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William H G Kingston

"The Two Shipmates"

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### Chapter One.

The stout trading brig *Amity*, Samuel Mudge master and part owner, was gliding up Plymouth Sound on a summer's evening towards her accustomed berth in Catwater, a few years before the termination of the last war between England and France. She had no pilot on board; indeed, her crew averred that the old craft could find the way in and out of the harbour by herself; at all events, her master knew it better than most men trading from the port, as did his young mate, Ralph Michelmore.

The last rays of the setting sun were glancing on the topgallant mast-heads of the brig when her anchor was dropped, and by the time her sails were furled and all was made snug the gloom of night had settled down on the Pool, and twinkling lights began to appear from the houses on shore.

"You'll be wishing to go on shore, my boy," said the old master, as Ralph, the duties for the day over, came into the cabin to join him at tea, which the boy had just placed on the table. "There'll be some one who'll be right glad to see thee, lad;" and the speaker looked up at the mate, whose handsome countenance beamed with pleasure, a slight blush rising on it as he answered—

"Thank you, sir; thank you heartily. I should very much like to pay Mistress Trevis—and—and her granddaughter a visit. I had few opportunities of seeing them when we were last in port, and as we have been long on this trip they may be anxious about us. But would not you prefer going on shore yourself, captain? It's my duty to remain on board."

"No, do you go, as I tell ye," replied the kind old master. "I'll stay on board and look after the ship. But I say, lad, take your protection with you. The press-gangs are sure to be out, and you may chance to fall in with one of them."

"Thank you, sir, I have it here," said Ralph, producing a tin case from his pocket; and hurriedly swallowing his tea without sitting down, he went into his cabin to rig himself in his shore-going suit.

Ralph's father, the commander of a merchant vessel, and an old friend and shipmate of Captain Mudge, had been lost at sea, washed from the deck in a heavy gale, leaving his wife and young child but ill provided for. The widow, a truly Christian woman, exerted herself to the utmost of her strength to support and educate her boy, but when he was about fourteen years of age her health gave way, and she died, committing him to the charge of good Captain Mudge.

Ralph, who had set his heart on going to sea, was taken as an apprentice on board the *Amity* the next voyage she made. By his steadiness, intelligence, and activity, he soon became a prime seaman. When on shore he studied navigation, and as soon as his time was out, Captain Mudge, the berth being vacant, made him his mate. Most of the crew heartily congratulated Ralph on his promotion, for they acknowledged him, young as he was, to be the best seaman among them. The only one who grumbled was Dick Bracewell, who had also been an apprentice on board the *Amity*, and being a year older than Ralph, and a very fair sailor, considered that he had superior claims to promotion.

"I'm not going to quarrel with you about the matter, Ralph," he said, though he looked very much inclined to do so. "If the skipper chooses to favour you that's not your fault; but you can't expect me, as good a man as yourself you'll allow, to be jumping here and there at your orders; and so as soon as we get back to Plymouth I shall take my chest and clear out of the old ship for good. I shall easily get a berth as mate on board another craft, and if we meet again we shall be as good friends as ever, I hope."

"No doubt about that, Dick," answered Ralph; "I am sorry, however, that you have made up your mind to leave us; still it's but natural, I own."

"Ay, I should think so," said Dick, walking forward.

Dick might have been as active and bold a seaman as Ralph, but the captain had, notwithstanding, ample reason for refusing to make him his mate, for he was known to be wild on shore, and was often far from attentive to his duty on board; while, though he professed to have learned navigation, his calculations were not to be depended on. Still, being good-natured and brave as need be, he was liked by the rest of the crew, in spite of being thoughtless and inclined to give way to temper. Ralph had a sincere regard for him. He saw his shipmate's errors, but believed him possessed of redeeming good qualities, and hoped that he would in time amend his bad ways.

Dick kept to his intention, and on reaching Plymouth bade his old captain and shipmates good-bye. This occurred about a couple of years before the time we are speaking of, and since then Ralph had heard nothing of Dick Bracewell.

No sailor takes long to dress. Ralph was quickly ready, and a fine young fellow he looked as he stepped back into the cabin habited in what the old captain called his "shore-going toggery." Promising to be on board again before midnight, he jumped into a boat which had just come alongside, and told the waterman to pull for the landing-place.

"You must keep a sharp look-out not to fall in with the press-gangs, master," observed the latter. "They are out every night, and are in no ways particular on whom they lay hands."

"Thank you," answered Ralph; "I've no cause to fear them, and am not going where they are likely to be looking for their prey."

Ralph had proceeded a few paces after landing, when he heard steps behind him and felt a hand placed on his shoulder. Turning round he saw a sailor-like man, who exclaimed, "What, Ralph Michelmore, old chum! Don't you know me? I am Dick Bracewell. I'm sure I can't be mistaken in you, for I saw the *Amity* come in at sunset, and hoped to fall in with you, though I'd no fancy to go on board, do you see."

"And I'm right glad to meet you, Dick," said Ralph, grasping the other's proffered hand. "Where have you been all these years?"

"Knocking about in one craft or another, and seeing something more of the world than you have in your jog-trot old tub, I fancy," answered Bracewell, with a laugh. "I've just come back from a voyage to the West Indies, with my pockets full of shiners, which I'm going to try and get rid of in enjoying myself. Come along, Ralph, and help me. I only stepped on shore for the first time just as you did, so I've not begun yet."

"Thank you, Dick; you mean it kindly, but I'm on my way to see some friends, and have promised to be on board again to-night," said Ralph, as they walked on together.

"What, not take a glass or two of grog with an old shipmate!" cried Dick in an aggrieved tone. "Come, come, man, just for once be social."

"Even if I ever took liquor, which I don't, I haven't time to stay with you," said Ralph, firmly; adding, after a moment's reflection, in the hope of preventing his companion from committing the folly he meditated, "Instead of doing as you propose, come along with me to see an old lady and her granddaughter. They are great friends of mine, and will welcome you for my sake; indeed, I'll confess that I hope some day to marry the little girl."

"No, no, my boy; I should be left to do the polite to the old dame, while you make love to the young one," answered Dick, with a hoarse laugh, which Ralph did not like. "That sort of thing is not to my taste; still, to please you, if you'll come in here and do as I want you, I'll think about it." The door of a public-house stood temptingly open. Dick endeavoured to drag in Ralph, who however resisted manfully, and tore his arm away from his companion's grasp.

"Once more hear me, Dick," he said, unwilling to abandon his old friend without another effort to save him. "If you take one glass you'll take another and another, till you won't know what you are about, and then ten to one you'll fall into the hands of crimps who'll fleece you of every shilling in your pocket, or you'll get picked up by a press-gang and be carried on board a man-of-war, not to regain your liberty for years to come."

"Don't preach to me, Ralph; I know how to take care of myself; so if you go on I'll follow you, and you shall see that I'm as sober as a judge," answered Dick, and with a laugh he darted into the public-house.

Ralph, though eager to be with his friends, waited a minute or more in the hope that he might come out, and then, as he did not appear, reluctantly walked on. At length, having passed through the town, he reached a small cottage in the outskirts, with a few yards of garden in front. Passing through the wicket-gate he stopped for a moment at the door. The window was partly open, and he could hear a sweet voice reading. He caught the words; they were from the Book of Books, which he had learned to know and value. He was unwilling to interrupt the reader. She stopped, however, having come to the end of the chapter. He knocked. "May I come in?" he asked. "Oh, granny, it is Ralph!" The words were uttered by the same person who had just ceased reading, but in a very different tone. He well knew the sweet voice. His heart beat quick. He heard the speaker come flying to the door. In a moment it was opened. "Jessie, my own dear Jessie!" he exclaimed, as he pressed the hand of a fair blooming girl, who welcomed him with a bright smile.

"I hoped that you might come to-day, and yet as the hours drew on I began to fear that I might again be disappointed," she said, as she looked up affectionately into his face. "How slow the *Amity* must have sailed!"

"She is like other craft, not able to make way without wind, and we had scarcely a cup-full all the voyage round from the Thames; besides which, we were detained there much longer than usual; but she has safely reached port at last," he answered; adding, as he advanced into the room towards a neatly-dressed old lady in a high mob-cap, seated in

an arm-chair, with knitting-needles in her hands and spectacles on her nose,—“And how is Mrs Treviss?”

“Ever glad to see thee, dear Ralph,” answered the old lady, trying, not without difficulty, to rise, till the young man springing forward quietly made her sit down again. “In spiritual health I am well—the Lord be praised for all His mercies; but bodily infirmities creep on apace with old age, and remind me that my earthly course is well-nigh run.”

“I hope that you will live many years to be a blessing to us, granny,” said the young sailor, affectionately, taking her hand.

“I am ready to remain if it is the Lord’s will,” she answered. “And now tell me, Ralph, how is good Captain Mudge? I hope that he will pay me a visit before he sails again, as I want much to talk to him on a matter of importance.”

“He is tough and hearty as ever; he will, I am sure, come and see you,” said Ralph.

Mrs Treviss, however, did not entirely occupy the young sailor’s attention. He and Jessie had a good deal to say to each other of especial interest to themselves as they sat side by side, Jessie’s hands having found their way into those of Ralph. At last Mrs Treviss reminded her that their guest might possibly be hungry, and that it was full time for supper, which she, in obedience to her grandmother, got up to place on the table. “How neat-handed and graceful in all her movements she is!” thought Ralph, as his eyes followed her about the room; and they were seldom off the door watching for her return when she went into the kitchen to warm up the old dame’s posset and prepare some other viands. Mrs Treviss took the opportunity of her absence to speak to Ralph on a subject which he found especially interesting. “If I was younger and stronger I would not give you this advice I am about to do,” she said. “I would say, wait for a few years till you have the command of a ship, and Jessie is older and better able than now to keep house and have the cares of a family, but as I fear my poor son-in-law, her father, Captain Flamank, will never more be heard of, and I may ere long be called to my rest, she will have no one in this world to protect her but you; and so it’s my wish that you should marry as soon as you can manage to spend a few weeks on shore.”

“Then that may be at once,” exclaimed the young lover, delighted. “The *Amity* requires some repairs, and the captain is much in a mind, unless a good freight offers, to go into dock, and his wish to serve me may settle the matter. I little thought when I came up this evening what good news you had in store for me; I can never thank you enough.”

“Nay, Ralph, though I love you, it’s my grandchild’s welfare I have at heart, for I can with perfect confidence confide her to you,” said the old lady, taking Ralph’s hand and looking him earnestly in the face. “You will cherish her and watch over her, and guard her from all evil.”

“Indeed I will, if health and strength is given me,” he answered solemnly.

“For that we must trust to God,” said Mrs Treviss. “All we can do is to exercise the sense He has given us, and guard against the dangers we know may occur. I have therefore made my will, and left the very small property I possess to Jessie; but most of my income, as the widow of a warrant-officer killed in action, ceases at my death, so that as a single woman she would be but poorly off, though she will have something to help keep house.”

“I would as willingly marry her if she had not a sixpence,” exclaimed Ralph, warmly. “More willingly I could not, but it would be a satisfaction to know that I was saving her from poverty or from having to toil for her living.”

“I know you will, Ralph, and I believe you, so say no more about that,” observed Mrs Treviss. “If your good captain settles to put the *Amity* into dock, you may perhaps marry some day next week. You can ask Jessie, and I don’t think she will say you nay.”

Ralph was pouring out his thanks from the bottom of his heart, with all the ardour of a young sailor, when Jessie returned. He would at once have broached the subject had not Mrs Treviss given him timely warning that by so doing he would considerably interfere with the supper arrangements. Jessie therefore went back to the kitchen and returned several times, unaware of the interesting conversation which had taken place, though she might have observed the animated expression of her lover’s countenance. When all was ready and they sat down to table Ralph ate so little that Jessie began to fear he was unwell, and she at last could not help looking up affectionately in his face and asking him if such was the case.

“Oh no, I never felt better in my life, Jessie; and so happy!” he answered.

Perhaps she herself might just then have had some suspicion of the truth, for she forgot to eat any more; and shortly afterwards her granny, getting up, hobbled out of the room. The young people were alone, and, as may be supposed, Ralph did not lose much time in telling Jessie what Mrs Treviss had said, and asking her if she would consent to the arrangement. Jessie was as ready to obey her granny’s wishes as Ralph could desire, and as he told her there would be no difficulty in obtaining a licence she consented to fix the following Monday for their wedding-day, if he could, as he hoped, remain in Plymouth. He was naturally very sanguine in the expectation of being able to obtain a holiday. He even thought that, should the *Amity* be offered a freight which could not be refused, Captain Mudge would propose getting another mate for the voyage, as it was summer time; not that he should like him to do that. Jessie thought that Captain Mudge would not hesitate about having the *Amity* repaired. How could he, when so important an event depended on his decision! At length granny came back into the room, with a smile on her countenance, and, sitting down in her arm-chair, looked up at the tall clock in the corner, which had gone “tick! tick! tick!” unheeded for an hour or more since supper.

“Well, my dears, is it all settled?” she asked.

“Yes,” answered Ralph. “Jessie has promised to make me the happiest young fellow alive next Monday—though I am wonderfully happy for that matter at present,”—and jumping up he kissed granny’s hand and thanked her again and

again for the gift she had bestowed on him, and then he ran back to Jessie's side.

At that instant there came several thundering blows on the door from a heavy cudgel, and a gruff voice cried out, "Open in the King's name;" while another was heard to say, in a lower tone, "Go round to the back and look out that he does not escape by that way."

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## Chapter Two.

When Dick Bracewell entered the tavern, he intended merely to take a glass of liquor, just to show his independence, and then to follow his friend. He, however, found a shipmate, Tom Joyce, in the bar, who easily persuaded him to take a second, followed, naturally, by a third; and then, his spirits raised, he was induced to accompany his companion to a dancing hall attached to a public-house in one of the back streets not far off. Upwards of fifty seamen were collected, many of them half-seas-over, when a press-gang, to whose commanding officer notice had been given of what was going forward (very likely by the landlord himself), rushed in, and, after a severe struggle, captured whole of them, including Dick and Tom, who, having only just fallen into the trap, were the most sober of the party.

While the more unruly were carried down at once to the boats, Dick and Tom with a few others were marched along by the larger part of the press-gang, who were evidently intent on making further captures.

The two captives had their wits wide awake, and were not without hopes of effecting their escape.

The press-gang went on till they reached the outskirts of the town, when they brought up before a neat little cottage. Three men were sent round to the back-door, while five others advanced to the front entrance and knocked loudly.

"That's where Widow Treviss lives; she's not one to harbour seamen," Dick heard one of the party observe.

"Nol Hedger says he marked a prime seaman go in there not two hours ago," answered another. It at once occurred to Dick that they were speaking of Ralph Michelmores.

"Poor fellow! It's where the young girl lives he's going to marry. If they get hold of him they'll not mind her tears and prayers, but will carry him off, like the rest of us, to serve the king. However he has a protection, and has a chance of getting off, I hope."

The blow on the door was, repeated.

"Open in the King's name," shouted the officer.

"I always obey that authority," answered Dame Treviss, from within, "Ralph, unlock the door."

The door was thrown open, and the seamen, led by their officer, rushed in. The old dame sat calmly in her chair, while Ralph, with Jessie clinging to his arm, stood in the centre of the room.

"Why have you come here at this time of the evening, my friends?" asked Mrs Treviss, with all the composure she could command.

"Because, old lady, we have information that you are harbouring seamen wanted for his Majesty's service, and, if I mistake not, here stands one of them, and a likely lad too," answered the officer, a rough old master's mate, well accustomed to such work, as he laid his hand on Ralph's arm and made a sign to his men to seize him.

"Oh, no, no! You cannot take him! You will not be so cruel—you shall not have him," cried Jessie, clinging tightly to her intended husband.

"Don't be frightened, dear Jessie, they cannot take me, I have my protection," said Ralph, trying to free himself from the officer's grasp.

"Let go my arm, and I will show you the paper which proves that I am mate of the *Amity*, and a protected man," he added, turning to the officer.

"Never took a fellow yet who didn't try to make out that he was protected. However, if the young woman here won't make such a fuss we'll let you overhaul your pockets for your protection."

Ralph was released, and began to search in his pockets. Poor Jessie stood by, still trembling with alarm, and anxiously watching him.

"Oh! You must have it, Ralph," she exclaimed in a plaintive tone, as she saw that he did not produce the important document. "Oh! Let me try," and she plunged her hands eagerly into his pockets. She uttered a cry of dismay when it was not to be found.

"I must have forgotten to take it out of my other jacket when I dressed to come on shore," said Ralph; "I had it just before I left the brig, I know. Don't be alarmed, Jessie dear, all will come right; Captain Mudge will send it to me, or, if the officer will permit me to go on board, I'll get it—I will, indeed, sir," he added, addressing the old mate, "and will, on my honour, return with it to any place you may name; I will, on my honour."

"That sort of note, I tell you, don't pass current with us, my lad," answered the old mate, more moved perhaps by Jessie's agony of grief and terror than from his gruff manner and language might have been supposed. "It's hard lines for you, I'll allow, as matters stand, I see; out cheer up, my good girl, many another man has had to serve his Majesty for a year or two and come home with his pockets full of rhino to set up house. As to the protection, I knew from the

first that was all fudge; so as we've lost too much time already palavering about it, come along, my brave fellow, without more ado." As he spoke he again seized Ralph by the arm, and three of the men stepped forward to assist him.

Poor Jessie clung to Ralph frantically, entreating that he might be allowed to remain. "He will bring you the paper to-morrow; I can answer for him, and so can my grandmother. He never told a falsehood in his life; he would not deceive even you," she exclaimed. "Oh, let him go! Cruel, cruel men!"

"The young man speaks only the truth," said Dame Treviss, trembling with agitation as she rose from her chair and tottered to her grand child's assistance.

While two of the men had seized Ralph, another was about to tear Jessie from him, when the dame took the poor girl in her arms.

"Take off your hands, lads, and I will accompany you without attempting to escape," he said, and the men releasing him he bore Jessie to the little horse-hair sofa, where he placed her by the dame's side, bestowing on her a loving kiss as he did so.

Having released himself gently from her arms, "Now I am ready to accompany you, sir," he said, and walked steadily towards the door. Perhaps even then the king's officer might have felt that the merchant seaman was, morally, his superior.

The dame, fearing that Jessie might be exposed to some rough treatment should she attempt to stop Ralph, held her in her arms till he had reached the door. She cast a fond look at him as his captors hurried him away.

The door was closed—he was gone! She listened with aching heart to the retreating steps of the cruel press-gang as they bore off their prisoners, till the sound died away in the distance. In vain her grandmother tried to console her; a fearful foreboding filled her gentle bosom that she might never see him more, and she refused to be comforted.

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### Chapter Three.

As soon as Ralph Micheltoreau was in the road, though he had offered no resistance, he was roughly thrust into the midst of the press-gang, who again closed round their prisoners. The officer called off the men on the watch at the other side of the house, and gave the order to proceed back to the boats. They had not gone far when Ralph felt one of his fellow captives stumble up against him, evidently to attract his attention.

"Hist, old ship! I'd have given a year's wages rather than have seen you in the hands of the gang," whispered the man, whom he knew at once to be Dick Bracewell.

"Thank you, Dick," answered Ralph. "I am vexed with myself for not having brought my protection with me. I shall, however, get it to-morrow, without doubt, so I shall be all right. I am sorry though to find that you have been pressed."

"It's little odds to me where I am, but much to you whether you keep your liberty, according to what you told me about that young girl," answered Dick, in the same low tone. "Now, depend on't, they'll take good care you don't receive your protection, for I've found out that we are to be shipped this very night aboard the *Falcon*, now lying in the Sound, and that she sails for a foreign station—the East Indies, they say—to-morrow morning. Bless ye, old ship! Before Captain Mudge can bring you your protection we shall have run the Eddystone out of sight."

This information made Ralph very anxious, for he had too much reason to fear that it was correct. Dick fancied that some of the press-gang were observing him, and was silent for some time, though not idle with his fingers, walking on as if resigned to his fate. Once more he stumbled, apparently without intending to do so, against Ralph.

"Hist, mate! You'd like to get your liberty, and come what may I've made up my mind to help you," he whispered. "My hands are free. In half a minute we shall be close to some dark lanes, and more than one hiding-place I know of. I'll knock the fellow down nearest to you, and then do you run for it."

"I cannot do it, Dick; I promised not to run, and I must not break my promise," answered Ralph.

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Dick; "if those fellows made you give a promise it's their look out."

"A promise is a promise in God's sight, however made," said Ralph.

"Then you don't care for the young girl you talked of marrying," said Dick, again lowering his voice.

"I'd give my life for her sake," answered Ralph.

"That's not the question. Come, here's the place; say the word and you'll be free," whispered Dick, not attending to his last remark.

"No, I cannot," answered Ralph firmly.

"An obstinate man will have his own way, and be sorry for it afterwards," exclaimed Dick, in a tone of vexation. "But I'll see what I can do in spite of you; there'll be another chance further on."

Dick staggered on as if he were still half-seas-over, gradually increasing his distance from Ralph till he got alongside his friend Tom. The latter was in no mood for talking, but he listened eagerly to what Dick had to say.

"Ay, give the word, and I'm ready," answered Tom, after listening for some time; "only just help me to get my hands out of limbo."

Dick had managed to liberate his own hands, and it was the work of a moment to free his companion's, the darkness preventing their guards from observing them.

They had by this time reached a street close to the water, though at some distance from where the boats were waiting. Suddenly the press-gang were assailed by the wildest shrieks and cries and showers of abuse, uttered by a number of women and boys, who rushed out from some narrow courts or other places where they had been concealed. They did not confide their attack to words, but, supported by some men, who, however, kept at a safe distance behind them, they opened a volley of brickbats and stones at the heads of the sailors. The latter turned to defend themselves and drive off their assailants, who nimbly retreated, when pursued, in all directions, redoubling their shrieks and cries. The officer, well knowing the object of the attack, shouted to his men to stand fast; but some amid the din did not understand what he said, and few were willing to obey his orders.

Tom, whose hands had been freed, tripped up the man nearest him, and dashed down the street towards the water, followed by two of the press-gang.

"Now's your time, mate," cried Dick, seizing Ralph by the arm; "come along."

"I cannot," answered Ralph, firmly; "I promised to remain. Save yourself if you can."

"You're a fool then," exclaimed Dick, and, springing past some of the press-gang attacked by those in front, he dashed through the crowd. He was, however, pursued, and quickly brought back.

"Luck's against me, hearties, but I'm not the lad to pipe my eye," he exclaimed, in a tone of bravado. "Just give me another chance, and I'll show you who has the fastest pair of heels."

The sailors laughed at Dick's sally, and thought him a hearty good fellow, though they did not neglect, for all that, to lash his hands more securely than at first.

In the meantime Tom had reached the wharf, but finding one side blocked up, had doubled, in the hope of escaping in another direction, when he saw two of the press-gang close to him. Numerous vessels of all sizes lay in the harbour. Dread of having to serve on board of a man-of-war made him desperate. Without hesitation he plunged into the water, and swam off, hoping to reach one of the vessels, on board which he might be received and concealed. His pursuers, expecting a flogging should he escape, dashed in after him. The heads of the three men could scarcely be discerned when the officer, with the main body, reached the quay. In vain he shouted to Tom to return and not to risk his life, while he ordered some of his men to push off in a boat and overtake the swimmers. No boat was, however, to be found afloat in the neighbourhood. Some were hauled up on a slip, but they were under repair, and no oars were in them. The people who had been mobbing the press-gang had collected on the quay, keeping at a safe distance, and they now uttered cries of encouragement to Tom to persevere, while they hurled execrations on the heads of his pursuers; their voices, joined with those of the shouting seamen, creating the wildest possible uproar. In a short time the splash of oars was heard, and a boat was dimly seen at some distance from the shore. The officer shouted to the people in her to take his men on board, but his orders were unheeded.

Almost within hail lay the *Amity*. Could Ralph once get on board her he was safe. At that moment he caught sight of a lad running by.

"Here, boy," he cried out, in spite of the growls of some of the press-gang near him, "there's a golden guinea for you if you'll get aboard the *Amity*, tell Captain Mudge that his mate, Ralph Michelmore, has been pressed, and ask him to bring my protection, which he will find in my jacket pocket, on board the *Falcon*. She sails to-morrow early, so there is no time to be lost; or, if you can get off at once—and you shall have thirty shillings if you do—he may overtake us before we reach the boats."

"Trust me, mate," answered the lad, a sharp young mud-larker. "I should just like the feel of a little earnest-money, though, to show that I am not being sent on a fool's errand."

The seamen laughed, and told the boy that such was very likely to be the case. Ralph, however, found a crown piece in his pocket.

"Here, my lad," he said, giving it to the boy; "notwithstanding what they say, I will trust you. What's your name, that I may know you again?"

"I'm sometimes called Peter Puddle, and sometimes Muddy Legs, and all sorts of names, for that matter; but I'm no ways particular."

"Well then, Peter Puddle, be smart about it, and gain the rest of your reward," said Ralph.

The lad, with a shout of delight, taking the money, ran off, and Ralph was left in doubt whether or not he would fulfil his commission.

The sailors laughed even more than before. "It's easy to see who's the fool now," observed one of them.

The attention of the party was, however, quickly recalled to what was going forward in the harbour. The boat before seen could be discerned dimly in the distance through the gloom, and from the same direction there came the sound of oars splashing, or people struggling in the water, and loud cries and shouts mingled with fierce oaths, while now a piercing cry rang through the night air. Some of the press-gang were eager to jump in and swim to their shipmates' assistance, but the officer forbade them, ordering three or four to make another search for a boat. At length the

sounds of struggling ceased, but which party had been defeated it was impossible to ascertain.

The sound of oars in the water was now heard, and a boat was observed slowly approaching the shore. She reached at length the jetty near which the man-of-war's men were standing. Some of them went down to meet her, and a shout proclaimed that their shipmates had returned, though without a prisoner. The two men were lifted out of the boat, not having strength to walk. Their arms and shoulders were fearfully battered and bruised, and the head of one of them was cut open. They had reached the boat, when they were attacked by the men in her with oars and stretchers, and they would have been drowned had they not got hold of the gunwale, and, in spite of opposition, clambered on board, and, after a desperate struggle, turned the occupants out, just at the moment that another boat came up. The men, they believed, had been taken on board her, as had, they supposed, the escaped prisoner; and, at all events, she had made off and got out of sight.

Followed by a collection of men, women, and boys, still shouting and hurling abuse at them, the press-gang, moving on, at length reached the boats. Ralph and Dick were among the first not over gently hauled on board; the rest of the captives were as quickly as possible shoved in after them; a strong party of the press-gang remaining on shore to keep back the mob, which seemed inclined to make a rush at the last, for the purpose of rescuing some of their friends. Their courage, however, failed them. The last of the man-of-war's men leaped on board, the order to shove off was given, and the boats proceeded down the Sound, followed by the yells and execrations of the people on shore.

"They'll hurt their own throats more than they do us," observed an old seaman who was pulling at the thwart on which Ralph and Dick sat. "It's hard lines, though, you think, for yourselves, mates, I dare say; but before long you'll be used to a life aboard a man-of-war, and be as ready to press others as we were to press you."

"Justice is justice; and I shall never think it right to press men against their will," answered Ralph. "I, however, hope to be free to-morrow, as I have a protection which will be brought on board to me."

"Don't count too much on that, mate," said the old sailor; "when they've got a man, they're not in a mind to let him go. It's wisest to make the best of a bad job, and that's what I advise you to do, my hearty."

"If I had only myself to think of, I would," said Ralph, liking the tone of the old sailor's voice; "but I was to be married next week, and it's bitter hard to be parted from the girl one loves, and harder for her." Ralph's voice trembled as he spoke.

"Ay, mate, hard, very hard!" answered the old sailor, in a sympathising tone; "I know what it is. I was pressed the very day I had married as sweet a young girl, and as good too, as an honest man would wish to have for his wife. I had five years of it out round the Cape without ever hearing a word of her, but I knew she would be true to me, and that kept my heart up. I got home at last, with plenty of prize-money to set up house, but she was gone. They showed me her grave. It might have been worse—I know that—still it seemed as if the life had been crushed out of me. I left my money with her childless mother, and volunteered aboard the first ship I heard of fitting out for a foreign station. From that day to this I've been at sea, turned over from one ship to another, and never saved a sixpence. I wish I had. I'd have got your discharge, that I would, if money could have done it."

"Thank ye, from the bottom of my heart, old friend," said Ralph, warmly. "Maybe I shall get my protection paper in time, and be set free."

"Wish I could say I thought so. But you'll know at least that there's one aboard the *Falcon* who can feel for you, and that's something; ay, and will stand your friend if there's a chance. Cheer up! Cheer up! Here we are, close alongside the frigate."

The pressed men, with Ralph and Dick among them, were sent down to the lower deck, and placed under charge of a sentry. They were allowed to stretch themselves on (as Dick, while bemoaning his fate, remarked) "the softest planks they could find," for the remainder of the night.

It seemed but a moment after Ralph had at length fallen asleep, that he heard the boatswain's shrill whistle and the deep rough voices of his mates rousing up all hands, while the pale light of early morning streamed down through the hatchways. The next cry which reached him was, "Hands aloft; loose sails." Other orders were issued; he knew too well their meaning; preparations were being made for immediately putting to sea.

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## Chapter Four.

Poor Jessie had wished at once to hasten on board the *Amity*, to obtain the assistance of Captain Mudge, and to get Ralph's protection, but her grandmother persuaded her to remain till the morning, as, not knowing where Ralph had been carried, she was sure nothing could be done till then.

Daylight came at length, and Jessie, receiving a loving embrace from her grandmother, set out. With a prayer for her safety, Mrs Trewiss watched the young girl, who, like a bird released from its cage, flew rather than walked, as she made her way in the grey light of the early morn in the direction of the port.

At last she reached the landing-place, some way off which Ralph had told her the *Amity* lay. There were several boats made fast to the shore, or moored off it; but no watermen were about. In vain she looked along the quays on either hand; no one was stirring. Here and there, on board some of the vessels, men were seen just coming up the fore hatchways on deck, but they were too far off to hear her voice had she called to them. She felt ready to give way to tears at the delay, when every moment might be so precious. At length she saw, through the veil of morning mist which still hung over the mirror-like surface of the harbour, a small boat approaching the landing-place. A boy was paddling her at his ease, singing as he slowly dipped his oars in the water. She hurried down to meet him, as,

standing up, he gave a few more strokes and brought the boat to shore.

"Well, Miss, what's it you want?" he asked.

"Oh, boy, will you take me off to the *Amity*?" said Jessie. "She lies not far away from the shore, and I will pay you well."

"Now that is curious," exclaimed the lad, the same Peter Puddle by name to whom Ralph had entrusted his important commission. "I was to have gone aboard her for a young chap who was pressed last night and had left his protection behind him, but I got another job and couldn't, though I am agoing when I've had breakfast."

"Pray take me off at once, for every moment may be of consequence," cried Jessie. "I want to see the captain about the same young man, and he will, I am sure, give you some breakfast."

"Well, step in, Miss, then," said Peter, offering his hand to help her, while he kept the boat close to the shore with his boat-hook. "I thought might be that the skipper would just hear what I'd got to say, and then kick me down the side again, as the chances are many I've met with would do."

"Oh no! no! Captain Mudge will treat you kindly and reward you for the trouble you have taken," said Jessie, as Peter began to pull away from the shore.

"As to trouble, Miss, I can't boast much of that, seeing I didn't go when I said I would," answered Peter, in a greatly changed tone. "I like you, for you speak kindly to me; and I'm sorry I didn't go when I promised; for, as you say, Miss, there's no time to be lost. He was taken aboard the *Falcon*, and she is to sail this morning for the Indies, so that if he goes in her he won't be back again for many a long year."

This information increased poor Jessie's agitation and anxiety. Fortunately, the boat was soon alongside the *Amity*: Peter hailed the deck. One of the crew looked over the side, and seeing Jessie, called the captain, who quickly made his appearance, while in the meantime the accommodation ladder had been lowered.

"What brings you here at this hour, my dear girl?" he exclaimed, with a look of anxiety in his countenance as he descended the ladder to help Jessie up the side. "Has anything happened to my mate?"

"Oh, yes, Captain Mudge; he has been pressed, and will be carried off to sea if we do not take him his protection," answered Jessie as she reached the deck, no longer able to restrain her tears. "That boy knows all about it."

Peter Puddle was called up, and gave the message he had received from Ralph with sufficient clearness.

"No time to be lost indeed," exclaimed the captain. "Dear me! dear me! poor Ralph! We'll make our way down the harbour as fast as sails and oars will send us along, and save him if we can. Lower the boat, lads, and take your breakfasts with you."

Jessie, in spite of her anxiety, did not forget her promise to Peter; and the captain told him to go forward and get some food, which Toby Trott, the cabin boy, would give him. Peter pulled one of his shaggy locks and hastened to the caboose, where the cook was busy blowing up the fire, the grey smoke from which had just begun to curl in light wreaths towards the blue sky. In the meantime, Jessie accompanied the captain into the cabin.

"I reminded him to take his protection just as he was going ashore. He must have lost it, I fear, on his way," observed the latter.

But Jessie was not so easily convinced of that. She hurried down to Ralph's berth, and eagerly put her hand into one of the pockets of his jacket hanging up inside the door; her countenance fell. She tried the other pocket; "Yes, here it is!" she exclaimed in a joyful tone, drawing out a tin case and examining it. "Oh, Captain Mudge, let us go with it at once."

"As soon as you have had a cup of coffee, my dear girl; I cannot let you start without that," answered the kind old captain. "Careless fellow! I am angry with him for giving you so much anxiety; but the fright he has had will be punishment enough you think, I daresay. Come, come, Jessie, don't cry; any man might have done the same. He just forgot in his eagerness to see you that he had changed his jacket.—Here comes the coffee." The captain poured out a cup for her, but she could only take a few sips, while he hurriedly swallowed his breakfast. The boat was soon ready. Jessie was handed into her, and the old captain taking his seat, with four stout hands to row, they shoved off from the vessel's side. They had got to a short distance off, when Peter Puddle looked over the bulwarks. "'Mind the mate of the sovereign he promised," he shouted. "I'll stay aboard till you come back."

"Never fear, lad; you'll get it if he is set free," answered the captain.

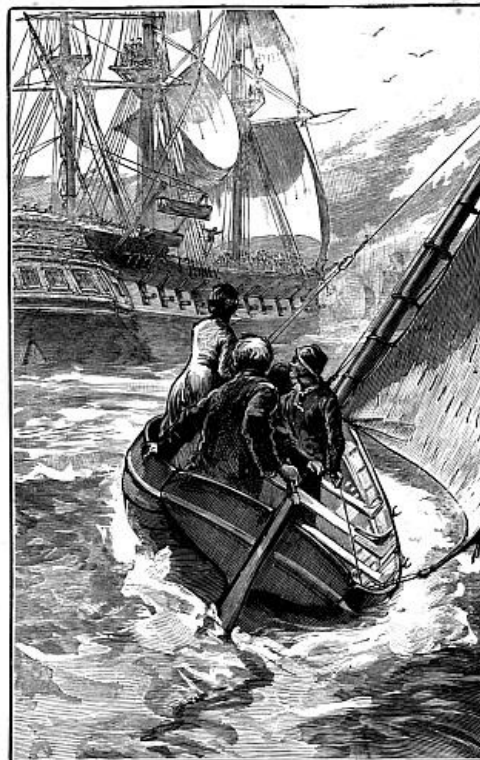
"Oh! he must, he will be freed," cried poor Jessie, who did not like the captain's "if."

"I hope so, my dear girl, but we must be prepared for disappointment," he said, in a soothing tone. "I have had a good deal in my time, though I know that God orders all for the best, and He has given me strength to bear it." He spoke for some time in the same strain. "It's still a dead calm, and the ship cannot sail without a breeze, though all the Lords of the Admiralty were to order her to get under weigh, that's one comfort," he continued. "So cheer up, Jessie, cheer up." The boat had got out of the Catwater, and was making good progress down the smooth waters of the Sound, with its high, richly-wooded shores on either side. Far ahead, at the entrance of the harbour, lay several ships-of-war and a fleet of merchantmen. The topsails of the largest, as well as those of the merchant vessels, were loosed and hung in the brails, and Blue-peter was flying from their mast-heads. It was evident that they were prepared for sea. Poor Jessie's anxiety increased. Now and anon a catspaw had passed across the mirror-like surface of the water, just rippling it for an instant, and then leaving it again placid as before. Others now followed in quick



succession. The sails and flags of the ships, hitherto hanging listlessly against the masts, began to blow out, and a vessel close-hauled was seen in the offing, gliding quickly across the mouth of the harbour.

“Step the mast, lads,” said the captain; “we shall feel the breeze presently, and the canvas will help us along. Keep the oars going though.” The sail was quickly hoisted and rigged out with a boat-hook, while the sheet was passed aft to the captain. The crew pulled more lustily than ever, for they saw that the frigate was preparing to sail, and were eager to rescue their mate, who was beloved by all of them. The breeze every moment increased. Poor Jessie, unable to speak from anxiety, her heart sinking within her, kept her eyes fixed on the ships, while the captain every now and then bent down to look at them under the foot of the sail. “In oars, lads,” he said at length, for the boat was skimming so fast over the water that they were of no further use. Still the wind blew stronger and stronger. They were within half a mile of the frigate. The loud sound of a gun fired from her side boomed over the water; it was followed by another—the signal for weighing. The head-sails of the merchantmen were sheeted home, and in quick succession their bows turned seaward and they glided away from their anchorage. The *Falcon* had not yet moved. They were now so near the frigate that the men in the tops and on the yards and swarming up the rigging could clearly be distinguished, while the boatswain’s shrill whistle and the voices of the officers were distinctly heard. A groan escaped from the old captain’s breast as the head-sails were let fall and sheeted home. The yards, hitherto backed against the mast, were swung round, and the huge anchor appeared rising above the water. Poor Jessie uttered a cry of grief, for she understood too well that there was now no hope of ever getting alongside. At that instant a person was seen to spring into the main rigging: Jessie held out her hands to him—it was Ralph. He must



have recognised the boat as she approached. *Frontispice.* HE WAVED A FAREWELL TO JESSIE. *Page 43.* He waved a farewell to Jessie. No words reached her ear; but she saw, or fancied that she saw, his lips moving. Standing up, she seemed as if about to spring towards her intended husband, but the old captain holding her back, she uttered a piercing cry and sank down senseless in his arms. He could not tell whether Ralph had seen what had happened; he had indeed enough to do in attending to Jessie and steering the boat. Recollecting the protection, he held up the case containing it; but it was unnoticed, or at all events unheeded. He heard one of his seamen remark, “Now’s his time! If he was to slip overboard and swim to us, we’d pick him up fast enough, and they’d not heave-to to send after him.” The sailors in the boat beckoned eagerly to Ralph, who could not have misunderstood their signals. The temptation to him must have been very great; but whether or not he intended to make the attempt they could not tell, for at that moment three men sprang into the rigging and he was dragged down on deck out of sight.

Happily for Jessie, she did not see what had occurred. The ship had paid off before the wind and was rapidly gathering way: her after-sails were let fall, her topgallant sails hoisted, and under a crowd of canvas she majestically glided out of the Sound.

The boat had got a considerable way up the harbour before Jessie gave signs of returning consciousness. The old captain sat watching her with the affectionate care of a father. With a deep sigh she at length recovered, and a flood of tears relieved her aching heart. She turned her eyes seaward and gazed long and steadfastly at the proud ship which bore Ralph away, till the man-of-war could no longer be distinguished from the crowd of other vessels which surrounded her. The good old captain could fully sympathise with her in her grief, for he himself felt very sad at having his mate, whom he loved as a son, taken so unjustly away from him.

As the boat passed the *Amity*, Peter Puddle looked over the side and hailed, “Haven’t you got the mate in?”

The captain shook his head.

“Then I’ve lost my guinea,” cried Peter; “but I mind more about the mate, that I do.”

“Never mind your guinea, lad. I’ll see after you. Stay on board till I come back,” answered the captain.

They soon reached the shore. Captain Mudge insisted on escorting Jessie home, for he could not bring himself to leave her till he had seen her safe with her grandmother, who would, he fancied, comfort her better than he could. On reaching home, Jessie, throwing herself into her granny's arms, gave way to her tears.

"It will do her good, and Ralph won't find fault with her when he hears of it," observed the old captain. "Fine young man, that mate of mine, Mrs Treviss. He's a great loss to me, no doubt about that; but it may turn out for his good after all. Shouldn't be surprised, as I said to Jessie just now, if he was to come back an officer in his Majesty's Service. He'd not be the first pressed man who has risen to be an admiral. We can all pray for him too, you know, Mrs Treviss; and that's a great comfort, isn't it?"

Jessie in a short time became calm again, and even looked up and smiled at her kind old friend. Captain Mudge had a good deal of business to attend to, so after a short chat, promising to return soon to see how they were getting on, he took his departure.

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## Chapter Five.

The *Falcon* sailed down Channel with her convoy of merchantmen. She was to see them safe across the Atlantic to different ports in the West Indies, and then to proceed on her voyage to the East.

Early in the morning, Ralph, with the other pressed men, had been sent up on deck and their names duly entered in the ship's books. Still he had a lingering hope that Captain Mudge would come off in time with the protection. How cruelly that hope was disappointed has been seen. With intense anxiety he had watched for the boat: he had seen her at length approaching. Already the capstan had been manned, and the men were tramping round against the pawls, the fifes playing merrily, to run the anchor up to the bows. While stationed at the fore-topsail braces, as he looked through a port he had recognised Jessie in the *Amity's* boat. The temptation to bid her farewell was greater than he could resist. The brace was belayed: he sprang into the rigging that Jessie might see him. A midshipman observing the boat, and thinking that he was about to spring overboard to her, ordered him to be seized, and suddenly he found himself dragged down on deck and placed under charge of the master-at-arms for attempting to desert.

Ralph had now more reason than ever to be cast down. The offence with which he was charged was a serious one, yet the consciousness that he had no intention of committing it supported him. For long he was kept in suspense, while the ship with her attendant merchantmen was making an offing from the land before shaping a course down Channel. At length he was conducted between two marines to the quarter-deck, where Captain Shortland and his officers were standing and a large portion of the crew were assembled.

"I must have you understand, my lads, that I intend to maintain strict discipline on board this ship. I shall have an eye on those who do their duty, and on those who neglect it. I never forgive an offence, and shall severely punish drunkenness, insubordination, and desertion, or attempt at desertion: and I intend to make an example of the man who was, I am informed, about to try to desert from the ship." And the captain looked at Ralph, who stood between his guards. All eyes were turned towards him. "What is his name?" asked the captain of the first lieutenant. On being told, he continued, "Ralph Michelmore, after having entered as one of this ship's company, you were about to desert to a boat which had come off to receive you, and I shall give you two dozen lashes as a warning to yourself and others for the future."

"I had no intention of deserting, sir," answered Ralph, firmly. "The boat brought off the master of the brig to which I belong, with my protection, and I could easily have slipped through a port had I wished it."

"And I can say, sir, that Ralph Michelmore speaks the truth. He's an old shipmate of mine, and I never heard him tell the shadow of a lie," said Dick Bracewell, stepping aft and doffing his hat. "He could have made his escape before he was brought aboard if he'd had a mind to do it, but he wouldn't because he'd passed his word that he'd stay quiet, and the officer who pressed us knows it and can say so if he likes."

The old mate who had commanded the press-gang, and was now attending to his duties on the lower deck, was sent for, and at once corroborated what Dick had said, explaining at the same time the circumstances of Ralph's capture.

"I believe you, and you may return to your duty," said the captain, looking at Ralph. "For your sake I am sorry that you were pressed, though I am glad to have got so smart a seaman as you appear to be; and if you turn out as I expect, you may have no reason to regret that you were compelled to join this ship. Pipe down."

The men went below or forward to their respective duties.

"Well, my lad," said the old sailor who had spoken to Ralph in the boat, coming up to him, "I'm right glad you've got out of that scrape, and, as I said afore, if ever you want a friend you'll find Jacob Crane a staunch one. I can feel for you, lad; I can feel for you."

"Thank you, Jacob," answered Ralph, putting out his hand to grasp that of the speaker, who wrung his heartily.

"Have you ever before served in a King's ship?" asked Jacob.

"No, I have never so much as been on board one before," said Ralph.

"Then I can be of use to you in putting you up to a thing or two," said old Jacob, and forthwith he began to explain the way in which the duty was carried on.

Ralph listened attentively, and made such good use of the knowledge he had gained that he was able from the first

to do his duty as well as any one. He was fortunately stationed at the gun of which Jacob was captain, and the old sailor took pains to instruct him in handling it. Naval gunnery not being in those days the art it has since become he was soon a proficient.

"How, my lad, came you to say that you have never before served on board a man-of-war?" asked the first lieutenant one day, observing his activity.

"Nor have I, sir," answered Ralph, touching his hat. "I never handled a gun before I joined this ship."

"You do very well, then, and may look out for a higher rating before long," observed Mr Handsel, passing on.

This remark somewhat raised Ralph's spirits. The captain himself had observed his activity and neat appearance, and the thorough way in which he did everything to which he put his hand. One day the signalman was on the sick-list. The post is a responsible one when a number of ships are sailing in company, as a watch has to be kept on the whole fleet and signals constantly made and answered. The captain sent for Ralph, and after a few questions directed him to attend to the duty. He performed it with his usual attention and intelligence. It kept him also on the quarter-deck and under the eyes of the officers. As is customary, the midshipmen assembled under the master each day at noon and at other periods with their sextants or quadrants to take observations. Some of the younger ones Ralph remarked handled their instruments rather clumsily, and evidently did not understand their use.

"I say, Dickenson, for the life of me I cannot manage to shoot the old sun with this thing, it only puts my eyes out; and yesterday again my day's work was all wrong somehow or other," said Mr Paul Chandos, a youngster who had just come to sea, to another midshipman who had also not been many months in the Navy.

"I'm sure I can't help you," answered Dickenson, a gawky lad, with a hopeless glance at his quadrant. "It seems a very useless expenditure of our valuable eyesight when it's the proper business of the master, and those fellows the master's assistants, to find out whereabouts the ship is."

"Still, I should like to know how to use this thing properly, for the captain is sure to find out if I don't; and besides, some day I may have command of a vessel, and I should look very foolish if I didn't know how to find my way in her," said young Chandos, putting the quadrant to his eye and imitating the master, who with the rest of the midshipmen stood at some distance off.

"It will be so long before either of us have that chance that I don't intend to trouble myself about the matter," answered the other midshipman, swinging his quadrant backwards and forwards as if he felt inclined to throw it overboard. Still Chandos persevered.

"If you like, I shall be happy to show you how to take an observation, and the way to work it out," said Ralph, touching his hat, though he felt more compassion than respect for the youngster.

"I wish you would, Michelmore," answered young Chandos, in a grateful tone; "I have been bothering away day after day and haven't liked to ask any one."

Ralph took the quadrant, and having first placed it to his own eye, made Chandos hold it while he showed him how to use it, and to watch for the moment when the lower edge of the sun seemed to touch the horizon before it rose again.

"There—there—I never saw it do that before," exclaimed the young midshipman. "Thank you, Michelmore, you are a good fellow: and now just work it out for me in this pocket-book, will you?"

Ralph, having in the meantime taken a glance round at the different ships of the fleet, very rapidly in a few figures did as requested.

It happened that the captain had just before come on deck, and, unnoticed, was an observer of the scene. He had remarked, too, the way in which Ralph had assisted the youngster without neglecting his proper duty. The master and his assistants, with the rest of the midshipmen, had taken their instruments below when he went aft to where Ralph was standing. "I see, Michelmore, you know how to take a meridional observation," he observed. "Do you understand much of navigation?"

"I take an interest in the study, sir, and am considered a fair navigator," answered Ralph, modestly.

"Have you made many voyages?" asked the captain.

"Several, sir, up the Mediterranean, to Lisbon, Madeira, and the Baltic, as mate," said Ralph.

"You consider yourself competent, then, to navigate a vessel in any part of the world," observed the captain, after a short pause.

"Yes, sir; I should have no fears as to the correctness of my observations," answered Ralph, modestly, though he spoke with confidence.

"I will consider what can be done, and will not lose sight of you," observed the captain, walking away.

There were grumblers and discontented men, as there are on board most ships. Dick Bracewell was among them. He soon got tired of the strict discipline, grumbled at being compelled to turn out neatly-dressed and clean, and at being only allowed to smoke his pipe at certain times and in one part of the ship, and more than all at having his grog stopped, or being compelled to drink it mixed with nine parts of water when he had neglected his duties or broken through any regulations, as was not unfrequently the case. Having had a good deal of money in his pocket when

pressed, he was able to buy from others their allowance of grog.

At length, one evening when Ralph went below, to his sorrow he found his old shipmate unusually uproarious, now singing and shouting, now ready to quarrel and fight with any one who interfered with him. Ralph was doing his best to get him to sit down quietly by himself, when the hammocks were piped below and the men sprang up on deck to bring them down from the hammock-nettings. "I'm off for mine," cried Dick, getting on his legs and staggering along the deck. "I look as sober as a judge, whatever I may be, though I feel very jolly." Ralph tried to stop him, but Dick, breaking from his friend, scrambled up the ladder, shouting out, "I'm a free man, and no one shall stop me from doing what I choose." His shouts drew the attention of one of the officers towards him. He was ordered aft with his hammock, carrying which, he went staggering along till he rolled over with it on the deck. In vain he tried to get on his feet, so he lay still, with just enough consciousness left to know that he was in a sad scrape, without a chance of getting out of it till his back and the cat had become acquainted. The officer of the watch, knowing that it would be useless to speak to him, sent for two marines, between whom he was taken below and forthwith placed in irons, thus to remain till he had recovered his senses. The inevitable consequence followed. The next morning Dick received two dozen lashes as a punishment for drunkenness.

Dick, who had been one of the merriest fellows on board, now became morose and surly, even to his best friends; and as the men were afraid of selling him their liquor, he could not drown his care, as he would have tried to do had he been able. "Don't talk to me, Ralph," he said one day when his old shipmate was trying to arouse him to a better state of mind. "I'm determined to take French leave, and you're not the man I think you, if you try to stop me."

"I have always been your friend, Dick, and I should prove that I am so still if I prevented you from doing a mad thing, which would be sure to bring you into a worse condition than you are now. You would, most probably, be retaken, or should you escape, you would to a certainty get drunk, spend all your money, and be left a beggar in a strange land."

"I've a notion that I can take as good care of myself as you, or any other man, though you have been mate of the *Amity*, and expect some day to walk the quarter-deck of this ship," answered Dick, with a scornful laugh, his old feeling of envy of Ralph reviving in his mind. "I shall have to touch my hat and 'sir' you, while you top the officer over me. Ha! ha! ha!"

Ralph had some time before, while in friendly converse, somewhat incautiously, perhaps, expressed his hopes to Dick, who then seemed cordially to sympathise with him. He felt hurt at Dick's remark, though not the less anxious to serve him. Before he could reply the boatswain's whistle was heard, and the crew were piped on deck to muster at divisions.

No one was allowed to be idle on board. The men were constantly exercised at the guns, or in the use of the small arms, or in shortening and making sail, the frigate sometimes dropping astern to whip up the laggards, then crowding on again to recover her former position in the van of the fleet. Ralph was now regularly employed as a signalman. While he was thus constantly on the quarter-deck, not only young Chandos, but several of the other midshipmen, were glad to get his assistance in taking observations and in working out their day's work. The master was glad to be relieved of the trouble of instructing them, and the captain was pleased to encourage the young man and to give him an opportunity of keeping up his knowledge.

Old Jacob Crane also congratulated him on his good prospects. "I'm glad to think on't, lad," he said, in a hearty tone. "You've the right stuff in you, and you've what's better than all, a firm trust in God, and a wish to do your duty in His sight. You'll do well wherever you are. I've never seen men like you fail."

"In saying that you unjustly condemn yourself, I suspect," observed Ralph.

"No, not unjustly," answered Jacob. "I did not understand that truth in my younger days, and only learned it of late years, when too late to do much towards altering my condition among my fellow-men. Mind, I don't say that I'm not much the better for it even now, for I'm happy and contented and fear no evil; but I remember what the Bible says, 'Honour thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' Those who do not, have bitterly to regret it when they grow old, even though they then learn to know and serve Him. The sins of our youth find us out, there is no doubt about that; and I envy you, Michelmore, who will not have to look back to the many misspent years that I do."

It was now Ralph's part to direct his friend to the only sure source of comfort—God's loving message to man, as found in His Word, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," when by loving obedient faith the sinner takes hold of the promises. Thus the one assisted the other. Ralph indeed required support. Jessie was never out of his mind. Her granny was old and infirm, and might soon be taken from her; and then, should Captain Mudge be away, what would she do? "She has not, that I know of, dear girl, a friend on whom she can depend," thought Ralph. "Yes, she and I have one in heaven on Whom we both rely. To Him I will pray for her, as she will, I know, for me." Earnestly and faithfully Ralph did pray, and he did not fail to obtain that answer which true prayer always receives. He was supported, and his heart comforted.

The fleet was now approaching Jamaica, and Ralph was more actively than ever engaged in making and answering signals. Port-Royal, to which most of the ships were bound, was reached at length, when another man-of-war took charge of the rest to escort them to their destinations.

Dick had not concealed from those he could trust his intention of deserting. Ralph had done his utmost to dissuade him from his foolish intentions, and though he would not inform the officers, he determined to keep a watch over his friend and stop him if he could. A boat, which came alongside directly the frigate dropped anchor, brought the news that the yellow fever was raging on shore, with orders that no one should leave the ship.

"You have lost your chance, Dick, and I am glad of it," said Ralph.

"Not so sure of that," answered Dick; "I'm a pretty good swimmer, and can make my way on shore if I've a mind for

it.”

“Don’t be so mad, Dick, as even to think of such a thing,” said Ralph. “Haven’t you heard of Port-Royal Jack, the big shark? He will be sure to catch you if you make the attempt.”

Dick looked incredulous, but the accounts he heard from his other shipmates of the number of people Port-Royal Jack had swallowed made him hesitate about putting his resolve into execution.

The next day the frigate, having taken in fresh provisions and water, put to sea, and Ralph hoped that Dick would be in a better mind before they again entered a port.

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## Chapter Six.

The *Falcon* had got some way to the south of the Line. Ralph was now a quartermaster, a position in which only seamen of merit and experience are placed.

It was night, and unusually dark for that latitude. A gentle breeze filled the frigate’s canvas as she glided over the calm ocean with the wind on the larboard quarter. Ralph was in the watch on deck, stationed near the man at the helm. Now he glanced his eyes aloft to ascertain that the sails drew properly, now at the binnacle to see that the proper course was kept; then he took a look on either side round the horizon.

Ralph had turned his eyes to the south-east, when he observed a vivid flash. It looked like lightning. Another and another flash followed in quick succession. He made his report to the officer of the watch. The flashes continued. There could be no doubt about the matter, an action was taking place. A midshipman was sent to inform the captain. As soon as he came on deck all hands were called and the yards braced up, a course was steered which would carry the frigate to windward of the combatants. There could be no doubt one of them was English and if the smaller of the two, the appearance of the *Falcon* would probably turn the tables. In the meantime the drums beat to quarters and the usual preparations were rapidly made for battle. Till near enough for the night-signals to be distinguished it was important that their approach should not be discovered, as it was as likely to discourage a friend as to overawe a foe, or what was of more consequence, might induce a foe to try and escape. All lights on board were therefore carefully shaded as the frigate stood on towards the combatants. Suddenly the flashes ceased: still, as the bearing of the strangers had been taken, there would be no difficulty in discovering them. The crew of the *Falcon* waited in vain for a renewal of the flashes. The fight was over. Which was the victor was the question. Ralph heard the subject discussed by the officers on the quarter-deck. They expressed their fears that there would be no fighting.

“An English ship would not have given in so soon,” observed the first lieutenant.

“Not unless she is the smallest,” answered the purser, who was addicted to croaking.

“Then we shall have the satisfaction of retaking her and thrashing her captor into the bargain,” said Mr Handsel.

“But what if her captor is bigger than we are?” asked the purser.

“Thrash him notwithstanding,” said the first lieutenant, laughing.

“It is possible that more than two vessels were engaged,” remarked the captain. “We shall know, however, before long. Have the night-signals ready, Mr Handsel. We must take care not to fire into a friend.”

The excitement on board increased as the frigate, moving at the rate of two or three knots an hour, drew near the spot where it was expected that the strangers would be discovered. The men stood at their guns prepared to open the ports and run them out when the order should be given. The magazines were open and powder and shot passed up. The surgeon and his assistants were below in the cockpit, making their arrangements for the duties they might have to perform; looking to their instruments, their bandages and styptics, and rigging their amputation-table.

“How do you feel, Paul?” asked Dickenson of young Chandos. “If we could see the enemy I shouldn’t mind; but, for my part, I don’t like this sort of work in the dark, I confess.”

“I was thinking of home and my mother and sisters,” answered Chandos. “I used to long to be in a battle, and I should be sorry to miss it, but I wish it was over. I would rather have to look back at it than forward.”

“So would I, provided I hadn’t lost an arm or a leg or been killed outright,” said Dickenson, in a dolorous tone.

“I haven’t thought about being killed, and I hope that neither you nor I will be,” answered Chandos; adding, “I shouldn’t mind, perhaps, a bullet through my arm or leg for the honour and glory of the thing, and to talk about when we get home.”

“I’m sure I don’t want any such honour and glory, and I wish you wouldn’t speak about such things,” groaned out Dickenson. “Perhaps we shan’t have a fight after all.”

“I hope we shall, though,” exclaimed his more plucky messmate; “that is to say if it does not last too long. I could hold out for an hour or so, but then I think I should begin to wish it was over.”

“Beg pardon, young gentlemen; you’d hold out better after the first hour than for the first five minutes,” observed old Jacob Crane, who had overheard the conversation. “Just let us exchange a couple of broadsides and you’d think no more about the matter than if you were snowballing each other. I know the stuff you’re made of too well to doubt that.”

"Thank you, Crane, for the compliment," said Chandos; "but do you think we shall have a fight?"

"Sure on't," answered the old man; "just look out over the larboard bow and you'll see three ships hove to, and some bright lights in the stern of the biggest of them. She's a lumping frigate if she isn't something larger, and though our signal has been hoisted some time she hasn't answered it."

The midshipmen, whose eyes were not so well accustomed to pierce the gloom of night as were old Jacob's, had at first some difficulty in distinguishing the three ships, though they saw the bright lights he pointed out. Gradually the frigate drew near, and the tall masts and widespread canvas of the strangers appeared clearly enough against the sky, like large phantoms stalking across the waters. Still the private signal remained unanswered. There could be no longer any doubt that the largest ship was an enemy, and that she had captured one or both of the others. Notwithstanding her apparent superiority, Captain Shortland did not hesitate about attacking her. Sail was shortened, and the frigate stood on with topsails, jib, and spanker set, so as to be thoroughly under command. It was no longer necessary to keep the ports closed. The order to open them and to run out the guns was given, and at the same time the crews of the guns were cautioned not to fire a shot till they heard the word of command. The hearts of the coolest beat quicker than usual when about midnight the *Falcon* drew within a mile of the enemy. The lights from the fighting lanterns of the latter, which exhibited two rows of ports, with only a small space between them, gave her a most formidable appearance. She evidently carried many more guns than the English frigate.

"What's the odds, lads," cried old Jacob, when some of the men near him remarked this. "It isn't the number of guns a ship carries will give her the victory, it's the way they are fought, and we'll soon show the mounseers how we can handle ours."

In a short time the enemy filled his sails, the two ships thus nearing each other more rapidly; then suddenly he hove in stays when on the lee bow of the *Falcon*, and his guns thundering forth, sent their shot flying through her rigging, the only serious effect, however, of which was to bring down her jib. The *Falcon* crew stood ready, the captains of the guns with lanyards in hand eager to fire in return, but no order came. Captain Shortland knew that he could depend on the steadiness of his crew, and was reserving their fire for a shorter and more effective distance. Several more shots hurtled through the air around them.

"The weathermost of the smaller ships is firing at us, sir," observed the first lieutenant to the captain.

"Never mind that, we can settle with her by-and-by," was the answer.

Thus the *Falcon* stood majestically on as if not a foe were near.

Though Ralph had never before seen a shot fired in anger, he stood at his post close to the wheel as calm and collected as the oldest seaman.

The eager crew had not much time to wait, before, by a clever manoeuvre, the frigate had been brought with her starboard broadside to bear directly on the stern of the French ship at less than pistol-shot distance. At the same moment the order to fire was passed along the decks and rapidly obeyed. Every shot went crashing into the French ship, raking her fore and aft, and probably killing the men at the wheel; for before she had time to alter her position the *Falcon* luffed into the wind, just scraping clear of her spanker-boom, and shooting up to leeward, let fly the whole of her other broadside with terrible effect into her opponent. So rapidly had this manoeuvre of the English frigate been performed, that several of the Frenchman's weather guns went off after she had passed to leeward. The action was now carried on broadside to broadside, the position in which British seamen most delight.

"Aim low, my lads! aim low!" was the oft repeated order of the officers in charge of the guns, as they moved along the decks; not that there was much necessity for it, as the men had got a good mark before them, and were pounding away at it as fast as they could load and run out their guns. The Frenchmen were at the same time vigorously returning their fire, but as if intent on crippling their foe and then taking her at a disadvantage, they sent most of their shot flying through her rigging, bringing blocks and spars and ropes in thick showers down on deck. Though most of the enemy's shot flew high, others came whizzing between the men's heads, crashing into the sides of the frigate, or knocking away her bulwarks. Several of the crew had been wounded and carried below, but as yet two only had been killed, their bodies being drawn aside, when it was found that they were really dead, out of the way of their shipmates at the guns. Hitherto Ralph had escaped unhurt, though the head of one of the men at the wheel close to him had been taken off by a round shot, and an officer near him had been struck to the deck. By the lurid glare from the quick succeeding flashes and the light of the lanterns, he caught a glimpse of Dick working away manfully at one of the upper deck guns, he, like most of the crew, stripped to the waist, with a handkerchief tied round his head. Now he was visible, now he was concealed by the clouds of smoke which, circling round and then rising in the air, formed a dark canopy over the combatants. Young Chandos was not far off. Whatever might have been his sensations at first, he was collected enough now to attend steadily to his duty, and the work going on was a pretty severe trial to young nerves. The midnight battle raged fiercer and fiercer. A shot came flying by. Ralph felt that he was hit severely in the arm, and was compelled to summon another man to the wheel; but binding up his wounded limb, he stood as before at his post. Not many minutes afterwards a round shot struck the bulwarks, sending splinters flying in every direction. At the same moment Ralph, who had his eye on the captain, saw him



RALPH . . . CAUGHT HIM WITH HIS UNWOUNDED ARM JUST AS HE WAS FALLING TO THE DECK. Page 70.

stagger, and springing forward, he was falling to the deck. Others gathered round. It was evident that he had been most seriously wounded. In vain he endeavoured to speak, but becoming senseless was carried below. Lieutenant Handsel at once took the command, making his clear voice, as he issued his orders, heard amid the wild din of battle. For an hour and a half the engagement had raged on and yet was as furious as ever. The lieutenant of marines, a tall, handsome young man, was cut almost in two by a round shot soon after the captain had fallen, and several more men were hit. Aloft, however, the damage was far more severe than on deck; the running rigging hung in festoons, the standing rigging was cut to pieces, every sail was riddled through and through, and the masts and yards were badly wounded in many places. Judging by the crashing sound which came back from the French ship after each broadside fired by the *Falcon*, and the white splinters which flew from every part of her upper works, she was in a still worse plight. Still her crew kept up a hot fire. The young midshipmen, and even others, might possibly have begun to wish that the battle was over.

"Keep at it, my lads!" was the cry passed along the decks; "she'll soon give in."

Broadsides had been exchanged: another proceeded from the *Falcon*; but none came in return.

"Cease firing!" cried Lieutenant Handsel; and as soon as all was silent he hailed the enemy and asked if she had struck. No reply was made. Again the *Falcon* opened fire; but as the Frenchmen did not return it, she at once ceased, and a second time the lieutenant hailed, but no answer was made.

"We must give them more of it!" he shouted.

At that instant, the smoke clearing away, it was seen that the rigging of the French ship was swarming with men, who were endeavouring to loose their topgallant sails, apparently with the intention of escaping. Some of the crew of the *Falcon* were ordered aloft to set theirs while the rest let fly another thundering broadside. Before the Frenchmen had time to descend, the mizenmast of their ship fell over the side, and several must have been plunged into the water; not a minute afterwards the main-mast, fore-mast, and bowsprit followed, and she lay a helpless wreck on the ocean.

Loud cheers burst from the throats of the British crew, and hearty shakes of the hand were exchanged among them. Before the question was asked, a voice came from the French ship, crying out that she had struck, and entreating that the English frigate would not again fire.

"No fear of that," was the answer; "what ship is she?"

"The French frigate *Concorde*," replied the officer who spoke. "Send a boat, I pray, for we have none left."

Three boats which had escaped injury were instantly lowered, and Mr Handsel, not aware that Ralph was wounded, ordered him to go in one of them. When he reached the deck of the prize, such a scene of horror as he had scarcely imagined met his sight. The boats, booms, the wheel, capstern, binnacle, and indeed all the upper portions of the ship, were cut to pieces; the bulwarks were destroyed and the starboard side almost beaten in, while the decks, slippery with gore, were literally strewn with the dead and badly wounded. The French captain, two lieutenants, several junior officers, and fully sixty men were killed, and two other lieutenants and eighty men were wounded. A young officer with his arm in a sling, who by the death of his superior had succeeded to the command, presented his sword in token of submission to the third lieutenant of the *Falcon*. It was at once returned to him with a compliment to his bravery and an expression of sympathy, and an assistant-surgeon was sent for from the *Falcon* to attend to the sufferers. Ralph was the first person the young man spoke to on coming on board.

"You are hurt, Michelmore," he said, in a friendly tone; "I must look to you at once;" and by the light of a lantern he dressed Ralph's arm, which greatly needed care. "I fear that our good captain is mortally wounded; but he has not forgotten you, for as soon as he came to himself he ordered his clerk to make out your appointment as a midshipman and signed it, though he could scarcely hold a pen. You'll come in for your share of prize-money as such, and be placed on the quarter-deck; so I'll congratulate you, my lad. There, now you'll do; but I must get you sent on board again, you're not fit for work here."

Ralph very unwillingly obeyed the order he received to return to the *Falcon*. When he had reached her he would not even then go below; but though he was unable to handle a rope, having reported himself to Mr Handsel, he received directions to superintend a party of men in refitting the rigging. There was work indeed for every one; for though the *Falcon* had suffered less than her antagonist, her masts and spars, wounded in various places, required to be fished and the standing rigging to be spliced, to enable her to make sail and go in chase of the two other ships just before captured by the *Concorde*. Happily it fell perfectly calm; and thus, while the prizes could not escape, time was obtained for repairing damages. There was not a moment to be lost, for every one knew that should a breeze spring up before the rigging had been set to rights, the tottering masts would to a certainty go over the side.

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## Chapter Seven.

Daylight found the *Falcon's* crew still hard at work, the prisoners on board the *Concorde* being assisted by the English seamen taken out of the two merchant vessels. The latter were South Sea whalers, furnished, as was not unusual in those days, with letters of marque, and returning home from round Cape Horn with full cargoes and a considerable amount of booty. They lay, their sails all set, about two miles off, waiting for a breeze to make their escape. Their masters, who had been found as prisoners on board the *Concorde*, were eager to attempt their recovery, and offered to man the *Falcons* boats with their crews, and to lead an expedition against them. Mr Handsel, however, at first considered that it would be extremely hazardous, and he could not spare the necessary number of men for the enterprise. So busy were all hands that no inquiries had been made about the killed and wounded. Few perhaps even thought of their shipmates writhing in agony below. The voices of several officers wont to be heard were silent, and not a few of their messmates were missed from among them. At length there was a rumour that their brave captain was even worse hurt than was at first supposed—it was soon whispered that he was dying—and then came the news that he was dead. Many a tear was dropped from the eyes of his hardy crew, which the loss of their own messmates had failed to draw forth. But there was no time to express their sorrow. All hands had to work on as hard as ever. The carpenters, having secured the masts and spars, were busy with the boats. Mr Handsel at length determined to send an expedition to recapture the whalers, which, fortunately lying rather more than a mile apart, could not assist each other. Ralph offered to go in one of the boats; as it was his left arm which was wounded, he could steer or handle a cutlass with his right.

"Yes, you will go in charge of the gig as an officer; Mr Symonds will take command of the expedition in the pinnace; the masters of the whalers will go in the other boats: should Mr Symonds fall, the command will devolve on you," said Mr Handsel. Mr Symonds was a master's mate; one of the lieutenants being wounded and the other on board the *Concorde*, he was the next in rank able to go. Four boats were quickly in the water, the last nail being driven in by the carpenter as they were being lowered. Their crews were armed with pistols and cutlasses. It was resolved to attack the nearest vessel first; and as she was said to be the fastest sailer, should she be captured, it was hoped that the other would be quickly overtaken. Old Jacob and Dick were with Ralph. The boats shoved off from the ship's side and pulled for the nearest whaler. As they approached she opened a hot fire, on which Mr Symonds ordered them to keep apart and to steer for her stern. One of the masters in charge of the pinnace did not hear the order. Ralph saw that she was struck several times. Mr Symonds's boat also suffered. He with the second cutter dashed on, the others following: one boarded on each quarter. The Frenchmen had to quit their guns and to defend themselves with pikes and pistols, but their assailants quickly swarmed on board, Ralph, in spite of his wounded arm, getting up the side with Jacob's assistance. The fight on deck was short. The prize-crew gave way, and in three minutes the English were in possession of the ship. Ralph looked round for Mr Symonds. He lay dead in the stern of his boat, and Ralph found himself in command of the prize. The master of the whaler just captured was also killed. The other was badly wounded, and several of their men had fallen. Having secured the prisoners and released the crew below, he ordered the boats to tow ahead towards the other whaler. As they approached she opened her fire, but by steering to the eastward he kept directly ahead of her, out of range of her guns. Getting still nearer, he brought his broadside to bear on her, when the Frenchmen, to avoid the consequences, hauled down their colours. She was quickly taken possession of, when the prize-crew were secured and the Englishmen remaining on board were released. As each vessel had six boats they in a short time were towed near to the *Falcon*. As they approached they were received with a loud cheer, and Mr Handsel ordered Ralph to take command of the first re-captured, the *Eagle*, and to send all the hands he could spare to assist in refitting the *Concorde* and setting up jury-masts. Of the other vessel, the *Penguin*, her only surviving mate took charge; for both had fought bravely, and had not struck till after a long chase, and when several officers and men had fallen. Both vessels had also so severely suffered in hull and rigging, that it would have been dangerous without undergoing repairs to proceed on their voyage.

Lieutenant Handsel therefore determined to proceed with all the ships to Rio de Janeiro, the nearest port in the Brazils. Ralph could scarcely believe that he was not in a dream when he thus found himself in command of a fine ship, with the probability of having to navigate her home. Should, however, a fitting man be obtained at Rio to take charge of her, he would be superseded and have to return to the *Falcon*. He naturally hoped that no one would be forthcoming. He should then realise his fondest hopes—be united to Jessie—with a good sum from his prize-money and pay as captain of the *Eagle* with which to set up house. He might then rejoin the navy as an officer, or obtain his discharge, or go back to the *Amity*, should Captain Mudge wish him to do so. "I will not be ungrateful to my kind old friend, though I suspect that Jessie would wish me to remain in the service; and though I entered unwillingly, I should now be sorry to leave it," he thought. "Perhaps I may rise still higher—others have done so—why should not I, if I do my duty, and my life is preserved?"



Ralph quickly got accustomed to his new position. His scanty crew acknowledged that they had never had a better captain. They were kept of necessity at work, but he made that work as light as possible by setting them to do it in the best way it could be done, and only ordering them to do what was absolutely required. Sailors, as indeed is the case with most classes of men, are very quick in discovering when they have an efficient officer placed over them who knows his duty. Insubordination and mutiny are generally the consequences rather of the ignorance and sloth of the captain than of tyranny.

Fortunately, the calm continued. The decks were washed clean of their bloody stains; the dead were committed to their ocean graves, and their shipmates, if they did not forget, soon ceased to talk about them. Jury-masts were rigged on board the *Concorde*, and a breeze at length springing up, the four ships, thus partially repaired, made sail for Rio.

Old Jacob and Dick had accompanied Ralph on board the *Eagle*. It was an unfortunate circumstance for the latter. Spirits were more easily obtained than on board the frigate, and he very soon became quarrelsome and mutinous. Ralph, not observing his state, had directed him to perform some duty.

"Not for you, or any man like you. You, who were before the mast only yesterday—you think you can top the officer over me, do you? I told you I wouldn't stand it, and I won't," exclaimed Dick, reeling about and flourishing his arms as his excitement increased.

The whaler's crew laughed, and some of the rougher characters even encouraged Dick with their applause.

Ralph knew that discipline must be maintained, though ready himself to bear any insult, and most unwilling to punish his former messmate. A boat from the *Falcon* was alongside. He ordered the boatswain and some other men on whom he could depend to seize Dick and lower him into her. It was done before the unhappy man knew what was happening. Ralph then wrote a note to Lieutenant Handsel, saying that the proceeding was necessary to prevent worse consequences, but begging that, as Bracewell had behaved bravely in the action, his offence might be overlooked. Dick stormed and raged when he found himself being carried back to the frigate, and vowed that he would be revenged. Ralph regretted what had happened, the more as he had hoped that, by keeping Dick on board the *Eagle*, he might have prevented him from attempting to desert. He resolved, however, as soon as they arrived at Rio, to go on board the *Falcon* and to try and bring him to reason. Though the distance to be run was not great, they were very long about it. Light winds and calms prevailed, and when there was a breeze, the other ships had to wait for the *Concorde*, which, under jury-masts, made but slow progress. At length land was sighted, and all hoped to get in the next day. As, however, evening drew on the weather looked very threatening. Dark clouds gathered rapidly in the sky. Squalls in quick succession swept over the ocean, and a heavy sea got up, in which the ships plunged and rolled as they made their way towards the harbour's mouth. Night coming down on the world of waters, the rest were ordered by a signal from the *Falcon* to stand off the land till daylight. Ralph trembled for the masts of the *Eagle*, and was still more anxious about those of the *Falcon*. The night became very dark, and the gale increased. The lights from the other ships could be distinguished at some distance apart. The *Falcon* and *Penguin* appeared to be making fair way, and the *Eagle* behaved very well, but the *Concorde* was evidently dropping astern. Ralph had kept his eye on her lights. They grew dimmer and dimmer. It was doubtful whether she was even holding her own. The *Eagle* was under close-reefed topsails, and could with difficulty carry them. A perfect hurricane was blowing dead on shore. "Lord help those on board the prize! I can nowhere see her lights," exclaimed old Jacob, who had been looking out to leeward. "She must have carried away her jury-masts, or her canvas has blown to ribbons, I fear. If not, we shouldn't have lost sight of her."

Ralph looked in vain in the direction in which he had last seen the lights of the *Concorde*, while those of the frigate and the whaler were clearly visible, the former about a mile ahead of the *Eagle*, and the latter rather further off, astern.

"If the wind doesn't change soon there'll go a good lump of prize-money and the lives of a good many poor fellows," observed old Jacob.

"But won't she be able to steer for the harbour, Crane?" asked young Chandos, who was, however, thinking more of his two messmates and others on board than of prize-money.

"It will be a hard matter to find it, even if they can steer the ship at all: and considering the way we knocked her about, it will be a wonder to my mind if she doesn't go to the bottom before morning," answered old Jacob with a sigh.

The anxious night passed away. When day dawned, it was found that the ships were nearer the land, notwithstanding all their endeavours to beat off it, than they had been on the previous evening. Many a glass was turned westward in search of the *Concorde*, though the hope of discovering her was slight. Not a trace of her was to be seen. She, with her prize-crew, had probably foundered or gone on shore at the moment her lights had disappeared. Still it was thought possible that she might have been driven into some bay, or between high rocks, and be concealed by them from sight. Soon after dawn the *Falcon* made the signal to bear up for the harbour. She leading, and the two recaptured whalers following, they stood towards it. Though the sea broke impetuously on the rocks on either side, they safely entered the magnificent harbour of Rio de Janeiro, and dropped their anchors off the town.

Lieutenant Handsel at once applied to the authorities for guides, and a party was sent off, under the master and purser, to search the coast to the northward for the wreck of the *Concorde*, and to assist any of the crew who might have escaped. The sea was still too rough to allow of an expedition by water. Ralph in the meantime was ordered to return to the *Falcon* with Mr Chandos and the men-of-war's men who had accompanied him on board the *Eagle*. Mr Handsel then told him that as there was no probability of an English master being found at Rio to take the *Eagle* home, he should direct him to do so, and would furnish him with a document which would enable him to obtain a passage to rejoin the *Falcon* in India, should he desire to remain in the navy. "I would strongly advise you to do so,"

he added; "and it will not be my fault if you do not gain promotion."

Ralph heartily thanked his commander, and begged that he might be allowed to defer his decision till his arrival in England. Before going on shore, which he had to visit to obtain workmen for the repairs of the *Eagle*, he went below to speak to Dick Bracewell. He hoped to soothe his anger and to persuade him to give up his intention of deserting. He did not see him as he went along the decks. He ascertained that he had not formed one of the exploring party. He sent others to search for him, but he was nowhere to be found. A number of shore-boats had been going backwards and forwards all day between the ship and the shore, and Ralph had too much reason to fear that Dick had smuggled himself into one of them and made his escape. He felt it his duty to inform the commander, that watch might be kept to prevent others from following so bad an example; and he received orders to take a couple of men and to bring back the deserter if he could be found. He first returned to the *Eagle* to warn the boatswain, who was in charge, to look sharply after their own men.

"Half are drunk already, and as they have somehow or other managed to get liquor on board there is no fear of them," was the unsatisfactory answer.

Ralph could only hope that the boatswain himself would keep sober, and as he could not remedy matters by remaining, he pulled on shore. Having obtained an interpreter and guide from the British consul, he commenced his search for Dick. After looking for him for some time, he heard that an English seaman, answering to his description, had been seen to enter a house in the neighbourhood of the town. Though it was now nearly dark he set off at once in the hopes of finding him before he could make his escape. He knew that he was acting really a kind part towards Dick, who would, if left on shore, soon fall a victim to intemperance and the unhealthy climate. The house was reached. The inhabitants appeared to be very much surprised at the visit, and though they allowed a search to be made for the runaway, they protested that they had never seen or heard of him. With much regret Ralph returned to the quay to go on board his ship. As he and his party approached the shore they observed a bright glare in the sky over the harbour.

"As I'm alive, there's a ship on fire," exclaimed one of the seamen. "Hope it isn't our frigate."

"It is one of the ships which came in this morning, at all events," observed the guide.

Ralph with an anxious heart hurried down to the quay, where a number of people were already collected. A ruddy glare extended far and wide over the harbour from a fiery mass which floated on its surface, lighting up the buildings and the figures of the people on the shore, and the ships at anchor off it. Among them lay the *Falcon*, her sides and lofty masts and rigging brought prominently into view. At some distance from her was the *Penguin*; and what was Ralph's dismay when he discovered that the burning ship was the *Eagle*. His impulse was to go off at once to her—but what aid could he render? Already the flames were bursting through her hatchways and ports and encircling her masts and spars. The oil and casks in her hold once having ignited, no human means could extinguish the conflagration. He looked for his boat. A boy alone was in her; the men, as was to be expected, had gone off to a wine-house, and only just having heard that a ship was on fire, came reeling down to the quay, uttering exclamations of surprise when they discovered that she was their own. Having tumbled into the boat they were sufficiently sober to row, and Ralph ordering them to shove off, steered for the unfortunate *Eagle*. Numerous boats were moving about, and some around her, and he hoped, therefore, that the people on board had been rescued. It made him fear, however, that all hope of saving the ship had been abandoned. Still it was his duty to get on board if he could, to ascertain that every possible effort had been made. He had passed through an outer circle of native boats, and was dashing on, when he was hailed by a man-of-war's boat, but not hearing what was said, he was still continuing his course, and would soon have been close to the ship, when there came a thundering report as if a whole broadside had been fired. Her mizen mast shot up into the air, followed by a large portion of the afterpart of her deck and bulwarks and interior fittings; some parts in large pieces, others rent into numberless burning fragments, which hung suspended in the air, and then in a thick fiery shower came hissing down into the water, the lighter bits reaching considerably beyond where the boats lay. Ralph had scarcely time even to get his boat round before the shattered pieces of burning wood began to fall thickly round his boat, threatening in an instant to sink her, and to kill any one who might be struck. Happily no one was hurt. The downfall of the wreck ceased; still the fire in the forepart of the ship was raging on, when the bows and bowsprit rose in the air surrounded by flames which, tapering up into a vast cone of fire, suddenly disappeared as, the stern sinking first, the water swept over the remainder of this hapless ship, and all was instantly dark, except here and there where the smouldering ends of spars and planks floated above the calm surface of the harbour. Ralph with a sad heart pulled on board the *Falcon*, feeling himself reduced from the position of captain of a fine ship to that of a master's assistant; and what weighed still more on his spirits, that he had no longer the prospect of returning to England and to his dear Jessie. He was thankful to find that the boatswain and most of the crew of the *Eagle* had been rescued, with the exception of three unhappy men who, overcome by liquor, had been suffocated below. The whole of the survivors entered on board the *Falcon*—indeed, they were not offered a choice. A dozen of her best hands were also taken out of the *Penguin*—such being the custom of the times, when a King's ship wanted men. Their places were filled by Portuguese and other foreigners, thirty of whom were shipped by the *Falcon* to make up her complement, in addition to a few runaway English seamen reduced to beggary, and sent on board by the consul. The exploring party returned without a survivor from the *Concorde*, a few pieces of wreck alone having been found as evidence of her fate. Such is the sad result of warfare. Three hundred human beings had lost their lives on board the four ships, two only of which now remained afloat. Ralph did his utmost to discover Dick, but without success, and at length he began to fear that he had been drowned in trying to make his escape, or had—not an unlikely occurrence—been murdered on shore. The *Falcon*, her repairs being completed, and Mr Handsel having written his despatches to send home by the *Penguin*, and having given himself an acting order as commander, sailed for the East Indies.

Ralph, as may be supposed, did not fail to write to Jessie and Captain Mudge by the *Penguin*, and to leave duplicates of two letters with the consul, to be forwarded by another opportunity.

## Chapter Eight.

Poor Jessie Flamank had good cause to be sad. For long she hoped against hope. Whenever the door opened her heart beat quick, and she looked up half ready to spring from her seat in expectation that her Ralph would appear. Her kind granny was unwilling to say anything which might quench the hope which kept up her spirits, yet the dame knew full well that Ralph was too good a seaman to be allowed his liberty. Captain Mudge looked in every evening when his work on board the *Amity* was over for the day, and did his utmost to comfort Jessie. He would not say, however, whether he thought that Ralph would come back soon, but he told her that he was sure to get on well, and be better off in many respects than on board the brig. "As to danger," he continued, "to my mind a man is as safe in one place as in another. God, remember, looks after those who trust in Him; they would be in a bad case if they had no other protection than such as they can find for themselves; so I don't see, Jessie, that any of us can do more for him than we are doing, that is, praying heartily for him. As I always say, it's a blessed thing that we can do that for ourselves and others, though we can do nothing else for our own or their help."

Jessie did trust to God, but her trial was hard to bear notwithstanding. Still it made her throw herself more than she might otherwise have done on His fatherly care, and she felt her heart lightened in a way she had not supposed possible. She had abundance of occupation; for Mrs Treviss was accustomed to take in needlework, to assist her limited means, and as her eyesight had of late become dim, Jessie endeavoured to relieve her by labouring with redoubled diligence.

Kind-hearted Captain Mudge seldom came to the cottage without some welcome present, which he said he had received as a gift from a brother skipper just returned from a foreign voyage. One day it was a Dutch cheese, another a few pounds of choice tea, or a box of dried fruit or some bottles of wine, and so on. One day, when the package was larger than would have been becoming for him, master of the good brig *Amity*, to carry through the streets, he was followed by a boy wheeling it along in a barrow. The lad, who was dressed in a neat sailor-like costume, set it down in the passage and was going away, when Jessie recognised, in spite of his changed appearance, her young tatterdemalion boatman, Peter Puddle. "What, Peter, I scarcely knew you again," she said. "You must stop and have something to eat."

"Thank ye, miss, I'm not hungry, as I used to be," he answered, in a tone of satisfaction. "Captain Mudge has taken me aboard the *Amity*, and I get as much grub as I want, though I shouldn't mind a bit of bread and cheese, thank you."

Jessie invited Peter into the kitchen and placed before him a loaf of bread and some cheese, to which, notwithstanding his assertion, he did ample justice. She observed that he had improved in his manners as well as in his appearance. Before beginning to eat, he said grace exactly in the words the captain used and in the same tone. He told her that Captain Mudge had given him an outfit, and was teaching him to read and say his prayers, and was ever so kind in all sorts of ways. "Oh, miss, there isn't no one like him," he added. "And only to think if I'd gone off at once that night and hadn't picked those fellows up, I might have saved your young man from going to sea in the frigate. I be main sorry, you may depend on't; but I'll do all the captain tells me, that I will."

Jessie sighed. "The men might have lost their lives had you not picked them up, though it was, indeed, careless of you to forget your commission," she said. "But what I have to forgive I heartily do forgive, and I hope that you will obey Captain Mudge, and follow his advice."

"That I will, miss, and thank you, too, for speaking so kindly to me," answered Peter warmly. "I hope I may have a chance of showing that I am grateful, some day, though it isn't likely, I'll allow."

The *Amity* was at length ready for sea. She was bound out to Riga for staves, a somewhat dangerous voyage in the autumn. Captain Mudge came to wish the widow and her granddaughter farewell. "I've got a fresh mate," he said, "a decent lad; but he isn't like Ralph, and I doubt if he's much of a navigator."

"Good-bye, Jessie, good-bye; heaven bless and protect you; keep a good heart, my girl, you'll see Ralph back some day," were his last words, as he wrung her hand at the porch and hurried down the road.

When he had gone, Jessie felt that she had lost the truest friend she possessed in the world next to her granny, and she could not help fearing that the days of her only relative were numbered. Every week Jessie saw a marked change in her. She could no longer get up and downstairs without the greatest difficulty, her eyesight grew worse, and her trembling fingers refused to hold a needle, while she could scarcely convey her food to her mouth. In one respect she had not changed: her mind remained clear and her trust in God as firm as ever. She knew that she was dying, though she was loth to say so to her grandchild, who would thus be left alone in the world. "God will look after the dear one," she said often to herself; "He is ever the father of the fatherless, and will not forsake her." She longed, however, for the return of Captain Mudge, but though it was the time for him to be back, no news had come from him. A letter at last arrived from Ralph, written from the West Indies, which gave her an account of his prospects of promotion, and cheered her up. He was well and as contented as could be, and she was thankful for that; still it compelled her to abandon all hopes of his speedy return. When his next letter arrived, giving an account of the battle and of the loss of the *Eagle* and of his own bitter disappointment, she was sitting by the death-bed of Mrs Treviss. Had it not been for the burning of the *Eagle*, Ralph might even now have been with her, but instead, he had certainly gone to that far, far off Indian Ocean, where he might be kept for years. Jessie restrained her tears that she might not disturb her grandmother's last hours.

Mrs Treviss, who was thinking of Captain Mudge, asked faintly if he was coming.

"No hope of it, dear granny," she answered, in a faltering voice.

"God's will be done! Trust to Him! Trust to Him!" whispered, the old woman, closing her eyes as if she were weary

and wanted sleep.

Jessie sat long watching her anxiously. There was no movement. She took her hand. It was icy cold. Her granny was dead, and she was alone in the world. The doctor some time after looked in and found the young girl still seated by the bedside. He sent a woman, Dame Judson by name, to assist her, and promised to make arrangements for the funeral, but he had a large family of his own, and could do little more except in the way of sympathy and advice. Mrs Treviss was carried to her grave, Jessie being the only mourner, while Dame Judson walked by her side to afford her support.

When she came back to her solitary home she could not for some time arouse herself from her grief, though Dame Judson, a motherly sort of woman, tried her best to console her. Jessie, however, felt that it was necessary to consider what she should do for her support. The cottage was hers, and she had about ten pounds a year left her, the interest of a sum in the hands of Messrs Grayson and Company, shipowners, of Plymouth. She could make something by her needle, but scarcely sufficient, though she was resolved to try her best. She would have let her cottage and looked for a situation as a lady's-maid or a nursery-governess, but then should Ralph come back he would be disappointed at not finding her there, and she might not even hear of his return, so she would not entertain the idea for a moment. She might find an old lady to lodge with her, and her last idea was to open a school for little girls. She had no one to consult with. Worthy Dame Judson hadn't an idea above charing; with her neighbours she was but slightly acquainted. Messrs Grayson and Company had paid her grandmother's interest regularly, but were not pleasant people to speak to. They had been part owners with her father in the *Dolphin*, the ship in which he had been wrecked. Having neglected to insure her they had lost a good deal of money by the circumstance, and being especially narrow-minded entertained an ill feeling even for poor Jessie herself, which they exhibited whenever she went to their office. She had been to a good school in Exeter, but the lady who kept it, and who would have been of great assistance, was dead, and the school broken up.

The clergyman of the church Jessie attended, on hearing of her unprotected condition, immediately called on her to offer such consolation and assistance as he had the power to bestow. He was, however, the vicar of an extensive parish, which, in addition to its usual large number of poor, contained at the time very many widows and orphans of the soldiers and sailors killed during the long protracted war, who demanded all his sympathy and attention. Having also but a limited income, insufficient for the extensive demands on his purse, he was unable to afford her any pecuniary assistance. His visits, few and far between, like those of angels, as they of necessity were, afforded her much comfort and support, as he never failed to urge her to seek for that strength from on high which will always be granted when asked for with a believing heart; and to place her reliance on Him who orders all for the best, though man, with his finite powers of mind, often fails to perceive it.

The only other person she could consult was Mr Barry, the apothecary, and he had but little time to give his thoughts to the subject.

The *Amity* had in the meantime gone back to London, and had made several other distant voyages without returning to Plymouth. The captain had written to her, but on each occasion had again sailed without receiving her replies, and was thus not aware of her grandmother's death. At length a letter reached him while he lay in the Thames, and in his answer he promised to come and see her without fail at the end of the next voyage. A long time passed after this, and no tidings came of him. She lived on in hopes, however, of his promised visit, till at length she heard from Mrs Judson of a rumour that the *Amity* was lost with all hands.

"But don't ye take on so now, my dear," exclaimed the good woman when she saw the effect her announcement had produced. "We often hear of vessels going to the bottom which are all the time snug in some port or other, and perhaps the *Amity*, which has to be sure been a terrible long time missing, will come back some day with her old captain all right."

These remarks slightly revived poor Jessie's hopes, but weeks and weeks went by and the old captain did not appear. Still she thought that the *Amity* might have been captured by the enemy and be in some foreign port; but the brokers had not heard from Captain Mudge, and even though a prisoner he would have managed to send a letter. She had long been expecting also to hear from Ralph. She was certain that he would have written if he had had the opportunity, but no news came of him. India was a long way off, and letters were often six months or even a year in coming, she knew. She was, therefore, though anxious, not alarmed, but she could not help watching with a beating heart each day at the hour the postman was wont to pass her door, in the expectation that he would stop with a letter in his hand.

Months and months passed, none came. Her heart sickened, her cheeks grew pale. Again Dame Judson was the bearer of bad tidings. "She didn't wish to alarm Miss Flamank, not she, but she had heard a report that one of his Majesty's ships had been lost in the Indian seas with all hands, and she was greatly afraid that it might be the *Falcon*. There were many other ships, though, on the station, and it might just as likely be one of them."

Jessie had never before fainted in her life, but she would have fallen to the ground had not Mrs Judson caught her and carried her to the sofa. The good woman was dreadfully frightened, for she thought that Jessie was dead, and that she had killed her by her incautious announcement. She tried all the usual expedients to restore animation, and at length the poor girl opened her eyes, but there was a pained yet vacant expression in them which the dame could not fail to remark.

Mr Barry happened soon afterwards to look in to say that he had the promise of four or five pupils, but he at once saw that poor Jessie would be unable to receive them for a long time to come. For weeks she remained in a sadly prostrated state, attended by Dame Judson, who looked after her, as she said truly, without hope of fee or reward. Youth and a good constitution prevailed at length, and Jessie recovered her health, though her heart seemed crushed, and she was unable to exert herself as she knew was necessary to obtain a livelihood. Poor girl! she felt utterly alone in the world. Still, though the news of the *Falcon's* loss was confirmed beyond all doubt, and the widows

and children of her officers and crew entitled to pensions had received them she heard, she herself would not abandon all hope of seeing Ralph. Had she not prayed to God that he might be preserved from all dangers with the truest faith? and oh, how earnestly! though, as in duty bound, she had added, "Thy will be done." She even now tried from her heart to repeat those words and to bow meekly to the will of her Heavenly Father. "He knows what is best, and does all for the best, as granny used to tell me, and as the kind vicar often says," she repeated to herself; "I am sure of that, though I cannot see it in this case, but that arises from my blindness and little faith."

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## Chapter Nine.

Kind Mrs Judson had gone to her own house. Jessie was seated at her work near the window for the sake of the light on an evening in the spring of the year, when she saw a man in a sailor's dress pass the garden gate, then stop and make inquiries of a passer by. Presently he came back, and opening the gate, knocked at the door. Her heart beat violently. He was a stranger, not at all like Ralph; but could he have brought news of him? She flew to open the door.

"Beg pardon, ma'am; are you Jessie Flamank?" asked the stranger, pulling off his hat with a sailor's courtesy.

"Oh, who are you? Oh, tell me why you have come!" exclaimed Jessie, scarcely able in her agitation to utter the words.

"Why, do you see, I'm an old shipmate of one you knew once upon a time, and I thought as now I was at Plymouth I'd come and look you up and see how you were getting on, and have a talk about him," answered the man, stepping in as Jessie made way for him.

"Then do you bring me no news of him—of Ralph Michelmores?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"Not what you may call news; seeing as how it's better than two years since I last set eyes on my old messmate," answered the stranger, taking a chair, while Jessie, unable to support herself, sank into the one she had left. "He told me all about you," he continued, "how you were to be married when he was pressed along with me and others, and so I came to know you: and, said I to myself, now that he's gone, poor fellow, and she's all forlorn-like, maybe, I'll try and comfort her a bit."

Poor Jessie! This strange address from the rough sailor, though apparently kindly meant, had anything but the effect intended, for she burst into tears.

"Now don't take on so," said the sailor, "I didn't think as how I'd have made you cry, or I wouldn't have talked about Ralph. Maybe he wasn't lost with the old *Falcon*. I've known men turn up after ever so many years, whom I thought fathoms deep below the waves long afore. Not but what he'd have been sure to come back to you if he could, that's certain."

"You have not told me who you are. How did you escape from the shipwreck?" said Jessie, at length becoming calm enough to speak.

"I've had a purser's name (see note 1) for some time past, but I don't mind telling you I'm Dick Bracewell, who sailed along with Captain Mudge in the *Amity* once upon a time," answered her visitor. "And as to how I escaped, why I'd left the ship after we took the Frenchman and put into Rio, and I didn't know but what Ralph was still aboard her, and a lieutenant by that time, till I heard when I came ashore last that she was lost with all hands."

Jessie did not quite like Dick's way of speaking, still it was a melancholy satisfaction to her to talk of Ralph; and as her visitor appeared to mean kindly, she did not express any wish that he would take his departure. He sat and sat on telling her many particulars about Ralph while on board the *Falcon*; how well he had behaved in the action, and how he had been made an officer, and been placed in command of the *Eagle*, Dick did not, however, tell her everything that had occurred regarding himself; but though he was not aware of it his tone betrayed the feeling of jealousy which he had entertained, and which her quick perception detecting, did not raise him in her estimation. At last she had to tell him that it was getting late, and to beg that he would go away.

"Well, I hope that I may call again and spin another yarn about old times," he answered, as he took up his hat.

She did not like to say no, and yet his conversation had not left a pleasant impression on her mind. When she had closed the door behind him, she sat down and cried bitterly. It seemed to her more certain than ever that Ralph was lost. Her evening reading of the Bible and her prayers, that solace of the afflicted, restored calmness to her mind.

Day after day Dick Bracewell came to pay her a visit, and, believing him to have been Ralph's particular friend, she did not like to decline seeing him. He told her that after he had left the *Falcon* he had joined a privateer, which had been wonderfully successful; that they had taken a rich Spanish galleon and many other valuable vessels, and that he, having become one of the mates of the ship, had had a large share of prize-money; enough, he declared, to set him up as an independent gentleman for life. To wind up his good luck he had come home in charge of the last prize they had made, which was fully as rich as any of the rest.

"My old shipmate, he that's gone, told me that I should be ruined if I left the frigate, but he was wrong, you see," added Dick. "He thought, too, that I hadn't the sense to take care of my money, if I got any; but I had had a sharp lesson or two, and I made up my mind not to touch liquor, whether afloat or ashore, and I've kept to it for better than two years."

Jessie had heard Ralph mention Dick Bracewell once or twice, but knowing nothing about his character, did not doubt the truth of his statements. Still Dick had not, as he supposed, gained her confidence. His frequent visits were, as might have been expected, noticed by Jessie's neighbours, and Dame Judson looked in one morning on purpose to

tell her of the remarks she had heard, and to give her advice on the subject. She concluded by saying, "If you think that he is worthy of you, my dear, which I don't, why, there is nothing to say. You are your own mistress, and can marry him when—"

"I marry him!" interrupted Jessie. "Oh, Mrs Judson, how can you think of such a thing? I did not suppose that he or any one else dreamed for a moment that I fancied he was making up to me, or I would not have received him after his first visit. Do, Mrs Judson, stay with me to-day, and if he comes tell him that I cannot see him, and beg that he will not come again."

Mrs Judson very readily consented to do as Jessie wished. She had made inquiries about Dick Bracewell, and did not altogether believe in the capture of the Spanish galleon, though she heard that he had come ashore from a prize brought into Plymouth to be sold. The dame had brought her work, and took Jessie's usual place by the window to watch for Dick. She had not been there long before she saw a young sailor approach the house, and, without stopping, walk straight up to the door. "That isn't Dick Bracewell. I wonder who he can be," she exclaimed, as a knock was heard.

"Can it be Ralph?" gasped out Jessie, rising from her seat.

"Oh, no, my dear, he's much too young-looking. You mustn't have such a fancy. I'll see what he wants," said the dame, going to the door.

"Please, ma'am, does Miss Flamank still live here?" asked the young sailor.

"What do you want to say to her?" said the dame.

"I've a great deal to say to her, and I think shell know me when I tell her who I am," replied the sailor.

"Do let him come in, Mrs Judson," exclaimed Jessie, eagerly, her heart beating with the belief that she should hear news of Ralph.

The stranger, doffing his hat, advanced into the room and stood before Jessie with a smile on his countenance as if expecting instantly to be recognised. "I thought, Miss Flamank, that you'd have known me," he said at length; "I've never forgotten you and your kindness to me. Don't you remember Peter Puddle?"

"Oh! yes, yes; indeed I do," exclaimed Jessie, putting out her hand. "And is the *Amity* not lost? Is Captain Mudge still alive?"

Peter shook his head. "I wish I could say there was any chance of that," he answered. "When the old brig went down in the dead of night, I was left afloat on a hen-coop, which the old captain had just before cast loose and told me to cling to, for all our boats were stove in. And I never saw him, nor any one belonging to the *Amity* alive again. Next morning I was picked up by a ship bound out to the West Indies, and I've been knocking about in those seas ever since. The captain had taught me navigation, and, what was better still, to read the Bible; and as I just did what that tells me to do, I got a good character aboard. I was made third mate, and the other two dying, I became first mate for want of a better man; though I was very young for such a charge. But I did my best, and the captain was satisfied, and says that, as he didn't want a better, I should sail with him again next voyage. We sailed for home at last, bound for London; but having sprung a leak, and carried away our fore-mast, we put into Plymouth for repairs—and that's how I've been able to come up to see you. But I've not yet spun all my yarn. Tell me, Miss, have you never got any letters from me?"

"No," answered Jessie, "I have not received a single letter from abroad for three long years or more," and she sighed sadly.

"I thought 'twas so when I got no answers to three I wrote," said Peter. "What I had to tell you was this,—that just before the brig went down the captain made fast to the hen-coop a bag with fifty golden guineas in it, and charged me, if I escaped, to take it to you. I unlashd it and managed to get it into my pocket just before I was hoisted on board. There would have been small chance of my keeping it, however, if I had not fallen among honest people; but when I came to know the captain, I was sure that it would be safe in his hands, so I gave it into his charge, and he stowed it away for me, and showed me where it was kept. If he hadn't done this I should have lost it, for a few months ago, when we were down in the Bay of Honduras, we were chased and overtaken by a schooner under Spanish colours. Her crew, a set of fellows of all nations, calling themselves privateer's-men, though they were more like pirates, robbed us of everything they could lay hands on, and all the specie they could find belonging to the captain and owners, and had begun to scuttle the ship, and would, no doubt, have set fire to her besides and carried off our boats, when an English man-of-war hove in sight, bringing up a strong breeze. The pirates, some of whom I was sure were Englishmen, in spite of their dress, for I heard them speaking, and should know two or three of them again, made off, and allowed us to stop the auger holes and pump out the water. Their schooner, being a fast craft, escaped; but the man-of-war, having seen us safe on our way to Barbadoes, went back to look for her. If she didn't find her, she would at all events have made those seas too hot for the pirate. I was better pleased than anything else that your money was saved, and here it is all right, just as the captain did it up for you."

As Peter spoke he placed on the table before Jessie a small weather-stained canvas bag, and, undoing the string, counted out fifty guineas.

"They are all right," he continued, "and my heart is lightened of the thought I've always had that I might lose them, though I would have made it up to you somehow or other—that I would."

Tears choked Jessie's utterance as she thought of the kind captain who had remembered her in his last moments, and of the sturdy honesty and faithfulness of Peter.

"I am, indeed, grateful to you as I am to Captain Mudge," she said at length; "but surely you are entitled to some of this."

"Not a dollar would I touch, not if all the judges in the land were to order me to take it," answered Peter, replacing the money in the bag, which he tied up and pressed into her hands. "There, it's all for you, and I wish you knew how happy I am to give it to you safe at last."

Before Jessie could reply there was a knock at the door. Mrs Judson went to open it. "Miss Flamank cannot see you," Jessie heard her say.

"She never sent that message," exclaimed Dick Bracewell, brushing by her and entering the room. He cast an angry glance at Peter, as if he considered him an intruder, and advanced to shake hands with Jessie. She drew back, greatly annoyed at his conduct.

"Mrs Judson told you I was engaged," she said.

"She told me you couldn't see me; but when a man loves a girl, and knows pretty well that she likes him, he isn't to be stopped by trifles," he answered, throwing himself into a chair, as if he felt perfectly at home.

A feeling of indignation prevented Jessie from saying anything. Meantime Peter had been narrowly eyeing her unwelcome visitor, and, stepping up to him, said—

"You've just come from the West Indies, mate, I've a notion?"

"Yes, I've been in those seas," answered Dick, for, having told Jessie so, he could not deny the fact.

"I thought as much; and we met there not long ago in a way I'm not likely to forget," said Peter, quietly. "Maybe you don't remember me, but I do you, I can tell you; and there are not a few of the crew of the *Kate* who will remember you, too, if they set eyes on you."

Dick; taken by surprise, turned pale, and declared he did not know what the young man meant; but Peter again minutely described how his ship had been boarded by pirates on the Spanish main, and positively asserting that Dick was one of them, advised him, if he valued his life and liberty, to clear out of Plymouth without delay.

Dick, as might have been expected, swore that the young man, as he called Peter, was mistaken; but shortly after, observing that it was clear he was not wanted, took up his hat, and, without much leave-taking, hurried out of the house.

Jessie, who feared that Peter was right in his suspicions, thanked him for giving Dick the warning.

"He was once, at all events, Ralph Michelmore's friend, and I should have grieved if you had been the means of bringing him to punishment," she said.

"I'd not hurt him, Miss Jessie, on any account," answered Peter; "but as I judged by the way you spoke to him that he was not welcome, I thought I would just say what would make him keep away for the future."

Peter remained to dinner and amused Jessie and Mrs Judson with an account of his adventures, in all of which his honesty and courage were remarkable, though he was not aware that what he said exhibited it.

"That's what the right training of good Captain Mudge has done for him," observed Mrs Judson, when he had gone. "I remember him a regular pickle; and, if he had been left to himself, he would have been a vagabond all his life, like many others who have had no kind friends to look after them."

Peter's warning had not, it appeared, been lost upon Dick Bracewell; for from that day Jessie saw him no more.

Peter came constantly, while he remained in Plymouth, to see her. At his last visit he put the sum of thirty pounds into her hands. "I want you to take this, Miss Flamank, and to spend any of it you like," he said, while a blush spread over his sunburnt countenance. "It's my savings since I was picked up by the *Kate*, and I always intended it for you.— Well, if you won't accept it as a gift, remember, if what happens to many a sailor happens to me, it will be yours. Now, don't say no, and you'll make me more happy than I can tell you."

Peter would take no refusal, so at last Jessie consented to receive the money, though she resolved not to spend it on any account. After Peter had sailed, Jessie lived on much as before, except that with the money she had received she was able to obtain many of the necessaries she had before denied herself. Still her pale cheek told of a sad heart, and though more than one young man well to do in the world asked her to become his wife, she remained faithful to the memory of her lost Ralph.

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Note 1: A fictitious name sailors who have deserted generally assume to escape recognition.

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## Chapter Ten.

The *Falcon* proceeded on her voyage to India. Though she was refitted as thoroughly as was possible in a foreign port, her commander had no wish to encounter another enemy with so large a proportion of his crew untried and inexperienced. He did his utmost, however, to get them into efficient order, and every day that the weather permitted they were exercised at the guns, as well as at making and shortening sail, and taught the use of the small arms.

Ralph Michelmore was fully occupied, and had but little time to think of his bitter disappointment at not returning home in the *Eagle*. By the time the *Falcon* reached the Hoogly, the crew had been brought into excellent order, and were highly complimented by the admiral on the station. There being no post-captain to supersede him, Mr Handsel received an acting order to continue in the command. The *Falcon* was allowed just time to take on board a fresh supply of powder, shot, and other stores and provisions, when she was ordered to proceed in search of an enemy's cruiser, said to have captured several English merchantmen in the southern part of the Indian Ocean. She was supposed to be a heavy frigate, equal, if not superior, in force to the *Falcon*, but neither Captain Handsel nor any of his ship's company had the slightest doubt as to what would be the result of an action should they be fortunate enough to fall in with her.

A sharp look-out was kept, and the ocean traversed in all directions for several weeks, but no traces of her could be discovered, till at length a prize she had taken only two days before was re-captured. Her probable whereabouts having been ascertained from the prisoners, the prize being sent on to Calcutta, the *Falcon* under all sail steered in the direction where it was hoped the enemy would be found. The stormy season was approaching. The weather, indeed, had already changed for the worse; but still Captain Handsel was unwilling to return to port, when on the point, as he hoped, of meeting the long looked-for foe.

A strong breeze was blowing from the northeast, and the frigate was steering south, under all the canvas she could bear. The crew had just been piped to breakfast.

"A sail on the lee bow," shouted the look-out at the mast-head.

Ralph was sent aloft to examine the stranger. She was standing close-hauled to the northward. From the squareness of her yards, he had little doubt, seen even at that distance, that she was a man-of-war, but as the two ships were rapidly nearing each other, the matter would soon be decided. The course of the *Falcon* was altered so as to intercept the stranger. Suddenly, however, the latter was seen to wear ship, and, setting more sail, to stand away before the wind. The *Falcon* was already carrying as much as she could well stagger under; still, eager to overtake the fugitive the captain ordered the topgallant sails to be loosed, and on flew the *Falcon*, like the bird from which she took her name, in chase of her expected prey. A stern chase is proverbially a long chase. It seemed doubtful, after the lapse of several hours, whether she was gaining ground on the stranger. The evening was drawing on: the gale was increasing.

"Hand the topgallant sails!" shouted the captain. The crew were going aloft when there came a loud crash. The fore and main topgallant masts were carried away. Two poor fellows were struck—one fell dead on the deck, the other was knocked overboard. To heave-to was impossible. The wreck of the masts was cleared away, and two reefs taken in the topsails, and the courses brailed up. The frigate flew on at her utmost speed. It was now almost night, and it was feared that the chase would escape in the darkness. Still it was possible, with the heavy gale blowing, that she might continue on the course she was steering.

When darkness came down over the ocean the chase could still be seen through the night-glasses, standing as before. As night, however, drew on, clouds gathered thickly in the sky, the obscurity became greater, the gale heavier, and after a tremendous squall, which struck the frigate, had passed over, those on the look-out could nowhere discern the chase.

The captain, however, did not believe that she had hauled her wind, and hoped to come up with her perhaps with her masts gone. The master, after speaking with the captain, had gone below to examine the chart, but even that could not be relied on, as the part of the ocean they were then in, was, in those days, but imperfectly known, and prudence dictated that they should heave-to till daylight.

The captain, in the meantime, expecting every instant again to sight the chase, kept the ship on her course. Ralph was standing aft with his two young messmates, Chandos and Dickenson, who had become much attached to him.

"What do you think of it, Michelmore? I don't like running into the darkness as we are doing," observed the former.

"The darkness will not hurt us, and provided there are no rocks or shoals in our course we may run on as safely as in the daytime," answered Ralph. "I examined the chart, and the nearest islands marked on it are, if they are correctly laid down, full fifty leagues to the south of us, though there are some shoals rather nearer."

The master, who had been below, returned hurriedly on deck, and spoke to the captain.

"If so, we'll heave the ship to," was the answer.

Scarcely had the order been given to "Put the helm a-lee," than the look-out forward shouted "Breakers ahead!" and the next instant a fearful crashing sound was heard. The ship quivered from stem to stern, the tall masts rocked, and those on deck, unable to hold on to the bulwarks, were thrown off their feet. It was a moment of intense suspense. The head-sheets had been let fly. Would the ship answer her helm? No. A tremendous sea met her bows, sweeping over her deck, and carrying several men in its relentless grasp into the raging surf to leeward. Again she struck, with greater violence than before; the next sea hove her on her beam ends. The carpenter reported twelve feet of water in the hold, and rapidly increasing—a rock had gone through her. The captain ordered the masts to be cut away. He had abandoned all hopes of saving the ship, and his only thought now was how to preserve the lives of his people. A party of the crew, led by Ralph and other officers, with gleaming axes quickly severed the weather rigging, and a few strokes were sufficient to send the tall masts, with their spars, crashing over to leeward. The furious seas in quick succession struck the devoted ship, carrying away her bulwarks, and destroying several of her boats. The officers and crew were collected on the quarter-deck, for the stern of the ship having swung round it was least exposed to the assaults of the waves. Ralph had sought out his two young friends, Chandos and Dickenson, wishing to help them if he could. Looking over the larboard quarter, he observed that the water in that direction was less broken than elsewhere, and he felt sure that he saw the land rising to a considerable height at no great distance. He told the



captain that he thought he might reach the shore, and, if it was inhabited, bring assistance to the ship. A small boat hung at the after-davits capable of carrying four or five people.

"You can try it," said the captain; "choose any two of the men on whom you can rely to accompany you, and take these two youngsters," touching Chandos and Dickenson on the shoulders, "there will be less risk for them than by their remaining on board, I fear. Remember, Michelmores, if you escape, that I was in chase of an enemy when the ship was lost, and that there was an error in the chart. Heaven bless and preserve you!" he wrung Ralph's hand as he spoke.

The two young midshipmen were placed in the boat, which was carefully lowered, with Jacob Crane, and another man, Ned Hawkins, whom Ralph selected, he himself following. He put Jacob at the helm, confident of the old man's judgment, and got out an oar, the rest doing the same. Sheltered by the wreck, the boat at first floated in comparatively smooth water, but scarcely had her head been got round than she was in the foaming waves, which rolled in towards the shore. They, however, did not break as they did at the fore part of the ship, and Ralph knew from this that she had struck on the extreme point of a reef, and he hoped that, could the remaining boats or rafts be launched, his shipmates might yet be saved. Anxious to communicate this information, he directed Jacob to steer back to the ship, but after pulling for some time they found that they had made no progress, and it became evident that a strong current was sweeping round the point, and that their utmost efforts would be in vain. The boat's head was therefore once more turned towards the shore. The current, however, swept them at a rapid rate to the westward, so that they soon lost sight of the ship. Not a glimpse either of the land could be obtained, and they began to fear that they should be carried out to sea.

"Never say die if we are," observed Jacob; "it may be better for us than having to run through the surf with the chance of being rolled over and over in it."

The storm raged with greater fury than before. Jacob advised, as the only hope of preserving their lives, that they should keep the boat's head to the sea, and allow her to drift on till daylight, when they might discover some spot where they could attempt to land with a prospect of success. In spite of all their efforts the seas continually washed into the boat, and compelled the two midshipmen to work hard at baling out the water, while Ralph and Ned Hawkins, with their two oars, kept the boat in a right position. Their anxiety about the fate of their shipmates prevented them from contemplating as much as they would otherwise have done the perils of their own situation. To return to the wreck was impossible; to land in safety seemed equally so. At any moment a raging sea might overwhelm them, and it required their utmost strength and skill to avert the catastrophe. Now and then, as the boat rose to the summit of a billow, Ralph fancied that he could distinguish through the darkness the dim outline of the coast, and as its form had changed since first seen, he was convinced that they were still drifting along it. He feared that, unless the direction of the current changed, they might be carried far away out to sea, when death from hunger and thirst must be their lot; still, trusting in God's mercy, he did his utmost to keep up the courage of his companions. The midshipmen behaved as became them, not a word of complaint escaping their lips, while every time a sea broke on board, Chandos cried out, "Hurrah, here's more work for us; bale away, Dickenson; we must clear her before the next comes." It seemed, indeed, wonderful that so small a boat could live in such a sea. Thus the night wore on.

At dawn of day Ralph discovered, less than half a mile to the south-west, a rocky point, the extreme eastern end, he supposed, of a somewhat elevated island, along the northern coast of which they had been drifting during the night. The light rapidly increased, while the clouds cleared away, and the wind abated. As far as the eye could reach to the westward appeared an unbroken line of raging surf, into which, had the boat been carried, her destruction would have been certain. He pointed out to his companions how mercifully they had hitherto been preserved; "and if we can get round yonder point we shall be in smooth water, under the lee of the island, and shall probably without difficulty get on shore," he added.

Once more he cast an anxious look westward, but not a trace of the wreck could be seen. Had the *Falcon* and her gallant crew been totally engulfed by the waves?

"I fear that it's all over with them," said Jacob; "I don't think we could have come so far as to lose sight of the wreck altogether if she still hung together."

The boat's head was now cautiously got round, and the midshipmen resuming their oars, they pulled away in a direction which would enable them to round the point clear of the surf. They were round it at last, but a fringe of black rocks, over which the sea leaped and foamed, warned them to keep at a distance. On and on they rowed. The coast was uninviting. No trees were to be seen; no signs of human habitation. At length a small sandy bay appeared, with high rocks on either side of it, while beyond was a valley, its sides clothed with trees and green herbage. No spot could be more desirable. Pulling in, they landed, and hauled up their boat on the beach.

"We are not ashamed, I hope, of thanking Him who preserved us through the dangers of the last dark night, and asking Him to take care of us for the future," said Jacob.

"No, indeed," answered Ralph and the midshipmen, and at once they knelt down on the sand, and, led by the old man, together offered up their prayers to the All Merciful One, to Whom they acknowledged their safety was alone due; for vain would have been all their efforts and skill without His aid. Rising from their knees, they set off in search of water, and their eyes were soon gladdened by the sight of a clear stream running down the valley. Having quenched their thirst, they looked about for food.

They had not gone far when, to their surprise, they saw close under the hill, shaded by trees, a well-built hut, evidently not the habitation of a savage. They hurried towards it, expecting to find the occupant within. No one appeared. The door was open. They entered. There was a bedstead with the clothes still on it, a fireplace built of rough stone, the ashes of a recently burning fire within it. Hung against the wall were several cooking utensils, and on some shelves were arranged some plates and dishes and cups and knives and forks. In the centre of the hut was a

cabin table, and placed round it were three chests, which had apparently served as seats. They contained only a few old shoes and worn-out clothes. No books or writing materials were found, or anything to show who had been the occupants of the hut. If it had contained any articles of value, they had been carried away. Both Ralph and Jacob were of the opinion, from the workmanship of the chests and table, that they were French. As no food was found in the hut, they were eager to continue their search for some. At a short distance off was a small garden, but it had lately been dug up, and all the vegetables and roots it had contained had been carried off.

"It's my opinion that there were three people who messed together in the hut. One lived in it—either the captain or another officer—and the other two slept elsewhere," observed Jacob. "We shall find their roosting place not far off. One thing seems certain, that they are not here now, and there's little doubt that a vessel visited the place lately, and that they and everything of value were carried away by her, as well as the produce of the garden."

Ralph and the rest thought that Jacob was probably right in his conjectures.

"Well, I can't make it out at all," exclaimed Jacob, who had gone ahead of his companions. He pointed, as they came up, to three long, narrow, grass-covered mounds on a level spot at some distance from the hut. They were evidently graves.

"If the poor fellows lie there they can't have got away; but, then, how could the last have managed to bury himself?"

Chandos remarked that perhaps there were four people, and that a survivor had performed that office for the rest; but the old man was positive that there were only three, as he had counted that number of plates and knives and forks, and had, moreover, found three worn-out pairs of shoes. Their hunger put a speedy end to the discussion, and made them continue their search for food. Birds flitted by them, but they had no fowling-pieces, and in vain they tried to knock some down. Berries and some larger fruits hung temptingly on the trees out of reach above their heads.

"Those birds do not live upon nothing," observed Chandos. "If we cannot catch them, we may at all events eat the fruit they live on."

"A bright idea," exclaimed Dickenson. "I see a big fellow pecking away at a yellow, juicy-looking fruit up there. Depend on it, he finds it ripe. Now, if you and Ned will give me a hoist, I can manage to reach the lowest branch, and though the boughs might break with the weight of a heavier man, they will bear me—if not, look out and catch me."

Dickenson, with the aid of Chandos and Ned—the first of whom mounted on the others' shoulders—soon clambered up the tree, and though the branches bent with his weight, he managed to throw down several ripe fruit. Having put two or three in his pocket, he retired to the inner end of a branch to stop the cravings of hunger, while Chandos and Ned were employed in the same way below. The fruit had stones in the centre, and was more mealy and much richer than a pear.

Ralph and Jacob had in the meantime gone down to the beach to collect mussels or other shell-fish. Chandos shouted to them, but as they did not hear him, he set off with a supply of the fruit in his pockets. They had found shell-fish in abundance, and had collected as many as they could require. Having no means of lighting a fire, they were obliged to eat them uncooked; but notwithstanding this, with the aid of the fruit, they contrived to make a hearty meal. Having thus somewhat recruited their strength, although they would gladly have thrown themselves on the ground and gone to sleep, they determined at once to set out in search of any of their shipmates who might have escaped from the wreck. The distance, Ralph feared, would, however, prove considerable, and tax their strength to the utmost. He proposed, therefore, that the midshipmen should remain behind, and, after taking the rest they required, employ themselves in searching for food.

"No! no! we'll hold out as well as any of you," exclaimed Chandos. "If our friends require help, the more there are to give it the better."

As Ralph could not object to this he agreed that they should come.

The bay in which they had landed looked towards the rising sun, and was thus near one end of the island, while the wreck had occurred, Ralph calculated, close to the other. They would have probably ravines to cross, hills to ascend, and other impediments to encounter. Having collected as many shell-fish and fruit as they could carry, they—notwithstanding their expected difficulties—set out with sturdy hearts, determined to overcome them.

The country was generally rocky and barren. Bleak hills destitute of vegetation, narrow ravines, and savage gorges appeared on every side. Often it seemed impossible that they could make any further progress; but after several hours spent in climbing and scrambling they at length reached the point for which they had been directing their course, on the north-western shore. As they approached it they observed a few spots of a more fertile character, and below them on level ground, forming the shores of a small bay, waved several cocoa-nut and other tropical trees. As no other huts were seen, or any plantations, they were convinced that the island was uninhabited. Their chief attention was, however, directed seaward in search of the wreck. Though the wind had gone down, the surf still beat furiously along the whole line of coast, so that no boats or rafts could have reached the shore in safety. About half a mile off rose, from amid a mass of foam, the black rugged points of a reef, now for a minute in sight, now concealed by the heavy rollers which dashed over them and came rushing on with an angry roar towards the cliffs which formed that end of the island.

"That must be the reef on which the frigate struck," said Ralph, with a deep sigh, and tears of manly sorrow sprang to his eyes. "Poor fellows! Not one can have escaped."

"It's too likely," said Jacob, gazing at the spot; "the ship must have fallen off the reef, and the current would have swept her and all on board away."

The rest of the party shared Ralph's grief, but they had no time to indulge in it. He was anxious to examine the coast on the bare possibility of any one having been washed on shore alive, and they then would have to search for water and some sheltered spot where they might pass the night. With some difficulty they descended the cliffs to the first line of beach they could discover, which extended for some distance towards the east. Here and there lighter pieces of the wreck strewed the shore, but the heavier fragments had been carried away by the current. The wreck would serve for fire-wood, but then they had no means of lighting a fire, and none of the pieces were large enough to be of use towards building a hut. They did not therefore stop to collect them, but pushed on, still not without some faint hopes that one or more of their shipmates might have reached the shore alive on planks or spars. The midshipmen, though their spirits kept them up, were, however, much fatigued, and were longing to find a sheltered spot where they might stop and rest.

An object in the surf now caught their sight, some way ahead, at a spot free from rocks. Hastening forward they found that it was a cask, and after several efforts, at the risk of being carried off by the sea, they succeeded in rolling



THEY SUCCEEDED IN ROLLING IT UPON THE BEACH. *Figure 136.*

it upon the beach.

It was full of beef, which, though they were compelled to eat it raw, greatly restored their strength. Further on a tangled mass of rigging had already been thrown on the shore. Perhaps a human being might be found among it. They ran on, eager to examine it. It consisted of spars and ropes and torn canvas. The latter might assist to form a roof for a hut, if not large enough for a tent. They were cutting it clear, when Chandos discovered the stock of a musket, with part of the barrel broken off, rolled up in its folds.

"That will not be of much use as we have no powder or shot," observed Dickenson.

"No, but see, the lock and flint are still on it," answered Chandos. "Hurrah! We shall now have the means of lighting a fire."

This success encouraged them to make further search. Several casks of pork, and flour, and other provisions, an invaluable iron saucepan with the lid tightly jammed on, as well as two sea-chests, with clothing and numerous useful articles, rewarded their labours. The wide bay they had before seen was reached at last. The extent of fertile ground was smaller than they had supposed, and but few cocoa-nut trees grew on it. Still, as the evening was advancing, and a sheltered nook near a rill of water was discovered, they settled to go no further. While Ralph with Jacob and Ned were putting up a rough hut the midshipmen collected some dry grass and broken branches. As they were hunting about they discovered several fungi growing near the roots of the trees.

"This stuff looks very like tinder," said Chandos. "Let us try if it will take a spark."

He produced the flint from the lock of the musket. In a few minutes, by dint of blowing and puffing, they had a blazing fire, and the iron pot with a piece of beef in it was put on to boil. The flour, though damaged by the salt water, supplied them with cakes cooked under the ashes. They had now no longer the fear of suffering from starvation. After an ample meal they lay down to rest, and it was broad daylight before any of the party awoke. The next day they resumed their search along the shore. More casks of beef and pork were secured, and numerous other articles. Among the things in one of the chests was a Bible, which being enclosed in a leathern case had escaped injury. The owner had apparently but seldom opened it. To Ralph and his companions it was of unspeakable value. Though he had been accustomed to read the Scriptures on a Sunday on board ship he had seldom gone to them for guidance and strength on other days in the week. Now morning and evening he read aloud from the precious volume, which from henceforth became the source of comfort and support to the castaways. Several days were spent in collecting whatever the sea had thrown on the shore from the wreck, but not a human body was found. Probably the ship had broken suddenly up, and all on board had been engulfed together. Having dried the contents of the chests, and stored them and their provisions in the hut, they returned to the bay in which they had landed. Its attractions being

far greater than those of any other part of the coast, in addition to its possessing a well-built abode, they resolved to settle there.

The direct distance across the island was less than three miles, and by a bird's-eye survey from the highest point in the centre, they calculated that the most practicable path would be about five miles. By this they at once set about removing their goods; carrying them in some parts on their shoulders, and in others dragging them on a truck, built out of wreck timber. The whole north shore presented no safe landing-place, or could they have taken them round by sea much labour would have been saved. One of the most welcome prizes was a bundle of fish-hooks, found in the boatswain's chest. Lines were easily manufactured, and less than an hour's fishing gave them food for the day. Birds were frequently caught in snares; and roots and fruits were not wanting. Thus, sterile as the island at first appeared, they had reason to be thankful that it supplied them with everything absolutely necessary for sustaining life.

The end of three months found them settled in the hut, following an almost regular routine of labour. Men-of-war's men, from their training, dislike idleness; and the three young officers and the two men cut out ample employment for themselves during every hour of the day. They did not fail, however, to discuss every possible means of escaping.

The midshipmen and Ned proposed to raise the sides of their small boat and to put to sea in her in the hopes of reaching India, or of finding some inhabited island at which ships were likely to touch, so that they might ultimately find their way home.

To this proposal Jacob Crane strongly objected, though Ralph was at first rather inclined to favour it, desperate as it appeared.

"Nothing we can do to the boat can make her fit for a long voyage, even if the weather should prove fine," observed Jacob. "To my mind, we ought to be thankful at being as well off as we are. God has mercifully saved our lives and placed us here, and here we should be content to remain and make the best use of our time till He thinks fit to send us relief. If we were likely to be starved, or if there were savages threatening to kill us, the case would be different. It then would be perfectly right for us to put off in our boat, and we might trust to Him for protection. If we had been supplied with tools, it might then have been our duty to try and build a vessel large enough for the voyage to India or the Cape of Good Hope; but we haven't got them, and there isn't a shipwright among us. Perhaps some vessel may be wrecked on the coast, and we may be the means of saving the lives of the people aboard her. Depend on it God has always got a purpose in all that He does or allows, though we don't see it—that's my firm belief—therefore I say again, let us be content with the blessings God has sent us, and be resigned to His will."

Jacob's argument decided Ralph, and won over the rest of the party.

Though their boat was not large enough for a voyage, they made frequent trips in her along the coast, and were by her means able to catch many more fish than they could have caught from the rocks.

A few seeds were found in the hut, and several plants which had been left in the ground sprang up, so that they were able to restore the garden, which had been destroyed, and also greatly to increase its size.

The discovery of some strong fibre enabled them to manufacture twine, which served not only for fishing-lines, but as they improved in the art of making it, they produced a fishing-net of fair size. With this they caught at times far more fish than they could consume, so they pickled the remainder with salt collected from the hollows of the rocks, and had consequently a supply during stormy weather.

Happily in one of the chests were a couple of books on navigation, and three or four others of an interesting character. By means of the first Ralph was able to give instruction to the midshipmen in the science so necessary to them in their professional career. He also made the model of a ship's deck and rigging, which, while it afforded a source of amusement, gave them a more thorough knowledge than they possessed of seamanship, while the other books were read till nearly got by heart. Thus the youngsters' time, which might otherwise have been utterly lost, was usefully employed.

Flagstaves were erected on high points at the northern and southern sides of the island: and a board was nailed to the former, with a direction carved on it to their cove. They were constantly on the look-out; but months and months went by and not even a distant sail was seen, to give them hopes that deliverance was near. At length, even Ralph began to fear that they were doomed to a life-long imprisonment on that unknown islet.

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## Chapter Eleven.

Bells were ringing; bonfires blazing throughout England. The battle of Waterloo had been fought. Peace, broken by the return of Napoleon from Elba, was restored; and the great agitator of Europe was a captive on board a British man-of-war, about to sail for Saint Helena. Though the nation was rejoicing, the hearts of many of all ranks, who had lost loved ones on the field of battle, were mourning.

Jessie Flamank was not alone in her sorrow. She was resigned; but time had not assuaged it, nor lessened her tender love for Ralph's memory. She had, of late, ample work, as several ladies in the neighbourhood who had heard her history were in the habit of sending for her to assist in making dresses for their families. Among them was a Mrs Chandos, whose husband, Colonel Chandos, had just returned home wounded from Waterloo, in which battle their only son had fallen.

The bereaved mother, while arranging the mourning for her little girls, spoke of him to Jessie, adding, with tears in her eyes, "His younger brother perished on board the *Falcon*, five years ago, in the Indian Ocean."

Jessie naturally became deeply interested in the poor lady, and could not help telling her that her intended husband

was an officer in the same ship.

"We long hoped against hope that some might have escaped, and that our son might be among the number," said Mrs Chandos; "but now we know that we have lost both our brave boys."

"All things are possible with God, ma'am; He orders all for the best; we should trust Him," answered Jessie, gently.

Scarcely had she reached home, when a young sailor, whom she at once recognised as Peter Puddle, hurried up to the door.

"Oh, Miss Flamank, I am so glad to find you!" he exclaimed eagerly; "I have been twice to the house, and was afraid that you had left it. May I come in?"

Jessie assured him that he was welcome.

"I have news for you. Wonderful news, which you little expected to hear," he continued.

"Oh, tell me! What is it?" cried Jessie, gasping for breath, and her heart beating violently.

"I had always heard say, what you thought also, that your father, Captain Flamank, perished at sea; now I've got to tell you that he didn't, for I've seen him, and he is alive and well, and he sent me on to tell you that he would be with you soon."

"My father alive!" ejaculated Jessie. Is she to be blamed if she felt disappointed at hearing his name instead of Ralph's as she had expected? Her affection for her father, long supposed dead, however, quickly revived, and she became eager to welcome him home.

Peter told her that the captain of the ship to which he himself belonged having died at the Cape of Good Hope, it became necessary for the consignees to find another. That one had been selected who, with other officers, had just arrived after having been prisoners to the French for several years in a remote island in the Indian Ocean. The crews of the captured vessels had been sent away and exchanged; but the officers had been detained till the termination of the war, for fear that they might give information to the English of the position of the island, the favourite rendezvous of French privateers.

"You may suppose how surprised I was to hear that our new captain's name was Flamank," continued Peter. "I at once told him that I knew you, and how kind you had been to me, and soon found that he was your father. He seemed never tired of asking me questions about you, and so of course I gave him a full account of all that I thought would interest him. He, in return, told me a great deal about himself. His ship had not been wrecked, as was supposed, but had been captured by a French privateer, on board which he had been taken. She was shortly afterwards wrecked on an island in the Indian Ocean, when the Frenchmen attempted to reach the shore in their boats, leaving the prisoners on board. The boats were swamped, and all in them perished. Notwithstanding this, most of the prisoners having built a raft, pushed off on it and shared their fate. Captain Flamank and two others, seeing signs of the gale abating, refused to join them, and the next day landed safely in a sheltered cove, in the neighbourhood of which they took up their abode, having brought on shore a large store of provisions and everything they required from the wreck before she went to pieces. His two companions, one of whom was wounded, died, and he was left alone for several years till taken off by another French privateer. From what the captain said I have an idea that he thinks of going back there if he has an opportunity, as he had hidden away no small amount of treasure, taken out of the wreck, which he didn't tell the French privateer's-men of, for more reasons than one. First, he couldn't speak their lingo; secondly, as bad weather was coming on, they were in a hurry to be off; and as it was property which their countrymen had taken from English vessels, he had no fancy to let them get it. But I've still another strange thing to tell you. Soon after the captain was taken aboard the privateer, she was chased by an English frigate during a heavy gale. The privateer narrowly escaped shipwreck on the island they had left; and it was the opinion of the Frenchmen, and the captain thinks they were right, that the frigate was cast away. There can be no doubt that she was the *Falcon*, and he thinks that some, if not all the crew, may have escaped, and be still living on the island."

Jessie was making many eager inquiries on the subject, when Peter, looking at his watch, jumped up, and telling her that she would soon see the captain, hurried away. Before an hour was over she was clasped in her father's arms. He had much to hear from her of her numerous trials and difficulties, and she in return longed to learn more about his adventures and the supposed wreck of the *Falcon* than Peter had told her. He confirmed in all points the account she had heard.

"It has always been supposed, I find, that my ship, the *Dolphin*, was driven on shore during a hurricane in the Indian Ocean, and that all on board had perished," continued Captain Flamank. "The report was brought home as you know by another English ship, the *Chieftain*, which had been in company with us. She herself narrowly escaped the outer end of a reef, and was driven far away to the southward, and her master having observed our perilous position, and not again falling in with us, naturally concluded that we had been lost. This I have only lately learned. We were truly in great danger, but happily, being carried through an opening in the reef, were able to anchor in safety under the lee of the land.

"We congratulated ourselves on our escape. Scarcely, however, had we made sail after the gale was over, than we saw standing out of a bay, a short distance off, which a lofty headland had concealed from us, a large ship which we soon knew to be a French privateer. In vain we did our utmost to escape, while we fired our stern guns in the hopes of crippling her. She soon ranged up alongside, when, finding that further resistance would be useless, with a sad heart I hauled down my flag. I was at once transferred to the privateer with several of my men, and a prize-crew was put on board the *Dolphin*, which sailed to the northward. As I never heard of her again, I suspect that she went down in a hurricane before she reached her destination. The privateer cruised for some time in the southern part of the

Indian Ocean, and after taking another prize with a large amount of specie, which was of course removed on board her, she one night was wrecked on a small rocky island, of the existence of which no one appeared to be aware. I will not describe the horrors which ensued. All discipline was lost, each man, regardless of the rest, thinking only how he could secure his own safety."

Captain Flamank then gave Jessie a full account of the occurrences of which Peter had already told her.

"The years spent on that lone island, especially after the death of my two companions, were indeed sad ones," he continued. "Often I believed that I should never again see the face of a fellow-creature. I thought of you, too, my child, left as I feared you would be when your grandmother was taken away, alone in the hard, cruel world, with no one to protect you from its snares, or to help you in your distress."

"But God protects those who trust in Him, and He never forsook me, but sent me kind friends who gave me all the help I needed," exclaimed Jessie, looking up in her father's face.

"I know that now, Jessie, but I did not then. I should have borne my misfortunes much better had I done so," he answered. "That good young fellow Peter, my mate, first put the truth before me on the voyage home. Many men would not dare to speak as faithfully to their captain as he did to me. He got me to read the Bible, and showed me throughout the Psalms God's numberless gracious promises to those who trust to Him, and His boundless love to sinful men in the Gospels, and what ample rules under all circumstances in life He has afforded us in the Epistles."

"Peter did not tell me of this," said Jessie.

"No, I should have supposed that he would not," answered her father; "he is too modest and humble to boast of anything he has done. I need not tell you, after the years I had spent in solitude, with what joy I welcomed the sight of a ship approaching the island. It was greatly damped, however, when I discovered that she was French. Still I resolved if I could to go on board her, hoping ultimately to make my escape. The very day before the wreck I had discovered the latitude and longitude we were in, and had noted it in my pocket-book, so that I could calculate the exact position of the island. I had also buried all the treasure which my companions and I had landed, and had raised over it a mound exactly resembling those I had placed over their graves. I thus should be able at any time to find the spot, I thought, while no one else was likely to disturb it. On ascertaining from the Frenchmen who landed that their ship was a privateer, and that they were still at war with the English, I said nothing about the treasure, determined rather to let it remain concealed for ever than allow them to possess it, for I knew that though I might claim it they would without scruple take it from me. Of this I was convinced from the way in which they pulled up all the vegetables in my garden and carried off everything of value which they found in the hut. Among other articles were my sextant, chronometer, and nautical almanacks, which I had brought in my chest from the *Dolphin*, though unable to use them on board the privateer till the day I spoke of. The chronometer I had carefully wound up every day, and it was still going when I returned to the wreck. I was thus able when on the island to verify my previous calculations and to ascertain its exact position.

"Having claimed the sextant and chronometer when I was carried on board, I was told that they were no longer mine, and care was taken that I should not ascertain the ship's position. In short, for several days I was kept below, so that I could not even discover the course we were steering. From what I overheard, however, I found that three days after leaving the island we were chased during a heavy gale by an English frigate, when we narrowly escaped destruction on a reef at its western end, on which it was supposed the frigate had been cast away. She, I have no doubt from what I have since heard, was the *Falcon*, to which Ralph Michelmore belonged. From my own experience, I have hopes if such was the case that some of the people may have reached the shore, and are still living there."

"Oh, father! I cannot doubt it; and that Ralph is among them," exclaimed Jessie, clasping her hands.

"I pray for your sake, my child, that he may be," said Captain Flamank. "Such scenes as took place when I was wrecked in the privateer are not likely to have occurred on board a well-disciplined man-of-war. After again, as I have described, narrowly escaping shipwreck, I began to hope that the time when I should be free and able to return to England was approaching. Notwithstanding the vigilance of the Frenchmen, I managed on several occasions to creep on deck at night, when a glance at the stars in the clear sky overhead assured me that the ship was steering to the northward, and as I supposed to one of the French settlements in India. What was my surprise, therefore, to find one morning that we were standing towards a small hilly island, with the appearance of which I was totally unacquainted. On being seen by the captain I was sent below, and when I was allowed to return on deck I discovered that we were in a completely land-locked harbour, with several other ships at anchor, most of which I knew from their build to be English. Lofty cliffs circled nearly round the harbour, concealing the masts even of the largest ships from being seen by any passing stranger. In one place the land sloped more gradually from the water, and on it were a number of huts, mostly well-built and of considerable size, forming a regular village. Some way above the village were several more huts surrounded by a high palisade with a gateway, before which paced a couple of sentries. I had not had much time to make my observations when I was ordered into a boat, and on landing was at once conducted up to the last-mentioned group of huts. Entering the gate I was led into a hut close to it, in which sat an officer who told me that I must consider myself a prisoner of war, and that as the English shut up the French who fell into their hands in Porchester Castle, I had no reason to complain. I urged that I had not been taken prisoner, and that after years of absence from my home I was anxious to return there. He shrugged his shoulders, smiling grimly, and made no reply. I found between thirty and forty persons living within the palisade, most of them masters and mates of captured ships. Several had been there from nearly the commencement of the war. They told me that they were strictly watched, and that they found it impossible to send letters home to inform their friends of their fate. Civilians and common seamen had of late not been allowed to land, but had been sent away immediately; the object of the French being, it was evident, to conceal this convenient rendezvous of their privateers from the enemy. I found this account too true, and though I made many attempts to send letters to you I was unable to succeed. We were not otherwise harshly treated, but we all pined for freedom, and great was our joy when peace was concluded, and we were sent off to the Cape. Care was even then taken to prevent us from learning the exact position of the island of our captivity;

but we ascertained it pretty correctly, and should another war break out it is not likely to be again used for the same purpose. On reaching the Cape I at once obtained, as you know, the command of a ship, and thus had no means of informing you of my existence before my arrival."

Much more interesting conversation, as may be supposed, passed between the father and daughter.

Jessie was very anxious to repeat what she had heard to her friend Mrs Chandos, and Captain Flamank consented to accompany her to the house of that lady. What mother could listen to such a narrative without the hope arising that her son might be among those who had escaped? Colonel Chandos, though less sanguine than his wife, was willing to make every effort necessary to ascertain the truth.

With the aid of the friends of other officers of the *Falcon*, a fine brig, the *Hope*, was chartered and quickly fitted out, Captain Flamank taking the command of her, with Peter as one of his mates. A picked crew having been easily obtained, she sailed on her long voyage.

Jessie knew that she must pass many anxious months before the brig could return; but would not He Who had restored her father to her have preserved also her still fondly loved Ralph? She had many kind friends to comfort and encourage her; and the warm sympathy of Mrs Chandos assisted greatly to keep up her spirits.

We might follow the *Hope* on her course. We can picture the delight of the exiles as they saw a brig, with English colours flying, heave-to off the bay, and her boat approach the shore. We can imagine their surprise, as they warmly grasped his hand on landing, when Captain Flamank announced himself as the former occupant of the hut, and, after the first greetings were over, led them to the spot which they had supposed was a grave, and with their assistance unearthed the long-hidden treasure.

We need scarcely speak of the eager questions Ralph put to the captain about Jessie, or say that before night the exiles with the treasure were on board the brig, and that she was on her homeward voyage.

Seven months had passed since the *Hope* had sailed, and Jessie had begun anxiously to count the days and hours as they went slowly by. That her Ralph would return she felt sure. Often she went to a spot whence she could gaze down the Sound, in expectation of seeing the brig with her white canvas spread gliding up it; but as often was she disappointed. Many a vessel left the harbour with a favouring breeze which kept the homeward bound at a distance. She had one day been asked to visit Mrs Chandos, with whom she was seated, when voices were heard in the hall, and soon afterwards the colonel entered the room.

"Prepare yourselves for a joyful event," he said, looking at his wife and Jessie. "Some young naval officers have just arrived, and if you will accompany me, Miss Flamank, I will lead you to the dining-room, where you will find one of them whom you know."

As they left the room a stranger sprang by them, and Jessie heard Mrs Chandos exclaim, "My son! My own dear boy!" In another instant Jessie was weeping tears of joy, supported in the arms of Ralph.

They were soon joined by her father and Dickenson, who, after spending a few hours with his friends, set off to afford a happy surprise to his own family in Hampshire.

Their voyage home had been prosperous, excepting the loss of a man overboard who had joined the brig at the Cape.

"He was in a wretched condition, produced by drunkenness; but the captain could not refuse him a passage," observed Ralph. "I knew him directly he came on board, though he entered under a feigned name, as my old shipmate Dick Bracewell; but I don't think he recognised me. He no longer appeared the smart seaman he once was; indeed, he could with difficulty perform his duty. I intended, however, to make myself known, and to speak to him with earnestness and kindness, when during the only gale we encountered, directly after leaving the Cape, he fell from the fore-topsail yard, and before an effort could be made to save him he had sunk for ever."

Jessie did not till long afterwards tell Ralph of the way his old shipmate had behaved to her.

"I forgive him," said Ralph. "When a man once leaves the right course and takes to drinking as unhappy Dick did, it is impossible to say of what vile actions he may be guilty."

Ralph and Jessie were married shortly after the return of the *Hope*. And Chandos, who acted as best-man to his old messmate, declared that it was the happiest day of his life.

They neither of them again went to sea, Ralph having been appointed to the coastguard, in which service he obtained a situation for Jacob Crane; while Captain Flamank enjoyed an ample competency from the treasure he had brought home in the *Hope*. Of that vessel, which the captain purchased, honest Peter, in the course of a few years, obtained the command. She proved a more fortunate craft than the *Amity*, and being well formed, and well manned, and well commanded, never failed to bring in to him and her liberal owner a good return.

Ralph and Jessie enjoyed many years of happiness, ever acknowledging that all the trials and anxieties through which they had gone had been ordered for the best, and ever grateful for the present blessings bestowed on them.

**The End.**

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