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Title: In the King's Name: The Cruise of the "Kestrel"

Author: George Manville Fenn

Release date: November 6, 2007 [eBook #23386]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN THE KING'S NAME: THE CRUISE OF THE "KESTREL" ***

George Manville Fenn

"In the King's Name"

Chapter One.

On Board the "Kestrel."

Morning on board the *Kestrel*, his Britannic majesty's cutter, lying on and off the south coast on the lookout for larks, or what were to her the dainty little birds that the little falcon, her namesake, would pick up. For the *Kestrel's* wings were widespread to the soft south-easterly breeze that barely rippled the water; and mainsail, gaff topsail, staysail, and jib were so new and white that they seemed to shine like silver in the sun.

The larks the hover-winged *Kestrel* was on the watch to pick up were smuggling boats of any sort or size, or Jacobite messages, or exiles, or fugitives—anything, in fact, that was not in accordance with the laws of his most gracious majesty King George the Second, whose troops had not long before dealt that fatal blow to the young Pretender's hopes at the battle of Culloden.

The sea was as bright and blue as the sea can look in the Channel when the bright sun is shining, and the arch above reflects itself in its bosom. The gulls floated half asleep on the water, with one eye open and the other closed; and the pale-grey kittiwakes seemed to glide about on the wing, to dip down here and there and cleverly snatch a tiny fish from the surface of the softly heaving sea.

On the deck of the little cutter all was in that well-known apple-pie order customary on board a man-of-war, for so Lieutenant Lipscombe in command always took care to call it, and in this he was diligently echoed by the young gentleman who acted as his first officer, and, truth to say, second and third officer as well, for he was the only one—to wit, Hilary Leigh, midshipman, lately drafted to this duty, to his great disgust, from on board the dashing frigate *Golden Fleece*.

"Man-o'-war!" he had said in disgust; "a contemptible little cock-boat. They ought to have called her a boy-o'-war—a little boy-o'-war. I shall walk overboard the first time I try to stretch my legs."

But somehow he had soon settled down on board the swift little craft with its very modest crew, and felt no small pride in the importance of his position, feeling quite a first lieutenant in his way, and for the greater part of the time almost entirely commanding the vessel.

She was just about the cut of a goodsized modern yacht, and though not so swift, a splendid sailer, carrying immense spars for her tonnage, and spreading canvas enough to have swamped a less deeply built craft.

The decks were as white as holystone could make them, the sails and the bell shone in the morning sun like gold, and there was not a speck to be seen on the cabin skylight any more than upon either of the three brass guns, a long and two shorts, as Billy Waters, who was gunner and gunner's mate all in one, used to call them.

Upon this bright summer morning Hilary Leigh was sitting, with his legs dangling over the side and his back against a stay, holding a fishing line, which, with a tiny silvery slip off the tail-end of a mackerel, was trailing behind the cutter, fathoms away, waving and playing about in the vessel's wake, to tempt some ripple-sided mackerel to dart at it, do a little bit of cannibalism, and die in the act.

Two had already been hauled on board, and lay in a wooden bucket, looking as if they had been carved out of pieces of solid sea at sunrise, so brilliant were the ripple marks and tints of pink and purple and grey and orange and gold—bright enough to make the gayest mother-o'-pearl shell blush for shame. Hilary Leigh had set his mind upon catching four—two for himself and two for the skipper—and he had congratulated himself upon the fact that he had already caught his two, when there was a sharp snatch, the line began to quiver, and for the next minute it was as though the hook was fast in the barbs of a silver arrow that was darting in all directions through the sea.

"Here's another, Billy!" cried the young man, or boy—for he was on the debatable ground of eighteen, when one may be either boy or man, according to one's acts, deeds, or exploits, as it used to say in Carpenter's Spelling.

Hilary Leigh, from his appearance, partook more of the man than the boy, for, though his face was as smooth as a new-laid egg, he had well-cut, decisive-looking Saxon features, and one of those capital closely-fitting heads of hair that look as if they never needed cutting, but settle round ears and forehead in not too tight clustering curls.

"Here's another, Billy," he cried; and a stoutly built sailor amidships cried, "Cheer ho, sir! Haul away, sir! Will it be a mess o' mick-a-ral for the lads to-day?"

"Don't know, Billy," was the reply, as the beautiful fish was hauled in, unhooked, a fresh lask or tongue of silvery bait put on, and the leaded line thrown over and allowed to run out fathoms astern once again.

Billy Waters, the gunner, went on with his task, rather a peculiar one, which would have been performed below in a larger vessel, but here the men pretty well lived on deck, caring little for the close stuffy quarters that formed the forecabin, where they had, being considered inferior beings, considerably less space than was apportioned to their two officers.

Billy's work was that of carefully binding or lashing round and round the great mass of hair hanging from the poll of a messmate, so as to form it into the orthodox pigtail of which the sailors of the day were excessively vain. The tail in question was the finest in the cutter, and was exactly two feet six inches long, hanging down between the sailor's shoulders, when duly lashed up and tied, like a long handle used for lifting off the top of his skull.

But, alas for the vanity of human nature! Tom Tully, owner of the longest tail in the cutter, and the envy of all his messmates, was not happy. He was ambitious; and where a man is ambitious there is but little true bliss. He wanted "that 'ere tail" to be half a fathom long, and though it was duly measured every week "that 'ere tail" refused to grow another inch.

Billy Waters had a fine tail, but his was only, to use his own words, "two foot one," but it was "half as thick agen as Tom Tully's," so he did not mind. In fact the first glance at the gunner's round good-humoured face told that there was neither envy nor ambition there. Give him enough to eat, his daily portion of cold water grog, and his 'bacco, and, again to use his own words, he "wouldn't change berths with the king hissen."

"Easy there, Billy messmet," growled Tom Tully; "avast hauling quite so hard. My tail ain't the cable."

"Why, you don't call that 'ere hauling, Tommy lad, do you?"

"'Nuff to take a fellow's head off," growled the other, just as the midshipman pulled in another mackerel, and directly after another, and another, for they were sailing through a shoal, and the man at the helm let his stolid face break up into a broad grin as the chance of a mess of mackerel for the men's dinner began to increase.

"Singing down deny, down deny, down deny down,
Sing—"

"Easy, messmet, d'yer hear," growled Tom Tully, straining his head round to look appealingly at the operator on his tail. "Why don't yer leave off singing till you've done?"

"Just you lay that there nose o' your'n straight amidships," cried Billy, using the tail as if it was a tiller, and steering the sailor's head into the proper position. "I can't work without I sing."

"For this I can tell, that nought will be well,
Till the king enjoys his own again."

He trolled out these words in a pleasant tenor voice, and was just drawing in breath to continue the rattling cavalier ballad when the young officer swung his right leg in board, and, sitting astride the low bulwark, exclaimed—

"I say, Billy, are you mad?"

"Mad, sir? not that I knows on, why?"

"For singing a disloyal song like that. You'll be yard-armed, young fellow, if you don't mind."

"What, for singing about the king?"

"Yes; if you get singing about a king over the water, my lad. That's an old song; but some people would think you meant the Pretend— Hallo! look there. You look out there forward, why didn't you hail? Hi! here fetch me a glass. Catch hold of that line, Billy. She's running for Shoreham, as sure as a gun. No: all right; let go."

He threw the line to the gunner just as a mackerel made a snatch at the bait, and before the sailor could catch it, away went the end astern, when the man at the helm made a dash at it just as the slight cord was running over the side.

Billy Waters made a dash at it just at the same moment, and there was a dull thud as the two men's heads came in contact, and they fell back into a sitting position on the deck, while the mackerel darted frightened away to puzzle the whole shoal of its fellows with the novel appendage hanging to its snout.

"Avast there, you lubber!" exclaimed Billy Waters angrily. "Stand by, my lad, stand by," replied the other, making a dart back at the helm just as the cutter was beginning to fall off.

"Look ye here, messmet, air you agoin' to make my head shipshape, or air you not?" growled Tom Tully; and then, before his hairdresser could finish tying the last knot, the lieutenant came on deck.

For when Hilary Leigh ran below, it was to seize a long spyglass out of the slings in the cabin bulkhead, and to give his commanding officer a tremendous shake.

"Sail on the larboard bow, Mr Lipscombe, sir. I say, do wake up, sir; I think it is something this time."

The officer in question, who was a hollow-cheeked man of about forty, very sallow-looking, and far from prepossessing in his features, opened his eye, but he did not attempt to rise from the bunker upon which he was stretched.

"Leigh," he said, turning his eye round towards the little oval thick glass window nearest to him, "You're a most painstaking young officer, but you are always mare's-nesting. What is it now?"

"One of those three-masted luggers, sir—a Frenchman—a *chasse marée*, laden deeply, and running for Shoreham."

"Let her run," said the lieutenant, closing his eye again; the other was permanently closed, having been poked out in boarding a Frenchman some years before, and with the extinction of that optic went the prospect of the lieutenant's being made a post-captain, and he was put in command of the *Kestrel* when he grew well.

"But it *is* something this time, sir, I'm sure."

"Leigh," said the lieutenant, yawning, "I was just in a delicious dream, and thoroughly enjoying myself when you come down and bother me about some confounded fishing-boat. There, be off. No: I'll come this time."

He yawned, and showed a set of very yellow teeth; and then, as if by an effort, leaped up and preceded the young officer on deck.

"Let's have a look at her, Leigh," he said, after a glance at a long, low, red-sailed lugger, about a couple of miles ahead, sailing fast in the light breeze.

He took the spyglass, and, going forward, looked long and steadily at the lugger before saying a word.

"Well, sir?"

"French lugger, certainly, Leigh," he said, quietly; "fresh from the fishing-ground I should say. They wouldn't attempt to run a cargo now."

"But you'll overhaul her, sir, won't you?"

"It's not worth while, Leigh, but as you have roused me up, it will be something to do. Here, call the lads up. Where's Waters? Waters!"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied that worthy in a voice of thunder, though he was close at hand.

"Load the long gun, and be ready to fire."

"Ay, ay, sir."

There was no beating to quarters, for the little crew were on deck, and every man fell naturally into his place as the lieutenant seemed now to wake up to his work, and glanced at the sails, which were all set, and giving his orders sharply and well, a pull was taken at a sheet here and a pull there, the helm altered, and in spite of the lightness of the breeze the *Kestrel* began to work along with an increase of speed of quite two knots an hour.

"Now then, Leigh, shall we ever have her, or shall we have to throw a shot across her bows to bring her to?"

"Let them have a shot, sir," cried the young officer, whose cheeks were beginning to flush with excitement, as he watched the quarry of which the little falcon was in chase.

"And waste the king's powder and ball, eh? No, Leigh, there will be no need. But we may as well put on our swords."

Meanwhile, Billy Waters was busy unlashng the tail of Long Tom, as he called the iron gun forward, and with a pat of affection he opened the ammunition chest, and got out the flannel bag of powder and smiled at a messmate, rammer in hand.

"Let's give him his breakfast, or else he won't bark," he said, with a grin; and the charge was rammed home, the ball sent after it with a big wad to keep it in its place, and the men waited eagerly for the order to fire.

Billy Waters knew that that would not come for some time, so he sidled up to Hilary, and whispered as the young man was buckling on his sword, the lieutenant having gone below to exchange a shabby cap for his cocked hat, "Let me have your sword a minute, sir, and I'll make it like a razor."

Hilary hesitated for a moment, and then drew it, and held it out to the gunner, who went below, and by the time the young officer had had a good inspection of the lugger, Billy came back with his left thumb trying the edge of the sword.

"I wouldn't be too hard on 'em, sir," he said, with mock respect.

"What do you mean, Billy?"

"Don't take off too many Frenchies' heads, sir; not as they'd know it, with a blade like that."

"Are we gaining on her, Leigh?" said the lieutenant.

"Just a little, sir, I think; but she creeps through the water at an awful rate."

The lieutenant looked up at the white sails, but nothing more could be done, for the *Kestrel* was flying her best; and the water bubbled and sparkled as she cut her way through, leaving an ever-widening train behind.

There was no chance of more wind, and nothing could be done but to hold steadily on, for, at the end of half an hour, it was plain enough that the distance had been slightly reduced.

"However do they manage to make those luggers sail so fast?" exclaimed the lieutenant impatiently. "Leigh, if this turns out to be another of your mares' nests, you'll be in disgrace."

"Very well, sir," said the young man quietly.

And then to himself: "Better make some mistake than let the real thing slip by."

The arms were not served out, for that would be but a minute's task; but an arm chest was opened ready, and the men stood at their various stations, but in a far more lax and careless way than would have been observed on board a larger vessel, which in its turn would have been in point of discipline far behind a vessel of the present day.

The gulls and kittiwakes rose and fell, uttering their peevish wails; a large shoal of fish fretting the radiant surface of the sea was passed and about a dozen porpoises went right across the cutter's bow, rising and diving down one after the other like so many black water-boys, playing at "Follow my leader;" but the eyes of all on board the *Kestrel* were fixed upon the dingy looking *chasse marée*, which apparently still kept on trying hard to escape by its speed.

And now the time, according to Billy Waters' judgment, having come for sending a shot, he stood ready, linstock in hand, watching the lieutenant, whose one eye was gazing intently through the long leather-covered glass.

"Fire!" he said at last. "Well ahead!"

The muzzle of the piece was trained a little more to the right, the linstock was applied, there was a puff of white smoke, a heavy deafening roar; and as Hilary Leigh gazed in the direction of the lugger, he saw the sea splashed a few hundred yards ahead, and then dip, dip, dip, dip, the water was thrown up at intervals as the shot ricocheted, making ducks and drakes right across the bows of the lugger.

"Curse his impudence!" cried the lieutenant, as the men busily sponged out and began to reload Long Tom; for the lugger paid not the slightest heed to the summons, but sailed away.

"Give her another—closer this time," cried the lieutenant; and once more the gun uttered its deep-mouthed roar, and the shot went skipping along the smooth surface of the sea, this time splashing the water a few yards only ahead of the lugger.

"I think that will bring him to his senses," cried the lieutenant, using his glass.

If the lowering of first one and then another sail meant bringing the lugger to its senses, the lieutenant was right, for first one ruddy brown spread of canvas sank with its spar into the lugger, and then another and another, the long low vessel lying passive upon the water, and in due time the cutter was steered close up, her sails flapped, and her boat which had been held ready was lowered, and Leigh with three men jumped in.

"Here, let me go too," exclaimed the lieutenant; "you don't half understand these fellows' French."

Hilary flushed, for he fancied he was a bit of a French scholar, but he said nothing; and the lieutenant jumped into the boat. A few strokes took them to the dingy lugger, at whose side were gathered about a dozen dirty-looking men and boys, for the most part in scarlet worsted caps, blue jerseys, and stiff canvas petticoats, sewn between the legs, to make believe they were trousers.

"Va t'en chien de Français. Pourquoi de diable n'arrêtez vous pas?" shouted the lieutenant to a yellow-looking man with whiskerless face, and thin gold rings in his ears.

"Hey?"

"I say pourquoi n'arrêtez vous pas?" roared the lieutenant fiercely.

"I ar'nt a Dutchman. I don't understand. Nichts verstand," shouted the man through his hollow hands, as if he were hailing some one a mile away.

"You scoundrel, why didn't you say you could speak English?"

"You never arkst me," growled the man.

"Silence, sir. How dare you address an officer of a king's ship like that!"

"Then what do you go shooting at me for? King George don't tell you to go firin' guns at peaceable fisher folk, as me."

"Silence, sir, or I'll put you in irons, and take you on board the cutter. Why didn't you obey my signals to heave-to?"

"Signals! I never see no signals."

"How dare you, sir! you know I fired."

"Oh, them! We thought you was practisin', and hauled down till you'd done, for the balls was flying very near."

"Where are you from?"

"From? Nowheres. We been out all night fishing."

"What's your port?"

"Shoreham."

"And what have you on board? Who are those people?"

Those two people had been seen on the instant by Hilary Leigh, as they sat below the half-deck of the lugger, shrinking from observation in the semi-darkness. He had noticed that, though wearing rough canvas covering similar to those affected by a crew in stormy weather, they were of a different class; and as the lieutenant was in converse with the skipper of the lugger, he climbed over the lowered sail between, and saw that one of the two whom the other tried to screen was quite a young girl.

It was but a momentary glance, for she hastily drew a hood over her face, as she saw that she was noticed.

"Jacobites for a crown!" said Hilary to himself, as he saw a pair of fierce dark eyes fixed upon him.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"Hush, for heaven's sake!" was the answer whispered back; "don't you know me, Leigh? A word from you and they will shoot me like a dog."

At the same moment there was a faint cry, and Hilary saw that the young girl had sunk back, fainting.

Chapter Two.

A Strict Search.

"Sir Henry!" ejaculated Hilary Leigh; and for the moment his heart seemed to stand still, for his duties as a king's officer had brought him face to face with a dear old friend, at whose house he had passed some of his happiest days, and he knew that the disguised figure the Jacobite gentleman sought to hide was his only daughter, Adela, Hilary's old playmate and friend, but so grown and changed that he hardly recognised her in the momentary glance he had of her fair young face.

"Hush! silence! Are you mad?" was the reply, in tones that set the young man's heart beating furiously, for he knew that Sir Henry Norland was proscribed for the part he had taken in the attempt of the Young Pretender, and Leigh had thought that he was in France.

"Who are they, Mr Leigh?" said the lieutenants striding over the lumber in the bottom of the boat.

"Seems to be an English gentleman, sir," said Leigh, in answer to an agonised appeal from Sir Henry's eyes.

"I am an English gentleman, sir, and this is my daughter. She is very ill."

"Of course she is," cried the lieutenant testily. "Women are sure to be sick if you bring them to sea. But look here, my good fellow, English gentleman or no English gentleman, you can't deceive me. Now then, what have you got on board?"

"Fish, I believe," said Sir Henry.

"Yes, of course," sneered the lieutenant; "and brandy, and silk, and velvet, and lace. Now then, skipper, you are caught this time. But look here, you scoundrel, what do you mean by pretending to be a Frenchman?"

"Frenchman? Frenchman?" said the skipper with a look of extreme stupidity. "You said I was a Dutchman."

"You lie, you scoundrel. Here, come forward and move that sail and those nets. Now no nonsense; set your fellows to work."

He clapped his hand sharply on the skipper's shoulder, and turned him round, following him forward.

"Take a man, Mr Leigh, and search that dog-hole."

Hilary Leigh was astounded, for knowing what he did he expected that the lieutenant would have instantly divined what seemed patent to him—that Sir Henry Norland was trying, for some reason or another, to get back to England, and that although the lugger was commanded by an Englishman, she was undoubtedly a French *chasse marée* from Saint Malo.

But the lieutenant had got it into his head that he had overhauled a smuggling vessel laden with what would turn into prize-money for himself and men, and the thought that she might be bound on a political errand did not cross his mind.

"I'll search fully," said Leigh; and bidding the sailor with the long pigtail stay where he was, the young officer bent down and crept in under the half-deck just as the fainting girl recovered.

As she caught sight of Hilary she made a snatch at his hand, and in a choking voice exclaimed:

"Oh, Hilary! don't you know me again? Pray, pray save my poor father. Oh, you will not give him up?"

The young man's heart seemed to stand still as the dilemma in which he was placed forced itself upon him. He was in his majesty's service, and in the king's name he ought to have called upon this gentleman, a well-known Jacobite, to surrender, and tell the lieutenant who he was.

On the other hand, if he did this unpleasant duty he would be betraying a dear old companion of his father, a man who had watched his own career with interest and helped him through many a little trouble; and, above all, he would be, as the thought flashed upon him, sending Adela's father—his own old companion's father—to the scaffold.

These thoughts flashed through his mind, and with them recollections of those delightful schoolboy days that he had passed at the Old Manor House, Sir Henry's pleasant home, in Sussex, when boy and girl he and Adela had roamed the woods, boated on the lake, and fished the river hard by.

"No," he muttered between his teeth; "I meant to be a faithful officer to my king; but I'd sooner jump overboard than do such dirty work as that."

There was an angry look in the young girl's eyes; and as Hilary read her thoughts he could not help thinking how bright and beautiful a woman she was growing. He saw that she believed he was hesitating, and there was something scornful in her gaze, an echo, as it were, of that of her grey-haired, careworn father, whose eyebrows even seemed to have turned white, though his dark eyes were fiery as ever.

There was no doubt about it; they believed that he would betray them, and there was something almost of loathing in Adela Norland's face as her hood fell back, and the motion she made to place her hands in her father's brought her head out of the shadow into the bright morning light.

"Thank ye, ma'am," said Hilary in a rough, brisk voice; "I was just going to ask you to move. You'd better come in, Tom Tully, there's a lot of things to move. P'r'aps this gentleman will stand outside."

"Ay, ay, sir," growled Tom Tully, as Hilary darted one meaning look at the proscribed man.

"Look here, sir," continued Hilary, as he heard the lieutenant approaching, "you may just as well save us the trouble by declaring what you have hidden. We are sure to find it."

"Got anything, Mr Leigh?" said the lieutenant briskly.

"Nothing yet, sir. Have you?"

"Not a tub, or a package."

"If you imagine, sir, that this boat is laden with smuggled goods you may save yourselves a great deal of trouble, for there is nothing contraband on board, I feel sure."

"Thank you," said the lieutenant politely, and with a satirical laugh; "but you'd hardly believe it, my dear sir, when I tell you that dozens of skippers and passengers in boats have said the very same thing to me, and whenever that has been the case we have generally made a pretty good haul of smuggled goods. Go on, my lads; I can't leave a corner unsearched."

Sir Henry gave his shoulders a slight shrug, and turned to draw his daughter's hood over her head.

"You'll excuse my child, gentlemen," he said coldly. "She is very weak and ill."

"Oh! of course," said Hilary; "we've searched here, sir; she can lie down again."

Adela uttered a low sigh of relief, and she longed to dart a grateful look at the young officer, but she dared not; and knowing that in place of looking pale and ill a warm flush of excitement was beaming in her cheeks, she hastily drew her hand closer over her face, and let her father place her upon a rough couch of dry nets.

"Heaven bless him!" muttered Sir Henry to himself; "but it was a struggle between friendship and duty, I could see."

Meanwhile the lugger was ransacked from end to end, three more men being called from the cutter for the purpose. Tubs were turned over, spare sails and nets dragged about, planks lifted, bunks and lockers searched, but nothing contraband was found, and all the while the skipper of the lugger and his crew stood staring stupidly at the efforts of the king's men.

"Labour in vain, Leigh," said the lieutenant at last. "Into the boat there. Confound that scoundrel! I wish he was overboard."

The lieutenant did not say what for, but as soon as the men were in the boat he turned to the skipper:

"Look ye here, my fine fellow, you've had a narrow escape."

"Yes," said the man stolidly, "I thought you'd have hit us."

The lieutenant did not condescend to reply, but climbed over the side into the cutter's boat, and motioned to Leigh to follow, which he did, not daring to glance at the passengers.

"Are you quite done, officer?" growled the skipper.

No answer was given, and as the boat reached the side of the cutter the sails of the lugger were being hoisted, and she began to move quickly through the water at once.

"Lay her head to the eastward," said the lieutenant sourly; "and look here, Leigh, don't you rouse me up again for one of your mare's nests, or it will be the—"

"Worse for you," Hilary supposed, but he did not hear the words, for the lieutenant was already down below, and the young officer took the glass and stood watching the lugger rapidly growing distant as the cutter began to feel the breeze.

A curious turmoil of thought was harassing the young man's brain, for he felt that he had been a traitor to the king, whose officer he was, and it seemed to him terrible that he should have broken his faith like this.

But at the same time he felt that he could not have done otherwise, and he stood watching the lugger, and then started, for yes—no—yes—there could be no mistake about it, a white handkerchief was being held over the side, and it was a signal of amity to him.

Quite a couple of hours had passed, and the lugger had for some time been out of sight round the headland astern, when all at once the lieutenant came on deck to where his junior was pacing up and down.

"Why, Leigh," he exclaimed, "I did not think of it then; but we ought to have detained that *chasse marée*."

"Indeed, sir; why?"

"Ah! of course it would not occur to you, being so young in the service; but depend upon it that fellow was a Jacobite, who had persuaded those dirty-looking scoundrels to bring him across from Saint Malo, or some other French port, and he's going to play spy and work no end of mischief. We've done wrong, Leigh, we've done wrong."

"Think so, sir?"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. I was so intent on finding smuggled goods that I didn't think of it at the time. But, there: it's too late now."

"Yes, sir," said Leigh quietly, "it's too late now."

For he knew that by that time the fugitives must be in Shoreham harbour.

Chapter Three.

The Lieutenant's Bargain.

Three days of cruising up and down on the lookout for suspicious craft, some of which were boarded, but boarded in vain, for, however suspicious they might appear at a distance, there was nothing to warrant their being detained and taken back into port.

Hilary used to laugh to himself at the impudence of their midge of a cutter firing shots across large merchantmen, bringing them to, and making them wait while the cutter sent a boat on board for their papers to be examined.

It gradually fell to his lot to perform this duty, though if it happened to be a very large vessel Lieutenant Lipscombe would take upon himself to go on board, especially if he fancied that there would be an invitation to a well-kept cabin and a glass of wine, or perhaps a dinner, during which Hilary would be in command, and the cutter would sail on in the big ship's wake till the lieutenant thought proper to come on board.

The men sang songs and tied one another's pigtailed; Hilary Leigh fished and caught mackerel, bass, pollack, and sometimes a conger eel, and for a bit of excitement a little of his majesty's powder was blazed away and a cannonball sent skipping along the surface of the water, but that was all.

Hilary used sometimes to own to himself that it was no wonder that Mr Lipscombe, who was a disappointed man, should spend much time in sleeping, and out of sheer imitation he once or twice took to having a nap himself, but twice settled that. He had too much vitality in his composition to sleep at abnormal times.

"Hang it all, Billy Waters," he said one day, after a week's sailing up and down doing nothing more exciting than chasing fishing-luggers and boarding trading brigs and schooners, "I do wish something would turn up."

"If something real don't turn up, sir," said the gunner, "I shall be certain to fire across the bows of a ship, from its always being my habit, sir, and never hit a mark when I want it."

"Here, hi! hail that fishing-boat," he said; "I've fished till I'm tired, and can't catch anything; perhaps we can get

something of him."

He pointed to a little boat with a tiny sail, steered by its crew of one man by means of an oar. The boat had been hanging about for some time after pulling off from the shore, and its owner was evidently fishing, but with what result the crew of the cutter could not tell.

"He don't want no hailing, sir; he's hailing of us," said Billy.

It was plain enough that the man was manoeuvring his cockleshell about, so as to get the cutter between it and the shore, and with pleasant visions in his mind of a lobster, crab, or some other fish to vary the monotony of the salt beef and pork, of which they had, in Hilary's thinking, far too much, he leaned over the side till the man allowed his boat to drift close up.

"Heave us a rope," he said. "Got any fish?"

"Yes. I want to see the captain."

"What for?"

"You'll see. I want the captain. Are you him?"

"No; he's down below."

"I want to see him. May I come aboard?"

"If you like," said Hilary; and the man climbed over the side.

He was a lithe, sunburnt fellow, and after looking at him for a few moments with a vague kind of feeling that he had seen him before, Hilary sent a message below, and Mr Lipscombe came up with his hand before his mouth to hide a yawn.

"Are you the captain?" said the man.

"I command this ship, fellow. What is it?"

"What'll you give me, captain, if I take you to a cove where they're going to run a cargo to-night?"

"Wait and see, my man. You take us there and you shall be rewarded."

"No, no," said the man laughing; "that won't do, captain. I'm not going to risk my life for a chance of what you'll give. I want a hundred pounds."

"Rubbish, man! Ten shillings," said Lipscombe sharply.

"I want a hundred pounds," said the man. "That there cargo's going to be worth two thousand pounds, and it's coming in a fast large French schooner from Havre. I want a hundred pounds, or I don't say a word."

A cargo worth two thousand pounds, and a smart French schooner! That would be a prize indeed, and it made the lieutenant's mouth water; but he still hesitated, for a hundred pounds was a good deal, perhaps more than his share would be. But still if he did not promise it they might miss the schooner altogether, for in spite of his vigilance he knew that cargoes were being run; so he gave way.

"Very well then, you shall have your hundred pounds."

"Now, captain?"

"Not likely. Earn your wages first."

"And then suppose you say you won't pay me? What shall I do?"

"I give you my word of honour as a king's officer, sir."

The man shook his head.

"Write it down," he said with all the low cunning of his class. The lieutenant was about to make an angry reply, but he wanted to take that prize, so he went below and wrote out and signed a memorandum to the effect that if, by the informer's guidance, the French schooner was taken, he should be paid one hundred pounds.

Lipscombe returned on deck and handed the paper to the fisherman, who took it and held it upside down, studying it attentively.

"Now you read it," he said to Hilary; who took it, and read it aloud.

"Yes," said the fellow, "that's it. Now you sign it."

Hilary glanced at his superior, who frowned and nodded his head; and the young man went below and added his signature.

"That'll do," said the man smiling. "Now look here, captain, as soon as I'm gone you sail right off out of sight if you

can, and get her lying off the point by about ten o'clock—two bells, or whatever it is. Then you wait till a small lugger comes creeping off slowly, as if it was going out for the night with the drift-nets. I and my mates will be aboard that lugger, and they'll drop down alongside and put me aboard, and I'll pilot you just to the place where you can lie in the cove out of sight till the schooner comes in. If I come in my little boat the boys on shore would make signals, and the schooner would keep off, but if they see us go as usual out in our lugger they'll pay no heed. But don't you come in a bit nigher than this. Now I'm off!"

Lieutenant Lipscombe stood thinking for a few minutes after the man had gone, stealing over the side of the cutter farthest from the shore, so that when his boat drifted by it was not likely that his visit on board would have been seen.

Then turning to Hilary:

"What do you think of it, Leigh?"

"It may be a ruse to get us away."

"Yes, it may be, but I don't think it is. 'Bout ship, there!" he shouted; and the great boom of the mainsail slowly swung round, and they sailed nearly out of sight of land by sundown, when the helm was once more rammed down hard, the cutter careened round in a half circle, and as the white wings were swelling, they made once more for the coast.

It was about nine o'clock of a deliciously soft night, and the moist sweet air that came off the shore was sweetly fragrant of flowers and new-mown hay. The night was cloudy, and very dusky for the time of year, a fact so much in their favour, and with the watch on the alert, for the lieutenant would not call the men to quarters in case the informer did not come, he and Hilary leaned over the side, gazing at the scattered lights that twinkled on the shore.

An hour and a half had passed away, and the time, which a church clock ashore had struck, ten, seemed to have far exceeded this hour, when, as they all watched the mist which hung between them and the invisible shore, a light was suddenly seen to come as it were out of a bank of fog, and glide slowly towards them, but as if to go astern.

The cutter had a small lamp hoisted to the little masthead, and the lieutenant knew that this would be sufficient signal of their whereabouts, and so it proved, for the gliding light came nearer and nearer, and soon after a voice they both recognised hailed them.

"Cutter ahoy!"

"Ahoy!"

The light came on nearer and nearer, and at last they could dimly make out the half-hoisted sails of a small fishing lugger, which was run cleverly enough close alongside, her occupants holding on by boathooks.

"Mind what you are doing there," cried the lieutenant sharply; "jump aboard, my man."

"All right, captain."

"Go down and get my sword, Leigh," whispered the lieutenant; "and put on your own."

It was as if just then an idea had occurred to him that there might be treachery, and the thought seemed to be communicated to Hilary, who ran down below, caught up the two swords from the hooks where they hung upon the bulkhead, and was on his way up, when the lieutenant came down upon him with a crash, there was the rattling on of the hatch, the trampling of feet, and a short scuffle, and as Hilary leaped over his prostrate officer, and, sword in hand, dashed up at the hatch, it was to find it fastened, for they had been cleverly trapped, and without doubt the cutter was in the smuggler's hands.

Chapter Four.

In Command.

Hilary Leigh was only a boy, and he acted boyishly at that moment, for in his rage and mortification he first of all struck at the hatch with his fist, and then shouted to the people on deck.

"Here, hi! you sirs, open this hatch directly."

But as he shouted he knew that his order was absurd, and tucking the lieutenant's sword under his arm he buckled on his own before leaping down to where his leader lay.

"Are you much hurt, sir?" he asked; but there was no answer.

"I've got a orfle whack side o' the head, sir," growled Tom Tully.

"So've I, sir," said another man.

"Serve you right too, for not keeping a good lookout," cried Hilary savagely; "here, it's disgraceful! A king's ship taken by a set of smuggling rascals. Look alive, there, my lads. Here, you marines, be smart. Where's Billy Waters?"

"Here, sir," cried that worthy.

“Serve out the arms smart, my man. Two of you carry the lieutenant into the cabin. Steady there! He isn’t dead.”

For two of the men had been seen, by the dim light of a horn lantern, to seize their commanding officer in the most unceremonious way, to lug him into the cabin.

By this time the ‘tween decks of the cutter was alive with dimly-seen figures, for in a vessel of this description the space devoted in a peaceful vessel to the storage of cargo was utilised for the convenience of the comparatively large crew.

“Heave those hammocks out of the way,” cried Hilary next; and this being done, he stood there with twenty well-armed men awaiting his next orders—orders which he did not give, for the simple reason that he did not know what to do.

It was a ticklish position for a lad of his years, to find himself suddenly in command of a score of fighting men, one and all excited and ready for the fray, as, schooled by drill and discipline, they formed themselves into a machine which he was to set in motion; but how, when, and where?

There was the rub, and in the midst of a dead silence Hilary listened to the trampling of feet overhead.

It was a curious scene—the gloomy ‘tween decks of the cutter, with the group of eager men standing about awaiting their young officer’s orders, their rough, weatherbeaten faces looking fierce in the shadowy twilight, for the lanterns swinging fore and aft only seemed to make darkness visible; and as the trampling went on, evidently that of men wearing heavy fisher-boots, the steps were within a few inches of the heads of the crew.

“Pair o’ pistols, sir,” said a low, gruff voice; and Hilary started, for the gunner had come up quite silently. “Shall I shove ‘em in your belt, sir?”

“Yes,” said Hilary sharply; and the gunner thrust the barrels of the two heavy, clumsy weapons into the young officer’s sword-belt, where they stuck in a most inconvenient way.

“Both loaded, sir, and cocked,” said the gunner quietly. Hilary nodded, and stood thinking.

It was an awkward time for quiet thought, for he knew that the men were anxiously awaiting some order; but, for the reasons above given, no order came, and the force of his position came with crushing violence upon the young officer’s head.

He knew that the lieutenant was to blame for not being prepared for an attack, however little it might be anticipated; but at the same time he would have to share the lieutenant’s disgrace as second officer—the disgrace of a well-manned and armed king’s ship falling into the hands of a pack of smugglers.

He knew, too, that if he had proposed taking precautions, Lieutenant Lipscombe would have laughed at him, and refused to take his advice; but he would have felt more at rest if he had made the suggestion.

But the mishap had happened, and according to the old proverb it was of no use to cry over spilt milk. What he felt he had to do now was to find a cow and get some more.

But how?

By the sounds on deck it was evident that the cutter had been seized by quite a strong party, and it was no less certain that they would not have made so desperate a move if they had not some particular venture on the way. What Hilary felt then was that he must not only turn the tables on the attacking party, but try and make a valuable capture as well.

But again—how?

He could not answer the question, but as he tried to solve the difficulty the feeling was strong upon him—could he manage to do this before the lieutenant recovered?

The excitement produced by this idea was such that it drove away all thoughts of peril and danger, and he could think of nothing but the dash and daring of such an exploit.

As he thought, his hand gripped the hilt of his sword more tightly, and he whispered an order to the men:

“Close round.”

The crew eagerly pressed up to him, and he spoke.

“We’ve got to wipe out a disgrace, my lads—hush! don’t cheer, let them think we are doing nothing.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” came in a low growl.

“I say, my lads, we’ve got to wipe out a disgrace, and the sooner the better. One hour ought to be enough to get on deck and drive these scoundrels either overboard or below. Then I think there’ll be some prize-money to be earned, for they are sure to be running a cargo to-night. Silence! No cheering. Now then, to work. Waters, how are we to get up the hatch?”

“Powder, sir,” said the gunner laconically.

“And blow ourselves to pieces.”

"No, sir, I think I can build up a pile of hammocks and fire half-a-dozen cartridges atop of it, and blow the hatch off without hurting us much below."

"Try it," said Hilary shortly. "You marines, come aft into the cabin and we'll get the ventilators open; you can fire through there."

The four marines and their corporal marched into the cabin, where a couple kneeled upon the little table, and two more stood ready to cover them, when the folly of attempting to blow off the hatch became apparent to Hilary; for he saw that he would do more harm to his own men than would warrant the attempt.

"Get axes," he said.

This was done, and the gunner brought out a long iron bar used in shifting the long gun, but he muttered a protest the while that there was nothing like the powder.

"Silence there," cried Hilary. "Waters, pass that bar to Tully, and you with your men go forward and keep the fore-hatch. If they open it and try to come down to take us in the rear when we begin to break through here, up with you and gain the deck at all costs. You understand?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I'll send you help if you get the hatch open. Go on!"

The gunner and half-a-dozen men went forward and stood ready, while at a sign from the young officer the dimly-seen figure of Tom Tully took a couple of steps up the cabin-ladder, and there he stood with the bar poised in his bare arms ready to make his first attack upon the wooden cover as soon as the order reached his ears.

Just then a rattling noise was heard, and the hatch was evidently about to be removed. The next moment it was off, and the light of a lantern flashed down, showing that half-a-dozen musket barrels had been thrust into the opening, while about them flashed the blades of as many swords.

There was a dead silence below, for Hilary and his men were taken by surprise, and though the hatch was now open there was such a terrible display of weapons in the opening that an attempt to rush up seemed madness.

"Below there!" cried a harsh voice; "surrender, or we fire."

"Is Hilary Leigh there?" cried another voice, one which made the young man start as he recognised that of Sir Harry Norland.

"Yes, sir, I am here," he said after a moment's pause.

"Tell your men to surrender quietly, Mr Leigh, and if they give their word not to attempt rescue or escape they will have two of the cutter's boats given to them, and they can row ashore."

"And what about the cutter, Sir Henry?" said Hilary quietly.

"She is our lawful prize," was the reply.

"And no mistake," said the rough, harsh voice, which Hilary recognised now as that of the apparently stupid skipper of the *chasse marée*.

"Come up first, Mr Leigh," said Sir Henry; "but leave your arms below. I give you my word that you shall not be hurt."

"I cannot give you my word that you will not be hurt, Sir Henry, if you do not keep out of danger," cried Hilary. "We are all coming on deck, cutlass in one hand, pistol in the other. Now, my lads! Forward!"

Madness or no madness he made a dash, and at the same moment Tom Tully struck upwards with his iron bar, sweeping aside the presented muskets, half of which were fired with the effect that their bullets were buried in the woodwork round the hatch.

What took place during those next few moments Hilary did not know, only that he made a spring to mount the cabin-ladder and got nearly out at the hatch, but as Tom Tully and another man sprang forward at the same moment they hindered one another, when there was a few moments' interval of fierce struggling, the sound of oaths and blows, a few shots were fired by the marines through the cabin skylight, and then Hilary found himself lying on the lower deck under Tom Tully, listening to the banging down of the cabin-hatch.

"Are you much hurt, sir?" said one of the men.

"Don't know yet," said Hilary, as Tully was dragged off him. "Confound the brutes! I'll serve them out for this. Is any one killed?"

"I ain't," growled Tom Tully, with his hand to the back of his head. "But that there slash went half through my tail, and I've got one on the cheek."

Tom Tully's wound on the cheek proved to be quite a slight cut, and the other man was only stunned, but the injury to his pigtail was more than he could bear.

"Of all the cowardly games as ever I did come acrost," he growled, "this here's 'bout the worst. Think o' trying to cut off a sailor's pigtail! It's worse than mutiny!"

"Hold your tongue, you stupid fellow!" cried Hilary, who could not help feeling amused even then. "Why, don't you see that your tail has saved your head?"

"Who wanted his head saved that way?" growled Tom Tully. "It's cowardly, that's what it is! I don't call it fair fighting to hit a man behind."

"Silence!" exclaimed Hilary; and as the trampling went on overhead he tried to make out what the enemy were doing.

He was startled to find Sir Henry on board, but though he looked upon him as a friend, he felt no compunction now in meeting him as an enemy who must take his chance. Betraying him when a fugitive was one thing, dealing with him as one of a party making an attack upon a king's ship another.

A chill of dread ran through him for a moment as he thought of the possibility of Sir Henry's daughter being his companion, but a second thought made him feel assured that she could not be present at a time like this.

"And Sir Henry would only think me a contemptible traitor if I surrendered," he said to himself; and then he began to make fresh plans.

He stepped into the cabin for a moment or two, to find that the lieutenant was lying in his bed place, perfectly insensible, while the marines, with their pieces in hand, were waiting fresh orders.

The difficulty was to give those orders, and turn which way he would there was a pair of eyes fixed upon him.

He had never before understood the responsibility of a commanding officer in a time of emergency, and how great a call there would be upon him for help, guidance, and protection. One thing, however, he kept before his eyes, and that was the idea that he must retake the cutter, and how to do it with the least loss of life was the problem to be solved.

In his extremity he called a council of war under the big lantern, with Billy Waters, the corporal of marines, and the boatswain for counsellors, and took their opinions.

"Well, sir, if it was me in command I should do as I said afore," said Billy Waters cheerfully. "A lot o' powder would rift that there cabin-hatch right off; and them as guards it."

"Yes, and kill the lieutenant and half the men below," said Hilary. "What do you say, corporal?"

"I think bayonets is the best things, sir," replied the corporal.

"Yes," exclaimed Hilary, "if you've got a chance to use them. What do you say, bo'sun?"

"Well, your honour, it seems as how we shall get into no end of a pickle if we let these here smugglers capter the *Kestrel*, so I think we'd best go below and scuttle her. It wouldn't take long."

"Well, but, my good fellow, don't you see that we should be scuttling ourselves too?" cried Hilary.

"Oh! no, sir, I don't mean scuttle ourselves. I only mean the cutter. She'd soon fill. We'd go off in the boats."

"How?"

The boatswain did not seem to have taken this into consideration at all, but stood scratching his head till he scratched out a bright thought.

"Couldn't we let them on deck know as we're going to scuttle her, sir, and then they'd sheer off, and as soon as they'd sheered off we wouldn't scuttle her, but only go up and take possession."

"Now, Jack Brown, how can you be such a fool?" cried Hilary, impatiently. "They're sharp smugglers who have seized the *Kestrel*, and not a pack of babies. Can't you suggest something better than that?"

"Well, sir, let's scuttle her, and let them know as she's sinking, and as soon as they've sheered off stop the leaks."

"Oh! you great bullet-head," cried Hilary angrily. "How could we?"

"Very sorry, sir," growled the man humbly; "I don't know, sir. I can trim and bend on sails, and overhaul the rigging as well as most bo'suns, sir, but I never did have no head for figgers."

"Figures!" cried Hilary, impatiently. "There, that'll do. Hark! What are they doing on deck?"

"Seems to me as if they're getting all sail set," growled the boatswain.

"And they'll run us over to the coast of France," cried Hilary excitedly. "We shall be prisoners indeed."

He drew his breath in between his teeth, and stamped on the deck in his impotent rage.

"There!" he said, at last, as the crew stood impatiently awaiting the result of their consultation. "It's of no use for me to bully you, my lads, for not giving me ideas, when I can find none myself. You are all right. We'll try all your plans, for the scoundrels must never sail the *Kestrel* into a French port with us on board. Waters, we'll blow up the hatchway—but the fore-hatchway, not the cabin. Corporal, you and your lads shall give them a charge with bayonets. And lastly, if both these plans fail Jack Brown and the carpenter shall scuttle the little cutter; we may perhaps save our

lives in the confusion.”

It was a sight to see the satisfied grin that shone out on each of the rough fellows' faces, upon finding that their ideas were taken. It was as if each had grown taller, and they smiled at each other and at the young officer in a most satisfied way. Hilary did not know it; but that stroke of involuntary policy on his part had raised him enormously in the estimation of the crew; and the little council being dissolved, it was wonderful with what alacrity they set to work.

For the gunner's plan was at once adopted, and in perfect silence a bed of chests was raised up close beneath the fore-hatchway, whose ladder was cautiously removed. On this pile were placed hammocks, and again upon these short planks, so that the flat surface was close up to the square opening that led from the fore-castle on deck.

“You see, sir, the charge won't leave much room to strike sidewise,” said the gunner, as he helped to get all ready, ending by emptying the bags of powder that formed four charges for the long gun. These he rolled up in a handkerchief, tied it pretty tightly, and before putting it in place he made a hole in it, so that some of the powder would trickle out on to the smooth plank.

This being done, he laid a train from it to the end of the plank, made a slow-match with some wet powder and a piece of paper, and finished by raising the planks by stuffing blankets under them at Hilary's suggestion, till the powder charge was right up in the opening of the hatch, surrounded by the coamings, and the planks rested up against the deck.

“If that there don't fetch 'im off, I'm a Dutchman,” said Billy Waters. “Here, just you keep that there lantern back, will you,” he cried to the corporal of marines; “we don't want her fired before her time.”

“Yes, that will do,” cried Hilary. “There, stand by, my lads, and the moment the charge is fired make a dash for it with the ladder, and up and clear the deck whether I lead you or no.”

There was something in those words that the men could not then understand, but they did as the gunner declared all to be ready.

“Hush! silence, my lads,” cried Hilary. “Away aft, and all lie down. Now, Waters, give me the lantern.”

“I'll fire the train, sir. I'm gunner,” said the man.

“No, no,” replied Hilary, “that is my task.”

“But, if you please, sir, you might get hit, and then—”

“Silence, sir! I'll fire the train,” cried Hilary, sternly. “Away aft with the men; and look, Mr Waters, my good fellow, if I go down I trust to you to retake the cutter.”

“All right, sir,” said the gunner. “Well, sir, if you will do it, here's my last words: open your lantern and just touch the end of the paper, then close and run aft. One touch does it; so go on, and good luck to you!”

The young officer nodded and took the lantern, while the gunner joined the men as far aft as they could go. There was something very strange and unreal to him as he took a couple of steps or so forward, and listened to the noise of men above, hesitating for the moment as he thought of the life he was about to destroy, and mentally praying that Sir Harry Norland might not be near. Then duty reasserted itself, and, not knowing whether he might not be about to destroy the vessel, and with it his own life, he slowly opened the door of the lantern.

What was it to be—life and liberty, or death and destruction? He could not say, but feeling that he ought to stick at nothing to try and retake the cutter, he held the flame of the wretched purser's dip in the lantern to the powder-besmeared paper, and there was on the instant an answering burst of tiny sparks.

Chapter Five.

A Missing Enemy.

As the slow-match began to sputter Hilary drew back, closed the door of the lantern, and walked backwards aft, towards where the men were gathered. The desire was strong upon him to run and rush right into the far corner of the cabin; but he was a king's officer, and the men looked up to him for example, so he told himself that he could not show the white feather.

Fortunately he was able to keep up his dignity and retreat in safety to where the men were crouching down, and, joining them, he too assumed a reclining position upon the deck, and watched the sparkling of the piece of paper in the darkness of the forepart of the cutter.

Sparkle, sparkle, sparkle, with plenty of scintillation; like some little firework made for their amusement, but no sign of the train being fired.

On deck there was an ominous silence, as if the smugglers had received warning of the coming danger, and they too were watching for the explosion.

More sparkling and more bright flashes of light, and yet the train did not catch. Never had moments seemed to Hilary so long before, and he felt sure that the slow-match had not been connected with the train, as it must have fired before now.

Then as he waited he wondered what would be the effect of the explosion, and whether it would do more harm than blow off the hatch. He hoped not, for Sir Henry's sake; and there were moments during that terribly lengthy time of watching when he hoped that after all the plan had failed, for it seemed too terrible, and he would gladly have run forward and dashed the light aside.

They were lightning like, these thoughts, for it really was but a question of very few moments before there was a flash, a hissing noise, a bright light, and then it was as though they had all been struck a violent blow with something exceedingly soft and elastic, and at the same moment there was a dull heavy roar.

Simultaneously the lower deck was filled with the foul dank choking fumes of exploded gunpowder, the thick smoke was blinding, and the men crouched in their places for the moment forgetful of their orders till they heard the voice of Hilary Leigh shouting to them to come on, and they leaped to their feet and followed.

It was a case of blindman's-buff; but the quarters below were narrow, and after a little blundering the two men who had charge of the ladder forced aside some of the heap of chests, hammocks and planks, placed the steps in position, and, sword in one hand, pistol in the other, the young officer sprang up. The gunner followed, and in less than a minute the whole crew were over the shattered coamings of the hatchway and on deck, ready to encounter the enemy.

The change from the stifling fumes below to the soft night-air was delightful, and the men leaped along the deck after their young leader, their cutlasses flashing in the faint light cast by the lanterns swung aloft and astern; but no enemy was to be seen.

They dashed aft right to the taffrail, and back along the starboard side, and away to the bowsprit; but the deck was without an enemy.

"Why, they're gone!" cried Hilary, in astonishment, as he now realised the meaning of the silence over his head when he was awaiting the explosion. "Here, hi! Waters, Brown, what does this mean? Quick! go to the helm, Brown!" he shouted; "we're going through the water at an awful pace. Quick! quick! down—down hard!" he roared. But it was too late; the wheel was lashed, and before the slightest effort could be made to check the cutter's way, she glided, with heavy sail set, over half a dozen long rollers, and then seemed to leap upon the beach, which she struck with so heavy a thud that the little vessel shuddered from stem to stern, and pretty well the whole crew were thrown upon the deck.

The causes of the enemy forsaking the cutter were plain enough now. They did not want her, and if they did it would have been without the crew, who would have been a cause of risk and trouble to them. If they could put her *hors de combat* it would do just as well, and to this end all the sail had been hoisted and sheeted home, the wheel lashed, and with the unfortunate cutter running dead for the beach the party who had seized her had quietly gone over the side while Hilary and his men were plotting their destruction, and knowing full well they had nothing to fear till next tide floated her off—if ever she floated again—they proceeded to carry out their plans.

The men struggled to their feet once more as the great sail flapped, while a wave that seemed bent on chasing them struck below the cutter's taffrail, and the spray leaped on board.

Fortunately for them it was calm and the tide fast falling, or the gallant little *Kestrel* would have flown her last flight. As it was, it was open to doubt whether she would ever spread her long wings again to skim the sea, for the rising tide might bring with it a gale, and before she could be got off her timbers might be torn into matchwood.

It was a rapid change from danger to danger. But a few minutes back they risked sinking the vessel by the explosion of gunpowder, believing her to be in the hands of the enemy who had cleverly compassed her defeat, and now they were cast ashore.

Hilary Leigh was seaman enough, however, to know what to do without consulting the boatswain, and giving his orders rapidly he stopped the heeling over and beating of the *Kestrel* upon the sand by relieving her of her sail, in the midst of which he was startled by the voice of Mr Lipscombe.

"Good heavens, Mr Leigh!" he exclaimed, angrily, "what does this mean? I go and lie down for a few minutes, leaving you in charge of the cutter, and I come up and find her ashore. Brown, Waters! where are you, men? Have you been mad, asleep, or drunk? Oh, my head! Good gracious, why, what's this—blood?"

He staggered, and seemed about to fall, but Hilary caught his arm.

"I am glad to see you better, sir," he cried; "but had you not better lie down?"

"Better?" he said—"better?"

"Yes, sir; don't you remember?"

"Remember? Remember?" he said, staring.

"Yes, sir, the smugglers; they knocked us down and took possession of the ship."

"Yes, of course, yes," said the lieutenant eagerly. "I remember now. Of course, yes, Leigh. But—but where are they now?"

"That's just what I should like to know, sir," said Leigh, sharply; "we've got rid of them, but they ran the little *Kestrel* ashore."

Chapter Six.

Exploring.

Fortunately for the little *Kestrel* the morning breeze was soft and the sea as smooth as a mirror, and all the crew had to do was to await the tide to float them off from where they were lying high and dry, with the keel driven so deeply in the sand that the cutter hardly needed a support, and the opportunity served for examining the bottom to see if any injury had been sustained.

Lieutenant Lipscombe appeared with a broad bandage round his head, for his head had been severely cut in his fall, and the pain he suffered did not improve his already sore temper.

For though he said nothing, Hilary Leigh could see plainly enough that his officer was bitterly annoyed at having been mastered in cunning and so nearly losing his ship. He knew that to go into port to repair damages meant so close an investigation that the result might be the loss of his command. So, after an examination of the injuries, which showed that the whole of the coamings of the hatchway were blown off and the deck terribly blackened with powder, the carpenter and his mate were set to work to cut out and piece in as busily as possible.

"Nothing to go into port for, Leigh, nothing at all. The men will soon put that right; but it was very badly managed, Leigh, very. Half that quantity of powder would have done; the rest was all waste. Hang it all! what could you have been thinking about? Here am I disabled for a few minutes, and you let a parcel of scoundrels seize the cutter and run her ashore, and then, with the idea of retaking her, you go and blow up half the deck! My good fellow, you will never make a decent officer if you go on like this."

"Well, that's grateful, certainly," thought Hilary; and the desire came upon him strongly to burst out into a hearty laugh, but he suppressed it and said quietly:

"Very sorry, sir; I tried to do all for the best."

"Yes; that's what every weak-headed noodle says when he has made a blunder. Well, Leigh, it is fortunate for you that I was sufficiently recovered to resume the command; but of all the pickles which one of his majesty's ships could be got into, this is about the worst. Here we are as helpless as a turned turtle on a Florida sandspit."

"Well, sir, not quite," replied Hilary smiling; "we've got our guns, and the crew would give good account of—"

"Silence, sir! This is no laughing matter," cried the lieutenant angrily. "It may seem very droll to you, but if I embody your conduct of the past night in a despatch your chance of promotion is gone for ever."

Hilary stared, but he had common sense enough to say nothing, while the lieutenant took a turn up and down the deck, which would have been a very pleasant promenade for a cripple with one leg shorter than the other; but as the cutter was a good deal heeled over, it was so unpleasant for Lieutenant Lipscombe, already suffering from giddiness, the result of his wound, that he stopped short and stood holding on by a stay.

"Most extraordinary thing," he said; "my head is always perfectly clear in the roughest seas, but ashore I turn as giddy as can be. But there; don't stand staring about, Leigh. Take half-a-dozen men and make a bit of search up and down the coast. See if you can find any traces of the smuggling party. If you had had any thought in you such a thing might have been proposed at daybreak. It will be hours before we float."

"Yes, sir, certainly," exclaimed Leigh, rather excitedly, for he was delighted with the idea. "Shall I arm the men, sir?"

"Arm the men, sir! Oh, no: of course not. Let every man carry a swab, and a spoon stuck in his belt. Goodness me, Mr Leigh, where are your brains? You are going to track out a parcel of desperadoes, and you ask me if you shall take the men armed."

"Very sorry, sir," said Hilary. "I'll try and do better. You see I am so sadly wanting in experience."

The lieutenant looked at him sharply, but Hilary's face was as calm and unruffled as the sea behind him, and not finding any chance for a reprimand, the lieutenant merely made a sign to him to go, walking forward himself to hurry on the carpenter, and then repassing Hilary and going below to his cabin.

"Skipper's got his legs acrost this mornin', sir," said Billy Waters, touching his hat. "Hope you'll take me with you, sir."

"I should like to have you, Waters, and Tom Tully. By the way, how is he this morning? He got hurt."

"Oh, he's all right, sir," said the gunner grinning. "He got a knock, sir, but he didn't get hurt. Nothin' hurts old Tom. I don't believe he's got any feeling in him at all."

"Now, if I propose to take them," thought Hilary, "Lipscombe will say they sha'n't go. Here he comes, though. I shall catch it for not being off."

He made a run and dropped down through the damaged hatchway, alighting amidst the carpenter's tools on the lower deck, ran aft to his cabin, obtained sword and pistols, and then mounted to the deck to find the lieutenant angrily addressing Waters and Tully.

For no sooner had Hilary disappeared, and the gunner made out that the chief officer was coming on deck, than he turned his back, busied himself about the breeching of one of the guns, and shouting to Tom Tully:

"Going to send you ashore, matey?"

"No," growled Tully; "what's on?"

"Oh! some wild-goose hunt o' the skipper's. I don't mean to go, and don't you if you can help it. There won't be a place to get a drop o' grog. All searching among the rocks."

"Gunner!"

"Yes, your honour."

Billy Waters' pigtail swung round like a pump-handle, as he lumped up and pulled his forelock to his angry officer.

"How dare you speak like that, sir, on the deck of his majesty's vessel? How dare you—you mutinous dog, you? Go forward, sir, and you, too, Tom Tully, and the cutter's crew, under the command of Mr Leigh, and think yourself lucky if you are not put under punishment."

"Very sorry, sir. Humbly beg pardon, sir," stammered the gunner.

"Silence, sir! Forward! Serve out cutlasses and pistols to the men, and I'll talk to you afterwards."

Billy Waters chuckled to himself at the success of his scheme, and after a word or two of command, Hilary's little party, instead of jumping into the cutter and rowing ashore, dropped down over the side on to the sands, and went off along the coast to the west.

"What's going to be done first, sir?" said the gunner.

"Well, Waters, I've just been thinking that we ought first to try and find some traces of the boats."

"Yes, sir; but how? They're fur enough away by now."

"Of course; but if we look along the shore here about the level that the tide was last night I daresay we shall find some traces of them in the sands, and that may give us a hint where to search inland, for I'll be bound to say they were landing cargo somewhere."

"I'll be bound to say you're right, sir," said Waters, slapping his leg. "Spread out, my lads, and report the first mark of a boat's keel."

They tramped on quite five miles over the sand and shingle, and amidst the loose rocks, without seeing anything to take their attention, when suddenly one of the men some fifty yards ahead gave a hail.

"What is it, my lad?" cried Hilary, running up.

"Only this here, sir," said the man, pointing to a long narrow groove in the sand, just such as might have been made by the keel of some large boat, whilst a closer inspection showed that the sand and shingle had been trampled by many feet.

"Yes, that's a boat, certainly," said Hilary, looking shorewards towards the cliffs, which rose like a vast ramp along that portion of the coast.

There was nothing to be seen there; neither inlet nor opening in the rock, nor depression in the vast line of cliffs. Why, then, should a boat be run ashore there? It looked suspicious. Nothing but a fishing lugger would be likely to be about, and no fishing lugger would have any reason for running ashore here. Except at certain times of the tide it would be dangerous.

"It's the smugglers, Billy," cried Hilary eagerly; "and there must be some way here up the rock. Hallo! what have you got there?" he exclaimed, as the gunner, true to his instinct, dropped upon his knees and scraped the sand away from something against which he had kicked his foot.

"Pistol, sir," was the reply; and the gunner brushed the sand off the large clumsy weapon, and wiped away the thin film of rust.

"And a Frenchman," said Hilary, examining the make.

"Frenchman it is, sir, and she ar'n't been many hours lying here."

"Dropped by some one last night," said Hilary. "Hurrah! my lads, we've struck the scent."

Just then Tom Tully began to sniff very loudly, and turned his head in various directions, his actions somewhat resembling those of a great dog.

"What yer up to, matey?" cried Waters. "Ah! I know, sir. He was always a wunner after his grog, and he's trying to make out whether they've landed and buried any kegs of brandy here."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Hilary; "they would not do that. Come along, my lads. One moment. Let's have a good look along the rocks for an opening. Can any of you see anything?"

"No, sir," was chorused, after a few minutes' inspection.

"Then now let's make a straight line for the cliff, and all of you keep a bright lookout."

They had about a couple of hundred yards to go, for the tide ran down very low at this point, and as they approached the great sandstone cliffs, instead of presenting the appearance of a perpendicular wall, as seen from a distance, all was broken up where the rock had split, and huge masses had come thundering down in avalanches of stone. In fact, in several places it seemed that an active man could climb up to where a thin fringe of green turf rested upon the edge of the cliff; but this did not satisfy Hilary, who felt convinced that such a place was not likely to be chosen for the landing of a cargo.

No opening in the cliff being visible, he spread his men to search right and left, but there was no sand here; all was rough shingle and broken *débris* from the cliff with massive weathered blocks standing up in all directions, forming quite a maze, through which they threaded their way.

"There might be a regular cavern about somewhere big enough to hold a dozen cargoes," thought Hilary, as he searched here and there, and then sat down to rest for a few minutes, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, when it suddenly occurred to him that they had been hours away from the cutter, and that if he did not soon make some discovery he had better return.

"And I don't like to go back without having done something," he thought. "Perhaps if we keep on looking we may make a find worth the trouble, and—what's that?"

Nothing much; only a little bird that kept rising up from a patch of wiry herbage at the foot of the cliff, jerking itself up some twenty or thirty feet and then letting itself down as it twittered out a pleasant little song.

Only a bird; but as he watched that bird, he did not know why, it suddenly went out of sight some twenty feet or so up the rock, and while he was wondering it came into sight again and fluttered downwards.

"Why, there must be a way through there," he cried, rising and gazing intently at the face of the rock, but seeing nothing but yellowish sandstone looking jagged and wild.

"No, there can't be," he muttered; "but I'll make sure."

Climbing over three or four large blocks, he lowered himself into a narrow passage which seemed to run parallel with the cliff, but doubled back directly, and in and out, and then stopped short at a perpendicular mass some twenty feet high.

"Leads nowhere," he said, feeling very hot and tired, and, turning to go back disappointed and panting, he took another look up at the lowering face of the cliff to see now that a large portion was apparently split away, but remained standing overlapping the main portion, and so like it that at a short distance the fracture could not be seen.

"There's a way round there for a guinea," thought Hilary, "but how to get there? Why, of course, one must climb over here."

"Here" was a rugged piece of rock about fifty feet back from the *cul de sac* to which he had reached, and placing his right foot in a chink and drawing himself up he was soon on the top with a rugged track before him to the face of the cliff; but as he took a step forward, meaning to investigate a little, and then summon his men, a low chirping noise on his right took his attention, and going cautiously forward he leaned towards a rock to see what animal it was, when something came like a black cloud over his head and he was thrown violently down.

Chapter Seven.

Hilary Leigh finds himself in an Undignified Position.

"That's a boat-cloak, and the brute's sitting on me," said Hilary Leigh to himself as he vainly struggled to get free and shout for help. He did utter a few inarticulate noises, but they were smothered in the folds of the thick cloak, and he felt as if he were about to be smothered himself. Getting free he soon found was out of the question, so was making use of the weapons with which he was armed, for his wrists were wrenched round behind his back and his elbows firmly lashed. So were his ankles, and at the same time he felt the pistols dragged out of his belt and his sword unhooked and taken away.

"Well, I've discovered the smugglers' place and no mistake," he thought; "but I might just as well have left it alone. Oh, this is too bad! Only last night in trouble, and now prisoner! I wonder what they are going to do?"

He was not long left in doubt, for he suddenly felt himself roughly seized and treated like a sack, for he was hauled on to some one's back and borne along in a very uncomfortable position, his legs being banged against corners of the rock as if he were being carried through a very narrow place.

This went on for a few minutes, during which he was, of course, in utter darkness, and panting for breath. Then he was allowed to slide down, with a bump, on to the rock.

"They're not going to kill me," thought Hilary, "or they would not have taken so much trouble. I wish I could make Billy Waters hear."

He tried to shout, but only produced a smothered noise, with the result that some one kicked him in the side.

"That's only lent, my friend," thought Hilary. "It shall be paid back if ever I get a chance. What now? I am trussed; are

they going to roast me?"

For just then he felt a rope was passed round him, and a slip-knot drawn tight under his arms. Then there was a sudden snatch, and he was raised upon his feet, steadied for a moment by a pair of hands, the rope tightened more and more, and he felt himself being drawn up, rising through the air, and slowly turning round, one elbow rasping gently against the rock from time to time.

"Well, I'm learning some of their secrets," thought Hilary, "even if they are keeping me in the dark. This is either the way up to their place, or else it's the way they get up their cargoes."

"Yes, cargoes only," he said directly, as he heard indistinctly a gruff voice at his elbow, some one being evidently climbing up at his side. "I hope they won't drop me."

In another minute he was dragged sidewise and lowered on to the rock, a change he gladly welcomed, for the rope had hurt him intolerably, and seemed to compress his chest so that he could hardly breathe.

"Well, this is pleasant," he thought, as he bit his lip with vexation. "The lads will have a good hunt for me, find nothing, and then go back and tell Lipscombe. He will lie on and off for an hour or two, and then go and report that I have deserted or gone off for a game, or some other pleasant thing. Oh, hang it all! this won't do. I must escape somehow. I wish they'd take off this cloak."

That seemed to be about the last thing his captors were disposed to do, for after he had been lying there in a most painfully uncomfortable position for quite an hour, every effort to obtain relief being met with a kick, save one, when he felt the cold ring of a pistol muzzle pressed against his neck under the cloak, he was lifted by the head and heels, some one else put an arm round him, and he was carried over some rugged ground, lifted up higher, and then his heart seemed to stand still, for he felt that he was going to be allowed to fall, and if allowed to fall it would be, he thought, from the top of the cliff.

The feeling was terrible, but the fall ridiculous, for it was a distance of a foot on to some straw. Then he felt straw thrown over him—a good heap—and directly after there was a jolting sensation, and he knew he was in a cart on a very rugged road. The sound of blows came dull upon his ear, and a faint hoarse "Go on!" And in spite of his pain, misery, and the ignorance he was in respecting his fate, Hilary Leigh began to laugh with all the light-heartedness of a lad, as he mentally said:

"Oh, this is too absurd! I'm in a donkey-cart, and the fellow who is driving can't make the brute go."

Chapter Eight.

Lieutenant Lipscombe lays down the Law.

"Say, lads, I'm getting tired of this here," said Tom Tully, bringing himself to an anchor on a patch of sand; "I'm as hot as I am dry. Where's our orsifer?"

"I d'no," said another. "Ahoy! Billy Waters, ahoy-y-y!"

"Ahoy!" came from amongst the rocks; and the gunner plodded up wiping his face, and another of the little party came at the same time from the other direction.

"Where's Muster Leigh?" said Tom Tully.

"Isn't he along of you?" said Waters.

"No, I ar'n't seen him for ever so long."

Notes were compared, as the hailing brought the rest of the party together, and it was agreed on all sides that Hilary had gone in amongst the rocks close by where they were standing.

"I know how it is," growled Tom Tully, "he's having a caulk under the lee of one of these here stones while we do all the hunting about; and I can't walk half so well as I used, after being shut up aboard that there little cutter."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't go to sleep," said the gunner. "He's close here somewhere. I hope he's had better luck than we, for I ar'n't found nothing; have you?"

"No, no," arose on all sides.

"Why, there ain't nothin' to find," growled Tom Tully. "I wish I was aboard. You're chief orsifer when he ar'n't here, Billy Waters. Give the order and let's go back."

"What, without Mr Leigh?" said the gunner; "that's a likely tale, that is. Here, come on lads, and let's find him. Ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came back from the rocks.

"There he is," said one of the men.

"No, my lads, that's only the ecker," said Billy Waters. "Hark ye—Ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came back directly.

"Hoy—hoy—hoy-y-y!" shouted the gunner again.

"Hoy—hoy-y-y!" came back.

"Mis' Leigh, ahoy!" roared the gunner.

"Leigh—hoy!" was the response.

"Told you so, my lads; he ar'n't about here. Let's go further on. Now then, Tom Tully, we must have off some o' that there tail if it's so heavy it keeps you anchored down. Get up, will you?"

The sailor got up unwillingly, and in obedience to the gunner's orders they began now, in place of searching for traces of the smugglers, to look for their missing officer, scattering along, as fate had it, farther and farther from the spot where he had disappeared, no one seeing a face watching them intently through the thin wiry strands of a tuft of grass growing close up under the cliff.

The heat was now intense, for the sun seemed to be reflected back from the face of the rocks, and the men were regularly fagged.

They shouted and waited, and shouted again, but the only answer they got was from the echoes; and at last they stood together in a knot, with Billy Waters scratching his head with all his might, and they were a good half mile now from where Hilary had made his discovery and stepped into a trap.

"Well, this here *is* a rummy go," exclaimed the gunner, after looking from face to face for the counsel that there was not. "Let's see, my lads; it was just about here as he went forrard, warn't it?"

"No," growled Tom Tully; "it were a good two-score fathom more to the east'ard."

"Nay, nay, lad; it were a couple o' cables' length doo west," said another.

"I think it were 'bout here," said Tom Tully; "but I can't find that there track o' the boat's keel now. What's going to be done?"

"Let's go aboard again," growled Tom Tully. "I'm 'bout sick o' this here, mates."

"But I tell yer we can't go aboard without our orsifer," cried the gunner. "'Taint likely."

"He'd go aboard without one of us," growled Tom Tully, "so where's the difference?"

"There's lots o' difference, my lad. We can't go aboard without him. But where is he?"

"Having a caulk somewhere," said Tully gruffly; "and I on'y wish I were doing of that same myself. If we stop here much longer we shall be cooked like herrings. It's as hot as hot."

"I tell you he wouldn't desert us and go to sleep," said the gunner stubbornly. "Mr Leigh's a lad as would stick to his men like pitch to a ball o' oakum."

"Then why don't he?" growled Tom Tully in an ill-used tone. "What does he go and sail away from conwoy for?"

"He couldn't have got up the cliffs," mused the gunner; "'cause there don't seem to be no way, and he couldn't have gone more to west'ard, 'cause we must have seen him. There ain't been no boats along shore, and he can't have gone back to the cutter. I say, my lads, we've been and gone and got ourselves into a reg'lar mess. What's the skipper going to say when he sees us? You see we can't tell him as the youngster's fell overboard."

"No," growled Tom Tully; "'cause there ar'n't no overboard for him to fall. I'm right, I know; he's having a caulk."

"Tell yer he ain't," roared Waters fiercely; "and if any one says again as my young orsifer's doing such a thing as to leave his men in the lurch and go to sleep on a hot day like this, he'll get my fist in his mouth."

"Sail ho!" cried one of the men; and looking in the indicated direction, there was the cutter afloat once more, and sailing towards them, quite a couple of miles away, and as they looked there was a little puff of white smoke from her side, and a few seconds after a dull report.

"Look at that now;" cried Billy Waters, "there's the skipper got some one meddling with my guns. That's that Jack Brown, that is; and he knows no more about firing a gun than he do 'bout Dutch. There was a dirty sort of a shot."

"That's a signal, that is, for us to come aboard," growled Tom Tully.

"Well, nobody said it warn't, did they?" cried Waters, who was regularly out of temper now.

"No," growled Tom Tully, "on'y wishes I was aboard, I do."

"Then you ain't going till you've found your orsifer, my lad."

"Hah!" said Tom Tully, oracularly. "Shouldn't wonder if he ar'n't deserted 'cause the skipper give him such a setting down this morning."

"Now just hark at this here chap," cried the gunner, appealing to the others. "He'd just go and do such a dirty thing hissself, and so he thinks every one else would do the same. Tom Tully, I'm 'bout ashamed o' you. I shouldn't ha'

thought as a fellow with such a pigtail as you've got to your headpiece would say such a thing of his orsifer."

"Then what call's he got to go and desert us for like this here, messmet?" growled Tom Tully. "I don't want to say no hard things o' nobody, but here's the skin off one o' my heels, and my tongue's baked; and what I says is, where is he if he ar'n't gone?"

That was a poser; and as after another short search there was a second gun fired from the cutter, and a boat was seen to put off and come towards them, there was nothing for them but to go down to the water and get into the boat, after Billy Waters had taken bearings, as he called it, of the place where the young officer had left them, setting up stones for marks,—which, however, through the deceptive nature and similarity of the coast in one part to another, were above half a mile from the true spot,—and suffer themselves to be rowed aboard.

"The skipper's in a fine temper," said one of the crew. "Where's Muster Leigh?"

"Ah! that's just what I want to know," said Waters, ruefully. "He'll be down upon me for losing on him—just as if I took him ashore like a dog tied to a string. How did you get the cutter off?"

"Easy as a glove," was the reply. "We just took out the little anchor and dropped it over, and when the tide come up hauled on it a bit, and she rode out as easy as a duck. But he's been going on savage because Muster Leigh didn't come back. Has he deserted?"

The gunner turned upon him so fierce a look, and made so menacing a movement, that the man shrank away, and catching what is called a crab upset the rower behind him, the crew for the moment being thrown into confusion, just as the lieutenant had raised his spyglass to his eye and was watching the coming off of the boat.

"What call had you got to do that, Billy?" cried the man, rubbing his elbows. "There'll be a row about that. Here, give way, my lads, and let's get aboard."

The men made the stout ashen blades bend as they forced the boat through the water, and at the end of a few minutes the oars were turned up, laid neatly over the thwarts, and the bowman held on with the boathook while the search party tumbled on board, the sides of the cutter being at no great height above the water.

The lieutenant was there, with his glass under his arm, his head tied up so that one eye was covered, and his cocked hat was rightly named in a double sense, being cocked almost off his head.

"Disgraceful, Mr Leigh!" he exclaimed furiously. "You deserve to be court-martialled, sir! Never saw a boat worse manned and rowed, sir. I never saw from the most beggarly crew of a wretched merchantman worse time kept. Why, the men were catching crabs, sir, from the moment they left the shore till the moment they came alongside. Bless my commission, sir! were you all drunk?"

He had one eye shut by the old accident, as we have intimated, and the injury of the previous night had so affected the other that he saw anything but clearly, as he kept stamping up and down the deck.

"Do you hear, sir? I say were you all drunk?" roared the lieutenant.

"Please your honour," said the gunner, "we never see a drop of anything except seawater since we went ashore."

"Silence, sir! How dare you speak?" roared the lieutenant. "Insubordination and mutiny. Did I speak to you, sir? I say, did I speak to you?"

"No, your honour, but—"

"If you say another word I'll clap you in irons, you dog!" cried the lieutenant. "A pretty state of affairs, indeed, when men are to answer their officers. Do you hear, there, you mutinous dogs! If another man among you dares to speak I'll clap him in irons."

The men exchanged glances, and there was a general hitching up of trousers along the little line in which the men were drawn up.

"Now then, sir. Have the goodness to explain why you have been so long, and why all my signals for recall have been disregarded. Silence, sir! don't speak till I've done," he continued, as one of the men, who had let a little tobacco juice get too near the swallowing point, gave a sort of snorting cough.

There was dead silence on board, save a slight creaking noise made by the crutch of the big boom as it swung gently and rubbed the mast.

"I call upon you, Mr Leigh, sir, for an explanation," continued the lieutenant. "Silence, sir! Not yet. I sent you ashore to make a search, expecting that your good sense would lead you to make it brief, and to get back in time to assist in hauling off the cutter which you had run ashore. Instead of doing this, sir, you race off with the men like a pack of schoolboys, sir, larking about among the rocks, and utterly refusing to notice my signals, sir, though they have been flying, sir, for hours; and here have I been obliged to waste his majesty's powder, sir, and foul his majesty's guns, sir."

Here, as the lieutenant's back was turned, Billy Waters shook his great fist at Jack Brown, the boatswain, going through sundry pantomimic motions to show how he, Billy Waters, would like to punch Jack Brown, the boatswain's head. To which, waiting until the lieutenant had turned and had his back to him, Jack Brown responded by taking his leg in his two hands just above the knee and shaking it in a very decisive manner at the gunner.

"And what is more, sir," continued the lieutenant, "you had my gunner with you."

Billy Waters, who had drawn back his fist level with his armpit in the act of striking an imaginary blow at the boatswain, stopped short as he heard himself mentioned, and the lieutenant continued his trot up and down like an angry wild beast in a narrow cage and went on:

"And, sir, I had to intrust the firing of that gun to a bungling, thick-headed, stupid idiot of a fellow, who don't know muzzle from vent; and the wonder is that he didn't blow one of his majesty's liege subjects into smithereens."

The lieutenant's back was now turned to Billy Waters, who as he saw Jack Brown's jaw drop placed his hands to his sides, and lifting up first one leg and then the other, as if in an agony of spasmodic delight, bent over first to starboard and then to larboard, and laughed silently till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"I say, sir—I say," continued the lieutenant, pushing up his bandage a little, "that such conduct is disgraceful, sir; and what is more, I say—"

The lieutenant did not finish the sentence then, for in him angry excitement he had continued his blind walk, extending it more and more till he had approached close to where the carpenter had sawn out several of the ragged planks torn by the previous night's explosion, and as he lifted his leg for another step it was right over the yawning opening into the men's quarters in the fore-castle below.

Chapter Nine.

Blind Proceedings.

It would have been an ugly fall for the lieutenant, for according to the wholesome custom observed by most mechanics, the carpenter had turned the damaged hatchway into a very pleasant kind of pitfall, such as the gentle mild Hindoo might have dug for his enemy the crafty tiger, with its arrangements for impaling whatever fell.

In this case Chips had all the ragged and jagged pieces of plank carefully stuck point upwards, with a couple of augers, a chisel or two, and a fair amount of gimlets and iron spike-like nails, so that it would have been impossible for his officer have fallen without receiving one or two ugly wounds.

Just in the nick of time, however, Jack Brown, the boatswain, darted forward and gave the lieutenant a tremendous push, which sent him clear of the opening in the deck, but in a sitting position under the bulwark, against which his head went with a goodly rap.

"Mutiny, by Jove!" he roared, in astonished fury. "Marines, fix bayonets! Run that scoundrel through."

"Beg your honour's pardon," began Jack Brown, offering his hand to assist the astonished commander to rise.

"It's a lie, sir! How dare you say it was an accident?" cried the lieutenant, struggling up and readjusting the handkerchief tied round his injured head, and his cocked hat over that. "It's mutiny, sir, rank mutiny. You struck your officer, sir, and you'll be shot. Corporal, take this man below. In irons, sir, in irons."

"But your honour would have gone through the hole squelch on to the lower deck," growled Jack Brown in an injured tone.

"Silence, sir," roared the lieutenant. "Corporal, do your duty."

"All right, corpy, I'm coming," said the boatswain, as the marine laid his hand upon his arm. "But the skipper may fall overboard and drown hisself next time, afore I gives him a helping hand."

"Mutiny! mutiny!" cried the lieutenant. "Do you hear, Mr Leigh? The ship's crew are in open mutiny, and uttering threats. Fetch my pistols, sir," he cried, drawing his sword. "Cut down the first man who utters another word. Do you hear, Mr Leigh? Quick! my pistols!"

"If you please, your honour," began Billy Waters, pulling his forelock and giving a kick out behind.

"Si-lence!" roared the lieutenant. "Here, marines, come on my side. I'll cut down the next man who dares to speak. Have you got the pistols, Mr Leigh?"

Of course there was no answer.

"I say, have you got my pistols, Mr Leigh?" cried the lieutenant again.

Still there was silence, and in his fury the lieutenant thrust the bandage up from over his inflamed eye, and tried to see what was going on.

Truth to speak, he was as blind as an owl in broad sunshine; but in his irritable frame of mind he would not own it, even to himself, and pushing the bandage higher he tilted off his cocked hat, which fell with a bang on the deck, and in trying to save his hat he struck himself on the jaw with the hilt of his sword, and dropped that in turn, to fall with a ringing noise on the whitened planks.

"Confusion!" he exclaimed as the corporal picked up hat and sword in turn, and handed them to the irate officer, whose temper was in no wise sweetened by this last upset. "Ha! thank you, Mr Leigh, you are very polite all at once," he cried sarcastically, as he stared at the corporal, who stood before him drawn up stiff as a ramrod, but representing

nothing but a blurred figure before the inflamed optic of the lieutenant. "Well, sir! Now, sir! perhaps you will condescend to give some explanation of your conduct. Silence, there! If any man of this crew dares to speak I'll cut him down. Now, Mr Leigh, I call upon you for an explanation."

No answer, of course.

"Do you hear what I say, sir?"

The corporal did not stir or move a muscle.

"Once more, sir, I demand why you do not explain your conduct," cried the lieutenant.

The corporal drew himself up a little tighter, and his eyes were fixed upon the bright blade quivering in the lieutenant's hand.

"Speak, sir. It's mutiny by all the articles of war," roared the lieutenant, taking a step forward, seizing the corporal by the collar, and presenting at his throat the point of the sword.

"Mind my eyes, your honour," cried the corporal, flinching; "I ain't Mr Leigh."

"Where is he then?" cried the astonished lieutenant.

"Your honour won't cut me down if I speak?" said the corporal.

"No, no," said the lieutenant, lowering the point of his sword; "where is Mr Leigh?"

"Ain't come aboard, sir."

"Not come aboard? Here, Waters!"

The gunner trotted forward, pulled his forelock and kicked out his right leg behind.

"Where is Mr Leigh?"

The gunner pulled his forelock again, kicked out his left leg, and as he bobbed his head, his pigtail went up and came down again flop between his shoulders as if it were a long knocker.

"I say, where is Mr Leigh? You mutinous scoundrel, why don't you speak?"

"Honour said you'd cut me down if I did."

"Rubbish! Nonsense! Tell me, where is Mr Leigh?"

"Don't know, your honour."

"Don't know, sir? What do you mean?"

"Please your honour, we'd found tracks, as we thought, of the smugglers' lugger, and then Mr Leigh lost us. No; I mean, your honour, we lost him. No, he lost—I say, Tom Tully, my lad, which way weer it?"

Tom Tully grunted, gave his trousers a hitch, and looked at the lieutenant's sword.

"Well, sir, do you hear?" cried the lieutenant; "how was it?"

"Stow all cuttin's down," grumbled Tom Tully, putting his hand behind so as to readjust the fall of his pigtail.

"Will—you—speak—out—you—ras—cal?" cried the lieutenant.

"Don't know, your honour," growled Tom Tully; "only as Muster Leigh went off."

"There, I thought as much!" cried the lieutenant. "Deserted his men, and gone off."

"Please your honour, I don't think as—"

"Silence!" cried the lieutenant, so fiercely that Billy Waters gave up the young officer's defence, and shut his teeth together with a loud snap like that of a trap.

"All hands 'bout ship!" cried the lieutenant. "He'll be coming back presently, and signalling for a boat to fetch him off, but he shall come on to Portsmouth and make his report to the admiral."

The great mainsail swung over to the other side, and the breeze favouring, the squaresail was set as well, and the *Kestrel*, so late helpless on shore, began to skim over the surface of the water at a tremendous rate, while the lieutenant, having given his orders as to which way the cutter's head should be laid, went down to the cabin to bathe his painful eye, having told one of the men to bring him some warm water from the galley.

The man he told happened to be Tom Tully, and as he stood by, ready to fetch more if it should be wanted, the bathing seemed to allay the irritation, so that the commander grew less angry, and condescended to ask a few questions. Then he began to think of the *Kestrel* having been ashore, the state of her deck about the fore-hatchway, and the late encounter, all of which he would have to minutely describe to the admiral if he ran into harbour to report Hilary Leigh's evasion.

Then, as he grew more comfortable, he began to think that perhaps, after all, the young man had not run off. Furthermore, as he owned that he was an indefatigable young officer, he came to the conclusion that perhaps Leigh might have discovered further traces of the smugglers, and, if so, it would be wrong to leave him in the lurch, especially as a good capture might be made, and with it a heap of prize-money.

“And besides, I’ll give fifty pounds to run up against that scoundrel who led me into that trap.”

A little more bathing made the lieutenant see so much more clearly, mentally as well as optically, that he went on deck and repeated his former orders of “‘Bout ship,” with the result that the *Kestrel* was once more gently gliding along off the cliff-bound stretch of land where Hilary Leigh had fallen into strange hands.

Chapter Ten.

In the Dark.

Hilary’s burst of merriment was of very short duration. There is, no doubt, something very amusing to a young naval officer in the fact of his being made a prisoner, and carried off in a donkey-cart; but the pleasure is not of a lasting kind.

At the end of a few moments Hilary’s mirth ceased, and he grew very wrathful. He was exceedingly hot and in no little pain, and in addition his sensations were such that he began to wonder whether he should live to reach his destination, where ever that might be, without being stifled.

For the folds of the cloak were very tight about his head, and the straw on which he lay let him settle down into a hole, while that above shook down more closely and kept out the air.

For a few minutes a horrible sensation of dread troubled him, and he uttered a hoarse cry; but, making a struggle to master his fear, he grew more calm, and though he was exceedingly hot and the effort was painful, he found he could breathe, and after a final effort to relieve himself of his bonds he lay still, patiently waiting for his release.

The road seemed to grow rougher and rougher, and he felt that he must be going along some out-of-the-way by-lane, full of tremendous ruts, for sometimes one wheel would be down low, sometimes the other; and every now and then the cart seemed to stick fast, and then followed the sound of blows.

Whenever there came this sound of blows the cart began to echo back the noise with a series of tremendous kicks; for it soon became evident that this was no patient, long-suffering donkey, but one with a spirit of its own, and ready to resist.

On again, and then another stick-fast.

Whack! whack! whack! went a stick, and clatter, clatter came the donkey’s heels against the front of the cart, in such close proximity to Hilary’s head that he began to be alarmed for the safety of his skull, and after a good deal of wriggling he managed to screw himself so far round that when the next assault took place with the stick and battering with the donkey’s heels the front boards of the cart only jarred against Hilary’s arm.

Another term of progress, during which the road seemed better, and they appeared to get along some distance before there was another jerk up and another jerk down, and then a series of jumps as if they were going downhill; and then the cart gave a big bump and stuck fast.

The driver shouted and banged the donkey, and the donkey brayed and battered the front of the cart, and once more, in spite of his pain and discomfort, Hilary lay under the straw and laughed as he pictured accurately enough the scene that was taking place in that narrow lane.

For he was in a rutty, little-used track, in a roughly-made, springless cart, drawn by a big, ragged, powerful jackass, which every time the cart stuck, and his driver used the light ash stick he carried, laid down his ears, bared his teeth, and kicked at the front of the cart, which was rough with indentations and splinters, the result of the prowess of the donkey’s heels.

On again—stop again—jolt here—jolt there—more blows and kicking, and Hilary still lying there half stifled beneath the straw; but his youth and abundant vitality kept him up, so that he lay listening to the battles between the donkey and his driver; then he thought of his men, and wondered whether they had made a good search for him; then he began to think of the lieutenant, and wondered what he would say when the men went back and reported his absence; lastly, he began to wonder whether Mr Lipscombe would come with the *Kestrel* and try to find him.

“Not much good to come with the cutter,” he thought as drew a long breath; “he would want a troop of light horse if I’m being taken inland, as it seems to me I am.”

Then he began to wonder what would be done with him, whether Sir Henry Norland knew of his capture. Perhaps it was by Sir Henry’s orders.

“Well, if it is,” he said, half aloud, “if he don’t behave well to me he is no gentleman.”

He began musing next about Adela, and thought of how she had altered since the old days when Sir Henry was a quiet country gentleman, and had not begun to mix himself up with the political questions of the day.

“Oh!” said Hilary at last, “this is horribly tiresome and very disgusting. I don’t know that I should have much minded

being made prisoner by a French ship, and then sent ashore, so long as they treated me well; but to be kidnapped like this by a beggarly set of smugglers is too bad."

"Well," he thought, "I don't see that I shall be very much better off if I make myself miserable about my condition. I can't escape just at present; they are evidently not going to kill me. That's not likely. Why should they? So I shall just make the best of things, and old Lipscombe must grumble as long as he likes."

Phew! It was very hot, and he was very weary. The kicking of the donkey and the sound of the blows had ceased to amuse him. He was so sore with the jolting that he told himself he could not get any worse. And still the cart went on, jolt, jolt, till a curious sensation of drowsiness came over him, and before he was aware that such a change was approaching he dropped off fast asleep, to make up for the wakefulness and excitement of the past night, the long and arduous walk of that morning, and the exhaustion produced by the jolting and shaking to which he had been subjected at intervals for the past two hours. During that time he had striven very hard to guess in which direction he was being taken, and wished he had known a little more of the locality inland, his geographical knowledge being confined to the points, bays, cliffs, villages, churches, and ports along the coast.

It was no slow dozing off and re-awaking—no softly passing through a pleasant dreamy state into a light sleep, for Nature seemed to say, with stern decision, that his body and mind had borne as great a strain as was good for either; and one moment he was awake, feeling rather drowsy; the next he was gone—plunged deep down in one of those heavy, dreamless sleeps in which hours pass away like moments, and the awakened sleeper wonders at the lapse of time.

Nature is very kind to her children, whether they are old or young; and during those restful times she builds up what the learned folks call tissue, and strengthens mind and muscle, fitting the said children for the wear and tear that is to go on again the next day, and the next.

Hilary awoke with a start, and so deep had been his sleep that it was some little time before he could recall what had taken place.

At first he thought he was in his berth on board the *Kestrel*, for it was intensely dark, but on stretching out his hands he could touch nothing, so it could not be there, where his elbows struck the side, and not many inches above his head there was the top.

No, it could not be there. Where was he then?

Asleep and dreaming, he believed the next minute; and then all came back with a leap—his capture, the swing off the cliff, the straw in the donkey-cart, and that was where he was now, only the donkey was standing still, for there was no jolting, and it had ceased to kick the front board of the cart.

He had either been asleep or insensible, he knew, and—

"Hullo! they've untied my arms," he exclaimed; "and it isn't so hot as it was. They must have taken off the cloak."

Yes; the cloak was gone and his arms were free. So were his legs.

No; his legs were securely tied, but the straw over his head had been taken away.

He lay perfectly still for a few minutes, thinking, and with his eyes trying in all directions to pierce the thick black darkness by which he was surrounded, but without avail.

"I wonder where I am," he thought, as, after forcing his mind to obey his will, he went over in review all the adventures that had befallen him from the time he left the ship till he was jolting along in that donkey-cart, half-suffocated in the boat-cloak and straw.

Then there came a dead stoppage. He could get no farther. He knew he must have gone to sleep, and the probabilities were that the cart had been backed into some shed, the donkey taken out, and he had been left to finish his sleep.

"I wish I knew what time it was," thought Hilary. "How dark it is, to be sure. I wonder where the donkey is; and—hullo! where are the sides of the cart?"

He felt about, but could touch only straw; and on stretching his hands out farther, it was with no better result.

He listened.

Not a sound.

Strained his eyes.

All was blacker than the blackest night.

What should he do? Get up? Crawl about? Shout?

He could not answer his own questions; and as he lay there wondering what would be best, that strange feeling of confusion that oppresses the strongest of us in the dark when we are ignorant of where we are, came upon him, and he lay there at last with the perspiration gathering in big drops upon his brow.

Chapter Eleven.

An Unpleasant Awakening.

Did you ever suffer from that unpleasant bodily disorder—sleep-walking? Did you ever wake up and find yourself standing undressed in the cold—somewhere—you can't tell where, only that you are out of bed and on the floor? You are confused—puzzled—and you want to know what is the matter. You know you ought to be in bed, or rather you have a vague kind of belief that you ought to be in bed, and you want to be back there, but the question directly arises—where is the bed? and for the life of you you cannot tell. You hold out your hands, and they touch nothing. You try in another direction—another, and another, with the same result, and, at last with one hand outstretched to the full extent, you gradually edge along sidewise till you touch something—wall, wardrobe, door, and somehow it feels so strange that you seem never to have touched it before; perhaps you never have, for in daylight one does not go about one's room touching doors and walls.

Of course the result is that you find your bed at last, and that it is close to you, for you stretched your hands right over it again and again; but all the same it is a very singular experience, and the accompanying confusion most peculiar, and those who have ever had such an awakening can the better understand Hilary Leigh's feelings as he lay there longing for the light.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, after vainly endeavouring to pierce the darkness, and to touch something else but straw and the stones upon which it had been heaped, "if any one had told me that I should be such a coward on waking up and finding myself in the dark, I should have hit him, I'm sure I should. But it is unpleasant all the same. Oh, I say, how my legs ache!"

This took his attention from his position, and he sat up and then drew up his legs.

"Well, I must be stupid and confused," he muttered impatiently. "Why do I sit here and let my legs ache with this rope tied round them when I might take it off?"

This was better still; it gave him something to do; and he at once attacked the tight knots, which proved so hard that he pulled out his pocket-knife, which had not been taken away. But the rope might be useful for escape! So he closed his knife, and with all a sailor's deftness of fingers attacked the knots so successfully that he at last set his legs free, and, coiling up the rope, tucked it beneath the straw.

"Murder!" he muttered, drawing in his breath; for now that his legs were freed they seemed to ache and smart most terribly. They throbbed, and burned, and stung, till he had been rubbing at them for a good half-hour, after which the circulation seemed to be restored to its proper force, and he felt better; but even then, when he tried to stand up they would hardly support his weight, and he was glad to sit down once more and think.

The darkness was terrible now that he had no longer to make any effort, and the silence was worse. He might have been buried alive, so solemn and still did all seem.

But Hilary soon shook off any weak dread that tried to oppress him, and rising at last he found that he could walk with less pain, and cautiously leaving the heap of straw upon which he had been lying, he began to explore.

Slowly and carefully he thrust out one foot and drew the other to it, feeling with his hands the while, till they came in contact with a wall that was roughly plastered.

That was something tangible; and gradually feeling his way along this he came to an angle in the wall, starting off in another direction.

This he traced, and at the end of a few paces came to another angle. Then again another, and in the next side of what was a stone-floored, nearly square apartment, he felt a door.

There was the way out, then. The door was not panelled, but of slant bevelled boards, crossed by strong iron hinges, and—yes—here was the keyhole; but on bending down and looking through, he could feel a cold draught of air, but see no light.

"There must be a window," he thought; and to find this he searched the place again as high as he could reach, but without avail; and at last he found his way back to the heap of straw, and threw himself down in disgust.

"Well, I sha'n't bother," he muttered. "I'm shut up here just as if I was in prison. I've been to sleep, and I've woke up in the dark, because it's night; and that's about the worst of it. I don't see anything to mind. There's no watch to keep, so I sha'n't be roused up by that precious bell; and as every sailor ought to get a good long sleep whenever he can, why here goes."

Perhaps Hilary Leigh's thoughts were not quite so doughty as his words; but whatever his thoughts were, he fought them down in the most manful way, stretched himself out upon the straw, and after lying thinking for a few minutes he dropped off fast asleep, breathing as regularly and easily as if he had been on board the *Kestrel*, and rocked in the cradle of the deep.

Chapter Twelve.

A more Pleasant Awakening, with a Hungry Fit.

"Tchu weet—tchu weet—tchu weet! Come to tea, Jack! Come to tea, Jack! Come to tea, Jack! Whips Kitty! Whips Kitty! Whips Kitty! Tcho-tcho-tcho!"

Hilary Leigh lay half awake, listening to the loud song of a thrush, full-throated and joyous, whistling away to his mate sitting close by in her clay cup of a nest upon four pale greenish-blue spotted eggs; and as he heard the notes he seemed to be in the old bedroom at Sir Henry Norland's, where he used to leave his window open to be called by the birds.

Yes, he was back in the old place, and here was the rich, ruddy, golden light of the sun streaming in at his window, and through on to the opposite wall; and it was such a beautiful morning that he would jump up and take his rod, and go down to the big hole in the river. The tench would bite like fun on a morning like this. There were plenty of big worms, too, in the old watering-pot, tough as worms should be after a good scouring in a heap of wet moss. Just another five minutes and he'd get up, and when he met Adela at breakfast he could brag about what a good one he was at early rising, and show her all the beautiful tench, and—

"Hallo! Am I awake?"

There was no mistake about it. He was wide awake now, and it was years ago that he used to listen to the birds in his old bedroom at Sir Henry Norland's; and though a thrush was whistling away outside, and the rising sun was streaming in at a window and shining on the opposite wall, where he was now Hilary Leigh did not know, only that he was seated on a heap of straw, and that he was in what looked like a part of an old-fashioned chapel, with a window high up above his reach.

"I feel as if I had been asleep for about a week," muttered Hilary, "and I'm so hungry that if they, whoever they are, don't soon bring me some breakfast I shall eat my boots."

"Why, they must have carried me in here while I was asleep," he thought; and then, "Hallo, old fellow!" he cried, laughing, "there you are, are you?"

For just then, completely eclipsing the thrush in power, a donkey—probably, he thought, the one that brought him there—trumpeted forth his own resonant song, the song that made the savage Irishman exclaim that it was "a wonderful bird for singing, only it seemed to have a moighty cowl'd." And if there had been any doubt before what donkey it was, Hilary's mind was set at rest, for as the bray ended in a long-drawn minor howl there came two or three sharp raps, just as if the jackass has relieved his feelings with these good kicks, as was the case, up against the boards of the shed in which he was confined.

"Well, this is a rum set-out," said Hilary, getting up, and then bending down to have a rub at his legs, which still suffered from the compression of the cord. "Hang it all! what a mess my uniform is in with this chaffy straw!"

He set to and brushed off as much as he could, and then began to inspect the place in which he was imprisoned, to find that the ideas he had formed of it in the dark were not far wrong, inasmuch as there was a plastered wall, a stone floor, an ancient-looking door with a big keyhole, through which he could see nothing, and the Gothic window with iron bars across, and no glass to keep out the air.

"Well, if any fellow had told me about this I should have said he was inventing. I suppose I'm a prisoner. I wonder what Lipscombe thinks of my not coming back. Well, I can't help it; and he must come with some of our men to cut me out."

"Come to tea, Jack! Come to tea, Jack! Whips Kitty! Whips Kitty! Whips Kitty!"

"Yes, I'll come to tea," said Hilary, as the thrush sang on; "but how am I to come? Oh! I say, I am so precious hungry. I could eat the hardest biscuit and the toughest bit of salt beef that ever a fellow put between his teeth. They might bring me some prog."

Hilary was well rested by his sleep, and felt as active as a young goat now, so running to the door he tried it again, to find it shut fast, and no chance of getting it open. So he turned at once to the window, and looked around for something to enable him to reach it, but looked in vain, for there was nothing to be seen.

"Never mind; here goes!" he cried; and walking back to the opposite wall he took a run and a jump, and succeeded in getting his hands upon the old stone sill, but only to slip back again.

He repeated his efforts several times, but in vain; and at last finding this was hopeless, unless for the time being he had been furnished with the hind-legs of a kangaroo, he took out his pocket-knife, opened it, and began to cut a notch in the wall.

It was the soft sandstone of the district, and he was not long in carving a good resting-place for one foot; and this he followed up, cutting another niche about a foot higher.

"I'm making a pretty mess," he muttered as he looked down; "serve 'em right for shutting me up."

On he went carving away with the big jack-knife, which was an offering made by Billy Waters, and his perseverance was at last rewarded by his contriving a series of niches in the stone wall by whose means he climbed up sufficiently high to enable him to reach the iron bars, when he easily drew himself up to the broad sill, upon which he could sit, and with one arm through the bars, make himself pretty comfortable and enjoy the view.

His first glance, though, was at the iron bars embedded in the stone, and he came to the conclusion that, given enough time, he could pick away the cement and make his escape; but as it would be a matter of time he thought that perhaps it would be better to defer it until he knew where he was.

"Looking due east," said Hilary, as he began taking observations; "then the sea must be to the right, over those hills; and out here to the left—my word, what a pretty place! Why, it is like a park!"

For gazing to the left, or northward, his eye ranged over the lovely undulating Sussex Weald, with its park-like, well-wooded hills and valleys, now in the first blush of their summer beauty, the leafage all tender green, and the soft meadowlike pastures gilded with the dazzling yellow of the over-abundant crowfoot.

There was a thick dew upon the grass, which sparkled like myriads of diamonds, emeralds, and sapphires in the morning sun. Here was a patch of vivid blue where the wild hyacinths were peering out from the edge of a wood which, farther in, was tinted with the delicate French-white of the anemones; the cuckoo-flowers rose with their pale lavender turrets of bloom above the hedgeroad herbage, and the rich purple of the spotted orchis was on every side.

There was a cottage here, a mossy-roofed barn there, all green and yellow; and a tile roofed and sided farmhouse peered from an apple orchard all pink blossoms farther on; and dotted about were the patches like pinky snow lying thick amongst the trees, telling of golden and ruddy russet apples in the days to come.

Here and there the land dipped down sharply into woody ravines, from out of whose depths there were reflected back the brilliant flashes of the sun where the little streamlets trickled down towards one that was broader, and opened out into quite a little lake, with a hoary-looking building at one end, where something seemed to be in motion, and, making a telescope of his hands, he could just discern that it was a great wheel, from which the water was falling in splashes that glistened and sparkled in the sun. Far away the hills seemed of a pale misty blue, near at hand they were of a golden green, and as he drank in with his eyes the beauty of the scene beneath the brilliant blue sky Hilary Leigh exclaimed:

"Oh! how I could enjoy all this, if I were not so jolly hungry!"

He forgot his hunger the next moment, for he caught sight of a couple of tiny white tails seeming to run up a sandy bank, their owners, a pair of brown rabbits, making for their holes as if ashamed of having been seen by daylight after eating tender herbage all the night. Far above them the bird that gave its name to the cutter was hovering in the air, seemingly motionless at times, as it poised itself over something that tried to hide itself in the grass.

The proceedings of the kestrel interested Hilary to no small extent as he saw it stoop, rise, hover again, and end by making a dash down like an arrow, and then skim along the ground and fly away without its prey.

"Like our dash after the smugglers," he said to himself; and then he looked closer home, to see that where he was formed part of a very ancient house, one of whose mossy-roofed, ivy-grown gables he could just make out by pressing his cheek very hard against the iron bars. Beside it was an orchard full of very old lichened trees, with patches of green moss about their boles, and beyond this there seemed to be a garden in a very neglected state, while surrounding all was a wide black moat.

"I wonder whether there's a bridge," thought Hilary, as he looked at the smooth dark water, dotted with the broad leaves of the yellow water-lily, and amidst the herbage of whose banks a sooty-looking water-hen was walking delicately upon its long thin green toes, darting its crimson-shielded head forward and flicking its white black-barred tail at every step.

"It's very nice to be growing a man," mused Hilary; "but how I could enjoy being a boy again! I'll be bound to say there's heaps of fish in that great moat, for it looks as deep as deep."

It was not above twenty yards from him at the nearest end, where it curved round the place that formed his prison, and from his elevated position he could command a good view.

"There, I said so!" he exclaimed; "I can see the lily leaves moving. There's a big tench pushing about amongst the stems. Smack! That was a great carp."

The water moved in a series of rings in the spot whence the loud smacking noise had come, and as Hilary excitedly watched the place a faint nibbling noise reached his ear. After looking about he saw what produced the sound, in the shape of a pretty little animal, that seemed to be made of the softest and finest of black velvet. It had crawled a little way up a strand of reed, and was nibbling its way through so rapidly that the reed fell over with a light splash in the water, when the little animal followed, took the cut end in its teeth, and swam across the moat, trailing the reed, and disappearing with it under some overhanging bushes, where it probably had its hole.

"I could be as happy as a king here," thought Hilary, "if I could go about as I liked. Why, there's a snake crawling out in the sun on that patch of sand, and—phew! what a whopper! a ten-pounder, if he's an ounce!" he cried, as, simultaneously with the flashing out of a shoal of little silvery fish from the black surface of the moat there was a rush, a swirl, a tremendous splash, and the green and gold of a large pike was seen as it threw itself out of the water in pursuit of its prey.

"I wonder whether they've got any fishing-tackle here," he cried excitedly. "How I could enjoy a week or two at this place! Why, there'd be no end of fun, only one would want a companion. Birds' nests must swarm, and one might get rabbits and hares, and fish of an evening."

He stopped short, for an acute pang drew his attention to an extremely vulgar want.

"Oh, I say, what a boy I am still!" he said, half aloud. "Here I am, half starved for want of food. I'm a king's officer taken prisoner by a pack of dirty smugglers, and I'm keeping up my dignity as a gentleman in the king's service by thinking about chasing water-rats and fishing for carp and pike. 'Pon my word I'm about ashamed of myself. What a beautiful magpie, though!" he continued, staring out of the window; "I never saw one with so large a tail. Why, there

are jays, too calling in the wood. Yes, there they go—char, char, char! One might keep 'em aboard ship to make fog-signals in thick weather. My word, how this does bring back all the old times! I feel as boyish and as bright and—Oh! I say, are you going to starve a fellow to death? I can't stand this. Ahoy! Is there any one here? Ahoy! Pipe all hands to breakfast, will you? Ahoy!"

He placed one hand to the side of his face and shouted with all his might, and as he ceased—

"Haw-w! hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw! haw-haw! haw-haw-wk!" came from a short distance, as if in answer to his hail, followed directly by half a dozen lively kicks.

"Sweet, intelligent beast!" cried Hilary. "What, are you hungry too? Surely they have not left us to starve, my gentle friend in misfortune."

Growing too hungry and impatient to be interested any longer by the beauty of the scene, Hilary shouted again several times, but without obtaining an answer. He startled some pigeons, though, from somewhere upon the roof, and they circled round a few times before settling down again, and beginning to sing, "Koo-coo-coo-cooo! koo-coo-coo-cooo!" over and over again.

He leaped down, went to the door, and hammered and kicked and shouted till his toes were tender and his throat hoarse; but in answer to his kicks came hollow echoes, and to his shouts the donkey's brays, and at last he threw himself sulkily down upon the straw.

"I'm not going to stop here and be starved to death," he exclaimed angrily; "there's no one in the place, that's my opinion, and they've stuffed me in here while they get out of the country."

He jumped up in a fury and went and kicked at the door again, but the mocking echoes were the only response, and, tired of that, he shouted through the keyhole, ran, jumped, and clambered to the window, as he took out his knife, opened it, and began to dig at the stonework to loosen the bars, when the donkey brayed once more.

"Be quiet, will you," roared Hilary, "or I'll kill you, and eat you afterwards."

As he said this he burst out laughing at the ludicrous situation, and this did him good, for he felt that it would be best to be patient.

So there he sat, listening for some sound to indicate the presence of a human being, but hearing nothing, longing intensely the while for some breakfast; and just as he was conjuring up visions of a country-house meal, with hot bread, delicious butter, and yellow cream, he detected in the distance the cooking of home-made bacon, and as if to add poignancy to the keen edge of his hunger, a hen began loudly to announce that somewhere or other there was a new-laid egg.

Chapter Thirteen.

Breakfast under Difficulties.

"Well, this beats everything I've had to do with," said Hilary, as the hours glided by, and he began to suffer acutely. Visions of delicious country breakfasts, for which he had longed, had now given place to the humblest of desires, for he felt as if he would have given anything for the most mouldy, weevilly biscuit that ever came out of a dirty bag in a purser's locker. He had fasted before now, but never to such an extent as this, and he sat upon his straw heap at last, chewing pieces to try and relieve his pain.

He had worked at the iron bars for a time, but had now given it up, finding that he would be knifeless long before he could loosen a single bar; besides, that gnawing hunger mastered everything else, and in place of the active the passive state had set in: with a feeling of obstinate annoyance against his captors he had determined to sit still and starve.

The probabilities are that Hilary's obstinate determination would have lasted about an hour; but he was not called upon to carry it out, for just about noon, as he guessed, he fancied he heard a voice, and jumping up he ran to the window and listened.

Yes, there was no mistake about it. Some one was singing, and it was in sweet girlish tones.

"Ahoy! I say there!" shouted Hilary at the invisible singer, who seemed to be right away on the other side of the garden; and the singing stopped on the instant. "Is any one there?"

There was not a sound now, and he was about to cry out once more when he caught a glimpse of a lady's dress, and a little slight figure came cautiously through the trees, looking wonderingly about.

"Hurrah!" shouted Hilary, thrusting out his arm and waving his hand, "Addy! Addy! Here!"

The figure came closer, showing the pleasant face and bright wondering eyes of Sir Henry Norland's daughter, who came timidly on towards the building where Hilary was confined.

"Don't you know me, Addy?" he cried.

"Hilary! you here?"

"Yes, for the present; and I've been kicking and shouting for hours. Am I to be starved to death?"

"Oh, Hilary!" she cried.

"Well, it seems like it. I haven't had a morsel since yesterday morning. Get me something, there's a dear girl—bread, meat, tea, coffee, anything, if it's only oats or barley."

"Wait a minute," cried the girl, turning to go.

"You mustn't be longer, or I shall be dead," shouted Hilary as she ran off; and then, dropping from the window, the young fellow executed a figure out of the dance of delight invented for such occasions by Dame Nature to aid young people in getting rid of their exuberance, stopped short, pulled out a pocket-comb, and carefully touched up his hair, relieving it from a number of scraps of straw and chaff in the process.

"A nice Tom o' Bedlam I must have looked," he said to himself. "No wonder she didn't know me."

"Hil! Hil!"

"Ahoy!" he shouted, scrambling up to the window and slipping down again, to try the next time more carefully and on regaining the window-sill there was the bright, eager-looking girl beneath, with a jug of milk and a great piece of bread.

"This was all I could get now, Hil," she said, her eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"All!" he cried. "New bread and new milk! Oh, Addy, it's lovely! There's nothing I like better for breakfast, and our cow on board won't milk and our oven won't bake. Give us hold: I'm ravenous for the feast."

Hilary reached one arm down and Adela Norland reached one arm up, but when they had strained to the utmost a good six feet intervened between Hilary's hand and the slice of bread.

"Oh, I say, how tantalising!" he cried, giving a shake at the bars. "Make haste, Addy, and do something. Isn't there a ladder?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I'll get a chair."

"Two chairs wouldn't do it," cried Hilary, who, sailor-like, was pretty ready at ideas. "Here, I know. Get a long stick; put the bread and milk down first."

She placed the jug on the ground, and was about to run off.

"Cover your handkerchief over them first," cried Hilary, "or I can't bear to sit and look at them."

"I won't be a minute," cried the girl; and she ran off, leaving the young sailor in the position of that mythical gentleman Tantalus, waiting her return.

The minute had reached two when a peculiar grunting noise was heard, and, to Hilary's horror, an exceedingly pendulous, narrow-backed pig came snuffing and rooting into sight, turning over stones with its huge pointed snout, investigating clods of earth, pushing aside pieces of wood, and all the while making an ill-used grunting squeaking noise, as if protesting against the long period that had elapsed since it was fed.

"Well, of all the ugly, hungry-looking brutes I ever saw," said Hilary, as he gazed down at the pig, "you are about the worst. Why, you are not fit to cut up and salt for a ship's company, which is saying a deal. Umph! indeed! Get out you ugly—Oh, murder! the brute's coming at my breakfast! Addy, Addy, quick! Yah! Pst! Get out! Ciss! Swine! Co-chon! Boo! Bah-h-h! Oh, if I'd only got something to throw at the wretch! Quick, Addy, quick!"

His sufferings were bad enough before, but now they were agonising, for, treating the loud objurgations of the prisoner with the greatest contempt, after raising its snout sidewise and gazing up at him with one little eye full of porcine wisdom, and flapping one of its ears the while, the pig came to the conclusion that Hilary could only throw words at it such as would not injure its pachydermatous hide, and then with a contemptuous grunt it came on.

Nearer and nearer to the breakfast came the pig, twiddling its miserable little tail about, investigating here and turning over there; and more frantic grew the prisoner. He abused that unfortunate pig with every sentence, phrase, and term he could remember or invent, but the animal paid not the slightest heed.

"Au, you thick-skinned beast," he cried; "if I were only down there with a stick!"

But he was not down there with a stick, and the pig evidently knew, though as yet he did not know of the breakfast lying on the ground so invitingly close, or it would have disappeared at once. Still, there was no doubt that before many minutes had passed it would be gone if Adela did not return, and at last Hilary pulled off a shoe, and as the animal came now in a straight line for the bread, he took careful aim and hit the intruder on the nose.

The pig uttered an angry squeal, and jumped back; but as the shoe lay motionless, it concluded that it was probably something thrown it to eat, and in this belief it approached the foot-guard, turned it over, thrust its nose right inside, and lifted it up, flung it off its snout, and proceeded to taste the leather, when, to Hilary's horror, the bread met the ugly little pink eyes.

The pig uttered a squeal of pleasure, and dropped the shoe. Hilary uttered a yell of horror, and threw the fellow shoe, and the pig made for the bread, just as, armed with a long stick, Adela came round the corner, saw the position, and

rushed at the intruder, whom a blow from the stick drove grunting away.

"Oh, I am glad you came," cried Hilary. "You were only just in time."

"The nasty thing," cried the lady, picking up the bread. "Had he touched it?"

"No," said Hilary pointedly; "*she* had. But pray make haste."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Adela, sticking the point of the stick into the bread, and then, with the weight at the end making the wand bend like a fishing-rod, she held it up bobbing and bowing about to Hilary, who caught at it eagerly, and took a most frightful bite out of one side, leaving a model for the arch of a bridge perfectly visible to the young lady.

"What lovely bread!" said Hilary, with his mouth full. Another model arch made in the bread.

"I was so precious hungry."

"I can see you were," cried Adela laughing.

"But I say," said Hilary, with his mouth full; "this is just like feeding a wild beast in a cage."

"But however did you come to be here?" cried the girl.

"Can't talk till I've been fed a little more," replied Hilary. "I say, Addy, dear, how about that milk?"

"That's what I was thinking," said the girl; "I can't push that up to you on the stick."

"No," said Hilary, munching away. "What are we to do?"

"I don't know, Hil."

"I do."

He took another tremendous bite, which made the two arches into one by the destruction of the model pier, laid the bread down on the window-sill, and was about to leap down, when he remembered something.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely; "would you mind picking up my shoes on the end of that stick, and passing them up?"

"Oh, Hilary!"

"I was obliged to shy them at the pig to save my breakfast. Thank you," he continued, as she laughingly picked up a shoe on the end of the stick and passed it up. "Now the other. Thanks," he added, dropping them inside his prison. "Now I want that milk."

As Adela picked up the jug the sailor dropped back after his shoes, put them on, ran to his straw bed, munching away the while, and drew out the cord that had been used to bind his legs.

"How useful a bit of line always is!" he muttered as he climbed back to the window-sill, held on with one arm through the bars, and took another tremendous bite from the bread, nodding pleasantly the while at his old friend.

"Why, Hil, how hungry you must have been!" she said. "Let me run and get some butter."

"How hungry I am, you mean," he said. "Addy, dear, I feel now just like what wolves must feel when they eat little children and old women. I'll never speak disrespectfully of a wolf again. Why, I could have eaten you."

"Oh, what nonsense!"

"I don't know so much about that," he said; "but never mind about the butter; let me have some of that milk. Look here, tie one end of this cord round the handle of the jug, and then I'll haul it up."

He lowered down one end of the cord and watched her carefully, munching busily the while, as she cleverly tied the end to the jug handle, and then held the vessel of milk up so that he should not have so far to haul.

"Steady," said Hilary, with his mouth unpleasantly full; and he softly drew the cord tight, but only to find that the want of balance would pull the jug so much on one side that half the milk would be spilled.

"That won't do," he said; "and I can't wait for you to tie the cord afresh; besides, I don't think you could do it right. I say, Addy, drink some of it, there's a good girl; it would be a pity to spill any."

Adela hesitated a moment, and then placed the jug to her lips, Hilary watching her attentively the while.

"Steady," he cried excitedly; "steady! Don't drink it all."

"Oh, Hilary," said the girl laughing, "what a greedy boy you are! You're just as bad as you used to be over the cider."

"Can't help it," he said. "There, drink a little more. You don't know how bad I am."

"Poor fellow!" she said feelingly; and having drunk a little more she again held up the jug, which he drew rapidly to the window, but not without spilling a good deal.

"Hah!" he exclaimed as he got hold of the vessel. "Good health."

He drank long and with avidity; and then setting down the jug once more, partook of some bread, looking down the while at his little benefactor, and ending by saying:

"Why, Addy, what a nice girl you have grown!"

"Have I!" she said laughingly. "And what a great big fellow you have grown; and oh, Hilary," she said, with her face becoming serious, "thank you—thank you for being so very, very kind to us the other day."

"Yes," he said, "and this is the way you show it. Now I'm better, and I want to know how you came here."

"Oh, this is a very old house—a Place they call it—where papa and I have been staying for some time. Poor papa is obliged to be in hiding."

"And who lives here?"

"Well, Hilary, perhaps I ought not to say," she said sadly.

"Tell me, then, how far are we from the sea?"

"About eight miles."

"Only eight miles? Well, how did I come here?"

"I don't know. I want to know."

"Am I a prisoner?"

"It seems like it."

"But where's everybody? I haven't heard a soul about till you came."

"They are not up yet," said Adela, glancing over her shoulder. "They have been out all night, Hilary."

"Oh, then, I'm in a regular smuggler's den, I suppose. What place is this I am in?"

"The old chapel, Hilary. They say it's haunted, and for the moment, when I saw you, I was frightened."

"What! are there ghosts here?" said Hilary, glancing inside.

"Yes, they say one walks there sometimes."

"I only wish he had walked here last night, and left the door open," said Hilary. "But I say, Addy, how funny that we should meet again like this."

"Yes, isn't it, Hilary? And yet," said the girl thoughtfully, "it is not funny, but sad, for the days are not so happy now as they were when we played together years ago."

"And we've both grown so," said Hilary thoughtfully. "But look here," he exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck him. "I want to see somebody. I'm not going to be made a prisoner here in my own country. I'm not cross with you, Addy, but I must have this set right. Where is Sir Henry?"

As he asked the question a distant voice was heard calling the young girl's name, and she turned, ran, and was out of sight in an instant.

Chapter Fourteen.

A Tempting Offer.

Hilary sat upon the window-ledge and listened, but he heard no further sound; so, coming to the conclusion that though he was extremely indignant he was also still uncommonly hungry, he drained the jug of milk, and went on steadily until he had finished his bread, after which, feeling better, he let himself down from the ledge, which was anything but a comfortable place, and began walking up and down the little chapel.

For a few minutes he was too indignant to do more than think about his position; and he kept on muttering about "A gross case of kidnapping!" "Cowardly scoundrels!" "Insult to king's officer!" and a few more such expressions; but having partaken of food he felt easier and soon had another good look round the place.

It was only a portion of the old chapel, and had evidently been patched and used for different purposes of late years, so that its old religious character was to a great extent gone.

"I don't think it would be so very hard to get out," he said to himself, "if a fellow made up his mind to it, and—hallo! here's some one coming at last."

His quick ears had detected footsteps, followed by the unlocking of a door; then the steps passed over a boarded floor in some empty echoing room.

Then he heard voices, and the unlocking of another door, when the voices and steps sounded plainer, and he began to understand how it was that his shouts had not been heard, for the people, whoever they were, now seemed to come down along a stone passage before they stopped at and unlocked the door of his prison.

As the heavy old door was thrown open Hilary saw two things—one which made him very cross, the other which made him very glad.

The sight that roused his anger was Sir Henry Norland, in elegant half-military costume, with high riding boots and spurs; the other was a rough, ill-looking man, carrying a tray, on which was bread, a cold chicken, and what seemed to be a flask of French wine.

Certainly Hilary had just partaken of food, but a draught of milk and some bread seemed only provocatives to fresh eating in the case of a young growing fellow who had been fasting for considerably more than twenty-four hours.

“Set the tray down, Allstone,” said Sir Henry. “Don’t wait,” he continued; “I’ll lock the door after me when I come out.”

“The skipper said I was to keep charge of the young lad,” said the man, surlily.

“Keep charge, then,” said Sir Henry sharply, “but wait outside.”

The man scowled and withdrew, whereupon Sir Henry held out his hand.

“Well, Hilary,” he said, “you and I seem to meet under strange conditions.”

“May I ask, Sir Henry,” cried Hilary sharply, and without looking at the extended hand, “why I am seized, bound, and kidnapped in this disgraceful way?”

“Certainly, my dear boy,” said Sir Henry; “but let me tell you at once that I had nothing whatever to do with it.”

“Who had, then?” cried Hilary, with the blood flaming in his cheeks.

“That I cannot exactly answer; but from what I can learn it seems that you were found prying rather too closely into the affairs of some friends of mine, and they pounced upon you and carried you off.”

“Yes, and I’ll pounce upon some of them,” cried Hilary, “and carry them off.”

“When you get your liberty,” said Sir Henry with a smile.

“Yes; when I get my liberty,” cried Hilary; “and that sha’n’t be long first. Even now my commander will be searching for me.”

“Very likely, Hilary,” said Sir Henry; “but you must be very hungry. I have only just learned of your being here, and that you had not been attended to. The habits of my friends here are somewhat nocturnal, and hence they are irregular by day. Come, sit down, man, and eat. We campaigners are not so particular as some people.”

He seated himself upon the straw as he spoke, and looked up so frankly and with such friendly eyes at the young man, that Hilary was slightly softened.

“Adela is here,” he said.

“Yes, I know; I have seen her this morning, Sir Henry.”

“Seen her! Oh, yes, I see—from the window. But come, fall to.”

Hilary glanced at the chicken and the bread, and felt disposed to resent his rough treatment, especially as just then the donkey brayed loudly, and fired off a salute of kicks against the side of the shed where he was confined; but there was a specially tempting brown side to that chicken, which looked tender and seductive, and Hilary argued that he should not be able to stand long upon his dignity if he starved himself, so he seated himself tailor-fashion beside the tray, and began to carve.

“You’ll take some, Sir Henry?” he said sulkily.

“With pleasure,” was the reply; and Sir Henry allowed himself to be helped, Hilary’s carving being of a very primitive kind, but he managed to hack off a leg and a wing, and passed them to Sir Henry, who, in return, cut some bread, and poured out a glass of wine.

The chicken came fully up to its looks, and those who discussed it were very busy for some little time.

“There is only one glass,” said Sir Henry. “Will you drink first, Hilary?”

“No, Sir Henry. After you.”

“But I stand in the place of your host,” said Sir Henry smiling. “However, I will set you the example after the good old custom, so as to show you that the wine is not drugged.”

“His majesty King Charles of England!” said Sir Henry, drinking a hearty draught before wiping his lips on a French cambric handkerchief. Then he refilled the glass and passed it to Hilary.

"His majesty King George the Second of England," said Hilary taking the glass, "and down with the Pretender!"

He said this defiantly, as he gazed full in Sir Henry's eyes; but the latter only smiled.

"You foolish boy," he said lightly; "how little you know what you are saying."

"I know that I am speaking like a loyal officer of the king, Sir Henry, and that if I did my duty I should arrest you at once on a charge of high treason."

"And get my head chopped off, eh, Hilary? Rather comical that would be, my boy, for a prisoner to arrest his visitor, and keep him in prison with him; but how would you manage to give him up to the law?"

Hilary bit his lip. Certainly it did seem laughable for him, a prisoner, to talk in such a way as that, and he felt vexed, and looked uneasily at his visitor; but he brightened up directly as he felt that he had shown his loyalty to the king he served.

"So you believe in the Dutchman, Hilary?"

"I don't understand you, Sir Henry," said the young man.

"I say you believe in the Dutchman—the man you call George the Second—the Pretender."

"I do not believe in the Pretender," exclaimed Hilary quickly.

"Don't quibble, my boy," said Sir Henry smiling. "You call my sovereign the Pretender, and that is what I call the man you serve. Good heavens, boy! how could you devote your frank young life to such a service?"

Hilary had finished all he wanted of the chicken, and he sat and gazed in the baronet's face.

"Well," said the latter, "what are you thinking?"

"I was thinking, Sir Henry, how much better it would be if we were both to speak out frankly. Now, what do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" said Sir Henry thoughtfully.

He stopped and remained thinking.

"I'll tell you what you mean, Sir Henry, if you like," said Hilary. "You have come here now, secure in your power, if you like to call it so, and you are going to try and win me over by soft words to join the other cause."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Sir Henry, changing his ground. "I did not say anything to make you think such a thing as that."

Hilary saw that he had made a mistake, and he, too, withdrew his argumentative position.

"Perhaps I am wrong then," he said.

"Presumably, Hilary. Why, my good boy, of what value would you be to us? I said what I did only out of compassion."

This nettled Hilary, who, boylike, had no little idea of his importance in the world.

"Oh, no, my dear boy, I only felt a little sorry; and as to being in my power, really I have no power whatever here. I am, as I told you, only a visitor."

"On the Pretender's business," said Hilary sharply.

"I did not say so," replied Sir Henry quietly. "But come, suppose we two enemies, in a political sense, leave off fencing and come, down to the matter of fact. Hilary, my boy, I am very grateful to you for your reticence the other day. You saved my life."

"I am very glad I served you, Sir Henry; but I hope I shall never be placed in such a situation again. If I am, sir, I shall be obliged to give you up."

"From a stern sense of duty," said Sir Henry laughing. "Well, now I want to serve you in turn, Hilary. What can I do for you?"

"Have me immediately set at liberty, Sir Henry."

"Ah! there you ask an impossibility, my boy. You know what you are supposed to have discovered?"

"Yes."

"And if you are set at liberty you will of course bring the *Kestrel* abreast of a certain part of the shore and land your men?"

"Of course."

"Then is it likely, my dear boy, that these people here will give you the opportunity? No; I am ready to help you in remembrance of old days; and if you will give your word of honour as a gentleman not to go more than five hundred yards in any direction from this old place I dare say I can get for you that length of tether."

"I'm to promise not to escape?"

"Most decidedly; and if you do I dare say I can manage for your life to pass far more agreeably than in your close quarters on board the cutter, with a peremptory, bullying officer."

"Lieutenant Lipscombe is my officer, and a gentleman, Sir Henry."

"Lieutenant Lipscombe is your officer, and he is no gentleman, Hilary Leigh," said Sir Henry warmly. "But we will not discuss that. As I was saying, I daresay I can manage to make your life pass pretty pleasantly here. Adela will be your companion, and you can be boy and girl together again, and spend your time collecting and fishing and boating on the little river. It will be pleasant for both of you. All you will have to do will be to hear, see, and say nothing. Better still—don't hear, don't see, and say whatever you like. I will take care that a snug room is provided for you, and you will have your meals with us. Now what do you say?"

"What is to become of my duty to my ship?"

"A prisoner of war has no duties."

"But I am not a prisoner of war, Sir Henry."

"Indeed, my boy, that you are, most decidedly. You and yours make war on the gentlemen who fetch brandy and lace from the French coast."

"And followers of the Pretender," said Hilary sharply.

"I accept your correction, my boy—and followers of his most gracious majesty King Charles Edward."

"Stuff!" cried Hilary.

"Every man according to his lights, my boy. But as I was saying, your people make war against these people, and they generally act on the defensive. Sometimes they retaliate. This time they have taken a prisoner—you."

"Yes, hang them!" cried Hilary.

"No, no," laughed Sir Henry, "don't do that. No yardarm work, my boy. You see we do not offer to hang you; on the contrary, I offer you a comfortable happy life for a few months on parole."

"A few months!" cried Hilary.

"Perhaps a year or two. Now what do you say?"

"No!" cried Hilary quickly.

"Think, my boy. You will be kept a very close prisoner, and it will be most unpleasant. We want to use you well."

"And you nearly smother me; you drag me here in a wretched donkey-cart; and you nearly starve me to death."

"On chicken and wine," said Sir Henry smiling. "Come, Hilary, your parole."

"No, Sir Henry," cried the young man, "I'll give no parole. I mean to get away from here, and I warn you that as soon as I do I'll bring brimstone and burn out this miserable wasps' nest; so get out of the way."

"Then I must leave you to think it over, Hilary. There," he continued, rising, "think about it. I'll come and see you this evening."

"Stop, Sir Henry," cried the young man, leaping up in turn; "this is an outrage on an officer in the navy. In the king's name I order you to set me at liberty."

"And in the king's name I refuse, Master Hilary."

"Then I shall take it," cried Hilary, making for the door, which he reached and flung open, but only to find himself confronted by three rough, sailor-looking fellows.

"You see," said Sir Henry smiling. "Allstone, take away that tray. Good-bye for the present, Hilary. I will see you to-night."

He went out of the door, which was slammed to and locked, and Sir Henry Norland said to himself:

"I like the lad, and it goes against me to make him break faith; but it must be done. My cause is a greater one than his. Once on our side, he could be of immense service. He will have to be won over somehow, poor fellow. Let's see what a day or two's caging will do."

Meanwhile Hilary was angrily walking up and down his prison, wrath with Sir Henry, with himself, and with fate, for placing him in such a position, to ameliorate which he climbed up to the window-sill and gazed out at the sunny meads.

Another Cruise Ashore.

Lieutenant Lipscombe made up his mind half a dozen times over that he would run into port and send in a despatch detailing Hilary Leigh's desertion; and each time that he so made up his mind, and had the cutter's head laid in the required direction, his eye became so painful that the cook had to supply hot water from the galley, and the worthy officer went below to bathe the injured optic.

Each time as the inflammation was relieved the lieutenant unmade his mind, and decided to wait a little longer, going on deck again to superintend the repairs Joe Smith, the carpenter, familiarly known as "Chips," was proceeding with in the damaged deck.

There was a great deal to do and the carpenter was doing that great deal well, but at his own pace, for "Chips" was not a rapid man. If he had a hole to make with gimlet or augur he did not dash at it and perhaps bore the hole a quarter or half an inch out of place, but took his measurements slowly and methodically, and no matter who or what was waiting he went steadily on.

There was enough in the composition of "Chips" to make anyone believe that he had descended from a family in the far-off antiquity who were bears; for he was heavy and bearlike in all his actions, especially in going up or coming down a ladder, and his caution was proverbial amongst the crew.

So deliberately were the proceedings now going on that Lieutenant Lipscombe grew hot every time he went on deck, and the hotter the commander became the cooler grew "Chips."

The lieutenant stormed and bade him make haste.

"You are disgracefully slow, sir," he exclaimed.

"Chips" immediately found that his saw or chisel wanted sharpening, and left off to touch up the teeth of the one with a file, and the edge of the other on a stone well lubricated with oil.

The lieutenant grew more angry, and the carpenter looked at him in the calmest possible way, till in despair, seeing that he was doing no good, but only hindering progress, Lieutenant Lipscombe went aft to his cabin and bathed his eye.

"Lookye here," said Billy Waters the day after Hilary's disappearance, "I hope, my lads, I'm as straightfarrard a chap as a man can be, and as free from mut'nous idees; but what I want to know is this: why don't we go ashore and have another sarch for our young orsifer?"

"That's just what I says," exclaimed Tom Tully.

"No, you don't, Thomas," cried the gunner sharply. "You did nothing but grumble and growl all the blessed time we was ashore, and say as our young orsifer had cut on some games or another. I put it to you, lads; now didn't he?"

"That's a true word," said one of the men, and several others agreed.

"Yes," growled Tom Tully; "but that was when I weer hot and wanted to stow some wittles below, and my feet was as sore as if they'd been holystoned or scraped with a rusty nail. I'm ready enough now."

"Then I think we ought to go. I don't like the idee o' forsakin' of him."

"Pass the word there for the gunner," cried the corporal of marines. "Captain wants him in his cabin."

Billy Waters pulled himself together, straightened his pigtail, and hauling up his slack, as he called it—to wit, giving the waistband of his trousers a rub up with one arm in front and a hitch up with one arm behind, he went off aft, and came back at the end of a quarter of an hour to announce that a fresh search was to be made for Mr Leigh, and that they were to go ashore as soon as it was dusk.

"What's the good o' going then?" said the boatswain. "Why not go now?"

"That's just what I was a-thinking," said Billy Waters; "but I s'pose the skipper knows best."

Preparations were made and arms served round. The boat was to go under command of the gunner, and each man was supplied with a ration of biscuits, to be supplemented by a tot of grog before starting, which was to be just at dark, and the men, being all eager to find their young officer, who was a great favourite, lounged about waiting the order, a most welcome one on account of the grog; but just as the grog was being mixed in its proper proportions the gunner was sent for to the cabin, where the lieutenant was still bathing his eye.

"Has that grog been served out, Waters?"

"No, your honour; it's just a-going to be done."

"Go and stop it."

"Stop it, your honour? The men's grog?"

"Go and stop it, I say," cried the lieutenant irascibly. "I shall not send the expedition to-night."

Billy Waters went back and gave the order in the hearing of the assembled crew, from whom a loud murmur arose—

truth to tell more on account of the extra tot of grog than the disappointment about searching for Hilary; but the latter feeling dominated a few minutes later, and the men lay about grumbling in no very pleasant way.

"I say it's a shame, that's what I says it is," growled Tom Tully, "and it ought to be reported. For half a button I'd desert, and go and look for him myself—that's about what I'd do."

Just then Chips, who had knocked off work for the night, struck in slowly, laughing heartily the while: "Why don't you say as you won't go, my lads? He's sure to send you then."

"That's a good 'un," said Tom Tully.

"Ah! to be sure," said the boatswain. "I'm a officer, and can't do it; but if I was you, seeing as we ought to fetch young Mr Leigh back aboard, I should just give three rattling good cheers."

"What good would that do?" said Billy Waters dubiously.

"Why, then the skipper would send for one of us to know what's the matter. 'Ship's crew mutinous, sir; says they wouldn't have gone ashore if they'd been ordered.'"

"Well?" said Billy Waters, "I don't see that that would have been no good neither."

"Why, don't you see? Soon as you says that he claps on his sword, takes his pistols, and orders you all into the boat; and says he, 'If you dare to come back without Mr Leigh I'll string one of you up to the yardarm.'"

"That's it," chorussed several of the men.

"Yes," said Billy Waters; "but suppose we do come back without him, and he do string us up—how then?"

"Ah! but he won't," said the boatswain. "Men's too scarce."

"Well, I wouldn't have gone ashore in the boat," said one man.

"Nor I," "Nor I," chorussed half-a-dozen; and then they stopped, for the lieutenant had approached unseen, caught the words, and in a fit of fury he shouted to the boatswain:

"Here, my sword—from the cabin!" he cried. "No; stop. Pipe away the boat's crew. You, Waters, head that expedition!" And then, as if moved to repeat the boatswain's words, he continued, "And don't you men dare to come back without Mr Leigh."

The men had got their own way; but though they waited patiently for the rest of the lieutenant's order respecting the extra tot of grog, that order did not come, and they had to set off without it.

They were in capital spirits, and bent well to their oars, sending the boat surging through the water, and chattering and laughing like so many boys as soon as they were out of hearing. No wonder, for there is something exceedingly monotonous in being cooped up day after day on board ship, especially if it be a very small one; and there is no wonder at Jack's being fond of a run ashore.

The evening was coming on very dark, and a thick bank of clouds was rising in the west, gradually blotting out the stars one by one, almost before they had had time to get well alight.

"Pull steady, my lads," said the gunner. "Save a little bit of breath for landing."

"All right, matey," said one of the men; and they rowed steadily, each stroke of an oar seeming to splash up so much pale liquid fire, while the boat's stem sent it flashing and sparkling away in an ever-diverging train.

"Now then, lads, steady," said Billy Waters, who seemed to have suddenly awakened to the fact that he ought to be more dignified, as became the officer in command. "We don't want to go for to let everybody ashore know we're coming."

There was silence then, only broken by the splash of the water from the oars, and a dismal creaking noise of wood upon wood.

"Shove a bit o' grease agen that there thole-pin o' yours, Tom Tully. Your oar'll rouse all the smugglers along the coast."

"Ar'n't no grease," growled Tom.

"Then why didn't you get a bit out of a lantern afore you come aboard?"

"'Cause nobody didn't tell me," growled Tom, who ceased rowing and splashed the space between the thole-pins with a few drops of water, when the noise ceased.

"Steady, my lads, steady!" said Billy Waters, giving a pull at the rudder, so as to run the boat more west towards where the cliff rose high and black against the darkening sky.

"Yer see—" began Tom Tully, and then he stopped.

"Not worry far," said the man pulling behind him.

"Well, what do you see, old Tommy?" said Billy Waters. "Give it voice."

"Yer see," began Tom Tully, "I'm a chap as allus gets bullied as soon as he opens his mouth."

"Soon as what chap opens his mouth?" said the gunner.

"Why, ar'n't I a-telling of you?—me," growled Tom Tully.

"Well, what's the matter now?" said the gunner.

"Well, I was a-wondering what we was going for ashore."

"Now, just hark at this here chap!" said the gunner indignantly.

"That's what I says," growled Tom Tully; "directly I opens my mouth I gets a bullying. I allus gets told I'm a-grumbling."

"Well, come now," said the gunner, "speak out will you? What's the matter?"

"Oh, I don't want to speak out unless you like," said Tom.

"Yes, come, out with it, and don't let's have no mutinous, onderhanded ways," cried the gunner importantly.

"Well, what I want to know is, what we're a-going for ashore?"

"Now just hark at him," cried the gunner, "grumbling again. Why, ar'n't we going to look after our young orsifer?"

"Then why didn't we come in the daytime, and not wait until it was getting so pitch dark as you can't see your hand afore your eyes?"

Billy Waters scratched his head.

"Well, it is getting dark, old Tommy, sartinly," he said apologetically.

"Dark as Davy Jones's locker," growled Tom. "I wants to find Muster Leigh as much as anybody, but you can't look if you can't see."

"That's a true word anyhow," said one of the men.

"It's my belief as our skipper's pretty nigh mad," continued Tom, giving a vicious jerk at his oar, "or else he wouldn't be sending us ashore at this time o' night."

"Well, it is late, Tommy," said the gunner; "but we must make the best on it."

"Yah! There ar'n't no best on it. All we can do is to get ashore, sit down on the sand, and shout out, 'Muster Leigh, ahoy!'"

"There, it ar'n't no use to growl again, Tom Tully," said Billy Waters, reassuming his dignified position of commanding officer. "Give way, my lads."

The men took long, steady strokes, and soon after the boat glided right in over the calm phosphorescent waves, four men leaped out as her bows touched the sand, and as the next wave lifted her, they ran her right up; the others leaped out and lent a hand, and the next minute the boat was high and dry.

"Now then, my lads," cried the gunner, "what I propose is that we try and find our landmarks, and as soon as we have hit the place where Master Leigh left us we'll all hail as loud as we can, and then wait for an answer."

Tom Tully growled out something in reply, it was impossible to say what, and leaving one man to act as boatkeeper, they all set off together along the shore.

Chapter Sixteen.

Attack and Defeat.

Tom Tully had marked down a towering portion of the cliff as being over the spot where they had lost sight of their young officer, and, as it happened, that really was pretty close to the place, so, trudging on in silence after giving a glance in the direction where the cutter lay, now seen only as a couple of lights about a mile from the shore, they soon reached the rocks, where the gunner called a halt.

"Now, my lads," he said, "get all of a row, face inwards, and make ready to hail. We'll give him one good '*Kestrel* ahoy!' and that'll wake him up, wherever he is. Hallo! stop that chap! There, he's dodged behind that big stone."

The men wanted no further inducement than the sight of some one trying to avoid them.

In an instant the quiet stolid row of men were dashing here and there among the rocks in chase of a dark figure, which, from a thorough knowledge of the ground, kept eluding them, darting between the rocks, scrambling over others; and had he had to deal with a couple of pursuers he would have escaped at once, but he had too many on his

track, and fortune was rather against him, so that several times over he ran right upon one or other of the party and was nearly taken.

The activity of the young man, for such he seemed to be, was something marvellous; and again and again he made a tremendous leap, scrambled over the rocks, and escaped. The last time, however, he dropped down in a narrow place that formed quite a *cul-de-sac*, and right in front of Tom Tully.

"What! have I got you?" cried the great stolid fellow; and he made a dash forward, straddling out his legs as if on board ship, when, to his intense astonishment, his quarry bent down, dashed at him, ducked between his knees, struggling through, and throwing the great sailor headlong flat upon his face.

The shout Tom Tully gave brought up Billy Waters; and as the stranger recovered his feet to escape in a fresh direction, he ran right into the gunner's arms, to be held with a grip like iron.

The man had his arms free, however, and putting his fingers into his mouth he gave vent to a piercing whistle, close to the gunner's ear.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Billy Waters. "Well, my lad, I sha'n't let you go any the more for that. Here, lend a hand my lads, and lash his wristies and elbows together. We've got him, and we'll keep him till we get back Muster Leigh. Now then, Tom Tully, you hold him while I lash his wristies. That's your style. I say, he won't get away once I— Look at that!"

Tom Tully had, as he thought, taken a good hold of the prisoner, when the man gave himself a sudden wrench, dived under the gunner's arm, and was gone.

"Well, of all—" began Tom Tully.

"Why didn't you hold him?" cried the gunner.

"I thought he was a man and not a slippery eel," cried Tom Tully. "He's for all the world like one o' them big congers Muster Leigh caught off Hastings."

"Yes," cried the gunner, "but he did hold 'em when he caught 'em. Look out, my lads! he come your way."

The men were well on the alert this time, and one of them, in spite of the darkness, saw which way the prisoner had taken, that being none other than the narrow passage between the rocks which Hilary had found.

He saw him go down here, and then caught sight of him as he climbed over the rock.

"This way," shouted the sailor as he scrambled over after the escaping man, got into the chasm on the other side, and then following him, just in time to hear a dull, heavy thud, and his mate staggered back against him half stunned by a heavy blow.

Just then there was a sharp whiz; and he felt the wind of a blow aimed at him from the rocks above his head, to which he replied by lugging out his hanger and dealing a vigorous blow at his unseen enemy, but without effect.

"Here, this way," he shouted. "Waters! Tom Tully! Here they are."

A sturdy "Ahoy!" came in response, just as the first man began to scramble to his feet and stood rubbing his head.

"Where away?" cried Billy Waters.

"Here ho!" replied both the men in the narrow pass; and beading the rest of the party, the gunner, after another hail or two, scrambled over and joined the two first men, every one of the party now having his unsheathed cutlass in his hand.

"Well," cried the gunner excitedly, "where are they?"

"Close here," said the man who had received the blow. "One of 'em hit me with a handspike."

"And some one cut at me from up above on the rocks," cried the other.

The gunner held up his hand to command silence, and then listened attentively.

"Why there ar'n't no one," he cried in tones of disgust. "You Joe Harris, you run up again a rock; and as for you, Jemmy Leeson, you've been asleep."

The two men indignantly declared that they had spoken the truth; but with an impatient "Pish!" the gunner went forward along the narrow way.

"Here, come along," he said; and as the words left his lips those behind heard a heavy blow, and Billy Waters came hastily back.

"That ain't fancy," said one of the men, "unless Billy hit his head again the rocks."

"It warn't my head," whispered the gunner drawing in his breath, and trying to suppress the pain. "It caught me right on the left shoulder. I shall be all right directly, my lads, and we'll give it 'em. I'll bet that's how they sarved poor Master Leigh; and we've dropped right into the proper spot. Just wait till I get my breath a bit."

"Think it's the smugglers?" said Tom Tully.

"Sertain," was the reply. "I wish we had a lantern or two. But never mind. If we can't see to hit them, they can't see to hit us; so it's broad as it's long."

"We shall want the pistols, shan't we?" said one of the men.

"Pistols? no," cried the gunner. "Stick to your whingers, lads. It's no use to fire a piece without you can take good aim, and you can't do that in the dark—it's only waste of powder. Now, then, are you ready?"

"Ay, ay," was whispered back in the midst of the ominous silence that prevailed.

"Then look here," cried the gunner, "I shall go in at 'em roosh; and if they downs me, don't you mind, lads, but keep on; go over me at once and board the place."

"Lookye here," growled Tom Tully, "I'm 'bout as hard as iron; they won't hurt me. Let me go fust, capten."

As he spoke the great fellow spat in his hand before taking a tighter grip of his weapon, and making a step forward.

"Just you keep aft, will yer, Tom Tully, and obey orders?" said the gunner, seizing the great fellow by the tail and dragging him back. "I'm skipper here, and I'm going to lead. Now, lads, are you all ready?"

"Ay, ay," was the reply.

"Then I ar'n't," said the gunner. "That crack pretty nigh split my shoulder. Now I am. Close up, and hit hard. We're all right, my lads; they're smugglers, and they hit us fust."

The gunner made a dash forward, and, as they had expected, a concealed enemy struck a tremendous blow at him; but Billy Waters was a sailor, and accustomed to rapid action. By quickness of movement and ready wit he avoided the blow, which, robbed of a good deal of its force, struck Tom Tully full in the chest, stopping him for a moment, but only serving to infuriate him, as, recovering himself, he dashed on after the gunner.

A sharp fight ensued, for now, as the sailors forced their way on, they found plenty of antagonists. Most of them seemed to be armed with stout clubs like capstan-bars, with which they struck blow after blow of the most formidable character from where they kept guard at various turns of the narrow passage, while the sailors could not reach them with their short cutlasses.

It was sharp work, and with all their native stubbornness the little party fought their way on, attacking and carrying yard after yard of the passage, forcing the smugglers to retreat from vantage ground to vantage ground, and always higher and higher up the rocks.

The attacking party were at a terrible disadvantage, for the place was to them like a maze, while the smugglers kept taking them in the rear, and striking at them from the most unexpected positions, till the sailors were hot with a rage that grew fiercer with every blow.

At the end of ten minutes two of the men were down, and the gunner and Tom Tully panting and breathless with their exertions; but far from feeling beaten they were more eager than ever to come to close quarters with their antagonists, for, in addition to the fighting spirit roused within them, they were inflamed with the idea of the large stores of smuggled goods that they would capture: velvets and laces and silks in endless quantities, with kegs of brandy besides. That they had hit accidentally upon the party who had seized Mr Leigh they had not a doubt, and so they fought bravely on till they reached a narrower pass amongst the rocks than any they had yet gone through. So narrow was it that they could only approach in single file, and, hemmed in as they were with the rocks to right and left, the attack now resolved itself into a combat of two—to wit, Billy Waters and a great broad-shouldered fellow who disputed his way. The men who backed up the big smuggler were apparently close behind him; but it was now too dark to see, and, to make matters worse for the gunner, there was no room for him to swing his cutlass; all he could do was to make clumsy stabs with the point, or try to guard himself from the savage thrusts made at him with the capstan bar or club by the smuggler.

This went on for some minutes without advantage on either side, till, growing tired, Billy Waters drew back for a moment. "Now, my lads," he whispered, "I'm going to roosh him. Keep close up, Tom Tully, and nail him if I go down."

Tom Tully growled out his assent to the order given to him, and the next moment the gunner made a dash forward into the darkness, striking sharply downwards with his cutlass, so sharply that the sparks flew from the rock, where his weapon struck, while on recovering himself for a second blow he found that it, too, struck the rock, and Billy Waters uttered a yell as he started back, overcome with superstitious horror on finding himself at the end of the narrow rift, and quite alone.

"What's the matter, matey?" growled Tom Tully; "are you hurt?"

"No. Go and try yourself," said the gunner, who was for the moment quite unnerved.

Tom Tully squeezed by, and, making a dash forward, he too struck at the rock, and made the sparks fly, after which he poked about with the point of his cutlass, which clinked and jingled against the stones.

"Why, they ar'n't here!" he cried. "Look out!"

Every one did look out, but in vain. They were in a very narrow passage between two perpendicular pieces of rock,

and they had driven the smugglers back step by step into what they expected to find to be a cavern crammed with treasure; but now that the end was reached they could feel nothing in the dark but the flat face of the rock, and this seemed to slope somewhat over their heads, and that was all.

Billy Waters' surprise had now evaporated along with his alarm, and pushing to the front once more he set himself to work to find how the enemy had eluded them.

They could not have gone through the rock, he argued, and there was no possible way that he could feel by which they had climbed up. Neither was ascent possible by scaling the rock to right or left, unless they had had a ladder, and of that there did not seem to have been any sign.

For a few moments the gunner stood as if nonplussed. Then an idea occurred to him.

Taking a pistol from his belt he quickly drew out the bullet and a portion of the powder before flashing off the other over some which he laid loose upon the rock.

This lit up the place for the moment, but revealed nothing more than they knew before, and that was that they were walled in on either side by rock, and that a huge mass rose up in front.

"It's a rum 'un," growled Tom Tully; and then again, "It's a rum 'un. I say, Billy Waters, old mate, what's gone o' them chaps?"

The gunner felt ready to believe once more that there was something "no canny" about the affair, but he shook off the feeling, and began searching about once more for some sign or other of his enemies; but he sought in vain, and at last he turned to his companions to ask them what they had better do.

Such a proceeding would, however, be derogatory to his dignity, he thought, so he proceeded to give his opinion on the best course.

"Look here, my lads," he said in a whisper; "it seems to me that we ought to have come on this trip by daylight."

"That ere's what I said," growled Tom Tully.

"All right, Tommy, only don't be so precious proud of it," said the leader. "I says we ought to have come on this trip by daylight."

"As I says afore, that's what I did say," growled Tom Tully again; but this time his superior officer refused to hear him, and continued:

"As we didn't come by daylight, my lads, we ought to have had lanterns."

"Ay, ay," said one of the men.

"So I think," said the gunner; "we'd best go back and get the lanterns, so as to have a good search, or else come back and do the job by daylight."

"Ay, ay," was chorussed by three of the party.

"Yes, it's all very well to say 'Ay, ay,' and talk about lanterns and daylight," growled Tom Tully; "but I don't like going off and leaving one's work half done. I want to have a go at that chap as fetched me a crack with a handspike, and I shan't feel happy till I have; so now then, my lads."

"What's the good o' being obst'nit, Tommy?" said his leader. "No one wants to stop you from giving it to him as hit you, only just tell me where he is."

"That ar'n't my job, Billy Waters," cried the big fellow; "that's your job. You leads, and I does the fighting. Show him to me and I'll make him that sore as he shall wish he'd stopped at home."

"Come on, then, and let's get the lanterns, and come back then," said the gunner. "It ar'n't no use to be knocking ourselves about here in the dark. Come on."

He tried to lead the way back as they had come, each man cutlass in hand, and well on the alert in case of attack; but nothing interposed to stop them as they scrambled and clambered over the rocks till they got to the open shore once more, just as, in front of them and out in the pitchy blackness, there was a flash, a report, and then the wall of darkness closed up once more.

"Oh! ah, we're a-coming," said Billy Waters, who, now that the excitement was over, began to feel very sore, while his companions got along very slowly, having a couple of sorely-beaten men to help. "Anybody make out the ship's lights?"

"I can see one on 'em," growled Tully.

"And where's our boat?" cried the gunner. "Jim Tanner, ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came in a faint voice from a distance.

"There he is," said Billy Waters. "Come, my lads, look alive, or we shall have the skipper firing away more o' my powder. I wish him and Jack Brown would let my guns alone. Now then, Jim Tanner, where away?"

"Ahoy!" came again in a faint voice, and stumbling on through the darkness, they came at last upon the boatkeeper, tied neck and heels, and lying in the sand.

"Who done this?" cried the gunner.

"I dunno," said the man; "only cast me loose, mates."

This was soon done, the man explaining that a couple of figures suddenly jumped upon him out of the darkness, and bound him before he could stand on his defence.

"Why, you was asleep, that's what you was," cried the gunner angrily. "Nice job we've made of it. My! ar'n't it dark? Now, then, where's this here boat? Bring them two wounded men along. D'yer hear?"

"Oh, it ar'n't been such a very bad time," growled Tom Tully; "we did have a bit of a fight!"

"Fight? ay! and didn't finish it. Now, then, Tom Tully, where's that boat? Can you see her?"

"Yes; here she is," growled the big sailor; "and blest if some one ar'n't took away the oars; and—yes that they have. No getting off to-night, lads; they've shoved a hole in her bottom."

"What!" cried Billy Waters, groping his way to the boat; and then, in a hoarse, angry voice, "and no mistake. She's stove-in!"

Chapter Seventeen.

A Few Ideas on Escape.

Hilary Leigh felt very angry at being shut up in his prison, but the good breakfast with which he had been supplied went some way towards mollifying him, and as he sat upon the window-sill he felt that Sir Henry would much like to win him over to his side.

"And he is not going to do it," he said half aloud.

It was a lovely day, and as he sat there gazing out at the view, he thought he had never seen anything so beautiful before. It was wonderful, too, how a comfortable meal had improved his appreciation of what he saw.

But even then there were drawbacks. A rough and narrow stone seat, upon which you can only sit by holding on tightly to some rusty iron bars, does go against the full enjoyment of a scene, especially if you know that those rusty iron bars prevent you from going any farther.

So before long Hilary grew weary of his irksome position, and, letting himself down, he had a walk along each side of the old chapel, striding out as fast as he could, till he fancied he heard his old playmate outside, when he pounded up to the window again, but only to be disappointed.

This went on hour after hour, but still Adela did not come, and as the afternoon wore on he began to think it extremely cruel and unsympathising.

"She knows I'm shut up here like a bird in a cage, and yet she does not come to say a single word to cheer me."

The side where the window was seemed darkened now, for the sun had got well round to the west, and as he climbed up for another good look out the landscape seemed to wear fresh charms, exciting an intense longing to get out and ramble over the sunshine-flooded hills, or to lie down beneath the shaded trees.

He was accustomed to a prison life, as it were, being shut up so much within a little sloop; but that wooden prison was always on the move, and never seemed to oppress him as did the four dull walls of his present abode.

"I shall wear out the knees of my breeches in no time, if I'm to be kept in here long," he said, as he was in the act of making a run and a jump for another look out; but he stopped short just in the act, for he fancied he heard the rattle of a key, and directly after he knew he was not deceived, for there was a heavy step, then another, and then a key was placed in the big door.

"Well, this is being made a prisoner, and no mistake. Hallo, handsome!" he cried aloud, as the forbidding-looking man addressed by Sir Henry as Allstone entered the place with another looking little more amiable, and both were bringing something in the shape of food.

"What?" said the man surlily.

"I said 'Hallo, handsome!'" cried Hilary. "Have you come to let me out?"

The man uttered a low hoarse chuckle, which sounded like a laugh, but his face did not move a muscle, and he looked as if he were scowling heavily.

"We'll carry you out some day, my young buck," he said, "feet foremost. There's a little burying-ground just outside the place here."

"Thank you," replied Hilary. "Is that meant for a joke?"

"Joke? No, I never joke. Here I've brought you something to eat, and you won't get any more till to-morrow."

He set the rough tray he carried on the floor, and the man who was with him did the same, after which they both stood and stared at the prisoner.

"Send him away," said Hilary suddenly, and he pointed to the fresh man.

"What for?"

"I want to talk to you."

Allstone gave his head a jerk and the man went outside. "Look here," said Hilary, "how long are you going to keep me here?"

"Till the skipper is tired of you, I suppose, or till Sir Henry's gone."

"And then you'll let me go?"

"Oh, yes," said the man grimly. "We shall let you go then."

There was another hoarse chuckle, which appeared very strange, for it did not seem to come from the man, who scowled at him in the same heavy, morose way.

"Oh! come! you're not going to frighten me into the belief that you can kill me, my man," cried Hilary. "I'm too old for that."

"Who's to know if we did?" said the fellow.

"Why, you don't suppose that one of his majesty's officers can be detained without proper search being made. You'll have the crew of my ship over here directly, and they'll burn the place about your ears."

"Thankye," said the man. "Is that all you want to say?"

"No. Now look here; I'll give you five guineas if you'll let me go some time to-night. You could break through that window, and it would seem as if I had done it myself."

For answer the man turned upon his heel and stalked out of the place without a word.

"Get out, you rude boor!" cried Hilary, as the door slammed and the key turned. "Kill me and bury me! Bah! I should like to see them do it."

A faint noise outside made him scale the window once more; but there was no sign of Adela, so he returned.

"Well, they're not going to starve me," he said to himself, as he looked at the plates before him, one containing a good-looking pork pasty, the others a loaf and a big piece of butter, while a large brown jug was half full of milk.

There was a couple of knives, too, the larger and stronger of which he took and thrust beneath the straw.

"What a piggish way of treating a fellow!" he muttered. "No chair, no table; not so much as a stool. Well, I'm not very hungry yet, and as this is to last till to-morrow I may as well wait."

He stood thinking for a bit, and then the idea of escaping came more strongly than ever, and he went and examined the door, which seemed strong enough to resist a battering-ram.

There was the window as the only other likely weak place, but on climbing up and again testing the mortar with the point of his knife, the result was disheartening, for the cement of the good old times hardened into something far more difficult to deal with than stone. In fact, he soon found that he would be more likely to escape by sawing through the bars or digging through the stone.

"Well, I mean to get out if Lipscombe don't send and fetch me; and I'll let them see that I'm not quite such a tame animal as to settle down to my cage without some effort;" and as he spoke he looked up at the ceiling as being a likely place to attack.

He had the satisfaction of seeing that it was evidently weak, and that with the exercise of a little ingenuity there would be no difficulty in cutting a way through.

But there was one drawback—it was many feet above his head, and impossible of access without scaffold or ladder.

"And I'm not a fly, to hold on with my head downwards," he said, half aloud.

He slowly lowered himself from the window-sill, and had another good look at the walls, tapping them here and there where they had been plastered; but though they sounded hollow, they seemed for the most part to be exceedingly thick, and offered no temptation for an assault.

He stood there musing, with the place of his confinement gradually growing more gloomy, and the glow in the sky reminding him of how glorious the sea would look upon such an evening.

There were a few strands of straw lying about, and he proceeded to kick them together in an idle fashion, his thoughts being far away at the time, when a sudden thought came to him like a flash.

The place was paved with slabs of stone, and it had been the chapel of the old mansion; perhaps there were vaults underneath, or maybe cellars.

The more he thought, the more likely this seemed. The old builders in that part of England believed in providing cool stores for wine and beer. In many places the dairy was underground, and why might there not be some place below here from which he could make his escape?

He stamped with his foot and listened.

Hollow, without a doubt.

He tried in another part, and another; and no matter where, the sound was such as would arise from a place beneath whose floor there was some great vault.

"That'll do," he said to himself, with a half-laugh. "I'm satisfied; so now I'll have something to eat."

The evening was closing in as he seated himself upon the straw and began his meal, listening the while for some sign of the presence of Adela under his prison window, but he listened in vain. There was the evening song of the thrush, and he could hear poultry and the distant grunting of his friend the pig. Now and then, too, there came through the window the soft cooing of the pigeons on the roof, but otherwise there was not a sound, and the place might have been deserted by human kind.

"So much the better for me," he said, "if I want to escape;" and having at last finished his meal, he placed the remains on one side for use in the morning, and tried to find a likely stone in the floor for loosening, but he had to give up because it was so dark, and climbed up once more to the window to gaze out now at the stars, which moment by moment grew brighter in the east.

There was something very soft and beautiful in the calm of the summer night, but it oppressed him with its solitude. In one place he could see a faint ray of light, apparently from some cottage window; but that soon went out, and the scene that had been so bright in the morning was now shrouded in a gloom which almost hid the nearest trees.

Now and then he could hear a splash in the moat made by fish or water-vole, and once or twice he saw the star-bejewelled surface twinkle and move as if some creature were swimming across; but soon that was all calm again, and the booming, buzzing noise of some great beetle sweeping by on reckless wing sounded quite loud.

"It's as lively as keeping the middle watch," said Hilary impatiently. "The best thing I can do is to go to sleep."

Hilary Leigh was one not slow to act upon his convictions, and getting down he proceeded to make himself as snug a nest as he could in the straw, lay down, pulled some of it over him, to the great bedusting of his uniform, and in five minutes he was fast asleep.

Chapter Eighteen.

Billy Waters finds it out.

"Well," said Billy Waters, "of all the cowardly, sneaking tricks anybody could do, I don't know a worse one than staving in a man's boat. Yah! a fellow who would do such a thing ought to be strung up at the yardarm, that he ought!"

"Every day," growled Tom Tully. "Well, matey, how is we to get aboard?"

"What's the good of asking me?" cried Billy Waters, who was regularly out of temper. "Leave that gun alone, will yer?" he roared as there was another flash and a report from the cutter. "It's enough to aggravate a hangel, that it is," he continued. "No sooner have I left the cutter, and my guns that clean you might drink grog out of 'em, than the skipper and that Jack Brown gets fooling of 'em about and making 'em foul. They neither of 'em know no more about loading a gun than they do about being archbishops; but they will do it, and they'll be a-busting of 'em some day. Firing again, just as if we don't know the first was a recall! Here, who's got a loaded pistol?"

"Here you are, matey," said Tom Tully.

"Fire away, then, uppards," said the gunner; "and let 'em know that we want help."

The flash from the pistol cut the darkness; there was a sharp report, and the gunner fired his own pistols to make three shots.

"There," he said, replacing them in his belt. "That'll make him send another boat, and if that there Jacky Brown's in it I shall give him a bit of my mind."

There was a long pause now, during which the weary men sat apart upon the sands, or with their backs propped against the sides of the damaged boat, but at last there came a hail out of the darkness, to which Tom Tully answered with a stentorian "Boat a-hoy-oy!"

"Who told you to hail, Tom Tully?" cried the gunner. "I'm chief orsifer here, so just you wait until you are told."

Tom Tully growled, and the gunner walked down to where the waves beat upon the shingle just as the regular splash of the oars told of the coming of the boat from the cutter with the boatswain in command, that worthy leaping

ashore, followed by half a dozen men.

"What's on?" he cried. "Have you found Muster Leigh?"

"No."

"What did you signal for?"

"Boat. Ourn's stove-in, and we've got knocked about awful."

"What! by the smugglers?"

"Ay, my lad. They beat us off."

"Then, now there's reinforcements, let's go and carry all afore us."

"It's all very fine for you, coming fresh and ready, to talk," said the gunner; "but it ar'n't no use, my lad—we're reg'lar beat out. They got away somehow, and you want daylight to find 'em."

"Then you may go up the side of the cutter first, my lad, that's all I've got to say," said the boatswain. "You don't catch me facing the skipper to-night."

It was a close pack to get all the men on board, but it was successfully accomplished, the stove-in boat taken in tow, and the side of the cutter reached at last, where, as the boatswain had vaguely hinted, there was a storm. Billy Waters was threatened with arrest, and he was abused for an hour for his clumsy management of the expedition.

"A child would have managed it better, sir," cried the lieutenant; "but never was officer in his majesty's service worse served than I am. Not one subordinate have I on whom I can depend; I might just as well get a draught of boys from the guardship, and if it was not for the men and the marines I don't know what I should do. Pipe down."

The men were piped down, glad enough to get something to eat, and then to crawl to their hammocks, out of which they rolled in the morning seeming little the worse for their engagement, the injured men being bruised pretty severely, though they would not own to their hurts, being too eager, as they put it, to go and pay their debts.

For quite early the cutter began to sail in pretty close to the shore, the carpenter busy the while in getting a fresh plank in the bottom of the stove-in boat, having it ready by the time the lieutenant mustered his men and told them off into the boats, leaving the boatswain in command of the cutter and leading the expedition himself.

The men fancied once or twice that they could see people on the cliffs watching their movements, but they could not be sure, and as the boats grated on the shingle the rocks looked as desolate and deserted as if there had not been a soul there for years.

The men were well-armed, and ready to make up for their misadventure of the previous night, and Billy Waters being sent to the front to act as guide he was not long in finding out the narrow entrance amongst the rocks, but only to be at fault directly after, on account of places looking so different in broad daylight to what they did when distorted by the shadowy gloom.

He had come to the head-scratching business, when a rub is expected to brighten the intellect, and felt ready to appeal to his companions for aid and counsel when he suddenly recollected that they had clambered over a rock here, and this he now did, shouting to his companions to come on, just as the lieutenant was approaching to fulminate in wrath upon his subordinate's ignorance.

"Here you are," he cried, and one after the other the men tumbled down the rock, following him through each well-remembered turn—spots impressed upon them by the blows they had received, until they were brought to a standstill in a complete *cul-de-sac*, through a passage so narrow that one man could have held it against a dozen if there had been anything to hold.

The lieutenant squeezed his way past the men till he stood beside his subordinate.

"Well, why have you brought us here?" he exclaimed.

"This here's the place where we chased 'em to, your honour," said the gunner, "and then they disappeared like."

"But you said it was so dark that you could not see any one."

"Yes, your honour, we couldn't hardly see 'em; but they disappeared all the same."

"Where? How?"

"Some'eres here, your honour."

"Nonsense, man! The rock's thirty feet high here, and they could not go up that."

"No, your honour."

"Then where did they go?"

"That's what none of us can't tell, your honour."

"Look here, Waters," said the lieutenant in a rage; "do you mean to tell me that you have let me lead his majesty's force of marines and sailors to the attack of a smugglers' stronghold, and then got nothing more to show than a corner in the rocks?"

Billy Waters scratched his head again and looked up at the face of the rock, then at the sides, and then down at his feet, before once more raising his eyes to his commander.

"Now, sir!" exclaimed the latter, "what have you to say?"

Billy Waters appealed to the rocks again in mute despair, but they were as stony-faced as ever.

"Do you hear me, sir?" cried the lieutenant. "The fact of it is that you all came ashore, got scandalously intoxicated, and then began fighting among yourselves."

"No, we didn't," growled Tom Tully from somewhere in the rear.

"Who was that? What mutinous scoundrel dared to speak like that?" cried the lieutenant; but no one answered, though the question was twice repeated. "Very good, then," continued the lieutenant; "I shall investigate this directly I am back on board. Waters, consider yourself under arrest."

"All right, your honour," said the gunner; "but if I didn't get a crack on the shoulder just about here from some one, I'm a Dutchman."

"Ay, ay," was uttered in chorus; and the members of the previous night's party stared up at the rocks on all sides, in search of some evidence to lay before their doubting commander; but none being forthcoming, they reluctantly followed him back to the open shore, where, as there was nothing to be seen but rocks, sand, and stones, and the towering cliff, they proceeded back to the boats.

"Fools! idiots! asses!" the lieutenant kept muttering till they embarked, the gunner and Tom Tully being in one boat, the lieutenant in the other, which was allowed to get well on ahead before the occupants of the second boat ventured to speak, when Tom Tully became the spokesman, the gunner being too much put out by the rebuff he had met with to do more than utter an occasional growl.

"Lookye here, my lads," said Tully; "arter this here, I'll be blessed."

That was all he said; but it was given in so emphatic a tone, and evidently meant so much, that his messmates all nodded their heads in sage acquiescence with his remark. Then they looked at each other and bent steadily to their oars, in expectation of what was to take place as soon as they got on board.

By the time they were three-quarters of the way Billy Waters had somewhat recovered himself.

"I've got it," he exclaimed.

"Got what?" said three or four men at once.

"Why that 'ere. I see it all now. Them chaps lives atop o' the cliff when they ar'n't afloat, and they've got tackle rigged up ready, and what do they do but whip one another up the side o' the rock, just as you might whip a lady out of a boat up the side of a three-decker."

Tom Tully opened his mouth and stared at the gunner in open admiration.

"Why, what a clever chap you are, Billy!" he growled. "I shouldn't ha' thought o' that if I'd lived to hundred-and-two."

"I see it all now plain enough, mates," continued the gunner. "I was hitting at that chap one minute in the dark, and then he was gone. He'd been keeping me off while his mates was whipped up, and then, when his turn came, up he goes like a bag o' biscuit into a warehouse door at Portsmouth, and I'll lay a tot o' grog that's what's become of our young orsifer."

"Hark at him!" cried Tom Tully, giving his head a sidewise wag. "That's it for sartain; and if I wouldn't rather sarve under Billy Waters for skipper than our luff, I ar'n't here."

"You'd best tell him, then, as soon as we get on board," said one of the men.

"What! and be called a fool and a hidiot!" cried the gunner. "Not I, my lads. I says let him find it out for hisself now, for I sha'n't tell nothing till I'm asked."

In this spirit the crew of the second boat reached the side of the cutter, went on board, the boats were hoisted up, and Billy Waters had the pleasure of finding himself placed under arrest, with the great grief upon his mind that his guns were left to the tender mercies of the boatswain, and a minor sorrow in the fact that his supply of grog was stopped.

Chapter Nineteen.

In the Middle Watch.

How long Hilary had been asleep he did not know, but he was aroused suddenly by something touching his face, and he lay there wide awake on the instant, wondering what it meant.

And now for the first time the hardship of his position came with renewed force. He was accustomed to a rough life on board ship, where in those days there were few of the luxuries of civilisation, but there he had a tolerably comfortable bed. Here he had straw, and the absence of a coverlet of any description made him terribly cold.

The cold chill did not last many seconds after his awaking, for he felt a strange sensation of heat come over him; his hands grew moist, and in a state of intense excitement he lay wondering what it was that had touched his face.

He could not be sure, but certainly it felt like a cold, soft hand, and he waited for a renewal of the touch, determined to grasp at it if it came again.

He was as brave as most lads of his age, but as he lay there, startled into a sudden wakefulness, it was impossible to help thinking of Adela's words spoken that morning and his own light remarks, and for a time he felt in a strange state of perturbation.

All was perfectly still, and it was so dark that he could not for some time make out the shape of the window against the night sky; but inside his prison there was a faint light, so faint that it did not make the wall visible, and towards this he strained his eyes, wondering whence it came.

"Why, what a coward I am!" he said to himself, as he made an effort to master his childish fears. "Ghosts, indeed! What nonsense! I'm worse than a child—afraid of being in the dark."

He lay listening with the straw rustling at his slightest movement, and then, unable to bear the uncertainty longer, he started up on one elbow.

As he did so there was a quick noise to his right, and he turned sharply in that direction.

"I might have known it," he muttered—"rats. I daresay they swarm in this old place. How did that fellow get in? I saw no holes."

Unable to answer the question, he turned his attention to the faint light that seemed to pervade the place, and, after a time, he made out that it struck down through some crack or crevice in the ceiling.

As he tried to make out where, it seemed to die away, leaving the place as black as ever; but now, in place of the depressing silence, he could hear that something was going on. There was a dull noise somewhere below him, making his heart beat fast with excitement, for it was an endorsement of his ideas that there was a cellar or vault. Then, in the distance, he fancied he could hear the rattle of chains, and the impatient stamp of a horse, with once or twice, but very faintly heard, a quick order or ejaculation.

"I wonder whether there are many rats here?" he thought, for he wanted to get up and clamber to the window, and look out to see if he could witness any of the proceedings of his captors.

It was an unpleasant thought that about the rats, for, as a matter of course, he began directly afterwards to recall all the old stories about people being attacked by rats, and half devoured by the fierce little animals; and it was some time before he could shake off the horrible idea that if he moved dozens of the little creatures might attack him.

Making an effort over himself to master his cowardly feelings, he sprang up and stood listening; but there was not so much as a scuffle of the tiny feet, and groping his way to the wall beneath the window, he climbed up and looked out, but could see nothing, only hear voices from the other side of the house.

Directly after, though, he heard some one apparently coming to his prison; for there were the steps upon the boarded floor, then others upon a stone passage, and a light shone beneath his door.

"They sha'n't find me up here," he thought; and he lowered himself down; but, to his surprise, instead of whoever it was coming right to his door, he seemed to go down some steps, with another following him. The light disappeared, and then the footsteps ceased, and he could hear the rumbling mutter of voices below his feet.

"I hope they are not getting up a gunpowder plot below," said Hilary to himself, for his dread had given place to curiosity. "I'll be bound to say that there's a regular store of good things down there waiting to be turned into prize-money for my lads when I once get back on board. Hallo! here they come again."

The ascending steps were heard plainly enough, and the light reappeared, shining feebly beneath the door; and, going softly across, Hilary looked through the great keyhole, and could see the ill-looking man Allstone with a candle in one hand and a little keg that might have contained gunpowder or spirit upon his shoulder.

"Here," he whispered to his companion, "lay hold while I lock up."

It was all in a moment. The keg was being passed from one to the other, when, between them, they let it fall with a crash, knocking the candle out of Allstone's hands.

Hilary saw the flash of the contents of the keg as the candle fell upon the stones; then there was the noise of a dull explosion that rattled the door; and as the prisoner started back from the door a stream of blue fire began to run beneath it, and he heard one of the men yell out:

"There's that young officer in there, and he'll be burned to death!"

A Fiery Trial.

It was a terrible position, and for a few moments Hilary felt helpless to move.

That blue stream of fire came gurgling and fluttering beneath the door, spreading rapidly over the floor, filling the chapel with a ghastly glare; and the prisoner saw that in a few moments it would reach the straw.

Even in those exciting moments he fully comprehended the affair. He knew, as in a case he had once seen on shipboard, that this was spirit of extraordinary strength, and that the vapour would explode wherever it gathered, even while the surface of the stream was burning.

He did not stand still, though, to think, but with all the matter-of-fact, business habitude of one accustomed to a life of emergencies, he proceeded to drag the straw into the corner farthest away from the increasing flame.

The next minute he saw that this corner was the one nearest the window, and that if he had to take refuge there, and the flame extended to the straw, there would be a tremendous blaze almost beneath him.

Setting to work, he dragged it away into another corner, sweeping up the loose pieces as rapidly as he could, and even as he did so the fluttering blue-and-orange flames advanced steadily across the floor, cutting off his access to the window, and rapidly spreading now all over the place, for the passage had a gradual descent to the door, and nearly the whole of the spilt spirit came bubbling and streaming in.

It was a beautiful, although an appalling sight, for the surface of the spirit was all dancing tongues of fire—red, blue, and orange, mingled with tiny puffs of smoke and bright sparks as it consumed the fragments of straw that lay upon the stones.

It had reached the opposite wall now, and ran as well right up to the window, the floor being now one blaze, except in the corner where Hilary stood on guard, as if to keep the flames back from the straw.

But now he found that he had another enemy with which to contend, for a peculiarly stifling vapour was arising, producing a sensation of giddiness, against which he could not battle; and as Hilary drew back from the approach of the tiny sea of waves of fire, pressing back, as he did so, the straw, he felt that unless he could reach the window he would be overcome.

There was no time for pause; help, if it were coming, could not reach him yet. In another instant he knew that the straw would catch fire. Even now a little rill of spirit had run to it, along which the flames were travelling, so, nerving himself for the effort, he made a dash to cross to the window.

At his first step the burning spirit splashed up in blue flames; at his second, the fire rose above his ankles; then, placing his foot upon a plate that had been left upon the floor, he slipped and fell headlong into the burning tongues that seemed to rise and lick him angrily.

The sensation was sharp to his hands, but not too pungent, and, fortunately, he kept his face from contact with the floor, while struggling up he for the moment lost his nerve, and felt ready to rush frantically about the place.

Fortunately, however, he mastered himself, and dashed at the window, leaped at the sill, and climbed up to breathe the pure cool air that was rushing in, just as the straw caught fire, blazed up furiously, and the place rapidly filled with rolling clouds of smoke.

He could not notice it, however, for the flames that fluttered about his garments where they were soaked with the spirit, and for some few minutes he thought of nothing but extinguishing the purply blaze.

They burned him but slightly, and in several places went out as the spirit became exhausted; but here and there the woollen material of his garments began to burn with a peculiar odour before he had extinguished the last spark.

Meanwhile, although the straw blazed furiously, and the smoke filled the place so that respiration would have been impossible, no help came. The spirit fluttered and danced as it burned, and save here and there where it lay in inequalities of the floor, it was nearly consumed, the danger now being from the straw, which still blazed.

Fortunately for Hilary, although he could feel the glow, his foresight in sweeping it to one corner saved him from being incommoded, and the heat caused a current of cool night-air to set in through the window and keep back the blinding and stifling fumes.

He listened, and could hear shouts in the distance; but no one came to his help, and he could not avoid feeling that if he had been dependent upon aid from without he must have lost his life. Fortunately for him, just at a time when his fate seemed sealed, the flames from the burning straw reached their height, and though they blackened the ceiling they did no worse harm, but exhausted from the want of supply they sank lower and lower. There was not a scrap of furniture in the place, or salient piece of wood to catch fire, and so as the spirit burned out, and the blazing straw settled down into some blackened sparkling ash, Hilary's spirits rose, and with the reaction as he clung there by the window came a feeling of indignation.

"If I don't be even with some of them for this!" he muttered. "They half starve me, and then try to burn me to death."

"Yes, that's right," he cried. "Bravo, heroes! Come, now the danger's over."

For as he sat there he could hear hurrying feet, the rattle of a key in the chapel door, and shouts to him to come out.

The smoke was so dense that the fresh comers could not possibly see him where he sat in the window, and they cried

to him again to come out.

"I sha'n't come," said Hilary to himself; "you'll only lock me up somewhere else, and now I have found out as much as I have, perhaps I shall be better off where I am."

"There'll be a pretty noise about this when Sir Henry comes back," cried a voice, which Hilary recognised as that of the ill-looking fellow Allstone. "You clumsy fool, dropping that keg!"

"It was as much you as me," cried another. "I sha'n't take all the blame."

"The lad's burned to death through your clumsiness," continued Allstone.

"And a whole keg of the strongest brandy wasted," said another dolefully.

"The place nearly burned down too," said another.

"Here, go in somebody," cried Allstone. "Perhaps he isn't quite dead, and I suppose we must save him if we can. Do you hear? Go in some of you."

"Who's going in?" said another voice. "There's smoke enough to choke you. Why don't you go in yourself?"

"Because I tell you to go," cried Allstone savagely. "I'm master here when the skipper's away, and I'll be obeyed. Go in, two of you, and fetch the boy out."

"He don't want no fetching out," said one of the men, as the current of air that set from the window drove the smoke aside and revealed the dimly-seen figure of Hilary seated in the embrasure holding on to the iron bars. "He don't want no help; there he sits."

Allstone, who had been seized with a fit of coughing and choking from the effects of the blinding, pungent smoke, did not speak for a few moments, during which the smoke went on getting thinner and thinner, though, as the men had no lights, everything was still very obscure.

"Oh, you're up there, are you?" cried Allstone at last. "Come down, sir; do you hear?" And he spoke as if he were addressing a disobedient dog; but Hilary remained perfectly silent, truth to say, almost speechless from indignation.

"What do you mean by pretending to be smothered and burned to death, hey?" cried the fellow again, roughly. "Why don't you answer? Get down."

"Out, bully!" cried Hilary angrily. "Why, you insolent dog, how dare you speak to a king's officer like that? Why, you ugly, indecent-looking outrage upon humanity, you set fire to the place through your clumsiness, and then come and insult me for not being burned to death."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed one of the men. "Well crowed, young gamecock."

"You cowardly lubbers, why didn't you come sooner to help me, instead of leaving me to frizzle here? I might have burned to death a dozen times for aught you cared."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed a couple of the men now, to Allstone's great annoyance.

"Hold your tongue, and come down, boy," he cried. "You can't stop there."

"Be off and lock the door again, bully," cried Hilary. "You great ugly, cowardly hound, if I had you on board the *Kestrel*, you should be triced up and have five dozen on your bare back."

"Haw! haw! haw!" came in a regular chorus this time, for the danger was over.

"I'd like to look on while the crew of you were being talked to by the boatswain," cried Hilary, angrily—"a set of cowardly loons."

"That'll do!" cried Allstone, who was hoarse with passion. "Go in and fetch him out."

No one stirred, and Allstone went in himself, but only to be seized with a furious fit of coughing which lasted a couple of minutes or so, and to his companions' intense delight.

The fit over, the fellow went in again and stood beneath the window.

"Come down!" he cried; but as Hilary did not condescend to notice him Allstone seized the young man by one of his legs, with the result that he clung with both hands to the iron bars, and raising up his knees for a moment, kicked out with as much cleverness as his friend the jackass, catching Allstone full in the chest and sending him staggering back for a few steps, where, unable to recover his balance, he went down heavily in a sitting position.

There was a roar of laughter from his companions, who stamped about, slapped their legs, and literally danced with delight; while, in spite of his anger and indignation at this scoundrel of a smuggler daring to touch a king's officer, Hilary could not help feeling amused.

But matters looked tragic directly after instead of comic, for, uttering a fierce oath, the man sprang up, pulled out his cutlass and made at the prisoner.

Active as a leopard, Hilary sprang down to avoid him, when the pieces of the broken plate—the remains of that which

had thrown the young officer down into the burning spirit—this time befriended him, for Allstone stepped upon a large fragment, slipped, fell sprawling, and the cutlass flew from his hand with a loud jangling noise in the far corner upon the stone floor.

Quick as lightning, and while the other men were roaring with laughter, Hilary dashed at the cutlass, picked it up, and, assuming now the part of aggressor, he turned upon Allstone, presenting the point of his weapon, and drove the ruffian before him out of the place, turning the next moment upon his companions, who offered not the slightest resistance, but retreated before him laughing with all their might.

Hilary was about to seize the opportunity to chase them onward through the passage and try to escape, but Allstone was too quick for him.

On being driven out the man had taken refuge behind the door, and as the last man of his companions passed he dashed it to, striking Hilary full and driving him backwards into the chapel, as it slammed against the post with a heavy echo, and was locked and bolted.

“Stop there, and starve and rot,” the ruffian cried through the keyhole furiously, as Hilary stood panting and shaking first one hand and then the other, against which the door, to the saving of his face, had come with tremendous force.

“We’ll see about that,” said Hilary to himself, as he gave the cutlass a flourish; and then, as the steps died down the passage and he heard the farther door close, with the steps of the men passing over the empty boarded room, he laughed at the change that had come over the scene during the last quarter of an hour.

Chapter Twenty One.

Temptation.

There was something ludicrous in the struggle that had taken place, especially as Hilary had so thoroughly won the day; but at the same time there was a very unpleasant side to his position. It was in the middle of the night and very dark, save in one corner of the stone-floored place where the remains of the heap of straw displayed a few sparks, and sent up a thin thread of smoke, which rose to the ceiling and there spread abroad, the rest having passed away, driven out by the draught caused by the open door. He had not a scrap of furniture; the straw was all burned, and the floor of his prison was stone.

Still there was one good thing upon his side—one which afforded Hilary the most intense satisfaction, and this was the fact that he had secured the cutlass. Not that he wanted it for fighting, though it might prove useful in case of need for his defence; but it suggested itself to him as being a splendid implement for raising one of the stones in the floor, with which help he might possibly get into the cellars or vaults below, and so escape.

“But I don’t like going to sleep on the stones,” said Hilary to himself, and tucking the cutlass under his arm, he felt the flooring in different places.

To his surprise he found it perfectly dry, for the intensely strong spirit had burned itself completely out, leaving not so much as a humid spot; and after climbing up to look out at the dark night, Hilary saw that the fire was as good as extinct, and ended by sitting down.

The stones were very cold, but he felt weary, and at last so intense a desire to sleep came upon him that he lay down, and in spite of the hardness of his couch and the fact that he had no pillow but his arm, he dropped off into a heavy sleep, from which he did not awaken till the sun was shining in through the window upon the smoke-blackened walls.

Hilary’s first thought was concerning his cutlass, which was safe by his side, and jumping up, he listened. Then he went to the door and listened again, but all was perfectly still.

What was he to do? he asked himself. He felt sure that Allstone would come before long, and others with him, to obtain possession of the weapon, and he was equally determined not to give it up. He might fight for it, but, now that he was cool, he felt a repugnance against shedding blood; and, besides, he knew that he must be overcome by numbers, perhaps wounded, and that would make a very uncomfortable state of things ten times worse.

The result was that he determined to hide the cutlass; but where?

He looked around the place, and, as far as he could see, there was not a place where he could have hidden away a bodkin, let alone the weapon in his hand.

Certainly he might have heaped over it the black ashes of the straw and the few unburned scraps; but such a proceeding would have been childish in the extreme.

It was terribly tantalising, for there was absolutely no place where he could conceal it; and at last, biting his lips with vexation, he exclaimed, after vainly looking out for a slab that he could raise:

“I must either fight for it or throw it out of the window; and I’d sooner do that than he should have it back. Hurrah! That will do!” he cried eagerly, as a thought struck him.

Laying down the cutlass, he leaped up to the window, pressed his face sidewise against the bars, and looked down, to see that the grass and weeds grew long below him.

He was down again directly and seated upon the floor, where, after listening for a few moments, he stripped down one of his blue worsted stoutly-knitted stockings, sought for a likely place, cut through a thread, and, pulling steadily, it rapidly came undone. This furnished him with a line of worsted some yards long.

Leaping up, he rapidly tied one end round the hilt of the cutlass, climbed to the window, and lowered the weapon down outside, till it lay hidden amongst the grass close to the wall. Then he tied the slight thread close down in the rusted-away part of one of the bars, descended again, and raked up some ashes, with which he mounted and sprinkled them over the thread, making it invisible from inside; after which he descended, feeling quite hopeful that the plan would not be discovered.

This done, he seemed to have more time for a look round at the effects of the fire; but beyond a little blackening of the ceiling and the heap of ashes, there was nothing much to see. The strong spirit had burned itself out without doing more than scorch the bottom of the door; but he had a lively recollection of the strange scene as the little blue tongues of fire seemed to be fluttering and dancing all over the place.

Just then he noticed the corner where he had placed the remains of his previous night's meal, and there were the empty plates—for not a scrap of the food was left; and this satisfactorily indorsed his ideas respecting the touch that had so startled him into wakefulness.

"Better be awakened by that than by the blaze of fire," he said half aloud. "Oh, won't I give Sir Henry a bit of my mind about the treatment I meet with here, and—here he is."

For just then he heard the tramp of feet over the boarded floor, the flinging open of the first door, then the steps in the passage, and he altered his opinion.

"No!" he exclaimed; "it's old Allstone coming after his cutlass."

He was quite right, for, well-armed, and followed by four men, Hilary's jailer entered the place, glanced sharply round, and exclaimed:

"I've come for that cutlass."

"Have you?" said Hilary coolly.

"Hand it over."

"I have not got it," said Hilary coolly.

"Don't tell me lies," said the fellow roughly. "Here, lay hold."

Five to one was too much for resistance, so Hilary submitted patiently to the search that was made, to see if he had it concealed beneath his clothes.

"There's nothing here," said one of the men; and Allstone tried himself, flinching sharply as the prisoner made believe to strike at him.

Then he carefully looked all round the place, which was soon done, and the fellow turned to him menacingly:

"Now then," he cried, "just you speak out, or it will be the worse for you. Where's that cutlass?"

Hilary looked at him mockingly.

"I'll tell you the strict truth," he thought; and he replied, "I dropped it out of the window."

"It's a lie," cried the ruffian savagely; "I don't believe you."

"I knew you would not," said Hilary laughing. "Where is it then?"

"I swallowed it."

"What!" said the fellow staring.

"Hilt and all if you like. Now, do you believe that?" The man stared at him.

"Because you would not believe the truth, so there's what you asked for—a lie."

The fellow stared at him again, seized hold of him, and felt him all over in the roughest way. Then, satisfied that the weapon was not concealed about the lad's person, he looked round the place once more, walked to the side of the room so as to get a view of the window-ledge, and then he turned to Hilary once more.

"When did you drop it out?" he said sharply.

"As soon as I awoke this morning," replied Hilary. "Just before you came."

"Come along, my lads," said the fellow, who then withdrew with his followers. The door clanged to, was locked, and as Hilary listened he heard them all depart, securing the farther door behind them; and, satisfied that they were gone, he nimbly climbed up to the window, raised the cutlass by means of the worsted, and having taking it in he descended once more, unfastened and rolled up the thread for further use, and then thrust the weapon down under his vest and into the left leg of his trousers, feeling pretty sure that they would not search him again.

A few minutes later he heard voices, and going beneath the window, and raising himself up till his ear was level with the ledge, he could hear all that was said, and he knew that the men were searching for the sword.

"Don't seem to be about here," said one of the men.

"Look well," Hilary heard Allstone say.

"That's just what we are doing. Think he did throw it over?"

"Must have done so," said Allstone; "there isn't a place anywhere big enough to hide a knife."

"Then some one's been by this morning and picked it up," said one of the men, "for it don't seem to be anywhere here."

"Turn over that long grass," said Allstone, "and kick those weeds aside."

Hilary heard the rustling sounds made by the men as they obeyed their leader; but of course there was no result.

"Somebody come by and picked it up," said the man again; and, apparently satisfied, the party went away, Hilary raising his eyes, saw the smugglers go round the corner of the house below the ivied gable, leaving him wondering whether they would come back.

"They may," he thought; "and if they do, they will see that I've got this thing tucked in here."

Quickly taking out the worsted he secured it to the cutlass, and lowering it once more out of the window, tied the thread to the bar.

"It's safest there, I'll be bound," he muttered; and he had hardly made his arrangements for concealment when he heard the steps coming, and began walking up and down as the door was opened, and, staring at him doubtfully, Allstone came in with two men bearing some breakfast for the prisoner, while their leader went round Hilary again, searchingly noting every fold of his garments before once more withdrawing.

"He must have seen it if I had it on," said Hilary, as he once more found himself alone, when he eagerly attacked the provisions that had been left.

After satisfying his hunger, he was a good deal divided in his mind as to what to do about the weapon, which might prove to be so valuable an implement in his attempt to escape. If left outside and searched for again, the smugglers must find it; but the chances were that they would not go and look again, so he decided to leave it where it was.

The morning wore on without a single incident to take his attention, and he spent the time in examining the floor of his prison, giving a tap here and a tap there, and noting where it sounded most hollow.

It was a long task, but he had plenty of time upon his hands, and he at last decided that he would make his attack upon a small stone in the corner by the wall which contained the window, that was not only the darkest place, the light seeming to pass over it, but there was a hollower echo when he struck the stone, from which he hoped that the slab was thinner than the rest.

He drove the knife in all round and found that it passed in without difficulty; and as he examined the place, he found to his great delight that some time or other there had evidently been a staple let into the slab, probably to hold a great ring for raising the stone, and undoubtedly this was a way down to the vaults below.

What he wanted now was a good supply of straw to lay over that part of the floor to conceal any efforts he might make for raising the stone, and meanwhile dusting some of the ashes and half-burned straw-chaff over the spot, he awaited Allstone's next appearance with no little anxiety.

Towards afternoon he heard steps, and evidently his jailer was coming; but to his surprise, instead of Allstone being accompanied by two or three men, his companion was Sir Henry Norland, who had evidently just returned from a journey.

"Ah, my dear Hilary," he exclaimed, "I have just been hearing of your narrow escape. My dear boy, I cannot tell you how sorry I am. You are not in the least hurt, I hope?"

"No, Sir Henry, not in body," said the young man distantly; "but you see all my prison furniture has been destroyed. Will you give orders that I am to be supplied with a little more straw?"

"I gave orders that a mattress and blankets, with a table and chairs, should be brought here before I went out," said Sir Henry, "with a few other things. Good gracious! I had no idea the fire had been so bad. Did it burn everything?"

"My furniture was what I asked to be replaced—a little straw," said Hilary bitterly. "I had nothing else."

Sir Henry turned frowning to the man, and said a few words in a low but commanding tone to him which made him scowl; but he went off growling something to himself in a sulky manner.

"My dear Hilary," said Sir Henry, "I did not know you had been so badly treated. I am so much engaged upon His Majesty's business that I am afraid I have neglected you sadly."

"Indeed, Sir Henry? And now you have come to say that I am at liberty to go free and attend to His Majesty's business?" said Hilary with a sarcastic ring in his words.

"Will you?" said Sir Henry eagerly.

"Yes, of course," said Hilary. "I serve the king, and I am ready to do anything in the king's name."

Sir Henry smiled pityingly.

"We misunderstand each other, Hilary. But come, my boy, let us waste no words. Listen. I come to you armed with powers to make you a great and honoured man. Join us, Hilary. We know that you are a skilful officer, a clever sailor. You are the merest subordinate now; but throw yourself heart and soul into the Stuart cause, help to restore the king to his rights, and you shall rise with him. Young as you are, I have a splendid offer to make you. As you are, you serve under a miserable officer, and in time you may rise to a captaincy. Join us, and, as I say, young as you are His Majesty gives you through me the rank of captain, and knighthood shall follow if you serve him well."

"Have you nearly done, Sir Henry?" said Hilary coldly.

"Done, my dear boy, I want to introduce you to a band of truly chivalrous noblemen and gentlemen who will receive you with open arms. I want you to be my friend and fellow patriot—to aid me with your advice and energy. I want you to leave this wretched prison, and to soar above the contemptible task of putting down a few miserable smugglers. I want you to come out of this place with me at once, to become once more the companion of my little Adela, who sends her message by me that she is waiting to take you by the hand. Come: leave the wretched usurper's chains, and be free if you would be a man. Adela says—Hark! There she is."

As he spoke there came in through the window, bearing with it the memories of bright and happy times, the tones of the girl's sweet young voice, and as Hilary listened he closed his eyes and thought of the bright sunny country, the joys of freedom, the high hopes of ambition, and a warm flush came into his cheeks, while Sir Henry smiled in the satisfaction of his heart as he whispered to himself the one word— "*Won!*"

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Surprise for Sir Henry.

It was very tempting. The country looked so bright and beautiful from his prison window; the voice of his old companion brought up such a host of pleasant recollections, and it would have been delightful to renew the old intimacy. Then, upon the other hand, what would he give up? A dull monotonous life under a tyrannical superior, with but little chance of promotion, to receive honour, advancement, and no doubt to enjoy no little adventure.

It was very tempting, and enough to make one with a stronger mind than Hilary Leigh waver in his allegiance.

As he stood there thinking the song went on, and Hilary felt that did he but say yes, and swear fealty to one who believed himself to be the rightful king of England, he would be at liberty to join Adela at once. There would be an end to his imprisonment, and no more wretched anxiety.

He had done his duty so far, he argued, and he was doing his duty when fortune went against him, and he was made a prisoner, so to a certain extent his changing sides might be considered excusable. He had had little else but rough usage and discomfort since he went to sea, and the offers now made to him by Sir Henry were full of promise, which he knew the baronet was too true to hold out without perfect honesty.

Taken altogether—that is in connection with his position, and the probability that he might be kept here a prisoner for any length of time, and that most likely he had already been reported by Mr Lipscombe as a deserter—there was such a bright prospect held out that Hilary felt for the time extremely weak and ready to give up.

Meanwhile the song went on outside, for all these thoughts ran very quickly through the young man's brain. Then Adela's voice died away, and Hilary opened his eyes to see Sir Henry standing there, with a smile upon his handsome face, and his hand extended.

"Well, Captain Leigh," he said, laughing, "I am to clasp hands with my young brother in the good cause?"

"You will shake hands with me, Sir Henry," said Hilary, "for we are very old friends, and I shall never forget my happy days at the old hall," and he laid his hand in that of the baronet.

"Forget them! No, my dear boy," cried Sir Henry enthusiastically. "But there will be brighter days yet. Come along and join Adela; she will be delighted to have you with her again. Come along! Why do you hang back? Why, Hil, my boy, you have not grown bashful?"

"You love the young Pre— I mean Charles Stuart," said Hilary quietly, as he still held his old friend's hand.

"Love, my boy? Yes, Heaven bless him! And so will you when you meet him. He will take to you with your frank young sailor face, Hilary."

"No, Sir Henry," Hilary replied sadly. "I have heard that he is generally frank, and an honourable gentleman."

"All that, Hilary," cried Sir Henry enthusiastically. "He is royal in his ways, and I am sure he will like you."

"If he is what you say, Sir Henry," replied the young man, "he would look with coldness and contempt upon a scoundrel and a traitor."

"To be sure he would," said Sir Henry, who in his elation and belief that he had won Hilary over to the Pretender's cause was thrown off his guard.

"Then why do you talk of his liking me, if, after signing my adhesion to him whom I look upon as my rightful king, I deserted him at the first touch of difficulty? No, Sir Henry, I could not accept your offer without looking upon myself afterwards as a traitor and a villain, and I am sure that you would be one of the first men to think of me with contempt."

Sir Henry dropped the hand he held in astonishment, completely taken aback, and a heavy frown came upon his brow.

"Are you mad, Hilary?" he exclaimed. "Do you know what you are refusing?"

"Yes, Sir Henry, I know what I am refusing; but I hope I am not mad."

"Honour, advancement, liberty, in place of what you are enduring now."

"Yes, Sir Henry, I can see it all."

"Adela's friendship—my friendship. Oh, my dear boy, you have not considered all this."

"Yes, Sir Henry, I have considered it all," said Hilary firmly; "and though you are angry now, I am sure that the time will come when you will respect me for being faithful to my king, just as you would have learned to despise me if I had broken my word."

Sir Henry did not reply, but turned short upon his heel and walked to the door, rapped loudly till the key was turned, and then without glancing at Hilary again he left the place.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Hilary's Way of Escape.

Hilary stood in the centre of the old chapel, gazing at the closed door, and listening to the rattle of the bolts. He was full of regrets, for, left early an orphan, he had been in the habit of looking up to Sir Henry somewhat in the way that a boy would regard a father; and he was grieved to the heart to think that so old and dear a friend should look upon him as an ingrate.

But at the same time he felt lighter at heart, and there was the knowledge to support him that he had done his duty at a very trying time.

"I should have felt that every right-thinking man had looked down upon me," he said, half aloud, "and little Adela would have been ashamed when she knew all, to call me friend."

He stood with his eyes still fixed upon the door thinking, and now his thoughts were mingled with bitter feelings, for he was still a prisoner at the mercy of a set of lawless men, Sir Henry being no doubt merely a visitor here, and possessed of but little authority.

"And I know too much for them to let me go and bring a few of our lads to rout out their nest," he said, half aloud. "Never mind, they won't dare to kill me, unless it is by accident," he added grimly, and then he ran to the window to see if Adela were in sight.

Practice had made him nimble now, and leaping up, he caught the bars, drew himself into the embrasure, and peered between the bars.

"Pst! Adela!" he cried eagerly, for he could just see her light dress between the trees.

She looked up, and came running towards the window, looking bright and happy, and there was an eager light in her eyes.

"Why, Hil!" she cried. "I did not think you would be there now. Papa said he thought you would soon be at liberty, and that perhaps you would stay with us a little while before you went away."

"And should you like me to stay with you?" he said, gazing down.

"Oh, yes; so much!" she said naïvely. "This old place is so dull and lonely, and I am so much alone with an old woman who waits upon us. Why don't you come out?"

"Because I am a prisoner," he said quietly.

"But I thought—I hoped—papa said you were going to give your parole not to escape," said Adela; "or else that you were going to join our cause and fight for the true king."

He shook his head mournfully.

"No, Addy. I cannot give my word of honour not to escape," he said; "because I hope to get away at the first opportunity."

"Then join our cause," cried Adela.

"No," he said, shaking his head, "I cannot join your cause, Addy, because I am an officer appointed in the king's name to serve in one of King George's vessels. I should be a traitor if I forsook my colours."

"But I want you to come," cried Adela, with the wayward tyranny of a child. "It seems so stupid for you to be shut up there like a wild beast in a cage. Oh, Hil, you must come on our side! Do!"

"Adela! Adela!" cried an imperious voice.

"Yes, papa, I am coming," she cried; and looking up quickly at the prisoner, she nodded and laughed, and the next moment she had disappeared.

Hilary sat watching as if in the hope that she would come back; but he knew in his heart that she would not, and so it proved at the end of quite a couple of hours.

"He has told her that she is to hold no communication with such a fellow," he said to himself. "Poor little Addy! what a sweet little thing she is growing, and what an impetuous, commanding way she has!"

He sat watching the place still, but without hope. Now and then the girl's words came to him.

"I seem like a wild beast in a cage, do I?" he said laughing. "Very good, Miss Addy; then I must gnaw my way out."

As he spoke his eyes fell upon the bit of worsted that was secured to the cutlass, and he was about to draw it up when he heard footsteps approaching from the interior, and he leaped lightly down and began walking about the place as the door was opened, and Allstone held it back for some of his men to enter with a couple of trusses of straw, a couple of blankets, a rough three-legged table, and a rougher stool, which were unceremoniously thrown or jerked down, and then, after a suspicious look at his prisoner, Allstone motioned to the men to go.

"Is there anything else your lordship would like?" he said with a sneer. "The best feather-beds are damp, and the carpets have been put away by mistake. What wines would your lordship like for your dinner and would you like silver cups or glass?"

"Now then, old Allstones, or Allbones, or Nobones, or whatever your name is," cried Hilary, putting his arms akimbo, and taking a step nearer to the jailer, "you are a big and precious ugly man of about forty, and I'm only a boy; but look here, if I had you on board my ship I'd have you triced up and flogged."

"But you are not on board your ship, my young cockerel," said the man mockingly.

"No," cried Hilary, "but I'm all here, and if you give me any of your sauce when you come in, I'll show you why some fellows are made officers and some keep common seamen to the end of their days."

"And how's that?" said the ruffian with a sneer.

"Because they know how to deal with bullies and blackguards like you. Now then, this is my room, so walk out."

He took another step forward and gazed so fiercely in the man's eyes, that, great as was the disparity in their ages and strength, Allstone shrank back step by step until he reached the doorway, when, if not afraid of Hilary, he was certainly so much taken aback by the young man's manner that he was thoroughly cowed for the moment, and shrank away, slipping through the door and banging it after him, leaving the prisoner to his meditations.

"Come, I've got a bed," he said, laughing, "and a chair and a table, and—hurrah! the very thing."

He then seized the table and turned it upside down to gaze beneath, and then replacing it, ran to the window, pulled up the cutlass, and going to the table once more, turned it over and inserted the point of the weapon between the side and the top, with the result that it stuck there firmly, and upon the table being replaced upon its legs it was quite concealed.

"There!" he cried, "that will be handy, and I daresay safe, for they will never think of searching that after bringing it in."

This done, he proceeded to roll up his worsted for future use, and placed it in one pocket, the piece of cord with which he had drawn up the milk being in another.

"Why, I might have used that instead of the worsted," he said, as he remembered it for the first time; but he recollected directly after that it would have been too easily seen.

Then he inspected the two trusses of straw, and made his bed close beside the opening he hoped to make by raising the slab; and then, having carefully examined the spot, he listened to make sure that he was not heard, and taking out his pocket-knife, went down upon his knees and began to pick out the hard dirt and cement that filled the cracks around the broad, flat stone.

It was rough work, but he had the satisfaction of feeling that he was making very fair progress, scraping up the pieces from the place around, and as fast as he secured a handful going to the window and throwing it out with a good jerk, looking out afterwards to see if it showed, and finding it was concealed by the long grass.

He was well upon the *qui vive*, having placed the straw close to the place where he was at work, and holding himself in readiness at the slightest alarm to scatter a portion over the slab.

But no one came, and he worked steadily on hour after hour till the crack all round was quite clear, and he had no need to do more till he tried to raise the stone by using the cutlass as a lever.

To guard against surprise he now scattered about some of the chaff and small scraps that had been shaken out of the two bundles of straw, and after listening attentively, he could not resist the temptation of taking out the heavy sword and trying whether he could lift the slab.

The point went in easily, and he was just about to press upon the handle when he snatched the weapon out and hastily thrust it back in its hiding-place, for there was the sound of an opening door, and a minute later Allstone walked in with a small loaf and a jug of water, placing them upon the table with a sour and malicious look at the prisoner, who did not even notice his presence, and then left the place.

"Bread and water, eh!" thought Hilary. "Well, the greater need for me to get away, for ship living will be better than this."

His hearty young appetite, however, was ready to induce him to look with favour upon food of any kind, and he set to at once, munching the bread and refreshing himself with draughts of water.

"If this is Sir Henry's doing," he said, "it is mean; but I'll put it down to the credit of our amiable friend Allstone. Perhaps I may be able some day to return the compliment. We shall see."

At his time of life low spirits do not last long, and he was too full of his idea of escape to trouble himself now about the quality of his food. All being well, he hoped to get down into the cellar, where, among other things it was evident that the smugglers kept their store of spirits; he might, perhaps, find firearms as well. At all events he hoped that the exit might prove easier than from the place where he now was.

He was obliged to leave off eating to try to raise the slab with the cutlass, so taking the weapon from its hiding-place, he tried the edge of the stone, inserting the point of the sword with the greatest care, and then pressing down the handle he found, to his great delight, that he could easily prise up the slab, raising it now a couple of inches before he lowered it down.

This was excellent, and the success of his project was far greater than he had anticipated; in fact, he had expected double the difficulty in loosening the stone.

"They are not much accustomed to having prisoners," he said, with a half-laugh, as he replaced the cutlass beneath the table. "Why, any fellow could get out of here."

Then, thinking that his remark in his self-communing was too conceited, he added:

"Down into the cellar or vaults; whether one could get out afterwards is another thing."

Returning to his stool, he worked away at the bread, steadily munching, finding the result quieting to his hungry pains, and also a kind of amusement to pass away the time till he felt that he might set to work in safety, for he did not mean to commence till nearly dusk.

As he expected, towards evening Allstone came again, not to bring more food, but to glance sharply round at the place and carefully scrutinise his prisoner as if looking for the missing sword.

Hilary looked straight before him, whistling softly the while in the most nonchalant manner, completely ignoring his visitor's presence, to the man's evident annoyance, his anger finding vent in a heavy bang of the door.

Hilary did not move for quite half an hour; then, all being perfectly still, and the evening shadows beginning to make his prison very dim, he rose with beating heart, listened, and all being silent as if there was not a soul within hearing, took the cutlass from its hiding-place, and proceeded to put his project in action.

Bending down, he once more swept aside the straw, and inserted the point of the sword, to find that this time there was more difficulty in his task, for he had to try several times, and in fresh positions, finding the cutlass bend almost to breaking-point, before success crowned his efforts, and he raised the stone sufficiently far to get his fingers beneath, and then the task was easy, for with a steady lift he raised one side and leaned it right up against the wall.

He had hardly accomplished this before he fancied he heard a slight noise outside, beneath the window, and the perspiration began to stand in a dew upon his face as he realised the fact that some one had just placed a ladder against the wall and was ascending to look in.

If the stone was seen upraised his chance of escape was at an end, and there was not a moment to spare, nor the slightest chance of closing it.

He glanced around, and, to his intense delight, noted that it was getting decidedly dark in the corner where he stood; but still detection seemed to be certain; and he had only one chance, that was—to throw himself down and pretend to be asleep.

This he did at once, breathing heavily, and lying perfectly motionless, but with his eyes wide open, and his ears strained to catch the slightest sound.

He was quite right; some one was ascending a short ladder placed by his window; and as he watched attentively he saw the opening suddenly darkened, and some man's face gazing straight in.

It was too dark now for him to distinguish the features, and he hoped that the obscurity would favour him by

preventing the intruder from seeing what had been done.

It was a time of terrible suspense, probably only of a minute's duration, but it seemed to Hilary like an hour; and there he lay, with half-closed eyes, gazing at the head so dimly-seen, wondering whether it was Allstone, but unable to make out.

Just then a thought flashed through his brain.

Might it not be a friend?—perhaps a party from the *Kestrel* arrived in search of him; and, full of hope, he gazed intently at the head. But his hopes sank as rapidly as they had risen, for he was compelled to own that, if it had been a friend, he would have spoken or whistled, or in some way have endeavoured to catch his attention.

At last, wearied with straining his attention, Hilary felt that he must speak, when it seemed to him that the window grew a little lighter, and as he gazed there was a faint scratching noise, telling that the ladder had been removed.

He could bear it no longer, but, softly rising, he made for the window, climbed up, and gently raising his head above the sill, peered out, to be just able to distinguish a dark figure carrying a short ladder, which brushed against the branches of a tree, and then a low, husky cough, which he at once recognised, told him who his visitor had been.

"A contemptible spy!" muttered Hilary, as he dropped back into the chapel. "Now then, has he seen or has he not?"

If he had it was useless to lower down the slab, so Hilary let it stay, and waited minute after minute to see if he would come. But all remained perfectly still, and, to all appearance, the people who made the old place their rendezvous were now away.

Hilary was divided in his mind as to what he should do. To be precipitate might ruin his chance of getting away, while if he left it too long the smugglers might return, and his opportunity would again be gone. He decided, then, on a medium course—to wait, as far as he could judge, for half an hour, and then make his attempt.

Meantime he began to think of what course he should pursue when he was free, and it seemed that all he could do would be to strike inland at once, for that would be the safest plan. If he tried to reach the coast the chances were that he would encounter one of the gang, or at all events some cottager who would most probably be in their pay.

"The half-hour must be up now," he exclaimed; and, after listening at the door, he thrust the cutlass in his belt, and made for the hole formed by the raised flag.

"I wonder how far it is down?" he muttered. "Seven feet at the outside; and if I lower myself gently I shall be able to touch the floor, or perhaps I shall come down on some barrel or package."

As he spoke he lowered himself gently down, with a hand on either side of the aperture, and then, swinging his legs about, one of them kicked the side, showing that the cellar or vault was a little smaller in dimensions than the place above.

He lowered himself a little more, and a little more, his sea life having made the muscles of his arms as tough almost as iron, and at last, having a good hold of the stones on either side, he let himself steadily go down till his head was beneath the floor and he hung down at the full length of his hands.

"Deeper down than I thought for," he muttered, as he swung himself to and fro. "Shall I drop, or sha'n't I? It can't be above a foot; but somehow one don't like to let go of a certainty, to drop no one can tell where—perhaps on to bottles, or no one knows what."

He still swung in hesitation, for it seemed cowardly to go back, now he was so far down; but somehow the desire to be upon the safe side obtained the mastery, and he determined to go back.

Easier settled upon than done. His muscles were tough enough, but somehow his position was awkward, and his hold upon the stones so slight that, though he drew himself up twice, he did not get well above the opening till he managed to force one toe into the niche between a couple of the stones of the wall, when, by a sharp effort, he drew himself so far out of the hole that he was able to seat himself upon the edge, with his legs dangling down.

"What a lot of trouble I am taking!" he said, laughing lightly, though at the same time he felt discomposed. "I might just as well have dropped, but as I am up here again I may as well take soundings."

His plan of taking soundings was to fish out his ball of worsted, and, after a moment's thought, to tie it to the handle of the brown water-jug, and this he lowered softly down the hole.

"It's deeper down than I thought for," he said to himself, as he let the jug right down to the extent of the worsted thread, and then knelt down and reached as far as he could, but still without result.

"Stop a moment," he said, pulling out his piece of line, "it's lucky I didn't leave go. Why, that worsted's at least a dozen feet long."

As he spoke he tied the end of the worsted to his piece of cord, and let the jug down lower still, to the extent of the cord as well, quite five yards more.

"Phew!" he whistled, as, with the cord round his finger, he reached down as far as he could; "I should have had a drop! and—hang it, there goes the jug!"

For at that moment the string suddenly became light, the worsted having parted; and as he knelt there, peering

down into the darkness, the perspiration started once more from his forehead, and a curious sensation, as of a comb with teeth of ice passing through his hair, affected him while he listened moment after moment, moment after moment, till there came up a dull whispering splash from below, at a distance that was perfectly horrifying after the risk that Hilary had run.

So overcome was he by his discovery that he shrank away from the opening in the floor completely unnerved, and unable for a time to move. He was, in fact, like one who had received a stunning blow, and only after some minutes had elapsed was he able to mutter a few words of thankfulness for his escape, as he now thoroughly realised that he had uncovered an old well of tremendous depth.

Chapter Twenty Four.

A Strange Fish in the Net.

Hilary's first act on recovering himself was to creep back cautiously to the side, and lower down the stone over the open well, shivering still as he realised more fully the narrowness of his escape.

"Old Allstone will be wanting to know what I have done with his jug," he said, as he seated himself upon the stool, and began to think what he should do.

He was somewhat unnerved by his adventure, but recovering himself fast, and he had the whole night before him for making another attempt. All the same, though, the time wore on without his moving; for the recollection of that horrible whispering plash and the echoes that had smitten his ear were hard to get rid of, try how he would; but at last, feeling that he was wasting time, he began upon hands and knees creeping about the place, and tapping the floor.

There were plenty of hollow, echoing sounds in reply as he hammered away with the hilt of the cutlass, and, telling himself that there could not be wells beneath every stone, he made up his mind at last to try one which seemed to present the greatest facilities for his effort—that is, as far as he could tell by feeling the crack between it and the next.

It proved a long and a tough job before he could move it. Twice over he was about to give it up, for when at last he managed to make it move a little it kept slipping back into its place, and seeming to wedge itself farther in.

The perspiration ran down his cheeks, and his arms ached; but he was toiling for liberty, and on the *nil desperandum* principle he worked away.

For, as he thought matters over, he was compelled to own that, however much Lieutenant Lipscombe might feel disposed to search for him, he had been spirited away so suddenly that it was not likely that success would attend the search.

Under these circumstances there was nothing for it but that he should depend upon himself, and this he did to such a brave extent that at last he placed the point of the cutlass in so satisfactory a position that on heaving up the stone upon which he was at work it did not slip back, but was so much dislodged that a little farther effort enabled him to pull it aside; and then he sat down panting beside the black square opening in the floor.

It was so dark that most of his work had to be done by the sense of touch, and consequently the toil was twice as hard, for he could not see where it was best to apply force. All the same, though, perseverance was rewarded, and he had raised the stone.

Hilary did not feel in any great hurry to try his fortune this time; for after his experience when he raised the last stone, he did not know what might be here. Try to laugh it off as he would, there was a curious, creeping sensation of dread came over him. He knew that this was a chapel, and what more likely than that the vault beneath might be the abiding place of the dead—of those who had occupied this old place in the past; and, mingled with this, Adela's words would come back about the place being haunted.

"Bah!" he exclaimed at last. "What a fool you are, Hil!"

As he spoke he gave himself a tremendous blow in the chest with his doubled fist, hurting himself a great deal more than he intended, and this roused him once more to action.

He was not going to lower himself down this time without trying for bottom; and pulling out his cord, he tied it to the hilt of the cutlass, lowered it into the hole, and began to fish, as he expressed it.

Clang! Jingle!

Steel upon stone, as far as he could judge, just over six feet below where he was leaning over.

He tried again, here, there, and everywhere within his reach, and the result was always the same, and there could be no mistake this time; he might drop down in safety.

He could not help hesitation, for the hole was black and forbidding. But it was for liberty, and after pausing for a few moments while he leaned down and felt about as far as he could reach, he prepared to descend.

His examination had taught him that the vault below was arched, for, close by him, he could feel the thickness of the floor, while at the other side of the square opening he could not reach down to the edge of the arch, try how he

would. In fact, his plan of sounding the floor had answered admirably, and he had raised a stone just in the right place.

Hesitating no longer he thrust the cutlass into his waistband and proceeded to lower himself down. His acts were very cautiously carried out, for his former experience had taught him care, and holding on tightly by the edge he gradually slid down, till at the full extent of his arms he felt firm footing.

Still he did not leave hold, but passing himself along first one edge and then another of his hole till he had gone along all four sides, and always with the same result, he let go, and stood in safety upon a stone floor.

Drawing his cutlass, he felt overhead the opening where the stone had been removed, and wondered what he was to do to find it again in the intense darkness; but he was obliged to own that he could do nothing.

A thrust to right touched nothing; a thrust to left had no better result; and then he stood and wiped his brow.

"I wonder what I shall find," he said to himself. "Cases and tubs, or old coffins."

He thrust out the sword once more straight in front of him, and this time it touched wood, and made him shiver.

For a few moments he did not care to move and investigate farther; but rousing himself once more, he tried again with his hand, to find that he touched hoops and staves, and that it was a goodly-sized tub.

He tried again, cautiously, feeling carefully with one foot before he attempted to move another, for the thought struck him that not very far from him the opening down into that terrible well must be yawning in the floor, and under these circumstances he moved most carefully.

He found that he need not have been so cautious, for after a little more of this obscure investigation he learned that he was in a very circumscribed area, surrounded on all sides by a most heterogeneous collection of tubs, full and empty, rough cases, bales, ropes, blocks, and iron tackle, such as might be used in a fishing-boat; and the next thing his hands encountered was a pile of fishing-nets.

It was as he had expected: the vault or cellar below the chapel was full of the stores belonging to the smugglers, and his task now was to find his way out.

It was of no avail to wish for flint and steel, to try, if only by the light of a few sparks, to dispel this terrible darkness, which seemed to surround and close him in, prisoning his faculties, as it were, and preventing him, now he had got so far, from making his escape.

There was always the dread of coming upon that terrible well acting like a bar to further progress. Then there was the utter helplessness of his position. Which way was he to go?

"At all events," he said to himself at last, "I can't go down the well if I'm climbing over tubs;" and he felt his way to the place where he had first touched a cask, and climbing up, he found that he could progress a little way, always getting higher, with many an awkward slip; and then he had to stop, for his head touched the roof.

A trial to right and left had no better result, and there was nothing for it but to return and begin elsewhere.

This he did, crawling over nets and boxes and packages, whose kind and shape he could not make out, but he always seemed to be stopped, try where he would, and at last, panting and hot with his exertions, he lay down on some fishing-nets close by to rest himself and endeavour to think out what was best to do.

Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, there was a heavy grating creak; a door was thrown open; and what to his eyes seemed to be a dazzling light shone into the place, revealing a narrow passage not ten feet from where he lay, but which he had passed over in the darkness again and again.

"Better light two or three more candles," said a gruff voice.

"All right," was the reply; and from just on the other side of a pile of merchandise that reached to the ceiling Hilary could hear some one blowing at the tindery fluff made by lighting the top of a fresh candle.

What was he to do? He could not see the men who had come down, for he was separated from them by the piled-up contents of the cellar; but any attempt to regain the chapel must result in discovery, so he lay motionless, hardly daring to breathe, till he heard more footsteps coming—heavy, shuffling footsteps, as if those who came were loaded; and, waiting till they came nearer and one of the first comers said something aloud, Hilary raised himself slightly, and, almost with the rapidity of thought, covered himself with some of the soft, loose fishing-nets, feet and legs first, then shoulders and head, finally throwing a few more folds over his head, and then lying down.

"Wouldn't be a bad plan to give them a good dose of brimstone," said one of the men.

"Give who a good dose?" said another.

"Why, the rats. Didn't you hear 'em?"

"Oh, ay, yes; I did hear a bit of scuffling. Let 'em bide; they don't do much mischief."

"Not much mischief!" said the other as Hilary felt his hopes rise as he heard the noise attributed to rats. "Why, there's a couple o' hundred fathom o' mack'rel net lying t'other side there gnawed full of holes."

"What o' that?" said the other. "Why, one such night as this, lad, is worth two months o' mack'rel fishing."

"Well, yes, so it be. Ah! that's better. We shall see now what we're about. I say, it was rather a near one with the cutter to-night. I thought she'd ha' been down upon us."

"Down upon us? ay! I wish her skipper was boxed up safe along with young cockchafer yonder."

"Hang his insolence!" thought Hilary. "Young cockchafer, indeed! He'll find me more of a wasp."

"Think anyone sent word to the cutter?"

"Nay, not they. Who would? She's hanging about after her boy."

"Boy, eh? That's I," said Hilary again to himself. "Well, maybe I shall show 'em I can fight like a man!"

"Here, I say," said another voice: "why don't you two begin to stow away these kegs?"

"Never you mind. You bring 'em down from the carts: we know what we're doing."

There was a sound of departing footsteps, and Hilary listened intently.

"Ah!" said one of the men, "if I was the skipper I'd send the young Tom chicken about his business; but the skipper says he knows too much."

"How long's he going to keep him then?"

"Altogether, I s'pose, unless he likes to join us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the other, who was evidently moving something heavy.

"Well, he might do worse, my lad. Anyhow, they ar'n't going to let him go and bring that cutter down upon us."

"No, that wouldn't do. Lend a hand here. This bag's heavy. What's in it?"

"I don't know. Feels like lead. P'r'aps it is."

"Think the cutter will hang about long?"

"How should I know? I say, though, how staggered them chaps was when they got up to the rock and found no one to fight!"

"I wasn't there."

"Oh, no—more you wasn't. Come along, come along, lads. Here we are waiting for stowage, and you talk about us keeping you waiting."

"You mind your own job," growled the voice that Hilary had heard finding fault before.

There was more scuffling of feet, and then the two men went on talking.

"The cutter's sailors had come, of course, after the boy, and they stumbled on the way through the rocks, just same as the boy did; and we waited for 'em with a few sticks, and then give 'em as much as were good for 'em, and then retreated, big Joey keeping the way till we had all got up the rock, and then up he come in the dark, and you'd have laughed fit to crack your sides to hear them down below whacking at the stones with their cutlasses till they was obliged to believe we was gone, and then they went back with their tails between their legs like a pack of dogs."

The other man laughed as Hilary drank in all this, and learned how the crew had been after him, and realised most thoroughly how it was that he had been brought there, and also the ingenious plan by which the smugglers and the political party with whom they seemed to be mixed up contrived to throw their enemies off the scent. There was an interval, during which the two men seemed to be very busy stowing away kegs and packages, and then they went on again.

"Skipper of the cutter come next day—that one-eyed chap we took in so with the lugger—and his chaps brought him up to the rocks, and then, my wig! how he did give it 'em for bringing them a fool's errand, as he called it! It was a fine game, I can tell you."

"Must have been," said the other, as Hilary drank in this information too, and made mental vows about how he would pay the scoundrels out for all this when once he got free.

Then there was a cessation of the feet coming down the stairs, broken by one step that Hilary seemed to recognise.

"How are you getting on?"

Hilary was right; it was Allstone.

"Waiting for more," was the reply.

"They'll bring up another cart directly," said Allstone in his sulky tone of voice.

"Sooner the better. I'm 'bout tired out. Fine lot o' rats here," said the man.

"Ah, yes! There's a few," said Allstone.

"Heard 'em scuffling about like fun over the other side," said the man.

Hilary felt the cold perspiration ooze out of him as he lay there, dimly seeing through the meshes of the net that he was in a low arched vault of considerable extent, the curved roof being of time-blackened stone, and that here and there were rough pillars from which the arches sprang.

He hardly dared to move, but, softly turning his head, he saw to his horror that the square opening whence he had taken the stone was full in view, the light that left him in darkness striking straight up through the hole.

If they looked up there, he felt that they must see that the stone had been moved, and he shivered as he felt that his efforts to escape had been in vain.

"They're a plaguey long time coming," said the man who had been talking so much. "Here, just come round here, my lad, and I'll show you what I mean about the nets."

"It's all over," said Hilary as he took a firm grip of the hilt of his cutlass, meaning as soon as he was discovered to strike out right and left, and try to escape during the surprise his appearance would cause.

As he lay there, ready to spring up at the smallest indication of his discovery, he saw the shadows move as the men came round by the heap of packages, and enter the narrow passage where he was. The first, bearing a candle stuck between some nails in a piece of wood, was a fair, fresh-coloured young fellow, and he was closely followed by a burly middle-aged man bearing another candle, Allstone coming last.

"There," said the younger man, "there's about as nice a mess for a set o' nets to be in as anyone ever saw;" and he laid hold of the pile that Hilary had drawn over his face.

It was only a matter of moments now, and as he lay there Hilary's nerves tingled, and he could hardly contain himself for eagerness to make his spring.

"Look at that, and that, and that," said the man, picking up folds of the soft brown netting, and seeming about to strip all off Hilary, but by a touch of fate helping his concealment the next moment, by throwing fold after fold over him, till the next thing seemed to be that he would be smothered.

"Tell you what," he said. "They nets are just being spoiled. There's plenty of time before the next cart unloads. Lend a hand here, and let's have 'em all out in the pure air. I hate seeing good trade left down here to spoil in a damp—"

He laid hold of the nets, and as he gave a drag Hilary felt the meshes gliding over his face, and prepared himself to spring up and make a dash for his liberty.

Chapter Twenty Five.

'twixt Cup and Lip.

Another instant and Hilary must have been discovered; but just then the trampling of feet was heard, a shout or two, and Allstone said gruffly:

"Let the nets alone, and come and get the stuff down."

The man dropped the nets, and taking up his candle, which he had placed upon a chest, followed Allstone back along the narrow passage between the piled-up tubs and packages, and once more Hilary was left in comparative darkness, to lie there dripping with perspiration, and hesitating as to what he should do next, for if he stayed where he was, it was probable that the men would come back to remove the nets. If, on the other hand, he attempted to move, the chances were that he would be heard. In short he dare not move, for the slightest rustle would be sure to take their attention.

And so he lay there in an extremely uncomfortable position, watching the shadows cast upon the dingy ceiling, as the distorted heads and shoulders of the men were seen moving to and fro. Sometimes he could distinguish what they carried, whether it was bale or tub, and upon which shoulder it was carried, till by degrees, as he found that he was not discovered, his thoughts began to turn upon what a grand haul the crew of the *Kestrel* could make in the way of prize-money if he only had the good fortune to escape, and could find his way back to the shore.

There must have been at least six carts unloaded by slow degrees, and their contents brought down into that vault before Allstone, who was at the head of the steps leading down, suddenly shouted:

"That's all. Look alive up."

"Ay, ay, we're coming," was the reply, and Hilary heard the men drag a case of some kind a little way along the floor with a loud scratching noise.

"I don't like leaving those nets," said the one who had been round. "We don't want 'em now, but the time may come when we shall be glad to go drifting again. What are you doing?"

"Only got a handful of this 'bacco, my boy. I don't see any fun in buying it where there's hundredweights down here."

"Bring me a handful too."

Hilary could resist the temptation no longer, and rising softly, he peered over the piled-up boxes and tubs to get a better view of the place, and make out where the door of exit lay. This he ascertained at a glance, and likewise obtained a pretty good idea of the shape and extent of the vault before the men took up their candles to go.

Now was the critical moment. Would they raise their eyes and see where there was a stone missing in the ceiling? A few moments would decide it, and so excited was Hilary now that he could not refrain from watching the men, though the act was excessively dangerous, and if they had turned their heads in his direction they must have seen him.

But they did not turn their heads as it happened, but went by within a yard of where the young officer was concealed. Then he saw them mount some broad rugged old steps beneath a little archway, whose stones were covered with chisel-marks; there was a Rembrandtish effect as they turned round the winding stair, and then there was the clang of a heavy door, and darkness reigned once more in the vault, for Hilary was alone.

For a few minutes he dared not stir for fear that some one or other of the men might return; but as the time wore on, and he could only hear the sounds of talking in a distant muffled way, he descended from his awkward position, reached the stone floor, and feeling his way along reached the opening through which the men had come, and then stumbling two or three times, and barely saving himself from falling, he found his way to where they had been at work, for his hand came in contact with one of the rough candlesticks thick with grease.

Sure thus far, he was not long in finding the doorway, where he stood listening to dull sounds from above, and then crept back a little way so as to be able to retreat in case the men were coming back, and touching a keg with his foot he sat down upon it to think.

If the door at the top of the stairs was locked he would be no better off than in the chapel, for it was not likely that there would be a window to this place, so that if he meant to escape he felt that it would be better not to leave it to daylight; though, on the other hand, if he did leave it to daybreak, and the door was unfastened, he would have an admirable opportunity of getting away, for by that time the men would have done their night's work, and would probably be fast asleep.

"It is of no use for me to play the coward," said Hilary to himself at last. "If I am to get away it must be by a bold dash."

He burst out into a hearty fit of silent laughter here.

"My word, what a game it would be!" he said. "They say the place is haunted. Suppose I cover myself with fishing-nets and march straight out."

"Wouldn't do!" he said, decidedly. "They would not be such noodles as to be frightened, and they would pop at me with their pistols."

Meanwhile there was a good deal of talking going on up above, and at last, unable to restrain his curiosity longer, Hilary returned to the foot of the steps, felt the wall on either side, and began softly to ascend, counting the steps as he went, and calculating that there would be about twelve.

He was quite right, and as he wound round and neared the top he found that there were rays of light coming beneath the door and through the keyhole, while the sound of voices came much plainer.

Going down on hands and knees, he was able to peer under the door, which shut right upon the top step; and after a few seconds he had pretty well ascertained his position.

He was looking under a door right at the end of a long stone-paved passage, and there was another door just upon his right, which evidently led into his prison; while straight before him, through an opening he could see into a large stone-paved kitchen where the talking was going on, the back of one man being visible as he seemed to be seated upon a stool, and changed his position from time to time.

The next thing to ascertain was whether the door was unfastened; and he was about to rise and try, when the familiar sound of steps upon a boarded floor fell upon his ear, a door that he had not hitherto seen was opened, and Allstone, Sir Henry, and the sharp-looking captain of the lugger passed before him, and, entering the lit-up kitchen, were lost to sight.

There was a louder burst of talking just now, and as it seemed a favourable opportunity Hilary rose to his feet, passed his hand up the side of the door, and touched the great solid hinges. Trying the other side he was more successful, for his hand came in contact with a huge latch which rattled softly at his touch, and set his heart beating heavily.

He paused for a few moments before he tried again, when, proceeding more carefully, he found that the latch rose easily enough; and then as he drew the door towards him it yielded slowly from its great weight; but there was the fact—the way was open for escape, and the place before him was clear.

There was nothing to do then but wait, and he was in the act of closing the door and lowering the latch when he heard Sir Henry's voice speaking, and directly after steps in the passage.

"Allstone has the keys," said a voice Hilary recognised as that of Sir Henry; "will you go and see him now?"

"Look here, Sir Henry," was whispered, "you must get him on our side. The boy would be invaluable. With such an ally on board the cutter we need never fear a surprise."

"You are thinking of your smuggling ventures," said Sir Henry contemptuously.

"I was thinking as much of your despatches. Why, you could have run them across in safety then. Come, Sir Henry, we won't quarrel about that. He'll be useful to both. Shall I go and see him? I'll wager I'll soon bully or bribe him into agreement."

"You don't know your man," said Sir Henry.

"Or boy," laughed the skipper.

"Give me time and I'll win him," said Sir Henry.

"That's what I can't give you," was the reply. "It isn't safe having prisoners here. Suppose the boy escapes. How long should we be before he brings a couple of dozen fellows from the cutter, if they've got so many; and then where shall we be?"

"Do you think he could hear what we say?" asked Sir Henry in so low a voice that Hilary had hard work to catch the words.

"Bah! not he. That door's six inches thick," said the skipper. "No, Sir Henry, there is no time to lose, and we must win him over, unless you'd rather—"

Hilary could not catch the end of what was said, but he suspected what was meant, as he heard Sir Henry utter a sharp exclamation full of anger.

"Leave it till to-morrow, and I think I can bring him to our wishes."

"That is what you said last time, Sir Henry," replied the skipper insolently. "Here, Allstone, give me the key and I'll soon bring the springald to reason."

There was a clink of metal, a step forward, and Hilary's heart sank within him, for the discovery of his evasion was a matter of course.

Chapter Twenty Six.

The Way to Escape.

In a moment Hilary mentally saw Sir Henry and the skipper enter his prison, fancied the shout of alarm, and seemed to see himself, cutlass in hand, making a dash for his liberty; but the struggle was not then to be, for, with an angry voice, Sir Henry interposed.

"Martin!" he exclaimed, "let us understand one another once and for all. Your duty, sir, is to obey me, and I'll be obeyed. As to that boy, I tell you I'll win him to our side, but it will be at my own good time. Sir, I order you to come away from that door."

"What!" exclaimed the skipper furiously; "do you know I have a dozen men ready to take my side if I raise my voice?"

"I neither know nor care," cried Sir Henry hoarsely; "but I do know that you have sworn allegiance to King Charles Edward, sir, and that you are my inferior officer in the cause. Disobey me, sir, at your peril."

Hilary grasped his cutlass, and the fighting blood of the Englishman was making his veins tingle.

"If it comes to a tussle," he thought, "there'll be one on Sir Henry's side they don't count upon;" and as he thought this he softly raised the latch, ready to swing open the door and dash out.

But Martin, the skipper, evidently did not care to quarrel with Sir Henry, and his next words were quite apologetic.

"Why, Sir Henry," he said with a rough laugh, "I believe we two were getting out of temper, and that won't do, you know."

"I am not out of temper," said Sir Henry; "but I'll be obeyed, sir."

"And so you shall be, Sir Henry. It's all right, and I'll say no more about it, only that it's dangerous leaving a young fellow like that shut up. These boys are as active as monkeys, and we might return at any time and find the young rascal gone. But you'll do your best to bring him round?"

"I will," replied Sir Henry, "for more reasons than one. Look here, Martin, if I spoke too angrily to you just now I beg your pardon, but you touch upon a tender point when you talk of rough measures towards that boy. I told you that he was my child's companion years ago—in fact, I used to look upon him quite as a son. There," he added hastily, "you may trust me to do my best. Good-night."

"Good-night, Sir Henry, good-night," said the skipper effusively. "I'll trust you. Good-night."

Sir Henry's steps were heard to die away, and so silent was everything that Hilary concluded that the skipper must have also gone; but just as he had made up his mind that this was the case some one uttered an oath.

"Give me the keys, Allstone," Hilary heard the next moment; and once more he concluded that all was over, for there was the jingle of the iron, and it seemed that now he was left to himself Martin was about to visit the young prisoner, and try to frighten him into following out his wishes.

Hilary was in despair, but he made up his mind what to do, and that was to fling open the door and walk swiftly across the place where the men were lying about, as soon as he heard the skipper and Allstone go into the old chapel.

To his dismay, however, the man came straight to the door where Hilary was standing, raised the latch, opened it, and as the young officer drew back the heavy door struck him in the chest, but before he could recover from his surprise there was a sharp bang, with the accompanying rattle of the great latch, and as a dull echo came from below, the key was turned, and the lock shot into the stone cheek.

"Curse him and his fine airs!" Hilary heard the skipper say, hoarsely. "I shall have the young villain bringing the cutter's crew down upon us. I wish his neck was broken."

"Put him in the top room, then," said Allstone; "he'll break his neck trying to get away."

"Not he," said the skipper; "those middies can climb like cats. He's safe enough now, I suppose."

"Oh, yes," said Allstone, "I went and had a look at the window-bars to-night."

"Safe enough, yes," muttered Hilary, as he heard the departing steps; "they've locked me up safe enough. Was anything ever so vexatious?"

As he heard the clang of a door he placed his eye to the open keyhole, and through it he could see into the great kitchen, which now seemed to be lit only by the glow from a great wood fire, for the shadows danced on the wall, and when now and then the fire fell together and the flames danced up more brightly he could make out quite definitely a pair of the shadows, which were evidently those of a couple of half-recumbent men.

Just on one side too he could plainly see part of a man's leg. No shadow this, but a limb of some one who had thrown himself upon the floor; and Hilary rightly judged that the crew of the lugger were snatching an hour or two's repose previous to being called up by their leader.

The laughing and talking were silenced, and he could hear nothing but the occasional crackle of burning wood.

He raised the latch softly, pressing against the door the while; but it was fast locked, and by running his fingers down the side he could feel where the great square bolt of the lock ran into the stone wall. Escape that way was cut off, and ready to stamp with mortification Hilary stood upon the step at the top of the flight asking himself what he had best do.

There was no chance of getting away that night, so he felt that he must give it up, and the sinking despondency that came over him was for the moment terrible; but reaction soon sets in when one is on the buoyant side of twenty, and he recalled the fact that, though he might be obliged to return to his prison, he had found a way of exit; and if he went back, lowered the stone and dusted it over, he might come down another time, night or morning, and find the door open; in fact, he might keep on trying till he did.

It was very disheartening, but there seemed to be nothing else to be done, and he stood there thinking of how nearly he had escaped, but at the same he was obliged to own how happily he had avoided detection.

Then the remembrance of the well came back, and the cold perspiration broke out on his hands and brow at the bare recollection.

"Bah! what's the good of thinking about that?" he said to himself; and he was about to descend when he fancied he heard a faint rustling noise on the other side of the door, and then whispers.

The sounds ceased directly, and he bent down so that his eye was to the keyhole, when, to his surprise, he found that something was between him and the light.

Just then the whispers began again, and placing his ear this time to the great hole, he plainly heard two men speaking:

"I think you can do it without a light," said one.

"Ay, easy enough. You stop, and if you hear Allstone coming, give just one pipe, and I'll be up directly."

"All right. Get the hollands this time. Gently with that key."

Hilary would have run down, but he was afraid of detection, for just then there was the harsh grating noise of a key being thrust into the big lock, the bolt creaked back, the latch was raised, and the door softly pushed open as he pressed himself back against the wall, and remained there in the darkness, almost afraid to breathe.

It was intensely dark now, even when the door was opened, and as Hilary stood there behind the door he heard some one descend, while another stood at the top, breathing hard, and evidently listening to the rustling of the man down below.

Several minutes passed, and then the man at the top of the stairs muttered impatiently, and went down two or three of the degrees.

"Pst! Dick!" he whispered.

"Ay, ay."

“Be quick, man!”

“I can’t find ’em,” was the whispered reply. “They’ve packed the cases atop of ’em.”

“Jolterhead!” muttered the other impatiently. “Why, they’re just at the back.”

“Come down,” was whispered from below, and to Hilary’s great delight he heard the man on the watch go softly below.

Now was Hilary’s opportunity, and gliding softly from behind the door, he stepped out into the stone passage, and saw before him a faint light shining under the bottom of the door which the men had evidently closed when they left the kitchen.

He might have locked the two fellows in the vault, but that would have caused needless noise, and perhaps hindered his escape, so without further hesitation he stepped lightly along the passage, and softly pressed against the farther door.

It yielded easily, and he found himself looking into a great low-ceiled kitchen, whose ancient black rafters shone in the glow from a huge fireplace, upon whose hearth the remains of a large fire flickered and sent forth a few dying sparks.

Around it, and stretched in a variety of postures upon the floor, were some eight or ten men fast asleep; and what took Hilary’s attention more than all was another door at the far corner, which it was now his aim to reach.

But to do this he would have to step over two of the men, and there was the possibility that, though they all seemed to be asleep, one or more might be awake and watchful.

It needed no little firmness to make the attempt; but if he were to escape, he knew it must be done.

“If they wake they will only take me back,” thought Hilary, “so I may as well try.”

He hesitated no longer, but stepping on tiptoe he passed on between two of the sleeping men, and was in the act of stepping over another, when a gruff voice from a corner exclaimed:—

“Why don’t you lie down. You’ll be glad of a nap by and by.”

Hilary felt as if his heart had leaped to his mouth, and he thought he was discovered; but the words were spoken in a sleepy tone, and from the sound that followed it was evident that the man had turned over.

Hilary waited a few minutes, and once more resumed his progress towards the door, making every movement with the greatest caution; and he was already half way to his goal when he heard the grating of the lock at the top of the dark cellar stairs, and a low whispering told him that the men were about to return.

There was not a moment to lose, and stepping lightly on, he reached the door, raised the great wooden latch by which it was secured, and passed in, while just as he closed it he saw through the opening the two men who had been below enter the place.

The fire was throwing out but little light now, but he could see that they carried what looked like a little spirit keg, which they set down by the fire. The closing door shut out the rest.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Manhood versus Selfishness—and Manhood wins.

Hilary breathed more freely as he silently let fall the latch, and then waited for a few minutes to recover his equanimity before making a farther trial. He had succeeded so far, and he felt that if he were patient and cautious he might regain his freedom; but he thought it better to let the men begin upon the spirits that two of the party had evidently been down to obtain.

But as far as he could make out they did not seem to be in any hurry to awaken their companions, and at last after waiting for some minutes for the burst of conversation that he hoped would make his movements pass unheard, he began to feel his way cautiously about, expecting a door of exit to meet his hand, or else to find that he was in some large passage. To his great disappointment he found that he could touch the wall on either side after making a step; and a very little investigation showed him farther that he was only in a stone-paved place that had probably been a dairy, for on one side there was an iron grating of very massive bars let into the stone, and there were stone benches along one side.

In fact, if the key of the door had been turned, he would have only exchanged one prison for another.

His heart sank within him as he realised his position, and found that there was only one door, upon which he raised his hand ready to return into the great kitchen; but a low creaking noise, suggestive of some one treading on a board, arrested him, and he stood there listening.

After a few minutes he grew more confident, and opening the door slightly he once more gazed upon the Rembrandtish scene, all light and shadow, with the men stretched about asleep, and two more seated upon a bench busily trickling spirit from the little keg into a small horn, from which they drank in turn with a sigh of satisfaction.

The others slept on, one now and then making an uneasy movement; but it was evident that there were to be no more partners in the coming drinking bout, and Hilary began to calculate how long it would be before they would have drunk enough to make them sleepy and ready to join their companions upon the floor.

He had no means of judging, but he concluded that it must now be nearly three o'clock, and in an hour's time it would be getting light. And yet, near as he was to safety, it seemed that he was to be disappointed, and to wait there till somebody or other came to the place and gave the alarm.

By keeping the door just ajar he was able to watch the two men; but a couple of hours had passed before he saw them stretch themselves upon the floor, after carefully hiding away the little keg, and at last Hilary felt that he might venture to cross the great kitchen again and endeavour to find another outlet.

The day had broken some time before, and the cold grey light that shone in through the iron grating showed him that he was correct in his surmises, and that the place had been a dairy; but the window was too strong for him to break through, and there was nothing for it but to cross the party of sleeping men.

He was some little time before he could make up his mind to the effort, and when he did, and began to slowly open the door, he let it glide to once more, for one of the men suddenly uttered a loud yawn, jumped up and stretched himself, before giving a companion a kick in the side.

It took several kicks to induce the man to get up; but when he did it was in a morose, angry disposition, and he revenged himself by going round and kicking every other man till the whole party was awake, and Hilary saw his chances fade away, while, to add to his misery, the next act of the party was to go to a great cupboard, from which a ham and a couple of loaves were produced, upon which they made a vigorous onslaught, each man opening his jack-knife and hewing off a lump of bread and cutting a great slice of ham.

They ate so heartily that a feeling of hunger was excited in the prisoner's breast; but this soon passed off, and he sat there wondering how long it would be before one or other of the party would come into the old dairy, though, upon looking round, there seemed to be nothing to bring them there.

Hour after hour glided by. The meal had long been ended, and the men were gone outside, but never all at once; always one stayed, sometimes two. Then Martin kept bustling in and giving orders. Once too Sir Harry came in and entered into a discussion with the skipper, apparently, from the few words that Hilary could catch, concerning the advisability of making some excursion; but there seemed to be some hindrance in the way, and Hilary's heart beat high with hope as he heard the word "cutter" spoken twice.

It was not much to hear; but it was good news for Hilary, who concluded that the vessel must still be lying off the coast, and in the smugglers' way.

At last, however, the conversation ended, and Hilary saw Sir Henry leave the place just as Allstone came in.

This made the young man's heart beat again, for either the fellow had come to announce his evasion, or else he was about to take food into the old chapel, when, of course, he would find his prisoner gone.

But no: he spoke quite calmly to the skipper, and after a short consultation they went out.

Just then the noise of wheels and the trampling of horses could be heard outside, facts which pointed to the leaving of one or more of the party.

Two of the men were still hanging about, but at last they also went, and Allstone came in and seated himself thoughtfully upon a bench.

By-and-by, though, he cut himself some food, hesitated, and proceeded to cut some more, which he placed in a coarse delf plate.

"My breakfast!" said Hilary to himself, and he wondered how soon the man would go to the chapel to present it to his prisoner.

This would be the signal for Hilary's escape, and, anxiously waiting till the man had finished his own repast, the young officer made up his mind to run to the window, climb out, and then trust to his heels for his liberty.

The time seemed as if it would never come, but at last the surly-looking fellow, having apparently satisfied his own hunger, rose up slowly, and, taking the plate, went slowly out of the door, rattling his keys the while.

He had hardly disappeared before Hilary glided out of his hiding-place, darted to the table and seized the remains of the bread, hesitated as to whether he should take the ham bone, but leaving it, climbed on to the window-sill, forced the frame open, and dropped outside amongst the nettles that grew beneath.

"Free!" he exclaimed. "Now which way?"

He had not much choice in the first place, for he remembered that there would be the moat to cross, and the probabilities were that there would only be one path. After that he saw his way clearly, and that was towards the sun, for he knew that if he made straight for that point he would be going by midday direct for the sea.

That was his goal. Once he could reach the cliffs and get down on the shore, he meant to seize the first boat he met with, get afloat, and trust to fortune for the rest.

For the first few moments Hilary kept close to the house, but, considering that a bold effort was the only one likely to

succeed, he walked out straight to the moat, hesitated a moment as to whether he should leap in and swim or wade across, and ended by walking sharply along its brink till it turned off at right angles, and he now saw a sandstone bridge facing the entry of a large, old-fashioned hall, that had evidently gone to ruin, and which, from the outside aspect, seemed to be uninhabited, for a more thorough aspect of desolation it was impossible to imagine.

There was not a soul in view as he walked sharply away till he reached the crumbling bridge, which he crossed, and then, finding that the road led along by the far side of the moat, he did not pause to think, but, trusting to the high hedge by which it was bordered and the wilderness of trees that had sprung up between the road and the moat to conceal him, he went right on, his way being a little east of south.

"I wonder whether old Allstone has given the alarm?" he said half aloud, as he placed the cutlass in his belt. "They'll have to run fast to catch me now. Hallo! what's that?"

That was a piercing scream, followed by loud cries of "Help! Papa—help!"

Hilary had made his escape, and he had nothing to do now but make straight for the sea; but that cry stopped him on the instant. It evidently came from the moat behind him, and sounded to him as if some one had fallen in; he thought as he ran, for without a moment's hesitation he forced his way through the old hedge, dashed in amongst the clumps of hawthorn and hornbeam scrub, making straight for the moat, where he saw a sight which caused him to increase his pace and make a running dash right to the water, where the next moment he was swimming towards where Adela Norland was struggling feebly for her life.

Hilary saw how it was in a moment. The poor girl had apparently been tempted into trying to get at some of the yellow lilies and silvery water crowfoot which were growing abundantly in the centre of the wide moat, and to effect this she had entered a clumsy old boat that was evidently utilised for clearing out the weeds and growth from the stagnant water. That it was a boat was sufficient for her, and she had pushed out into the middle, not heeding that the craft was so rotten and fragile that just as she was out in one of the deepest parts it began to fill rapidly, and sank beneath her weight, leaving her struggling in the water.

Hilary had some distance to swim, for here, in the front of the house, the moat was double the width of the part by his prison window, and to his horror he saw the beating hands subside beneath the water while he was many yards away. But he was a good swimmer, and redoubling his exertions he forced his way onward, as he saw Sir Henry, Allstone, and three more men come running out to the moat; but only one of them, Sir Henry himself, attempted to save the drowning girl's life.

Long before Sir Henry could reach Adela, Hilary was at the spot where he had seen her go down, and, rising for a moment and making a dive, he went down, rose, dived again, and once again before he caught hold of the poor girl's dress, and then swam with her for the shore.

The moat was deep right up to the grassy edge; and Hilary was in the act of placing Adela in the hands held down to catch her when a fresh cry for help assailed his ears, and, turning, it was to see that Sir Henry was a dozen yards away, swimming apparently, but making no progress.

Hilary suspected the cause as he turned and swam to his old friend's help. For Sir Henry was heavily dressed, and, in addition, booted and spurred. The consequence had been that his heavy boots, with their appendages, were entangled in the long tough stems of the lilies, and his position was perilous in the extreme.

For a moment Hilary wondered how he could help his old friend, and as he wondered the thought came.

Swimming with one hand, he drew the cutlass from his belt, and telling Sir Henry to be cool, he swam up to him, thrust the cutlass down beneath the water, and after two or three attempts succeeded in dividing the tough stalks, ending by helping the nearly exhausted swimmer towards the shore.

The men on the shore, and that little figure kneeling by them with clasped hands, seemed to be growing dim and indistinct, close as they were, and as if they were receding. His arms felt like lead, and he could hardly make his strokes, while somehow Sir Henry now embarrassed him by being so close that he could not take hold, as it were, of the water. But still he strove on, with the foam bubbling at his lips, then over his lips, then to his dim eyes; and then he felt something strike against his hand, and he clutched at a pole held out by Allstone, when Sir Henry and he were dragged out, to lie panting for the next minute or two upon the bank.

"You're not dead, are you, Sir Henry?" said Allstone gruffly; and Hilary could not help, even then, feeling annoyed as he raised himself upon one elbow, but only to give place to other thoughts as he saw Adela kneeling there in speechless agony, holding her father's head in her lap.

Poor girl! She was white as ashes, and her beautiful hair hung long and dishevelled about her shoulders; but just then she seemed to have no thought of self, her whole feeling being concentrated upon the pale, motionless face before her, from which the life seemed to have passed away.

But after a time Sir Henry shuddered and opened his eyes, smiling affectionately in his child's face, and, as he realised their position, he said something to her in a low voice.

They had all been so long occupied in watching for the recovery of Sir Henry that Hilary had had time to regain breath and some of his strength, and now the knowledge of his own position came back to him. He had escaped from the net, and voluntarily returned to it to save Adela. Her he had saved, and also her father. Now it was time to save himself, and, jumping up, he gave a hasty glance round.

"No, you don't!" said a hoarse voice. "You're my prisoner." And Allstone seized him by his wet jacket.

Hilary was weak yet with his struggle in the water, but the dread of being once more a prisoner gave him strength, and, striking up the arm, he made for the bridge to cross once more for liberty; but a couple of men coming from the other direction, having just heard the alarm, cut off his retreat, and, exhausted as he was, he did not hesitate for an instant, but plunged once more into the moat.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

A Race for Liberty.

It was a question of time.

Could Hilary get across the moat before the men who ran off to stop him reached the bridge, crossed, then ran along the other side?

Appearances were against Hilary, and he saw that they were. In fact, so black was the lookout, that he half thought of finding a shallow place and standing there amongst the waterlilies, laughing at his pursuers.

"Only it would look so stupid," he muttered; "and I should be obliged to come out at last."

He was striking out pretty well, and, but for the fact that his late exertions had told upon him, he felt that he would have got across with ease.

"It's too bad, though," he thought; "and Sir Henry isn't half the fellow I thought him if he allows me to be taken. Hulloo! Hurrah! Down they go!" he exclaimed, as, straining his eyes towards the bridge, he saw one man trip and fall out of sight behind the low wall and another go over him.

This reanimated him; and, taking long, slow strokes, he was soon pretty close to the farther side, with the determination in him strong to get away.

Fortunately he had retained the cutlass; and as he reached the bank and scrambled out, dripping like some huge Newfoundland dog, Allstone came panting up and seized him by the collar.

"Not this time, my lad," he growled, showing his teeth. "You thought you had done it, didn't you?"

"Let go!" panted Hilary, as the water streamed down and made a pool.

"Yes, when I've got you in a safer place," was the reply.

"Here, come along, you two. No; one of you fetch a rope."

This was to his followers, one of whom was limping, and the other bleeding from a cut in the face caused by his fall.

"Will you let go?" cried Hilary hoarsely, but fast regaining his breath.

"There, it's no use for you to struggle, my boy," said Allstone. "Murder! Here! Help!"

Hilary had glanced round and taken in his position. Sir Henry was standing holding Adela, who had hidden her face in his breast so as not to see the struggle, while her father made no attempt to interfere. The two men were close up; and as Allstone held him firmly he felt that he was about to be dragged back to his prison like some drowned rat, and he vowed that he would not give up if he died for it.

For Hilary's blood was now up, and, wrenching himself round, he got hold of the hilt of the cutlass, where it stuck in his belt, dragged it out, and in doing so struck his captor beneath the chin with the pommel.

So sharp was the blow that Allstone quitted his hold, uttering hoarse cries, and staggered back two or three yards, while Hilary drove him farther by making at him as if about to deliver point.

The two injured men, in answer to their leader's call, now made an attempt to seize Hilary; but their effort was a faint-hearted one, for on the young officer making a dash at them they gave way, and, waving his hand to Sir Henry, he dashed across the road and along a winding lane.

"A set of cowards!" he muttered. "The cutlass would hardly cut butter, and it would want a hammer to drive in its point. Yes; you may shout. You don't suppose I am coming back?"

He looked over his shoulder, and saw that Allstone and four men were now after him, and that, if he meant to get away, he must use his last remaining strength, for, clumsily as they ran, he was so tired with his recent exertions that they were diminishing the distance fast.

"I wonder how many pounds of water I've got to carry?" muttered Hilary, as he ran on, with the moisture still streaming from him, and making a most unpleasant noise in his boots. "There's one good thing, though," he said: "it keeps on growing less."

It was a lonely, winding lane, with the trees meeting overhead, and the sunshine raining down, as it were, in silvery streams upon the dappled earth. On either side were ancient hazel clumps, with here and there a majestic moss-covered oak or beech. It was, in fact, such a place as a lover of nature would have been loath to quit; and even in his time of need Hilary was not insensible to the beauties of the spot, but he could not help feeling that the ruddy roadway was atrocious.

"Well, it's as bad for them as it is for me," he said to himself as he ran at a steady trot—now in full view, now hidden from his pursuers by the windings of the lane.

"I wonder whether this is the lane they brought me along with that jackass," he thought; and then, as his clothes grew lighter and stuck less closely to his limbs, he began to wonder how long they would take to dry.

"Well, that don't matter," he thought; "I shan't be allowed to sit down and rest just yet."

He glanced back; and saw that his pursuers were out of sight, and he was just about to take advantage of the fact and spring over into the wood when they came in view again and uttered a shout.

"Anyone would think I was a hare and they were trying to run me down," he said. "Get out, you yelping curs!"

Hare-like, indeed; for he was looking back and thinking of his pursuers so intently that he did not cast his eyes ahead beyond his steps till another shout roused him, and he saw that his pursuers were calling to a party of men coming with a cart from the other direction, and who had started forward to join in the pursuit.

His idea a minute before had been to wait his opportunity, leap into the wood, and hide while the men went by. Now he saw that his only course was to dash in amongst the forest trees in full sight of his pursuers, and trust to his speed or the density of the way, for his retreat was cut off, and he had no other chance.

There was no time for hesitation, so, catching at a pendent bough, he swung himself up the sandy bank, but slipped and fell back, losing part of the ground he had won by his greater speed; but his next effort was more successful, and pressing in amongst the low undergrowth he forced his way along.

Hilary's desires went far faster than his legs, for it was very hard work here. The low birch scrub and hazel, interspersed with sapling ash, mingled and were interlaced with the shade-loving woodland bramble, whose spiny strands wove the branches together, clung to his clothes and checked him continually. Well might they be called briars, for it was as if a hundred hands were snatching at him. But, keeping his hands well before his face, he struggled on, with the wood growing denser each moment and his pursuers close behind.

"Ah, if I only had half a dozen of our lads here," he panted, "how I would turn upon these cowardly rascals! Twelve against one, and hunting him down. Never mind," he cried, making a vicious cut with his weapon at a bramble that met him breast high, "I'd rather be the hunted stag than one of a pack of miserable hounds."

At another time the wild untrodden wood must have filled him with delight, so full was it of beauty. The earth was carpeted with brilliant moss, which ran over the old stumps and climbed the boles of the great forest-trees; woodland flowers were crushed beneath his feet, and the sunlight danced amongst the leaves. Every here and there a frightened rabbit rushed away, while the long forest arcades echoed with the cries of the startled birds.

But Hilary was too hot and excited to notice any of the beauties around. His drenching was forgotten, and he was beginning to pant with heat, while the shouts of his pursuers made his eyes flash with rage.

He was gaining somewhat, and increasing the distance between them, but not greatly; for so far the men, part of whom were those returning from the cliffs, were still pretty close, and he could hear the crashing of the boughs and twigs as they came on; but he had managed to get out of their sight, and coming now upon a more open part where the trees were bigger, he ran with all his might, dashed into another denser patch, and then feeling that to keep on running was only to grow more and more exhausted, and to make his capture a matter of time, he began to think whether he could not make his brains help his legs.

There was no time to lose, for the smugglers had now entered the more open part, and were, as their shouts indicated, coming on fast. What he was to do must be done quickly.

Hilary crept on cautiously, making as little noise as possible, dividing the branches tenderly so as to leave no broken twigs, and finding that the ground which he had now reached rapidly descended into a deep ravine or gully—one of the many that drain that part of the country—in a few minutes he was down between the fern-hung sandstone rocks.

There was a tiny stream at the bottom, now reduced to a mere thread that joined together a few pools, but the well-washed banks high above his head showed that in rainy times it must be a rushing torrent.

Here was his road, then; for he argued that this stream, even if it did not lead right to the sea, would be sure to run into one that did; and besides, as he needed not rapid travelling, but the cautious creeping that should keep him concealed from his enemies, he could not have met with a better way.

Leaping down, then, from stone to stone till he reached the bottom, he dived under a number of overhanging brambles, and went slowly on.

His pursuers' cries had for the moment ceased, and his spirits rose as he began to feel that they had gone upon the wrong scent; when suddenly, as he was forcing his way cautiously along, he heard a loud halloo just below him, and not fifty yards away.

To his horror, as he stopped short, there came an answering shout from above, and another from higher up the gully.

"Send a couple down into the river bed!" shouted the voice below. "I'll stop him here."

Hilary ground his teeth, for cunning as he thought himself, it was evident that the same idea had occurred to his pursuers.

What was he to do? If he climbed up the banks he was certain to be seen; if he kept on along the bed of the stream he would walk right into an enemy's arms; and the same if he worked upward.

He stopped, thinking, but no fresh idea struck him; and setting his teeth and drawing a long breath, he stepped on into a more open place.

"I'll make a fight for it," he said sharply, "for I don't mean to be taken back."

Just then he caught sight of a hollow that had evidently been tunnelled out of the rocks by centuries of floods. There was a perfect curtain of thin stranded holly, ivy, and bramble hanging before it, and creeping cautiously forward he parted the hanging strands, passed in, and they fell back in place, almost shutting out the light of day.

The hollow did not even approach the dimensions of a cave, but was the merest hollowing out of the soft sand rock; still, it was sufficient to conceal him from his pursuers, and, cutlass in hand, he crouched down, holding open one little place in the green curtain and listening for the next hint of the coming of his pursuers. A dead silence ensued, during which he could feel the heavy throb, throb of his heart and the hard labouring of his breath, for his exertions had been tremendous. But still no sound reached his ears; not a shout was heard, and he began to grow hopeful.

Five minutes must have passed, and he had recovered his breath. From out of the tiny opening he had left he saw a robin flit down and perch upon a twig. Then came a blackbird to investigate the state of the commissariat department in the gully, turning busily over the leaves; and so calmly did the bird work that Hilary felt still more hopeful, for he knew that no one could be near.

Vain hope! All at once the bird uttered its sharp alarm note and flew like a streak of black velvet up into the dense growth above, but still there was not a sound to be heard.

Hilary's heart began to beat again, for the excitement was intense. Then there came a faint rustle, and another. Then silence again, and he felt that the men must have given up the chase.

Just then there was another faint rustle, and through the screen of leaves Hilary saw the head and then the shoulders of a strongly-built man appear, whose eyes were diligently searching every inch of ground till he came nearer, and then, as his gaze lighted on the screen of leaves Hilary saw a look of intelligence come upon his stolid features, and stepping forward, he was about to drag the leafage aside, when there came a loud shout from below—

"Ahoy! this way. Here he is!"

The man made a rush down the ravine, and the young officer's heart felt as if released from some tremendous pressure, for he had nerved himself for a tremendous struggle, and the danger had passed.

A minute later there was a sudden outburst of voices and a roar of laughter, after which Hilary fancied he could hear Allstone shouting and angrily abusing the men. Then once more came silence, and he lay there and waited.

He half expected to see the men come back, but an hour passed and there was not a sound save that of the birds in the distance; and at last, after fighting down the intense desire to be up and doing till he could master himself no longer, Hilary parted the leaves and stepped out into the gully to continue his course downwards.

He stopped in a stooping position to listen, for he fancied he had heard a rustle.

"Rabbit," he muttered, directly after; and as he did so a tremendous weight fell upon his back, throwing him forward upon his face, where, as he struggled round and tried to get up, it was to find that the great sturdy fellow he had before seen was sitting upon his chest.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Back in Bonds.

"That's the way I do with the rabbuds, shipmet," said the man laughing.

"You dog! you scoundrel!" panted Hilary, continuing his ineffectual struggle.

"Better be still, boy," said the man coolly. "You'll only hurt yourself."

As he spoke he wrested the cutlass from the young man's hand, after which he coolly took out a tobacco-bag and helped himself to a quid.

Hilary felt his helplessness, and after another furious effort, during which he partly raised his captor from his position of 'vantage, he lay still and looked in the man's face.

"Look here!" he said; "what'll you take to let me go?"

The man looked at him in an amused fashion, and then laughed.

"Do you hear?" cried Hilary. "Come, get off me; you hurt my chest."

"Yes. I hear," said the man coolly.

"Then why don't you answer? Quick, before the others come! What will you take to let me go?"

"What'll you take, youngster, to join us?"

"What do you take me for?" cried Hilary. "How dare you ask me such a question?"

"Just by the same law that you ask me," said the man coolly. "Do you think everybody is to be bought and sold?"

"But look here," cried Hilary. "I have been shut up there, and I want to get away; I must get away."

"To bring the crew of the cutter to rout us up yonder, eh!" said the man, laughing. "Now, come, I suppose you would call yourself a young gentleman; so speak the truth. If I let you go, will you lead the cutter off on a false scent, or will you show the captain the way to our place?"

Hilary remained silent.

"Why don't you speak, youngster? Which would you do?"

"My duty," said Hilary sturdily.

"And that is, of course, to point us out," said the man, smiling. "Well youngster, I don't like you a bit the worse for speaking out like a man. I've got my duty to do as well, and here goes."

He blew a shrill chirruping whistle twice over, and it was answered from a distance; while before many minutes had elapsed there was the sound of breaking twigs, voices talking hurriedly, and directly after, looking black and angry, Allstone came up with half-a-dozen men.

Allstone's countenance changed into a look of malignant pleasure as soon as he saw Hilary lying amidst the bushes.

"You've got him, then?" he cried.

"Oh, yes," said Hilary's captor coolly. "It only wanted time."

"I thought we should get him again!" shouted Allstone, grinning in the captive's face. "Here's that cutlass, too. He's a liar, this fellow. He said he had thrown it out of the window."

"So I did, idiot!" cried Hilary indignantly. "But I tied a string to it to pull it back when I wanted it."

The men burst out into a hearty laugh at the idea, as much as at someone calling Allstone, who had bullied them a good deal, an idiot.

The man glanced at him savagely, and Hilary read in his eye so much promise of a hard time that he determined to make one more effort for his liberty, and this he did.

"Who's got a bit o' cord?" said Allstone. "Oh, here, I have. Now then, up with him, and hold his hands behind his back."

Hilary's captor rose, and a couple of men caught him by the arms, jerked him up and held him, dragging back his arms, which Allstone came forward to bind; but seeing the young man helpless before him, he could not resist the temptation offered to him.

"I'm an idiot, am I?" he shouted. "How do you like that for an idiot's touch?"

He struck Hilary a brutal back-handed blow across the face as he spoke, and then went backwards into the gully with a crash. For, his hands being secured, the young officer felt no compunction, under the circumstances, in making use of his foot, and with it he gave the bully so tremendous a kick in the chest that he went down breathless; and, wrenching his arms free, Hilary made a dash for liberty, but his former captor seized him as he passed.

"No, my lad, it won't do," he exclaimed. "It was too much trouble to catch you, so we'll keep you now."

Allstone struggled up, but Hilary's captor interfered as he was about to strike at him with his doubled fist.

"No, no, Master Allstone," he said sharply, "I'm sure the skipper and Sir Henry wouldn't let you do that."

"You stand aside," roared Allstone. "Who told you to interfere?"

"No one," said the man coolly; "but I shall interfere, and if you touch that lad again it'll be through me."

"Do you hear this, lads?" cried Allstone. "He's breaking his oaths. Come on my side and we'll deal with him too."

"This young fellow was about right when he called you an idiot, Jemmy Allstone," said the man quietly.

"He's going to help him get away," cried Allstone, who was mad with passion.

"Yes, that's it, boys," said the man laughing, "that's why I caught him and kept him till you came up, and that's why I'm going to tie his arms. Here, give me the rope."

He snatched the cord from Allstone's hands, and turned to Hilary.

"Hold up your arms, my lad, and I won't hurt you. Come, it's of no use to try and run; we're too many for you. Never fight your ship when you know you are beaten; it's only waste of strength. Come, hold up."

Hilary felt that he had done all that was possible, and, won by his captor's frank, manly way, he held up his wrists, to have them so tightly and ingeniously tied that he was a prisoner indeed.

As they went back by a short cut through the wood, and one which brought them into a narrow lane, Allstone once found an opportunity to maliciously kick his prisoner, as if by accident; but Hilary's friend saw the act, and took care that he did not again approach too near; and, after what seemed a weary walk, the little party crossed the moat of the handsome old place. Hilary was led into the great kitchen, and then up-stairs, past flight after flight, to a room at the top with a strongly-bound door. Into this place he was thrust, and Allstone was about to leave him as he was; but the friendly smuggler stepped forward, and began to unfasten the bonds.

"Never mind that," cried Allstone; "let him stay bound."

The man paid no heed whatever, but undid the cord, set Hilary free, and then retired, the door being banged to, locked loudly, and secured by a heavy bar thrust clanging across.

The young officer stood staring at the door for a few minutes, and then stamped his foot upon the floor.

"Was ever fellow so unlucky!" he exclaimed. "Lipscombe might have found me out by this time; and when I do get out, I'm caught and brought back. But never mind; if they think I'm beaten they are wrong, for I'll get out, if only to show Sir Henry what a mean-spirited fellow he is."

He looked round his room, which was a bare old attic, with dormer windows and casements, from which, on flinging one open, he saw that he was far too high from the ground for a descent without a rope; but a second glance showed him that it would be possible to climb upon the roof, and when there he might perhaps manage to get somewhere else.

Just then he heard a window opened on the floor below, and, looking down, he saw Adela, evidently gazing towards the moat.

For a few moments he felt too indignant to speak, for he thought Sir Henry was behaving very ill to him; but a little reflection told him that his old companion was not to blame, and what she might even then be feeling very grateful to him for what he had done.

"Well, I'll give her a chance to show it," he thought; and, leaning out a little more he said lightly, "Well, Addy, are you any the worse for your dip?"

"Oh, Hil!" she exclaimed looking up, "are you there?"

"Yes, and locked up safely. I say, your people are behaving very badly to me."

"Oh, Hil," cried the girl with the tears in her eyes, "I am so sorry. I've been begging papa not to have you caught, and he says he could not help it."

"Then he ought to help it," replied Hilary warmly.

"But he says he's bound to keep faith with his friends; and that if you would only give your word not to escape and betray our hiding-place you might come and live with us; and oh, Hil dear, it would be like old times, and we could have such walks together. Do be a good boy, and promise what papa wishes! I should like you to come and be with us again, for I have no companion now."

Hilary looked down at the bright little face, and as the thoughts of how pleasantly the time would pass in her company came upon him, as compared with the miseries he had to endure, he felt sorely tempted to give his parole; he might do that, he argued.

"Do come, Hil," she said again, as if she were reading his hesitation. "Papa will be so pleased."

"And try his best to make me turn traitor," thought Hilary.

"No," he exclaimed, "I cannot do it, Addy; and I'm sure you would not wish me to break faith with those to whom I owe duty. I should like to come, but—ah, Sir Henry, you there?"

He started, for a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and turning, there stood Sir Henry, holding out his hand.

"I have come to thank you, my brave, true lad, for what you have done," he exclaimed warmly. "You saved my darling's life and then mine."

"And for which you had me hunted down," said Hilary bitterly.

"It was no act of mine, my boy," said Sir Henry sadly. "Why will you ignore the fact that I am not master of your position? Hilary, my dear boy, once more, will you join us?"

"No, Sir Henry; and even if I did you would only despise me."

"No, no. Nothing of the kind."

"Then I should despise myself," cried Hilary. "Once more, Sir Henry, I am a king's officer, and refuse your proposals."

"Then give me your parole not to escape."

"I give you my word of honour that I will escape as soon as I possibly can," said Hilary smiling. "So take my advice, and take Adela away. Save yourself, too, for if I find you here I shall be obliged to arrest you."

"Why, you foolish fellow," said Sir Henry smiling, "you are a prisoner, and you have found out that you cannot get away."

"Not so, Sir Henry. I found that I could not get away this first time; but you don't know me if you think I am going to sit down quietly here without an effort to escape."

"But it is impossible here, my good lad," said Sir Henry.

"So your people thought when you locked me up in that old chapel. I tell you, Sir Henry, I mean to get back to my ship."

"Then, for the safety of my child, and for my own safety, Hilary, you force me to show myself the stern officer of his majesty our rightful king, and I must see that you are kept fast. However, I will try to temper justice with some show of kindness, and I have had dry clothes brought up for your use till the others are right."

"Oh, they are pretty well right now," said Hilary carelessly.

"Then is it to be war, Hilary?" said Sir Henry with a sad smile.

"Yes, Sir Henry, war."

"We shall keep you very close and very fast, my boy."

"No, Sir Henry, you will not," cried Hilary cheerily, "for before many hours are over I mean to be free."

"It is a game of chess, then," said Sir Henry laughing.

"Yes, Sir Henry, and you have moved out your pawns and played your queen;" and he pointed below.

"I have," said Sir Henry smiling. "Now what do you mean to do?"

"Well, Sir Henry, seeing how I am shut up, suppose we say that I am castled."

"Very good," laughed Sir Henry going to the door and passing out.

"Very good or very bad," muttered Hilary, "I mean to be out before many days are passed; and when once I am free the smugglers may look out for squalls."

Chapter Thirty.

Hilary tries again.

Soon after Sir Henry had gone, Hilary went to the window, but drew back directly.

"No," he said to himself, "if I go there I shall be tempted into giving my parole or joining the Pretender's party. Sir Henry seems to think he can win me over; so let us see."

He began to walk up and down his prison. Then it struck him that his clothes had pretty well grown dry again, and he went over in his mind the incidents of the day and the past night, thoughts which were interrupted by the coming of Allstone, who bore some bread and meat, and a mug of beer, while a man behind him dragged in a table and chair, and afterwards carried in a straw mattress and a pillow, Allstone looking grimly on.

The man went out, but Allstone still waited, and at last the man came back with a bundle of sheets and blankets, which he threw upon the bed.

"There," said Allstone, "that will do;" and seeing the man out, he darted a surly look at Hilary, and then followed and banged the door.

"Thank you," said Hilary, laughing. "Perhaps a ladder would have been a little more convenient; but what donkeys people are—give a sailor sheets and blankets, and shut him up in a garret, and think he won't escape! Ha! ha! ha!"

The sight of the food changed the current of Hilary's thoughts, and sitting down he made a very hearty meal, felt that his clothes had grown thoroughly dry, and then did what was not surprising under the circumstances, began to nod, and then went off fast asleep.

Before an hour had passed he awoke; but he was so drowsy that he threw himself upon the mattress, and falling asleep directly he did not awaken till early the next morning.

No escape that day, and as he had to make up his mind to this, he waited until Allstone came with a rough breakfast, when he made a peremptory demand for some means of washing and making himself more presentable.

"My orders be to bring you something to sleep on and your meals, that's all," growled the fellow. "I had no orders about washing tackle."

"Get out, you surly ill-conditioned ruffian," cried Hilary; and the fellow grinned.

"Here's something for you," he said, contemptuously jerking a letter on to the floor, which Hilary picked up.

"Look here, Master Allstone," he cried, shaking a finger at him; "one of these days I shall come here with a dozen or two of our brave boys, and if I don't have you flogged till you beg my pardon for all this, my name is not Hilary Leigh."

"Bah!" ejaculated the man; and he went away making as much noise as he could with the lock and bar so as to annoy his prisoner, but without success, for that individual was reading the letter he had received.

It was as follows:—

"My dear Hilary,—Fate has placed us on opposite sides, and though she has now thrown us together, I am compelled to hold aloof until you can say to me, 'Here is my parole of honour not to betray you or to escape!' or 'I see that I am on the side of a usurper, and abjure his service. From henceforth I am heart and soul with you.' When you can send me either of those messages, Hilary, Adela and I are ready to receive you with open arms. Till then we must be estranged; but all the same, my dear boy, accept my gratitude and love for your bravery in saving our lives.—Affectionately yours, Henry Norland."

"Then we shall have to remain estranged," said Hilary as he stood by the open window refolding the letter and thinking of his position.

"Hil! Hil!" came from below.

"Ahoy!" he answered. "Well, little lady?" and he leaned out.

"Isn't it a beautiful morning, Hil," said Adela, looking up. "Lovely."

"Why don't you come down and have a run with me in the woods?"

"For one reason, because I am locked up," said Hilary. "For another, because I have not made my hands and face acquainted with soap and water since I was aboard the cutter; my hair is full of bits of straw and dead leaves, and my clothes are soaked and shrunken, and muddied and torn. Altogether, I am not fit to be seen."

"Well, but Hil, dear, why don't you wash yourself?"

"Because your esteemed friends here do not allow me soap, water, and towel. I say, Addy, if I lower down a piece of string, will you send me a jug of water?"

"Same as I did the milk? Oh, of course!" said the girl laughing.

"All right," said Hilary; "get it, please."

He took out his knife, and without hesitation nicked and tore off the hem of one of his sheets, knotted two lengths together, lowered them down, and in turn drew up wash-hand jug, soap, brush and comb, and afterwards a basin, by having it tied up in a towel, and attaching the string to the knots.

Adela seemed to enjoy it all as fun, but she turned serious directly after as she told her old companion how grateful she felt to him for his bravery on the previous day, remarks which made Hilary feel uncomfortable and go away from the window with the excuse that he wanted to attend to his toilet.

For the next quarter of an hour Hilary was revelling in a good wash, with all the enjoyment of one who has been shut off from the use of soap and towel, with the result that after he had finished off with a brush, he felt more himself, and ready to stare his position more comfortably in the face.

He went to the window in spite of his resolutions not to be tempted, and looked down; but Adela had gone, so he had a good look round at the country.

Here he was facing due south, and before him, stretched in the bright sunshine, wave after wave as it were of hilly land, pretty well clothed with forest-trees. In the far distance there was a range of hills with a church and a windmill, both of which he recognised as having seen from the other side when upon the deck of the cutter, and this gave him a good idea of where he was, and how to shape his course when he made his escape.

That word set him thinking, and without more ado he proceeded to cut up the sheets, knot together some of the strips, and then to lay them up, sailor fashion, into a serviceable linen rope, for the sheets were coarse and strong.

This he did with his ears attent to the coming of footsteps, and a place ready in the bed to throw his work and cover it over should Allstone or Sir Henry be at hand. But he need not have troubled, for he completed about forty feet of good strong line from the pair of sheets, and coiled it up after securing the ends ready for use.

His escape now was simplicity itself he thought, and his toil ended and the shreds carefully swept up and blown from the window, he seated himself upon the sill, and enjoyed the warmth of the afternoon sunshine, planning out how he would slip down after securing one end of his cord to the window-frame.

Sir Henry would, he felt sure, provide for the safety of Adela and himself as soon as he found that the prisoner had escaped, for he felt that he could not bring peril upon them. There was no cause for fear, though, and he sat thinking of how grand it would be if he could escape the moment it was dark and get down to the shore and find the *Kestrel*.

That seemed hopeless, though, and too much to expect; for it was not likely that the cutter would be still cruising about and waiting for him. If she was, though, he knew how he could bring a boat's crew well-armed ashore, and that was by making a signal with a light in a particular way.

The sun was getting lower, and everything round the old place was still, nothing but a couple of fowls that were pecking about in what had once been a large garden between the old house and the moat, being visible.

It had once been a goodly residence, no doubt, but all now was ruin and desolation, except that the warm sunshine made even the neglect and weeds look picturesque. There were massive gables to right and left, and the old tiles were orange and grey with a thick coating of lichen. Just between his window and that of Adela there were the mouldering remains of a carved shield, with surmounting helmet and crest, and a decayed motto below, while to right and left the ivy had covered the front with its dark-green glossy leaves, among which the cable-like runners could be seen.

Anywhere, almost, along the front of the venerable place he could have climbed down by the help of the ivy; in his neighbourhood, however, it had been cleared away.

He wondered sometimes how it was that he had heard no more of Adela, and that everything about the place should be so still, and concluded that Sir Henry had forbidden her to hold counsel with him, and in this belief he sat on waiting until the sun went down in a flood of orange glory.

Just then he heard Allstone's heavy step upon the stairs, and coming away from the window Hilary threw himself upon his bed over the hidden rope.

But he need not have feared that it would be seen, for Allstone simply placed some food upon the table and went away directly after, locking the door.

The repast though rough and plain was substantial, and very welcome. Hilary felt somewhat agitated at the attempt he was about to make; but he knew that he needed fortifying with food, and he ate heartily, placing the remains of his meal in his pockets as a reserve for by-and-by.

As the sun went down the moon began to make its presence known; but it was early in its first quarter, and in the course of a couple of hours it too had set, leaving the sky to the stars, which twinkled brightly, doing little, though, to dispel the darkness.

In fact, by about nine, as he guessed it to be, the night was as suitable as possible for such an enterprise as his, and after listening to some distant sounds of talking in the back of the house, Hilary proceeded with beating heart to take out and unroll his light coil of rope.

By means of a little management he took one of the leaded panes from the bottom of the casement so as to allow the rope to be securely tied round the stout oak centrepiece of the window, and then, after watching attentively for a few minutes, he lowered down the other end until the full extent was reached, and as nearly as he could judge it touched the ground.

Even if it did not, there was nothing to fear, for at the utmost he would have had but a few feet to drop, and after a few moments' hesitancy he passed one leg out of the window, took a good grip of the rope, climbed right out, twisted his legs round in turn, and directly after, while swinging gently, he let himself down foot by foot.

It was nothing to him. His sailor life made a descent by a rope one of the merest trifles.

Down lower and lower, past Adela's window, and then coming into sight of a broad casement where a light was burning.

The upper floors of the old building projected beyond the lower, so that he had not been aware of this lighted room, and as he hung there turning slowly round and round he could plainly see Sir Henry in a comfortably-furnished place, seated at a table writing, while Adela was gazing up into his face as she sat upon a low stool at his feet.

For a few moments Hilary hung there motionless, feeling that if Sir Henry raised his eyes, as he was sure to do at the slightest sound, he could not help seeing him gently spinning round and round.

Recovering himself though, directly, he let himself slide, and reached the ground, but made so much noise that he heard Sir Henry speak, and he had hardly time to dart aside, drawing with him the white rope, and crouch down close to the house, before the window was opened, and he knew that some one was looking out.

"No, papa," said a well-known voice, "I can see nothing."

"Look again," said Sir Henry. "Stop; I'll come."

There was the noise of a moving chair, and then Hilary felt that Sir Henry was looking out of the window, and wondered whether he was seen.

He hardly dared to breathe, and it seemed like an hour before he heard a sigh, and Sir Henry said, softly—

"What a lovely night, my child!"

Then there was the sound of the casement being closed, steps faintly heard across the room, and, gliding from his place of concealment, Hilary made for the bridge, crossed it, and then darted amongst the bushes beside the narrow lane, for there was a buzz of voices behind him, and from the other side of the house he could see the light of a

lantern, and then came the tramp of a horse and the sound of wheels.

Chapter Thirty One.

Signalling the Kestrel.

Hilary knew that if he wished to escape he must achieve it with his brain perhaps as much as his heels. He could pretty well tell which way to go, but his knowledge of the country was very small, and great care was necessary. It was evident that there was a party leaving the old house, and most probably they were going to be present at some landing of goods upon the shore, whence the cart would bring the lading of some lugger back. If he went on now, it would be with this party always ready to overtake him at any moment, for he did not know the road. If, on the other hand, he kept hidden until the cart had gone by, their lantern would be a guide to him, and he could follow silently till he reached the cliffs. After that he must be guided by circumstances.

It was a wise idea, and lying *perdu* for a few minutes, he found that a cart passed him slowly, attended by six men, one of whom bore the lantern. They were all chatting and laughing, and so intent upon their business in hand that Hilary was able to follow them at a moderate distance, the lantern acting as his guide.

He soon found that fortune had favoured him, for without their guidance the chances were that he would have wandered off into one of the rugged lanes through the woods, if he had not lost the track entirely, for it was hardly worthy of the name of road.

He was going cautiously along, keeping the lantern well in sight, when, all at once, a faint glow appeared just in front; and he only stopped short just in time to avoid blundering over one of the party who had hung back to refill and light his pipe with a piece of touchwood, which he was now blowing up into a brisk glow before applying it to the bowl.

Hilary stopped as if struck by lightning, and held his breath, so close was he to the man, who, fortunately, was too much occupied with the task he had in hand to notice the young officer's proximity; and, after getting his pipe well alight, he started off after his companions.

This adventure made Hilary, if possible, more cautious, and for the next two hours he kept at a greater distance, wondering the while how much farther it was, when all at once he noticed that the lantern had become stationary. Directly after another light approached, and then a broad glare shone out, evidently from an open door. Then there was a good deal of talking and the rattle of a cart; then of another; and Hilary, finding that he could progress no farther by the track, struck off amongst the bushes and ferns on his left, finding now that the trees were left behind; and as the next minute he found even the bushes had given place to heather and turf, he concluded that he must be nearing the sea.

It had grown so dark that he had to proceed with caution or he would have tripped over some patch of furze or fern.

But he escaped pretty well; and seeing that the lanterns were once more in motion, he determined to proceed, as well as he could, parallel with the party, watch their proceedings, and learn all he could for future service if he succeeded in getting away.

Once he thought that he had better devote himself to his escape; but he could do no more until daybreak, and if he could see how the smugglers landed their cargoes such knowledge would be invaluable.

Going cautiously on, then, he must have proceeded for a couple of hundred yards when he found that the bearers of the lanterns had stopped, and there was a low buzz of talking, and someone seemed to be giving orders.

Then the noise ceased, and he fancied he could hear footsteps going away, while the lanterns burned close together, apparently on the ground.

He was too far-off still, he thought, and in his eager curiosity he bent down and took a few steps forward, felt one foot give way, threw himself back, and lay upon the turf, wet with a cold, chilling perspiration, and clutching the short turf with his fingers driven in as far as he could.

As he lay there trembling he heard a familiar sound from far below, and as his vision cleared and he grew calmer he could just make out a faint line of light where the waves were breaking amongst the stones, for he had been within an inch of a terrible death. The little patch of turf upon which he had trod grew right on the verge of the cliff, and but for his spasmodic effort to throw himself back as the earth gave way, he must have pitched headlong on to the rocks a couple of hundred feet below.

"What an escape!" he muttered; and then, after a calm feeling of thankfulness had pervaded him for a time, he lay there enjoying the soft salt breeze that blew gently upon his cheeks, and listening with delight to the murmurous splash of the waves.

As he gazed out to sea, where all was exceedingly dark, his heart gave a great leap, for not a couple of miles away, as he judged, a vessel was lying, and there was something in the position of the lights that made him feel certain it was the *Kestrel*.

He would not believe it at first, but told himself it was his fancy—the suggestion of that which he fondly wished; but as he shaded his eyes and watched he became more and more certain that it was his ship, and in his elation it was all he could do not to utter a joyous shout by way of a hail.

He checked himself, however, in the mad idea, and lay thinking. There was the old *Kestrel*, and the idea of getting

back to his stuffy quarters and the ill-temper of Lieutenant Lipscombe seemed delightful; but he knew that the greatest caution was needed, or he would fail in his attempt.

Then, again, he thought it impossible that it could be the *Kestrel*, for the smugglers would never have the hardihood to run a cargo just under the very nose of a king's ship; but directly afterwards he was obliged to own that it was by these very acts of daring that they were able to carry on with such success; and the more he gazed out at those lights, the more certain he felt that they belonged to his vessel.

"Yes," he thought, "it's the old lass sure enough, and the lads will be as glad as can be to see me back. I know they will. Oh, if I could only signal to them and bring a boat's crew ashore."

He lay thinking, and then, with beating heart, began to crawl cautiously along close to the edge of the cliff till he was abreast of the lanterns, which, as he had half suspected, lay in a depression, with a high bank of rush and bushes between them and the sea. There was no one with them, and all was very silent.

Where were the smugglers, then?

That was soon solved; for on crawling a little farther he found his hands go down suddenly where the cliff made a rapid slope, and as he lay upon his chest he could hear the hum of voices, the trampling of feet upon the shingle, and though he could hardly distinguish moving figures, his imagination supplied the rest; and, as plainly as if he could see it all, there, he knew, was a large lugger ashore and a party of men landing her cargo, carrying it up the beach and among the rocks, where it was being drawn up by a rough pulley, and yonder, all the while, lay the king's ship in utter ignorance of what was going on.

There it all was, the soft murmur of the sea—he could almost fancy he heard it lap the lugger's sides; and certainly as he gazed more intently down, there was a dark break in the line of foam. That, then, must be the lugger.

If it had only been a little lighter he could have seen all—the busy party like so many ants running to and fro with their loads, while others were drawing them up the rocks ready for the loading of the carts. Yes, there was the creak of a pulley from a heavier load than usual; and this was the way it was done on these dark fine nights. Perhaps in another hour the whole cargo would be drawn up on the cliff, the carts would be loaded at their leisure, and as the tide rose the lugger would push off once more, and all, as he had before said, just under the nose of his majesty's cutter.

"No wonder," thought Hilary, "that we are so often unsuccessful; but we'll checkmate them now! What can I do?"

He lay thus thinking and listening, and then an idea came to him. The men were all busy down below, and they had left their lanterns in that hollow.

As the thought occurred to him he began to crawl back cautiously but quickly till he was close up to where the lanterns were hidden.

"If there is anyone there," he argued, "I can dash off into the darkness and escape."

But he felt sure that there was no one. Still he tested the question by saying suddenly in a gruff voice:

"Now, my lads, you're wanted below."

It was a bold stroke, but it satisfied him that all was right, and that all hands were away.

Now, then, was his time. He could not help the *Kestrel's* men, they must do the work; but if they came ashore they would know why it was, and the possibilities were that they would surprise the lugger—perhaps be in time to capture half her cargo.

Hilary did not hesitate now, but creeping down into the hollow, he extinguished the candle in one lantern and took off his jacket and wrapped it round the other, completely hiding its light. Then, taking the first in his hand, he crept up once more to the higher part of the cliff.

Here he could see the lights of the *Kestrel* plain enough, but even when stooping down he could not help seeing the black patch upon the shore.

That would not do, so he crept back a few yards, finding the cliff rise in a sharp slope, going to the top of which he found that he could see the light in what was apparently a cottage.

Descending again, he cautiously chose a spot where he could easily see the cutter's lights but not the shore below the cliff, and then he paused and listened.

The dull murmur was fainter now, but he could make out the men at work, and for a few moments he hesitated. Suppose he should be surprised and taken back!

"Never mind," he thought, "I am only doing my duty. They dare not kill me, and, in the king's name, here goes."

He uncovered the lantern and placed it upon the turf, where it burned steadily and well; then opening the door, he took the candle from the extinct lantern, lit it, replaced it, and closed it in, put on his jacket, and then, taking a couple of steps to the left, he stood there holding the second lantern breast high, making a signal that he knew would be understood on board if the diagonal lights were seen by anyone of the watch.

Hilary's heart beat fast. He was concealed by the cliff from the busy party below, and by the rise behind him from

those inland, but at any moment some one might come up to where the lanterns had been placed, miss them, and see what he was about.

It was risky work, but he did not shrink, although he knew that he was lessening his chances of escape. Still, if he could only bring the *Kestrel's* boats down upon the scoundrels it would be so grand a *coup* that his hesitation was always mastered, and he stood firm, gazing out to sea.

How long the minutes seemed, and what a forlorn hope it was! The chances were that the watch might not notice the lights; and even if they were seen, it might not be by anyone of sufficient intelligence to report them to the lieutenant, or to the boatswain or gunner.

Every now and then he fancied he heard steps. Then his imagination created the idea that some one was crawling along the ground to push him over the cliff; but he set his teeth and stood his post, keenly alive, though, to every real sound and such sights as he could see, and ready at any moment to dash down the lanterns and run inland for liberty, if not for life. How dark the lanterns seemed to make it, and how hot the one grew in his hands! Would those on board ever see it, and was he to stand there in vain?

"Ah! if I had only been on board," he muttered, as the time wore on, till what seemed to him a couple of hours had passed, but what was really only about a fourth of that time; "I would have seen it. Somebody ought to have seen it."

Still the lights from the cutter burned out brightly, like a couple of stars, and at last, in a hopeless mood, he began to think that the signal he was displaying was too feeble to be seen so far.

"I may as well give it up," he muttered despairingly; "the rascals will be up directly now, and I shall be caught, and the *Kestrels* could never get ashore in time.—Yes—no—yes—no—yes," he panted.

For, as he stared out at the cutter's lights, all at once they disappeared.

He gazed till his eyes seemed starting, but there was no doubt about it; they had been put out or covered; and turning sharply round, he hid the lantern he carried, and turned over the other with his foot prior to stooping and blowing it out.

The signal had been seen.

Chapter Thirty Two.

Hilary gets in a Queer Fix.

With his heart throbbing with joy Hilary now proceeded to reverse his performance, for, taking off his jacket once more, he enveloped the burning lantern, picked up the other that was emitting an abominable odour, and hastily carried them back to the hollow where he found them.

It was so dark that he was doubtful whether he had found the right place, but he kicked against another lantern, and that convinced him.

Placing the burning one on the ground, he relit the other, his hands trembling so that he hardly knew what he did, and impeded himself to no slight degree. He succeeded, however, and had just set the second lantern down as nearly as he could remember, when he fancied he heard a sound as of some one snoring, and glancing in the direction, he saw to his horror that a man was lying there asleep.

For a few moments he felt paralysed, and stood there holding his jacket in his hand unable to move, as he asked himself whether that man had been there when he spoke and took the lights.

As he stood there wondering, he heard a voice call "Jem!" in a low tone; and this roused Hilary, who dropped down and crept away, glancing to seaward as he did so, where the cutter's lights—if it was she—once more brightly burned.

He did not dare to go far, but lay flat upon the turf, listening as someone came up; and then there was a dull noise as of a man kicking another.

"Get up, Jem! Do you hear! Why, what a fellow you are to sleep!"

"Hullo! Oh, all right," said another voice; and now Hilary could see two men standing, their figures plainly shown against the lantern's light. "Oh, yes; it's all very well to say 'Hullo!' and 'All right!'" grumbled the first voice; "I never see such a fellow to sleep."

"Have you done?" said the sleepy one yawning.

"Done? No; nor half done; she's got a heavy cargo. If we get done in three hours we shall have worked well. Put out them candles, and come and haul."

The lights were extinguished; and Hilary, wondering at his escape, felt his heart bound with joy, for by that time the crews of a couple of boats must have been mustered on the *Kestrel's* deck, and in another five minutes they would be pulling, with muffled oars, towards the shore.

"Ah! if I were only in command of one!" cried Hilary to himself; "but as I am not, can I do anything more to help our

fellows besides bringing them ashore?"

It was a question that puzzled him to answer, and he lay there on the turf wondering what it would be best to do, ending by making up his mind to creep down as cautiously as he could in the direction taken by the two men.

"The worst that could happen to me," he thought, "would be that I should be taken; and if I am made prisoner once more, it will only be in the cause of duty—so here goes."

The darkness favoured him as far as concealment was concerned, but it had its disadvantages. A little way to his left was the edge of the cliff, and Hilary knew that if he were not careful he would reach the shore in a way not only unpleasant to himself, but which would totally spoil him for farther service; so he exercised as much caution for self-preservation as he did to keep himself hidden from his enemies.

There was a well-beaten track, and, following this, he found the descent was very rapid into a little valley-like depression, from the bottom of which came the faint creak of a pulley now and then, with mingled sounds of busy men going to and fro with loads, which they seemed to be, as he judged, carrying up to carts somewhere at the head of the ravine.

He could see very little, the darkness was so great; but his keen sense of hearing supplied the want of sight; and as he lay beside a clump of what seemed to be furze, he very soon arrived at a tolerably good idea of what was going on.

Still he was not satisfied. He wanted to realise more thoroughly the whole procedure of the smugglers, so that if the present attempt should prove a failure he might be in a position to circumvent them another time.

It was a great risk to go any nearer, and it might result in capture, perhaps in being knocked down; but he determined to go on, especially as it grew darker every minute, the stars being completely blotted out by a curtain of cloud that came sweeping over the sky.

He hesitated for a few moments, and then crept on, listening intently the while.

The smugglers were still some distance off, down towards the edge of the lower cliff; and he crept nearer and nearer, till to his horror he found that the clearness of the part about him was only due to the cessation of the carrying for a few minutes, and now a party seemed to be coming up from the cliff edge, apparently loaded, while, when he turned to retreat, he found by the sound of voices that another party was coming down.

His manifest proceeding then was to get out of the track, but, to his horror, he found that he was down in a rift between two high walls of rock, and his first attempt to climb up resulted in a slip back, scratching his hands, and tearing his clothes.

Before he could make a second attempt he was seized by a pair of strong arms and forced down upon his knees; and dimly in the gloom he could make out that he was pretty well surrounded by rough-looking men.

"Caught you, have I?" said a deep voice.

Hilary remained silent. It was of no avail to struggle, and he reserved his strength for a better opportunity to escape.

He thought of shouting aloud to the boats, which he hoped were now well on their way; but he restrained himself, as he felt that the success of their approach depended upon their secrecy, so he merely hung down his head, without offering the slightest resistance.

He had his reward.

"Get up, you lazy, skulking lubber!" cried his captor, "or I'll rope's-end you." This, by the way, was rather cool language, especially after forcing the captive down upon his knees.

"Here are we to work like plantation niggers at the oars, rowing night and day, and you 'long-shore idlers leave us to do all the work."

"Why, he takes me for one of their party," thought Hilary; and, dark though it was, he felt astonished at the man's stupidity, for it did not occur to him then that he was hatless, that his hair was rough, his face and hands anything but clean, and his old uniform shrunken by his immersion, and so caked with mud and dirt, and withal so torn and ragged, that even by broad daylight anyone would have strongly doubted that he was a king's officer, while in the gloom of that ravine he could easily be taken for a rough-looking carrier belonging to their gang.

"Come on," said the man hauling him along, "I've got a nice little job for you. I don't care for your sulky looks. Go it, my lads. Got the lot?" he continued, as a line of loaded men filed past them, they having to stand back against the rock to let the burdened party pass.

"All? no; nor yet half," was the reply. "There, get on."

"All right. Take it easy," was the reply; and, trying hard to make out the surroundings, Hilary made no resistance, but let himself be hurried along down the declivity they were in, till he found himself on a platform of trampled earth, where, as far as he could make out against the skyline, a rough kind of shears was rigged up, and, by means of a block, a couple of men were hauling up packages, and another was landing them upon the platform, and unfastening and sending down the empty hooks.

"Here, one of you carry now," said Hilary's captor, "and let this joker haul. I found him trying to miche, and nipped

him as he was skulking off. Lay hold, you lazy lubber, and haul."

One of the men left the rope, and assuming a sulky, injured manner, Hilary took his place at the rope, and, upon the signal being given, hauled away with his new companion, who gave a grunt indicative of satisfaction, as he found how well Hilary kept time with him, bringing his strength to bear in unison with the other's, so that they worked like one man.

"Ah, that's better!" he said. "I've been doing all the work."

They had brought a keg above the cliff edge, and this being detached, Hilary's captor mounted it upon his shoulders, and the man who had been hauling in Hilary's place took up a package and they began to move off.

"Let me know if he don't work," said the rough-voiced man.

"I'll soon be back. Mind he don't slip off."

"All right," said Hilary's companion.

"Haul," said a voice, and they pulled up another keg, while the tramping of men could be plainly heard below, telling Hilary of what was going on.

"Why," he thought, as he worked steadily on, "this is where they hauled me up, the rascals; and now—"

He could not help laughing to himself at the strange trick Fate had played him in setting him, a naval officer, helping a party of smugglers to land their cargo; but all the same, he gloried in the amount of information he was picking up for some future time.

"I don't seem to know you," said the man beside him at last, after they had hauled up several packages and kegs. "Did old Allstone send you to help?"

This was a poser, and Hilary paused for a moment or two before saying frankly:

"No; he didn't want me to come."

"Ah! he's a nice 'un," growled the other. "I wish I'd my way; I'd make him work a little harder. He's always skulking up at the old manor."

Hilary uttered a low grunt, and in the intervals of hauling he strained his eyes to grasp all he could of his surroundings; but there was very little to see. He could make out that he was at the edge of a lower part of the cliff; that the rock-strewn beach was, as far as he could make out by the hauling, some forty feet below; that the platform where he stood was the sea termination of a gully, where probably in wet weather a stream ran down and over the edge in a kind of fall, while on either side the cliff towered up to a great height.

There was not much to learn, but it was enough to teach him what he wanted to know, and it quite explained the success of the smugglers in evading capture.

Hilary had strained his eyes again and again seaward; but, save that the cutter's lights were burning brightly in the darkness, there was no sign of coming help, though, for the matter of that, a fleet of small boats might have landed and been unseen from where he stood.

The man's suspicions seemed to have been lulled, and Hilary kept on hauling. The men came and went from where they were to the carts that he judged to be waiting, and those below, like dim shadows just seen now and then, toiled on over the rocks, but still no sign of the cutter's boats, and in despair now of my such capture as might have been made, Hilary was thinking that when a suitable opportunity occurred he would seize hold of the hook with one hand, retain the hauling rope in the other, and let himself rapidly down, when there was a shrill chirruping whistle from below, the scrambling of feet, and a voice from the beach said sharply:

"Quick there! Luggers ahoy! Look out!"

Chapter Thirty Three.

Tom Tully acts as Guide.

Lieutenant Lipscombe's eye had grown rapidly better, and his temper rapidly worse. He had grumbled at Chips for being so long over his task of repairing the deck and hatchway, and Chips had responded by leaving off to sharpen his tools, after which he had diligently set traps to catch his superior officer, who never went near the carpenter without running risks of laming himself by treading upon nails half buried in the deck, or being knocked down by pieces of wood delicately poised upon one end so that the slightest touch would send them over with a crash.

Chips never trod upon the upright nails, cut himself against the tools, or touched the pieces of wood or planks to make them fall. He moved about slowly, like a bear, and somehow seemed to be charmed; but it was different with the lieutenant: he never went near to grumble without putting his foot straight upon the first upright clout-nail, or leaning his arm or hand upon some ticklishly-balanced piece of plank. The consequences were that he was several times a good deal hurt, and then Chips seemed exceedingly sorry, and said he was.

But the lieutenant forgot his little accidents next day, and went straight to the carpenter, bullied him again, and after

bearing it for awhile Chips's adze would become so blunt that he was obliged to go off to the grindstone, where he would stop for a couple of hours, a good deal of which time was spent in oiling the spindle before he began.

At last, though he was obliged to finish his task, and after waiting for the deck to be done as the time when he would go straight into harbour and report Hilary's desertion, as he persisted in calling it, Lieutenant Lipscombe concluded that he would not go, but give the young officer a chance to come back.

Meanwhile he had cruised about, chased and boarded vessels without there being the slightest necessity, put in at one or two places where he heard rumours that the Young Pretender was expected to land off the coast somewhere close at hand, heard the report contradicted at the next place he touched at, and then went cruising up and down once more.

One day he chased and boarded a lugger that bore despatches from France to certain emissaries in England; but the lieutenant did not find the despatches, only some dried fish, which he captured and had conveyed on board the cutter.

His men grumbled, and said that Master Leigh ought to be found, and there was some talk of petitioning the lieutenant to form another expedition in search of the missing man; but the lieutenant had no intention of going ashore in the dark to get his men knocked about by invisible foes without the prospect of a grand haul of prize-money at the end; so he turned a deaf ear to all suggestions for such a proceeding, and kept on cruising up and down.

"I tell you what it is," said Tom Tully on the evening of Hilary's escape, as the men were all grouped together in the forecabin enjoying a smoke and a yarn or two, "it strikes me as we're doing a wonderful lot o' good upon this here station. What do you say, Jack Brown?"

"Wonderful!" said the boatswain, falling into the speaker's sarcastic vein.

"Ah!" said Chips, "we shall never get all our prize-money spent, boys."

"No," said the corporal of marines, "never. I say, speaking as a orsifer, oughtn't we to have another one in place of Master Leigh?"

"No," said Tom Tully. "We couldn't get another like he."

"That's a true word, Tommy," said Billy Waters, who did not often agree with the big sailor. "We couldn't get another now he's lost."

"But that's all werry well," said Chips; "but it won't do. If I lost my adze or caulking-hammer overboard, I must have another, mustn't I?" No one answered, and he continued:

"If you lost the rammer of the big gun, Billy Waters, or the corporal here hadn't got his bayonet, he'd want a new one; so why shouldn't we have a new orsifer?"

"Don't know," said Billy Waters gruffly; and as the carpenter looked at each in turn, the men all shook their heads, and then they all smoked in silence.

"I wishes as we could find him again," said Tom Tully; "and as he'd chuck the skipper overboard, or send him afloat in the dinghy, and command the cutter hisself, and I don't kear who tells the luff as I said it."

"No one ain't going to tell on you, Tommy," said Billy Waters reprovingly; for the big sailor had looked defiantly round, and ended by staring him defiantly in the face. "We all wishes as the young chap could be found, and that he was back aboard; and I think as it ought to be all reported and another expedition sent."

There was a growl of approval at this as there had been before when similar ideas were promulgated; but the lieutenant sat in his cabin, and nothing was done.

The lights were burning brightly, and as it was a dead calm the anchor had been let go, so that the cutter should not be swept along the coast by the racing tide. The night had come on very dark since the moon had set, and the watch scanned the surface of the sea in an idle mood, that task being soon done, for there was very little sea visible to scan, and, coming to the conclusion that it was a night when they would be able to watch just as well with their ears, they made themselves comfortable and gazed longingly at the shore.

There was nothing to tempt them there but that it *was* shore, and they would have preferred being there to loitering on shipboard, though there was not so much as a cottage light to be seen from where they lay.

A large lugger propelled by a dozen sweeps passed them in the darkness, but so silently that they did not hear so much as the splash of an oar, and a drowsy feeling seemed to pervade the whole crew.

"I'll be bound to say if we was to set up a song with a good rattling chorus he'd kick up a row," said Billy Waters, getting up from where he was seated upon the deck, going to the side, and leaning over. "For my part I'd—Hullo! Lookye here, Jack Brown; what do you make of them there lights?"

He pointed as he spoke to a couple of dim stars high up on the cliff and placed diagonally.

"Signal," said the boatswain decidedly.

"For us?" said Tom Tully.

"No," said the gunner; "for some smuggling craft. Beg pardon, your honour," he continued as the lieutenant came forward, "but what do you make o' them there lights?"

The lieutenant had a long look, and then, with a display of energy that was unusual with him, he exclaimed, "It is a signal for boats; there's a landing going on."

His words seemed to electrify everyone on board, and the men watched the lights on shore with intense eagerness, seeing prize-money in them, as they did in every boat sent from the cutter; while, to test the lights ashore as to whether they really formed a signal, or were only an accidental arrangement of a shepherd's lanterns, the lieutenant had the two riding lamps suddenly lowered and covered.

Then there were a few moments of intense excitement, every eye being directed to the dim diagonally-placed stars on the cliff, both of which suddenly disappeared.

"Right," said the lieutenant. "Up with our lights again. That's either Mr Leigh signalling to be fetched off or else there's going to be a cargo run. Man the two boats! Gunner, serve out arms! No pipe, boatswain. Quietly, every man, and muffle the oars!"

The men needed no pipe to call them to their places, for every man was in a state of intense excitement, and ready to execute a kind of war-dance on the deck, till the lieutenant, who had been to fetch his sword and pistols, returned on deck in a dubious state of mind.

"I don't know," he said. "Perhaps it is only a dodge to get us away. Somebody is tricking us; and while we are going one way they'll run a cargo in another direction."

The men dared not murmur, but they grumbled in silence.

"Give up your arms again, my men," said the lieutenant, "and we'll be watchful where we are. I'm tired of being tricked."

The men were unwillingly giving up their weapons when, as Billy Waters put it, the wind veered round again.

"Serve out the arms, my man! Now then, be smart! Tumble into the boats!"

For fear their commander should change his mind again the men did literally tumble into the boats, and, giving the boatswain charge of the vessel and putting the gunner in charge of the smaller boat, the lieutenant descended into the other, gave orders that not a word should be spoken, and they pushed off into the black night.

"When we land," whispered the lieutenant, "two men are to stop in the boats and keep off a dozen or so yards from the shore. No getting them stove-in, or—"

He did not finish his sentence, and in its mutilated form it was passed to the other boat, which was close behind.

For the first part of the distance they rowed pretty swiftly, but when they were about halfway the lieutenant slackened speed, and, after nearly running into them, the second followed the example, and they went softly on.

It seemed to grow darker and darker, and but for the fact that they could hear the wash of the water upon the shore, and see the lights of the cutter, it would have been impossible to tell which way to go. They steered, however, straight for the land, every ear being attent, and the men so anxious to make the present expedition a success that their oars dipped without a sound.

All at once, as it seemed to them, they could hear something above the soft wash of the water that made every man's heart beat, and roused the lieutenant to an intense state of excitement. For, plainly enough, there came from out of the pitchy darkness right ahead the tramp of feet hurrying to and fro across the sands, and there could be only one interpretation of such a sound, namely, the fact that a party of men were unloading a boat.

The lieutenant ordered his men to wait so that the second boat might come up alongside, and then they advanced together in perfect silence, with the keenest-eyed men in the bows, ready to signal by touch if they saw anything ahead.

The sound was still going on upon the beach, and the people were evidently very busy, when, at the same moment, the crews of the two boats caught sight of a large lugger run ashore, and not twenty yards away.

The lieutenant's orders to the gunner were short and sharp.

"Board her on the larboard side; I'll take this! Off; give way, my lads! Close in; out cutlasses and up and have her!"

Softly as his whisper was uttered it was heard upon the lugger by the watchful smugglers. A shrill whistle rang out; there was a rush of feet to get back aboard, and men sprang to their arms.

But the *Kestrels* were too close in this time. The boats were run one on either side; the crews pulled out their cutlasses and sprang up, racing as to who should be first on board; and after a short sharp struggle the smugglers were beaten down, and the lugger was taken.

"Now, Waters, make sure of the prisoners, and don't trust them below!" cried the lieutenant. "Come, my lads. Crew of the first boat head for the shore."

"Would you like lanterns, sir?" said the gunner.

"What! to show the rascals where to shoot!" said the lieutenant. "No, sir. We could take the lugger in the dark, and now we'll have the rest of the gang and the cargo. Look here, my men," he said, turning to the prisoners, "fifty pounds and a free pardon to the man who will act as guide and show us the way to the place where the lugger's cargo has been placed."

There was no answer.

"Do you hear there, my men? Don't be afraid to speak. Fifty pounds, liberty, and my protection to the man who will act as guide."

Still no answer.

"A hundred pounds, then," said the lieutenant, eagerly.

"Come, be quick; there is no time to lose."

There was not the slightest notice taken of the offer.

"Look here," cried the lieutenant, "I promise you that the man who will tell where the cargo is carried shall be amply protected."

Still no reply.

"Come, come, come!" cried the lieutenant; "who is going to earn this money? There, time is valuable; I'll give two hundred pounds if we capture the rest of the cargo."

"If you'll give me two hundred pounds I'll tell you where it is," said a voice out of the darkness; and a groan and a hiss arose from the prisoners.

"Bravo! my lad," cried the lieutenant. "I give you my word of honour you shall have the two hundred pounds. Now, then; where is it? Which way shall we go? Quick! where is it?"

"Where you and your lot won't never find it," said the man; and there was a tremendous roar of laughter.

"Come, my lads," said the lieutenant angrily, "follow me."

As the men followed him down into the boat another shrill chirruping whistle rang out upon the dark night-air, a whistle which the lieutenant knew well enough to be a warning to the men ashore that there was danger.

"Never mind," he said; "we shall find the bags this time, and with plenty of honey too, my lads. Let's see, who was here last and went up among the rocks?"

"Me, your honour," said Tom Tully. "I can show you the way."

"Come to my side, then," said the lieutenant, leaping ashore. Tom Tully ranged up alongside, and together they hurried over the sand and shingle.

There was no doubt about their being upon the right track, for they stumbled first against a keg, directly after upon a package, then upon another and another, just as the smugglers had thrown them down to race back and defend the lugger; and with these for their guides they made right for the rocks, where, after a little hesitation, Tom Tully led the party through a narrow opening.

"I should know the place, sir," he said, "for I got a hawful polt o' the side of the head somewheres about here; and—ah! this here's right, for there's another little keg o' spirits."

He had kicked against the little vessel, and, to endorse his opinion, he had come upon a small package, which, with the keg, was placed upon a block of rock ready for their return.

But in spite of his recollection of the blows he had received in the struggle amongst the rocks Tom Tully's guidance was not very good. It was horribly dark, and, but for the scuffling noise they kept hearing in front and beyond the chaos of rocks amongst which they were, the lieutenant would have ordered his men back, and tried some other way, or else, in spite of the risks, have waited while some of his men went back for lights.

There was, however, always the noise in front, and partly by climbing and dragging one another up over the rocks they managed to get nearer and nearer without once hitting upon the narrow and comparatively easy but maze-like track that was the regular way, and which was so familiar to the smuggling party that they ran along it and surmounted the various barriers with the greatest ease.

"Come, come, Tully, are you asleep?" cried the lieutenant impatiently; "push on."

"That's just what I am a doing of, your honour," said the great fellow; "but they seem to have been a moving the rocks, and altering the place since we was here last, and its so plaguy dark, too, I don't seem to hit it at all."

"Give way, there, and let another man come to the front," said the lieutenant.

Tom Tully did give way, and another and another tried, but made worse of it, for the big fellow did blunder on somehow, no matter what obstacles presented themselves; and at last, quite in despair, just as the sounds in front were dying right away, almost the last man being up the cliff, the great sailor clambered over a huge block of rock and uttered a shout of joy.

"Here's the place, your honour, here's the place!" he shouted, and the lieutenant and the men scrambled to his side.

"Well," cried the lieutenant, "what have you found? Where are we?"

"We're here, your honour," cried Tom Tully eagerly. "We're all right. Oh lor', look out! what's that 'ere?"

For just at that moment there was the whizz made by a running out rope, a rushing sound, a heavy body came plump on Tom Tully's shoulders, and he was dashed to the ground.

Chapter Thirty Four.

On board once more.

There was an attempt at flight on the part of the *Kestrels*, but there was no room to fly, though the general impression was that the smugglers were about to hurl down pieces of rock upon them from above, but their dread was chased away by a well-known voice exclaiming:

"All right, my lads: I'm not killed."

"But you've 'most killed me," growled Tom Tully.

"Never mind, Tom. You shall have some grog when we get back aboard. Who's in command?"

"I am, sir," exclaimed the lieutenant from somewhere at the back; "and I beg to know what is the meaning of this indecorous proceeding."

"Well, sir," said Hilary, "I was in a hurry to rejoin the ship's company, and I was coming down a rope when some one above cast it off."

"Three cheers for Muster Leigh!" cried a voice.

"Silence!" roared the lieutenant. "Now, Mr Leigh, if you are not joined to the band of rascals show us the way to them."

"There's no way here, sir, unless we bring a long spar and rig up some tackle. The rock's forty feet high, and as straight as a wall. Will you let me speak to you, sir?"

The lieutenant grunted, and Hilary limped to his side.

"Now, Mr Leigh," he said, "I will hear what you have to say; but have the goodness to consider yourself under arrest."

"All right, sir," replied Hilary; "I'm used to that sort of thing now."

"Where have you been, sir?"

"Made prisoner by the smugglers, sir. And now, if you will take my advice, sir, you will draw off the men and secure the lugger. By daylight I can, if we find a way up the cliffs, conduct you to the place they make their rendezvous."

"I repeat, Mr Leigh, that you must consider yourself under arrest," said the lieutenant stiffly. "Your plans may be very good, but I have already made my own."

Hilary said nothing, for he knew his officer of old; and that, while he would profess to ignore everything that had been said, he would follow out the advice to the letter.

And so it proved; for, drawing off the men, they were led down to the boats, the lugger was pushed off, and those of her crew left on board made to handle the sweeps till she was secured alongside of the cutter, where the smugglers to the number of eight were made prisoners below.

The men were in high glee, for it proved next morning that there was still enough of the cargo on board to give them a fair share of prize-money, and there was the hope of securing more of the cargo at the old hall of which Hilary spoke.

"I am quite convinced of the existence of that place, Mr Leigh," said the lieutenant pompously, "and I have been questioning the prisoners about it. If you give your promise not to attempt an escape, I will allow you to accompany the expedition under the command of the gunner, as I shall be obliged to stay on board."

To his intense astonishment, Hilary, who longed to head the party and try to capture the rest of the smuggling crew, drew himself up.

"Thank you, sir, no," he replied; "as I am a prisoner, I will wait until I have been before a court-martial. Shall I go below, sir?"

The lieutenant was speechless for a few moments.

"What, sir? go below, sir? and at a time like this when the ship is shorthanded, and we have eight prisoners to guard? This is worse and worse, Mr Leigh. What am I to think of such conduct?"

"What you please, sir," said Hilary quietly.

"Then, sir, in addition to deserting, which you try to hide by professing to have been made a prisoner, you now mutiny against my orders!"

"Look here, Lieutenant Lipscombe," cried Hilary, who was now in a passion; "if you want me to take command of the expedition, and to lead the men to the smugglers' place, say so like a man. If you do not want me to go, send me below as a prisoner. I'm not going to act under our gunner."

"Mr Leigh," said the lieutenant, "I shall report the whole of your insubordinations in a properly written-out despatch. At present I am compelled to make use of your assistance, so take the gunner and six men."

"Six will not be enough, sir."

"Then take seven," said the lieutenant, impatiently.

"Seven will not be enough, sir," replied Hilary. "I must have at least a dozen."

"Bless my soul, Mr Leigh! hadn't you better take command of the cutter, and supersede me altogether?"

"No, sir; I don't think that would be better," said Hilary.

"I have eight prisoners on board, and they must be well guarded."

"Yes, sir, of course."

"Then I am obliged to have four or five men in the lugger."

"Yes, sir; so under the circumstances I think it will be best to place the eight prisoners in the lugger's boat, and send them ashore."

"What! to join the others?"

"No, sir; I should take care to land them after the expedition party were well on the way."

"Bless me, Mr Leigh! this is beyond bearing. How dare you dictate to me in this way?" cried the lieutenant.

"And," continued Hilary, "I would disable them for a few hours by means of the irons. There are five or six sets on board."

"Ah! yes, yes; but what do you mean?"

"I'd let the gunner rivet them on, sir, joining the men two and two. They could not get them off without a blacksmith; and it would disable them for some hours."

"Well, yes, I had some such an idea as that," replied the lieutenant. "Under the circumstances, Mr Leigh, I will humour you in this."

"Thank you, sir," said Hilary quietly, for he was so much in earnest as to the duty required at this special moment, that he would not let his annoyance keep him back.

"Perhaps, too, you had better take command of the expedition, Mr Leigh. Duty to the king stands first, you know."

"Certainly, sir."

"And, by the way, Mr Leigh, I would certainly change my uniform; for, you will excuse my saying so, you look more like a scarecrow than an officer."

Hilary bowed, and soon after he was inspecting the men detailed for the duty in hand, one and all of whom saluted him with a grin of satisfaction.

"Well, Tom Tully," he said, "how is your shoulder?"

"Feels as if it was shov'd out, sir," growled the big sailor; "but lor' bless your 'art, sir, I don't mind."

"Tom wishes you'd fell on his head, sir," said Billy Waters, laughing; "it's so thick, it wouldn't have hurt him a bit."

"I'll try to manage better next time," said the young officer; "but I had to look sharp to get away the best fashion I could."

"Well, sir, the lads say as they're all werry glad to see you again," continued the gunner; "and they hopes you're going to give them some fun."

"I hope I am," replied Hilary; "but I can't feel sure, for they are slippery fellows we are after, and we may get there to find them gone."

Meanwhile, in accordance with Hilary's advice, which the lieutenant had adopted as his own idea, the cutter was sailing east in search of an opening in the cliff, through which the party could reach the higher ground; and, after going four or five miles, this was found, the party landed, and the cutter then sailed on to get rid of the boatload of

prisoners she towed behind, some eight or ten miles farther away.

Hilary felt himself again, as, after he had said a few words to his men, they started off inland, mounting a rugged pathway, and then journeying due north.

It was rather puzzling, and the young officer did not anticipate finding the old hall without some trouble; but he had an idea that it lay to the east of the smugglers' landing-place, as well as some miles inland.

Hilary's first idea was to get upon one of the ridges, from which he hoped to recognise the hills which he had looked upon from his prison. Failing this he meant to search until he did find it, when a happy thought struck him.

He remembered the dam he had seen, and the great plashing water-wheel. There was, of course, the little river, and if he could find that he could track it up to the mill, from whence the old hall would be visible.

The place seemed singularly uncultivated, and it was some time before they came upon a cottage, where an old woman looked at them curiously.

"River? Oh, yes, there's the little river runs down in the hollow," she replied, in answer to Hilary's questions. It was upon his tongue's end to ask the old woman about the hall; but a moment's reflection told him the cottagers anywhere near the sea would be either favourable to the smugglers, or would hold them in such dread that they would be certain to refuse all information. Even then he was not sure that the old woman was not sending them upon a false scent.

This did not, however, prove to be the case, for after a walk of about a couple of miles, through patches of woodland and along dells, where the men seemed as happy as a pack of schoolboys, a ridge was reached, from which the little streamlet could be seen; and making their way down to it, Hilary found that they were on the wrong side, a fact which necessitated wading, though he went over dry-shod, Tom Tully insisting upon carrying him upon his back.

Another couple of miles along the winding course brought them to the mill, where a heavy-looking man stood watching the unwonted appearance of a dozen well-armed sailors; but neither party spoke, and after a bit of a rest for the discussion of a few biscuits, Hilary prepared for his advance to the old hall.

They were just about to start when the heavy-looking man lounged up.

"Going by Rorley Place?" he said.

"Rorley Place?" said Hilary; "where's that?"

"Yon old house," was the reply. "Don't go in; she's harnted!"

"Oh! is she?" said Hilary.

"Ay, that she be," said the man. "She's been empty this hundred year; but you can see the lights shining in the windows of a night, and hear the groans down by the gate and by the little bridge over Rorley stream."

"Thank you," said Hilary, "we'll take care. Now, my lads, forward. Now, Tom Tully, what's the matter?"

"I'm a man as 'll fight any man or any body any day," said the big sailor; "but if we're going again that there place I'm done. I can't abide ghosts and them sort o' things."

"Stuff!" said Hilary. "Forward. Why, what are you thinking about, man? That's where I was shut up night after night."

"And did you see 'em, sir?"

"See what?" replied Hilary.

"Them there as yon chap talked about, sir."

"I saw a good many very substantial smugglers, and I saw a cellar full of kegs and packages, and those are what we are going to get."

Tom Tully seemed a bit reassured, and tightening his belt a little, he kept step with the others, as Hilary led the way right across country, so as to come out of the wood suddenly after a curve, just in front of the entrance to the narrow bridge over the moat.

Hilary managed well, and his men following him in single file, he led them so that, apparently unseen by the occupants of the old hall, they were at last gathered together in the clump of trees, waiting the order to advance.

The moat, as Hilary knew, was too deep to think of wading, and there was the old bridge quite clear, temptingly offering itself as a way to the front of the old house; but this tempting appearance rather repelled the young officer. He was no coward, but he was good leader enough to shrink from subjecting his men to unnecessary risk.

The smugglers would be, under the present circumstances, as desperate as rats in a corner; and as they would certainly expect an attack through his escape, and the events of the past night, it was not likely that they would have neglected to protect the one entrance to their stronghold.

"I say, wot are we awaiting for?" growled Tom Tully.

"Hold your noise!" said Waters; "don't you see the orsifer as leads you thinks there's a trap?"

"Wheer? I don't see no trap. Wot sorter trap?" growled Tom Tully.

"Will yer be quiet, Tommy!" whispered the gunner. "What a chap you are!"

"Yes, ar'n't I?" said the big sailor, taking his messmate's remark as a compliment; and settling himself tailor-fashion upon the ground, he waited until the reconnaissance was over.

For Hilary was scanning the front of the old house most carefully. There was the room in which he had been imprisoned, with the window still open, and the thin white cord swinging gently in the air. There was Adela's room, open-windowed too, and there also was the room where he had seen Sir Henry busy writing, with his child at his knee.

Where were they now? he asked himself, and his heart felt a sudden throb as he thought of the possibility of their being still in the house and in danger.

But he cast the thought away directly, feeling sure that Sir Henry, a proscribed political offender, would not, for his own and his child's sake, run the slightest risk of being taken.

"But suppose he trusts to me, and thinks that I care too much for them to betray their hiding-place?"

His brow turned damp at the thought, and for a moment, as he saw in imagination his old companion Adela looking reproachfully at him for having sent her father to the block, he felt that at all costs he must take the men back.

Then came reaction.

"No," he thought, "I gave Sir Henry fair warning that I must do my duty, and that if we encountered again I should have to arrest him in the king's name. He tried to tempt me to join his party, but I refused, and told him I had my duty to do. He must, I am sure he must, have made his escape, and I shall lead on my men."

He hesitated a moment, and then thought that he was come there to capture smugglers, not political offenders, and that after all he would find a way out of his difficulty; but colouring the next moment, he felt that he must do his duty at all hazards; and he turned to Waters.

"I can see no trace of anything wrong, gunner," he said, "but I feel that those rascals have laid a trap for us. They'll open fire directly we attempt to cross that bridge."

"Then let me and Tom Tully and some one else try it first," said the gunner in reply.

"No, no, Waters; that would never do," said Hilary. "If anyone goes first it must be I. Look all along the bottom windows. Can you see any gun barrels?"

"Not ne'er a one, sir," replied the gunner; "and I ar'n't seen anything but two or three pigeons and an old lame hen since we've come."

"Then they must be lying in wait," said Hilary. "Never mind, it must be done. Here, I shall rush over first with Tom Tully. Then, if all's right, you bring the rest of the men. If I go down, why, you must see if you can do anything to take the place; and if you cannot, you must take the men back."

"Hadn't we better all rush it together, sir?"

"No; certainly not."

"Then hadn't I best go first, sir? I ar'n't so much consequence as you."

"No, Waters, I must go first. I can't send my men to risks I daren't attempt myself. Now then, are you ready, Tully?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Let me go first, sir," pleaded the gunner.

"Silence, sir," cried Hilary. "Now, Tully—off."

Cutlass in hand and closely followed by the elephantine seaman, Hilary ran from his place of concealment across the open space to the bridge, and then without a moment's hesitation he bounded across it, and on to the rough, ill-tended patch of grass.

To his intense surprise and delight he got over in safety, and then pausing he held up his sword, and with a cheer Billy Waters raced across with the rest of the men.

"Now, quick, Waters, take half the lads and secure the back—no, take four. Two of you keep the bridge. We must capture them all to a man."

Not a shot was fired. There was no answering cheer. All was as silent as if there had never been a soul there for years, and after carefully scanning the window Hilary went up to the front door and battered it loudly with his sword-hilt.

This knocking he had to repeat twice over before he heard steps, and then a couple of rusty bolts were pushed back, the door was dragged open, and a very venerable old lady stood peering wonderingly in their faces as she screened her eyes with her hand.

"Ye'd better not come in," she said in a loud, harsh voice. "The place is harnted, and it isn't safe."

"Where's Allstone?" cried Hilary as he led his men into the desolate-looking hall.

"Hey?"

"I say where's Allstone, the scoundrel?" shouted Hilary.

"I'm very sorry, but I can't hear a word you say, young man. I've been stone-deaf ever sin' I came to take care o' this house five year ago. It's a terrifying damp place."

"Where are the men?" shouted Hilary with his lips to her ear.

"Men? No, no; I ar'n't feared o' your men," said the old lady. "They won't hurt a poor old crittur like me."

"There, spread out and search the place," said Hilary. "She's as deaf as a post. Whistle for help whoever finds the rascals."

Detaining four men Hilary made his way to the kitchen, and then to the passage by the vault-door and the chapel, to find all wide open; and upon a light being obtained Hilary was about to descend, but, fearing a trap, he left two of his men on guard and went down into the vault, to find it empty. There was some old rubbish and the nets, but that was all. Short as had been the time the smugglers had cleared the place.

He went into the chapel and to Sir Henry and Adela's rooms, to find the old furniture there, but that was all; and at the end of a good half-hour's search the party of sailors stood together in the hall, with the deaf old woman staring at them and they staring at each other, waiting their officer's commands.

"Ar'n't there not going to be no fight?" growled Tom Tully.

Evidently not; and after another search Hilary would have felt ready to declare that there had not been a soul there for months, and that he had dreamed about his escape, if the white cord had not still hung from the window.

Further investigation proving to be vain, for they could get nothing out of the deaf old woman, and a short excursion in the neighbourhood producing nothing but shakes of the head, Hilary had to lead his men back to the shore, where they arrived at last, regularly tired out and their commander dispirited. All the same, though, he could not help feeling glad at heart as he signalled to the cutter for a boat, that Sir Henry and his daughter were safe from seizure, for had he been bound to take them prisoners he felt as if he could have known no peace.

But Hilary had no time to give to such thoughts as these, for a boat was coming from the cutter, and in a very short time he knew that he would have to face the lieutenant and give his account of the unsuccessful nature of his quest; and as he thought of this he began to ask himself whether the injuries his commander had received at different times had not something to do with the eccentricity and awkwardness of his behaviour.

Hilary was still thinking this when he climbed to the deck of the cutter and saluted his officer with the customary "Come on board."

Chapter Thirty Five.

A Risky Watch.

Lieutenant Lipscombe was so dissatisfied with the result of Hilary's expedition that he landed himself the next day with a party of the *Kestrels* and went over and searched the old hall.

From thence he followed the lane down to the cliffs, where, as Billy Waters afterwards told Hilary, they found the place where the smugglers had been in the habit of landing their goods, and the cottage he had described. But the people seemed stupid and ignorant, professing to know nothing, and it was not until after a search that the rope was found with the tackle and block lying amongst some stunted bushes; and by means of this tackle the party descended, afterwards signalling to the cutter and getting on board.

The next thing was to take the prize into port and report to the superior officer what had been done, when orders were at once received to put out to sea and watch the coast.

For the emissaries of the Pretender had, it seemed, been busy at work, and there were rumours of risings and landings of men from France. In spite of the watchfulness of the various war-vessels on the coast messengers seemed to come and go with impunity. So angry were the authorities that, instead of the lieutenant receiving praise for what he had done, he only obtained a severe snubbing. He was told that the capture of a lugger with some contraband cargo was nothing to the taking of the political emissaries. These, it seemed, he had allowed to slip through his fingers, and he returned on board with his sailing orders, furious with the treatment he had received.

"Look here, Mr Leigh," he said sternly; "out of consideration for your youth I refrained from reporting your late desertion."

"I was taken prisoner, sir."

"Well, there, call it taken prisoner if you like," said the lieutenant impatiently. "I say I did not report it; but I consider that you are to blame for our late ill success."

"Thank you, sir," said Hilary in an undertone.

"It seems," continued the lieutenant, "that there is a Sir Henry Norland who comes and goes with fishermen and smugglers, and I am as certain as can be that we had him once on board that fishing lugger when you were stupid enough to let him go; I mean that ill-looking scoundrel with the girl. There, there; it is of no use for you to try and defend yourself. You were in fault, and the only way for you to amend your failing is by placing this man in my hands."

"But really, sir—" began Hilary.

"Go to your duty, sir!" exclaimed the lieutenant sternly; and, biting his lips as he felt how awkwardly he was situated, Hilary went forward, and soon after the cutter was skimming over the waves with a brisk breeze abeam.

Time glided on, with the young officer fully determined to do his duty if he should again have an opportunity of arresting the emissary of the would-be king; but somehow it seemed as if the opportunity was never to come. They cruised here and they cruised there, with the usual vicissitudes of storm and sunshine. Fishing-boats were rigorously overhauled, great merchant ships bidden to heave-to while a boat was sent on board, but no capture was made.

They put into port over and over again, always to hear the same news—that the young Pretender's emissaries were as busy as ever, and that they came and went with impunity, but how no one could say.

The lieutenant always returned on board, after going ashore to see the port-admiral, in a furious temper, and his junior and the crew found this to their cost.

Days and nights of cruising without avail. It seemed as if the *Kestrel* was watched out of sight, and then, with the coast clear, the followers of the young Pretender's fortunes landed in England with impunity. Hilary heard from time to time that Sir Henry had grown more daring, and had had two or three narrow escapes from being taken ashore, but he had always been too clever for his pursuers, and had got away.

Of Adela he had heard nothing, and he frequently hoped that she was safe with some of their friends, and not leading a fugitive life with her father.

It was on a gloomy night in November that the *Kestrel* was well out in mid-channel on the lookout for a small vessel, of whose coming they had been warned by a message received the day before from the admiral.

A bright lookout was being kept, in spite of the feeling that it might be, after all, only a false scent, and that while they were seeking in one direction the enemy might make their way to the shore in another.

There was nothing for it but to watch, in the hope that this time they might be right, and all that afternoon and evening the cutter had been as it were disguised. Her sails had been allowed to hang loosely, her customary smartness was hidden, and the carpenter had been over the bows with a pot of white paint, and painted big letters and a couple of figures on each side, to give the *Kestrel* the appearance of a fishing-boat. This done, the jollyboat was allowed to swing by her painter behind, and thus they waited for night.

As the darkness came on, in place of hoisting the lights they were kept under shelter of the bulwarks, and then, in spite of the preparations, Hilary saw and said that their work would be in vain, for the night would be too dark for them to see anything unless it came within a cable's length.

It was not likely; and the young officer, as he leaned over the side, after some hours' watching, talking in a low voice to the gunner, who was with him, began to think how pleasant it would be to follow the lieutenant's example and go below and have a good sleep, when he suddenly started.

"What's that, Billy?" he whispered.

"Don't hear nothing, sir," said the gunner. "Yes, I do. It's a ship of some kind, and not very far-off. I can hear the water under her bows."

"Far-off?—no. Look!" cried Hilary, in a hoarse whisper. "Down with the helm! hard down!" he cried. "Hoist a light!"

But as he gave the orders he felt that they were in vain, for they had so well chosen their place to intercept the French vessel they hoped to meet, that it was coming, as it were, out of a bank of darkness not fifty yards away; and in another minute Hilary, as he saw the size and the cloud of sail, knew that the *Kestrel* would be either cut down to the water's edge or sunk by the coming craft.

Chapter Thirty Six.

Without Lights.

In those moments of peril Hilary hardly knew how it all happened, but fortunately the men with him were men-of-war's men, and accustomed to prompt obedience. The helm was put down hard as the strange vessel came swiftly on, seeming to the young officer like his fate, and in an instant his instinct of self-preservation suggested to him that he had better run forward, and, as the stranger struck the *Kestrel*, leap from the low bulwark and catch at one of the stays. His activity, he knew, would do the rest.

Then discipline set in and reminded him that he was in charge of the deck, and that his duty was to think of the safety of his men and the cutter—last of all, of himself.

The stranger showed no lights, a suspicious fact which Hilary afterwards recalled, and she came on as the cutter rapidly answered her helm, seeming at first as if she would go right over the little sloop of war, but when the collision came, so well had the *Kestrel* swerved aside, the stranger's bowsprit went between jib and staysail, and struck the cutter just behind the figurehead.

There was a grinding crash, a loud yell from the oncoming vessel; the *Kestrel* went over almost on her beam-ends, and then the stranger scraped on by her bows, carrying away bowsprit, jibboom, and the sails.

"Chien de fool Jean Bool, fish, dog!" roared a voice from the side of the large schooner, for such Hilary could now see it was. "Vat for you no hoist light? I run you down."

"Hoist your own lights, you French idiot!" shouted back Hilary between his hands. "Ahoy, there! heave-to!"

There was a good deal of shouting and confusion on board the schooner, which went on several hundred yards before her way was stopped; but before this Hilary had ordered out the two boats; for there was no need to hail the men below, with "All hands on deck!"

The men came tumbling up in the lightest of costumes, one of the foremost being the lieutenant, with his nether garments in one hand, his cocked hat in the other.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Into the boats before she goes down!"

"No, no, sir!" cried Hilary excitedly. "Let's see the mischief first. Is she making water, carpenter?"

"Can't see as she is," replied that worthy. "We've lost the bowsprit and figurehead, and there's some planks started; but I think we shall float."

"Of course; yes," cried Lieutenant Lipscombe. "Back from those boats, men! I'll blow the brains out of the mutinous dog who dares to enter first. Discipline must be maintained. Here, Waters, let me lean against you."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the gunner; and the lieutenant proceeded to insert his legs in the portion of his uniform intended to keep his lower man warm.

"Now, Mr Leigh," he shouted, as he stamped upon the deck with his bare feet; "what have you to say to this?"

"Regular wreck forward, sir," replied Hilary, who had been examining the extent of the mischief.

"My fate for leaving you in charge," cried the lieutenant. "Where was the lookout?"

"Two boats coming from the schooner, sir," said Tom Tully. "They've got lanterns, and they're full of men."

"Then it's the vessel we were looking for," cried Hilary. "Quick, sir, give orders, or they'll board and take us before we can stir."

"Mr Leigh," said the lieutenant, with dignity, "I command this ship."

He walked slowly to the side, and peered at the coming boats, while Hilary stood fretting and fuming at his side. There was, however, something so ominous in the look of the boats, dimly-seen though they were through the murky night, that the lieutenant did give orders, and cutlasses and boarding-pikes were seized, the men then clustering about their officers.

"She ar'n't making a drop o' water," said the carpenter just then—an announcement which seemed to put heart into the crew, who now watched the coming of the boats.

"Hey! Hoop!" shouted a voice. "What sheeps is that? Are you sink?"

"May I answer, sir?" whispered Hilary.

"Yes, Mr Leigh; and be quick."

"Ahoy! What ship's that?" cried Hilary.

There was no response, only a buzz of conversation reached their ears, and the boats came rapidly on, the occupants of the *Kestrel's* deck seeing that they separated and changed position, so as to board on each bow, for the cutter now lay with her sail flapping, like a log upon the water.

"She's an enemy, sir," whispered Hilary; and he did not alter his opinion as the boats neared.

"All raight. We come take you off, sailor boy," cried the same voice that had hailed. "You shall be safe before you will sink you sheep."

The lieutenant seemed to have come to himself, and to be a little more matter-of-fact and sane in his actions, for he now ordered Waters to load the long gun, and the gunner eagerly slipped away.

"There, that will do," cried the lieutenant now. "We are not sinking. What ship's that?"

The boats stopped for a moment, and there was again a whispering on board; but the next instant they came on.

"Stop there, or I'll sink you!" cried the lieutenant. But the boats now dashed on, and it was evidently a case of

fighting and beating them off.

Every man grasped his weapon, and a thrill of excitement ran through Hilary as he felt that he was really about to engage in what might be a serious fight. Fortunately for the crew of the *Kestrel*, both of the boats were not able to board at once, for that on the larboard bow was driven right into the wreck of the jibboom and sail, which, with the attendant cordage, proved to be sufficient to hamper their progress for the time being, while the other boat dashed alongside with a French cheer, and, sword in hand, the crew swarmed over on to the deck.

It was bravely done; and, had they met with a less stout resistance, the *Kestrel* would have been captured. But, as it was, they had Englishmen to deal with, and Hilary and about ten of the crew met them bravely, Hilary going down, though, from the first blow—one from a boarding-pike. This, however, so enraged the *Kestrels* that they beat back the attacking party, cutting down several and literally hurling others over into their boat, which hauled off, not liking its reception.

Meanwhile, after a struggle, the crew of the other boat got itself clear of the tangle, and came on to the attack, to find themselves, after a sharp struggle, repulsed by the lieutenant and his party, the leader fighting bravely and well.

It was evident that the commander of the schooner had realised the character of the vessel with which he had been in collision, and had hoped to make an easy capture of her, if she did not prove to be in a sinking state. If she were, motives of humanity had prompted him to take off the crew, if they needed help. The task, however, had proved more severe than he anticipated, and the two boats were now together, with their leaders evidently in consultation.

The next minute an order was evidently given, and the boats turned, separated, and began to row back.

The schooner could only be made out now by a light she had hoisted; but this was quite sufficient for Billy Waters, who stood ready by his gun waiting for orders. Possibly he might have hit and sunk one of the boats, but the lieutenant did not seem to wish for this, but began giving his orders with unwonted energy, trying to make sail upon the *Kestrel*, which lay there upon the water, with one of her wings, as it were, so crippled that he found it would take quite half an hour before she could be cleared.

"It's of no use, Mr Leigh," he cried excitedly. "I wanted to board and take this schooner, and we cannot get alongside. Take charge of the gun, sir, and try and bring down one of her spars. Let's cripple her too. I'll order out the boats to board her."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Hilary, delighted at the energy shown by his chief. "Now, Billy Waters, send a shot through her mainmast. I'd aim straight at her light."

"Which on 'em, sir?" said the gunner drily.

"Why, that one! There's only one," cried Hilary sharply.

"Look alive! and—ah—how provoking, the light's out!"

"Ay, sir, they've doused their light now the boats know where to go, and it would be only waste o' good powder and round shot to go plumping 'em into that there bank o' blackness out yonder."

"Well, Mr Leigh, why don't you fire?" shouted the lieutenant.

"Beg pardon, sir, but there's nothing to fire at," replied Hilary.

"Fire at the schooner's light, sir,—fire at her light," cried the lieutenant indignantly. "Bless my soul, Mr Leigh," he said, bustling up. "Here, let me lay the gun, and—eh?—what?—the light out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why, in the name of common sense, Mr Leigh, didn't you fire before it went out?"

"Didn't get no orders," growled Billy Waters.

"Silence, sir; how dare you speak!" cried the lieutenant. "But are you sure the light's out, Mr Leigh?"

"There isn't a sign of it, sir."

"Then—then how are we to manage about the boats?"

There was a momentary silence, during which, as the men stood ready to man the two boats that had been lowered, the lieutenant and his junior tried to make out where the schooner lay, but on every side, as the *Kestrel* lay softly rolling in the trough of the sea, a thick bank of darkness seemed to be closing them in, and pursuit of the schooner by boats would have been as mad a venture as could have been set upon by the officer of a ship.

Chapter Thirty Seven.

Repairing Damages.

During the excitement, the bustle of the attack, the lieutenant had seemed more himself, and he had given his orders in a concise and businesslike way; but now that they were left to themselves all seemed changed, and he reverted to his former childish temper, turning angrily upon Hilary as the cause of all his misfortunes.

"Never in the whole career of the English navy," he cried, stamping his bare foot upon the deck, "was officer plagued with a more helpless, blundering junior than I am. Bless my heart! it is very cold, and I've no coat on. Mr Leigh, fetch my coat and waistcoat."

"Yes," he continued, as he put on the two garments, "as I said before, never was officer plagued with a more helpless, blundering, mischievous junior."

"Very sorry, sir. I do my best," said Hilary bluntly.

"Exactly, sir. You do your best," said the lieutenant; "and your best is to lay the *Kestrel*—His Majesty's ship *Kestrel*—right in the track of that French schooner, and but for my fortunate arrival upon deck we should have been sunk."

Hilary recalled the fact that he had ordered the helm hard down, and saved the vessel himself, but he did not say so.

"I'll be bound to say," continued the lieutenant, "that you were sailing slowly along without a light."

"Yes, sir, we had no light hoisted," said Hilary, who, in spite of his annoyance, could not help feeling amused.

"Exactly. Just what I expected," continued the lieutenant. "Then pray, sir, why, upon a dark night like this, was there no light?"

"My superior officer gave me orders, sir, that we were to keep a sharp lookout for French boats cruising the channel, and burn no light."

"Hah! Yes, I think I did give some such orders, sir, but how was I to know that it would turn out so dark, eh, sir? How was I to know it would turn out so dark?"

"It was very dark, sir, certainly," said Hilary.

"Yes, atrociously dark. And I distinctly told you to keep a sharp lookout."

"Yes, sir, and we did."

"It looks like it, Mr Leigh," said the lieutenant, pointing forward. "Bowsprit gone, and all the forward bulwarks, leaving us helpless on the water, and you say you kept a good lookout. Mr Leigh, sir, you will be turned out of the service."

"I hope not, sir. I think I saved the ship."

"Saved? saved? Good gracious me, Mr Leigh," said the lieutenant, bursting out laughing; "what madness! Here, Waters—Tully—do you hear this?"

"Ay, ay, your honour."

"And what do you think of it?"

"As we'd all have gone to the bottom, sir, if it hadn't been for Mr Leigh here," said Waters, pulling his forelock.

"Oh!" said the lieutenant sharply; "and pray what do you think, Tully; and you, bo'sun?"

"Think just the same as Billy Waters, your honour," said the boatswain.

"And that 'ere's just the same with me," growled Tom Tully, kicking out a leg behind. "He's a won'ful smart orsifer Muster Leigh is, your honour; and that's so."

"Silence, sir! How dare you speak like that?" cried the lieutenant furiously. "Now, Mr Leigh," he added sarcastically, "if you will condescend to assist, there is a good deal to see to, for the forepart of His Majesty's ship *Kestrel* is a complete wreck from your neglect. I am going below to finish dressing, but I shall be back directly."

Hilary returned his officer's sarcastic bow, and then gave a stamp on the deck.

"Which I don't wonder at it, your honour," said Tom Tully, in his low deep growl: "I ain't said not nowt to my messmates, but I'll answer for it as they'll all be willing."

"Willing? willing for what?" cried Hilary.

"Shove the skipper into the dinghy with two days' provision and water, sir, and let him make the shore, if you'll take command of the little *Kestrel*."

"Why, you mutinous rascal," cried Hilary. "How dare you make such a proposal to me? Hold your tongue, and go forward, Tom Tully. Duty on board is to obey your superiors, and if they happen to be just a little bit unreasonable, you must not complain."

"All right, your honour," said Tom Tully, giving his loose breeches a hitch; "but if the skipper was to talk to me like he do to you—"

"Well, sir, what?"

"I'd—I'd—I'd—"

Tom Tully had taken out his tobacco-box, and opened his jack-knife, with which he viciously cut off a bit of twist, exclaiming:

“That I would!”

He said no more, but it seemed probable that he meant cut off his commander’s head; and he then rolled forward to help the carpenter, and the whole strength of the crew, whom the first rays of a dull grey morning found still at work hauling in the tangle of spar and rope; and soon after, a stay having been secured to the wreck of the cutwater, a staysail was hoisted, and the cutter pretty well answered her helm.

Hilary felt less disposed to take the lieutenant’s words to heart, for he knew that if he were charged with neglect of duty the evidence of the men would be quite sufficient to clear him; so, after turning the matter over and over in his mind, he had cheerily set to work to try and get the cutter in decent trim, and, as the morning broke, crippled as she was in her fair proportions, she sailed well enough to have warranted the lieutenant in making an attack, should the schooner have come in sight.

But there was no such good fortune. Both the lieutenant and he swept the horizon and the cliff-bound coast with their glasses, and the *Kestrel* was sailed along close inshore in the hope that the enemy might be seen sheltered in some cove, or the mouth of one of the little rivers; but there was no result, and at last, very unwillingly, the cutter’s head was laid for Portsmouth, and the lieutenant went below to prepare his despatch.

“How long shall we be refitting, carpenter?” asked Hilary, after a long examination of the damages they had received, and a thorough awakening to the fact that if it had not been for that turn of the helm they must have been struck amidships, and sent to the bottom.

“All a month, sir,” said the carpenter. “There’ll be a deal to do, and if we get out of the shipwright’s hands and to sea in five weeks I’ll say we’ve done well.”

It was galling, for it meant four or five weeks of inaction, just at a time when Hilary was getting intensely interested in the political question of the day, and eagerly looking forward for a chance of distinguishing himself in some way.

“Who knows,” he said to himself, “but that schooner may have borne the Young Pretender and his officers to the English coast. If it did I just lost a chance of taking him.”

Ah! he thought, if he could have taken the young prince with his own hand. It would have been glorious, and he could have shown Sir Henry that he was on the way to honour and distinction without turning traitor to his king.

And so he went on hour after hour building castles in the air, but with little chance of raising up one that would prove solid, till they passed by the eastern end of the Isle of Wight, went right up the harbour, and the lieutenant had a boat manned and went ashore to make his report to the admiral.

To Hilary’s great disgust he found that he was not to go ashore, but to remain in charge of the cutter during the repairs, for the lieutenant announced his intention of himself remaining in the town.

But Hilary had one satisfaction—that of finding that the lieutenant had made no report concerning his conduct on the night of the collision. In fact, the lieutenant had forgotten his mad words almost as soon as he had spoken them, for they were only the outcomings of his petty malicious spirit for the time being.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

Off his Guard.

The carpenter’s four weeks extended to five, then to six, and seven had glided away before the cutter was pretty well ready for sea. Urgent orders had been given that her repairs were to be hastened, and the crew was kept in readiness to proceed to sea at once, but still the dockyard artificers clung to their job in the most affectionate manner. There was always a bit more caulking to do, a little more paint to put on, new ropes to reeve; and when at last she seemed quite ready, an overlooker declared that she would not be fit to go to sea until there had been a thorough examination of the keel.

It was during these last few days that Hilary found a chance of going ashore, and gladly availed himself of his liberty, having a good run round Portsmouth, a look at the fortifications; and finally, the weather being crisp, sunshiny, and the ground hard with frost, he determined to have a sharp walk inland for a change.

“I declare,” he cried, as he had a good run in the brisk wintry air, “it does one good after being prisoned in that bit of a cutter.”

He had been so much on board of late that he experienced a hearty pleasure in being out and away from the town in the free country air. The frost was keen, and it seemed to make his blood tingle in his veins. He set off running again and again, just pausing to take breath, and it was only when he was some miles away from the port and the evening was closing in that he began to think it was time to turn back.

As he did so he saw that three sailors who had been for some time past going the same way were still a short distance off, and as he passed them it seemed to him that they had been indulging themselves, as sailors will when ashore for a holiday.

“What cheer, messmate!” said one of them in his bluff, frank way. “Is this the way to London?”

"No, my lad; you're on the wrong road. You must go back three miles or so, and then turn off to the right."

"I told you so, Joe," the man exclaimed in an injured tone. "What's the good o' trusting to a chap like you? Here, come along and let's get back."

"I sha'n't go back," said the one addressed; "shall you, Jemmy?"

"Not I," said the other. "Can't us get to London this way, captain?"

"Yes," said Hilary laughing; "if you go straight on, but you'll have to go all round the world first."

"There!" cried the one addressed as Jemmy; "I told you so, matey. Come along."

"Don't be a fool," said the first sailor. "Lay holt of his arm, Joe, and let's get him back; it'll be dark afore long."

Hilary could not help feeling amused at the men; but as he trudged on back towards Portsmouth he saw that they were trying to make up for lost ground, and were following him pretty quickly.

Once they made such good use of their legs that they got before him; then Hilary walked a little faster and passed them, and so on during the next two miles they passed and repassed each other, the sailors saying a cheery word or two and laughing as they went by. But soon this was at an end; they seemed to grow tired, and during the next mile it had grown dark, and the sailors walked on one side of the road, Hilary on the other.

At last the sailors seemed to have made up their minds to get right away from him, walking on rapidly, till all at once Hilary heard voices talking loudly, and as he came nearer he could distinguish what was said.

"Come on. Come, Jem, get up."

"I want a glass," growled another voice.

"Never mind. Wait till we get on the London road," cried the man who had been addressed as Joe.

"I want a glass," growled the man again; and as Hilary came close up he saw that one of the men was seated in the path just in front of a roadside cottage, and that his two companions were kicking and shaking him to make him rise.

"I say, your honour," said one of the men, crossing to Hilary, "you're an officer, ar'n't you?"

"Yes, my man."

"Just come and order him to get up, quarterdeck fashion, sir, and I'd be obleeged to you. He won't mind us; but if you, an officer, comes and orders him up, he'll mind what you say. We want to get to the next town to-night."

Hilary hesitated for a moment, feeling loath to trouble himself about the stupid, drunken sailor, but his good nature prevailed and he crossed the road.

"Here, my lad," he said sharply, "get up directly."

"Going to turn in!" said the fellow sleepily.

"No, no. Nonsense," cried Hilary, giving him a touch with his foot. "Get up and walk on."

"Sha'n't," said the man. "Going to sleep, I tell you."

"Lookye here, Jemmy," said the sailor who had first spoken, "you'll get your back scratched, you will, if you don't get up when you're told. This here's a officer."

"Not he," grumbled the man sleepily. "He ar'n't no officer, I know. Going to sleep, I tell you."

"Get up, sir," cried Hilary sharply. "I am an officer."

"Bah! get out. Only officer of a merchant ship. You ar'n't no reg'lar officer."

"If you don't get up directly, you dog, I'll have the marines sent after you," cried Hilary.

The man sat up and stared.

"I say," he said, "you ar'n't king's officer, are you?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"What ship?"

"The *Kestrel*."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he grumbled. "Beg your honour's pardon. I'll get up. Give's your hand."

Half-laughing and at the same time proud of the power his rank gave him, Hilary held out his hands to the man, who took them tightly and was in the act of drawing himself up, when the young officer felt himself seized from behind and held, as it were, in a vice. Just at the same moment the door of the cottage was opened, there was a bright light shone out, and before he could realise his position he was forced into the place, and awoke to the fact, as the door

was banged to, that he had fallen into a trap.

"You scoundrels!" he cried furiously; "do you want to rob me?" And he saw that he was in the presence of half a dozen more men.

"Silence, sir!" cried an authoritative voice. "Stand back, my lads. It was very cleverly done."

"Cleverly done!" cried Hilary. "What do you mean, sir? I desire you let me go. Are you aware that I am a king's officer?"

"Yes, I heard you announce it, and you are the man we have been looking after for days," said the one who seemed to be in authority; and by the light of a bright wood fire Hilary could make out that he was a tall, dark man in a long boat-cloak, which he had thrown back from his breast.

"Then I advise you to set me free directly," said Hilary.

"Yes, we shall do that when we have done," said the leader, from whom all the others stood away in respect; and as the light burned up the speaker took off his cocked hat, and Hilary saw that he was a singularly handsome man of about forty.

"When you have done!" cried Hilary. "What do you mean?"

"Be silent and answer my questions, my good lad," said the other. "You are the young officer of the *Kestrel*, and your name is Hilary Leigh, I believe?"

"Yes, that is my name," cried Hilary sharply. "By what right do you have me seized?"

"The right of might," said the man. "Now look here, sir. Your vessel is now seaworthy, and to-morrow you will get your sailing orders."

"How do you know?" cried Hilary.

"Never mind how I know. I tell you the fact, my good lad. You will be despatched to watch the port of Dunquerque, to stop the boat that is supposed to come to land from this coast on the king's business."

"I suppose you mean the Pretender's business," cried Hilary quickly.

"I mean His Majesty Charles Edward," said the man, "to whom I wish you to take these papers." And he pulled a packet from his pocket.

"I? Take papers? What do you suppose I am?"

"One who will obey my orders," said the man haughtily, "and who will never be able to play fast and loose with his employers; for if he were false, no matter where he hid himself, he would be punished."

"And suppose I refuse to take your papers and become a traitor?" said Hilary.

"I shall make you," said the stranger. "I tell you that the voyage of your cutter suits our convenience, and that you will have to take these papers, for which service you will be amply rewarded."

"Then I do refuse," said Hilary firmly.

"No; don't refuse yet," said the stranger with a peculiar look in his countenance. "The despatches must be taken. Think of the proposal, my good lad, and then reply."

As he spoke Hilary saw him take a pistol from his breast-pocket, and, if physiognomy was any index of the mind, Hilary saw plainly enough that if he refused to obey this man's orders he would have no compunction in shooting him like a dog.

Chapter Thirty Nine.

Captain Charteris.

Hilary felt the cold perspiration breaking out on his face, as he thought of the loneliness of the spot where he was, and of his helplessness here in the hands of these desperate men, who were ready to brave all for their cause. He saw now that he had been watched almost from the outset, and that he had been marked as one likely to carry out their designs. Perhaps, he thought, Sir Henry had had something to do with the seizure; but he gave up the idea directly, giving his old friend credit for too much honourable feeling towards him to have him trapped in so cowardly a manner.

These thoughts came quickly as he stood watching the leader of the party by whom he was surrounded—men who were ready at the slightest movement to spring upon him, and secure him, should he attempt to escape.

"I suppose," said Hilary's questioner, "you know what I am?" and he looked at the young officer sternly.

"Personally, no," replied Hilary, boldly; "but your behaviour shows me that you are traitors to the king."

"No, sir," cried the other fiercely; "we are faithful followers of the king, and enemies of the German hound."

"How dare you speak like that of His Majesty!" cried Hilary quite as fiercely; and he took a couple of steps forward, but only to find himself seized and dragged back.

"Hold the young rascal tightly," said the officer.

"Yes, hold me tightly," cried Hilary, "you cowards!"

"I am having you held tightly for your own sake," said the officer, taking up and playing with a large pistol he had laid on the table before him. "I should be sorry to have to shoot so distinguished a follower of Hanoverian George."

Hilary bit his lip and remained silent. It was of no use to speak, of less account to struggle, and he stood facing his captors without flinching.

"Now," continued the leader, "as you have got rid of your little burst of passion, perhaps you will be reasonable. Listen to me, young man. Your position as second officer on board that despatch cutter will bring you frequently to both sides of the Channel, so that you will have ample opportunities for carrying messages for us without risk, and,"—he paused here, watching the young man intently—"greatly to your own profit. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Hilary shortly.

"We shall not have merely one despatch for you to take, to be paid for with so many guineas, my lad, but there will be a regular correspondence carried on, and you will make from it a handsome sum, for we recompense liberally; something different to your munificent pay as officer of the *Kestrel*."

Hilary still remained silent, and his tempter pulled a bag of coin from his pocket and threw it heavily upon the table.

"Of course the task is rather a risky one, and deserves to be paid for generously. That I am ready to do. In fact, you may name your own price, and anything in reason will be granted. At the same time I warn you that we shall put up with no trifling, and I may as well say that it is impossible to escape us. We have emissaries everywhere, whose duty it is to reward or punish as the case may require. Come, I see you are growing reasonable."

"Oh, yes! I am quite reasonable," said Hilary smiling.

"That's well," said the officer; "cast him loose, my lads, and stand more aside. Now, Mr Hilary Leigh," he said, as his orders were obeyed, "I am glad to find so dashing and brave a young fellow as you finds himself ready to join the good cause. I ask you to swear no oaths of fidelity. I shall merely give you this despatch and a handful of gold coin, and you will bring the answer here at your earliest opportunity."

"And suppose I refuse?" said Hilary.

"Refuse? Oh, you will not refuse," said the officer banteringly. "It would be a pity to rob Hanoverian George of so brave and promising a young officer."

"What do you mean," said Hilary.

"Oh nothing—nothing," said the other coolly. "We might, perhaps, think it necessary, as you know so much, to shoot you."

"Shoot me!" cried Hilary.

"Y-e-es; you see you know a good deal, my young friend, but we should bury you decently. You broke up the rendezvous at Rorley Place, and spoiled the smuggler's landing, did you not?"

"I did," said Hilary boldly.

"Yes. And you were kept a prisoner there, were you not?"

"I was."

"And escaped and made signals with the smuggler's lanterns to bring down the cutter's crew upon the party, did you not?"

"I did. It was my duty."

"Yes, you thought it was, my good lad. Let me see, you nearly captured Sir Henry Norland, too, did you not?"

"I should have taken him if he had been there," replied Hilary; "but I was glad he was not."

"Why?"

"Because he was an old friend."

"Let me see," continued the officer; "Sir Henry asked you to join us, did he not?"

"Several times," said Hilary quietly.

"Ah, yes! I suppose he would. Came to see you when you were a prisoner, I suppose?"

"He did."

"But he is not a good diplomat, Sir Henry Norland. By the way, what did he offer you?"

"The captaincy of a man-of-war."

"Young as you were?"

"Young as I am."

"But that was in prospective. Hard gold coin is much more satisfactory, Mr Hilary Leigh," said the officer, pouring out some bright golden guineas upon the table. "Of course you thought that Charles Edward might not come to the throne, and that you would never get your—get your—"

"Traitor's pay," said Hilary sharply, finishing the sentence.

"Don't call things by hard names, young man," said the officer sternly. "And let me tell you that I know for a certainty that your position in Hanoverian George's service is a very precarious one. Strange things have been told of you."

"Very likely," said Hilary coldly.

"I believe your officer has reported upon your conduct."

"I can't help that," said Hilary coldly. "I have always served his majesty faithfully and well."

"Even to taking pay from the other side?" said the officer with a mocking smile.

"It is a lie," cried Hilary angrily; "I never tampered with my duty to the king."

"Till now," said the officer laughing. "There, there, there, my lad, I'm not going to quarrel with you, and we will not use high-sounding phrases about loyalty, and fealty, and duty, and the like. There, I am glad to welcome you to our side. There are a hundred guineas in that bag. Take them, but spend them sensibly, or you will be suspected. If I were you I would save them, and those that are to come. Here is your despatch, and you will see the address at Dunquerque. Be faithful and vigilant and careful. There, take them and go your way. No one will be a bit the wiser for what you have done, and when you return to port bring your answer here, and give it to anyone you see. One word more: do not trust your lieutenant. I don't think he means well by you."

"I know that," said Hilary scornfully.

"Never mind," said the officer; "some day, when we are in power, we will find you a brave ship to command for your good services to Charles Edward. But there, time presses; you must get back to your ship. Here!"

He held out the bag of gold coin and the despatch, and he smiled meaningly as Hilary took them, one in each hand, and stood gazing full in the officer's face.

There was a dead silence in the room, and the dancing flames lit up strangely the figures of the tall well-knit man and the slight boyish figure, while, half in shadow, the sailors stood with all the intentness of disciplined men, watching what was going on.

"Look here, sir," said Hilary, speaking firmly, "if I did this thing, even if you came into power—which you never will—you would not find me a captain's commission, but would treat me as such a traitor deserved. There are your dirty guineas," he cried, dashing the bag upon the table, so that the coins flew jingling all over the room; "and there is your traitorous despatch," he continued, tearing it in half, and flinging it in the officer's face. "I am an officer of his majesty. God save the king!" he shouted. "Now, shoot me if you dare."

He gave one sharp glance round for a way of escape, but there was none. A dozen men stood there like statues, evidently too well disciplined to move till the appointed time. Doors and windows were well guarded, and with such odds Hilary knew that it would be but a wretched struggle without avail. Better, he thought, maintain his dignity. And he did, as he saw the officer pick up the pistol from the table and point it at his head.

A momentary sensation of horror appalled Hilary, and he felt the blood rush to his heart, but he did not flinch.

"I am a king's officer," he thought, "and I have done my duty in the king's name. Heaven give me strength, lad as I am, to die like a man!"

He looked then straight at the pistol barrel without flinching for a few moments. Then his eyes closed, and he who held the weapon saw the young man's lips move softly, as if in prayer, and he dashed the pistol down.

"There, my lads!" he cried aloud to the men, "if ever you see a Frenchman stand fire like that you may tell me if you will. Hilary Leigh," he cried, laying his hands smartly on the young man's shoulders, "you make me proud to be an Englishman, and in a service that can show such stuff as you. Here, give me your hand."

"No," cried Hilary hoarsely. "Stand off, sir; cajolery will not do your work any more than threats."

"Hang the work, my lad," cried the other. "It was rather dirty work, but we want to know our men in times like these. Give me your hand, my boy, I am no traitor, I am Captain Charteris, of the *Ruby*, and I have had to try your faith and loyalty to the king. Here, my men, you did your work well. Pick up those guineas; there should be a hundred of them. You may keep back five guineas to drink his majesty's health. Bo'sun, you can bring the rest on to me."

"Ay, ay, sir," said a thickset dark man, saluting, man-o'-war fashion.

"Come, Mr Leigh, you and I will walk on, and you shall dine to-night with the admiral. I told him I should bring you to dinner, but Lieutenant Lipscombe has given you so bad a character that the admiral declared you would take the bribe, and have to go to prison and wait your court-martial. Here, you need not doubt me. Come along."

Hilary felt giddy. The reaction was almost more than he could bear. He felt hurt and insulted that such a trick should have been played upon him, and he was ready to turn from the captain in an injured way.

The latter saw it and smiled.

"Yes," he said, taking the young man's arm, "it was a dirty trick, but it was a necessity. We have several black sheep in the navy, my lad, and we want to weed them out; but after all, I do not regret what I have done, since it has taught me what stuff we have got in it as well. Come, shake hands, my dear boy, you and I must be great friends from now."

Hilary held out his hand as he drew it from the other's arm, and they stood there gripping each other for some seconds in a cordial grasp.

"I don't think I could have stood fire like you did, Leigh," said the captain, as they were entering Portsmouth, the latter proving to be a man of a genial temperament that rapidly won upon his companion.

"I hope you could, far better, sir," said Hilary frankly.

"Why? How so, my lad?"

"I felt horribly frightened, sir."

"You felt afraid of death?" said the captain sharply.

"Yes, sir, terribly. It seemed so hard to die when I was so young, but I would not show it."

"Why, my dear boy," said the captain enthusiastically, as he clapped Hilary on the shoulder, "you are a braver fellow even than I thought. It takes a very brave man to confess that he was afraid; but don't you mind this. There was never a man yet in the full burst of health and strength who did not feel afraid to die. But come, we won't talk any more of that, for here is the admiral's dock."

Chapter Forty.

At the Admiral's.

It was with no little trepidation that Hilary entered the room where the admiral was waiting Captain Charteris' return, and as soon as he saw that he came with a young companion, the handsome grey-haired old gentleman came forward and shook hands with Hilary warmly.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "If you have passed Captain Charteris's test I know that we have another officer in the service of whom we may well feel proud. At the same time, Mr Leigh, I think we ought to beg your pardon."

Hilary hardly knew whether he was upon his head or his heels that evening, and it was like a revelation to find how genial and pleasant the reputed stern and uncompromising port-admiral could be. There was an excellent dinner, political matters were strictly tabooed, and the two officers talked a good deal aside. No further allusion was made to the *Kestrel* till it was time to go on board, a fact of which Hilary reminded the admiral.

"To be sure, yes. Keep to your time, Mr Leigh. By the way, before you go will you tell me in a frank gentlemanly spirit what you think of Lieutenant Lipscombe."

"No, sir, I can't," said Hilary bluntly.

The admiral looked angry on receiving so flat a refusal, but he calmed down directly.

Then, recollecting himself, Hilary exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, sir; I hope you will not ask me. I would rather not say."

"Quite right, Mr Leigh; I ought not to have asked you, for you are not the proper person to speak, but you will tell me this, I suppose," he added with a smile. "You will not be sorry to hear that Lieutenant Lipscombe will be appointed to another vessel."

"I am both sorry and glad, sir," replied Hilary, "for he is a brave officer, even if he is eccentric."

"Eccentric!" said Captain Charteris. "I think he is half mad."

"But you do not ask who will be your new commander!"

"No, sir," said Hilary; "I shall try and do my best whoever he may be."

"Good!" said the admiral; "but I'll tell you all the same—shall I?" he said laughing.

"Yes, sir, I should be glad to know," replied Hilary.

The old admiral stood looking at him attentively for a few moments, and then said quietly:

"You."

Hilary half staggered back in his surprise.

"Me? me, sir? Do you mean that I shall be appointed to the command of the *Kestrel*? I have not passed my examination for lieutenant yet."

"No, but you will, Mr Leigh, and I have no doubt with credit. I have been having a chat with my friend the captain here. It is a novelty, I own, but the *Kestrel* is a very small vessel, and for the present you will have with you a brother officer of riper years, who, pending his own appointment to a ship, will, as it were, share your command, and in cases of emergency give you his advice. Of course all this is to be if I obtain the sanction of the Admiralty, but I think I may tell you this will come."

Hilary was so overpowered by this announcement that he could only stammer a few words, and Captain Charteris took his hand.

"You see, Mr Leigh," he said, "we want a dashing, spirited young officer of the greatest fidelity, a man who is brave without doubt; ready-witted, and apt to deal with the smuggling and fishing craft likely to be the bearers of emissaries from the enemy's camp. We want such an officer at once for the *Kestrel*, and in the emergency, as we find those qualities in you, the admiral decides to set the question of years aside, while, as his spokesman and one to whom he often refers for counsel—"

"And takes it," said the admiral smiling.

"I cannot help giving my vote in your favour. Mr Leigh," he said, speaking very sternly now, "in the king's name I ask you from this time forth to set aside boyish things and to be a man in every sense of the word, for you are entering upon a great responsibility; and Lieutenant Anderson, who comes with you, will never interfere, according to his instructions, unless he sees that you are about to be guilty of a piece of reckless folly, which in your case is, I am sure, as good as saying that he will never interfere."

"The fact is, Mr Leigh," said the admiral kindly, "Lieutenant Lipscombe unwittingly advanced your cause, and it was solely on account of what has occurred coming to my ears that you were to-night put to so severe a proof. Now, good-night. You will receive your despatches to-morrow morning, and lieutenant Anderson will come on board. Then make the best of your way to Dunkerque, and I need hardly say that I shall be glad to see you whenever you are in port on business or for pleasure."

"And I as well, Leigh," said Captain Charteris. "Some day let's hope that I shall be an admiral, and when I am I shall wish for no better luck than to have Captain Leigh in command of my flagship. But that will be some time ahead. Now, good-night."

Hilary said good-night and made his way out into the fresh night-air, wondering if it was all true, and whether he was not suffering from some attack of nightmare; but the streets and the docks all looked very real, and when he reached the cutter and was saluted by the watch he began to think that there was no doubt about it, and he began, as he lay awake, to consider whether he ought not at once to take possession of the lieutenant's cabin.

Chapter Forty One.

In Command.

The memory of that dinner and the words that he had heard filled Hilary's dreams that night. He was always waking up with a start, nervous and excited, and then dropping off again to dream of being lieutenant, captain, admiral, in rapid succession. Then his dreams changed, and he was helping Sir Henry and saving Adela from some great danger. Then he was in great trouble, for it seemed that he had been guilty of some gross blunder over his despatches, and he seemed to hear the voices of Captain Charteris and the admiral accusing him of neglect and ingratitude after the promotion given him.

It was therefore weary and unrefreshed that he arose the next morning, glad to have a walk up and down the deck, which had just been washed; and as he soon began to revive in the cold fresh air, he felt a sensation of just pride in the smart little cutter now just freed from the workpeople and shining in her paint and polish. New sails had been bent and a great deal of rigging had been newly run up. The crew, glad to have the cutter clean once more, had made all shipshape. Ropes were coiled down, Billy Waters' guns shone in the morning sun, and all that was wanted now was the order to start.

Hilary went below and had his breakfast, which he had hardly finished when the corporal of marines came down with a despatch.

"Boat from the shore, sir," he said, saluting.

Hilary took the packet, which was addressed to him, and as he opened it the colour flushed into his face and then he became very pale.

The despatch was very short. It ordered him to take the cutter outside instantly and wait for the important despatches he was to take across to Dunkerque. Above all, he was to sail the moment Lieutenant Anderson came on board with the papers and stop for nothing, for the papers were most urgent.

But with the letter was something else which made his heart throb with joy—what was really his commission as lieutenant, and the despatch was addressed to him as Lieutenant Leigh.

As soon as he could recover himself he rose from the table cool and firm.

“Is the boat waiting, corporal?”

“No, sir. It went back directly.”

Hilary could not help it; he put on his hat with just the slightest cock in the world, went on deck, and gave his orders in the shortest and sharpest way.

The men stared at him, but they executed his orders, and in a very short time the cutter was out of the basin, a sail or two was hoisted, and, as if rejoicing in her liberty, the *Kestrel* ran lightly out to a buoy, to which, after what almost seemed like resistance, she was made fast, the sails being lowered, and the cutter rose and fell upon the waves, fretting and impatient to be off.

The mainsail was cast loose, jib and staysail ready, and the gaff topsail would not take many minutes to run up in its place. Then, as if fearing that the blocks might run stiff and that there would be some delay at starting, Hilary gave his orders and the mainsail was run up, a turn or two of the wheel laid the cutter’s head to the wind, and there she lay with the canvas flapping and straining and seeming to quiver in her excitement to be off once more.

“Poor old gal! she feels just as if she was just let out of prison,” said the boatswain affectionately. “How well she looks!”

“Ay, she do,” said Billy Waters. “Well, Tom Tully, my lad, how d’yer feel?”

“Ready for suthin’ to do, matey,” said the big sailor. “But when’s old Lipscombe coming aboard?”

“I d’no,” said the gunner. “Wish he wasn’t coming at all. Wonder where we’re for. I’ve a good mind to ask Master Leigh. He’ll tell me if he can.”

“Ay, lad, do,” said the boatswain.

Just then Hilary came out of the cabin with a red spot in each cheek, and began walking up and down the deck and watching for the coming boat.

“Is all ready and shipshape, boatswain?” he said.

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“Your guns well lashed, Waters?”

“Ay, ay, sir, and longing to have a bark. Beg pardon, sir, shall I get the fishing-lines out?”

“No!” said Hilary shortly.

“All right, sir. But beg pardon, sir.”

“What is it, Waters?”

“Is the lieutenant soon coming aboard? His traps ar’n’t come yet.”

“No,” said Hilary firmly. “He’s no longer in command.”

“Then I says three cheers, my lads,” cried Billy Waters excitedly. “Leastwise, if I may.”

“No. Stop. No demonstrations now, my lads. We are just off on important business, and I must ask you to be ready and smart as you have never been before.”

“Which, if it’s Muster Leigh as asks us, sir,” said Billy Waters, “I think I may say for the whole crew, from my mates here to the sojers, as there ar’n’t one who won’t do his best.”

“It is not Master Leigh who asks you,” said Hilary flushing, as the whole of his little crew now stood grouped about the forward part of the deck. “This is no time for speeches, my lads, but I must tell you this, that I ask you as your commander, the newly-appointed officer of the *Kestrel*, Lieutenant Leigh.”

Billy Waters bent down and gave his leg a tremendous slap; then, turning short round, he slapped the same hand into that of the boatswain, and the whole crew began shaking hands one with the other; the next moment every cap was flying in the air, and then came three hearty cheers.

“Which, speaking for the whole crew, as I think I may,” said Billy Waters, glancing round to receive encouragement in a murmur of acquiescence, “I says, sir, with my and our respex, success to the *Kestrel* and her new commander, and —”

“Hooroar!” cried Tom Tully.

“Boat from the shore, sir,” cried the man at the side.

Hilary stepped quickly to the bulwark, to see that a boat well manned by a party of sailors was rapidly approaching, and, what took the young commander's attention, a naval officer seated in the stern sheets.

"So that's my companion, is it?" said Hilary to himself, and he watched the officer very keenly as the boat came rapidly alongside, the officer sprang on board, waved his hand, and the boat pushed off at once.

"Your despatches, Lieutenant Leigh," he said, quietly, as he saluted the young officer, who saluted in return. "You have your orders, sir. You stop for nothing."

"For nothing," said Hilary, taking the packet from the newcomer's hands. "I presume sir, you are—"

"Lieutenant Anderson, at your service," said the other rather stiffly.

Then Hilary's voice rang out sharp and clear in the keen morning air. Up flew the staysail, and away and up ran the jib, bellying out as the rope that held the head of the cutter to the great ring of the buoy was slipped; the *Kestrel* gave a leap, the great mainsail boom swung over to port, the cutter careened over, the water lapped her sides, and began as it were to run astern in foam, and away went the swift little craft, as if rejoicing in her freedom, and making straight for the eastern end of the Isle of Wight.

The newcomer walked up and down, watching the proceedings for a time, glancing occasionally at the receding shore, and Hilary rapidly gave order after order, feeling a strange joy and excitement as for the next quarter of an hour he was busy, and kept pretty close to the sailor at the wheel.

All at once there was a puff of smoke from one of the forts, and the deep roar of a gun.

"Hullo!" cried Hilary. "What does that mean?"

"Practice, I should say," replied the newcomer. "Nothing that concerns us. You have your orders, sir."

"Yes," said Hilary, "and I'll obey them;" and away sped the *Kestrel*, her young commander little thinking that he had been made the victim of a clever plot, and that he was bearing despatches to the enemy such as might set England in a blaze.

Chapter Forty Two.

A Troublesome Mentor.

"Those sound to me like signals of recall," said Hilary to his companion, as gun after gun was fired, the last sending a shot skipping before the bows of the *Kestrel*.

"Yes, they must be; but not for us," said Lieutenant Anderson coolly.

"Why, there's a signal flying too," said Hilary, as he took his glass.

"Yes, that's a signal of recall too," said the other coolly. "I wonder what ship they are speaking to? The *Kestrel* sails well."

"Gloriously," said Hilary, flushing with pleasure; "and I know how to sail her, too. Well, Mr Anderson, now we're getting towards clear water, and there's time to speak, let's shake hands. I'm very glad to see you, and I hope we shall be the best of friends."

"I'm sure we shall," said the newcomer, shaking hands warmly. "Ah! that shot fell behind us. We're getting beyond them now."

"Oh, yes; there's no fear of their hitting us," said Hilary laughing, as the *Kestrel* careened over more and more as she caught the full force of the wind. "If we go on at this rate it will almost puzzle a cannonball to catch us. I know there is no vessel in Portsmouth harbour that could with this wind."

"Do you think not?" said the lieutenant.

"I'm sure not," said Hilary gaily; and they walked the deck chatting as, by degrees, they passed the Isle of Wight, making the open channel more and more, while Lieutenant Anderson—the real—was closeted with Admiral and Captain Charteris, all puzzled at the sudden flight of the *Kestrel*, which had set sail without her despatches, and also without what the old admiral called ballast for the young commander, namely, Lieutenant Anderson, who had gone off with his despatches directly after his counterfeit, only to find the cutter gone.

Signal guns and flags proving vain, there was nothing for it but to send another vessel in chase of the *Kestrel*, but it was hours before one could be got off, and meanwhile the swift despatch boat was tearing on towards her destination, with poor Hilary happy in the blind belief that he was doing his best.

There was something very delightful in feeling that he was chief officer of the *Kestrel*, that the duty of the swift little cutter was to be carried out without the wretched cavilling and fault-finding of the late commander. Everything seemed to work so smoothly now; the men were all alacrity, and they saluted him constantly with a bright smile, which showed that they shared his pleasure.

The breeze was brisk, the sun came out, and Lieutenant Anderson, the self-styled, proved to be a very pleasant, well informed man, who very soon showed Hilary that he had not the slightest intention of interfering in any way with his

management of the cutter.

"No," said Hilary to himself, "I suppose not. As they told me, he is only to interfere in cases of emergency, or when I am doing any foolish thing; and that I don't mean to do if I can help it."

Towards afternoon the wind fell light, and the great squaresail was spread, but it made little appreciable difference, and as evening came on, to Hilary's great disgust the wind dropped almost completely.

"Did you ever know anything so unfortunate!" cried Hilary; "just when I wanted to show the admiral what speed there was in the little *Kestrel* as a despatch boat."

"Unfortunate!" cried his companion, who had been struggling to maintain his composure, but who now broke out; "it is atrocious, sir. Those despatches are of the greatest importance, and here your cursed vessel lies upon the water like a log!" Hilary stared.

"It is very unfortunate," he said; "but let's hope the wind will spring up soon after sundown."

"Hope, sir!" cried the other. "Don't talk of hope. Do something."

Hilary flushed a little at the other's imperious way. He was not going to prove so pleasant a companion as he had hoped for, and there was that worst of all qualities for a man in command—unreason.

"I am to take your advice, sir, in emergencies," said Hilary, restraining his annoyance; "what would you suggest for me to do?"

"I suggest, Lieutenant Leigh!" exclaimed the other, stamping up and down the little deck. "I am not in command of the cutter. It is your duty to suggest and to act."

"Yes, sir, and I will," replied Hilary.

"It is a question of vital importance—the delivery of these despatches—and every moment lost means more than you can imagine. Come, sir, your position is at stake. You command this cutter: do something to get her on."

Hilary looked up at the flapping sails, which hung motionless; then out to windward in search of cats'-paws upon the water; then at his men, who were lounging about the lee side of the cutter; and then back at his companion.

"Really, sir," he said at last, "I am quite helpless. You are more experienced than I. What would you advise me to do?"

"And you are placed in command of this cutter!" said the other ironically. "Why, a child would know better. Have out the boats, sir, and let the men tow the cutter."

"Tow, sir!" cried Hilary; "why, it would be exhausting the men for nothing. We could not make head against the current we have here."

"It will save something, sir," said the other; "and I order you to do it at once." Hilary felt the hot blood flush into his face, and the order was so unreasonable and absurd that he felt ready to refuse, especially as he knew his own power, and that there was not a man on board who would not be at his back. But he recalled his duty, and feeling that this was a case of emergency, where he ought to obey, he ordered out the two boats; lines were made fast, and soon after the men were bending well to their work, while the stout ash blades bent as they dipped in rhythmical motion, and sent the clear water splashing and sparkling back into their wake.

The men worked willingly enough, but Hilary saw to his annoyance that they glanced at and whispered to one another, and it seemed very hard that he should be forced to inaugurate his first day in command by setting his men to an unreasonable task, for it was mere waste of energy.

But even now it was done the officer seemed no better satisfied, but tramped up and down the little deck, uttering the most angry expressions of impatience, and at last abusing the cutter unmercifully.

"Well," thought Hilary, "he has dropped the mask, and no mistake. It is not going to be such smooth sailing as I expected. Never mind; one must have some bitters with the sweet, and after all he is only angry from a sense of being unable to do his duty, while I was taking it as cool as could be."

For quite five hours the boats were kept out, the men being relieved at intervals; and at the end of those five hours the cutter had not advanced a mile, when Hilary seized the speaking-trumpet, and hailed them to come on board.

"Stop!" cried the officer. "Why have you done that, sir, without my permission?"

This was too much for Hilary, and he spoke out: "Because, sir, I am in command here, and there is no occasion for the men to row any longer."

"I insist, sir, upon their keeping on with the towing."

"And I insist, sir," replied Hilary, "on the men returning on board."

"I shall report your conduct," cried his officer.

"Do so, sir," replied Hilary, "if you think it your duty. In with you, my lads. Let go the halyards there, and down with that squaresail. Quick with those boats. There will be a squall upon us directly."

He had proved himself on the alert, guided as he had been by the signs of the weather, and the great squaresail had hardly been lowered, the boats made snug, and a reef or two taken in the mainsail, before the wind came with a sharp gust, and the next minute the *Kestrel* was sending the water surging behind her in a long track of foam.

"Ah! that's better," cried the officer, whose ill-humour seemed to vanish on the instant. "How painful it is, Mr Leigh, to be lying like a log, and all the time with important despatches to deliver!"

"It is, sir," said Hilary quietly.

"I declare there were times when I felt disposed to jump overboard and to swim on with the despatches."

"Rather a long swim," said Hilary drily; and he thought it rather odd that the other should think of swimming on with the papers that he had locked up in the cabin despatch-box, and that again in a locker for safety.

"Well, yes," said the other, "it would have been a long swim. But tell me, Mr Leigh, about what time do you think we shall make Dunkerque?"

"If this wind holds good, sir, by eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Not till eight o'clock to-morrow morning!" cried the other furiously. "Good heavens! how we crawl! There, have the reefs shaken out of that mainsail, and send the cutter along."

Hilary looked aloft, and then at the way in which the cutter lay over, dipping her bowsprit from time to time in the waves.

"I think she has as much canvas upon her as she can bear, sir."

"Absurd! nonsense! You can get two or three knots more an hour out of a cutter like this."

"I could get another knot an hour out of her, sir, by running the risk of losing one of her spars; and that means risking the delivery of the despatches."

"Look here, Mr Leigh," said the officer; "you seem to be doing all you can to delay the delivery of these despatches. I order you, sir, to shake out the reefs of that mainsail."

Hilary took up the speaking-trumpet to give the order, but as he held it to his lips he felt that he would be doing wrong. He knew the cutter's powers intimately. He saw, too, that she was sailing her best, and he asked himself whether he would not be doing wrong by obeying what was, he felt, an insensate command. Surely there must be some limit to his obedience, he thought; and more than ever he felt what a peculiar position was that in which he had been placed, and he wondered whether Captain Charteris could be aware of the peculiar temperament of his companion.

Hilary lowered the speaking-trumpet, as the cutter rushed on through the darkness.

"Well, sir," said his companion, "you heard my orders?"

"I did, sir," replied Hilary. "Here, bosun."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"How much more canvas will the cutter bear?"

"Bear, sir?" said the experienced old salt; "begging your pardon, sir, I was going to ask you if you didn't think it time to take a little off if you don't want the mast to go."

"Silence, sir!" said the officer. "Mr Leigh, these despatches must be delivered at all hazards. I order you again, sir, to risk more canvas."

Hilary stood for a moment undecided, and his thoughts flashed rapidly through his brain.

This man was unreasonable. He did not understand the *Kestrel's* powers, for she was already dashing at headlong speed through the sea, and he wanted him to run an unwarrantable risk. At all hazards he would refuse. He knew his duty, he felt that he was a better seaman than his mentor, and he turned to him quietly:

"My orders were, sir, to refer to you for advice in times of emergency; but I was not told to run risks that my commonsense forbids. The cutter will bear no more canvas, sir, for the wind is increasing. In half an hour we shall have to take in another reef."

"If you dare!" said the officer, laying his hand upon his sword.

"I dare do my duty, sir," replied Hilary, ignoring the gesture; and the cutter dashed on through the darkness of the night.

Chapter Forty Three.

Delivering Despatches.

The men had been witnesses of all that took place, and had heard the officer's angry words, respecting which they talked in a low tone, Billy Waters more than once saying that he didn't like the lookout forrard—the "forrard" being the future, and not the sea beyond the cutter's bows.

As the night wore on the officer had become very friendly. "I was wrong, Mr Leigh. Put it down, please, to my anxiety. I beg your pardon."

"Granted," said Hilary frankly. "I would not oppose you, sir, if I did not feel that I was right."

"I am glad I am in the company of so clever a young officer," the other replied. "Now about rest. I am too anxious to lie down to sleep. I will take charge of the deck while you go and get a few hours' rest."

"Thank you, no," said Hilary quietly; "I, too, am anxious, and I shall not be able to sleep till we are in port and the despatches are delivered."

"But there is no need for both of us to watch, my dear sir," said the other blandly.

"Then pray go below, sir," said Hilary. "You may depend on me."

The officer did not reply, but took a turn or two up and down, and as the time glided on he tried again and again to persuade Hilary to go below, which, in his capacity of chief officer, holding his first command on a dark night and upon an important mission, he absolutely refused to do.

Towards morning on two occasions the officer brought him glasses of spirits and water, which Hilary refused to take; and at last, fearing to make him suspicious, the officer desisted and stood leaning with his back against the side, wrapped in a cloak, for it was very cold.

The light in front of the wheel shone faintly upon him as Hilary walked slowly fore and aft, visiting the lookout man at the bows and the man at the wheel; and at last, in the gloomy darkness of the winter's morning, Hilary saw the Dunkerque lights.

"We're in sight of port, Mr Anderson," he said as he walked aft.

"Indeed!" said the other starting, and the wind gave his cloak a puff, showing for a moment what Hilary saw was the butt of a pistol.

"What does he want with pistols?" said Hilary to himself; and after a short conversation he again went forward, feeling curiously suspicious, though there seemed to be no pegs upon which his suspicions could hang.

But he was not long kept in suspense and doubt. When they were about a couple of miles from the entrance to the port a boat manned by eight rowers came towards them, and Hilary noticed it directly.

"What does that boat mean?" he said sharply.

"Don't know. Can't say," the officer replied. "Perhaps a man-o'-war's boat coming to meet us for the despatches."

Hilary was not satisfied, but he said nothing. He merely resumed his walk to and fro.

"Now then, bosun," he said, "have your men up ready. It will be down sails directly."

"Not yet awhile, Mr Leigh," said the officer. "The *Kestrel* does not fly—she crawls."

"Waters," said Hilary as he passed out of his companion's sight, "make no sign, but lay a bar or two and some pikes about handy for use if wanted, and give the men a hint to be ready if there's anything wrong. Quietly, mind."

Billy Waters nodded, and as Hilary walked back to where the officer was standing he became aware that the gunner had taken his hint, but it was all done so quietly that it did not catch the officer's attention.

"That boat means to board us," said Hilary, as their proximity to the land sheltered them from the wind and their progress became slow.

"Offer to pilot us, perhaps," said the officer. "No; it is as I said."

"Ahoy, there! Heave-to!" shouted the officer in command of the boat.

"What boat's that?" cried Hilary.

"The *Royal Mary's*. Have you despatches on board?"

"My orders were to deliver my despatches myself at a certain address," thought Hilary; "this may be a trick."

"On special business," cried Hilary back.

"Nonsense, Mr Leigh!" cried the assumed Lieutenant Anderson. "Heave-to, sir. I order you! Hi, my lads there, down with the sails."

"No sails don't go down for no orders like that," growled the boatswain; but by skilful management the boat was already alongside and the bowman had caught the bulwark with his hook.

"Keep back!" cried Hilary sharply.

"Are you mad?" cried the man by his side, now throwing off his cloak, and with it his disguise, for he caught Hilary by the collar and presented a pistol at his head. "Quick, there, up with you!"

Hilary struck up the pistol, but the next instant he received a heavy blow on the forehead and staggered back as, to his horror, the crew of the boat, well-armed and headed by Sir Henry Norland, leaped aboard and drove back the two or three of the crew who were near.

"At last!" cried Sir Henry to the false lieutenant. "I thought you would never come, Hartland. Have you the papers?"

"Yes, all right," said the gentleman addressed, "and all's right. Here."

He had thrust his hand into his breast when there was a shout and a cheer as the stout crew of the *Kestrel*, headed by the gunner and armed with pikes and capstan-bars, charged down upon them.

There was a shot or two. Hilary was knocked down by his own men as he had struggled up; the false lieutenant was driven headlong down the companion hatch, and in less than a minute Sir Henry Norland and his men were, with two exceptions, who lay stunned upon the deck, driven over the side, to get to their boat as best they could. Then as Hilary once more gained his feet the assailing boat was a quarter of a mile astern.

"The treacherous scoundrel!" cried Hilary. "Oh, my lads, my lads, you've saved the cutter. But tell me, did that fellow get away?"

"What! him as I hit down the hatchway for hysting your honour?" said Tom Tully. "He's down below."

Hilary and a couple of men ran to the hatchway, to find the false lieutenant lying below by the cabin door, with one arm broken, and his head so injured that he lay insensible, with the end of a packet of papers standing out of his breast.

Hilary seized them at once, and then, as a light broke in upon his breast, he ran to the locker, opened it and the despatch-box, and longed to open the papers he held.

But they were close in to the port, and, resolving to deliver the despatches, he left the false lieutenant well guarded, leaped into one of the boats, and was rowed ashore to the consul, to whom he told his tale.

"It has been a trick," said that gentleman; "there is no such street in the town as that on the despatch, and no such officer known."

"What should you do?" cried Hilary. Then, without waiting to be answered, he cried, "I know," and, hurrying back to his boat, he was soon on board, and with the sails once more spread he was on his way back to Portsmouth with the despatches, and three prisoners in the hold.

Before he had gone many miles he became aware of a swift schooner sailing across his track; and though, of course, he could not recognise her, he had a strong suspicion that it was the one that had nearly run them down.

Chapter Forty Four.

A Good Fight for it.

Before long he found that it evidently meant to intercept him, and he had the deck cleared for action and the men at quarters.

"They want the despatches they tricked me into carrying," cried Hilary; "but they go overboard if I am beaten."

To secure this he placed them in the despatch-box, in company with a couple of heavy shot, and placed all ready to heave overboard should matters go wrong.

He knew what was his duty in such a case, though; and that was to run for Portsmouth with the papers, fighting only on the defensive; and this, to the great disappointment of his men, he kept to.

The schooner commenced the aggressive by sending a shot in front of the cutter's bows, as an order to heave-to, but the cutter kept on, and the next shot went through her mainsail.

"Now, Billy Waters," said Hilary, "train the long gun aft, and fire as fast as you can; send every shot, mind, at her masts and yards; she is twice as big as we are, and full of men."

"But we'd lick 'em, sir," said the gunner. "Let's get alongside and board her."

"No," said Hilary sternly; "we must make Portsmouth before night."

Then the long gun began to speak, and Hilary kept up a steady running fight, hour after hour, but in spite of his efforts to escape, the schooner hung closely at his heels, gradually creeping up, and doing so much mischief that at last the young commander began to feel that before long it would be a case of repelling boarders, and he placed the despatch-box ready to throw over the side.

Closer and closer came on the schooner, and man after man went down; but still Billy Waters, aided by the

boatswain, kept firing with more or less success from the long gun, till at last the time came when the schooner's crew were firing with small arms as well, and Hilary knew that in another minute they would be grappled and the enemy on board.

He paused with the despatch-box in his hand, ready to sink it, while Billy Waters was taking careful aim with the long gun. Then there was the puff of smoke, the bellowing roar, and apparently no result, when all at once there was a loud crack, a splash, and the cutter's crew cheered like mad, for the schooner's mainmast went over the side with its press of sail, and the foremast, that had been wounded before, followed, leaving the swift vessel a helpless wreck upon the water.

She would have been easy of capture now, but under the circumstances Hilary's duty was to risk no severe fight in boarding her, but to continue his course, and this he did, passing a gunboat going in search of him, the despatches he had left behind having gone by another boat.

Answering the hail, Hilary communicated with the commander, who in another hour had captured the schooner, and the next morning she was brought into Portsmouth harbour with her crew.

Meantime Hilary had reached Portsmouth and been rowed ashore, where he went straight to the admiral's house. Captain Charteris was with the admiral, and both looked very stern as he told his tale.

"A bad beginning, Lieutenant Leigh," said the admiral, "but it was a clever ruse on the enemy's part. But you are wounded. Sit down."

"Only a scratch or two, sir," said Hilary piteously, for he felt very weak and quite overcome as he handed his papers.

Just then he became aware of the presence of a plainly-dressed gentleman, to whom the admiral, with great deference, handed the captured despatches. He opened them—Hilary's first.

"Yes," he said, "a clear case; all blank. Now for the others."

As he opened the packet he uttered a cry of joy.

"This is news indeed. My young officer, you have done more than you think for in capturing these. Captain Charteris, instantly—marines and sailors, you can take them all."

"Yes, young man," continued the stranger, "this is a proud day for you. It is a death-blow to the Pretender's cause. You have done great things."

"In the King's name—hurrah!" cried Hilary feebly, as he waved his hat; then he reeled and fell heavily upon the floor.

Chapter Forty Five.

Meeting Old Friends.

Hilary Leigh's scratches were two severe wounds which kept him in bed for a couple of months, during which he learned that the despatches he had brought back after turning the tables on the Pretender's followers had, as the high official had said, given such information that by their means a death-blow was given to the plots to place Charles Edward upon the English throne; and when he was once more about, it was to join his little vessel, with his lieutenant's grade endorsed, and in a span new uniform, of which he was deservedly proud.

The cutter had been pretty well knocked about in the fight, but she was once more in good trim, and her crew, who had received a capital share of prize-money for their part in the capture of the schooner, received him with three cheers.

For years after, the *Kestrel* swept the Channel pretty clear of smugglers and enemies, and continued so to do long after Hilary had joined Captain Charteris's ship, taking with him the principal members of his crew, Billy Waters rapidly becoming gunner of the great man-of-war, and Tom Tully remaining Tom Tully still, able seaman and owner of the biggest pigtail amongst five hundred men.

Five years had elapsed before Hilary again saw Sir Henry Norland, and this was one day in a French port, when the greeting was most cordial.

"No, Hilary, my boy," he said, as he led the lieutenant to a handsome house just outside the town. "I shall not come back to England to live. Our cause failed, and I have given up politics now. The English government have left me alone, or forgotten me, and I won't come back and tell them who I am."

"And you don't feel any enmity against me, Sir Henry, for behaving to you as I did?"

"Enmity, my dear boy!" cried Sir Henry, laying his hands affectionately upon the young man's shoulders; "I was sorry that we were on opposite sides, but I was more proud of you than I can tell. Many's the time I said to myself, I would that you had been my son."

Just then Hilary started, for a graceful woman entered the room, to gaze at him wonderingly for a moment, and then, with a mutual cry of pleasure, they ran forward to catch each other's hands.

Sir Henry uttered a sigh of satisfaction, one that was not heard by the young people, who were too much wrapped up

in each other's words, for this was a meeting neither had anticipated, and they had much to say.

Who is it that needs to be told that Hilary saw Adela Norland as often as he could, and that being high in favour with the government, and soon after made captain of a dashing ship, he should ask for, and obtain permission, for Sir Henry Norland to return?

This permit giving him free pardon for the past Hilary himself took to the French port, where he behaved very badly, for he told Adela Norland that he would not give it up unless she made him a certain promise, and this, with many blushes, she did, just as Sir Henry came into the room.

"Ah!" he said laughing, "I expected all this. Well, Hilary, I have no son, and you want to take away my daughter."

"No, sir," said Hilary; "I only want to find you a son, and to take you, free from all political care, once more home."

And this he did, making his name a brighter one still in the annals of his country, for many were the gallant acts done by the brave sailor Captain Hilary Leigh, for his country's good, and in the King's name.

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