free for the day, I upset my new friend and patron by going amongst the men and passengers as they came on deck.

"Here, don't you be so fast," said Walters, as I was hurrying from place to place asking questions of the sailors, and finding interest in everything on board, where, though bearing a certain similarity, all was so different to the arrangements upon a yacht.

"Fast!" I said, wonderingly.

"Yes," said Walters, shortly. "You'll be getting into trouble. You'd better, now you're so new, let me lead, and I'll tell

you all that you want to know.”

“Mind your eyes, youngsters,” sang out a good-looking, youngish man, “Now, my lads, right under, and lash it fast.”

“Second mate,” whispered Walters to me, as about a dozen men dragged a great spar, evidently an extra top-mast, close under the bulwarks, to secure it tight out of the way.

“Quite right, youngster,” said the officer, who seemed to have exceedingly sharp ears, and then he gave me a nod.

“Hang him and his youngsters,” grumbled Walters as we went forward. “He has no business to speak like that before the men.”

“Oh, what does it matter?” I said. “Look there, at that thin gentleman and the young lady who came on board yesterday evening. He must be ill. Oh! mind,” I cried, and I sprang forward just in time to catch the gentleman’s arm, for as he came out of the cabin entrance, looking very pale, and leaning upon the arm of the lady, he caught his foot in a rope being drawn along the deck, and in spite of the lady clinging to him he would have fallen if I had not run up.

“Don’t!” he cried angrily, turning upon me. “Why do you leave your ropes about like that?”

“John, dear!”

Only those two words, spoken in a gentle reproachful tone, and the young lady turned to me and smiled.

“Thank you,” she said; “my brother has been very ill, and is weak yet.”

“Lena,” he cried, “don’t parade it before everybody;” but as he turned his eyes with an irritable look to the lady and encountered hers, a change came over him, and he clung to my arm, which he had thrust away.

“Thank you,” he said. “Give me a hand to the side there. My legs are shaky yet.” Then with a smile which made his thin yellow face light up, and gave him something the look of his sister, as he glanced at my uniform—“You’re not the captain, are you? Ah, that’s better,” he sighed, as he leaned his arms on the bulwark, and drew a deep breath. “Thank you. Just wait till we’ve been a month at sea, and I’ll race you all through the rigging.”

“All right,” I said, “you shall. My father says there’s nothing like a sea trip when you’ve been ill. He took me in his yacht after I had had fever.”

“And you got well in no time, didn’t you?”

I nodded, as I looked at his wasted figure, and noted his eager, anxious way.

“There, Lena, hear that,” he said quickly. “I told you so.” Then turning to me again—“Come and sit near us in the cabin; I shan’t be so nasty and snappish when I’ve had my breakfast.”

He laughed in a forced way, and promising that I would if I could, I drew back to leave the brother and sister together, for Walters gave my jacket a twitch.

“I say, I shall never get you round the ship,” he said, in an ill-used tone. “Now look here,” he began, “this is the saloon-deck, that’s the mizzen-mast, and come along here and I’ll show you the binnacle.”

“Why, I know all these,” I said, laughing merrily. “Come, I’ll box the compass with you.”

“Tuppens as you can’t do it right, young gent,” said a rough-looking elderly sailor, who was coiling down the rope which had nearly overset the sick passenger.

“You keep your place, sir, and speak when you’re spoken to,” said Walters, sharply.

“Certeny, sir. Beg pardon, sir, of course. Here, you Neb Dumlow, and you Barney Blane,” cried the man to a couple of his fellows, who were busy tightening the tarpaulin over a boat which swung from the davits.

The two men, whose lower jaws were working ox-fashion as they ruminated over their tobacco, left off and faced round; the first addressed, a big, ugly fellow, with a terrific squint which made his eyes look as if they were trying to join each other under the Roman nose, held a tarry hand up to his ear and growled—

“What say, mate?”

“These here’s our two noo officers, and you’ve got to be wery ’spectful when you speaks.”

“Look here, young man,” said Walters, haughtily, “I’ve been to sea before, and know a thing or two. If you give me any of your cheek I’ll report you to the first mate. Come on, Dale.”

He turned away, and the bluff-looking sailor winked at me solemnly as I followed, and muttered the words, “Oh my!”

“Nothing like keeping the sailors in their places,” continued Walters, “and—”

“Morning,” said a handsome, keen-looking man of about thirty.

“Morning, sir.”

“Our two new middies, eh? Well, shall you want me to-morrow?”

He looked at me as he spoke.

"Want you, sir!" I replied. "Are you one of the mates?"

"Every man's mate when he's on his back," was the laughing reply. "I'm the doctor."

"Oh!" I cried, catching his meaning, "I hope not, sir, unless it's very rough, but I think I can stand it."

"So do a good many folks," he continued. "Morning."

This was to a big, heavy-looking gentleman of about eight-and-twenty, who came up just then and shook hands with the doctor, holding on to him it seemed to me in a weak, helpless, amiable fashion, as if he was so glad he had found a friend that he didn't like to let go.

"Good—good-morning, doctor," he said, and as he spoke, I felt as if I must laugh, for his voice was a regular high-pitched squeak, and it sounded so queer coming from a big, stoutish, smooth-faced man of six feet high.

Walters looked at me with a grin.

"Oh, here's a Tommy soft," he whispered.

"Don't," I said with my eyes, as I screwed up my face quite firmly.

"I'm so glad I met you, as every one is so strange, and I don't like to question the servants—I mean the stewards—because they are all so busy. How long will it be to breakfast?"

"Quite half-an-hour," said the doctor, smiling, as he looked at his watch. "Hungry?"

"Oh no; I wanted to know if there would be time to see to my little charges first."

"Your little— Oh yes, I remember the captain told me. You have quite a collection."

"Yes, very large, and I am anxious to get them all across safely."

"I wish you success, I'm sure," said the doctor quietly. "You naturalists take a great deal of pains over your studies."

"Oh, we do our best," said the big man mildly, and it was just as if a girl was speaking. "Perhaps your two young gentlemen would like to see them."

"To be sure they would," said the doctor. "Let me introduce them. Let me see, your name is—"

"Preddle—Arthur Preddle."

"To be sure, you told me last night in the cabin. Then here are two of our embryo captains, Mr—"

"Nicholas Walters," said my companion, trying to speak gruffly.

"And—"

"Alison Dale."

"That's right; I like to know the name of my patients present or to be. Let me make you known to Mr Arthur Preddle, FZS."

"And FLS," said the big passenger, mildly.

"To be sure, forgive my ignorance," said the doctor. "Now let's go and see the fish."

Mr Preddle led the way—that is, his words and looks were eager, but his body was very slow and lumbering as he walked with us to the steps, and then down to the main-deck, and forward; and all the time, as he moved his feet, I could not for the life of me help thinking about the way in which an elephant walked onward in his slow, soft way. It put one in mind of india-rubber, and all the time our new acquaintance gave a peculiar roll from side to side.

There was still a great deal of lumber about the deck, but the officers were rapidly getting everything cleared, and we soon reached a well-protected and sheltered spot forwards, where several large frames had been fitted up on purpose, and the boards which had been screwed on when they were brought on board having been removed, there they were, several shallow trays of little fish swimming hurriedly about in shoals in the clear water, but ready enough to dash at the tiny scraps of food Mr Preddle threw in.

"For fresh food, sir?" said Walters. "Won't they be very small?"

The doctor laughed, while the naturalist's eyes opened very wide and round, so did his mouth.

"For food, my dear young friend?" he said in his quiet way. "They are being sent out by an acclimatisation society, in the hope that they will assist to furnish Australia and New Zealand with a good supply of salmon and trout. Look at the little beauties, how strong and healthy, and bright and well they seem!"

I was afraid to look at Walters for fear he should make me laugh, so I stood staring first in one tray then in the other, till it was time for breakfast, and Walters whispered as we hung back to the last—

"I say, how I should like to kick that fish chap."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he is so soft and fat."

By this time we were up by the cabin-door, and as we entered rather awkwardly, the captain shouted to us from the other end—

"Here, youngsters, you can find a seat at this table," and just then I saw my sick acquaintance standing up, and he beckoned to me.

"Come and sit by me," he said; "you will not mind, Captain Berriman?"

"Not I, sir," said that gentleman bluffly, and as I moved towards where my new friend was seated, Walters said sharply in my ear, "Oh, that's it, is it? Well, you are a sneak!"

Chapter Four.

These were the people I saw most of, on that first day. The next I did not see any of them, for when I awoke next morning, it was to feel that there was a heavy sea on, which somehow, from experience, I took quite as a matter of course; but a deep groan below me, and sounding very startling, taught me that some one else was not taking it in the same fashion.

"That you, Dale?" came piteously.

"Yes; what's the matter?"

"Oh, pray go and fetch the doctor. Some of that meat we had has upset me."

I looked at him, and certainly he seemed very ill, as I hurriedly began to dress.

"Oh dear, oh dear," he groaned, "I never felt so bad as this before."

"I shan't be long," I said; "when did you begins to feel bad?"

"Don't, don't ask any questions," he cried, half-angrily; "do you want to see me die?"

"Poor fellow!" I muttered, as I fought hard to get buttons through their proper holes, after a desperate struggle with my trousers, into which I got one leg, and had to try again and again to get in the other as I stood; but so sure as I raised the second limb the ship gave a lurch, and I either went against the bulk-head or banged up against our bunks.

"You're doing that on purpose," groaned Walters. "Oh, do, do call for help."

"No, I'd better run and fetch Mr—Mr—what's the doctor's name?"

"We never heard his name," moaned my messmate; "fetch him. I knew how it would be. It's a shame to poison officers with bad preserved meat."

"But I ate a lot of it," I said, as I triumphantly finished fastening my second brace.

"Ah, you'll have it directly. Oh dear, oh dear! I am so bad—why did I ever come to sea?"

Slosh—whish—bang!

A wave had struck the ship, and we could hear the water flying over us, as, after a tremendous effort to keep on my legs, I came down, sitting on my sea-chest; and then, instead of springing up again, I sat rolling from side to side, laughing silently and trying hard to master the intense desire to break forth into a tremendous roar.

Walters did not see it for a few moments, but kept on bemoaning his condition.

"I'll complain to the owners myself, if the captain doesn't take it up. It's too bad. Oh, do make haste—the doctor—the doctor—I'm dying." Then with a good deal of energy he cried, "Why, you're laughing."

"Of course I am," I said, giving way now to my mirth. "Why, you're only a bit sea-sick."

"I'm not," he snapped out; "I'm poisoned by that bad meat we had. Oh, the doctor, the doctor!"

"You're not," I said. "It's only sea-sickness. Why, I should have thought you could stand it."

"Oh, help—help!"

"Hush, don't make that noise!" I cried.

"Then fetch the doctor, oh, pray, pray!"

I hesitated no longer, but hurried out, and one of the first I encountered on deck was the bluff-looking sailor, whom my companion had snubbed.

"Look here," I cried quickly, "Mr Walters is very ill. Where's the doctor's cabin?"

Just then the ship made a lurch, and so did I, but by giving a kind of hop and jump and getting my legs apart, I preserved my balance.

"Well done, youngster," cried the man. "You've been at sea before."

"Yes, often," I replied, "but where's the doctor?"

"I'll show you, sir. Number three's his cabin. Next but two to the skipper's. But your messmate's only got the Channel chump, has he?"

"I think he's only sea-sick, but he says it was the meat last night."

"Clck!"

It was a curious sound that one cannot spell any nearer, partly laugh, partly cry of derision.

"That's what they all says, sir," he continued. "Sea-sick, sure as my name's Bob Hampton." As he spoke he had descended with me, and ended by pointing out number three.

"There you are, sir; two rollers at night, and a shake the bottle in the morning. That's Mr Frewen's cabin; I must get back on deck."

The next minute I was knocking at the doctor's door.

"Hullo!" came instantly.

"Would you get up, please, sir? Walters is very bad."

"So will some more be," I heard him say, "with this sea on." Then, louder, "Wait a minute."

I waited a minute and then a bolt was drawn.

"Come in."

I entered, to find the young doctor hurriedly dressing.

"I thought it was your voice," he said, "What is it?"

"He thinks the meat we had last night has poisoned him, sir!"

"Rubbish! The rough sea. But I'll come and have a look at him directly."

I ran back to our cabin, which I reached this time without going first on deck.

"How are you now?" I said.

"Is he coming soon?" moaned Walters. "Oh dear! He'll be too late. I know I'm dying; and if I do, don't—don't let 'em throw me overboard."

"You're not so bad as that," I said, trying to cheer him up.

"Oh, you don't know. Go and tell him to make haste before he is too late."

To my surprise and delight the door was opened, and the doctor with a very rough head came in.

"Now, squire," he cried, "what's the matter?"

"Ah, doctor, oh!"

"Ah, doctor, oh! Don't make that noise like an old woman of sixty. Pretty sort of a fellow you are to come to sea."

"Oh dear, oh dear! I know I'm dying."

"Then you are precious clever, my lad. Bah! There's nothing the matter with you but the sea tossing you up and down. Lie still, you'll soon come round."

"It—asn't—sea—sick—ick—ickness," moaned Walters.

"Then it's uncommonly like it, that's all I can say," cried the doctor, laughing. Then, turning to me—"There, you needn't be alarmed about him, my lad."

"I wasn't sir," I replied. "I told him that was what ailed him."

"And quite right. I suppose you'll have a turn next if this rough weather keeps on."

"But do, do give me something, doctor," groaned Walters.

"Your messmate will get you some tea presently," said the doctor, quietly. "There, I must go and finish dressing."

And he left the cabin, while a good deal of my first work at sea was attending on poor Walters, who was about as bad as he could be for the next few days, during which the only passenger I saw was Mr Preddle, who came out of his cabin twice a day, looking miserably ill, and having hard work to stand; but Hampton the sailor and I used to help him go right forward to attend to his fish and then help him back again.

"It's so good of you," he used to say; "I'm not used to the sea, and if I get worse, do please go and see to my poor fish."

"Yes, they shan't be neglected," I said. "But I think the sea's going down, and you'll be all right, sir, then."

He shook his head sorrowfully, and when I helped him to lie down again—no easy task, for he was so big—he shut his eyes and whispered, "How is our sick friend?" he said.

"What, Walters, my messmate?"

"No, no, the passenger, Mr Denning."

"I haven't seen him, but the steward said he seemed pretty well, sir."

"Impossible. In such a delicate state of health. Have you seen the lady?"

"No, she has not been on deck."

"No. It would be too rough," sighed the poor fellow. "What's that?" he cried, excitedly, "something wrong?"

"I'll go and see," I said; for there had reached us the sound of an angry voice, and then a noise as of something falling overhead, and as I hurried out and on deck, I could hear the captain storming furiously, evidently at one of the men.

Chapter Five.

"And sarve him jolly well right," growled Hampton, looking at me as I hurried forward to where Captain Berriman was following up one of the sailors, who, with his hand to his bleeding cheek, was gazing fiercely at his officer and backing away toward the forecabin.

"Yes," shouted the captain, "get down below and don't show yourself to me again to-day, you scoundrel. Call yourself a sailor, and haven't learned the first line of a sailor's catechism—obedience to his officer."

The captain's face was flushed and the veins in his brow were knotted, but the aspect of his countenance changed directly, as in backing away from him the man did not allow for the heaving of the ship, and the consequence was that he stumbled, tried to save himself, and then fell heavily and rolled over into the lee-scuppers, but picked himself up and then hurried forward and out of sight.

As I looked back at the captain, it was to see his rugged face twinkling now with mirth, and he turned to Mr Frewen the doctor, who had hurried on deck at the noise.

"There, doctor," he said, "you see the old Burgh Castle wouldn't rest easy, and see her skipper insulted. Pitched the scoundrel off his legs. That comes of having these mongrel sort of fellows aboard. He's half a Frenchman. Shipped in a hurry. An insolent dog. Got my blood up; for as long as I walk this deck, right or wrong, I'll be obeyed. Perhaps I ought to have put him in irons though, instead of being so handy with my fists. You'll have to go and stick half-a-yard of plaster on his cheek: it's cut."

"What was the matter?" said the doctor, as soon as the captain gave him an opportunity.

"Brymer told him and another of the men to go up aloft, and he refused. I heard him, and ordered him to go at once, and he said, loud enough for Miss Denning to hear— never mind what. Here she comes;—and I knocked him down."

"Ah, my dear young lady," he continued, taking off his cap, "I apologise to you for that scene. But a captain must be master of his ship."

"I am very sorry too," she replied sadly. "It seemed so shocking for you to strike the man."

"Now, now, now, my dear, don't you scold me, an old fellow who has to play the part of father to you and your brother on this voyage. It was a pity perhaps, but I was obliged. But there, there, it's all over now."

"Hope it be," grumbled a voice behind me, and I turned sharply to see that Hampton was close alongside. "Yes, sir," he said again, "I hope it be, but chaps who wears earrings has got tempers like spiteful women, and that chap Jarette arn't the sort to forget a blow."

"Did the captain hit him very hard?" I said, after a glance over my shoulder, to see that the officers were walking aft talking to Miss Denning.

"Hard? Did the skipper hit him hard, sir? What says you, Barney, and you, Neb Dumlow?"

This was to the two sailors who were generally pretty close to his heels, all three men being thorough messmates, and having, as I afterwards learned, sailed together for years.

"Did he hit him hard?" said Barney, slowly, and giving his mouth a rub with the back of his hand.

"That's what I said, messmate; don't get chewin' o' my words over five hundred times to show off afore our young officer. Did he hit him hard?"

"Orfle!" said Barney.

"Then why didn't you say so afore, 'stead o' getting into bad habits, a-saying things for the sake o' talking. Now, Neb Dumlow, just look the young gent straight in the face and say what you thinks."

"Couldn't ha' hit him no harder," growled the great fellow in his deep bass voice.

"Not with one hand," acquiesced Hampton; "but you needn't ha' screwed both your eyes out o' sight to say it, matey. Bad habit o' hisn, sir," he continued, turning to me, "but I'm a-trying to break him on it. Neb's a good sort o' chap if you could straighten his eyes; arn't you Neb?"

"Dunno," growled the man.

"Then it's a good job for you as I do, mate. Ay, the skipper did give Master Jarette a floorer, and I'm sorry for it."

"Why," I said, "if he deserved it?"

"Well, you see, sir, it's like this; if me or Neb or Barney there had scared one of the officers, and the skipper had knocked us down, why, we shouldn't ha' liked it—eh, mates?"

"No," came in a growl.

"Course not; but then we're Englishmen, and knowing as we was in the wrong, why, next day we should have forgot all about it."

"Ay, ay," growled Dumlow, and Barney nodded his acquiescence.

"But strikes me, sir—you needn't tell the skipper I says so, because p'r'aps I'm wrong—strikes me as that chap won't forget it, and I should be sorry for there to be any more rows with ladies on board, 'cause they don't like it. But I say, sir!"

"Yes, Hampton," I replied.

"I thought as Mr Walters as had been to sea afore was going to put you through it all. When's he going to show on deck?"

"Oh, he'll come up as soon as he's well enough," I said.

"If I was skipper, he'd be well enough now," said the sailor, roughly. "More you gives way to being sea-sick, more you may. I don't say as it's nice, far from it; but if a man shows fight, he soon gets too many for it. Here's him been a voyage, and you arn't. He lies below, below, below in his bunk, and you goes about just as if you was at home."

"Because I haven't been ill," I said, laughing.

"No, sir, you arn't; but if I was you, I'd soon go down and cure him."

"How?" I said, expecting to hear of some good old remedy.

"Physic, sir."

"Yes, what physic?" I said.

"Bucket o' water, sir,—take a hair o' the dog as bit you, as the Scotch chaps say,—fresh dipped."

"Rubbish, Bob Hampton; how could he drink a bucket of salt water?"

"Who said anything about drinking it, sir? I meant as lotion, 'Outward application only,' as Mr Frewen puts on his bottles o' stuff sometimes."

"What! bathe him with salt water?"

"Yes, sir, on'y we calls it dowsin'. Sharp and sudden like. Furst dollop fails, give him another, and keep it up till he walks on deck to get dry; then call me to swab up the cabin, and he's all right."

"I'll tell Mr Walters what you say, Hampton."

"No, sir, I wouldn't do that; 'cause if you do, he'll have his knife into me. I on'y meant it as good advice. He on'y wants rousin' up. Why, if you was to set some of us to rattle a chain over his head, and then make a rash, and you went down and telled him the ship was sinking, he'd be quite well, thank ye, and come on deck and look out for a place in the first boat."

"You're too hard upon him," I said, and not liking to hear the man talk in this way, which sounded like an attempt to, what my father used to call, curry favour, I went aft to find that the invalid passenger, Mr John Denning, had been helped out on to the poop-deck by his sister and the steward, and was now having a cane-chair lashed for him close

up by the mizzen-mast.

He beckoned as he caught sight of me, just as he was being lowered into his place, and I went up slowly, for the captain and Mr Frewen were by his side, and as I approached I heard him say rather irritably—

“Thank you, doctor. If I feel unwell I will ask you to help me. I’m quite right, only half-suffocated by being down so long.”

“Very good, Mr Denning. I only thought you might wish to avail yourself of my services.”

“Thank you; yes—of course.”

I saw Miss Denning look pained, and press her brother’s arm.

He turned upon her impatiently.

“Yes, yes, Lena, I know,” he said; “and I have thanked Mr Frewen for his attention. Now I want to be alone.”

Mr Frewen raised his cap, and walked forward, descending to the main-deck, and the invalid said something angrily to his sister which made her eyes fill with tears.

I was passing on, but Mr Denning made a sharp gesture.

“No, no, I want you,” he cried sharply.

“Then I’ll say good-morning,” said the captain, smiling at Miss Denning. “I only wanted to say I was glad to see you on deck, sir.”

“Thank you, captain; but don’t go. I can’t help being a bit irritable; I’ve had so much to do with doctors that I hate them.”

“John, dear!”

“Well, so I do, Lena. I was dying for want of some fresh air, and as soon as I get on deck, captain, down swoops the doctor as if he were a vulture and I was so much carrion.”

“Oh, come, come, my lad, you won’t talk like that when you’ve been on deck a bit. Nothing like fresh air, sir. Keep yourself warm, though, and we mustn’t have you wet.”

“Now, captain, don’t, pray,” cried the invalid.

“All right, then, I won’t. Look here, then. If it gets too rough, come into my cabin and have a cigar and a chat. You won’t mind a little smoke, my dear?”

“Oh no, Captain Berriman; not at all.”

“That’s right. You know where my cabin is, and don’t you mind me calling you my dear. I’ve got three girls at home as old or older than you, and a son as big as Mr Denning.”

Miss Denning smiled in his face, while I felt as if I wished he would be as fatherly with me.

“Look here,” he continued, with a twinkle of the eye. “I’ve just had a telegram from old Neptune. He says the gale’s pretty well over, and he’s going to give us some fine weather now. He was obliged to blow up a bit because the waves were getting sulky and idle, and the winds were all gone to sleep.”

It did not seem like the same man who was so fierce with the sailor a short time before.

“And look here, Mr Denning,” he continued, turning back after taking a few steps toward the man at the wheel; “you’re quite right, sir; pitch the doctor overboard, and I’ll prescribe for you. I’ve got a bottle or two of prime port wine and burgundy on board,—you understand? And as soon as the weather mends you must try some fishing; I dare say I can fit you up, and young Dale here will lend a hand.”

“Oh yes,” I said eagerly.

“And don’t know anything about it, eh?”

I stared at him in surprise.

“Why, I’ve fished at sea hundreds of times, sir,” I said. “Whiffing, long line, trot, and bulter; and we used to go out to the rocks off Falmouth to set small trammels.”

“Why, you’re quite a sailor, Dale,” said the captain. “All right, my lad, you’ll do.”

“I like Captain Berriman, Lena,” said Mr Denning, thoughtfully; “but I will not have that doctor always hanging about my chair.”

I saw Miss Denning look sadly at me and colour a little as she glanced back at her brother, who nodded sharply and turned to me, and changed the conversation. “Were you on deck when there was that disturbance?”

"Yes."

"The captain knocked the man down, didn't he?"

"Yes; sent him sprawling upon the deck."

I saw the young man's eyes flash, and there was a slight flush upon his sallow cheek as he laid a thin hand on my arm, and went on eagerly—

"I wish I had been on deck."

"Oh, there wasn't much to see," I said. "His cheek was cut, and bled."

"So much the better. Let Mr Frewen go and attend him. But the man was insolent, wasn't he?"

"Very, I believe; and Captain Berriman said he would have proper discipline in his ship."

"Yes, of course. I should have liked to see the captain knock him down. Perhaps it will make him spiteful."

I looked at him wonderingly, and he smiled.

"Well, why shouldn't I?" he said. "One likes to see a few exciting scenes now and then. Life is so dull."

He was holding on by the arms of the chair, for the ship rose and fell, and rolled a good deal in the short, choppy sea; but he seemed to like it, and as his sister stood with her hands resting on the back of the chair, balancing herself and yielding to the motion of the ship, her eyes brightened, and she gazed away over the foaming sea, where the sun had come through the clouds, and made the spray sparkle like diamonds as the waves curled over and broke.

They neither of them spoke to me, and I walked slowly away to see that the captain had raised his hand.

"You can spend a little time with the sick passenger, Dale," he said; "I mean when he wants you. Poor fellow, I'm afraid he's in a bad way."

He walked back toward the group by the mizzen as he spoke, and then as we drew near he changed the conversation.

"Look here, Dale," he said; "you'd better go down and pull your messmate out of his bunk by the hind leg. Time he was on deck now. And look here, go and see how that Mr Preddle is. He's keeping below, too, when a touch of this brisk breeze would set him up. Go down, and tell him the fish are fighting—ah, fighting—that will be more like the truth. They're sure to fight. That will bring him on deck."

"Shall I, sir?"

"Yes; off with you."

As I started I saw that Mr Denning was frowning, and that his sister looked troubled. But it was only a momentary glance, and a minute or two later I approached the door of Mr Preddle's cabin and knocked.

There was a groan, and in spite of its pitiful nature I could not help smiling, and I knocked again.

"Come in," I heard in quite a squeak; and then as I opened the door—"Is that Doctor Frewen?"

"No, sir," I replied. "I've come to ask you to get up and come on deck."

"On deck! Is there any danger?"

The speaker raised himself upon his elbow, and looked at me eagerly.

"Oh no," I replied; "the sea's going down, and the captain thinks an hour or two on deck would do you good."

"Too ill, too much prostrated," sighed the great fellow, who lay, as I thought, like a sick elephant, when he had dropped back on to the pillow.

"Captain Berriman said something about seeing to your fish, sir."

"My fish! Ah, yes; you shall look at them for me."

"But it really is nice and fresh on deck, sir."

"Yes, for you."

"And it seems to be doing Mr Denning and his sister ever so much good."

Mr Preddle rose suddenly to his elbow.

"Miss— They are not on deck?" he said eagerly. "What, Mr and Miss Denning?"

"Yes," I said, looking at him wonderingly, for he appeared to be so excited. "Oh yes; he's sitting up there, looking at the sea, and his sister's standing by his chair."

"Would—would you mind helping me on with a few of my things, Mr Dale?" he said hurriedly, as he began to creep out of his berth. "It's so awkward dressing when the ship sways about so. It makes me feel giddy."

"Oh yes; I'll help you," I said.

"Thank you; it's very kind of you. The captain is quite right, and I'm not doing what I ought about those fish. I will go and see to them. So much time and expense was devoted to—oh, my gracious!"

I tried to save him, but he was too heavy, and we went down together with him half over me; but I didn't feel it much, for he was very soft. You see he had got one leg half-way into his trousers, when the Burgh Castle gave a lurch, and bang he went up against the bulk-head, and then on to the floor.

"Hurt yourself much, sir?" I said, as we both struggled up.

"Oh, horri— no, no, not much, thank you," he muttered. "I—I—haven't quite got my sea-legs yet, as you sailors call it. That's better. Now if you wouldn't mind, Mr Dale."

I didn't mind, of course, and I helped him all I could, thinking all the while he was like a big fat boy we used to have at school, only Mr Preddle was nearly three times the size. And all the time, though he must have felt very faint and poorly, he kept a good face upon his troubles, trying to laugh and make light of them, till I said, merrily—

"That's the way, Mr Preddle. Now, if you get up on deck and don't think about the ship rolling, you will soon be better."

"Yes," he said; "I believe I should if I only could keep from thinking about the ship rolling. But it won't let me." This was while he was rubbing his big, round, smooth face, which looked as good-natured as possible, though the smile upon it was only forced.

"Oh, but you'll soon get over it," I cried. "I'll stop and help you up."

"Yes, do please stop," he said hurriedly; "but don't try and help me up. I'm going to walk up and balance myself. I shall keep close to the bulwarks, don't you call them, and hold on. Which is the best side?"

"I should go along on the weather side," I replied. "You may get splashed a bit; but you'll soon learn not to mind that. I've often been drenched when out in the yacht with father, but one soon got dry again."

"Didn't you catch a bad cold?" he said, out of the towel.

"Oh no."

Then he looked in his little glass as he steadied himself with one hand, and then in his highly-pitched voice he said, as he looked round at me with a faint laugh, and passed his hand over his chin—

"It's a very good job, isn't it, that I don't have to shave? I'm sure I couldn't use a razor with the ship rising and falling like this."

Thud! Whish!

The little round window was darkened for a few moments, and Mr Preddle held on with both hands.

"What's that?" he cried, excitedly. "Is there any danger?"

"Danger? No," I said with a laugh. "It was only a wave. Good job you hadn't opened your window. Don't you ever shave, then, sir?"

"No," he said with a sigh; "my beard never came."

"Then it never will," I remember thinking to myself as I looked at his smooth cheeks and chin, while he carefully combed and brushed his hair as he stood in his trousers and shirt, and then opened a little box and took out three neckerchiefs, all different in colour.

"Which one would you wear, Mr Dale?" he said, as he looked up at me.

"Oh, I don't know," I cried merrily; "which you like best—the blue one. There's plenty of blue sky and blue sea now."

"Yes, you're right," he said, eagerly. "And—you wouldn't mind, would you?"

"Mind what, sir?"

"Showing me how to tie a sailor's knot. I never could manage it properly."

I showed him, and then he put on a white waistcoat and a blue serge jacket, like that worn by a yachting-man, buttoned up tightly, and looked at me again.

"It's very kind of you to help me," he said; "but do you think it's fine enough for a straw hat?"

I shook my head as I pictured his round, plump, white face under the straight brim, and thought how comic it would look.

"I should wear that," I said, pointing to a yachtman's blue woollen peaked cap. "There's so much wind, and it will keep on better."

"Of course; you are quite right," he said. "It's because you have had so much experience of the sea. But it isn't quite so becoming as the straw, is it?"

I stared at him wonderingly as I thought how vain he must be; but I said it looked right enough.

"I should keep the straw hat for when we get down into the hot parts, sir," I said.

"To be sure; so I will. Do you know, that wash seems to have done me a lot of good, Mr Dale. I really think I feel better."

"Then you'll be all right now, sir. I should get the steward to give me a basin of soup."

He shuddered, and gave me a look of horror.

"I couldn't touch it," he whispered. "Don't ask me. Not now."

"Wait till you've been on deck a bit, sir."

"Yes, yes," he said, excitedly; and after another look in the glass he told me he was ready, and we went out to go on deck: but he declined to go up the steps to where the captain would be with the other passengers, and said he would go forward to have a look at the fish; but before he had gone many steps, he altered his mind.

"I do feel better, Mr Dale," he said, with a half-laugh, "and I think I will go up and pay my respects to the captain and—and the other passengers," and then, talking eagerly to me about his fish, and carefully preserving his balance, we went up on the poop-deck, with the ship gliding along swiftly and more easily.

The captain saw us, and came to meet him along with Mr Brymer, the first mate, and both shook hands warmly.

"Glad, to see you on deck, sir. There, you've got over your bit of trouble. It was rather a rough beginning."

"Yes, and of course I'm not much used to the sea, Captain Berriman," said Mr Preddle, as he walked on by his side with legs rather widely apart, I following behind with Mr Brymer.

It seemed to me then that Mr Preddle was managing so as to get up to where Mr Denning sat with his sister, and the next minute they were abreast of them, and the captain said in his bluff way—

"There, Mr Denning, another of your fellow-passengers has found out the advantage of coming on deck."

"Yes," said Mr Preddle, hastily, as he took off his cap to Miss Denning, and then bowed to her brother. "So fresh and bright after the clo— clo— clo— Oh dear me!"

I was obliged to laugh, and though Mr Denning looked angry, I saw Miss Denning turn away to hide a smile, for the captain and Mr Brymer laughed as merrily as I did. And no wonder, for just as Mr Preddle was bowing and smiling and talking hurriedly, the ship gave another sudden lurch; he made a wild grasp at the captain, missed him; another at Mr Denning's chair; and then sat down involuntarily on the deck, to look up ruefully at me, his eyes seeming to say, "Oh, how can you laugh!"

"All right, sir, not hurt, I hope?" said the captain, and he and the first mate helped our stout passenger to rise.

"No, not at all, thanks; sadly awkward though at first," he said, rather piteously. "Mr Dale—would you mind?"

I hurriedly offered him my arm, and he gave a quick look round.

"A little weak and giddy," he continued, with his eyes resting on Miss Denning, who held out her hand, and in a quiet sweet way, said—

"Yes, we have been rather unwell too. I turned quite giddy once."

Mr Denning looked at her angrily, and Mr Preddle shook hands very awkwardly before walking away with me, and as I helped him down the ladder, he said in a whisper—

"Are they all laughing at me? Look."

"Oh no," I said, after a hasty glance. "I'm afraid we were all very rude, but every one meets with these accidents at sea."

I fancied he muttered something about "disgraced," but he was very silent, and hardly noticed the men who touched their caps to him as we went forward, where he stayed with the fish for a few minutes, and lifted out a couple which lay floating wrong side up, with a tiny landing-net; and then walked back without me towards his cabin. I let him get nearly to the companion-way, and then ran after him with my face burning.

"I beg your pardon for laughing at you, Mr Preddle," I said.

He turned his piteous face toward me, and smiled in a simple, good-natured way, as he held out his hand.

"You couldn't help it," he said; "I suppose I did look very ridiculous. It's because I'm so stout; p'r'aps being at sea will

take it down.”

He nodded and went on, leaving me thinking.

It was awkward, just too as he wanted to show how well he was. Then I started and looked round, for some one clapped me on the shoulder.

“You and Mr Preddle seem to be getting capital friends, Dale; how smart he had made himself look!”

“Yes, sir,” I said; “but he had quite an accident on deck,” and I looked half-smilingly in the young doctor’s face, for it was he.

“Accident? Hurt?” he said, eagerly.

“Oh no, sir. He was going up to speak to Miss Denning and her brother, and the ship lurched, and he came down sitting.”

“Oh!” said the doctor, and it struck me at the time that he looked rather pleased.

Chapter Six.

The next morning broke bright and glorious. We were right away in the open sea now, going south before a brisk north-west breeze, which was just enough to make the water dance and glitter in the sunshine, as the Burgh Castle with a full press of sail careened gently over. While feeling fresh and eager, I thought how delightful the ocean looked, and was eager to see what the tropic waters would have to show.

“Here, Dale,” said the captain, “this sort of thing won’t do. Where’s your messmate—Walters?”

“He’s a little better this morning, sir, but not out of his bunk.”

“You go down and tell him that if he is not up on deck in a quarter of an hour, I’ll send two of the men down to fetch him.”

“Yes, sir,” and I went and delivered my message to the poor, miserable-looking, yellow-faced fellow, as he lay with his face screwed up, only half seen in his bunk.

“I don’t care. Let him send if he dares. I can’t get up. I’ll complain to the owners. It’s a cruel shame, and it’s a wonder I haven’t died, left neglected down here.”

“That you haven’t been,” I cried; “why, I’ve regularly nursed you, and the steward couldn’t have been kinder.”

“Who said he could?” cried Walters, with plenty of animation now. “But where’s the doctor? What’s a doctor carried on a ship for if he isn’t to attend to the sick people?”

“Oh, but you’re not sick,” I said.

“What?” he cried fiercely.

“Well, not now,” I replied, laughing. “Of course you were, but you’re only qualmy now. Here, this place does smell stuffy. I’ll open the window.”

“That you won’t; I don’t want to catch a bad cold. Wish I hadn’t come to sea in such a miserable ship.”

“Nonsense. Get up and dress.”

“Shan’t!”

“But you’d feel ever so much better.”

“How do you know? You go and tell the captain he’s a brute, and I’m not going to get up till I’m better.”

“Not I. It would only be a lie,” I said.

“What?”

“You are ever so much better. Shall I ask the steward to make you some tea?”

“No, I couldn’t touch it, and he wouldn’t make it if you did. This ain’t a London hotel.”

“Of course it isn’t; but he’d make a cup if I asked him.”

“No, he wouldn’t. They’re all brutes here.”

“Look here,” I cried, as I saw how argumentative he could be, and that if he roused himself up he’d be better, “if you don’t jump into your trousers I’ll be a brute too.”

“What do you mean?” he said, sharply.

"I'll lay hold of one leg, and pull you out on to the floor."

"You dare to touch me, and I'll give you the biggest hiding you ever had in your life."

"Not you. Come, get up, or the skipper will send down two fellows to fetch you out."

"Let him at his peril," snarled my messmate, pulling the clothes higher.

"Shall I go and tell him that?"

"If you dare."

"Oh, I dare," I said, "but I wouldn't be such a sneak. But he really will send after you, if you don't get up."

"Let him."

"Come, you are better."

"I'm not; I'm half dead."

"You're not."

"I am, you unfeeling brute; I am so weak, I can't stir."

"You said you were strong enough to give me a good hiding."

"Yes, when I'm better."

"You're better now, so get out."

"Shan't."

"Am I to pull you out?"

"You dare to touch me, and I'll half-kill you."

"Here goes, then!" I cried, and diving my hand under the blanket, I caught hold of him by his leg, and with one good tug had him out on the floor of the narrow cabin, kicking and struggling to get from beneath the clothes. As soon as he was free he flew at me, hitting out fiercely, while I only closed with him to keep him from hurting.

Then for about a minute we had a combined wrestle and fight about the cabin, with the result that I, being dressed and in better condition, got him down and sat upon his chest, panting heavily, to get my breath, while I could feel the saddle upon which I sat move sharply up and down.

"There," I said good-temperedly, "I knew you weren't bad. Will you dress yourself, and come on deck if I get off?"

"I'll half-kill you!" he snarled through his set teeth.

"Then I'll sit here till you change your mind."

He drew up his knees, so as to get his heels as near me as he could, then placed his hands close to his ribs, waited a few moments to get his breath, and at a moment when he thought I was quite off my guard, he raised his chest so as to make a bow of his spine, and giving a sudden quick heave, tried to throw me off sidewise.

But I had too good a seat for my restive steed, and nipping him tightly, held on while he frantically tried the same movement again and again, till he was compelled to stop from lack of breath. And all the time his face grew blacker with fury, while mine was puckered up by mirth, for I was thoroughly enjoying the fun of the thing, and not in the least alarmed by his threats.

"You beast!" he snarled. "Only wait till my turn comes, and you shall have it for this."

"Not I, my lad," I cried merrily. "You'll be as pleased as can be to-morrow, and thank me for doing you so much good. Why, Walters, old chap, you're growing stronger every minute. I thought you were so faint you couldn't move."

"So I am, and you're suffocating me by sitting on my chest, you cowardly wretch."

"Not I. It makes the bellows work better," I cried, as I bumped gently up and down. "Good for you after lying there so long. Ready for another try?"

I gave so heavy a bump that he yelled out, but I only laughed, for every doubt of his condition had passed away, as he proved to me in our struggle that he was as strong and well able to be about as I.

"Now then, if I get off, will you wash and dress?"

"I'll thrash you till you can't stand," he snarled.

"Not you. Be too grateful; and if you speak like that again I'll nip your ribs twice as hard."

"You wait till I get up."

"You're not going to get up," I said, "till you promise to behave yourself."

"I'll make you sorry for this, my fine fellow, as soon as I'm well."

"Then you had better do it at once," I said, "if you can."

He gave another heave, but I was too firmly settled, and he subsided again, and lay panting and glaring at me fiercely.

"There, let's have no more nonsense," I said at last; "don't be so silly. I only did it all in fun to get you to make an effort. Will you get up quietly and shake hands?"

"No!" he roared, and he gave such a jerk that I had hard work to keep my seat, while he struck at me savagely with his doubled fists.

"Wo ho!" I cried, as I managed to secure his wrists, and now as I saw his malignant look, I began to feel uncomfortable, and to wish that I had gone some other way to work to bring him round.

"You shall repent all this, you wretch!" he cried.

"Pooh!" I said contemptuously, for my own temper was rising; "I am not afraid. There, get up and dress at once, and don't make an idiot of yourself."

As I spoke I gathered myself together, and with one effort I sprang to my feet, being quite on my guard, but expecting the greater part of what he had said was talk, and that he would not dress himself. But to my astonishment he leaped up, dashed at me, striking out right and left, and the next minute there would have been an angry fight on the way, if the door had not suddenly darkened and a voice which I recognised as Mr Brymer's exclaimed—

"Hullo! what's all this?"

My rising anger was checked on the instant as Walters started back, and the chief mate and Mr Frewen came in.

"Walters has got a fit, sir," I said, laughing.

"I haven't," he cried furiously; "this cowardly beast has been dragging me out of my bunk when I was so ill I could hardly move myself."

"The captain said he was to get up, sir," I pleaded; "and I tried to coax him first, but he wouldn't stir. Then I did pull him out, but he's been going on like mad ever since."

"Let me see," said Mr Frewen, seriously, and he felt Walters' pulse. "Let me look at your tongue, sir," he continued; "no, no, not the tip. Out with it. Hah! And so you had the heart to drag this poor fellow out of his bed, Dale, when he was as weak as a baby?"

"Why, I could hardly hold him, sir," I protested. "He's stronger than I am, only I got him down and sat upon him."

"Sat upon him—got him down! Why, you might have killed him."

"I didn't think he was bad, sir," I said. "You should have seen him a little while ago."

"Oh!" groaned Walters, piteously, and he lowered the lids of his eyes, and then let them wander feebly about the cabin.

"He's looking for his breeches," said the doctor, changing his tone. "There, dress yourself, you cowardly sham!" he cried. "A great strong healthy lad like you, who has been to sea for eighteen months, to lay up like a sickly weak girl. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Walters opened his eyes widely and stared.

"Dale ought to have tugged you out a couple of days ago, and given you a bucket of water. There, nothing whatever's the matter with him, Brymer. Come along, and I'll report the case to the captain."

"Well, to see the way he was showing fight," said the mate, "didn't seem to me like being weak."

"Weak? Pish! You did quite right, Dale. I'm sympathetic enough with any poor fellow who is really bad, but if there is anything that raises my dander it's a cowardly pitiful fellow who gives up for nothing. Look here, sir, if you're not on deck in a quarter of an hour, I shall suggest strong measures to the captain in answer to his order to come down and see how you were."

He stepped out of the little cabin, but put his head in again.

"Open that window, Dale, my lad, this place is stifling."

"Yes," said the first mate. "On deck in a quarter of an hour, sir, or you'll wish yourself on shore."

They both left the cabin, and I only made poor Walters more bitter against me by bursting out laughing as he began to dress quickly.

"A set of brutes!" he grumbled; "a set of unfeeling brutes!"

"There, drop it now," I cried; "I shall stop and help you."

"You'll stop till I help you," he said through his clenched teeth. "I shan't forget this."

"All right," I replied, and I left him to himself to cool down; but feeling sorry for him, and thinking that I had been unfeeling, I hurried off to the cook, who was pretending to be very busy in the galley, and who gave me a suspicious look as soon as I showed myself at the door.

"I say, have you got any beef-tea?" I asked.

"Beef-tea, sir!" he said, giving the lad with him a sharp look. "Anything else, sir?—Turtle, sir; gravy, spring, or asparagus soup,—like it now?"

I stared for a moment, then seeing that the man was poking fun at me, I changed my tone and slipped a shilling in his hand.

"Look here," I cried; "Mr Walters has been very queer and he's now getting up, can't you give me a basin of soup for him?"

"Soup, sir! Ah, now you're talking wisdom. I'll see what I can do; but to talk about beef-tea just when the butcher's shop round the corner's shut up—butcher's shop is shut up, arn't it, Tom?" he continued, turning to his assistant.

"Yes; all gone wrong. Trade was so bad."

"Now, no chaff," I said; "you will get me a basin of something?"

"I should think so, sir. Here, Tom, strain off some of the liquor from that Irish stoo."

A lid was lifted off, and a pleasant savoury steam arose as a basinful of good soup was ladled out, strained into another, and then the man turned to me—

"Like to try one yourself, sir?"

"Yes," I cried eagerly, for the odour was tempting. "No," I said, resisting the temptation. "Give us hold," and the next minute I was on my way back with the basin and a spoon toward the cabin aft.

I don't know how it is, but so sure as you don't want to be seen doing anything, everyone is on the way to meet you. It was so then. I was carefully balancing the steaming basin so as not to spill any of its contents on the white deck, as the ship rose and fell, when I came upon the doctor, who laughed. The next minute Mr Brymer popped upon me.

"Hullo!" he said, "who's that for?"

"Mr Walters, sir."

"Humph!"

I went on watching the surface of the soup, which kept on threatening to slop over, when a rough voice said—

"Thankye, sir. I'll have it here. Did you put in the salt?"

I gave the speaker, Bob Hampton, a sharp look, and saw that the two men who were generally near him, Barney Blane and Dumlow, were showing all their teeth as they indulged in hard grins; and then I was close upon the cabin-door, but started and stopped short as I heard a cough, and looking up, there was the captain leaning over the rail and watching me.

"That's not your duty, is it, my lad?" he said.

"No, sir. For Walters, sir, before he comes on deck."

"Oh!" he ejaculated with a grim look, and he turned away, while I dived in through the door and made my way to the cabin, where I could hear that Walters was having a good wash.

"Here, I've brought you something to take," I cried.

He glanced round sharply, saw what I had, and took no more notice, but went on with his washing.

"Better have it while it's hot," I said.

He took up the towel and began to rub.

"Look sharp, you must take it," I cried. "If I stand it down, it will slop over the side."

"Oh, well, if you won't," I cried at last, "I shall eat it myself."

He threw down the towel, turned, half-snatched the basin away, and held it as if he were going to throw the contents in my face.

His action was so sudden that I flinched.

"Ah, you know you deserve it," he cried, sourly.

"Yes, shall I eat it?" I replied, recovering myself.

"Bah!" he snarled out, and feeling that I had done all that was necessary, I backed away and went up on deck, from whence I saw my messmate come out of the cabin about ten minutes after, and as the captain signed to him to come near, I slipped down out of curiosity, hurried to the cabin, and found that the basin was emptied to the last drop.

I ran forward and popped my head in at the galley.

"Send a boy to fetch the empty basin from our cabin," I said quickly.

"All right, sir," was the reply, and I went aft, just as Walters was leaving the cabin, but he took care not to come near me, and I went on with my work.

Chapter Seven.

Down south we sailed as swiftly as favouring gales and plenty of sail could take us, and in course of time we had passed below the Azores, and every one on board was waking up to the fact that we were getting into latitudes where the weather grew hotter and more sunshiny day by day.

All the foul winds and rough seas had been left far behind in the north, and anything more delightful than the life on board it would have been impossible to conceive.

There were troubles, of course, and I used to think that the captain was unnecessarily severe on Jarette and several of the other men; but I set it down to a desire to preserve good discipline, and of course I felt that he must know best how to manage his crew.

The passengers passed the greater part of their time on deck, coming up early to bathe in the bright sunshine which made the metal look too hot to touch, and the tar to glisten in little beads all along beneath the ropes and about the seams of the deck, and they stayed late at night in the brilliant moonlight, till I used to think that our voyage was going to be one long time of pleasure; for every one—no, not every one—seemed to be happy and cheerful, and I made no end of friends. I had plenty to do, but even in their strictest moments the officers were pleasant to me, and I thought, thanks to the breaking in I had had with my father on his yacht, going to sea in a big clipper ship one of the most delightful of lives.

But there was some bitter in it. Walters and I never grew to be warm friends, though I did my best. He did not get on with the officers either, but used to seize every opportunity to get away and talk to some of the sailors, particularly with the Frenchman Jarette, who was in trouble with the captain just after our starting, but who, thanks to the severe treatment he had received, now proved to be one of the smartest of the crew.

He spoke English as well as I did, but if ever I drew near when Walters had gone to lean over the bulwarks and talk to him, I could hear that it was in French—bad French, spoken very slowly on Walters' part, and he used to have to make Jarette say what he had to say two or three times over before he could quite make it out.

"No business of mine," I thought. "I might do the same and practise up my French," which needed it badly enough, for I had pretty well forgotten all I had learned.

Things were not quite happy either on deck. I did not thoroughly understand why, and attributed it to Mr Denning's ill-temper, consequent upon his being unwell, for he was haughty and distant with Mr Frewen whenever he tried to be friendly, and I used to set it down to his having had so much to do with doctors that he quite hated them; but there seemed to be no reason why he should snub Mr Preddle so whenever the big stout fellow approached him and his sister and tried to enter into conversation.

Mr Preddle used to complain to me about it when I went with him to see to the aerating and giving fresh water to the fish, which needed a great deal of attention, and in spite of all our care would insist in turning wrong side up, to paddle about slowly and helplessly for a while, and then make a vigorous effort and swim naturally.

But the next minute they were back down and white up, and so they would go on till they were too weak to move, and a few minutes after they would die.

"Yes, it's sad business, Alison Dale," Mr Preddle would say with a sigh, as he lifted a little trout out of one tray, or a tiny salmon from another. "I'm afraid that I shall not have many left by the time I arrive over in New Zealand."

"Perhaps they will get on better when we are in warmer parts."

"I'm afraid they'll die faster then," he said, taking something out of a locked-up box under one of the water-troughs, and to my surprise I saw that it was an ordinary pair of kitchen bellows.

"What! are you going to light a fire to warm them, sir?" I said.

He smiled.

"No, no; don't you know that fish require plenty of air?"

"Yes, I've heard something of the kind, and that if a pond is frozen over, and the ice is not broken, the fish die."

"Exactly, for want of air. Look at those fish in that trough."

"Yes, they're hungry," I said, for in one corner a number of them were putting their mouths nearly out of the water, and opening and shutting them.

"No, they want air; there is not enough in the water. Now you'll see."

He thrust the nozzle of the bellows beneath the surface, and began puffing away till the water boiled and bubbled and was covered with foam, while after the first few puffs the fish swam about more vigorously and left the surface.

"There, you see," he said, "there is plenty of air now," and he served the other troughs the same. "Now, look here, Alison Dale," he said, as he replaced the bellows, and locked the box, "I'll leave the key behind this trough, and if you would not mind, I should be greatly obliged if you would give the fish a little air now and then just to help me, for I should dearly like to keep the poor things alive."

"Oh yes," I said, "I'll do it whenever I have a chance, but I don't quite understand; I thought fish breathed water."

"With air in it. If there is no air to mingle with the water, the fish soon die."

"But air over the water, you mean," I said.

"No; in the water; it will hold an enormous deal of air or gas. Look at soda-water, for instance, how full of gas that is, and how the tiny beads come bubbling out as soon as the pressure is removed. Now, if I only had a few fish in these troughs, there would be plenty of air for them naturally in the water, but with so many in my charge," he sighed, "it must be supplied artificially."

"All right, then, we'll supply it artificially; but it looks very comic to be blowing the water with bellows instead of the fire, and if Walters catches me at it, he'll tell everybody that I've gone mad."

"Then you will help me?" he said, appealingly.

"Oh yes, I'll help you," I replied, and he looked so big and boyish that I felt as if I ought to slap him over the back and call him "old chap."

"Thank you, thank you," he said in his mild way; "and—er—er—"

Then he stopped, with his mouth opening and shutting; and as I stared at him, I could not help thinking how like he was to one of his fish.

"Yes," I said; "you were going to say something."

"Eh? Was I?" he said, looking quite red in the face, and uneasy. "Oh, it was nothing—nothing—I—er—I hardly know what I was about to say. Yes, I do," he cried, desperately; "I remember now. You were close to us this morning when Mr Denning spoke to me. Did you hear what he said?"

"No, I was too far off," I replied; "but he seemed to be speaking snappishly."

"Yes, he does sometimes; I'm afraid that he does not like me."

"You worry him," I thought to myself, "by hanging about him so, and talking to Miss Denning when he wants her to read to him."

"Yes?" said Mr Preddle; "what were you thinking?"

"Oh, about what you said. He is irritable, you know, from bad health."

"Yes," he said, quite in a whisper, "irritable from bad health, poor fellow."

He stood with the little landing-net in his hand, gazing down into the trough nearest to us as if watching the little trout; but his thoughts were, I dare say, of something else, and I did not like to disturb him, but stood giving a side look now and then at him, but for the most part watching his charge, and thinking how thoroughly man had imitated the shape of a fish in making a ship, even to the tail to steer it with. Then all at once I looked up, for there were voices outside, and I knew it was Jarette the Frenchman saying something very earnestly to Walters.

I did not hear what either of them said, for they spoke in a very low tone, and in French. But I caught just the last words which were uttered by Jarette, and they were these—

"Mais prenez-garde, mon ami. Prenez-garde."

Then they had passed on, and all was silent again, with Mr Preddle still watching the fish.

"'But take care, my friend, take care.' That's what he said," I thought to myself; "I know French enough for that. Take care of what? And why does he call Walters 'my friend'? He's only a common sailor, and a midshipman even in a merchantman oughtn't to be friends in that way with the men."

Then I laughed silently to myself as I thought of how fond I was of leaning over the bulwarks and talking to old Bob Hampton when he had the watch, and listening to his sea-tales about storms and pirates.

"How ready one is to find fault with people one doesn't like," I said to myself.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr Preddle.

"I didn't speak, sir."

"No; but I had gone into a brown study. There, the fish will do now."

We both went on deck, and somehow when I was alone I too went into a brown study, and began wondering at Mr Preddle's curious ways, and thinking what a pity it was that a gentleman like Mr Denning, who was on a voyage for the sake of his health, should take such a dislike to Mr Frewen and Mr Preddle too. It hardly seemed to be like irritability, for after all he was as merry and friendly with the officers as he was with me. I never went near him without his beckoning to me to come to his side, and both he and his sister were quite affectionate to me, making my first long voyage wonderfully pleasant, and the captain encouraged it.

"He must have heard something about them," I thought, and then I began to think about Walters and the French sailor and the other sailors, of those who seemed to form one party all to themselves, and of the others who kept more along with Bob Hampton and his two friends, who had sailed together for so many years.

"There, what does it matter?" I said to myself, as I roused myself from my musings. "Walters doesn't like Bob Hampton because Bob laughed at him, and that's why he hangs toward Jarette; pities him, perhaps, because they both got into trouble with the officers, and birds of a feather flock together."

These were all dreamy thoughts, like clouds in my mind. I could not understand them. I grew wiser later on when the troubles came.

Chapter Eight.

I had so many things to take up my attention that I forgot all about hearing Jarette and Walters talking together. Perhaps it came to mind once or twice afterwards, but it made no impression then, however much I may have thought about it afterwards. For then I was trying to learn my duties, studying up a little navigation, helping Mr Preddle with his fish that were to stock the New Zealand rivers with trout, and attending to Mr Denning. I suppose it was attending upon him, but to me it was all one jolly time of amusement, during which the poor fellow seemed to forget all about his bad health, and became as interested as a boy with our various bits of sport.

Now in a fast steamer there is not much done, for I suppose that quick rush of the vessel, as it ploughs its way through the sea, startles the fish away to right and left, and then when they might be swimming quietly after the first rush, the tremendous beating up of the water by the whirling screw sends them off again, and makes the water so foamy that they cannot see a bait.

But with a sailing vessel it is different. When there is not much wind, of course she glides along gently, leaving a wake of foam, but the water is not so disturbed; and soon after the weather had settled down, and was day by day growing warmer, so that the awning was rigged up over the poop, and our fishing began.

"Oh yes," Captain Berriman said, "fish away, sir, and the more fresh fish you catch for us, the better the passengers and crew will like it."

I was standing by one morning when this was said, and Miss Denning glanced at me and smiled as if she knew what was coming.

"You will let young Dale help me?" said Mr Denning. "Want him?"

"Oh yes."

"Take him, then. He isn't much use," said the captain, laughingly. "I often wonder why the owners have boys on board. Better have young Walters, he's more of a sailor than this fellow."

"Oh no," said Mr Denning, "I should like Dale."

"All right," said the captain. "Don't tumble overboard, Dale."

"I'll try not, sir," I said, "but I can swim."

"So much the better, my lad, but it takes a long time to lower a boat down, and a man overboard gets left a long way behind when a ship is in full sail."

He walked away, and looking as eager as I did, Mr Denning began about a fishing-line, while his sister looked bright and happy to see her brother so much interested in the plans he had in view.

"I suppose there are plenty of fishing-lines on board," he said. "Let's get right back beyond the man at the wheel, and fish from there."

"I'll go and see about the lines," I said; and I went forward to where the boatswain was looking after some men who were bending on a new sail.

"Lines? Fishin'-lines, my lad?—no, I don't know of any."

Directly after I came upon Walters. "I say, do you know anything about any fishing-lines?" I said.

"Of course I do," he replied in a contemptuous tone; "who doesn't?"

"But where do they keep them—with the stores?"

"Who's going fishing?" said Walters. "Mr Denning."

"Oh! I'll come and help him; I like fishing," he said.

I looked at him curiously, as I thought of what had been said, and then asked him again.

"I don't know," he cried, "I don't carry fishing-lines in my pockets. Ask old fat Preddle, he's a regular fisherman. But you won't catch any."

I did not think Mr Preddle was likely to have lines, so I did not ask him, but thought I would go and ask every man I met, when I caught sight of Bob Hampton, and went to him.

"Fishin'-lines, my lad? No, I don't think there's any aboard."

"Yes, there are," growled Barney; "I see Frenchy Jarette rigging some up t'other day, as if he meant to have a try."

I felt as if I did not like to ask a favour of the Frenchman, for somehow I did not like him; but feeling that Mr Denning would be disappointed if none were found, I asked where the man was, and found that he was down in the fore-castle asleep, for he had been in one of the night watches.

It was so dark there, that for a few moments I could not make out which of the sleeping men lying there was the one I sought. They were all breathing heavily, and at first going down out of the bright sunshine the faces all looked alike; but after getting a little more accustomed to the gloom, I saw a hand just where the faint rays came down through a little sky-light, and on one of the fingers there was a silver ring. Thinking that the wearer might possibly be the Frenchman, I went farther and looked a little more closely, and saw that I was right, for though I could not have been sure that the ring on the hand proved this to be the man I sought, one that I could just make out in the ear satisfied me, and stooping lower still I laid my hand upon his shoulder.

The touch had no effect, and I took hold and shook him.

"Jarette—Jarette!" I said.

He sprang partly up with a faint cry, and to my horror, gripped me by the throat.

"Curse you, I'll— Ah, it's you, cher ami," he said, beginning fiercely, and changing his tone to a whisper. "No, no, not yet," he continued, "it isn't ripe. Wait, cher ami, wait a little."

"Jarette," I said wonderingly, for the man puzzled me—I had no key to his meaning then—"wake up. I'm sorry I roused you, but we want a fishing-line, and Bob Hampton says you have some."

"What—to fish! No, you wish to speak. Hist! I—ah, I see now," he cried quickly. "It is dark below. I see it is you, Mr Dale. Fishing-lines? Yes, I get you some."

"Why, you thought I was Mr Walters," I said, laughing.

"I?—my faith, no, sir. I was asleep and dreaming. Yes," he continued, scrambling out and going to a canvas bag, out of which he drew a large square wooden winder.

"There; it is a very long line and nearly new. I have not used it once, sir. Mister the captain objects to the men having these delassements, these untirings, when you are weary."

"Oh, thank you, Jarette," I cried eagerly.

"And here are these hooks, if the one at the end breaks."

"Yes."

"And the good fortune to you. Good luck you say it."

I went back on deck with my prize, and called at the galley, thinking no more of the Frenchman's mistake.

There the cook readily furnished me with a sharp knife and some tough rind pieces of pork and bacon liberally furnished on one side with fat.

"Cut 'em in long baits, sir," he said, "and the fish are sure to come at them."

"But they will taste too salt," I said.

He laughed.

"How can a fish know whether the bait is salt when it takes it in salt water?"

I had not thought of that, and I returned aft, passing Mr Frewen and Mr Preddle, both of whom looked disturbed, and then I reached the spot where I had left Mr Denning and his sister. He was looking angry, and Miss Denning had tears in her eyes as she quickly turned away.

"I've got a line and baits," I said, speaking as if I had not noticed that anything was wrong, though I felt sure that the

doctor and Mr Preddle had been there in my absence.

"You can take them back," said Mr Denning, shortly, "I shall not fish to-day."

Miss Denning turned round quickly.

"John dear!" she whispered, and she gave him a piteous look.

He frowned and turned to me, when seeing, I suppose, my disappointment, he smoothed his face and then smiled.

"Oh, very well," he said, "I was going to my cabin, but we will have a try."

I saw Miss Denning lay her hand upon his arm, but took no notice, for I knelt down on the deck directly, cut a bait ready—a long strip of the bacon rind—stuck the point of the large sharp hook through one end as if I were going to fish for mackerel at home, and then after unwinding some of the line, to which a heavy leaden sinker was attached, I was about to throw the bait over the stern.

"But that piece of lead will be too heavy," cried Mr Denning, now full of interest in the fishing. "It will make the line hang straight down, and I keep seeing the fish play near the top."

I shook my head.

"It will not sink six feet," I said, "because we shall drag it along so fast. If we were going faster I should require a heavier lead."

"Ah, well, I suppose you know best," he said, smiling. "Go on."

He gave an uneasy glance back along the deck to see if any one else were near but the man at the wheel, who had his back to us, and I let about fifty yards of the stout line run out before I checked it and placed it in Mr Denning's hands as he stood leaning against the bulwarks.

"Shall I give a twist round one of the belaying-pins?" I said.

"What for?" he cried sharply. "Do you think I am too weak to hold it?"

"Oh no," I said quickly, "but we may hook a big fish, and the line would cut your hand."

He smiled as if he doubted me, and to guard against his letting go, I unwound the whole of the remaining line and laid it out in rings before fastening the winder tightly beneath the bulwark, so that even if the line were all run out the fish would be checked and caught.

Just then Walters came sauntering up, and I could not help thinking that from his size and our uniform being the same, how easily we might be taken one for the other in the gloom of the forecastle.

Mr Denning turned and looked at him for a moment, and then back to watch his line without a word, while Miss Denning bowed slightly.

"They don't like Walters," I said to myself.

"Had any bites?" he said with a sniggering laugh.

"No," replied Mr Denning, coldly; "I have only just begun."

There was silence for a few minutes, Walters' coming having seemed to damp our proceedings.

"Here, I know what's the matter," he said suddenly, taking a couple of steps close up to Mr Denning. "Your bait isn't right."

"Mind!" I cried. "You're treading on the line."

"Well, it won't hurt it," said Walters, roughly, and he kicked some of the rings up with one of his feet. Then to Mr Denning—"It isn't as if I'd got on nailed boots. Here, let me pull in your bait and pat a proper one on. I've caught lots of fish. He doesn't know anything about it."

"Thank you," said Mr Denning, coldly, "when I require your help, I will ask for it. Ah!"

He uttered a sharp ejaculation, as there came a sudden fierce tug at the line which dragged his hands right out to the full length of his arms and brought his chest heavily against his side.

"Hooray! you've got him," cried Walters, "and a big one too. Hold fast!"

It was as if Mr Denning was playing at the old forfeit game of the Rules of Contrary, for he let go. The line rushed out, and the next moment the rings in which Walters had stepped tightened round his legs just as he was changing his position, and with so heavy a drag that the lad lost his balance and came down heavily upon the deck, which his head struck with a sharp rap.

"That was your doing!" he shouted, as I rushed at him where he was struggling to free himself, for the line kept on tightening round him from the furious jerks given by the fish which had seized the bait.

But I was not thinking of freeing him, only of getting hold of the line, and as he struck at me quickly, I thrust him back so sharply that his head struck the deck again.

By that time I had hold of the line, and, thinking no more of Walters, I tried to hold the prize, but was fain to call excitedly upon Mr Denning to help me.

He seized the line too, and for the next five minutes the fish was tearing about here and there in the water far below where we stood, and jerking our arms and shoulders till they ached. Now it would go off at right angles, now directly in the opposite direction.

Then slacking the line for a few moments it shot right away aft, jerking the line so heavily that it was dragged through our hands. The next moment we saw what looked like a huge bar of blue and silver shoot right out of the water and come down with a heavy splash.

"Gone!" I said with a groan, for there were no more fierce tugs, and as I hauled, the line came in yard by yard for me to cast down on the deck.

"The line's broken," said Mr Denning in a husky voice, as he drew out his handkerchief to wipe his face.

"Yes; it was a monster," I said dolefully. "Oh, what a pity!"

"Missed one?" said the captain.

"Yes, sir; a great fellow, five feet long at least."

"One of the big albigores, I dare say," he said. "They are very strong in the water. But he has not broken your line, has he?"

"I'm afraid so," I replied, as I hauled away till the lead rattled against the ship's side. Then another haul or two brought the hook over the rail, for the line was not broken, but the stout wire hook had straightened with the weight of the fish, and had been drawn back out of the creature's jaws.

By this time Walters had pretty well cleared himself from the line tangled about his leg, and he stood looking on and scowling at me in turn as I removed the straightened hook, and put on another from the spare ones with which Jarette had furnished me. This I baited as before and threw over, the line running out rapidly till about the same length was out; and Mr Denning took hold again, the red spots in his cheeks showing how thoroughly he was interested in the sport.

"Better luck to you this time," said the captain, and he nodded and walked away; but Walters stayed, saying nothing, but leaning against the rail, and looking on in a sulky, ill-used way at me and my every action as I attended on Mr Denning.

"We shall never get to be friends," I thought. "He always looks as if he was so jealous that he would like to throw me overboard."

"Shall I fasten the line this time, sir?"

"No, no; not on any account," said Mr Denning. "It would take away half the excitement, and I get so little in my life. Eh, Lena?"

Miss Denning smiled at him half-pityingly, and his face looked very gentle now as he smiled back at her. Then all his attention was directed to the line where it hit the water.

"You will be ready to help if I hook a big one," he said to me; "I'm not so strong as I used to be."

"I'll catch hold directly you tell me," I replied; "but perhaps it will be a small one this time."

I turned to arrange the spare line once more so that it would run out easily, and Miss Denning went closer to her brother, while I became aware now of the fact that Walters was watching me in a sour, sneering way.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"Oh, go on," he whispered; "make much of it. You did that on purpose just now."

"What, when you went down?" I said eagerly. "I didn't, really."

"All right; I'm not blind, and I'm not a fool. Of course we're the favourite, and everything is to give way to us; but never mind, my lad, every dog has his day."

I looked at him with a feeling of wonder that any one could be so thoroughly disagreeable, so determined to look at everything from a wrong point of view, and then I laughed, for it seemed to be utterly absurd that he should misconstrue even that look, for he exclaimed viciously—

"That's right, grin away, my lad; but the day may come when you'll laugh the wrong side of your mouth."

"Why, what a chap you are, Nic!" I whispered. "I never saw such a fellow. Come, let's be friends; I'm sure I want to."

"And I don't, with a miserable sneak who is always trying to undermine me with people."

"Under-grandmother you," I said in a low voice, so that Miss Denning should not hear. "Don't talk such stuff."

"Go on. Insult me as much as you like," he whispered back: "I shan't say anything. You're setting everybody against me, so that instead of being friends, as a young officer should with his equals, I'm obliged to go and talk to the men."

I could not help laughing again at his mock-tragic and absurd way of taking things, and as I honestly felt that if matters were unpleasant it was all his own fault, he leaned toward me now with his eyes half shut and his teeth pressed together as he whispered close to my ear—

"All right. You'll be sorry for it some day, and then—"

"Here's another, Dale! Quick!" cried Mr Denning.

"Yes, yes, quick, quick," cried his sister, and I offended poor Walters again quite unintentionally by swinging one arm across his chest in my hurry and excitement to get to Mr Denning's help; and as I reached over the rail to get hold of the line, I felt sure that my messmate would think that I struck him. For the moment I felt vexed and sorry, then I could not help smiling to think how comic it was that I should keep on upsetting him. Then I forgot all about it in the excitement of righting the fish.

"It's a big one, Mr Denning," I said, as we both held on to the line—holding on now with it across the rail. "Let's give him a chance to run, and then haul in. Then he can run over again to tire himself."

Mr Denning was too much excited to speak, but he nodded his head, and we let the line run, after I had placed one foot upon it to hold it down on the deck and check its race.

Away went the fish, with ring after ring working off beneath my foot till only about three yards were left.

"Stop it now," cried Mr Denning, and I pressed my foot down hard, feeling a curious quivering sensation run up my leg before I quite stopped the running.

And now the fish began to rush in another direction, giving us an opportunity to haul in some of the line; but we soon had to let it go again; and every time I glanced at Walters, all hot, excited, and eager as I was, I could see that he was looking on with a half-mocking scowl.

But the next minute he gave quite a start and seized the line, for the captain, Mr Brymer, and Mr Frewen had all come up on seeing that a fish had been hooked, and the former said sharply—

"Come, Walters, don't stand there with your hands in your pockets and let Dale do all the work."

And again I upset my messmate as if it were a fatality, for I cried out—

"All right, sir, we can manage. Don't touch the line, Walters."

"No; don't touch the line!" cried Mr Denning, and the lad shrank back as if the thin hemp were red-hot.

Then amidst plenty of excitement and some of the crew coming aft, I helped Mr Denning haul and haul till the fish was gradually drawn so close in that we could see its failing efforts to regain its freedom. Apparently it was nearly five feet long, and its sides flashed in the clear water where it was not foaming with the lashing of the captive's vigorous widely-forked tail.

"Bonito," cried the captain.

"No, no, albacore," said Mr Brymer.

"Suppose we wait till it's fully caught," said Mr Frewen, smiling at Miss Denning, when I saw her brother give him an angry look.

But the next moment I was thinking only of the fish, which was now so exhausted that it had ceased struggling, and allowed itself to be dragged along in the wake of the ship, merely giving a flap with its tail from time to time which turned it from side to side.

"Now," said Mr Denning to me, "let us both haul it on board."

But I protested, saying that the weight of the fish would certainly break it away, and that we should lose it.

To save us from such a catastrophe, I unfastened the other end of the line, made a running noose round the tight line beneath Mr Denning's hands, and let it run down till the noose struck the fish on the nose, and made it give a furious plunge to escape.

But the hook held firm in spite of my dread, and after a little twitching and shaking, with the lookers-on making remarks which only fidgeted me instead of helping, I managed to make the noose glide over the slippery body.

"Now!" cried Mr Frewen, who was as interested as the rest; but before the word was well uttered, I had given the line a sharp snatch just as the running noose was in the narrow part before where the tail fin curved out above and below like a new moon.

This meant a double hold, for the noose tightened, and now in spite of a fresh set of furious struggles the fish was steadily hauled out of the water, and we nearly had it up to the poop-rail, when the hook was torn out of its holding, and the fish hung down quivering and flapping from the noose about its tail.

The weight seemed to be tremendous, but I gave two or three sharp tugs, had the fish over the rail, and over on to the deck, whose planks it began to belabour heavily, while we gazed excitedly at the beautiful creature glistening in its splendid coat of many colours, which flashed gold, silver, orange, scarlet, and metallic blue and green at every quivering blow.

"What is it?" said Mr Denning eagerly, and I remember thinking how animated and well he looked that day.

"Well," said the captain, "many years as I've sailed these seas, I hardly know what to say. It's something like a dolphin, but it's more like a bonito, and it isn't unlike an albicore. What should you say, Brymer?"

"Quite fresh to me," said the mate. "Certainly one of the mackerel family, by its head and the great crescent moon tail."

"Yes, and the short fins on front, top, and bottom. Never mind, it looks a good one for the table, and I congratulate you, Mr Denning, upon your luck. Going to try again?"

"No," said the invalid, peevishly, as he glanced quickly from his sister to the doctor and back. "Thank you for helping me, Alison Dale. Lena, your arm; I'll go below."

No one spoke till he had disappeared, and then the captain shook his head.

"Poor chap," he said, with a sigh. "Here, Dale, Walters, carry the fish to the cook; Hampton—Dumlow, swabs and a bucket."

"Keep tight hold," I cried to my companion, who was holding the head of the fish by a loop of yarn passed through its gills, while I carried it by getting a good grip of the thin tail.

"Do you want to carry it yourself?"

"Not at all. Too heavy."

Just then the fish began to quiver as if it were all steel spring, and waggled its tail so sharply that it flung off my grasp, and once more I offended Walters, for the fish fell across his feet.

"There!" he cried, "you can't deny that. You did it on purpose. A filthy, slimy thing!"

As he stood there with both his hands clenched I thought he was going to strike me; but even if he had it would have made no difference, I should have been obliged to laugh, and laugh I did, till as I was wiping my eyes I found that Jarette the French sailor was close up and looking at me keenly.

"Here, Barney Blane," I said, "take hold."

The man grinned and came and helped me bear it away to the cook, after which I put away the tackle, hanging it to dry before giving it back to its owner.

Chapter Nine.

All at once, just as our life at sea was as calm and peaceful as could be, Captain Berriman grew quite queer in his manner. He was pleasant enough to the passengers, and I never had an unkind word from him, but he was most tyrannical to a number of the men, ordering them about, making them set fresh sail, take it down, and altering his orders half-a-dozen times over, till the men used to go about muttering, and more than once I heard words spoken about him that were startling, to say the least.

One evening when it was very dark, the moon not having risen, I was looking over the side and down into the calm, black water which was as full of tiny specks of light as the sky above me, and every now and then these little glittering points beneath the surface would be driven here and there as if a fish had swum sharply by. It was all so beautiful, to watch point after point gliding about lower and lower till all was jet black, that I had forgotten everything, heard nothing, till all at once just behind me I heard Mr Brymer say—

"Of course it is very unpleasant for me. I'm afraid the men will not stand much more of it. Do you think he is going mad?"

There was a pause for a few moments, and then Mr Frewen said—

"No; I feel sure that it is only a temporary trouble due to the heat and over-anxiety about the ship."

"But he is getting worse; and twice over to-day I felt as if I ought to shut him up in his cabin and take charge altogether."

"No, I should not do that," said Mr Frewen, "so long as nothing serious goes wrong. If he really gets too bad, I suppose I must help you by justifying your proceedings in superseding him."

"For the owners' sake, of course."

"Of course. It is a very serious position for us both. But there, he may be better to-morrow. If not, we must hope for the improvement when we get further south."

"Then you would not take command?"

"Certainly not, under the present circumstances."

"Halloa!" cried Mr Brymer—"a spy! Who's that—Walters?"

"No, sir; it is I."

"And what are you doing there, listening?"

"I was watching the phosphorescence of the sea, sir, and you came and stood close to me and began talking."

"And you heard?" said Mr Frewen.

"Every word, sir."

"And do you know that we were talking about Mr Denning?" said the mate.

"No; you were talking about the captain."

They were silent for a few moments, and then Mr Frewen spoke.

"Look here, Dale," he said, "this is a delicate matter. You have seen that Captain Berriman is ill?"

"I thought he was very strange, and a bit cross sometimes."

"Far worse than that. Look here, Dale, if you go chattering about what you have heard," said Mr Brymer, "you may make a great deal of mischief."

"I am not likely to talk about it to anybody unless it be to Mr Denning," I said, feeling a little hurt.

"Then pray don't mention it to him. It would only make him and his sister uneasy," cried Mr Frewen, quickly.

"I'm afraid they've seen enough for themselves," said Mr Brymer. "Look here, youngster, I shall speak plainly to you, because you are a sensible lad. If you spoke about what we have said, and it reached Captain Berriman's ear now he is in that excitable state, he would immediately think I was conspiring against him, go frantic, and there might be terrible mischief. So don't say a word, even to your messmate, or he'll go chattering to that French scoundrel and the rest of the men. By the way, Dale, let me give you a word of advice. I don't like the way in which young Walters is going on. It is not becoming for a midshipman or apprentice to make friends too readily with the sailors. Don't you follow his example."

"I don't sir," I said indignantly.

"Softly, my lad; I've seen you talking a good deal with that old fellow Hampton, and the two men with him."

"Oh yes; I have talked to them a good deal," I said: "but it was only when we were on the watch, and I wanted them to tell me something about the sea."

"Ah, well, be careful, my lad. Here, shake hands. I'm not cross with you, for you have behaved uncommonly well since you've been on board. There, that will do."

"Good-night, Dale," said Mr Frewen, kindly; "a still tongue maketh a wise head, my lad."

They walked on, and disappeared in the darkness directly, while I stood with my back to the bulwarks and my hands in my pockets, thinking about what they had said, and recalling the little things I had thought nothing of at the time, but which came back now looking to be big things. Yes, I remembered the captain had certainly been rather strange in his manner sometimes. Why, of course, Mr Denning had said to his sister that the captain need not be so disagreeable to the men.

I was just wondering what would happen, and then thinking that it would not make much difference if Mr Brymer were captain, and that it would be better perhaps for Captain Berriman to lie by and be attended by Mr Frewen, when I heard a sound over my head—something like a low hiss.

"Some kind of night-bird," I thought. But the next moment I felt quite startled, for the sound was repeated, and I knew now that it was some one whispering. Then, as I stood quite still in the darkness, with the glow coming from the cabin-windows and from the binnacle-light, there was a faint rushing up above, and a little off to my left, and directly after I knew what it was,—somebody's feet on the ratlines coming down from the main-top.

There was no sail being made or reduced, and it seemed strange for any one to be up there, and it had just struck me that perhaps it was Captain Berriman, who had seen Mr Brymer and Mr Frewen talking together and had gone up to listen, when, so close to me that I wondered I was not seen, somebody stepped down on to the top of the bulwarks, and then swung himself softly on to the deck; then crouching down close under the side, he crept forward swiftly and was gone.

"That couldn't have been the captain," I thought; "the step was too light. It was some one quite active."

I was thinking of going forward to try and make out, when there was another rustling noise above, which recalled the whispering that had passed out of my mind for the moment; then the rustling continued, and some one else came down, stepped lightly on the deck, and stood perfectly still as if looking about to see if any one was near.

It was so dark that I could not make out who it was till he walked aft not very far from where I stood, and a few moments later I saw who it was, for his figure came between my eyes and the glow from the cabin-windows.

"Why, it was Walters," I said to myself, and then I began to wonder more and more what it all meant. I ran it over in my mind, but I could not think of any one at all likely to be Walters' companion at night in the main-top; in fact, I could not think of any one at all likely to climb up so high, or even half-way up the shrouds.

"It couldn't have been a cabin passenger," I thought, "for he went forward; nor yet one of the steerage people."

Then I knew, and wondered that I had not thought of him at first.

"Why, it was Jarette," I said to myself. "He's as light and active as a cat."

I waited a bit; and then went slowly right forward and stood for a time with the men at the look-out, to gaze right away into the soft, hot, black darkness, thinking how easily we might run into another vessel, or another vessel run into us. Then setting my face aft, I went back along the starboard side, and made my way, blinking like an owl after being so long in the darkness, into the saloon-cabin, where the passengers were sitting about, some reading, others working, and where on one side I found Mr Denning playing chess with his sister.

Everything looked calm, and as if the people were happy enough, and never thinking it likely there could be any trouble about Captain Berriman or anything else.

But the saloon-cabin was so warm down there in the south that I soon went back on deck to hang over the bulwarks for a time, and then go right aft to look down at the sparkling water, all ablaze now as it seemed to rush from both sides of the rudder, where in the daytime all would be white foam.

I had no duty to perform that night to keep me on deck; but still I lingered, thinking that perhaps the cabin would be terribly hot, as it had been on the previous night, only I dropped off to sleep so soon that the heat did not trouble me.

"And I shall have it all to myself to-night," I thought, "for Walters will have to take his turn in the watch."

At last, half envying him the task of passing a good deal of the night on deck, I took a look round. The saloon-lights were out, and there was no one there; the sailing-lights were up in their places, and the faint glow rose from about the binnacle, just faintly showing the steersman's face. Away forward I could hear the low murmur of conversation where the watch were on duty, and now, for the first time, I yawned, and some one spoke from close behind me and made me start.

"Well," he said, "if you are so drowsy as that, why don't you go to your bunk?"

"Just going, sir," I said, for it was the first mate, Mr Brymer; and now I hurried down, threw off my clothes, and in a very few minutes I was sound asleep.

I suppose it was the heat, for I don't believe that it had anything to do with the coming danger, but at any rate I slept badly that night—an uneasy, troubled kind of sleep, such as I should have expected to have if some one was to come and call me about two bells.

It must have been about that time that I was lying more asleep than awake, but sufficiently conscious to spring up in my berth and say quite aloud—

"Yes; what is it?"

There was no reply, though I could have declared that some one called me. But though there was no reply, I could hear voices. Some one was giving orders in a sharp, angry voice; and directly after, I could hear a scuffling sound, followed by a savage curse uttered in a low voice, and then there was the sound of a fall.

Something was evidently wrong, and for a few moments I was sure that the captain had found out about the conversation which had taken place, and had now taken matters into his hands in no mild fashion. Mr Brymer was the last man I saw on deck, and without doubt that must be he.

I lay there, with the perspiration oozing out of every pore, and listened for the next sounds; but all was still for a few moments. Then there were evidently people running about on deck, and a chill of horror ran through me as I now noticed that something was wrong with the ship. For instead of rising and falling steadily as she glided onward, she was right down in the trough of the sea, and swaying and rolling in a way that was startling. Fully convinced now that we had gone on a rock or a sandbank—being ready to imagine anything in my excitement—I rolled out of my berth and began to hurry on some clothes.

I never dressed more quickly in my life, for as I hastily slipped on my things, there was the sharp report of a gun or pistol, and a loud crash as of a door being burst in. Then the hush and quiet was at an end; there was a piercing shriek, another shot, followed by the sounds of struggling, loud and angry voices, then cries for help; and I made for the deck as quickly as I could, to find all in darkness. But men were running here and there, a sharp voice was giving orders, and then I saw the flash of a pistol or gun. The report came, there was a low groan, and then all at once some one rose as it were out of the darkness and made a blow at me, for I heard the whish of a weapon.

But the blow was made in the dark, and had no effect; but whoever struck now made a dash at me, and I ducked down, leaped sidewise, and with my heart in my mouth ran right forward, with whoever it was in pursuit.

I felt that I knew who it was now as I ran. The captain really had gone mad, and as I ran and heard the steps behind me, fear lent me great speed. Other people had been shot or cut down, and something terrible was going on. So I ran

for my life to take refuge with the crew in the fore-castle; but as I reached it, there was struggling and fighting going on there, and I crossed the deck to run back aft on the other side, meaning to reach Mr Brymer's cabin or Mr Frewen's if I could.

For a moment I fancied that I had evaded my pursuer, but there was another dash made for me again out of the darkness, and I ran on.

"Look out there, you, sir," cried a voice from behind me; "here comes one."

This told me that there were enemies in front, and I was ready to dart anywhere to avoid whoever tried to stop me.

That there was danger I soon found, for struggling, and oaths, and curses saluted my ears again as I reached the ladder and ran up on to the poop-deck, just as a shout from near the wheel drove me back.

"Got him?" shouted some one.

"No; where is he?"

I was crouching now under the starboard bulwark, and feeling certain that in another minute I should be found, I passed my hand upward, searched about, and found that which I sought, the mizzen-shrouds. The next minute I had caught well hold with both hands, swung up my feet, and went on inboard hand over hand till I was twenty feet above the deck, clinging there in the darkness, and listening to the efforts made—evidently by three or four men—beneath to find out where I could be gone.

Chapter Ten.

As I clung there in the mizzen-shroud, afraid to stir, hardly daring to breathe lest I should be heard, and puzzled beyond measure as to what it could all mean, but feeling all the same certain that something terrible had happened, and that it was no shipwreck, there was a tremendous kicking and banging at one of the cabin-doors, and up through the sky-light came in smothered tones—

"Here, open this, or I'll kick it off the hinges."

"Lie down!" yelled a sharp angry voice from somewhere beneath me, and there was a flash of a pistol, the loud report, and a few moments after the smell of the powder rose to my nostrils.

"Jarette," I said to myself, as I recognised the half-French sailor's voice, and then I felt sure that it was Mr Frewen who had shouted from one of the cabins where he must be locked in.

"Then it must be a mutiny," I thought, and such a cold paralysing chill ran through me that I felt as if I should drop down on deck. For the recollection of all I had read of such affairs taking place in bygone times flashed through my brain—of officers murdered in cold blood, ships carried off by the crew to unknown islands, and—yes—I was an officer, young as I might be, and if the mutineers caught me they would murder me, as perhaps they had already murdered Captain Berriman and Mr Brymer.

I felt giddy then, and the wonder has always been to me that I did not let go and fall. But my fingers were well hooked on to the ropes, and there I hung listening, as after pretty well scouring the deck the men below me stopped, and the voice that I had set down as Jarette's said—

"Well, have you got him?"

"No."

"Did you feel under the seats?"

"Yes; there's no one on this deck."

"Did he go overboard?"

"No; he must have dodged us and dropped back from the rail."

"Who was it? The doctor?"

"No; that whipper-snapper of a boy."

"Oh, him. Well, then he'd better come out of his hole, wherever he is," said Jarette loudly, speaking in very good English, though with a peculiar accent which sounded to me almost ferocious, as I hung there feeling as if I could not hold on much longer.

"Do you hear, boy? Come here, or I'll send a bullet to fetch you."

That man was not twenty feet below me, and as I strained my eyes to try and see whether he was watching me and taking aim, a curious creeping sensation ran over my body as if tiny fingers were touching me.

"Do you hear?" came in a fierce snarl,— "am I to fire?"

The voice sounded so close now that the words seemed to be shouted in my ear, and for the minute, feeling certain

that he knew where I was, I drew myself up ready to drop down. But still I hesitated, though I felt perfectly certain he was looking up and pointing his pistol at me.

There was an interval of perfect silence then, save that a murmur came from below, and this encouraged me, for I felt that I must be invisible in the darkness, or else Jarette would have had me down.

Then my heart sank, for the man shouted suddenly—

“There, boy, I can see you; come out or I’ll fire.”

“Come out! Then he cannot see me,” I thought, and I clung there spasmodically, hoping still that I was unobserved.

“He’s not here,” said Jarette, sharply; “now then, one of you, I want a man at the wheel, the ship’s yawing about anyhow. Who have you there—Morris?”

“Down on guard at the cabin-door,” said a voice.

“Brook?”

“‘Long with him.”

“Jackson?”

“Sitting on the forksle-hatch.”

“Sacré! Where’s Bob Hampton?”

“Hee-ar!” came from the direction of the way down to the lower deck.

“Come up here and take the wheel.”

“Ay, ay,” growled the familiar voice, and I felt heart-sick to hear it, for Bob Hampton would have been the first man I should have picked out as one to be trusted, while the sound of his voice made it appear that every one would be against us.

But though these thoughts flashed through my mind, I was listening all the time intently to what went on below, striving as I was to grasp the real state of affairs.

“Here you are then, Bob Hampton. Behold you, my friend, though it’s so dark I can’t see you,” said Jarette, and I heard a low chuckling noise which I recognised as Bob Hampton’s laugh.

“And that’s a bull as arn’t an Irish one,” he said.

“Ah, yes, faith of a man, but don’t you try to be funny, my man,” said Jarette, “for this is not a funny time, when men are working with their necks in the hang-dog noose. Now, look here, my friend, I did not ask you to join us, because I did not trust you; but you have joined us to save your skin; so you had better work for us well, or—there, I will not say ugly things. You are a good sailor, Bob Hampton, and know your work, and it would be a pity if you were to be knocked overboard and drowned.”

“Horrid pity, messmet.”

“Captain, if you please, Bob Hampton, and your friend if you are faithful. That will do. Now go to the wheel, and send the ship on her voyage south. She is rolling in the trough of the sea.”

“Right!” said Bob. “‘Spose, captain, you won’t be so particklar; man may light his pipe while he is at the wheel.”

“Oh yes. Smoke and be comfortable; but you will mind how you steer, for I shall be a hard severe man. You understand, extrèmement severe.”

“Course you will,” said Bob, coolly; “skippers must be. Don’t matter to me, messmate—cap’n, I mean—one skipper’s good as another. But I say, cap’n, there’s Barney Blane and Neb Dumlow knocked on the head in the forksle. They on’y showed fight a-cause they see as I did at first. They’re good mates and true, and ‘ll jyne me as they allus have. ‘Wheer you sails,’ say they, ‘we sails.’ So I thought I’d put in a word, as you wants trusty men.”

“I can choose my crew, Bob Hampton,” said the Frenchman, in a peculiar tone of voice. “Too much talk is only good for parrot birds. Go you and steer.”

“Right you are, cap’n,” said Bob, and I heard him go aft, but could not see him till I wrenched my head round, and could then dimly see something in the halo of soft light shed by the lamp on the compass.

And all this time the ship was rolling slowly, with the yards making a strange creaking sound and the sails filling and flapping about with strange flutterings and whimperings; but in a few minutes there was a perceptible change, the ship’s head swinging round, and I knew that we were once more gliding swiftly through the water.

That there was a group of men below me I felt absolutely certain, though I could see nobody; and at last, when I had come to the conclusion that I had reached the extreme limit of my strength, and that I must drop, Jarette spoke suddenly, but in quite a low voice—

“You two stay here by the sky-light, and if any attempt is made to get on deck, shoot at once. If they are killed, their

blood be on their own heads. Where's young Mr Walters?"

"Why, you left him on guard with the others at the cabin-door," said a man surlily.

"Fetch him here: I did," said Jarette, and I felt then that I was going down on the heads of the men below. But I made one more desperate effort, as I heard the soft footsteps moving off in different directions; and then almost without a sound I got my arm round the outside shroud, then one leg round,—how I can hardly tell you now, I was so exhausted,—and the next minute I had relieved my muscles of the strain, and was standing there with my feet on the ratlines, my arms thrust right through and folded round one of the inner ropes, and my head thrust through as well; safe, I felt, even if I lost my senses and fainted away.

Fortunately for me, the ship was heeling over now in the opposite direction, so that my position was easier, and as I half lay, half clung there, the painful stress on mind and body grew lighter—at least the bodily stress did, and I began to think more clearly.

It was horrible. The ship then had been seized by the crew, headed by Jarette. Some of the men had resisted, and were prisoners in the forecabin; but Bob Hampton had gone over to the side of the mutineers, and the others were sure to follow. But the worst thing of all was the knowledge that my brother midshipman was in the mutiny, and keeping guard over the officers and passengers. And he was a gentleman's son. Here then was the explanation of his being so friendly with Jarette, and that was why he and Jarette had been up aloft in the dark.

I shivered at the thought. But the next moment I was seeing something else clearly, and I guessed at two things which afterwards I found to be correct. Jarette had traded upon Walters' discontent, and won him over with, no doubt, great promises, because he would be useful; and of course I saw it plainly now it had been necessary to fasten the cabin-doors, and shut the officers in. Mr Frewen was, as I had heard, locked in his cabin. Who was there to go quietly at night and fasten their doors? No one more likely than the lad who had the run of the cabins and saloon.

"No, I won't believe it," I thought the next moment. "Nic Walters couldn't be such a miserable scoundrel as that."

Chapter Eleven.

What was I to do?

The answer came readily enough. Join your friends.

But how? They were prisoners below in the cabins, and with guards set at the companion and over the sky-lights.

There appeared to be no way but to go up aloft higher, crawl along some stay, and then lower myself down, and to creep through the sky-light.

"And be dragged back long before I could get down, even if I could get down at all," I said to myself bitterly.

That would not do; there must be some other way.

"Join the mutineers," something seemed to suggest, and wait till there was a chance of leaving them and giving information to the authorities, or another ship.

I couldn't do that, and even if I had felt disposed, Walters would have taken care that I was not trusted. He would have been too jealous. Feeling rested, I now began to creep up step by step so as to reach the mizzen-top, where I hoped I could remain unseen. It was ticklish work, for the men on guard by the sky-light were a very little distance away; but moving by slow degrees I climbed up at last, and lay down in comparative safety, not having been heard.

I had hardly reached my hiding-place, when I heard one of the men below me say—

"Here they come," and directly after I could see ascend to the poop-deck, by the light of three lanterns the men carried, a party of about fourteen, one of whom was Jarette, another Nic Walters, and the rest were sailors, with the two rough fellows, Dumlow and Blane, firmly bound with stout line, in their midst.

They were pushed and dragged up to the foot of the mizzen-mast, where Jarette seated himself in one of the deck chairs, and Walters, with a pistol in his hand and another in his belt, stood by the Frenchman's side, resting one foot upon the seat of the chair, as if on terms of the greatest intimacy with its occupant.

"Bring 'em forward," said Jarette, and the two men were thrust to the front, Dumlow growling like some strange animal, and Blane trying to strike at his guards with his elbows.

"Steady there," shouted Jarette.

"Steady it is," growled Dumlow. "Look here, you Jarette, if you'll just have these ropes undone on the starboard side to let one o' my fins at liberty I'll fight yer one hand."

"Hold you your tongue, fool."

"Shan't, so now then. Jest you have this rope undone and I'll take a pair on you."

"Will you hold that tongue, or shall I cut it out?"

"I should just like to ketch you at it, yer sham make-believe English sailor."

My head, at the risk of my white face being seen, was thrust over the side of the top.

"Look here, you two, you are brought before me, the captain of this ship, for me to see whether I am willing to let you off easy."

"Oh, you're the skipper, are yer?" said Barney, spitting on the deck. "Well, yer don't look like it, messmet."

"Silence," shouted Jarette. "Now, look here, my lads, if I have you cut loose and forgive you for giving us so much trouble and knocking your mates about, will you join us and help us work the ship?"

"No!" roared Dumlow, "I'm blessed if I do."

"And you, Barney?"

"Same I says as my mate."

"Vairy good, then, my friends, we were going to offer you a happy life and a share in our prize, but you will not take them, so we shall have to pitch you both overboard."

"As Neb says, I should just like to ketch yer at it," roared Blane.

"Lookye here, Frenchy," cried Dumlow in his strange growl, "you make these beggars loosen this here line, and I'll fight yer one hand."

"Will you join us, big idiot?" said Jarette, and I drew in my breath as I wondered whether the two brave fellows would prove staunch, and if they did, whether Jarette would dare to carry out his threat.

"No; course I won't, you ugly piratical frog-soup-eating Frenchy."

"Hit him in the mouth," said Jarette.

"You'd better!" roared Dumlow, raising a leg to kick the first man who approached him, and now I started, for Walters spoke.

"Don't be fools, you two," he said; "Bob Hampton has joined us."

"Yer lie, yer young warmint," cried Dumlow; "Bob Hampton wouldn't be such a sneak."

Walters winced at the man's words, but he pointed aft.

"Look," he said; "there he is at the wheel steering."

"Ahoy yonder!" roared Dumlow. "That theer arn't you, is it, Bob?"

"Me it is, messmet," said Hampton, coolly.

"Sure, messmet?"

"Ay. All right."

"Why, you arn't jyned 'em, have you, lad?" said Blane.

"Ay, I've jyned, lad," replied Hampton, and then—"Say, skipper, hadn't I better keep her off a pynte or two?"

"Yes," shouted Jarette.

"Well, I'm blessed," growled Dumlow. Then aloud—"Hi! Bob, lad, what's to be done?"

"'Bout what?" came back from the wheel.

"Air we to let 'em pitch us overboard, or air we to jyne?"

"Jyne," growled Bob Hampton.

"Jyne it is, messmet," said Dumlow, in his low growling tone. "Here, unleash these blessed ropes, they're a-cuttin' into my arms like hooroar."

"And you'll join us too, Barney?" said Jarette.

"I does same as my two mates," said Blane. "I arn't going to be pitched overboard if they arn't. Share and share alike, says I. Fair play's my motto, and no favour. Here, cast off all these here lashins. What d'yer want to tie a fellow up so tight for?"

"Take off the ropes," said Jarette, in a voice full of triumph, and I could hear the rustling and rattling noise made as the lines were untied, and directly after Dumlow's voice, saying—

"Here, give 's a drop o' summat; I'm as dry inside as a biscuit-bag."

And my lips and throat felt dry too with excitement, while a strange feeling of despair came over me. Walters, Bob Hampton, Dumlow, and Blane all turned traitors. What was to become of the poor passengers, the officers, and

myself?

There was only one way out of the difficulty, and that was to join the prisoners in the cabin.

But how?

I lay listening. The men were talking loudly, and I soon made out that drink was going round; but all was still as death now in the saloon and cabins. Their occupants were evidently waiting to see what would be done, and listening to the proceedings on deck.

“How can I get to them?—How can I get to them?” I kept on saying to myself.

The darkness would favour me if I crept down, but the places were so guarded that there was not the most remote chance of my getting past the sentries.

I felt more despondent than ever, as I lay listening to the faint creaking of the yards when they yielded gently to the wind. There was no chance whatever of my joining my friends, and I was about to resign myself to my fate, when I had a bright flash of hope. I could see my way through the darkness. There was light ahead—mental light—and I determined to dare the peril and act at once, if I could; if not, as soon as the men below had dispersed.

Unfortunately I had to wait some time and listen, hardly daring to stir for fear of being heard or seen, for there were three lanterns stood about the deck, shedding their feeble light around, and now and then looking brighter, and showing me the faces of the mutineers as they opened the lantern-doors to light their pipes.

Jarette was talking quickly to a group of the men about him, but I hardly heard what he said, my attention being fixed upon my plan of escape, till I heard Jarette say—

“Wait till daylight then, my lads, and we’ll soon have them all out of there.”

“All out of there,” could only mean the people out of the cabin. Never mind, they should have me out to, for my mind was made up, and I was only waiting my chance.

Then it came, for the lanterns were picked up, and two of them were carried down to the main-deck, while I could see that Walters picked up the other and walked aft with Jarette, the light showing me two men, one on each side of the saloon sky-lights, as Jarette stopped to give them some orders in a low tone, standing back from the light as if expecting a shot from below.

Then, as I watched them, feeling all the while as if I should like to be exactly over Walters’ head and let myself fall right upon him, they went on to where Bob Hampton stood at the wheel, while I scanned eagerly the long boom of the mizzen-spanker, the great fore and aft canvas running off astern and towering up till it was all in darkness, for the lantern-light was only a poor gleam. Then Jarette began talking to Bob Hampton, but I could not and did not want to hear what the traitorous wretch said, feeling mad against him, and vexed with myself for ever having been at all friendly with the scoundrel. My attention was directed to the great boom of the mizzen-spanker and the stern-rail, which I could just faintly see as Walters turned the lantern here and there.

“Oh, if I only ever have the chance!” I muttered, as for a moment I thought of my companion, and though he was triumphant and I in so perilous a position, I would not have changed places, I told myself, for worlds.

I saw all I could, and then waited impatiently for what was to come next.

I soon knew, for Jarette and Walters came back, and passing the men on guard, descended to the main-deck and went forward, leaving all in darkness.

“Now for it,” I muttered, and with my heart beating heavily, I thrust my hand into my pocket.

All right, my clasp-knife was there, and rising cautiously I stopped to think. Then satisfying myself that my recollections were correct, I began to feel about cautiously, as I now stood up, close to where the top-mast joined the mizzen, and was at first disappointed, but directly after my heart gave a throb of satisfaction, for my hand came in contact with that which I sought, the thin strong line that ran up from the deck right to the mizzen-truck, passed through it over a wheel, and came down again to the deck.

Opening my knife, I began to cut through the ascending line, and found it so hard and tough that the knife had hard work to get through. This was satisfactory, for it was evidently new and strong.

Then leaving one end hanging, I fastened the lower one to the first rope I could feel, so that it should not fall to the deck. Then I began to haul in the uncut portion, and found it came easily enough, but making every now and then a faint creaking noise as the wheel in the truck spun round.

I turned cold at this, for though it was very high up, I was afraid the sound would take the attention of the men on deck.

But they paid no heed, and I hauled away till I felt sure that I must have at least forty or fifty yards of the line—quite as much as I wanted; and then I used the knife again, and after replacing it, wound the line into a skein from elbow to hand, ending by hanging it round my neck with the ends twisted in so that they could not get loose.

So far, so good, but I had not fastened the other end of the line to save it from falling, and this I now did.

The next proceeding was, I knew, perilous, but I was desperate, and I did not hesitate. It was my only chance, I knew,

and I must do it. There was the danger of being heard, and that of making a slip and going overboard. But I was young, strong, and active, and giving myself no time to think, I felt in the darkness for the crutch at the thick end of the gaff or yard which embraced the mizzen-mast below the top—the yard, that is, which spread the top of the mizzen-spanker—lowered myself down till I stood upon it, and then taking well hold with hands and knees, I began to creep softly up and along that diagonally stretched yard higher and higher till I felt that I must be over the sea.

But in my desperation I did not hesitate. I climbed on, and I know it was not easy; still I climbed on up that round perilous slope, feeling that if the sea had been rough I should have certainly been jerked off. And try hard as I would, I could not help making a little noise, which I felt sure Bob Hampton must hear, for there he was below me leaning over the wheel, and his head visible in the binnacle-light.

But he did not hear, and I crept on and upward on my chest, nipping the yard well with my knees, and clinging with my hands. It was hard and awkward work, for I had to pass the blocks and ropes which hoisted it up, and it swung inboard and out as the wind pressed upon the great bellying canvas, curving down below me to the great boom which ran out and over the steersman's head some feet above the stern-rail.

Still I climbed on and over the cords which laced the rail to the yard, and at last clung there, holding on for dear life, having reached the end with my hands, and grasping the top corner of the great sail edged with stout rope.

"Now Bob Hampton will hear me," I thought, and I stopped to think what I should do next. But not for long. Nipping the yard well with my knees, I passed the hank of line over my head, unfastened one end, and tied it securely round the top of the yard before letting the coils slide down inside the hollow curve of the sail, knowing that they would come apart as they glided down the stiff strong canvas. This done, I hesitated for a few moments before trusting myself to descend; but drawing a long breath at last, I took a good grip of the line with my left hand, of the rope-edge of the sail with the other, and began to slide down, keeping my chest as near as I could to the canvas.

This was terrible at first, for the upper part of the sail was a long way on toward being perpendicular, and I had to cling tightly to save myself from coming down with a run; but every foot after the first ten grew easier, so that I lay at last well on the great curve, and glided down almost in silence, only having to grip rope and line hard enough to keep a little check upon my descent. I followed the edge of the sail right away out over the sea, to where it was secured to the large horizontal projecting boom, and here my feet rested as I held on and looked inboard from where I insecurely stood, faintly making out the figure of Bob Hampton, who was in perfect ignorance of my descent, though how it was he did not hear the rustling I cannot make out, unless he was asleep—though he never would own to it in after days.

A doubly dangerous position I seemed to be in, though nothing to a sailor; still, in spite of my desperation, I felt nervous and strange as I now seated myself astride of the great boom riding up and down, and hauling up the line to find how much there was free.

Plenty to use double; and reaching up as high as I could, I once more cut it off, doubled it, and then hitched in along the boom till I was pretty close to the stern-rail, and now once more I made my end fast.

My plan must now be pretty clear to whoever reads, for I had determined to get down to this boom and then slide down the line to the stern cabin-windows, through one of which I hoped to be able to creep and join my friends.

Still the task was not easy, and I hesitated as I held on and looked down, for all was perfectly dark—so dark that I could not see whether the lights were open or closed; and if I slid down and found them closed, and could not make any one understand my position, I was doubtful as to whether I should be able to climb back. In that case, I should be swinging and swaying about there, growing weaker and weaker, till I had to let go and the great waters swallowed me, or I was finally saved by shouting for help till I was drawn up a prisoner, having run all these risks for nothing.

For a full ten minutes I was in despair. Then my courage returned, and I prepared to descend.

But there was another unfortunate matter. The pressure on the sail curved the boom well to starboard, so that at times it ran out in a way that would bring me, as I hung there, out of reach of the cabin-windows, so that I had to judge my time till there was not so much pressure, the boom had swung back a little, and then I at last prepared to descend.

But I did not begin even then, for I shuddered at the idea of not being able to climb back to the boom if I failed to get in, and to make a way back to safety I now hauled up my double line, and proceeded to tie knots all down it at intervals of about a foot, so as to have something better to grip than the bare rope.

Down I dropped it once more, waited for the boom to swing nearly level, and then gripping the line well with one hand, keeping my right arm over the boom, I leaned forward, drew my leg off from where I had been sitting, and the next minute I was hanging from the great rounded yard, and turning slowly round and round over the swirling water which rushed under on either side of the deeply-hidden rudder.

The distance I had to lower myself was not great, and finding now the value of the knots, and trying to give myself courage by saying that it was an easy job after all, I checked myself abreast of a window, but soon made out that it was closed, for I was not two feet away, and brought myself closer, and touched it by giving a kick against the stern. I got my feet close together, and rested on the knot, which, small though it was, gave me a great deal of support. I contrived, too, that my hands should also rest above a knot, and in this position I had to wait again and again, for the turning round motion kept on slowly, so that for the greater part of the time I was looking right away from the windows. In addition, there was the swaying movement of the great boom from which I was suspended, carrying me to and fro across the stern.

I dare not call out, and unless I swayed myself towards the stern I could not reach the windows, so I was rapidly

beginning to find that what had promised to be the easiest part of my task was proving itself to be the hardest, when, probably from a turn of the wheel, the ship made quite a plunge. The big sail with its boom swung heavily, and of course communicated its motion to me, so that as the cord turned in its horribly giddy way, I first rode from side to side, and then by degrees to and fro, with the result that when nearest, I made a dash with one hand to tap on the window opposite to me; but being unable to govern the force exercised, my hand went right through the pane, and the glass fell tinkling to the floor within.

The perspiration stood out upon my face as I heard above me Bob Hampton's voice cry—

"Hullo! What's that?"

Almost at the same moment the cabin-window was opened, I had a faint glimpse of a face looking as if out of black mist, and Mr Frewen's voice said softly—

"Quick, some one; a knife."

"He's going to cut the rope," I thought, and I tried to shout, but it was like being in a nightmare: my tongue felt paralysed, and as I hung there clinging wildly to the rope I heard voices on deck.

"What is it? Trying to get out?" some one cried, and Bob Hampton said in answer—

"Dunno! Breaking glass."

"Where? The cabin-windows?"

"Yes."

But while this was going on, some one leaned out of the window, and the rope was seized. Then I felt it jar as if a knife-blade was being used upon it, and this as I had turned round, and my back was toward the window.

Then my voice came back with the power to speak, and in a quick whisper I said, as I felt that in another instant I should fall into the sea—

"Mr Frewen!—help!"

There was a quick ejaculation, and the sound of something dropped into the water; but at the same moment I felt my jacket seized by two strong hands, and I was drawn close in to the stern of the ship, and held there fast.

Then from overhead came in Jarette's voice—

"A lantern here, quick!"

Directly after, as I still held on to the line, and felt some one's hot breath against my cheek, there was a glow of light overhead, and Jarette cried—

"Here, cut this line."

Then the rope jarred heavily and was jerked. The next instant it gave way, and the strain I had maintained upon it was gone. I felt myself drop, but it was only an inch or two, for I was held tightly and drawn right into the cabin, where I crouched, listening to the altercation above my head, every word coming plainly to my ears and those of Mr Frewen, for of course it was he who had seized me.

Jarette was raging furiously at some one, whom he was accusing of helping the prisoners to escape.

Bob Hampton was the some one, for we heard him defending himself loudly.

"How could I help 'em to get out when I haven't left the wheel?"

"But there was a rope hanging down from the spanker-boom."

"I don't care if all the ropes in the ship hung down. I arn't moved. Ask them."

"No, he hasn't left the wheel," said a voice.

"How do you know? How could you see?" cried Jarette.

"Hadn't he got the binnacle-light on his phiz all the time, captain?"

"Then who did help them? Some one fastened that line. Look, there it is."

A lantern was held out over the stern, and there was a murmur of voices.

"That line doesn't belong there, and wasn't there yesterday," cried Jarette. "There's a traitor somewhere."

"All right, cap'n, find him then," said Bob Hampton, surlily.

"If it was you!" snarled Jarette.

"Look here, don't you shove that pistol in my face," cried Bob Hampton, angrily, "or I shall out with my knife and have a fight for it. What yer talking about? If I'd left the wheel, wouldn't the ship have yawed, and you come to see

what was the matter?"

That sounded so convincing that Jarette was silent, while Bob Hampton continued—

"And if I'd wanted to help 'em to get on deck, do you think I should ha' been such a fool as to tie a bit o' signal halyard to the spanker-boom, when I could ha' made a bit o' strong rope fast to the belaying-pins, and hung it over the stern?"

Jarette growled out something we could not hear.

"Then it must have been one of them two," said Bob Hampton; "or they chucked it up from the cabin-window."

"It was not one of them," said Jarette, with a peculiar intonation in his voice. "I'm not afraid of that."

"Strikes me," growled Bob, "if yer wants to know my 'pinion, as it must have been some one who was up aloft."

I gave a jump.

"Hah!" cried Jarette, "whoever it was you lads chased. I know: it was that monkey of a boy."

Bob Hampton uttered a low chuckle.

"Like enough," he said.

"And you helped him."

"Oh, very well, then, have it your own way if you like; I helped him,—but how I could ha' done it, I don't know, cap'n, nor them two neither. I don't care. But look here, I'm down tired, and it's time some one else took his trick at the wheel. I want a sleep."

"If you play false to me, Bob Hampton," came in tones which made me shiver, "you'll have a sleep that will last you for always. Do you hear?—tousjours!"

"Two jours, that's two days, arn't it, skipper?"

"No," hissed the man fiercely; "for ever. Here, Brown, bring an axe and a lantern. Stand it there."

We heard steps overhead, and a light gleamed down from the lantern placed upon the stern-rails.

"Now," said Jarette, "be always ready to bring that axe down upon the head of any man who tries to climb up from the cabin."

"Ay, ay," came in a low growl; and just then I became conscious of the face just over me, and it was lit from the outside; while farther back I could dimly make out other faces which were shadowy, and did not appear to be connected with bodies.

I knew directly after that it was not from the lantern placed on the stern-rail, but from the pale grey glare in the east, for I had reached my shelter none too soon. It was the beginning of another day.

Chapter Twelve.

The light was coming fast now, as the sound of talking died out on the deck, and as I rose, Mr Frewen caught my hand.

"My dear lad," he whispered, "I thought you were gone. Thank God! thank God!"

"Isn't it horrible?" I whispered, though there was no necessity for restraining my voice.

"Horrible?" he said; "it seems to be impossible."

"Where's Captain Berriman?"

"In his cabin wounded."

"And Mr Brymer?"

"Yonder. Don't ask."

"Is any one else hurt?" I said, lowering my voice still more.

"I hardly know how many," he said. "It was a surprise. We were all mastered by treachery. Some traitor came amongst us, and when the attack began and the ship was seized, we were all fastened in our cabins."

"Some traitor!" I said, turning cold. "Yes, and they thought it must have been you. I heard some one accuse you in the dark, just after I had broken out of my cabin."

I was silent for a few moments, as I thought of whom the traitor must have been, though even to defend myself I could not speak out and accuse Walters.

"Who was it said I did it?" I whispered at last.

"I am not sure. Everything has been so dark and confused; I fancied for the moment that it was Mr Denning."

"I don't believe it was," I said stoutly. "He would not think I could be such a miserable, contemptible wretch."

"But you were not with us, Dale, and people are ready enough to accuse at a time like that."

"Mr Denning did not accuse him," said a weak voice, and there close by us stood Mr Denning himself, looking almost ghastly in the pale morning light which stole into the cabin. "Alison Dale could not be such a scoundrel."

"Thank you, Mr Denning," I said, grasping the hand he held out to me, as with the other he supported himself by resting, as I saw, upon a double-barrelled gun. "I shan't defend myself. If I had been the traitor, I should not be here now. I didn't think I could manage it."

I was eagerly questioned, and had to explain how I escaped, and to tell all that I knew of the attack, and as I spoke I could not help noticing how distant Mr Frewen and Mr Denning seemed, and I thought that now we were in such trouble they would perhaps become friends.

I had another surprise before I had told all about my escape, for from out of one of the cabins, looking horrible with his head tied up by a stained handkerchief, Mr Brymer appeared, and I saw that he was evidently weak and faint from his wound.

"Can you tell us anything about who is at the head of the mutiny?" he asked. "I was cut down, and could hardly understand anything in the darkness, till I seemed to wake and find myself on the saloon-floor, below the table where I must have crawled."

I told him that Jarette was at the head of it all.

"Ah, I always mistrusted that man, and the gang he gathered about him. Where is the rest of the crew then; I mean those they did not kill—down in the fore-castle?"

I was silent for a few moments, and he repeated his question.

"I'm afraid they have all joined him."

"No, no; not men like Hampton and Dumlow. They were of a different stamp."

I told him what I knew, and I heard him grind his teeth.

"The scoundrels!" he muttered.

"There is no telling what a man may do for dear life," said Mr Frewen, sadly.

"But Walters. Did you see anything of him?" said Mr Brymer.

I was silent. Something seemed to choke me, and I could not speak for the hot indignation I felt.

"Poor boy!" groaned Mr Brymer. "I never liked him, but it is horrible for him to have come to such an end as this."

"Yes!" I said bitterly, as I found my tongue; "horrible for him to have come to such an end as this."

They did not grasp the truth, and I would not tell them.

"They'll know soon enough," I thought.

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr Denning, speaking now, "there is no doubt about the catastrophe. What is to be done?"

"Barricade the companion-way," said Mr Frewen, "and shoot down every ruffian who tries to enter. There is a lady on board, and we must defend her with our lives."

I saw Mr Denning dart an angry look at the young doctor, whose pale face had lighted up so that he looked eager and animated.

"What do you say, Mr Brymer?" said Mr Denning, turning from the doctor.

"The same as Mr Frewen," was the reply. "Doctor, you'll have to patch me up so that I can fight a bit."

"Your spirit will do more for you than I can, sir," was the reply. "I am sorry to say, though, that Captain Berriman is completely prostrated. He must have received a crushing blow from behind."

"Then you will fight?" said Mr Denning, eagerly.

"Of course," said the mate quickly. "Now, gentlemen, please, the first thing is to pile up all the chests and boxes we have at command in the companion-way, so as to keep out the ruffians. They will get at the drink, and then stop at nothing. I'm afraid I cannot lift, but I can fire a pistol or a gun."

"And I cannot lift," said Mr Denning, with his eyes flashing, "but I can fire with this and take good aim. I brought it to shoot birds on the voyage. It will be gaol-birds now!"

Just then there was a stir and movement on deck, and the men gathered in that saloon made a rush for the door with such fierce determination that my heart gave a leap, and I felt that I was about to see blood shed, as I had often read of it in books. But this was no romance.

There were quick whispers, and as it rapidly grew lighter I saw Mr Denning stand right in the centre with the mate and Mr Frewen, all armed with guns ready to fire upon any one who appeared; but the alarm passed off, and Mr Denning being left on guard, the others all set to work carrying chests and portmanteaus from the different cabins, so many being available that they were used as so many bricks, and carefully built up from floor to ceiling, but with openings left in through which the defenders of the saloon could fire when the attack was made.

I worked eagerly with all the rest till the big entry was completely filled up, Mr Frewen taking the lead, and lifting and packing in the chests, till the solid wall was formed—one so well bonded together, as a bricklayer would call it, that it seemed to me that it would require a battering-ram to force a way through.

As I walked away, hurrying eagerly first into one cabin and then another, in search of trunks and portmanteaus that would fit into the various openings, I suddenly found myself face to face with Miss Denning, whose pallid countenance lit-up on seeing me, and she held out her hand to cling to mine.

“Oh, Mr Dale,” she whispered half hysterically, “is there much danger?”

“Oh no, I hope not,” I said, speaking in an encouraging way; but she shook her head.

“Don’t—don’t speak to me like that,” she cried. “I’m not a child. Be frank with me, and tell me as if I were your sister. There is danger, is there not?”

“Well, I’m afraid there’ll be a fight,” I said; “but we have plenty of firearms, and we’ve got right on our side, and I hope we shall give the scoundrels such a lesson that they will come down on their knees.”

“I’m afraid not,” she said. “But tell me, why is it? Is it what they call a mutiny? I thought all such things were over now.”

“So did I, Miss Denning,” I said; “but that’s what it is. I never thought of it before, but I suppose we must have a very valuable cargo on board.”

“Yes, my brother said there was a large sum in specie.”

“Money, that is, isn’t it?” I said. “Well then, that’s what has tempted the scoundrels. But don’t you be frightened. Mr Frewen and the rest will take care that the blackguards don’t get into the cabin, and I’m going to try if I cannot fight too.”

She pressed my hand and smiled sadly.

“Yes, I know you and your brother midshipman will be very brave and fight for us,” she said, with a quiet satisfied nod of the head, and I winced as I thought about Walters; but she did not notice it, and went on, “You had a very narrow escape, did you not?”

“Oh, I had to run and dodge about in the dark, and then came down a rope,” I replied; “but that was nothing much.” And as I spoke I could see that she was hardly paying any attention to my words, but watching the cabin-door and listening.

“Tell me how my brother is,” she whispered. “Is he quite safe?”

“Oh yes, and on guard.”

“He is so ill and weak, it frightens me,” she said; “but he will not listen to me and stay here.”

“No,” I replied, “how could he as an English gentleman at a time like this!”

She gave me a quick, half-resentful look; but her face lit-up directly and she smiled.

“I suppose you are right,” she said with a sigh. “It is so hard to be a woman, and not be able to help. I should not mind so much if I could be busy.”

“But there is nothing to do now, Miss Denning,” I said,—“that is, for you. There, I must go now.”

“Tell me though—my brother ordered me to stay here in the cabin—tell me—couldn’t I be of some help? The captain and mate are both wounded, are they not?”

“Yes, a little,” I said encouragingly; “but Mr Frewen has seen to them. Shall I ask him if you can come and attend on the captain?”

“Yes; do!” she cried. Then quickly—“No, no! I must go by what my brother says.”

“And I must go out in the saloon and help. When all is safe I shall see you again.”

“When all is safe,” she whispered despondently.

“Yes, and it is going to be. Oh, it will be all right. May I take this?”

I pointed to a chest, and she tried to say yes, but only gave a nod; and shouldering the little box, I hurried with it to find that it was not wanted, for Mr Frewen was just forcing one in between the top of the pile and the ceiling, by standing upon a box which Mr Preddle was holding steady.

Chapter Thirteen.

"Oh dear me—dear me, Alison Dale," said Mr Preddle, rising up from his stooping position very slowly and wiping his broad fat face, which was covered with drops of perspiration, "this is a very sad business, isn't it?"

"Horrible!" I said, "but it will all come right." He laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"Come into my cabin," he whispered; and I followed him.

"You think it will come right?" he said, looking at me in a terribly perplexed way.

"Oh yes, I think so," I said; "Mr Denning and Mr Frewen will give the rascals a good peppering and bring them to their senses."

"And so will I!" he cried excitedly. "I never tried to fight seriously since I left school, but I don't see why I shouldn't be able to if I tried,—do you?"

"Of course not sir," I replied, smiling. I wanted to laugh outright, for he did not at all come up to my ideas of a fighting man.

"I can see," he went on mildly, "you don't think I could, but I shall try."

"I won't laugh at you, Mr Preddle," I said; "indeed you have more cause to laugh at me when I say that, boy as I am, I mean to fight and try to defend Miss Denning."

He caught hold of my hand, held it in his left, and brought his big soft right down into it with a sounding slap, and then squeezed my fingers as hard as he could.

"That you will, Alison. You're a brave lad, I know. We'll all try and fight like men against the ruffians. Like lions, eh, Dale? Like lions."

"To be sure, sir," I said; "but hadn't we better go back into the saloon?"

"Yes, yes, directly," he said hastily, and I saw him turn very red in the face. "I suppose the mutineers know that we have a very valuable cargo?"

"Yes, sir; I expect that's it," I replied. "But they're not going to have it. We'll sink the ship first, and escape in one of the boats."

"To be sure we will, but it's a sad business, Dale. There is my consignment of salmon and trout. Do you think the scoundrels would let me go and see to them?"

"No, sir," I said, "I don't believe they would. Come along."

"I'm afraid you are right. Yes; I'll come directly; but there was something else that I wanted to say to you. Dear me, what a memory I have! Oh, I know!"

He stopped short and turned redder than ever, while I stared and waited.

"Yes; it was about—oh yes—that was it. It's a terrible business, and—how does Miss Denning seem? Does she bear up about it all?"

"Well, pretty fairly, sir. Of course she is very much alarmed, and she is anxious about her brother."

"Is she, though?" he said. "Poor girl. Of course, yes, she would be. Did she seem very anxious about any one else—Mr Frewen, for instance?"

"No, sir; I don't remember that she mentioned him."

"Poor girl. No, of course not, nor me neither, I suppose?"

"Oh no, I'm sure of that, sir," I said decisively. "She certainly did not mention your name. But we must go back now, sir, and see if we are wanted."

"Of course. Come along," said Mr Preddle, hurriedly; and we went into the saloon, where I found the captain standing by the table in the middle, looking very white, and I saw now that his arm was in a sling, and the lower part of his head bandaged.

He was arranging some pistols and rifles on the table as we entered, and he looked up, nodded at us, and said—

"Two more. There, boy, you'll have to try and fight with the rest of us."

"I'll try, sir," I said, and I looked at him wonderingly, for I had been under the impression that he was unwell in the cabin; I had forgotten the fact that he too had been on deck and received several severe injuries when the mutineers

made their attack.

"Oh, look here, Dale," he said suddenly, "while I think of it, my lad. I went on deck last night to have a look round at the weather, and when I came back I found that my cabin-door was fastened up. Was that your doing?"

"No, sir," I replied. "Certainly not."

"That's right," he said, looking at me searchingly. "I went back on deck to make some inquiries, and when I reached the men's quarters, I was attacked. But I should like to clear that matter up. The steward swears it was not his doing; it would not have been one of the crew. Where is your messmate, Walters?"

I shook my head.

"Not hurt?" he cried, anxiously.

"No, sir. Not that I know of. Last time I saw him he was quite well."

"Where is he?"

There was a dead silence for a few moments, and then Mr Brymer spoke—

"Poor Walters is not with us, sir."

"What?" cried Captain Berriman. "Poor lad! Poor lad!" Then after a pause, "He is a prisoner then?"

"Yes, sir, we suppose so," replied Mr Brymer, and I heard the captain groan, while a hot feeling of indignation rose in my breast.

"Poor Walters!" and all that pity and sympathy for the ill-conditioned cowardly young wretch. I felt that I must speak out and tell all that I knew, but somehow I could not; and to this day I have never been able to settle in my own mind whether I was right or wrong.

"Well," said the captain at last, "we have no time to waste upon sympathy. I am sorry to say, gentlemen, that I fear I can do little in this terrible emergency. You have decided to defend yourselves, and, God helping us we may get back our positions in the ship, but it can only be by making a stout defence, and waiting for an opportunity to surprise the scoundrels at some weak moment, say when they have been for a long time at the spirits on board."

"To be sure," said Mr Frewen. "There is no cause for despair with such a formidable arrangement. The scoundrels dare not attack us."

"Well," said Captain Berriman, slowly, "I have brought out all the arms, but I have a painful announcement to make. The traitor who came round to secure us in our cabins had carried off all the cartridges he could, and those left in the cases had been deluged with water."

"Great heaven!" cried Mr Frewen, excitedly; "then the weapons are useless." Captain Berriman was silent.

"Stop a moment!" cried Mr Frewen; and he ran into his cabin, to return with a revolver which he threw on the table. "Useless," he said. "The case of cartridges gone. Here, Mr Denning, see to your gun,—see what cartridges you have."

Mr Denning threw open the breech of his double-barrelled gun, examined the two cartridges, and closed the breech again.

"All right!" he said, and then he reeled and would have fallen if Mr Preddle had not caught him.

"Don't!" he cried, pettishly. "I mean, thank you. It was a horrible thought. I saw some one come out of my cabin last evening, I'm sure now. I thought then it was fancy. Some one has been—to steal—the case of cartridges I brought."

He walked feebly but quickly to his cabin, shut the door after him, and then Mr Preddle went to his cabin, to come back directly, shaking his head.

"Some one has taken all mine but one," he said. "The lid is off the box, and this is the only one left."

"But your gun is loaded?"

"Yes, there are two in that," replied Mr Preddle, "and I hope Mr Denning will be more fortunate in his search."

At that moment Mr Denning made his appearance, and from his aspect we all thought that his supply had been taken too, but his face lit-up as he exclaimed—

"They could not find them. The cartridge-box was at the bottom of the locker."

"Ha!" cried Mr Frewen, triumphantly. "How many have you?"

"A hundred, for I have not fired off one."

"And what bore is your gun?"

"Twelve-bore."

"And yours?"

"Sixteen."

"That's the same size as mine," said Mr Preddle, quietly. "I'm afraid those of yours would not fit."

"Fit? No!" cried Mr Frewen, impatiently. "They would be absolutely useless."

"And of course we could not load in the old-fashioned way if we took out the powder," said Mr Preddle.

The doctor turned away, and I saw him look anxiously toward the barricade he had so carefully built up. Then gravely —

"We have the charges in our guns, gentlemen; when they are expended we must trust to Mr Denning."

The captain spoke again—

"Have you examined as to what provisions and water we have, Brymer?"

"Yes, sir, enough for about three days, without counting anything our passenger friends have in the way of private stores—preserved meat, delicacies, or the like."

"Yes, but the water?" said the captain, naming the grave necessity of life in that hot climate.

"I must frankly say a very short supply, sir."

There was another ominous silence, as all thought of our numbers.

Then Mr Frewen spoke—

"This all sounds very bad, Captain Berriman, but we are not going to give in. The ammunition and provisions are on board the ship, and when a besieged garrison runs short, it makes sallies to obtain fresh supplies. But we have not arrived at that starvation point yet. Before then the ship may be under the rule of Captain Berriman once again."

"Hist!" I cried, in an excited whisper, and I pointed up at the sky-light, across which a shadow lay, cast by the newly-risen sun which had flooded the cabin with gold.

"Listening, eh?" said Mr Brymer, and stepping softly on one side, he took one of the guns, and, with a sudden motion, thrust it through.

There was a bound and the rush of feet as the shadow disappeared.

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser," said the mate, laughing, "a criminal running away from an empty gun!"

"A lesson for us in being cautious in making our plans," observed Mr Frewen. "Now, Captain Berriman, will you give us our orders?"

"My first idea is, gentlemen, that one of you stand on guard there by the door, and, if the opportunity offers, he is to shoot down that scoundrel Jarette. They're coming. Now, on guard."

For as he spoke there were voices heard approaching and the trampling of feet. Directly after guns were seized, and the occupants of the cabin stood ready, for the door was unfastened, and an effort made to thrust it open.

Chapter Fourteen.

The result of that thrust was that the door was opened some little distance, and then stopped by part of the pile of chests and other luggage formed into a barricade.

There was a dead silence in the saloon as the deep voice of a man was heard speaking in a subdued tone to those with him; and pointing to the sky-light, Mr Frewen stepped back from the defenders of the barricade so as to be ready in case an effort should be made to assail them there.

Then the door was rattled loudly, and Jarette's voice was heard speaking angrily to some one without.

Again there was silence for a few moments, and then Jarette cried, "Now then; do you hear?"

This was followed by a sharp rap on the door, and a voice cried—

"You in the cabin—Captain Jarette says you are to understand that he is now master of this ship, and that no harm will be done to any one if you all give up quietly."

"And if we do not," said Captain Berriman, sharply, "what then?"

"That is for Captain Jarette to decide," replied the voice, one which made me writhe as I looked from one to the other, wondering whether they recognised who was speaking.

"Captain Jarette!" cried our sturdy old officer, furiously. "Look here, sir, don't you insult me by calling that French scoundrel by such a title. And look here, are you making this announcement of your own free will, or are you forced

by that contemptible mongrel knave to deliver his insolent message?"

"There is no compulsion, captain, and no need for you to call names, without you wish to be punished for your insolence. I am Captain Jarette, sir, and this is my good ship, these are my good brave men. Brave enfans—do you hear, bons enfans. This lad is my young lieutenant, who, like the rest, was sick of the vagaries of such a tyrannical old wretch as you."

"You dog!" growled the captain, furiously.

"Yes, dog, sir, so don't tease me into biting, or I may use my teeth sharply."

"You, Walters," cried the captain, "listen, boy—why are you with these men? Are you a prisoner?"

There was silence for a space before Walters said sharply, as if some one had made a threatening gesture close to his head—

"No, I am not a prisoner."

"But you have not joined these mutinous scoundrels, sir?" cried the captain, and his voice sounded quite plaintive.

Walters made no reply.

"Do you hear me, boy? Answer me, you— Oh no, it is impossible."

There was a low derisive laugh plainly heard, and then in a mocking tone Jarette said—

"Why don't you answer the good kind captain, Lieutenant Walters?"

I started at this, and my lips parted to give utterance to the ejaculation, "Oh!" as I felt I was grasping the reason of my messmate's conduct. Could it be ambition?

"What! you're too modest? All right, dear boy, I'll answer for you. Yes, he has joined me, skipper, as my right hand, to help navigate our ship. Do you hear—our ship? He was sick of your bullying and domineering, just as we all were. I had only to ask the lads if they were not tired of being slaves, to have them join me at once. And now you've often talked to me; let me talk to you for your good. No more bad language, please, unless you want to go overboard to join those fools who showed fight last night. Be civil, and you shall be decently treated, till I set you afloat or ashore, as seems best to me. There, we only want to say—don't play the fool, and let the doctor and those passengers think they can do any good by resisting. We don't want to make any of you bleed. What have you been doing to the door to keep it from opening? Have it pulled down, and come out like sensible people."

"Don't answer him, sir," said the mate, in a whisper.

"Do you hear?" cried Jarette, savagely. "Open the door, or I'll put a few pounds of powder up against it and blow it in."

"Come and touch the door," cried the captain, sternly, "and we'll blow your brains out."

"What?" cried Jarette, mockingly. "You blow my brains out, fool!—what with?"

"This!" said Mr Denning, sharply, and he thrust the barrel of the double gun so quickly through one of the openings left, and also through the narrow slit formed by the partly opened door, that there was the sound of men scuffling back, and a heavy fall, followed by a roar of laughter.

We knew the next moment who had fallen, for Jarette's voice came to us in an angry snarl.

"You grinning idiots," he cried, "take that!"

As he spoke there was the sharp report of a pistol, and a fearful shriek, followed by a fall, and a low moaning as of some one in agony.

"Serve him right!" cried Jarette. "Take him below. I'll have the doctor out and send him down."

A minute later, after we had listened to the meaning noise growing fainter, Jarette spoke again.

"There, Berriman," he said, "that's the stuff I'm made of, so no more nonsense; open the door and come out."

"Come and open it yourself, you half-French poodle hound," cried the captain, "and I'll show you what stuff I'm made of, and save you the trouble of going through a trial before reaching the hangman."

"You bragging idiot," cried Jarette, fiercely, "open the door, or I'll serve you as we served your miserable Brymer. Do you want to go overboard to join him?"

"No; Captain Berriman prefers to stay on board to see me pay you back in your own coin," said the mate. "Now, sir, who's the braggart now?"

Jarette was silenced for the moment, but he recovered himself directly.

"Oh, you're there then?" he cried. "I must punish some of my lads for only half doing their work. There, you are not so mad as Berriman is. Never mind the fool; open the door, and don't make me savage, so that I am tempted to go to

extremities. Do you hear?" he cried, after a pause.

"I'll answer for Mr Brymer," cried the captain, "as you answered for that miserable, treacherous boy. No, he will not open the door for you and your pack to come in and wreck and rob. This is our stronghold till some ship heaves in sight, and you and your gang are put in irons to await your fate. I give you all fair warning," he cried, raising his voice so that every one present might hear. "If you wish to escape being shot down, keep away from that door-way; for by all that is holy we will shoot the first ruffian who tries to open it."

"Powder!" said Jarette, laconically, "half a keg. It's their own fault, my lads. They shall soon see who is master here."

There was a quick movement in the cabin then, and Captain Berriman turned to Mr Frewen.

"Try and make more of an opening," he said. "We must have full play for the guns."

The doctor nodded and drew back three of the chests a little.

"That ought to do," he said. "If one of us stands aside and watches, he can tell the others when to fire."

"Ah! but that will require care," said the captain, quickly; "the shot must not be at the powder, or we shall be blown up. Look here, Mr Denning, if you will lend me your gun I think I can pick off the first scoundrel who comes to lay the powder. Perhaps another will come, but if he is dropped they will not try again."

"I can shoot them," said Mr Denning, quietly. "I do not like to take life, but I feel that I must fire now."

"Then keep your gun, sir," said Captain Berriman; "you need not hesitate, for it is a good deed to rid the earth of such wretches as these, and remember you are fighting for your sister's sake."

"Yes," said Mr Denning, in a low voice, almost a whisper to himself, "for my sister's sake,"—and he moved a little to one side, where he could get a better aim and command the outer portion of the door, though it was only through quite a slit.

"Hah!" cried Jarette, then in a triumphant tone—"but too much, my lads. We don't want to blow out the side of the ship. She's too much value to us now. Never mind, we'll use half of it to make a good long train. Come, lieutenant, here's a chance for you to distinguish yourself before the men. You shall lay the train."

"I? Lay the powder?" cried Walters, so excitedly that the men burst into a roar of laughter.

"Bah! Don't show the white feather, boy. It must be done. What? You won't?"

"No," said Walters, quickly. "They've got a spite against me, and will shoot me. Let some one else."

Jarette uttered a fierce ejaculation.

"Stand aside then," he growled, "and let some one who is a man do it. Here, any one of you come and plant this powder, and show young Walters here how brave lads fight."

We listened full of excitement for the next moment, as every one watched Mr Denning standing there close to the opening in the barricade, his arms and the gun invisible as he reached through toward the saloon-door. But there was perfect silence, not a movement to be heard, as Jarette burst into a nasty harsh laugh.

"Don't all want to do the job?" he cried. "Not one to volunteer? Why, you laugh at me, and call me Frenchy, and brag about your English pluck, and not one man will come forward. Here you, Bob Hampton, your trick's over at the wheel; come and lay this powder."

"What, to blow in the cabin-door?" came in familiar tones. "All right, skipper; only I don't know much about powder to make trains. You wet in, don't wild-fire on it?"

"Bah! stand aside. Here you, Blane, lay that powder close up door."

"What me, skipper? Anything in going aloft and settin' sail; but I know no more about gunpowder than a babby."

"Get out of the way, idiot. Where's Dumlow?"

"Which here I be," growled that individual.

"Here, lay hold of this powder, and plant it, my lad, and then lay a train."

"Take that there powder and lay a train?" said the big sailor.

"Yes."

"Not me."

"What! You dare—" cried Jarette.

"Lookye here, skipper," growled Dumlow, "don't you get poking that there pestle in my face, 'cause it might go off."

"Yes, and it will go off," cried Jarette. "I mean to be obeyed by this crew, as I've just shown you."

"Nay, but don't poke pestles in my face; 'cause it make me hit out, and when I hits out I hurts. You ask some one else."

"Bah!" ejaculated Jarette; and the word sounded like the short, sharp bark of some cur, as it reached us through the barricade.

"Goin' to plant it yourself?" said Bob Hampton.

"Yes, you brave Englishman," sneered Jarette. "I'm going to show you what your captain can do."

"Shoot the scoundrel!" said Captain Berriman, excitedly.

"Impossible, without he comes into sight," whispered Mr Denning.

"Can't you see him?"

"No; he is pushing a bag of powder right in up against the door, and now sprinkling handfuls of powder up to it."

"You come away," said the captain. "Quick, man! Here, every one lie down at the far end of the saloon."

I was one of the first to run; but I came back with a can of water, and held it to Mr Frewen.

"Can you do anything with that, sir?" I said.

"No, my lad. Quite impossible to reach it effectually."

I stood staring at the barricade and its openings for a few moments, and then an idea struck me. I had often seen my father's gun cleaned, and when the barrels were detached from the stack, taken them up to look through them, binocular fashion, to see whether they were clean inside.

"Take off the barrels from that gun!" I said excitedly.

"What for?" cried Mr Frewen; but he did that which was asked all the same, and handed the barrels to me.

"What are you going to do?" whispered the captain.

"One minute, sir, and I'll show you," I said. "Let me come there, Mr Denning."

That gentleman altered his position a little, so that I could reach through the opening and let the ends of the barrels rest upon the deck, close to the powder, which I could just see scattered about the flooring.

Directly after, I had raised my can and was carefully trickling the water down through one of the barrels with such good effect that the explosive grains were either saturated or borne away.

I had been sending the little stream through for some moments before it was seen, and the first intimation we had of the mutineers noticing our defence was the explosion of a pistol, and simultaneously a dull, cracking sound as a bullet passed through the door and was buried in the trunk behind it.

"That don't matter, Berriman," cried Jarette; "we have plenty of powder, and you can't say the same about water."

I started at this, for it struck me that I had been pouring precious drops away which might mean life. But I laughed directly after, as I recalled the fact that we had only to drop a bucket out of the stern-windows and haul up as much salt water as we liked.

Mr Frewen must have been thinking the same thing, for directly after he and Mr Brymer attached pieces of new halyard to a couple of tin pails, and threw them out of the window, and drew them up full, ready for the next attempt to lay powder.

"No need to pour away the precious drops now," said Mr Frewen. "But we must have down some of those chests so as to get at the powder easily."

The words had hardly left his lips when there was the sharp report of Mr Denning's piece, followed directly after by a second shot, and the rush of feet upon the deck.

Chapter Fifteen.

"Well!" said the captain grimly. "Did you bring down your gaol-bird, sir?"

"No," replied Mr Denning, as he drew back and began to reload. "I could not see any one, only that a bag of powder was being thrust along the deck with a hand-spike, and I fired at where I thought a man might be."

"And hit him, seemingly," said Mr Frewen. "Now then, we must down with some of these trunks."

They were seized directly, and pulled away, so that had we liked we could have opened the door widely; and Mr Denning now took up his position here, while Mr Frewen and Mr Preddle stood ready each with their guns, which had not yet been discharged, while I and Mr Brymer were in charge of the two buckets of water.

There was now plenty of room for any one to look round the edge of the door and make an observation; and though

our position was a good deal weakened, this was to some extent counterbalanced by the chests and trunks being built across as a breastwork, behind which the guns were stationed, Mr Brymer and I being between the breastwork and the door.

"Now, Dale, look out and see how matters stand," said the captain.

I peered cautiously round, and saw that the deck was blackened with moist powder, and that two powder-bags lay in patches of wet, while all round was rapidly drying up. There were the mutineers, standing in a group, every man armed, though some only had knives and hatchets. By their side, as if in command, stood Walters, with two pistols in his belt, looking like a pirate in a penny picture; and they were all staring at the cabin-door; but I looked in vain for the leader of the mutiny.

I drew back and reported what I could see, and Mr Frewen whispered—

"Could you reach the powder-bags with a walking-stick? I mean one with a hook."

"No; but I could easily run out and pick them up."

"No; never mind," said the captain; "the water would run up through them like in salt or sugar. There's no danger from them. Look out again."

I peered out, and felt quite ready to laugh in spite of our perilous condition, for I could not help thinking what a conceited fool Walters looked. He seemed to me like a big school-boy playing at being a buccaneer; and the feeling was strong upon me that I should like to go out and punch his head till it was soft enough for some common-sense to get in.

Then the reality, the stern, horrible reality, of all that was before me came with terrible force; for as I scanned the rapidly drying deck, all strewn and splotched with trampled wet powder, I saw one great patch that did not seem to dry up at all, and the next moment I grasped what it was, and shuddered, for it was blood.

And then I felt that in spite of the absurdity of the appearance of Walters and some of the men, we poor creatures, shut up there in that saloon-cabin, with ladies depending upon us for protection, were face to face with death; for when weak, thoughtless men were once committed to an enterprise and led away, there would be no bounds to the excesses they might commit.

Strong thoughts, terrible thoughts these, but the weapons, the powder, and the blood showed me that there was no exaggeration.

A cold shudder passed through me as I stood there watching, and ready to report the next movement on the part of our enemies. My eyes felt a little dim, too, as I looked round vainly in search of Jarette, who must be, I was sure, planning some means of getting us all into his power.

The door was only opened widely enough for me to look along the deck where the men were watching the door; and I was just thinking that if we all made a bold dash at them, armed as we were with right upon our side, there was no reason why we should not scatter them; and once scattered and Jarette mastered, the rest would, I knew, be easy enough.

"And we shall have to do it," I thought. "I can't do much, but I could and I would lick Walters."

My fingers itched to get at him as I thought all this, and the blood flushed up into my temples.

"A mean, contemptible coward!" I muttered, as I gazed at him. "Yes, you may stand there as cocky as you like with your pistols, but they don't frighten me. You daren't fire them, and you showed what a coward you were when you were told to lay the powder here and— Hallo!"

The current of my thoughts was changed on the instant as something came down very softly from above—something soft and grey-looking hanging from a string. There was not a sound, but I grasped directly what it meant.

Some one had gone softly up on to the poop-deck, and was standing just over my head, letting down this something by a string, so that it should lie gently close up to the door.

I could not look right up and see, but I knew as well as could be that it was Jarette there leaning over the rail; and as I watched, the bag—for bag it certainly was—came lower and lower till it nearly touched the deck-planks, when it was swung gently to and fro till it would just touch the door. Then the string was dropped; and it had all been so well managed that the bag, with perhaps ten pounds of powder within, leaned close up.

"The cunning wretch," I thought to myself, and I was so interested in the plan that I could not withdraw my eyes from the slit, but stood watching to see what would come next.

I was not kept waiting many moments before there was a thick black shower of dust scattered down from above, and I knew that Jarette must be throwing down powder, so as to form a train. And this he did cleverly enough, so that the deck was thick with powder, close up to the bag, and then the train grew thinner, and I felt that he would have to come down on the lower deck to finish his task.

Almost as I thought this, I saw a shadow, just the head and shoulders of a man, cast by the sun upon the deck, and I knew that our enemy was going to descend by the starboard ladder, and pass round to where he could scatter his powder.

And now for a moment I drew back, and whispered to Mr Frewen.

“Let me have the walking-stick now.”

“Right, my lad. Get yours, Mr Preddle, with the big hook.”

I heard a rustling behind me, and hurried back to watch, getting my eye on the deck in time to see a cloud of dust thrown toward the cabin-door, just as a farmer’s man might be sowing some kind of seed broadcast. And all the while, though the firing of that bag of powder would mean destruction, possibly death to some of us, I did not—mind, I who write you this am not boasting, but setting down the simple facts—I did not, I repeat, feel in the slightest degree alarmed, but so full of confidence, that it was like participating in some capital trick which was to result in confusion to a scoundrel.

The dust was thrown still, and I could see something very curious now, for as Jarette suddenly came into sight, I saw the mutineers, led by Walters, all draw back to some distance farther, while Jarette said something to him, I don’t know what, but I think it was insulting, and laughed.

Just as he had turned his head, Mr Preddle’s soft, smooth voice said—

“Here is the stick,” and without turning my head, I reached back my hand, took it, and passed out the great hook. It was ash, I remember, and of a light brown.

It was none too soon, for all at once right along the deck I saw a flash, then a white puff of smoke as Jarette knelt down, lit a match, and held it to the dust upon the deck.

Above the smoke in one glance I saw Walters slinking back behind the main-mast, and then the white vapour shut off everything, so that I reached out unseen, hooked the powder-bag, and after two or three tries drew it in, and shut the door close.

“What is it?” cried Mr Frewen, excitedly; “are they coming?” There was no time to answer. I leaped over the breastwork with the powder-bag in my hand, meaning to run to the stern-window and throw it out, but I thought it might be useful, and I rushed into Mr Preddle’s room to stand holding it behind me as there came a loud hiss and rush, and the saloon began to fill with smoke.

As soon as the danger was over I went out, leaving the powder upon Mr Preddle’s cot, and told them why I had rushed by.

“Oh, come, that’s better,” said the captain; “we thought you were showing the white feather, boy. So you hooked the powder-bag?”

“Yes, there it is,” I said. “Ah, well, this is no time for praise,” said the captain. “You did your duty well, my lad. Yes, it would have been a pity to have thrown the stuff overboard, we might have wanted it to send back with our compliments, eh? Leaden ones. What is it, Brymer?”

“Hist! Jarette is outside, looking astonished that the powder has not done any damage.”

“And he’ll be trying it again,” said Mr Frewen, who, after a few words with the captain, took his gun, placed a chair on the saloon-table, and then mounted upon it, thus bringing his head well up in the sky-light and above the level of the deck, so that he could watch Jarette’s motions if he attempted the same plan.

In addition, after glancing astern to see whether he was out of the steersman’s sight, he wrenched open the window a little more, pushed out the barrel of his gun, and stood there waiting.

He was not kept long before he saw the man come on deck bearing a heavier bag of powder, and he was in the act of sitting down in one of the cane seats near the rail to tie on a piece of string, when, with all the caution of some wild bird, he looked sharply round for danger.

In an instant he had caught sight of the barrel of the gun thrust through the window, and making a bound he reached the ladder, and swung himself down upon the main-deck, where he stood with the powder-bag in his hand, as if hesitating as to what he should do.

The men were watching him, and he knew it. They must have noticed his ignoble retreat, and here was the way to redeem his character.

This he did by coming straight to the cabin-door, and depositing the bag there, opening it, and throwing out several handfuls of powder to help form the train; but just at that moment the door was snatched open, and a gun thrust out so suddenly that it struck the mutinous leader on the side, and he leaped back, lost his balance, and fell heavily upon his back, while a roar of laughter arose from his followers.

Jarette leaped up with a cry of rage, snatched a pistol from his belt, and bravely enough dashed at the door; but as he nearly reached it, there was the sharp report of a gun, and almost simultaneously there was a burst of flame from the deck, a heavy rushing sound,—and the mutineer disappeared in a dense white cloud of smoke, out of which he staggered back to his followers, panting, startled, but, with the exception of a little singeing, unhurt.

Chapter Sixteen.

“Why didn’t you aim straight, man?—why didn’t you aim straight?” cried Captain Berriman. “You did not touch him.”

"I did not try to hit him," replied Mr Frewen, quietly.

"Then why did you fire, sir? A loud noise is not likely to frighten such a man as that."

"No; but the idea of being shot at, and the explosion of that loose powder about his ears has startled him, and he'll be careful about coming up to the door to lay powder-bags again."

"Then you fired to light the loose powder?"

"Yes, and it has had its effect, though I hesitated for a moment for fear the bag should not be far enough off. Where did you put it, Dale?"

"Along with the other in Mr Preddle's cabin," I said triumphantly, for when the door was open I was down on my knees ready by Mr Frewen's legs, and as he thrust the barrels of his gun against Jarette's side, I snatched at the bag and drew it in.

"Take my place, Mr Preddle," said Mr Denning to him, "I must go back to our cabin and speak to my sister. She will be terribly alarmed by the firing."

"Shall I go and speak to her?" said Mr Preddle, eagerly.

"If you are afraid to take my place," said Mr Denning, sternly.

"I—I thought—I wanted—I wished to save you trouble," stammered the stout passenger. "Thank you; my piece is loaded."

He was very red in the face as he stepped into Mr Denning's place by the door, which was now carefully watched in expectation of another attempt to blow it open.

But the minutes glided on, and all grew quiet forward to our great surprise; but we soon knew why, for a man came along bearing some biscuit and cold pork in one hand, a bowl of steaming coffee in the other, and it was evident that he was taking the man at the wheel some breakfast from the meal of which the crew were partaking.

"A good example, captain," said Mr Frewen. "I can keep on guard here while you people all have some refreshment. They must need it, for I'm sure I do."

I offered to take Mr Frewen's place, but he would not hear of it, and matters were compromised by my taking him his breakfast, when some provisions had hastily been placed on the saloon-table; and carrying mine with me, together with a box for our table, dragged down close to the barricade, and between it and the door, we made a hearty meal.

The ladies had come out of their cabins, and I saw how eager Miss Denning was to attend upon her brother and Mr Brymer, for whom, in his wounded state, she seemed to be full of sympathy. Then after attending upon him, she flitted to the captain's side, while from time to time Mr Frewen looked on, and appeared to be wishing that he too was wounded so as to be waited upon like that. At last the captain spoke.

"There, my dear," he cried, "not another mouthful for me if you don't go to your place by your brother, and have something to eat yourself."

"Oh, but I can have something at any time, Captain Berriman, when you are all busy protecting us."

"No," cried Captain Berriman, "not another mouthful." And he spoke so emphatically, that Miss Denning glanced at her brother, and then at a nod went and sat down.

I noticed that in spite of our position, everybody was making an effort to treat the trouble coolly; even Mr Frewen smiled at me, after glancing through the narrow opening.

"Come, Dale, lad, eat away. Don't say you've got no appetite."

"Oh, I'm pretty hungry, sir," I replied; "but all this in the night isn't the sort of thing to make one want his breakfast."

"Don't despair, my lad, it will come all right. Why, they must have given us nearly all the powder in those two bags you brought in, and if they don't mind, you and I will make a contrivance to hoist them with their own petard. But I don't want to shed blood if I can help it."

"No," I said, with a shudder, "it is too horrid."

Mr Frewen looked at me searchingly.

"Only," he continued slowly, "if blood is to be shed, and by none of our seeking, it is our duty to see that it is the blood of the villains who have turned upon us and set the law at defiance. Do you see that, Dale?"

"Yes," I said, "I see that, and of course we cannot be expected to be merciful to them who would blow us up with gunpowder. Why, they wouldn't have cared if the ladies had been injured as well as the men."

"You are quite right."

"But you did not shoot Jarette this morning, sir," I said, and I believe that my eyes twinkled mischievously at being able to confute him.

"No, Dale," he said, "I couldn't. Doctors have spent all their time learning how to save life, and it would have been such a cold-blooded act."

"But if you had shot him, sir, the mutiny would have been at an end."

"Unless your messmate, Walters, had constituted himself captain, and carried on the war."

"He!" I cried contemptuously. "Why, I'd go and fetch him out by one ear the same as a dog or a pig out of a drove. I believe, sir, that he is a regular coward and sneak."

"Ah, well, we shall see," replied Mr Frewen, "but I suppose that I really ought to have shot down that ruffian, broken one of his legs say, and then spent six months in curing him ready for a judge and jury to punish."

"But look here, Mr Frewen," I said, "isn't it all a mad and stupid thing for that man to do?"

"Worse than mad, my boy, for what can they do if they keep us down, and carry this vessel into port, which I doubt their ability to do?"

"Oh, they can do that," I said quickly. "Bob Hampton is such a capital sailor."

"A capital scoundrel," he cried hotly, "and if I have a chance I'll pitch him overboard."

"No, you won't, Mr Frewen," I said, laughing; "I don't believe that."

"Well, Dale, I'm afraid that if I did, I should want a boat lowered down to pick him up, and go in it myself. There, as you say, it is a mad thing for the men to have done. It shows how a whole party can be carried away by the specious arguments of one scoundrel. However, we know our duty, my lad; and that is to re-take the ship, place the worst of the men in irons, and make the others navigate the vessel, unless you advocate our hanging the worst of them instead of putting them in irons."

"There are no irons on board a ship like this," I said quietly.

"Ah, and there is plenty of rope, my lad; so you advocate hanging?"

"Don't make a joke of it all, Mr Frewen," I said, for I felt annoyed at his talking to me in that way, as if I were a mere boy of eight or nine.

"Right," he said sharply. "We will be wise over it all. Hallo, Mr Brymer is making signs for us to be quiet. The captain is going to speak."

I looked quickly at the table, and saw that Captain Berriman was standing just below the sky-light, when all at once there was a violent crashing of glass, and I saw pistols held down through the light, while almost at the same moment I heard a rustling noise outside, and leaped up.

"Look out, Mr Frewen," I whispered; "powder again!"

For the rustling noise had been made by Jarette, who had crept along unnoticed till he could plant a powder-bag, and as I glanced out I saw that he was rapidly laying a train by drawing a second bag of powder after him as he stepped rapidly back towards another man who was carrying a lighted lanthorn—lighted, I felt sure, though in the brilliant sunshine the flicker of the candle inside was hardly visible.

"Quick," I said; "draw open the door a little more."

As I spoke I tried to pull the chest away upon which we had been having our meal, but I could not move it, as it was against Mr Frewen's legs, and kept the door from being opened sufficiently wide in that narrow space for me to pass out.

"Oh, quick—quick!" I whispered.

"Anything the matter there?" cried Mr Brymer.

"No, sir, no, sir," said Mr Frewen. "Keep back there, everybody. Now, Dale, up on end with it."

I stooped down, and we quickly lifted the chest on its end, dragged the door a little way, but not far, for the chest still impeded it.

But there was room for me to force my way through the door, and I was in the act of passing through a little way, so as to lean out and once more snatch the powder-bag in out of danger when I saw that Jarette had snatched the candle out of the lantern held ready for him, and applied the light to the train.

Mr Frewen saw it too, and dragged me back, and in one and the same effort threw me and himself over the barricade. I should more correctly have said, let himself, as he held me, fall backward over the wall of chests into the cabin.

It all took place almost as quick as thought, for as we fell heavily upon the saloon-floor, there was a terrific flash, a roar, and I was conscious of being driven right into the great cabin, buried beneath a weight which caused me intense pain, and then all was blank.

Chapter Seventeen.

I could not have been insensible many moments, for I was conscious of shouting and trampling, of a thick black smoke which made it seem like night, of voices giving orders, and Jarette yelling to his men now in French, now in English, and all the time there was a crushing weight across my legs and chest.

Then there were a couple of shots fired, and the shutting and banging of doors; some one shrieked, and a man was thrown back over the mass which held me down.

After that I must have been insensible again, for the next thing I remember is hearing a groan, and directly after the voices of men talking in a familiar way.

"That's it, lads; altogether, and out she comes."

I could see light now, for something was lifted off me, and I looked out through a framework of shattered woodwork at the bright sunshine.

"Now then," said the same voice; "lift him out on to the deck."

It was Bob Hampton speaking, and it was Dumlow who spoke next in a low growl.

"Poor lad; he's got it bad, arn't he?"

I thought in my half-stunned fashion that they were talking about me; but they were lifting some one else, and just then Jarette came up. I couldn't see him, but I could hear him blundering over the wreck around, and his words plain enough as he said sharply—

"Dead? Overboard with him if he is."

"No, he arn't dead," said Bob Hampton. "Doctors don't die in a hurry. He'll come to and cure hisself, I dessay. Come on, mate."

In a muddled, dreamy way I knew now that it was a doctor they were carrying, and if it was a doctor I felt that it must be Mr Frewen; but what it all meant, or why I was lying there, I could not tell in the least.

There was half-darkness then for a little while, then light—then darkness again, and some one was leaning over me.

"Steady, lad," was growled, and I knew it was Bob Hampton again, and I tried to think and ask him what was the matter, but no words would come, though everything was growing very clear now, and the men's words bounded painfully sharp upon my ears.

"Got him?"

"Ay, ay."

"Heave then, together. No, hold hard; the corner of that portmanteau's over his hind leg. That's it; hyste it away."

I felt myself laid down while something was done close to me, and then I was lifted once more and carried out into the warm sunshine, and laid upon the hot boards of the deck.

"Poor laddie," growled Bob Hampton, "he's got it badly. Rum world this here, Neb!"

"Orful," said Dumlow.

"Reg'lar wusser," said another voice, which I knew to be Blane's.

"Look sharp there, my lads," cried Jarette, from somewhere overhead, which must have been the poop-deck. "That one dead?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You're a liar, Barney Blane."

"If he's dead, pitch him overboard."

"But he arn't dead, captain," growled Bob Hampton. "There's stuff enough in him to make a full-sized sailor yet, and he's far too good to be chucked over to the sharkses."

"But Barney Blane said he was dead."

"Don't you take no notice o' what Barney Blane says, skipper," cried Dumlow. "He dunno chalk from cheese best o' times, and I know he can't tell a dead man from mutton."

"Hear, hear, mate!" cried Bob Hampton. "Haw, haw, haw; we'll chuck the boy overboard if you like, capt'n; but there's a kick in one of his hind legs, an' I see him wink and waggle one ear."

"Let him lie there a bit till I come round," cried Jarette. "You go on and clear that cabin."

"Ay, ay," cried the three men who were near. "Come on, lads. Here, Barney, go and get that there pannikin o' water

from the breaker, and pour some in the boy's mouth. What yer go and say he were dead for?"

"Well, mate, I thought as he were. He had enough to ha' killed a man, let alone a boy."

"You look sharp, and we'll pull him and the doctor through, see if we don't. I don't think no bones is broke. Them chesties sheltered 'em."

Then I felt water being trickled into my mouth and some poured over my forehead, while, though I could neither move nor speak, I heard Jarette's voice giving orders apparently ever so far away.

"Look sharp, lads," said Bob Hampton, "or Frog-soup 'll be back and bully us."

"Must give the jollop purser a drop more," said Dumlow. "Here, he arn't dead neither; takes the water down as free as if it were grog. They'll come right agen, won't they?"

"Ay, to be sure," said Bob Hampton. "Now then, heave ahead afore he comes. Rum games these here, messmets."

"Rum arn't the right word," said Dumlow, and then all was perfectly still again, and I lay there wondering what was the matter, and why I couldn't think as I should, and make out why I was lying there on my back in the hot sun listening to a low moaning sound, and some one close to my ear talking in a muttering tone.

Then there was silence again for I don't know how long: before there was another low moan, and the voice close by me muttered—

"Oh, for more strength—could have saved—"

The words died out, and I lay there wondering still. Then I felt that people were coming near me, and stopped talking together.

I must have grown a little more sensible then, for I recognised the voices as some one gave me a rude thrust with the foot.

"This boy's dead enough," and the words sounded so sharp and cruel that they quite stung me.

"I think he is," said another voice, which I knew to be that of Walters.

"Oh yes; try him," said the first speaker, Jarette, I was certain.

And now as I felt some one take hold of my hand and raise my arm, my full senses seemed to come, and with them an intense feeling of pain. It was just as if the lifting of that arm was connected with something within me which had been stopped up, for as the arm was allowed to drop heavily back, and Walters said callously—"Yes; he's dead enough," I shouted as loudly as I could—"No, I'm not!" and opened my eyes to stare up at the group on deck.

There was a hearty burst of laughter at this, and I suppose it was partly directed at Walters, who sprang up as sharply as if I had bitten him, and then joined weakly in the laugh.

"Just like him," he said, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "Shamming again."

"Come, I like that," I said faintly. "Why, your life's all sham."

He took a step toward me as I lay there, and I thought he was about to kick me, but Jarette laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Let him be," he said shortly. "Look here, young Dale, where are you hurt?"

"I suppose I'm not hurt at all," I said, speaking with a good deal of pain; "if I say I am, he'll tell you I'm shamming."

"Never mind him, boy," said Jarette, "listen to me. Look here, the game's up with the officers, and they're either my prisoners or as good as dead, so there's nothing more for you to do. Now, I suppose you don't want me to have you thrown overboard, do you?"

"Of course not."

"Very well, then; it's only a change in your captain, and I dare say you can be useful. What do you say to joining me?"

"What, turning mutineer and pirate?" I said boldly.

"Don't you use ugly words, boy," he said, with a scowl. "Come, I offer you good terms; will you join us?"

"You don't want midshipmen," I said, as I tried to think hard as to what I ought to do under the circumstances.

"How do you know, boy? Join us, and serve under me. It will only be like going on again with your old messmate here, and I dare say I can promote you faster than you would have been under Captain Berriman."

"But where are we going? What do you mean to do with the ship?"

"What's that to you? There, I offer you your chance; will you join us?"

"I would if I was you, Mr Dale, sir," said a familiar voice, and turning my head with difficulty, there was Bob Hampton

looking quite frank and honest, and as if there was not such a thing as a mutineer on the face of the earth.

"Why? What for?" I cried, with a catching of the breath which made me raise my hand to my breast.

"'Cause we're all so jolly together now, sir. You'll like it same as me and my mates do. Jyne us, sir."

"All right," I said, "if—"

"If what?" said Jarette, sharply.

"If you rouse up the doctor and make him tend to me, for I'm afraid I've got some broken ribs."

"Good! We will," cried Jarette, but to my astonishment Walters suddenly roared out—

"No; don't trust him. He is a traitor, and he would only play the spy."

With a good deal of effort I raised myself upon one arm and looked him full in the face, for the pain I suffered and his words roused up in me a furious burst of temper.

"Traitor! sham!" I cried. "You ought to be hung for turning against your captain as you did."

"Don't trust him, Jarette; he'd only betray us."

"If ever I get a chance, I will, if it's only for the sake of seeing you get your deserts, you miserable hound!" I cried. "No, I'm not fit to be trusted, Jarette," I cried, now quite beside myself with rage and pain; "and don't let that miserable cur come near me, or I shall try to do him some mischief."

"Do you hear, lieutenant?" said Jarette, with a sneering laugh. "Why don't you go and serve him out for threatening you? He's about helpless if his ribs are broken, and couldn't hurt you back."

"I'm not going to meddle with the miserable, sneaking cur," he said contemptuously. "And you needn't banter me; I've saved you from being cheated by him."

"Oh, I don't know," said Jarette, gazing at Walters through his half-closed lids; "I dare say it was all talk, for he wouldn't have dared to play tricks. But I say, lieutenant, he has got a stouter heart than you have. He'd be too much for you."

Walters gave him a malicious look, full of angry spite, and as Jarette saw it, there was a complete change in the man. His eyes flashed, his form seemed to dilate, and he looked taller, while I now realised how it was that he had gained so much ascendancy over the men, making them follow and trust him with powers which would possibly land them all in gaol, if no worse fate were in store.

He and Walters were close to me, and I heard what could not have reached the ears of the men.

"Take care, youngster," he half whispered. "You've got a hasty tongue, and it stings sometimes. Mind I don't turn and sting again. Recollect you've committed yourself so deeply that you are mine now; and recollect, too, that I'm captain."

"Yes, I know," said Walters, sharply, "but he isn't to be trusted, and—"

"You hate him," said Jarette. "Well, I know you do. There, that's enough. Here, some of you, which cabin is empty?"

"Second one on the left," cried several.

"Is the door broken by the powder?"

"No; it's all right," said Bob Hampton.

"Carry 'em both in," said Jarette. "Fasten 'em up, and bring me the key. There, youngster," he continued to me, "I'm sending the doctor with you to set you right."

I nodded, and then had hard work to keep from shrieking out as two men lifted me and carried me through the companion into the shattered saloon, and then into the cabin on the left, laying me down pretty gently in the cot.

It seemed quite natural to me that I should be brought there, though it was unintentional on Jarette's part, for the cabin I was in was that apportioned to Mr Frewen, who was now carried in and laid upon a rug which covered a portion of the floor.

"Cheer up, Mr Dale, sir," said Dumlow, bluffly, for he was one of the men who had helped to carry in Mr Frewen. "They won't starve yer. If they do I'll bring you some o' my wittles and drink."

"Look here, Dumlow," I said, "where are the officers and the passengers?"

"Shut up, sir, in their cabins, like precious crocks in a cupboard, that's where they are; and now you're just the same, only you've got a crack in you somewheres."

The men all laughed and went out, and shut from my sight the shattered side, and confusion of chests and boxes lying in the saloon. Then I heard the door fastened, and I made an effort and looked over the side of the cot, groaning the while with the pain it gave me, down at poor Mr Frewen, who lay there quite insensible, and I said to myself

bitterly—

“Very kind of them to send me a doctor; why, I shall have to doctor him.”

Then for the first time I saw that he was bleeding a little from one side of his head, and this roused me so that I forgot a good deal of my pain; and after feeling my chest and side a little to try and make out where my ribs were broken, and without success, I managed to crawl out of the cot, and got down on my knees by my companion.

“Mr Frewen,” I said; “Mr Frewen,” and I laid my hand on his forehead. “Oh, I say, do, do pray try and speak. Tell me what to do for you.”

There was no reply, and I grew more excited, and as I did, so did my suffering seem to be less, and all my anxiety began to be about him.

“Mr Frewen,” I said. “Can’t you say a word?”

But he made no sign, and, forced by the circumstances to act, I leaned over, turned his head a little more on one side, and found that the hair was all matted together with the blood, which was already drying up.

Then I began to think that the hair ought all to be cut away, the wound bathed and strapped up, and I was about to proceed to do it, when another thought occurred to me.

It was this:—

The bleeding had pretty well stopped, and would, I felt sure, quite stop in a few minutes, so perhaps I should not be acting wisely if I disturbed the injury then, for it might be better if I tried to bring him to his senses, and then he would advise me what to do, and how to do it.

I believe I was in great pain then, but I forgot it for the moment as I looked round and I saw that there was water there, and sponges and towels were close at hand, so without farther hesitation I poured out some of the water into a little basin, and taking a sponge, well bathed his face, after opening the window, for the cabin was suffocating.

I bathed and bathed, and changed the water so as to get it a little cooler, though the rapid evaporation helped me most, and at last, to my great delight, his eyelids began to quiver, and finally he lay there staring at me wildly, and with his face terribly white.

“Mr Frewen, do you know me?” I said.

“Know you?—know you? Yes, of course,” he said hoarsely. “What is the matter?—what has happened?” and his hand went to the back of his head.

“You were hurt when the powder went off,” I said, watching his face eagerly. “Don’t you remember?”

“Yes,” he cried eagerly. “I threw myself back over the barricade with you.”

“And the door and all the boxes and chests were blown in and buried us, I think.”

“Was—was any one killed?” he said huskily.

“I don’t know; I think not,” I replied.

“But don’t you know, boy?” he cried angrily.

“No; I was hurt by the chests the same as you were, and don’t know what happened. It was all like being in a dream till a little while ago.”

“Then you know nothing?” he said excitedly.

“I only have a sort of misty recollection of lying there after the explosion, till I was carried out on deck and laid in the sun.”

Then I told him all about being like in a nightmare, and hearing them talk of throwing us both overboard, only Bob Hampton said we were alive.

“The scoundrel!” he said bitterly.

“Well, I thought it very jolly of him then,” I said, “for if it had not been for him we should have—”

I pointed downward.

“Right to the bottom of the sea,” I added.

“Yes; and you seem to have been hurt.”

“Hurt? I should think I was, horribly,” I cried; “but it don’t seem so bad now, since I’ve been helping you.”

“But the passengers, Dale?” he said excitedly, as he tried to sit up, but sank back with a groan; “have you not heard anything whatever about them?”

I shook my head.

"Didn't you see anything to suggest that any one was killed and—and thrown overboard?"

"No, Mr Frewen."

"Go out then and make inquiries, my good lad," he said piteously; "this suspense is worse than the injury."

"You forget," I said quietly.

"Forget? What?"

"That we are prisoners. I couldn't get out."

"Yes, yes," he moaned. "I forgot. My head is all confused and strange. What's that?"

"Some one knocking gently at the bulk-head," I whispered, for there were three gentle taps on the wooden partition just opposite to where I was kneeling.

"Then there is some one else a prisoner," he cried. "Quick, speak to him."

"Better not speak," I said; "we may bring in some of Jarette's gang;" and rising softly, I took out my pocket-knife, and gave three gentle taps with the haft just about the spot where we had heard the sounds.

The moment I had done, two knocks came in answer, and when I had responded in the same way, there was one single one given which I also answered.

"That only stands for some one being there," said Mr Frewen, with a sigh; "we have no code arranged by which we could communicate."

"Oh yes, we have," I said, with a laugh, and, after breaking my thumb-nail, I managed to open out a gimlet fitted in the back of my knife, in company with a button-hook, a lancet, another to bleed horses, a tooth-pick, pair of tweezers, and a corkscrew, all of which had been very satisfactory to look at when I received the knife as a present; but I often had come to the conclusion that the knife would have been better with two more blades instead. But now its time had come, and with a feeling of being able to triumph over a difficulty, I stepped to the bulk-head, feeling rather giddy and strange in the head, but this passed off in the excitement, as I rapidly stuck in the point of the gimlet and began to bore.

The bulk-head was composed of three-quarter inch board, but I kept on boring and boring without apparently getting through, and I drew out the gimlet at last, after boring in as far as I could, and stood looking at the position in dismay.

Just then came a fresh tapping, to which I responded, and then as I listened to the hollow sound I knew what had been wrong. I had been boring through the board just where it was backed by one of the uprights which gave strength to the bulk-head.

The next minute I had bored a hole right through, and on withdrawing the gimlet I could see daylight.

"Who's that?" I whispered, with my lips to the tiny hole, and placing my ear to the orifice I heard for answer—

"Me, Mr Preddle. Who are you?"

"Dale and Mr Frewen," I answered.

"What does he say?" asked Mr Frewen.

"Says he is so glad, sir."

"Thank him, and ask him about the passengers, whether any one is hurt."

I whispered the question through the hole, and listened for the answer.

"Captain Berriman and Mr Brymer both wounded again in the struggle, when the men rushed into the saloon after the explosion. Now shut up in their cabins."

"But the passengers; ask him about the passengers," whispered Mr Frewen.

I asked, and the answer came back—

"No one hurt."

I saw Mr Frewen close his eyes at this, and his lips moved as I felt sure in prayer.

"Yes?" I whispered back, as Mr Preddle said something which sounded all buzz, buzz, buzz.

"I say, what will those wretches do with us?"

"I don't know."

"Will they kill us and throw us overboard?"

"No," I whispered through. "If they had meant that, they would have done it at once. But don't talk any more now."

"Buzz, buzz, buzz."

"What say?"

"Buzz, talk, buzz, buzz."

I opened my penknife, for I knew that the reason why Mr Preddle's words sounded so buzzy, was that a lot of little bits of wood were sticking up through the hole left by the gimlet. And so it proved, for after a little cutting all the words sounded clearly enough, and he promised to wait till I had attended to Mr Frewen's injuries before asking any more questions.

"Yes," he said, "I'll wait; but when one is in prison, and can talk to the prisoners next door, it does seem to do one good."

I had just knelt down to see to Mr Frewen's head, when I heard my name pronounced again.

"Yes," I cried impatiently, "what is it?"

"Only a word," said Mr Preddle.

"Quick, then."

"You were out on the deck some time, weren't you?"

"Yes; a long time," I replied impatiently. "Why?"

"Could you see how my poor fishes were getting on?"

"No, I couldn't," I said gruffly, for my temper was as sore as my body just then, and Mr Preddle irritated me; he did seem so girlish and weak.

"Now, Mr Frewen," I said, "tell me what to do to your head."

"Leave it alone," he said, smiling, "or no, perhaps you had better do something to it; I shall be better and stronger, and I want all my strength now."

"To help get back the ship?" I said.

"Yes, of course. Now then, my lad," he continued, "you must think that you are a surgeon's mate or dresser." I nodded.

"You will not mind?"

"Of course not, sir."

"Then go to that drawer, and you will find scissors, lint, bandages, and strapping."

I went to the drawer, and there, neatly arranged, were the articles he had described, in company with many more.

"Now get water, sponge, and towel," he said, and this I did.

"Now go to work and cut away the hair, so that you can see what damage is done."

"But I'm afraid—"

"What?"

"Of hurting you."

"Then set that aside, boy," he said, smiling. "A surgeon must take all the care he can, but he must not be afraid of hurting his patient. Go on."

It was not quite my first surgical experiment, for I had bound up cut fingers before then, and once roughly tended to the broken arm of a school-fellow, who had fallen in climbing a tree, though my attention merely consisted in laying the arm straight and bandaging it with a woollen comforter, while the doctor was fetched; but all the same I felt very hot, nervous, and uncomfortable, as, in following out Mr Frewen's instructions, I cut away the hair, bathed the place, and told him exactly what I saw, horrible as it was.

"Pooh!" he said, with a little laugh. "A mere scratch. Why, if it were a patient I was attending—you, for instance—I should say you were making a miserable fuss about nothing."

"But it is very bad, sir," I said. "Why, you were quite insensible."

"Yes, Dale, that was the contusion. One of the chests must have been driven against my head like a square shot. Well, there's one comfort, the skull isn't cracked. Now cut some strips of that plaister, and place them across and across."

I followed out his instructions, and ended by laying some lint over the wound and securing all with a neatly sewn on

bandage.

He turned very pale twice over as I was busy, and, in obedience to a whisper, I took down a bottle and measured out some of its contents, afterwards administering the dose in water.

“Not pleasant stuff, Dale,” he said, smiling feebly, “and it’s rather hard lines, as you lads would call it, for a doctor to have to take his own stuff; but you see I have a nasty crack, and if I had not been a particularly thick-headed sort of fellow, I’m afraid I should not have wanted another.”

“What is that you have taken?” I asked. “Only ammonia—sal volatile—a capital stimulus when faintness comes on. There, I’m better now, and I dare say I shall do. I can examine you now. Ribs broken, eh?”

“I thought so, sir.”

“And I’m sure you are wrong, my lad. If your ribs, or even one rib, had been fractured, you could not have gone on working for me like that. You would have been in agony.”

“Well, it does hurt pretty tidily, sir.”

“Perhaps so, Dale, but not to the extent it would under those circumstances. There, I’m better now. Help me to sit up.” I helped him, and he turned ghastly.

“Feel faint, sir?” I said.

“Horrible, Dale, but I will master it. This is no time for giving way like a young lady in a hot room. There, that’s better. Nothing like making a fight for it. Come.”

“Oh no; I’m not very much hurt, sir,” I cried. “Wait till you are easier.”

“Come closer,” he said firmly. “Off with your jacket, and open the neck of your shirt.”

I obeyed him unwillingly, and making another determined effort to master the faintness from which he suffered, he carefully examined my chest and side, giving me such intense pain the while that I too felt sick, and would gladly have prescribed for myself a draught of the medicine he had taken.

“There,” he cried at last, “that’s perfectly satisfactory. No ribs broken, Dale, but you had a tremendous blow there from the nearest box. It’s a wonder that we were not killed.”

“Then I shan’t want strapping or bandaging, sir?”

“No; I’ll give you some arnica to bathe the place with. You’ll have some terrible bruises all up your side, but that will be all. Now then, my lad, that we have repaired damages, the next thing is to see what we can do for other people.”

“Yes, and about re-taking the ship,” I said excitedly, though I could not then see the slightest chance of success.

Chapter Eighteen.

Mr Frewen and I were both too weak and faint from the terrible shock we had had, to do anything that day but lie back and rest, my place being chosen close to the hole I had bored, so that I could be ready to answer Mr Preddle’s questions, which were constantly coming, and to listen to his lamentations about his fish—about the trouble he had taken, the water which must be drying—till, as I lay back there with my ear close to a second hole which I had bored lower down, every now and then from pain, heat, and the consequent faintness, I kept on dropping into a curious half-dreamy state, in which I seemed to be watching Mr Preddle’s fish swimming about with their fat little mouths gasping at the surface of the water, and all looking as if they were so many hundreds of tiny Preddles asking me to get them out of prison.

Oh, what a wretched time that was, and how I wished that I could go right off to sleep—a sleep without any dreams—and keep asleep till my side had left off aching. But it was no use to wish, for though Mr Frewen was sleeping, so sure as I nearly dropped off, Mr Preddle would put his lips to the hole I had made for my own torture, and whisper something.

“Dale, I’ve been thinking that if Mr Frewen could seize the man who opens your door and attends upon you, and hold him while you ran out and opened mine, you and I could then go and open two more cabins, and so on, and then we could seize the ship.”

“Yes,” I said heavily, and there was a pause. Then just as I was dropping off to sleep again—“Dale!”

“Yes, sir.”

“We ought to do it when it is dark. I’m quite strong, and not hurt a bit. Do you think Mr Frewen is well enough?”

“Oh yes!” I said drowsily, though all the time I knew he was not, but I couldn’t help it.

“Then I think we ought to try to-night. But what is your opinion of Mr John Denning?”

“Haven’t any opinion of him,” I said, almost talking in my sleep.

"Oh, but that's not fair. He certainly is very irritable, but he might be useful, and I think he is brave. A man who is in bad health is frequently irritable, and if we have to fight, as I suppose we very likely shall have to, his irritability would be of great advantage to us, because it would be vented upon our enemies."

That's as far as I can remember what he said, for nature would bear no more, and I was fast asleep with a murmuring sound close to my ear shaping my dreams, which lasted till there was a rattling sound at the door, which as I started up was flung open, and two men brought in what was intended for our supper and dinner together.

The supply was very coarse, and only consisted of cold salt beef, bread, and water, but if it had been a repast of the most delicious nature, it would not have tempted Mr Frewen or me. The fresh water was all we cared for, and a sip of this from time to time was most refreshing.

But as soon as the men had left our cabin and closed the door, we heard them go into the next, and as we sat listening, we could hear almost every word that was said, for Mr Preddle questioned the men sharply, but obtained no answer, the door being roughly closed just in the middle of one of his speeches. Then as we sat listening we could hear the men go from cabin to cabin down one side of the saloon and back along the other.

After this we began to talk in a whisper about our future prospects, and our plans were soon made—to wit, that as soon as Mr Frewen felt himself strong enough to act, an attempt should be made to evade the vigilance of the men on guard, and communicate with the captain or Mr Brymer, and then try to make some plan.

"There don't seem to be much chance," I said, rather dolefully, for I was in a good deal of pain.

"You never know what is going to happen, my lad," said Mr Frewen. "As for me, I feel quite cheerful about our prospects. These men never can get on without quarrelling, and if they are divided, then is our chance."

"But suppose they do not quarrel, and are not divided?" I said.

"Don't suppose impossibilities, Dale. I've been at sea long enough to understand a little about sailors. This man Jarette has won their ear for the time, but he will soon begin to behave tyrannically to them, and then they will be as ready to rebel against him as they were against Captain Berriman. We have to wait for that moment, and take advantage of it if we can."

But three days glided on without our having a chance of knowing what was going on in the other cabins. We knew that we were sailing away south, and that the men seemed to be enjoying themselves, for there was a good deal of singing and shouting—strong indications of drinking going on. Mr Frewen was far better, and my pains had passed into an unpleasant stiffness; otherwise, I was all right.

As for Mr Preddle, he would sit against the bulk-head and bemoan his fate as long as he could get a listener, and half his discourse would be about his fish, the other about the unfortunate passengers.

I had cut a way through into his cabin by boring a great many holes, and then joining them with my knife, so that I could pass it through for him to try if he could communicate with the cabin further on. But that proved to be empty, and we could do nothing that way.

So we sat through the hot day talking about the mad act on the part of the men, and watched the horizon in the hope of seeing a ship to which we could signal, but nothing came in sight.

The fourth night had arrived, and now Mr Frewen had made up his mind that our plan ought to be to work at a board in the bulk-head till we could get enough loose to draw a piece out; and then, after getting into Mr Preddle's cabin, work a way through into the next, the empty one, which was pretty sure to be open.

Mr Preddle was almost speechless with excitement when the plan was broached to him, and he declared it to be too good for there to be any failure.

"Why, we have only to loosen a board or two on my side, go through, watch our opportunity, and then go from cabin to cabin and let out our friends; then wait till the mutineers are all quiet below, and fasten the hatches tight down upon them. Alison Dale, my dear boy, we shall re-take the ship, save the ladies, and I shall, after all, get across with the greater part of my consignment of salmon and trout."

He had his plump round face to the opening looking in at us as he said all this, and I could see that his eyes were sparkling with pleasure at the thought of the great success that was coming.

"It is very easy in theory, Preddle," said Mr Frewen, "but I don't know that it is going to turn out so satisfactory in practice."

"Oh, my dear Frewen, don't throw cold water on the plan, pray," he cried.

"Not a drop," said Mr Frewen.

"And you will try?"

"Oh yes; anything that promises success in any shape. We cannot sit still. We must master them."

"But are you strong enough to try?"

"I'll make myself strong enough," said Mr Frewen, quietly.

"Then which board shall we try to loosen first?"

"Hist! some one coming," I said quickly, and I moved a couple of bottles belonging to Mr Frewen's store across the little opening, and took down another bottle to remove the stopper and begin sniffing at it as there was a sudden rattling at the door, which was thrown open, and Jarette entered. He left a bodyguard of five or six well-armed men outside, among whom I saw Bob Hampton, and I felt so enraged against him that I fixed him with my eye, but he seemed in no wise abashed, looking boldly back at me, and giving me quite a friendly nod.

"Tracherous brute!" I muttered, and turned away to find Jarette looking at me searchingly.

"Not dead yet then?" he said, with a half-laugh. Then to Mr Frewen—

"Well, doctor, you've patched yourself up, I see. What do you say to come under my flag?"

"Prison flag!" said Mr Frewen, contemptuously.

"Oh no, my good friend; in my little kingdom I am going to found. What do you say to a lovely spice island, all sunshine and flowers, where I can start a new civilisation? I offer you a fine position there as the only doctor. What do you say?"

"No, of course," replied Mr Frewen, contemptuously.

"Ah, you'll think better of it. I've started the idea too suddenly for you now you're sore; but you'll come round, and the sooner you do the more comfortable you'll be. It must come to that. You'll have no other chance."

"We shall see," said Mr Frewen, coldly.

Jarette looked at him sharply, and then all about the narrow cabin before fixing his eyes again upon my fellow-prisoner.

"Look here," he said, in a sharp, fierce way. "You're thinking of escaping—listen to this, boy," he added, turning sharply to me, "it will do for you too. Now don't think any more about such a *bêtise*, doctor," he continued, "for it is of no use. There is no escape for you. If you tried to break out I have men on the watch whose orders are to shoot down any one who tries to get away, and that shooting down means pitching overboard afterwards. It would save me a great deal of trouble, but I don't want any more fighting and killing: I want peace. There, you can think it over. You had better be friends, for it would hurt my feelings to have to set you afloat in an open boat with those brute bullies, Berriman and Brymer. Think it over, man. Your friend, Mr Preddle, is sure to join me, for I can find him a pond or a river in which to keep his fish."

He backed out of the cabin, and the door was closed, while as we listened we heard the party move on to Mr Preddle's cabin.

I could not resist the temptation of listening, and as I was standing close by the partition, I took a step nearer to the opening I had made, and softly drew aside the bottle I had placed before it.

Mr Frewen's lips moved, and I took it that he said "Be careful," so I nodded to him as much as to say "I will," and listened.

I could not see through, for Mr Preddle had done as I had—drawn something before his side of the opening, which was so small and in such a dark part of the cabin, that unless searched for it was not likely to be seen.

"Well, sir," cried Jarette, "when are you coming on deck again?"

"Coming on deck?" said Mr Preddle, wonderingly.

"Yes; those fish of yours want seeing to; I had to lift out half-a-dozen this morning with that string ladle of yours."

"The little net?" cried Mr Preddle, eagerly. "That was very good of you. How do they all seem?"

"As if they wanted their master to come and feed them. They all swam up to the top and put their mouths out of the water; didn't they, Hampton?"

"Ay, ay, that's so," growled Bob, "and they all called out, 'Wittles, wittles,' in fish, on'y they've got such little voices through being so much in the damp that you couldn't hear 'em."

The men laughed, and Mr Preddle joined in, but in a feeble forced way as he said weakly—

"No, no, that was for fresh air. They'll all be dead soon, I'm afraid."

"Then why don't you come and attend to 'em?" said Jarette.

"May I, Mr Jarette?" cried Mr Preddle, excitedly.

"To be sure you may, sir. You've only got to satisfy me that you've thrown over these people here, whom I have been obliged to shut up for violence. Cast in your lot with us, and there you are, quite free; and I'll—come, I'll make you naturalist to my expedition, and one of the chief men of my island."

"Naturalist to your expedition?" faltered Mr Preddle, wondering at the language used by a man whom he had heretofore looked upon as a common sailor, perfectly uneducated, and ready for any amount of violence and rapine,

—“chief man in your island!”

“To be sure.”

“But have you got an island?”

“Waiting for me to go and take it, sir; and there you can study nature at home,—just the place for gentlemen like you.”

“Ah, yes, that it is,” said Mr Preddle.

“You’ll join us then?”

“The weak limp wretch,” I heard Mr Frewen whisper.

“No, sir, you said that I was a gentleman. I am, and gentlemen cannot do such things as that.”

“Not take up a delightful life yonder?”

“No; the cost is too great. I should have to be false to my class, and to my companions in misfortune here.”

“Bah!—they are not so squeamish. They come, all of them, and are glad. You will join us?”

“No, sir, no.”

“But your fish—dying!”

“Poor things! It is a disappointment, sir; but I cannot do as you wish me to, even to save them.”

“You will not?”

“No, sir, no.”

“Idiot!” cried Jarette, sharply, and directly after the door was banged and fastened.

“My fish—my fish—my poor little fish!” muttered Mr Preddle; “but I couldn’t, even to save them.”

Then there was silence, and I softly recovered the little hole and looked round at Mr Frewen, who nodded and smiled.

“Yes,” he whispered, “it is quite true: he is a gentleman, poor fellow, in spite of all.”

Then we listened again, and heard door after door opened, as Jarette went round to see his prisoners; and principally, I fancy, to make sure, as he used his eyes sharply, that no one was likely to escape.

Door after door was opened, and then we heard fierce angry voices, one of which I was sure was Captain Berriman’s. We could not hear what was said, but his voice sounded threatening, and Mr Frewen whispered—

“Thank heaven! I was afraid the poor captain had been murdered.”

Hardly had the words passed his lips before we heard a sharp report, a piercing shriek, and a heavy fall.

Then for a few moments there was silence, but a quick muttering of voices followed, and then a door was banged.

A few moments later as I stood there panting, and with the perspiration standing out upon my forehead, another door seemed to have been opened, and I heard a quick angry voice speaking loudly and upbraidingly.

“Mr Denning!” I said excitedly, as I turned to my companion, whose face looked terrible in its rage and despair.

“Whose voice was that, Dale?” he cried wildly.

“Mr Denning’s, I’m sure.”

“No, no, the lady’s cry.”

“I—I—don’t know,” I stammered.

“You do—you do!” he cried wildly, as he caught me by the breast; “speak out.”

“I—I half fancied it was Miss Denning shrieked out,” I faltered.

“Yes,” he groaned. “Yes, and I am shut up like this. Is there no way of escape?”

And all this while the angry muttering and talking went on, Mr Denning evidently bitterly upbraiding Jarette, and the latter mockingly defiant, and uttering what sounded like contemptuous retorts. Then a door was banged again loudly, and we stood listening, Mr Frewen with his forehead resting against the panel and his hands clenched, while his face was all drawn into puckers and wrinkles as if he was suffering the most intense agony.

And as we listened, I, horror-stricken, and in the full belief that poor Miss Denning had been shot, perhaps in trying to save her brother, a couple more of the cabin-doors were opened and closed; then there was a good deal of talking and the giving of orders. At last, when we felt that Jarette and his men were going forward once again to their

quarters in the fore-castle, leaving us in horrible suspense, a heavy step approached our door, which was opened, and Hampton appeared.

"Who was that shot?" cried Mr Frewen, rushing at the man and seizing him by the breast.

"Easy, sir; easy it is. You'd best ask the skipper."

"I say, who was that shot just now?"

"And I says, ask the skipper, sir. It ain't my business. My business is to bring you out. You're wanted, and you're to bring your tools."

"Wanted? To attend the injured person?"

"I suppose so," replied Hampton, with brutal callousness; and just as Jarette approached, "Here's the captain, ask him."

Mr Frewen did not ask, but darted to one of the little drawers with which his cabin was fitted, took out a case and a packet of surgical necessaries packed all ready for emergencies, and turned back to the door.

"Here, where are you going, youngster?" cried Hampton, who was looking in with a peculiar expression upon his countenance.

"With Mr Frewen," I said stoutly.

"No, you're not. Go back."

"But he'll want me to help him!" I cried excitedly. "I must go."

"Yes; come with me, my lad!" cried Mr Frewen, and as I pressed forward, Hampton made no further objections to my presence, though before at a look from his leader he had barred the way with his sturdy arms.

The next moment we were standing in the torn and blackened saloon, with Mr Frewen looking round wildly from door to door, seeking the one through which he was to go.

Chapter Nineteen.

"Here, this way," said Jarette, fiercely, "and now you'll see that I'm not a man to be played with. I'm captain here now, and it's obey me or—"

He snatched a pistol from his breast and held it menacingly toward Frewen, who flashed out at him—

"Put that thing away, madman, and show me my patient. Which cabin is it?"

"That one," said Jarette, surlily. Then showing his teeth, he said in a peculiar tone of voice—"They say it's kill or cure with your set; let it be cure this time, or perhaps it may be kill afterwards. Come on. Go in there."

He signed to a man acting as sentry by one of the doors well aft, and the man drew back while Frewen brushed by the scoundrel who held it open, and entered quickly, I following ready to do everything I could to help.

I entered that cabin fully expecting to see Miss Denning lying bleeding on the floor, and I am sure that this was Mr Frewen's impression; but to the surprise of both it was a totally different person, for there lay the captain in one corner, his head slightly raised, staring at us wildly as he held one hand pressed to his shoulder, and his eyes were so fixed that for the moment I was ready to think that he was passing away. But a faint smile came upon his face as he looked up at the doctor, and then he smiled at me.

I darted a look full of horror and sympathy at him, and then closed the door, while as I turned I saw that the woodwork side of the cabin was marked by a bullet, for so I took it to be, which had splintered the board all round a good-sized hole.

Mr Frewen went down on one knee by the captain, and took the hand which rested on his shoulder, pressed it, and then began to examine the injury.

"Come and help me, Dale," he said; "we must get him in a different position."

"Perhaps—I can help," said the captain faintly. "The scoundrel shot me."

"Don't try to talk," said Mr Frewen, quickly. "Wait till I have bandaged the wound."

But as he spoke I noticed how he watched Captain Berriman, and seemed to take special heed of him as he whispered the above words evidently with pain.

"Is it very bad, doctor?" he whispered now after Mr Frewen had been busy about his breast, and shoulder for a few minutes. "You can tell me, I can bear it."

"Bad enough, but not so bad as it might have been if it had gone an inch lower. But keep quiet, talking will only distress you, and tend to make you feverish. There," he said at last, "there will be no more bleeding, and that was the only danger to apprehend."

By this time the captain was lying in an easy position, carefully bandaged and apparently suffering less.

“He came in—”

“Hush! don’t tell me; I know—as he did to us with inviting propositions. We heard your angry words, and the coward shot at you. But that shriek, surely it was Miss Denning’s?”

“Yes,” whispered the captain. “The bullet crashed through there afterwards and struck Mr Denning. Not hurt, but his sister shrieked on hearing the shot and seeing him fall.”

“Then they are in there?”

The captain nodded.

“And can hear our words?”

There was another movement of the head.

“Then let them hear that we are trying hard to put an end to this miserable state of affairs. Mr Denning should be ready to help us if called upon.”

There was a gentle tapping on the partition at this, and I was on my way to the bulk-head to reply, when the cabin-door was opened and Jarette came inside.

“Come, doctor, you must be done if you can find all that time for talking. Can you save him?”

“I am trying, sir, if only to be prepared to have a witness against you when the time comes for your punishment.”

“Oh yes, of course, doctor, we know all about that. This way, sir. Now, boy. Come!”

“Good-bye, Captain Berriman,” I said, as I leaned over my poor officer and pressed his hand. Then in a whisper—“Cheer up! Perhaps we shall re-take the ship after all.”

Then I followed the doctor, and a minute later we were once more under lock and key, while as I crossed the saloon I saw that a couple of men were pacing up and down, pistol in hand.

I made a remark about this, and then I spoke about the way in which the powder had driven in all the end of the saloon.

“I suppose Jarette must have used about all there is now.”

Mr Frewen shook his head.

“Didn’t you know?” he said. “There is a large quantity on board. It is being taken—across for blasting purposes in New Zealand. Jarette, I suppose, helped with the lading, and knew where it was stowed. That accounts for its being brought out so soon.”

“Pity we can’t give them a dose of it,” I said, “so as to frighten them into better order. Just fancy, Mr Frewen, dropping a bagful into the fore-castle with a fuse attached and lit; how they would run for the hatch, and before they could reach it—bang!”

“Yes, with that part of the deck blown up and a dozen or so of wretched mutilated creatures lying about shrieking for help. Well, Dale, I dare say there is one of the bags somewhere about the cabins, but I don’t think you could use it.”

“Well, now you talk like that, I don’t think I should like to,” I said.

“I am sure you would not, boy. You and I could not fight that way. We must have a better way than that.”

We lay there trying to think out some plan for the rest of that day, sometimes talking to ourselves, sometimes with Mr Preddle joining in; but for the most part he could talk about nothing else but his own troubles, and about his fish, which he was sure were dying off rapidly, for no one, he said, could attend to them like he would himself.

“Unless it was you, Dale,” he whispered apologetically. “You certainly did seem to understand them almost as well as I did myself. Ah, I’d give almost anything to be out there attending to the poor little things, but I could not go at the cost that was proposed.”

He sighed very deeply, drew back, and the little hole was darkened directly after, for Mr Preddle had lain down to meditate upon the sufferings of his fish, and when I peeped through at him a few minutes later he was still meditating with his eyes shut and his mouth open, while a peculiar sound came at regular intervals from between his lips.

Mr Frewen looked at me inquiringly as I turned round.

“Sound asleep,” I whispered.

“Poor Mr Preddle,” said Mr Frewen, “he is a very good amiable fellow, but I think that you and I must make our plans, Dale, and call upon him to help when all is ready.”

I nodded, for I thought so too, and after listening for a few moments at the door, we came to the conclusion that

there was nothing to mind about the sentries, so we proceeded to make our examination of our prison in a more determined way.

Several times my fingers had played about the knife I had in my pocket, and I had longed to bore holes in the cabin-door so as to watch the sentries; but of course I was checked by the knowledge that by making a hole through which I could watch them I was providing one by which they could watch us.

The cabins on either side of the saloon were only so many portions of the ship boarded off, and provided with doors, so that a couple of carpenters would have had little difficulty in clearing away the partition and making one long opening, but we had no tools, and the slightest noise would have drawn attention to our acts; and these ideas would, we knew, govern our actions in all we did.

Our idea was of course to get a board out between the doctor's cabin and Mr Preddle's, and if possible one at the darkest portion of the place close up to the ship's side; but examine as we would, there did not appear to be one that it would be possible to move, try how we would.

"It seems to be a very hopeless case, Dale," said my companion at last with a sigh, "unless we patiently cut a way through with your knife; one cutting, while the other keeps on throwing the chips out of the window so that they cannot be seen."

"But we shall make a big hole," I objected, "and the first time that Jarette comes in he will see it, and put us somewhere else."

"Of course. It looks very hopeless, my lad."

"You see we want holes, sir, so that we could take out one board from top to bottom quite whole, and put it back just as it was."

"Yes; but how are we to do that without tools?"

"I thought doctors always had a lot of tools," I said; "knives and saws and choppers for operations."

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "My head has not come right yet after that injury. Why, look here, lad!"

He went to a drawer fitted into a chest, and drew it open to take out a mahogany case in which, lying on blue velvet, were some of the things I had named—knives, and a couple of saws, beside other instruments whose purpose I did not grasp.

"We draw the line at choppers, Dale," he said, smiling; "and I suppose I ought not to devote my choice instruments to such a duty, but I think these will do."

"Splendidly!" I cried in delight, as I quite gloated over the bright steel saw. "Why, with one of those I can get a whole board out in an hour or two."

"Without being heard?"

"I didn't think of that," I said. "Let's see what noise it would make."

"No," said Mr Frewen, quietly. "We must wait till night; and it will be a very much longer task than you think, because we shall have to work so slowly."

"Wait till night!" I cried impatiently.

He nodded, and the dreary, slow way in which the rest of that day passed was terrible. It was as if the sun would never set; but Mr Frewen was right. There were two interruptions to expect—the coming of the man who would bring us our evening meal, a sort of tea-dinner-supper, and possibly a visit from Jarette to fetch Mr Frewen to see the captain.

The man came with our comfortless, unsatisfactory meal, at which I grumbled, but which Mr Frewen said was far better than ordinary prison fare; and just at dark, as he had suggested, we were startled by the sudden rattling at the fastening of our door.

Then Jarette appeared, and signed imperiously to Mr Frewen to follow him.

My companion frowned, but he rose and followed; not to obey Jarette, as he afterwards said, but to go and attend upon the captain.

I rose to go too; but as I reached the door, Jarette rudely thrust me back, so that I staggered to the cabin-window.

"Non!" he ejaculated sharply; and the door was banged to and fastened before I had recovered from my surprise.

"Never mind," I said to myself; "wait a bit," as I bit my lips and stood with clenched fists, thinking in my annoyance how much I should like to use them.

But I consoled myself by going to Mr Frewen's drawer and opening the case and looking at the bright steel saws, and then talking in a whisper to Mr Preddle, who came to the little opening to know whether anything was the matter.

I did not tell him about the saws after I had said that Mr Frewen had been fetched, but thought I would leave that for my companion to do, and then waited till he came; but he was so long that I began to be afraid he had been placed in

another cabin, the mutineer chief having suddenly become suspicious of our hatching a conspiracy to escape.

He came at last, though, to my very great relief, and told me that he thought Jarette, in spite of his display of bravado and carelessness, was alarmed about Captain Berriman's state, and afraid that he would die.

"And is he in a dangerous state?" I asked anxiously.

"No; only a little feverish, as the natural result of his wound."

"That was what made you stay so long then?" I said.

"Well, no," he replied, with a smile. "I'm afraid I tried to impose upon our new captain by assuming to be very much concerned about poor Berriman's state; but I had another reason as well. I wanted to try and have a few words with the Dennings, whom I could hear in the next cabin."

"Yes; and did you?" I asked eagerly.

"No, I was too closely watched. I could have whispered to them through the hole made by the bullet; but Jarette was at the door all the time that he was not in the cabin watching me, and I could not say anything aloud for them to hear without his knowing what I said."

"I know what I should have done," I cried.

"What?"

"Told them what our plans were in French."

"That would have been clever," he said dryly, "for a Frenchman to hear."

"How absurd!" I said. "Well then, in German."

"Equally absurd, Dale. I hardly know a word."

"Well then, in Latin."

"My studies in Caesar and Horace never gave me the power to be conversational, Dale," he replied; and soon after, as it was now getting late, and from the sounds we heard forward it was evident that the crew were enjoying themselves, Mr Frewen proposed that we should make our first start at cutting the board.

Word was passed through the opening to Mr Preddle, who was all eagerness to begin, and asked for one of the little saws, so that he might work at the top of the board while we cut at the bottom; but Mr Frewen promptly decided that one of the instruments would make quite enough noise, and told him that he must understand that our task was one probably of days, for everything must be done slowly and carefully, and in a way that would leave no traces behind.

"Very well," said Mr Preddle, almost petulantly, "you know best; but I am very, very anxious to get out of this wretched cabin."

"So are we," said Mr Frewen. "Help us, then, by keeping guard by your door, and at the slightest sound outside giving us the alarm."

"Yes, yes; of course," he said eagerly; and directly after, in the darkness, I heard Mr Frewen open the drawer and the instrument-case, to take out the little saw which might open our prison, and cut a way into another for the scoundrelly mutineers.

"How are you going to begin?" I whispered, after listening at the door. "Shall I bore some holes first to make a way in for the saw?"

"They will not be necessary," he replied. "I can manage to cut a way across the last board but one."

"Why not the last?" I asked.

"Not enough room to work. I shall try to cut in a sloping way to splay the board if I can, so that it will fit better when we put it back—if we get one out. Hush!—don't talk."

I stood close by him, ready to help in any way he required, and expected that when he grew tired he would ask me to take his place, so that no time might be lost.

We had one advantage that I have not mentioned, and it was this. We were of course locked in, but there was a bolt on the door, so that we could secure ourselves on the inside from any sudden interruption; and by keeping the door fastened, there would be time to hide the saw and brush away the dust before any one who came was admitted.

My position was facing the little round window of the cabin as Mr Frewen made the first start toward obtaining our freedom; and as the saw began to bite at the wood with a sound like that which would be made by a gnawing mouse, I stood gazing out at the beauty of the grand tropic night. It was very dark, but it was a transparent darkness, with the sky within reach of my vision thickly spangled with stars, which were so brightly reflected in the calm sea through which we were gliding gently, that there were moments when I could hardly tell where the sky ended and the sea began.

Then faintly and steadily rasp, rasp, rasp went the saw, with so little noise that it did not seem likely that any one out

in the saloon would hear it; and though at the first cut or two my heart began to beat with dread, a few minutes later it was throbbing with exultation.

For every gnaw of that little keen-toothed instrument sent a thrill of hope through me; and I did not stop to consider what we were to do, or what were our probabilities of success when we reached the saloon, for it seemed to me then that the rest would come. And on it went, gnaw, gnaw, gnaw at the soft grain of the pine-wood board, very slowly, but very surely, I knew; and I was just going to whisper to Mr Frewen, and ask him whether he would like me to take a turn, when the sawing stopped.

“Only for a few minutes’ breath,” he whispered.

“Shall I take a turn?”

“When we cut the bottom one. I am taller and stronger, and can get at this better than you.”

Then he began again, and I gazed through the cabin-window, and listened both to his working on the thick board, and for any sound which might indicate that a sentry had taken alarm.

But all was silent; and comforting myself with the belief that if the noise was heard it might be taken for the gnawing of a rat, I listened and watched the stars.

At last I was in such a state of nervous excitement that I was on the point of begging my companion, to let me take a turn, when from being so intensely hot I suddenly turned speechless and cold. For it suddenly occurred to me that the stars were blotted out, and that the night was blacker.

“A cloud,” I said to myself at first, but even as I thought that, I felt that it could not be; and at last I was lifting my hand to touch Mr Frewen, and draw his attention to the strange phenomenon, when the sawing suddenly ceased. My companion drew a long breath; and at the same moment, as I felt drawn toward the window by some strange attraction, to try and make out why it was so dark, there was the sound of another deep breath, and I felt it hot and strange right in my face, as in a hoarse whisper some one said—

“How are you getting on?”

Chapter Twenty.

For a few moments I could not utter a word in that black darkness. I heard Mr Frewen give a sudden start and his elbow jar against the partition, but he too was silent, save that I could hear his hurried breathing.

Then some one spoke again—

“Can’t you hear me there? I says, how are you getting on?”

“Bob Hampton!” I cried excitedly.

“Pst! Steady, my lad. Bob Hampton it is. But don’t shout, or some ‘un ‘ll hear you, and ‘ll come along the deck overhead and cut me adrift.”

“But what are you doing there?”

“Hanging on to a bit o’ line made fast to a belaying-pin.”

“But why? What do you want, sir?”

“Will yer keep quiet, my lad?” whispered the man, excitedly. “I don’t want to hear old Jarette sawing through this rope. What do I want? Come, I like that, arter risking all this here to get a word with you.”

“Go back to your friends, you scoundrel,” whispered Mr Frewen; “you have come to spy upon us!”

“Wheer’s my lantern, then? Man can’t spy a night like this, when it’s as black as inside a water-cask in a ship’s hold.”

“Mr Frewen is right,” I said. “Go back to your friends.”

“Arn’t got none forrard, leastwise only two; I’ve come to say ‘how de do.’”

“Don’t trust him, Mr Frewen, he’s a traitor,” I whispered; only Hampton evidently heard.

“Come, I like that, Mr Dale, sir. But I say, how could you be so easily took in? Theer was nothing else for a man to do but to go with the bad beggars, and when I seemed to jyne ‘em, why of course Neb Dumlow and old Barney joined at once.”

“Bob!” I ejaculated, as a feeling of delight sent a flush of blood to my cheeks, and I felt hot and excited once more, “you don’t mean to say that—”

“But I just do, sir. ‘Tarn’t likely I should run all this risk if I didn’t mean it.”

“You hear, Mr Frewen,” I whispered.

“Yes, but—”

"Look here," said Bob Hampton, angrily, "am I to creep in and stuff something into your mouth, Mr Dale, sir? You don't know how sounds run on a still night like this. It's grim death for me if I'm found out."

"Then you are true to us all the same, Bob?" I cried, reaching out to lay my hand upon the man's shoulder.

"True as gorspel, sir; and ready along with Neb Dumlow and Barney Blane to pitch old Frenchy overboard, or drown him in a water-cask, if you say the word, or Mr Frewen either, though I'd rayther take it from you, my lad, as you're one of the officers of the Burgh Castle and it'd come better like than from our doctor, and no disrespectment either."

"How are we to know that we are to trust you, Hampton?" said Mr Frewen.

"Tell you dreckly, sir, soon as I can get foot-hold. I'm pretty strong in the arms, but you can't hang by them as long as you can stand on your legs, 'less you're born a monkey, which I warn't. You see there's no board nor nothing to get a foot on, and I knows without trying that I couldn't get through that window."

"How can we help him, Dale?" whispered Mr Frewen. "I suppose we must trust him?"

"Trust him? Yes, of course. Stop a moment. Yes, I know." Then thrusting my arms out—"Hold hard a minute, Bob," I whispered. "Let me get hold of the rope and haul up the end."

"What for, lad?"

"For us to draw in here and make fast, then you can stand in the bight like a stirrup."

"Well, you are a winner, Mr Dale, sir," he replied. "Haul away, there's plenty down below; I should never have thought of that."

In a very few seconds I had pulled in the lower part of the rope by which he was swinging, got hold of the dripping end and passed it to Mr Frewen, letting the rest fall back like a big loop, but not so quietly as I could have wished. Then we hauled in slowly, till after a little management we had the bight so exactly adjusted that Bob Hampton's feet rested upon it while we held the rope tight.

"Hah!" he whispered, with his face close to the cabin-window, "that rests my flippers. Mind, I'm going to ease off a bit now, but if you two slacken down I shall go, and there won't be time to say good-bye."

"You may trust us, Bob," I said.

"Ay, ay, my lad, I will, and the least thing as you can do is to trust me and my mates."

"I will, Bob, and I'm sure Mr Frewen will, but we couldn't help thinking you were a traitor."

"Course you couldn't, lad. On'y nat'ral. But you see now as it was on'y make-believe."

"There's my hand, Hampton," said Mr Frewen.

"Thankye kindly, sir. That sounds English, on'y I can't give it a grip, 'cause I'm holding on. But if you'd just stuff one finger in my mouth I'll bite it if you like, to show I mean square and honest by you all."

"Never mind that, Hampton," said Mr Frewen; "we'll take it as being all right."

"Right it is then," said Bob Hampton, with a satisfied grunt, "on'y let's speak gently."

"Can you help us to escape, Bob?" I whispered. "Can't we re-take the ship?"

"Steady, my lad, don't get out o' breath. That's what we come about, and Neb Dumlow's bylin' over to do it."

"Tell us first what is the state of affairs," said Mr Frewen.

"State of affairs is, that all the orficers and you the doctor, along with the passengers, is prisoners, and Frenchy Jarette's skipper of the Burgh Castle, with that there rat of a 'prentice or middy, or whatever he calls hisself, first mate."

"But where are we going?" said Mr Frewen.

"Nobody knows but Frenchy, and there is times when I think he don't know. For he's as mad as a whole cargo o' hatters or he'd never ha' done what he has. But look sharp, sir, I can't stop long. If he found out, he'd cut the rope and send me adrift as soon as look at me, and that would be a pity, 'cause if there's one man as I do respeck and like it's Bob Hampton, mariner, spite of his looks."

"Yes, we'll be quick," said Mr Frewen.

"Is anything the matter?" came in a loud whisper.

"Oh lor'! Here I goes," groaned Bob Hampton.

"No, no; it's all right," I whispered. "That was only Mr Preddle."

"I thought it was Frenchy, sir."

"Hush! No, nothing wrong. Help come," whispered Mr Frewen. "Wait!"

Then coming back to the window—

"Now, Hampton, what can you suggest?"

"Well, sir, I've been thinking that if you gents— Pst!"

He ceased whispering in at the cabin-window, for just then we heard steps overhead as if two people were walking along the deck, and directly after I could make out voices in eager conversation fairly loud for a few moments, and then they died away, and I knew by the sounds that the speakers had gone right aft. Then Jarette's voice was heard making inquiries of the man at the wheel, to whom he stopped talking for a few minutes, which seemed to extend into an age of anxiety to me who listened so anxiously and in such dread lest the scoundrel should return and lean over the bulwark, or run his hand along, feel the rope, and so discover poor Hampton. Then I felt sure that he would have no hesitation in cutting him adrift, and that meant death to a brave and true man.

I felt a horrible pang of dread at these thoughts, and softly thrusting out my hand, I felt for and gripped Bob Hampton's great paw as it held on to the rope, and then whispering to Mr Frewen to do the same, I took tightly hold of the man's wrist with some idea of saving him if the scoundrel on deck should hear, and cut the rope.

The next minute, to my horror, as with one hand grasping the rope and the other Bob Hampton's arm, Mr Frewen and I stood face to face close to the cabin-window, we heard the voices on deck come nearer, then stop just overhead, and as far as I could judge, the speaker stood leaning against the bulwarks, so that we could distinctly hear Walters say—

"Why don't you send them all adrift in one of the boats?"

"Because we are not near enough to land, my son," replied Jarette; "and I am so anxious about my young lieutenant. It would grieve me to death to see him hung for a pirate."

"I wish you would talk common-sense, Jarette, and not be so fond of chaffing me. You'll make me wish some day that I had not joined you."

The Frenchman laughed derisively. "Why, my little brave," he cried, "what a dust-filled-eyed one you think me. Do I not know that you have been in a tremble ever since?"

"No, you don't," said Walters, sharply. "I'm sure I've done everything I can."

"My faith, yes; we will say it is so," said Jarette, with another sneering laugh. "It is wonderful how nervous men are who have their necks in the noose—boys too."

At that moment we felt Hampton softly loosen his hold of the rope with one hand, and pass it and his arm in at the window so as to get a grip inside, for evidently he expected that the rope would be discovered and cut. Though even then, unless Jarette were willing to save him, it would only be prolonging his existence for a few minutes, since it would have been impossible for us to draw so bulky a man through the circular hole which lit and ventilated Mr Frewen's cabin.

But he was safe for the time, come what might, and we remained there listening to the conversation overhead, gathering that there was very little friendship existing between Walters and his new captain, who let us know that he was in great perplexity about his prisoners, and certainly not in the mind then to end their lives. What might happen afterwards we could not say.

At last, after some minutes that felt like hours, they went on and down the ladder to the lower deck.

"Phew!" panted Bob Hampton. "Oh, my lad, my lad, why didn't you whistle a jig out of the window?"

"Why didn't I what?" I cried.

"Whistle a toon, my lad. That would ha' let 'em know you could hear 'em talking, and they'd ha' gone. Hold me tight, please, for I'm 'bout spent."

The man spoke so faintly that we took alarm.

"No, no, Bob," I whispered. "Don't say that. Rest for a few moments, and then climb back on deck."

"Rest?" he said, in so pitiful a tone that I tightened my grasp all I possibly could, and felt how absurd my advice was to a man in such a position.

"You couldn't haul me in?" he whispered faintly.

"No," I said despairingly. "It is impossible."

"Impossible it is," he groaned. "Well, I shall have to face it."

"What do you mean, man?" whispered Mr Frewen.

"What we've all got to face, doctor. I couldn't swarm up that rope again."

"Dale, could we get the rope round his waist, and hold him?" whispered Mr Frewen.

"Here! hist! quick!" came through the opening where Mr Preddle was listening all the time.

"Silence!" cried Mr Frewen, sternly. "What do you say, Hampton?"

"I says as if you takes the line from under my feet for half a moment down I goes, for all the feeling's gone out of my arms. I'm done."

"No, no," I whispered in desperation. "Hold on, Bob; we must—we will save you."

"Ay, lad," he said dolefully, "I'll hold on as long as I can; but if you two are going to save me, you'll have to be very smart about it, I'm afraid."

"Mr Frewen! Dale!" came from the opening.

"Silence, I say!" cried the doctor, fiercely.

"I won't be silent," cried Mr Preddle. "Here, Dale, take this; I've pushed it through as far as I can reach. Give it him. Brandy."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr Frewen. "Quick."

I had already reached out with the hand which I had taken from Hampton's wrist, and was fishing about with it in the dark, but without a bite.

"Where is it?" I cried; but as I spoke my knuckles came in contact with the leather-covered flask so sharply, that I knocked it out of Mr Preddle's hand, and it fell with a bang on the floor, upon which the spirit began to gurgle out.

Bob Hampton groaned, and I felt that all was over; but hanging on to the rope I bent down, and guided by the sound seized the flask, gave it a shake, which told me that there was yet a good deal inside, and the next moment I was holding it to the poor fellow's lips, and listening to the gurgling the spirit made as he gulped quite a couple of mouthfuls down.

I knew he had taken it all, for I had at last raised the flask quite upright, and he drew his lips away.

"Now, Hampton," whispered Mr Frewen, "hold on for a little till the spirit begins to stimulate you."

"It's begun a'ready, doctor," was the answer. "It's put new life into me, sir, and I'm going to make a try for it directly."

"Not for a minute, man, not for a minute."

"In half a minute, sir, or it's of no good, for I'm a heavy man."

I tried to speak, but no words would come, for I felt as if my mouth and throat were quite dry, and there I stood hanging on to the rope, till in a curious hoarse whisper the man said—

"I'd say make fast the end o' the rope about me; but—"

"Can you hold on the while?" I said; for my voice came back at this.

"Try, lad."

I don't know how I did it in so short a time; but it was Bob Hampton's teaching that made me so quick, as, leaving Mr Frewen to hold up the bight, I seized the end, passed it round the man's chest, and made it fast, and as I finished he said softly—

"Here goes!"

Then he began to climb, and as he went up I soon found that the rope was being drawn through our hands. But we kept our touch of it, so that if he fell we could still let it glide till he reached the water, and then hold on till a boat was lowered to save him. Up he went, breathing very hard, higher and higher, with a loud, rustling noise. Then he stopped a little, and we tightened our hold, for we thought he was gone; but he struggled on again, up and up, and at last hung quite still, and now we felt that it was all over, for he was exhausted. I listened for the horrible splash, but it did not come, for he began again, and we heard one of his hands give a sharp smack.

"What's that?" whispered Mr Preddle through the opening, but neither of us replied.

We could not, though we knew that Bob Hampton must have loosened his grip of the rope with one hand to make a dash at the top of the bulwarks. Then there came a faint scraping sound, and I turned giddy from the cessation of the intense drag upon my brain. For I knew that the poor fellow had reached the deck. In proof thereof the rope was shaken sharply, and then jerked out of our hands. A faint scraping sound followed, and I knew it was being drawn up.

I heard no more till Mr Frewen spoke to me; his voice sounding strange through a peculiar, loud, humming noise in my ears.

"Feel better, my lad?"

"Better!" I said wonderingly. "I'm not ill."

"Oh no," he said, "not ill; only a little faint."

"Here," I said sharply, "why did you lay me on the floor?"

"You fell," he said; "or rather you slipped down. There, drink a little of this water."

"Is he all right again?" came out of the darkness in a sharp whisper.

"Yes, coming round now," I heard Mr Frewen say.

"Yes, I remember now," I cried quickly. "But Bob Hampton, did he get up safely?"

"Yes, quite safely."

Just then there was a sharp rattling of the door, and it was thrown open, while I closed my lids, so dazzling did the light of the lanterns which were held up above the heads of Jarette and Walters seem to my aching eyes.

Chapter Twenty One.

"Here, what's all this noise about?" cried Jarette, roughly; and his words gave me intense relief, for I knew that he must be in ignorance of all that had taken place.

"I was not aware, sir, that we were making any noise," said Mr Frewen, coldly.

"Then what's the matter, doctor?"

"You can see, sir. The lad has been taken ill. No wonder, shut up in this stifling cabin."

"Humph! My faith, yes. One is enough. Make him well, and he shall have another to himself to-morrow."

"Not if I know it," I said to myself, as I lay with my eyes closed, thinking how I would sham being too ill to leave the doctor's cabin; but directly after feeling quite in dismay, for it struck me that if I were not taken away, Mr Frewen might be, and then all our proposed plans would be upset.

I opened my eyes with quite a start just then, for to my great delight a gruff voice exclaimed—

"He arn't ill. Wants a bucket of cold water drawn and soused over him. That'd put him right."

"You speak when you're spoken to, Bob Hampton," said Jarette, with a snarl.

"All right, skipper—cap'n, I mean; all right."

"Yes, it's all right," I said to myself, with a sigh of relief, as I closed my eyes again and lay quite still, listening to what passed.

"Well," said Jarette, "what are you going to do? Oh, that is some stuff you are going to give him."

"Yes, you need not wait," said Mr Frewen, quietly. "But you had better leave me a light."

"What for? Set the ship on fire?"

"If I wanted to set the ship on fire, I have plenty of matches," said Mr Frewen.

His imitation of the renegade Frenchman's pronunciation of the word "ship" was almost involuntary, and he told me afterwards how he regretted making such a slip, for Jarette winced and darted a malignant look at him which was not pleasant to see.

He did not speak again, but stood looking on while Mr Frewen held some water to my lips, and bathed my temples, both of which proceedings were quite needless, for I was quite recovered now from my faintness, and he ended by helping me to lie down in the cot.

Upon seeing this, Jarette said something shortly to his followers and they drew back, the door was closed, and we were in total darkness once again.

"And all that trouble, care, and suffering for nothing, Dale," said Mr Frewen, dolefully.

"For nothing?" I said, sitting up. "Do you call it nothing to have found out that we have three strong men on the other side ready to fight for us? I don't."

"I had forgotten that for the moment," said my companion. "Yes, that is worth all our trouble; but I'm afraid poor Hampton will not venture to communicate with us again, so what do you say to beginning our sawing business once more?"

"Oh no: not to-night!" I said. "Perhaps Bob Hampton will be able to propose a better way next time he comes."

"If he does come, my lad."

"Ah, you don't know him so well as I do, Mr Frewen. He is sure to come again."

"I hope he will, my lad."

"Oh, he will; and you see if he does not tell us to wait until he and Neb Dumlow are on guard. They'll get us out and then help us to open the cabins one by one."

"Nothing like being sanguine, my lad," he said; "but there, it's getting very late. Let's sleep now."

I did not feel at all disposed to obey, and lay still, watching the stars through the open cabin-window, thinking over the events of the earlier part of the night, till the stars were blotted out, and I was as fast asleep as Mr Frewen, or our fellow-prisoner in the next cabin, who breathed so heavily that when I was awake it sounded like a snore.

I seemed to be watching the stars one minute, and the dazzling water the next, for the sun was high when I opened my eyes again, and the sea looked of such a delicious blue, that it was hard to feel low-spirited, and trouble oneself about our failure.

Mr Frewen lay on the floor fast asleep, and I was thinking whether I had not better follow his example, when I started up and gave my head a thump against the top of the cot, for something suddenly appeared at the round opening of the cabin-window, and for a moment I thought it was a bird. The next I was out of my cot and close to the window, waiting for an opportunity to make a snatch at the object swinging to and fro.

I could have made a dart at it instantly, but I wanted to make sure, knowing as I did that Bob Hampton or one of his men must be leaning over the bulwarks listening, and that the bait at the end of the thin line hanging down over our window was intended for me.

At last I made a snatch at the object, but it only swung out of reach; then another snatch, but all in vain. But the last time I was successful, for one of my hands flew out, and I caught hold of and dragged the bait in, cut the line with my pocket-knife, and saw it snatched up out of sight directly.

I made some slight noise in starting back, and Mr Frewen rose quickly to his elbow to stare in my excited face.

"What is it?" he said in a hurried whisper.

For answer I held before him a packet of something made up in a piece of canvas, and tied round with spun-yarn.

"Let down to the cabin-window," I whispered, full of excitement, for the packet was heavy, and I had my suspicions as to what it contained.

I had my knife still in my hand, and my fingers itched to cut the yarn and open the parcel; but I thrust it beneath the blanket on the cot, and went to the cabin-door to listen.

All was silent there, and though I listened for a few minutes, there did not seem to be any one stirring on deck, so I turned back to Mr Frewen, who was now standing by the cot, with his hands under the blanket, and offered him the knife.

"I believe there are pistols inside, Dale," he whispered.

"I'm sure of it," I said. "Open it quick. I'll stand on this side."

He now stood between the parcel and the cabin-door so as to shelter our treasure, which was turned out of the canvas the next minute, and proved to be the weapons named, a pair that I remembered to have seen in Captain Berriman's cabin, and with them plenty of ammunition.

"Loaded!" whispered Mr Frewen. "Be careful with yours."

"Mine?" I said.

"Yes; one is for you, and I hope you will not have to use it; but these are stern times, Dale, and we must not be squeamish now."

After a few moments' consideration, it was decided to hide one pistol at the foot of the cot, and the other beneath a quantity of drugs in the big medicine-chest which stood in one corner of the cabin.

"Hah!" said my companion, smiling for the first time for days. "I begin to feel a little more hopeful now, Dale. You and I are going to take the ship yet. That was Hampton's work, of course?"

"Sure to be," I said, and we now began to turn over every plan we could think of for getting our freedom.

"I want to do it if I can, my lad, without shedding blood, unless one could not do that without risking life."

I could not help shuddering slightly at this.

That day passed by slowly and monotonously. We were visited from time to time by Jarette or one of his men, but always with a strong guard outside, in which I noted Blane and Dumlow, but they were not allowed to enter the cabin or hold any communication with us, for they had not originally been of the mutineer party, and Jarette evidently mistrusted them still.

I was anxious and excited for fear that orders should come for me to occupy another cabin, but none came, and no more orders for Mr Frewen to see the captain. Toward evening a strong wind arose, which kept Jarette's men pretty well occupied in reducing sail.

"The scoundrel must be a good seaman," Mr Frewen said to me that night. "The ship is well handled, you see, and it strikes me that we are going to have a rough night."

His words proved true, for now as the ship rose and fell creaking and groaning, and the wind swished through the rigging, I could begin to realise how horrible it was to be shut below there in the darkness, for if those now in command of the vessel proved wanting at some particular crisis of the storm, our fate was sealed. They might try to save themselves in the boats, but they would not stop for us.

"What are you thinking about?" said Mr Frewen, suddenly, some time after dark.

I started, for we had been silent for some time, listening to the hiss and roar of the waves, and the rough blows given from time to time as some heavy sea struck us and then rushed by. And now that Mr Frewen did speak it was quite aloud, for there was no need for whispering.

"I was thinking about what Captain Berriman and Mr Brymer must feel," I said.

"About the management of the ship? Yes, poor fellows, and both suffering too. You see that scoundrel has let the whole day pass by without letting me go and attend the captain. You are right, Dale, they must both be feeling horribly about the ship. Think you can sleep?"

"Sleep? No; nor you. It is far too rough for that. Think this is a good seaworthy ship, Mr Frewen?"

"I think so. I hope so," he replied. "The owners stand high for their character. I wish the crew were as good as the ship. Dale, do you think we might break out to-night? We could do it without being heard; I am sure that I could saw round the lock of the door."

"But Bob Hampton and the others would not be ready for us, and we should not have their help," I protested.

"But this seems such a chance, my lad, with all that noise, and I want to be clear in case of accidents."

"Hist!"

"What is it?"

"Something tapped at the cabin-window."

I ran to it, and began to unscrew the fastening, for it was closed tightly to keep out the spray, since more than once a great wave had struck against it with a heavy thud that evening, and we did not want a wet cabin to add to our other miseries.

I swung open the round iron frame, and gazed at the furious sea, all covered with its white foam, but there was nothing visible for a time. Then all at once something swung by as the ship rose after careening over and literally rolling in the hollow between two great waves.

It was momentary, and like a faint shadow, but directly after, with the swing as of some great pendulum, it passed by again.

The next time I was ready for it, feeling as I did that it was some of Bob Hampton's work, and reaching out as far as I could get my arm, I gazed straight before me, trying vainly to make out what it was in the darkness.

"See anything?"

"No," I said; but the next instant something struck my hand, swept by, came back, and I had hold of it to draw into the cabin, cut the string again, and then hastily closed the window—just in time too, for a wave broke against it directly after with a heavy thud.

Chapter Twenty Two.

As soon as the roar and rush of water had passed, Mr Frewen whispered—

"Another pistol?"

"Yes," I said, for I had been hurriedly tearing off the drenched canvas in which it had been wrapped so securely that though the woollen bag in which pistol and cartridges lay was quite damp, as far as I could tell they were none the worse for being dipped again and again into the sea.

For there is a capital quality in canvas as a protector; as the material gets thoroughly soaked it swells and tightens, till it is a long way on toward being waterproof; and after carefully feeling the weapon, and examining it in every way we could in the darkness, Mr Frewen expressed his opinion that it was uninjured, and placed it in his breast to dry.

"This will do for Mr Preddle," he said, and after listening at the door, where nothing was to be heard but the creaking of the ship's timbers as she laboured on, sounding to me as if at any moment she might come to pieces, my fellow-prisoner tapped softly at the partition, and placing his lips to the opening, called softly upon Mr Preddle.

This had to be repeated several times without effect, and it was not until I had taken Mr Frewen's place and jerked a little empty phial bottle through, so that it fell upon him where he was sleeping, that Mr Preddle started up and cried loudly—

"Who's there?"

"Hist!" I whispered, and he came quickly to the opening.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "I had just lain down, and the noise of the waves prevented my hearing you."

"I thought you were asleep," I said dryly.

"Asleep? Well, perhaps I was nearly. You've come to tell me that all the water will be tossed out of those trays. Oh, my poor fish!"

"I hadn't," I said, "Mr Frewen wants to speak to you. He has a pistol for you ready for when we try to escape."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" he sighed. "We shall never try to escape. We're shut in here, and shall be drowned. Is the ship going down?"

"No, no; she'll ride it out."

"But those men don't know how to manage her, do they?"

"I think so," I replied. "I don't half understand big ships, but they seem to be doing what my father would do with a yacht."

"Let me come, Dale," whispered Mr Frewen.

I drew back, but I was still near enough to hear every word that was said as the pistol was passed through by Mr Frewen.

"Take it, and be careful. When it is light, you had better make sure that there is no moisture in the chambers."

"But when are we going to try and do something?" said Mr Preddle, in quite an ill-used tone. "I thought you were going to saw out one of these boards."

"We are going to act as soon as the word comes from our friends outside. We can do nothing better than be ready."

I clapped my hand over Mr Frewen's lips, and forcing myself by him, whispered sharply to Mr Preddle—

"Quick,—lie down!"

I had no occasion to warn my companion, for he had seen my reason for checking him, and lay down at the side of the cabin, while I glided into the cot. For I had caught sight of a gleam of light beneath the door, and I had hardly settled myself in my sleeping-place, the noise of the waves and wind covering any sounds we made, when the door was thrown open, and Jarette and two men stood in the entrance, holding up lanterns which made their dripping oilskins glisten.

I jumped up directly.

"Is she going down?" I asked.

Jarette made no reply, but glanced quickly round to satisfy himself that we were not taking advantage of the storm to try and escape, while Mr Frewen rose as if he had expected to be called.

"You want me to come and see the captain?" he said quietly.

"No," was the abrupt reply, and the men drew back, the door was shut and fastened, and we were once more in darkness, listening to the labouring of the ship as she rose and fell, plunging every now and then head-first into some great wave which broke over her and deluged the decks.

The faint streak of light disappeared from under the door-way, and we breathed freely again as there were heavy steps overhead, and I could tell that in all probability Jarette and the others had gone to join the man—or men—at the wheel.

"I don't envy that madman his position, Dale," said Mr Frewen. "His mind must be in a pleasant state of anxiety, what with the management of the ship in a storm, his doubts about his prisoners, and the pleasant little fancies he must have about the laws of our country."

"I think we're best off after all, aren't we?" I said. "Hush!—he's back again. No—it's Mr Preddle."

"Are you people asleep?" came from the partition.

"Hush! Go away," I heard Mr Frewen whisper loudly, as after all I found that I had been deceived, for Jarette had evidently come back to spy upon and trap us; for, with my breath held in my excitement, I could hear the rustle of a hand upon the outside of the door, and then a faint clicking and rustling sound, as if the fastenings were being softly withdrawn.

"Oh, how I should like to give him a topper!" I thought, as I rose upon my elbow and listened, making out, in spite of the roar of the storm, every movement of our enemy.

"Why, if Mr Frewen liked, he could strike him down senseless, and then we should be masters of the ship, for the men

would give in if they had no leader.”

People’s minds have a way of running in the same groove when there is anything very particular to be done, and it was so here, for Mr Frewen was thinking, as he told me afterwards, exactly as I did.

But now I could hear nothing but the creaking of the ship and the roar of the storm, and I was not sure whether the door had been opened or not. Suppose it had been, I thought, and Jarette was going to do some mischief in the darkness!

It was a horrible thought, one which made the perspiration stand upon my forehead, and begin to tickle the sides of my nose, as I listened intently for the next movement, or for the sound of his breathing.

But still I could hear nothing, and I longed for a few moments’ cessation of the thud of the waves and hiss and splash which followed, just as a billow came over the bows and swept the deck with a tremendous rush and noise.

That was what our visitors had been waiting for. The door had only been unfastened. It was now opened with a quick dash, so that the noise it would make might be covered by the storm.

Yes; I could mentally see it all now, though everything was black as ink. Jarette was standing in the door-way in his oilskins, for I could hear the crackling sound they made as the noise from the deck and the hiss of the wind came plainer, and then too, drip, drip,—in those moments I could hear the water falling from the coat on to the cabin-floor.

It was all in so many moments. He seemed to be listening either for any sound we might make, or for what was passing on deck; and then as he took a step forward into the cabin, there was a sudden rush, a struggle, and for the moment, as my blood ran cold, I thought that Jarette had seized and was about to murder poor Mr Frewen.

My hand went to the foot of the cot, and I was dragging out the revolver hidden there, when a hoarse voice exclaimed in a husky whisper—

“Avast! what are yer doing on, Mr Frewen?—you’ll choke me.”

“You, Hampton?”

“Ay, at present.”

“I thought it was Jarette,” said Mr Frewen, panting.

“Wish it had been, my lad,” said the sailor, in the same husky whisper. “My word, you have got a grip! But there, I must get back; on’y look here. There’ll never be a better chance. Here’s an old bosun’s whistle; stuff it in yer pocket, and don’t blow it till the right moment. When you do, blow hard, and me, Barney, and Neb Dumlow’s with you.”

“But—”

“Butter be hanged, doctor. You’ve got three pistols, and the door’s open. You let out the mate, Mr Denning, and Mr Fishmonger; wait till you think the moment’s right, and then down on old Frenchy; whistle hard, and then we’ll all make a rush for the others, and drive ’em chock into the forksle, or overboard if they don’t mind. Off!”

“One moment, Hampton;” but there was a sharp rustling of oilskins, and the man had hurried through the saloon and out on deck, where Jarette’s voice could be heard shouting above the din of the wind and sea.

In the cabin then for a few moments there was silence, and I stood in that black darkness with my heart beating painfully, waiting for Mr Frewen to speak, and face to face with the thought that in a few minutes I might be engaged in a desperate struggle with a man and his followers, and that they would stop at nothing when attacked.

“Why don’t you speak—why don’t you speak?” I kept saying to myself, with a feeling of anger against the man who was absolutely torturing me by his silence.

But it could not have been a minute, though in my excitement it seemed to be so long, and he had to make his plans. Then he spoke in a quiet, firm way.

“Now, Dale,” he said, “it is our duty, and we must fight. Forget that you are a boy, and act like a man. Got your revolver?”

“Yes.”

“Charged?”

“Yes.”

I’m afraid my voice sounded very husky in my excitement, and my heart went in leaps and bounds. Frightened? Yes, I was: horribly; and if under similar circumstances any boy or man tells you he was not, don’t believe him. I wouldn’t. I know I was all of a tremble, but I never felt for a moment that I was going to shrink as I listened to Mr Frewen giving Mr Preddle instructions about the revolver.

“No, no,” I heard him say, “don’t stop to re-charge. If it will not go off, use it as a club.” Then he gripped me by the hand.

“Ready?” he whispered.

"Yes."

"Then keep close to me, and come on."

We stepped out into the saloon, shut our door after us, and stood listening, wondering whether there was a sentry, but all was still, and concluding that all hands were on deck, Mr Frewen unfastened Mr Preddle's door in the black darkness. He came out, and his door was also closed again.

"Follow!"

We went after Mr Frewen, and he stopped at a cabin-door on the opposite side, opened it, and I heard him say—

"Brymer."

"Yes, who is it? Doctor?"

"Yes, dress sharply. Trousers only."

"I am dressed. What's up? Striking?"

"A blow for liberty."

"Hah! A good time while they're fumbling with the old Castle. How many are you?"

"Three, and three stout men on deck."

"Who are they?"

"Hampton, Blane, Dumlow."

"All traitors and scoundrels."

"All true men waiting for my signal."

"Good. And the captain?"

"Too badly wounded to stir."

"Mr Denning?"

"Too weak."

"Yes. Lead then; I'll do all you say."

"Are you stronger?"

"Strong enough for that; but give me something to hit with. All right, I have my pocket-knife."

"Ready then? Come on, and let's see what had better be done."

"Get Jarette down at any cost," said the mate. "The rest will come easy."

All this was in a whisper, and then we followed Mr Frewen to the shattered entrance of the saloon, and stood there looking forward, but seeing very little, though a white peculiar gleam came off the sea, and a couple of lanterns swung forward, by the side of one of which we made out the gleam of an oilskin upon whose wet surface the dim light played.

"He'll be up by the wheel," Mr Brymer whispered. "We must tackle him there; and once get him down, we can beat back the others. I'll make sure for you."

Just as he spoke all doubt was at an end, for we heard Jarette shout an order to the men at the wheel; and then, before any plan could be made, he trotted forward, swung himself down the steps on to the deck, as we shrank back into the companion-way, and went forward.

"Bah! We've let our chance go," whispered Mr Frewen, and then we stood fast, for Jarette stopped and turned to come back into the saloon.

"Delivered into our hands," I said to myself, as I drew a long breath, for the great struggle was about to begin.

Chapter Twenty Three.

The companion-way was so black that we were completely hidden, and I heard Mr Frewen draw his breath with a soft hissing sound, as if he now grasped the fact that a better chance was to be afforded to us of mastering the leader of the mutineers, who came right to the shattered entrance, and appeared to be about to enter, but stopped short listening for a sound, but for a few seconds there was none. Then all at once in a muffled way we heard Mr John Denning say a few words in an angry impatient tone, for the wind had lulled for a few moments. Then there came the low murmur of Miss Denning's voice, and directly after the whistling of the wind again.

Jarette was not two yards from us, and if he had taken another step, I had made up my mind to fling myself upon him and cling with all my might to his legs, while the others seized him by the throat and arms. I say this, for we compared notes afterwards.

It was not to be, for he came no farther; but apparently satisfied that all was right, he turned sharply and went forward, and we could from time to time make out his voice among the others as he gave orders to the men.

"Another opportunity gone," said Mr Frewen. "We ought to have leaped upon him."

"Better luck next time," said the mate. "He cannot stay forward long. He is seaman enough to know that his place is at the wheel."

"Then at all costs we must have him when he returns."

"And what then?" said the mate. "You do not mean to kill him, I suppose?"

"Oh no; of course not."

"Then I should place the door of one of the cabins wide open, and prop it. Then as soon as we have mastered and disarmed him, bundle him inside and keep him a prisoner."

"Yes; excellent," said Mr Frewen. "I'll open mine at once."

He crept cautiously across and opened the door to its full extent, and, as he told me afterwards, he placed a heavy case of instruments against it, so that it should not swing to again from the motion of the ship.

The next minute he was back, and we were watching and waiting as the ship laboured terribly, the sea being now terrific; but, as Mr Brymer whispered, everything possible had been done, and she was under close-reefed storm canvas.

"I couldn't have done better myself there, but the men at the wheel are steering very wildly."

There was silence again, and as I listened for a voice, the lanterns forward swung to and fro, and so much water came aboard that I fully expected to see them extinguished, when all forward would have been in darkness.

"Is he never coming again?" whispered Mr Frewen at last.

"Oh yes, he'll come," said Mr Brymer. "They've got the grog forward there, and perhaps he has gone below."

"Then why not crawl forward and clap on the fore-castle-hatch?"

"Because it will be far safer for us to secure their leader; and, besides, by closing up the fore-castle you might shut in our friends as well."

"Yes, quite right," replied Mr Frewen, and we waited still, with the wind shrieking amongst the cordage, and the night appearing blacker than ever.

Thud! Plash!

A heavy wave had struck the bows, and the spray came hissing and rushing along the deck after deluging the ship forward.

"I'm certain that my poor fish will all be killed by the salt water, Dale," whispered Mr Preddle, but I only made an impatient movement, for I was trying to hear what Mr Brymer whispered to the doctor, who did not hear the remark, and said—

"What?"

"I say that was bad steering, and if I were in command, there would be a row."

Thud! Splash!

This time the water must have curled over in a perfect deluge, for we could hear it hiss and roar amongst the cordage on the leeward side, and stream out of the scuppers.

"That must fetch him up if he is below," whispered Mr Brymer, and sure enough the next moment we heard his voice shouting furiously at the men at the wheel, though we could hardly make out a word he said.

"Look out! Here he comes!"

"To the wheel, not here," said Mr Frewen. "Shall we—"

There was not time to say more, for we caught an indistinct glimpse of the figure in oilskins, as, balancing itself as well as it could, it made for the ladder on the starboard side; but just then the ship gave a tremendous lurch, and our enemy missed the ladder, nearly fell, but saved himself, and consequent upon the impetus with which he was moving, darted right in through the companion-way.

The next moment he was down on the deck, making a half-stifled sound, and held fast while a revolver and knife were taken from a belt beneath his oilskin. Then his hands were bandaged behind his back, his legs treated to bonds,

and he was dragged into the cabin, while we stood panting over him.

“Look here,” said Mr Frewen then, in a hoarse voice; “we are going to lock you in this cabin, but mind, we’re all armed—feel that!—it is the point of a revolver—and I swear to you by all that is holy, if you make a sound I’ll shoot you as I would a dog.”

He made a curious, half-choking sound, and we drew back out of the cabin and the door was shut and fastened.

“Have you got his knife and pistol, Brymer?”

“Yes. All safe. Now then, forward silently till we are close upon them, and then give your signal—a whistle, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Give it sharply; it will do for your friends as well as for us. Then fire if there is the least resistance, close with them, and let’s get them under hatches. But I beg pardon, sir; you are in command.”

“Nonsense! You could not have given better advice.”

“But they will not show much fight. Without their leader they will be like sheep.”

I could not help hoping that they would turn out to be like sheep, and leave it to us to play the sheep-dog with them.

“Now then, one more word,” said the mate. “It would have been better to divide, and part go to starboard, the rest to port, but we are so few.”

“Yes, let’s keep together,” said Mr Frewen, “and make our rush. Creep forward half-way, then I’ll whistle, and we must do our best. Ready, Mr Preddle?”

“Yes, sir, I’m ready; but I’m afraid you must not expect much from me. I’ll hit as hard as I can though.”

“That will do. Now, gentlemen, forward!”

The wind shrieked more loudly than ever as Mr Frewen gave the word, and with our pistols ready we crept forward with no little difficulty toward where the lanterns swung, keeping together, and moving slowly so as to keep our feet. Before we were half-way toward the bows we could see a dull light glowing from the fore-castle-hatch, and a couple of dark figures standing in front of it, so that their oilskin-covered bodies stood out big and grotesque.

That was our goal, I felt, and I knew that if we made a bold rush those two could easily be driven down, while I hoped that the others would be too much cowed to fight.

Mr Frewen and the mate were first, Mr Preddle and I behind, and I was just thinking that it was nearly time for the whistle to be blown and the rush made, while I thought, too, how easy it would be to make a mistake and injure a friend with our pistols, when the ship gave such a lurch that we all went heavily against the bulwarks, to which we clung to save ourselves from a heavy fall, then bang, *splash*, rose a wave over the bows, and a voice which came from one of the figures by the light from the hatch yelled forth a torrent of oaths as he asked what the men were doing at the wheel.

I turned cold all down my back without the help of the spray, for it was Jarette’s voice we heard, and we had bagged the wrong fox!

For a moment we clung together there in the darkness as the ship hung over to port; then, as she righted herself, Mr Frewen, feeling desperate, and that we could not now go back to our place, clapped the boatswain’s whistle to his lips; it sounded shrilly above that which we could hear in the rigging, and we made our rush.

Describe what followed! How? I remember the rush; feeling mad and desperate, and hearing, as we closed with half-a-dozen men, a couple of shots fired quickly one after the other. Then I was in the middle of a savage wrestling match, in which men were striking blows with all their might, and a voice was yelling order after order in French, while we were getting, I felt, the worst of it.

I had seized a man, who whisked me off my legs and whirled me round, but I stuck to him till he flung me heavily on the deck, and then I wound my arms round his legs so firmly that as the ship lurched again he fell and rolled over with me into the scuppers, where he roared at me to let go before he used his knife.

I need not add that he did not say use his knife, for his language was far stronger, and he made a horrible reference to my throat. But I was wound up then; the fighting instinct had been roused, and holding on more tightly, I made use of my teeth as well, but not in his flesh.

Meanwhile I had a misty notion of the fight going against Mr Frewen and my two friends, and just then Jarette yelled in French, and directly after in English—

“Heave them overboard if they don’t give in!”—when rush! crack! two men who had been forward sprung at the Frenchman, who went down heavily, but rose on one arm, and as I clung to the man in the scuppers I could see the chief mutineer clearly. For he was between me and the light, and I started as there were two loud pistol reports, a shriek, and a man fell with a thud; but the next instant I saw some one spring at Jarette as he was going to fire, and strike with all his force, with the result that he fell backward down the hatch.

Then another man was beaten below, and again another, and then the hatch was clapped down and held by Mr

Preddle, while another man was dragged along struggling hard till Bob Hampton struck him over the head.

"Open the hatch!" he yelled.

Mr Preddle obeyed, and a flash of light came out with a loud report as the man was thrown down and the hatch clapped on again.

"Here, quick, help!" I shouted, for I was about exhausted.

"Where are you, boy?" cried Bob Hampton, and he ran to where the man I clung to was just jerking himself clear. Then he came down upon me with a groan as Bob Hampton struck at him, and, half-insensible, he too was dragged to the hatch and thrown down as another shot was fired.

"I'm all right!" yelled Mr Preddle, securing the hatch again.

"Where's Mr Brymer?"

"Here, help!" came from somewhere forward, and as I struggled up I had a faint view of Mr Frewen and Hampton rushing forward and bringing back a couple more men with pistols held to their heads. I saw that, for the light from the swinging lanterns gleamed upon the barrels.

These two men were thrown down, and one more shot came crashing up, but without hurting any one, and then a familiar voice said—

"Here's another!" and Dumlow staggered up, pushing a sailor before him.

"You'll pay for this night's work when the noo—"

He said no more, for he received a heavy blow in the mouth, and then kicking and struggling with rage, he too was thrown down.

"How many more?" panted Mr Frewen.

"There's three on 'em forward," growled Bob Hampton. "The look-out man and two more."

"Pistols!" cried Mr Frewen, loudly, and then as there was a sharp clicking from mine as well as three others, he shouted—"Now, you men, surrender, or we fire!"

"Not us!" came back hoarsely. "Now, lads, rush 'em; they've got no pistols!"

Two shots hardly heard in the roar of the storm were fired over the heads of the men who were about to rush forward; but if the reports were faint in the din, the flashes were bright and clear, and in place of charging at us they hung back, and we were upon them in an instant. I say we, for somehow or other I did as the others did, and the men gave in directly and were marched to the hatch, below which jarette could be heard raving at his fellow-prisoners.

"Now," cried Mr Brymer, "you know me, my lads; I never say things I don't mean. The moment that hatch is opened, you jump down. If you hesitate I fire."

"But old Frenchy will fire up as soon as it's opened."

"He will not fire at you."

"But he may hit us, sir."

"Open that hatch, Mr Preddle," cried Brymer, and he cocked his pistol, Mr Frewen following suit.

"That's right, sir; fire too, in case I miss."

"But," cried the man, imploringly, "let me stay on deck, and I'll return to my duty."

"We don't want you, dog!" cried Mr Frewen.

"Down with you!" roared Mr Brymer, as the hatch flew up, and there was a flash and report, which the man waited for, and then leaped.

"Down with you!" cried Mr Brymer again, but the other two men hesitated, and were hanging back. The next moment they went down headlong, impelled as they were by Bob Hampton and Dumlow.

"There," cried Bob Hampton, as we all stood there breathless with excitement, and quite forgetful of the storm raging round us, "if anybody had told me, Neb, as Barney would have been such a cur, I'd ha' hit him in the mouth for a liar."

"Yah!" growled Dumlow, "and I've shook hands with him and called him 'mate' scores o' times. Yah!"

"Never mind, gents, we've done it, eh?" cried Bob Hampton.

"God bless you both for true men!" cried Mr Brymer, holding out his hands to them, and for a few minutes there was a general hand-shaking all round.

"But we're forgetting the men at the wheel," said Mr Frewen. "How many are there? Two?"

"Oh, they're a couple o' soft Tommy sort of chaps," said Bob Hampton. "I can settle them two with one hand. That arn't the worst on it, sir; we've got to tackle Barney Blane. No, I won't do it for fear I should finish him, and you'd best steer out o' that job, Neb."

"If I don't, I shall sarve him like a wornut, mate."

"Dessay you would, my lad. We'll sponge over the two lads at the wheel while the gents does Barney. Hit him, gents, or shoot him somewhere low down, for he deserves it; all I wonder now is as he did not split all about it to old Frenchy."

"We could all deal with him," said Mr Frewen. "You two men come with us, and you, Dale, keep guard here with Mr Preddle. A shout will bring us back directly."

"Right, sir," I said, in a disappointed tone, and then I brightened up, for he told Dumlow to stop instead.

"Don't be long," said Mr Preddle. "I want to see to my fish."

"On'y to think, gents," growled Bob Hampton, holding a lantern while Mr Brymer and the doctor thrust fresh cartridges into their pistols, "the skipper—I mean Frenchy—sends Barney aft to speak to the men at the wheel, for they were steering anyhow, and he knowed as this game was going to be played, and—Eh? Well, what are you laughing at, Mr Dale? What have I said wrong?"

For I had burst into a roar of laughter, in which Mr Frewen joined.

Chapter Twenty Four.

"That's one enemy the less to deal with," cried the mate, as we went aft, followed by the sailor. "Only a couple of them to tackle."

"I makes three of 'em, sir," said Hampton, "so don't you make no mistake. Barney will be as nasty as nasty at seeing hisself the wrong side, and find as he can fight when he likes."

"Our friend Barney is already accounted for, Hampton," cried Mr Frewen.

"What?—you have tackled him?" said Bob Hampton excitedly, slapping his knee.

"Yes, that we have, Bob," I cried, "and he is quite safe."

"Then I scuses you all for laughing, gentlemen; though it did seem rather a rum thing to me for you to be a-busting out in a loud grin at a serus time like this. I see now. You met him then?"

"Yes, we met him," replied Mr Frewen, leading the way up the ladder to the poop-deck, "but he must wait."

He cocked his pistol as he reached the top, and we did the same.

"Shall I speak 'em first, gentlemen?" said Bob Hampton, in a low voice.

"Yes, tell them to surrender," said the mate. "We don't want any more fighting; and look here, Hampton, we want their help to navigate the ship."

"I know, sir," growled the old sailor, and stepping to the front he walked straight to where the two men still kept to their posts at the wheel, knowing as they did that to leave it meant throwing the ship into the trough of the sea to be deluged by every wave.

"Game's up, my lads!" shouted Hampton. "Orficers has got the upper hand on us with loaded pistols, and you've got to knuckle down same as we have, and return to your dooty."

"All right, messmate," said one of the men, shouting back so as to make his voice heard, "I don't mind; on'y what about Frenchy?"

"Ay, what about Frenchy?" cried the other. "We don't want him to come cussin' us and saying it's all t'other way on."

"Frenchy's down in the fork'sle, with the hatch over him, and two men with loaded pistols keeping guard, lads."

"But s'pose he gets out again?"

"They arn't going to let him," said Bob Hampton, "so what's it to be? I've knuckled down, and so's Neb Dumlow and Barney Blane. Are you going to return to dooty or make a fight on it? Just say sharp, 'cause we're in a hurry."

"Oh, we don't want to fight," said the first speaker, "and we didn't want to mutiny, on'y Frenchy said we was to, and we did."

"Pretty pair o' sheep you was, too, my lads, to run through a gap that way. And now look here, you, jest recklect all this; you've both got your necks in nooses, and Mr Brymer here's got hold o' the other ends of the ropes, so as he can pull 'em any time he likes, and he will too if you don't stick pretty close to your dooty. That's right, arn't it, sir?"

"Yes, that's right, Hampton," cried Mr Brymer. "You understand, then, if you do your duty now and help to navigate the ship into port, your conduct may—I say may, mind—be looked over."

"Oh, my mate and I'll stick to it, sir," said the spokesman of the two men. "Frenchy was all talk about our being officers and gentlemen if we rose again Captain Berriman, but as soon as we did rise he pumps hisself up, and it's all Captain Jarette, and every one else is nobody at all 'cept for him to cuss at."

"That was so," growled Hampton.

"Yes," said the other sailor; "but I wants to know this: if we two's got our necks in the nooses, why arn't Bob Hampton and Neb Dumlow?"

"'Cause we never shoved 'em in, my lad," said Bob Hampton, with a chuckle. "It was all a paddy till we could get the genle-men out to make a fight on it. That's so, arn't it, gents?"

"Yes, my lads, Hampton, Dumlow, and Blane have been fighting for us all through."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the man. "Very well. Anything for a quiet life, I says; on'y how much longer are we to be at the wheel?"

"I'll have you relieved soon, my men, so do your best, and keep easing her off another point or two now and then."

"Ay; don't keep running her nose into all the big waves, mateys," cried Hampton; and then to Mr Frewen—"You won't have to shoot 'em this time, sir. They arn't a bad sort. It was all that Frenchy."

"Come to the saloon now," said Mr Frewen, and we all hurried down into the black place, and to the door of the cabin, through which we could hear a growling sound.

By this time Bob Hampton had been made fully aware of the strange state of affairs, and was indulging in several hearty chuckles at his messmate's expense. And now as I began to unfasten the door, he said quickly—

"I'd be a bit on my guard, gentlemen, for Barney 'll be a bit nasty at all this here, and p'r'aps show fight, and when he do he hits hard. Did you tie him werry fast?"

"As fast as we could," said Mr Brymer, and I threw open the door.

"Below there, matey!" cried Bob Hampton. "How are you?"

There was a curious growling noise and a loud rap on the cabin-floor.

"Easy, my lad, and I'll cast you off. Wait till I get hold of the knots. Frenchy's under hatches, and things is all right again."

"Goroo, goroo!" gurgled poor Blane, and knowing exactly what was the matter, I got hold of the piece of linen that had been used as a gag, and dragging at one end, soon freed the poor fellow's mouth from its great stopper.

"Ah!" he roared out, after taking a long free breath. "That was your game, Bob, but on'y just wait till I gets my lists."

"No, no, my lad," cried Mr Brymer; "it was all our doing, and we made a mistake in the darkness. We were lying in wait for Jarette, and took you for him."

"No, you didn't," cried Barney, fiercely, "or you'd have pitched me overboard—you on'y wait till I get my hands loose."

"Don't be a fool, messmate!" growled Bob Hampton; "you hears what the gentleman says."

"Yes, but it was a lark, and you sent me here to be ketched."

"Now, hark at him, gents; did you ever hear such a wooden image of a man as that? Why, it were Frenchy sent you to bully the lads at the wheel, warn't it?"

"Well, I won't tell a lie," panted the man, "it were, but I arn't been able hardly to breathe."

"It was all a mistake, my lad," said Mr Frewen; "but we've re-taken the ship."

"All right, sir," cried Barney; "but it isn't all right. It arn't fair. I was to help re-take the Burgh Castle, and I was going to, on'y you all set upon me as you did, and I'm knocked about orfle."

"Well, messmate, it is disappnyting, I'll allow," growled Bob Hampton; "but there arn't much the matter with you, Barney, and out forrard there was games, I can tell you. Old Frenchy was chucking bullets about anyhow, and 'stead o' being here in this here cabin with me untying these here knots, you might ha' been yonder with a hole or two through your carcadge."

"Ay, that's right enough, matey," growled Blane; "but I wanted to help, and have it out with Frenchy. He kicked me below when the mootny fust began, and I can't forget it. I'm English, I am, and I arn't going to sit down and be kicked by a Frenchman, 'tarn't likely."

"No, matey, it arn't. But lookye here. He's forrard and down in the forksle, and as soon as you get the feeling back in your legs—"

"Ay, you may say that, mate. They're like a mask o' cold lead."

"Then I'll rub them for you, and then you can go and strike him back."

"What! now he's down. Nice sort of cold meat work that'd be; I wanted to go at him when he was up."

"There, Blane," said Mr Frewen, "you must forgive us and shake hands. It was all a mistake, and part of the re-taking of the ship."

"Oh, if you put it that way, sir, I'm ready," growled the man; "but I don't seem to have got no hands. It was orfle lying here, and one corner o' that rug as you stuffed into my mouth got a bit o' the way down my throat, and kep' on tickling me till I wanted to cough, and couldn't. Say, Bob Hampton, mate, air you going to untie them knots and cast off these here lashings, or arn't you?"

"Why, they are off your arms, man."

"When what's gone o' my arms? Have they been took off?"

"Nay, they're all right."

"Well, my legs arn't. Nice way to sarve a fellow."

"Shake hands, Barney," I said. "I'm so sorry."

"Can't, sir. You must do it yourself. I don't b'lieve yet as I've got no hands, no arms, nor anything else, but a head."

"There you are, matey," cried Bob Hampton. "Did you tie them ropes, Mr Brymer, sir? They was tight 'uns."

"No; it was Mr Dale here."

"Oh, him!" growled Bob Hampton. "Well, they was done in a second-hand sort o' way."

"Why, they were fastened the way you taught me, Bob!" I cried.

"Well, sir, that's my modesty," said Bob, with a chuckle. "I can't say they were done now. Now, matey, stand up, we've got lots to do."

"Can't," said Barney.

"Then lie down till we've got a lantern, and seen to the captain and Mr Denning."

"Yes, get a lantern," said Mr Brymer; "stop, I'll come with you and stay with Mr Preddle and Dumlow; we mustn't have the scoundrels break loose. Ha! What's that?"

The mate asked the question, but we all knew what it was, and started forward at once, for it was the report of a pistol, plainly heard in a lulling of the wind.

Chapter Twenty Five.

It was alarming, but on reaching the hatch over the forecastle there was not much wrong. A desperate attempt had been made to break out, and in the midst of the effort Mr Preddle had fired his pistol, sending the ball splintering through the woodwork, and this had the effect of damping the ardour of the men below for the time. But we did not leave the hatch till it had been made more secure, and then leaving Mr Brymer to strengthen the guard as arranged, we hurried back to relieve the anxiety of Mr Denning and his sister, and of Captain Berriman, who must all of them be in agony.

I felt that we ought to have gone to them sooner, but I did not see how we could have acted differently; and eager now to bear the news of the change in the state of affairs, I trotted back with the lantern as fast as I could over the streaming deck, and found Barney sitting down and rubbing his legs.

"Circ'lation's a-coming back, youngster," he said. "I say, did you kill that young Walters?"

"Walters!" I cried. "I'd forgotten all about him. I didn't see or hear anything of him."

"Dessay not, sir. He'd get out of the way while the row was on. Maybe he'd got into a bunk to have a snooze and didn't hear it. But, I say, what a game!"

"What, our re-taking the ship, Barney?"

"No; you thinking I was Frenchy. Well, it's lucky you didn't heave me overboard."

"Coming round, mate?" said Bob Hampton.

"Ay, my lad, I've got one arm and a bit o' one leg back, and toothers is coming back slowly like, but it's rum work feeling nothing but head and body, and your arms and legs all gone dead at first, and then you begins to know as they arn't been cut off and chucked away, and they're still there. They was just like sleeves and stockings stuffed with sorduss, and people making cushions of 'em and sticking the pins in as hard as ever they can."

"I'm so sorry, Barney," I said.

"Ay, lad, I s'pose you are, and seeing as you thinked it was old Frenchy, I don't wonder as you tied them there knots as hard as ever you could. But what I do wonder at is, that the line didn't cut my legs right off. Shows as my muscles must be made of real good stuff, and when I've done rubbing 'em back into shape, I s'pose they'll come all right once more; but I should have liked to be in the fun."

"Get your pincushions all right, messmate," said Bob Hampton, slapping Barney on the back, "and don't growl; the game's on'y just begun, and you shall have first innings next time."

"Think there'll be any more fighting, matey?" said Barney eagerly.

"Think there'll be any more fighting? Just hark at him, gentlemen. Why, you grumblin' old swab, do you think as, once having hold of the Burgh Castle and calling hisself skipper, old Frenchy's the sort o' man to let a few planks and a hatchway keep him from making another try? You wait a bit, old man, if you're so precious anxious to get yourself made sore. Frenchy won't forget us for gammoning him, and pretending to be on his side."

"I ain't hankshus to be made sore, Bob, old matey," growled Barney; "it's a kind o' nat'ral feeling in me to make him sore, and I'm going to do it if I gets half a chance."

"All right then, Mr Brymer 'll see as you has one, I dessay."

The next minute we were at the cabin in which the captain was lying, but he rose up on one arm as the door was thrown open and the light of the lantern flashed in.

Mr Frewen went to him directly.

"How are you?" he cried. "I could not come to you before."

"Tell me," cried Captain Berriman excitedly, "what has been going on?"

"Nothing much," said Mr Frewen, smiling.

"But I heard firing and a struggle in the saloon," cried the captain, clinging to Mr Frewen's arm.

"Well, yes, we have been re-taking the ship."

"What?"

"Humph! Poor fellow, he could not bear it," said Mr Frewen, as Captain Berriman sank back half-fainting, but he re-opened his eyes and clung to the doctor again.

"Too good—to be true," he muttered. "Thank God—thank God!"

There was perfect silence for a few moments, as our poor wounded captain lay back with his eyes closed. Then with his face losing its feeble, despairing look, he said anxiously—

"I don't see Brymer; is he hurt?"

"No; quite safe."

"Mr Preddle?"

"We are all pretty sound, and the mutineers are shut down in the forecabin, sir."

"Oh, if I only had strength!" said the captain. "Doctor, you have half cured me with this news; can't you give anything to set me up for an hour or two?"

"Nothing," said Mr Frewen, sadly. "I can only tell you that you must be patient. You must lie here and give your orders. We will execute them as far as we can."

"And we are in a bad storm. There must be danger on that side too, but I can do nothing."

"Mr Brymer will do his best, and there are three of the best seamen to help."

"What?" he cried excitedly.

"Hampton, and two more?"

"No, no, traitors, don't trust them—the scoundrels."

"No, we arn't, cap'n," growled Bob Hampton. "We was obliged to sham Abram a bit. Now I do call that 'ere hard, arter me and Dumlow and Barney helped get the ship back again."

"You did?" cried the captain.

"Course we did."

"Yes, they have been true as steel," said Mr Frewen. "You need not fear these men."

"And that boy, Walters?"

"Oh, him, sir! He's down below somewheres, and he'd better stay too," growled Bob Hampton, "for if he shows his nose, young Mr Dale here's going to tackle him pretty warmly."

"But have you got the men prisoners?" said the captain, anxiously.

"Yes, quite safe."

"Then the ship must be seen to. She's labouring heavily. Tell Brymer—"

"I shall tell Mr Brymer nothing," said Mr Frewen firmly. "You shall give him your orders instead. You can be at peace now, sir, so lie still patiently, and believe that everything possible will be done to preserve order and save the ship."

"Yes; thank you," said the captain, whose lip was quivering. "I know I must be patient. There, I'll try and do what I have not done these many hours,—go to sleep. But bring me some news sometimes, Dale, my lad, I shall be so anxious to know."

I promised him, and then we hurried out, for from time to time there was an anxious whispering going on in the next cabin, which appealed strongly to Mr Frewen and to me.

He pointed to the door as soon as we were outside, and his voice sounded very husky as he said—

"Unfasten it, and go in and tell them that all is safe once more."

"Won't you go?" I asked, as I offered him the lantern.

"No," he replied, after making an effort to master his anxiety to take the lead. "You and Mr Denning were on friendly terms. He would rather receive the good news from you. In with you quick, and tell him that if he feels strong enough, I—that is, Mr Brymer would be glad if he would come and help to keep watch over the prisoners."

"With a revolver," growled Bob Hampton.

"Yes, say with a pistol," said Mr Frewen. "He would be as effective there as a strong man."

"Better," growled Bob, "for he understands fire-arm tools, and knows how to shoot."

I gave a sharp knock at the door, and then unfastened it and entered, lantern in hand, to see Mr Denning looking ghastly as the light fell upon his face, where he stood before his sister with a tiny revolver in his hand, while the other was behind him holding the poor girl whom he was ready, poor weak creature that he was, to defend as long as he had life.

They had been so long in darkness that the light of the lantern, feeble as it was, dazzled them, and they could not see who it was.

Before I had time to speak Mr Denning cried fiercely—

"Keep back, scoundrel, or I'll fire!"

"No, no! Mr Denning," I cried; "it's all right now, and we've mastered the mutineers."

"Ah!"

I started forward at that cry—a long, low, pitiful cry—uttered by Miss Denning; and I heard Mr Frewen's step behind me as I dropped the lantern and tried to catch the poor girl. For the good news, after the long and terrible strain, was more than she could bear. I knew afterwards that she had acted like a heroine all through the fearful excitement, and had worked hard to comfort and sustain her brother; while now that the tension was removed, she reeled and would have fallen in spite of my effort. But as the lantern fell, and we were in darkness, I felt some one brush by me, and I knew by the sound that she had not struck the cabin-floor.

"Quick, a light, Bob!—matches!" I cried.

"Right you are, sir," he said; and as he came into the cabin, I heard him fumbling about and trying to strike a match, but for several minutes there was nothing but a phosphorescent streak made on the boards of the partition.

"Yah! everything's so plaguy wet," growled the sailor.

"Here, let me come, matey," I heard Dumlow say. "Mine's brass box." And the next minute there was a sharp crick, crick, crack, a burst of flame, and I saw Mr Frewen holding poor Miss Denning in his arms, ready to lay her carefully and reverently down as the lantern was re-lit.

"Yes, Mr Denning," he said quietly, "I think there is no more cause for anxiety now, except from the storm. Will you see to your sister, and bathe her face? It is only a fainting fit from the sudden shock."

"Yes, thank you," said Mr Denning, coldly and ungraciously, I thought. "Be good enough to take away your men."

"Of course. Come, my lads," said Mr Frewen; and he stepped out of the cabin, followed by Bob Hampton and Dumlow.

"It's all right, Mr Denning," I said. "Nothing to mind now."

But somehow I did not speak very warmly, for I was hurt by his cold reception of a man who had been risking his life to save him and his sister.

My feelings changed though the next moment, for to my astonishment Mr Denning laid hands on my shoulders, and he quite broke down and sobbed, while his words were choking and strange.

"Thank God!—thank God!" he said. "Oh, Dale, if you only knew what we have suffered, my poor sister and I!"

"Yes, yes, it has been horrible," I said, trying to comfort him, for his illness had made him weak as a girl; "but that's nothing to mind now. We've thrashed the scoundrels and locked them up, and Mr Frewen has behaved like a hero."

"Yes; and—and I'm afraid I spoke very sharply to him, but I could not help it, Dale."

"Well, you weren't very warm to him," I said; "and he does deserve something."

"Yes, yes," he cried hastily; "and I'll try and thank him another time. Hush! she's coming to."

"Yes, and I mustn't stay," I cried quickly; for I was miserably uncomfortable, and wanted to get away before Miss Denning quite came to, and burst out sobbing and crying, as I was sure she would.

"Can't you stop—a few minutes?" he said.

"No; I must go on deck. There's everything to do, and we're short-handed. I'll leave you the light."

"Thank you, yes," he cried, wringing my hand.

"Tell Miss Denning I'm so glad," I said hastily; and then I hurried out. But I was no sooner outside than I remembered my message, and ran back, to find, as I expected, that Miss Denning was sobbing on her brother's shoulder; when to my horror she left him, and with a cry flung her arms about my neck and kissed me.

"Oh, Alison Dale," she cried warmly, "bless you, and thank you! You have always been like a dear good brother to us both, ever since we have been on board."

"He has—he has," cried Mr Denning warmly, and he looked as pleased as could be at his sister's behaviour; while as for me, I would have given anything to be outside the cabin. For to a lad of my age, being thanked for what I had done was painful in the extreme; and in a hurried way I hastened to tell them my message, and briefly about how we had found friends in the mutineers' ranks, and then of our attack and success.

But my stay was brief. We had so far mastered one enemy, but were suffering from the attack of another, which we had ignored for a time; while now it was impressing itself upon us all, as I soon found, in a very serious way.

On reaching the deck, along which I had to guide myself by holding on by the side, and catching at rope and belaying-pin, I found that the sea had risen higher, and the wind was rushing through the rigging with almost hurricane force. But I made my way to the fore-castle-hatch, where Mr Preddle was still on guard, as I could see by the light of the swaying lantern, and Mr Brymer was with him.

"Ah, Dale," he cried, "I'm glad you've come. I want you to stay on guard with Mr Preddle. You have a pistol?"

"Yes," I said, pointing to my belt.

"That's right. I want to go to the wheel. Hampton is there now. I should like to do more, but it is terrible work now, short-handed as we are; and we must run on in this blind fashion, for I have no idea where we are."

Just at that moment there was a tremendous crack overhead, followed by a snapping as of pistol-shots; for one of the sails had got loose, and was now being torn into ribbons, which snapped and cracked like so many cart-whips on a gigantic scale.

"Is that dangerous?" I shouted, for the wind carried away my voice.

"No; a blessing, my lad. It will save her. I only want steering power. Look here, don't fire unless you are obliged. If you do, mind, I take it as a signal that you want help, both of you; and then of course we shall come to your help. But what about Mr Denning?"

As he spoke, the invalid came struggling along by the bulwarks, and I ran to help him to where he could stand in shelter.

"Glad to see you, Mr Denning. Ah, that's right. Rather a small pistol, but I dare say it can do its duty. You will help them?"

"As far as my strength will let me," he said.

"That's right. Now, Mr Preddle, I must go. Sorry about your fish, but we can do nothing till the weather mends."

"No, I'm afraid not," Mr Preddle yelled.

"I don't hear that crying out now."

"No; I haven't heard it since Mr Dale came," panted Mr Preddle, with the wind driving his words back so that he could hardly get his breath.

"That must wait too. The safety of the ship is all we can look to now."

He made a dash for the weather-bulwark, and disappeared at once into the darkness and mist of spray which flew before the gale, hissing by us, and drenching us to the skin.

"You ought to have brought a waterproof, Mr Denning," I said.

"Who could think of waterproofs at a time like this?" he said, with his lips to my ear. Then with a start, as he turned his head and looked forward—"What's that?"

I had heard a cry as he spoke.

"I don't know," I said. "Why, it must be some one wounded crying for help."

"It is what Mr Brymer and I heard several times before," said Mr Preddle excitedly. "He thought it must be one of the mutineers who had escaped aloft at first, afraid to stir to come down."

"I don't think it could be that," I said. "It didn't sound like being up aloft."

"So he said. Then he thought—"

"There it is again," cried Mr Denning and I heard, above the shrieking of the wind and the hissing spray, a despairing kind of wail, as if some one called for help.

"Why, it's forward somewhere," I said, with a curious shudder running through me which was not caused by the wind and spray.

"Yes, that's what Mr Brymer said; but he went and searched all about forward."

"Then it must be one of the men below—one who is wounded," I said. "Do you think we could send Mr Frewen down to his help?"

"Not without letting your prisoners loose," said Mr Denning, decisively. "I'm sorry for the man, but he must suffer for the present."

"It's very horrible," I said; "for he may be very bad—dying perhaps."

"Yes," said Mr Denning coldly; "but it was not our work, I suppose."

"There it is again," said Mr Preddle. "When the mate was here, he felt sure that some one had crept overboard, and down to what he called the stays under the bowsprit."

"When the attack was made?" I cried. "Yes, that must be it. There it goes again. That was certainly 'Help!'"

"Yes."

"He must be afraid of falling. Why, the vessel keeps on driving into these great waves, and at every dip down he must be nearly drowned."

"What are you going to do, Dale?" cried Mr Denning.

"Find out where he is, and then lower a rope to him; and when he has fastened it round him, we must haul him on board, even if he is another enemy. There'll be no need to be afraid of him."

I was trying to make out where I could most handily find a rope, when, plainly heard above the heavy beating of the waves against our bows, as the ship rose and fell in her wild race onward through the dense blackness ahead, there was the murmur of a voice and a loud movement below the hatch we were guarding.

Then distinctly heard came the words—

"Give me room then," and this was followed by a crashing sound, and a jar against my hand as I held on to the side of the hatchway.

"They've got a chopper, and are going to cut their way out!" I said excitedly. And almost as I spoke there was another dull blow, and this was followed by a cheer.

"What are you going to do?" I cried, as Mr Preddle held on with one hand, and presented his revolver at the door of the hatchway.

A flash and a dull report served for my answer then; and as the bullet crashed through the woodwork, there was a yell, a dull sound as of a fall, and then in the momentary silence Mr Preddle said—

"Those were my orders; I was obliged."

A ragged volley was fired then from below, and we heard the bullets striking the wood, and saw two or three splitting the thick wood at the top of the hatchway. But we stood back too much for either of them to touch us, as we listened,

trying to distinguish the words said, as we pictured, no doubt pretty accurately, what was going on in the forecastle; for a dull groaning told only too plainly that Mr Preddle's shot had taken effect.

What I pictured was the men lifting their bleeding companion forward to one of the bunks, while others were talking and raging furiously about the shot.

I shuddered, and yet I felt excited, and that it was a necessity. And just then I made out Jarette's voice shouting at the men, and giving some order which only evoked a deep growl.

"I don't like having to fire like that," said Mr Preddle just then; "and I feel now as if I ought to fetch the doctor.—Ah, Frewen," he cried, "I've just shot one of the men."

For there were Mr Frewen, the mate, and Barney Blane, all panting and eager to help us.

I told him what had happened, and Mr Brymer said quietly—

"On their own heads be it. This may act as a warning to them. But there must be no hesitation; our lives and that of Miss Denning depend upon swift action. At the first stroke of an axe, fire again."

"I will," said Mr Preddle firmly; and by the light of the lantern I saw that the chambers of his revolver were exposed, and that he was thrusting in a fresh cartridge.

"Ought we to send down Mr Frewen?" said Mr Denning just then.

"Don't ask absurd questions, sir," replied Mr Brymer angrily. "Come, Frewen. Now, my lad."

He turned away, and before following, Barney Blane got beside me, to say in my ear—

"Disappoynted again, sir. I did think I was to have a go at Frenchy now."

He hurried off; and the shrieking of the wind ceased for a few moments, during which we strained our ears to try and make out what went on below, when very faintly, but the word distinctly heard, came the cry—

"Help!"

"There is some one forward there by the bowsprit!" I cried excitedly; and leaving my companions, I crept to the bows, and, holding on tightly, climbed up and looked over, seeing nothing but the foaming water churned up by the ship as she plunged on and on, looking as if she were moment by moment going to split upon what might have been one huge black rock right ahead.

I changed my position, and got to the other side of the bowsprit to hold on and look over there, but still I could see nothing, and though I shouted again and again there was no reply.

"Nobody could possibly be hanging on there," I thought, as I tried to pierce the mist of spray; and I felt that if low down on the stays, he would be dipped at every plunge, and drowned in a few minutes, and if higher, to a certainty, unless lashed to the ropes, be washed off.

I stayed some minutes, hailing again and again, with my voice carried forward by the wind, and then made my way back to my two companions, whose faces were turned inquiringly toward me as I shook my head.

"There can't be any one there," I said. "It's impossible."

"So Mr Brymer thought," said Mr Preddle. "He said he would be either washed off or drowned, and that it must be one of the men below."

"There it is again," said Mr Denning; "and it is below."

"Yes; there!" I cried, for there was a heavy banging at a bulk-head, and some one shouted savagely to whoever cried for help to be quiet, and then a shot was fired, but not at us.

"The wretches!" I said.

"The wretch!" said Mr Denning. "That was Jarette's voice, I'm sure; and he must have fired."

"At some prisoner they have there below," I said.

"Or at the wounded man," cried Mr Preddle.

"It must be another wounded man then, for you heard the sound before you fired that shot."

"Yes; and it makes me feel better satisfied, for the mutineers are such brutes—such savage brutes."

"There!" I cried; "do you hear?" for once more the cry for help came so piteous, faint, and despairing that it seemed to go through me from head to heel in one long, continuous shudder.

"If it hadn't been for what we heard just now," said Mr Preddle just then, "I should have been ready to think it was something uncanny—something ghostly; but," he added hastily, as Mr Denning turned a mocking face to him, "I don't think so now."

"It's very horrid," I said; "and the worst of it is that one can't do anything. I wish we could send Mr Frewen to help the poor fellow, whoever it is."

"Yes, it is horrible," said Mr Denning; "but they made us suffer so that I feel hardened against them. It must be a wounded man."

"Why," I cried, as a flash of mental light just then illumined my thick brain, "I know!"

I was so excited by my discovery, which was one of those simple finds that the wonder was it had not been thought of at once, I could hardly contain myself, and I made for a swinging lantern and took it down.

"What is it? What have you found out?" cried Mr Denning at the top of his voice, though it only sounded feeble then in the din of the storm.

"It's some one in the cable-tier," I cried.

"Cable-tier? Where's that?"

"Just forward. Front of the forksle," I shouted. "We must get the hatch off."

"No, no; not till Mr Brymer comes," said Mr Denning.

The words sounded so wise that I hesitated with the lantern in my hand, and for a moment or two I thought of running off to report my discovery; but I recalled the fact that I was on a perilous duty, and that I had no right to leave my post without orders; so I re-hung the lantern, and then, after listening and convincing myself that there was no threatening sound coming from below, I shouted to my companions what I was going to do, and then staggered forward to the carefully battened down hatch, beneath which the great rusty chain cable was lying in a heap.

I listened, and my heart sank with disappointment, for the wind was shrieking as fiercely as ever, and I could not hear a sound.

"Am I mistaken after all?" I thought, and listened still.

Just then, with a heavy thud, as the ship plunged downward, a wave struck the port-bow, rose in a perfect cataract, and curling over, deluged me and rushed along the deck.

I should have been swept away, but the combings of the hatch sheltered me a little, and as the hissing splash of the water ceased, I fancied I heard a faint clink of one of the links of the great chain below, while the moment after came more plainly than I had heard it before a smothered, piteous cry—

"Help!"

And again directly after, as if he who uttered the cry were in agony—

"Help!"

I took out my pistol and thumped with the butt on the hatch, when there was silence again.

"Below there!" I shouted with my lips close to the boards.

"Help! pray help!" came in answer.

"All right," I cried; "I'll see."

I crept back on hands and knees to my companions, who were waiting for me impatiently.

"It's all right," I said; "there's some one in the cable-tier a prisoner, and as it must be some one of our lads he is of course afraid. Oughtn't I to run to Mr Brymer?"

The need ceased the next moment, for before we could decide whether the signal ought to be given by firing a pistol, Neb Dumlow appeared in the feeble glow shed by the lantern, coming out of the black darkness in a peculiarly weird fashion.

"Ahoy!" he growled. "Mate says, is all right?"

"No," I said eagerly, for boy as I was, I seemed to be the captain of that watch, the two gentlemen giving place to me, even if they did oppose some of my ideas. "Go and tell Mr Brymer to come here."

"Ay, ay!" growled the great ugly fellow—uglier now in the darkness than he had ever looked before—and he turned and trotted aft, to return in a few minutes bearing a lantern, and in company with the mate and Mr Frewen.

I told them what I had discovered, and Mr Brymer gave an angry stamp.

"Of course!" he cried. "I might have known. Why, it must be one of our lads, and a friend. Quick, Dumlow, and have off that hatch."

In another moment or two the sailor was on his knees dragging off the piece of tarpaulin which had been fastened down over the top, probably when the storm began, and directly after the hatch was lifted off, and the lantern held down to throw its light upon a ghastly face, which was raised to us as a couple of hands grasped the combings

around the opening. I was so astounded that I could not speak, only listen, as Dumlow shouted—

“I say, what cheer you, my lad?”

And Mr Brymer—

“Walters! Why, my lad, what are you doing there?”

“Help!” groaned my old messmate with a piteous look up at us; “half-smothered—water—help!”

“Well, mutineer or middy,” said Mr Brymer, “there’s nothing to fear from you. Take one arm, Dumlow,” and seizing the other himself, they hoisted Walters quickly out of the little compartment and set him on his feet; but his legs gave way, and he dropped on the deck and lay upon his back.

At that moment sounds came up from the hatch, which suggested the possibility of the mutineers breaking through the heavy bulk-head and making their way on deck that way, so before aught else was done, the hatch was securely fastened down again.

While that was in progress, but feeling wroth all the time, I bent down over the poor, miserable-looking wretch, whose eyes were following every movement I made, and recalling the shot I had heard fired, I at once came to the conclusion that he was hurt.

“Here,” I said roughly, “where are you wounded, so that I can tell Mr Frewen?”

“I’m—I’m—”

“Well, where?” I said, still very roughly, for the sight of the treacherous young wretch made a hot feeling of rage against him rise in my throat.

“Not—not wounded,” he said feebly.

“Then what’s the matter with you?” I cried contemptuously; “sea-sick?”

“No—no, that—that wretch, Jarette.”

“What?” cried Mr Brymer, with a mocking laugh. “What? ‘Wretch Jarette!’ Do you mean your captain, my worthy young lieutenant?”

Walters’ eyes gave a roll and then closed as he lay there; but they opened again directly, for Mr Brymer gave him an angry thrust—a thrust, not a kick—with his foot.

“Here, get up, cur! You’re our prisoner now. What do you say?”

Walters’ lips were moving as Dumlow held the light over him and bent down.

“Says as you’re to stow him in prison, sir, and not let the skipper see him.”

“Bah! Has it come to this? Speak to him, Dale. What does he say now?”

“Water; he is asking for water,” I said, as I saw how piteously weak the lad was.

“Suffering from exhaustion and want of air.”

“Then he must have a rest,” cried Mr Brymer. “Now, sir, can you get up and walk?”

“No,” said Mr Frewen, decisively.

“Lift him up, Dumlow,” said Mr Brymer, “and bring him aft to one of the cabins. Will you see to him, Mr Frewen?”

The doctor nodded, and I felt as if I wanted to go; but my duty was there, and I had to stay.

Chapter Twenty Six.

That storm showed no signs though of abating, and we watched on through the night, constantly on the strain, attacked as we were by alarms from below, and the furious assault of the winds and waves. Several times over during the night, when I was suffering from the cold, and faint with hunger and exhaustion, a horrible chilly feeling of despair came creeping over me. I began thinking of home and those there who would be heart-broken if I was lost; but always at these worst times something seemed to happen that took me out of myself, giving me work so particular to do that all my energies were directed to that duty, and in consequence I forgot my own troubles.

Twice over, when Mr Brymer came with one or other of the men, Mr Denning expressed a wish to be relieved, and I had to take his arm and help him along under the shelter of the bulwarks to the saloon and the cabin where his sister was waiting anxiously for news, and as we struggled aft, he talked to me as freely as if I had been his brother.

“Is there any hope for us, Dale?” he said on one occasion as we rested for a few moments underneath the bulwarks.

“Oh yes,” I replied. “Why not?”

"I don't know, I'm not a sailor, but I should not have thought the ship could have kept on long like this without sinking."

I laughed.

"Why, she's a splendid boat," I said, "and quite strong, and so long as we've got plenty of sea-room, we shan't hurt."

"You're talking like this to comfort me," he said.

"No; I'm telling you the truth as far as I understand it. Of course I've never been out in a storm on the ocean before, but I've been in some big ones off the coast round Ireland, where we were always in danger of going on the rocks, which are awful there."

"But the sea comes thundering down on the ship so."

"What of that?" I replied. "The ship's hollow, and it sounds all the more, but the water is soft, and we go through it or ride over it somehow."

"Ah, you're too young to know what fear is," he said sadly.

"Oh no, I'm not," I cried, laughing. "I've been awfully frightened several times to-night, but I'm more afraid of Jarette and his gang than I am of the sea."

"You have no sister on board," he said. "No bitter regrets for letting her come into such danger."

"No," I said, rather chokingly; "but I've got people at home, and it would be very horrid to think I should never see them again."

"Let's go on," he said laconically, and I helped him along, choosing the easiest moments till we were in shelter, and then without leaving hold of me he whispered—

"Make the best of things to her."

There was a lamp burning in the cabin as we entered, and Miss Denning sprang to our side.

"Oh, John," she cried piteously, "this will be death to you, drenched with the cold sea! Pray, pray, stay in shelter now."

"Nonsense!" he cried; "it does me good, and it's grandly exciting to fight the storm like this. How are you, little one? Ah, don't touch me, I'm wet."

"Suffering terribly, John dear. You must stay with me now."

"Tied to your apron, you foolish girl," he said merrily. "Nonsense! I'm wanted to help. There, I bring you good news. We've got all the pirates safely in prison, and as soon as the storm's over all will be right again."

Miss Denning gave me a piteous, inquiring look.

"Yes, that's quite right, Miss Denning," I said cheerfully.

"But this terrible storm; shall we be wrecked?"

"Ships don't get wrecked out in the open sea," I replied coolly, "only have their sails blown away, and sometimes lose a spar, or get a boat torn off the davits."

"Then you think we are safe?"

"Oh yes, I hope so," I replied.

"Safe? Of course, darling little cowardly sis," said Mr Denning, kissing her pale cheek very lovingly, and I felt that I had never liked him so well before, never having seen his true nature and affection for his sister.

"Now then, Mr Dale and I have to go back on duty to shoot mutineers and pirates, and you are to lie down and trust in our all taking care of you. Try and sleep for a few hours."

"Sleep!" she said reproachfully, "with you exposed to all that danger."

"Yes! Why not? To grow strong, and ready to help me if I want it."

"But, must you go, John?"

"Yes, dear," he said gravely, "I must; but, please God, the worst danger is over, and you will not hinder me from doing my duty like a man, even if I am a weak one."

She held his hand to her cheek, and smiling at me, spoke quite cheerfully.

"Come back in about an hour," she said, "and I will have coffee made with the spirit-lamp, and try and find some biscuits."

"That we will," cried Mr Denning. "Make plenty, Lena, Mr Brymer and—and the sailors will be glad of some."

She nodded, trying to look cheerful, and we left her, but had not reached the broken companion-way before a door on our right opened, a light was thrown across us, and I felt Mr Denning's arm twitch. For it was Mr Frewen coming out of the cabin in which Walters had been placed, the one in which Mr Preddle had been kept a prisoner, and as soon as he was outside he carefully locked it.

"Not much need for it," he said to us quietly, "for the little wretch is very weak still. Nice sort of characters you choose for your companions, Dale," he continued. "How do we know that you have not been contaminated, and are going to rise against us?"

"There's no fear till the storm's over, Mr Frewen," I said, laughing, and then, with the two gentlemen keeping perfectly silent, we went forward again, and had nearly reached the fore-castle-hatch, when, sounding very feeble and strange, there was the report of a pistol, and we hurried forward to hear shouts of rage coming from below the hatch, and the blows of an axe being used with such effect, that before long whoever wielded it must make a way through.

Mr Brymer glanced round at us as we came up, and I saw the barrel of his revolver glistening in the pale light.

Then with his face close to the hatch he shouted—

"Once more, stop that or I fire!"

A shout of derision came from within.

"I warn you again!" roared Mr Brymer. "I fired before without trying to hit you, now I shall aim straight. Stop that this moment!"

"Fire away! Ready below, lads, I'll have it off—"

The report of the revolver, a hoarse, half-stifled cry from within, and then a yell of rage arose, to mingle with the shrieking of the wind.

"I was obliged to fire, Mr Frewen," said the mate, sharply, "for at any cost we will keep the upper hand now."

No one spoke, and I could not help shivering as I saw the stern looks of the men by me, even Mr Preddle's round smooth face looking fierce and determined.

Mr Frewen was the first to open his lips.

"It is a bitter necessity," he said; "those men must be kept down, but I am obliged to speak now. Brymer, I am a surgeon, and there are at least two wounded men there below, perhaps more. It is necessary for me to go down."

"It is impossible, Mr Frewen. If I give orders for that hatch to be opened, there will be a rush, and even if we remain masters and beat them down, it can only be at the cost of wounding more, perhaps causing death."

"Why not make a truce with them?"

"With the men it would be easy enough, but not with their leader, a scoundrel who feels that he is fighting with penal servitude before him, perhaps the halter! But, Mr Frewen, these are no times for being humane. No; that hatch shall not be opened."

"But I will stand ready, after telling the men what I am going to do, and if they will keep away while the hatch is open there can be no rush."

"I think differently, sir," said Mr Brymer, coldly.

"I agree with Mr Brymer, sir," said Mr Denning, "that it would be madness."

"But you agree with me, Mr Preddle?" cried the doctor, excitedly.

"No, I don't, Mr Frewen," came in Mr Preddle's high-pitched voice. "I don't like men to suffer, but I won't give my vote for you to go down into that wild beasts' cage."

Mr Frewen laughed bitterly, and turned to me.

"What do you say, fellow-prisoner?" he cried.

"I shall vote against Mr Frewen being allowed to go down," I said sturdily. "We want your help more than they do."

"Bravo! my lad," cried Mr Brymer.

"Well, yes; bravo! then," said the doctor, sadly. "I am beaten; I give in."

"Thank you, Frewen," cried Mr Brymer, holding out his hand, which the doctor took frankly. "I am sorry to go against you, but you are too valuable to us here. I am sure that if I let you go down, they would not let you come up again. Jarette is fox enough to know how your absence would weaken us, and then there is the captain; I place his life as of more value than that of a mutinous crew."

"I'm convinced," said Mr Frewen. "My desire was to stay, but as a surgeon I couldn't stand still, knowing that my help was wanted down there."

"You doctors are so greedy," cried Mr Preddle. "You have two patients as it is, and if we're going, on like this I'm afraid you'll soon have some more."

"Yes," said the doctor, turning to Mr Denning, "I shall have another one. Forgive me for speaking, Mr Denning, but I think you ought to go back to your cabin now and remove your wet things."

"You mean well, sir," said Mr Denning, courteously, "but I am wanted here."

"Not now, sir," said the mate. "I think we can manage, and if you would hold yourself in readiness to turn out if we raise an alarm that would be enough."

"I am here, and I have faced so much of the storm and trouble that I will see it through now."

No one attempted to argue with him, and the watch was resumed, with the ship tearing through the water before the storm, for short-handed as we were, Mr Brymer shrank from attempting to alter her course, or riding head to wind.

From time to time there was a stir below, and voices rose angrily, but we could always hear Jarette's shrill utterances, and he generally seemed to calm the men down, or to master them, with the result that the angry sounds ceased and gave place to a low murmuring as if some plan were being discussed. After this had been going on some time, on one occasion Mr Brymer, who had been aft at the wheel with Bob Hampton and had returned in time to hear the talking, shook his head and said to Mr Frewen—

"That sounds bad. They're hatching a new plot against us. It is like having your ship on fire somewhere amongst the cargo in a place where you cannot reach. It goes on smouldering day after day, and you are in the full expectation of its breaking out. You don't know when, but you are sure that it must come before long."

"I was thinking something of the kind," replied the doctor.

And so was I, though I did not speak. And in addition, I had an idea in my head that I could not work out, and while I was trying I had another idea. The first one was, that if by any means we could catch Jarette, the mutiny would all fall to pieces; but then the job was to catch the rascal, and that puzzled me.

It was very close to daylight; and cold, low-spirited, and miserable, I was beginning to think that between the storm and the men below, the poor old Burgh Castle must come to grief, when Bob Hampton came up glistening in his oilskins.

"I were to come and say as the lady's got jorums o' hot coffee ready, sir, in the captain's cabin. Mr Denning and Mr Dale's to go first, and I'm to take the watch till they comes back."

I saw Mr Denning wince and dart a sharp look at the doctor, but the latter did not turn his head, and once more we began fighting our way back, with the ship seeming at times quite to dance on the tops of the waves.

But we reached the shelter in safety, and as soon as we were under cover I felt sure that the wind was not so fierce, and said so.

"I could not tell any difference," said Mr Denning, sadly, as we went right aft, to find the captain's cabin, right in the stern—the one through whose window I had climbed after my hazardous descent from the rigging—looking bright and cheerful, and hot coffee waiting for us, in company with sweet smiles and cheering words.

It was wonderful. One minute I had been ready to give up and think that all was over; the next, as the hot drink sent a glow through me, I was ready to smile back at Miss Denning, and join her in persuading her brother to go to his cabin and change; while the very next minute Mr Brymer came down with a large bottle, and after hastily swallowing a cup of the coffee, he begged for a bottleful to carry up to the men at the wheel.

"Is the storm still so bad, Mr Brymer?" asked Miss Denning, as the mate was about to hurry back on deck.

"No," he said emphatically. "It's one of those gales which blow in a circle, and we're passing through it. The glass is rising, and in less than an hour I think it will begin to lull." This was joyful news, and I rose to hurry back so as to take the place of Mr Preddle.

"You'll stay now, John," I heard Miss Denning say, and he answered her quite passionately.

"Don't tempt me, Lena!" he cried. "I want to stay, but I want also to—there, I will act like a man."

I did not then understand him as I did afterwards, what a strange jealous hatred and dislike there was burning within him as he caught my arm, and held it tightly.

"Help me quickly!" he whispered. "Take me back before my weakness masters me, and I break down."

"But if you are so weak?" I said anxiously. "Take me forward!" he whispered angrily. "You cannot understand."

I saw Miss Denning looking wonderingly at her brother as we went out, and again fought our way back to the fore-castle-hatch, no easy task with the ship heeling over, and the spray flying as it did; but I felt hardened to it now, and the darkness did not appear so terrible, nor the danger so great, with the warm glow I felt spreading through me. Then I looked at my companion quite wonderingly, as I could just see his pale thin face, for he said quickly in a lull of the wind—

"I think I've conquered, Dale."

"Conquered? It's wonderful how brave you have been."

I saw him smile, and then wondered afresh that I could have seen the change in his face. "Why, it's getting light!" I said joyfully.

I was quite right, and as we were in the tropics the change was coming rapidly. But just then we reached the watch, and to my surprise Mr Denning said as well as the rushing wind would let him—

"Mr Frewen, Mr Preddle, my sister has hot coffee ready, and will be glad if you can go at once."

I saw Mr Frewen give quite a start, and Mr Preddle regularly jumped, but they were both so surprised that they could neither of them speak, while Mr Denning turned to Bob Hampton.

"Your turn must be when they come back," he said.

"Oh, all right, sir, I can wait," growled Bob—I mean roared—for though there was a momentary cessation in the shrieking of the wind, he spoke as if Mr Denning were by the wheel; and there was no doubt now—we could not see it, nor were we likely to, through the mist and spray, but the sun was rising, and ten minutes after I was gazing at the sea, which was churned up into one chaos of foam.

"It's all over!" yelled Bob, a minute or two later.

"What's all over?" I asked.

"The hurry-cane, sir. We're most through it, and the wind's beginning to drop."

"But it's blowing terribly," I cried.

"Ay, sir, it is; but 'nour ago it was blowing ten times as terrible. Why, there was a time when it most shaved my head, and another time when I put my hands up to feel if my ears was cut off. Strikes me as they would ha' gone if they hadn't been tied down with the flaps of this here sou'-wester."

"Yes, it's getting lighter fast," cried Mr Denning. "But how rough the sea is!"

"Ay, sir, she be a bit tossy like," said Bob; "but this here's nothing to what it is on a rocky coast. Ah, that's bad if you like."

"But we've had an awful night, Bob."

"Tidy, sir, tidy. Not so bad as it might ha' been."

"Oh, it couldn't have been worse!" I cried.

"What? Not been worse, sir? Why, where's your mainmas' gone by the board, and your fore-mast cut off at the top-mast-head, and your mizzen splintered into matchwood? Why, my lad, this arn't been nothing. And look yonder, there's the sun a-coming out, leastwise it's making the clouds look red-like. We're coming out of it well. Why, you ought to be proud, Mr Dale, o' belonging to such a ship as the Burgh Castle. She's a clipper, if ever there was one built."

"I am proud of her, Bob," I said, "but I'm not proud of her crew."

"Well, no, sir," said Bob, rubbing his red nose, which looked wet and shiny now; "they arn't turned out a werry good lot, but then arter all they might ha' been worse. You see it's just like having so much soup as the cook's made for you, and all as good as can be, till the cook's mate tilts the lamp aside by a-hitting it with his head, and a drop o' hyle goes into the soup. That one drop o' train-hyle spyles all the pot. See what I mean?"

"That Jarette is the drop of oil?"

"That's it, sir, and a werry, werry rancid drop he be."

Mr Denning laughed, and I saw him turn his back to the direction in which Mr Frewen had gone.

"*Tlat!*" went Bob Hampton's lips in a loud smack. "Glad when they gents come back, for I want some o' your young lady's hot coffee, bless her! to take the taste o' the hyle out o' my mouth."

"You shall have it soon, Hampton, my good brave fellow," cried Mr Denning, and I saw the weak tears in his eyes, "and you tell my sister that she is to find my little silver flask, and give you some brandy in your coffee."

"Thankye, sir, thankye, that's very good of you. Why, Mr Dale, sir, you talk of our having a bad night. Tchah!—nothing, lad, nothing. How could it be a werry bad 'un when you have the luck to be shipped aboard a craft with a angel aboard? A angel, that's what I says, and Neb Dumlow and Barney says the same. We all said it arter the mutiny had begun, and that if we didn't get the best of old Frenchy somehow we'd eat our heads.—Lie down, will yer?" he roared, as he gave the side of the hatch so fierce a kick that I thought his heavy boot would have gone through.

There was a heavy rustling sound, and the grumbling of voices plainly heard now, for the wind was rapidly falling.

"That was French Jarette a-listening, sir, for a penny-piece," whispered Bob, for it was growing possible to whisper now. "Strikes me we arn't done with him yet, and if I might adwise, I should say as Mr Frewen ought to be sent down below with some of his doctor's stuff to pyson that chap like you would a rat, for there'll never be no peace while he's

aboard. Hah!" he continued, smacking his lips. "There's your sort; here's Mr Preddle coming back with his face shining and smelling o' hot coffee like a flower-garding."

Mr Denning turned round sharply, but checked himself as he saw that Mr Frewen was coming too.

"Looks like my turn now."

"Miss Denning is waiting to give you some coffee, Mr Hampton," said the naturalist.

"Thankye for the mister, sir, and thank her for the coffee," said Bob, smiling, and he straddled off, the sloping of the deck as the ship rose and fell and heeled over being apparently of no consequence to him.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

A few minutes later Mr Brymer joined us, rubbing his hands.

"We shall almost have a calm in an hour, gentlemen," he said, "and smooth water, with nothing but a long heavy swell before night. I think we may all congratulate ourselves upon what we have done, for we've saved the ship."

"Not yet," said Mr Frewen, pointing at the fore-castle-hatch.

"No, not yet, doctor; but we've only one enemy to deal with now, and can devote all our attention to him. I think I can relieve two of you gentlemen now. Mr Frewen, will you fight out another hour or two, while these gentlemen go and change, and have an hour or two's sleep?"

"I'll go and change," said Mr Denning; "but no sleep to-day."

"Please yourselves, gentlemen; but you must have rest, and be in readiness for a call. Hah! that's grand; what should we do without the sun?"

For as he was speaking, a bright gleam suddenly shot almost level across the spray, which still flew over the waves, and made it flash like a rainbow. It did more, for it sent light and joy into our breasts as Mr Preddle and Mr Denning went aft, meeting Bob Hampton with some boards, a saw, hammer, and nails with which he was soon busily at work strengthening the sides and top of the hatch, nailing down board after board, and only leaving one small opening in case communication should be needed with the prisoners below, who, saving for the light filtering through a small sky-light, and also through the ventilator, were in the dark.

An hour later a sort of council of war was held in the captain's cabin, and it was decided to well nail up the hatch of the cable-tier as well, there being no dread of the men breaking out in other directions on account of the closely-packed-in heavy cargo, much of which consisted, as I said, of machinery—agricultural implements and the like—for the Antipodes. Then arrangements were made as to the men being fed with biscuit and water, just sufficient for keeping them alive, and this starvation policy it was considered would be the means of setting the mutineers thoroughly against their leader, with the probable result that they would open up negotiations, and end by binding Jarette hand and foot and delivering him up. After that, as many as the captain thought could be trusted might be released to assist in navigating the ship, and the rest could be kept in prison.

Mr Brymer was quite right about the weather; we sailed right through the circular storm, and long before sunset of what proved to be a very hot day, the ship was gently gliding up one side of a long wave, and after pausing for a moment on the top, gliding down the other, so that it was hard to imagine that we had just passed through so terrible a storm.

That evening I asked Mr Frewen to take me with him when he went into Mr Preddle's cabin to see Walters, and this resulted in his leaving me behind to sit down by where my brother midshipman lay, looking white, or rather grey as ashes.

I found him very stubbornly silent with the doctor, who did not seem to think him very bad; and to all the sharp appeals to him to try and sit up, or explain his symptoms, he only gave vent to a piteous kind of groan which worried me a good deal, for I could not help thinking that Mr Frewen was hard, and to put it plainly, rather brutal, to one who had evidently gone through a great deal of suffering, and was now completely prostrate.

But certainly it had been rather tantalising, for to everything there was this piteous groan.

"Put out your tongue," said Mr Frewen.

"Oh!"

"Well, open your eyes."

"Oh!"—long drawn out, and strange.

"Surely that does not hurt you, my lad. I want to do you good if I can."

"Oh!"

"Are you in pain?"

"Oh!"

"Does that hurt you?"

"Oh!"

"Can you feel it if I press your chest?"

"Oh!"

"Stand a little on one side, Dale; I want to look at his eyes."

I stepped back, feeling very uncomfortable, and Mr Frewen parted the lad's eyelids gently enough.

"Oh!" came more loudly than ever, as Mr Frewen looked closely into first one and then the other eye.

Another moan and groan came fast one after the other, sometimes loud and sometimes piteous in the extreme, making me shiver again as I imagined all kinds of horrors.

At first Mr Frewen was very gentle in his examination; but as Walters kept on groaning, the doctor seemed to lose patience, and in feeling the patient's ribs, testing his arms and joints, he was, I thought, unnecessarily rough and harsh.

Mr Frewen did not speak out, but kept on uttering little ejaculations; and at last he began to pass his hands over and around Walters' skull, while I shuddered, and fully expected to hear the broken bone-edges grate together from a fracture.

But the doctor let my messmate's head sink down again, quickly too, for Walters uttered a thrilling moan and let his face hang down away from the doctor, looking so ghastly and strange that I was more horrified than ever in the dim cabin-light.

I looked anxiously at the doctor, silently asking him what was the matter; but he only gave me a short nod of the head, and once more directed his attention to Walters, who lay breathing slowly in a catchy, spasmodic fashion, and I was almost about to question Mr Frewen, but he once more bent over the prisoner patient, listening to his breathing.

I saw him frown and then lay his hand upon Walters' side, and then I started, for there came so piteous a groan that I was sure the ribs must have been crushed, and I felt angry with him for not being more sympathetic.

"He went against us and played the blackguard," I thought to myself; "but he has been severely punished, and is down, so it isn't right to jump upon him."

I felt then that I disliked Mr Frewen, who must be a cold-hearted, brutal kind of man, and I was not surprised at Mr Denning the invalid showing so much dislike to him now.

"Yes, he's very bad," said Mr Frewen at last, "I shall have to get ready a mixture for him—something pretty strong too."

I was looking anxiously in his eyes as he said this, and then we both looked at Walters, for the poor fellow winced and moaned again.

"Yes," said Mr Frewen to me, but watching his patient the while; "medicine is as a rule very nasty, and the strong mixtures worst of all; but there are cases where you cannot hesitate to administer them, even if they are distasteful; and where you disguise their taste with syrups and essential oils you often do harm instead of good."

"Do you think he is very bad, Mr Frewen?" I said.

"Oh yes—very," was the reply. "Not dangerous!" I whispered.

"Yes, decidedly dangerous," he said, in the same low tone.

"Then he ought not to be left?"

"Oh yes, better left. He'll come round. There, I'm going to see how the other prisoners are getting on. I'm afraid that I am badly wanted there."

He stood looking down at the patient with his brow knit, and I noticed a fidgety movement about one of his feet.

"Oughtn't I to stop and nurse him?" I asked.

"No; certainly not. He is better alone. This kind of case does not require attention—only time. Come along," and he went to the door.

"All right, Mr Frewen; I'll come directly," I said softly.

"But I want to fasten the door," he whispered.

"I'll fasten it when I come out."

"No, that will not do; Mr Brymer said that the door was to be kept fast, and I can't go away and leave it."

"But I want to talk to him," I whispered. "Lock me in for a bit."

"And suppose he turns savage with you, and tries to get your weapons?" whispered Mr Frewen, with a smile.

"I shan't let him have them," I replied. "Besides, he's weak and ill."

"Humph!—not so very, my lad. There, I'll lock you in, and come and let you out in a quarter of an hour."

He closed and locked the cabin door sharply, and I stood there thinking what I should say to my old messmate, and feeling how awkward it was now he was in trouble. For he lay there half turned away with his eyes closed, and I heard him moan piteously again while I waited to hear Mr Frewen's departing step.

But it did not come for a few moments. Then I heard him go into the adjoining cabin, and the opening of his medicine-chest quite plainly.

"I don't believe he wants medicine," I thought. "He must be suffering from some internal injury." Though as to what part of his body the injury might be in, I had not the slightest idea.

There was a loud clink of bottle or glass, and then quite plainly came the setting down of something hard upon a shelf, the sound coming plainly through the opening we had so laboriously made when Mr Preddle was a prisoner in this cabin, and Mr Frewen and I in the next.

Then I heard a loud cough. There was a squeaking sound of a cork being thrust into a bottle, and the doctor went out of his cabin, shut the door sharply, and went off, while it was like an electric shock through me, and I stared wildly, for Walters started up, and in a vicious angry voice exclaimed—

"Brute! Beast! I only wish—"

He stopped short as he vigorously wrenched himself round.

"I thought you were gone," he said blankly. "He told you to come away."

"I stopped to help you," I said. "I did not like to have you left when you were so bad."

"No, you didn't," he cried, with a vicious snarl. "You stopped to play the miserable, contemptible, cowardly spy. It's just like you, Dale. You always were a beast!"

"If you call me a beast, I'll knock your head off!" I cried, for my temper was rising against him and against myself, for I felt that I had been imposed upon, and horribly weak and stupid in my sympathy for one who was shamming from beginning to end.

"It would take a better man than you," he snarled.

"Not it, though you are bigger and stronger," I cried. "Get up, and I'll show you."

"Get up," he groaned, "while I'm so weak and bad that I can't stir?"

"Can't stir," I said, as I realised how thoroughly the doctor had read him, and I understood now why Mr Frewen was so indifferent instead of being sympathetic. "Why, there's nothing the matter with you at all. You can move as well as I can. Get up, sneak!"

"Oh!" he groaned, "you're as great a brute as the doctor," and he turned up his eyes till only the whites showed, making him look so ghastly in the dim light, that I was ready to fancy I was misjudging him after all.

But I recalled his manner and his utterance as soon as he had made sure that the doctor had gone, and thought himself quite alone.

"Get up," I said again, "and leave off this miserable shamming. There's nothing the matter with you at all."

He groaned again, and it made me feel so angry at the thought of his believing that he could impose upon me again, that I raised my right foot, whose toes seemed to itch with a desire to kick him.

"Get up!" I cried angrily again.

"I can't, I can't!" he groaned.

"Get up," I said, "or I'll lie down by you and punch your head that way!"

"Oh, you coward, you coward!" he moaned.

"No, it's you who are the coward, shamming being injured. Will you get up?"

"What," he snarled, changing his manner again, "to fight with a miserable coward who is armed?"

"I'm not armed now," I cried, snatching the revolver I carried from my belt, and laying it on Mr Preddle's chest. "Get up, you miserable, cowardly, treacherous, shamming impostor! I'll give you some physic which will do you more good than the doctor's."

As I spoke, I gave him a heavy push with my foot.

He sprang from the bunk as if he had been suddenly galvanised, made a rush at me, and struck out with all his force,

but I darted on one side, and he struck the bulk-head with his fist.

"Poor fellow, how weak he is!" I said, as I stood on my guard, and writhing now with bodily as well as mental pain, he came at me looking almost diabolical.

I forgot everything the next moment—the nearness of the dangerously wounded captain, and the alarm that would be felt by Miss Denning, and with fists feeling like solid bone I sprang at him in turn. For I was in a strange state of exaltation. My nerves had been stirred by the excitement of the past days. I had been horribly imposed upon, and in place of my pity I now felt something very near akin to hate for my treacherous messmate, whom I had been ready, to forgive everything. I felt as if the most delightful thing in life would be to thrash him till he was in such a condition that he would be obliged to have the doctor to see to him and put him right—if he did not half-kill me instead, for he looked capable of doing it then. But this last did not occur to me, as I made my fists fly at his head, no round-about windmill blows, but straight-out shots right at his face, chest, anywhere I could see a chance to hit, though in the majority of cases I missed him, and received his blows instead.

But these did not seem to hurt, only excite me, and give me strength. They were like spurring to a horse; and as I hit out, my tongue was not idle, for I kept on taunting and gibing at him, asking if that one did not make him groan and this one did not need the doctor, while all the time he was perfectly silent, save that as he glared at me and fought savagely I could hear his teeth grinding together. He fought savagely, and so did I, for to use an old school-boy term, my monkey was up, and I was ready to keep on till I dropped.

Blows fell fast enough on both, and then we closed and wrestled and went down.

Then we were up, and crashing against the bulk-head on one side, then on the other. Then I sent him staggering against the door; and *en revanche*, as he recovered himself and came on again, he sent me heavily against the ship's side, where the back of my head gave a sounding rap close to the little circular window.

Of course it was a matter of a very few minutes. Boy human nature could not stand a prolongation of such a fierce struggle, even if our muscles were tense as so much elastic wood. And how that time passed I can hardly tell. I was conscious of seeing sparks, and then of Walters' eyes and gleaming teeth which were very hard to my knuckles. So was his head, and the boards, and cabin-floor; but I fought on, and wrestled and went down, and got up again, and the fighting was soon in perfect silence as far as our lips were concerned, till after one desperate round—the last—I struck out so fiercely with my left, adding to it the whole weight of my body, that Walters fell back over the chest in one corner, his head struck the bulk-head with a sounding bang, and he went down in a sitting position, but in an instant sprang up again, grinding his teeth.

The cabin was nearly dark now and my fists were up for the renewal of the contest, for Walters seemed to be about to spring at me; but he drew back, and as quickly as I could grasp what it meant, I heard almost simultaneously the clicking of my pistol-lock, the report, and the crash caused by the sudden wrenching open of the cabin-door.

"Hurt?" cried Mr Brymer, as I staggered back, conscious of a sharp stinging pain at the side of my head; and as he spoke he sprang at Walters, wrested the pistol from him, and threw him down.

"I—I don't know," I stammered as I put my hand to my ear. "Yes, I think so," for my fingers were wet with blood.

"You cowardly, treacherous hound!" cried the mate, with his foot upon Walters' breast.

"I—oh don't!—help!—I was only defending myself from Dale. I'm weak and hurt, and—"

"A cowardly, malingering liar!" cried Mr Frewen, hotly. "He tried to make me believe he was very bad, groaning and wincing, and thinking he had deceived me, but I saw through him all the time."

"No, no, I am bad!" groaned Walters, piteously.

"He isn't," I said, with my anger against him mastering a sensation of sickness. "He was shamming; I found him out, and we quarrelled and fought, and as soon as he was beaten he caught up the pistol and fired at me."

"It's all a lie!" shouted Walters, fiercely. "I was so weak and ill that I—"

"Jumped up well as I was, and called Mr Frewen a brute and a beast as soon as he was out of hearing."

"And the pistol cocked itself, jumped up into his hand, and then went off and wounded Dale. Is it much, doctor?" said Mr Brymer.

"No, only his ear cut, fortunately," said Mr Frewen, holding a handkerchief to my head. "An inch more and our amiable, treacherous young friend would have had to be tried for murder. Who's that?"

"Me," growled Neb Dumlow. "Want help, sir?"

"No. Go and tell the captain there's nothing the matter, and Miss Denning that there's no cause for alarm. Lock up the wild beast, Brymer! I thought he was a little weak and wanted feeding up. Leave him to me, and I'll feed him down."

Mr Brymer gave a sharp look round, and then closed the door and locked it, while following Mr Frewen into the next cabin, he put a few stitches in my injured ear and then strapped it up.

"Feel sick?" he said.

"Pretty well," I said, and I looked dismally at my knuckles.

"Like a light, and a glass to see your face?"

"Eh? No," I cried, as I recalled all that had taken place. "Does it look very bad?"

"Not half so bad as it will to-morrow," said Mr Frewen, coolly. "You had a tidy fight then, you two?"

"Oh yes; don't talk about it, please, sir. He made me feel so wild after I found out that he was only shamming."

"Humph! Well, don't let Miss Denning see you. If you had been knocked about like this in a struggle with those scoundrels under the hatch you would have won her sympathy; but a lad who goes and indulges in fisticuffs till his face looks like a muffin which has tumbled into the slop-basin, can't show himself in ladies' society till he has grown well."

"Oh, I say, Mr Frewen!" I cried.

"It's a fact," he said, laughing at my dismal face.

"But can't you put some stuff on it to make it look better?"

"No, nothing," he said coolly. "I only know of one thing that will help you out of your difficulty," he continued quietly.

"Yes," I said. "What?"

"You must wait till we have another fight with the men forward, and then if you get knocked about, all those bruises will go to the same account."

I was busily bathing my face and hands as he spoke, and then, as I began dabbing myself gently with a towel, there was an alarm from forward which suggested that, though I was getting stiffer and more sore every moment, the time had already come for the doctor's remedy to be put in force, for there was a pistol-shot followed by several more, and a loud shouting which sounded like cries for help.

It was a wonderful change from the previous night as we hurried along the deck to join our friends. The ship rode on an even keel, the night was glorious with stars, and the lanterns shone bright and clear where they were swung. There was no creeping along a few feet at a time, holding on by rope and belaying-pin, with the spray dashing over the side.

We could see the group about the hatch standing a little back, for in spite of our defences, the mutineers were making a desperate effort to escape, and were keeping up a steady fire through the top and sides to cover the work of one of their number, who was chopping away at the door to hack out the fastening.

As we reached them, Mr Brymer was ready revolver in hand, hesitating as to whether he should fire, for he was husbanding his ammunition, the supply being far from abundant.

"It's getting warm, doctor," he said as we came up. "What is to be done? I grudge wasting cartridges."

Just then Bob Hampton, who had been right aft, came trotting up.

"Who is at the wheel?" said Mr Brymer, sharply.

"Blane, sir."

"That will do. Look here, Hampton, the captain saw to the receiving of the powder and cartridges while I was busy over the other portions of the cargo, and he is too weak to be questioned. You joined the mutiny for a time."

"Never, sir, for no time," growled Bob.

"Well, you were with the men, and in their confidence."

"Not a bit on it, sir, arksing your pardon. Frenchy never trusted me a mite; only got all the work out of me that he could."

"Well, well, we will not argue little points," said Mr Brymer, impatiently, as the chopping and firing went on. "You saw a great deal of what was going on."

"Yes, sir, heaps; I kep' my eyes open."

"Well, tell me this—what about the powder and weapons? What do you know about them?"

"I'll tell you, sir," said Bob; "but, begging your pardon, hadn't you better clap a stopper on this here game?"

"How, man?"

"Answering them shots, sir."

"I would, but my cartridges are nearly all gone. How did you get these?"

"Outer the hold, sir, where they stowed 'em close alongside o' the blasting-powder. There's plenty more."

"Can you get them?"

"Oh yes, sir. You see, before the mutiny began, Jarette set some one, as I heard afterward, to smuggle all the cartridges and weapons he could out of the cabins and from the captain's locker."

"Yes, we found out that had been done. Who did they send?"

Bob Hampton chuckled.

"Why, you know, sir."

"Not Mr Walters?"

"If you was to spend all the rest o' your life, sir, making shots at it, you wouldn't never get nigher than that."

"The young scoundrel! Then you know where the cartridges are?"

"Course I do, sir: under the battened down hatches yonder. Frenchy put 'em there himself, and wouldn't let no one go nigh 'em, 'cause the fellows were always smoking. I got down to 'em at night when the storm was coming, as you know, and when you want more, there they are,—yer pistols and guns too."

"Oh, that puts quite a different complexion upon our position, Mr Denning. We can fire as much as we like," cried the mate. "But one word more, Hampton. What about the mutineers? Have they a very large supply of ammunition?"

"Well, sir, that I can't say. I know Jarette always kep' his pockets jam-full, but I don't know nothing about the others."

The chopping was still going on while this discussion took place, and shot after shot was fired, evidently in a blind fashion, as if the man who used the revolver was unable to take an aim at any one, and merely fired to keep us away from the hatch; but now all at once we were startled by a sharp jingling of glass, and the violent swinging of one of the lanterns, which had been struck by a bullet.

"That was the result of some one aiming," cried Mr Denning, sharply.

"If they don't do any more damage than that it won't matter," said Mr Preddle.

"Look here, Brymer," whispered Mr Frewen, speaking now after carefully watching the dimly-seen hatch for some minutes, "it strikes me that if you let them go on firing for a little longer they will be forced to surrender."

"For want of ammunition?" said the mate.

"No; for want of air. That ventilator will not carry off the foul gas from the firing."

"But the holes they are making will," said the mate. "If it were not so dark you would see that the smoke is curling out from several little holes."

Mr Frewen took a step forward; there was a sharp report, and he staggered back. "Flit?" cried Mr Preddle, excitedly. "Yes, but not hurt," replied Mr Frewen. "The bullet struck my collar, and it was like something giving me a violent jerk."

"Change positions every one," said Mr Brymer in a low voice. "Hampton, the lanterns. Let them both down, and put them in the galley."

Bob Hampton ran to one line by which they were hoisted up, I to the other; and as I was lowering mine down, I heard a shot, and a whizz like a bee flying over my head.

"Quite time that was done," said the mate, as the two lighted lanterns were taken by Bob and carried to the galley. But the door was fast, and it was not until after a good deal of dragging and wrenching that it was pulled open, I holding the two lights, while Bob tugged.

Bang! went a revolver again, and a shot whizzed by my companion's ear, and stuck into the side of the galley.

"Look sharp, Hampton; they can see you, man!" cried Mr Brymer. "Throw something over the lights."

"Done it, sir," cried Bob, as the door yielded, and I stepped forward to get the lanterns in, when, as Bob opened the door widely, and the light flashed in, he uttered a yell, and nearly dropped the lanterns, for there before us in the corner of the galley stood, or lay back, a ghastly-looking figure which at first sight seemed to me like the body of one of the mutineers who had been shot. But as I stood trembling and holding up one light, the white face moved and the eyes blinked.

"What's the matter?" cried Mr Brymer, loudly. "Go and see, Mr Frewen."

The doctor took a few steps and joined us, saw the figure, and said sharply—"Another prisoner?"

"No, sir; can't he; 'cause he's fastened hisself in," replied Bob. "Why, matey, what are you doing here? I thought you was a ghost."

"Why, it's the cook!" I exclaimed.

"Cooky it is, sir," said Hampton. "Here y'are, mate; we've brought you a light."

The lanterns were thrust in, the door shut, and we hurried back, discussing our discovery, but this was checked by the firing from the hatch, while the blows from an axe threatened to make short work of the door and the boards that had been nailed across.

"What's to be done?" said Mr Preddle, mildly. "Hadn't you better speak to them, Mr Brymer?"

"I feel as if I can only speak by deputy," he replied, and he raised his pistol,—“by this. But I don't like firing until the last extremity.”

"I'll speak to them," said Mr Frewen.

"Very well; but get well out of reach. They will not be so merciful as we are.”

Mr Frewen went round to the bow-side of the hatch, and shouted loudly to those in the fore-castle, with the result that the chopping ceased, and after a few moments' delay Jarette's voice was heard.

"You surrender then, eh?" he shouted. "Look sharp and knock off these boards.”

Mr Brymer could not help laughing aloud, and a pistol was fired in his direction.

"Stop that!" shouted Mr Frewen. "Look here, my men, if you hand out your weapons through the top of the hatch, and promise not to attempt to escape, food and water shall be passed down, and you shall receive fair treatment till we get into port.”

"Do you hear, my lads?" cried Jarette, loudly. "And when we get in port they'll hand us over as prisoners. What do you—there, I'll say it for you," he continued hastily. "No, no, no! And now listen to me, all you who can hear. You can't sail into port without us, and you are only proposing a truce because you are growing frightened.”

"Indeed!" said Mr Frewen, coolly.

"Yes, indeed, doctor. I know your voice. Now you take my advice—you and those two passengers. Get back to your cabins, and perhaps I'll forgive you. We can come on deck now whenever we like, and we're masters here. If you don't do as I say, look out, for I warn you I can cover all of you with my pistol, and if I couldn't I'd sink the ship before you should hold her again.”

"Then you refuse to surrender?" cried Mr Frewen. "Harkye, my lads, below there; don't let this madman lead you on to your ruin. Will you surrender?"

"Silence below there!" shouted Jarette. "I'll give him his answer. There!"

He fired, evidently aiming in the direction of Mr Frewen's voice, for the bullet whizzed over the doctor's head; when, without waiting for orders, Mr Preddle fired back, and his shot was followed by a sharp ejaculation, suggesting that some one had been hit; but directly after we heard a little talking, and several shots were fired at us, but without effect.

"There," said Mr Brymer, "we have done our duty by them, we must now do it by ourselves.”

"If we could only master that one man," said Mr Frewen in the little council of war which followed, "we could manage.”

"Hadn't you better order the hose to be laid on, Mr Brymer, sir," said Bob Hampton, "and drown 'em out like rats?"

"It would be punishing the weak with the guilty and strong, my lad," said Mr Brymer. "I am loth to proceed to extremities.”

"Werry well then, sir, smoke 'em out as you would rats. I dessay the doctor has got some brimstone.”

"Yes, I have, Hampton," said Mr Frewen; "but, you see, these are men, not rats.”

"That's a true word, sir.”

"You would not like to kill them all in cold blood, my man?"

"No, sir, that's a butchery sort o' way; but I'm ready to give 'em a wopses' nest squib to bring 'em to their senses.”

"Out of their senses, man!" cried Mr Frewen, impatiently. "It means death, I tell you—wholesale murder. The men, I repeat, are not rats.”

"Well, sir, they're behaving like 'em, and there's no gammon about it now. They're desprit; Jarette's worked 'em up; and they've got the judge to face if we take 'em into port. Strikes me it's our lives or theirs; but you knows best. I was thinking about the young lady.”

Just then the chopping began again, and Mr Brymer raised his pistol and fired.

The chopping ceased, and there was a burst of loud talking. Then all was still for hours, while a careful watch was kept until morning.

The discovery of the cook made a great difference in the state of affairs. It was found that he had been forced by Jarette's threats to work for the mutineers, and if they had gained the upper hand he would no doubt have sided with them again; but now he seemed to return gladly to his regular duties, and he was as energetic as possible in preparing breakfast, waiting on Miss Denning and her brother, and when he was not cooking, making himself generally useful, as the advertisements say, about the cabins, especially that of the captain, to whom, unasked, he began to act as nurse.

That morning, by Mr Brymer's orders, he filled a number of bottles with fresh water, and got ready a quantity of biscuits, which he was told to bear to the mutineers.

"But I dursten't, sir," he said. "That Jarette would swear I was a traitor as soon as he heard my voice, and shoot me same as he did poor Phipps."

"What! the steward?" cried Mr Frewen.

"Yes, sir, dead, on the night they rose."

"You rose," said Mr Brymer.

"No, sir, I didn't; I'm only a cook, and not a fighting man. One does lots of things when a pistol's held to your head as you wouldn't do other times."

"Bring the biscuit and water," said Mr Frewen, "and I'll speak to the men. They will not use pistols when they know food is going to be given to them."

The cook shook his head.

"You don't know Jarette, sir," he said.

"I'll go with you and help you," I cried, for I fully believed Mr Frewen's words, which proved quite correct, till we had passed down all that we had taken, the men eagerly thrusting up their hands and seizing bottle and biscuit.

Then as the last bottle of water was handed through the opening Bob Hampton had left when he nailed the boards over, Jarette shouted—

"That isn't all, is it?"

"Yes," I said, "that's all you'll get;" and fortunately I started away and fell back in my fright, for quick as lightning the scoundrel thrust out a pistol and fired at me, the flash being so close that I felt sure for the moment that I was hit. In fact I was stunned, but it was from the sharp rap which I gave the back of my head on the deck.

"Hurt?" cried Mr Frewen, running to my help, as I sat up rubbing the back of my head.

"Hurt? Yes, of course I am," I cried, angrily; but I laughed it off the next minute, for I was afraid that they would think it cowardly of me for shrinking away.

"I'm afraid it will be some time before they get any more refreshments," said Mr Preddle, laughing; and now by Mr Brymer's orders a tarpaulin was drawn over the top of the hatch, but it had not been there a minute before a knife-blade was passed through it, and a good-sized piece cut out.

Then a board was thrown on, but it was only tossed away, and shot after shot was fired, evidently, from the good aim taken, by some one who could see the people on deck.

Nothing more was done then, for the mutineers made no further attempt to escape; and in wonderful contrast to what we had gone through, it now fell perfectly calm, with the sun blazing down upon us and the heat intense.

Short-handed though we were, matters fell back into the old ship routine, with the exception that the watches kept were against something more serious than the weather.

The captain seemed better; and though they were not friendly, there was, it appeared to me, a certain amount of polite intercourse kept up between Mr Frewen and the Dennings, though Mr Denning always appeared to be rather cold and strange during the short time they were together at meals. These the cook served up regularly for the officers, passengers, and men, the two who were at the wheel having settled down in their places with Hampton and his two companions, and had even gone so far as to offer to fight upon our side.

They sent the message by Bob Hampton, and he bore it to Mr Brymer, but said to me afterwards with a good deal of screwing up of his honest wrinkled countenance—

"Mr Brymer can do as he likes, of course, Mr Dale, but I should just trust them two chaps as far as I could see 'em."

"They'll be all right while we have the upper hand, Bob," I said, "and go against us if Jarette beats us."

"That's it, sir. You're as right as you can get. I'm friendly with 'em, of course; but I've got my eyes open, and they don't go nigh that hatch while I'm on deck."

"Do you think we can trust the cook, Bob?" I said in a low voice, for we were not far from the galley, which was smoking away as methodically as if there were no such thing as a mutiny on board.

Bob gave me a very slow wink.

"Suet," he said in a whisper.

"What?"

"Suet, sir. That's 'bout what he's made on. Sort of soft fat man. There's no harm in him, only softness. Think of a fellow being so scared that he goes and shuts hisself up and drinks hisself into a state o' muddle so as not to know what's going on. Why, if one's got to be drowned, one wants to make a bit of a fight for it. Never say die, my lad. Life in a mussel, you know. Oh, there's no harm in old bile-the-pot, only I shouldn't like to depend on him in a row, though he could do us a lot o' good."

"How?" I said, laughing, as I thought of Bob's low estimate of his fighting powers.

"Lot of ways, my lad. Cook's got a good many advantages, you see. Red-hot pokers is one; pots and kettles o' boiling water's another, without counting the long sharp knives; but he won't do nothing, and I must. Don't walk too near the wild beasts' cage, my lad, I'm going aft."

He went steadily aft to mount the poop-deck, while being near the galley I strolled towards it to have a few words with the man of suet, and as he welcomed me with a simple placid smile, I felt that Bob Hampton's estimate of his character was pretty correct, and that it would be bad policy to trust much to him in a time of peril.

"Well," I said, "been to the captain?"

"Yes, Mr Dale, sir, and have taken him a beautiful basin of broth. Let me give you one."

"No, not now," I said, though I felt tempted to say yes. "Did you take Mr Walters his provisions?"

"I did, sir, with Mr Brymer looking on all the time."

"Does he seem very bad?"

"Well, sir, he pulled a long face, but I don't think there's much the matter with him. He can eat readily enough."

"I say, cook," I half whispered, "you were a good deal on deck?"

"No, sir, not much, I was busy here. The crew ate a deal."

"But you knew about Mr Walters being shut up in the cable-tier?"

The cook glanced uneasily toward the fore-castle-hatch and shook his head.

"They can't hear you," I said, "and even if they could they can't get at you."

"I don't know, sir," he whispered; "that Jarette's got ears such as no man before ever had. I've often thought it isn't hearing he has, but a kind of knowing."

"Oh, he's knowing enough!" I said, laughing.

"I don't mean that, Mr Dale," he whispered. "I mean there's something uncanny about him, as the Scotch people say, and he can tell what you are thinking about without your saying it."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"It arn't nonsense, sir, and there's more about him than you think for. Why, he can do anything with the men. They're not only afraid of him, but they're obliged to do what he wants, and if I was Mr Brymer, sir, I shouldn't rest till he was put in a boat and sent off to shift for himself."

"You think he's dangerous then?"

"Ah, that he is, sir; and if he isn't hatching out something row to surprise you all, I don't know mutton from beef."

I looked sharply at the cook, for his words chimed in with a kind of fancy I had that the people in the fore-castle were not so silent for nothing.

"Ah, well," I said, "I dare say we shall be ready for him if he does try to play any pranks. But you didn't tell me about Mr Walters."

The cook gave a sharp glance round.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I don't seem to like to talk about him, sir," he whispered. "He never forgets anything, and never forgives anybody. I wouldn't say a word against him for worlds."

"I don't ask you to," I said; "I only asked you why Mr Walters was shut up in the cable-tier?"

"Jarette don't like him, sir. He found him very useful for stealing pistols and cartridges, and fastening people in the cabins, but once he got all he wanted, though he made a fuss with him and encouraged him to strut about, and called him his lieutenant, he used to be always looking at him ugly-like, and I got to think that before long there would be a row."

“And there was?”

“Oh yes, sir, a terrible row. You see Mr Walters couldn't forget that he had been an officer, and Jarette couldn't forget he had been a fore-mast man, and feel jealous of Mr Walters, who used to make-believe amongst the men that he was the real captain of the ship, and that everything depended upon him. So at last there was a terrible row about something in the navigation, and Mr Walters told Jarette that he didn't know anything about it. Then the Frenchman hit him, kind of boxed his ears, and Mr Walters whips out a pistol. That was enough. Jarette whistled up the men, who none of 'em liked Mr Walters, and before he knew where he was, they had him on his back with his pistol gone and him helpless. He made a bit of a fuss, and threatened to have Jarette punished if he did not give it up, and then the skipper pointed the pistol at him, and told the men who were holding Mr Walters down to hang back as far as they could while he shot the prisoner. That was enough. The poor boy began to holloa out and beg for mercy, and Jarette set to and teased him, sir, horribly.

“‘Oh, very well,’ he says, ‘you don't want to be shot?’

“‘No, no!’ cries Mr Walters, crying now like a little child.

“‘Well, then, sir,’ says Jarette, ‘I'll try and oblige you.’

“Mr Walters lay watching him with his eyes rolling, but they wouldn't let him turn his head, while Jarette whispered something to some of the men, who went forward, and I saw them stoop down, but I didn't know what they were doing there even when they came back, and at a word four of them seized him, taking hold of his ankles and wrists.

“‘What are you going to do?’ cried Mr Walters, who looked white, sir, as so much dough.

“‘What you wanted,’ says Jarette. ‘You didn't want to be shot, so I thought I'd humour you, and have you pitched overboard.’

“Then Mr Walters begins to howl for mercy, but Jarette shakes his head.

“‘Off with him!’ he cried; and in spite of the poor fellow's kicks and struggles, they trotted with him right forward and close up to the bows. Then I shut my eyes, for I thought it was all over, and I put my head a little farther out of the door-way here to listen for the splash. But there came a shriek and a loud slap down of a lid, and then I opened my eyes and saw the men all laughing, and found what they had done. For they had given the poor fellow a few swings to make him believe he was going over, and then all at once took a few steps and shot him down feet first into the cable-tier, shutting the lid over him directly after.”

“The cowardly brute, to torture any one like that!” I said to myself, as I went aft and into the saloon, stopping for a few moments by Walters' prison, and feeling sorry for him till I passed my hand over my face.

That night passed quietly enough, and a soft breeze rose to send us gently through the water, Mr Brymer giving his instructions to the men at the wheel as to the course they were to steer, though I had not the least notion where we were bound for now.

A strict watch was kept, of course, and there was a slight alarm once, but it passed off; and the sun rose again, with the wind dropping, and leaving us once more rocking gently upon the smooth ocean.

We were all in better spirits though, thanks to the cook and the few hours of rest every one had managed to snatch. Mr Frewen gave us the news, too, that the captain was decidedly better, and that Miss Denning was nursing him constantly.

This was a bit of relief to me, for it kept Miss Denning in the cabin, and I was determined not to let her see my face till I looked different.

About an hour later, first one and then another crawled along the deck very silently to try and make out what was going on in the fore-castle.

I did not go, neither did Mr Frewen or Mr Preddle. Mr Denning was in the captain's cabin resting; but all came back with the same story, one which relieved me, for I was startled, thinking that the party were all smothered by being shut down in the cabin place in such hot weather.

Dumlow, Blane, and Bob Hampton all said that the men were sleeping, and that they thought they had been at the drink.

Mr Brymer crept close up in his turn, listened for some time, and confirmed the men's statement.

“Getting ready for a fresh attack,” he said. “I'll have a talk to the captain as to what is to be done.”

He placed another trusty man on duty, ready to give the alarm if the mutineers woke and tried to break out, and then proposed that we should all go into the captain's cabin and have a council of war once more.

“Think he can bear it, Frewen?” he said.

“Oh yes, if we do not stay too long. It will rouse him up and do him good mentally, to feel that he has some interest in the management of the ship.”

“Then come along,” said the mate. “But where is Mr Preddle?”

"Gone to look after his fish," I said; for he was always snatching every opportunity to go and see how the salmon and trout fry were getting on.

"Go and fetch him, Dale."

I had to pass Mr Frewen on my way, and I seized the opportunity to whisper to him—

"I shall hang back till you come to the door, and signal to me that Miss Denning has gone. She mustn't see me like this."

He smiled, and I went forward to where Mr Preddle was making himself very hot by using the bellows to aerate the water.

"Yes—yes, of course," he said. "I'll come." And hastily putting on the light flannel jacket he had removed, he followed me toward the saloon.

"They will not make a rush and get out while we are away, will they?" he said, with an uneasy look over his shoulder.

"They are well watched," I replied, "and we shall not be very long."

"Ah! It would be very dreadful if they did, Dale. Have they been fed this morning?"

"Why, you talk as if they were wild beasts in a cage, Mr Preddle," I said merrily.

"So they are," he cried,— "worse. I feel sometimes as if I could kill them all."

"Gone to her own cabin, Dale," said Mr Frewen, meeting us at the saloon-door-way, and Mr Preddle looked at us inquiringly.

"Dale is afraid of Miss Denning seeing his wounds," said Mr Frewen, laughing. "He does not think they look the proper kind to be proud of."

"I wish you wouldn't joke me about my bad face, Mr Frewen," I said, as we entered the far cabin, where the mate was seated by Captain Berriman's cot, and I was startled to see how changed he looked.

But his eyes were bright, and he held out his hand to each in turn, as we stood about with the door well open, the place of course being very small.

"Now, sir," said Mr Brymer, firmly, "you know how we stand. I'm horribly averse to taking life, but things cannot go on as they are."

"No," said the captain, in a voice hardly above a whisper. "You must act now, and firmly, before there is loss of life on our side."

"That means then," said Mr Frewen, "shooting down every man who attacks us."

"Of course," said a low, firm voice, and I started to see that Mr Denning was standing outside.

"My practice is always to save life if I can, Mr Denning," said the doctor, sadly. "Are you not too hard and revengeful?"

"Neither, sir," replied Mr Denning, sternly. "If I were alone I would say nothing, but I have my sister to protect, and I say that at any cost these ruffians must not leave that place alive."

There was so absolute a silence in the captain's cabin, that we all heard distinctly a piteous sigh from that which Mr Denning had just left.

"Yes, Mr Denning is quite right," said Mr Preddle, in his highly-pitched voice. "I hate all this, and I am not a fighting man; but I know that I shall fire on the first wretch who tries to break out without a qualm."

"You hear, Mr Frewen," said the mate; "I am forced by circumstances to take very strong measures."

"That may mean the death of several of those misguided men?" said Mr Frewen, excitedly.

"I fear so, sir. But Captain Berriman agrees with me that it is our duty, unless we like to well provision a boat and leave the ship."

"But that would be a terrible alternative," said Mr Frewen, hastily.

"Terrible, sir; and a cowardly and unfaithful one to the owners of the vessel."

"But can we not keep the men down until you are able to run into some port?"

"When we have run into the region of calms. No, sir, even if we had favourable winds we are horribly short-handed, and I should not dare to make much sail for fear of a change, and being unable to reduce it."

"But that is not the point, doctor," said the captain, in a feeble voice; "those scoundrels are certain to make a desperate effort to break out before many hours have passed, and if they do, I fear that you gentlemen will be too humane to back up Mr Brymer and the men."

"But—" began Mr Preddle.

"Pray understand, gentlemen, that I do not doubt your courage," said the captain.

"Nor I, gentlemen," cried Mr Brymer, warmly. "You have to a man—and boy," he added hastily as he glanced at me—"proved how I can trust you; but there is not one of you who would not shrink, and naturally too, from shooting down one of our enemies. Am I not right?"

"I'm afraid so," replied Mr Frewen, gravely. "Even Mr Denning would shrink from the stern necessity."

I glanced at Mr Denning, and saw him wince.

"Then you will agree with Captain Berriman and me that some very stern measures must be taken?"

"Yes," said Mr Preddle.

"I do, certainly," replied Mr Denning.

Mr Frewen and I were both silent; but at last the doctor spoke.

"What do you propose doing?" he said, rather huskily.

"That is what we are here to decide, and that quickly, for one or two of us must always be on deck. Can you suggest anything, either of you?"

No one spoke, and I felt that whoever did would feel like a judge condemning a man to death.

"Time is flying, gentlemen," said the mate. "We must act, and the captain and I ask for your help to share this terrible responsibility; for whatever we do we shall have to answer for to the laws of our country."

"Yes," said Mr Frewen, solemnly, "and to our God."

"Amen," said Mr Denning, softly; and he walked into the cabin, and laid his hand upon that of Captain Berriman, both men gazing into each other's eyes as if in their feeble state they might soon be called upon to answer the question what they had done with the talents committed to their charge.

Perhaps I was very weak then, and I ought to have been stronger and more manly; but my eyes grew very dim, and for some minutes I could not see what was going on.

Mr Frewen was the first to break the solemn silence.

"Gentlemen," he said; and then he stopped while every one turned to him, and I thought how handsome, manly, and yet how stern he looked as he stood gazing straight before him and through the cabin-window at the glittering sea, while I could hardly hear a breath. Then he went on—"Heaven knows," he said, "that I would not shrink from my duty; and Mr Denning may rest assured, that if it comes to the worst, I will give my life sooner than harm should come to the dear lady we all reverence—and love. But I shrink, as a man who has had so much to do with life and death, from taking the life of any one, however vile he may be."

Mr Brymer fidgeted a little, and Mr Frewen saw it.

"Bear with me a few moments," he said, "and I have done. I shrink, I say, from shedding blood; but if the stern necessity comes, I will strike home as a man should at such a time."

"You—" began Mr Brymer.

"Stop, sir, and hear me out," said Mr Frewen. "It seems to me that there can be no doubt of one thing: if we can shoot down—wounded, I hope—this man Jarette, we might easily master his followers."

"I have no doubt of that whatever," said Mr Brymer.

"Exactly, and that shall be done if all other methods fail."

"What other methods, sir?" said Mr Denning.

"You gentlemen may have some plans, for my part I have but one."

"We have no plans," they all said eagerly. "Then you have one?"

"Yes," said Mr Frewen. "I have one—a wild and desperate one, whose aim is to separate Jarette from his followers, living, and to make him prisoner. It may fail, for it is, as I say, a wild and desperate plan."

"In Heaven's name then, doctor, what is it?" said the captain, feebly. "Speak out, sir; you know how bad I am, and that this business is killing me."

"Then I will speak out, captain," said Mr Frewen, warmly. "I did mean to ask you all to wait, and have confidence in me sufficient to let me have forty-eight hours for my trial without divulging what I intended to do."

"The times are too desperate, Mr Frewen," said the mate. "Don't ask that of us."

"No; I say I will speak, but I ask you not to look upon the attempt as childish or absurd until it has been tried."

He paused, and seeing how faint and hot the captain looked, bade me step back, and push the saloon-light farther open.

I did so, and returned nervous and excited, in dread lest I should miss a word.

But Mr Frewen had not spoken, but stood looking straight before him. Then he said quickly—"I am going to do rather a risky thing, an act which may imperil men's lives; but I shall be as guarded as possible."

"Yes," said Mr Denning, eagerly.

"Before long," continued Mr Frewen, in a low, firm voice, "a fresh supply of food and water must be given to those men. They cannot be starved to death."

"No, of course not," said Mr Brymer, excitedly.

"Then you grasp of course what I propose doing. I shall drug that food with one of the powerful extracts which I have in my medicine-chest. It will be passed down to the men, who will be almost voracious, and then we shall have to wait until it has taken effect, open the hatch, secure Jarette, and separate the others into, say, three parties—one in the cable-tier, the other in the fore-castle, the last in the hold or one of the cabins. The rest, I think, will be easy."

There was a dead silence.

"Do you think my plan too wild?"

"No," said Mr Denning, quickly. "God bless you, doctor!" and he held out both his hands.

"Yes, that plan will do," said Captain Berriman, "I feel assured."

"Yes, yes," was murmured in a tone full of emotion; and at that moment there was a sharp crack which seemed to have come from somewhere in the saloon.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

We all ran out, but no one was there, and Walters' cabin door was fast.

I was quickest, and ran out of the saloon, but there was no one nearer than the fore-castle-hatch in one direction, and on the other as I ran up the ladder there was the man at the wheel, one of the men we had secured, while the other was seated on the bulwark talking to him and smoking.

"What could it have been?" I thought, for a shiver of dread had run through me, a dread that some one had been listening, and overheard the doctor's words.

But the next moment I laughed, and went back to those who were examining the various cabins.

"All right," I said, pointing upwards, "that was it; I did not properly fasten up that sky-light, and it fell down."

It was exactly as I said, for there was the window I had stuck open shut closely down.

"I was afraid that some one had been listening to what I had planned," said Mr Frewen.

"So was I, sir," I said, "but we're all right. The men were both at the wheel."

The next minute we were all in consultation again. I say we, for I was quite made one of them, young as I was. Then the matter was thoroughly discussed, for Mr Frewen's plan proved to be not so easy on consideration as we had at first supposed.

"You see, gentlemen," said Mr Brymer, "it's one thing to set a trap, and another to get your rats to walk into it. How were you thinking of giving it to them?"

"I thought dissolved in water," replied Mr Frewen.

"Two objections to that," said Mr Denning; "the stuff would make it taste, and in all probability some of the men would not take it."

"I'll answer for it that Jarette would not touch water," cried Mr Brymer, "so that plan will not do. You can't give it to him with biscuits. Yes, what's the matter?" he cried, for there was a loud rapping at the entrance to the saloon.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Bob Hampton's voice, "here's a deppytation from the chaps in the forksle."

"What?" cried Mr Brymer, in alarm, "are they out?"

"No, sir, not they. One of 'em's got up into the hatchway as spokesman, and he's been giving us a bit of his mind."

"What does he say?"

"Says as he wants to know whether you mean to starve 'em out; as they've on'y had some water and biscuit for

twenty-four hours, and that if you don't send 'em some grub, they'll set fire to the ship, for they'd sooner be roasted than starved."

"All right, Hampton; go back and tell them that we will see what can be done, but that if they fire another shot they shall not have a biscuit."

"Right, sir," growled Hampton, and he turned upon his heel and went back, while Mr Brymer exclaimed in an excited whisper—

"There, doctor, could anything be better?"

"No; they are playing into our hands; but there is the difficulty still. How can we give it to them? It must be something of which all will partake. Why not have some coffee made for them?"

"Half of them wouldn't touch it," said Captain Berriman. "I'd suggest grog, but they have spirits no doubt, and they want food."

There was a dead silence, and then feeling nervous, and as if I was certain to be snubbed, I ventured to speak.

"Wouldn't a tin of the soup do?" I said.

Mr Brymer brought his hand down on my shoulder.

"The very thing!" he cried eagerly. "You have some tins of soup amongst the Australian meat, captain?"

"Yes, plenty."

"That will do then, only it must be done with a certain amount of cunning, or they may have suspicions. Depend upon it, if I am seen in it they will not take the stuff."

"Then what is to be done?" said Mr Frewen.

"I propose," replied Mr Brymer, "that I get a couple of tins out of the store and open them. Then Dale here shall take them to the cook; the excuse for their being opened is to be that so many tins have gone bad."

"Which is true enough," said the captain, feebly.

"Exactly," continued Mr Brymer; "and these were opened to make sure that they were all right."

"Well?"

"You can give me the stuff—laudanum, or whatever it is—to mix with the contents of one tin, which Dale can take to the cook, and tell him to warm up and reduce with hot water, while he reserves the other for our table."

"But why give him two?" said the doctor.

"Because I want to avert suspicion in every way. The cook has been mixed up with the men, and he shut himself up as you know in dread of our punishing him, perhaps shooting him down. He may suspect something, and manage to warn the men. If two tins are sent, one for the men and one for our own table, everything will look simple and ordinary."

"And suppose he gives us the drugged one by mistake?"

"We can guard against that by sending a large one and a small one. No—by sending two different kinds."

"There is only one kind," said the captain.

"I don't like the plan," said the doctor. "It may end in a mistake, and we don't want to be hoist with our own petard."

"Hang it, no!" cried Mr Brymer. "All right then, we will not eat the soup."

"But why shouldn't I take my drug—it will only be a small portion of a white powder—and drop it into the soup when it is ready?"

"Because there would certainly be some hitch in the proceedings to hinder you getting it in. Besides, we don't want the cook to be in the secret."

"Very well then," said the doctor, "I suppose that must be the plan. I'll go and get the drug ready at once, and bring it here. But one minute; how many men are there in the fore-castle?—because I must reckon accordingly."

"Say sixteen. You must give them a pretty good dose."

"Yes; but not strong enough to be risky," said Mr Frewen; and he signed to me to go with him to his cabin, where he opened his medicine-chest, and after a little thought, carefully weighed out, from a stoppered bottle, an absurdly small portion of a whitish powder and placed it in a square of white paper.

"There," he said, "take that to Mr Brymer, and tell him to give it a good stir round, or we shall be killing some of the scoundrels, and letting others off scot free."

"Yes," I said, looking with no little interest at the powder which he had turned out of the tiny scales he had used. "The cook is sure to stir it well too. But, Mr Frewen, will that little pinch or two of stuff be enough?"

"Plenty," he said. "It is as far as I dare go, for it is most potent."

"And it will send them off to sleep?"

"Into a sleep so deep that it would be impossible to awaken them for some hours."

"Ugh!" I ejaculated, as I took the little packet and thrust it into my pocket. "I hope, if ever you give me any physic, you'll be careful not to give me any out of the wrong bottle."

"I'll take care," he said. "Mind you warn Mr Brymer to be very careful too."

I nodded and went out of the cabin, took a turn along the deck to see that the men were keeping watch by the fore-castle-hatch, and then turned in at the galley to say a word or two to the cook, asking him what we were to have for our dinner. I went straight back to where Mr Brymer was down in the captain's store-room with a lantern, by whose light I could see before me two of the large well-known drum-shaped tins of portable soup.

"Got it?" he said in a whisper.

I handed him the packet without a word.

"Look here," he said. "There are two kinds, with blue label and yellow label. You see I shall put the stuff in the yellow labelled tin."

"Yes, I see," I replied; and he opened the packet, shook out the contents, so that it lay spread on the top of the brown-looking gluey meat essence, and then stirred it well round with a knife, till it could not help being well mixed.

"There, we must chance that," he whispered, "but it seems a very small dose."

"Mr Frewen said it was wonderfully strong," I said.

"Well, we must hope so. Take the tins. You will not make any mistake?"

"Oh no, I'll take care," I said. "The yellow one for the men, the blue for us; but you don't catch me touching it."

"Nor me, Dale," he said, with a nod. "And look here, I shan't open this, but here's a big tin of kangaroo-tail; give him that too for warming up for our dinner."

I went away pretty well loaded, and walked to the galley.

"Here," I said, trying to speak merrily, but it was all forced, for I felt exceedingly nervous. "I was asking you just now what was for dinner. Here you are—kangaroo-tail for our dinner, and that soup in the blue tin; and you're to put plenty of water to this other one, and make a half-bucket-full of soup for the men in the fore-castle. How soon will it be ready?"

"Five minutes. I've plenty of boiling water. Who opened them?"

"We did," I replied. "They are all right, but some of the tins are going bad."

"Yes; I've had some I was glad to pitch overboard, sir, and if I had my way I'd make the folks as sells such rubbish for poor sailors eat it themselves."

"And serve 'em right. You understand you're to keep this one for us, and get ready the yellow tin?"

"All right, Mr Dale."

"Hulloa, cookie, what's for dinner?" said the man who had just been relieved from taking his trick at the wheel. "Oh!—didn't know you were here, sir."

"Chump end of a hurdy-gurdy and organ sauce, messmate," said the cook, meaning to be very facetious, while I walked out of the galley, passing the man who had been sitting aft talking to the steersman.

I reported the progress of what I had done to Mr Brymer, and then waited for further orders.

"I think I'll stand out of this business altogether now, Dale," he said. "Wait a few minutes and then take one of the men, say Dumlow, and serve out the stuff to them, passing down a fresh supply of biscuits as well. What's the matter?"

I flushed up.

"I—I don't quite like doing it, Mr Brymer," I said.

He looked at me angrily, but his face softened directly.

"No," he said, "it is not a pleasant task. It seems treacherous and cruel, but I cannot show myself in the matter. They might turn suspicious. Some one in authority must go, and it is a work of sheer necessity. You will have to go, Dale."

"Yes, sir, I'll go," I said firmly. "I don't like it, but I know it is right."

"Go on then, my lad, and carry it through for all our sakes. Be careful that the man with you does not touch it."

I nodded, and the time being near, I thrust my hands into my pockets, and began to whistle as I walked forward, passed the galley, and I was about to speak to Dumlow, who was on the watch, when a voice came out of the hatchway sounding smothered but unmistakable as Jarette's.

"Now then, you sirs. Are there to be any rations served out, or are we to set fire to the ship?"

"Can't you wait a few minutes?" I said, trying to speak coolly as I saw the two men who had been by the wheel smoking their pipes near the galley and looking on.

"Minutes, you whipper-snapper!" he snarled; "we've been waiting hours."

"If you're not civil I'll tell the cook to keep the soup back for an hour."

"Soup? What soup?" he cried.

"Soup the cook's getting ready; Dumlow, go and get the biscuit-bag."

Jarette uttered a grunt, and there was a buzz of voices from below whose tones plainly enough told of eager expectation, for they had been pretty well starved since they had been shut down in the cabin.

Dumlow fetched the bag of biscuits, and with the men watching me I prepared to go forward.

"Better let me do it, sir," growled Bob Hampton; "they may shoot."

"No, I don't think they will," I said quietly, as I looked aft to see that my friends were, like the men hard by, watching me, and Barney Blane right aft at the wheel. "Look here, below there," I said, trying to keep my voice steady, for I felt horribly nervous, and could not help thinking that if anything went wrong the mutineers would visit what had been done on me.

"Look here, you, I'm going to serve out biscuits and soup. I shall hand the tins down through the hole in the hatch. Fair play. No pistols now."

"Let's have the soup, and don't chatter, boy," said Jarette, sharply, and just then the cook came out smiling with a bucket nearly full of steaming, fragrant-smelling soup, and the man who had been by the wheel came behind him carrying a dozen tin mugs whose handles were strung on a piece of rope.

"Here we are!" I said, strung up now to get the miserable business over as quickly as I could, and just then the cook set the bucket down on the deck, and began to stir it with a big iron ladle.

"Lot o' preserved vegetables and herbs and all in it, sir," he exclaimed. "If I don't stir they'll go to the bottom."

"Oh, keep stirring!" I said huskily, as I took a tin, made Dumlow lay some biscuits on the wooden boarding over the hatch, and I held the tin ready while the cook filled it from the ladle.

The next minute, with my hand trembling, I handed the first tin and a biscuit down, for both to be snatched from me. Then I shivered and felt that all was over, for a familiar voice said—

"Taste that, one of you, and see if it's all right."

"Oh, that's all right! Mister Jarette. Plenty o' salt, pepper, and dried herbs in it," said the cook.

Then there was a peculiar noise below, slightly suggestive of pigs, and a voice said—

"Jolly hot, but—suss!—good—capital!"

"Here, look sharp, skipper, make haste! Here, I'm first," and a dozen other expressions greeted my ear, as, gaining courage, I had a second one filled and passed it down, leaving it to Dumlow now to hand down the biscuits, while as every portion was served there were grunts of satisfaction, and the cook smiled and looked as proud as could be.

"Here you, cookie, *bon chef*," cried Jarette; "I'll promote you as soon as I come to my rights. Ladle away."

The cook did ladle away, and I handed the tins, moved by a kind of frenzy, so eager was I to get the horrible task over, while my heart beat furiously. I shivered as I heard the men below laughing and talking, as they praised the cook's performance, little imagining the hand I had had in the preparation. But I thought of how horrible it would be if the drug proved too strong for some of the men, or if others got more than their share through its settling down, and in spite of the vigorous use the cook made of his ladle as we neared the bottom, I felt worse and worse, feeling as I did at last, that we were sending down to some of the men that which might prove to be their death.

"That's all!" shouted the cook at last, giving the upturned tin bucket a loud banging with his ladle, and a loud murmur of disappointment came up through the opening.

"Be good boys, then, and I'll make you another lot to-morrow. Why, Mr Dale, sir," he said, turning to me, "it has made you hot; your face is all over great drops."

"Is it?" I said, rather faintly; "I suppose it is very hot."

But all the same I felt cold and ready to shiver, while to escape notice I hurried aft and entered the saloon where the gentlemen were waiting, Mr Brymer following me in.

"Well!" he said eagerly.

"They've taken it to the last drop," I panted, and then to the doctor—"Oh, Mr Frewen, I feel as if I had been committing a dozen murders. I wish I had not said a word about the soup."

Chapter Thirty.

Seeing how thoroughly upset I was, the mate told Mr Frewen to speak to me as soon as he was gone; for he was about to join the men on the watch by the fore-castle-hatch, so as to be ready to take action as soon as possible after the drug had acted.

"How soon will it be?" he asked Mr Frewen.

"I cannot tell you. I never administered it like this before, only in small doses as an opiate in cases of intense suffering. It may be soon, it may be an hour or two. If they have, as we suppose, an ample supply of spirits and tobacco below, it is possible that they may retard the action."

"Well," said Mr Brymer, "be ready to come well-armed when I give the signal—two whistles, mind. I shall call upon you the moment I fancy it can be done. Hist!—the men."

For the two sailors whom we had made prisoners through their being at the wheel had been apportioned the duty of taking the steward's place, that poor fellow having without doubt gone overboard on the night of the rising; and as Mr Brymer left the cabin, these two quickly and roughly prepared the table for our mid-day meal, went forward, and brought back a tureen of soup, with a kind of ragout of the kangaroo's tail from the tin.

The dinner was just ready, when there was a noise from forward; and we hurried to the door-way, but it was only to hear a roaring chorus rise from the fore-castle-hatchway.

"They have begun at the spirits," said Mr Frewen. And then telling the two sailors to ask Mr Brymer to come and join us, the men went forward, spoke to the mate, and he came to the saloon entrance.

"Better come and join us, Brymer," said Mr Frewen. "You want food: and we can tell by the cessation of the noise they are making when the time for action has come."

"Oh, I can't eat, man, at a time like this!" said the mate, excitedly.

"You must, to keep up your strength. Will Miss Denning join us?"

This to Mr Denning, who shook his head.

"No; let her stay in her cabin. She would only be in our way. I will take her in some dinner."

"You had better keep up appearances, so that the men may not notice anything. Mr Preddle, help the soup."

I shuddered, and every one turned pale.

"Oh, there is no risk," said the mate quickly. "But here, make the plates and spoons look as if they had been used, and then throw all the soup out of the stern-window."

I brightened a little at hearing this, for the possibility of the cook having made a mistake was always before my eyes. So after satisfying ourselves that the men were not likely to return yet, I was one of the busiest in dirtying the plates and spoons, and ended by emptying the soup from the window with a feeling of the most intense relief.

"Will it send the fishes to sleep, Mr Frewen?" I whispered, as I placed the empty tureen back in its place.

"Bad for them if it does," he said, with an attempt at looking merry. "For their enemies are safe to swallow them while they are napping."

"With both eyes open," said Mr Preddle.

The departure of the soup acted like a charm on all; and after Mr Brymer had been down once more as far as the fore-castle, we all began to partake of the savoury Australian dish the cook had prepared, with an abundance of rich gravy, and the whole surrounded by a thick wall of beautifully cooked white rice.

Though our meals had been rough and unsatisfactory for many hours, every one began his dinner with manifest distaste, for it was impossible to avoid thinking of what had been done; but after a portion had been taken into the cabin by Mr Denning for his sister, and a little of the gravy and rice to the captain by the doctor's orders, first one made a little pretence of eating by nibbling at his biscuit, then another tasted the savoury-looking dish and commented upon it, and a minute later, as a jovial chorus came rolling out of the fore-castle-hatch, Mr Frewen began to eat.

"Come, Dale," he said, "have some dinner, and forget all that. It was your duty, my lad."

"Yes; I will try," I said; and making an effort, I mastered my disinclination and swallowed a mouthful.

“Capital, isn’t it?” said Mr Frewen, smiling.

“Yes, it is good,” I replied; and I went on, feeling surprised at my returning appetite.

The result was that Mr Brymer and Mr Denning fell to, and we were all—perhaps in a forced manner, to encourage each other—loud in our praises of the dish, of which we ate heartily.

In fact, when I had nearly finished my plateful, a thought struck me, and after a little hesitation I turned to Mr Brymer.

“Well?” he said. “What is it, Dale?”

“I was thinking, sir,” I said.

“What of—the gang singing? They’re passing the bottle round pretty freely.”

“No, sir,” I said. “I was thinking how tantalising it must be to hear this dinner going on, and smell it, and not get some.”

“Oh, we’ll call the men to finish it when we’ve done. Poor fellows! they work hard for us, and we will not stand on ceremony now.”

“I meant Walters, sir,” I said.

“Humph! The treacherous young hound! Why, you don’t mean you want to take him some?”

“Yes, I do, sir,” I said quickly. “I don’t like him, or defend him, but I’d give him a plate of this.”

Mr Brymer looked round the table and frowned.

“Well,” he said, “take him some, but mind he don’t get out.”

I rose eagerly. Mr Preddle smiled all over his round, plump face, and well filled a plate, which I bore to the cabin in which Walters was prisoned, and unfastening it, bore it in.

He was leaning against the ship’s side, gazing out of the cabin-window, and would not turn his head.

“I’ve brought you some dinner,” I said, but he paid no attention, and I repeated the words, but still he did not move. “Oh, very well,” I said. “If you like to be sulky, be so. I’ll take it back.”

He faced round in an instant. Hunger is, after all, very taming.

“Set it down,” he said shortly; and thereat our eyes met, and he saw my bruised and disfigured features. His face expanded in an unpleasantly triumphant grin.

“Oh, all right,” I said, setting the plate and biscuit down on the locker, though feeling all the time as if I should like to take it back. “Laugh away; you don’t look so very beautiful, Mr Pirate Lieutenant.”

He gave an angry start, and the smile changed to a savage frown, which did not improve a pair of terribly black eyes and a cut and swollen lip.

But I was ready to give him quite as defiant a look as I opened the door, and then going out I re-locked him in, and went back to my place, ready for some more of the kangaroo stew.

“Well, was he very grateful?” said Mr Brymer.

I shook my head, and finished my dinner in silence, listening the while to the men, who were singing uproariously.

“Your prescription seems to agree with them, Mr Frewen,” said the mate significantly, as we all rose.

“Yes; but wait a wee, as the Scotch folk say.”

“Yes, up by the forecastle,” said the mate. “Put your pistols in your pockets, and we’ll keep watch and listen to the effects of the drug while the men have their meal. Dale, my lad, take Blane at the wheel a portion, while I send the others to have theirs.”

I hastily obeyed, taking a pretty good ration for Barney Blane, who must have been having pretty good sniffs of the savoury food to slacken his appetite, and he grinned hugely as he saw me approach.

“That’s your sort, sir; I was getting hungry.”

“Can you eat and steer too, Barney?” I said.

“Can I eat and steer too?” he cried. “You just set that theer on the binnacle, sir, and come back in ten minutes and see.”

“I will, Barney,” I said, “and bring you some grog too.”

“And I’ll say you’re a real gentleman, Mr Dale, sir, that I will, and drink your health.”

“You shall, Barney,” I said, turning to go.

"But I say, sir, ain't they pretty lively down in the forksle?"

"Yes, very."

"What did you serve out? Were it rum?"

"No, Barney, soup," I said; "but wait a bit and they won't be quite so merry."

"No, sir, they won't. It's unlimited grog, for they've got plenty down below; but, as you say, wait a bit. They will have done by-and-by."

"They will," I said to myself, with a faint shiver of nervousness coming over me again as I descended the ladder, just as, relieved from duty, Bob Hampton and Neb Dumlow came aft.

"In with you," I said, "and eat away. The others coming?"

"No, Mr Dale, sir; they've been having their snack along with the cook in the galley, and got it done."

"The more for you then," I said, trying to laugh, but feeling very serious indeed.

They entered on tip-toe as if afraid of disturbing the captain and Miss Denning, and directly after were eating ravenously at the remainder of the meal.

It was a lovely day, and I could not help thinking what a pity it was that Miss Denning should not be on deck watching the blue sea and the silvery, fleecy clouds. Every now and then some fish sprang out of the clear water as if disturbed by the Burgh Castle's prow as she glided along due south almost upon an even keel. One moment I felt disposed to suggest to Mr Denning that he should bring her out to where the sails cast a shade, but the singing of the men in the forecabin and the anxious looks of Mr Brymer and the gentlemen with him reminded me of the serious business in hand.

The cook was busy in his galley, and the two men were lolling about talking to him now and then, and occasionally glancing aft, waiting for Bob Hampton and Dumlow to finish before going aft to clear away, and fetch the things to the galley, where they would get hot water to wash up.

How beautiful and calm and peaceful it all seemed! The ocean looked so lovely, and I felt so happy and so much at peace that it seemed a pity for me to have that pistol stuck in my belt, for it was in my way as I laid my arms on the bulwarks and my breast against them to listen to the singing of the mutineers. For they were not shouting now. Their voices sounded pleasant and sweet, though I could not make out the words, which came softer and softer, and then there was the chorus almost as soft. I knew why this was. The drug was beginning to take effect, and I felt that before long their voices would be quite hushed. They would be asleep, and I did not mind it now. It was all my exaggerated fancy, I felt, for it would do them good, and bring them to their senses to find themselves separated and away from the influence of Jarette.

I turned to look toward the forecabin, near which Mr Frewen was standing with Mr Brymer, and they were evidently listening attentively, while Mr Preddle and Mr Denning were close up to the bulwarks on the starboard side, I being to port.

After a time Mr Frewen approached me, and I began to think that he was a very much taller man than I had been in the habit of supposing, and his face was bigger too. It looked larger round than Mr Preddle's and there was a peculiar, light, rainbow-like look around it as if I was gazing at him through a spy-glass.

Then I started, for though he was a long way off he took hold of my shoulder with an arm like a telescope, and shook me.

"What's the matter, Dale?" he said. "Don't look like that, my lad. Not well?"

"Not well?" I said, or rather it was as if somebody a long way off said so. "Of course I am. Quite well, thank you."

"Well, don't go to sleep, boy."

He shook me just as I felt as if I was beginning to fly right off over the blue sea, and away into the fleecy clouds, and as I made an effort to get rid of the clutch upon my shoulder, he said, or somebody else said—

"Great heavens! what does this mean?"

I distinctly heard Mr Frewen say that, and wondered what he meant. For it did seem absurd that he should come slowly up to me till his eyes were looking close into mine, and then gradually shrink away again till he was right off on the other side of the ship, and then over the bulwarks and away at sea, till he was no higher than my finger before he came back again.

But though he appeared to be so distant, I could hear him breathing hard all the time.

I was so disgusted that I determined to take no notice of him, and looked instead at the two sailors by the galley. One of them was laughing and the other staring at me very hard. Then he began behaving in the same manner as Mr Frewen, till the doctor said suddenly—

"Drink this."

It was cold water, and tasted, delicious.

"Thank you," I said, with my voice sounding a long way off, and I think it was Mr Brymer who spoke then, but his voice sounded too as if he were distant, though his words were perfectly distinct.

"Over-excitement, isn't it, and the heat of the sun?"

Then after a very long pause Mr Frewen said—

"Perhaps, but I am beginning to be afraid. Yes, that's light, my lad, sit down here in the shade. Take off your cap."

That lad—I did not know who it was then—sat down on the bottom of a tub, and leaned his head back against the bulwarks for the soft breeze to play through his hair; and very pleasant and dreamy and restful it all was for him, whoever he was, while I listened, too, to what was going on.

A great deal appeared to be going on about me just then, and I quite enjoyed it, and somehow it was as if everything was surrounded by beautiful colours. Mr Brymer came and went just as if I were seeing him through a cut-glass decanter-stopper, but he was not half so striking as Mr Preddle, who came and stood over me looking gigantic, but his face and even his clothes were prismatic. So was the air, which now began to descend rapidly, as if it were some brilliant waterfall coming down from the clouds.

"Will you fetch me a cane seat off the poop?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

It was Mr Preddle's highly-pitched voice which I heard, and it was the sailor who had sat talking to the steersman who answered, and soon after I heard the chair squeak very loudly, as big Mr Preddle, looking as large as an elephant now, sat down by the boy on the tub, and leaned his head back against the bulwarks.

He talked to him about the fish, and said that the hot weather did not agree with them, and that he was afraid that kangaroo-tail was too rich a dish to agree with them, for it was indigestible, and made people drowsy.

The boy did not make any answer, but sat staring at Mr Preddle sidewise, wondering why the big stout naturalist also should keep on going and coming in that telescopic fashion, which was so puzzling to me as well as to that boy, who was, however, exceedingly stupid, for he did not say a word, but only stared with his mouth half open.

Then I was listening to Mr Brymer, who was talking anxiously to the doctor, as they stood watching the fore-castle-hatch, from which came a deliciously sweet chorus, and I knew why it sounded so pleasant—it was because the men were so far away in the bows, for the Burgh Castle grew longer and longer, till the bowsprit seemed as if it were miles away, but with every rope and block as distinctly seen as if it were still close to me.

"Well, my lad, how are you?" said Mr Frewen just then; but the boy leaning back against the bulwark only stared at him, and I felt ready to kick him for being so rude, and then I wanted to punch Mr Preddle, for he began to snore abominably.

"I don't like it, Frewen," said somebody just then. "What do you say? You don't think it possible that—"

He did not finish speaking, for just then I saw Mr Frewen go to the boy on the tub, and dash some water over his face.

"Now, my lad," he said, "you must get up and walk about."

He took hold of the boy's arm, but did not pull him up, for the lad fought against him angrily, and then I knew I was that boy staring hard at the doctor, and then at Mr Denning, who came along the deck from the companion-way far-distant, crying—

"Doctor—my sister—come directly—she's dying!"

The doctor went away directly, and I saw him going what seemed to be miles away, but so gently and easily that it was like something in a dream. Mr Brymer went after him, and the cook and the two men stood watching them till they disappeared through the saloon entrance, while the men in the fore-castle kept on singing a chorus, sounding now loud and now soft, just as one hears the music of a great organ when the performer opens and closes the swell.

I don't know how long it was afterwards, but it did not seem to matter, for everything was so pleasant and calm, before I saw Mr Brymer come back with the doctor, and directly after, though he seemed to be still a long way off, Mr Brymer said—

"I must send another man. He is hanging fast asleep over the wheel."

Then I saw Mr Frewen catch at one of the shrouds and stand gazing at him vacantly, and then I felt quite pleased, for Bob Hampton was there along with Neb Dumlow.

"It is all going to be right now," I thought, though I did not know that anything was wrong, and I felt as if I was just dropping off into a delicious sleep.

But all was quite clear and plain again, as I heard Bob Hampton say—

"Some one has been playing larks with the grub, sir. I can't go to the wheel, for I can't—can't—can't—can't— Here, hold up Neb, lad; don't lurch about like that."

"I'm a-going down, matey, I'm a-going down," growled Dumlow, and I saw him sink on the deck.

"You scoundrels, you've been at the rum!" cried Mr Brymer, and he drew his pistol, but only gave a stagger, and caught about in the air to try and save himself from falling. "Help—Frewen—something—give me something," he panted, and Mr Frewen came to him, feeling his way with his arms stretched out just as if he were playing at blindman's buff.

He came on as if from a great distance, till he touched Mr Brymer, and I heard him whisper the one word—"Treachery."

"I knew it!" cried the mate, fiercely, and cocking his pistol he staggered for a moment just as I saw Bob Hampton sink down on the deck holding his head.

Directly after, as Mr Frewen stood swaying to and fro, the mate rushed to where the cook and the two men stood by the galley-door.

The two sailors shrank away to right and left, while Mr Brymer seized the cook and dragged him away, forcing him down upon his knees, holding him by the collar with one hand, and swaying to and fro as he said thickly—

"You dog, you drugged that dish you sent in to dinner!"

"No, sir—'pon my word, sir—I swear, sir!" shrieked the poor fellow.

"You treacherous hound, you've poisoned us!" stammered out the mate.

"I swear I haven't, Mr Brymer, sir. Don't, sir—that pistol, sir—pray, sir—indeed, indeed, I haven't!"

Mr Brymer was shaking the pistol about threateningly, as he rocked to and fro over the cook, who as he knelt clasped his hands in agony, and I heard him say something very indistinctly, for he was sobbing about his wife and child.

Then there was a loud bang as the pistol fell, and directly after I saw Mr Brymer glide down as it were on to the deck, and roll over toward where Mr Frewen already lay—though I had not seen him fall—with his arms now folded, and his face upon them as if he were asleep.

And still it didn't seem to trouble me in the least. Even when Mr Brymer was gesticulating with his pistol, it did not alarm me, for it was all something interesting going on before me just as if it were part of a dream which would all dissolve away directly, and then I should wake up and think of it no more.

I think my eyes must have been closing then, but they opened widely again, and at one glance I saw my companions perfectly motionless from where I sat back against the bulwark, and heard Mr Preddle snoring heavily by my side. For the cook exclaimed passionately—

"I swear, if it was the last word I had to titter, I've done nothing! I never drugged nobody's food!"

"All right, matey," said the sailor I had seen talking to the steersman; "it warn't you—it was me."

"You?" cried the cook. "You've poisoned them!"

"Not I, my lad," said the man, laughing; and every word he uttered rang in my ears as if it was being shouted by some tremendous voice, for my senses were at that moment abnormally clear. "Not I, my lad. I was up yonder, when I saw Brymer and the rest of 'em get together to have what old Frenchy calls a parley, and they hadn't been there long, leaving me wondering what game was up, and what they were going to do about the lads down below, when I see the sky-light opened a bit. So of course I crep' along the deck to hear what they'd got to say."

"And did you hear?"

"Every word, mate. They were going to get the doctor to find the stuff to send all the lads to sleep, and then they were going to open the hatch and shove Jarette by himself, and the others some in the cable-tier and some in the hold."

"Yes, yes!" cried the cook, eagerly, while I listened hard.

"Well then, that warmint yonder said it ought to be put in the soup, and so they settled it.

"'Two can play at that game,' I says, and I listened till they spoke so low that I opened the light a bit wider, and it slipped out of my hands and went down bang. So I nipped back to set alongside o' Tommy here, and my gentleman comes up to peep, sees me right away, and goes back again. I thought perhaps they'd give it up then, but I kep' my eyes open, and bimeby I sees my nipper here come to you with three tins, and he tells you what to do with them.

"'All right,' I says, 'I can see through that dodge,' so I lays low and waits my chance, empties the tin of soup you'd put aside into a pan, and then pours the one you were going to use into the one you'd set aside, and that out of the pan into the tin, but I washed it out first, and put it ready for you to use."

"You couldn't; I was here all the time," said the cook, angrily.

"Oh, was you? Didn't go round to the back to fetch taters, did you?"

"Of course. I forgot."

"Ah, that's right," continued the man. "But I warn't satisfied then, for I says to myself, 'Them poor beggars down below won't get the dose now, but I should like t'others to have a taste;' and to make sure as they did, I takes the tin

as you'd got the lumps o' meat in, pours out all the pieces and fills it up from the tin they'd doctored, and filled it up again with the juice I'd poured out; now I says to myself, whichever lot they have'll give 'em what they meant for some one else—and so it did. My word, they mixed it pretty strong."

"Why, the tins were wet and sticky!" cried the cook.

"Course they was, mate; I had to be in such a hurry for fear of your coming back."

"And I couldn't make out about that pan."

"Hadn't time to wash it, messmate."

"Then I gave the lads down below the soup the cabin was to have had?"

"You did."

"And them in the cabin the soup and kangaroo they'd physicked?"

"That's so, matey, and their games are over again. You'll jyne us, won't you?"

"I? Join you?" faltered the cook, looking across at me; "here, what are you going to do?"

"Let the lads out again. It's their turn now."

And just then the men in the fore-castle finished a chorus and began to cheer.

"I shall wake up from this dream directly," I remember thinking, but I did not, for all was black, and I was in the deepest sleep that I ever had in my long life.

Chapter Thirty One.

Hot! So hot that I could hardly breathe, and so dark that I could not see across the cabin. My head ached, and I was terribly sleepy, with a heavy, unsatisfied drowsiness, which kept me from stirring, though I longed to get out of my cot and go and open the window, and at the same time have a good drink from the water-bottle.

I was lying on my brick, and there was the impression upon me that I had been having bad dreams, during the passing of which I had been in great trouble of some kind, but what that trouble was I could not tell; and as soon as I tried to think, my brain felt as if it was hot and dry, and rolling slowly from side to side of my skull.

I was very uncomfortable and moved a little, but it made my head throb so that I was glad to lie still again and wait till the throbbing grew less violent.

"It all comes of sleeping in a cabin in these hot latitudes with the window closed. Mr Frewen ought to know better," I thought, "being a doctor. I'll tell him of it as soon as he wakes."

This is how I mused, thinking all the time how foolish I was not to get up and open the window, but still feeling no more ready to cool the stifling air of the cabin.

"What makes men snore so?" I thought then, and began to wonder how it was that so gentlemanly a man as the doctor should make such a noise in his sleep. I had never heard him do so before. As a rule he lay down, closed his eyes, and went off fast, breathing as softly as a baby till he woke in the morning. Now his breathing was what doctors call stertorous, heavy and oppressed.

"Oh, how I wish he would wake up and open the window!" I thought; but he did not wake up nor cease breathing so heavily, and I lay thinking about coming to bed on the previous night. That is to say, I lay trying to think about coming to bed, for I could not recall anything. I had some dreamy notion of its having been my watch; but whether I had taken it, or whether it was yet to come and some one was due to rouse me up soon, I could not tell.

"It's all due to having such a headache," I thought, "and of course through this horrid air. Why doesn't he wake up and open the window?"

How long that lasted I cannot tell, but it must have been for some time, during which my brain burned and my thoughts came in a horribly confused manner. I could hear the sounds on deck, and feel that the ship was careening over with the breeze, but these facts suggested nothing to me, and I must have been in quite a stupor, when I was roused by a voice saying angrily—

"Well, what is it?"

I knew the voice from its rough harsh tones, and I lay waiting for some one to answer, but there was no reply, and all was blacker and hotter than ever, when there came the peculiar smacking noise of one passing his tongue over his dry lips, and once more he spoke.

"D'yer hear, what is it?"

There was no reply, and it seemed to me that the speaker was settling himself down to go to sleep again, for he moved uneasily.

“What did yer say, Neb?”

I had not heard Neb Dumlow say anything, and I wondered why I had not, for I did not think I had been to sleep. But I felt that I must have been, or I should have heard.

“Mussy me, what a head I’ve got!” muttered the voice. “Did the gents give us some rum?”

There was a pause.

“Must ha’ done, but I don’t reckon. Why, it must ha’ been a whole lot.”

My head must have been growing less confused, for now I began to be puzzled about how it was that Bob Hampton was sleeping in our cabin instead of just under shelter with the others at the entrance of the saloon. It was very strange, but I was too stupid to arrange things. Once I wondered whether I really was in the cabin along with Mr Frewen, but I got no farther with that line of reasoning, and I was sinking back into my stupor or lethargy when Bob Hampton spoke again.

“Here, Neb—Barney, open something, and let’s have some fresh air. My, how hot!”

He had a headache too then, and could hardly breathe for the hot closeness of the place. This roused me, and I lay thinking how strange it was that he should be just as much indisposed as I was to move. But he was a fore-mast man and I was an officer, so I had only to speak to be obeyed, and after making two or three efforts which only resulted in a dull muttering sound, Bob Hampton exclaimed—

“Here, whatcher talking about? Who is it, and what do you want?”

“I say, open the window, Bob, and let’s have some fresh air.”

There was a quick rustling movement close by me, as if some one had risen upon his elbow, and he exclaimed—

“What d’yer say?”

“Open the window, Bob; I’m half-stifled.”

“So’m I, my lad. Here, what’s the matter? What are you doing here?”

“No,” I said; “what are you doing here in the cabin, Bob?”

“I arn’t in the cabin, my lad, and you arn’t in the cabin, for this arn’t in it, and—Here, I say, what’s up?”

“I don’t know,” I said peevishly, “but it’s so hot I can’t bear it; do open something.”

“Blest if I— Look here, my lad— There arn’t anything to open anywheres, and my head won’t go. Would you mind telling me where the sky-light is, for I s’pose I had too much grog last night like a fool, and I arn’t werry clear in the head.”

“I don’t know, I can’t tell, Bob. It’s all a puzzle.”

“And it’s so plaguey dark, my lad. Wait a bit and I’ll feel round with my fingers, for eyes aren’t no good here.”

“Well,” I said, for there was a good deal of rustling, “what can you feel?”

“Chesties and casks, my lad, and we’re a-lying on ’em—leastwise I am. What are we two a-lying on chesties and casks for?”

“I don’t know, Bob. But who’s that snoring so?”

“Where?”

“Somebody was snoring just now, but it stopped when you spoke.”

“Then I s’pose it must ha’ been me, my lad. I have heard say as I could play a pretty good toon on my nose when I was very fast asleep.”

“No. There it goes again,” I said in a hoarse whisper, as the noise which I had first heard recommenced.

“Oh, there’s no gammon ’bout that, my lad. That there’s Neb Dumlow. If ever you’re anywheres and hears a sound like a vessel blowing off her steam under water, all snort and bubble, you may take your oath it’s Neb Dumlow. Here, I’ll stop that.”

“Wait a moment, Bob,” I said. “I want to know first where we are.”

“So do I, my lad, but it seems to me, as my old mother used to say, that want’ll be your master. I dunno, my lad; arn’t dead and buried, are we?”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” I said peevishly. “Look here,—were you on the middle watch last night?”

“Dunno, my lad,—were you?”

“I can’t recollect, Bob. But do try. We must be somewhere in the dark, and it’s that which puzzles us.”

"Oh yes, there's no gammon about that, my lad; we're somewheres in the dark, and it's 'bout the solidest, thickest darkness I ever found myself in. Here, I'll wake up old Neb. He's very ugly and precious stoopid, but he'll tell us where we are in a jiffy. Here! Hi! Avast there! Neb!"

"Hullo!" came in answer to what sounded like a heavy shaking after Bob Hampton had crept by me.

"Now, my lad, rouse up a bit."

"Our watch, old man?"

"No; not yet."

"Bless yer. Good-night."

Snore.

"No, no; rouse up."

"Well, all right, messmate. That there's flesh and blood you've got hold on, not suit. Don't skin me."

"Then wake up."

"Well, I'm woke up. What is it? Who's dowsed the lantern?"

"I d'know. Here's Mr Dale wants you to tell him where we are."

"Mr Dale?"

"Yes; I said so, didn't I, stoopid?"

"Course you did, matey, but what's he doing here?"

"That's what he wants you to tell him, only he wants to know first where here is."

There was the sound of some one feeling about, and I fancied I could hear some one else breathing, but I was not sure, and I listened patiently for what Neb Dumlow was going to say. But Bob Hampton was the first to speak, and he said in a gruff whisper—

"He's a awful thick-headed chap, sir, but I think he'll hit it off for us directly."

"Messmate!" came from a little way off.

"Well?"

"Has some one been having a lark with us?"

"I dunno, and I don't know anything," growled Bob. "You arn't wanted to ask questions, but to answer what Mr Dale wants to know. Now, then, what d'yer make of it?"

"Nowt."

"Well, where are we?"

"Dunno."

"What!—can't yer tell?"

"Can't find bottom, my lad; only seem to arrive at one thing."

"Well, what is it?"

"Well, it's this here; if it was me and you and old Barney—where is old Barney?"

"Here, messmate."

"Oh, come then, I might be right, on'y you see we've got Mr Dale with us."

"Look here, what are you fogging about? Why don't you say what yer mean, my lad? Now then, out with it. Where are we?—'cause Mr Dale wants to know."

"Well, as he's here, we can't be here," growled Dumlow.

"What d'yer mean, stoopid?"

"Why, we can't be where I thought we was."

"And wheers that?"

"Why, my lad, it looks like this here 'cording to what I feels. But stop a moment, let's ask Barney a question. Barney, old lad!"

"Hullo!"

"How's yer head?"

"Just as if it was a beehive, and all the bees swarming."

"That's it. Then we are here, and all I've got to say for myself is, as I wonder I could ha' been such a fool, and I'm sorry as Mr Dale don't know better."

"Then where are we, Dumlow?" I said hastily; "for I don't know any better."

"Then you ought to, sir; you a orficer and brought up proper. I wonder at you a-leading men into trouble, and there'll be an awful row when old Brymer finds us out."

"He's got it, sir," said Bob Hampton. "It's what I thought, and it's a rum 'un."

"Then, where are we?" I said pettishly; for my head kept on feeling as if it was spinning round.

"Why, sir," said Dumlow; "we're down in the hold among them sperrit casks as was stowed by themselves, and some one's been opening one of 'em with a gimlet and letting us all drink."

"Hist!"

Tap, tap, tap, tap.

A long, low knocking as of knuckles against a bulk-head.

"Come in!" growled Bob Hampton. "Here's the cook brought your shaving-water, sir."

The tapping was repeated, and sounded some little distance off.

"Answer them, whoever it is, Bob," I said; for this seemed to be something, if not tangible, at all events certain.

There was a little rustling about, and the tapping came again.

"Why don't you answer them?" I said tetchily.

"What do you mean, sir—shout?"

"No, no; tap again."

"But there arn't nothin' to knock on, sir. It's no good to hit the top, or the floor."

"But there must be a partition somewhere," I said.

"Dessay there is, sir; but I can't tell where it is."

"Are we not somewhere near the forecastle?"

"Dessay we are, sir; but my head's some'at like a lump o' solid wood. What did you bring us down here for?"

"I! Bring you down! Nonsense, man. I did not bring you."

"Then how did we come, sir? Do you know, Neb?"

"No."

"Do you, Barney?"

"No. I only knows here we are, and my head's a rum 'un."

"But there must be some reason for us being here," I said piteously, as I struggled vainly to get beyond what seemed to be a black curtain hanging between the past and present.

"Yes, sir," said Bob, coolly; "there must be some reason."

"Then what is it, Bob?"

"Oh, don't ask me, sir; I arn't no scholard. I'm all muzzly like. Seems to me that we've been to one o' they casks,—and all the time it don't. No; we arn't had no drink. We shouldn't with all that there trouble a-hanging over us."

"Yes, Bob," I said eagerly, for he had touched a chord which set me thinking—I mean trying to think; "that trouble hanging over us. There was some trouble, wasn't there?"

"Oh yes, sir; we was in a lot o' trouble about something, but blest if I know what it was."

"Well; try, man," I cried. "Think about trouble. What trouble was it?"

"No, sir, I dunno," he cried, after a pause. "We're aboard the Burgh Castle still, arn't we?"

"I don't know," I began. "Yes, of course we are, and we must be down in the hold. It's coming now, I think. Why did we come down here? Surely one of you must know."

"It arn't likely, sir, if you don't," growled Dumlow.

"But what were we in trouble about?" I said, for—I cannot describe it—there was the thick feeling of something having happened; but strange as it may seem, neither I nor the men could make anything out about what had preceded our unnatural sleep.

"It's a rum 'un," said Bob Hampton at last. "I dunno. It's a rum 'un."

"But cannot either of you think at all?" I cried in agony. "It seems so horrible to be here like this in black darkness, and not know how or why."

"Or what?" suggested Bob.

"I think I've got it now," said Dumlow.

"Yes; what is it?"

"All gone mad wi' being so much out in the sun."

"You may be mad, Neb, I arn't, and I don't mean to. I'll take my trick at the wheel and box the compass with any on yer. Wheel—wheel," he added, thoughtfully—"steering. Why arn't I at the wheel now?"

"'Cause you're here, messmate," said Dumlow.

"But I was a-steering when you comes, Mr Dale, sir, and brings me a plate o' wittles, and you says, says you—"

"Oh!" I cried excitedly.

"No, you didn't, sir, beggin' your parding; you says something about could I steer and eat too, and I says—no, you says—no, it was I says; well, it was one or t'other of us, I can't quite 'member which says, 'put it on the binnacle,'—and it was put there, and I ate it, and it was very good."

"Oh!" I cried again, as I pressed my temples with my hands, for I could see a faint gleam of light peeping through into my head, or so it seemed; but it kept on dying out again, and I was blank of memory again as ever.

"Did you say wittles?" cried Dumlow, suddenly.

"Ay, mate, I did."

"Why, I 'members something 'bout wittles. O' course. Me and you, Bob."

"When? Where?"

"Ah, I dunno when it was, nor wheer it was, but—"

"She's dying—she's dying," I cried; for those words came cutting through the black silence, and gave me quite a pang.

"Who's she? And what's she a-dying for?" growled Bob Hampton.

"Toe be sure, mate," said Dumlow, "that's what Mr Denning says as he come out of his cabin. 'She's dying,' he says, and you and me got up and sat down again feeling as silly as two booby birds."

"Here, you don't know what you're talking about, messmate," said Bob Hampton.

"Yes, he does," I cried excitedly, for a greater light seemed to have now flashed into my brain. "You did go into the saloon to have— Oh, Bob Hampton, I recollect it all now."

"Do you, sir? Then let's have it," he said gruffly.

"There was a great mistake made," I cried.

"Seems like it, sir."

"And, yes," I continued, "I know Barney went to sleep at the wheel."

"That's a lie!" he rapped out. "Leastwise, I beg your pardon, sir; I mean I arn't the sort o' man to go to sleep on duty."

"No, no; of course not, Barney," I said piteously; "but you did, and Bob Hampton and Neb Dumlow came and laid down on the deck, and I saw it all, and heard it, and, oh dear, oh dear! what a terrible mess!"

"Arn't he going off his head, matey?" whispered Dumlow; but I heard him.

"No, no, man; it's all coming back now. You don't know, but you must now; it was a plan to give the mutineers stuff to send them all to sleep, and it was changed and given to us instead."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Bob Hampton; "but hadn't you better lie down and go to sleep again?"

"Why, Bob?"

"'Cause, to speak plain English, you're talking nonsense, sir."

"No, man; it's sense. That fellow Dean heard all, and changed the tins."

"Now, do lie down, sir; it's o' no use for you to go on worrying yourself about tins."

"I tell you I can see it all now, man," I cried angrily. "We took the stuff, and the prisoners got off. They're out now, and we're prisoners. Don't you see?"

"No, sir; it's too dark. But—"

"I tell you I'm all right. My head is come clear again, and I can think. We were all confused through taking Mr Frewen's stuff."

"I never took none o' the doctor's stuff," growled Dumlow. "And I don't never mean to."

"Are you sure o' what you're saying, sir?" said Bob Hampton.

"Certain, Bob."

"I arn't."

"You hold your tongue, and don't be sarcy, Neb," growled Bob. "I'm a-beginning to see now. Mr Dale's right. If he warn't, how could we be shut up down here with our heads as thick as if we'd been having 'em stuffed? That's it, sir, though I don't half understand what you say. Then we've all been hocused, and Jarette's got the upper hand again?"

"Yes, Bob, I'm afraid so."

"Well, that's ugly, my lad; but there's no help for it now, and the sooner we get to work and take the ship again, I suppose, the better."

"Yes, Bob," I said. "Of course."

"Very well, my lad, then here goes. I'm glad it's how you say, for I was beginning to think I'd got crazed, and been shut up for being violent. That's a comfort anyhow, for I don't hold with a man going off his head."

"Then it's all right, messmate?" growled Dumlow.

"Right as it can be in a place like this, matey. Yer can't breathe, nor you can't see, and—well now, that's queer. You seem to ha' set my head working again, Mr Dale, sir; and I recklect sittin' in the s'loon eating our dinner arter you gents had done, and then coming over all pleasant and comfble like, and then I don't seem to 'member no more till I woke up down here."

"And that knocking we heard must be some of the others," I cried excitedly.

"That's sartain, sir."

"Is there any one else here beside us four?"

"If there be," says Barney, "we're a-lying on 'em, for there arn't no room without as I can see."

"Yer can't see," growled Dumlow.

"Well, I didn't mean with my eyes, Neb; so don't be so chuff on a fellow. I meant with my understanding."

"Don't. Don't get arguing together," I cried impatiently. "It is suffocating down here. I want to understand how we are placed, and I can't quite make it out yet."

"Well, sir, p'r'aps I can help you a bit," said Bob. "Seems to me as they pulled up a hatch and pitched us in, and then battened it down again."

"And where are our friends?"

"Why, they'd shove 'em where we shoved they, down in the forksle, I should say, unless they've stuffed 'em in the cable-tier."

"Yes, perhaps so," I said thoughtfully.

"Why, o' course," growled Dumlow.

"What? They are in the cable-tier?"

"Oh, I dunno, sir; I was a-thinking about our taking they wittles in the s'loon, and it's come back like sort o' bells ringing in my ear, and Mr Denning saying she's dying. Oh yes, I recklect that, and the doctor coming. That's 'bout as far as I can get."

"I 'member the wittles on the binnacle quite plain now," said Barney; "and, yes, o' course, I kep' coming over all soft like, and wantin' to sing songs, and listen to moosic, and couldn't sing; but it was all silver and gold and sunshine and beautiful birds in beautiful trees. Yes, it's all right, sir. You see now, don't you, Neb?"

"No, I can't see nowt; but I dessay it's all right. I don't want to know; it don't matter to me."

"Hush!" I whispered. "There's that knocking again."

There it was quite plainly, and then came a repetition seemingly close at hand,—three smart taps as of knuckles on a chest.

"There's some one else, and quite near," I said in a low voice.

"No, my lad, that was me. Here's a big case behind me, and I let go on it."

There were three more taps at a distance.

"Knock again," I said, and this time Bob struck twice.

A few moments later there were distinctly heard two knocks.

"They heard us," I said, and answered. "Try again with one."

He struck once as loudly as he could, and we waited excitedly to hear one blow given apparently on a bulk-head.

"Those are our friends there," I cried excitedly.

"If it arn't old Frenchy gammoning us, sir," said Barney.

"I think it must be our friends," I said, feeling unwilling to give up the idea; and I was going to add something, when there came to us plainly enough the sound of feet passing somewhere overhead, and directly after a voice shouted something, but what we could not hear.

Chapter Thirty Two.

Our heads, on comparing notes, began to feel more bearable, and as the throbbing gradually died away we could feel that the effort to think was easier, while our thoughts were clearer, and before long we began to feel about so as to learn what kind of place we were in, and made out that it was an oblong kind of space between cases, and with barrels underneath, and upon which we had been lying when we began to come to. We could learn nothing further, and there were no replies now to the tappings we gave from time to time, a fact which made my heart sink rather low. For I knew that there must be some reason for this, and I was trying to puzzle it out, when Barney Blane said suddenly—

"Say, messmates, arn't it 'bout time as some 'un came round to feed the crew?"

"Ay," said Bob, "and the sooner they do it the better. I'm getting wild for want o' somethin' to stow in my hold. They've got to bring something too, or I'll soon let 'em know."

"Know what, Bob?" I said anxiously, for the man's voice sounded fierce and strange.

"Why, sir, they threatened us as to what they'd do; fired it right into my ear, Jarette did. He says to me he says, 'If yer don't soon let us out, I'll set fire to the ship.'"

"Yes, I know he did," I said.

"That's 'robborative evidence, messmates, when yer orficer says you're right. Well, then, what I says to him is this, I've got a box o' matches in my pocket, and if they don't soon let us out, or put us somewhere so as we can breathe, I'll set the blessed old Burgh Castle alight myself and burn our way out."

"Nonsense," I cried; "you're mad."

"And 'nuff to make me, sir. That there stuff we took's set up a reg'lar fierce annymile or something in my inside, as goes on gnaw, gnaw, gnaw, till I shan't be able to stand it much longer, and shall have to break out."

"Well, you are a rum 'un, Bob," said Barney. "Why, you're not going to turn canniball, are yer, at your time o' life?"

"What d'yer mean?"

"Talking about eating your messmates."

"Who did? What yer talking about? Nobody wouldn't want to eat you, Barney. If I wanted to get the flavour o' 'bacco in my mouth I'd get it from a quid, and while a man could get at a bit o' oak or an old shoe he wouldn't think o' trying to gnaw old Neb. What d'yer mean?"

"Then what d'yer talk o' roasting us for in that there mad way, matey?"

"Oh, well, I don't know as I meant it, messmate, but I'm that hungry just now as never was."

"That will do," I said, asserting my position as officer. "Silence, please."

"All right, sir; all right," growled Bob. "I'm ready. What yer going to do?"

"Try and feel about, Bob, to find where the hatch is. We must get some air somehow."

"That's right, sir. Come on, lads, and have a try. Who's got knives?"

"I have," said Barney. "Me too," growled Dumlow. "That's right, then; we may have to use 'em."

Then a rustling sound began, and I knew that the men were feeling about overhead; while being able to think pretty clearly now, I came to the conclusion that we had been thrown down here, the hatches put on again, and the tarpaulin spread over them, and that was why it was so airless and hot.

I had an endorsement of my opinion a minute later, for Bob growled out—

"Here's the hatches, sir, and they're all battened down and the 'paulins is nailed over 'em. I'll soon have some fresh air in." And before I could grasp what he was going to do, I heard a curious ripping sound, which told me that he had passed the blade of his long Spanish spring-knife through between two of the cross-hatches, and was cutting through it.

"There!" he said, as a gleam of light struck through, so brilliant that I knew it must be broad daylight; and even that ray sent a thrill of hope through me, for it seemed to bring me nearer to the living world after feeling as if I had been buried alive.

"Don't cut any more yet, Bob," I whispered.

"But that there hole won't give enough air for one man to sniff, sir. You must have another to let out the steam."

"But listen first," I said. "Can you hear any one on deck?"

There was perfect silence for some minutes, and then came a deep—

"No."

"What time should you think it is?"

"'Bout four bells, I should say, sir. Sun's shining down so as the tarpaulin's made the hatch hot."

"Then the lubbers are all having a caulk," growled Dumlow. "Tell him to have another cut, sir, and a good long 'un this time."

I hesitated for a few moments, shrinking from doing anything to let the enemy know that we were trying to get out; but the heat was so terrible that I was obliged to give the order at last.

"Cut, Bob," I whispered, and there was a low buzz of satisfaction as the knife ripped through the tarred canvas, and we could see a long streak of bright light.

"'Nother, sir?" said Bob.

"Yes," I said desperately, "we shall be suffocated if you don't."

Rip went the tarpaulin again, and another streak of light a short distance from the others appeared, while directly after, without waiting for orders, Bob lengthened the first cut he had made till it equalled the two latter.

"Won't be much better," he growled, "but it's better than nothing. Shall I get under the end of one of the hatches now, sir, and try and push it up?"

"No, not yet. If we do that it ought to be after dark. But I don't think there will be any chance, for they are sure to be well fastened down. Listen again. There must be some one on deck."

"Yes, sir, for sartain, but they'll be up at the other end. Dessay they're a-feeding o' themselves, and got plenty to drink."

"Ay, trust 'em, messmate," growled Dumlow, "but it's no use to grumble. Ups and downs in life we see. We're down now, and it's their turn."

"Now," said Barney.

"Hush!" I whispered.

We all listened, and plainly heard a step overhead, as if a man was walking along the deck. It passed by, sounding fainter, and died away, but at the end of a minute we heard it again, and knew that whoever it might be, he was returning and would pass by us again.

This happened, and I feared that he would notice the cuts in the tarpaulin, but he went on, the footsteps grew fainter, and I fancied that I heard them continue on the ladder as the man ascended to the poop-deck.

"Could you tell who that was, Bob?" I said.

"Ay, sir. No mistaking that pair o' legs. They don't go like an Englishman's would. That was old Jarette."

I set my teeth hard, and almost writhed at the feeling of impotence which troubled me. To have been so near success, and then for that scoundrel, who had promised to work faithfully for us if he were forgiven, to have played the spy, and contrived after hearing our plot to change the contents of the tins. For it was all clear enough now in my memory, and I could recall every word the man had said to the cook.

"We ought to have kept some one on the watch while we made our plans," I said to myself, but felt how absurd it was to murmur now that the mischief was done.

The heat seemed a little less intense now, but it was so terrible that the throbbing in my head commenced again, and I was ready to order an attempt to be made to force up one side of the hatch, when there was a whisper.

"What say, Bob?" I replied.

"Didn't speak, sir," was the reply.

"You then, Dumlow?"

"No; not me, sir."

"Well then, Barney, it was you," I said tetchily. "What do you want?"

"I never spoke, sir," said Barney, in an ill-used tone. "What do they want to say it was me for?"

"Cheer up!" came now quite plainly.

"Eh? Who spoke?"

"Friend," was whispered again.

"Yes, what? Who is it?"

"Pst!"

I waited for whoever it was to speak again, but there was not another sound, and I turned to where I believed Bob to be lying.

"Who could that be?" I said.

"Well, sir, when a man blows his words down through a slit in a tarpaulin—"

"You think it came down through the hole you cut?"

"Yes, sir, sure on it; but as I was a-saying, when a man blows his words down like that he might just as well be whistlin' a hornpipe for all you can tell who it is. But if I was put upon my oath afore a judge I should swear as it were Plum Duff."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well, sir, old Byled Salt Pork."

"The cook?"

"That's him, sir."

"But he whispered 'Friend,'" I panted excitedly.

"Yes, and that's what bothered me. If it had been any one else it would ha' been all right, but one can't quite believe in a cook being your friend at any time. After what has taken place just lately I should say he was the worst enemy we ever had."

"No, no," I cried eagerly, "the man could not help it. He was innocent enough. It was that scoundrel who did the mischief."

"All right, sir; have it your own way. I'm willing."

"Then we have one friend on deck."

"Yes, sir, and s'pose he'll doctor the lot of 'em this next time and have us all up on deck again. Good luck to him. I hope he'll look sharp about it."

"Hist! What's that?"

It was the three knocks again plainly heard from forward somewhere, and plain proof that we had other friends who would gladly join us in a combination against our common enemy.

We answered the knocks, which were repeated, and we soon found that we could signal to or talk to our friends forward, for we had pretty well made out now which was fore and which aft, though it was evidently a dead calm again, and the ship was rolling slowly from side to side.

But though we could signal and converse, there was no code for the signals, and our conversation was in an unknown tongue.

I suppose it was the heat, or the fact that I had gone through so terrible an experience from the narcotic, which made me feel so intensely irritable, for after our knocking and tapping had gone on for some time, I exclaimed—

“I wish to goodness they wouldn’t. What is the good of their keeping on doing that? It means nothing, and does no good.”

“Oh, but it do mean something, sir,” said Bob.

“Well, then, what?”

“They keep on tapping to show us where they are, and means us to go to them.”

“Why don’t they come to us?” I said, in a tone full of vexation.

“‘Cause they can’t, sir.”

“And we can’t go to them,” I cried pettishly.

“Well, I don’t know, sir; I’ve been thinking as perhaps we could.”

“But how, man? We can’t get through all these cases and barrels and things.”

“No, sir; but praps we might manage to creep along over ‘em. One on us ought to volunteer to try.”

“All right; volunteer it is,” growled Dumlow. “I’ll go.”

“There you are, Mr Dale, sir. Never say die. Wait a minute, Neb, old man, and let’s set my fingers and thumbs to work to try whether they can see a hole as ‘ll soot you to go along by.”

“There can’t be any holes, Bob,” I said.

“Mebbe not, sir; but I tell you what cargo does in a voyage, specially if you get a storm or two to shake it together. You may pack it and jam it as much as you like when you’re in dock, but it’s sure to settle a bit, and leave some room up at the top. I’m going to try whether there arn’t some o’ that room here.”

We waited almost breathlessly, and listened to our fellow-prisoner as he rustled about; and then my heart gave a bound, for he exclaimed—

“Here’s plenty o’ room here, sir, just at the top, but it goes aft. This can’t be toward the bows. But it was this way as the knocking came, warn’t it?”

“No, no, no,” we all cried. “The other way.”

“Look at that,” growled Bob. “My head can’t be right yet, or else it’s the darkness as confooses a man. It’s like being in a thick fog and having to steer.”

“Try again,” I said.

“Ay, ay, sir; I’ll try again, o’ course.”

“I say, don’t kneel on a man’s chesty like that, messmate,” grumbled Dumlow.

“Then why don’t you put your chesty somewheres else?” growled Bob. “You’re allers lying about all over the deck.”

“Nay, I arn’t, matey,” remonstrated Dumlow. “Speak the truth, my lad, if you can.”

“Why, you’re spreadin’ about on your back now, arn’t yer?”

“Course I am, mate; I was trying how flat I could make myself ‘fore I started on the adwenter.”

“Try, pray try the other way, Bob, and don’t quarrel so—”

“Now hark at that, Barney, when I’m trying all I can to be as civil and smooth as butter, on’y Neb let out at me.”

There was a pause, and we could hear Bob grunting as he felt about in the other direction, sending joy into all our hearts directly, just as the tapping began again.

“It’s just as I said, Mr Dale, sir,” he whispered. “The knocking comes along over the cargo here, and there is just room for a man to creep along.”

“Hush! let me answer the knocking first,” I whispered.

“Never mind the knocking, sir; let’s get to ‘em ‘fore we misses the chance. Now, Neb, lad; ready?”

"Ready it is, messmate."

"Here you are then; on'y go face downwards."

"Would yer? Can't breathe so well if you turns yer fizzy mahogany down."

"And yer can't crawl so well if yer goes with it up."

"You had better crawl, Dumlow," I whispered; "but try and go straight toward where the knocking came from."

"He'll be 'bliged to, sir. No doubt about that, 'cause there arn't no other way. Now then, I'll give yer a hyste. Can you manage it?"

There was a loud breathing and panting, and though Barney Blane and I could see nothing with our eyes, yet we could mentally picture the great slow-moving sailor crawling into an aperture between the beams and the heterogeneous stowing of bales and boxes, casks and crates of all kinds of goods en route for our destination.

Now we knew that his head and chest were in, for his voice came in a half-smothered tone.

"Deal hotter in here, messmate. Just take hold o' my hind legs, as if they was part of a wheelbarrow, and give 'em a lift and a shove at the same time."

"That right?"

"Yes; that's good. Steady!"

"Steady it is."

"Now another. With a will, my lad."

"Right. How far are yer in?"

"Up to the middle, lad; and if yer give another shove I can get a bit of a pull here. That's yer sort."

"I can't get you up no farder, messmate," said Bob. "Yes, I can, if you clap your foots together. I'll plant my hands again 'em, and ram yer along that way. Ready?"

"Ay, ready," came in smothered tones.

"There you goes then," growled Bob. "Now another. I'll shove yer feet with my hands."

There was a loud grunting and rustling, and Bob said, panting—

"There he goes. I've sent him in as far as I can reach. He must do the rest hisself."

We crouched there just under the streaks of light which came down from the cuts, listening for a good ten minutes to the scuffling, scrambling noise made by the big sailor, but they all sounded close to us, as if he was not making much way; but I concluded that this was because the opening conducted the sound so well, and in hopeful anticipation I saw the brave fellow going on and on along the top of the cargo till he reached the fore-castle bulk-head, upon which our friends must have tapped their signals. Then we should be able to arrange a plan of co-operation, and perhaps succeed in re-taking the vessel, when crash! down went my card castle.

"Bob!" came in smothered tones.

"Hullo."

"Can't get any farder, mate."

"Why?"

"I'm too big."

"Well, then, come back and let me try."

"Can't, mate."

"Why?"

"'Cause I'm stuck fast, and can't move either way a hinch."

Bang, bang! came on the hatches overhead, in company with a loud talking, and above it the voice of Jarette.

"Have it off, my lads. Only one, my braves. And below there, be quiet all of you. Make a movement, and I'll shoot you down like dogs."

Those were terrible moments. The sudden glare of light by the removal of the hatch dazzled us, a couple of pistols were thrust down, and a bucket of water was lowered. Then some biscuits were thrown to us, as if we were the dogs of which Jarette had spoken; and I crouched there motionless, thinking only of Dumlow jammed in there amongst the cases, and expecting moment by moment to hear him call out for help.

But, poor fellow, he was as silent as we were, feeling as he did and afterwards said to me, that it would have been like telling Jarette that we had a chance of getting out.

But before the hatch was rattled on again, and hammered down into its place, I managed to get a glimpse of the opening in among the cargo, into which we had been thrown, and in that rapid glance I grasped the fact that it had evidently been made by the removal of a number of cases, probably hoisted out by Jarette's men.

I did not breathe freely again till the hatch was replaced, but I did then, from the fact that the strain was taken off my mind, and the hatch had been off long enough for the foul hot air below to rise, and be replaced by fresh.

To my great delight the tarpaulin was not put down over the opening, and consequently there were a few vivid pencils of light to brighten our prison.

We waited till the men had gone forward, and then I spoke to Dumlow.

"Are you sure you can't get any farther?" I whispered.

"Yes, sartain, sir."

"Then make another trial and get back at once."

"Can't, sir."

"Nonsense," I cried, speaking sharply to inspirit him; "if the hole was big enough for you to go in, it's big enough for you to come out."

"No it arn't, cause it's like a rat-trap, and the corners and things keeps you from getting back, sir."

The perspiration began to stand out on my forehead, and a strange feeling of horror came over me as I thought of the man's position, and of what might happen if he could not get back; while just as thoughts of suffocation ensuing came rushing through my mind, the object of my thoughts suddenly said in a low husky voice—

"Bob, lad?"

"Hullo, mate!"

"You and Barney get hold of a leg each, and haul me back, or I shall be suffocated."

"Yah! not you; wiggle yourself back, matey."

"There arn't no wiggle left in me, lad, and it's so hot that I can't breathe."

"Have another try," whispered Barney.

We heard a rustling, struggling sound as if some one was striving hard to get forward or back, but without result, and then the voice came more husky and smothered than ever.

"No go, lads. Look sharp and have me out, or I'm a goner."

"Get out," growled Bob, quite excitedly. "You don't half try."

"I did, mate, but I'm getting worse," came back faintly, "I'm a-swelling up and fitting tighter every moment. Can't yer get me out?"

"Here, ketch hold of one o' his legs, Barney," growled Bob, hurriedly. "We must have him out somehow. Got him?"

"There arn't no room, messmate."

"Lie up close to me and reach in together. Head in too."

A low groan now came from the hold, and though I could not see, of course I knew what was going on, and could estimate the difficulties of the position. Dumlow's two messmates, in their efforts to help him, were making his position more perilous, for they were forcing their heads and shoulders into the opening, and stopping off what little air could get to him.

There was another groan.

"Don't make a row, lad, we're doing our best," came in a distant voice which sounded as far away as poor Dumlow's groans. "Got him, matey?"

"Ay, ay."

"Both together. Yo ho, ahoy!"

This was all quite in a smothered tone, and accompanied by jerking and dragging sounds, which as they were kept up were accompanied and followed by feeble groans.

"Quick, quick!" I cried. "Have him out, or they'll hear on deck."

No one answered, and I moved forward and tried to help by clasping Bob round the waist.

"Ahoy! Ahoy! Haul away—hoy!"

All in quite a smothered whisper, and then there was another moan.

"Now again. All together."

I joined in and dragged with all my might, but our efforts were in vain, Barney paused to get a fresh messmate's legs.

"He's worked himself on till he's regularly jammed in," growled Bob. "Now then, once more; we must have him, or he'll be a dead 'un. Haul. Now then!"

We all dragged together. There was a sudden giving way, a rush, and I was on my back with two men—it felt like three—upon me, and I dare not call out in my horror and pain, but had to lie there listening to passing footsteps overhead until they had gone, and then to my greater horror Bob Hampton growled out—

"Well, we've got his legs, anyhow."

There was a smothered groan once more.

"It's all right, messmate," said Barney. "Here's his uppards and head come too. Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. Are you hurt?"

"Hurt?—yes!" I said angrily, "but never mind me. How's Dumlow?"

There was a low groan in answer.

"Oh, he's all right, sir," said Barney. "We didn't break him. He's all out."

"No, he arn't all right," growled Bob, who was feeling about in the dark. "He's in a reg'lar muddle, I dunno what's the matter with him. Strikes me we've pulled him inside out."

"Go on with yer. It's all right. It's on'y his jersey pulled right over his head and shoulders, and most off his arms. That's the way. There you are. You're all right now, arn't you, Neb?"

"Oh, my heye!" muttered the great fellow, and I felt a profound sense of satisfaction in hearing him speak again. "I began to think I was a goner."

"Not you," said Bob.

"Warn't the skin all off o' me, Barney?"

"Nay, not it, lad."

"Sure? Felt as if you was a-stripping of it all off o' me when I began to come."

"Nay, you're in your skin right enough, messmate."

"Sure, Barney? 'Cause I feel precious sore uppards."

"Sure? Yes. There, I'm glad we got you out without breaking."

"So'm I, mate, werry glad indeed. I'm two sizes too big for a hole like that, and I don't think it's any use for me to try again."

As he spoke there came the three signal knocks, and as Bob answered them he growled out—

"Oh yes, we know you're there. Look here, Mr Dale, sir. I'm two sizes smaller than Neb; I'm going to have a try."

"No, you'd better not, Bob," I whispered. "Let's wait and try to break through the hatch."

"Nay, sir, we ought to get along with them if we could. I'll just try, I'm quite two sizes smaller than Neb, and I won't be such an old silly as to go and ram myself in fast. Say I may go, sir."

"Yes, sir, let him go," said Dumlow. "It'll take some o' the conceit out on him when he gets stuck fast."

"Well then, go, Bob, but pray be careful."

"Ay, ay, sir, I'll be careful, for I've got a great respect for Bob Hampton, mariner. But you'll lend a hand, Neb, if I want hauling out?"

"I just wall," growled the big fellow. "You shall have it, messmate."

I felt very much disposed to stop him, but while I was hesitating there was the old scuffling noise, and I could mentally see Bob Hampton shuffling in the opening above the cases, and soon after there was a grunting and panting, followed by a low muttering in the hole.

"What d'yer say, messmate?" whispered Barney.

Pat!

"Here, I say, mind what you're arter," cried Barney, angrily. "You kicked me right in the chin. I don't want my teeth loosened that how."

"Why, he's a-comin' back," growled Neb.

For the shuffling and rustling was continued, and the next minute Bob Hampton was back and lying along the casks.

"Couldn't you get any farther?" I said, feeling greatly relieved at his return.

"No, sir. Neb's two sizes too large for the place, and I'm one size. I got as far as he did, and if I'd moved a bit farther I should ha' stuck."

"Yer didn't go as far as I did."

"Yes, I did, mate."

"How d'yer know?"

"'Cause I brought back your knife as lay just where I reached."

Neb Dumlow grunted, and Bob drew a series of very long breaths.

"Rayther hot in there, sir, and Neb had swallowed up all the fresh air there was."

"And precious little too. I could ha' swallowed bucketsful more if I'd had it."

"Lor'! what a fuss you two chaps make," said Barney. "I knowed that's how it would be. There, shut your eyes, both on you, and see yer father do it."

"You're not going, Barney?" I whispered.

"Oh yes, I am, sir. I can do it."

"Yes, sir, let him go," said Bob. "He's a reg'lar conger-eely sort o' fellow, as can wiggle hissself through a gas-pipe a'most. You let him go, and see what he can do."

"Yes, sir, let me have a try," said Barney, and I reluctantly consented, though I had very little hope of his getting through.

"Hadn't us better have a biscuit and a drink of water first, sir?" said Bob Hampton. "I'm strange and hungry yet."

In my excitement I had forgotten all about the food, and giving the word, we squatted down round the bucket of water to nibble our biscuits and have a good drink from time to time; and in spite of the heat and closeness of our prison, that was one of the most enjoyable meals I ever ate.

We had just finished when we heard Jarette and his followers talking above us, and the subject of their discourse, as far as I could make it out, seemed to be something about a boat.

Then I heard Jarette say something that sounded like—

"Bah, my brave! He won't die. Well, let him. He'll be out of the way."

Then there was a good deal of thumping and stamping about, and I fancied that they were going to open the hatch again.

Under these circumstances I did not let Barney, who was thoroughly eager to show his prowess, make the trial; but at last all was quiet on deck, save that there was a good deal of talking and singing right aft, and as it seemed to me in the saloon.

"They've got some good stuff forrard there, lads," said Barney, suddenly.

"Why, o' course. I know," growled Bob Hampton, "and they might ha' left one or two lots for us."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Why, sir, here's where there was a whole lot o' cases o' champagne stored, and they fished them out, and left this here hole as we're in. I wouldn't mind a drop o' that now to cheer us up again. It's werry good stuff, ain't it?"

"What, champagne, Bob? I don't know. They say it is, but I never tasted it."

"More didn't we, sir," said Bob.

"You speak for yourself, old man," said Barney.

"Well, you ain't tasted it, and you know it," growled Bob, "so tell the truth."

"Well, I can't say as ever I did taste champagne," said Barney, "but I've had a bottle—ay, bottles and bottles—o' what comes next to it, and fizzles up wonderful."

"Why, what does?"

"Joeydone, or Sueydone, or something like that they calls it. It arn't so very bad. Might go now, sir, mightn't I?"

"Well, yes, if you mean to try."

"Oh yes, I mean to try, sir," he said. "Dessay I can manage it. Shall I start?"

"Yes," I replied, and without a moment's pause he rose, thrust his head and shoulders into the hole, and as he drew himself in, he began to whistle.

"He'd better save his wind," grumbled Dumlow. "He'll want it soon."

"Ay, that's the worst o' young chaps, they're so wasteful," muttered Bob Hampton. "But they thinks they knows best. How are you getting on, messmate?"

"Tidy—tidy!" came back. "It arn't so very tight."

The rustling went on, and I heard Dumlow whisper—

"When he holloas, let's fetch him out with a will."

"Ay, ay, but he don't holloa," said Bob. "Why, he've got farder than we did."

"Nay, not he. Why, he have though!"

For the whistling went on, just a softened hissing, and it was evident that Barney had got some distance in. What was more was that he was still progressing.

"He's going to do it, Bob!" I cried excitedly.

"Getting a bit farder, sir, that's all," replied Bob. "But what I wants to know is, how are we going to get hold on his legs when he gets stuck? There won't be no reaching on 'em, as I can see."

"Hadn't yer better hail him to hold hard, and come back for us to hitch a line round one of his fins?"

"Which line would you use, messmate?" said Bob dryly. "The old 'un or the noo 'un?"

"Eh? Which on 'em?"

"Ay. Why, there arn't no line down here, is there? What yer talking about?"

"No," muttered Dumlow, thoughtfully; "there arn't no line down here, o' course. I never thought o' that. But s'pose he gets stuck fast, as he will farder on, what's to be done?"

"I d'know, without old Jarette comes and has the cargo out. Why, where's he got to!"

I was listening intently, but the whistling and rustling had ceased, and half in alarm, half hopeful that he would find a way through to where our companions were imprisoned, I strained my ears longingly for some suggestion of how far Barney could be. All at once the sound recommenced, stopped, began again, and then much nearer than I had expected there came a struggling and panting, which made my blood run cold.

"He's hitched," muttered Bob Hampton, and then in quite a low voice he cried into the opening—

"Where are you, mate?"

"Here," came back in a smothered voice.

"I knowed he would," growled Dumlow. "He's got fast, and now what's to be done?"

It was very horrible, shut down there in that close, hot place, listening to the struggles of a fellow-creature who was in such a position that wanting help he was beyond the reach of those who were eager to render it. The perspiration once more streamed down my face, and my hands trembled as I called upon myself to act in a manly way. Neither of my companions could go to Barney's help. They were, as had been proved, too bulky, and yet help must be given, and quickly too. Everything pointed to the fact that the task must fall upon me to creep forward to render aid; but when I got there in that confined place, what would my strength be toward getting the poor fellow back? All I could do would be to creep along to him and say a few words of encouragement to incite him to make a fresh effort or two to struggle free, and if that failed, stay beside him and talk of hope while the men gave the alarm, and help was brought to take off the hatches right along, and drag out cargo until the man was reached and set free.

"Ahoy, messmate!" cried Bob now. "Are you stuck fast?"

"Ay, ay."

The words sounded so stifled and strange that I knew the moment had come for me to make an effort to save him, and mastering the horrible sensation of shrinking cowardice that came over me, I drew a long, deep breath, and seized Bob Hampton to draw him aside.

"What's wrong, my lad? What is it?" he said, almost surlily. "It arn't my fault; I'd go in to pull him back, but I shouldn't get in fur 'fore I was stuck."

"No, no," I said excitedly. "Of course not."

"Then Neb had have to come, and he wouldn't get far arter me for he was stuck too. Then what would you do 'bout pulling us out all three?"

"Nothing," I said, desperately. "You must not either of you go. The time has come for me to try and save him myself."

Bob Hampton laid a hand upon my shoulder to stop me; but I thrust him back and was half into the opening when the rustling sound within increased.

"I'm coming, Blane," I said, in a loud whisper.

"No, no; don't you come," he whispered back. "I'm coming out, and there arn't room for two."

I stopped in astonishment, for I had pictured him to be hopelessly fixed and unable to move; and not only did the rustling continue, and he seemed to be approaching, but he said he was coming out.

"Rather an awkward kind o' place, sir," he said, and his voice was carried along toward me, so that it sounded as if he were whispering close to my ear. "One feels like a rat going down a pump to make a meal off the sucker, and a drink o' water after. Don't you try to come, sir."

"But I am in, Barney, I came to help you."

"Thankye, sir; but I'll talk to you when I get out. I'm coming fast now."

And he did come on so fast that in less than a minute, as I waited motionless, and with one hand extended to touch his feet when they came into reach, his face was close to mine, and I shrank back as he said—

"Here we are, sir. That's you, isn't it?"

"Yes, Barney. But you didn't go in feet first?"

"No, sir, head-first; and I come out head-first too."

I was so puzzled that I said nothing, and backed out as quickly as I could, followed by the sailor, who seated himself panting.

"Precious hot in there, sir," he said.

"But how did you manage? You said you were stuck fast," growled Bob.

"So I was, matey, for a minute or two, right at the end as far as I could go; for it got too small for me at last."

"How far did you go in?"

"Ah, that I don't know, sir. Ever so far in, till it got so as I should ha' been stuck fast if I'd gone any farther."

"Then how could you turn round?"

"It was wider and higher a little bit this side of the narrow part, and I made shift to double myself up pretty close and get round there."

"Then was it there you were stuck?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; but by a bit o' giving and taking I got round, and come out face forrard, as you see."

"I am thankful," I murmured.

"Well, if you come to that, sir, I liked it better when I'd got face outwards; for it arn't nice to feel yourself set fast in among a lot o' cargo which may shift if the ship gives a roll, and there you are, just like a blue-bottle shut in a big book, and come out next year flat and dry."

"Why, you must be a thin 'un, Barney," growled Bob. "You'd better leave the sea, and take to being first-class messenger to go up and down steam-pipes."

"Be quiet, Bob!" I said angrily. "Here, tell me, Barney," I continued; for now that the man was safe, the horror and nervousness of a terrible accident rapidly passed away.

"Tell you what, sir?"

"Is it hopeless? Is there no chance of getting to the fore-castle bulk-head that way?"

"Well, sir, I can't say only that you know how far Neb Dumlow got, and then how Bob Hampton got a little farther."

"Didn't," growled Dumlow.

"Now what's the good o' you talking, messmate? because he did, just a bit farther," said Barney, in a tone full of protest. "You may just as well say I didn't go three times as far."

"Nay, I won't say that, lad."

“Cause I did; and arter the tight nip of a bit where them two stuck, it were pretty easy, and I got along fast, though of course it’s all ups and downs like. Then there’s the widish bit ’tween them two big cases, where I twisted round; and after that the cargo’s closer together, and nigher the beams, till it got too stiff for me, and I give it up; for I knowed that if I got stuck there, I should have to stay.”

“Then there is a way on?” I said excitedly.

“Kind of a sort of a way, sir. I don’t think I could ha’ got along if I’d tried ever so hard, ’cause the cargo’s jammed up so close to the roof; but a small sort o’ man might do it, or p’r’aps I might if old Frenchy keeps me here long enough to get precious thin.”

“But a boy could get along?” I said.

“Oh yes, sir, I dessay a boy could; but don’t you get thinking it’s a regular pipe or a passage, ’cause it arn’t. It’s all in and out, and over chests and cases and things as don’t fit together, or has got settled down; and you have to feel all this as you go, and trust to the tips of your fingers for leading of you right. It arn’t as if there was any light, you see; ’cause their ain’t enough to show a mouse the way to the inside of a Dutch cheese.”

“Then if any one got along there far enough, he would come to the forecastle bulk-head?” I said eagerly.

“Well, that I can’t say, sir; ’cause, you see, he might find he had to creep along right under the forksle floor, and the men’s bunks.”

“If he got to the place where our friends are, that would not matter,” I cried excitedly. “The distance must be very small.”

“O’ course, sir.”

“But one moment, Barney. Could any of the cargo be pushed out of the way, so as to make more room?”

“No, sir, for sartain, ’cause it’s all wedged together, and there’s nowhere else to put it so as to make room.”

“And I don’t see, if one got there, that it could be a great deal of good, because they couldn’t get here, and we couldn’t all get there.”

“They seems to think it would be some good, sir,” growled Barney, “because they keeps on knocking. There they goes again.”

For once more the tapping commenced, and was repeated impatiently as we did not answer.

“Give ’em the sigginals, Bob,” said Dumlow, gruffly.

The tapping was answered—three taps together, two, then one, and in all manner of variations; till the others stopped, and so did we, and there was silence till Bob spoke.

“That’s all very pretty,” he said; “but, you see, it don’t lead to nothing. They raps, and seems to say, Here we are! And then we raps, and says, So are we! And so it goes on, over and over again, till you don’t know what they mean, or what you mean, or where you are. I wish we could do something to make ’em understand as we’re stuck fast.”

“The only way to do that is to tell them so,” I cried passionately. “Even if nothing more comes of it, I feel as if it would be something to feel that you can communicate with your friends when you like. We might contrive something too, some means of escape. Yes, we must get to them, my lads.”

“Then you’ll have to starve down, Barney, till you’re as thin as a skelington,” said Bob, “and then have another try.”

“All right, messmate, I’m willin’,” said Barney, with a sigh. “I don’t like going without my wittles, but what we gets here arn’t much to lose. There you are then, Mr Dale, sir; starve me down till I’m small enough.”

“No, Barney,” I said firmly; “there’s no need. I’m small enough already; and if you’ll follow me for company as far as you can, and to help me if possible, I will go myself. I said when you were in there I’d try and help you; now you must try and help me. Will you come?”

“My hand on it, sir, if you’ll shake it.”

I shook it.

“I shall keep as close to you as I can, sir,” said the sailor. “You won’t want any telling which way to go, for there is only one way for you to get along, as you’ll soon find out.”

I started, and soon felt that I must be past where the two men had found it so tight a fit, though I had had no difficulty in getting along whatever, and gaining courage from the excitement, I crawled forward over the tops of rough packing-cases and between others, finding the passage uneven, and with a different level every minute. Now there would be plenty of room; but a foot or two farther I had to crawl over a case that came so close to a beam arching over from side to side of the ship that I began wondering how my companion had passed in, and as soon as I was through and into the wider space beyond, I stopped with my head turned back to speak.

“You can’t get through there, can you?” I asked.

“Well, it is pretty tight, sir, but I did it afore, and I’ve got to do it again.”

I listened to his efforts, and could make out that he was getting through inch by inch, and he kept on commenting upon his progress the while.

“Good job as one’s bones give a bit, sir,” he was saying, when the knocking ahead came clearly, and seemed not so very far away. “Give ’em an answer, sir; not too loud. Do it with your knuckles on something.”

I was upon a case as he spoke, and I answered at once; but to my annoyance this only drew forth fresh knockings in various ways—two knocks together, then two more very quickly—a regular rat-rat—and then all kinds of variations, to which I replied as well as I could, and then left off in a pet.

“Who’s going to keep on doing that?” I cried angrily. “They must wait.”

“Yes,” growled Barney; “I’d go on, sir. That arn’t doing nobody no good.”

The consequence was that I went forward slowly, with an accompaniment of taps, which kept irritating me in that hot, stifling passage—no, it is not fair to call such a place a passage, seeing that it was merely an opening formed by the settling down of the packages, or their opening out from the rolling of the ship in the storm.

I was passing along one of these latter portions with great care when a cold chill ran through me, for the thought came—suppose the ship heels over now, I shall be nipped in here and crushed to death.

But the ship did not heel over; though I did not feel comfortable till I was out of the opening, and flat once more on the top of a huge crate, between whose openings, the sharp ends of the straw used in packing it projected and scratched my face. Here I paused to listen to Barney panting and grunting as he struggled along.

“Mustn’t make quite so much noise, sir,” he whispered; “or some ’un uppards ’ll be hearing of us.”

He was more careful, and I once more went crawling laboriously, and finding on the whole so little room that I began to think I must have gone much farther than Barney had been before. And there was a strange thing connected with that creep over and amongst the cargo. Time seemed to be indefinitely prolonged. I could fancy one moment that I had been crawling and crawling for hours, and going a tremendous distance, while the next my idea was that I had hardly moved and not been there a minute. Every now and then, in spite of setting my teeth hard, and even biting my tongue, that horrible feeling of fright came back; and I have often asked myself since whether I was an awful coward. But I never could give a fair judgment, for I have thought that most people would have felt the same, whether they were lads or grown men, and certainly my three companions in talking it over said it upset them more than going in for a real fight.

It was curious, too, how busy one’s brain was when I could keep from thinking of being smothered or crushed, or so fixed in that I could not get out. For then I began to think about moles burrowing underground, and worms in their holes, and rabbits and mice; and on one of these occasions I started and wondered at the peculiarity of the coincidence, for I suddenly became aware of a peculiar, half-musky smell, and then there was a scuffling, squealing sound which sent a shudder through me.

“Hear the rats, sir?” whispered Barney; but I was so upset that I couldn’t reply.

All at once, as I was crawling more freely, my companion whispered—

“You ought to be close to where I turned myself round, sir. Aren’t there more room?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Then that’s it, sir. Eh?”

“I didn’t speak.”

“But some one did, sir. It arn’t them in the forksle, is it?”

We listened, and there was whispered, close to us apparently—

“How are you getting on?”

“It’s them behind, sir. I’ll lay down flat as I can, and you whisper back as we’re all right. Sound travels easy.”

I found that I could readily turn, and I did as he proposed that I should, hearing my voice sound so smothered that it startled me again. But the tapping was resumed; and answering it again, I turned and went on once more in silence till all at once my way was stopped by a crate which touched the beams overhead.

“Is this where you got to, Barney?” I said.

“Where there’s a big crate thing, sir, as goes right up? That’s it.”

“Then we can’t get any farther?”

“I don’t think I can; but that tapping wouldn’t come so plain if there warn’t a way. It weer too tight for me; but you can try if you can’t get round the end of the stopper. It may be big enough for you.”

I would have given anything to get back now, feeling as I did that I had done enough; but I plucked up my courage, and began feeling about to make the discovery that while one end of the crate was closed solidly against the next package, the other end did not touch.

"There's a way here," I said to my companion, who was sitting up behind me, having found a place where he could let his legs go down.

"Well, sir, that's what I thought," said Barney. "But it's too small for me, arn't it?"

"Yes, far too small," I said. "I don't think I could get along. Is it any use to try?"

Tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap.

That knocking came so plainly and from so near now that I at once said—

"Yes; I must get through."

"Bravo you, sir. That's your sort. Take it coolly. Where the head 'll go, the rest on you'll follow if you wiggles yerself well. Don't you get scared, sir. I'll pull you back if you get stuck."

"But it's horribly hot here, Barney," I whispered.

"Yes, sir; but I s'pose we mustn't mind that. Go it, sir, and let's get it over."

I did not need his words, for I was already trying to get round that great crate. It was, I felt, an impossible job, for I had to pass round one angle, and the heat as I wedged myself in became insufferable. But I forced myself along inch by inch till I could get my arms round the end, where to my great joy I found that I could get hold of the bars of the crate, the straw with which its contents were packed yielding enough to allow my fingers to obtain a firm grip, and with this purchase I pulled and pulled, getting myself farther and farther till I was part of the way past the angle; then more and more, till my hips checked the way for a few minutes, and I stopped short, feeling that it was all over, for I could get no farther.

Then I felt that I had done enough. It was useless fighting against the impossible, and I made up my mind to go back; but at the first movement I rucked up my jacket and trousers and literally wedged myself in, finding that I could not get back an inch, and that if I tried more I should be stuck beyond the hope of extrication.

I felt faint with the heat and horror, then a peculiar giddiness came over me; I saw lights dancing before my eyes, and my senses were fast going, when, sounding quite cool and unconcerned, Barney's voice came to me, teaching me the value of companionship at such a time as this.

"Having a rest, sir? Say when, and I'll give your feet a shove."

Just those few simple words, but they were sufficient to give me courage once more, and drive away the mists of horror.

I was myself again, tightened my grip on the stout bars of the crate, gave a spasmodic jerk, and dragged myself as I lay edgewise two or three inches along the end of the great crate.

"That wins it, sir," whispered Barney, and feeling desperate I tried again and again, the bars giving me so much assistance that I got on and on till I was lyings as I said, edgewise along the end, with my back against a large wooden case.

Then I stopped, panting with my exertion, the perspiration streaming from me, and feeling as if it would be impossible to get any farther. But all the same I was cheered by my success, and after gaining my breath I was just going to have another try when Barney whispered—

"What's ahead of you? Can you touch anything?"

I stretched out my hands as far as I could reach, and this action elongated me a trifle, so that I felt myself slipping down a little—only a few inches, but that was enough; a curious oppression of my chest followed, and to my horror I realised that the passage narrowed downwards, and my weight had carried me lower, so that now at last I felt that I was hopelessly wedged in.

For some moments the horror of my position rendered me helpless. I could not struggle, but lay as if paralysed till Barney roused me by whispering in his cheery way—

"Takin' a rest again, my lad?"

"No, no," I panted in a hopeless tone of voice; "I'm fast, Barney; I can't move."

"Oh yes, you can, sir," he replied; "take it coolly."

"But the packages on each side are holding me," I panted.

"Have another go, sir. You don't know how ingyrubbery you are till you try, sir. Take it coolly, sir, then wait your time, and you'll work yourself out just as we did. All three on us got fast."

"Yes; but there was some one to pull Bob Hampton out," I said angrily; and in this spirit I made a fierce effort after reaching up with one leg and one arm, and somehow managed to drag myself higher, so that I did not feel so much oppression at my chest. Another inch or two made me wonder why I had been so much alarmed, and in another minute I had passed the great crate, and found more room between the cargo and the beams overhead.

But I hesitated to go farther in that horrible darkness, dreading some fresh complication, and feeling that now I had

reached a part where I could hear, it would be wise to go back and accept my fate of a prisoner, and see what Jarette would do, when all at once the tapping, which had been unheard for some time, recommenced, and apparently so close, that my cowardly dread passed off, and I determined to go on.

"All right now, aren't you, sir?" whispered Barney.

"Yes."

"Told you so. Only be careful, sir, I can't help you now."

I felt about a little, and then crawled forward in no narrow perpendicular crevice, but flat on my chest, between the cargo and the deck, and in less than a minute my hand touched an upright piece of roughly-sawn wood. Then another and another, and passing my hand between them I felt board, while the next instant there was a dull jar as if some one on the other side struck the board I touched, and gave three taps. I answered directly with my knuckles, and a strange feeling of emotion made my heart palpitate as a voice came through the narrow opening between the boards.

"Is any one there?"

I placed my mouth as close to the crevice as I could in my constrained position, and chancing being heard, I cried—

"Yes."

"Who is it?" came back.

"Dale; and the three men are with me."

"Can you force off one of these boards?"

"No. Who is it?" I said.

I was almost sure when I asked the question, and my ideas were confirmed. It was Mr Brymer speaking, and he told me that Mr Preddle, Mr Frewen, and the captain were with him.

That was good news, but he had not told me all.

"Where is Miss Denning?" I asked.

"With her brother in their cabin still, I think. Now look here, Dale, we will try and pull out one of these boards, and you and the others must join us here."

I must have made his heart sink in despair the next minute, when I told him that it was impossible, and said how I had had to struggle to get to him.

"Then either you or we must get out, and the party that gets on deck must help the other. Wait a minute."

I waited, and heard the sound of boring, and a few minutes later, as I kept a hand upon the board, I felt the point of a knife or gimlet working its way through.

After it was withdrawn conversation became more easy, and I had a few words with Mr Frewen and Mr Preddle, all of which were cheering, though as far as escape was concerned it did no good. But I learned how that they had been literally thrown down there, as they supposed, for they had come to very much as we had, to find themselves lying helpless on the floor.

We had reached this point when Barney's voice came, and it sounded anxious.

"Better come now, Mr Dale, sir," he whispered. "We can get along here again."

"Yes, I'll come soon," I whispered back, for to a certain extent I forgot my troubles in the satisfaction of having been able to reach my friends.

"Better come now, sir. They're getting scared behind yonder, and seems to me there's on'y just wind enough left for us to breathe going back. If you stop any longer there won't be none, for I shall swaller it all."

I explained what he said to me, and it was Mr Frewen who now spoke through the tiny hole.

"Yes, go back directly," he said. "Come again in a few hours' time, the air will be better again then, and we will cut this hole big enough for you to come through."

I could have wished it to have been made bigger then, so that I could get to my friends, but I knew it would be like forsaking the men I had left, so after promising to return soon—thinking nothing now of the difficulty of the journey—I said good-bye, and began to crawl back, remembering directly plenty of things I should have liked to ask.

But now I had to think of my perilous journey back, and I shuddered as I thought how nearly I had been wedged fast beside the crate. Somehow, though, now that I knew the extent of my risk, it did not seem half so bad, I reached the crate, changed from the horizontal to the perpendicular opening, kept close to the top with my head and shoulders, and let my legs go down till I could rest them on the crossbar of the crate, made my way to the end round the corner, and reached the place where Barney was anxiously waiting, and then paused for a few moments to rest, ready to wonder at the ease with which I had returned. I said something of the kind to Barney, and he laughed.

"Oh yes, sir," he said. "It's like going aloft when you're young. I remember the first time I went up to the main-topgallant mast-head, I said to myself, 'On'y let me once get down safe, and you'll never ketch me up here again;' while now one goes up and does what one has to do without thinking about it, and— Hear that?"

"Yes; what are they bumping about on the deck?"

"Dunno, sir. Sounds like getting the big boats off from over the galley. But they won't hear us, sir; let's get back to where we can have a pull at the fresh air. Will you go first?"

"No; you know the way best."

Barney chuckled.

"There arn't much queshtion of knowing the way, sir. There arn't no first turnings to the left, and second to the right. It's all go ahead, and you're sure to come out right if you don't get stuck, and I s'pose I mustn't get jammed anywhere 'cause of you."

He went on, and as I followed I could not help thinking about how terrible it would be if he did get fast, and more than once a curious sensation ran through me as he struggled on. But we had no mishap, and at last crept out to where Bob Hampton and Dumlow were waiting for us.

"You have been a long time, sir," growled the former. "Did you make anything out of it?"

"Yes, Bob, I reached the forecastle."

"You did, lad! Well done you! I allus thought you'd do something some day."

Then I told them both of all that had passed, as I lay there in that hot, dark, stifling hole, thinking though all the while how delightfully fresh and light it was. When I had finished, Bob rubbed his ear, and growled softly—

"Why, my lad," he said, "seems to me as it's like pig-shearing."

"Pig-shearing? What do you mean?"

"Much cry and little wool, sir. We've all been crawling about in the hold like rats, and got to where the t'others are—leastwise you have—and then you've come back again."

"Yes, Bob."

"Taken all that trouble for nothing."

"Well, but I have been able to talk to them, and make plans."

"Bah, sir, I don't call them plans. What was the good of us all getting smothered as we was, just to find out as we couldn't do nothing?"

"I communicated with Mr Brymer and Mr Frewen," I cried.

"And said 'How de do? I'm quite well thank you, how are you?' Didn't pay for the trouble, sir. We must do something better than that. What do you say, Neb?"

"I says as I arn't going to squeeedge my carcadge into that hole again if I knows it, messmate."

"And you, Barney?"

Barney Blane uttered a low deep snore. Worn-out by his exertions, he had lain down on his back and gone to sleep at once, and ten minutes later the hot vitiated air had produced such an effect upon me that I was just as fast, and dreaming of bright sunshine and lovely tropic lands, till I was aroused by strange noise, and a sharp angry voice cried —

"Now then, all! *Vite! vite!* Tumble up."

Chapter Thirty Four.

I was so confused by being awakened suddenly from a deep sleep, and by the light of a lantern flashing in my eyes, that for a few minutes I moved about quite mechanically, getting out of the way of my companions in misfortune, as first Barney, and then Neb Dumlow, obeyed and climbed out on deck.

"Now then, look sharp," cried the same voice, "don't keep us here all night."

"You go next, my lad," growled Bob, "and I'll give you a hyste. Take hold o' the combings and give me one leg."

I obeyed, in a sleepy stupid way—in fact, if I had been told to jump overboard I think I should have done so then—and as I grasped the combings Bob Hampton seized the leg I lifted as if I had been going to mount a horse, and jerked me right up to where I was seized by a couple of men, thrown down, and then dragged along the deck to the open gangway, where, as I awoke to the fact that there was the black sea all gleaming with yellow scintillations, I suddenly made a desperate effort to escape.

"No, no," I shouted. "Help!"

"Hold still, will you?" cried one of the men. "Now then, out with him!"

In spite of my struggles they forced me onward, holding on to my wrists the while; and speechless now in my horror, I felt that the next moment I should be plunged into the black water to drown.

Those were terrible moments, but they only were those brief spaces of time, for just as I felt that all was over, the man who had just spoken shouted—"Below there! Now then, together, mate," and they stooped as low as they could, lowering me down, and then snatched their hands away, and I fell what seemed to be a terrific distance, though it was only a few feet, before I was caught by strong arms and lowered into a boat.

"There you are, sir. Go aft."

I staggered in the direction in which I was pushed, and dropped on to a thwart, still half-stunned and confused, but sensible enough to understand the words uttered about me, and to see the dull yellow light of the lanterns held by the gangway lighting up a number of drink-flushed faces.

"I don't want chucking down, I tell you," growled Bob Hampton. "Give's a hold of a rope and I'll drop down."

"Yes, you pig," snarled Jarette, for I knew it was he now who gave orders, and now came full into sight, with the lights showing: his evil-looking face. "It's rope you want, is it? Hah, for two sous I'd have one round your neck and run you up to the yard-arm. Treacherous lying dog."

Bob Hampton was a big heavy man, but as quickly and actively as a boy he swung himself clear of the men who held him, and lowered himself down.

"Stand clear," he shouted, and the next moment he had dropped down into the boat.

"Was you talking 'bout the rope for yourself, Frenchy?—because they keep that round the yard-arm for thieves and pirates, not for honest men."

"Pig—cochon!" yelled Jarette, and there was a flash of light and a sharp report as he fired a pistol to hit the sailor, or perhaps only to frighten us, for no harm was done.

"Silence, man, don't exasperate him," whispered a voice from close by where I sat, and I knew that if I raised my hand I could have touched Mr Frewen.

"All right, sir," growled Bob, and Jarette spoke now.

"Below there," he cried. "I'm behaving better to you than you all deserve. Some men would have pitched you all overboard to drown. Now then, listen you, Captain Berriman; you can row west and get into the line the packets take, or you can row east and make the coast somewhere, if you don't get caught in a storm and go to the bottom. But that's none of my doing, I can't help that. Now then, push off before I alter my mind and have a bag of ballast pitched through the bottom of the boat. Off with you. Fasten up that gangway, my lads."

"No, no, stop," cried Mr Frewen, excitedly. "We are not all here," and I glanced round, but it was too dark to make anything out below where the light of the lanterns was cast outward in quite a straight line, well defined against the blackness below, which looked solid.

"Not all there, doctor? Oh, I forgot," said Jarette. "Wait a minute."

He turned away from the side, and we heard him give some order, which was followed a minute later by a sharp shrill cry, which went through me, and then there was a series of frantic shrieks, which seemed to pierce the dark night air. We could hear a scuffling too, and appeal after appeal approaching the side from somewhere aft.

"Silence!" snapped out Jarette, and a sharp smack was followed by a low moan.

Then in loud hysterical tones, as if a hoarse frantic woman were appealing, I heard as I sat shuddering there—

"No, no, don't, Captain Jarette. I'll work with you, and stick to you, and help you always. Don't do that."

"You—you cowardly, sneaking traitor! Who'd trust you an inch out of his sight? Over with him, lads. No, no, not there. Over with him here."

"Help! Mercy, pray! help! help!" came with frantic shrieks, for the poor fellow evidently did not know of the boat over the side. He felt that he was going to his death, and then he was evidently clinging to something, for there was a pause, and in a hoarse yell we heard him cry—

"Don't kill me, Jarette, and I'll tell you where the money-chests are stowed."

"You? Why, I know. Over with him!" cried Jarette, and then, uttering shrieks that horrified us, we saw Walters for a moment above the bulwarks in the full light of the lanterns, and then he was pitched outwards, shrieking as he fell, a loud splash and a gurgling noise, which ceased suddenly, telling us where he had gone down.

The boat was pushed along in the darkness, and without an order being given.

"See him?" said Mr Brymer, in a hurried whisper.

"No, sir, not yet," growled Bob Hampton.

Almost at that moment there was a wild shriek for help just by the boat's side, and Dumlow growled out—

"I got him."

Then came a splashing and a repetition of the cry for help, but this time from the bottom of the boat.

"What has he done wrong?" said Bob Hampton. "Want us to chuck you in again?"

"Oh, help!" cried Walters piteously.

"What, have you took him aboard?" said a sneering voice overhead. "Better let him drown. He isn't worth the biscuit and water he'll want."

"Oh, only wait!" cried Walters, rising up to his knees.

"Wait," snarled Jarette. "Yes, you cur, I will with one of the shot-guns if you ever come near my ship again. And you, Berriman, and you, Brymer, take my warning; I've given you your chance, so take it. If you hang about near here I'll have the signal-gun loaded and sink you, so be out of sight by daylight. Now push off before you get something thrown over to go through the bottom of the boat."

There was a low whispering close by me, and then I could just make out the doctor's figure as he stood up.

"Stop," he shouted. "Mr Jarette, we are not all here."

"What? Why, who is left behind?"

"Mr Denning."

"The sick passenger?"

"And his sister, sir."

"Oh yes, I know, board."

"No, sir, they must come with us. I warn you that Mr Denning's health is such that he must have medical attendance."

"Oh, I see," cried Jarette, with a sneering laugh. "You are afraid of missing your job. There, cure the captain. One patient is enough in an open boat."

"If anything happens to him, sir, you will have to answer for his life."

"You are stupid," sneered Jarette. "You wish to trap me. It would kill the patient to keep him with you, exposed in an open boat. No, Monsieur le docteur, I am too wise—too much of the fox, le renard—to be trapped like that. Push off."

"No, no, sir," cried Mr Frewen; "for mercy's sake, sir, let Mr Denning and his sister be lowered down to us."

"But they do not wish to come, monsieur."

"I will not argue with you, sir, or contradict. You hold the power. I only say, for mercy's sake let that poor suffering invalid and his sister come. We will then push off and leave you to your prize."

Jarette was resting his arms on the bulwark, gazing down at us, no doubt maliciously, but the lights were behind him and at his side, so that his features were in the dark, and as I looked up I could not help thinking how easily any one might have shot him dead and thrown him overboard. But I shuddered at this horrible idea as it flashed through my head, and waited for him to speak.

Mr Frewen waited too, but he remained silent, only making a slight movement as if to pass one arm over the bulwarks, though from where I sat I could not quite make out his act.

"You heard me, Jarette?" said Mr Frewen, after this painful pause. "You will let your people help Mr Denning and his sister down?"

Still the man did not answer, but appeared to be staring hard at the doctor.

"Mr Jarette."

"Captain Jarette, doctor. There, you see what a merciful man I am. You do not know that I have been taking aim at you right between the eyes for the last five minutes, and could at any moment have sent a bullet through your head."

"Yes, sir," said the doctor, calmly; "yes, Captain Jarette, I knew that you were aiming at me."

"Then why did you not flinch and ask for mercy!"

"Because I am accustomed to look death in the face, sir, when I am doing my duty, I am doing it now. Mr Denning's life is in danger. Come, sir, you will let him and his sister join us?"

"In an open boat? No."

"Mr Jarette."

"Captain Jarette, doctor," cried the man, angrily. "Now all of you row and take this mad fellow away, before I am tempted to shoot him."

Bob Hampton uttered a low growling sound as he sought in the darkness for the boat-hook, stood up, and began to thrust the boat from the ship's side.

"No; stop," cried Mr Frewen, fiercely, "we cannot desert the Dennings like this. Ahoy!—on board there! Mr Denning, where are you?"

"Here," came from one of the cabin-windows aft.

"Row beneath that window," cried the doctor, and the boat was not rowed but dragged slowly there by Bob Hampton, who kept hooking on by the main and mizzen-chains.

"Keep off!" roared Jarette fiercely. "Do you hear? Keep off, or I fire."

But Bob Hampton paid no heed to his orders till the boat was beneath one of the round cabin-windows, and then he thrust the boat about six feet from the ship.

He had a reason for so doing, and he had hardly steadied the boat when, in obedience to an order from Jarette, something tremendously heavy was thrown over the side, and fell with a loud splash between us and the ship, deluging us with the shower it raised, and making the boat rock.

But Mr Frewen paid no heed to that which would have driven a hole through the bottom of the boat, perhaps killed one of its occupants at the same moment.

"Are you there, Denning?" he said, in a quick whisper.

"Yes."

"Quick, run with your sister to the stern-windows and jump out. For heaven's sake don't hesitate. We can pick you up."

"Ay, ay," growled Bob Hampton.

"Impossible! We are both fastened in," said Mr Denning.

"Can you pass through that window?"

"No. Save yourselves; you cannot help us now."

"Over with it, my lads. Well out."

We could not see what was heaved over the side, but something else, probably a piece of pig-iron, was thrown over, and fell with a heavier splash, making the phosphorescent water flash and sparkle, so that I could see the light dancing in the darkness for far enough down.

Jarette's savage design was again frustrated, and in spite of our terrible danger no one among us stirred or said a word about the risk.

"Do you hear?" cried Mr Denning, from the cabin-light. "Save yourself; the wretch will sink the boat."

"I cannot go and leave you and your sister in this man's power."

"It is madness to stay. You have done all that is possible. Captain Berriman, order your men to row you out of danger."

"I am not in command," said the captain feebly.

"Mr Brymer, then," cried Mr Denning. "Quick, they are dragging up something else to throw over."

"I should not be a man, sir, if I ordered the men in cold blood to leave you and your sister," said Mr Brymer huskily.

"But you are risking other lives. Mr Frewen," cried the young man, "I wish it; my sister wishes it. You must—you shall go."

Mr Frewen uttered a strange kind of laugh.

"If I told the men to row away, sir, I do not believe they would go," he replied. "Answer for yourselves, my lads; would you go?"

"'Bout two foot farder," growled Bob, "so as they couldn't hit us; that's 'bout all."

"But you can do no good," said Mr Denning. "Lena, my child, they have been very brave, and done everything they could; tell them to go now; it is to save their lives."

"Don't—don't, Miss Denning," I shouted, for I could bear it no longer. "There isn't anybody here but Nic Walters who would be such a cur."

I said the words passionately, feeling a kind of exaltation come over me, and everything was in the most unstudied way, or I should not have said it at all.

The words were not without their effect, for they stung Walters to the quick. The moment before he had been lying shivering in the bottom of the boat, but as I spoke he sprang up and cried in a high-pitched, hysterical voice that might have been Mr Preddle's—

"It isn't true, Miss Denning. I've been a treacherous coward and a beast, but I'd sooner die now than leave you to come to harm."

"A pity you didn't, my lad, before you betrayed us as you did," said Mr Brymer, in a deep-toned voice.

"Ah, yes. Words are no use now," said the captain slowly.

"No! No use now—no use now," cried Walters wildly. "It is too late, too late," and before any one could grasp what he was about to do, he leaped over the side into the black water.

But not to drown, for the scintillations of the tiny creatures disturbed by his plunge showed exactly where he was, and Bob Hampton only had to lower the boat-hook and thrust it right down as a wild cry came from the cabin overhead. The next minute he had caught the wretched, half-distraught fellow, and dragged him to the surface, where Neb Dumlow seized him and snatched him over the side to let him fall into the bottom of the boat, and thrust his foot upon him to keep him down.

"Want to doctor him, sir?" then said Dumlow gruffly.

But there was no answer, for our attention was taken up by a savage burst of rage from Jarette, who fired at us unmistakably this time, and a sharp cry came from one of the occupants of the boat.

"I warned you," cried Jarette. "Now row for your lives."

"Yes, in heaven's name, go," cried Mr Denning, "you are only adding to our agony."

"No," cried Mr Frewen, "I will not give up. Brymer—my lads, you will fol—"

"Hush," said Mr Brymer, as there was another flash and a report from Jarette's pistol. "Of course we will follow, but not now. It would be madness. Wait, man! We will not go far. Use your oars, my lads."

"No, no, I forbid it," cried Mr Frewen wildly, "and I call upon you men to help me board this ship."

"You are not in command here, sir," said Mr Brymer sternly. "Take your place. Now, my lads, oars, and give way."

There was another shot from the deck, and one of the men uttered an exclamation as the blades were thrust over the side, dipped, and seemed to lift golden water at every stroke.

"Good-bye, and God bless you!" came from the cabin-window, and directly after the same words were spoken by Miss Denning, and I heard Mr Frewen utter a groan.

Another shot came from the ship, whose lanterns showed where she lay, while, but for the golden oil the oars stirred on the surface of the water, our boat must have been invisible, though that bullet was sufficiently well aimed to strike the side of the boat with a sharp crack.

"That will do. In oars!" cried Mr Brymer, when we were about a hundred yards away.

"How can you be such a coward?" I heard Mr Frewen whisper passionately.

"No coward, sir," replied the mate. "I am ready to risk my life in trying, as is my duty, to save those two passengers from harm, but it must be done with guile. It is madness for unarmed men to try and climb up that ship just to be thrown back into the sea."

"Then you will not row right away?" said Mr Frewen, excitedly.

"And leave the ship in the hands of that scoundrel? Is it likely?"

"I beg your pardon, Brymer," whispered Mr Frewen, "I did not know what I was saying. I was half mad."

"My dear fellow, I know," was the mate's reply in the same tone. "I'm not going to give up, nor yet despair. There's always a chance for us. That scoundrel may come to his end from a quarrel with one of his men; a ship may heave in sight; or we may board and surprise them, and if we do, may I be forgiven, but I'll crush the life out of that wretch as I would destroy a tiger. Now just leave me to do my duty, and do yours."

"What can I do?" replied Mr Frewen. "You do not want me to row away?"

"No; but I do wish you to attend to our wounded."

"Ah! I had forgotten that," said Mr Frewen, hastily bestirring himself. "Here, some one cried out when one of those shots was fired, and again I heard an exclamation just now."

"It was Walters who was hit first," I said, from where I knelt in the bottom of the boat.

"Where is he? Somewhere forward?"

"No; here," I said.

"Has any one matches? It is impossible to see," muttered Mr Frewen.

"He is hit in the chest, sir," I said.

"How do you know?" cried Mr Frewen. "Is this your hand, my lad? What are you doing?"

"Holding my neckerchief against his side to stop the bleeding," I said in a low voice.

"Hah!"

It was only like a loud expiration of the breath, as Mr Frewen knelt down beside me, and cutting away Walters' jacket he quickly examined the wound by touch, and I then heard him tear my neckerchief and then one of his own pocket-handkerchiefs.

"Your hand here. Now your finger here, my lad," he whispered to me. "Don't be squeamish. Think that you are trying to save another's life."

"I shan't faint," I said quietly. "It doesn't even make me feel sick."

"That's right, my boy. Now hold that end while I pass the bandage round his chest."

I obeyed, and there was dead silence in the boat as the doctor busied himself over his patient.

"Is he insensible, sir?" I whispered; "really insensible?"

"Yes, and no wonder."

"Is it a very bad wound?"

"Yes; bad enough. The bullet has passed through or else round one of the ribs. It is nearly out on the other side; I could feel it, but it must stay till daylight. That's it.—I've plugged the wound. He cannot bleed now. Thank you, Dale."

"What for, sir?" I said innocently enough.

He did not answer, but busied himself laying Walters down, and then the lad was so silent that a horrible feeling of dread began to trouble me. I was brought back to other thoughts, though, by the doctor's speaking out of the darkness.

"Who else was hurt?" he said.

"Neb Dumlow's got a hole in him somewheres, sir," said Barney.

"Wish you'd keep that tongue o' yourn quiet, Barney," growled Dumlow. "Who said he'd got a hole in him, my lad?"

"Why, you did," cried Barney, "and I knowed it without. Didn't I hear you squeak?"

"Well, only just then. It was sharp for a moment, but it's better now."

"Let me pass you, my man," said the doctor quietly.

"There you are, sir. This way. Neb's on the next thwart."

"You needn't come to me, sir," protested Dumlow. "I'm all light, I tied a bit o' line round the place. You can give me a pill or a shedlicks powder or something o' that kind to-morrow if you like."

"Hold your tongue, Neb, and let the doctor tie you up," growled Bob Hampton. "What's the use of being so jolly independent? Don't you take no notice o' what he says, sir. Dessay he's got a reeg'lar hole in him."

"Tut tut tut!" muttered Mr Frewen. "What is this,—fishing-line?"

"That's it, sir," said Dumlow. "It's right enough, there arn't no knobs on it, and it stopped the bleeding fine."

"Difficult work here, Dale," Mr Frewen whispered to me. "One need have well-educated fingers—what surgeons call the *tactus eruditus*—to work like this in the dark."

"Terrible," I replied, and I noticed how his voice trembled. For he seemed to me to be doing everything he could to keep himself from dwelling upon those we had left in the ship.

"Hurt you, my man?" he said to Dumlow.

"Oh, it tingles a bit, sir; but here, stop, hold hard a minute. None o' them games."

"What games? I don't understand you."

"No takin' advantage of a poor helpless fellow as trusts yer, doctor!"

"Explain yourself, man."

"Explain myself, sir? How?"

"Tell me what you mean."

"I mean, I want you to tell me what you mean, sir."

"To dress your wound."

"Ay, but you're a-doing of something with that 'ere other hand."

"No, my man, no."

"Arn't got a knife in't then?"

"Certainly not. Why?"

"Dumlow thinks you were going to cut his leg off, sir," I said, feeling amused in spite of our terrible position.

"Course I did," growled the man. "I've been telled as there's nothing a doctor likes better than to have a chance o' chopping off a man's legs or wings, and I don't mean to go hoppin' about on one leg and a timber toe, and so I tells yer flat."

"I'm not going to cut your leg off, Dumlow."

"Honour, sir?"

"Honour, my man."

"Honour bright, sir?"

"On my word as a gentleman."

"Thankye, sir, but if it's all the same to you, I'd rather as you said honour bright."

"Well then, honour bright. There, I am not going to do any more to you now; I must dress the wound by daylight."

"Won't bleed any more, sir, will it?"

"Not now."

"That'll 'bout do then, sir, thank ye kindly."

"You are welcome, my man," said the doctor, and then, "What is it?" for I had grasped his arm.

"I want you to tell me about Walters," I whispered. "Feel his pulse first."

He turned from me and bent down over my messmate, who lay in the bottom of the boat perfectly motionless.

I could not see what he did, but listened attentively, not for the sake of hearing his movements, but so as to hear a sigh or moan from that unhappy lad.

"Well?" I said excitedly.

"I can tell you nothing yet," said Mr Frewen, as I thought, evasively.

"He—he is not dead?" I gasped; and I fell a-trembling with horror at the idea of one whom I had known vigorous and strong so short a time before, lying there at my feet, robbed of the power of making any reparation for the crime he had so weakly committed, and with no chance for repentance.

"I—I say, he is not dead, is he?"

I spoke fiercely, for Mr Frewen had not replied; and now I caught and held on by his hand.

He quite started, and turned upon me.

"I—I beg your pardon, Dale," he cried. "I was thinking of something else—of those on board that unfortunate ship. It seems so cowardly to leave them to their fate."

"How could we help it, Mr Frewen? What could we do? But tell me about Walters."

"Yes," he said, drawing a long breath, as if he were making an effort to keep his mind fixed upon the present—"yes, I'll tell you."

"Then he is dead?" I whispered, with a shudder; and as I looked down into the bottom of the boat, where all was perfectly black, I seemed to see the white face of the lad quite plainly, with his fixed eyes gazing straight at me, full of appeal, and as if asking forgiveness for the past.

"No, not dead, Dale," said Mr Frewen in a low voice. "Be quiet. Don't talk about it. We have quite enough to depress us without that. I can say nothing for certain in this black darkness, and he may recover."

"Is the wound so very bad?" I asked.

"Dangerous enough, as far as I can tell; but he has everything against him, my lad."

"But if he dies?" I exclaimed in horror.

"Well?" said Mr Frewen bitterly. "If he were a man, I should say it were the best thing that could happen. He has as a young officer hopelessly dishonoured himself. He can only be looked upon as a criminal."

I could not argue with him, and relapsed into silence, thinking the while of the horror of my messmate's condition, and asking myself whether it would not have been possible for him to redeem the past, and grow up into a straightforward, honourable man.

It was a hard matter to mentally discuss, but as I sat in the darkness that night, with hardly a word spoken by my companions, I forgot all Walters' bitterness and dislike, and only thought of his being young and strong like myself; and that he had those at home who would be heart-broken if they heard of his death, and would feel his disgrace as bitterly as he must have felt it himself, when all came to be known.

"I won't think it was his nature," I said to myself. "It was a piece of mad folly. He was won over by that brute of a Frenchman, who, now that he has obtained all he wants, throws over the tool he used, and ends by shooting him. Poor fellow! how could he be such a fool?"

I sat on, thinking how bitterly he would have repented his folly, and how his last days must have been spent in the keenest of regret. And it was in this spirit that I bent down over him, to thrust my hand in his breast to feel for the beating of his heart.

"Mr Frewen," I whispered as I rose, "tell me how you think he is now."

The doctor bent down, and after a little examination, rose again.

"There is no difference which I can detect," he said gravely.

"But you will—you will—"

"Will what, Dale?" he said, for I had paused.

"You will not treat him as if—as if he were a criminal?"

"How can I help it? He is one. We have him to thank for our position here, for those two people being left on the ship, at the mercy of those scoundrels."

His whole manner changed as he said this, and his voice sounded full of fierce anger.

"Yes," I faltered, "that's all true; but you will not be revengeful?"

"A doctor revengeful, Dale?" he said quickly.

"I don't mean that," I said. "I mean, you will do your best to save his life?"

"For him to be punished by the law?"

"I was not thinking of that," I said hastily. "I mean, that you will do all you can to cure him, Mr Frewen?"

"Why, of course, my lad—of course. Am I not a doctor? I am neither prosecutor nor judge. You have curious ideas about my profession."

"I could not help it, Mr Frewen," I pleaded. "It is only that I am so anxious for him to recover."

"And do you another ill turn, Dale—betray us once more!"

"No, no, it isn't that." I cried; "it is only that I should like him to live and be sorry for all this. I believe, after what has taken place to-night, he would be only too glad to come over to our side, and fight for us."

"Perhaps so, if he were well enough; but who would ever dream of trusting him again?"

I was silent, thinking as I was how terrible was the slip my messmate had made, and seeing now clearly how it must take years for him to climb back to the position he held when we left the London Docks.

"There," said Mr Frewen at last, "you need not be afraid, Dale. I shall treat him as I would any other patient. A medical man has but one aim when he treats a sick person, a surgeon one who is injured—to make the sufferer well again. That is my duty here, and I shall do it to the best of my ability."

I did not answer, only laid my hand upon his, and he pressed it warmly, holding it for some moments before turning his back to me; and I made out that he rested his arm upon the side of the boat, and sat gazing at the dim lights which showed where the ship lay.

For some time no one spoke, and we lay there gently rising and falling on the golden-spangled water. There was not a breath of wind, and the silence was so great that any one could have imagined that the occupants of the boat were asleep.

But no one dozed for a moment, only sat or lay there, trying to bear patiently their mental and bodily suffering.

It was the captain who broke the silence, toward morning, by saying to the mate—

“Have you settled what to do, Brymer?”

“Yes,” said the mate, starting. “I can’t quite make out how we are situated till daylight, but unless Jarette has taken them out, we have the boat’s spars and sails. You know how fast she is, and I propose, if we can do so, to—”

He stopped short, for Walters moaned piteously till Mr Frewen bent down over him and altered the position in which he lay.

“Yes, go on,” said the captain feebly.

“I propose hoisting sail in the morning.”

“And making for the Cape?”

“No, sir; weather permitting, and if we have a sufficiency of provisions and water, I shall keep pretty close to the ship—our ship. I shall keep just out of range of a bullet, and that is all; merely hang about or follow her when she catches the wind, until some other vessel heaves in sight. Captain Jarette is a clever, cunning man, but he has, I think, given us our chance, and we shall hang on to him till a chance comes for seizing the ship again.”

“I thought our case was hopeless to-night,” said the captain.

“And so did I, for a time, sir,” continued the mate; “but he has over-reached himself in trying to get rid of us—hoist himself with his own petard—if the weather will only favour us now.”

Mr Frewen drew a deep breath, which sounded to me as if full of relief, and the mate went on—

“It is not too much to expect that if at any time we make an attack now, some of the men will side with us.”

“Don’t matter if they don’t, sir,” growled Bob Hampton, in the deepest of deep bass voices. “We’re strong enough, if you’ll only give us a chance.”

“All depends on chance, my lads,” said Mr Brymer. “Let’s get the daylight, and see what we have on board.”

Chapter Thirty Five.

That daylight seemed as if it would never come, and a more painful and depressing time I never spent, in spite of the glory of the starry heavens, and the beauty of their reflections in the calm sea beneath. It was hard sometimes not to believe that many of the stars had fallen, and were sinking slowly down into the dark, inky black of the ocean, where I could see dots of light travelling here and there, now looking mere pinheads, now flashing out into soft effulgent globes, whose brightness reached a certain point, and then slowly died out.

Every now and then too there was a disturbance some little distance down, as if something had suddenly passed along, and caused all the phosphorescent creatures to flash and sparkle, and mingle their lights into a pale lambent blaze, which soon passed away, leaving all still and calm as before, with the tiny stars gliding softly here and there.

But the greater part of my attention was taken up by the lights dimly visible on board the ship, where I tried to picture what was going on in the cabin where Mr Denning and his sister were prisoned. Jarette would, I know, have taken possession of the guns, but without doubt Mr Denning would have kept the little revolver which I knew he wore hidden about his person. And, what was more, I knew that he had the stern courage to use it if put to the test, in spite of his weakness.

“And if he does use it,” I thought, “it could only be against Jarette.”

“If he does,” I said half-aloud, “what a change in the state of affairs it would produce!”

“What yer talking about, Mr Dale?” said Dumlow, who was nearest to me of those forward; “not asleep, are you?”

“Asleep!—who could go to sleep at a time like this?”

“Ah, it’s hard lines, sir,” said Barney Blane, joining. “Such a pity, too, just as we’d found a way of getting along over the cargo! Next thing would have been as we should have took the ship.”

“And we’ll do that yet somehow, Barney,” I whispered, for I felt in my heart that Mr Frewen would not rest till some desperate effort had been made to save Mr and Miss Denning.

Barney said he hoped we should, if it was only to give him one chance at Jarette.

“One charnsh,” growled Dumlow, whose voice sounded as if he were very sore indeed. “I on’y want half a charnsh, my lad; that’ll be enough for me. I don’t brag, but on’y give me half a charnsh, I don’t care if he’s all pistols. I says

on'y give me half a charnsh, and the side of the ship close by—”

“What'll you do?—chuck him overboard, mate?”

“Ay, that I will, just as if he were a mad cat, and that's about what he is. Just think of it, our getting that dose as the doctor meant for him. I can't get over it, and that's a fact.”

The night passed slowly by—so slowly that I felt we must have been roused up quite early, and directly after we had gone to sleep. But at last the golden clouds began to appear high up in the sky, then it was all flecked with orange and gold, and directly after the great sun rolled slowly up over the ruddy water, lighting the ship where she lay not a quarter of a mile off, till the whole of her rigging looked as if the ropes were of brass, and the sails so many sheets of ruddy gold. To us it seemed to give life as well as light, and instead of feeling despairing, and as if all was over, the brightness of that morning made me look eagerly at the ship, and ask myself whether the time had not come for us to make our dash and secure it. For I could not see a soul visible at first, not even a man at the wheel. Then my heart gave a throb, for I could see a white face framed in the little opening of one of the cabin-windows.

“It's Miss Denning,” I said to myself, and I waved my hand, and then felt for a handkerchief to wave that.

But I had none, though it did not matter, for my signal had been seen, and a white handkerchief was waved in response.

I turned to Mr Frewen, who was bending down over Walters, and was about to point out the face at the window, but it disappeared.

“How is he?” I asked.

“Very bad,” was the laconic answer, and I could not help shuddering as I looked at the pinched, changed features of my messmate, as he lay there in the bottom of the boat, evidently quite insensible.

“I must not move him now,” said Mr Frewen gravely. And turning to Dumlow he was about to offer to dress the wound better now that he could see, but the great fellow only laughed.

“It'll do, sir,” he said. “There's nothing much the matter. I'm not going to make a fuss over that. It's just a pill as old Frenchy give me. If it gets worse I'll ask you for a fresh touch up.”

There appeared to be so little the matter with the man that Mr Frewen did not press for an examination, and he joined me in searching the ship with our eyes, but there was no one at the round window.

“Can you see any one on board, sir?” I said.

“Only one man. But he is evidently watching us.”

“Where? I can't see any one.”

“In the main-top.”

I had not raised my eyes from the deck, but now as I looked aloft, there was a man plainly enough, and he was, as Mr Frewen said, watching us.

Directly after, I saw him descend, and we neither of us had any doubt about its being Jarette.

Our attention was now directed to Mr Brymer, who, being in command, had, directly the light made such action possible, begun to see how we poor wretches afloat in an open boat, eight hundred or a thousand miles from land, were situated for water and food, and he soon satisfied himself that our enemy, possibly for his own sake, had been extremely merciful and considerate.

For there were two breakers of water, a couple of kegs of biscuit, and a quantity of tins of provision, which had been pitched down anyhow.

There was a compass too, and the regular fit out of the boat, spars and two sails, so that if the water kept calm, and gentle breezes sprung up, there was no reason why we should not safely reach land.

But we did not wish to safely reach land in that way, and the exaltation in Mr Brymer's face and tone was due to the power which Jarette had unwittingly placed in our leader's hands.

“He never thought of it; he could not have thought of it,” said Mr Brymer. “Of course in a gale of wind we shall be nowhere, but if the weather is kindly, we can hang about the ship, or sail round her if we like, and so weary him out, that sooner or later our chance must come for surprising him.”

“Without any arms,” said Mr Preddle, shaking his head sadly.

“We must use brains instead, sir,” replied Mr Brymer. “Jarette mastered us by means of cunning, we must fight him with his own weapons. Dale, I shall have to depend on you to carry out a plan I have ready.”

“Yes, sir,” I said eagerly; “what is it?”

“That you shall see, my lad. Now then, gentlemen, and my men, we must have strict discipline, please; just as if we were on board ship. The first thing is to rig up a bit of an awning here astern, to shelter the captain and—faugh! it makes my gorge rise to see that young scoundrel here, but I suppose we must behave like Christians,—eh, Mr

Frewen?"

"You have just proved that you intended to, sir, for you were thinking of sheltering the lad as well as Captain Berriman, when you talked of the awning."

"Well, yes, I confess I was, but I thought of our lad here too. I suppose you will have to lie up, Dumlow?"

The big fellow gave quite a start, and then turned frowning and spat in the sea, in token of his disgust.

"Me, sir—me lie up!" he growled. "What for?"

"You are wounded."

"Wounded? Tchah! I don't call that a wound. Why, it arn't bled much more than a cut finger. Me under a hawning! I should look pretty, shouldn't I, mates?"

"Oh, I don't want to make an invalid of you, my lad, if you can go on."

"Then don't you talk 'bout puttin' of me under a hawning, sir; why I'd as soon have you shove me in a glass case."

The bit of awning was soon rigged up, and the captain and Walters placed side by side. Then the little mast was shipped forward, and the tiny one for the mizzen right aft; the sails hoisted ready for use, and also so that they might add their shade; and while this was being done, and the rudder hooked on as well, I saw that some of the men had come on deck and were leaning over the bulwarks watching us, while at the same time I saw something glisten, and pointed it out to Mr Brymer.

"Yes," he said, smiling, "but I'm afraid that he will be disappointed. Do you see, gentlemen?"

Both Mr Frewen and Mr Preddle, who were eagerly scanning the ship, turned to look at him inquiringly.

"Jarette has the captain's spy-glass at work, and he is watching us, expecting to see us move off, rowing, I suppose, but I'm afraid he will be disappointed. He did not think he was arranging to have a tender to watch him till he loses the ship. But now all is ready, as they say on board a man-of-war, we will pipe to breakfast."

A tin was opened, and with bread and water served round, but nobody had any appetite. I could hardly touch anything, but I had enjoyed bathing my face and hands in the clear, cool water, while the rough meal had hardly come to an end, and I had placed myself close to Walters, to see if I could be of any use in tending him, when a faint breeze sprang up, making the sails of the ship flap to and fro, and the yards swing and creak, though she hardly stirred. With us though it was different, for giving orders to Bob Hampton to trim the sails, Mr Brymer told me to take hold of the sheet of the mizzen, and he seized the rudder, so that the next minute we were gliding through the water.

Jarette came to the side, and seemed to be staring in astonishment at the boat, which he evidently expected to begin sailing right away, but instead was aiming right for the ship, Mr Brymer steering so that we should pass close under the stern.

"Keep farther out!" yelled Jarette, as we approached, but no notice was taken, and just then the mate said steadily to me—

"Now, Dale, hail Mr Denning. I want to speak to him as we pass."

"Denning, ahoy!" I shouted through my hands. "Mis-ter Den-ning!"

"Keep off there, do you hear?" roared Jarette, and I saw the sun gleam on the barrel of a pistol.

"Den-ning, ahoy!" I cried again, but I must confess that the sight of that pistol levelled at the boat altered my voice, so that it trembled slightly and I gazed at it rather wildly, expecting to see a puff of smoke from the muzzle.

"Hail again, Dale," cried Mr Brymer. "Never mind his pistol, my lad. It would take a better shot than he is to hit us as we sail."

"Mr Denning, ahoy!" I shouted once more.

Bang! went the pistol.

"I told you so," said Mr Brymer coolly, and at that moment I heard a sharp gasp behind me, and saw that a white face was at the little round cabin-window we were nearing.

"When we are passing," said Mr Brymer, "that is, when I say 'now,' and begin to run off, tell Miss Denning to be of good cheer, for she and her brother shall not be forsaken. We are going to keep close to the ship till help comes."

"Keep off, you dogs," snarled Jarette; "you will have it then," and he fired again.

I felt horribly nervous as I thought of the wounds received by Walters and Dumlow, but I drew my breath hard, as I stood up in the boat and tried not to look alarmed, though, as I waited for Mr Brymer's orders to speak, I knew that I must offer the most prominent object for the mutineer's aim.

And all the while nearer and nearer glided the boat, and I saw Jarette, after cocking the pistol, raise his arm to fire again.

"Yah! boo! coward!" yelled Dumlow, and as he shouted, he lifted one of the oars which he had thrust over the side, and let it fall with a heavy splash just as the Frenchman drew trigger, and the bullet went through the sail.

"Now," cried Mr Brymer, ramming down the tiller, and as we glided round the stern I cried—

"We are going to stay close by, Miss Denning."

"Keep off!" roared Jarette, and he fired again.

"The boat will be kept close at hand to help you and your brother."

"Yes—yes—thank you," she cried shrilly. "God bless you all! I knew you would not—"

"Go," I dare say she said, but another shot prevented us from hearing the word, and as we sailed round the stern Jarette rushed to the other side, held his left hand to his mouth, and shouted—

"Now off with you. Come near this ship again and I'll sink you—I'll run you down."

"Hi, Frenchy," roared Barney, "look out for squalls; we're coming aboard one night to hang you."

"Silence forward!" cried Mr Brymer, and we were now leaving the ship fast. "Frewen, what does this mean? Where is Mr Den—"

The doctor shook his head.

Chapter Thirty Six.

"We want a long calm," said the mate that evening, as we lay on the glassy sea.

"You will have it," said Captain Berriman, and so it proved.

We saw the enemy, as he was called by all, pacing up and down the poop-deck hastily, and scanning the offing with a spy-glass, as if in search of approaching vessels or of clouds that promised wind, but neither came, dark night fell once more, and Mr Brymer ordered the oars out and we were rowed round to the other side of the ship, from which position we could see a light faintly shining from the little round cabin-window where we knew Miss Denning to be.

Mr Frewen had been carefully attending Walters; Dumlow had declared he was "quite well, thank ye," and the captain was lying patiently waiting for better days, too weak to stir, but in no danger of losing his life; and now Mr Brymer and the two gentlemen sat together talking in a low voice, and at the same time treating me as one of themselves, by bringing me into the conversation.

It was a weird experience there in the darkness, with the only sounds heard the shouts and songs of the ship's crew, for they were evidently feasting and drinking.

"And thinking nothing of to-morrow," said Mr Preddle, sadly.

"No, sir, and that is our opportunity," said Mr Brymer. "Let them drink; they have plenty of opportunity, with the cases of wine and the quantity of spirits on board. We could soon deal with them after one of their drinking bouts; but the mischief is that Jarette is a cool, calculating man, and sober to a degree. He lets the men drink to keep them in a good humour, and to make them more manageable. He touches very little himself."

"What do you propose doing?" said Mr Frewen, suddenly. "We must act at once."

"Yes; I feel that, sir," replied Mr Brymer, "but can either of you suggest a plan?"

They both answered "No."

Then Mr Frewen spoke out—

"There is only one plan. We must wait till toward morning, and then quietly row close to the ship, climb on board, and make a brave attack, and hope to succeed."

"Yes," said Mr Preddle, "and if we fail we shall have done our duty. Yes, we must fight."

"But you've got nothing to fight with," I said, for no one spoke now.

"Except the oars," said Mr Preddle.

"Why, you couldn't climb up the ship's side with an oar in your hand," I cried. "Look here, wouldn't it be best for one of us to get on board in the dark, and try to get some guns or pistols?"

"Will you go and try, Dale?" said Mr Brymer, eagerly. "That was what I meant."

I was silent.

"You are right," he said sadly; "it would be too risky."

"I didn't mean that," I said hastily; "I was only thinking about how I could get on board. I don't mind trying, because if

he heard me and tried to catch me, I could jump over the side, and you'd be there waiting to pick me up."

"Of course," cried Mr Brymer. "I know it is a great deal to ask of you, my lad, and I would say, do not expose yourself to much risk. We should be, as you say, ready to pick you up."

"I don't see why he shouldn't go," drawled Mr Preddle. "One boy stole the arms and ammunition away, so it only seems right that another boy should go and steal—no, I don't mean steal—get them back."

"Will you go, Mr Preddle?" said the mate.

"If you like. I'll do anything; but I'm afraid I couldn't climb on board, I'm so fat and heavy, and, oh dear! I'm afraid that all my poor fish are dead."

At any other time I should have laughed, but our position was too grave for even a smile to come upon my face. Instead of feeling that Mr Preddle was an object to excite my mirth, I felt a sensation of pity for the pleasant, amiable gentleman, and thought how helpless he must feel.

"You will have to go, Dale," said Mr Brymer.

"Yes," said Mr Frewen; "Dale will go for all our sakes."

"When shall he go?" said the mate; "to-morrow night, after we have thrown Jarette off his guard by sailing right away?"

"It would not throw him off his guard," cried Mr Frewen, excitedly. "The man is too cunning. He would know that it was only a ruse, and be on the watch. Dale must go to-night—at once. Who knows what twenty-four hours may produce?"

"Exactly," said Mr Preddle.

"I quite agree with you," replied the mate; "but I did not wish to urge the lad to attempt so forlorn a hope without giving him a little time for plan and preparation."

"I'm ready," I said, making an effort to feel brave as we sat there in the darkness. "I don't think I could do better if I thought till to-morrow night."

"How would you manage?" said the mate.

"I know," I said. "I'm not very strong, but if you made the boat drift under the ship's bows, I could catch hold of and swarm up the bob-stay easily enough. Nobody would see me, and if I got hold quickly, the boat could go on round to the stern, and if anybody was on the watch he would think you were trying to get to the Dennings' window."

"Some one would be on the watch," said the mate; "and that some one would be Jarette."

"And he would think as Dale says," exclaimed Mr Frewen, "that is certain."

"Oh yes, I must go to-night," I said, with a bit of a shiver. "It would be so cruel to Miss Denning to keep her in suspense, and thinking we were not trying to help her."

A hand touched my arm, glided down to my wrist, and then a warm palm pressed mine hard.

"Then you shall go, Dale," said Mr Brymer, firmly. "Keep a good heart, my lad, for the darkness will protect you from Jarette's pistol, and you can recollect this, we shall be close at hand lying across the stern ready to row along either side of the ship if we hear a splash. That splash would of course be you leaping overboard, and you must remember to swim astern to meet the boat."

"And what is he to do when he gets on board, sir?" said Mr Frewen. "Make for the Dennings' cabin at once?"

"No," I said sharply. "That's just where I shouldn't go. Some one would be sure to be watching it. I should try and find out which was the cabin Jarette uses, for the arms would be there, and then I should tie some guns—"

"And cartridges," whispered Mr Preddle, excitedly.

"Oh yes, I shouldn't forget them. I'd tie 'em together and lower them down out of the window. He's sure to have the captain's cabin, and the window will be open, ready."

"Bravo!" cried Mr Preddle. "Oh dear! I wish I was a boy again."

"And the best of the fun will be," I continued excitedly, "old Jarette will never think anyone would go straight to his cabin, and be watching everywhere else."

"Then you think you can do this?" said Mr Frewen, eagerly.

"Oh yes, I think so, sir."

"I'd better come with you, my lad," he continued.

"No; that would spoil all. A boy could do it, but I don't believe a man could."

"He is right, Frewen," said the mate. "Then understand this, Dale, you will have to act according to circumstances. Your object is to get weapons, which you will hang out so that we can get hold of them; perhaps you will be able to lower them into the boat and then slide down the rope you use. But mind this, you are not to try and communicate with the Dennings."

"What?" said Mr Frewen, angrily.

"It would be fatal to our success," said the mate, firmly. "Now, Dale, you understand, guns or revolvers, whichever you can get."

"Yes, sir, I know."

"Then how soon will you be ready?"

"I'm ready now."

"Hah!" ejaculated Mr Frewen, and my heart began to go pat pat, pat pat, so heavily that it seemed to jar against my ribs, while a curious series of thoughts ran through my brain, all of which were leavened by the same idea, that I had been playing the braggart, and offering to do things which I did not dare.

Chapter Thirty Seven.

"Now," whispered Mr Brymer, "utter silence, please. Not a word must be spoken. Shake hands with us all, Dale, and God bless and speed you in your gallant attempt."

I shook hands all round, Mr Brymer whispering—

"Don't talk to him, gentlemen. Let him make his attempt on his own basis. He will act according to circumstances, and will know what is best to do. There, Dale. Now off! Go right forward into the bows, and send Hampton aft. He shall put an oar over the stern and scull you right in under the bowsprit. Then we shall go on round to the stern and wait. If you do not hear or see us, act all the same. It is intensely dark, and we shall be there. Off!"

It was like being started on a school race, and my breath came short as if I were running. I crept forward as silently as possible to where Bob Hampton was seated, and it was so dark that I had to feel for him.

"Go aft and take an oar with you," I whispered. "Don't speak, and don't make a sound."

Then I crept right into the bows, and stood there gazing at the faint lights on board the ship, and trying to think of nothing but the task I had in hand.

"I've got it to do," I said to myself, "and I will do it for Miss Denning's and her brother's sake."

Then I shivered, but I made a fresh effort to be firm, and said half laughingly—but oh! what a sham it was!—"It's only like going in for a game of hide-and-seek. There'll be no one on deck but Jarette."

I stopped short there, for I thought of his pistol and Walters' wound.

"Hang his pistol!" I exclaimed mentally, "perhaps it isn't loaded again, and he couldn't hit me in the dark.—But he hit Walters and poor old Neb Dumlow," something within me argued.

"Well," I replied to the imaginary arguer, "if my wound when it comes is no worse than poor old Neb's, I shan't much mind."

And all the while I could feel that we were moving toward the ship, for though I could not hear a splash aft nor a ripple of the sea against the bows, the boat rolled slightly, so that I had to spread my legs apart to keep my balance.

Oh, how dark it was that night! And how thankful I felt! For saving that the lights in the cabin shone out, there was no trace of the ship; nothing ahead but intense blackness, and not a star to be seen.

"I can't see it," I thought. "I hope Bob won't run us bump up against the hull, and give the alarm."

Then I hugged myself and felt encouraged, for if I could not see the great ship with her towering masts, and rigging, and sails hanging, waiting for the breeze which must succeed the long calm, it was not likely that the keenest-eyed watcher would see our small boat.

"But he may hear it coming," I argued. And then. "Not likely, for I can't hear a sound myself."

On we went with the round dim light in the ship's side showing a little plainer; but I noticed, as I stood there buttoning up my jacket tightly, that the light appeared a little more to my right, which of course meant that Bob Hampton was steering for the left to where lay the ship's bows.

I tried to make out her outlines, but I could see nothing. I could hear, though, for from where I guessed the fore-castle to be came a song sung in a very tipsy voice as a man struck up. It sounded dull and half-smothered, but I heard "Moon on the ocean," and "standing toast," and "Lass that loves a sailor." Then there was a chorus badly sung, and I started, for away to the right where the cabin-light was, I heard a sound like an angry ejaculation or an oath muttered in the stillness of the dark night.

"Jarette," I said softly. "Hurrah! He won't hear me climb the stay, and I can get on deck safely."

Another minute of the slowest possible movement, and I was thinking whether I ought not after all to take off my jacket; but I felt I was right in keeping it on, for my shirt-sleeves would have shown light perhaps if I had been anywhere near a lantern. Then I had something else to think of, for looming up before me, blacker than the night, was the hull of the ship, and directly after, as I looked up, there, just dimly-seen like the faintest of shadows against the sky, was the big anchor beneath which we were gliding so slowly that we hardly seemed to stir.

"How well Bob is sculling us!" I thought; and then I looked up, strained over, made a snatch and touched a great wire rope reaching from the ship's prow below the water to the bowsprit, to hold it down, flung up my other hand, gave the boat a good thrust with my feet as I got both hands well round the rope, and swung my legs up and round the stay, from which I hung like a monkey on a stick, my head screwed round as I tried to see my companions, and just dimly seeing a shadow apparently glide by, leaving me hanging there alone, with the water beneath me, and a shuddering feeling coming over me for a few moments as I thought of the consequences that would ensue if I let go.

As I hung there from that taut rope, I felt that if I let go I should be plunged in the sea, go down ever so far into the terrible black water, and rise again half-suffocated, my nerve gone, and I should be drowned, for the occupants of the boat would be out of hearing, and I should never be able to swim and overtake them, since they would make a long détour before reaching the stern-windows.

But then I had no occasion to let go. Why should I? And as I climbed I was ready to laugh at my fears. For I was strong for my age, and active enough to climb that stay, and I did; halting at last by the spritsail-yard to listen before mounting to the bowsprit, getting my feet upon the ropes beneath, and then travelling slowly sideways, till I was able to rest by the figure-head and look over on to the forepart of the dark deck.

I was as silent as I possibly could be for fear of encountering a man on the look-out, but there was no one, and hesitating no longer, I climbed over and stood upon the deck, thinking how easily the rest might have reached it too; when there would have been a chance for us to close the fore-castle-hatch once more. For there it was open, a dim light rising from it to form a very faint halo around; and the men seemed to be all there, for I could hear the talking, and then an uproarious burst of laughter, caused by one of them beginning to sing in a drunken tone, and breaking down at the end of a couple of lines.

There was nothing to fear there, I thought, and after listening I began to creep along, step by step, close to the starboard bulwark, keeping my hands thereon for a few paces, till becoming bolder I stepped out more, but stumbled directly over something big and soft, and went sprawling on the deck.

I felt that all was over, as I went down noisily, and springing up, hesitated as to what I should do, but not for long. The fore-shrouds were close at hand, and feeling for them I drew myself up, ascending higher and higher as I heard some one coming rapidly from aft till he was close beneath me, and catching his foot in the same obstacle as had thrown me, he too went down heavily, and scrambled up, cursing.

My heart throbbed more heavily than before as the voice told me it was Jarette, though for the moment I did not grasp the fact that his fall had been my safety. For naturally attributing the noise he had heard to the object over which he had fallen, he began to kick and abuse and call the obstacle, in a low tone, all the drunken idiots and dogs he could lay his tongue to.

"And I run all these risks for such a brute as you," he snarled; "but wait a little, my dear friend, and you shall see."

I was in hopes he was going away, but he only went to the fore-castle-hatch, where to my horror he called down to the men carousing below to bring a lantern; and feeling that my only chance was to climb higher, I crept up step by step, ratline by ratline, till the light appeared and four men stumbled out on to the deck. Then I stood still, hugging the ropes and looking down, certain, as everything below was so plain, that in a few moments I must be seen, perhaps to become a target for Jarette's bullets.

There on the deck lay the tipsy sailor over whom I had fallen, and about ten feet away there was another.

"Haul these brutes down below!" said Jarette, fiercely; and in a slow surly way first one and then the other was dragged to the hatchway and lowered down, with scant attention to any injuries which might accrue.

So intent was every one upon the task in hand that not an eye was cast upwards, and it was with a devout feeling of thankfulness that I saw the man who carried the lantern follow his comrades, the last rays of the light falling upon Jarette's features as he stood by the hatchway.

"Now then," he said savagely, "no more drinking to-night. There'll be wind before morning, and you'll have to make sail."

"All right, skipper," said the man with a half-laugh, and he and his lantern disappeared, while I clung there listening and wondering why Jarette did not go aft. Could he see me?

Just when I felt as if I could bear the suspense no longer, I heard him move off, whistling softly, and as soon as I dared I descended and followed, creeping along step by step, and listening with all my ears for the faint whistling sound to which he gave vent from time to time.

There it was plainly enough, just abaft the main-mast, and he seemed to have stopped there and to be looking over the bulwark—I merely guessed as much, for the sound had stopped, and of course I stopped too.

To my intense satisfaction I found that I was right, for the faint sibillation began again, and was continued along the

deck, till, as I followed, it paused again, grew louder, and I knew that the scoundrel was coming back.

But he altered his mind again, turned and went aft—into the saloon, I thought for a few moments, for the faint whistling ceased, and then began again high up.

There was no mistaking that. He had mounted to the poop-deck, and was walking towards the wheel. Young as I was then, I grasped the fact that the man was restless and worried lest some attempt should be made to recover the ship, and unable to trust one of his men, he was traversing the deck uneasily, keeping strict watch himself.

This was bad for my purpose, for it was too dark to see him, and at any moment I felt he might come upon me, and my attempt be defeated.

But here was an opportunity I had hardly dared to reckon upon, and the minute his steps died out I hurried to the companion-way, entered, and saw that there was a dim light in the captain's cabin at the end of the saloon.

This seemed to prove that my ideas were right, and that Jarette had taken possession of this cabin now for his own use, and at all hazards I was about to hurry there, when I caught sight of another faint light on my right—a mere line of light which came from beneath the cabin-door, and told me plainly enough that this was the one in which Miss Denning was kept a prisoner. Whether her brother was there too I could not tell, for there was not a sound.

I hesitated and stopped, for the inclination was terribly strong upon me to tap and whisper a word or two about help being at hand. It was not a minute, but long enough to deprive me of the chance of finding out whether there were arms in the cabin, for as I hesitated I heard a light step overhead, and knew that Jarette was returning from his uneasy round.

The probability was that he would now come into the saloon.

Where should I go! There was not a moment to lose, and my first impulse was to dart forward into the captain's cabin—a mad idea, for the chances were that Jarette would come right through the saloon and enter it. So darting to the side, I felt along it in the dark for the first cabin-door that would yield, found one directly, and had hardly entered and drawn to the door when I heard Jarette's step at the companion-way; and as it happened he came in and along my side of the table, so that at one moment, as I listened by the drawn-to door, he passed within a few inches of where I was hiding.

The next minute there was a creaking sound, and the saloon was dimly lit-up, telling me that our enemy had opened the cabin-door and gone in. But he did not stay. I heard the clink of a glass, and then a repetition of the creaking sound, the saloon darkened again, and as I listened I heard his step returning. This time, though, he did not come back on my side, but on the other, stopping for a few moments evidently to listen at the door where his prisoners were confined.

For a moment I thought he meant to go in, but I heard his footsteps commence again, pass on to the companion, and there they ceased.

This was terrible; for aught I knew he might be standing there listening as he kept his uneasy watch, and for some minutes I dared not stir.

At last though, to my great delight, I heard a step overhead, and now without farther hesitation I stepped out, hurried to the cabin at the end, guided by the light which came through the nearly closed door, entered, and shut it behind me before looking round.

A lamp hung from the ceiling, there was spirit in a flask, and the remains of some food upon the table; but what most delighted me was the sight of three guns lying on a locker near to the cabin-window, which was wide open, and I felt that I should only have to show myself for the boat to be rowed beneath.

My first want was a rope or line, my next a supply of ammunition for the guns, and there was neither.

I felt ready to stamp, with vexation, for I might easily have brought a line wrapped round me, but neither Mr Brymer nor the others had thought of this, and unless I could find a fishing-line in one of the lockers, I felt that I should have to go back on deck.

At that moment I remembered that Captain Berriman had a number of small flags in one of the lockers—that beneath the window. Four or five of those tied together would answer my purpose for lowering the guns, and if tied to the window they would be strong enough for me to slide down.

I lifted the locker-lid, and there they were, quite a bed of them in the bottom of the great convenient store of objects not in everyday use.

That got over one difficulty, but there was that of the ammunition, and turning to the locker on my left I looked in that, to find plenty of odds and ends of provisions, for it had become quite a store-room, but no cartridges.

"Where can they be?" I muttered, as I stood holding the locker-lid and gazing round the cabin for a likely spot for Jarette to have stowed them ready for an emergency, when I heard his step so suddenly overhead that I started in alarm to leave for my place of concealment, when the lid of the locker slipped from my hand and fell with a smart rap.

I felt that I was lost—that it would be impossible for me to get to the cabin and hide before he reached the companion-way, alarmed as he would be by the sound, and looking frantically round I was for leaping into the cot and drawing the curtains, but another thought struck me just as I heard his step, and lifting the lid of the locker beneath

the window, I slipped in upon the flags, and let the cover down and shut me in.

The moment I was lying there in the darkness, the place just seeming big enough to hold me lying upon my back with my knees drawn up, I felt that I had done a mad thing, for Jarette would immediately come to the conclusion that it was the shutting down of a locker which made the sound, and come straight to the one I was in, open it, and drag me out. It was too hot, and I could feel that in a few minutes I should be suffocated if he did not find me. That he had entered the cabin I had ample proof, for I heard him move something on the table quite plainly, while directly he came to the locker where I was, and I heard a noise. It was the thump, thump made by his knees as he got upon the lid to kneel upon it and look out of the window.

My heart gave a bound; he did not know then that I was hiding there. But the next moment I was in despair, for the heat was intense, my breath was coming short and painful, and Jarette made no sign of leaving what promised to be my tomb.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

I bore it as long as I could, and then I was on the point of shrieking out and striking at the lid of the locker, when I heard a movement over my head, Jarette stepped down, and I forced the lid open a little way, and drew a long deep breath.

I don't believe that the air was any better, but there was the idea of its being purer, and the horror of suffocation which had nearly driven me frantic was gone.

I have often wondered since that he did not hear or see the movement of the lid, but his attention was probably taken up by something else, and I heard him go out into the saloon, and then on through the companion-way to the deck.

I opened the lid a little more and peered out, breathing freely now as I kept the locker open with my head; and to my horror I saw that he had left the door wide open, so that with the lamp burning it was impossible for me to get out without the risk of being seen.

But I felt relieved, for I could breathe freely now, and I lay still with the lid raised, listening for Jarette's uneasy step as he came and went, and thinking of how easy it was to make plans, and how difficult to carry them out. I knew that if we were going to try and obtain the mastery once more we must act at once, for a fresh breeze would separate us at once, and the chance be gone. But how could we do it without weapons?

How I lay puzzling my brains as to where the cartridges could be! I recalled how Walters had stolen them, and he must have carried them forward, where the main portion would be stowed somewhere; but all the same I felt that Jarette would, for certain, have some in this or one of the other cabins, ready for use in case of emergency. But where?

I tried very hard, but I could not think it out, and at last lay there quite despondent and feeling in no hurry to stir, for it only meant going back to the boat to say that I had failed.

There was Walters, of course, but he was insensible, and it was not likely that I could get any information from him. No; the case was hopeless. I had failed, and all my hopes of our gallant little party storming the deck and carrying all before them were crushed.

By degrees, though, the mental wind changed the course of that peculiar weathercock, one's mind, and I felt better.

Violence would not do, so why not try cunning?

How?

Well, I thought, if I could so easily steal on board, and get actually into the cabin, it must surely be possible for Mr Brymer, Mr Frewen, and two of the men to get up, wait their opportunity, and, in spite of his pistols, seize and master Jarette.

"That's it," I said to myself; "the only chance. How could I be so stupid as not to think of it before?"

All excitement again, I was now eager to get back to the boat, so that my friends might take advantage of the darkness, and carry out my plans before morning came. For another night would perhaps prove to be too clear.

I raised the lid a little higher and looked out, but the table was too much in the way for me to see more than the top of the other door-way, and this encouraged me, for that worked two ways—if I could not see out into the saloon, Jarette could not see the locker. But all the same I was afraid to get out. It was so light in the cabin, and everywhere else was so dark, that if he were on deck, and looking in my direction, he would be sure to see what took place.

Then I concluded that I could do nothing till the door was closed, and as soon as an opportunity offered itself, I determined to creep out, and at all risks draw that door to, trusting to Jarette thinking that the closing was caused by the motion of the ship as it gently rocked upon the swell.

At last as I lay there, for minutes which seemed to be hours, I heard my enemy talking loudly, and I knew that he must be speaking to the men in the forecabin.

That would do. He could see nothing now, for between us there were the main and foremasts, and plenty besides—

the galley and water-cask, and the long cabin-like range upon the top of which our boat had lain in the chocks.

I crept over the side after propping up the lid, went upon hands and knees to the door, readied out and touched it. That was sufficient: it swung upon its hinges so that Jarette could easily imagine that the motion of the ship had caused the change.

The next minute, still keeping the locker open ready to form a retreat for me in case of necessity, I leaned right out as far as I could, and bending down, strained my eyes, trying to cut the darkness as I whispered sharply—

“Are you there?”

“Yes; got them?” came from the boat, though to me the voice came out of the black darkness.

“No cartridges,” I whispered. “Come closer. No—keep back.”

I said that, not that I knew anything, but I had a kind of impression that Jarette was returning, and dropping down into the locker once more, I lowered the lid, but this time not quite close, for I thrust in a bit of one of the flags, so that there was room for a little air to get in, and that and possibly the idea that I could not be suffocated, made me more at my ease.

I waited some little time, and then began to grow impatient; feeling sure that I had fancied his coming and taken alarm at nothing, I determined to lift the lid and get some fresh air, but I did not stir just then, only lay still, finding my position terribly irksome. I could not hear well either, and at last I began to move cautiously to peer out, when to my horror there was a sharp blow delivered on the lid of the locker, and then another probably given with the butt of a revolver, and Jarette exclaimed fiercely—

“Hang the rats!”

I lay back, breathless, expecting that he would hear the dull heavy throb of my pulses, while I trembled violently, thinking that all was over, and that he was trifling with me, and knew all the while that I was lying there. But by degrees I grew calmer. There were rats enough in the hold. I had heard them, and why should he not have attributed the slight rustling noise I made to one of the mischievous little animals?

At last, to satisfy my doubts, I heard him come and kneel upon the locker again, as if looking out of the cabin-window.

He stayed some minutes, and I began to think that he must see the boat; but I soon set that idea aside and felt that it was absurd, for if he had seen the boat he certainly would either have shouted to warn its occupants away, or fired at them.

“He feels that he is not safe,” I said to myself at last, and to my great relief he got down, muttering to himself, and I could tell by the sound that he was at the table, for I heard a clink of glass, the gurgling of liquor out of a bottle, and then quite plainly the noise he made in drinking before he set down the glass and uttered a loud “Hah!”

Just then I heard voices from forward, loud laughing and talking.

“Curse them, what are they doing now?” exclaimed Jarette, loudly. “Oh, if I had only one man I could trust!”

He hurried out of the cabin, and I did not flinch now from opening the lid and looking out, to find that the door had swung to as soon as he had passed through.

The noise was so boisterous forward that I crept out, pushed the door, and stood in the dark saloon, where I could still see the line of light at the bottom of Miss Denning’s cabin as I crept to the companion, and, excited by curiosity, slipped aside to where I could shelter under the bulwark and see what was going on.

There were lanterns now by the big hatch in front of the main-mast, and I could see quite a group of men at whom Jarette was storming.

It was a curious weird-looking scene there in the darkness, for the men’s faces stood out in the lantern-light, and in spite of their fear of their leader they were laughing boisterously.

“You dogs,” he roared; “not a drop more. Go back to your kennel.”

“Mus’ have little drop more, skipper,” cried one of the men.

“No,” he roared, “not a drop, and it shall be allowances from this night.”

“But there’s heaps o’ good stuff spoiling, skipper.”

“I’ll spoil you, you dog,” snarled Jarette, and I saw him snatch a lantern from one of the men and lean down, holding the light over the open hold. “Hi! below there,” he roared; “leave that spirit-keg alone, and come up.”

In the silence which ensued I heard a muffled muttering come from below, and Jarette dropped upon his knees to hold the lantern right down in the open hold, while the light struck up and made his face and his actions plain from where I stood watching.

“Once more, do you hear? Come up and leave that spirit, or I’ll fetch you with a bullet.”

“Better come up, mate,” shouted one of the men.

"You hold your tongue," snarled Jarette to the speaker. "Now then, will you come, or am I to fire?"

There was no reply, and Jarette spoke once more in quite a calm, gentle, persuasive voice.

"I say, will you leave that spirit-keg alone and come up?"

Still no answer, and Jarette turned his head to the group of men.

"That's a fresh keg broached. Who did it?" he said slowly. "I said no more was to be taken. I say—who broached that keg?"

"Oh, well, it was all on us, skipper. You see we couldn't do nothing in this calm," said the man who had before spoken, and who seemed to be the most sensible of the group.

"Then you all broke my orders," cried Jarette, hastily now, "and you shall all see how I punish a man for breaking my orders."

I looked on as if spellbound, forgetting the boat and my mission as I crouched there in the dark, feeling that a tragedy was at hand, though I could not grasp all and divine that this was the crowning-point of the mutiny.

For Jarette bent right down over the open hold, lowering the lantern, whose light played upon the barrel of a pistol.

"Now," he cried, "once more, will you come up and leave that spirit-barrel, or am I to fire?"

"Fire away," came up in muffled tones, but quite defiantly, and as the last word reached my ear there was the sharp report of the pistol, whose flash shone out brighter than the lantern. Then a horrible cry came from below, and for a few moments I could see nothing for the smoke which hung in the air. But from out of it came an excited burst of talking and yelling.

"Stand back," roared Jarette. "I have five more shots ready, and you see I can hit. Serve the scoundrel right."

"But look, look!" shouted the man who had spoken before; and as the smoke dispersed, I saw him pointing down into the hold, while the other men, sobered now, stood huddled together in alarm.

Then with a wild yell of horror one of them threw up his hands, shouting "Fire, fire!" ran forward, while a fearful figure suddenly appeared at the mouth of the hold, climbed on deck, and then shrieking horribly, also ran forward with Jarette and the others in full pursuit.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

It was a horrible sight, one which made me cling to the bulwarks absolutely paralysed, for the man who had climbed on deck was one mass of blue and yellow flames, which flickered and danced from foot to shoulder, and in those brief moments I realised that he must have fallen and upset the spirit-keg when Jarette fired, saturated his garments, and no doubt the fallen lantern had set all instantaneously in a blaze.

It was impossible to stir. My legs trembled, and every shriek uttered by the poor wretch, as he ran wildly here and there, thrilled me through and through. One moment it seemed as if he were coming headlong toward me, and I felt that discovery was inevitable; but before he reached the open hold, he dashed across the deck to the starboard bulwark, turned and ran forward again shrieking more loudly than ever, while the rapid motion through the air made the flames burn more furiously, and I could distinctly hear them flatter and roar.

His messmates, headed by Jarette, were not idle; they shouted to him to stop; they chased him, and some tried to cut him off here and there; but as if the idea of being stopped maddened him, the poor wretch shifted, dodged, and avoided them in the most wonderful manner, shrieking more wildly than ever, as a man who had been below suddenly confronted him with a tarpaulin to fling round him and smother the flames.

At last, with the sharp tongues of fire rising above his head, he made one maddened rush forward, and the whole of the party in pursuit; while his cries, and the sight of the man dashing on like a living torch through the darkness of that awful night, made me long to close my eyes and stop my ears. But I could not—it was impossible. I could only cling helplessly to that bulwark, praying for the power to help, but unable to stir.

It takes long to describe all this, but it was only a matter of a minute or two, before, with the flames rushing up to a point above his head and streaming behind him, he rushed for the bows.

I grasped in an instant what he intended to do, and felt that at last I could act. For, seeing that he meant to leap overboard, I made a start to run back to the cabin and shout to those in the boat to pick him up, when he caught his foot in a rope, and fell upon the deck with a heavy thud; and before he could rise, the man with the oilskin overcoat flung it over him, rolled him over and over in it, and extinguished the flames.

In the midst of the loud talking which followed, I heard Jarette's voice above all the rest.

"It was his own fault," he cried. "Here, carry him below. I shall not take the blame."

"But you shot at and hit him," growled a man angrily.

"As I will at you, you dog," roared Jarette, "if you disobey my orders. Quick!—get him below."

I saw Jarette bend down to the moaning man, for two of the crew held lanterns over him; and then, as they were all crowding down the hatchway, I hurried into the cabin, closed the door after me, and going to the window, I leaned out, and called in a whisper to Mr Brymer, but there was no answer.

I called again and again, raising my voice till, had any one been on deck, there must have been an alarm raised; but still there was no reply from the boat, and feeling at last that my companions must have rowed along by the ship to try and find out what was the matter, I was about to go back and run along till I could hail them and implore the doctor to come on board to try and save the poor wretch's life, when, all at once, there was the faint splash of an oar, and Mr Brymer exclaimed—

“Ah, at last! I was afraid you were being hunted. What were they doing? What was the meaning of those cries, and the torches they were rushing about the deck with?”

I explained in few words, and, saying I would fetch a rope, implored Mr Frewen to come up and help the poor creature.

“Come? Of course I will, Dale,” he said; “but it seems curious work to do—help the men who have sent us adrift on the ocean in an open boat.”

“Yes,” I cried excitedly; “but wait while I get a rope.”

“Yes; quick, my lad,” said Mr Brymer. “It is our only opportunity.”

I made no attempt now at concealment, but ran through the saloon, and out on the deck, to secure the first coil of rope I could find.

I got hold of one directly, not neatly coiled, but tumbled down anyhow; and then, looking forward to see if any one was on deck, I was conscious of a dull bluish glow, which I attributed to the lights by the fore-castle-hatch, from which I could hear a low muttering of voices dominated by Jarette's sharp angry snapping.

Then grasping the fact that there appeared to be no one on deck, I ran back into the dark saloon, tapped smartly on the door of Miss Denning's cabin, cried, “Help coming!” and darted through the door, closing it after me.

“Got a rope?” came from below; and my answer was to lower it down as quickly as I could before passing it twice round the legs of the fixed table.

Then came a sharp whisper—

“All fast?”

“Yes; all right,” I said; and the next moment Bob Hampton was climbing in.

“Sent me to help you, my lad. Hooroar! the ship's our own again.”

In another minute Barney was up alongside, and he was followed by Mr Frewen and Mr Brymer. These all seized guns.

“They're not loaded,” I said sadly.

“Never mind, my lad; appearances go a long way,” said Mr Brymer. “The scoundrels will not know. Now then, pick up something for a weapon, Dale, if it's only the cabin poker.”

“Are you going to fight?” I said in a low tone. “I thought you were going to help that poor wretch.”

“I can attend him as well when he is our prisoner, Dale, as if we were Jarette's.”

“Of course,” I said excitedly. “But hadn't you better have Dumlow too?”

“Can't climb up, my lad,” said Bob Hampton, in a husky whisper; “and Mr Preddle's too fat.”

“Ready?” said Mr Brymer.

“Ay, ay,” came from the men, and “Yes” from Mr Frewen.

“Then come on.”

The mate threw open the door to lead the way, and then hesitated for a moment or two, for the saloon was flooded by a pale bluish light.

“I hoped we should have darkness on our side,” he said, “but—”

“Look, look!” I cried wildly; “the ship's on fire.”

We all ran to the companion together, three on one side of the saloon-table, two on the other; while I could hardly believe my eyes as I saw flooding up from beyond the main-mast great soft waves of bluish fire.

“It is the casks of spirits in the hold,” cried Mr Brymer, excitedly. “They've done for it at last. But come on quickly: we can pass that without getting much harm; and as soon as we have secured the scoundrels, we must try the pump and hose.”

We tried to go along the starboard side, but the flames came out in such strong pulsations there, that we were obliged to cross to the port side, where there seemed to be about ten feet clear.

"Now then," cried Mr Brymer; "they're all below, and have not taken the alarm. A quick rush, and we have them."

He was half-way along the clear pathway formed along the deck between the flames floating up from the hold and the port bulwark, and his figure stood up strangely unreal against the bluish light, when there was a heavy report below in the hold, and a rush of flame which extended from side to side of the ship. But after the report there was no roar or crackling sound of burning, for the blue and orange flames came pulsing up in great waves silent and strange, the quiet mastery they had attained being appalling.

The explosion—that of a spirit-cask, one of the many in the hold—brought up the men from the fore-castle, wild with excitement; but we only saw them for, a moment, and then they were screened from us by the fire, which was singularly clear from smoke, and rose steadily upward and away from the main-mast, whose sails hung down motionless in the calm.

We all stood motionless, unable to grasp the extent of this new calamity, and listened to the yelling and shouting of the frightened men, who now broke loose entirely from the slight control Jarette had held principally by means of his revolver. For death in a more horrible form threatened them than that from the pistol which had held them in subjugation, and with one consent they all began to shout the word "Boats!"

Just then there was the report of a pistol, and Jarette's voice rose loud and clear.

"Silence—idiots—fools!" he shouted. "It is your own doing, and now you want to run away and leave a good ship and all its valuable cargo—ours, do you hear?—all ours—to burn. Bah!"

"The boats, quick!—the boats!" shouted one of the men.

"Throw that fool overboard, some of you," cried Jarette, contemptuously; "he has not the spirit of a *mouche*. Bah! what is it? A cask or two of spirit in the hold. Come along, brave lads. The pumps and buckets; we will soon make grog of the spirits, and it will cease to burn."

"No, no! The boats!" cried two or three. "We are all lost!"

"Yes, if you do not obey," cried Jarette, speaking slowly through his teeth, and with a very marked French accent, as he did when greatly excited. "I go not to lose our great prize, for which I have fought and won. Every man now a bucket, and you four to the pump and hose."

"Draw back a little," whispered Mr Brymer; "they have not seen us."

"Shall we get buckets, sir?" said Bob Hampton in a gruff whisper.

"No; it is useless. There are nearly fifty of those casks of strong spirits there below, and no efforts of ours could stop that fire."

"But you will not let it burn without an effort?" whispered Mr Frewen.

"I shall let it burn, sir, without an effort," said Mr Brymer, drawing back, and leading Mr Frewen toward the companion, I being so close that I could hear every word, which was only intended for the doctor's ears. "I'll tell you why," he said. "As those casks burst, the spirit will run through the cargo in all directions, the flame will glide along the surface, and as the spirit heats, the hold will be full of inflammable gas, which will keep on exploding."

"Yes," said Mr Frewen, angrily; "but an abundance of water—"

"Would not stop the flashing of that spirit here and there, doctor, till, sooner or later, it reaches the blasting-powder. That must be reached, and then the ship will be rent open."

"Great heaven!" cried Mr Frewen.

"And the fire will be extinguished then. My good sir, with a well-trained crew, working calmly, we might perhaps reach the powder and cast it overboard; but, situated as we are now, any efforts of ours would be worse than folly."

"Then—the boat!"

"Yes, but don't hurry or grow excited; the vessel may burn a day or two before the final calamity comes. We have plenty of time to do our duty."

"Yes, I understand," said Mr Frewen, and he hurried towards the saloon.

"Aren't we going to try and put out the fire, Mr Brymer, sir?" said Bob Hampton.

"No, my lad; we'll leave that to Jarette and his gang. Come and help."

By this time we had reached the cabin-door, from beneath which the faint light shone, and Mr Frewen exclaimed—

"Are you there, Miss Denning?"

"Yes, yes," she cried eagerly. "Pray, pray help us."

"Yes. One minute; is the door locked on the inside?"

"Yes," came from within, in company with a sharp snapping sound which was repeated, while the doctor felt outside, and convinced himself that it was secured there too, and that we had no means of unfastening it.

"Stand back from the door, right to the other side of the cabin," said Mr Frewen, and, drawing back some distance, he ran at the panel, raised his foot, struck it just above the handle, and it was driven right off, and he saw Miss Denning standing there, pale and large-eyed, holding a little taper in her hand, while in the bed-place lay her brother, gazing at us wildly, but for his countenance to change and become restful and calm as he saw that he was in the presence of friends.

"I told you they would not desert us, Lena," he said faintly; and then his head sank back as if he were too weak to raise it from the pillow.

Mr Frewen stepped close up to the bed-place as I joined Mr Denning and laid my hand in his, for his eyes had seemed to invite me to come to him. Then, as if I had not been there, he whispered quickly to the invalid—

"Denning, you don't like me, but we are in a perilous strait. Believe me, I will do everything man can for you and your sister now. Will you trust me?"

"Yes."

Mr Frewen turned to Miss Denning, and said firmly—

"Dress quickly, as if for a long journey." She looked at him wonderingly. "Yes," he said, and his voice sounded almost harsh. "In five minutes or less you must both be down in the boat. Hat, cloak, waterproof, and any necessary that you think may be useful. Nothing more. You understand?"

She bowed, and began hurriedly to collect the few things she required, while, without waiting to be told, I dragged pillow and blankets from the cot, and ran out with them to the stern-window, beneath which I could plainly see the boat now.

"Mr Preddle—Dumlow," I cried, "stow these aft;" and I threw down the articles I had brought, and went to fetch others from the cabin, passing Bob Hampton and Barney, who were collecting everything they could find in the way of provisions, tins, bottles, bags, from the captain's stores, and throwing them down.

By the time I was back, Miss Denning was ready, and she was about to help her brother, but he hung back.

"No, no," he said. "Take her first, Frewen."

She would have resisted, but I said quickly—"The ship is on fire; we must not lose a moment. Pray come."

She put her hand in mine, and I led her through the saloon, now full of a lurid light, and into the captain's cabin, where the rope still hung down.

"Be ready to help, Mr Preddle," I said, as I hauled it up, and handed the end to Bob Hampton, who came in loaded.

"Make a loop, Bob, and help lower Miss Denning down."

"That I will, my dear lad," he said, shooting his load on one of the lockers. "Don't you be skeart, but just you trust to me. That's your sort," he cried, as he passed the rope round her, and knotted it. "Now then, you'll just take a tight grip of the rope there with both hands, and trust to me, just as if I was going to give you a swing."

"I'll trust you, Hampton," she said, with a quiet smile.

"That's right, miss; you'll be like a baby in my arms. Now, Barney, boy, lay hold of the rope. Nay, you needn't, she's light as a feather. Give way to me, my dear, just as if I was your father, and I'll lower you right enough."

I could not help thinking how pretty and gentle and brave she looked as she left herself in Bob's hands, while he knelt on the locker, lifted her up, passed her out of the cabin-window, held for a moment or two by the knot, and then gently lowered her down.

"Done lovely," said Bob. "Better let Neb Dumlow cast off the rope, Mr Preddle, sir. You can hand the lady into the starn arter-wards. That's your sort, sir," as he hauled up. "Why, some gals would ha' kicked and squealed and made no end o' fuss. Want this for Mr Denning, shan't us?"

"Yes," I said, and at that moment, supporting the poor fellow below the arms, Mr Frewen and the mate helped Mr Denning into the cabin, panting heavily even from that little exertion.

"I'll be—as quick—as I can," he sighed. "There is no hurry," said Mr Brymer, quietly; "we have a wall of fire between us and our enemies."

"Go on heaving down that there prog, Barney," whispered Bob from behind his hand. "I don't hold with running short out in a hopen boat."

Barney grunted, and while Bob passed the rope round Mr Denning so that he could sit in the bight, and then made a hitch round his breast so as to secure him in case his weak hold with his hands gave way, the sailor kept various articles of food in tins flying down to Neb Dumlow, who caught them deftly and stowed them rapidly forward in the bottom of the boat.

The next minute Mr Denning was tenderly lifted by Bob Hampton and Mr Frewen, and his legs were passed out from the window, the rope was tightened, then he swung to and fro, and a minute later Dumlow had left the catching and stowing to cast off the rope which was now left hanging, so as to afford us a ready means of retreat in case it should be necessary.

With the help of Mr Preddle and the sailor, Mr Denning was soon lying back in the stern, and now the mate leaned out to give a few directions to Dumlow.

"Have you got that painter fast to the ring-bolt so that you can cast off directly?"

"Ay, ay, sir. Hear the pumps going?"

"Yes; go on stowing the stores sent down as well as you can. Mr Preddle will help you."

"There, doctor," he said the next minute, "now we can cast off at a moment's notice if there's danger."

"From the explosion?"

"It would not hurt us," said Mr Brymer, coolly, for now that Miss Denning and her brother were safe, he did not seem to mind. "When the powder goes off it will be amidships, and strike up. We shall only hear the noise, and perhaps have a few bits of burning wood come down near. What I fear is Jarette and his party when they take to the boats. But I think we can out-sail them."

"Then what are we going to do now?"

"Collect everything that I think may be of use, so work away, Dale, my lad, and help me. Hampton, Blane, get another breaker of water. Take the one on the poop-deck, and lower it down over the stern."

Bob Hampton grunted, and after seeing to a few more things being lowered into the boat, we three went quietly toward where the fire was hissing furiously, and a great cloud of steam rose now from the hold. But the blaze was as great as ever, and as we looked, and I wondered that the main-mast and its sails had not caught fire, we heard the clanking of the pumps cease, and Jarette's voice rise above the noise and confusion.

"Boats," he said laconically. "But no hurry, my lads. Water and stores in first. We're all right for hours yet."

It was curious to be there, behind the main-mast, listening to all that was going on forward, and yet seeing nothing for the fiery curtain at which we gazed, and which cast a lurid reflection on either side, and brightened the sea till it looked like gold. And it appeared the more strange that the men had not the slightest idea of our being on board, as we could tell by the orders shouted from time to time.

"There," said Mr Brymer at last, in answer to Mr Frewen's uneasy looks, "the lads have got that breaker of fresh water down by now, so we'll just take the captain's little compass and chronometer, and a few more things from the store, and be off. Ah, here they are."

For just then the two men came down coolly enough from the poop-deck, reported the water on board, and then eagerly set to work, carrying more stores, blankets, and all else we could by any possibility want, till the mate cried hold, enough.

"We've got all we can stow, I'm sure," he said.

"Then pray let us get away before it is too late," whispered Mr Frewen.

"Afraid, doctor?"

"Yes—for those poor shivering people below, sir—and, well, yes, I am alarmed too, knowing that at any time the deck may be rent up beneath our feet and the vessel sink."

"Yes; it is unpleasant to think about, and there is the danger of those scoundrels lowering one of the boats and coming round here for stores that they have none of there. Ah, there goes one of them down."

For plainly enough came the chirruping of the falls as the boat was lowered from the davits.

"Now then, down with you, Frewen. You next, my lads; I don't think I can remember anything else. You after the men, Dale, and I come last, as I'm captain for the time."

We all obeyed with alacrity, and I breathed more freely as I sat down in the boat. Then Mr Brymer slid down, and threw the rope back through the cabin-window.

The next minute the painter was withdrawn from the ring-bolt, and Bob Hampton sent the boat away with a tremendous thrust; oars were got out, and we rowed out into the darkness to lie-to about three hundred yards from the ship, just as a dark object came along from forward, and we saw that, as the mate had expected, the boat which had been lowered had come round to the stern-windows for the men to mount, if they could, in search of stores.

"None too soon. Dale," said the mate, coolly, and a deep breath of relief escaped my lips as I replied in his words—

"No, sir; none too soon."

Chapter Forty.

As we lay there in our boat, only a short distance from the burning ship, it seemed to me impossible that it could be long before Jarette and his men discovered us, and came in pursuit. For I felt sure that they would give us the credit of having been beforehand with them, when they saw how the stores had been put under contribution; and knowing how much more easy it would be for them to remove the things from one boat to another than to obtain them from the ship, we should, if overtaken, be absolutely stripped. Something to this effect I whispered to Bob Hampton, but he shook his head.

“Not they, my lad; they’re in too much of a scare. Don’t suppose they’ve got any room in their heads to think about anything just now. They know fast enough that the poor old ship will soon blow up, and what they want to do is to get some more prog, and then row off soon as they can.”

I was going to say more, but I had a warning from the mate to be silent, and I sat there watching the men make a good many tries before they reached the cabin-window; but how they did it at last I couldn’t quite make out, for they were in the shadow, while all around them spread the lurid glare cast by the flames which rose from the burning hold.

These seemed to have reached their greatest height soon after the fire first broke out, and directly the first cask of spirits had burst. Then the fire went steadily on till it began to wane slightly, when another cask would explode, and flames rush up again—those great waves of fire which lapped and leaped, and floated up out of the hold, appearing from where we lay to lick the sails hanging from the fore and main-masts. But these never caught, the golden and bluish waves rising steadily and spreading to starboard and port, and every now and then sending out detached waves to float on the black night air for a moment or two before they died out.

It was very terrible and yet beautiful to see the great bursts of flame gliding up so softly and silently, almost without a sound; there was every mast and stay glistening in the light, and the sails that were hanging from the yards transparent, or half darkened on the main and mizzen-masts, while those on the fore-mast beyond the fire shone like gold.

I wondered how it was that the sides of the deck did not begin to burn, crackling, splitting, and sending up clouds of black smoke dotted with brilliant sparks, as I had once seen at the burning of a coal brig in Falmouth harbour; but they did not, and the utter stillness of the night, in that hot calm, which had on and off lasted for days, had so far saved the masts.

But as I watched, I felt that their turn must come, and that sooner or later I should be watching them turned into pyramids—all brilliant glow—till they fell with a crash, hissing and steaming, into the sea.

I pictured all that clearly enough in my mind’s eye, feeling in my expectancy a sensation of awe as the conflagration went on—this gradual burning of the spirits in the casks, which kept on exploding one by one with a singular regularity.

And all the time, as I watched, there in the shadow at the stern were the crew, busily throwing out such stores and necessaries as they could find.

I said that I could not tell how they managed to reach the cabin-window, but I suppose they spliced two oars together, and leaned them pole-like from the boat up toward the cabin-lights, and then one of the most active must have climbed.

There was a great deal of shouting and talking, and the light in the cabin enabled us to see them going and coming to the window loaded, and heaving things down.

By-and-by another boat came into sight, gliding along over the golden water, and we could see the faces of the men shining in the light as they gazed at the burning ship, and every now and then we could make out all they said, Jarette’s abuse and orders being quite distinct as they worked more busily than ever. But still they did not see us, though whenever they stirred we could plainly make out their actions, and at times even could distinguish the objects that were brought to the window and thrown down.

This was more especially the case after the second boat had come from forward, for several more men had ascended by the rope they had lowered, and the second cabin-door was opened, so that both the stern-windows were now illuminated; and as the bigger waves of light floated upward, every now and then quite a glare struck through the companion-way, lighting up the saloon, showing the men hurrying here and there, and then making for the windows to throw something down to their companions in the boats.

All at once I felt a hot breath on my cheek, and then Bob Hampton’s lips close to my ear.

“They’re a-getting a whole jorum o’ things, my lad, as won’t be much use to ‘em. I’d rather have a cask o’ fresh water than one o’ them boat-loads o’ odds and ends.”

I nodded and watched for a time, and then turned to look aft at the faces of my companions, all intent upon the strange scene before them, wondering why Mr Brymer did not give orders for the men to row away before we were discovered.

But he did not open his lips, and by degrees the reason came. For no doubt the slightest splash of an oar would have made the water flash, and drawn Jarette’s attention to us where we lay at the edge of the circle of light shed by the burning ship.

I can give no account of the time occupied by the various events of that night, for some things are strangely jumbled

up in my mind consequent upon my excited state; but, oddly enough, others stand out bright and clear as if lit-up by the blaze, and there were moments when the silent burning and the floating away of those waves of light beyond the busy black and gold figures at the cabin-window seemed to be part of some strange dream.

All at once, as the men were hurrying to and fro, one of the spirit-casks exploded so loudly that I saw them all dash for the windows. Then came another and another report in such quick succession, that it was almost like one. There was a tremendous burst of flame, which floated high up, and I felt that the masts must catch now, and then the cabin-lights stood cut clear without a figure visible; a burst of talking, and then a roar of laughter telling that all had safely reached the boats.

The next minute the Frenchman's voice came clearly to us as he ordered the men to mount again, and this was answered by a confused clamour.

"You miserable gang of cowards!" shouted Jarette, sharply; and his words were so clear coming across the water that they might have been spoken a dozen yards away.

"Why don't you go up yourself?" cried one of the men, evidently from the next boat.

"Because I order you," he shouted.

"And because you are afraid."

I did not catch what he said, but there was a little stir in one of the boats, and directly after I saw a figure appear at the window of Captain Berriman's cabin and begin to climb in.

"There he is," whispered Bob Hampton. "Sarve him right if the boys rowed away and left him."

I was too much interested in the scene before me to pay much heed to Bob Hampton's words, and sat watching Jarette, as he turned from the window and disappeared. Then, directly after, I heard him shout and shout again, something which sounded familiar, but I could not quite make it out even when I heard him calling again, but nobody in the boats seemed to stir.

Bob Hampton grasped the fact though, for he laid his hand on my knee, and whispered excitedly—

"Why, Mr Dale, sir, he's gone up to fetch Mr and Miss Denning, and he can't find 'em."

To endorse his words Jarette appeared the next minute at the stern-windows and cried—

"Did any of you see those passengers?" There was of course a chorus of Noes, and the man ran back again shouting Mr Denning's name, and we could hear the banging of cabin-doors. Then I saw the man's shadow as he came back into the captain's cabin to fetch the lamp, with which he went back, and, as I judged, ran from cabin to cabin. The next minute he appeared upon the poop-deck, his figure thrown up by the light and plainly seen as he ran here and there, and then disappeared, to be seen at the stern-window.

"They're nowhere about," he cried.

"How rum now, aren't it?" muttered Bob Hampton. "Now I do call that strange."

"Didn't either of you see them?" shouted Jarette.

"No."

"Did you go into their cabin?"

"No, no."

"They must be somewhere."

"All right then," shouted a voice. "You go and find 'em. We're off."

Jarette was back at the window in an instant.

"Stop!" he cried, in his clear sharp voice.

"Pull away, my lads, we've had enough of this," cried the same voice. "We don't want to be blowed to bits."

We heard every word clearly, and the hurried splashing of the oars.

"I told you to stop," cried Jarette, authoritatively.

"Pull, lads! She'll bust up directly, and suck us down. Pull!"

"Stop!" roared Jarette again, as the oars, splashed rapidly, and the boats' heads both appeared in the light, as they left the ship.

"Why, we shall have to save him ourselves," I thought in horror, as something seemed to rise in my throat, so enraged was I with the cowardly crew.

There was a sharp report, a wild cry, and a man who was standing upright in the bows of the first boat toppled over

and fell into the sea with a splash of golden water.

The men ceased rowing.

“One,” cried Jarette sharply. “I can hit eleven more without reloading, for I never miss. There, go on, my lads. I don’t ask you to come back.”

A low murmuring sound arose, and we saw that instead of the boats going on forward they were returning into the shadow once again, as Jarette shouted aloud mockingly—

“One less to row. Why didn’t you pick him up?”

Again the low murmuring growl arose, and my mouth felt hot and dry, as with eager eyes I vainly searched the surface of the water, just where there was the plain demarcation between black shadow and the golden light.

“The wretch!” I thought. “Why don’t they rise against him?” But a fresh current of thought arose, and in a confused way I could not help thinking that it was fair retaliation. The man who had been shot and fell into the sea was evidently the one who had incited the two boats’ crews to leave Jarette to a horrible death. Was he not justified in what he did?

Then as with a strange contraction at my heart I realised the fact that Jarette’s victim had not risen to struggle on the surface of the water, I could not help feeling what power that man had over his companions, and what a leader he might have proved had he devoted himself to some good cause.

By this time the boats were right under the stern, and as I watched the lighted-up window one moment, the glistening, motionless water the next, I saw Jarette climb out, rope in hand, and glide down into the darkness.

“How horrible!” I thought, as the cold perspiration gathered on my face—“only a minute or two, and one of these men living, the next—dead.”

And then I leaped up in the boat and fell back, for from the ship a terrific rush of flame sprang up skyward, mounting higher and higher, far above the tops of the masts as it appeared to me; and then, as the fire curved over in every direction, there was a terrible concussion, and all instantaneously a short sharp roar as of one tremendous clap of thunder, cut short before it had had time to roll.

Chapter Forty One.

The boat we were in rose as a long rolling swell which lifted the bows passed under it and swept on, while I gazed in awe at the falling pieces of burning wood, which were for the most part quenched in the sea, though others floated and blazed, shedding plenty of rays of light, and showing two boats being rowed with all the power of their occupants right away from where the ship rocked slowly, half hidden by a dense canopy of smoke which hung overhead.

The great waves of burning spirit were there no more. It was as if they had suddenly been blown cut, and in their place there were volumes of smoke, through which, dimly-seen, were sparks and patches of smouldering wood. And as the burning pieces which were floating here and there gradually died out, a strangely weird kind of gloom came over the scene, which grew more and more dim till the sea was black once more, and the sole light came from the ship—a feeble, lurid glow nearly hidden by steam and smoke.

And now we were half-stifled by the smell of the exploded powder and the steam evolved when the burning fragments fell in all directions, to be quenched over acres of water around the ship. It was a dank, hydrogenous odour, which made me hold my fingers to my nose till I forgot it in the interest with which I watched the ship. For Mr Brymer said sadly, but in a low voice, for fear that a boat should be within hearing—

“Poor old girl! she ought to have had a few more voyages before this. She’ll go down directly.”

But the minutes passed, and the ship still floated and burned slowly, though it was a different kind of burning now. No soft floats of spirit-blaze rose gently and silently, but little sluggish bits of fire burned here and there where the tar had melted, and the flame was yellow and the smoke black; in other places where the wood had caught there were vicious hissings, spittings, and cracklings, as if it were hard work to burn. And so hard did it seem in some places that the scraps of wood gave it up as a bad job, and went out.

But there was plenty of mischief still in the hold, from whence a dense body of smoke rose, the rolling volumes being dimly-seen by the reflections cast upon them, and tingeing the suffocating vapour of a dull red.

We sat there almost in perfect silence, watching the ship for quite an hour; but though she was expected from moment to moment to heel over a little first to one side, then to the other, she still floated upon an even keel, and her masts with their unfilled sails retained their places. But we dared go no nearer for fear of the death-agonies of the monster coming on, and our being sucked down into the vortex she made as she plunged beneath the sea which had borne her triumphantly so many times in the past.

The desire was strong amongst us to begin talking, but Mr Brymer forbade a word being spoken.

“Jarette may be waiting somewhere close at hand with his two boats, till he has seen the last of the ship. We have had troubles enough; we do not want to increase them by a fresh encounter with the scoundrel.”

So there we sat watching, with the dull smouldering still going on in the hold of the ship. Sometimes it flashed up a

little, and promised to blaze fiercely; but it was only a spasmodic attempt, and it soon settled down again to the dull smouldering, with a few vicious sparks rising here and there to hide themselves in the dull, rolling clouds, and we were in momentary expectation of seeing the vapour-enshrouded masts begin to describe arcs in the cloud, and then slowly settle down after the sinking vessel. And as I watched and calculated, I seemed to see the water rising slowly around the faintly-marked black hull, till it covered the ports, reached the deck, and then began to pour over into the burning hold, when of course there would be a fierce hissing, steam would rise in volumes, which would cover the clouds of smoke, and then all would be over, and we should be left on the wide ocean to try and fight our way to the land.

How dim the sparks and tiny, darting flames grew, and how black the ship! I listened for the splash of oars, and the sound of voices; but I heard neither for a time, and then only in faint whisperings, whose import I could not grasp.

Then our silence was broken by a slight moaning, for the doctor had gone to attend Walters, where he still lay insensible; and after that I faintly grasped the fact that in that darkness aft Mr Frewen had been attending to the captain and to Mr Denning. But I knew it all in a very misty way, and then I knew nothing whatever, for everything was a blank till I started up excitedly, and Mr Brymer said—

“Steady, my lad, steady; nobody is going to throw you overboard.”

I had been asleep for hours, and I moved out of the way now, feeling ashamed to look round; but when I did, it was to see that Mr Brymer, I, and two more were the only people awake.

“Then the ship hasn’t sunk,” I said, as I looked at her about five hundred yards away, with a pillar of smoke rising out of her hold, and the masts, yards, and sails all in their places intact.

“Yes; she still floats,” said Mr Brymer, quietly; “and we are going closer to see how she stands.”

“Where are Jarette and the men?”

“They rowed away to the east,” replied Mr Brymer, “and are quite out of sight.”

“Then we can talk aloud,” I cried.

“Ay, and shout if you like.”

It was morning, and there were signs of the sun being just about to roll up above the smooth sea, as the men gently dipped their oars so as not to waken the sleepers, and the boat began to move softly toward the ship.

“It is a puzzle to me that she has not gone down, Dale,” said Mr Brymer, in a low voice. “That explosion was enough to drive out her sides, as well as rip up her deck; and I am beginning to think that after all she may float.”

“But she is on fire still,” I said; “and though burning slowly, the fire must be eating its way through the bottom.”

“Perhaps not, my lad,” he replied. “There was an immense amount of cargo solidly stowed below, and it may be only that which is burning.”

“But you will not venture to go on board?” I said.

“Why not, my lad?”

“She may suddenly sink.”

“She does not look now as if she would; at all events not during this calm. Yes; I am going on board, and you may come too if you like.”

I looked at him wonderingly, and felt a strange shrinking; but I fancied that I could detect a faint smile at the corner of his lip, and this touched me home, and made me speak at once.

“Very well,” I said. “I’ll go with you, sir.”

“That’s right, my lad,” he said, laying his hand on my shoulder. “Why, Dale, you will be chief mate of some ship, young as you are, almost before I get to be captain. But we won’t waste time passing compliments. What should you say if we find that the old ship is strong enough to carry us into port?”

“Oh, it is impossible,” I cried.

“Not so impossible perhaps after all; but we are getting near, and we’ll see.”

“But suppose she is so near sinking that the addition of our weight proves to be enough to make her begin settling down?”

“Well, I should be greatly surprised if it did,” he said with a smile. “But we’ll be on the safe side. As soon as we mount on deck through the cabin-window, the boat shall be backed out of the way of danger, and our first task shall be to cut loose a couple of the life-buoys. Then, if the ship drags us down, we shall be sure to rise again and float.”

I could not help a shudder at the idea of being dragged down in such a horrible vortex, perhaps to be entangled in some part of the rigging, and never rise again; and seeing what I was thinking, Mr Brymer laughed.

“No fear, my lad. She will not sink now, unless there is a storm; perhaps not even then. Row right round, my lads,” he

continued to Bob Hampton and Barney; and we made a circuit of the ship, passing from astern right forward, without the hull showing any damage; and though Mr Brymer touched her just about opposite to where the principal body of smoke arose, there was no perceptible heat to be felt. Then as we pressed on under the bowsprit, I looked up at the bob-stay and the rigging about that spritsail where I had climbed; and we began to go back on the other side, to find the hull intact, and no sign of damage, but here the side was decidedly warm. Then on to the stern and under the first window, where a rope was still hanging out.

"Will you go first, Dale, or shall I?" said Mr Brymer.

For answer I began to climb, and in a very short time reached the window and crept in.

Then the rope was drawn taut again, and the mate climbed in after me, turned, and spoke gently—

"Row aft about a hundred yards, my lads. It is only for form's sake." And as the men began to paddle gently away, he said to me quietly—

"There is no fear of her going down, Dale, for many hours, if at all. I want to see what damage there is forward, and whether we can come aboard and attack the fire with any chance of success."

"But shall we not be safer in the boat?" I said.

"Most decidedly not. And fancy, boy, there are three sick and wounded people, and a lady! It is our duty to study them, and besides, after all, we may save the ship."

This sent a thrill of enthusiasm through me as we passed out of the cabin, littered with all kinds of stores and fittings, out along the damaged saloon, and thence through the companion on to the deck, which was blackened with pieces of burnt wood, scraps of a heterogeneous kind that had probably been sent skyward by the explosions, to fall back half-charred.

The smell of burnt powder now was terrible, and I could not help stopping.

"What is it?" said Mr Brymer.

"Do you think there is any more powder below?" I said, as I thought of the possibility of another explosion.

"Indeed I don't," said the mate, decisively. "Not a grain. It is all honest fire, my lad, smouldering away in the cargo, and waiting for a little encouragement in the shape of wind to burst out into an unconquerable blaze."

We had been advancing again through the charred embers and fragments, to stand at last by a large ragged cavity, torn up in the deck. The whole of the hatches and combings were blasted away, and a clean sweep had been made for fully thirty feet onward, and twenty or so across; and everywhere was of a blackish grey, showing the effects of the blasting-powder. Still there was room enough on both sides to walk along by the hole; and as we looked down we could see that, in spite of the destruction, with one exception the great cross-beams which supported the deck were intact.

"She will not sink, Dale," said the mate, quietly; and as a feeling of confidence on that question made me feel better, the fire suddenly flamed up in one place, burning briskly with a good deal of crackling and sputtering, making me feel doubtful of the ship's stability on that side.

Mr Brymer gave me a nod, meant for encouragement, as he went on—

"All the force of the powder went upwards, as it usually does. If it had been dynamite, the explosion would have struck down, driving out the bottom, and then of course the ship would have sunk."

"But the fire!" I said; and the anxiety I felt affected my voice, making it sound husky.

"Oh, the fire," he said coolly. "We must fight that. It is dangerous, but the explosive spirit has burned out, or been destroyed; the powder has gone, and we have nothing to fear now but the slow working of our friend or enemy, whichever you make it."

"But it may burst out furiously at any moment."

"It may, my lad, but I hardly think it possible. Of course a great deal of the cargo is highly combustible, but things will not burn quickly without room and plenty of air. Fire shut in only smoulders, and eats its way slowly, as you see it there. Come, I think we may hail the boat, and get our friends on board."

"But do you think it will be safe?"

"Safer than leaving them in an open boat."

"But the mast—the main-mast? Suppose the fire has eaten its way through that?"

"If it had the mast would fall; but the fire has worked forward, and, as far as I can see, the mast is untouched. Run up to the main-top, it is clear now. Have a look round, to see if you can make out the two boats with our friends."

I looked at him sharply, and he laughed. "Not afraid that the main-mast will give way with your weight, are you?"

I felt the colour burn in my cheeks at this, for he had read my thoughts exactly; and without another word, I sprang to the side, climbed above the main-chains, and made my way upwards. But I had not gone far before, as I rose higher

and more over the burning hold, I became aware of a hot, stifling fume, and the irritating smoke which rose from beneath me.

But I persevered, and though it increased for a time, a few feet higher still the oppressive sensation of breathing these hot fumes grew less; and by the time I had reached and climbed into the top, the smoke was so much dissipated as to trouble me very little indeed.

The moment I was up I laid hold of a rope and began to look round, my eyes falling, naturally enough, first upon our boat lying a short distance away, with Mr Frewen, who had just awakened, bending over Walters; and I watched him anxiously, to see if I could make out how my messmate was. But I was brought back from thoughts of him and his position by the mate's voice, as he hailed me from the deck.

"Well," he said, "what can you see?" I looked sharply round before answering, and there was the wide sea in all directions, glistening in the morning sunshine. "Nothing," I said at last. "Try again. Take a good look round, my lad. The boats look small in the distance. They can hardly have passed out of sight."

I shaded my eyes, and looked long and carefully east, west, north, and south, but could see nothing, and said so.

"Well, that's good news; but I don't want them to see that the ship is still floating, and come back again. Go up to the main-topgallant mast-head, and have a look from there."

I mounted higher, and reached the head, to pause there and survey, but as far as I could see there was nothing visible.

"That will do; come down," shouted Mr Brymer; and I descended as quickly as I could to the deck, when we took a hurried peep at the forecabin, to find there and in the galley plenty of traces of the hurried departure of Jarette and the crew.

"They do not seem to have been disposed to stop for the explosion, Dale," said Mr Brymer, smiling. "Now let's hail the boat, and have our friends on board."

"But do you really think it safe for them to come?" I said again.

"I told you before, my lad, safer than in an open boat. My good fellow, escaping as we were last night, we were glad to do anything; but think of the sufferings of Miss Denning and our wounded in such close quarters! They must come on board while we fight the fire; and if matters get too bad, there will be the boat all ready, swinging astern, and we can take to it."

The boat was hailed, one of the gangways amidships opened, and by means of a sling, which Bob Hampton and Barney soon had rigged, Miss Denning and our invalids were quickly hauled on deck. Then after the boat had been made fast, they were left in charge of the doctor and Mr Preddle, who had orders to join us as soon as the sufferers were attended to in the cabin; while Mr Brymer led us forward to see if something could not be done to save the ship.

Chapter Forty Two.

Ours appeared to be a herculean task, for the fire had been burning many hours now, as after a little examination Mr Brymer decided that it would be best to attack it from the starboard side, where a bold man could approach the worst part and pour in water from buckets if the hose from the pump could not be brought to bear.

As I looked down into the blackened hold, surrounded by the jagged planks of the deck, which had been splintered and torn in the most wonderful way, the place looked to me like what I had always imagined a volcano to be. This was very small, of course; but there was the glowing centre, from which arose a column of smoke towering and curling up for some distance, and then spreading out like a tree.

The glow of the smouldering fire could be seen, but with the sun now shining brilliantly its appearance was anything but terrible, the greater light completely dimming the lesser; but as I stepped out on to the beam from which the planks had been torn by the explosion, I was made fully aware of the danger being great, for a peculiar dizziness suddenly seized me, and I was caught by the collar and dragged back to the strip of ragged deck on the starboard side.

"None o' them games, Mr Dale, sir," said a gruff voice in my ear, as I clung to the bulwark, and a cold perspiration gathered on my forehead.

"Anything the matter?" cried Mr Brymer.

"Not much, sir," growled the sailor; "on'y Mr Dale, here, trying to dive down into the hold to look for the fire."

"Why, Dale!" cried Mr Brymer, hurrying up from where he had been forward examining the hose left by the mutineers after their feeble attempt to extinguish the fire, "did the fumes attack you?"

"Yes," I said faintly, as I pressed my hands over my forehead; "I suppose it was that."

"Some'at queer burning below, sir," growled Bob Hampton.

"Or the gas from the combustion," said the mate, leading me a little more from the part where the smoke arose.

"Pretty nigh combusted him, sir, if I hadn't got hold on his arm."

"Well, it's a warning for us," said Mr Brymer. "Now then, come and pass this hose along."

I felt better now, and walked forward to where the pump was rigged, and helped to drag the hose along the narrow path beneath, the bulwarks to where Neb Dumlow was now stationed with the brass nozzle at the end of the canvas tube, and Mr Brymer instructed him how to direct the stream of water as soon as the pump was started.

"Better let me pump, sir," he grumbled. "I understands that a deal better."

"I set you to this, man, because of your wound. You are not fit to take your turn at the pump."

"Well, I like that, sir. It makes me mut'nous, it do. Why, you wants all the strength yonder to take spells in pumping," grumbled Dumlow; "wants men, don't yer, while this here's boy's work, or might be done by the gal. A baby could handle this squirt."

"If you can pump, for goodness' sake go forward, and don't talk now," cried Mr Brymer, impatiently. "Here, Dale, is that sickness gone off?"

"Oh, yes," I cried eagerly.

"Take the branch, then, and direct the stream. Right down, mind, where the glow rises. As he says, we want all our strength there, and you can serve us better here."

I seized the brass nozzle and held it ready.

"Be careful," cried Mr Brymer. "Keep back so that the fumes don't overcome you, and call out if you want help."

I nodded, and he hurried forward, while as I stood there in the hot sunshine waiting for the water to come, I directed the nozzle so as to strike one particular part of the smouldering ruins just beside where the great spiral of smoke rose up.

The next minute clink-clank came the strokes of the double-handled pump, invisible to me, for it was on the far side of the smoke which rose from the forward part of the deck. But no water came, and after a minute or two I heard them talking loudly, and the clanking ceased. Then came the splash of a bucket over the side, and though I could see nothing, I could picture the throwing down of that bucket, and the handing of it up with the sparkling of the water as it streamed back; and I knew what the gurgling and splashing meant, as the contents freshly drawn were poured into the top of the pump.

Then the clanking began again, and I waited listening to the steady working up and down of the handles, and the strange, gasping, sucking sounds which rose hollowly from the piston.

But still no water came, and I listened to the splash of the bucket as the process of filling the big barrel of the pump was repeated. Then clang-clank again, with gurgling, hissing, and splashing; and I felt that the pump must be broken or worn-out.

"They will have to take to the buckets," I said half-aloud; and in fancy I saw what a slow, laborious task that would be, and how hopeless it was to imagine that, short-handed as we were, we could cope with that terrible fire steadily eating its way down through the cargo, and which would certainly before long burst forth with uncontrollable fury.

"It's all over," I said to myself; and my heart sank once more as I began to think that we ought before long to get back to the boat, and trust to it alone, for although open and comparatively frail, it would not have a terrible enemy on board, insidiously waiting to destroy us.

"Oh, how disappointing!" I muttered, as I passed the metal nozzle from my right to my left hand, so as to wipe the perspiration from my face, when all at once there was a quick, throbbing sensation; something ran through my left hand. There was a splash, a hiss, and a cry, and Mr Preddle rushed back into the shelter of the main-mast, from behind which he had suddenly appeared.

"Oh, I say, Mr Dale," he shouted, "you shouldn't!"

The stream of water had come with a sudden rush, and struck him full in his smooth, plump, round face.

I tried to say, "I beg your pardon," but I was choking with laughter and could not speak. But I could act, for I rapidly changed the nozzle back to my right hand, and directed it down at the spot I had selected for my attack, and as the clear, bright jet of water struck the smouldering cargo the effect was startling.

That fire might almost have been some fierce, dragon-like monster, suddenly attacked by its most deadly foe, for in an instant there was a savage hiss, followed by a series of crackling explosions, sputtering, popping, and shrieking even. For the steam began to generate and rush up from the hold, instantaneously changing from its natural invisibility to dense white clouds of vapour, which rose and spread, and grew so thick that I could not see where to direct the jet of water, but had to trust to my ear for the spot to attack.

"Hurray! hurray!" came faintly from forward, where the pump clanked steadily; and I responded to the cheer, but my voice was stilled by the hissing and shrieking arising from the hold. But I cheered again, and kept on, feeling quite excited, and more and more as if I were attacking a den of dragons, or serpents, so strangely unusual were the noises which followed every fresh direction of the stream.

"I say, Dale, you shouldn't, you know," came from close by me, in a tone full of protest; and I quite started to see Mr Preddle's face looming out of the mist in which I was closely enveloped, and which grew more and more dense each

minute.

"I didn't do it on purpose," I shouted.

"Oh, don't say that, Dale," he cried back, the voice sounding very peculiar through the hissing and shrieking of the steam. "I am quite ready to forgive you, my dear boy."

"But I didn't really," I yelled.

"Oh, Dale, don't—don't! Why, I saw you take aim at me with that thing across this dreadful gap."

"I—can't talk—now," I shouted. Then, contradicting myself,—“Going to help pump?”

"Yes; but what a fearful noise!—and you have made me so wet."

"How are you getting on?" shouted Mr Frewen. "That's right."

I could not see him for the steam; but his voice came from the other side of the deck, and I must have altered the direction of the jet a little, for a fresh series of explosions arose to prove how much more serious the hidden fire was than we could judge it to be from what was visible.

Crick, crack, sputter, and then report after report, as loud as those made by a revolver, while each steam-shot was followed by a ball of white vapour which came rushing up as from the mouth of a gun.

"Hurrah!" came from by the pump again, and Mr Preddle came slowly along to pass me and get forward.

"I suppose I can get by you," he said.

"No, no; don't try it," I cried excitedly. "I must not stir, and there is so little room. Go back and round with Mr Frewen."

"No, no; I daren't."

"The fire isn't there," I said, as the screaming and hissing were louder than ever.

"I'm not so much afraid of the fire as I am of the water," cried Mr Preddle. "You want to squirt me again."

I couldn't say "I don't," for his words tickled and yet annoyed me, so that I felt that I really did want to deluge him with the water from head to foot.

"Will you promise me not to squirt if I go that way?" he shouted.

"Honour—bright," I yelled. "Couldn't see you."

That was a fact, for from cut of the hold, and spreading all over the ship, the dense white fumes hid everything; and though Mr Preddle was now only about a yard away, I could not see anything but a dim, blurred patch; while facing me a dull, luminous disk all blurred and hidden from time to time showed where the sun was dealing his slanting beams.

"Well, I'm going to trust you," said Mr Preddle, "and I beg you will not do it again."

"All right," I shouted; and the next minute I felt that I was alone to carry on the war against the enemy below.

"How stupid of him to think that!" I said aloud, with a laugh.

"I don't see anything stupid. It was stupid of you to play tricks at such a time," said Mr Preddle.

"Why I thought you were gone," I shouted.

"No; I waited to see whether you were going to keep your word," he replied; and then I heard no more till Mr Brymer shouted—

"Want any help, Dale?"

"No, sir."

"Steam too much for you?"

"No, sir; all right. I'll call if I want help."

The pump clanked steadily on, and without any more than a half-stoppage as they made a change for resting, and I kept on searching out the hottest places by following up the loudest hissing and sputtering of the water as it changed into steam, and rose and floated upward till I thought that if the mutineers were able to see it, they would conclude that the ship was burning right away to the water's edge, for the steam, as it floated up in that huge volume, would have all the appearance of smoke.

Then I started, for from close behind me came Mr Brymer's voice—

"How are you getting on, my lad?"

"I don't know; I can't see."

"No, but I can. Capittally," he cried. "There must be a tremendous body of fire down below; far more than I thought."

"But is there any fear of our pumping too much down and sinking the ship after all?"

Mr Brymer burst into a cheery laugh.

"I don't think we should sink her by our pumping, Dale. We should get tired first, I'm afraid. Why, my good lad, I don't know whether my calculation is right, but I should say that half the water you send down there must float up again in steam."

"Think so, sir?" I shouted, altering the direction of the jet a little, and feeling startled at the consequences, for the shrieking and hissing which followed became deafening.

"I'm sure," shouted my companion. "Quite below in my calculation. You can keep on, can't you?"

"Oh yes," I said.

"That's right. I couldn't do it better. Go on; every drop's telling in extinguishing the fire, or wetting other parts of the cargo so that they will not burn. But what a fiery furnace it is! I had no idea it was so bad."

"Do you think—" I began.

"Yes—what?"

"That it has burned through to the ship's bottom?"

"No; and it will not now," he shouted. "There is so much heat there that an immense body of steam must be rising, and that will help to extinguish the fire."

"Then I am doing some good, sir?"

"Good? Yes; you are winning the fight. I must get back now, and relieve Mr Preddle. I left him and the doctor pumping."

I did not hear him go, but when I spoke again there was no answer, and I devoted all my energy to my task, though it had become so monotonous that my thoughts began to stray, and I found myself wondering how matters were going in the cabin—whether they were very much alarmed by the noise of the steam, or whether they felt as confident as the mate did about our ultimate mastery of the fire, and how Walters and Mr Denning were.

Just then a gruff, familiar voice came out of the steam behind me.

"Mr Brymer's orders, sir, as you're to hand me the nozzle, and go aft and get a refresher. Says you must be choked enough."

"Did he order me to go, Bob?" I said.

"That's it, sir. Give's hold."

I handed the nozzle.

"Talk about a fog," he cried; "this is a wunner. I say, Mr Dale."

"Yes."

"Sounds like something good being cooked, don't it? I s'pose there'll be a bit o' something to eat soon. I'm growing streaky, and could eat anything, from biscuit up to bull-beef. Well, what's the matter?" he cried, as a fiercer shrieking came along with clouds of vapour. "That go in the wrong place? Well, will that do?"

He shifted the direction of the nozzle, but the noise was as bad as ever.

"Well, you are hard to please, and you'll have to take it now as I like to give it you, so off you go, my lad."

"All right, Bob," I replied; "I'm going," and saturated with the moisture of my strange vapour-bath, I went along the narrow passage by the bulwarks, to find to my astonishment that I had walked out of a dense fog into the clear sunshine; and when I looked back, it was to see the white vapour towering up as if to reach the skies.

Chapter Forty Three.

I was faint and hungry, but I could not help standing there for a few minutes in the hot sunshine, which sent a pleasant glow through my damp clothes, and watching the wonderful great wreaths of steam rolling and circling up in the bright light, which made them look as if the pearly lining of sea-shells were there in a gaseous state in preparation before sinking in solution down into the sea.

Here the wreaths looked soft and pearly and grey, there they were flushed with a lovely pink which, as the steam-cloud curled over, became scarlet and orange and gold. In places where they opened as they ascended, the gold-rayed blue sky showed through, to give fresh effects of beauty, while high up, there at times were the upper parts of

the masts standing out as if they belonged to some smaller ship sailing away through a thick sea-fog of an ocean far above the level where I stood.

I was gazing wonderingly at the beautiful effects produced by the bright sunshine upon the vapour, forgetting all about our danger for the moment in spite of the steady clank of the double pump, which came in regular pulsation above the hiss and roar of the steam, when my name was suddenly pronounced behind me, and turning sharply, I saw Miss Denning standing there, looking very pale, and with a scared expression in her eyes that was painful to see.

She had evidently just come to the companion-way and caught sight of me, and now held out her hands, with a smile coming into her troubled face.

"I am so glad," she cried. "You will tell me the truth. My brother has sent me to see. Are we in great danger?"

"Oh no, I think not," I cried, as I took her hands, and felt as if I had been neglecting a sister and a sick brother to gratify my desire to watch some coloured clouds.

"You are not deceiving me?" she cried. "Tell me, is not the danger very great? Come and tell John."

She hurried me in through the saloon to where her brother was back in his own cabin, lying upon his mattress, looking terribly weak and ill. His face brightened though as he saw me, and he too held out his hands.

"Ah, Dale," he said feebly, "I wanted to see you. It is so hard to lie here without being able to help, and I sent Lena to get news. Tell us the whole truth. Don't keep anything back."

I told him all I knew, meeting his great sunken eyes frankly enough, and he seemed relieved.

"Then there is hope?" he said at last.

"Certainly, I think so," I replied. "They are mastering the fire, and it cannot burst out afresh, for the cargo not burned will be drenched with water."

"But it may have worked its way through the ship's side," he said, with a shake of his head. Then, suddenly—"Look here, I want you, if I break down altogether, and my sister here is left alone, to take my place, and be as it were her brother. We have both liked you from the first day we met. Will you promise this?"

"I will when it becomes necessary," I said quietly; "but you are going to be better."

He shook his head, and Miss Denning gazed at me wildly.

"Oh, come," I cried, "don't look at the black side of things. It was enough to make you much worse, having to go through all that trouble; but we've got rid of the mutineers, gone through an explosion and a fire, and all sorts of other trouble. You'll soon feel better when we are all straight again."

"That's what I tell him," said Miss Denning eagerly, "but he only shakes his head at me."

"And he doesn't know so well as I do."

"Had your breakfast, Dale, my lad?" cried Mr Brymer cheerily. "Good-morning, Miss Denning. Well, Mr Denning, we're winning the battle."

"Then you will save the ship?" cried Mr Denning.

"Oh yes, I think so now," said Mr Brymer quietly. "Miss Denning, it is almost an insult to ask you, but if you could find time to help us a little!"

"Yes," she said eagerly. "What can I do?"

"I would not ask you, but we are all forced to go on pumping to extinguish the fire, and to a man we are getting exhausted."

"And you want food—breakfast?"

"That's it, my dear young lady; and if you could collect a few scraps together for us—"

"It is all ready in the cabin next to the captain's."

"Hah! I might have known," cried the mate, taking Miss Denning's hand to raise it to his lips. "God bless you for all you have done for us, Miss Denning. If my little wife at home could only know everything, she would be down on her knees praying for your safety. Look here, Mr Denning, don't you be down-hearted. I can read you like a book, better than the doctor. Half your complaint is worry about your sister here."

"Well," said Mr Denning with a faint smile, "suppose I grant that it is."

"Why, then, you would be honest, that's all. Now don't you fidget about her, for there are on board this ship six men—I was going to say and a boy, but I can't, for that boy counts as a man in the spirit to do all he can, so I shall say seven good men and true—who will do everything they can to protect as sweet a young English lady as ever stepped. There isn't one of us, from grim-looking Neb Dumlow or brown Bob Hampton up to the doctor, who wouldn't cheerfully give his life to save her from harm."

"Yes, yes," cried Mr Denning, with the weak tears in his eyes, "I know."

"And I too," said Miss Denning, in a choking voice, "though I do not know what I have done to deserve it."

"You don't?" cried Mr Brymer; "then I'll tell you, my dear. There, I say it, and mean it. You have behaved like a true, sweet English lady should, ever since you have been on board. Do you think, rough sailors as we are, we haven't seen your devotion to your brother? Do you think we haven't all loved you for your genuine patient English pluck all through troubles that would have made scores of fine madams faint. Here, I'm getting into a knot, instead of getting something to eat, and going back to my work. Mr Denning, don't you fidget, sir. We'll pull you through. And you, Miss Denning, if you'll go on seeing that the poor fellows have a morsel now and then, we'll bless you a little more. Come along, Dale, we must get back."

We hurried out, but I saw Miss Denning sink down on her knees sobbing by her brother's side; and, as he put his left arm round her neck, he waved his right hand to me.

"It's no use talking, Dale, my lad," said Mr Brymer huskily, "we must save the ship—we will. Now, then, let's get a handful of food a-piece and look in on the captain before we go back."

I followed him into the right cabin, where a freshly-opened tin of beef, some biscuits, and a can of fresh water stood ready on a white cloth, and we both began to eat ravenously.

"There's an angel for you, Dale," mumbled the mate, with his mouth full. "Right kind of angel too, who can open meat-tins for hungry men, and who knows that even now it's nicer off a white cloth. I don't wonder at the doctor."

"What about the doctor?" I said curiously, as I too ate as if I had not had anything for a month.

"Never you mind. Fill your fists and come along. Eat as we go."

We each covered a biscuit with meat and laid another on the top, to form the hardest sandwiches ever made by man, and then hurried into the next cabin, where Captain Berriman was lying on a mattress.

"Ah, Brymer! At last!" he cried. "Well?"

"Yes, it's well, skipper," said Mr Brymer. "I think we shall save the ship."

Captain Berriman's lips moved, as his eyes closed for a few moments.

"Can you eat this?" said the mate, offering his sandwich.

"Oh no. Miss Denning has been attending to me, bless her!"

"Amen, and a double blessing," said Mr Brymer. "There, keep a good heart, man, and pray for another day or two's calm. We'll do everything possible. Good-bye."

"I know you will, Brymer. Go on, then. You will all do your best."

He smiled at me then, and I followed the mate, who was hurrying along to the end of the saloon.

"Let's look at Walters first."

"No. You go; I can't, my lad. If I do I shall feel as if I must throw him overboard. He might have saved us from all this. Go and see him, and don't let him starve; though I suppose Mr Frewen's feeding him now on physic."

He hurried away, as I felt that in all probability Miss Denning had been there to see to the wretched lad; and so it proved, for on the locker close to his head was a glass of fresh water, and the white handkerchief bound round his head, still moist with eau-de-cologne, was evidently one of hers.

His eyes were closed as I entered, but after a minute he opened them and looked at me fixedly.

I could not help shuddering, and thinking how horribly bad he looked, but the repelling feeling gave way to pity directly, as I thought of how sharply he was being punished for all he had done—wounded, suffering severely in body, and far worse, I was sure, in mind.

I hesitated for a few moments, hardly knowing how to approach him, for mentally I felt farther from him than ever. We had never been friends, for I knew that he had never liked me, while now, as I gazed at him, and thought of all the sufferings he had caused, I felt that we ought to be enemies indeed. And so I behaved to him like the worst enemy I ever had, and as he gazed at me fixedly I went and laid my hand upon his forehead.

"You're precious hot and feverish," I said. "You had better have the door open too."

I propped the cabin-door wide, so that the air might pass through, and then added, gruffly enough—

"Shipbuilders are awful fools to make such little round windows," but, as I said it, I felt all the time that the little iron-framed circular window that could be screwed up, air and water-tight, had been the saving of many a ship in rough seas.

"Hadn't you better drink some water?" I said next, as I saw him pass his dry tongue over his parched lips.

"Please," he said feebly; and, as I took the glass of water, passed my arm under his head to hold him up and let him

drink, I said to myself—

“You cowardly, treacherous brute!—the bullet ought to have killed you, or we should have let you drown.”

“Hah!” he sighed, as, after sipping a little of the water and swallowing it painfully, he began taking long deep draughts with avidity, just as if the first drops had moistened his throat and made a way for the rest.

“Have another glass?” I said abruptly.

He bowed his head, and I let him down gently; though, as I thought of Miss Denning, her brother, and the burning ship, I felt that I ought to let him down with as hard a bump as I could.

I filled the glass again, and once more lifted him and let him drink, scowling at him all the time.

“There,” I thought, as I laid him back again, “that’s enough. You’ll soon die, and I don’t want to have the credit of killing you with kindness.”

He looked at me piteously, and his lips moved, but I could not grasp what he said.

“Wound hurt?” I asked.

He bowed his head.

“Sure to,” I said. “It’ll be ever so much worse yet.”

He bowed his head again.

“Look here,” I said gruffly, “why don’t you speak, and not wag your head like a mandarin in a tea-shop?”

He looked at me reproachfully, and his lips moved again.

“Is the ship still burning?” he said faintly, and evidently with a great effort.

“Yes, I s’pose so,” I replied. “It wasn’t out when I came away. Arn’t you glad?”

“Glad?” he said with a groan.

“Oh, well, it was all your doing. Feel proud, don’t you?”

His eyes gazed fully in mine, and their look said plainly, “I’m weak, helpless, and in misery. I’m full of repentance too, now. Don’t, don’t, pray, cast my sins in my face.”

But somehow my tongue seemed to be out of my control. I wanted to take pity on him, and to do all I could to make his position more bearable, but all the time I kept on attacking him with the sharpest and most bitter reproaches.

“You ought to be proud,” I said. “You can lie there and think that through your blackguards the ship has been blown up, and is now burning, and would burn to the water’s edge if we couldn’t stop it. The captain looks as if he were dying; you are nearly killed; you’ve nearly killed poor Mr Denning, who came this voyage for the benefit of his health; you have had Miss Denning insulted and exposed to no end of dangers; poor old Neb Dumlow has a shot in him; and we’ve been treated more like dogs than anything else; while now your beautiful friends have turned upon you, and left you to be burned in the ship they have set on fire, for aught they care. Yes; you ought to be proud of your work.”

He groaned, and I felt as if I should like to bite my tongue off, as I wondered how I could have said such bitter things.

“I say, don’t faint,” I cried, and leaned over him, and sprinkled his face with water, for his eyelids had drooped, and a terribly ghastly look came over his face. But even as I tried to bring him to, I felt as if I were only doing so to make him hear my reproaches once more.

He opened his eyes after a few moments, and looked up at me.

“Here,” I said roughly; “I’d better fetch the doctor to you.”

“What for?” he cried. “He will only try and save my life, when it would be better for me to die out of the way. I want to die. How can I face people at home again? No, no, don’t fetch him. It’s all over. There is no hope for me now.”

“Can I help you, Walters?” said Miss Denning, suddenly appearing at the door-way; and as I looked at her bright gentle face, with my wretched messmate’s words still ringing in my ears, I could not help thinking that there must be hope even for such a cowardly traitor as he had proved, when she was here ready to help him and forgive all the past.

“Yes, Miss Denning, I think you can,” I said very clumsily, I know. “Walters knows what a brute he has been, and of course he is horribly sorry, and bad now, and keeps on speaking about there being no hope for him, and wanting to die. I can’t talk to him, because I don’t seem to be able to do anything but pitch into him—I mean with words—but you can.”

“Poor fellow!” she said gently; and she laid her hand upon his hot brow; “he is very feverish, and in great pain.”

“Yes, of course he is,” I cried hurriedly; “but that’s the way. I couldn’t have said that. It would do any fellow good. And I say, Miss Denning, you tell him that I didn’t mean all I said,” I continued. “He’s done wrong, and he’s sorry for

it, and I'm sure I'll forgive him if you will."

She smiled at us both so gently that the stupid weak tears came in my eyes.

"That means you will," I cried hurriedly. "Then I say, you speak to him, and make him feel that talking about dying's no good. He can't show how sorry he is if he does, can he?"

"Of course not."

"Then tell him he's to get well as soon as he can, and play the man now and help us to save the ship, and you, and all of us; and I say, I really must go and help now, and—oh, Miss Denning, don't sit down there; that's my sandwich."

I caught up the partly eaten biscuit and meat, and hurried out of the cabin to make my way forward.

"What a donkey I have made of myself!" I cried, mentally. "I thought I had said stupid enough things to poor old Walters, and now I've spoken such nonsense to her that she'll always look upon me as a regular booby. Yes, that she will."

Chapter Forty Four.

I was so upset and worried about the way in which I had acted in the cabin, that for a time I forgot all about my sandwich; but, as I neared the steam, and heard the hissing and shrieking going on, I began nibbling the biscuit, and went on along the side of the broken deck close to the starboard gangway, and as soon as I was in the thick mist, I forgot all about the scene in the cabin, the clanking of the pump so steadily going on helping to drive it out of my head.

"Well, Bob," I said, "you haven't put it all out yet, then. Why, I could have finished long ago, if I'd stopped."

"No doubt, clever-shakes," said Mr Brymer. "Here, lay hold of the nozzle and do it then."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I cried. "I thought it was Bob Hampton."

"I know you did," he said, as I took a step or two forward to where I could dimly see the mate manipulating the copper tube, and directing the water here and there. "Catch hold: I'll go and pump, and send some one to have some food."

I took the nozzle and went on with the task, Mr Brymer hurrying forward to the pump, while I was astonished to find how little impression had been made upon the fire. Tons of water must have been poured into the hold, but wherever I directed the stream, there was the sputtering, hissing, and shrieking, and I began to ask myself whether it would be possible to master the great body of fire after all.

A strange, nervous feeling came over me now, and I began to suppose—and, oh, what nonsense one can suppose when that tap is turned on, and allowed to run!—I imagined danger after danger. I saw the fire gradually eating its way to chests of horrible explosives—chemicals of whose existence we were not aware—and as, with feverish haste, I directed the heavy streams of water down into that thick mist of vapour, I kept on fancying that the sharp reports of steam were the precursors of another terrible explosion, of which, from my position, I should be the first victim. And as I thought these horrors, I poured the water here, there, everywhere, so as to make sure that I did not miss the dangerous place, though, even as I directed the jet, I felt as nervous as ever. For I told myself that the explosive might be so tightly packed to make it waterproof that all I sent down was only for it to run off again, and that I might spare my pains.

Just as I was in one of my most nervous fits, there was a momentary cessation of the pumping, and instead of hissing and spurting violently from the nozzle, the water ceased for a moment or two and then shot out in a couple of feeble spurts.

"It's all over," I thought; "the pump has broken down."

But the thought had hardly crossed my mind when the jet came as strong as ever, and I knew that they must have been changing hands, proof of this being the correct idea coming directly after out of the dense mist. For a well-known voice exclaimed—

"Hold on tight, Mr Dale, sir; we're coming by this side, so as to speak you."

"Who's with you, Bob?" I cried.

"T'other two, sir; Barney and Neb. There's Mr Trout-and-Salmon Preddle at one handle, and the doctor at t'other, with Mr Brymer to relieve while we're off dooty to go and 'vestigate the wittling department. That's so, eh, lads?"

"Ay, ay," growled Dumlow.

"That's so," said Barney; "and then I'm to take my turn at the squirting, if so be as you can't put it out."

"No fear of that, Barney," I cried. "It seems as if it won't be put out."

"Oh, it'll have to, sir, 'fore we've done with it."

"How is your wound, Dumlow?" I said, loudly. "Hurt you much?"

"Don't shout, Mr Dale, sir. I'm a-goin' out to braxfuss with a lady, and I don't want her to hear as I've had a hole punched in me, or she'll be thinking about it all the time."

"But does it hurt you much?" I asked.

"Tidy, sir. Sometimes it's better; sometimes it's worse. 'Tarn't a nat'ral way o' taking blue pill, and consekently it don't agree with you. But don't you worry about that, nor me neither: I arn't killed yet."

As Dumlow spoke, the others got carefully by me, and passed on out of sight. Then it came to his turn.

"Stand fast, sir," he said. "I don't want to shove you down into that hole. Looks just like my old mother's washus used to on heavy days. She was a laundress out at Starch Green, she was, and—hff!"

"What's the matter?" I said, for the man uttered a peculiar sound.

"Just a bit of a nip from that there bullet, that's all, sir. That's better now I'm by. 'Tis a bit steamy, though, eh?"

"Horrible," I said; "but I say, do let Mr Frewen see to your wound. It isn't right to leave it."

"Course it ain't; but I put it to you, as a young gent who's got a head of his own, and got it screwed on right, as you've showed us more'n once; can I go and get a bite and sup, and can the doctor see to my leg and go on pumping, and all at the same time?"

"Of course not, but as soon as you've had some breakfast, do have it done."

"All right, sir, all right; and thankye heartily for what you say. Why, dear lad, you make as much fuss over me, and my damaged post, as if it was your uncle, or your father, or somebody else. It's very good of you, Mr Dale, sir."

"Are you stopping to hargy anything, Neb, old man?" cried Barney, who had returned.

"No, mate, I arn't."

"Well, then, come on. Yer can't 'spect the young lady to stand all day a-holding the coffee-pot up in the air, while you're a-talking out all the breath in your chest. Do send him on, sir."

"All right; coming," growled Dumlow, and he went on, leaving me to fight with the fire, listening to the hissing and sputtering of the steam, fire, and water, and to the steady clang-clank of the pump.

It was strange how shut in I seemed, and how lonely, in the midst of that white vapour; but it did not seem very long before the men returned to pass by on the other side, and after I had waited for the slight cessation of the water which followed, telling me that there was a fresh change being made at the pumps, I soon heard voices, and Mr Frewen came up to me to pass to the cabin.

"Going to have some breakfast?" I shouted. "Isn't it Mr Preddle's turn too?"

"Yes," he squeaked, from over the other side; "I'm going too, but it's very hard work passing along here. Dale, my dear boy."

"Yes, Mr Preddle."

"I've had a look in at my place forward, and quite half the fish are dead."

"I'm very sorry," I shouted; and then in a lower voice to Mr Frewen—"Do have a look at poor Walters, sir," I said; "he's very bad."

"Yes, he's very bad, Dale, mentally as well as bodily, I hope."

"Oh yes, sir; he's horribly sorry now."

"Sorry?—Hah!"

I felt that I was not evoking much sympathy for my messmate, and I changed my attack.

"Dumlow's in a lot of pain too, sir," I said. "I should be so glad if you'd see to him."

"Poor fellow! Yes, I know his wound's worse than he'll own to. He shall have it dressed as soon as I get back. I wanted to do it before, but he was as obstinate as a mule."

"Coming, Mr Frewen?" came from aft; and the doctor went on, leaving me once more alone, to go on searching out hot places with that jet of water till he returned and stood by me.

"Why, Dale," he said, "you are winning."

"Oh no, sir; it's as bad as ever," I cried.

"Nonsense, my lad; not half. The mist is not so dense overhead, and the hissing and shrieking of the steam is nothing like so loud. We can talk to one another without shouting."

"I say," squeaked Mr Preddle from the other side, "it isn't so thick, is it?"

"No," cried the doctor; and just then Mr Brymer came near, and, to my surprise, I could see him dimly on the other side of the gap in the deck.

"Three cheers!" he shouted; "the day's our own. In an hour or two we shall be able to cry hold hard!"

Those three cheers were given—cheers as full of thankfulness as they were of joy at our prospect of final success. Mr Brymer came round to me, and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"Let Blane take the branch now," he said. "Why, Dale, my lad, you couldn't have stood to your water-gun better if you had been a man."

And I felt a burning flash of pride in my cheeks, and that it was time to leave off, for my arms ached so that I could hardly direct the branch.

Chapter Forty Five.

So much water had been pumped into the hold, that it was now doing the work steadily by soaking in all directions, and making packing-case and bale so saturated that the fire was languishing for want of food.

For my part I fully expected that if we poured in much more the ship would become unsafe; and when I descended into the fore-castle and cable-tier in turn, I thought the water would be a couple of feet deep on the floor. But there was no sign of a drop. Saturation had taken up an enormous quantity, but more had gone off into the air turned into steam; and when I went down with Mr Brymer to sound the well, I was astonished to find how small the amount of water was in the ship.

"No fear of our sinking, Dale," said the mate; and he went on deck again to look at the tremendous clouds of steam rising from the hold.

Before evening the pumping had been allowed to slacken; and as wherever the jet was directed now, the hissing had ceased, it was decided to give up and rest, though everything was laid ready for continuing the fight should it become necessary.

Every one was fagged, but there was so much to do that we could not afford to show it, and we set to work to try and place matters so that we could go steadily on as far as was possible in the regular routine of the ship—no easy matter, seeing that we were so short-handed.

But the cabin arrangements were put straight, and Miss Denning and Mr Preddle did all they could to provide a comfortable late dinner, which, if not hot, was plentiful.

Then Mr Frewen did all he could for his patients, and Neb Dumlow was bandaged and ordered to rest. He said he could not, for there was so much to do. It was not, he said, as if he could have been set to steer, for the ship still lay motionless, merely drifting with the current.

"I can do nothing, sir," he growled morosely.

"Look here, my lad," said Mr Frewen, "I have no objection if you wish to provide me with a bit of practice—go on, and I will do my best."

"Whatcher mean, sir, with yer bit o' practice?—pouring of physic into me as if I was a cask?"

"No; I meant taking off your leg."

"Taking off my leg!" cried Dumlow, with so comical a look of disgust on his countenance that I was obliged to laugh; "whatcher want to take off my leg for? Can't you stop the holes up?"

"I don't want to take off your leg, my man, and I can stop up the holes as you call it; but you persist in using it, and if you do, the consequences will possibly be that the wounds will mortify, and the leg get into such a state that I shall have to amputate it to save your life."

"Hear this, Mr Dale!" growled Dumlow.

I nodded.

"That won't do for me. Timber-toes goes with the Ryle Navy and pensions. They won't do in the marchant sarvice. All right, doctor; I'm game to do just as you tell me, only let me get about a bit. Couldn't you put my leg in a sling?"

"Your leg isn't your arm, Neb," I cried, laughing.

"Well, sir, who said it were? I knows the diffrens 'tween a fore and a hind flipper."

"There, that will do, my man," said the doctor. "Your wound is not a bad one, but in this hot climate it would soon be if neglected."

The doctor walked away, and the sailor chuckled.

"It's all right, Mr Dale, I won't do what the doctor don't want. Ketch me getting rid of a leg like a lobster does his claw. But I say, sir; I did think, you know, just then, as I might have a hankychy round my neck and hang my leg in it."

I was called aft soon after, and I saw Dumlow go forward, disappearing amongst the steam, while I went to Mr Frewen and helped him while he dressed Walters' wound, and was with him afterwards when he went to the captain and Mr Denning, both of whom were certainly easier now.

We had a light in the saloon too, for I had managed to trim the lamp, and Mr Brymer had been busy hunting out ammunition for the guns. This he had found in the fore-castle lying in one of the upper bunks, and with it a couple of revolvers, so that once more we were fairly armed. Then it was decided that the boat should be hooked on to the falls, and an attempt made to raise her, but Bob Hampton shook his head.

"Don't think we can manage her, sir, to-night. To-morrow perhaps I might rig up tackle, and we could get her on deck. She's too big for them davits. But why not let her hang on behind, as the weather's fine?"

"And suppose those scoundrels return, sir, what then?" cried Mr Brymer.

Bob Hampton scratched his head.

"Ah, you may well say what then, sir," he grumbled. "I hadn't thought o' that. Don't think they will come, do you?"

"It is possible. They left in a scare, but if they see the ship still floating they may come back."

"Then we'd better get a couple o' pigs o' ballast ready to heave over, and knock holes in the bottom in case they do come, for we can't get her hysted to-night."

"I suppose you are right," said Mr Brymer in a dissatisfied tone; and, giving the orders, Hampton and Barney Blane went off to get the two big pieces of cast-iron and place them ready for the emergency, though it was fervently hoped that that need might not occur.

Then as the night was clear, and we were so short-handed, it was settled that one man only should take the watch, and every one volunteered, though we were all so exhausted that we could hardly stand. But Mr Brymer settled that.

"I will take the first watch myself," he said. "All of you go and get some rest so as to relieve me."

This consultation was held just outside the saloon, and Mr Frewen had just spoken and told Mr Brymer that he ought to have some one to share the watch with him, when a white figure suddenly came up out of the semi-darkness of the cabin, and I gave quite a start.

"You, Miss Denning?" I said.

"Yes. Mr Brymer, our cabin-door is open, and my brother and I have heard every word."

"Well, my dear young lady," said the mate pleasantly, "I wish you had heard better news."

"It was the best you could give us," she said quietly. "But my brother sends me to say that he has had a long sleep, and that if he is helped to a chair on the upper deck with a night-glass, he could keep the watch himself, and easily give the alarm if it were necessary."

"But he is not fit to leave alone, Miss Denning," said the doctor quickly.

"He would not be alone, Mr Frewen," she replied gently. "I should share his watch."

"And do you think, my dear child," cried Mr Brymer, "that we big strong men are going to lie down to sleep, and let you watch for us?"

"Why not?" she said quietly. "You have all risked your lives to save us. It is the least we can do."

"Yes," came in Mr Denning's sharp voice; "we shall keep this watch together, I am strong enough for that. Nothing shall approach the ship, Mr Brymer, without your having warning."

"He is quite right, Brymer," said a fresh debater in a faint voice, as no less a person than the captain joined in the discussion. "You are all worn-out. We sick folk have sharp ears, and will keep them well opened."

"I—I really hardly know what to say," said Mr Brymer.

I did, for I suddenly started from the spot where I stood, after sniffing suspiciously two or three times, shouting—"Fire!—fire!" For the enemy had evidently been at work insidiously, and had burst its water-chains, and leaped up to attack us again.

We all made a rush for the pump and hose, for the smell of burning was stronger as we reached the steaming hold, I being first. But I felt puzzled, for the steam was dense as ever, and I could only smell the dank, unpleasant, hydrogenous odour of decomposed water, while the smell which had reached the companion-way had been the fresh, sharp, pungent scent of burning wood. The next moment, though, I saw where the danger was, and shouted—

"The galley—the galley!"

We all ran round to the door, for smoke was issuing from the wooden building freely, and a dull light shone out on to the darkness. Then I burst out in astonishment—

"What, Dumlow! You here?"

"Ay, ay, sir. Practysing up. I got it now, and go ahead to-morrow morning. Stove bothered me a bit at first, but I can work her, and there'll be hot water and coffee for braxfast in the morning, and soup and taters for dinner. Cooking's easy enough when you knows how."

There was a roar of laughter at this.

"Ah, you may laugh, all on you, I don't keer. This won't hurt my leg, will it, doctor?"

"No; you can go on with that," replied Mr Frewen; "but keep seated all you can."

"Toe be sure, sir. I've often seen the cook sitting down to peel the taters and stir the soup."

"Well, let that fire out now, and get some rest," said Mr Brymer. "You startled us all."

Then leading the way back to the saloon, he told Miss Denning that we should all gladly accept her brother's offer; and it having been arranged that a whistle should give the signal of danger, the poor fellow was carried up on the poop-deck, and left there with his sister, a final look given at the steaming hold, and then the men went forward, and we to our cabins, I choosing for mine the one occupied by Walters, to whom I talked for a few minutes, and then in an instant I was asleep.

Chapter Forty Six.

I said in an instant, for I was talking to Walters one moment, and the next I was fighting the fire over again, and seeing now all kinds of horrible glowing-eyed serpents and dragons, which kept on raising their heads and breathing out flames. And as they reared their heads, they glared at me with their glowing eyeballs, and lifted themselves higher, to try and lick with their fiery tongues the woodwork of the ship.

It was all wonderfully plain, and the worry and trouble were terrible. I held the nozzle, of the hose, and knew that unless I drove them back with a strong jet of water they would destroy the ship at once; but the tube was empty, the pump did not clank, and the hissing creatures rose higher and higher, till they were about to scorch me, when I started into wakefulness, and found that I was lying on my back, bathed in perspiration, and all was perfectly still.

I soon changed my position, and dropped off to sleep again—a calm, restful sleep for a time; but the old trouble returned: there I was standing at the edge of that great steaming gap in the deck, with the fiery serpents darting here and there and dancing up and down. Then they began to make darts at the woodwork, and one greater than all the rest reared itself up to try and reach the main-mast, but sank back again. Then it reared itself up and tried once more, this time reaching higher and higher, till it disappeared in the grey smoke; and directly after I saw that it had reached the mast, and was creeping up it, in one long undulating streak of golden and ruddy fire, which would soon reach the mast-head, if I did not drive it down with the jet of water.

I raised the copper branch, and directed it straight at the fiery monster, but the pump still did not clank, and no water flowed. Instead thereof came a jet of steam—not the visible grey vapour which is really the water in tiny vesicles, but a jet of invisible steam which rushed out of the breach with a shrill whistling sound, and again I awoke with a start to fancy that I was yet dreaming, for the sharp whistling still rang in my ears.

Then I knew what it was—the signal of danger given by Mr Denning or his sister, and, hurrying out of the cabin, I crossed the saloon, and ran out and upon deck to where they were.

"A boat?—the mutineers?" I panted.

"No," said Miss Denning, excitedly. "The fire has broken out again!"

At the same moment I found that the alarm had been heard forward, for the men were tumbling up from the forecabin, and Bob Hampton's voice thundered out—

"Ahoy, there! man the pumps. She's going it again."

For, on reaching the gap in the deck where the hissing had recommenced, the steam which we had left steadily rising when we went to lie down, then looking of a blackish grey, now appeared luminous, as if some great light were playing about beyond it.

Knowing where the copper branch had been made ready, I made for it at once; but as I picked it up, it was snatched from my hands by some one, whom I could not distinguish till he spoke, and when he did, his voice sounded husky and strange from excitement.

"Ready there?" shouted Bob Hampton, from forward; and none too soon, for there was a flash of light, which turned the steam to ruddy gold, and a dull crackling roar was rising out of the hold.

"Yes; go on there!" shouted Mr Brymer from the other side of the deck. "Who has the branch?"

"I have," cried Mr Frewen.

Then as my heart beat wildly from excitement, the clanking of the pump began again, and directly after a shrieking and hissing, which, in the darkness of the night, sounded louder than ever. Report after report came too, and with them the steam seemed to be denser than ever. Dark as the night appeared, it was visible enough, and looked so awful and yet grand, lit-up as it was by the fierce burst of fire beneath, that it became hard to believe that it too was not glowing, curling flame, rising up from the hold, and wreathing about the great yards and sails of the main-mast.

I watched it as it rose, fully expecting to see the sails burst into flame; but there it came in heavy folds, dimly-seen here, black in shadow there, and the fiery-looking clouds proved to be only visible vapours, water perfectly harmless, while the real flames caused by the fire having reached something specially combustible, never rose many feet in the hold, and by degrees began to yield to the powerful jet of water Mr Frewen poured down.

"Tell me if I miss any of the worst places, Dale," he shouted, to make his voice heard above the din of the elemental strife.

I answered that he was doing quite right; and the proof of my words was shown by the gradual darkening of the steam from bright gold to pale yellow, then to orange, bright red, and soon after to a dull glow, which served to show where the danger lay, and this part was so deluged, that in less than an hour the glow died out, and we were in utter darkness.

"Let me take it a bit now," said Mr Brymer, joining us; and with the hissing and sputtering to guide him, he now continued to pour on the water, talking loudly the while about our alarm.

"I ought not to have lain down," he said, in tones full of self-reproach. "I might have known that the fire would break out again."

"Why, we couldn't have had a better watch kept, Mr Brymer."

"You are right, my lad," he replied warmly. "I ought to have thought of that too. Go and tell Mr and Miss Denning that the danger is at an end."

I hurried off, and mounted to the poop, where Mr Denning sat in his chair, well wrapped in a plaid; and as I approached, Miss Denning's voice asked quickly—"Who is that?"

"Dale, Miss Denning. I've come to tell you that the fire is mastered again."

I heard her utter a deep sigh, and I believe she began to cry, but it was too dark to see her face.

"How long had it been burning when you whistled?" I asked.

"Not a minute," said Miss Denning. "We were watching the setting of one of the stars, when all at once there was a dull report somewhere in the hold, and in an instant there was a flash, and great volumes of fire and smoke began to roll up."

"But it was only lit-up steam," I said, talking as one experienced in such matters.

"Then there is no more danger?" said Mr Denning.

"No, I think not—at present."

"Why do you say at present?" cried Miss Denning, eagerly; and she caught my arm.

"Don't say anything to frighten her, Dale," said Mr Denning; "she is half-hysterical now."

"Indeed no, John dear; I am quite calm. Tell us, Alison. It is better to know the worst."

"I only meant," I said hastily, "that there is sure to be some fire left smouldering below, where the water will not reach it, and it may break out again two or three times—just a little, that's all. But we shall watch it better now. No, no," I cried, "I don't mean that; because no one could have watched better than you did."

"Starboard watch, ahoy!" cried Mr Brymer, cheerily. "How are you, Miss Denning?" but before she could reply the mate was up with us.

"Thank you for keeping watch so well. Any idea what time it is?—we hadn't been asleep long, I suppose."

Mr Denning uttered a little laugh.

"It must be close upon morning," he said.

"Morning? Impossible! What do you say, Miss Denning?"

"I think it must be very near day," she replied. "It is many hours since you left us."

"And gone like that!" cried the mate in astonishment. "Ahoy there, Mr Frewen, Preddle," he shouted, "what time should you think it is?"

"My watch is not going," replied Mr Frewen; "but I should say it is about midnight."

"Oh no," cried Mr Preddle, in his highly-pitched voice; "about eleven at the outside. Do you think we may venture to lie down again?"

"Almost a pity, isn't it," said the mate, merrily. "Look yonder—there—right astern."

"Yes?" said Mr Frewen. "What is that? The moon about to rise?"

"Say sun, and you will be right," cried Mr Brymer. "Go and lie down if you like, gentlemen; but look yonder too; there

is a fleck of orange high up. For my part, I propose a good breakfast.”

“No, no, you cannot be right,” said Mr Frewen, from the main-deck; “but we’ll take our watch now. Mr Denning, will you and your sister go and take yours below?”

“No, not yet,” said Mr Denning.

“Then I must speak as the medical man, and give my patient orders. You ought both to have some sleep now.”

“Wonderful!” cried Mr Preddle, excitedly. For, with the wondrous rapidity of change from night to day so familiar in the tropics, the morning broke without any of the gradations of dawn and twilight. There was a brilliant glow of red, which, as we gazed at it, became gold; and then, dazzling in its brightness, the edge of the sun appeared above the gleaming water, still and smooth as ever; then higher and higher, sending its rays across the vast level, and turning all to gold. It was between us and the sun now one broad patch of light, but not quite all golden glory, for as I looked right away from the poop-deck, with that indescribable feeling of joy in my breast which comes when the darkness of night and its horrors give place to the life and light of day, I felt a strange contraction about my heart—a curious shrinking sensation of dread.

For, far away on that gleaming path of gold, I could plainly see a couple of black specks. Half-stifled with emotion, I caught at Mr Brymer’s arm, and pointed as I looked in his face, and tried to speak, but no words would come.

I must have pointed widely, for he turned quickly, looked in the direction indicated by my finger, and then clapped me on the shoulder.

“Why, Dale, my lad, what’s the matter?” he said. “Did you see a whale?”

At that moment Barney shouted from where he stood forward, unseen for the mist of dimly illuminated steam which lay between us, though his voice was plainly heard, and sent a thrill through all who heard—

“Boat-ho! Two on ’em astarn.”

“Ay, ay!” roared Bob Hampton in a voice of thunder, “lying doo east. It’s Frenchy and his gang come back.”

For a few seconds there was a dead silence, and no one stirred. Then, as if electrified, I ran half-way down the ladder, and leaped the rest of the way, dashed through the saloon to Mr Brymer’s cabin, seized his glass, and ran back with it and up on to the poop-deck.

He gave me a quick look which seemed to say, “Good!”—snatched the glass, brought it to bear upon the two black specks, and then stood motionless, while all present waited breathless for the lowering of the glass again, and the mate’s first words.

For we hoped against hope. The boats might be two sent from some invisible ship to our aid.

All such thoughts were swept away as the mate lowered his glass and nearly threw it to me.

“He’s right,” he said calmly. “They are our boats and men. They must have been somewhere near, and seen the light rising up from the ship, and come back to see what it means.”

“Then all is lost!” said Mr Denning, wildly, as he seized his sister’s hand.

“Oh, no,” replied Mr Brymer, coolly, “by no means. Miss Denning, kindly see what you can do in the way of breakfast for us. Those men cannot be here under an hour, and we shall all be faint. Cheer up. They’re not on board yet.”

The next minute he was on the main-deck, giving his orders.

“They can’t board us,” he said, “but they can cut that boat adrift, and carry her off with all those provisions on board. Now, Mr Frewen, you will help us. Mr Preddle, be ready to come and haul when you are asked, but in the meantime I leave the arms to you. See that they are all loaded and laid ready on the saloon-table, and with the ammunition to hand.”

“Yes, I’ll do that,” he said eagerly; and he was moving off.

“Stop,” cried Mr Brymer. “There is a small keg of powder in the cable-tier, get that in the saloon too; and in the locker in my cabin you’ll find some big cartridges and shot. Everything is there. Do you think you can load and prime the cannon?”

He pointed as he spoke to the small brass gun, used for signalling when going into port. “I never loaded a big one,” said Mr Preddle, “but I used to have a brass one when I was a boy, and I’ve loaded and fired that.”

“It is precisely the same, sir. Have it ready, and a poker in the galley red-hot. Bah! we have no fire.”

“Wrong, sir. Stove’s going, and the kettle nearly on the bile,” growled Dumlow, who had limped up.

“Bravo!” cried the mate. “They have not taken us yet. Off with you, Mr Preddle. Now, Hampton, we must either get that boat on board, or save all we can, and then she must be stove in.”

“Which would be a pity, sir,” said Bob Hampton. “She’s heavy, and we’re few, but I think if you’ll help get out all you can from her, water-breakers and sech, I can slew round the yard, and rig up tackle as ’ll do the job.”

"Right! Up with you! Now, Blane, and you, Dale, have the boat round here to the gangway, and down into her. Mr Frewen, you and I will lower tackle, and have all up we can to lighten her."

The men cheered, and, as excited as they were, I added my shout, and the next minute we were all at work as ordered by the mate. The boat was soon brought round, made fast, and by the time Barney and I were in, the port-gangway was opened, and tackle lowered, to which we made fast one of the breakers of water, and saw it hauled up. The other followed, and then cases, biscuit-bags, everything heavy was roped together and hauled up on them, till nothing remained but small things that it would have taken too long to collect.

"Now then," shouted Mr Brymer, "look out!" and there was a creaking and clanging sound as the iron wheel of the tackle used for loading and unloading the cargo spun round, and the falls for running up boats to the davits descended, and were hooked on bow and stern.

"Now then, up with you!" cried the mate; and we seized the rope lowered, and climbed on board.

"Are they close here, sir?" I panted.

"Don't talk; no. Ready there at the capstan?"

"Ay, ay," came back.

"Haul away then."

The rattle and clang of the tackle began, as the men turned with all their might, the catches on either side making sure of every foot they won, and by degrees the heavy boat rose slowly out of the water, and higher and higher, till she was above the bulwarks, when the men cheered, ceased turning, made all fast, and while two of us got hold of the painter and swung the boat's head round, the crane-like spar, at whose end the iron wheel, hung, was slewed round till the boat was well on board.

Then Hampton and Barney ran back to the capstan and lowered away, till the boat lay on its side on the deck, when, with a rousing cheer, the gangway was closed, and I felt that I could breathe; for, as I looked over the bulwarks for our enemies, there they were, steadily rowing toward us, but still quite a mile away.

I breathed more freely then, for, in spite of their superior strength, I felt that our position was not unfavourable. The sides of the ship were high and smooth, and, without help from within, the only likely places for our enemies to be able to gain the deck were from under the bowsprit, where I had climbed up, or through the stern-windows. But we had a keen and thoughtful man in command. Mr Brymer soon rendered the stern-windows safe by having the dead-lights over them, while I was sent round to screw up the glazed-iron frame of every circular window. Then our principal vulnerable point was the stay beneath the bowsprit, where he stationed Dumlow, armed with a capstan-bar, which the big sailor prepared to use as a club; the other dangerous points being the chains, where it was possible for a man to climb up by means of a boot-hook.

These places Mr Brymer guarded as well as possible by stationing one or other of his forces ready for their defence, with the understanding that we were to act on our discretion, and run to help in the defence of the part most menaced.

All these arrangements were quickly made, and lastly, the saloon was reserved for our final stand, the cannon being wheeled just inside, pointed so as to sweep the entrance, though I failed to see how it was to be fired if we were driven there, when the red-hot poker was in the stove of the galley.

By this time they were all armed. Miss Denning was back in our citadel, the saloon, where we had all been refreshed with the provisions she had prepared for us. Mr Brymer had begged Mr Denning, too, to go into his cabin, out of the way of danger; but he had flushed up and insisted upon having a chair placed by the cannon, and being furnished with one of the guns and some cartridges.

"I am a good shot," he said, "weak as I am, and I command a good deal of the bulwarks on either side of the ship."

So he was placed as he wished, and sat with his gun across his knees, just at the breach of the cannon.

"And I can fire that if it becomes necessary," he confided to me, as I said good-bye to him before I went to my place.

"How?" I asked,— "with a match?"

"No," he whispered; "if it comes to the worst, and Jarette and his scoundrels are making for here, I shall put the muzzle of my gun to the touch-hole and fire it."

"Won't it blow the priming away?" I said.

"No; it will fire the piece instantly."

"I hope he will not have to try," I thought to myself as I ran to Walters' cabin, and told him of the fight to come.

"And I can't help," he moaned. "I wish I could."

"What, to take the ship?" I said spitefully.

"You know better than that," he said.

I don't know how it was, but one minute I was saying that to him spitefully, the next I had hold of his hand and shook

it.

"I didn't mean it," I said quite hurriedly. "Good-bye, old chap; we're going to whop them after all."

I ran out of the cabin with the thought in my mind that I might perhaps be killed.

"And one ought to forgive everybody," I said to myself, just as Mr Brymer cried—

"Oh, here you are, Dale. Take this gun, and mind, you are the reserve. Be ready to go and help any one who is most pressed. There must be no nonsense now. Shoot down without mercy the first scoundrel who reaches the deck. If it is Jarette, aim at his head or breast; if it is one of the others, let him have it in the legs."

He hurried to the side then, leaving me with a double-barrelled gun and a handful of cartridges, which, after seeing that the piece was loaded, I thrust into the breast-pocket of my jacket.

"This is a rum way of forgiving one's enemies," I said to myself; "but I suppose I must."

And then I began patrolling the deck as we waited on our defence, with the boats coming on and the insidious enemy within, for the fire was certainly making a little way in the hold.

The boats were only a couple of hundred yards away now. I could see Jarette seated in the stem of one of them, as they came on abreast, making straight for the port-gangway abaft the main-mast; and my breath came thick and fast, for the fight was about to begin, and I felt that we could not expect much mercy at the hands of the leader of the men.

Chapter Forty Seven.

"It's all over," I thought to myself; "they'll take the ship and send us adrift now;" but all the same I knew that the defence would be desperate as soon as Mr Brymer gave the word.

I could see the faces of Jarette and his men now clearly enough in the one boat, while in the other I picked out five men, among whom was the cook, who would have been, I should have thought, the very last to join in so desperate a game, one which certainly meant penal servitude for all, and possibly a worse punishment for the leaders, as death might very probably ensue in the desperate attack upon the ship. But I had no more time for such thoughts. Jarette just then rose up in the stern of the boat he was in, and hailed us.

"Ahoy, there! Open that gangway," he shouted, "and let down the roped steps."

Mr Brymer stepped to the bulwarks just opposite the boat.

"Throw up your oars there," he cried, and the men obeyed, so used were they to his orders.

"Row, you idiots, row!" roared Jarette, and the oars splashed again.

"Stop there, you in the boats," cried Mr Brymer, "or I give the order to fire."

"Bah! don't be a fool, Brymer," he shouted. "Pull away, my lads; they won't fire. Hi! there, the rest of you, don't take any notice of the mate. We saw you were on fire and in danger. We saw the fire and smoke in the night, and came to save you."

"In the same way as you deserted the ship when you thought she would sink," said Mr Brymer, tauntingly.

"Pull, my lads, and get aboard," cried Jarette, so that the men in the other boat could hear; "he doesn't know what he's talking about. We'll put the fire out, and then talk to him."

Bang! went Mr Brymer's revolver, fired over the heads of the men in Jarette's boat, and the Frenchman fell backward into the stern-sheets.

I thought he was killed, and the men ceased rowing.

But Jarette was up again directly.

"Pull, you beasts!" he cried. "You jerked me off my feet. You, there," he roared to the men in the second boat, "round to the starboard side and board there. No—"

He leaned over the side and said something behind his hand to the men in the other boat, which we could not hear, but we did hear him say—"We must have her. It's too far to row."

Those last words enlightened us, telling as they did that the boats had made very little progress, but had drifted with the current just as the ship had, and they could never have been very far away. They must too have supposed the vessel had sunk till they saw the fire renewed, when feeling that they had been premature in forsaking her, they came back, and were no doubt a good deal taken aback by finding us there ready to defy them.

"Now!" shouted Jarette. "Ready? Off!"

The boats came on in spite of two or three shots fired from the deck, and then, with Jarette rapidly returning our fire, they were soon close up and sheltered to a great extent.

Jarette's boat came right alongside at once in the most plucky manner, urged on as the men were by their leader, who seemed utterly devoid of fear. But the other boat rowed right round by the stern, and its occupants were damped on finding that unless they could mount by the fore or mizzen-chains, there was apparently no means of reaching the deck. They ceased rowing in each of these places, but there were a couple of defenders ready at each halt, and they made no further attempt, but lay on their oars in a half-hearted way, as if waiting for an opportunity to occur.

But meanwhile the fight had begun by the main-chains on the port side, where, with Jarette to cover them with his revolver, the men made a desperate effort to gain the deck, but only to be beaten back each time they showed their heads above the bulwarks, and after five minutes they sat down sullenly and refused to stir.

"You cowards!" snarled Jarette, savagely. "Do you want to stop afloat in open boats and starve? Now then, once more. Up with you!"

The men rose at his words, but Mr Brymer appeared now above them.

"Sheer off," he roared, "or we'll sink the boat."

Two reports followed this speech, and, to my horror, I saw Mr Brymer fall back heavily on the deck to lie motionless.

"That's winning, boys," shouted Jarette, triumphantly. "Now then, all of you follow."

He made a spring at the boat-hook they had fastened to the chains, and scrambled up, to step on one side crouching down, revolver in hand, sheltering himself, but watchfully ready to fire at either of us who might show, and waiting while his men climbed to him.

While they were climbing out of the boat to his side, Mr Preddle stepped forward gun in hand, to pass it over the bulwark, and hold the men in check; but the barrels were seized, pressed on one side, and a man reached up and struck the naturalist over the head, so that he too went down heavily.

"Here, hi! Mr Dale, you're in command now," shouted Bob Hampton. "Barney, doctor, Neb, come and help here."

We all made a rush to the side to help Bob, and our presence was needed, for man after man had now reached the chains, where they waited for Jarette's orders to make a rush.

"Here, let me come," cried Dumlow, limping up with his capstan-bar. "Give me room, and I'll clear the lot down."

He swung up his bar to reach over and deliver a sweeping blow, but he was over Jarette, who started up below the bar, and fired right in the big sailor's face, when he too went down, but not hit. The shock and the whizz of a bullet close to his ear had sufficed to stagger him, so that he tripped over Mr Preddle's prostrate body, and gave his head a sharp blow on the back.

To all appearances, three of our side were now hors de combat, and I felt that all was over; and to confirm my thought, there was a shout forward in the bows.

I uttered a despairing groan, for it was all plain enough. The second boat had made for the stay beneath the bows, just as Dumlow had been called away with his capstan-bar, and as I looked forward, there, to my horror, dimly-seen through and beneath the ascending steam, were four men who had climbed on board.

"We're licked, Mr Dale, sir; but hit, shoot, do anything as they come over the side. Do, dear lad, shoot Frenchy, whatever you do. Now then, let 'em have it, for Old England's sake and sweet home! Here they come!"

Jarette and four men rose up now suddenly in the chains, climbed on to the bulwark, and were about to leap down, and with a desperate feeling of horror, I raised my gun to fire. But there was a rush and a cheer as the men from forward rushed down to us, and I was roughly jostled, my aim diverted; but the trigger was being pulled, and the piece went off loudly.

The next moment blows were being given and taken. Mr Frewen was fighting furiously, and well seconded by Bob and Barney. Jarette and his men were checked, two going down, and to my astonishment they fell from blows given by the four men who had dashed forward.

It was all one horrid confusion, for now one of these men turned on me, and wrested the gun from my grasp, though I tugged at it hard. Then it was pointed and fired at Jarette—not at me—missing him though, but making him lose his foot-hold, and fall with a heavy splash into the sea.

"Hurray!" yelled Bob.

"Give it to 'em," cried Barney; and I saw Mr Frewen strike one with a revolver in his hand, but using his fist as if he were boxing, and another man went backwards into the boat, while a blow or two from Neb Dumlow's capstan-bar, which Barney had picked up, sufficed to clear the chains.

I looked over the side for a moment, and saw a man holding out an oar to Jarette, who was swimming; but there was a rush of feet again, and the men who had come over the bows were running back just in time to drive back three more, tumbling them over into the sea, to regain their boat the best way they could.

Then these four, headed by the man who had led them, began to cheer, and came running back toward us, the man who had snatched my gun, and whom I saw now to be the cook, shouting louder than all the rest put together.

"What, are you on our side, then, old Plum Duff?" cried Dumlow, who was now sitting up.

"Seems like it, Neb," cried the cook. "Here, Mr Dale, sir, load quickly and fire, or they'll come on again."

He handed me the gun, and I rapidly opened the breech and slipped in the cartridges, just as firing began from aft, and I saw that Mr Frewen was standing against the companion-way aiming at the boat containing Jarette, which had sheered off after picking up their leader and another man, while now the second boat hove in sight from under the bows, in time for Mr Frewen to send a stinging charge of shot at her crew in turn.

He kept up his practice, while in both boats the men pulled with all their might to get out of range.

But our troubles did not seem over, for hardly had we grasped the fact that the cook and three of the men had snatched at the opportunity to escape from Jarette's rule, and join us in the defence of the ship, than I saw that which made me shout—

"Fire!—fire!" for the great cloud of steam always rising was swept suddenly towards the starboard side, and the vessel slowly careened over in the same direction.

"Burnt through, and sinking," I groaned to myself, and then I felt stunned, for Bob yelled out—

"Run to the wheel, Barney, lad. Keep her before the wind."

The sailor bounded to the ladder, and up on the poop-deck, to spin round the spokes of the wheel; and the next minute, almost before I could grasp what had happened, the sails, which had hung for days motionless, had filled, and we were running free, leaving the two boats and their occupants far behind.

"Thank God!" cried a voice behind me, and I turned to see that it was Mr Frewen, who now ran to the entrance of the saloon, where I saw him grasping Miss Denning's and her brother's hands, and I knew he was saying "Saved!"

Directly after he was back with us, who were carefully lifting Mr Brymer, while Mr Preddle lay so motionless that I was afraid he was dead.

Mr Frewen dropped on one knee, and began to examine the mate, while I watched him with intense eagerness, waiting to hear his words.

"It must have been a bad cartridge, or the pistol improperly loaded. It did not pierce the cloth of his cap, and even the skin of the scalp is not broken."

"Then it will not be fatal?" I said.

"Fatal?—no! There may be a little concussion of the brain. You had better carry him into his cabin, my lads, out of the sun."

The cook and one of the men who had returned to their allegiance lifted the mate carefully, and bore him toward the saloon, while Mr Frewen now directed his attention to the naturalist.

"I'm not in fit trim for acting as surgeon, Dale," he said. "I'm bubbling over with excitement; my nerves are all on the strain with the struggle I have gone through. But we've won, my lad, thanks to those fellows who came over on our side. Now, Preddle, my good friend, how is it with you? Hah! Only been stunned. A nasty crack on the head though."

He parted the hair to show me how the head had puffed up into a great lump; but I had hardly bent forward to examine it, as the poor fellow lay sheltered from the morning sun by the shadow cast by one of the sails, when he opened his eyes, looked vacantly about him, and then fixed them on me, and recognising me, a look of intelligence brightened in his gaze, and he said quietly—

"My fish all right, Dale?"

"I—I haven't been to look at them this morning," I stammered, hardly able to keep back a laugh.

"I forgot. I went myself," he said. "Of course. But I couldn't find the bellows. You haven't taken them, have you?"

"No," I said gently, thinking that he was wandering in his mind.

"How tiresome! That water wants aerating badly."

"Bellows, sir?" growled Dumlow, who was looking on; "I took 'em to make the kittle bile, and didn't have no time to put 'em back 'cause of the boats coming."

"Ah, the boats," cried Mr Preddle, excitedly. "Jarette knocked me down."

"And he got knocked down hisself, sir. Reg'lar one for his nob," said Dumlow.

"Then we won, Dale?"

"Oh yes, we've won," I cried, "and the boats are a couple of miles away."

"Let me examine your head again," said Mr Frewen.

"What, for that!" cried the naturalist. "Oh, it's nothing—makes me feel a little giddy and headachy, that's all. But I

think I'll go and sit out of the sun for a bit. Why, we're sailing again."

"Yes," I cried; "there's a beautiful breeze on, and we've left the beaten enemy behind, and—"

Flip-flip-flap-flap-flop!

The wind had ceased as suddenly as it had come on.

"Well, sir," said Bob Hampton, a short time later, "I never 'spected to see you get to be skipper dooring this voyage."

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, Bob," I cried. "Look—they're coming on again as fast as they can row."

The old sailor shaded his eyes and looked aft at the two boats, which the men were tugging along with all their might, taking advantage of our being becalmed to try and overtake us and renew their attempt.

"Yes, there they are, bless 'em!" cried Bob. "Well, sir, as skipper o' this here ship, with all the 'sponsibility depending on you, o' course you know what to do."

"No, I don't, Bob," I cried. "How can a boy like I am know how to manage a full-rigged ship?"

"Tchah! You've been to sea times enough, and a ship's on'y a yacht growed up. Besides, there's no navigating wanted now as there's no wind."

"But the boats!" I cried. "Look at the boats."

"Oh, I see 'em, my lad; well, that means fighting, and I never knowed a boy yet as didn't know how to fight."

"We must try to beat them off, Bob," I said, ignoring his remark.

"Nay, not try—do it, sir; and you, being skipper, of course 'll give 'em a startler to show 'em what's waiting for 'em, if they try to board again."

"What do you mean, Bob?" I cried.

"Well, come, I like that, sir," he said, with a laugh; "there have you got the little signal-gun loaded and primed, and the poker all red-hot and waiting, and i'stead o' having it run to the gangway, set open ready to give 'em their startler, you says you don't know what to do?"

"Would you do that, Bob?" I said anxiously.

"No; but you would, sir, being skipper, and wanting to save the ship, what's left o' the cargo, and all aboard."

"But it might sink them."

"And jolly well serve 'em right—a set of piratical sharks. Ahoy, Barney!—you aren't to stop at that there wheel now; the skipper wants you to lend a hand with the gun."

Barney ran up to us, and the gun was dragged to the open gangway, ready for the mutineers, as they still rowed on.

"Neb, old lad," cried Bob, "give a hye to the red-hot poker, and when I cries 'Sarvice!' out you runs with it, and hands it to me."

"Ay, ay," growled Dumlow, in his deepest bass.

"It's all right, Mr Dale, sir," whispered Bob. "You can't hit 'em with that thing if you try ever so; but it'll splash up the water, and scare the lot on 'em so that old Frenchy 'll have no end of a job to get 'em to come on."

I felt better at that, and waited for the attack. Mr Frewen was back with us, and Mr Preddle too. Mr Denning was also in his old place with his gun; and as the men, including the four who had joined us, were armed with the weapons they had brought from the boat, they made a respectable show.

"But do you think we can trust those men?" I whispered to Bob.

"Trust 'em, my lad?" he replied, with a chuckle. "You jest may. They knows it would be all over with 'em if once Frenchy got 'em under his thumb again. Don't you be scared about them; they'll fight like gamecocks."

"If we could only get the wind again," said Mr Frewen, who looked anxious.

"Is there any chance of it, Bob?" I asked.

"Can't say, sir. Maybe we shall get a breeze; maybe we shan't. But never mind; we'll raise a storm for them in the boats, in precious few minutes too. She's charged all right, arn't she, sir?"

"Oh yes," said Mr Preddle. "I rammed the cartridge well home, and primed the touch-hole with powder."

"Then I should not wait long," said Mr Frewen, anxiously. "It will perhaps make the scoundrels keep off."

"'Zactly, sir. Mr Dale here's skipper now, and he'll give the order directly."

"No, no," I said; "Mr Frewen, you take the lead."

"I am only the doctor," he replied, with a smile, which made me feel that he was laughing at me. But the boats were coming on so fast that something had to be done, and in my excitement I cried—

"Now, Bob. Time!"

"Ay, ay, sir," he shouted, going down on one knee to point the little gun. "Sarvice!"

There was a growl from forward, and Neb Dumlow came limping from the galley, along the narrow piece of deck, by where the steam still rose, and flourishing a red-hot poker, hurried to our side.

"Cap'en o' the gun says— Stand well from behind; keep alongside, 'cause she kicks. One moment. I can't get no better aim. Now, sir, ready!"

"Fire!" I cried; and I felt in agony, but had faith in Bob Hampton's words.

Down went the hot poker. There was a flash, a fizz, and a puff of smoke from the touch-hole, and that was all. No, not all, for a puff of wind followed that of smoke, and the ship began to glide onward again, while the men gave a cheer, and Barney ran to the wheel.

"Saved once more," cried Mr Frewen.

"Yes, sir, and them too. But beg pardon, sir," growled Bob Hampton; "I mean you, sir,—Mr Preddle, sir,—are you sure as you loaded the gun?"

"Yes, quite. With one of these cartridges,"—and he went to a box, out of which he took one with the ball fitted in its place by means of a couple of tin bands.

"That's right, sir; but did you ram it home?"

"Yes, hard."

Bob Hampton thrust in the rammer and felt the cartridge.

"Yes, sir; seems right. Perhaps the powder's old and damp."

"No; I think it was perfectly dry."

"Humph!" growled Bob; and then an idea seemed to strike him.

"Beg pardon, sir," he cried; "would you mind showing me how you shoved the cartridge in?"

"Like this," cried Mr Preddle, eagerly, stooping down to apply the cartridge to the mouth of the little brass gun.

"Sure you did it like that, sir?"

"Yes; certain."

"Then no wonder it didn't go off. Why, that's the way to sarve one o' them breeches-loaders. You don't put a cartridge ball first into the muzzle of a gun."

"Why, no!" cried Mr Preddle, colouring like a girl. "How stupid!"

"And we shall have a job to unload her," growled Bob.

But his attention was directly after taken up by the management of the ship, for the wind held on, and by night we had left the boats down below the horizon line, invisible to us even from the mast-head.

That proved an anxious time, for the wind sank soon after sunset, and a careful watch had to be kept, both for the boats, and against our enemy the fire, which kept on showing that there was still some danger in the hold.

The next morning dawned with the boats in sight again, and their crews were evidently straining every nerve to overtake us, for it was once more a dead calm.

We were more hopeful though, for a couple more applications of the hose had pretty well extinguished the fire; the cannon had been unloaded and properly charged; and, best of all, Mr Frewen's patients were all better, and Mr Brymer sufficiently well to sit up in a chair, and be brought on deck to take his place as captain, to my intense relief.

The cook had quietly gone to his galley, and then acted as steward as well, so that while the boats were still miles away, we had the best breakfast we had been provided with for many days. And, after this, quite ready for our enemies, and well furnished with weapons, we waited their coming.

I obtained a glass from the captain's cabin, my principal officer telling me to keep it as long as I liked, on condition that I kept reporting to him the state of affairs on deck.

"Everyone is very kind," he said sadly; "but I spend a great many anxious hours here, longing to hear how things are going on, and if it were not for Miss Denning, my position would be ten times worse."

I hurried out with the glass, focussed it on the boats, and watched the men for long enough. The forces had been equalised by four men being sent out of Jarette's boat to take the places of the men who had returned to their

allegiance, and, as I watched them, I could see that as they slaved away at the oars, their leader kept jumping up with a pistol in his hand, to throw himself about wildly, stamping, gesticulating, and pointing to the ship, as if he were urging the crews on.

I was not the only one who used a glass, for there was nothing to do now but wait for the coming attack; and as I had been watching for some time with the glass on the rail, one eye shut, and the other close to the glass, I suddenly ceased, for my right eye felt dazzled by the glare of the sun, and I found that Mr Frewen was close beside me.

"Well, Dale," he said, "who will get tired first—these scoundrels of attacking us, or we of trying to beat them off?"

"They will," I said decisively, as I closed my glass and tucked it under my arm. "We've got nothing to do but wait; they've got to row miles in this hot sun, and then they have to fight afterwards. They can't help having the worst of it."

"Yes; they have the worst of it," he said, smiling.

"And it strikes me they'd be very glad to— Hurray! here's the wind again."

For the surface of the sea was dappled with dark patches, and long before the boats could reach us, we were sailing gently away, certainly twice as fast as their crews could row.

It is astonishing what effect those gentle breezes had upon our spirits. I found myself whistling and going to the galley to ask the cook what there was for dinner, and I found him singing, and polishing away at his tins, his galley all neat and clean, and the dinner well in progress.

"Well, mutineer," I said; "anything good to-day?"

"Oh, I do call that unkind, Mr Dale, sir, and it isn't true. Didn't I show you as soon as I could that I wasn't one of that sort?"

"Well, yes, you sneaked back when you thought your side was going to be beaten."

He looked at me fiercely, but smiled the next moment.

"Plain Irish stoo to-day, sir, made out of Noo Zealand mutton, for I found the onions. There's plenty of 'em. You don't mean what you said, sir. Just you have a pistol stuck in one of your ears, and be told that you're not to be a cook and a slave any more, but to join the adventurers who are going to live in a beautiful island of their own, where it's always fine weather, and if you don't you're to be shot. Why, of course I joined 'em, same as lots more did. Any fellow would rather live in a beautiful island than have his brains blown out."

"I don't know about that," I said shortly. "I wouldn't on Jarette's terms."

"No, sir, you wouldn't," said the cook; "but Mr Walters would."

As he spoke he lifted the lid off one of his pots, and gave the contents a stir round.

"Smell that, sir? There's nothing on Jarette's island as'll come up to that. But, between ourselves, I don't believe he knows of any island at all such as he talked about to the men, till he'd gammoned them or bullied them over. Hah!" he continued, tasting his cookery; "wants a dash more pepper and a twist of salt, and then that stuff's strong enough to do the skipper and Mr Denning more good than all the doctor's stuff. Young Walters, too; he's very bad, isn't he?"

"Terribly."

"Sarve him right. Wonderful island indeed! This galley's good enough island for me. You didn't mean that, Mr Dale, sir. I got out of the scrape as soon as I could, and so did those other three lads as come aboard with me; and we'll all fight jolly hard to keep from getting into it again. I believe that some of the others would drop the game, and be glad to get back on board, if they weren't afraid of Frenchy, as we call him. That man's mad as a hatter, sir."

"That's a true word, cookie," growled Bob Hampton. "You smell good, mate, but I wish you'd keep your door shut. It makes me feel mut'nous, and as if I wanted to turn pirate and 'tack the galley."

"Wind going to hold good, Bob?" I said, moving off.

"Arn't seen the clerk o' the weather this mornin', sir, so can't say."

"Jarette's mad—Jarette's mad," I repeated to myself as I left the galley, and found Mr Preddle, with his head very much swollen and tied up in a handkerchief, blowing away into the water where his fish still survived.

"I shall get some of them across after all," he said, with a nod.

"I hope so," I replied; and after a look at the far-distant boats—mere specks now—I went on aft to have a chat with Mr Denning, who lay on a mattress in the shade, with his sister reading to him; but there was his loaded gun lying beside him, to prove that it was not yet all peace. I stopped to sit down tailor-fashion on the deck and have a chat with them both, feeling pleased to see how their eyes lit-up, and what smiles greeted me; and somehow it seemed to me then that they felt toward me as if I were their younger brother, and they called me by my Christian name quite as a matter of course.

"If the wind would only keep on!" Miss Denning said.

"Or if Mr Preddle would only use those bellows of his on the sails," said her brother, smiling.

"Why, you're ever so much better," I said quickly, "or you wouldn't joke like that."

"Yes," he said with a sigh, "I feel better. Mr Frewen's doing me good, or else it's this lovely soft, warm air."

"Oh, we shall have him running ashore in New Zealand like a stag, Miss Denning," I cried, getting up.

"Don't go yet," she said.

"I must," I cried. "I want to stop, but Mr Brymer uses me now as his tongue and fists. I have to give all his orders to the men."

I went to where the mate was seated, received his orders, had them executed, and then met Mr Frewen coming out of Walters' cabin.

"Oh, there you are, Dale," he cried. "Go in and talk to that poor wretch for a few minutes. You must try and cheer him up, or he'll die, as sure as I'm here."

"Oh, I say, don't tell me that," I cried. "I don't like him, and I think he behaved horribly, but I don't want him to die."

I hurried into my messmate's cabin, and found him lying there so ghastly and strange-looking that I shivered, and began to move on tip-toe.

"Come and sit down a minute, Dale," he said in a weak voice; and I at once seated myself close to his bunk.

"Want some water?"

"No," he said sadly; "I want nothing now, only for you to promise me something."

"What is it?"

"I can't write, but I want you to promise me when you get home to go to my father and mother, and of course they'll know everything from the papers; but I want you, my messmate, to tell them I was not quite such a wretch as I seem to have been."

"Oh, never mind about that now," I said. "Get well, and go and tell them yourself."

"No," he said calmly; "I shall not get well. I could see it in Mr Frewen's eyes. I'm very glad now. If I got well, of course I should have to be tried and punished, and be a convict. I should deserve it, but the judge and lawyers would be very hard, and I don't want them to try me."

"Oh, come, Walters, old chap," I cried in a choking voice, "don't take it like that." And I caught his hand in mine, and felt him press it feebly, as his face lit-up with a pleasant smile, which made him look quite changed.

"Yes," he said, quite cheerfully, but almost in a whisper, "I must take it like that now. Old Jarette aimed too well."

He lay looking straight out of the bright cabin-window; while I tried to speak, but found no words would come. I knew that the wind had dropped again, for the ship had grown steady once more; but I forgot all about the approaching boats, and could only sit holding Walters' hand, and watching his altered face.

"Yes," he said at last, "Jarette aimed too straight, Dale, old fellow, it has all been a mistake. I was a weak, conceited fool, and thought every one was against me, when it was all my fault. I know it now. Any fellow can make himself liked if he only tries—no, without trying, if he'll only go straight and act like a man. But somehow I couldn't. I got jealous of you, and wild because people made so much of you. And I said you hated me, and did all you could to make things worse, but it wasn't true, Dale, old fellow. It was all my fault."

"Yes, yes; but that's all over, old chap," I said huskily. "You'll get well, and do your bit of punishment, and make a fresh start."

He looked at me with a smile on his poor wan face, and I never realised before how good-looking he was. And then I shuddered, for he said quietly—

"Yes, I shall make a fresh start—somewhere else."

"Walters!" I whispered.

"Yes, somewhere else," he repeated. "It was all wrong; and just when I was at my worst, that wretch, who had been watching me and reading it all, came to me, and, as if he were some evil spirit, kept on day after day, laughing and jeering at me, till he regularly worked round me like the snake he is, and flattered, and planned, and talked of the future, till in my weak, vain folly I drank it all in. For I was weak, and he was strong; and at last, though I didn't know it then, I was his slave, Dale, and ready to do every bit of villainy he wished. But there, I need not tell you any more. I only want you, knowing all you do, to go to my poor old father and mother and tell them everything—how it all happened. It will be better than for them only to know it from the papers. They will understand then how it was I went wrong so quickly, right to the bitter end."

"No," I cried; "you shall go and confess it all yourself."

He laughed gently.

"Oh no. I'm glad Jarette aimed so straight, Dale. It was the kindest thing he could do. It's all over now. Can't you see it's best?"

"No," I said more firmly. "It would be best for you to get well, and prove in the future as a man, that you have repented your weakness as a boy."

"Yes, perhaps," he said, after a long pause; "but it is not to be so. I'm not going to be tried here, Dale, where no one can tell everything, and understand how weak I was, and how, from the first day, I bitterly repented giving that man such power over me. I'm going to be judged there, Dale, where everything is known."

He closed his eyes as he spoke, and I was going to steal away, but his grasp tightened on my hand.

"Don't leave me, Dale," he whispered. "You'll promise all this, won't you?"

"If it is necessary," I said; "but you—"

He opened his eyes, and looked at me, smiling gently, and I ceased speaking, for I knew that my words were not true as I sat beside him all through that hot day waiting.

Mr Frewen came in from time to time, but he said little, and Walters appeared to be dozing for the most part.

"Better stay," Mr Frewen whispered; and then in answer to my questioning look, he shook his head, and I knew that it was all over.

It was close upon sundown, and the interior of the cabin was filled with an orange glow when Mr Frewen came in again.

Walters seemed to be fast asleep, quite free from pain, and breathing easily.

"You must be terribly faint, my lad. You have had nothing," the doctor whispered.

"Yes, I have," I replied. "Bob Hampton brought me a biscuit and some soup, and Miss Denning brought me some tea just now."

"Heaven bless her!" he muttered. Then in a quick whisper—"We shall have to call you up presently, my lad."

"Why?"

"The enemy are closing in. They'll make a desperate fight of it this time, and every help we can muster is necessary. Eh! Want me?" he said, as there was a tap on the door.

He went out, and I was thinking whether I could withdraw my hand without waking Walters, so as to get out on deck and help, when he opened his eyes and looked round quickly as if he wondered where he was.

Then he saw me and smiled.

"Don't forget, Dale," he whispered. "Now I want Miss Denning."

He loosened my hand, and I went out to find her waiting close by the door.

"Walters wants to see you, Miss Denning," I said, and she bowed her head and crept silently into the ruddily-lit cabin, and knelt down by where Walters lay.

"Yes," he said, holding out his hands. "Thank you. But you tell them—how sorry—they will listen—to you.—Now—'Our Father'—"

Helena Denning's voice took up the words and went on in a low appealing murmur, and as I looked wildly in Walters' face, I saw his lips moving till she uttered the words—"and forgive us our trespasses—"

Then his lips became motionless, his gaze fixed on the golden glory in the heavens, and I started wildly to my feet, for at that moment there was a tremendous roar. The heavily-charged cannon had been fired, and I knew that the enemy were close at hand.

I gave one glance at Miss Denning, who knelt there now, crouching low, with her face buried in her hands, and then ran on deck ready to help repel the attack.

For there were the two boats close into the port-gangway, and the men in them frantically gesticulating and waving their hands.

"Don't—don't fire," one of the men yelled. "We give in."

"Yes, yes; give in," came in a wild chorus.

"The beggars surrender, sir," cried Bob Hampton, who was on his knees re-charging the cannon. "But get that there poker ready again, Neb. We'll hit 'em next time if they don't."

"Ahoy!" cried Mr Brymer, through a speaking-trumpet. "One boat come forward; but if there is any treachery, we'll show no mercy to any one there."

"Treachery?" shouted a man pitifully, as the first boat was slowly rowed in. "We're all spent, sir. There aren't a drop of water. Give us all a drink first, and then shoot us if you like."

"Where's Jarette?"

"Here, in the bottom, sir, tied neck and heels. He went stark mad last night, and bit and fought till we had to tie him down under the thwarts."

"Water—water!—for heaven's sake, water!" came in a piteous chorus, as the second boat rowed slowly in.

"Is it real or a trick?" said Mr Brymer, in a whisper.

"Real enough," said Mr Frewen. "The men are suffering horribly, and—oh! look! There's no subterfuge there,—that man—Jarette. He is dead!"

Chapter Forty Eight.

It was plain enough: the man had died there where his companions had tied him fast, and that night the two boats lay astern carefully watched after all the arms had been handed on board.

Not that there was anything to fear. For at daybreak, after two bodies had been committed to the deep, the spokesman of the mutinous crew told a pitiful tale, of how they would gladly have given up but for their leader, who by force and violence kept them to their task till, in utter despair, they had turned upon him and bound him, as they would some dangerous wild beast that they dared not kill.

That day, half the poor worn-out wretches were again confined in the fore-castle, while the others were, under careful surveillance, allowed to return to their work.

For the calms were over, and a hard fight began with the weather, which grew so bad at last that Mr Brymer, who, as the days passed on, seemed to recover the more rapidly for having plenty to do, was glad to have all the men back to their duty.

This, in the hope of some mitigation of their punishment, they did well, working away, so that long before we reached Auckland we seemed to have a model crew.

That latter part of our voyage had its good effect on every one. Captain Berriman recovered sufficiently to have re-taken the command, but he left it in Mr Brymer's hands till the day we sailed into harbour, when he once more took his place, and laughingly complimented Mr Denning upon the change which had taken place in him as well, though, poor fellow, he was so weak that he was glad to lean upon his sister's arm.

There was nothing to show how adventurous our voyage had been, but the roughly boarded-over deck, beneath which lay the sadly damaged cargo.

But, as Bob Hampton said,—“It were an accident, and of course it was well insured. But I want to know, my lad, what they're a-goin' to do with our crew. My word, they are a-shivering in their shirts, eh, Barney?”

“They just are. It'd be a charity to wring 'em out to dry.”

“Arter taking on 'em off, and givin' on 'em four dozen a-piece on the bare back, and say no more about it,” growled Neb Dumlow, “for I forgive—far as I'm consarned.”

But there could be no “say no more about it” in such a case as this. The men were tried and punished, but got off very easily in consideration of their sufferings and subsequent good behaviour. Hampton, Barney, and Neb Dumlow were the only men who sailed with us again.

I kept my word to Walters, and a painful task it was. I have often thought of his conduct since, and talked with Mr and Mrs Frewen when I have been to see them at their residence in Auckland, where I have been four times since. But, as Mrs Frewen always says. “He was sorely tempted, and he fell.”

“And,—*De mortuis*—you know the rest of the quotation, Dale,” said Mr Frewen, “and if you cannot say nothing but good of the dead, my lad, don't say anything at all.”

Those were delightful visits, when I was on shore in New Zealand, divided between Mr Denning's up-country farm, where he has grown strong as one of his own horses, and the Frewens' charming house just outside Auckland, where he is the most famous doctor for miles. Mr Frewen and Mr Denning are like brothers, of course, and they are always tempting me to leave the sea and settle in that grand new England; but no—I resist, and keep to my profession, and I suppose I always shall, for, as Bob Hampton says, “a man might do worse than go to sea.”

“Not as I hold much with having ladies on board, my lad,” the old fellow once said. “They're okkard an' in the way, unless they're the same kind as Miss Denning—I mean Mrs Frewen, bless her heart!—for it was like havin' of a hangel with us. But I say, Mr Dale, sir,” he added with a chuckle; “her brother didn't like the doctor, bein' a bit jealous like; but I says to Neb Dumlow and Barney when they first come aboard,—‘You see if them two don't make up a match.’”

“You did, lad,” said Barney.

“That's so,” said Neb.

For they did; but all through that voyage such an idea never entered my mind. I was a boy then, on my first long voyage. A perilous one too. And would I go through it again? No, not for untold gold. I don't know though. Yes! I would—if once more I were a boy.

The End.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAIL HO! A BOY AT SEA ***

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