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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DUTCH THE DIVER; OR, A MAN'S MISTAKE ***

George Manville Fenn

"Dutch the Diver"

"A Man's Mistake"

Story 1--Chapter I.

Story One — Dutch the Diver.

At the Diver's Office.

"I say, Rasp. Confound the man! Rasp, will you leave that fire alone? Do you want to roast me?"

"What's the good o' you saying will I leave the fire alone, Mr Pug?" said the man addressed, stoking savagely at the grate; "you know as well as I do that if I leave it half hour you never touches it, but lets it go out."

Half a scuttle of coals poured on.

"No, no. No more coals, Rasp."

"They're on now, Mr Pug," said Rasp, with a grim grin. "You know how the governor grumbles if the fire's out, and it's me as ketches it."

"The office is insufferably hot now."

"Good job, too; for it's cold enough outside, I can tell you; and there's a draught where I sits just as if you'd got yer ear up again the escape-valve of the air-pump."

"Get a screen, then," said the first speaker, impatiently, as he scratched his thick, curly, crisp brown hair with the point of a pair of compasses, and gazed intently at a piece of drawing-paper pinned out upon the desk before him.

"Screen? Bah! What do I want wi' screens? I can stand wind and cold, and a bit o' fire, too, for the matter o' that. I ain't like some people."

"Hang it all, Rasp, I wish you'd go," said the first speaker. "You see how busy I am. What's the matter with you this morning? Really, you're about the most disagreeable old man I ever knew."

"Disagreeable? Old?" cried Rasp, seizing the poker, and inserting it in the bars for another good stoke at the office fire, when the compasses were banged down on the desk, their owner leaped off the stool, twisted the poker out of the stoker's hand, and laughingly threw it down on the fender.

"I'll get Mr Parkley to find you a post somewhere as fireman at a furnace," said the first speaker, laughing.

"I don't want no fireman's places," growled Rasp. "How'd the work go on here wi'out me? Old, eh? Disagreeable, eh! Sixty ain't so old, nayther; and just you wear diving soots for forty year, and get your head blown full o' wind till you're 'most ready to choke, and be always going down, and risking your blessed life, and see if you wouldn't soon be disagreeable."

"Well, Rasp, I've been down pretty frequently, and in as risky places as most men of my age, and it hasn't made me such an old crab."

"What, you? Bah! Nothing puts you out—nothing makes you cross 'cept too much fire, and you do get waxey over that. But you try it for forty year—forty year, you know, and just see what you're like then, Mr Pug."

"Confound it all, Rasp," cried the younger man, "that's the third time in the last ten minutes that you've called me Pug. My name is Pugh—PUGH—Pugh."

"'Taint," said the old fellow, roughly, "I ain't lived sixty year in the world, and don't know how to spell. PEW spells *pew*, and PUGH spells *pug*, with the H at the end and wi'out it, so you needn't tell me."

"You obstinate old crab," said the other, good-humouredly, as he stopped him from making another dash at the poker. "There, be off, I'm very busy."

"You allus are busy," growled the old fellow; "you'll get your brains all in a muddle wi' your figuring and drawing them new dodges and plans. No one thinks the better o' you, no matter how hard you works. It's my opinion, Mr Dutch—there, will that suit yer, as you don't like to be called Mr Pug?"

"There, call me what you like, Rasp, you're a good, old fellow, and I shall never forget what you have done for me."

"Bah! Don't talk stuff," cried the old fellow, snappishly.

"Stuff, eh?" said the other, laughing, as he took up his compasses, and resumed his seat. "Leave—that—fire—alone!" he cried, seizing a heavy ruler, and shaking it menacingly as the old man made once more for the poker. "And now, hark here—Mrs Pugh says you are to come out to the cottage on Sunday week to dinner, and spend the day."

"Did she say that? Did she say that, Mr Dutch?" cried the old man, with exultation.

"Yes, she wants to have a long chat with the man who saved her husband's life."

"Now, what's the good o' talking such stuff as that, Mr Pug?" cried the old man, angrily. "Save life, indeed! Why, I only come down and put a rope round you. Any fool could ha' done it."

"But no other fool would risk his life as you did yours to save mine, Rasp," said the younger man, quietly. "But, there, we won't talk about it. It gives me the horrors. Now, mind, you're to come down on Sunday week."

"I ain't comin' out there to be buttered," growled the old fellow, sourly.

"Buttered, man?"

"Well, yes—to be talked to and fussed and made much of by your missus, Master Dutch."

"Nonsense!"

"'Taint nonsense. There, I tell you what, if she'll make a contract not to say a word about the accident, and I may sit and smoke a pipe in that there harbour o' yourn, I'll come."

"Arbour at this time of the year, Rasp?" laughed the younger man. "Why, it's too cold."

"What's that to do wi' it? Just as if I couldn't stand cold. Deal better than you can heat."

"Then I shall tell her you are coming, Rasp. What would you like for dinner?"

"Oh, anything'll do for the likes o' me. I ain't particular."

"No, but you may as well have what you like for dinner."

"Oh, I ain't particular. Have just what you like. But if there was a morsel o' tripe on the way I might pick a bit."

"Good!" said the other, smiling, "you shall have some tripe for dinner for one thing."

"Don't you get letting it be got o' purpose for me. Anything'll do for me—a bit o' soetty pudden, for instance."

"All right, Rasp. Tripe and suet pudding on Sunday week."

"If ever there was," said Rasp, thoughtfully, as he made an offer to get at the poker, "a woman as was made to be a beautiful angel, and didn't turn out to be one because they forgot her wings, that's your missus, Master Dutch."

"Thank you, Rasp, old fellow, thank you," said the young man, smiling; and his eyes brightened as he listened to this homely praise of the woman he worshipped.

"But what's a puzzle to me," continued the old fellow, with a grim chuckle, "is how she as is so soft, and fair, and dark-haired, and gentle, could take up with such a strong, broad-shouldered chap as you, Mr Dutch."

"Yes, it was strange," said the young man.

"I should more like have expected to see you pair off wi' Captain Studwick's lass—Miss Bessy. Now, she's a fine gal, if you like."

"Yes, she's a fine, handsome girl, Rasp; and her father's very proud of her, too."

"I should just think he ought to be," said Rasp. "Why, it's my belief, if any chap offended her, she'd give him such a clap aside o' the head as would make his ears ring."

"I don't know about that, Rasp," laughed the other; "but I do believe whoever wins her will have a true-hearted

Englishwoman for his wife."

"O' course he will, else she wouldn't be the skipper's lass. Bless her!—she's always got a nice, pleasant word to say to a man when she comes here with her father. He used to think you meant to make up to her, Master Dutch."

"Nonsense, man, nonsense!"

"Oh, but he did; and then this other affair came off. I never could understand it, though."

"Ah, it was a problem, eh?" laughed the younger man.

"For you ain't good-looking, are you, sir?"

"Not at all, Rasp," laughed the other. "We should neither of us get the prize for beauty, eh, Rasp?"

"I should think not," said Rasp: "but I always was the ugliest man our way. I think she took to you because you were so straight, and stout, and strong."

"Perhaps so, Rasp."

"I've heerd say, as the more gentle, and soft, and tender a woman is, the more she likes a fellow as is all big bone and muscle, so as to take care of her, you know. That must ha' been it, sir," continued the old fellow, chuckling, "unless she took a fancy to your name. Ho! ho! ho!"

"No, I don't think it was that, Rasp, my man," said the other, quietly.

"More don't I, sir; Dutch Pug. Ho! ho! ho!"

"Dutch Drayson Pugh, Master Rasp."

"Pug's bad enough," said the old fellow; "but Dutch! What did they call you Dutch for?"

"It was a whim of my father," said the other. "My grandfather married a lady in Holland, and in memory of the alliance my father said—so I've often been told—that as I was a fair, sturdy little fellow, like a Dutch burgomaster in miniature, I should be called Dutch; and that is my name, Mr Rasp, at your service."

"Well, you can't help it now, sir, any more than you can the Pug; but if it had been me I should have called myself Drayson."

"And seemed ashamed of the name my dear old father gave me, Rasp! No, I'm not the man for that," said Dutch, warmly.

"No, sir, you ain't," said Rasp, in a more respectful tone, as he looked at the colour flaming up in the younger man's cheeks, and in his heart of hearts acknowledged that he was not such a bad-looking fellow after all; for, though far from handsome, he was bold, bluff, and Saxon of aspect, broad-shouldered, and evidently Herculean in strength, though, from his deep build and fine proportions, in no wise heavy.

Now, on the other hand, Rasp was a decidedly plain man, rough, rugged, grizzled, and with eyebrows and whiskers of the raggedest nature possible. Their peculiar bristly quality was partaken of also by his hair, which, though cut short, was abundant; and though you might have brushed it to your heart's content, it was as obstinate as its owner, for it never lay in any direction but that it liked.

At this point Rasp, who was a favoured old servant of the firm in which Dutch Pugh held a confidential post, made another attempt to stoke the fire, was turned on his flank, and retreated, leaving the young man to busily resume the drawing of a plan for some piece of machinery.

It was a dark, gloomy-looking room, that in which he worked, for the one window opened upon the narrow street of the busy sea-port of Ramwich; and a heavy, yellow fog hung over the town, and made the office look gloomy and full of shadow.

The place was fitted up as a private office, and near the window was placed one of those great double-sloped desks, so arranged that four people could stand, or sit upon the high leather-covered stools, and write at it at the same time. A wide level divided the two slopes, and this was dominated by brass rails, beneath which stood a couple of those broad, flat, pewter inkstands common in commercial offices, and which in this case it was Rasp's delight to keep clean.

There were other objects about the gloomy office, though, upon which Rasp bestowed his time; for in three places, fitted on stands, and strapped to the wall to prevent their falling forward, were what looked at first sight, as they peered from the gloom, like so many suits of grotesque armour; for what light there was gleamed from the huge polished helmets, with their great brass, latticed goggle glass eyes—whose crests were tubes, and ornamentation glistening rims and studs of copper. A nervous person coming upon them in the dark might easily have been startled, for, with a certain grim idea of humour, Rasp had by degrees so arranged them that they leaned forward in peculiarly life-like positions—the hand of one holding a copper lantern, another being in the act of striking with a massive hatchet, and the third poisoning a huge crowbar in a menacing mode.

Farther back in the gloom stood a strange-looking air-pump; while in various directions, coiled and trailed like snakes, great lengths of india-rubber tubing, apparently in disorder, but really carefully kept ready for instant use, this being Rasp's special task, of which he was proud to a degree.

"This is a teaser," said Dutch to himself, after making sundry lines on the paper before him, and then pausing, compasses in one hand, pen in the other. "Valve A to close tube B—escape-valve at A dash—small copper globe at B dash, as a reservoir, and—hum—ha—yes—to be sure, small stop-cock in the middle of the copper tube at H. That's it! I've got it at last."

"Of course you have—I knew you would," said a short quick voice.

Dutch started, and turned sharply round, to confront the little, square-built man who had entered the office quietly, and stood peering over his shoulder.

"Ah, Mr Parkley! I didn't hear you come in," said Dutch, smiling.

"Too busy over your work," said the new-comer, who seemed all hat and comforter, from between which peered a pair of keen, restless eyes. "I knew you'd work that out, Dutch, or else I shouldn't have given you the job. Dutch Pugh, I'd give something for your cleverness with pen and pencil. Look at me, sir, a man dragged up instead of brought up—a man who never signs his name because he can't write decently—a man who can hardly read a newspaper, unless the type's big. Ignorant, ignorant to a degree—a man—"

"Of sound judgment, sir," said Dutch, interrupting him, "who from the power of his brain and long experience has suggested more improvements in hydraulic machinery than any of our greatest scientists, and who has not only originated and made his great business, but whose opinion is sought from everywhere in all great diving cases."

"Stuff—stuff—stuff, Dutch! I'm ashamed of my ignorance."

"And who is one of the wealthiest men in Ramwich."

"Gammon and flattery, Dutch, my lad," said the other, taking off his great hat to place it jauntily on one of the diving-helmets, and then returning into the light, with his broad bald head shining, and his dark, restless eyes twinkling good-humouredly. "Here, catch hold of that," he continued, thrusting one hand into his chest, and dragging out the fringed end of his white woollen comforter.

Dutch Pugh laid down his compasses, smiling, and took hold of the end of the comforter, when its wearer began slowly to turn round before the fire, as if he was being roasted, unwinding about three yards of comforter from his neck, and then giving a sigh of relief as he again went into the back part of the office, and hung the woollen wrap round one of the diver's necks.

"I've managed to make bread and cheese, Pugh—bread and cheese," he said, chuckling, as he came back, climbed upon a stool by that of his assistant, and sat with his hands on his knees. "Yes, bread and cheese; beef and horse-radish. Pugh, how's the little wife?"

"Quite well, Mr Parkley," said Dutch, smiling.

"That's right, bless her! Tell her I'm coming down to spend a Sunday soon."

"We shall only be too glad, sir," said Dutch, smiling. "When shall it be?"

"Soon, man; but not yet. Too busy. I've got this big job on," he continued, rubbing his bald head, which looked as if he had worn a diver's helmet till all the hair had been frayed off. "Oh, here's a letter."

For just then Rasp came into the office, not quietly, like his master—who walked slowly and heavily, as if putting down boots with massive leaden soles, and seemed as if he were wading through deep water, and liable to get entangled amongst sunken rigging—but with a bang and a rush like a big wind, and even made the letter he held in his hand rustle as he held it out to Mr Parkley, saying, with a surly snarl—

"Letter. Answer. Waiting."

Then, uttering a snort, he walked across to the diving suits, snatched off Mr Parkley's hat, whisked off the comforter, and dabbed them both on a hat-peg close at hand; after which he took out a large blue-check cotton pocket-handkerchief drew forward a set of short steps, and, growling as he did so, began to breathe on the bright copper, gave it a good polishing, and then went off to his den.

"See that?" said Mr Parkley, nodding his head sideways at Rasp, as he went out—but not until he had seized the poker, rammed it between the bars with a scientific twist, and made the blaze go dancing up the chimney. "See that, Pugh! He's the real master here. He's a tyrant."

"Well, really, sir, he has his own way pretty well."

"Rare stuff though, Pugh, my dear boy—rare stuff. That man's one you can always trust in any emergency. I'd leave my life in his hands at any time."

"I know that, sir," said Dutch, warmly. "He is as true as steel."

"Right, Pugh, my dear boy—right. But look here," he continued, thrusting a finger in the young man's button-hole, "I wish you would drop that 'sir' to me. I don't like it. I'm only a business fellow, and you've had the education of a gentleman, and I feel sometimes as if I ought to say 'sir' to you."

"My dear sir—"

"There you go again."

"Well, my dear Mr Parkley, then, I have you to thank for so much kindness."

"Stuff! stuff! stuff!" cried the elder, laying his hand playfully on his mouth. "You came to me to help me, and I was to pay you for that help. Well, look here, Pugh, you've been no end of value to me, and get more useful every day. What I pay you is nonsense to what you are worth. Now, look here; in three months the current business year with me will be up, and I'm going to ask you to join me as junior partner."

"Mr Parkley!" cried the young man, astounded, as his employer leaped off his stool, and took down and replaced his hat.

"Say no more," he cried; "I don't act without thinking, do I?"

"Never, sir."

"Then it's all right. Catch hold of this," he continued, handing the young man one end of the comforter, and then, tucking the other in under his waistcoat, he slowly wound himself up in it again, tapped the letter, and said, "Big job on here—I'm going to see them about it;" and then, lifting his feet in his peculiar way, he seemed to move out of the office as if he were under water, and the door closed behind him.

Story 1--Chapter II.

Golden Promises.

The last words of his employer had such an effect upon Dutch Pugh that he leaped from his stool, and began to pace the office excitedly, for this was beyond his wildest dreams. Partner in such a business, where he knew that many thousands were netted every year! He could hardly believe it. At one moment he was all exhilaration, thinking of the delight it would afford his young wife; at the next, he felt a strange sensation of depression, as of coming trouble. It was as if the sunshine of his life had been crossed by a black shadow; and minute by minute this increased upon him, till he shuddered, started, and turned round, to glance uneasily about the office, as if expecting to see trouble there.

And then it seemed to him as if the three goblinlike figures were laughing and blinking at him weirdly, menacing him with crowbar and hatchet; and, as if in a dream for the next few moments, he seemed to see himself engaged in some dangerous diving experiment, and at the mercy of an enemy who sought his life, while his young wife pleaded for him and in vain.

It was all misty and strange; his brain was confused, and he could the next minute no more have analysed this waking dream, or idealised the actors therein, than have flown; but there, for a few brief moments, was the impression upon him of coming trouble—trouble so horrible that it menaced his life and the honour of her he most dearly loved. That was the impression; but how, when, where, he could not comprehend.

"Am I going mad?" he exclaimed, dashing his hand to his forehead. "What an idiot I am!" he cried, with a forced laugh. "That old rascal has made the place like an oven, and the blood has flown to my head. There, only to think what trifles will upset a man, and, if he is weak-minded, make him superstitious and fanciful. Some men would have really believed that a terrible calamity was about to befall them, when it was only—"

"Here's a gentleman to see you," said Rasp, barking out his words, and ushering in a stranger.

Dutch Pugh involuntarily started, for he seemed to be in the presence of a stranger, and yet somehow the face was familiar to him. It was that of an exceedingly handsome man of about thirty, who took off a soft sombrero hat, and loosened the folds of a heavy black cloak, one end of which was thrown over his shoulder. He was evidently a foreigner, for his complexion was of a rich creamy tinge, his crisp black hair curled closely round a broad, high forehead, his dark eyes glittered beneath straight black brows, his nose was slightly aquiline, and the lower part of his face was covered with a thick, silky, black beard.

As he loosened the cords of his heavy cloak with his carefully-gloved hand, Dutch Pugh saw that he was faultlessly dressed, and, as he smiled and showed his white teeth, he said in good English, but with a perceptible foreign accent

"Mr Parkley, I learn, is out. I address Mr Pugh?"

"The same," said Dutch, who seemed fascinated by his look. "Will you take a chair?"

A cold chill came over the speaker as the visitor smiled and seated himself, but only to be succeeded by a feeling of suffocation; and for an instant his brain swam, and the dreamy feeling seemed about to return, but it passed off instantly, as, rousing himself, Dutch said—

"You will find this room too hot, perhaps. Shall I open—"

"Hot!" laughed the stranger, taking out a card and letter of introduction. "My dear sir, it is comfortable after your chilly streets. I am from Cuba, where we see the sun."

As he spoke he handed a card, upon which was printed—"Señor Manuel Lauré."

"You will open the letter?" he continued, passing the one he held in his hand. "No?"

"Mr Parkley will be here shortly," said Dutch. "Would you prefer to see him?"

"Yes—no," said the stranger. "I should like to see him, but I am content to talk to you. You Englishmen are so intelligent, and those who sent me here told me that their fellow-countrymen would be ready to help my designs."

"May I ask what they are?" said Dutch, who began to feel suspicious of the stranger.

"Yes, for I shall betray nothing. First, am I right? Yes," he said, glancing round, and pointing at the diving suits. "I see I am right. You work under water—dive?"

"That is our business, and the making of apparatus."

"Apparatus? Oh, yes, I understand. Would you—would Mr Parkley like to make a great fortune?"

"Not a doubt about it," said Mr Parkley, entering, all hat and comforter. "How do?" he continued, bluffly, as the visitor rose and bowed, and then scanned him searchingly, as hat and comforter were placed once more upon the diving suit.

"This is Mr Parkley, the head of this establishment."

"I am delighted," said the stranger, raising his eyebrows, and half-closing his eyes. "Will you, then, read?"

"Thinks I don't look it, Pugh," said Mr Parkley aside, as he took the letter handed him, opened it, glanced at the contents and superscription, and then handed it to Dutch.

"Sit down, sir," he said, sharply, as he perched himself on a stool as jerkily as the stranger resumed his full of grace. "Read it aloud, Mr Pugh."

Dutch still felt troubled; but he read, in a clear voice, the letter from a well-known English firm at Havana.

"Dear Sir,—The bearer of this, Señor Manuel Lauré, comes to you with our earnest recommendation. He has certain peculiar projects that he will explain. To some people they would seem wild and visionary; but to you, with your appliances, they will doubtless appear in a very different light. He is a gentleman of good position here, and worthy of your respect. If you do not see fit to carry out his wishes, kindly place him in communication with some other firm, and do what you can to prevent his being imposed upon.—Faithfully yours,—

"Roberts and Moore.

"To Mr Parkley, Ramwich."

"Glad to see you, sir," said Mr Parkley, upon whom the letter wrought a complete change. "Good people, Roberts and Moore. Supplied them with a complete diving apparatus. So you've come over on purpose to offer me a fortune?"

"Yes," said the visitor, "a great fortune. You smile, but listen. Do I think you a child, sir? Oh, no. I do not tell you I want to make a great fortune for you only, but for myself as well."

"Of course," said Mr Parkley, smiling, and showing in his manner how thoroughly business-like he was. "I thought that had to come."

"See here, sir—This Mr Pugh is in your confidence?"

"Quite. Go on."

"See, then: I have travelled much, boating—yachting you would call it in England—all around the shores of the Great Gulf of Mexico. I know every island and piece of coast in the Carib Sea."

"Yes," said Mr Parkley, drumming on the desk.

"I have made discoveries there."

"Mines?" said Mr Parkley. "Not in my way."

"No, sir—better than mines; for the gold and silver are gathered and smelted—cast into ingots."

"Buried treasure, eh? Not in my way, sir—not in my way."

"Yes, buried treasure, Mr Parkley; but buried in the bright, clear sea, where the sun lights up the sand and rocks below."

"Sea, eh? Well, that is more in our way. Eh, Pugh?"

"Read the old chronicles of the time, sir, two or three hundred years ago," said the Cuban, rising, with his eyes flashing, and his handsome face lit up by his glowing excitement, "and you shall find that gold ships and plate-ships—ships laden with the treasures of Mexico and Peru, taken by the Spaniards, were sunk here and there upon those wondrous coasts."

"Old women's tales," said Mr Parkley, abruptly. "Cock-and-bull stories."

"I do not quite understand," said the Cuban, haughtily, "except that you doubt me. Sir, these are truths. I doubted first; but for five years in a small vessel I have searched the Carib Sea, and I can take you to where three ships have been wrecked and sunk—ships whose existence is only known to me."

"Very likely," said Mr Parkley; "but that don't prove that they were laden with gold."

"Look," said the Cuban, taking from a pocket in his cloak a packet, and, opening it out, he unwrapped two papers, in one of which was a small ingot of gold, in the other a bar of silver. They were cast in a very rough fashion, and the peculiarity that gave strength to the Cuban's story was that each bar of about six inches long was for the most part encrusted with barnacle-like shells and other peculiar sea growths.

"Hum! Could this have been stuck on, Pugh?" said Mr Parkley, curiously examining each bar in turn.

"I think not, sir, decidedly," said Pugh. "Those pieces of metal must have been under water for a great length of time."

"You are right, Mr Pugh," said the Cuban, whose face brightened. "You are a man of sound sense. They have been under water three hundred years."

He smiled at the young Englishman as he spoke, but the other felt repelled by him, and his looks were cold.

"How did you get those bars and ingots?" said Mr Parkley, abruptly.

"From amongst the rotten timbers of an old galleon," said the Cuban. "But where?"

"That is my secret. Thirty feet below the surface at low water."

"Easy depth," said Mr Parkley, thoughtfully. "But why did you not get more?"

"Sir, am I a fish? I practised diving till I could go down with a stone, and stay a minute; but what is that? How could I tear away shell, and coral, and hard wood, and sand, and stones. I find six such bars, and I am satisfied. I seek for years for the place, and I know three huge mines of wealth for the bold Englishmen who would fit out a ship with things like these"—pointing to the diving suits—"with brave men who will go down with bars, and stay an hour, and break a way to the treasure, and there load—load that ship with gold and silver, and perhaps rich jewels. Sir, I say to you," he continued, his face gradually glowing in excitement, "are you the brave Englishman who will fit out a ship and go with me? I say, make a written bond of agreement to find all we shall want in what you call apparatus and brave men. I show you the exact place. I take your ship to the spot to anchor, and then, when we get the treasures, I take half for myself, and you take half for yourselves. Is it fair?"

"Yes, it sounds fair enough," said Mr Parkley, rubbing his nose with a pair of compasses. "What do you say, Pugh?"

"I hardly know what to say, sir. The project is tempting, certainly; but—"

"But it is a monstrous fortune," said the Cuban. "It is an opportunity that cannot come twice to a man. Do you hear? Great ingots of gold and bars of silver. Treasures untold, of which I offer you half, and yet you English people are so cold and unmovable. Why, a Spaniard or a Frenchman would have gone mad with excitement."

"Yes," said Mr Parkley, "but we don't do that sort of thing here."

"No," said the Cuban, "you are so cold."

"It takes some time to warm us, sir," said Dutch, sternly; "but when we are hot, we keep so till our work is done. Your Frenchman and Spaniard soon get hot, and are cold directly."

"That's right, Pugh, every word," said Mr Parkley, nodding his head.

"Then you refuse my offer?" said the Cuban, with a bitter look of contempt stealing over his face.

"Do I?" replied Mr Parkley.

"Yes, you are silent—you do not respond."

"Englishmen don't risk ten thousand pounds without looking where it is to go, my fine fellow," said Mr Parkley, drumming away at the desk. "I don't say I shall not take it up, and I don't say I shall."

"You doubt me, then. Are not my papers good?"

"Unexceptionable."

"Is not the half of the wondrous wealth enough for you? You who only take out your ship and divers to get what it has taken me years to find. I tell you there are cargoes of this rich metal lying there—hundreds of thousands of pounds—a princely fortune; and yet you hesitate."

"Are there any volcanoes your way?" said Mr Parkley, drily.

"Yes—many. Why?"

"I thought so," said the sturdy Englishman.

"It is enough," cried the Cuban, haughtily. "You play with me, and insult me."

And, as he spoke, with flashing eyes, he snatched at the two ingots, and began to wrap them up, but with a smile of contempt he threw them back on the desk.

"No, we do not," said Mr Parkley quietly; "only you are so red hot. I must have time to think."

"Time to think?"

"Yes. I like the idea, and I think I shall accept your offer."

"You believe in my papers, then?"

"Oh, yes, they are beyond suspicion," said Mr Parkley, holding out his hand. "Only there are so many tricks played that one has to go carefully. Well, how are you? Glad to see you, and hope we shall be good friends."

"My great friend!" exclaimed the Cuban, throwing his arms round the sturdy little man, and nearly oversetting him, stool and all, in his fervid embrace. "They were right: you are the true enterprising man of energy after all."

"I say, don't do that again, please," said Mr Parkley. "We shake hands here, and save those hugs for the other sex—at least the young fellows do."

"But I am overjoyed," exclaimed the Cuban, enthusiastically. "Here, I will be English," he cried, holding out his hand and shaking that of Dutch most heartily. "We two shall be great friends, I see. You will come too. You are young and full of energy, and you shall be as rich as he. You shall both draw up gold in heaps and be princes. Thank you both—thank you. And now we will make our plans."

"Gently, gently," exclaimed Mr Parkley; "this all takes time. If that treasure has lain for three hundred years at the bottom of the sea, it will be safe for a few months longer."

"Ah, yes, yes."

"Then we must take our time, and, if we go, make plenty of preparation."

"Yes, yes," said the Cuban; "take plenty of diving suits and a diving bell."

"Don't you fidget about that, sir," said Mr Parkley, proudly. "I think we can find such appliances as will do the trick. Eh, Pugh?"

Dutch nodded, and then looked uneasily at the Cuban, whose presence seemed to fill him with a vague trouble.

"I've got an important contract on too," continued Parkley.

"A contract?" said the Cuban. "A new machine?"

"No, no; a bond such as we must have to do certain work."

"Yes, yes. I see."

"I've got to empty a ship off the coast here. She went down, laden with copper."

"I must see that," cried the Cuban, excitedly. "Where is it? Let us go. I must see the men go under water."

"All in good time, sir—all in good time; for I must finish that job first. Well, Rasp," he continued, as that worthy came in.

"It's Mrs Pug, sir. Shall I show her in?"

"No, no," exclaimed Dutch, eagerly.

But he was too late; for, as he spoke, a lady-like figure entered the room, and the bright, fair, girlish face, with its clustering curls of rich dark-brown hair, turned from one to the other in a timid, apologetic way.

"I am sorry," she faltered. "You are engaged. My husband arranged—"

"Come in, my dear—come in," said Mr Parkley, hopping off his stool, taking her hands, and patting them affectionately, as he placed her in a chair. "We've about done for to-day; and if we had not, there's nothing you might not hear. I'll be bound to say, Pugh keeps nothing from you."

"But she is beautiful!" muttered the Cuban, with sparkling eyes, as his lips parted, and a warm flush came into his creamy cheeks; while Dutch turned pale as he saw his admiration, and the vague feeling of dread came once more in combination with one of dislike.

Story 1--Chapter III.

Under Water and Under Current.

"But I am not polite, my dear," said Mr Parkley. "This is Señor Manuel Lorry, a gentleman from Havana. Señor, Mrs

Pugh, the wife of my future partner, and almost my daughter.”

The Cuban bowed low as the young Englishwoman rose and looked anxiously at him, her eyes falling directly, and she blushed vividly, as though her fair young cheeks were scorched beneath his ardent gaze.

A pang shot through the breast of Dutch Pugh; but the eyes were raised again to his with so naïve and innocent a look that the pain was assuaged, and he crossed to her side.

“Well, Señor,” said Mr Parkley, “I am to see that you are not imposed upon, so you are in my charge.”

“I know so much of the straightforward honesty of the English, sir, that I am glad to be in your hands.”

“That’s complimentary,” said Mr Parkley.

“It is true, sir,” said the Cuban, bowing.

“Very well, then,” said Mr Parkley, “we’ll begin by trusting one another fully. Well, Rasp, what is it now?”

“Here’s Sam Oakum just come from Barrport.”

“Well, have they got out all the copper?”

“Not a bit of it, for the men won’t go down.”

“Why?”

“Say the engine don’t supply enough air, and the receiver’s bust. Won’t go down, hany one on ’em.”

“Nonsense!”

“John Tolly’s dead or thereabouts.”

“Dead?”

“So Sam says.”

“Tut, tut, tut!” ejaculated Mr Parkley. “Always something wrong. Pugh, you’ll have to go down directly, and set an example, or I must. Tolly always comes up dead when he don’t like a job.”

“No, no, no!” exclaimed Mrs Pugh, leaping off to catch her husband by the arm. “He must never go down again. Promise me you will not go,” she cried, turning her ashy face up to his.

“But she is beautiful indeed!” muttered the Cuban.

“My darling,” whispered Dutch, “be a woman. There is no danger.”

“No danger!” she wailed. “Dutch, I’ve dreamed night after night of some terrible trouble, and it is this. You must not—must not go.”

“My darling,” he whispered. And, bending over her, he said a few words in her ear, which made her set her teeth firmly and try to smile, as she stood up clasping his hand.

“I will try,” she whispered—“try so hard.”

“I’m ready, Mr Parkley,” said the young man, hoarsely.

“That’s right, Pugh. Go and set matters square. I’ll see your wife safe back home.”

“I leave her to you,” said Dutch, in a low voice. “Good-bye, my darling, get back home. I’ll join you soon,” he whispered, and hurried out of the office.

But as he turned for a moment, it was to see the Cuban’s eyes fixed upon the trembling girl; while the goblinlike figures against the wall seemed to be nodding and gibbering at him, as if laughing at the troubles that assailed his breast.

“Off down to Barrport, Mr Pug?” said Rasp, as he stood in the outer office.

“Yes, instantly. Come, Oakum,” he said, to a rough-looking sailor, who stood hat in hand.

“Sharp’s the word, Mr Pug,” said Rasp; “but I say,” he continued, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder, “that foreign chap, I don’t like the looks o’ he.”

“I tell you what it is, sir,” said the rough-looking sailor, as he walked by Dutch Pugh’s side down to the station. “If I weer much along o’ that Rasp, it would soon come to a row.”

“Why, man?”

“’Cause he’s such a overbearing sort of a chap. He’s one of them kind as always thinks he’s skipper, and every one else is afore the mast. If he’d come aboard the ship and hailed me, I should ha’ ast him to sit down on the deck and handed him the bacco; but when I comes in he sits and stares at one orty like, and goes on taking his bacco, in a

savage sorter way, up his nose, and never so much as says, 'Have a pinch, mate,' or the like."

"You don't know him, my man," said Dutch, quietly.

"And don't want to," growled the old sailor. "I should just like to have him aboard our vessel for a month. I'd show him how to count ten, I know."

"Well, there are more unlikely things," said Dutch. "Perhaps he may sail with you."

"What, are we going off, sir?" said the sailor, facing round.

"I don't know yet," said Dutch, "but it is possible."

"I'm glad on it," said the sailor, giving his canvas trousers a slap. "I'm tired o' hanging about the coast as we do. All this diving work's very well, but I want to get out in the blue again."

"Tell me all about the upset over the work," said Dutch. "Is Tolly bad?"

"Not he, sir," chuckled the sailor. "I'd ha' cured him with a rope's-end in about two twos. Didn't want to go down, and when the skipper turned rusty, and said as how he must, his mates takes sides with him, and say as Mr Parkley wants to send 'em to their death, and then the real sore place comes out—they wants a rise in the pay. 'Well, then,' says the skipper, 'I'll send for Mr Parkley;' and then Tolly says in his blustering way, 'Ah,' he says, 'I ain't afraid to go down, and if I loses my life it's all the governor's fault.' So down he goes, and dreckly after he begins pulling his siggle rope, and they pulls him up, unscrews him, and lays him on the deck, and gives him cold grog."

"But was he senseless?"

"He wasn't so senseless that he couldn't lap the grog, sir, no end; and if he warn't playing at sham Abraham, my name ain't Sam Oakum."

Barrport was soon reached, and, boarding a small lugger, Dutch and his companion were put aboard a handsomely-rigged schooner, lying about four miles along the coast, at anchor, by the two masts of a vessel seen above the water. And here it was evident that arrangements had been made for diving, for a ladder was lashed to the side of the vessel, evidently leading down to the deck of the sunken ship, while four men in diving suits lounged against the bulwarks, their round helmets, so greatly out of proportion to their heads, standing on a kind of rack, while the heavy leaden breast and back pieces they wore lay on the planks.

"Ah, Pugh," said a weather-beaten, middle-aged man, greeting Dutch as he reached the deck; "glad you've come. When I've a mutiny amongst my own men I know what to do; but with these fellows I'm about done, especially as they say the machinery is defective."

"Of course, Captain Studwick," said Dutch aloud, "men cannot be asked to risk their lives. Here, Tolly, what is it?"

The diver spoken to, a fat-faced, pig-eyed fellow, with an artful leer upon his countenance, sidled up.

"The pump don't work as it should, Mr Pugh," he said. "Near pretty nigh gone—warn't I, mates?"

The others nodded.

"Is the work below very hard?" said Dutch, quietly.

"Well, no, sir, I don't know as it's much harder nor usual; but the copper's heavy to move, and the way into the hold is littler nor usual; ain't it, mates?"

"Take off your suit," said Dutch, after glancing at the men at the air-pump, and seeing that they were those he could trust.

"It won't fit you, sir," said the man, surlily.

"I'm the best judge of that," said Dutch; "take it off instantly."

The man glanced at his companions, but seeing no help forthcoming from them, he began sulkily to take off the copper gorget and the india-rubber garments, with the heavy leaden-soled boots, which, with the help of the old sailor, Dutch slipped on with the ease of one accustomed to handle such articles; then fitting on the leaden weights—the chest and back piece—he took up the helmet, saw that the tube from the back was properly adjusted and connected with the air-pump, which he examined, and then turned to Captain Studwick—

"You'll see that no one touches the tube, Mr Studwick," he said, in a low tone. "One of those fellows might feel disposed to tamper with it."

The captain nodded, and Dutch then lifted on the helmet, the rim of which fitted exactly to the gorget, had the screws tightened, and then, with the old sailor and the captain himself seeing that the tube and signalling cords were all right, the pump began to work, and Dutch walked heavily to the side, took hold of the rungs of the ladder, and began to descend.

In a few moments his head had disappeared, and his blurred figure could be made out going down into the darkness, while a constant stream of exhausted air which escaped from the helmet-valve kept rising in great bubbles. The pump clanked as its pistons worked up and down, and the sailors and divers—the former eagerly and the latter in a sulky fashion—approached the side and looked over.

Captain Studwick himself held the signal-line, and answered the calls made upon him for more or less air by communicating with the men at the pump; and so the minutes passed, during which time, by the necessity for lengthening out the tube and cord, it was evident that Dutch was going over the submerged vessel in different directions. All had gone so well that the captain had relaxed somewhat in his watchfulness, when he was brought back to attention by a violent jerking of the cord.

"More air!" he shouted—"quick!" just as there was a yell, a scuffle, and the man Tolly struggled into the middle of the deck, wrestling hard with a black sailor, who backed away from him, and then, running forward like a ram, struck his adversary in the chest and sent him rolling over into the scuppers.

By this time the signalling had ceased, and Dutch was evidently moving about at his ease.

"What was that?" said Captain Studwick, sternly, as the man Tolly got up and made savagely at the black, but was restrained by the strong arm of the old sailor, Oakum.

Tolly and the black both spoke excitedly together, and not a word was to be understood.

"Here you, Mr Tolly, what is it?" cried the captain. "Hold your tongue, 'Pollo."

"I bash him head, sah. I—"

"Hold your tongue, sir," said the captain. "What was it?"

"I happened to look round, sir, and found this stupid nigger standing on the tube, and when I dragged him off he struck me."

"Who you call nigger, you ugly, white, fat-head tief?" shouted the black, savagely. "I bash your ugly head."

"Silence!" cried the captain.

"It great big lie, sah," cried the black. "I turn roun' and see dat ugly tief set him hoof on de tubum, and top all de wind out of Mass' Dutch Pugh, and I scruff him."

"You infamous—"

"Silence!" roared the captain. "Stand back, both of you. Oakum, see that no one goes near the tube. Haul in gently there; he's coming up."

This was the case, for in another minute the great round top of the helmet was seen to emerge from the water; its wearer mounted the side, and was soon relieved of his casque, displaying the flushed face of Dutch, who looked sharply round.

"Some one must have stepped on the tube," he said. "Who was it?"

"It lies between these two," said Captain Studwick, pointing to the pair of adversaries.

"It was the nigger, sir," said Tolly.

"No, sah, 'sure you, sah. I too much sense, sah, to put um foot on de tubum. It was dis fellow, sah," said the black, with dignity.

"I presume it was an accident," said Dutch, quietly. Then, turning to the divers—"I have been down, as you see, my men. The apparatus is in perfect working order, the water clear, the light good, and the copper easy to get at. Begin work directly. If anything goes wrong, it is the fault of your management."

"But ain't this black fellow to be punished?" began the man Tolly.

"Mr John Tolly, you are foreman of these divers," said Dutch quietly, "and answerable to Mr Parkley for their conduct. If one of the sailors deserves punishment, that is Captain Studwick's affair."

For a moment there was dead silence, then 'Pollo spoke.

"I not a sailor, sah; I de ship cook. You mind I not put de cork in de tubum, Mass' Tolly, next time you go down."

"There! do you hear him?" cried Tolly. "Who's going down to be threatened like that?"

"Yah, yah, yah!" laughed the black. "Him great coward, sah. He not worf notice."

Then he turned and walked forward, while Tolly resumed his suit, vacated for him by Dutch, their helmets were put on by two of the men, and diving commenced, Dutch remaining on board till it was time to cease, and having the satisfaction of seeing a goodly portion of the copper hauled on the deck of the schooner, the divers fastening ropes round the ingots, which were drawn up by the sailors.

"That was a malicious trick, of course," said Dutch to the captain while Tolly was below.

"I'm afraid it was," said the captain, "to try and make out that the machinery was out of order."

"Yes, I expected it," said Dutch; "and that's why I spoke to you. They did not mean to do me a mischief, of course—"

only to frighten me. I don't suspect the black, though."

"What, 'Pollo!" said the captain. "Good heavens, no! He's as staunch as steel. A thoroughly trustworthy man."

"I must wink at it, I suppose," said Dutch, "for it is not easy to supply vacancies in our little staff, and the men know it. They are hard fellows to manage."

"And yet you manage them well," said the captain, smiling. "You ought to have been a skipper."

"Think so?" said Dutch; "but look, who is this coming on board?"

"Poor John!" said the captain, with a sigh. "Poor boy, he's in a sad way."

"But he's very young, Mr Studwick, and with the fine weather he may amend."

"He's beginning to be out of hope, Pugh, and so is poor Bessy. The doctor says he must have a sea voyage into some warmer climate—not that he promises health, but prolonged life."

"Indeed!" said Dutch, starting, as he thought of the Cuban's proposal, and the probability of Captain Studwick having charge of the vessel if the trip was made, but not feeling at liberty to say much; and, the boat from the shore touching the side, he held his peace.

A minute later a fine, handsome, but rather masculine girl—whose clear eyes sparkled as they lit on Dutch Pugh, and then were turned sharply away—stepped on deck, holding out her hand directly after to assist an invalid to pass the gangway, which he did, panting slightly, and then pausing to cough.

He was evidently enough the girl's brother, for with his delicate looks and hectic flush he looked strangely effeminate, and in height and stature the pair were wonderfully alike.

"I don't think it was wise of you to come out, John," said the captain, kindly; "it's a cold, thick day."

"It's so dull at home," said the young man, "and I must have change. There, I'm well wrapped up, father; and Bessy takes no end of care of me."

He gave the girl a tender and affectionate look as he spoke; and she smiled most pleasantly.

"Ah, Mr Pugh, I'm glad to see you. Have you been down?"

"Yes, just for a little while," said Dutch, shaking hands with him, and then holding out his hand to the sister, who half shrank from him with an angry, flushed face; but his frank, pleasant look overcame her, and she held out her hand to him.

"You have not been to see us yet, Miss Studwick," he said, frankly. "Hester quite expects you to call, and I hope you will be friends."

"I will try to be, Mr Pugh," said the girl, huskily. "I'll call—soon."

"That's right," he said, smiling. "Come, too, John. We shall be very glad to see you."

The young man started, and looked at him searchingly with his unnaturally bright eyes.

"No," he said, sadly. "I'm too much of an invalid now. That is, at present," he said, catching his father's eye, and speaking hastily. "I shall be better in a month or two. I'm stronger now—much stronger; am I not, Bessy? Give me your arm, dear. I want to see the divers."

The couple walked forward to where the air-pump was standing, and the eyes of the captain and Dutch Pugh met, when the former shook his head sadly, and turned away.

There was something very pathetic in the aspect of the young man, in whom it was plain enough to see that one by one most fatal diseases had made such inroads as to preclude all hope of recovery; and saddened at heart, for more than one reason, above all feeling that his presence was not welcome, Dutch superintended his men till, feeling that it would be absolutely necessary that some one would have to be on deck every day till the copper was all recovered, he made up his mind that it would fall to his lot, except at such times as Mr Parkley would relieve guard.

Story 1--Chapter IV.

The Diver at Home.

The next morning Rasp was sent off to act as superintendent, for Mr Parkley decided that Dutch must stay and help him in his plans for carrying out the Cuban's wishes, if he took the affair up, and previously to discuss the matter.

Dutch announced to Rasp then that he would have to set off at once.

"It's always the way," grumbled the old fellow. "Board that schooner, too. Yah!"

"Never mind, Rasp; you like work. You'll be like the busy bee, improving each shining hour," said Dutch, smiling.

"Yes; and my helmets, and tubes, and pumps getting not fit to be seen, and made hat-pegs of. Busy bee, indeed! I'm tired of improving the shining hours. I've been all my life a-polishing of 'em up for some one else."

He set off growling, and vowing vengeance on the men if they did not work; and Dutch returned to find Mr Parkley with a map of the West Indies spread upon the desk.

"Look here," he said, "here's the place," and he pointed to the Caribbean Sea.

"Do you think seriously of this matter, then?" said Dutch.

"Very. Why not? I believe it is genuine. Don't you?"

"I can't say," replied Dutch. "It may be."

"I think it is," said the other, sharply; "and it seems to me a chance."

"If it proved as this Cuban says, of course it would be."

"And why should it not?" said Mr Parkley. "You see he has nothing to gain by getting me to fit out an expedition, unless we are successful."

"But it may be visionary."

"Those ingots were solid visions," said Mr Parkley. "No, my lad; the thing's genuine. I've thought it out all right, and decided to go in for it at once—that is, as soon as we can arrange matters."

"Indeed, sir!" said Dutch, startled at the suddenness of the decision.

"Yes, my lad, I have faith in it. We could go in the schooner. Take a couple of those divers, and some of our newest appliances. I look upon the whole affair as a godsend. Hum! Here he is. Don't seem too eager, but follow my lead."

A clerk announced the previous night's visitor; and Dutch recalled for the moment the previous day's meeting, and the annoyance he had felt on seeing the stranger's admiring gaze. But this was all forgotten in a few moments, the Cuban being certainly all that could be desired in gentlemanly courtesy, and his manners were winning in the extreme.

"And now that you have had a night for consideration, Señor Parkley, what do you think of my project?" he said, glancing at the map.

"I want to know more," said Mr Parkley.

"I have told you that vessels were sunk—ships laden with gold and silver, Señor Parkley, and I say join me. Find all that is wanted—a ship—divers—and make an agreement to give me half the treasure recovered, and I will take your ship to the spots. Where these are is my secret."

"You said I was slow and cold, Mr Lorry, yesterday," said Mr Parkley. "You shan't say so to-day. When I make up my mind I strike while the iron is hot. My mind is made up."

"Then you refuse," said the Cuban, frowning.

"No, sir, I agree. Here's my hand upon it."

He held out his hand, which the Cuban caught and pressed hastily.

"Viva!" he exclaimed, his face flushing with pleasure.

"You will both be rich as princes. Our friend here goes too?"

"Yes, I shall take him with us," said Mr Parkley.

Dutch started in wonder at what seemed so rash a proceeding.

"And he must share, too," said the Cuban, warmly.

"Yes; he will be my partner," said Mr Parkley.

"And when do we start—to-morrow?"

"To-morrow!" laughed Mr Parkley. "No, sir; it will take us a month to fit out our expedition."

"A month?"

"At least. We must go well prepared, and not fail for want of means."

"Yes, yes, that is good."

"And all this takes time. Trust me, sir, I shall not let the grass grow under my feet."

"I do not understand the grass grow," said the Cuban.

"I mean I shall hurry on the preparations," said Mr Parkley.

The Cuban nodded his satisfaction; when the rest of the morning was spent in discussing the matter; and, though the visitor was extremely careful not to say a word that might give a hint as to the locality of the treasure, it became more and more evident that he was no empty enthusiast, but one who had spent years in the search, and had had his quest browned with success.

Several days passed in this way, during which great success attended the raising of the copper, and a proper deed of agreement had been drawn up and duly signed between the parties to the proposed expedition, at which, however, Dutch had said but little at his own home, lest he should cause his wife, who had been delicate since their marriage, any uneasiness.

The strange fancies that had troubled him had been almost forgotten, and in spite of himself he had become somewhat tinged by the Cuban's enthusiasm, and often found himself dwelling on the pleasure of being possessed of riches such as were described.

"It would make her a lady," he argued; "and if anything happened to me she would be above want."

He was musing in this way one morning, when Mr Parkley came to him, they having dined together with the Cuban on the previous evening at his hotel.

"Well, Pugh," he said, "I'm getting more faith every day. Lorry's a gentleman."

"Yes," said Dutch, "he is most polished in his ways, and I must say I begin to feel a great deal of faith in him myself."

"That's well," said Mr Parkley, rubbing his hands. "You'll have to go with us."

"I'm afraid, sir, you must—"

"Excuse you? No, I don't think I can. Besides, Pugh, you would go with me as my partner, for I shall have all that settled."

"You are very, very kind, sir," said Dutch, flushing with pleasure.

"Nonsense, man," cried Mr Parkley; "all selfishness. You and I can do so much together. See how useful you are to me, partner."

"Not your partner yet, sir."

"Yes, you are, Pugh," said the other, slapping him on the shoulder; "and now we'll go in for calculations and arrangements for the expedition. I was thinking the schooner would do, but I find it would be too small, so I shall set Captain Studwick to look out for a good brig or a small barque, and take him into our confidence to some extent."

"Not wholly?"

"No; and yet, perhaps, it would be as well. And now, Pugh, I've got a favour to ask of you."

"Anything, sir, that I can do I will do with all my heart," replied Pugh, enthusiastically.

"I knew you would," replied Mr Parkley. "You see, this is a big thing, my lad, and will be the making of us both, and Lorry is a very decent fellow."

"Decidedly," said Pugh, wondering at what was coming.

"Well, I must be as civil to him as I can, and so will you, of course."

"Of course."

"He's taken a great fancy to you, by-the-way, and praises you sky-high."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and look here, Pugh, he has got to be tired of this hotel where he is, and wants society. I can't ask him to my shabby place, so I want you to oblige me by playing the host."

Pugh started as if he had been stung.

"Nothing could be better," continued Mr Parkley, who did not notice the other's emotion. "Ask him to come and stay at your little place. Mrs Pugh has things about her in so nice and refined a way that you can make him quite at home. You will gain his confidence, too, and we shall work better for not being on mere hard business terms."

Dutch felt his brain begin to swim.

"I'll come as often as I can, and we shall be making him one of us. The time will pass more pleasantly for him, and there'll be no fear of somebody else getting hold of him to make better terms."

"Yes—exactly—I see," faltered Pugh, whose mind was wandering towards home, and who recalled the Cuban's openly expressed admiration for his wife.

"The dear little woman," continued Mr Parkley, "could take him out for a drive while you are busy, and you can have music and chess in the evenings. You'll have to live better, perhaps; but mind, my dear fellow, we are not going to let you suffer for that, and you must let me send you some wine, and a box or two of cigars. We must do the thing handsomely for him."

"Yes, of course," said Dutch vaguely.

"Quite a stranger here, you know, and by making him a friend, all will go on so much more smoothly afterwards."

"Exactly," said Dutch again.

"But how dreamy you are? What are you thinking about?"

Dutch started, for in spite of his love and trust he was thinking of the handsome Cuban being installed at his home, and always in company with his innocent young wife, while he was away busy over his daily avocations.

"I beg pardon; did I seem thinking?"

"That you did. But never mind; you'll do this for me, Pugh?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Dutch, making an effort; while the figure of the Cuban seemed to be coming like a dark shadow across his life.

"Well, yes, I do wish it, Pugh, and I am very much obliged. By-the-way, though, what will she say to your going out on the expedition?"

Dutch shook his head.

"By Jove, I never thought of that," said Mr Parkley. "Poor little woman, it will be too bad. I tell you what, I was going to get old Norton to mind the business. I will not. You shall stay at home."

"I should like to go," said Pugh, quietly; "but situated as I am, I should be glad if I could stay."

"So you shall, Pugh—so you shall," said Mr Parkley. And nodding his head over and over again, he left Dutch to his thoughts.

He left for home that night with the cloud seeming to darken round him. He felt that under the circumstances he was bound to accede to his partner's wishes, and yet he was about to take this man, a stranger, to his own sacred hearth, and he shuddered again and again at the ideas that forced themselves upon his brain.

"I've said I'll receive him," he said at last, half aloud; "but it is not yet too late. Hester shall decide, and if she says 'No,' why there's an end of it all."

A short run by the rail took him to his pleasant little home—a small house, almost a cottage, with its tolerably large grounds and well-kept lawn. The little dining and drawing-rooms were shaded by a broad green verandah, over which the bedroom of the young couple looked down, in summer, upon a perfect nest of trailing roses.

Dutch gave a sigh of satisfaction as he saw the bright, sunny look of pleasure that greeted him, and for the next hour he had forgotten the dark shadow as he related to his young wife the great advance in their future prospects.

"I do love that dear old Mr Parkley so," she cried, enthusiastically. "And now, Dutch, dear, tell me all about why this foreign gentleman is taking up so much of your time. Why, darling, is anything the matter?"

Dutch sighed again, but it was with satisfaction, as with a mingling of tender love and anxiety the little woman rose, and, throwing one arm round his neck, laid her soft little cheek to his.

"Matter! No, dear. Why?" he said, trying to smile.

"You looked so dull and ill all at once, as if in some pain."

"Did I? Oh, it was nothing, only I was a little bothered."

"May I know what about?"

"Well, yes, dear," he said, playing with her soft hair, as he drew her down upon his knee. "The fact is that Mr Parkley is anxious for some attention to be paid to this Cuban gentleman—this Mr Lauré."

"And he wants us to ask him here," said Hester, gravely; and for a moment a look of pain crossed her face.

"Yes. How did you know?" he cried, startled at her words.

"I can't tell," she replied, smiling again directly. "I seemed to know what you were going to say by instinct."

"But we cannot have him here, can we?" said Dutch, eagerly. "It would inconvenience you so."

She remained silent for a moment, and a warm flush appeared upon her face as he gazed at her searchingly; for it was evident that a struggle was going on within her breast, and she was debating as to what she should say. Then, to his great annoyance, she replied—

"I don't think that we ought to refuse Mr Parkley this request, dear. I hardly liked the idea at first, and this Mr Lauré did not impress me favourably when we met."

Dutch's face brightened.

"But," she continued, "I have no doubt I shall like him very much, and we will do all we can to make his stay a pleasant one."

Dutch remained silent, and a frown gathered on his brow for a few moments; but the next moment he looked up, smiling on the sweet ingenuous countenance before him, feeling ashamed of the doubts and fancies that had intruded.

"You are right, dear," he said, cheerfully. "It is a nuisance, for I don't like any one coming between us and spoiling our evenings; but it will not be for long, and he has come about an enterprise that may bring us a considerable sum."

"I'll do all I can, dear," she cried, cheerfully.

And then, going to the piano, the tones of her voice fell upon the ears of Dutch Pugh even as the melodies of David on the troubled spirit of Saul of old, for as the young husband lay back in his chair, and listened to his favourite songs—sung, it seemed to him, more sweetly than ever—the tears gathered in his eyes, and he closed them, feeling that the evil spirit that assailed his breast had been exorcised, and that the cruel doubts and fears were bitter sins against a pure, sweet woman, who loved him with all her soul; and he cursed his folly as he vowed that he never again would suffer such fancies to gain an entrance to his breast.

For quite an hour they sat thus, she singing in her soft, low voice ballad after ballad that she knew he loved; and he lying back there, dreamily drinking in the happiness that was his, and thanking Heaven for his lot. For the shadow was beaten back, and true joy once more reigned supreme.

He was roused from his delicious reverie by the touch of two soft, warm lips on his forehead.

"Asleep, darling?" whispered Hester.

"Asleep? No," he cried, in a low, deep voice, as he drew her to his heart. "Awake, darling—wide awake to the fact that I am the happiest of men in owning all your tender, true, womanly love."

As he spoke his lips sought hers, and with a sigh of content, and a sweet smile lighting up her gentle face, Hester's arms clasped his neck, and she nestled closer to his breast.

Story 1--Chapter V.

A Waking Dream.

The next day, after a long and busy discussion, in which Lauré took eager interest, and during which plans were made as to stores, arms for protection against the Indians of the coast they were to visit, lifting and diving apparatus, and the like, the Cuban was installed at the cottage, and that first night Dutch saw again upon his face that intense admiration the dark, warm-blooded Southerner felt for the fair young English girl. For girl she still was, with a girl's ways, prettily mingled with her attempts to play the part of mistress of her own house. The young husband felt a pang of jealous misery await him as he sat back in the shade of his prettily-furnished drawing-room, seeing their visitor hover about the piano while Hester sang, paying endless attentions with the polish and courtesy of a foreigner, various little refined acts—such as would never have occurred to the bluff young Englishman.

"I'm a jealous fool—that's what I am," said Dutch to himself; "and if I go on like this I shall be wretched all the time he is here. I won't have it—I won't believe it. She is beautiful—God bless her! and no man could see her without admiring her. I ought to be proud of his admiration instead of letting it annoy me; for, of course, it's his foreign way of showing it. An Englishman would be very different; but what right have I to fancy for a moment that this foreign gentleman, my guest, would harbour a thought that was not honourable to me? There, it's all gone."

He brightened up directly; and as, with a pleasant smile, Lauré came to him soon afterwards and challenged him to a game of chess, the evening passed pleasantly away.

The days glided on rapidly enough, with Dutch Pugh always repeating to himself the stern reproof that he was unjust to his guest and to his young wife to allow a single thought of ill to enter his heart; and to keep these fancies away he worked harder than ever at the preparations for the voyage, being fain, though, to confess that one thing that urged him on was the desire to be rid of his guest.

"I don't think much of these furren fellows," said Rasp, one day, when, after a shorter stay than usual at the offices, Lauré had effusively pressed Dutch's hand and gone back to the cottage. "How does Mrs Pug like him?"

Dutch started, but said, quietly—

"Suppose we get on with the packing of that air-pump, Rasp. You had better get in a couple of the men."

"All right," grumbled the old fellow; "I wasn't going to leave it undone; but if I was a married man with a 'ansum wife, 'ang me if I should care about having a smooth-tongued, dark-eyed, scented foreign monkey of a chap like that at my house."

"You insolent old scoundrel!" cried Dutch, flashing into a rage; and he caught the old fellow by the throat, but loosened him again with an impatient "Pish!"

Rasp seized the poker and sent the red-hot cinders flying as he stoked away at the fire.

"I desire that you never speak to me again like that. How dare you!"

"Oh, all right, Mr Pug, I won't speak again," said Rasp. "I didn't mean no offence. I only said what I thought, and that was as I didn't like to see that furren chap always a-hanging after going back to your house, when he ought to be here, helping to see to the things getting ready."

"Rasp!" said Dutch angrily.

"Well, so he ought to, instead of being away. Nobody wants him to take off his yaller kid gloves and work, but he might look on. He's going to be a niste one, he is, when he gets out in the place where we're a-going. He'll have a hammock slung and a hawning over it when he gets out in the hot sunshine, that's about what he'll do, and lie on his back and smoke cigarettes while one works. Say, Mr Pug, I wish you was going with us!"

He went and had another stoke at the fire, and glanced at Dutch's back, for he was writing, and made no response. "Sulky, and won't speak," muttered Rasp; and, going out, banged the door after him.

"The fancies of a vulgar mind," said Dutch to himself, as soon as he was alone. "The coarse belief of one who cannot understand the purity of feeling and thought of a true woman; and I actually let such ideas have a place in my breast. Bah! It's disgraceful!"

He glanced round the office, and then angrily devoted himself once more to his work, for it seemed as if the great goggle-eyed diving-helmets were once more bending forward and laughing at him derisively.

"I will not have this office made so hot," he muttered impatiently; and he worked on for some time, but only to fall dreaming again, as he said, "A little more than a fortnight and we shall be ready. Good luck to the expedition. I wish it were gone."

Then, in spite of himself, he began thinking about the conduct of Lauré at his house, and wishing earnestly that he had never agreed to his reception as a guest.

"But, there, he is a perfect gentleman," he argued; "and his conduct to me is almost too effusive. Little Hester must find him all that could be desired, or she would complain. Hallo, who is this?"

"Company to see you," said Rasp, roughly; and, as Dutch left his stool, it was to meet Captain Studwick's invalid son and his sister, who came in, accompanied by a quiet, gentlemanly-looking young man, whom he introduced as Mr Meldon.

"The medical gentleman who attends me now," said John Studwick, smiling; "not that I want much, do I, Mr Meldon?"

"Well, no, we will not call you an invalid, Mr Studwick," said the stranger.

"Fact is," said John Studwick, "I've set up a medical man of my own. Mr Meldon is going with us on the voyage."

"What voyage?" said Dutch, eagerly.

"Oh, you don't know, of course," said John Studwick, laughing. "My father thinks a sea voyage will set me right, and I am going in the *Sea King*. Bessy's going too."

"Indeed," said Dutch, looking from one to the other, while Bessy coloured slightly, and turned away.

"Yes, it's just settled this morning. Mr Parkley is willing, so we shall have a sea voyage and adventure too. I say, Mr Pugh, you asked me to come to your house."

"Yes, and I shall be very glad," said Dutch, smiling.

"Well, can we fix a day when we may be introduced to this Spanish Cuban gentleman? I'm curious to know my fellow-passenger. Sick man's fancy."

"Thursday week, then," said Dutch, eagerly. "Mr Meldon, perhaps, will join us."

"I shall be very happy," replied that individual.

And he glanced at Bessy, who coloured again slightly; and then, after a few words about the voyage, in which John Studwick expressed his regret that Dutch was not going on the expedition, the little party went away.

"If I'm not mistaken," said Dutch to himself, as he climbed to his stool, "there's somebody there to heal the sore place in poor Bessy's heart. Poor girl! If I was not coxcombical to say so, I should think she really was fond of me. There, come forth, little loadstone," he said, with a look of intense love lighting up his countenance, and raising the lid of his desk he took from a drawer a photographic carte of his wife, and set it before him, to gaze at it fondly.

"I don't think I could have cared for Bessy Studwick, darling, even if there had been no Hester in the world."

As he gazed tenderly at the little miniature of his wife's features, there seemed to come a peculiar look in the eyes—the expression on the face became one of pain.

He knew it was fancy, but he gazed on at the picture till his imagination took a wider leap, and as if it were quite real, so real that in his disturbed state he could not have declared it untrue, he saw Hester seated in their own room, with every object around clearly defined, her head bent forward, and the Cuban kneeling at her feet, and pressing her hands to his lips.

So real was the scene that he started away from the desk with a loud cry, oversetting his stool, and letting the heavy desk lid fall with a crash.

In a moment Rasp ran into the office, armed with a heavy diver's axe, and then stood staring in amazement.

"Is any one gone mad?" he growled.

"It was nothing, Rasp," said Dutch, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"I never heard nothing make such a row as that afore," growled Rasp.

And then, putting the axe down, he made for the poker, had a good stoke at the fire, and went out muttering.

Dutch opened the desk on the instant, but the scene was gone, and hastily closing the lid again he began to pace the room.

For a moment his intention was to rush off home, but he restrained himself for the time, and tried to recall the past; but his brain was in a whirl. At last he grew more calm, and took out his watch.

"Only five o'clock," and he had said that he should get some dinner where he was, stop late at work, and not be home till after nine.

He was to stay there and work for another three or four hours—to make calculations that required all his thought, when he had seen or conjured up that dreadful sight. No: he could not bear it. His nerves tingled, his brain was throbbing, and incipient madness seemed to threaten his reason as he prepared to obey the influence that urged him to go home.

"The villain!" he groaned. "It must be a warning. Heaven help me, I will know the worst."

Story 1--Chapter VI.

A Pleasant Evening.

Dutch Pugh seized his hat and coat, and was about to dash into the street, when the remembrance of that evening before the coming of the Cuban came upon him, and he replaced them.

"Stop a moment," he said hoarsely, as he began to walk up and down once more. "Let me think—let me take matters coolly, or I shall go mad. There, there, this will not do; I'm going up and down here like a wild beast in his cage."

He made an effort, and forced himself to sit down. "Now," he said, "let's see. What does this mean? Here am I, a strong, full-blooded, sane man, and what have I been doing?"

He paused for a moment before answering his question.

"Letting my mind dwell on thoughts that are a disgrace to me, till I imagine—yes, imagine—so vividly that it seems real, all that nonsense. I picture the scene. I magnify a simple piece of cardboard, and make it fit my own vile imaginations till I see what could never have taken place; and on the strength of that, what am I going to do? Why rush off home as jealous and mad as an Othello, ready to distort everything I see, believe what does not exist, and generally play such a part as I should repent to my last day. Poor girl, has it come to this, that I cannot trust you, and am going to play the spy upon your actions?"

"No, hang me if I do. Now, look here, Dutch, this is not manly," he continued, catechising himself. "You are foolishly jealous of that man, are you not?"

"Yes," he said, answering his own question. "Now then, why are you jealous? Has your wife ever given you the slightest cause?"

"Never, so help me Heaven."

"There, then, does not that satisfy you? Why, man, if everyone who has a handsome wife were to act like this, what a world we should have. So much, then, for your wife. Now, then, about this man—what of him? He is polished and refined, and pays your wife attentions. Well, so would any foreigner under the circumstances. Shame, man, shame; he is your guest, the guest, too, of a woman whose truth you know—whose whole life is beyond suspicion. You leave her every day to go here or there, and does she ask you where you have been—what you have done? Does she suspect you? Why, Dutch Pugh, you wretched maniac, if she saw you talking to a score of pretty women how would she act? I'll tell you. She'd open those sweet, candid eyes of hers, and beam upon you, and no more doubt your truth than that of Heaven."

"And I'll not doubt yours, darling," he muttered, going to the desk, taking out the photograph, kissing it before putting it back; and then, tightening his lips, he took his seat, fixed his attention upon his work, and grew so intent that the next time he looked at his watch it was close upon nine, when, in a calm, matter-of-fact way, he walked all

the way home.

In spite of his determination, he could not help seeing that Hester looked pale and troubled when he entered the little drawing-room, and that her manner was strange and constrained. She met his gaze in a timid way, and without doubt her hand trembled.

He would not notice her, though, but began chatting to them, Lauré being in the highest of spirits and relating anecdotes of his travels till Dutch felt in the best of spirits, and it was near midnight when they all rose for bed, Hester looking very pallid though—so much so that Dutch noticed it.

“Are you quite well, dear?” he asked.

She raised her eyes, and was about to speak when she caught Lauré’s eyes fixed upon her in a strange manner, and she replied hastily—

“Oh, yes, dear, quite, quite well?”

“You don’t feel any of your old symptoms?”

“Oh, no,” she replied, smiling. “You are so anxious about me.”

“No wonder,” said Lauré, “with such a pearl of a wife. Well, I must to bed. Good-night, dear host and hostess.”

He advanced to Hester Pugh and kissed her hand, turning directly to Dutch and pressing his so affectionately that the young Englishman returned the grip with such interest that the Cuban winced, and then smiled as he saw in Dutch’s eyes how honest and true was the intent.

“I was sorry to be detained to-night,” continued Dutch frankly; “it must be very dull here. Look here, Hester, I’ve asked John Studwick and his sister and Mr Meldon, a doctor, to dinner on Thursday. Send a letter to Miss Studwick yourself and ask Mr Parkley as well, so as to have a pleasant evening.”

Hester Pugh brightened up directly, and began to talk of the arrangements for the dinner, while the Cuban went off with a peculiar smile upon his face.

“But I don’t know what to say about this, Dutch,” said Hester, playfully, as she made an effort to be gay and shake off the lassitude that seemed to oppress her. “Report says, sir, that Miss Bessy Studwick was very fond of a certain gentleman we know.”

“Poor Bessy!” said Dutch, thoughtfully.

“Poor Bessy, sir. Then it is all true?”

“What—about Bessy Studwick, darling? Well, I think it was. It sounds conceited of me to say so, but I believe it was the case. But,” he added, drawing her to him, “this certain gentleman only had one heart, and a certain lady took possession of it all. Hester, my darling, I never in my life had loving thought about more than one woman, and her I love more dearly every day.”

She closed her eyes, and the tears gathered beneath her lids as he pressed her to his heart and sighed gently.

Miss Studwick’s name was mentioned no more that night.

The time passed quickly, away, and the Thursday came. Dutch had been so fully occupied, and so determined not to listen to the promptings of his fancy, as he called it, that he refused to take any notice of the way in which the Cuban had settled down in his house. From being all eager now to get the expedition fitted out, and ready to be pettish and impatient with Mr Parkley and Dutch for their careful, deliberate preparations, he seemed now quite careless, pleading indisposition, and spending the greater part of his time at the cottage.

The dinner passed off most pleasantly, and the table was made bright by the magnificent flowers the Cuban had purchased as his offering to the feast, and by the rich fruit Mr Parkley had added in his rough pleasant way, coming down to the cottage with a heavy basket on his arm, and smiling all round as he dabbed his lace and head, hot with the exertion.

To the great delight of Dutch, he saw that quite a liking had sprung up between his wife and Bessy Studwick, both evidently trying hard to let him see that they indulged in no thoughts of the past; while the Cuban ceased his attentions to Hester, and taking Bessy down to dinner, heaped his foreign, nameless little results of polish upon the tall, Juno-like maiden.

The only person in the party who looked grave was John Studwick, who watched all this with uneasy glances, though it must be said that he seemed just as much annoyed when Mr Meldon, the young doctor, was speaking to his sister. He lacked no attentions, though, himself, for, compassionating the state of the invalid’s health, both Dutch and Hester tried hard to make the meeting pleasant to him.

“The little wife looks ill, Pugh,” said Mr Parkley, as they went in to dinner. “You ask Mr Meldon his opinion about her by-and-by. Our coming worries her.”

“I’ll ask her if she’s poorly or worried,” said Dutch smiling. “Hester!”

She came up to him looking pale and startled, but he did not notice it.

"Mr Parkley thinks you wish all the visitors anywhere," said Dutch playfully.

"He does not," said Hester, placing her hand on Mr Parkley's arm. "He knows he is always so very welcome here."

She went in with him to dinner, and evidently exerted herself greatly to chase away the cloud that shadowed her, devoting herself to her guests, but in spite of her efforts her eyes were more than once directed partially to where Lauré was chatting volubly with Bessy Studwick, and, meeting his, remained for a few moments as if fascinated or fixed by his gaze.

Later on in the evening, when they were all in the drawing-room, Hester seemed quite excited, and full of forced gaiety, while Lauré was brimming with anecdote, chatting more volubly than ever. Before long he was asked to sing, and Hester sat down to the piano.

While he was singing in a low, passionate voice some Spanish love song, and those near were listening as if enthralled, Dutch felt his arm touched, and John Studwick motioned him to follow into the back drawing-room, and then, seeing it was impossible to speak there, Dutch led the way into the little dining-room, where, with the rich tones of the Cuban's voice penetrating to where they stood, the invalid, who seemed greatly excited, caught his host by the arm.

"Dutch Pugh," he said, "I like you because you're so frank and manly, and that's why I speak. I shan't go out with this expedition if that half Spanish fellow is going too. I hate him. Look how he has been pestering Bessy all the evening. I don't like it. Why did you ask him here?"

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Dutch, "be reasonable. You expressed a wish to meet him."

"So I did. Yes, so I did, but I don't like him now. I don't like his ways. Pugh, if I was a married man, I would not have that fellow in my house for worlds."

"My dear John Studwick," said Dutch, uneasily, "this is foolish. He is a foreigner, and it is his way."

"I don't like his way," cried the young man, whose cheeks were flushed and eyes unnaturally bright. "If he won Bessy from me, I should kill him. I was afraid of you once, but that's passed now."

"But, my dear boy," said Dutch, laying his hand on his shoulder, "you must expect your sister to form an attachment some day."

"Yes, some day," said the young man. "Some day; but let her wait till I'm gone. I couldn't bear to have her taken from me now. She is everything to me."

"My dear Studwick, don't talk like that."

"Why not?" he replied with a strange look. "Do you think I don't know? I shall only live about six months: nothing will save me."

"Nonsense, man! That sea trip will set you right again. Come, let's get back into the drawing-room."

He led the way back, and, seeking his opportunity, whispered to Bessy Studwick that her brother was low-spirited, and taking her from the Cuban's side, he made John Studwick happy by bringing her to him.

The Cuban's eyes flashed, and he arose and crossed the room, so that when Dutch looked in that direction it was to see that he whispered something to Hester, who glanced across at him where he was standing by Bessy.

The next minute he was seized by Mr Parkley, who backed him up into a corner, where he seized one particular button on the young man's breast—a habit he had, going to the same particular button as a small pig seeks the same single spot when in search of nutriment.

"Dutch," said Mr Parkley, as soon as they were alone, and while he was busily trying with his left hand to screw the button off, "Dutch, shake hands."

The young man did so wonderingly.

"That's right: no one's looking. That chap's going to sing another song, and little Hester's getting ready the music. See here, Dutch, you won't be offended at what I say?"

"Offended? Absurd!"

"Old, tried, staunch friend, you know. Wouldn't say a word to hurt you, and I love that little girl of yours like a father—just as if she was my own flesh and blood."

"And I'm sure Hester loves and respects you, Mr Parkley."

"Yes, yes, of course; and that's what makes me so wild about it."

"I don't understand you, Mr Parkley," said Dutch, uneasily.

"There, that's what I was afraid of when I spoke. But I must say it now, Pugh. I'm afraid I made a mistake in asking you to invite that Cuban hero. I'll tell him to come and stay with me."

"Indeed, I beg you will do no such thing, Mr Parkley," said Dutch hotly, as his face burned with mortification. "I

understand what you mean, sir, and can assure you that your suspicions are unjust.”

“I’m very glad to hear you say so, Pugh, I am indeed,” said Mr Parkley earnestly. “Don’t be angry with me, my dear boy. I’m getting old—stupid, I suppose. There, don’t take any more notice of what I said.”

Under these circumstances it was hard work for Dutch Pugh to preserve an unclouded face before his guests, but he strove hard—the harder that he was annoyed at people for having the same fancies as those he had tried so hard to banish. It was, then, with no small feeling of pleasure that he welcomed the time when his guests departed, but even then he was not to be spared a fresh wound, for on taking Bessy Studwick down to the fly she said to him in a low voice:

“Dutch, I have been trying so hard to-night to love your wife. I do so hope you will be very happy.”

“Thank you, Bessy, thank you,” he said warmly. “I’m sure you wish me well.”

“I do, I do, indeed,” she whispered earnestly, “and therefore I say I do not like your new friend, that foreign gentleman. He is treacherous: I am sure he is. Good-night.”

“Good-night!” said Dutch to himself as he stood on the gravel path with the gate in his hand listening to the departed wheels; and then in spite of his determination the flood of evil fancies came rolling back, sweeping all before it.

“They all see it, and think me blind,” he groaned as he literally reeled against the gate. “Those thoughts, then, were a warning—one I would not heed. Hester—Hester—my love,” he moaned as he pressed his hands to his forehead. “Oh, my God, that it should come to this!”

He stood leaning against the gate post for a few minutes in a stunned, dazed way, but recovering himself he clenched his hands and exclaimed through his teeth:

“I will not believe it. She could not be no false.”

He strode in, apparently quite calm, to find Hester standing by the fire-place, looking very scared and pale, while Lauré, who had thrown himself back upon the couch, began to laugh in a peculiar way.

“Ah, you English husbands,” he said, banteringly, “how you do forsake your beautiful wives. But there, the fair visitor was very sweet and gracious. I almost fell in love myself.”

Dutch Pugh’s eyes flashed for a moment, but he said nothing, only glanced at his wife, who met his look in a troubled way, and then let her eyes fall to the carpet, while Lauré went on talking in a playful, bantering manner.

Story 1--Chapter VII.

More Shadows.

From that night a complete change seemed to have come upon the home of Dutch Pugh. He had more than once determined upon putting an end to the Cuban’s stay, feeling at the same time as if he would like to end his life; but reason told him that his were, after all, but suspicions, and that perhaps they were unjust. Under the circumstances, he sought for relief in work, and strove night and day to perfect the arrangements which now fast approached completion. Captain Studwick was to be in command of the large yacht-like schooner that had been secured, and was being carefully fitted with the necessaries in stores and machinery. Two of the divers engaged in raising the copper had volunteered to go, and a capital crew had been selected. The cabins were comfortably furnished, there being plenty of space, and places were set apart for the captain’s son and daughter, while a gentleman friend—a naturalist—had, on learning from Captain Studwick the part of the world to which the ship was to sail, petitioned hard, and obtained permission to go.

This last gentleman said his object was to collect specimens of the wonderful birds of Central America; but the probabilities are that if he had not been aware that Bessy Studwick was to be of the party, he, being a very bad sailor, would have stayed at home.

By degrees everything necessary was put on board the handsome vessel, and though the ship’s destination was kept a secret, and the real object of her mission confided to few, she formed the general topic of conversation in the port, and plenty of exaggerations flew about.

The energetic way in which Dutch worked served to lull to a certain extent the sense of pain that he endured; but he suffered bitterly; and at last it had come to this: that he spent as little of his time at home as possible, returning there, however, at night faint and weary, but with a heart sickness that drove away the needful sleep.

It afforded him some gratification, though, to find that Miss Studwick often called at his home; and when, on more than one occasion, she came with her brother to the office, he read in her eyes the deep sympathy that she felt for him, and asked himself why he had not made this woman his wife.

He sat often quite late in the office, long after Rasp had grumblingly gone off with a final stoke at the fire, which afterwards sank and died out; and at such times, in the semi-darkness, with the goggle-eyed helmets seeming to stare at him and rejoice in his sufferings, he asked himself what he should do? Whether he should leave home for ever? Whether he should put her away from him, and wait till some time in the far-off distance of life when she might, perhaps, come to him, and ask his pardon for the wrong she had done.

"No!" he would exclaim, "I will not believe such evil of her. She is dazzled by this polished scoundrel, and poor, rough, I compare badly with him, for she cannot see our hearts."

Should he end the matter at once?

No, he felt that he could not, for he had nothing but his bare, cruel suspicions to go upon, the greatest of which was that before long Hester would flee with this man, and his home would be wretched.

Wretched? If not wretched already, for all was wretched at home: Hester was low-spirited; for his own part, he rarely spoke; and the Cuban avoided him.

So far, Dutch had indulged in the hope that he might, after all, be deceiving himself, when one evening, on entering the little drawing-room suddenly, Hester started up, looking confused, and left the room, while the Cuban turned away with a short nod, and walked to the window.

From that hour every spare moment was devoted to watching: for the suspicion grew stronger now than before long, if he did not stay it, his home would be left desolate.

This lasted for some days, when the idea was checked by Lauré himself, who, as the time approached for the departure of the expedition, suddenly began to display great interest in the proceedings, so that Dutch felt compelled to own that his ideas of flight must be wrong; in fact, it was as if Lauré had divined his thoughts just as he was about to speak to Mr Parkley, and tell him his suspicions that the Cuban evidently meant to give up the expedition, and, much as it would tear his heart to speak, give the reasons for his belief.

Hardly, though, had he come to the conclusion that he was wrong, when a trifle set him off back in his former way of thinking, for his mind was now a chaos of wilderling fancies, and the slightest thing set his jealous feelings in a blaze.

He would not speak to Hester; he would not take an open, manly way of seeing whether his suspicions were just; but, submitting his better parts to his distorted reason, he nursed his anguish, and so it fell out that one night he found himself watching his own house, in the full belief that his wife's illness in the morning before he left for the office was a subterfuge, and that the time had come for her to take some step fatal to her future.

"But I will stop it," muttered Dutch to himself, as with throbbing pulse and beating temples he avoided the gate, so as not to have his footsteps heard on the gravel, and, climbing the fence, entered his own garden like a thief.

He had hardly reached the little lawn when he heard the sound of wheels, and stepping behind a clump of laurels he stopped, listening with beating heart, for here was food for his suspicions.

As he expected, the fly stopped at the gate; a man in a cloak got out, went hastily up the path, knocked softly at the door, and was admitted on the instant.

Dutch paused, hesitating as to what he should do. Should he follow and enter? No, he decided that he would stay there, and stop them as they came out, for the fly was waiting.

Where would Hester be now? he asked himself, with the dimly-seen house seeming to swim before him; and the answer came as if hissed into his ear by some mocking fiend—

"In her bedroom, getting something for her flight."

Half-a-dozen steps over the soft grass took him where he could see the window, and of course there was a light there, and then—

The blood seemed to rush to his brain, a horrible sense of choking came upon him, and he groaned as he staggered back, for there, plainly enough seen, was the figure of Hester, her hair hanging loose as she lay back over the arm of a man, who was half-leading, half-carrying her towards the door.

All this in shadow was sharply cost upon the blind, and with a groan of mingled rage and misery Dutch rushed towards the house, but only to totter and fall heavily, for it was as though a sharp blow had been dealt him, and for some time he lay there passive and ignorant of what passed around.

He recovered at length, and lay trying to think—to call to mind what this meant. Why was he lying there on the wet grass, with this strange deathly feeling of sickness upon him?

Then all came back with a rush, and he rose to his feet to see that the light was still in the bedroom, but the shadows were gone.

With a cry of horror he ran to the gate, but the carriage was not there, and he stood listening.

Yes, there was the sound of wheels dying away. No, they had stopped, and he was about to rush off in pursuit when a hasty step coming in his direction stayed him, for he knew it well, and, drawing back, he let the Cuban pass him, then followed him softly as he stole round the house, going on tiptoe towards the dining-room window, where Dutch caught him by the shoulder.

"Ah," he said, laughing, "so our gallant Englishman is on the watch, is he? Does the jealous trembler think I would steal his wife?"

"Dog!" hissed Dutch, catching him by the throat, "what are you doing here?"

“What is that to you, fool!” exclaimed the Cuban, flashing into rage. “Loose me, you madman, or you shall repent it. Curse you, you are strong.”

Blind to everything but his maddening passion, kept back now for so many days, and absorbed by the feeling that he could now wreak his vengeance upon the man who had wrecked his home, Dutch savagely tightened his hold upon his adversary, who, though a strong man, bent like a reed before him. It was no time for reason to suggest that he might be wrong; the idea had possession of the young man’s soul that he was stopping an intended flight, and he drove the Cuban backwards, and had nearly forced him across a garden seat when Lauré, writhing like an eel, got partly free.

“Curse your English brute strength!” he muttered, and getting his arm from his cloak, he struck Dutch full on the temple with some weapon, and the young man fell once more prone on the grass.

Story 1--Chapter VIII.

Breaking the Contract.

Five days had passed since the encounter in the garden, and Dutch Pugh had not been back to his home. He had lain for some time stunned from the blow he had received, and then risen half-dazed, and in a wretched, dejected way made for the town, where, letting himself into the office, he had thrown himself upon the floor, and slept heavily till morning, to the great surprise of the clerks, who found him there when they came.

With an intense desire to hide his anguish from everyone, he had given out that he had fallen asleep after being many hours at work, and no notice was taken of his soiled clothes. Then, with the truth gradually oozing out, that no flight had been intended, but that for some reason, so Mr Parkley said, Señor Lauré had gone back to his hotel, Dutch worked on, superintending till the vessel was ready for sea.

The stores and machinery were complete for the purpose, and the passengers were on board. Moreover, a brother of Mr Parkley had been invited to assist in the business during the chief partner’s absence, and together Mr Parkley and Dutch walked down to the dock.

“We had a sort of hint from Bessy Studwick that you haven’t been home for some days, Pugh,” said Mr Parkley.

“Don’t talk about it, please.”

“Well, I won’t much,” said Mr Parkley, “for I guess a great deal. It was all my fault, Dutch, my dear boy. I had no business to have proposed such a thing, and, believe me, if I had known what a scoundrel the fellow was, I would never have entered into this project with him.”

“Pray say no more,” exclaimed Dutch.

“I must, my dear boy, I must, for I want to clear myself. You see the preparation for this trip means five thousand pounds, and I cannot throw the matter over; the loss is too heavy, or else I would.”

“Oh, no, it is impossible,” exclaimed Dutch.

“If I had known my man sooner, I would have seen him at Hanover before I would have had anything to do with him. But look here, my dear Pugh, I couldn’t help hearing a great deal about your domestic trouble. Haven’t you been wronging the little woman?”

“If you have any respect or feeling for me, Mr Parkley, say no more.”

“All right, my dear fellow,” said the other, with a sigh, “I will not; only act like a sensible man in all things—home and business. Heigho, I really wish I was not going, but the idea of these hidden treasures sets me on fire.”

Mr Parkley forgot all his hesitation as they stepped on board and saw how—in spite of the bustle and confusion consequent upon receiving late supplies of fresh meat and vegetables—ship-shape and excellent were Captain Studwick’s arrangements. John Studwick was on board, seated upon a wicker chair, and his sister beside him; Mr Meldon, the young doctor, was leaning over the bulwarks, with a very tall, thin young man, the naturalist friend; the sailors were busy lowering bales and arranging coops and hens; and all was ready for the start—in fact, the dockmen were ready to warp the schooner out, and after a short run behind a tug down the harbour, they would have the open Channel before them.

There was a goodly concourse of people about the wharves, for the object of the schooner’s trip had somehow gained wind, and while some expressed interest and curiosity in the voyage, others laughingly called it a fool’s errand.

“Has anybody seen Señor Lorry?” said Mr Parkley at last.

“I had a note from him,” said Captain Studwick, “He said he would be down here punctually at twelve. Has his luggage come, Oakum?”

“None on it, sir,” said the rough old sailor, pulling his forelock.

“That’s strange,” said the captain. “When did you see him, Parkley?”

“Last night, and he said he would be aboard in the morning, and glad of it, for he was sick of England.”

"Twelve o'clock now," said the captain. "Well, the tide serves; I must give the word for getting out of dock. He must have a longer row for being late. He's sure to come, of course."

"Oh, yes," said Mr Parkley; but he glanced uneasily at Dutch, as if he did not feel sure.

"Ready there," cried the captain. "Now, my lads, be handy—cast off those ropes for'ard. Oh, here he is. Hold hard there."

"But where's his luggage?" said Mr Parkley.

"Oh, behind the crowd," said the captain. "Come along, sir, we were going without you."

"Indeed!" said the Cuban, with a smile. "I doubt that. Where would you go?"

"Where Mr Parkley told me," said the captain. "Give me the order. I'll find the place. Let's see, Mr Pugh, we are to send you back in the tug, I suppose."

Dutch nodded.

"Now, then, for'ard there," cried the captain; "be ready to cast off. Are you ready?"

"Ay, ay," came in chorus from the smart, well-picked crew.

"Stop!" exclaimed Lauré in a loud voice, and, turning to Mr Parkley, he pointed to Dutch and said, "That is your partner, is it not, Mr Parkley?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And he will share in the profits of this expedition?"

"Certainly he will, sir."

"Then, sir, I break our engagement. I shall have nothing to do with the voyage. The matter is entirely off."

"Confound it all, sir!" cried Mr Parkley, in a passion. "You can't do that."

"But, sir, I have done it," said the Cuban, lighting a cigar.

"What! After I've spent all this money in preparation?"

"I have told you," said the Cuban, contemptuously—and he gave a malignant glance at Dutch.

"Mr Parkley," said Dutch, stepping forward, "my private quarrel with this man shall not stand in your way. All this preparation has been made for the expedition, and my being your partner shall not stop it. Sir, our partnership is at an end."

"Is it?" said Mr Parkley, with his teeth set. "No, I'll be hanged if it is;" and as the men gathered round, wondering at what they had heard, he laid his hand on Dutch Pugh's shoulder. "I've proved you, my lad, but I've not proved this man, who at the first touch bends and nearly breaks. We are partners, and mean to stay so, and Mr Lorry here will have to keep to his bond, or I'll soon see what the law says to him."

The Cuban smiled contemptuously.

"Suppose I say it was all a mad dream, and I know of no such place: what then?"

"Why, you are a bigger scoundrel than I took you for."

"Sir!" cried the Cuban, menacingly.

"Oh, you want to frighten me with your big looks, sir," cried Mr Parkley. "Now then, I ask you in plain English, will you fulfil your undertaking, and show me the place where the old Spanish galleons are sunk?"

"No," said the Cuban, coolly, "I will not help to enrich my enemy!" and he again looked indignantly at Dutch.

"Mr Parkley!" exclaimed the latter, "I cannot see all this costly enterprise ruined because of my private trouble with this villain."

"Villain!" cried Lauré, confronting Dutch, whose face flushed and whose hands were half raised to seize his enemy.

"Be silent," he said, in a low, hoarse voice, "I've that within me that I can hardly control. If you rouse it again, by the God who made me, I'll strangle you and hurl you over the side."

The Cuban involuntarily shrank from the menacing face before him, and Dutch by a strong effort turned to Mr Parkley.

"Make terms with him, sir. I will not stand in your way."

"Yes, I'll make terms with him," exclaimed Mr Parkley, angrily. "Now, sir, I ask you again will you fulfil your contract?"

The Cuban half-closed his eyes, puffed forth a ring of smoke, and said quietly,—

"In my country, when one man strikes another the insult is washed out in blood. Your bold partner there has struck me, a weaker man than himself, and I cannot avenge the insult, for you cold islanders here boast of your courage, but you will not equalise the weak and strong by placing the sword, the knife, or the pistol in their hands. You say no; that is the law. You call in your police. Fools! cowards! do you think that will satisfy me?"

"Did Mr Pugh strike you, then?" said Mr Parkley.

"Yes, three cruel blows," hissed the Cuban, with his face distorted with rage.

"Then you must have deserved it," cried Mr Parkley.

"You think so," said the Cuban, growing unnaturally calm again. "Then I say I must have satisfaction somehow. Your partner makes me his enemy, and you must suffer. I shall not fulfil my contract. I will not take you where the galleons lie. You have made your preparations. Good. You must suffer for it, even as I suffer. I give up one of the dreams of my life. I will not go."

A pang shot through Dutch Pugh's breast, for in this refusal to depart he saw an excuse to remain in England, and once more the hot blood rose to his face.

"You absolutely refuse, then, to show Captain Studwick and me where the objects we seek are hid?" said Mr Parkley, turning up his cuffs as if he meant to fight; and the Cuban's hand went into his breast.

"I absolutely refuse," said the Cuban, disdainfully.

"You know, I suppose, that you forfeit half the result," said Mr Parkley.

"Yes," said the Cuban, moving towards the gangway, "I know I lose half the result."

"You know I have spent five thousand pounds in preparations," said Mr Parkley, calmly.

"Yes," sneered the Cuban, "and you have your law. Go to it for revenge; it may please you."

"No," said Mr Parkley, looking round at the frowning faces of his friends; "that means spending another thousand to gain the day, and nothing to be obtained of a beggarly Cuban adventurer, who has neither money nor honour."

"Take care!" cried Lauré, flashing into rage, and baring his teeth like some wild cat. But the next instant, with wonderful self-command, he cooled down, standing erect, proud and handsome, with his great black beard half-way down his breast. "Bah!" he exclaimed, "the English diving-master is angry, and stoops to utter coward's insults."

"I'll show you, Mr Lorry, that I am no coward over this," said Mr Parkley, firmly. "You mean to throw us over, then, now that we are ready to start."

"You threaten to throw me over," said the Cuban, smiling disdainfully. "If you mean, do I still refuse to go, I say yes! yes! yes! You and your partner shall never touch a single bar of the treasure. Ha! ha! What will you do now?"

"Start without you," said Mr Parkley, coolly. "Captain Studwick, see that this man goes ashore."

The Cuban was already close to the gangway, but he turned sharply round, and took a couple of steps towards the last speaker.

"What!" he said, with a look of apprehension flashing out of his eyes. "You will go yourself without one to guide you?"

"Yes," said Mr Parkley; "and if you went down on your knees now to beg me, damme, sir, you've broke your contract, and I wouldn't take you."

"Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha!" laughed the Cuban, derisively, as he quickly recovered his composure. "A beggarly threat. Do you not know that it took me five years of constant toil to make the discovery? and you talk like this!"

"Yes," said Mr Parkley. "It took a beggarly mongrel foreigner five years, no doubt; but it would not take an enterprising Englishman five weeks."

The Cuban's hand went into his breast again as he heard the words "beggarly mongrel foreigner," and Captain Studwick grasped a marlin-spike, ready to strike his arm down if he drew a weapon; but the rage was crushed down directly, and Lauré laughed again derisively.

"Go, then, fools, if you like. But I know: it is an empty threat. Ha, ha, ha! Go alone. A pleasant voyage, Señor Parkley, and you, too, Señor Captain. You will perhaps find me there before you."

"Perhaps," said Mr Parkley. "But go I will, and hang me if I come back till I have found it."

"Well, for the matter o' that, Master Parkley and Capen Studwick," said a rough voice, "if it means putting the schooner at anchor where them Spanish galleons was sunk in the Carib Sea, if you'll let me take the wheel, and you'll find fine weather, I'll steer you to the very spot."

Story 1--Chapter IX.

'Pollo's Evidence.

"What?" shrieked the Cuban, rushing forward, with outstretched hands, but only to control himself directly and smile contemptuously.

"I says as I'll clap this here schooner right over two or three spots where old ships went down, and also off the coast where one on 'em lies buried in the sand, all but her ribs and a few planks," said the old sailor, Sam Oakum.

"He's a liar—a cheat. Bah!" exclaimed the Cuban with contempt.

"I wouldn't advise you to say them sorter things, gov'nor," said Oakum, quietly. "I knowd a chap as rubbed the skin off the bridge of his nose wunst and blacked both his eyes agin my fist for saying less than that."

"Bah!" said the Cuban, snapping his fingers.

"And do you know, Oakum?" exclaimed Mr Parkley, eagerly. "Can you prove it?"

"If anybody would pass a man a bit o' 'bacco, I could, I dessay," said the old fellow quietly. "Thanky, mate. Just pass the word for 'Pollo to come aft, will you? He's in the galley."

A sailor who had given Oakum the tobacco ran forward, while all waited in breathless attention—the Cuban standing like a statue, with folded arms, but, in spite of his apparent composure, smoking furiously, like a volcano preparing for an eruption.

The sailor came back directly.

"Says he's cooking the passengers' dinner, and can't leave it, sir," said the sailor.

"Tell the cook to come here directly. I want him," exclaimed the captain, sternly; and the sailor ran off, returning with 'Pollo, the black cook, rubbing his shiny face.

"I speck, sah, if de rose meat burn himself all up, you no blame de cook, sah," he said.

"No, no, 'Pollo; only answer a question or two."

"Yes, sah; d'reckly, sah."

"Look ye here, 'Pollo, old mate," said Oakum; "you and I have had some rum voyages in our time, old nigger."

"You call me ole mate, sah," said 'Pollo, angrily, "I answer hundred tousan queshtum. You call me nigger, sah, I dam if I say noder word."

"It's all right, 'Pollo, I won't any more. You're a coloured gentleman; and, though I chaff you sometimes, I know that I can always depend on you, fair weather or foul."

The black nodded, showed his white teeth, and his eyes twinkled.

"Now look here, 'Pollo, old man; do you remember being in the little brig off Caraccas, when we had the gold?"

"Yes, sah, I membah well; and membah when we had do tree hundred lilly women aboard de big ship, and de big horse alligator woman. Yah, yah, yah!"

"So do I, 'Pollo; but what did we do when we were in the brig?"

"Catch de fish," said 'Pollo.

"To be sure we did; but what did we find lying down fathoms deep in the clear water?"

"You mean de ole 'Panish gold ship, sah?"

"There!" said Sam Oakum, turning round with a grim smile on his mahogany face; "Ain't that there corroborative evidence, sir?"

"We find two ole ship, sah, and one on de shore," said 'Pollo, volubly, "and I dibe down, sah."

"Did you find anything?" said Mr Parkley, eagerly.

"No, sah, him too deep down, but I membah perfect well, sah, all about 'em. All 'Panish ship, sah."

"That will do, 'Pollo," said Mr Parkley. "Now go and see to the dinner. By-the-way, 'Pollo, will you come into the cabin after dinner, and join Mr Oakum in drinking a glass of wine to the success of our voyage?"

"I hab great pleasure, sah," said the black, with his eyes twinkling; and as he went away bowing and smiling, Mr Parkley turned to the Cuban.

"Now, Mr Lorry, or Lauré, or whatever your name is, will you have the goodness to step ashore? This is my ship, and this expedition belongs to me and my partner. You have refused to carry out your contract before twenty witnesses, and now you see that I can do without you."

"But," said Lauré, "the man is mad. He cannot take you; but I will not carry my revenge so far. Make me a good concession and I will consent to go."

"I thank you, Señor Lauré, for endorsing the statement of our old friend, Oakum, and the ship's cook, and since you are so kind, I will make you a concession."

"You consent," said the Cuban, more eagerly than he intended.

"Yes," said Mr Parkley. "You shall be allowed to walk off the ship instead of being kicked off. Captain Studwick, see that man off this deck."

A look that was almost demoniacal overspread the Cuban's face, and shaking his fist menacingly, he stepped on to the wharf and disappeared through the crowd.

"Now, then," said Mr Parkley, triumphantly, "we are ready. Captain Studwick, westward ho! Hallo, what now? What is it, Rasp?" as that individual came panting up.

"Are you sure as you've got all your company aboard?" said Rasp.

"Yes, I think so. Eh, captain?"

"My crew is all right, certainly," said the captain. "I don't know anything about yours."

"To be sure, I did not think to look after them as they had promised to be aboard in good time. Where are John Tolly and James Morrison?"

"What, them?" said Oakum. "Oh, they came aboard at nine this morning."

"Yes," said one of the sailors, "but they went ashore again about ten; I saw 'em go."

"There," said Rasp, "where would you have been without me? I see John Tolly go by the orifice half-an-hour ago, so drunk he could hardly walk, and Morrison as well, and—"

"Tut, tut, tut! we must have them," exclaimed Mr Parkley. "The scoundrels! to deceive us like this. Pugh, come ashore, we must get the police to help us."

"Then we shall not sail to-day," said the captain, with a shrug. "Never mind, we shall have the more time for getting ship-shape."

"Nonsense!" said Mr Parkley eagerly; "we shall soon be back."

The captain shook his head, for he knew better; and night had fallen, and no more had been seen of the two divers on whom so much depended.

As the day wore on, Mr Parkley and Dutch returned to the ship two or three times to report progress, if such it could be called, for nothing was heard of the two divers.

"Dutch Pugh," said Mr Parkley, on one of these meetings, "I shall never forgive myself. Here am I, as I thought, such a business-like man, and what do I do but go and forget to look after the very mainspring of my works. I fit all my wheels together, and then when I want to wind up there's no springs. What should we have done without divers?"

Night closed in without success, and a little party assembled in the cabin, for as the ship might sail at any time, those who occupied the place of passengers felt that it was hardly worth while to return ashore. Mr Parkley kept a bright face on the matter, but it was evident that he was a good deal dispirited, though he chatted merrily enough, and talked to John Studwick and his sister of the beauties of the land they were about to visit.

"If we get off, Mr Parkley," said John Studwick, quietly.

"Get off, sir; why of course we shall. These two scoundrels will come off to-morrow morning, penniless, and with sick headaches. The rascals!"

Mr Parkley was reckoning without his host, for at that moment the two divers, each with twenty pounds in his pocket above the advance pay he had drawn, were on their way to London, and the man who had given the money was now forward in the darkest part of the deck, crouching beneath the high bulwarks of the large three-masted schooner, whispering with one of the men.

Their discussion seemed to take a long time, but it ended in the other man of the watch joining them, and the conversation still went on.

It was interrupted by the coming on deck of Captain Studwick, and silence ensued, while the captain took a turn round the deck, and gave an eye to the riding lights, for, as evening had come on, the vessel had been warped out of dock, and lay a couple of hundred yards out in the great estuary, fast to one of the buoys.

"We might have some of the lads taking a fancy to go on shore," he had said to Mr Parkley, when he complained of having to take a boat to come off; "and we shall be all the more ready to drop down with the tide. I don't want to find my crew like yours to-morrow morning—missing."

Finding all apparently quite right, and the lanterns burning, brightly, Captain Studwick took another turn round the deck, peeped down into the fore-castle, where the men were talking and smoking, then went right forward and looked over at the hawser fast to the buoy, said a word or two of warning to the men, and went below.

It was now ten o'clock, and excessively dark—so dark that it was impossible to see across the deck, and the lights

hoisted up in the rigging seemed like great stars. The buzz of conversation in the forecabin had grown much more subdued, and then suddenly ceased, though a dull buzzing murmur could be heard from the deckhouse, where the dim light of a smoky lantern, hung from the roof, shone upon the bright cooking apparatus with which the place was furnished, and upon the glistening teeth of 'Pollo, the black cook, and Oakum, the old sailor, both smoking, and in earnest converse.

"Yes, 'Pollo," said Oakum, "it seemed to bring up old times, and some of our vyges, so I thought I'd come and have a palaver before we turned in."

"I glad to see you, Mass' Sam Oakum, sah, and I hope you often gin me de pleasure ob your company during de voyage. I 'spect you, Mass' Oakum, and you always 'spect colour genlum, sah, dough we use quarrel some time."

"Only chaff, 'Pollo."

"Course it was, sah, only chaff, and nuffum at all. And now I tink ob it, sah, I hav 'plendid 'rangement here, and supply for de cooking; and when, by an' by, you find de beef too salt, and de biscuit too hard, juss you drop in here, sah, after dark, and 'Pollo most likely find lilly bit ob somefin nice leff from de cabin dinner."

"Thanky, 'Pollo, thanky," said Oakum. "But what do you say, eh ship-mate? I think we can find the old galleons again?"

"I quite 'tent, sah, to put dis ship in de hands ob such sperienced navigator as Mass' Sam Oakum, who know all ober de world quite perfect. You tink we sail in de morning?"

"If they catch them two skulking scoundrels of divers, 'Pollo. I'd just like to ropesend that Mr John Tolly. Gets three times the pay o' the other men, and is ten times as saucy."

"'Top!"

"Eh?" said Oakum.

"What dat, Mass' Oakum, sah?" said the black, whose eyes were rolling and ears twitching.

Oakum listened attentively for a few moments, and then went on.

"Nothing at all, my lad, that I could hear."

"I sure I hear somefin, sah. Let's go and see."

They both stepped out on to the deck, and stood and listened, for it was impossible for them to see, though the light from the deckhouse made them stand out plainly in view if anyone else was on the watch.

They saw nothing, for as they stepped out, a man, who was stealing aft, dropped softly down and crouched under the bulwarks.

The hawsers creaked softly as they swung in the tide, and a faint light shone up from the forecabin hatch, while from aft there was a tolerably bright glow from the cabin skylight. Here and there the riding lights of other vessels rose and fell as they were swayed by the hurrying waters, while the lights of the shore twinkled like stars on a black background, but, saving the rippling noise of the tide against the great schooner's side, all was perfectly still.

"False alarm, 'Pollo," said Oakum, leading the way back.

"No, sah," said 'Pollo, reseating himself, cross-legged, beneath the lantern. "I sure I hear somefin, sah, dough I no say what it was."

"I've often wished for you as a mate in a dark watch, 'Pollo," said Oakum, hewing off a quid of tobacco, and thrusting it into one cheek. "You would not go to sleep."

"Not ob a night, sah," said 'Pollo, complacently, "but I no so sure bout dat if de sun shine hot; I go sleep den fass enough."

They had hardly resumed their conversation when the man who had dropped down under the bulwarks rose, and went softly by the deckhouse, walking rapidly aft to the side, where he climbed over, after running his hand along and finding a rope, slid down, and took his place in a large boat already half-full.

A few moments later and another man crept softly along the deck, went over the side, and slid into the boat.

Another and another followed, and then one man who had been waiting by the forecabin hatch, instead of going aft, opened a sharp knife and crept forward to where the stout coir hawser was made fast to the buoy. It was drawn very tight, for the tide was running in fast, and a few sharp cuts would have divided the strands, with the result that the schooner would have drifted up with the current, and, if it had not fouled, and perhaps sunk some smaller vessel in its course, have run ashore.

The man listened attentively but all was still, and raising his knife he began to saw through the strands, when, rising, he shut the knife with a snap and exclaimed:

"No, hang it all, I won't. It's too bad; and there's a woman aboard. Bad enough as it is."

Then following the example of those who had gone before, he went softly aft, feeling his way along the bulwarks till

his hand came in contact with the rope, and he, too, slid down into the boat.

"Well, did you cut the great rope?" whispered a voice.

"Yes, gov'nor, all right. But not deep," added the man to himself.

"Quick then, quick then," whispered the former speaker, "undo this little rope and let the boat float away."

The boat's painter was loosened—but not without rattling the iron ring through which it was run—dropped over the side with a splash, and just faintly grating against the vessel's side the boat glided away, appearing for a few moments in the faint glow cast from the stern windows, and then seeming to pass into a bank of utter darkness.

"I no care what you say, Mass' Oakum, sah," said 'Pollo a few moments before; and his great black ears seemed to start forward like those of a hare, "I sure I hear de rattle ob a rope; and you see if dare isn't a boat under de side."

He leaped softly up, and ran on deck, followed by Oakum.

"Dere, I sure I right," whispered the black, pointing astern. "Boat full ob men."

"I can't see nowt," growled Sam. "Let's go forward and ask the look-out if they heerd anything. Hear a boat touch the side, mates?" he said aloud.

There was no answer.

"The lubbers are asleep," he cried, angrily; and hurrying to where the men should have been, he found that they were missing, and ran to the hatchway. "Below there!" he shouted. "On deck here, some of yer!"

All silent, and he lowered himself down to find a lantern burning, but not a soul there even in the bunks, the men's kits being also gone.

"Deserted, by jingo!" cried Oakum, slapping his thigh, as he began to ascend the ladder. "Here, 'Pollo, run and call the skipper."

"What's wrong?" cried Captain Studwick, from out of the darkness.

"Not a blessed man, sir, left aboard;" and the captain brought his foot down with a savage stamp upon deck.

Story 1--Chapter X.

Off at Last.

The outcry brought the doctor, Mr Wilson, and John Studwick on deck the latter panting, and evidently in a terrible state of alarm.

"Quick, father, the boat, save Bessy, don't mind me," he gasped.

"There's nothing to fear, my boy," exclaimed the captain, catching the young man's arm. "Only the men have gone ashore—forsaken the ship. Now go below. Here, you Oakum, what do you mean, you scoundrel? Where's Mr Jones?"

"Here, sir," said the mate, who had hurried from his berth. "What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" exclaimed the captain, stamping about the deck in his rage. "Why, the men have forsaken the ship. What were you about?"

"I beg pardon, Captain Studwick," said the mate, sharply; "but it was my watch below. You said you would see to the first watch with Oakum."

"So I did, so I did," cried the captain. "Here, Oakum."

"You said I could go below, Capen," said Oakum, gruffly.

"Did you know anything of this?"

"If I'd know'd anything of it, I should have come and told you," growled Oakum. "Didn't I give the alarm as soon as I know'd?"

"Yes, yes, yes," cried the captain. "There, I beg your pardon, Mr Jones. Don't take any notice, Oakum. It's enough to make any man mad. How am I to face Mr Parkley and Mr Pugh when they come off in the morning?"

"Lads on'y gone off to have a good drink, p'raps, sir," suggested Oakum.

"Drink? No. They've been got at and bribed, or persuaded not to go. The scoundrels! I'll have them before the nearest magistrate and punish them for this."

"Got to ketch 'em first," growled Oakum to himself.

"Look here, when did you find this out?" exclaimed the captain.

"When you heard me shout," said Oakum. "'Pollo here thought he heard a noise, and we came and looked."

"And I see de boat go astern wif all de men in, sah," said 'Pollo, importantly.

"It's a planned thing, or the men would not have gone off like that," said the captain. "Mark my words, John, that foreigner's at the bottom of this. Did either of you see him come near the ship?"

"I did, sah," cried 'Pollo.

"You did?" exclaimed the captain.

"Yes, sah, jus' 'fore dark I see um get in boat 'low de wharf, and two men row boat wif um."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sah, I quite sure. I see um sit in de stern wrap up in um cloak, and smoke cigar. But he nebber come nigh de ship."

"I thought as much," groaned the captain. "Here, go below, John. The night air's chilly. There's nothing the matter, my child," he continued tenderly, "only some of the crew have absconded." For just then Bessy Studwick, very quiet and trembling, had come to his side. "Well, gentlemen, I'm very sorry, but I could not help it, and now I shall have to ask you to share the watch with Mr Jones and myself. Oakum and 'Pollo, go below. Oakum, you will take the next watch with Mr Jones; Mr Meldon, or you Mr Wilson, will, perhaps, join me in the morning watch."

Both gentlemen expressed their willingness, and the night passed off without further misadventure.

Captain Studwick was quite right, for the Cuban had hovered about the schooner until darkness set in, when, watching his opportunity, he caught the attention of one of the men, who absolutely refused to listen to him at first, but as Lauré bribed higher, and vowed that it was a mad voyage, of which he had himself repented, as he would not expose the men to the risks of the deadly coast where the treasure lay, the man began to listen.

"There are fevers always on those shores, of the most deadly kind," he whispered; "and I shall feel as if I had sent a party of good British seamen to their death."

At last his words and his money began to tell. This man was won over, and when the others were brought under the persuasive ways of the Cuban, the dread of punishment for desertion was mastered by another sovereign or two, and after his last words they gave way.

"Take your choice," he had said at last; "a dog's death and your body for the sharks in that pestilent clime, or the money I give you. You can take the night train for London, have your run there, and then get a good vessel afterwards."

An additional sovereign to the man he felt most likely to be his tool made him promise to cut the hawser, and then all went well for the infamous design, except that this man repented of part of his bargain, and the crew of stout, able seamen was taken off, and landed a mile or so above where the schooner lay in the tideway.

By eight o'clock in the morning Mr Parkley and Dutch came off to announce that they had discovered through 'Pollo that when he saw Tolly and the other diver they were on their way to the station, and had taken tickets for London.

"Did you ever have worse news?" said Mr Parkley, bitterly. "It may be months before we can get others who will go, for Layman, my other man, is ill."

"Yes," said the captain, quietly.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr Parkley, aghast.

"Our friend the Cuban has seduced all the men away, and stopped the expedition."

"I'll be—No, I won't swear," exclaimed Mr

Parkley, turning red with fury. "Stopped the voyage, has he! Got my divers away, and the crew, has he! Look here, Dutch Pugh; look here, Captain Studwick. I'm a man who takes a good deal of moving, but when I do move it takes more to stop me. I'll move heaven and earth to carry this plan out, and I'll spend every sixpence I've got, but what I'll beat that scoundrel."

"You will apply to the magistrates about the men?" said the captain; "at least, shall I?"

"No," said Mr Parkley, sharply. "Might just as well commence proceedings against that scoundrel. Waste of time. Dutch Pugh, you'll stand by me?"

"Indeed I will, Mr Parkley," said Dutch, calmly, as he held out his hand.

"And I'm sure I will," exclaimed the captain.

"I knew you would," said Mr Parkley, warmly. "I'm determined now, for it's evident that that rascal will try all he can to thwart me. Come down in the cabin, and let's see what's to be done. We'll have a meeting."

They were all seated round the cabin table soon after, and the matter was discussed in all its bearings, Captain Studwick saying that he had no fear of being able to get a dozen good men in a day or two, if they were prepared to

pay pretty highly.

"Then you must pay highly," said Mr Parkley; "but look here, every step you take must be with the knowledge that this Lauré is trying to thwart you."

"I will not boast," said Captain Studwick, "but if I get a crew on board here again, I think it will take two Laurés to trick me."

"Good!" said Mr Parkley, beginning to brighten up. "What I want is to get off at once. It will be horrible to stay, for we shall be the laughing-stock of the whole town. The chaff was beginning last night."

"But about divers?" said the captain.

"Yes, there is the difficulty. It is not every man who will train for it, as it is a risky thing. Perhaps I may be able to train one or two of the men we get. At all events, go I will, and I will not be beaten."

"I'm afraid that would be but a poor chance," said Dutch, who sat there pale and troubled, but had hardly spoken.

"Don't throw cold water on it, Pugh, for Heaven's sake," cried Mr Parkley, testily.

"I do not wish to do that," said Dutch. "I wish to help you."

"Well, then," cried Mr Parkley, sharply, "I shall take old Rasp. He'll go to oblige me, old as he is; and if it is necessary I will go down myself. I've not been down for years now, but sooner than that scoundrel shall crow over me I'll do all the diving myself."

"There will be no necessity," said Dutch, quickly.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr Parkley.

"I will go with you myself," said Dutch.

"What!" cried Mr Parkley, joyfully. "You? You go with me? My dear Pugh, I shall never forget this."

He rose and grasped the young man's hand with both of his own, and his face flushed with pleasure.

"Yes," said Dutch, quietly, "I will go, and with old Rasp I think we can manage."

"Manage!" cried Mr Parkley, "why, you are a host in yourself. But look here, my dear boy. Gentlemen, you will excuse us. Come on deck."

He led the way, and Dutch followed him to the side of the schooner, where he took him by the button.

"I'm so grateful, Pugh," he exclaimed, "you can't think; but it won't do. The business would be all right with another, but I can't take you away."

"Why not?" said Dutch, sharply.

"Your poor little wife, my boy, I could never look her in the face again."

"For God's sake don't mention her," cried Dutch, passionately. "There, there," he cried, mastering himself, "you need not consider that."

"But, my dear Pugh, are you not too hasty—too ready to believe? No, no, it won't do, you misjudge her. I won't let you go. In a few days all will be well again."

"Parkley," exclaimed Dutch, hoarsely, "it will never be all right again. I speak to you as I would speak to no other man. Heaven knows how I have loved that woman. But I have no home now. I shall never see her again."

"No, no, no, don't speak like that, my dear boy. You are too rush. Come, have patience, and all will be right. You shall not go."

Dutch smiled bitterly.

"You are mad just now, but it will pass off; and look here, my dear boy, it was all my fault for getting you to take the cursed scoundrel in."

"Don't speak of it, pray," cried Dutch.

"I must, my dear boy. Now, look here. After being guilty of one wrong to that poor little woman of yours, how can I do her another by taking her husband away?"

"I am no longer her husband, and she is no longer my wife," said Dutch, sternly. "I tell you I shall go."

"No, no; I will not let you."

"I am your partner, and I shall insist upon it. Stay at home and let me take the lead in the expedition. You may trust me."

"Better than I would myself," said Mr Parkley, warmly.

"Then let me go. It will be a relief to me from the torture I have suffered these last weeks. Parkley, you cannot dream of what I have felt."

"Do you really earnestly mean all this?" said Mr Parkley, gazing in the other's troubled face.

"Mean it? Yes, it would be a real kindness."

"Time cures all wounds," said Mr Parkley, "so perhaps it will be best, and you will make arrangements for her while you are away."

"She has the house," said Dutch, bitterly, "and what money I have. I shall write to her mother to join her. Is that enough?"

Mr Parkley held out his hand, and the two men grasped each other's for a moment, and then turned back to the cabin.

"Mr Pugh goes with us, Studwick; Rasp I know will come when he hears that Mr Pugh is with us."

"Indeed," said Dutch, "I should have thought not."

"You'll see," said Mr Parkley, writing a few lines in his pocket-book and tearing off the leaf. "Now, then, about Rasp. Whom can we trust to take this ashore?"

"Let me go," said Mr Meldon, the young doctor, "I will deliver it in safety."

"You will?" cried Mr Parkley. "That's well; but mind you don't get tampered with, nor the man this is to fetch."

Mr Meldon started, being rowed ashore in a boat they hailed. The captain was ready to suspect everyone now, but in an hour old Rasp came grumbling aboard, with a huge carpet bag, which dragged him into the boat in which he came off, and nearly pulled him back into it when he mounted the side.

"Oh, yes, I'll go," he said, as soon as he encountered his employers on the deck. "Hain't got enough clean shirts, though. I allus thought that Tolly was good for nowt, and the forrener a bad un."

"And now, Rasp, I want you to go ashore again for me," said Dutch.

"I'll take him with me," said the captain, "and keep a sharp look-out. Mr Parkley is going too."

"I don't want no sharp look-outs," said Rasp, gruffly. "I can take care o' mysen'."

Rasp's mission was a simple one, namely, to purchase certain articles of outfit, for, with stern determination, the young man had set his face against revisiting his home. Moreover, as if distrustful of himself, he stayed on board, meaning to remain there for good.

The captain and mate both left for the shore, leaving Dutch in charge of the vessel, and so earnestly did they work that by nightfall they had secured six fresh men, and were hopeful of obtaining another half-dozen—all they required—by the following day.

The new-comers were of a rougher class than those who had been wiled away, but for all that they were sturdy, useful men, and, anxious as the leaders of the expedition were to start, it was no time for choosing.

That night, little thinking that every action in connection with the vessel had been closely watched with a powerful glass from the upper window of a house overlooking the estuary, Captain Studwick returned with the mate, taking the precaution to give the men plenty of liquor, and placing them under hatches for safety.

Rasp had long been back with the necessaries Dutch required, bringing with them a letter, which the young man read, tore to shreds, and then sent fluttering over the side; and at last the party, feeling hopeful of success on the morrow, retired for the night, saving such as had to keep watch.

The next day, however, brought no success; not a man of those unemployed could be induced to undertake the voyage, and to Captain Studwick's great annoyance he found that by some means the whole business of the voyage had been turned into ridicule, and the men he addressed responded to his questions with a coarse burst of laughter. With the determination, then, of sailing the next morning with the crew he had, and putting in at Plymouth with the hope of obtaining more, he returned on board, and was in the act of relating his ill-success, when Oakum hailed a boat, pulled towards them by a couple of watermen, with half-a-dozen sailors in her stern.

It was growing dark, but those on deck could make out that the men had their long bolster-like kits with them, and the captain's heart beat with joy as he heard, in answer to the hail, that the men had come from one of the sailors' boarding-houses, having arrived there that afternoon.

"Simpson's, on West Quay," said one of the watermen. "He heerd you were looking out for hands, and he gave me this."

He handed a up letter in which the boarding-house keeper asked for five pounds for securing the men and talking them into coming, and as the sailors came on deck, and proved quite willing to sign for the voyage, the money was paid and the boat pushed off.

They were not a handsome set of men, three being Englishmen, one a Dane, and the other two Lascars, one a long black-haired fellow, the other a short-haired, closely-shaven man, with a stoop, and a slight halt in one leg. He was

nearly black, and did not look an attractive addition to the party; but the men declared he was an old ship-mate, and a good hand, evidently displaying an inclination, too, to refuse to go without him, so he was included.

"I think we can set our friend at defiance now," said the captain, rubbing his hands as the men went below.

"I don't know," said Mr Parkley. "He's one of those treacherous, cunning scoundrels that will steal a march on us when it is least expected. It's a fine night, and not so very dark; the tide serves; so what do you say to dropping down at once, and putting a few miles of sea between us and our friend?"

"The very thing I should have proposed," said the captain; "and, what's more, I say make all sail for our port, in case our friend should charter a fresh vessel and be before us."

"He would not get the divers."

"No, perhaps not; but he might make up a party who could overhaul and plunder us. I shall not be happy till we are well on the way."

"Good, then, let's make our start. It will astonish Pugh when he comes up from his berth to find us full-handed and well on our way."

"Is he lying down, then?" said the captain.

"Yes, I persuaded him to go, as he was the watch again to-night. The fellow is ill with worry and anxiety, and we can't afford to have him knocked up. You'll start, then, at once."

"In a quarter of an hour or so," said Captain Studwick. "Here's a large barque coming up, and we may as well let her clear us first."

Giving the word to the mate, the first half-dozen men were called up, and a couple of sails made ready for hoisting, so as to give steerage way, and the motions of the dimly-seen barque were watched.

"I don't want her to run foul of us," said the captain, "for if she did, I should be ready to swear that it was one of the Cuban's plans."

"Hardly," replied Mr Parkley. "If any fresh hindrance is to come to us, it will be from the shore. If you take my advice, you will not let a boat approach the ship to-night."

"I don't mean to," said the captain. "All right, she'll give us a pretty good wide berth. Hallo! What's that?" he said, crossing over to port.

"Boat from the shore, sir," said one of the men; and at the same moment came a hail out of the darkness.

"Ahoy there! Heave us a rope."

Oakum stepped forward, and was about to cast a rope down, when the captain stayed him.

"What is it?" he said sharply. "Keep off, or you may have something through your planks;" and as he spoke he peered down into the boat. "Here, Jones, keep a sharp look-out on the other side, and see that no boat comes up."

"Is that Captain Studwick?" said a woman's voice.

"Yes, and what then?" said the captain. "Now, it won't do. The trick's too clear. How many have you in that boat?"

"No one but myself," replied the same voice. "Pray, pray let me come on board."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" exclaimed the captain. "Quick! I've no time to waste."

"Let her come on board," cried Mr Parkley, hastily. "Don't you know her?" he whispered; "it's Mrs Pugh." Then leaning over the side—"Hester, my child, is that you?"

"Yes," was the hoarse reply. "Mr Parkley, for Heaven's sake, take me on board."

"There, I told you so," exclaimed Mr Parkley; "let down the steps."

"I tell you it's some ruse of that cursed Cuban," cried the captain, angrily. "If you give way we shall be stopped again. Keep that boat off below there."

"No, no!" cried Mr Parkley. "Stop. Studwick, I take the responsibility on myself. Oakum, lower the steps, and throw that rope."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the old sailor. "Am I to do it?" he continued to the captain.

"Yes, if he wishes it," was the testy reply; and then in a low voice he said to the mate, "Slip the hawser, and haul up the jib and staysail. I'm going to the wheel."

His orders were rapidly executed, and the long, graceful vessel began almost imperceptibly to move through the water.

"If it is any trick," said the captain, as he went aft to the man he had stationed at the wheel, "it shall take place at

sea. What's that?"

He turned back instantly, for at that moment what sounded like a slight scuffle was heard by the gangway he had left.

Story 1--Chapter XI.

In Bessy's Cabin.

So determined was Captain Studwick not to be lightly trifled with that a pistol was in his hand as he ran back to the side, but his alarm was unnecessary, for the scuffling noise was caused merely by Mr Parkley catching their visitor as she tottered and nearly fell on the deck.

"Let me see my husband, Mr Parkley," she moaned, "for pity's sake let me see my husband. If I saw him and spoke to him, he would listen to me."

"But, my dear child," began Mr Parkley.

"I shall die if I do not see him," she moaned again. "I have been so ill—I have suffered so much, and this evening the news came that he was going away—away without seeing me. Oh, God, what have I done that I should suffer so!"

"My dear child—my dear Mrs Pugh."

"I must see him—pray, pray take me to him," she sobbed, "it is more than I can—more than I can bear."

Mr Parkley caught her again just in time, for she swooned away, and laying her upon the deck he tried hard to restore her. Then looking up he became aware that the lights of the town were fast receding.

"Why, Studwick," he exclaimed, "the schooner's moving."

"Yes," said the captain.

"But the boat this poor girl came off in?"

"Ashore by this time."

"But we can't take her. Hang it, man, we cannot have domestic differences on board. She must go back."

"We must now land her at Plymouth," said the captain. "Send for my Bessy, man, she will soon bring her to. How foolish of the little woman to come aboard."

"Shall I fetch the young lady, sir?" said Sam Oakum gruffly, as he stood with a look of disgust upon his face.

"Yes, for goodness' sake, do. Quick!" exclaimed Mr Parkley, whose efforts to restore animation were all in vain.

Just as Sam went aft, though, Mrs Pugh began to revive, stared wildly about, and sitting up saw the captain bending over her.

"Captain Studwick," she cried, catching his hand and drawing herself upon her knees to cling to him, "don't send me back—don't send me away. Let me go too. I could not bear to part from my husband like this. He is angry with me," she whispered, "I cannot tell you why, but he has not spoken to me for days, and I have been so—so ill."

"Yes, yes, you shall see him, my dear, but stand up. You must not make a scene."

"Oh no," she exclaimed, rising hastily, "I will do anything you say, only let me see him and explain. Let me go with you. If I could talk to him he would believe me, and all would be well again. If not," she said with a hysterical cry, "I shall go mad—I shall go mad."

"Come, let me take you below," said the captain, for she was clinging tightly to his arm.

"Yes, yes," whispered the poor trembling woman. "I could not help that; I am trying so hard to be calm, but my poor breast is so care-laden that a cry would escape. Let me go with you, Captain Studwick. I will be so quiet—so careful."

"It is impossible, my dear child," he said in a husky voice, for her agony affected him.

"No, no, don't say that; I will help Bessy nurse your poor son. She loves me, and believes in me, and I will give no trouble. If you set me ashore I shall die of grief. I cannot live to be separated from my husband—for him to leave me like this."

"Well, well, well, I'll see what I can do," said the captain in the quieting way that one would speak to a child; but she peered instantly into his face.

"You are deceiving me," she cried. "You are trying to calm me with promises, and you mean to set me ashore. Mr Parkley," she wailed, turning to him, "you know me, and believe in me: you know the cause of this trouble. Take me to my dear husband, and help me to drive away this horrible belief of his, or I shall die."

"My dear child—my dear child," he said, drawing her to him, "I will try all I can."

"But you will set me ashore again when I strove so hard to get to him. I was so ill in bed, and he has not been near me. I found out that you were taking Dutch from me, and I could not stay. Let me see him—oh, let me see him!"

"You shall, my dear, as soon as you are calm."

"But he is here," she whispered, not daring to raise her voice lest, in her excited state, it should get the mastery over her, and she should burst forth in hysterical wails.

"Yes, my child, he is here. He is asleep below."

"Poor Dutch!" she whispered to herself; and then with a faint, weary smile she laid her hands in those of her old friend. "There, you can see how calm and patient I will be," she continued. "No one shall suspect any trouble. I will be so quiet and patient, and if he will not listen to me, I will not complain, so long as I am near him—only wait till God changes his heart towards me."

"There, then, you shall stay—till we get to Plymouth," exclaimed Mr Parkley, hastily passing his hand across his eyes. "Don't let the men see that anything's the matter, my dear."

"No: oh, no," she replied. "I'm quite calm now. Ah, here's Miss Studwick."

"You here, Mrs Pugh!" exclaimed the captain's daughter, who believed that she was coming to her father.

"Yes, I could not stay," sobbed Hester. "I was obliged to come. Oh, Bessy, dear Bessy, don't shrink from me," she wailed, as the men gladly drew away and left them together.

"Hush! don't say a word here," said Bessy, glancing round, and speaking hoarsely; "come down to my cabin."

Hester tottered, and would have fallen, but Bessy caught her arm and led her below, where, as soon as they were alone, the former fell upon her knees, and held up her hands, catching those of Bessy as she stood before her.

"Listen to me, Miss Studwick," she moaned. "Don't condemn me unheard. I thought you believed in me, but you shrank from me just now."

Bessy did not speak, but gazed down on the sobbing woman with a look of pity.

"My dear husband has allowed cruel suspicions to creep into his heart, and he wrongs me—he does, indeed. Oh, Bessy, Bessy, you loved him once, I know, I know you did, and you must have hated me for taking his love from you."

A low sigh burst from Bessy's breast, but she did not speak.

"You know," sobbed Hester, "how true and noble and frank he is."

"I do," said Bessy softly.

"Then, what would the woman be who could betray him, even in thought? Would she not be the vilest, the most cruel of wretches?"

"She would, indeed," said Bessy coldly.

"Bessy—Miss Studwick," cried Hester, with a low wail of misery, "if I have committed any sin it is that of loving my dear husband too well. God—God knows how innocent I am. Oh! it is too hard to bear."

She sank lower on the cabin floor, weeping silently, but only by a great effort, for the heavy sobs kept rising to her lips, and in her agony the intense desire to obtain relief in uttering loud cries was almost more than she could master.

Bessy stood looking down upon her with brows knit and lips pressed together, for her heart whispered to her that this was a judgment on this woman, who had robbed her of her love, and that she ought to rejoice over her downfall. Then, too, the thought came that, this idol fallen, she might, perhaps, herself be raised up in its place, and a flash of joy irradiated her mind, but only for a moment. Then her better nature prevailed, and bending down she lifted the prostrate woman with ease, and laid her upon the couch-like locker that filled one side of the cabin, kneeling down beside her, and drawing the dishevelled head upon her bosom.

"Hester," she whispered, "I did hate you, very, very bitterly, as intensely as I once loved Dutch Pugh; but all that is passed. When I came to your house, and began to know you better, I used to go home and kneel down and pray for his happiness with you, while, when I heard of his trouble, my hatred began to fight its way back, so that the last day or two I have felt ready to curse you for the wreck you have made."

"Oh, no, no, no," sobbed Hester, clinging to her; "I am innocent."

"Yes, I know and believe that now," said Bessy; "and I will help you to win him back to the same belief."

"But you will bring him to me quickly, or they will set me ashore," wailed Hester, clinging tightly to her companion as she uttered a sigh of relief. "If I could but stay only to see him sometimes, and know that he was safe, I should wait then patiently until he came to me and told me that all this dreadful dream was at an end."

"And you believe that he will do this?"

"Believe!" cried Hester, starting up, and gazing full at her companion. "Oh, yes, I believe it. It may be long first, but the time will come, and I can wait—I can wait—I can wait."

She sank back quite exhausted as she repeated the last words again and again in a whisper, the last time almost inaudibly; and then, holding Bessy Studwick's hand tightly clasped to her bosom, her eyes closed, and she sank into the deep sleep of exhaustion, the first sleep that had visited the weary woman for three nights; while, as the light from the cabin lamp fell athwart her pretty troubled face, Bessy knelt there watching her, passing her soft white hand across the forehead to sweep away the tangled locks. Then as the time wore on, and the rippling, plashing noise of the water against the ship grew louder, and the footsteps on the deck less frequent, she listened for the catching sighs that escaped at intervals from the sleeping young wife's lips, her own tears stealing gently down from time to time, as Hester murmured more than once the name of which she had herself loved to dream.

"Poor Dutch! and he might have felt the same trouble, perhaps about me," thought Bessy, as she bent over and kissed Hester's cheek, to feel the sleeping woman's arms steal round her neck for a moment, and then glide softly down again.

"No, no, it could not be true," she whispered again, as she knelt there watching hour after hour for Hester to awake, till her own head sank lower and lower, and at last she fell asleep by the suffering woman's side.

Story 1--Chapter XII.

The Doctor's Decree.

As the morning broke bright and clear, the large three-masted schooner was running down the Channel under easy sail, and the men were beginning to fall into their places, though all was at present rather awkward and strange. Captain Studwick and Mr Parkley had gone below, congratulating themselves on having succeeded so far, and placed themselves out of the reach of Lauré's machinations, while Mr Jones, the mate, had taken charge, and was now pacing the deck in company with Dutch, who was trying hard to master his pain by throwing his whole soul into the adventure.

In spite of himself, though, a little suffering face constantly presented itself before him; and again and again he found his conscience smiting him, and charging him with cruelty in forsaking his wife—asking him, too, if he was sure that his suspicions were just.

At such times he recalled the shadows on the blind, set his teeth, and thought of Lauré's sneering laugh of triumph, and then his blood seemed to boil up, and it was only by a strong effort that he was able to master the agony he felt, mingled as it was with a desire for revenge.

"If I don't get to work at something," he muttered, "I shall go mad."

Just then the sun rose bright and clear, sending a flood of wondrous radiance over the dancing waters, flecking the distant land with golden radiance and dark shadows, while the soft mists gradually rose higher and higher, gleaming like transparent silver, as they floated over woodland and down.

"I wonder whether I shall ever see you again," muttered Dutch to himself, as he leaned over the bulwark, and gazed at the beautiful panorama by which they were swiftly gliding; and then, turning away with a sigh, he came full upon the dark-skinned mulatto sailor, busily coiling down a rope, and Dutch started slightly, half feeling that he had seen the lowering countenance before, but the man paid no heed to him, only went on with his task with his tarry hands, and finally limped off to another part of the vessel.

Just then Captain Studwick and Mr Parkley came on deck, talking earnestly, and when he went forward to shake hands they looked troubled, and there was an air of constraint in their manner that he could not understand.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, with an affectation of ease which he did not feel, "we are out of our troubles now."

"I don't know so much about that," said Mr Parkley. "Eh, Studwick?"

"No," said the captain, "I don't know either."

"Why, what do you mean?" said Dutch, and his eye involuntarily fell upon the dark-skinned sailor, who was close at hand. "You don't suspect that the Cuban can interfere now?"

"You'd better tell him," whispered Mr Parkley.

"No, no, you tell him," said the captain uneasily, "known him longer, and so on."

"What are you whispering about?" exclaimed Dutch. "Pray speak out."

Mr Parkley looked at the captain for help, but he began to whistle, and walked away to give an order.

"Well, my dear Pugh, the fact is," said Mr Parkley, taking hold of his special button.

"Pray go on," exclaimed Dutch, "not anything serious?"

"N-no, not serious, but awkward. The fact is your wife came on board last night."

"My wife!" exclaimed Dutch, and a flash of joy lit up his face. Then the sombre cloud overshadowed it again, and he exclaimed bitterly, "I have no wife," and walked away.

"Well, my lad," said Captain Studwick sharply, for the mulatto had ceased working, and, half bent down as he was,

stood listening intently to all that passed, "you've nothing to do with what those gentlemen are saying."

The man made a deprecating motion with his hand and bent to his work again.

"We may as well understand each other at once," said the captain sharply. "Stand up."

The mulatto stood up, but in a half-averted way, and displayed a curious sinister expression, caused by what appeared to be a scar across his cheek, while his eyes seemed shifty and unable to meet the speaker's gaze.

"What is your name?"

"Tonio," said the mulatto.

"Well, Tonio, mind this: You are engaged here for good pay. I always see that my men are well supplied in their mess, and, in return, I expect smart work and strict obedience. Do you understand?"

"Yes, captain," said the man, in a tone half sulky, half-full of humiliation.

"That will do. Now go and help that fellow to take a pull at the jib."

The man went limping off, but with great alacrity, passing Dutch, who came back looking very stern and angry.

"Captain Studwick, I must ask you to put in at Plymouth. Mr Parkley, she must be set ashore."

"But, my dear boy, had you not better see her first. I'm—I'm afraid she will object to go without."

"No," said Dutch sternly, and he gazed at both in turn. "She must be set ashore as soon as possible."

Captain Studwick walked forward again, whistling, and then pulling out his glass he took a look at a fast steamer astern.

"Parkley," said Dutch, as soon as they were alone, "I could not say it before him, but I have not the manly strength to see her. I am weak as water, and I could not bear to see her agony. Tell her," he added with his lower lip working, "that I forgive her, and will pray for her, but I can never see her again."

"But, my dear Pugh, you must—"

"Good morning, gentlemen," said a voice that made them start; and turning sharply round, it was to find Mr Meldon, the young doctor. "I wanted to see you, Mr Pugh."

"To see me?"

"Yes, about Mrs Pugh. You know she came on board last night."

"Yes, I know," said Pugh, coldly.

"She must have left her sick bed to come and see you, I suppose. It was a very ill-advised course, for she was ill."

"Yes," exclaimed Dutch, with an eagerness he could not conceal.

"And I am sorry to say that she is now in a high state of fever."

"Fever!"

"Yes, and quite delirious."

"We must put back, then," exclaimed Dutch. "She must be set ashore—taken home."

"I should not like to take the responsibility of having her moved," said the doctor. "If you will take my advice, you will let her remain."

"Let her remain?" gasped Dutch. "Impossible!"

"No," said the doctor, smiling; "the removal is impossible."

"Is she in danger?"

"Not necessarily now; but she would be in great danger if moved. I'm afraid I must ask you to leave her to me. It is fortunate that I was on board, and that she has so good a nurse with her as Miss Studwick."

Dutch essayed to speak, but no words came, and drawing in his breath as if in intense pain he walked to the side and stood with his head resting upon his hand, looking out to sea, and wondering how this tangle was to be ended.

"Poor fellow! he seems a good deal cut up about it," said Mr Meldon, who was a dark, earnest-looking man of three or four-and-thirty.

"Yes," said Mr Parkley. "She was to have gone ashore at Plymouth."

"Ha?" said Meldon. "Poor young thing. Great trouble about parting from her husband."

"Ye-es," said Parkley. Then, to turn the conversation, he said with a smile, "Lucky thing for us bachelors, Mr Meldon. We never have to trouble our heads about the women."

"N-no," said the doctor, looking sharply at his companion, with a broad red stain of blood suffusing his cheeks. "Quite a novelty, though, a voyage with ladies on board. He didn't hear me," he continued, as Mr Parkley obeyed a sign from the captain to come and have a look through his glass at the steamer astern.

"No, sir, he's gone to have a good look at that steamer, as seems as if she meant to overhaul us," said Sam Oakum; "but I heard you, and you're right."

"Let's see, you are the second mate, aren't you, Mr Oakum?"

"Sir, to you, I am," said Oakum.

"But what do you mean by being right?" said the doctor with a smile.

"'Bout having ladies on board, sir. I know I've been voyages before with women aboard twice or three times mayhap, and no good can come of it."

"Ah, you're a croaker, I see," said the doctor, nodding and laughing. "Your liver's out of order."

"Hope I am, sir; and as to my liver, I don't believe I've got one, leastways I can't say as I knows I've one. Ay, ay, sir, coming."

He trotted forward to obey a call from the captain, and more sail was hoisted, the steamer still overhauling them, and both the captain and Mr Parkley watched her intently, fully expecting to find that this was some new trick of the Cuban, but to the satisfaction of all concerned it proved a false alarm, and the schooner continued her way onwards towards the west.

It soon became evident, even to the greatest doubter, that the doctor was in the right, and, accepting it as fate that Hester must remain on board, Dutch devoted himself to the preparations for their cruise, rather avoiding the cabins when possible, and dividing his time between reading to the invalid John Studwick, and long talks with old Sam Oakum about the coast and the places where he swore the old plate-ships lay.

"Lor' bless you, Mr Pugh, sir, and you, Mr Parkley," Oakum said one day, when Land's End had long been left behind, and all was open water, "I'm as sure of the place as can be. I remember all the bearings, too, so well. Don't you be skeart about that; I'll take you, sure enough."

"Well, Oakum, we are going to trust you," said Mr Parkley, "and if you lead us to success you shall not go unrewarded."

"I don't want no reward, sir," said the old man gruffly. "If it turns up trumps, you give me a pound or two o' bacco, and I shall be satisfied."

Mr Parkley laughed, and after a time left them together, Dutch seeming to find solace in the old sailor's company as, in a grumbling way, he began to talk about the state of those on board.

"Seems to me, sir, as it warn't wise to bring that there poor fellow aboard here, just to die and be wrapped in a hammock, for a sailor's funeral: he's allus in your way, and gives a fellow low spirits to see. Look at that steward as the skipper must have, just as if we wanted a steward when we've got 'Pollo, as is as good a cook as ever came to. Great fat fellow to go walloping down just when I wanted some rope coiled down, and set to blubbering like a great gal because he's left his wife behind."

Dutch winced slightly, and turned away to light a cigar.

"By-the-way, sir, how's your missus?" said Oakum.

"Better, decidedly," said Dutch shortly.

"Glad on it, sir. Not as I likes women aboard; but I don't want 'em to be ill. Good job we've got the doctor here, to see as everybody takes his salts and senny reg'lar; but what in the world the skipper meant by shipping that great long chap, Mr Wilson, for I don't know. He won't go into one o' your soots, Mr Dutch, I know."

"Oh, no," said Dutch, smiling; "he's a naturalist, and going to collect birds."

"And take 'em out too, sir. He is a long-legged 'un. Why, I see him hit his head twiced up agen the cabin ceiling, and he's allus knocking his hat out o' shape. Nattalist, eh? Well, he's about the unnattalist-shaped chap I ever see, and all corners. It's my opinion, sir, as when he was made Natur begun him for a geerarf, and when she'd done his legs altered her mind and turned him into a man. You don't mind me going on talking, sir?"

"No, Oakum, I like it," said Dutch, though he hardly took in a word.

"Well, sir, he's got a couple of cages full of birds, robins, and sparrers, and starnels, and all sorts, as he says he's going to set free out in South Amerikee, and bring back the cages full of other sorts."

"Naturalists have queer ideas, Oakum," said Dutch, moving himself. "But about this place we are going to. The sea is always calm, you say?"

"'Cept in stormy times, sir, when, of course, she gets a bit thick. But there, don't you worry about that; we'll take you

right to the spot, and lay you just where you can have the long-boat out with the pumps and traps, or maybe even get the schooner anchored right over the place, and you and Master Rasp there can go down and crowbar the gold and silver out in heaps."

"But suppose some one has been there before us," said Dutch.

"Not they, sir: first place, no one knows of it 'cept that furren gentleman; second place, where's the air-pumps and divers' togs, to go down and get at it? I get wondering now why I never thought of a trip out there, after being with Capen Studwick here, but I never did. And now, sir, if you'll give me a light I'll have a quiet smoke."

Dutch took out a match-box, and was going to light up, but Oakum held up his hand to command silence; and before the young man could make out what he was about to do, he stepped softly to the side, where a large tarpaulin covered one of the boats lying in its chocks, gave one end of the cover a sharp snatch, and the mulatto started up.

"Now then, out o' that," said the old sailor, menacingly. "If you want a caul, just you take it below in your bunk."

The man bent his head, as he leaped lightly out, gave Oakum a curious look from beneath his half-closed eyelids, and then limped forward.

"I don't like the looks o' that chap, Mr Dutch. He's one o' the sort, that if you hit him, he'd out with a knife and sheath it in a man's ribs. That chap was listening, that's what he was a-doing, though he pretended to be asleep. I don't like the look on him, nor of some more o' them as come aboard with him, and if the skipper don't look out there'll be mischief."

"I'm afraid you are given to prophesying evil, Oakum," said Dutch, with a smile.

"Well, sir, I on'y says what I thinks, but, mind you this: if we get back safe, I shall be surprised, for never yet, when I've gone out to sea with petticoats on board have we got back without an accident."

"Nonsense, man."

"'Taint nonsense, sir; it's fate," said Oakum, "and what's more, look here, I ain't a sooperstitious man, but the speerits o' them sailors as was lost in the olden times along o' the treasure ships ain't a-going to let us get hold o' what they've been watching all those hundreds o' years without making a bit of a how-de-do."

Story 1--Chapter XIII.

The Captain's Suspicions.

The next day it came on to blow—and for quite a week tempestuous weather set in, the schooner skimming along almost under bare poles, but progressing well on her voyage. Captain Studwick had some trouble with his men, but on the whole they were pretty good sailors, and his strict discipline kept them well to their work, so that, from showing at first a little insubordination, they went pretty willingly to their duties.

On the tenth day out, the sun rose over a sea just rippled by a pleasant breeze. The men were busy drying clothes, and all the ports and hatches were well open, and as the day wore on Mrs Pugh, looking very weak and pale, came on deck, leaning on Bessy Studwick's arm, the latter leading her to where Dutch was talking to Mr Parkley.

Dutch started as he saw them coming up, then, bowing coldly, he walked to the other side of the deck to where John Studwick was sitting, impatiently watching his sister; and as soon as he saw Mr Parkley lead Mrs Pugh to a seat, he called to Bessy sharply to come to him, keeping her jealously by his side, as he saw Mr Wilson and the doctor come up and begin walking up and down, and frowning as they both raised their hats, and smiled at his sister.

"I wish you would not notice these men, Bessy," he exclaimed in an impatient whisper.

"I only bowed courteously to them, John dear," she said sadly; "and I will not speak to them if you do not wish it."

"I don't like it," he said, hastily. "Come and read to me."

She glanced across at Hester Pugh, and saw her white lips working as her eyes followed her husband, and then, taking up a book, began to read to her brother.

"Look at that, Bob," said one of a little group of men, busy overhauling a large sail which had been split during the late gale.

"Yes, he looks bad enough," said another. "A couple more days like we've had would about finish him."

"Get out," said the other; "I don't mean him, I meant the gal."

"Yes, she ain't bad to look at," said the first. "That's her as Oakum was talking about."

"That it warn't," said the other; "'twas the little pale one."

"Just you two get on with that sail, will you," said a gruff voice behind them; "and leave the women passengers alone."

One of the men looked across at the other, and grinned, and they went on with their work, while Sam Oakum walked

grumbling forward.

"I wish they wouldn't have no women aboard," he muttered half aloud.

"Why not?" said the doctor, who overheard him, and, facing round, Sam found him standing there with the tall young naturalist, whom the men, with their tendency at sea to nickname everyone, had christened Pigeons.

"Why not?" growled Oakum, scowling across at old Rasp, between which two a deep dislike had sprung up. "Because—though someone here as I won't name will contradict every word I says—they ain't no good. They sets the men talking about 'em instead of doing their work; they consooms the stores; they causes the ship to be littered with green stuff and fresh meat; and, what with them and invalids, my deck's always in a mess. Why here's a cow and chickens, and a goat and ducks, and 'Pollo milking every morning to get some thin blue stuff like scupper washings, and the whole place turned into a farm-yard, and all because of the women. Blame 'em! I wish there warn't one on the face of the blessed earth."

"Hear him," said one of the two sailors who had just spoken; "hear him, Bob," for they were dragging the sail aft as Oakum spoke. "He was crossed in love when he was green."

"Women's right enough at times," said Bob, a dull heavy fellow, with a dreadful squint, one of those distortions of the eyes which cause the owner to look behind his nose, which in this case was a very thick one. "I'm right sorry for that little one there, though, for she seems mighty bad."

"Let me introduce one of our protectors to you, Miss Studwick," said the doctor, stopping by where she sat, book in hand.

John Studwick gave an impatient twist in his chair.

"This is Mr Oakum, the second mate, a gentleman who is a confirmed hater of your sex."

"No I arn't," said Sam gruffly; "I only said as ladies hadn't no business on board ships, even if they is captain's daughters. They only get listening by accident to people's tongues going a deal too fast and free."

"That's meant for me, I suppose," said the doctor, laughing. "Never mind, Oakum, we shall not quarrel. I think you'll like Oakum, Mr Studwick."

"Thank you," said the young man, sharply, "but I only take your medical advice, Mr Meldon. Come, Bessy, it's chilly here."

"But the sun is getting warmer every moment, John," said his sister, gently. "I think you will be all the better for staying on deck."

"I'm sure you will," said the doctor, smiling, and passing on.

"I'm sure I shall not," exclaimed the invalid, pettishly, while his eyes looked jealously and brightly at the young doctor. "Take me below, Bessy. There—I can walk; come along. Mr Oakum is right—men's tongues do go too freely here."

Bessy looked at him sadly, and then smiling pleasantly as he raised his eyes, walked with him to the cabin door.

"I hope you will not take any notice of my son's sharp remarks, doctor," said Captain Studwick, overtaking the two young men, for he had heard what had passed.

"Not I, indeed, captain," said the doctor, frankly. "I think I understand what it means, and I should be a poor student of human nature if I visited his petulance upon him. We shall be the best of friends before long, I'll be bound."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said the captain, gloomily, "for it's quite possible that we may need to hold well together before our trip is over."

"Do you anticipate any danger, captain?" said Wilson, turning pale.

The captain hesitated, and then said—

"Voyages are always dangerous—that's all."

"He means more than he says," thought the doctor; and he followed the captain with his eyes as he went forward, stopped, and spoke a few words to Hester and Mr Parkley, who were still sitting together, and then joined Dutch, who was, according to his wont, gazing over the bulwark far out to sea.

"Pugh," he said, holding out his cigar-case, for several of the men were standing about, and he thought it better not to seem to be making a communication, "I've got something on my mind, and of all the men on board you are the one I have chosen to make my confidant."

Dutch's eyes brightened, and he turned to the captain eagerly.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"Nothing—only listen. Perhaps this is only a mare's nest; but I've had so much to do with men, that I am rather a keen observer."

"Is there any danger—anything wrong?" exclaimed Dutch, glancing involuntarily towards his wife.

"Danger or no danger," replied the captain, "life is very uncertain, and if you will excuse me for saying it, I don't think you would like to die, or see her die,"—he nodded in the direction of the spot where Hester was sitting—"without clasping hands once more."

Story 1--Chapter XIV.

A Man Overboard.

Dutch turned pale as ashes, and closed his eyes for a few moments; then turning an angry look upon the captain, he exclaimed—

"You have no right to intrude in this way upon my private feelings, Captain Studwick."

"Not, perhaps, between man and man, Pugh; but I speak as one who would give all he has to recall his poor wife, who died while he was at sea, after parting from her in anger."

"For heaven's sake, be silent!" panted Dutch, grasping his arm.

"She looks, poor little woman," continued the captain, paying no heed to his appeal, "as if a few weeks' neglect from you will kill her."

"I cannot, I will not listen to you," said Dutch, hoarsely, and with the veins in his temples swelling.

"I will say no more about that, then," said the captain, "but confide to you what I wish to say."

"Go on."

"Well, I may be wrong, but I have been trying to think it out ever since we started, and I have said nothing to Parkley because I am so uncertain."

"I do not understand you," said Dutch, looking at him curiously.

"I hardly understand myself," replied the captain; "but I will try to explain. In the first place, you or we have made a deadly enemy in our Cuban acquaintance."

"Undoubtedly," exclaimed Dutch.

"One who would do anything to serve his ends—to stop us from getting to the place Oakum professes to know."

"I am sure he would."

"He would atop us at any cost."

"If he could; but we were too quick for him, and he has not stopped us."

"That's what troubles me."

"How troubles you? Why should that cause uneasiness?" said Dutch.

"Because he strikes me as being a man of such diabolical ingenuity that he would have found, if he had wished, some means of circumventing us before we started; and hence, as you know, I have carefully scanned every ship we neared, or steamer that passed us."

"Yes, I know all that," said Dutch, growing excited; "but we have been too much for him."

"I fear not," said Captain Studwick.

"Then you think we are in danger from him still?"

"I do, and that he would not stop at murder, or sinking the ship, to gain his ends."

"I believe not," said Dutch, moodily. "But you have found out something?"

"Not yet."

"You know of something, then, for certain?"

"Not yet."

"Speak, man," exclaimed Dutch, impatiently. "You torture me with your riddles. What is it you think?"

"Don't speak so loud," said the captain; "and don't look round and start when I tell you, but smoke quietly, and seem like me—watching those bonito playing below."

Dutch nodded.

"Go on," he said in a low voice.

"I will explain, then," said the captain. "But first I believe this: we have not been stopped or overtaken by Lauré, because—"

"Because what?"

"We have the danger we shunned here on board."

In spite of the feelings that had troubled him, the deep fervent love for his wife asserted itself at the words of Captain Studwick, and Dutch Pugh made a step in her direction, as if to be ready to protect her from harm, before he recollected himself, and recalled that there could be no immediate danger.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed then, eagerly.

"That's a larger one than I've seen yet," said the captain, pointing with his cigar down into the clear water. "Oakum, ask Mr Jones to get up the grains, and let any of the men who like try to strike a few of the fish."

"Ay, ay, sir," exclaimed Oakum.

"Didn't I warn you to be quiet?" said the captain. "Our safety and success depend on keeping our enemy in ignorance that we suspect him."

"I beg pardon," said Dutch, taking his double-glass from its case, adjusting it, and watching the fish play about; by its help seeing them swimming together, rising, diving, and chasing one another through the water, which was of all shades, from the faintest aquamarine and pale turquoise to the richest, deepest sapphire blue. "I am impulsive; but I will control myself. Go on. Whom do you suspect?"

"That Cuban, of course."

"But he is two thousand miles away."

"Possibly, but his influence is with us."

"What do you think, then?"

"There's a much finer one still," cried the captain, pointing to an albacore, which kept pace exactly with the schooner, as she careened over to the soft breeze and surged through the sparkling water. "No one."

"Yes, I see him," said Dutch, aloud. "But you think that Lauré has emissaries on board?"

"May be yes, may be no. Lend me your glass, Mr Pugh. Thanks."

"Pray be a little more explicit. What do you think, then?"

"I hope they will strike a few of these fellows," said the captain, returning the glass. "I can get on better without it, thank you. Look here, Pugh," he said, in a lower tone, "I am all suspicion, and no certainty. One thing is certain—those treasures have an existence; the Cuban's acts prove that, and he will never let us get the spoil if he can prevent it. The colours of those fish are magnificent," he said, aloud, as the mulatto limped by. "The ladies ought to come and look at them. Every act of that man," he continued, "that I saw, proved him to be a fellow of marvellous resource and ingenuity."

"Yes," said Dutch, nodding, with his eyes to the binocular.

"And unscrupulous to a degree."

Dutch nodded again.

"If the *Wave* was a steamer, instead of a fast three-masted schooner, it's my impression that we should have gone to the bottom before now."

"How? Why?"

"He would have had a few sham lumps of coal conveyed into the bunkers—hollow pieces of cast iron, full of powder or dynamite; one or two would have been thrown into the furnace in firing, and the poor vessel would have had a hole blown in her, and gone to the bottom before we knew what was the matter."

"Diabolical!" exclaimed Dutch, below his breath.

"Oh, here is the grains," said the captain, as Oakum came along with an implement something like an eel spear, or the trident Neptune is represented as carrying, except that in this case, instead of three, it was furnished with five sharp barbed teeth, and a thin, strong cord was attached to the middle of the shaft. "Would you like to try?" he continued, turning to Tonio, who stood close at hand.

"Yes, I'll try," said the mulatto, in a guttural voice.

"Let him have the grains, Oakum," said the captain, to the great disappointment of several of the men. "These fellows are, some of them, very clever this way."

The mulatto eagerly took the spear, fastened the cord around his wrist, and, followed by several of the men, went forward to the bowsprit, climbed out, and, descending, stood bare-footed on one of the stays, bending down with the weapon poised ready to dart it at the first likely fish that came within range.

"I am all impatient to hear more," said Dutch, still watching the fish that played about in the blue water.

"And I am all impatient to find out more," said the captain; "but we must be patient."

"Then you know nothing?"

"Nothing whatever. I only feel sure that the Cuban is at work, trying to checkmate us; and, of course, I suspect. Now, I want your help."

"Of course," replied Dutch, both speaking more freely, for the attention of all was taken up now with the scene being enacted in the bows of the swift craft. "I feel sure that you must be right; but I have had so much to think of that these things did not trouble me. He must have started, and will get there before us."

"I don't think that possible," said the captain, "but I have thought so."

"But suppose that he has some of his men on board, scoundrels in his own pay."

"That is far more likely," said the captain; "and that is why I am so careful."

"Of course, that must be it," exclaimed Dutch. "The villain! He bribed your crew to desert, and has supplied others—his own miscreants."

"That is one thing I suspect."

"That last party there—the mulatto and the black."

"That is the most natural supposition at the first blush; but the men are all strangers, and for this very reason I am half disposed to think it was the first lot. One is so disposed to judge wrongly."

"You are right," said Dutch, thoughtfully, "and we have no common plotter to deal with. You remember the man who wanted to hide an important letter from the French spies?"

"No," said the captain, watching him intently. "What did he do?"

"He placed the letter somewhere so as they should not find it, knowing full well that they would come and ransack his chambers as soon as his back was turned."

"Well," said the captain, impatiently.

"Well, the spies of the police came; and in his absence searched the place in every direction, even trying the legs of the chairs and tables to see if the document was rolled up and plugged in one of them; but they gave up in despair, finding nothing."

"Where was it hidden, then," said the captain.

"It was not hidden at all," said Dutch, smiling. "The owner came back at last, after having been waylaid and searched, even to the linings of his clothes; and then, feeling secure, took the letter from where he had placed it, the French police feeling that it must be in other hands."

"But where was it?" said the captain again.

"Why, where he left it: in a common envelope, plain for everybody to see, just stuck half behind the looking-glass over the mantel-piece, and had probably been in the searchers' hands half-a-dozen times."

"That is just the trick that the Cuban will try with us," exclaimed the captain.

"I think so," said Dutch; "otherwise one might look upon that mulatto as a suspicious character."

"Yes, of course," replied the captain. "I was ready to pitch upon him at first, but I changed my mind, and am more disposed to suspect those two quiet English fellows, Lennie and Rolls, the men Oakum was talking to some time back."

"I know," said Dutch. "One of them is a dark fellow, with an outrageous cast in his eye."

"In both his eyes, you mean," said the captain. "That is Rolls. The other fellow seems as thick-headed and stupid as an ox. He has a perpetual grin on his face, and looks simplicity itself."

"I know the men," said Dutch. "But now what do you propose to do?"

"Nothing but wait. I had thought of putting the others on their guard; but by doing so I might defeat my own ends. Perhaps, after all, I am wrong, and we shall never hear more of Master Lauré, except, if we are successful, he may attack you by law for a share."

"But you could take precautions," exclaimed Dutch, who again glanced involuntarily at his wife, who sat there watching him in a sad appealing way that went to his heart.

“Every precaution with respect to the arms, which I always keep under lock and key. And now, what I want you to do is to keep about at all times, night or day, as the chance may serve, picking up such facts as you come across, and communicating them to me; while, for my part, I shall keep every possible stitch of canvas set, and reach the place as soon as I can.”

“For it may turn out a false alarm,” said Dutch.

“I trust it may; but I feel sure it will not,” replied the captain.

“I’m afraid I must agree with you,” said Dutch. “Depend upon it, there is some deeply-laid plot ready to be sprung upon us. However, forewarned—”

“Man overboard! Man overboard!” shouted half-a-dozen voices in chorus; and directly after, Mr Jones, the mate, was heard to cry hoarsely to the man at the wheel—

“Hard down, my lad, hard down; steady, my lads. Quick to those braces—’bout ship.”

“Here, four of you lower down this boat,” cried the captain, as excitedly as the rest, for the fact was plain enough for comprehension. Tonio, the mulatto, had been darting his spear with more or less success at the bonito, and had at last sent it down with such precision in the back of a large fish that he had buried it far beyond the barbs, when his prey made a tremendous rush, gave the cord a violent jerk, and, being attached to the thrower’s wrist, it literally snatched him from his precarious position, and, in spite of his being a good swimmer, he was rapidly being drowned by the frantic efforts of the fish.

Dutch saw in an instant that long before the boat could be lowered the man would be exhausted, unless he was freed from the cord that jerked at his wrist as he swam, and by means of which he was dragged again and again beneath the water. There was no time for thought: a fellow-creature was in deadly peril, and he felt that he could give help, so, throwing off the loose jacket he wore, and kicking off his shoes, he took out and opened his knife, and climbed on the bulwarks. As he did so, he caught a glimpse of Hester tottering with outspread arms towards him, and heard her wail his name, but as he did so he was leaping from the schooner’s side to plunge deep down in the bright water, sending the shoal of bonito flying in all directions as his body formed a curve, and he came up twenty feet from where he had dipped, and then began swimming lustily towards the drowning man.

A loud cheer saluted him as he turned on his side and swam hard, as the preparations for lowering the boat went on, with the schooner becoming each instant more distant, while it soon became evident with him that unless something unforeseen occurred the mulatto must be drowned; for, in spite of all Dutch’s efforts, the fish took him farther and farther away, the man’s struggles, as he rose on the long swell of the Atlantic, growing evidently feebler and feebler, till in its frantic dread and pain the fish suddenly turned, making back for where Dutch, with long slow strokes, urged himself rapidly through the water.

He hardly knew how it happened, for as he made a dash to cut off the pain-maddened creature, it leaped over him, dived down, and, to his horror, Dutch found that the rope was over his body, and that he was being towed rapidly down into the awful depths of the ocean. The light above him seemed to be dimmed, and he half lost consciousness. Then, with one vigorous application of the knife, he was free, and a few kicks brought him breathless to the surface, where, as he panted, he paddled about looking for the mulatto, and had almost given him up when something rose up slowly to the surface, and one hand appeared clutching vainly at the air.

Half-a-dozen strokes took Dutch to his side, and, catching the drowning man’s wrist, he turned him over, and tried to get behind him. But he was not quick enough, for, in the strong desire for life, the mulatto, as soon as he was touched, clasped the swimmer with arms and legs, completely crippling him, and, after a brief struggle, they sank together.

As they rose once more, Dutch saw that the boat was quite two hundred yards away, and that his case was hopeless unless he took some high-handed manner of saving himself; so, turning as well as he could, he struck the drowning man a tremendous blow upon the temple with his doubled fist, stunning him effectually; his clasp loosened, and, shaking himself free, Dutch now turned him on his back, floating by his side as he sustained him, till, with a loud hurrah, echoed from the schooner, which was now coming down upon them hand-over-hand, the pair were dragged into the boat, and soon after lay in safety upon their vessel’s deck.

The first upon whom Dutch’s eyes fell was his wife, kneeling by his side; and, as their eyes met, she took his hand, trembling, and raised it to her lips, those quivering lips seeming inaudibly to say—

“Don’t repulse me. I love you so dearly, and so well.”

The next moment Bessy was leading her away, and, after swallowing a glass of stimulant handed to him by the doctor, Dutch rose, went below and changed, returning, little the worse for his immersion, to find that the doctor had succeeded in restoring the mulatto to consciousness, while Dutch himself was received with a hearty cheer.

Story 1--Chapter XV.

The Silent Sea.

The schooner sped on, and nothing troublous disturbed the progress of the voyage as the days glided by. So free from suspicion was everything on board, that the captain was beginning to be lulled into a sense of security, and a change had come over Pugh.

A reconciliation had not taken place between him and Hester; but he did not avoid her now, but in a quiet, stern way watched over her, attending her as she struggled back to health under the unremitting charge of the doctor; and her lips daily grew less pale as the light of hope began once more to shine in her eyes.

The routine of the ship went on in a regular way, and the men smoked and idled as they entered the tropics, and neared the object of the voyage. The doctor made himself specially agreeable to Sam Oakum, chatted with him, gave him cigars, which Sam cut up and chewed, ending by talking about John Studwick; at which Sam winked to himself as he thought that the doctor would not have taken so much interest in the case if it had not been for the sister. Then, to use Oakum's own words, Mr Wilson would "come and fold his back," so as to lean his elbows on the bulwarks, and chatter about his birds and the natural-history objects Sam had seen in his travels—that worthy not forgetting to shoot the birds he described with the long bow; and all the while Mr Wilson, who was an exceedingly meek individual, would be smoothing his light, towey hair, which the winds blew about, altering the set of his tie and collar, and brushing the specks off his clothes.

"He's a poor, weak, soft Tommy sort of a chap," said Sam to himself, as he watched him out of one corner of his eye, and saw that he was constantly on the look-out to see if Bessy Studwick came up on deck, content to watch her from a distance, for her brother had taken quite an antipathy to him.

"Heigho!" he'd sigh, as he shook his head, and gazed down at the water, as if wondering whether he had not better emulate Dutch's plunge, and not come up again. "Heigho! this is a strange world, Mr Oakum."

"It's a rum 'un, sir, all round, and always was. But I say, sir, it's easy to see what's the matter with you."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense, Mr Oakum!" said the tall fellow, blushing like a girl.

"It's only natur', sir," said Sam, sympathetically, as he gave a good twist to his quid, and winked at one of the blacks. "It ain't nothin' to be ashamed on."

"Ah; Mr Oakum, I wish I was in such favour as you are over yonder."

"You would not like to pay the cost, sir, I know."

"Pay the cost, Mr Oakum; what do you mean?"

"It's only we ugly ones as enjoys these privileges with the fair sect. You wouldn't like to be old and ugly like me, to be talked to as I am."

"Ah, Mr Oakum, I would be her dog if she would be fond of me—or a bird," he said, enthusiastically. "Ah, if I had only thought of it before I started."

"Thought o' what, sir?" said Sam, winking at the black again.

"Of bringing a few canaries. They are such nice presents to give a lady."

"Do you want to send a present to her, sir?"

"Oh, yes, Mr Oakum."

"Well, sir, if I were in love with a lady, and wanted—"

"Oh, hush! Mr Oakum."

"Wanted, I says, to find her a present, I shouldn't send whistling canaries, but a pair o' cooing doves."

The young naturalist stared at old Oakum, as if he wished to penetrate his inmost thoughts; but the old sailor never flinched, looking as serious as a judge outside, but laughing heartily within at the other's expense.

"I will," he exclaimed; and hurrying away he was busy the rest of the day painting up one of his old cages, in which he placed a pair of doves, and called the old sailor down to him in the evening.

"Take those to Miss Studwick, Mr Oakum, with my compliments, and—er—by the way—er—you would not feel offended if I offered you half-a-crown to buy tobacco?"

"Not in the least, sir," exclaimed Oakum, earnestly. "I'd do owt to oblige you."

"Take them directly, then," he exclaimed; and with the two soft-plumaged birds sitting close together as the old fellow swung the cage, the present was taken to where Bessy Studwick sat by the side of her brother, reading to him on deck.

Oakum was gone some time, and meanwhile poor Wilson fidgeted about amongst his birds, hardly able to bear the suspense, turning first red, and then pale, as Oakum came back, cage in hand, and set it down before him.

"Miss Studwick says she's werry much obliged to you, sir," said Sam; "but she can't werry well keep the birds, as Mr John thinks they'd be too much for him to bear when they took to cooing."

"It don't matter, Oakum—set them down," he said, huskily, with his back turned to the old sailor. "I only thought the birds might amuse them, as Mr John is so ill. Dick, Dick, pretty Dick," first to one bird and then to another, to hide his confusion. "Come, little tame bird—come, Jenny," he continued, opening one of the cage doors, when a pretty little red-poll came hopping down from one perch to the other, and then stood at the door looking out, with its head first

on one side and then on the other, and its little beady eyes directed first at Oakum, then at its master.

"Why, bless its little heart, it looks as knowing as a Christian," said the old sailor. "Why didn't you send that one, sir? That would have pleased the young lady, and would have made no noise."

Wilson shook his head as he held out his finger, and the bird uttered a loud twitter and flew to him, sitting on its living perch, and then, ruffling its throat and crest, jerked out a little song, suffering itself afterwards to be stroked, and ending by picking a crumb from the naturalist's mouth, and then flitting back to the cage in which it was duly secured.

But all of the birds were more or less tame, being ready to peck at the young man's fingers; and a robin, setting up his feathers and making a playful attack as it fluttered its wings, and pecked and fought, ended by hopping on its perch, and bursting into a triumphant song, as if it had conquered some fierce rival.

"I wonder how many of them'll live in a foreign country, sir, when you gets 'em there," said Oakum.

"Well, not all," said Mr Wilson; "but many of them. Mind the paint on that cage, Mr Oakum. I'm so much obliged. Er—you won't take any notice about that cage and the birds? Not that it matters, only Mr Meldon or Mr Parkley might laugh, perhaps."

"Not I, sir. You may trust me," growled Sam.

"Some people have a habit of laughing at natural history, you know, er—er—because they don't understand."

"You may trust me, sir," exclaimed the old fellow, as he went up the steps; and then to himself, "Yes, some folks has a habit of laughing at that kind o' nat'ral history when they see it. For only to think of a thin, wobbling chap fancying as our Miss Bessy would take up with the likes o' he. Hah! its a curus thing this love, and them as has got spliced don't allus seem to fit."

He went on deck to find Bessy Studwick still reading to her brother; and her voice sounded so hoarse that the old fellow trotted to the steward's pantry for a glass of water and a couple of lumps of sugar, squeezing in afterwards the two halves of a lemon, bearing the drink himself to where John Studwick lay back gazing at the setting sun, his face lit up with a calm, placid smile; and, though his sister read on, he evidently hardly heard a word that was read.

He started slightly as Oakum came up with the tumbler.

"What is it?" he said, harshly. "Has that Mr Meldon sent me more medicine? I will not take it."

Bessy Studwick must have turned her face more to the setting sun, for her cheeks grew crimson at her brother's words; and, seeing this, he looked at her angrily.

"Lor' bless your 'art, no, sir," said Oakum. "I thought you and our young lady here might be a bit thirsty after so much book, so I brought you some lemonade."

They gave him a grateful look, each thanking him for the attention to the other, and as he walked back with the empty glass Mr Meldon, who was standing talking to Hester Pugh and Mr Parkley, turned, sighed to himself, and looked after the old man with a feeling of envy.

"If I had paid that little attention," he thought, "it would have been refused with some harsh remark. Poor fellow! even though he's her brother, I do not wonder at his feeling jealous of every look."

Days of sailing over bright, sun-flecked seas, evenings of gorgeous sunsets, and nights of black violet skies, with the great stars sparkling overhead, and reflected in myriads on the smooth surface of the wondrous phosphorescent water, all aglow with pale fire wherever fish darted, while the schooner's bows seemed plunging through foaming, liquid moonbeams. Mornings with such wondrous tints of orange and scarlet, crimson and gold, that those who gazed upon them did so in awe of the mighty works of the grand world. Then came heat so intense that the brass rails burned the hand, the pitch oozed from the seams, and the passengers lay panting beneath the awning spread aft, and longing for the evening breeze.

Now and then the coconut-fringed islands were seen, but no stoppage was made; for, on consideration, it was decided that such a step might afford the Cuban a clue to their whereabouts, while now both Captain Studwick and Dutch felt satisfied that their suspicions had been without foundation—that they had indeed eluded him, and all they had to do now was to make the best of their way to the treasure, and secure their prizes.

So southward and westward went the schooner, past reef, key, and island towards the El Dorado of their hopes; the two invalids much better; in fact, Hester's colour had been pretty well restored, and all she waited for was the day when her golden hopes would be realised—not those of finding ingot or bar long buried in the sea, but the restoration, complete and full, of her husband's love and trust.

The Caribbean Sea had long been entered, and its sheltering chain of islands left behind; and now, with Oakum in consultation with the captain, the vessel's course was altered to due south, with the result that one evening, after gradually creeping along the forest-clad coast of Venezuela, and land that seemed almost weird in its silence and wild grandeur, anchor was cast for the night, for the voyage was almost at an end.

A long debate took place that night, in which Oakum and the black took part, the result being eminently satisfactory to Mr Parkley and Dutch, for both the above spoke positively as to their being now within certainly a mile east or west of the spot where one of the wrecks could be found.

"I don't say, you know, as I've put the schooner right on the spot; but she's here close, and we must out boats and cruise about, looking down through the water, which is as clear as glass, till we get right, and then we can sail or tow her up."

As the stars came out, and the adventurers stood by the bulwarks, gazing at the thick black wall of forest beyond the rocks and snowy sand, where the waves broke in lines of phosphorescent gold, they could easily understand how it was that these treasures had lain untouched so long. For here the beasts of the forest had sole dominion; and even the Indians of the country showed no sign of ever visiting the grand solitudes. All seemed as nature had left it when her handiwork was at an end; and, driven by some furious hurricane upon one or other of the rocks that abounded, a ship would fill and sink, and be forgotten.

Story 1--Chapter XVI.

Oakum at Fault.

There was a silence almost awful, affecting those on board so that they spoke in whispers; but every now and then some strange howl or wild cry made sailors and passengers start, and listen again for the weird whispers and noises that arose.

The solemnity of the scene had its effect on the men, who gathered together talking of supernatural visitations, haunted ships, and the ghosts of the old buccaneers who watched over their buried treasure, till they were all more or less infected with fear; and the squinting sailor expressed his opinion that no good would come of meddling with what was evidently meant to lie buried, he was sure—a declaration that excited the laughter of Tonio, who ended by calling him a cowardly fool.

Meanwhile, on deck the excitement of being at last so near the goal of their hopes kept the leaders of the expedition from seeking their cots, and Dutch was gazing thoughtfully at the breaking sea falling back in a murmur in golden foam, when he started, for a little cold hand was laid upon his, and he found that Hester was by his side.

"What do you want?" he said, coldly; but his voice had lost its former harshness.

"My husband to tell me that he believes and trusts me once again," she said, piteously. And she sank on the deck to embrace his knees.

Dutch Pugh was a stern man, but he could not long resist this appeal. He had fought against the piteous glances now for many days. He had turned a deaf ear to Bessy Studwick's rebukes and insistence upon Hester's innocence; but now, in the soft darkness of that tropic night, in the silent grandeur of that mysterious sea, he felt his heart beat wildly with its old love. But there was that damning scene that he had witnessed from the garden seeming to rise up like a grim shadow between them, and, with a sigh, he raised her and led her weeping to the cabin stairs.

"Good-night, Dutch, dear Dutch," she filtered, clinging to his arm.

"Good-night, Hester," he said, coldly.

"Pray, pray do not let us part like that," she whispered. "Dutch, dear Dutch, if you could only read my heart, you would know how unkind are your suspicions, how cruel to me. Let me explain. Question me—anything."

"Good-night," he said. "Go down below. I will not have a scene here."

"I will obey you, Dutch," she said, quietly, as by a great effort she mastered her emotion. "Some day, dear, you will find out the truth. Till then I will wait patiently and unchanging. Don't be angry with me for coming. I should have died if you had left me behind."

She spoke with so sweet a pathos in her voice that Dutch's heart beat painfully, and the words were on his lips to say, "Come to me, darling, I do believe you;" but they were not spoken, for she slowly descended the stairs to the cabin, leaving him gazing wistfully after her. Then, walking to the side, he leaned his head upon his hands, praying in the bitterness of his heart that this painful time might end, and listening, as it were, to adverse promptings of his spirit, seeming to hear the sweet innocency of her life proclaimed to him on the one side, while on the other, in hateful repetition, came the scenes he had witnessed, the dreamy vision, the strange alteration in her manner, Lauré's triumphant sneers, and the shadow on the blind.

"If heaven had but given me the strength of mind that has been given to my outward frame, I could have been happy," he groaned.

"If you lean there and doze, so close to these forests, friend Pugh, we shall have you down with fever," said the captain, laying his hand upon his shoulder.

Dutch started up, for he had not heard him approach.

"I was only thinking," he said, hastily.

"I know what about, Pugh; and, from what my girl Bessy has said to me, I should like to talk to you. But I can't help feeling that matters are coming right without my interfering. There, I'll say no more. I only wanted to have a chat with you quietly. I've been talking to Parkley, and I wanted to tell you that I have made the strictest arrangements for guarding against surprise. Regular watch will be kept, just as if we were at sea; for, of course, before long it is probable that we may have many thousand pounds' worth of metal on board. But at the same time I think we have

circumvented the enemy.”

“You have seen nothing to excite your suspicions, then,” said Dutch.

“No. Nor you?”

“Nothing whatever.”

“That’s well; but, all the same, we will not relax our watchfulness. Parkley and the doctor have both promised, and you must do the same.”

“What is that?”

“Whenever you wake in the night, get up and come and have a turn round the deck. It will keep the men well to their work if they feel that at any time they may be overhauled.”

“What was that?” said Dutch, softly; and he laid his hand upon the captain’s arm.

They both stood listening intently, and gazing in the direction whence the sound had come.

The night was now intense in its darkness, and for reasons of their own—being, of course, far out of the track of ships—no lights whatever were shown; even those in the cabins were out, or so arranged that they would not attract attention if a wandering savage should have drawn up his canoe on the beach. The stars glittered overhead, but the greater part of the sky was overcast, and the heat seemed to portend a storm; but all was perfectly still, except the low, soft wash of the water as it broke upon the sands, and bathed them with the pale gold phosphorescence.

“I heard nothing,” said the captain, softly. “I’m afraid, Dutch Pugh, that we have frightened ourselves rather too much. All we need fear now is the weather. Perhaps we might have a little trouble with the Indians if they found us out; but we could easily keep them at bay.”

“I certainly heard an unusual sound,” replied Dutch. “Let’s walk quietly forward.”

They walked towards the bows, and as they did so a dark figure that had been lying a couple of yards from Dutch, close beneath the bulwarks, glided softly away, like some huge snake. So dark was it that it was hard to distinguish the outlines, and to trace where the figure went, while its movements were so silent that the two watchers saw nothing.

They went and spoke to the man leaning over the bows, who proved to be Dick Rolls.

“Heard anything?” said the captain, going up so silently that the man started.

“Lord’s truth, capen, don’t do that!” he exclaimed, in an injured tone. “It’s skeary enough here listening to the things creeping about in the wood there. No, I ain’t heard nothing else.”

“Keep a sharp look-out,” said the captain, and the man uttered a growl.

Walking softly aft, they found the man on the watch to be Bob Lennie, who was seated on the bulwarks, making a sort of humming noise to himself, under the impression that he was singing. He, too, allowed himself to be so closely approached that they almost touched him before he spoke.

“No,” he said, slowly, “I ain’t seed nor heered anything; only the lights over yonder in the woods, and the black things crawling in and out of the water where that there patch o’ yaller sand is.”

“You must have been mistaken, Pugh,” said the captain. “All’s right; let’s go and turn in.”

Dutch followed him down the cabin stairs, and the deck was left to the watch.

For quite half an hour all was perfectly still, except when some strange forest cry arose, and then two figures stole softly out from under the bulwarks, and went forward, to find that Dick Rolls had joined his fellow-watcher for company’s sake.

That was sufficient. The next minute the falls were seized, and the little dingy which hung from the davits was softly lowered into the water; two men slid down the ropes, unhooked the boat as it rose with the swell, and, without attempting to use the sculls, let the current drift them slowly away into the bank of darkness that closed the vessel round.

Before dawn every man was on deck waiting for the rising of the sun, for there was not one who did not look forward with great excitement to the coming day, which might bring large wealth to some, and to all an increase of pay, besides which there was a certain fascination in the search. The mystery and uncertainty of the adventure had their charms, while to the more ignorant there was a thrill of excitement in the superstition with which their minds mingled the project. Those who had in their lives toiled hard to obtain the treasure must, they felt, return to the place in spirit where it was lost, and try to guard it from sacrilegious touch.

The subject had been well discussed in the forecastle, and there was hardly one who did not feel the childlike desire, mingled with dread, that is felt by the ignorant over some ghost story—the shrinking and the desire to know.

It was, indeed, felt to be an eventful morning, and Mr Parkley looked pale as he stood on deck in the cool grey mist talking to Dutch, and wondering whether good fortune was to attend their venture. As for Oakum and ‘Pollo, they, too, were both on their mettle, for on them depended a good deal; while old Rasp also appeared among the excited

group on deck, where he had been seen but little during the voyage after the first few days, for he had spent most of his time below, polishing helmets and oiling and re-oiling valves in the cabin he shared with Oakum, and where they had squabbled and disagreed all through the voyage.

There was a complete change in Rasp as he came up to where his employers stood, for his listless way was thrown off, and a look of importance overspread his features as he gave a side glance at Oakum, which plainly said, "There, your reign is over, and mine has begun."

"Shall I be getting up the tackle, Mr Pug?" he said, "so as to be well ready."

"No, Rasp, we shall not want you yet," replied Dutch. "Wait till we get to the spot."

Oakum gave a chuckle which made Rasp turn upon him angrily; but the old fellow's face was as hard and solid as if carved out of wood, and with not the vestige of a smile thereon; but 'Pollo, who stood close by, was showing his white teeth to the fullest extent.

"What are you grinning at, old ebony?" snarled Rasp, glad to have somebody upon whom he could turn.

"I just tink, sah, dat as I go to be berry busy find de treasure ship 'long o' Mass' Oakum, you like to come and 'joy yourself, poke de galley fire all day."

"Yah!" ejaculated Rasp, angrily; and he walked to the side, and began spitting viciously at the rippling waves under the schooner's counter.

"How is it that boat's down in the water?" exclaimed the captain, suddenly, as he crossed to where the dingy was swinging by her painter.

"I left her hanging to the davits last night," said the mate. "Do you know, Oakum?"

"Wasn't my watch," said that worthy, "but the skipper's. Dick, 'Pollo, and Bob Lennie was on deck for one spell."

"Do you know why the boat was lowered?" said the captain, turning to the men, who had just left their hammocks.

Bob Lennie the quiet shook his head, and Dick Rolls' eyes nearly disappeared under the thick bridge of his nose as he stared down with his head first on one side, then on the other.

"No, I dunno," he growled. "I never knowed it was lowered."

The question was passed round, but no one knew anything about it; and the men shook their heads, and seemed to think it was very mysterious.

For there seemed to be no reason why it should have been let down. Had it been missing altogether, and a man or two with it, the cause would have been plain; but every man of the crew was on deck, and one and all denied knowledge of the boat having been touched.

This excited the suspicion of the captain again; but the busy events of the morning chased the feeling away, and it was soon forgotten.

For Sam Oakum was to all intents and purposes now captain of the schooner, and 'Pollo his mate, as the former took the direction, had the anchor heaved up, and, consulting again and again with the latter, the vessel was allowed to drift with the current a few hundred yards.

"Do you feel pretty certain, Oakum?" said the captain, after a time, for the old sailor's actions did not inspire him with much confidence. In fact, after running half a mile with the current, he suddenly gave orders for a couple of sails to be hoisted, put the schooner about, and began to beat back.

"You let me alone," growled Oakum. "I'm a-doing the best I can. You see, it's a good many years since I was here, and the bearings ar'n't so fresh in my mem'ry as they was."

The captain said nothing, only glanced at Dutch, who had heard every word, and as the eyes of these two met they seemed to say to one another, "Suppose that this—trust of ours should be a foolish one, after all."

Mr Parkley went up to Oakum once and spoke, but he received so sharp a reply that the old fellow was left alone. It was evident that he was a good deal puzzled, for in the course of an hour he renewed his quid of tobacco half-a-dozen times, and literally scraped the perspiration off his face with his rough finger, as he stood by the wheel giving directions to the man who was steering.

It was a most interesting time to all on board; the passengers were on deck, and even listless John Studwick stood leaning over the bulwarks, with his eyes brightening, and Mr Wilson and the doctor seemed to be as eager as the rest to find the buried treasure. Even the mulatto and the black sailor seemed roused from their slow-going apathy, and watched Oakum as he changed the course of the vessel from time to time, running amongst rocks, now close in shore, and once so near to a point that the waving cocoanut and other palms almost touched the rigging, and Captain Studwick stood ready to seize the wheel himself, for it seemed as if the schooner would be run aground.

If the thirst for gold had been less strong, no one there could have failed to revel in the beauty of the scene; for now, in the ever-increasing heat of the morning sunshine, the black mystery of the forest seemed to be swept away, and they gazed upon a belt of wondrously tinted green, with leafage of every variety and shape, seen beyond a narrow strip of golden sand, while sometimes, where rock took the place of the sand, the strange tropic trees waved right

over the limpid sea which washed their roots. So close were they at times that the very veins of the great leaves could be traced, and the beauty of the various tints and lovely flowers of parasitic growth, which climbed up and then hung down their great trumpet-shaped bells with lavish prodigality to swing in the hot breeze, was reflected in the little creeks and inlets of the coast.

Wilson was in raptures, and wanted to form an expedition directly to go in pursuit of the gorgeously-feathered birds that came down to the edge of the forest, and then, uttering strange cries, flitted back into its shades. John Studwick looked earnestly at the leafy paradise, with its brilliant blossoms, and longed to lie and dream away his hours in the delicious shade, and even the doctor ceased to watch intently every motion of Bessy Studwick, and gazed with delight at the beauteous scene.

But there was the adverse side to the beautiful picture; for here and there in the inlets black, rugged, weird-looking forms could be seen lying apparently asleep on the sand, but ready to scuffle back into the water on the vessel's approach—alligators looking as dangerous as loathsome. There were dangers, too, in the sharp-edged rocks, around which the pale blue sea rose and fell so placidly; and a score of times it seemed as if the schooner's planks must be pierced by the sharp points that were so threateningly near. Always, however, in the most threatening times, a turn of the wheel sufficed to send the graceful vessel clear, and so skilfully was she handled that Captain Studwick grew more satisfied on that point, as he felt doubts of Oakum's other knowledge grow stronger every hour.

His doubts were shared, too, by Dutch and Mr Parkley, and it was very evident that he was at fault, for 'Pollo was severely snubbed upon several occasions when he hazarded a remark, and the men began to talk in whispers as they saw the schooner retrace her path again and again.

"Can't you find it, Oakum?" said Dutch at last, as he dragged his eyes from the group composed of his young wife, Bessy Studwick, and her brother, all seated in the mellow shade cast by an awning; for the sun was now sending down a shower of silvery, white-hot arrows upon the deck.

"Don't you be in such a mighty fuss, Mr Dutch," was the tetchy reply. "These here things ain't done in a hurry. I'm a-working as hard as ever I can; its hereabouts somewhere, on'y the bearings don't seem to be the same."

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" said Dutch.

"Yes; just get out of the way, sir. There, be smart ahead there. Be ready to let go the anchor when I cry let go."

As he spoke he gave the man he had placed for the time at the wheel an impatient look, took the spokes in hand himself, ran the vessel in towards the shore, then gave the word; there was a dull splash, the chain rattled out through the hawse-holes, and was stopped; the sails flapped and shivered in the gentle breeze, and the schooner softly swung round, with a motion hardly perceptible, till she lay with her head to the current, now so slow that its effects on the vessel could hardly be seen.

"Is this the place, then?" cried Mr Parkley, eagerly, as he ran to peer over the side, where half the men were already similarly engaged.

"No 'taint," said Sam, crossly, as he let go the spokes, and, taking off his straw hat, began scratching his bald head in a vicious way. "It's somewhere about here, but the bearings is altered. There was four tall cocoanut trees on a bluff, and you had to bring them in a line with a bit o' rock sticking out o' the water like a wet monkey, and they're gone."

"But are you sure this was the piece of coast line?" said the captain, rather sternly.

"Course I am. This is one of the places, and there's two more—one on 'em ashore, 'bout fifty miles from here."

"Had we not better try that first?" said Dutch.

"What's the good o' your talking like that, sir, when you've brought diving things o' purpose to go down? No, I ain't half done yet. Here, I've finished my bacco; some 'un lend me a bit."

The mate handed him some, and Sam stood staring about, while the men were evidently laughing at his failure.

"Think, Mass' Oakum, sah—"

"No, you don't," said Sam, who wanted some one on whom to vent his spleen. "You don't think, and you never did think, and never will with that thick skull of yours. So hold your tongue."

'Pollo held his tongue, put all the little nose he had in the air, and stalked off with great dignity to his galley.

"What do you propose doing?" said Captain Studwick.

"Lower down the jolly-boat," said Sam, after indulging in another good scratch.

This was immediately done, and with four men at the oars, and Dutch, Mr Parkley, the captain, and Oakum for freight they pushed off from the schooner.

Oakum took his place in the bows with Dutch, and then, directing the men to row very softly as he directed, they went slowly forward over the limpid waters.

"You keep a good lookout over the side, Mr Dutch Pugh," said Sam, "and I'll do the same. It's so clear that you can see seven or eight fathoms down; and if you see anything particular, give the word, and we'll stop."

Heedless of the blazing sun—which, however, made their task very easy, lighting up, as it did, the clear waters below—they zigzagged for hours in all directions from the schooner, seeing below groves and trees of coral of the most wondrous tints, among which darted and played fish banded with gold, vermilion, and azure, silvery-sided, olive, green, and blue of the brightest and every tint. Great shells, almost as gay in colour, were slowly kept in motion by their inhabitants as they crawled over the surface of the many-hued rocks. Shoals of fish played amongst the moving seaweeds, and then flashed away like some brilliant silver firework as the shadow of the boat approached them, its shape being plainly seen on the sand below; and on every side new objects of beauty came into sight. Treasures of natural history there were of every kind, but not the treasure they sought; and at last, worn out with heat and disappointment, Mr Parkley proposed that they should return.

“What an opportunity,” thought Dutch, as, after a growling protest, Sam Oakum seated himself in the bottom of the boat and began viciously to cut off a wedge of tobacco—“what an opportunity we have given those on board for a rising, if there are any suspicious characters there.” And then his heart leaped and his hand involuntarily sought his pistol as he thought of his wife and the danger to which she would be exposed.

“Suppose,” he thought, as he shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed at the distant vessel, “those two scoundrels should assume the command, and set us at defiance, we could never get back on board.”

He shuddered as these thoughts gained stronger power over him, and looked from one to the other; but it was evident that no such thoughts troubled them, for as the oars of the four sailors lazily dipped, and made the water flash and sparkle, he could see that his companions, listless with the heat, were leaning back and troubled more with disappointment about the failure.

“Look here everybody,” cried Sam, suddenly, in a voice that, heard in that wonderful solitude, made every one start. “I’m not beat, you know; not a bit of it. Them there ships is to be found—what’s left of ‘em—and I’m going to find ‘em.”

“I hope you are, Oakum,” said the captain, quietly; “but don’t boast. The first effort has not been a successful one.”

“I never said as I’d find ‘em the first time,” said Sam, sharply. “‘Taint likely as a man’s going to sail a ship thousands o’ miles and put her right on the spot. You wait a bit.”

No one answered; and, to Dutch’s great delight, they were soon back on board, to find everybody half asleep, and no sign whatever of danger; and though far from being disposed to greet his wife in the old way, he felt, in spite of himself, obliged to say a few kind words as she pressed forward to meet him, her eager eyes telling of her joy to see him back. Then he shrank away with a frown, for it seemed to him that the mulatto was watching them curiously, though the second time he glanced at the man he was busy arranging a brightly-coloured kerchief over his head, before leaning back against the bulwark with half-closed eyes.

Nothing had taken place in their absence, and a dead calm had fallen. The heat was excessive, for not the faintest breath of air came from land or sea; but the beauty of the surroundings seemed to have its effect upon all, even to the lowest sailor; for as the evening came on, and the stars were lighted aloft, there was a dreamy delight in the darkening forest shore, where fireflies flitted; and once more strange whisperings, rustlings of trees, and splashes in the water were heard. But they did not excite the superstitious dread of the previous night; and at last, when most careful arrangements had been made by Captain Studwick to guard against internal and external surprise, watch was set, and the silence of death seemed to tall upon the schooner.

Story 1--Chapter XVII.

The Protectors of the Treasure.

That night passed away quietly enough, after a discussion as to future proceedings, when it had been decided to leave Sam Oakum to his own devices; for they were so solely dependent upon his success that it would have been folly to interfere.

“It was easy enough at Ramwich to talk about sweeping the sea till we found what we sought,” said Mr Parkley, dolefully; “but now we are here it seems as if we might hunt for our lifetimes without success.”

“And yet that scoundrel discovered the old wrecks,” said Dutch, firmly. “What one man has done another can do. For my part, now we are out upon the adventure, I mean to stop till we succeed.”

Mr Parkley patted him on the back, and looked up smilingly at him; and Dutch’s words seemed to impart spirit to all present.

Sam Oakum had insisted upon taking the first watch, declaring that he was not tired, and wanted to think; and the consequence was that the sun was well up before he put in an appearance on deck after his breakfast.

“Now, Oakum,” said Captain Studwick, rather impatiently, “what do you propose doing? Shall we up anchor and run along the coast a little way, and then anchor and have a fresh search?”

Sam did not reply, for he had his cake of tobacco in one hand and his knife in the other, and he was going to take a piece off for his morning refreshment. But knife and cake remained unemployed as his attention seemed fixed by something ashore. Then the cake was thrust back into one pocket, the knife closed with a snap and thrust back into the other, and he took a glance round.

The ship was now swinging in a different direction to that which it had occupied on the previous day, and this seemed

to puzzle Sam for the moment. The tide was low, too, and that made a difference in the surroundings—rocks standing clear of the water that were invisible before, and there was a ravine opened out that was not visible on the previous day.

“She’s dragged her anchor a bit, hasn’t she?” said Sam, at last.

“No,” said the captain, “we were too close to those rocks, so I up with the anchor this morning, and let her drift a couple of hundred yards before dropping it again.”

“Just hand us that double-barrel spyglass o’ yours, Mr Pugh, will you please?” said Oakum quietly; and when he had set it to the right focus for his eyes, he took a long look at the shore, shut the glass up, returned it, sat down on the deck, and taking out his tobacco and knife hewed off a good piece of the hard cake, and thrust it into his mouth without a word.

“Well, Mr Oakum,” said the captain, at last, with a look of annoyance on his face, “what is to be done next?”

“Send forrard for ‘Pollo,” said Sam, coolly.

The captain gave an impatient stamp, but turning to the mulatto, who was by the bulwark, sent him for the black cook.

“You want me, sah?” exclaimed ‘Pollo, showing his white teeth.

“So I do, ‘Pollo,” said Sam, borrowing the glass again from Dutch, and, after focussing it, placing it flat on the bulwarks, and bringing it to bear on some object ashore. “Now, come here, ‘Pollo,” he continued; “stoop down and take a squint through this here glass, and tell us what you see.”

‘Pollo stooped down to look through the glass.

“Not that way, you lubber,” cried Sam. “What are you shutting one eye up for? Don’t you see it’s a double spyglass?”

“Oh, yes, sah—I see, sah,” said ‘Pollo, bending down for another look.

“Now you’re a-shutting up tother eye,” cried Sam, sharply.

“Was I, sah? Well, so I tink I was. Now, den, I try bofe open togedder. Dat’s him; I see beauful now. All de lubby trees shinin’ in de sun, and four big long trees lie down top o’ one anoder. All blow down by de wind.”

“And what’s that, ‘Pollo?” cried Sam, giving him a slap on the back, as he pointed to a rock lying under the shade of a point right aft.

“Dat am de rock like de wet monkey, Mass’ Oakum, sah. Dere, genelmen, I tell you I find de place easy ‘nough.”

“Don’t you think it might be me as has found it?” said Sam, with a grim laugh. “There, gentlemen, I couldn’t answer for those trees being blown down by a hurricane. I looked out for them to take my bearings, and they were gone. I must have seen the rock, too, at low water.”

“Then you think we are near the place?” cried Dutch, eagerly.

“Well, sir,” said Oakum coolly, “I won’t be too cocksure to a foot or two in a few thousand miles; but if the capen here will send out a kedge anchor in the boat, and drop it about a dozen fathoms towards that rock to port there, and haul upon it till the schooner’s bowsprit pynts dead for them two rocks, so as we has them in a line, I’ll eat my hat if we ain’t right over some part or other of the old wreck.”

A dead silence ensued for a few moments as if every man’s breath was taken away, and then giving his orders sharply a little anchor was lowered down into the jolly-boat; and to Mr Jones was given the task of carrying out the manoeuvre. This was soon done—the anchor dropped over the boat’s side with a splash, taking firm hold directly, and then the hawser was hauled upon by the men on board, till the position of the schooner was altered so that she lay with her bowsprit pointing right across the two rocks indicated by Oakum.

“That will do,” the latter shouted—“not another foot. Make fast.”

Story 1--Chapter XVIII.

Over the Treasure.

The hawser was secured and, as the jolly-boat lay alongside, a second small anchor was lowered into her, and carried out and dropped on the other side, the rope hauled taut and made fast, and the schooner now moored in a position which the light current could not affect, though a storm would doubtless have made the anchors drag.

“That’s my job ‘bout done, capen and Mr Parkley, sire. I said as I’d put the schooner over the spot; and there she is.”

“But do you really think, Oakum—” began Mr Parkley.

“I don’t think nothing, sir. There’s the place and that ‘ere’s the rock as ‘Pollo dived off into the deep water. Ain’t it, ‘Pollo?”

"Dat's true, sah," cried the black, laughing boisterously.

"Then its 'bout time I browt up the helmets and things, eh?" said Rasp, who had been looking on with inquiring eye.

"Not yet, Rasp," exclaimed Dutch, who now hurried to the side, and peered down into the brightly illumined depths, an example followed by the captain and half the crew.

The result was disappointing, and Dutch and Mr Parkley descended into the boat, waiting till it was perfectly motionless, and then making use of a large tube which they thrust some feet down into the water, and gazed intently at the rocks, sands, and wonders of the sea below.

This process they followed up as they slowly shifted the boat round from place to place; and each time that Dutch looked up to answer some question from the deck it was to encounter the sinister face of the mulatto, with the scar plainly marked in the sunlight, gazing intently down. For the matter of that so was the face of 'Pollo, the other black, and the rest of the crew; but the countenance of the mulatto alone seemed to strike him, for the peculiarity of its looks, and the eagerness with which, in a partial way, its owner seemed to watch his every action.

"Well, gentlemen," said John Studwick, in a half-mocking way, "can you see the El Dorado through that piece of brass pipe?"

"Not yet," said Dutch, quietly. And he went on with his research, seeing fish as brilliant as any he had before noticed, rocks covered with olive green and scarlet weed, that floated out and played in the water, many yards in length; great stones covered with shells and acorn barnacles; sea anemones, whose petals were more delicately beautiful than any flowers he had beheld; but no trace of old ship timber, in the shape of ribs, stern-post, keel, or stem. Nothing but sand, rock, and seaweed; and at last the two sat up in the boat and looked at one another.

"What's the good o' you humbugging?" said Rasp, on deck, to self-satisfied Oakum, who stood leaning his back against the bulwark, and staring at the landmarks by which he had found the spot.

"Who's humbugging?" said Oakum, roughly.

"Why, you. It's all sham. There ain't no wreck below there."

"Bah! How do you know?" growled Oakum. "I know there is, but don't say as there ain't been no one near and cleaned it out."

Hester was standing close by, and heard all this. Her face flushed with anxiety, and her heart rose and fell, as she eagerly listened to the opinions expressed, and thought of the bitter disappointment Dutch would feel if the search was without success.

Just then her husband said something hastily, which drew the attention of all on board; and taking hold of a rope, she leaned forward to try and catch a glimpse of what was going forward, when she started back with a faint cry of alarm, for a pair of burning lips were placed upon her hand, and as she snatched it away, and faced round it was to meet the glittering eyes of the mulatto fixed upon her, with so fiercely intense a gaze that she shrank away trembling, but not before he had whispered to her—

"Silence, if you value your life!"

She felt sick with horror as the man glided away, for the tones of his voice seemed familiar, and her very first impulse was to call her husband; but the mulatto's words had such an effect upon her, weakened as she was with long illness, that she dared not speak even to Bessy, to whose side she crept as an eager buzz of conversation went on.

For, after sitting thoughtfully in the boat for a few minutes, Dutch had leaned over the side once more, placing his face in the water, and gazed down at the beautiful submarine grove, when he saw a long, grey body pass slowly out from amongst the weeds, and woke to the fact that there were sharks in those waters, this creature being fourteen or fifteen feet long.

He shuddered at the sight, and thought of the helplessness of any diver if one of these monsters attacked him. He raised his face to breathe, and then looked down again, to see the monster part a bed of seaweed, and as it did so his past troubles were forgotten in the thrill of delight he felt: for Oakum was certainly right as to the wreck. As the shark glided slowly on, it parted the weeds more and more, leaving bare, plainly to be seen, what looked like a stump standing out of the sand, but which his experienced eye knew at once to be one of the ribs of a ship, black with age where it was not grey with barnacles and other shells.

He rose from the water again, with his face dripping, inhaled a long breath, and once more softly stooped and peered down into the clear, ambient depths, where the waving seaweed and multitudinous growths seemed ever changing their colours as they waved gently in the current.

The weed parted by the shark had closed up together once more, and not a vestige seemed left of the piece of wreck wood; in fact, it might have been a dream, only that close by where he had seen it before, half-hidden in the weed, lay the shark, its long, unequal-lobed tail waving slightly to and fro a few moments, and then the monster was perfectly still—so quiet that the sharpest eye would have passed it unnoticed, so exactly was its back in hue like the sand upon which it lay.

But Dutch knew, dreamer as he had been, that this was no piece of imagination; and taking the tube once more, and recalling the peculiar bend of the piece of timber, he began again to examine the bottom, especially the portion that lay in the shadow cast by the schooner's hull. According to the bend of the timber, he knew that the wreck, if wreck it belonged to, must be lying in the opposite direction to the schooner; and, tracing its imaginary shape, he concluded

that there must be a succession of ribs embedded in the sand, though not visible in the lines he marked out with his eye.

And so it seemed, for as he looked he could make out that the weeds lay in thick clusters in the position they should occupy if they were attached to the timbers of an old ship. Huge corals were there as well, forming quite a submarine forest, but evidently they took the form of a ship where they were most dense; and, to Dutch's great surprise, the vessel must have been one of nearly double the size of the schooner.

"See anything?" said Mr Parkley, as the young man rose for a few minutes and wiped his brow.

"Yes," said Dutch, bluntly. "Shark!"

"Ah, there are plenty, no doubt," said Mr Parkley.

But Dutch did not hear him, for he was once more eagerly trying to trace out in the weeds the shape of the old galleon.

Yes, there it was, undoubtedly; and, to make assurance doubly sure, another shark slowly glided out, about thirty feet to the left of where Dutch saw the first, setting the weeds in motion, and displaying, black and grey with encrustations, three more of the nearly buried ribs of an old ship.

With this help to locality, he could now make out plainly where the galleon lay, and see that she must have been nearly a hundred feet long, and that her stem had struck on the mass of rocks described as those off which 'Pollo had dived; while her stern lay off behind the boat in the dense forest of sea growth. And as Dutch looked on he became more and more aware of the fact that there were watchers over the treasure—if treasure there was—in the shape of sharks. He had already seen two, and now, dimly visible in their lairs, lay no less than five more, of which he could just make out a fin of one, the snout of another, the tail of another, and so on, one gliding slowly out into the sunshine, turning right over so as to show its white belly and great teeth-armed jaws, before dashing after a shoal of bright-coloured fish which had tempted him from his lair.

So powerful were the strokes of the monster's tail that the water was all of a quiver, and the long strands of the seaweed waved and undulated to and fro, displaying here and there more blackened stumps, and showing how possible it was for anyone to sail a boat over the wreck a hundred times without catching a glimpse or dreaming of its existence.

"Well," said Mr Parkley, "when you're tired of shark-gazing, we may as well go on board."

There was only one man of the crew looking over the side now, and that was the mulatto, who, with half-closed eyes, lazily watched their actions; the others, finding the business uninteresting, having adjourned to the shade.

"I'm ready to go on board," said Dutch, quietly. "When shall we begin work?"

"Oh, at once. Let's ask Studwick to weigh anchor, and try one of the other places. Ah, my lad, I'm afraid I let my anger get the better of my judgment. We shall do nothing without the cursed Cuban."

"Think not?" said Dutch, with a smile.

"I am sure of it," said Mr Parkley. "How can we hunt over the whole of this sea? It would be madness."

"I meant get to work with the apparatus," said Dutch, smiling.

"What are you laughing at?" said Mr Parkley, impatiently.

"At your despondency," replied Dutch. "Old Oakum was right. The schooner's lying right athwart the galleon."

"What!" cried Mr Parkley, excitedly. "Nonsense!—you are half-mad."

"Over some things, perhaps," said Dutch, gloomily; "but sane enough over this. Mind, I don't say that there is any treasure there, but the old fellow has anchored us right across an old wreck."

"Give me that tube," cried Mr Parkley, and he thrust it down into the water excitedly, looking in all directions.

"There's nothing there," he cried. "I examined that place before."

"But it did not occur to us that the weeds had grown up and hidden the timbers. Now you watch that clump lying just under the schooner's keel. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, I see."

"Then keep your eye upon it," said Dutch, as he crept softly to the bows of the jolly-boat, and, taking one of half-a-dozen great boulders that were used for ballast, he heaved it overboard with a good splash, and then watched its effects.

As he expected, from half-a-dozen weed masses out darted as many sharks, to make a dash at the stone as it descended rapidly through the clear water, and first one and then another turned over to show its white under-parts before going away sulkily and in disgust.

"Well, what did you see?" said Dutch.

"Sharks! Ugh, the beasts!" exclaimed Mr Parkley, with a shudder.

"What else?"

"Rough stumps of timber amongst the weeds."

"Timbers of the old galleon, no doubt, preserved by the shelly concretions that have formed upon them and held them together."

"But it's impossible, my dear boy. No man dare go down there; the sharks would rend him limb from limb. Who could go down?"

"I shall, for one," said Dutch, calmly. "So now let's get on board."

They climbed the side, and, as the news of their discovery spread through the ship, the excitement became great. Rasp began to bring up helmets and leaden weights, and ordered a couple of the men to come and assist with the air-pump, which had to be got up from below.

"But, my dear Dutch," exclaimed Mr Parkley, in despair, "it is impossible—no one can go down."

"Not at present," said Dutch, smiling, as he looked round and saw that nearly everybody was gazing over the side. "Perhaps, when I have set the example, Rasp will not mind following it."

"But the sharks, my dear boy—they would tear you to pieces."

"Let them, if they can," said Dutch, grimly. "I'm not going to be deterred from the search by a few sharks. And if, as you say, I was torn to pieces," he added, bitterly, "what then?"

"I tell you I shall not let you risk your life," said Mr Parkley, firmly.

"And I tell you I shall go down. If anything happens—"

"That sweet little woman will be a widow," said Mr Parkley.

"And who would care?" said Dutch, bitterly. "My dear Mr Parkley, we are anchored over the treasure, and sharks or no sharks, torn to pieces or left alone, I go down—Hester!"

He started and turned sharply round, just in time to catch the fainting woman as she was falling senseless on the deck.

Story 1--Chapter XIX.

Pepper for the Sharks.

Dutch felt a pang at his heart as he raised and carried the fainting woman below—Bessy Studwick joining him as he laid her on the little couch in the cabin; and he was about to leave her in the latter's care, when she began to revive, and called him by name.

For a moment he was about to run to her, but the old and bitter suspicions hardened his heart, and he turned away.

"Oh," exclaimed Bessy Studwick, bitterly, "if he had been my husband, and behaved to me like that!"

"Pray, hush!" said Hester, feebly.

"I can't," exclaimed Bessy, clasping the weeping woman in her arms. "I know you must have felt horribly jealous of me once, dear, and I really did of you; but as for Dutch Pugh now, I absolutely hate him, and I'm sure you must ever so much more."

"I never loved him so dearly as I do now," sighed Hester. "Some day he will believe in me again."

She covered her face with her hands, and thought of her little adventure upon the deck, one which puzzled as well as alarmed her; and once or twice she was on the point of confiding in Bessy, but the thoughts of her husband's peril drove others away, and, making an effort, she rose to go on deck again.

"I'm sure you are not fit to go on deck," exclaimed Bessy, trying to restrain her.

"Yes," she said, gently. "I am better now, and I could not bear to stay here if he is in danger."

Feeling that it would only cause an extra strain on nerves already weakened, Bessy made no further opposition, but accompanied Hester on deck, where a bustle of preparation was going on, the captain and doctor both working in subordination to Dutch and Mr Parkley. The air-pump was being fixed in a convenient spot, diving suits were in readiness for use, and tubes coiled in great snake-like rings. With an oily rag in his hand, and his cheeks blown out with importance, Rasp was fussing about and giving a touch here and a touch there; while no less important, and evidently feeling as if his task were done, Oakum sat on a coil of rope, chewing his tobacco, and looking on.

But to Hester's great relief the diving apparatus was not yet going to be put in use. For Dutch, Mr Parkley, and the doctor were busy at work with sundry jars, wires, and plates. In fact, they were placing a galvanic battery ready for

action, and making some mysterious preparations that the sailors did not understand.

There was a small white canister, too, over which the doctor kept guard, ordering back any of the sailors that approached.

At last, when the battery was ready, and emitting a low, hissing noise from the zinc and platina plates immersed in a solution, a long coil of thin wire was unwound and attached to the little white canister.

“For heaven’s sake be careful, Dutch!” said Mr Parkley, who had performed the latter operation. “Don’t connect the wire till I give the word.”

“Don’t be alarmed,” said Dutch, quietly, as he held the other end in his hand. “I shall be careful.”

“But I am alarmed,” said Mr Parkley to himself. “He thinks life of no more value than the snuff of a candle, and I want to live as long as I can.”

“Now, are you nearly ready?” said the captain, who came up, followed by ‘Pollo grinning, and having on a tin three great pieces of beef.

“Yes, quite ready,” said Dutch.

“Bring the meat here,” exclaimed Mr Parkley; and, choosing the largest piece, he half cut it in two, placed the white canister in the opening, and bound the meat round it firmly with a fresh piece of wire.

“Am dat mustard, sah?” said ‘Pollo, with his eyes wide open.

“No, ‘Pollo, it’s pepper—pepper for the sharks,” said Mr Parkley, smiling.

“Ho!” said ‘Pollo thoughtfully. “I no see de good to gib de shark pepper, sah.”

“Wait a minute and you will, ‘Pollo,” said the captain, smiling.

“All ready now,” said Mr Parkley. “Every one stand back.”

The crew shrank away, some of the men, though, climbing the rigging to get a good view of the proceedings, and John Studwick being helped into a sure position in the main chains. Then one of the pieces of coarse beef was taken and jerked out half-a-dozen yards from the ship.

As it struck the water and began to sink there was a rush and commotion as dark-grey forms and white streaks seemed to rise from below. The water bubbled and foamed, and the lump of beef was seized, torn asunder, and two huge sharks gorged the pieces, and then could be seen swimming backwards and forwards, and round and round, in company with others.

“Cut the next up into small bits, ‘Pollo,” said the captain, who was standing on the bulwarks, holding on by the main shrouds.

“Yes, sah, I cut um small and easy for mass’ shark ‘gestion,” said ‘Pollo grinning; and he cut the beef into pieces of the size of his fist with the large cook’s knife he wore in a sheath at his belt.

As he passed them up the captain threw them to the hungry sharks, each piece being snapped up by one or the other, as the monsters, not disdaining such morsels, turned half over and gorged each fragment as it fell.

No less than seven could now be counted, all evidently made more savage and eager by the taste of meat, and ready to leap out of the water as they glided one over the other in a space not many yards square, where the water was still impregnated with the odour and juices of the beef.

“That will do for them now,” cried Mr Parkley, mounting beside the captain with the lump of beef bound round the can in his fingers, holding it in one hand, whilst with the other he took a good grip of one of the rattlins.

“Are you ready, Pugh?”

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Is the wire all clear for a run?”

“Yes, perfectly. Stand back, man,” cried Dutch, as the mulatto stood eagerly watching what was done.

“Then I shall throw it into the midst of them, and when I cry *now*, make the connection—not before.”

“I understand,” said Dutch.

“One moment,” said the captain; “will it endanger the ship?”

“No,” said Mr Parkley, “because it will be too far away, and too deep. It will rock her, of course.”

“All right,” said Captain Studwick, nodding his head; and, giving the beef a swing to and fro, Mr Parkley launched it through the air, so that it fell with a heavy splash some fifty feet from the schooner, and began to sink rapidly.

There was a tremendous swirl in the clear water directly, as the sharks dashed at it, going over one another like dogs

in their eagerness to be first, for this was a piece of fourteen or fifteen pounds weight.

The next moment they were tearing at it, but baffled somewhat by the strong wire binding, while it sank rapidly, and the thin copper wire, that had fallen on the smooth surface like a line of light, ran rapidly over the side.

"*Now,*" cried Mr Parkley loudly.

As the word left his lips, Dutch applied the other end of the wire to the galvanic battery, an invisible spark darted along the thin copper to the case of dynamite; there was a dull rumble; the ship shivered as if struck by some heavy blow; a column of water rose in the air and sank back; and the schooner rolled from side to side as a large wave lifted her, let her down, and then rushed onward over the rocks to the shore, running up the sands in a line of foam, and laving the trunks of the palms beyond the narrow strip.

The men clung to the bulwarks, looking startled, but seeing that the danger was over, they uttered a loud cheer, for as the water subsided the clear limpidity was gone—sand, blood, fragments of weed and flesh, all combined to make it murky; and, what set the men off cheering again, there were the bodies of the seven sharks, four of them in scraps, the other three apparently uninjured, but floating back downwards quite dead, and with the foul pieces gliding slowly off with the hardly perceptible current.

"Well, I confess, Dutch, I should never have thought of that," exclaimed Mr Parkley. "It was a good idea."

"So the men seem to think," said the captain, as a couple slipped down into the jolly-boat, and, sculling it about, secured about a couple of dozen large fish that had also been killed by the dynamite. "But that was too near the schooner for safety: a shock or two like that would shake the masts out of her hull."

"It was more powerful than I expected," said Dutch. "We will fire the next from the boat with a good length of wire, and the schooner must be fifty or a hundred yards away."

"But you will not fire another unless you are troubled with sharks?" queried the captain.

"I intend to fire a canister exactly beneath where we stand," said Dutch, "so as to sweep away the growth and sand and shingle that have been accumulating for the last two hundred years. One of those charges will do more in an instant than the men could do under water in a week."

He raised his eyes as he spoke, and found that the mulatto was listening intently to every word, but with his eyes half-closed and a bitter look upon his face.

By this time the water was fast growing clear, and the change beneath the schooner was remarkable. The canister of dynamite must have sunk nearly to the bottom before it was exploded, and so great was the lateral sweep of the concussion that the seaweed seemed to have been levelled down in one direction, like a plantation after the passage of a hurricane; and grim and stark stood up now a series of dark stumps, the relics of the timbers of the ill-fated Spanish galleon, if such it really proved to be. Some of these were black and nearly level with the sand; some were worn to a point by the attrition of the current; but there, plainly enough now, could be traced out in timbers the shape of the vessel; but not for long, since the weed began once more to float into its normal position; but enough was known now, and Oakum took a fresh plug of tobacco as he said to Rasp—

"There, old 'un, your work's cut out for some time to come."

No time was lost. A couple of dynamite canisters were lowered down in the most suitable spots where the sand and weed seemed to be thickest, and Mr Parkley held one thin coil of wire, and Dutch and another, at opposite sides of the schooner, the kedge hawsers were buoyed and slipped; and, as the vessel slowly went with the current, the wire was payed out till the schooner had swung right round, and was riding by the anchor from her bows, and eighty or ninety yards away from the sunken wreck. The wire was sufficiently long to render the use of the boat unnecessary, and all being ready the battery was once more brought into use, the wires being connected, and this time the water surged up as from some volcanic eruption, a great wave ran towards the schooner, which rode over it easily, and it passed on towards the shore, washing right up again amongst the trees.

The men went to work with a will, getting ropes to the buoys, hauling upon them, and gradually working the schooner back, and mooring her in her old position; but it was a good hour later before the water was once more clear, and they gazed down upon quite a different scene from that of the morning.

So effective had been the force of the explosion that sand, weeds, small rocks and shingles, had been completely swept away, and lay at a distance, while the interior of the old wreck seemed to have been scooped right out.

The most careful search with the eye, though, failed to show any traces of that which they sought, and as evening was now fast drawing on, any further investigations were left till the following day.

Story 1--Chapter XX.

A Discovery.

So far as they had been able to make out, there was no trace of inhabitants near the place where the schooner was moored; but the adventure was of so important a nature that Captain Studwick felt it his duty to keep the most careful watch; and he was not sorry that afternoon to yield to the pressing request of Mr Wilson and the doctor to go on shore with their guns for a couple of hours' shooting.

"I consent," he said, "on condition that you are back here by nightfall, and that you take a couple of the men well-armed with you."

This was agreed to, and the party of four was rowed ashore, Dutch and Mr Parkley both declining to accompany them, on the score of fatigue; while, though John Studwick longed to be of the party, he felt that he was too weak, and watched them from the side, as the boat rowed through the sparkling water, landing the party on the golden sands.

As the boat was returning to the side, the longing to go on shore proved too strong for John Studwick, and he beckoned his sister to his side.

"Bessy," he said, "I must go and have an hour's walk under those shady trees, where the sand seems to be so smooth and soft."

Bessy started, partly at his saddened way of speaking, and partly that he, who seemed to hate the very idea of her being anywhere near Mr Meldon, should propose to go ashore after him.

"You mean alone?" she said, quickly.

"Alone? No," he cried, petulantly. "I mean with you. Mrs Pugh would like to go too, perhaps."

"I will speak to father," she said, eager to please him in every way; and she went forward to where Captain Studwick was chatting with Mr Parkley and Dutch about the morrow's arrangements.

"John wishes to go ashore, father," she said, "to sit under the trees."

The captain stood thinking for a moment or two, and then, after a little hesitation—

"Well," he said, "I see no harm. The men shall row you ashore, and stop there. Don't go out of sight, nor far from the boat. I don't think there can be any danger, and, poor fellow, he will soon want to be back."

By the time Bessy returned to her brother, the keen desire was growing blunted, and he felt almost ready to resent what he looked upon as his sister's eagerness to get ashore, where the young doctor had gone.

"The boat is waiting, John dear," she said, holding out her hand. "You will go, too, Hester?"

Hester glanced towards Dutch, but he made no sign, and, yielding to Bessy's implied wish, she followed them to the boat, Oakum helping them down, and receiving his instructions from the captain as to keeping a sharp watch.

As the boat pushed off, the men just dipping their oars, and Oakum standing up and steering, for the distance was only about fifty yards, the captain turned quietly to the mate.

"Lower down the other boat quietly," he said, "and have the rest of the men ready to jump in and row ashore at a moment's notice. Parkley, Mr Pugh, I think it is better to be too particular than not particular enough, so we will get our revolvers and a rifle or two ready. Where's Mr Pugh?"

"He went to the cabin directly," said Mr Parkley; and on their following him they found him loading his rifle, and saw the butt of his revolver sticking out of his breast.

"Actuated by the same thought," said the captain.

"Well, yes," said Dutch, "there may be no danger either from beast or Indian, but it is as well to be on the safe side."

Taking rifles on deck, they went and leaned over the bulwarks, talking, to see the little party land, and Oakum help out the ladies, who walked slowly up with John Studwick towards the trees, while the sailors sat about close to the boat, or threw themselves down upon the sands.

"We seem to have been suspicious enough over this affair," said the captain, taking off his cap, so as to let the soft breeze that was now beginning to blow after the heat of the day, fan his brown forehead. "I wonder what has become of the Cuban."

"Home by this time, I should say," replied Mr Parkley, while Dutch, with an uneasy feeling creeping over him, leaned there, rifle in hand, watching the shore.

"I had my suspicions at first," continued the captain, "and really hardly expected to get out here without some hindrance."

"What did you suspect?" said Mr Parkley, lighting a cigar, and handing one to the captain, who lit up in turn.

"Anything—nothing. I had got it into my head that this fellow wanted to stop us, and I was prepared to be overhauled by a swift steamer; for a mutiny on board; to find him here first—there, it is always the way; once give your imagination its head, and away it goes."

"Well, nothing could have gone better than the trip has since we started, and if it should prove that there is treasure below us here, all we have to do is to dive and get it all."

"If the sharks will let you," said the captain.

"Well, at first I thought we were completely checkmated, but you saw what Pugh did to-day," he continued, in a low

tone. "It's my belief that if obstacles ten times as difficult offer themselves, he would surmount them."

They both glanced at Dutch, and then followed his eyes to see that the ladies were gathering flowers, the men fruit and shellfish, and that all on shore looked so peaceful and lovely that the longing came upon them to join the little party.

"It is so easy to imagine danger," said the captain; and then, lulled by the peaceful aspect of matters into security, they went on talking in a low tone about the various incidents of the day, while Dutch kept stern watch alone.

Meanwhile, John Studwick's jealous fancies passed away as his feet touched the sand, and it was with a thrill of delight that he pointed towards the lovely tropic scene before him.

"Flowers, fruit, mossy carpet," he said fervently. "Why, it is really Eden—a paradise. I could live here, I think."

There was an inexpressible sadness in his words, and Bessy's eyes filled with tears as she glanced at Hester, for she knew but too well that her brother's days were numbered.

Hester's heart was full to overflowing, and these words and her friend's sad look had touched the spring ready to gush forth. It was only by a great effort that she could keep from a hysterical fit of crying, and she was obliged to turn away.

John Studwick smiled lovingly upon his sister, though, directly after, for his heart smote him for many little harsh words directed at her in regard to Mr Meldon; and he began to chat earnestly to her about the flowers, calling one of the men to get down a cocoanut or two for them, and sitting down to watch the man make a gasket or band of twisted cane with almost boyish pleasure, Bessy's eyes brightening as she saw his eagerness, and remembering the bright happiness of that scene for years to come.

For the spot was lovely, and in the shade of the densely foliaged trees the wondrous blossoms of gaily tinted bellflowers hung in wreaths and garlands as they festooned the undergrowth and offered their nectary cups to the humming birds that flashed in and out of the sunshine to poise themselves on invisible wings, while each moment some new object struck the eye.

It was, indeed, a scene of loveliness to the sick man and his sister as they rose and wandered here and there, now gazing into beautiful green glades, now looking up at the delicate lacework of some wonderful tree-fern against the sky, or toward the deep blue sea, with the schooner doubled before them as it lay mirrored in its breast. But bright as it was to them, the beauteous scene was, as it were, covered with ashes to Hester Pugh. The sky might have been dark, and the sun's light quenched even as was the light of hope in her breast. She had thought that Dutch would have listened to her before now, and that this dreadful cloud of suspicion would have been swept away; but no, he had let her come ashore without a word, as if careless of her fate, and at last, blind with the gathering tears, she had wandered slowly away unnoticed amongst the trees, as she thought, to find some place where she could relieve her bursting heart and throbbing brain of the tears that she had kept back so long.

She sank down at last upon the trunk of a fallen tree, sobbing as if her heart would break, and, as her head sank down upon her hands, she moaned in the bitterness of her spirit.

All was silent for a time, and in her grief she did not hear the rustling amongst the trees, and it was not until her hands were taken and drawn gently from before her face that she looked up, to see, with the blood chilling in her veins, the mulatto upon his knees before her, gazing with glittering eyes, full in hers.

She was too much surprised and frightened to cry out, but she tried to start up and flee. The effort was vain, though, for, tightening his hold of her hands, the man rested his arms upon her knees and kept her a prisoner.

"Hush!" he said; "for your own sake be silent."

"Let me go," she panted, hoarsely.

"No, no, beautiful Hester," he whispered, his voice low with passion. "Why do you pretend that you do not recognise me, when you know me so well?"

"How dare you!" she began, in a loud voice, when the glittering eyes fixed upon hers seemed to fascinate her, and her tongue refused its office.

"How dare I?" he laughed; "because I love you more than even I loved you the first day I saw you in that dark office in miserable, cold England; I loved you when, in those dear ecstatic days, I hung over you in your little home, when that jealous fool, your husband, interrupted our *tête-à-têtes* with his hateful presence; and now, in this nature's paradise, I love you more—more dearly than ever, even though I have lived these many weeks only to hear your sweet voice."

"Lauré!" she panted, with dilating eyes.

"Yes, Lauré, your Manuel, who loves you," he whispered, his face now transformed, and the dull, drooping look of the mulatto gone, to give place to the flashing eyes of the Cuban. "Pish! you have known me all along. You are the only one that my disguise could not deceive. I might have known that no darkened skin, no false scar, no assumed limp or cunning disguise could deceive the woman I love and who loves me."

Hester struggled once more to rise, but she was powerless in his grasp, and in the horror she felt at the discovery of this man's presence she could not cry for help. It was to her like some terrible nightmare; there were the voices on the sands, help was so near, and yet she could not claim it.

"I was afraid that you would betray me at first, dearest," he whispered, with his face close to hers, and his hot breath fanning her cheeks; "but I need not have feared, and I waited and suffered. There, do not struggle, little one, you are so safe with me. Have I not watched him and his cold, brutal cruelty to you—the way he has neglected, scorned one who is to me all that is bright and beautiful, and for whose sake I have hacked and disguised myself, working with a set of coarse sailors, eating their wretched fare, sleeping in their miserable den. Hester, beautiful Hester, but you will reward me for all this. You will live with me here in one of these beautiful sunny lands, where all is bright, and where the very air breathes love."

"Let me go," she panted.

"No, no," he whispered, "you cannot be so cruel. Only a short time now and the object of my mission is over, and then—then—Oh, my darling, I love you—I love you."

He clasped her in his arms, and, in spite of her struggles, his lips sought hers, when the sound of approaching voices made him start up.

Hester's lips moved to shriek for help, but he laid his hand quickly upon her mouth, and held her tightly to him, as he whispered:

"One word—say a word of what has passed, and Pugh, perhaps all your friends will die."

She glanced at him and shuddered, as she saw his hand go into his breast, and read in his eyes too plainly so fell a purpose, that she knew she dared not speak.

"Sit down," he whispered. "I shall be watching you from close at hand. If you betray me, it is some one's death signal. You are mine, Hester; you know I love you; but I would not force that love when I know that soon it must be mine."

He pressed her back into her seat, and glided into the low bushes, her eyes following till she saw him crouch, and knew that he had his gaze fixed upon her face, and read it, so that if she attempted to betray him he might keep his word.

The horror was more than she could bear, for this discovery taught her of the danger to Dutch, perhaps to all on board. Partly from his passion for her, then, partly to watch the proceedings of the adventurers, he had contrived to get on board, and was undiscovered. Here, then, was the secret of what she had looked upon as an insult from a half-savage sailor.

She let her pale face fall again into her hands, and sat there shivering, not daring even to answer, though she heard Bessy's voice close at hand.

What should she do? What should she do? She dared not speak now, but as soon as they were safe on board she would warn Dutch of his danger, and if the Cuban slew her, what then? She would have saved her husband's dear life.

But if he killed Dutch instead!

The thought paralysed her, and a death-like perspiration broke out on her forehead as she felt that she dared not speak lest ill should happen to him she loved. She essayed to rise, but sank back trembling, with her eyes fixed upon the spot where she knew the Cuban was hidden, when Bessy came in sight.

"Why, you've been crying, dear," she said, gaily, as she sat down beside her on the tree trunk. "Come, come, dear, be a woman. All will come right if we wait."

"All will come right if we wait," muttered Hester to herself. Would it? Ought she to wait and trust, or should she warn Dutch?

"Yes, she would," she said to herself, as soon as they were on board; and, rising, she accompanied Bessy on to the beach, where the first person on whom her eyes lit was the Cuban, with drooping eyelids, limping slowly along with some shellfish in his hand, so changed once more that Hester asked herself whether this scene had indeed been the nightmare of some dream.

A shout came now from the schooner, and they moved towards the boat, for the sun was beginning to dip, when another shout from behind made them turn, to see Mr Wilson, Mr Meldon, and the two sailors coming from their expedition, laden with beautifully-plumaged birds.

They were soon on board once more, Hester sick at heart, for the Cuban had contrived to whisper to her that one word, "Remember!" and she had shrunk away shivering, feeling that she dared not speak. So great was this man's influence over her that she spent the evening in torture, feeling that his eyes were following her everywhere, that his face was at her cabin window, at the skylight; and she was in both instances right, for Lauré felt that she might betray him at any moment, and his plans were not yet ripe.

He watched, then, without intermission, with the intent of forcing her to swear some terrible oath that she would be silent, and this he felt that he could exact from her could he get the chance.

"I shall begin to think that you are going to have some relapse, Hester," said Bessy at last, as they sat alone, trying to read by the light in their little cabin, for John Studwick had gone to rest, and Bessy was sitting with Hester alone.

"Oh, no," she exclaimed, with a smile, "I am quite well."

"But you have been acting so strangely, and starting as you looked up at the skylight. Surely you have not caught some terrible fever through sitting in that bit of jungle."

"Oh, no; I am quite well," said Hester, making an effort to control her feelings. "The heat, perhaps, makes me nervous."

"I know," said Bessy, "you are nervous about your husband going down to-morrow."

"Yes, yes, I am," cried Hester. "I always fear when I know of his taking the work in hand himself. He is so venturesome."

"I wish he would be a little more kind. There, I'll say no more. Good-night. He has the watch to-night on deck—the first watch."

"Has he?"

"Yes; and if he were my husband I should go to him and ask him if this wicked estrangement was to last, because, if so, it should last for ever, for I would never make another advance to him."

"Are you sure he has the watch to-night?"

"Yes," said Bessy, kissing her; "and it's as dark as pitch on deck. Shall I go with you, dear?"

"No, no," whispered Hester, eagerly, as her heart began to throb. "Good-night, good-night."

"But where are you going?" said Bessy, playfully.

"I am going to speak to my husband," said Hester, whose face was as white as ashes, but her voice very firm, for the strength that she had prayed for seemed to have come at last, and she felt that at any hazard she must go and tell Dutch of the impending danger to them both. For it was evident from the Cuban's words, as much as from his presence, that he held some deep design on hand, and perhaps she might be saving others as well as her husband by the step she was about to take.

But he had said that he would kill Dutch if she betrayed him, and her heart seemed to stand still at the horrible thought. But no—Dutch was so strong and brave, and he would seize this villain, and, by taking rapid action, secure safety to himself, perhaps to the ship as well.

"You had better let me go too," said Bessy, smiling.

"No, no," said Hester, shaking her head; "stop here. I shall be back almost directly."

"I am not so sure," said Bessy, laughing. "There, dear, all happiness come of your meeting. You will find him right forward, I think."

Hester took a step towards the door, and then realised how weak she was, for she trembled and felt as if she should drop. But this was no time for hesitation, and she came back to say farewell.

"Put out the light or turn it down. I do not want any one to see me go on deck."

Bessy smiled, and turned down the lamp until it was almost out; and then, opening the door gently, Hester stepped to the foot of the cabin stairs, where, as she laid her hand upon the cold brass rail, the trembling fit again seized her, for her heart whispered that Lauré should be watching her.

She recovered herself directly and ascended the cabin stairs, leaving the deep voices of the captain and the others talking behind her; and as she went on her courage seemed to increase, and whispering to herself that it was to save him she loved, she stepped cautiously upon the deck.

All was perfectly silent, and the darkness was intense, save ashore, where the fireflies glanced and played in scintillations amongst the trees. She turned from them with a shudder, for it reminded her of the evening's encounter, and, trying to make out where her husband was watching, she went cautiously on, for there was not a sound to be heard.

The distance was very short, but she had to go to the side so as to avoid the masts and deckhouse, beyond which she felt that Dutch would be standing, and she had already reached the mainmast, when she heard a slight cough, which she knew to have been uttered by Dutch.

"He will believe me and love me again," she said to herself, with her heart beginning to throb with joy, "and I shall save him from some dreadful death—save myself too, from that wretch."

As these words were pronounced silently by her lips a chill of horror and a curse made her cower shivering back as something dark rose before her, an arm was passed tightly round her quivering form, and a damp, cold hand laid upon her mouth checked the shriek with which she was about to pierce the darkness of the night.

Story 1--Chapter XXI.

The Shadow Darkened.

In the horror of those moments Hester Pugh felt nerveless, and after the first spasmodic attempt to shriek there was no necessity for the hand pressed so tightly over her lips as she was lifted by a strong arm and carried back a few paces, and then held firmly against the bulwarks.

The next moment, as with starting eyes she gazed wildly about in search of help, her captor's lips were placed close to her, and words that seemed to scorch her brain were hissed into her ear.

"Have I not warned you sufficiently? But for the intense love I bear you, this moment would be your last. One plunge, and it would be impossible to save you in this darkness, and no one would realise who did the deed. Do you wish me to make use of the knowledge I gained to-day with those dynamite experiments; because, listen, I have not looked on in vain. One touch of a wire—one that I have laid—and this ship and all on board would be in fragments. That would have happened if you had gone forward to-night and betrayed me. Once more, listen; it is useless for you to fight against your fate, for I am not alone here; and when I cease watching you others take up the task. There. See, I release and trust you after what I have said."

He took his hand from the trembling woman's lips, but grasped her tightly still, lest she should sink down fainting.

"Now return quietly to your cabin," he continued, "and remember this. You think to save Dutch Pugh and the rest by betraying me. Instead of that you will send them to their death. Now go back without a sound."

Hester felt her arm released, and that she was free. Her first wild thought was to run forward, shrieking for help; her next that Lauré would keep his word, and, controlling herself she tottered with outstretched hands back to the cabin stairs, and reached the little cabin where Bessy was already asleep, and then, sinking on her knees, prayed for help in this time of need.

That night of agony seemed as if it would never pass away, for Hester crouched there sleepless and watching, starting at every sound, and trembling lest the Cuban should be already putting some diabolical scheme into action. At length the day broke, and quite exhausted she sank into a troubled slumber, from which she awoke affrighted with the feeling upon her that Lauré was bending down trying to read her face and tell whether she was going to warn her husband or not.

A smile of relief crossed her lips, though, as she saw that it was Bessy Studwick, and she listened calmly to her chidings, but refused to go to bed.

"It was so foolish," said Bessy, "to sit there the night through. It is not the way to grow strong."

From the noise on deck it was evident that preparations for diving were rapidly going on, and now another dread assailed Hester. She felt sure that Dutch would be one of the first to go down, and she shuddered as she thought of the sharks, and determined to make an effort to dissuade him.

She was on the point of going on deck when Lauré's words stayed her. She was watched, and if she tried to communicate with her husband might he not interpret it as an attempt to betray him, and in an instant compass his destruction.

"If I only knew what to do?" she moaned. "If I could but warn him of the danger they might seize that villain in time. I will warn him at all hazards."

She was ready to die to save Dutch from peril, but she was so circumstanced that her warning would compass his destruction, and she sank back feeling at last that she could not betray what she knew.

For the moment she was reassured by hearing Dutch's voice, and directly after Bessy came to fetch her into the cabin to breakfast, where all save she were in high spirits, no one having a suspicion of the danger that threatened them. The talk was all of the treasure, and the specimen ingots that Lauré had shown them were mentioned, while to Hester's horror she found that the Cuban was apparently forgotten.

It soon became evident to her that all the preparations had been made, and she followed the actors in the busy scene to be enacted on deck as soon as the hurried meal was at an end.

Dutch had glanced at her once, and her heart throbbed with pleasure as she read his look as one more of sorrow than anger, and this last determined her to speak to him at all hazards.

The air-pump was ready, with Rasp dictating and ordering the men about; and had Hester felt any hesitation before, the sight of Dutch drawing on the heavy india-rubber suit determined her to act.

"I don't think their teeth would go through this," he said coolly to Mr Parkley, "if they come; but we'll do what we said, and that will keep them off."

He went on with his preparations, and twice over, as she saw him nearing readiness, Hester approached, but, each time on glancing round, she saw that the Cuban had his eyes fixed upon her, and she shrank away.

At last, however, Dutch was ready, all but having the great copper diving-helmet screwed on. A stout leather belt was round his waist, heavy leaden-soled boots upon his feet; square weights of lead hung from the copper gorget round his neck and breast and back; the long tube was attached to helmet and air-pump, and a keen handy axe and a long sharp double-edged knife lay ready for placing in his belt, side by side with a heavy iron bar.

A stout wooden ladder, in joints, had been fitted together and secured to the gangway, its foot being within a few inches of the sand that lay in the midst of the sunken wreck, which, seen through the clear water, seemed, although five fathoms down, but a very little distance from the keel of the schooner.

There too was the signalling rope ready for placing round the diver; and to make the preparations more complete, the galvanic battery was charged, and half-a-dozen little dynamite cartridges, attached to as many thin wires, lay ready for hurling in the direction of any approaching shark and exploding in the water. This, it was considered, might kill it, but would certainly scare it away, while the size was not large enough to injure the diver, protected by his helmet. A careful investigation had resulted in not one of the monsters being seen, and all hoped that the explosions of the previous day had killed and scared all that they need fear for the present.

Very good theories all these, but those on board forgot that a good deal of refuse food was thrown overboard by 'Pollo every now and then, and that this floated away slowly on the current, and might act as an attraction to the fish some distance away.

The air-pump was tried, and proved, thanks to Rasp, in excellent condition. Such of the crew as were not to work at the pump were in good places for observation, partly to satisfy their own curiosity, for the novelty of the coming experiment quite excited them, partly to keep watch for sharks and give ample warning; while a portion of the deck was marked off, where the apparatus was placed, and no one but those at work was allowed to pass the ropes. Here Rasp had arranged his coils with mathematical exactness; the rope for signalling was as carefully arranged, and men stationed at the pump, to the use of which he had drilled them; and in addition a stouter coil with a spring hook was ready, the spring being held in Rasp's hand.

"I think you had better have it attached, Pugh," said Mr Parkley.

"Nonsense!" replied Dutch, smiling; and as his countenance lit up Hester thought he had never looked so true and brave before. "Why, anyone would think I was a novice, who had never been down."

"'Taint that, Mr Pug," said Rasp, "it's on account of those long-nosed sharks. You just have it on, and if we sees one o' the warmint coming we'll haul you up in a way such as'll startle him."

"I'm not afraid of the sharks," said Dutch, taking up and feeling the point of the great dagger-like knife. "A man can but the once."

"My dear Pugh," exclaimed Mr Parkley, "don't talk in that cynical way. Of course, a man can only die once; but do you think I want to go to the end of my days feeling that I had murdered you by my neglect. My dear boy, I would not exchange your life for twenty sunken ship-loads of treasure."

"Thank you, Parkley," said Dutch, taking and wringing his hand, "I believe you."

"Then, come, you will have the rope attached?"

"No, no, it will only be in the way."

"My dear fellow, it will not. It is not as if you were going down the hold of a ship. All is clear; there is not even a rock in your way, only a few upright ribs that you can easily avoid."

"But it is such a childlike preparation," said Dutch, petulantly. "Here, give me the helmet, Rasp."

"Yah, you allus was as obstinate as a mule, Mr Pug," said the old fellow, handing the great casque with its barred visor. "If you don't have the rope, I won't give you a good supply of wind—there!"

"I'm not afraid of that, Rasp," said Dutch, laughing; and then, as he stood with the helmet on his arm, he turned cold and stern again, for he saw Hester approach, and as she did so the others involuntarily drew away.

"What is it?" he said, coldly.

"Dutch," she whispered, as she laid her hands upon his shoulders, "your true, faithful wife, who has never wronged you in thought or deed, implores you to take the precaution they ask."

"Pish!" he exclaimed, contemptuously.

"You do not believe me, dear," she continued, with the tears streaming down her cheeks; "but God is my judge that I speak the truth. Oh, Dutch, Dutch!" she continued, as she saw his face begin to work, "some day you will know all, and your heart will bleed for the agony you have caused me."

"Hester," he said, in the same low tone, "I'd give twenty years of my life to have back the same old trust in you, but it is gone, gone for ever."

"No," she replied, with a bright look beaming in her face, "it is not: the truth is coming—coming soon, and when it does, Dutch, you will come back to my heart with the knowledge that your little wife has forgiven you your injustice from the first, that she loves you more dearly than ever."

"You forgive me?" he said bitterly.

"Yes, the wrong you have done me, Dutch. You have nothing to forgive me but for keeping my secret for your sake."

There was such an air of candour and truth in her countenance that had they been alone he would have clutched her to his breast, but he knew that they were watched by many eyes, and restraining himself he said quietly:

"It is enough now. Tell me this—will you—when I return—"

"You're a-going to have on that rope, ain't you, Mr Dutch?" said Rasp, interrupting them.

"Yes. You can get it ready," replied Dutch.

"God bless you for that," whispered Hester earnestly.

"Now, go back," he said quietly; "there must be no scene here. You need not be afraid for me; I shall incur no risks now, in the hope that, as you say, you can make all clear between us. You will explain all—everything to me when I come up."

With a wild look of delight she was about to say yes, when she quailed and shrank away, for at a little distance behind Dutch she saw Lauré apparently busy arranging the rope there around the deck, but evidently hearing all that was said.

"You promise?" said Dutch sternly.

"Spare me, oh, my darling," she moaned. "I dare not—oh I dare not speak."

"What," he whispered, "is this your truth?"

"It is for your sake," she moaned, "for your sake," and with drooping head she crept away.

"Come, come, little woman," said Mr Parkley, taking her hand; "be firm, be firm; he shall not come to harm."

"Not he, mum, while old Tom Rasp is alive to help," growled the old fellow.

"Perhaps you'd better go below, my dear," said Mr Parkley.

"No," said Hester firmly, and drawing herself up; "I shall stay."

"Then you shall, my dear; but," he added, with a smile, "woman for ever! You've won the day: he's going to have the life-rope."

The old doubts, which had been growing fainter and which would, no doubt, have been entirely swept away by an explanation, came back more strongly again at Hester's refusal, and with a feeling of rage and bitterness Dutch raised the helmet, placed it upon his head, and signed to old Rasp to come and screw it on.

This the old fellow did after securing the extra life-line to his belt, but not before Dutch had had a few words with Mr Parkley as to the management of the dynamite and wires.

The men on the look-out could see no sharks, all being apparently quite clear, and at last, when with hatchet and knife in his belt, and the wheel of the air-pump beginning to clank, Dutch moved towards the gangway, trailing after him the long india-rubber tube, there was a loud cheer, and everyone leaned forward in eager excitement.

"Now to solve the problem, Studwick," said Mr Parkley, who was evidently excited, and who dabbed his face to get rid of the dripping perspiration. "Is it to be luck or ill-luck?"

"That I'll tell you by-and-by," said the captain, smiling; and like Mr Wilson and the doctor, he stood up on the bulwarks to help to keep a good lookout for sharks.

"Now look here, Mr Parkley," said Rasp, who had assumed the management, and dictated as if everything belonged to him, "just you place Mr Jones the mate, here with three men to let that there life-line run softly through their hands when it's pulled, and to heave in the slack when it isn't; but when I give the word they're to run it in with all their might—take hold of it, you know, and run along the deck."

Hester Pugh's breath caught, as now, with dilating eyes, she watched her husband, who, as calmly as possible, stepped on to the ladder, and began to descend step by step, till his shoulders were immersed, when he paused for a moment to alter the way in which the tube hung from his helmet; then Rasp, passing it through his hands, and giving a word or two of advice to the men at the pump, the helmet disappeared beneath the surface, and in place of the hissing noise heard as the air escaped from the valve, there came foaming up a continuous stream of bubbles through the limpid water.

The men gave another cheer, and the Cuban, who had crept round close to Hester, looked down over the bulwark, full of curiosity to see what would follow.

Down, down, down went Dutch, armed with a small sharp shovel, made in the shape of the ordinary spade of a pack of cards, and so bright was the water that his every motion was perfectly plain to those on deck, as he stepped from the ladder to the bed of the old vessel, and, after taking care that the tube should be clear of the ladder, walked slowly between the black ribs of the old galleon towards what had evidently been the stern.

Story 1--Chapter XXII.

A Submarine Excursion.

To those on deck the sight was curious in the extreme, for, foreshortened by the clear medium through which they gazed, the diver seemed like some hideous water-goblin, with an enormous head, creeping about on the yellow sand.

But interesting as it was to those on deck, it was perhaps more so to Dutch, who, as soon as he had assumed his

helmet and began to descend, threw off all thought of his domestic troubles by a strong effort of his will, and, feeling that the success or ill-success of the expedition depended upon him, he set to work eagerly to solve the question of the treasure. He had been down too many times to feel nervous, but, all the same, an unwonted tremor, which he ascribed to disease, oppressed him as he slowly went down from round to round; but as he reached the bottom this also passed off, and finding that he was well supplied with air, and that all worked well, he began to consider how he should act. This confidence arose in a great measure from the knowledge that both Mr Parkley and old Rasp were watching over his safety, and feeling that his knife could be easily drawn from his belt, he began to look about him.

All was beautifully clear; and though the motion of his heavy boots stirred up the sand, it sank down again directly without thickening the water. A few yards away was the ladder, and above it, with the air-tube and two ropes plainly seen running up, was the schooner, casting a dark shadow on to the bottom. Even his own shadow was cast behind him, and it seemed as if he were only walking in a medium of thickened air. He could even make out the faces of those gazing over the side, but in a blurred, distorted way, for the bright bubbles of air that ran up in a stream made the water seem heavy overhead, though all around it was clearness itself.

His first thoughts were naturally of the sharks, but he could see nothing to fear, though he had made up his mind if one should attack him to take advantage of its sluggish action, and, instead of trying to escape, thrust boldly at the monster with his knife.

As he was looking about there was a flash of many colours through the water, and then it seemed as if the gold and silver ingots he had come in search of had become animated, for a shoal of fish, whose scales were burnished metal in appearance, suddenly darted about him, coming close up to his helmet as he remained stationary, as if in wonder at his appearance; but on his raising his arm there was a rush, the water quivered for a moment, and, like streaks of the rich metals he sought, they disappeared.

So beautiful was the scene around him—the soft sunshine, the delicious tint of the water, and the long vistas in the distance of wondrous sea growths, which ran up six, twelve, and fourteen feet towards the surface, all aglow with the most lovely tints—that the desire was strong upon him to walk on beyond the portion of the bottom that had been swept by the dynamite, and gaze upon the various natural objects around. But he had sterner work on hand, and set himself to investigate the appearance of the old hull, in whose interior he was.

For he found now that what had seemed short stumps of blackened wood were some of them six or eight feet high; and that while the upper portions were encrusted with grey shelly matter, the lower were of an intense black, and these had evidently been forcibly denuded by the sweeping away of the sand.

As he moved forward, he gave a twitch or two at the life-line to signal all well; and then had to make the signal that he required more air. An increased supply of the life-giving stream was forced down directly, and, raising his spade, he began to investigate the place more closely. In an instant the bottom seemed to have become alive, for curious flat-fish, whose sides assimilated so strangely to the sand, in which they lay half buried, rose at every step, making little clouds, and going off with a peculiar undulating motion to settle down again, flick the sand and tiny stones over their sides by a peculiar motion of their broad fins, and the next minute they had become invisible.

As to the wreck, there was not much to see beyond the rows of rib timbers on either hand, while where he stood was there nothing but sand, which covered the whole of the interior, though now, probably through the explosions, it was in hillocks, with their accompanying depressions.

Knowing that those above must be anxiously watching, he thrust the spade down into the bottom and began to dig slowly and with great excitement, to find that the tool penetrated easily through; and as he raised the sand, and placed it on one side, it softly flowed back again.

"I ought to have brought an iron rod to probe with," he thought to himself, as he gave the spade another thrust down, to find that nothing obstructed him, when he became aware of a dull shock, and he was thrown down, for the water seemed to rush by him with considerable violence.

The next moment there was a violent pull at the life-line, and he was raised from his feet in a most uncomfortable position; and, but for a sudden snatch at his signal-cord to signify "All right," one which he repeated again and again, he would have been drawn to the surface.

In obedience to his signals, the rope was slackened, but he had hardly recovered himself when it was tightened once more, and but for his vigorous snatch to show that he wanted no assistance, those on the schooner's deck would have drawn him to the surface. He knew well enough now what was the meaning of the shock, and felt how necessary it was for a diver to be full of the calm nerve and courage of a man ready to battle with difficulties, for his safety depended entirely upon his taking the dangers he encountered in the coolest manner.

The conclusion was evidently due to the firing of a dynamite cartridge, but, in spite of this, here was the reason for their trying to drag him to the surface, in the shape of something dim and large approaching him slowly, and apparently without effort. As he saw it at first coming end on, it seemed to him like some very short, thick fish, but as it neared him, and grew more distinct, it swerved off to his right, and his heart beat fast as he saw from its altered position that it was a shark seven or eight feet long.

He signalled again, "More air—all right," and the tightening life-rope slackened as he drew the long, keen-bladed knife from its wooden sheath.

It was a terrible weapon, with a fine point, and about eighteen inches long beyond the handle, while its two edges were ground as sharp as a razor. Armed with this he awaited the coming of the shark, feeling that to it he must prove as he looked, a monster as deadly in his power. For Dutch agreed that to leave the field on this first encounter with one of the creatures that infested these waters was to confess to himself that he was beaten, and morally to consent

to a defeat of their project, while could he nerve himself to boldly meet the attack, and so disable his enemy by skilful tactics as to kill it, or compel its retreat, he would give himself so much confidence, and Rasp as well, that they would in the future have little compunction in descending, and scarcely any fear of their dangerous enemies.

"If I fail," he said to himself bitterly; "well, it is a horrible death, but why should I mind dying? I have nothing to live for now."

"Bah! Dying," he went on, mastering his trepidation, and feeling a savage energy of will. "I, a man with reasoning powers, with ingenuity enough to help to invent the apparatus by which I can stay down here and meet this creature with arms in my hand in his own element. Pooh! it is absurd. I shall—I will kill it."

He had plenty of time to think, and he had once more to impatiently signal "All right," for he became aware of a tightening of the life-line, while the shark, with its curious, crafty look, undulated by him, its long, unequally-lobed tail waving softly as it nearly passed him with the greatest apparent ease, turned, sailed back some little distance, and then turned once more as if to pass him on the other side.

"That is where he has the advantage," thought Dutch, as he saw the ease with which the creature glided along, on about a level with the top of his helmet, and knew for his own part what an effort it needed for him to move through the water.

He felt very little alarm now in the excitement of these moments, and as he watched the shark's manoeuvres he grew more and more determined to make this the test of the future. He had often read of how the South Sea Islanders made no scruple about bathing where there were sharks, and how ready they were to attack them in their own element, while protected as he was on head, back, neck, and breast, by his copper armour and weights, he felt that it would be cowardly to retreat.

"Poor thing! I hope she cannot see me now," he muttered, as for a fleeting moment his thoughts reverted to Hester. Then, with set teeth and knit brows, he waited the coming of the shark, feeling that his one most vulnerable point was the air-tube, and dreading lest the creature should make a snap at that in passing. For either that or the continuous stream of bright air bubbles had evidently excited its attention, and for a few moments it swam up eight or ten feet, giving Dutch a good view of its white under-portions, and the great gash of a mouth that seemed as if formed by one cut of a large knife.

The creature came down again, though, directly, in the most leisurely way gazing full now at the helmet, and, poising itself almost motionless in the water, it remained gazing straight at him while Dutch awaited the attack.

This was not long in coming, for the shark, after altering its position once or twice, and descending to about the level of the young man's shoulders, made a forward movement, but with no great rapidity, and Dutch gave a sharp signal once more, to ensure liberty of action before the shark, as it came gliding through the clear water as if to seize his left arm, rolled softly over on its side, opened its great jaws, which glistened with saw-like teeth, and was in the act of closing them, when, with a thrust like lightning, Dutch buried his knife to the haft between the monster's pectoral fins, which offered a fair mark, dragged it out, and prepared to strike again.

As the blade entered its yielding body the shark gave a spasmodic jerk and shot straight up, with the water becoming tinged with a ruddy hue, but, turning, it darted down once more, leaving a red trail behind it, and again made to attack.

There was a sudden tightening of the life-line, but Dutch met it with the signal, "All right," just before the shark once more approached, turned over to seize him, and again received the full length of the blade, while as the monster darted forward and dragged itself free it was at the expense of so fearful a gash that a cloud of blood darkened the water, the shark struggled feebly for a few minutes, and then floated, belly up, to the surface.

Dutch gave his knife a wave or two through the water to remove the blood, replaced it in his belt, and stood gazing up at the ruddy cloud above his head for a few moments, gave a signal or two with the rope such as would show them on deck that he was unhurt, and, stooping down, once more took his spade to try the sand.

It was with a strange feeling of elation that he resumed his task, knowing now, as he did, that by the exercise of ordinary courage a man might readily defend himself from any of these monsters. In fact, so far from feeling alarm now, he was ready to encounter another whenever it might appear; but now the only one in sight was the creature floating far above his head, and more distinctly seen each moment, for the ruddy cloud was becoming rapidly diffused, and the outline of the schooner's hull and the ladder, which had seemed misty and dull, were now well defined and plain to see.

Dutch now began to feel that he must soon ascend once more, but not wishing to do so without making some discovery, he thrust down the spade here and there, in all directions, but encountered nothing. It was evident that if the treasure existed, it must be far below the sand that had gone on accumulating for centuries.

There was one place, though, that he had not tried, and that was the depression scooped out by the dynamite, a spot which he had reserved to the last. Wading here, then, a task which necessitated his passing right under the schooner and farther from the ladder than he had yet been, he began to examine the surface, and detecting nothing, he thrust down his spade, working it about so as to make it penetrate farther and farther, but still there was no resistance, and, faint and weary, he was about to give up when he thought he would try once more.

This he did, thrusting in the spade and forcing it down till his hand was nearly on a level with the sand, and then—Yes! No! Yes! there was a slight obstruction.

He forced it down again, his heart beating painfully the while, for here was the test.

It might be only a copper bolt in the rotten old wood, or a stone; he might have reached the rock below the sand, but a second thought told him that the keel must be eight or ten feet lower, and that the touch was not that of stone or rock. Neither could it be wood. It was either a metal bolt or that of which he was in search.

Dutch forgot now all about the necessity for ascending; his sole thought was the sunken treasure, and, working as vigorously as he could in his cumbersome garments, he shovelled out the sand, though it was a slow and laborious task, as it kept running back into the hole he made.

Still he dug down more and more till he had made a fair-sized excavation, when, once more thrusting in the spade, he found it checked against something, and his heart sank as he fancied that he might have struck upon a bed of old shells. Still he persevered, not that he expected to lift that which he touched, but in the hope that he might reach it more easily, and satisfy himself that he was touching metal.

He was getting quite exhausted, and had already been down far too long. Nothing but the strong desire to have something definite to say kept him toiling on, and at last he unwillingly gave up, when something dark amongst the sand he had thrown out took his attention, and reaching down he picked up a lump of shells concreted together, and with an impatient gesture he was about to throw them down again, when it struck him that they were uncommonly heavy. To an inexperienced man this would have passed unnoticed, for the difficulty of telling the difference of weight in so dense a medium as the water was not one easily mastered, but Dutch had been down too many times not to have a good idea of such matters, and, checking himself just as he was about to throw the mass down, he raised it to the front of his helmet.

Shells, shells, nothing but shells of several kinds joined together by the calcareous deposit of some kind of sea worm; but, all the same, it was very heavy, and, wrong or right, determining to take the lump up with him, he turned to go under the schooner and reach the ladder.

For, he argued, those little ingots the Cuban had shown them had shelly accretion firmly attached, and it was probable that a good deal had been knocked off. At all events, he must ascend now, and going slowly along, placing the piece of concrete in a net pouch at his back, he was in the shadow of the schooner with its keel nearly above his head, when a peculiar sensation that he knew too well suddenly attacked him. His head began to swim, blood seemed to gorge the vessels of his eyes, and a horrible sensation of oppression to attack his chest.

Already exhausted by his too long stay and extra exertion, combined with the nervous excitement of his fight with the shark, he was not master of himself, and in spite of his old experience he literally lost his head, becoming so unnerved that he sank down upon his knees, forgetting his signal-line, and tugging at the helmet to get it from his head.

One drag at that thin cord should have been sufficient to secure help, but it was forgotten, even though he touched it with his hands as they went to his helmet, and to make matters worse, he was kneeling now out of sight of those on deck; and for the moment all seemed over. He was blind, for a thick darkness had, as it were, come over him, mentally and bodily, in the intense horror of the moment, but through that darkness flashed scene after scene of the past, and he saw Hester, looking young and beautiful, gazing pityingly down at him, but without stretching out a hand to save, while, with a smile of triumph upon his countenance, there stood Lauré, the bane of his existence. Then came pleasant thoughts of his old childish days, mingled with a dull sense of drowsiness that it was impossible to fight against, and then a reaction, as Dutch made a violent effort to reach his feet, but only to sink down prone upon his face.

For though, like some gigantic sea worm, the india-rubber tube meandered over the sand, out of the shadow of the schooner into the sunshine, and then straight up towards the surface, the supply of air had stopped!

Story 1--Chapter XXIII.

A Crafty Foe.

It was with a feeling of intense agony that Hester Pugh watched her husband as he stepped on to the ladder and gradually descended below the surface of the water, and then with beating heart she altered her position, going beyond the others and leaning over the bulwark, so that she could peer down into the clear water and follow his every motion.

It would have been painful enough if they had parted lovingly, but, with the knowledge that his doubts had been strengthened by her refusal to explain, her position was doubly painful. In bygone days, before their marriage, Dutch had been one of the most successful and daring of divers, more from choice than necessity; but of late he had devoted himself to drawing and making plans at her desire, though his old love of submarine adventure was strong within him still; and now it almost seemed as if his resumption of his old pursuit had been caused by hatred of her.

For the time being all thought of the hidden peril to which those on board were exposed was swallowed up in the present danger, and, not noticing who was her nearest neighbour, she watched the progress of her husband with the great drops of anguish starting to her forehead. Every movement he made was plainly to be seen by all on board, and when Mr Meldon first raised the cry of "Shark!" so intense was the interest in the proceedings that no one paid the slightest heed to her. Thus it was that, in a state that made her ask herself sometimes whether this was not some wild dream, she saw the bustle on deck accompanying Mr Parkley's efforts to drive off the unwelcome visitors, of which there were two. A cartridge was thrown, and exploded close to one of them, with the result that it seemed to sink to the bottom, for they saw it no more, while, when the other was seen to be making straight for the diver, the cry arose that he should be drawn up, and under Rasp's direction the men were starting the life-line with a run, when

"Hold hard!" cried Rasp, "he's a signalling 'All right.'"

"But it is madness," cried Mr Parkley and the captain in a breath.

"He's a signalling 'All right,'" cried Rasp sternly. "You should never touch a diver when he does that. See there."

Rasp quickly pulled the line, so as to tighten it, when the impatient jerk at the signal-cord came again.

"Can you see exactly what is going on, Mr Meldon?" said the captain.

"Yes, quite plainly," was the reply, "he has his knife out, and is going to fight the shark."

Hester had already seen this, and had shrunk aside, covering her eyes with her hands, fearing to listen to the conversation that ensued as Mr Meldon described in vivid words what we already know. She heard, too, the various impatient suggestions that Dutch should be drawn up, and in an agony of supplication she prayed that this might take place, but always, till she felt that she hated him with an intensity of dislike, she heard Rasp's harsh voice dominating the others as, with the sense of responsibility that he had a diver's life in his hands, he absolutely refused. He was lord of the proceedings, having been invested by Dutch with his duties, and he maintained his position after nearly yielding two or three times and tightening the life-line.

"There, you may say what you like," he growled, "I know my dooty, and I'm a-doing on it. You should never meddle with a man as is down till he asks for help—go on with that pumping, my lads, keep it up," he said, interrupting his didactic remarks to admonish the sailors at the air-pump—"cause if you do, you means well p'raps, but you only flurries the man, and that's the very thing as you oughtn't to do. Do you know what would make the best divers, Oakum?"

"No," growled that worthy.

"Cowcubers, 'cause they're so cool. Now, lookye here everybody, he's going on as right as can be. Mr Dutch keeps on giving the signal 'All right,' so why should we interfere. I'm master o' this descent, and he shan't be interfered with."

"But, you madman, there's a huge shark just going to dash at him," cried Mr Meldon excitedly.

"Then I'm very sorry for the shark," said Rasp coolly. "Lor' bless you, Mr Dutch is too much for any shark as can swim. Madman, eh, Mr Doctor. What would you say to me if I called you a madman for not letting me interfere when you'd got your patient a-going on all right, and just because I thought he was in danger? My patient's a-going on all right. There, he says so himself," he continued, as the customary signal passed along the line.

"Rasp is quite right," said Mr Parkley, who stood there with a cartridge in one hand, the wire in the other, and the battery between his feet. "A diver should never be interfered with."

"There, hear that?" said Rasp, watching the tube where it descended into the water.

"But look! Good heavens, it is horrible!" cried the doctor.

Hester's hands dropped from her face, and she gazed down now to see a thick cloud of blood rising through the water, shutting out the figure of him she loved, and white as ashes, with eyes starting, and parted lips, but without uttering a word, she gazed on.

"Well, what o' that?" said Rasp coolly, as he held the signal-line delicately in his hand, drawing in and slackening out like a man feeling with a ground line. "He's as right as a trivet, and I've felt him all along with the line here, and he's give the shark such a one-er. I felt him let go at it."

"I'm afraid it is his own blood," exclaimed Mr Wilson.

"For heaven's sake be silent, Wilson!" cried Mr Parkley. "There, you've made Miss Studwick faint."

In fact Bessy, standing by her brother's side as he watched the whole of the proceedings, had sunk down softly on the deck; but when the doctor turned to her help, John Studwick angrily repelled him.

"It was your horrible talk began it, and that long fool's finished the work," exclaimed John Studwick. "Now, go back and see the shark killed. I can attend to my sister. Send for some cold water, father," he added, as the captain came up.

But it was needless, for Bessy was recovering fast, and after looking wildly about for a few moments she sat up by her brother, and held his hand with her back turned to the group on deck.

"Bah!" ejaculated Rasp, coolly. "There, keep clear o' that chube," he shouted. "It's shark's blood, that's what it is, and you'll see him turn up by-and-by. Here he comes; no he ain't turned up yet. Now he's going down again. There," he cried directly after, as the line glided softly through his hand. "Mr Dutch has given him another. Look at the cloud rising again, and—ha, ha, ha! What did I tell you?"

As he spoke Hester saw the form of the shark rising slowly through the ruddy cloud till its white belly gleamed in the sunshine, and Rasp pointed out with delight the two great gashes through which its life blood was passing out, while the monster made a few ineffectual struggles to recover itself, and then floated slowly to leeward.

"There ain't many about here just now," said Rasp, "or else that blood would have brought 'em round. Ha! there

won't be much of him left by to-morrow morning. Serve him right for interfering with divers."

Hester's eyes closed again for a few moments as her heart went up in grateful thanksgiving. Then she was watching the gradually clearing water till she could see her husband once again, and as she saw him moving it was with a feeling of hope that he would come up now.

But as we know he passed right under the schooner, and there were more spectators crossed over to the other side to watch his efforts, while she, faint and exhausted with her emotions, sat down on a coil of rope, gazing at the tube that passed close by her, Rasp having set a goodly length free as soon as he found that Dutch was on the move, and she had seen this long snake-like pipe creep out well over the side as the diver went farther and farther away, knowing that it was the bond which held him to life, and feeling with a kind of fascination that she could not explain that it was now her duty to watch the tube and see that it was not touched.

As she felt this, she raised her eyes for a moment, to see that Rasp was standing with his back to her and that she was alone, for all were now intent upon the diver's actions, and commenting upon his work.

"He's found out the place," said one. "He's got something—no he hasn't," and so on.

Just then Hester Pugh became aware of some one standing close by her, and turning her eyes it was to find that Lauré had crossed unnoticed to her side, where he stood as if looking over the bulwarks for sharks, but really all the time with his eyes fixed upon and fascinating hers, while to her horror she saw that one of his bare feet kept touching the tube.

"I've been waiting for this opportunity," he said at last in a low whisper. "You tried to betray me this morning."

"No, no," she moaned, as the wretch placed his foot upon the tube, smiling at her the while.

"You will betray me in spite of my warning," he continued in the same low tone; "and for this, because I will not have my plans spoiled, and partly because I hate Dutch Pugh and love you, my child, I am going to press my foot down upon this tube. Hark! dare to raise your voice in the least," he whispered fiercely, as he saw her white lips part, "and it is his instant death. Do you understand? If I stop the flow of air for only a few seconds, he will be so startled that he will not recover himself, while if I double the time it will make assurance doubly sure, as you English people say. Swear now to me, by all that is holy, by all your future hopes, that you will not betray me."

"Heaven give me strength, I cannot," panted Hester.

"My foot is pressing the tube," he hissed. "But there I know, sweet love, that you wish him dead, that there may be no hindrance to our passion."

"Monster!" she cried.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Will you swear?"

"Yes, yes," she panted.

"That you will neither by word nor deed betray me."

"Yes," she said hoarsely. "I swear."

"Thanks, dear one," he whispered. "It is but for a few days. Mind, they have found one of my treasure stores; they shall work for me—for us—in ignorance, and bring it all to the surface. For us, Hester. You need not turn away; I read your heart, and that you will love me as I love you soon, and you shall revel in wealth like an Eastern princess. But now you must swear more; I cannot wait. I will not have those loathing looks and angry eyes directed at me. You shall swear that you will be mine when and where I ask it of you, or—"

"Are you some fiend?" exclaimed Hester with a look of horror as she saw his foot pressing the tube.

"No," he whispered passionately, "only a man whom you have driven nearly mad with your beauty, and who can and will suffer no more. Have you not always been cold and rejected me, even in spite of my prayers? Now I am driven to extremities. Swear that you will be mine, or Dutch Pugh dies beneath your feet."

"I cannot—will not," she faltered, with her senses reeling.

"Cannot! Will not! You must and shall. You know that I have but to keep my foot firmly pressed down for a few moments, and he becomes senseless. And what then? Who in the confusion will know that it was I? Swear it to me, girl, this moment. Hester, I implore, as well as command. Have I not told you my love? Listen to me. Have I not followed you here—done everything for your sake?"

"I will not swear," exclaimed Hester in low, panting tones, and then she uttered a faint cry, which was checked on the instant, as with a look of passionate rage that he could not control she saw Lauré flatten the tube, and knew that it was to her husband's death.

"Will you swear now?" he whispered. "He is dying. Will you not save him?"

"I cannot, I cannot," she panted. "Oh, it is too horrible. Dutch, my love, it is for your sake. I swear."

"That you are mine?"

"Yes, yes," she whispered; and she swooned away, while Lauré removed his foot from the tube.

Story 1--Chapter XXIV.

Rasp's Adventure.

"Quick, my lads, with a will," shouted Rasp. "Haul! Run him up."

For the old diver had suddenly awakened to the fact that something was wrong below, and at his command the men holding the life-line ran forward along the deck, drawing Dutch rapidly to the surface, where half-a-dozen willing hands, the Cuban's among them, seized him and laid him on the deck, where Rasp rapidly unscrewed the helmet and exposed the young man's face, blue and distorted with strangulation.

"Quick! some more of these things off," exclaimed Mr Meldon.

"You let him alone," growled Rasp. "I'll bring him to in a jiffy;" and, rudely elbowing the doctor aside, he seized Dutch's arms, pumped them up and down a few times, and then forcibly pressing on his breast produced a kind of artificial respiration, for at the end of a minute Dutch sighed, and then rapidly began to recover.

As he commenced breathing more regularly, those surrounding became aware that Hester was trying to get to his side, for, unnoticed in the excitement, she had recovered her senses, and then, pale and sick at heart, crept to the group, where she dreaded to look upon the form of him she loved lying dead.

A look of joy, succeeded by one of intense despair, crossed her face as she knelt down by Dutch's head, waiting to see his eyes open and to hear his words, as she shudderingly recalled the promise she had made to save his life.

She was so behind him that he did not see her, when at last he opened his eyes, and gazed wildly about him as if not comprehending where he was, and directly after he placed his hands to his face as if to feel the helmet.

His eyes opened more widely then, and Rasp held the cup of a brandy flask to his lips.

"Take a sup o' this here, Mr Pug," he said in his rough way.

Dutch obeyed without a word, and his face began to resume its natural aspect.

"That was a near touch, Mr Dutch, sir," growled the old fellow. "You would stop down too long."

"Too long?" said Dutch faintly, as he tried to sit up.

"No, no, be still for a few minutes," said the doctor, who had been pushing up the india-rubber bands of his sleeve, and feeling the sufferer's pulse, to Rasp's great disgust.

"Who said I stopped down too long?" said Dutch faintly, as Hester crouched at his head, with her hands to her face.

"I did," growled Rasp. "You shouldn't have overdone it the first time."

"I did not stay down too long," said Dutch angrily, but in rather a feeble way. "The supply of air was stepped."

"What!" cried Rasp, fiercely.

"I say the wind was stopped."

"Hark at him," cried Rasp, looking round from one to the other. "Hark at that, Mister Parkley, and you, too, captain. Why, I sooperintended it all myself, and the supply never stopped for a moment."

Hester shuddered.

"Here he goes and overdoes it, gets fightin' sharks, and stopping down about twiced as long as he should the first time, and then says the pumping was checked."

"You must have got the tube kinked," said Dutch, sitting up. "Take off these weights."

"*You* must, you mean," said Rasp, unhooking the leaden pads from breast and back; and while he was so engaged Hester looked wildly round in a desperate resolve to tell all, but her eyes dropped directly as she shuddered, for just at her husband's feet stood Lauré, and she felt that she dare not tell the secret that seemed to be driving her mad.

"Here you goes right under the schooner, and must have hitched the chube in the ladder; that's what you must have done."

"There, it's of no use to argue with you, Rasp," said Dutch. "I'm all right again now, thank you, doctor; but I'm sure of one thing: the supply of air was stopped somehow, and I've had a bit of a shaking."

"And I'm sure it just wasn't," growled Rasp. "Everything went just as it should go. There!"

Dutch rose without assistance, and as he did so Hester, with a sigh of misery, shrank away, feeling that she could never look upon his face again.

"But I have saved his life," she sighed to herself. "I have saved his life;" and then, shuddering with horror, and asking

herself whether the time had not come when she had better die, she crept slowly to the cabin stairs, descended, and, sinking into a chair by her cot, sat there and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Dutch smiled with pleasure as he stood up and found that he could take a few steps here and there without feeling his brain reel, for Oakum took off his old straw hat, waved it round his head, and the men gave a hearty cheer.

"It weer too bad o' you though to stop his wind Rasp, owd mate," growled Oakum, in the old diver's ear.

Rasp looked daggers at him, and then proceeded to wipe and polish the helmet, from which he had been removing some grains of sand.

"Have a cigar, Mr Pugh," said Wilson, holding out his case, and then shaking hands, an example followed by Mr Parkley, the captain, and John Studwick, who stood looking at him with admiration.

"I have done nothing but shake your hands for the last ten minutes, Mr Pugh," said the doctor, warmly, "but we may as well shake hands again, though really our old friend Rasp here, with his rough-and-ready means, was principal attendant."

"Humph!" growled Rasp, "I do get the credit for that, then. Stopped the wind, indeed! Here, you nigger, just leave that pump alone."

This last to 'Pollo, who was curiously inspecting the machine, and who strutted off with his opal eyes rolling and his teeth grinning indignation at being called a nigger.

"Well, Pugh," said Mr Parkley, who so far had been able to restrain his impatience, but who longed to hear the result of the investigation, "I must congratulate you on your brave encounter with the shark."

"And wanted me to haul you up," growled Rasp.

"There was not much bravery in it," said Dutch, who was now smoking as composedly as if nothing had occurred, while the water that had streamed from his india-rubber suit was fast drying on the sun-baked deck. "I was well-armed; my enemy was not."

"Wasn't he?" growled Rasp, giving a vicious rub at the helmet. "What do you call them teeth? But, then, we divers are not skeered about a shark or two."

"Do you feel well enough to talk about your descent, Pugh?" said Mr Parkley.

"I feel well enough to go down again," said Dutch smiling; "but this time I must have a sharp-pointed iron rod to probe the sand."

"I'm a-going down next," said Rasp. "It's my turn."

"But what is your opinion? What have you made out?" said Mr Parkley.

"Almost nothing," replied Dutch. "If there is anything below there, it is buried deep in sand, which, I think, we must blast away, for it runs back as fast as it is dug."

"Then you found absolutely nothing," said Mr Parkley, while the others waited eagerly for the young man's answer.

"Unless this proves to be something," replied Dutch, taking the shelly mass from his net basket and handing it to his partner.

Mr Parkley received it with trembling hands.

"It is heavy," he said, turning it over and over. "Here Rasp, a hammer, quick."

The old fellow handed a bright steel-headed tool, with the ordinary hammer head on one side, but a sharp wedge-shaped edge at the other, and with this Mr Parkley chipped away the small barnacles and other shells conglomerated together, and at about the fourth stroke laid bare something bright and shining.

"My dear Dutch," cried his partner, dropping the hammer, "we are right. Look—silver!"

He wrung Dutch's hand vigorously, as the young man's face flushed with pleasure; and then, picking up the hammer, he struck off the remainder of the shelly concretion, and passed round a blackened wedge-shaped ingot of about a couple of pounds weight, and undoubtedly of fine silver.

"Here, lay hold of the legs of this soot," cried Rasp eagerly, as he seized the second suit which lay ready on a seat. "I'm a-going down dreckly."

"We'd better wait first, and make some definite plan of action," said Mr Parkley, who was nearly as excited as his old assistant.

"No, we hadn't," said Rasp, shuffling into the india-rubber garments. "Only just have that there ladder shifted over to port. You can make your plans while I go down tother side and feels about with the iron rod. You two's administrative; I'm zeketive. I shan't be happy unless I has a go in."

The point was yielded, the ladder shifted over to the other side, and in a few minutes Rasp had taken the keen knife and stuck it in his belt, thrown down a long iron rod, and declared himself ready.

"I shall set to work where you left that there spade," he said. "You'll see as the wind ain't stopped, Mr Parkley, sir?"

"Of course," was the reply.

"And you'll see as the chube ain't in no kinks, Mr Pug;" he continued, with a dry chuckling laugh, "and so will I."

"You may laugh, Rasp," said Dutch, good-humouredly, "but you will not alter my opinion about it at all."

"I know that, Mr Pug; I know that," he chuckled.

"But you haven't got the life-line attached."

"Yah! I don't want no life-lines," said the old fellow. "I've been down too many times."

"You don't go down without, Rasp," said Mr Parkley, authoritatively.

"And why not?" said the stubborn old fellow.

"Because if you like to throw your life away, I don't choose to spare you at such a time."

The old fellow assumed his helmet, growling and grumbling the whole time, and then, all being ready, the look-out was arranged once more for sharks, Mr Parkley held a cartridge or two ready, and Dutch took the management of the descent, watchfully minding that the tube and lines were clear. Then Rasp went down, to be seen directly after thrusting the rod here and there, and soon after commencing digging in the slow, laborious way inevitable in so dense a medium.

The water was disturbed by the continuous fountain of exhausted air bubbles that rose rapidly to the surface, but all the same Rasp's motions could be pretty well followed, and they were scanned with great eagerness by all on deck, when suddenly the cry of sharks was raised, and the black fins of a couple of monsters were seen slowly coming up astern.

In an instant Mr Parkley ran aft, and after seeing that his wire coil would be perfectly free, he threw the cartridge with such precision that it fell between the two fish, and on the wire being applied to the battery, there was a dull report, a heavy column of water flew up in which could be seen the forms of the sharks, and as the commotion subsided they were seen swimming feebly in a stunned, helpless manner round and round, and gradually getting more distant from the schooner.

The men gave a cheer at the result, but as they did so Mr Wilson raised the cry again of "shark," and pointed downwards where a monster was seen slowly approaching Rasp, who was working away in profound ignorance of his danger, though he had been seen to straighten himself up for a moment or two when the cartridges were exploded.

"Stand ready with the life-line," shouted Dutch. "Keep on pumping, my lads."

As he spoke he signalled with the cord, and Rasp faced round, to be seen to squat down directly as he drew his knife.

The scene below was very vivid, for the sun shone out so brightly that even the rivets in the copper helmet were visible, and but for a word or two of warning those whose duty it was to attend to life-line and pump would have stopped short to try and catch a glance at what was going on below.

Dutch's stern voice brought them back to their duty, and the pump clanked, and those who held the life-line stood ready for a run forward to drag Rasp up if there was any need.

"Why," exclaimed Mr Parkley, eagerly, "he is not ready for the monster, and it is sailing round him. I dare not send down a cartridge, as the brute will not be the only sufferer. Look, look, for heaven's sake, Dutch! It has seized him."

Plainly enough to be seen, as Mr Parkley spoke, the shark gave its tail a wave, turned over so that its white breast was like a flash of light in the water, and opening its large jaws it seemed to seize the diver.

At the same moment there was a tug at the signal-cord, and a sharp tug at the life-line, for Dutch gave the word, and Rasp was dragged rapidly to the surface, the shark following, and making a fresh snap at him as he was hoisted on deck.

The second snap divided the tube, which the monster caught across his jaws, but no sooner was Rasp in safety than Mr Parkley threw one of his cartridges at the shark, where it swam now round and round, with only its back fin above the water.

In an instant the creature turned on one side, and the white cartridge was seen to disappear. Then followed a touch of the wire against the hissing battery, there was a deafening report, and the schooner heaved a little over on one side, and the surface of the placid sea was covered with blood-stained fragments which were seized and borne off by a shoal of silvery-looking fish, which seemed attracted to the spot in thousands.

"What did you pull me up for?" roared Rasp, as soon as he was relieved of his helmet.

"To save your life," was the reply.

"It's shabby, that's what it is," said Rasp angrily. "No one interfered with you, Mr Dutch, when you had your turn."

"But you signalled to be pulled up."

"That I didn't," growled the old fellow. "It was that brute bit at my helmet. Has he made any marks?"

"Yes," said Mr Parkley, lifting up the bright copper headpiece, and examining the couple of curves of sharply defined scratches which had been made by the monster's teeth.

"Then you should have left me alone," growled Rasp. "I should have killed that chap if I could have got my knife out of the sheath."

"And could you not?" said Dutch.

"No. It's a sticking fast in the sheath there, and— Who's took it out?" he growled, feeling his side. "Why, I must have dropped it."

The bright blade could be seen lying below, and Rasp stood grumbling and wondering how it could have happened, ending with whispering to Dutch.

"I ain't afeard on the beggars, but don't let out as I was took aback. I worn't ready, you know; that's how it was."

Dutch nodded assent, and the subject dropped, for Rasp pulled a couple of large and two small lumps of shelly matter from his pocket, the weight of which instantly told Mr Parkley that they were ingots in the same condition as the first.

There was no doubt now about the treasure having been found, and the question discussed was whether it would be better to try and get rid of the sand by blasting, or try the slower and more laborious plan of digging it away.

This last was decided on, especially as, by blasting away the sand, the silver ingots to a great extent might be cast away with the covering. Besides which, the position of the schooner was so satisfactory that the captain was averse to its being moved, and wished, if possible, to retain it where it was. Tackle was rigged up, then, with iron buckets attached to ropes, and the afternoon was spent by Dutch and Rasp in turn in filling the buckets, which were then drawn up by the sailors and emptied beyond the ribs of the old galleon.

The filling of the buckets resulted in the discovery of many ingots, which were placed aside, and at last, after several descents, a portion of the treasure was reached, and instead of sending up sand, the buckets were filled with silver and the rough shelly concrete, though every ingot as they worked lower was more free from the adhesion, till the lower ones were almost literally blackened silver covered with sand.

Worn out with fatigue the task was at last set aside for the day, and in honour of their great success, 'Pollo's best endeavours had been called into question to prepare what was quite a banquet, during which Mr Parkley was congratulated by his friends in turn, and afterwards, when seated in the comparative cool of the evening, the question was discussed as to there being any risk attending their proceedings.

"I don't suppose we are right from some points of view," said Mr Parkley, gaily. "But let's secure all the treasure, and we'll talk about that afterwards. We shall give you a rich cargo, Studwick."

"I hope so," was the reply, "but you'll have to go on for many days at this rate before I am overloaded."

"Wait a bit, eh, Dutch Pugh. I think we shall astonish him yet. Come, a glass of champagne, man. You are low with your accident. What are you dreaming about?"

"I was wondering," said Dutch, quietly, "whether we ought not to take more precautions."

"What about? Indians ashore?"

"No; sailors afloat."

"Quite right," said the captain.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Dutch, "that we must not excite the cupidity of these men by letting them see too much of the treasure, or mischief may follow. There are several fellows here whose looks I don't like."

"Don't invent bugbears, Pugh," said Mr Parkley, gaily. "We can take care of what we find, for we have plenty of arms, and I doubt very much whether the men would risk their necks by entering into anything in the shape of a mutiny. What do you say to that, eh, Studwick? Am I not right?"

"I don't know what to say," replied the captain. "I must confess now that I had my misgivings about some of the men at the commencement of the voyage, and, though I have seen nothing to make me suspicious, the fact of having a large freight of silver on board with such a crew as we have does not tend to make me feel quite at ease."

"But you have not your large freight of silver on board yet," said the doctor smiling.

"No, by jove," exclaimed Mr Studwick; "but if they go on piling up the ingots at the rate they have been this afternoon, we shall soon have a temptation strong enough to incite a set of scoundrels to cut all our throats."

Dutch started and shuddered.

"Come, come, gentlemen," cried Mr Parkley, "suppose we stop all this dismal quaking. Here we have so far succeeded in our quest, and the trip bids fair to be all that can be desired, whereupon you set to inventing troubles."

Come, I'll give you a toast. Here, 'Home, sweet home!'"

"Home, sweet home!" said the others in chorus, as they drained their glasses, saving Dutch, who sat moodily thinking. For these words had recalled happy days that were past. There was no happy home for him, and it seemed as if a wandering life would be the happiest that he could now look forward to in the future.

At last, being weary with their exertions, the watch was set and they went below, the doctor sternly forbidding any one from lying down to sleep on the deck,—a most tempting place in the heat; and no sooner had the captain taken a look round than a couple of dark figures crept stealthily from under the tarpaulin that covered a boat, and were joined by another, who cautiously came forward to join them from the forecabin hatch, the three getting together under the dark shelter of the bulwarks, where earnest conversation was carried on in a whisper.

About half-an-hour later another dark figure crept out upon the deck, and stood listening for a few moments before going down on hands and knees, and then apparently flat upon the deck, to worm its way towards where a faint light shone up from the cabin, and gaze cautiously down through the skylight as far as it could for the wire protection spread over the glass.

Apparently satisfied, the figure crept forward again, and made for the hatch leading down to the berths occupied by Mr Jones, the doctor, the naturalist, Rasp, and where Sam Oakum also turned in.

Now, it so happened that the latter gentleman was enjoying a strange nightmare, in which it seemed to him that Rasp had, out of spite, forced him into one of the diving suits, made him go to the bottom of the sea, and had then suddenly cut off the supply of air. He fought, he struggled, he grunted, he made every effort he could to breathe, but all in vain, and in the horror of the suffocating sensation he awoke to find that a hand was pressed heavily upon his mouth, while another seemed busy at his breast.

Story 1--Chapter XXV.

'Pollo's Report.

Oakum was not a man to shout for help, but to act, and act he did on the instant by turning sharply round, and seizing his assailant by the throat. He lowered his hands, though, in a moment, for a thick voice whispered—

"Don't make 'tupid bobbery, Mass' Sam Oakum, sah, or you wake de oder gentlemen."

"What's up, 'Pollo?" said Oakum, in the same low tone, for he was awake now to the fact that something was wrong. "Injins?"

"No, sah, I tink not; but you come out here, sah, where de oder gentleman not hear, and I tell you."

Oakum squabbled with 'Pollo every day, but they were very old shipmates, and the rough sailor had the most abundant confidence in the black, so he drew on his trousers, and cautiously followed him to the foot of the steps, where 'Pollo sat down, and Oakum knelt by his side.

"Now, then, what's up?" growled Oakum.

"I tell you, sah, reckly, but first must 'fess somefin to you."

"Go ahead then, my hearty," was the reply.

"Well, sah, while I busy all de mornin' in my galley, I see de beauful lump of silber brought up ober and ober again, and I see Mass' Jone and noder sailor busy knock off de shell and tuff, and frow him all of a heap."

"Yes, and there it lies now on deck," said Sam, "instead of being shyed overboard. What o' that?"

"Well, sah, no able to sleep 'cause of dat, and so I get out of my hammock and creep all soft like on deck."

"What, did you get some of the bits o' shell in your blanket."

"No, sah, no," chuckled 'Pollo. "You know me, Mass' Sam Oakum, sah, we berry ole friend, and go froo deal ob trouble togedder."

"Well, yes, 'Pollo, old man, we have had a hardship or two, but what o' that?"

"Why, sah, I 'fess eberything to you, sah, and tell you all."

"Heave ahead, then."

"Well, sah, I no tink it berry wrong, sah, cause there such a debble ob a lot ob silber, but while I watch Mass' Jone and de sailor chip, chip, chip at de shell to knock 'em off I see dem knock little bit ob silber too some time, and one time dey fro lump of shell down. I quite sure got big piece of silber inside."

"And you've been up on deck to get hold of it, eh?"

"Yes, Mass' Oakum, sah, dat's him."

"Hand over, and let's feel the weight on it, 'Pollo, old man, only you needn't do that, my lad. We found the spot for

the govners, and they'll come down handsome."

"Yes, Mass' Oakum, sah, but I tink it great pity waste anyting, eben bit ob fat, so no like see bit ob silber fro overboard."

"Where's the stuff; 'Pollo?"

"I no got um, sah, dat's why I came to ask you."

"But is it so heavy as all that, 'Pollo?"

"No, sah, you no understand. I come on deck, find de silber, and I find someting else."

"What's that?" said Oakum sleepily.

"I find piece ob de crew, sah, all sit togedder in a corner, hatchin' mutiny."

"What?" exclaimed Oakum, whom these words galvanised into an excited state.

"Hatch de mutiny, sah."

"I've good as expected as much," exclaimed Oakum, giving his leg a slap. "Heave out, and let's rouse the skipper. The beggars mean treachery."

"We better go softly then, Mass' Oakum, sah, or we get knife in de ribs."

"Right, 'Pollo," said Oakum; "let's investigate first and see."

Creeping softly up the ladder he just raised his head above the coamings of the hatchway, and peered cautiously round, but seeing nothing he drew himself the whole way out, and lay down on deck, 'Pollo following him on the instant.

"Well?" whispered Oakum, "what's their bearings?"

'Pollo, for answer, crawled away into the darkness, and returned at the end of a couple of minutes to announce that they were all gone.

"Look here, Master 'Pollo," growled Oakum in a whisper; "if you've woke me out of a fine sleep to humbug me, you and I will have a row."

"I quite suah, sah, dat free sailor fellow set under de bulwark, sah, hatch mutiny."

"Come and have a look round," said the old fellow, and together they went softly to the man who had the watch forward, to find that he had heard nothing, though a sharper investigator than Oakum would have come to the conclusion that the fellow had been fast asleep.

A similar result followed the journey aft, when with a growl Oakum walked straight back to the hatchway, where he turned round.

"Lookye here, 'Pollo, old man, you get to your hammock and have a good night's rest, or you'll be rolling into the fire fast asleep to-morrow, and burning those beautiful curls of yourn. And lookye here, too, my lad, you leave that there silver rubbish alone, and trust to what the skippers and the govners give you for reward. Good-night."

"Dah!" cried 'Pollo, sulkily, "I don't care who come and take de ship now. I no say word about more. Only get laugh at;" and muttering volubly to himself, he crept back to his hammock, and the next minute he was lying fast asleep with his mouth open.

The morning broke bright and beautiful, with the golden sunshine glinting through the tall columns of the palm-trees ashore, and lighting up the dark vistas of the jungle in the most wonderful manner; but the thoughts of all on board were directed not to the golden sunshine, save that it was available for the manner in which it lit up the depths of the clear sea; and all that day in steady turns Dutch, Mr Parkley, and Rasp went down, working away clearing out the sand, and sending up the iron buckets laden with silver.

Careful probing with the iron rod had shown them that the space in which the treasure lay was not great, only spread over a portion of the lower part of the old galleon of about twelve feet by sixteen; everywhere else the rod would penetrate to any depth, save where it came in contact with the old hardened ribs of the ship, or portions of its keel, and they gave forth to the touch such unmistakable signs of what the opposing material was that the adventurers were quite content.

A receptacle had been prepared for the treasure in the hold, and the way to this was down the cabin stairs, strong bulkheads cutting this off from the other portions of the vessel; and down here continuously, after the shelly concretions, where they existed, had been knocked off, was carried bucket after bucket of ingots, which Mr Jones and Oakum stacked as regularly as they would lie, while the captain superintended and kept watch on deck.

The men worked admirably: their wonder at the richness of the find passing away as the silver became common to their sight, for it was shot out of the buckets on to the deck, hammered even, and thrown about as if it was so much stone.

There were two or three alarms of sharks, but an occasional cartridge fired under water at a distance from the ship

had the desired effect of scaring the monsters away.

Rasp worked even harder than Dutch, giving as his reason that they ought to make hay while the sun shone; and certainly he made a goodly addition to the silver stack, while Mr Parkley was not far behind his partner. The doctor, Mr Wilson, and even John Studwick helped, by cleaning the ingots as they were raised by the sailors in the buckets, and emptied out on deck, while Bessy Studwick, Hester, and 'Pollo aided by being always ready with refreshments as they were needed, and besides kept a lookout.

For it was determined to make the best use they could of the daylight, and consequently their meals were snatched in the little intervals of work. Even the men forbore to grumble at being kept without their regular food, for there was a novelty in their task.

The sand caused a great deal of trouble to the divers, but this was steadily mastered, and when at sunset the task was set aside for the night, and, wearied out, the adventurers sat down to the repast 'Pollo had prepared and the steward set out, the question was asked in a whisper, what was the value of the treasure recovered. Mr Parkley, who had been below, could only say—

“Many thousands.”

Story 1--Chapter XXVI.

A Good Resolution.

The next day and the next and the next passed rapidly in the same toil; and work, rest, and refreshment were all that were thought of. Even Dutch had been seized now by the thirst for wealth, and, hardly looking at Hester, he toiled on at his task, while she, pale and rigid, kept watch over him, never once gaining confidence as she saw his many descents, but always tortured by the horror of that first day.

To her great relief, though, Lauré had hardly noticed her, and there seemed to be an unspoken truce existing between them. She could see that he was one of the most industrious of the workers, and she shuddered as she felt why this was, and knew that some terrible catastrophe might ere now have taken place on the schooner, only that Lauré wanted the divers to do their work to the full before he asserted himself.

And yet she dared not speak, feeling that to utter a warning would be to sign her husband's death-warrant, while he, giving no heed to, perhaps not crediting, her sufferings, passed her by at times without a look.

But a change was rapidly approaching, and it took place so suddenly as almost to surprise Hester herself.

The only thing that had disturbed the harmony of the past week had been the bitter opposition of John Studwick to the advances made by the young doctor. So far from the presence of a medical man on board being of advantage to the invalid, it had served to irritate and annoy him, and more than once he had angrily turned his back and drawn his sister away with the petty jealousy of a child more than a man, all which the doctor had taken in quite good part, while Bessy had more than one hearty cry to herself, as she called it.

Hester and she were like sisters now, and in consequence a coolness existed towards Dutch, who saw nothing, however, but, miser-like, gloated over the enormous wealth he was helping to pile up for himself and partner.

It was on the ninth day of the diving that, all elate, and congratulating themselves on the calm and delightful weather that had attended their efforts, the task began once more. The sand had been well mastered, and great half-rotten, water-hardened pieces of timber had been removed, and the silver was sent up, from the ease with which it was obtained, at a greater rate than ever.

Dutch had been down five times, and he was now down for the sixth, having succeeded Mr Parkley, and wading to the hole that had been made, after filling the bucket with some difficulty, the silver having now become scarce, he took his bar and tried to remove a piece of blackened wood that showed plainly in the mid-day sun.

It seemed quite fast, but a good wrench moved it, and, lifting it with ease, Dutch carried it a few paces and thrust it between two of the ribs behind him.

A man shut up in a diver's helmet and suit is not in a condition to feel much elation, but Dutch's heart beat rapidly as he resumed and stooped to gaze down at what he had found. There was no mistake, though. The hold of the wreck had been cleared from side to side, and there was evidently no more silver—in fact, as far as it was concerned, the treasure was won. He tried the iron probe to find sand or wood—sand or wood, forward or aft, while, of course, the possibility of anything being found to right or left was bounded by the old ribs which now stood out clear to the keel.

But here, aft of the silver treasure, and separated originally, no doubt, by a strong timber partition, one of the timbers of which Dutch had wrenched away, dull red and glistening, totally free from shelly concretion, but in places bound together by a fine sand, lay, as he cleared away the covering from the surface, and plainly marked out by the black wood that surrounded it on three sides, forming a great chest-like place about four feet by six, but whose sides, of black rotten timber, were ten inches thick, what was evidently of greater value than the mass of silver they had obtained.

For there before him lay neatly packed, as they had been by busy hands at least two hundred and fifty years before, hundreds upon hundreds of little rough ingots of gold. Not a bar was displaced, for the massive framework in which they had been stowed, though rotten, had not given way like what had probably surrounded the silver, which lay tossed about at random.

"Wealth, wealth, rich gold," muttered Dutch, as he signalled for more air; and then, looking more closely at his find, he could see by sweeping away the sand that slowly trickled back, as if eager to cover the treasure it had held secret so long, that the gold had not been packed as he had supposed, but had evidently been in little wooden boxes, which had rotted quite away, the places of the wood being filled up by sand, which lay in rectangular lines.

"The silver has all been saved without doubt," said Dutch to himself as he gazed at his find, and thought of the delight with which the news would be received by his partner. Then he turned to get the bucket and fill it, wishing himself on deck when it arrived there to watch the astonishment of those who emptied it.

As he moved he had again to signal for more air, and looking down he saw the sand slowly trickling back over the gold, so that in a very few moments it would have been covered.

He picked up the shovel, meaning to throw the sand in that part more effectually away, when once more the difficulty of breathing attacked him.

He signalled for more air, but no more came, neither to his next signal; and feeling that something must be wrong with the apparatus, he was already on his way to the steps, when he received a signal to come up; and on reaching the surface, with the air becoming each moment more deficient, he was quickly helped on board and relieved of his helmet.

"I couldn't help it, Mr Dutch," exclaimed Rasp, "the leather's giving way on the piston, and we must have a good repair."

"But it's held out just long enough," said Mr Parkley, "for Rasp tells me we've got to the end, and he only just left you a little of the silver to send up."

"Yea, Mr Pug, I tried all round, but there was nothing but wood and sand—wood and sand everywhere. 'Cept what you've sent up, I say there wasn't a bit more silver left."

"Why didn't you say so before I went down?" said Dutch.

"Because I wanted to hear what you thought, and let you judge for yourself," growled Rasp, handling a screw-hammer.

As they spoke, the men who had been pumping and hauling gathered round, evidently eager to hear what was said, and this made Dutch alter the words he was about to utter.

"Rasp is right," he said, "I have sent up the last of the silver."

"And have you tried well round with the rod?"

"Everywhere," said Dutch, "and touched the ship's timbers right down into the sand. There isn't another bar of silver, I should say."

"Well," said Mr Parkley, "man's never satisfied. I was quite ready to get more. There, my lads, we'll clean up our apparatus."

"Yes," said the captain, "and clear the decks; they want it badly enough. You've worked well, my lads, and you shall have a bit of a feast for this. 'Pollo shall prepare you a supper, and we'll drink success to our next venture."

The men gave a bit of a cheer, but on the whole they looked rather disappointed, and Dutch, he hardly knew why, held his peace about the gold. One thing was evident: nothing could be done to get it on deck till the worn valve of the air-pump had been repaired, and this Rasp declared would take him all the afternoon, for he would have to apply new leathers and india-rubber.

So the diving suits were hung up to dry, the helmets, polished dry and clean, and placed upon their stands. Mr Parkley and the doctor, who had looked upon this part as more in his province—Mr Parkley said because it helped to destroy life—had coiled up the wires, emptied the battery, and placed the dynamite in safety, and the rough shelly matter was thrown over the side, while Dutch, who had still kept his discovery to himself, was down below close to the end of the wind-sail—that canvas funnel that took down a constant current of fresh air—smoking a cigar with Mr Wilson, the naturalist, who was chatting away about his birds, and his determination to have another run or two on shore to shoot, asking his companion to accompany him.

"It would do the ladies so much good, too, I'm sure," said Mr Wilson; "and really, Mr Pugh, I never dare speak to Miss Studwick now," he added with a sigh, "for if I do, her brother looks daggers at me, and if I mention Mrs Pugh, you look just as cross."

Dutch had been saying "Yes" and "No" in amusing manner, hardly hearing what his companion said, but the mention of his wife's name made him start angrily round and glare at the speaker.

"There, that's just how Mr Studwick, junior, looks at me," said the naturalist simply. "A regular jealous, fierce look. I wish you would not treat me so, Mr Pugh," he continued earnestly, and with a pleading look in his weak, lamblike face, "for I like you, I do, indeed. I always have liked you, Mr Pugh, and how you can fancy I have dishonourable ideas about Mrs Pugh I can't think. It shocks me, Mr Pugh, it does, indeed."

"My dear fellow," said Dutch, smiling, half in amusement, half in contempt, "I never did think any such thing."

"Then why do you look at me so?" continued Wilson, mildly. "You see," he said, with gathering enthusiasm, "I love

Miss Studwick very dearly, but I seem to have no hope whatever. But why are you so angry?"

"There, there, there, don't talk about it," said Dutch, shaking the naturalist's hand. "These are matters one don't like to talk about."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Wilson, looking at him wistfully. "But you won't mention what I said."

"As to your love confidences," said Dutch smiling, "they are safe with me; but look here, Wilson, you are better as you are—better as you are."

"You think so, perhaps," said the young man; "but I do not. You are angry with Mrs Pugh for something: that is all. She is very pretty, but perhaps she is a little imprudent," he added simply.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Dutch angrily.

"Don't be cross with me, Mr Pugh. Perhaps I am wrong."

"Speak! What do you mean?" exclaimed Dutch, panting.

"I only thought she ought to be more particular, perhaps, as a lady, and not speak to the dark mulatto sailor."

"Have—have you seen her speaking to—to that man?" said Dutch, with his breath coming thick and short.

"Yes, I did last night," said Wilson; "but I did not mention it to anyone else, and of course she was only doing it out of kindness, for she is very amiable."

"When—when was it?" panted Dutch, whose face flushed with shame and anger that he should be stooping to ask such questions.

"Just after dark, when you diving people were having your meal below. They parted, though, directly."

"Thanks; say no more about this," said Dutch, more calmly. "Perhaps it looks a little imprudent, but, as you say, she is so amiable and kind to the men that her actions are easily misconstrued."

Dutch rose to go on deck, for the air in the cabin seemed to stifle him, but Wilson arrested his steps.

"But you will come if we have a shooting expedition, Mr Pugh?" he exclaimed. "You have not been ashore yet, but spending your time over this dreadful treasure-hunting, when the treasures ashore are a thousand times more beautiful."

"I will see—perhaps—I cannot say," replied Dutch; and he stumbled on deck to stand watching Rasp, who was busy over the air-pump, which he had taken all to pieces, but as it was close upon dusk he was collecting the various screws and placing them loosely in their proper holes before covering all over with a tarpaulin to keep off the heavy night dew that hung in drops each morning from every rail.

The words of Wilson, the simple-hearted naturalist, had so troubled Dutch that his mind was once more in a whirl. Till then he had been gradually getting into a calm, resigned state, and accepting the inevitable; but now to hear such remarks as these about his wife's conduct was simply maddening him, and as he went and leaned over the side, gazing down into the pure water where the golden treasure lay, it was forgotten mostly in the trouble of his heart, and he made up his mind that he would see Hester and demand some full explanation of her conduct, and so end this terrible suspense.

"I will know," he muttered; and as he rose he felt surprised at the lapse of time, for the short tropic twilight had given place to intense darkness while he had been brooding over his troubles, and now it occurred to him that he had not told Mr Parkley about the gold.

"I'll see him now," he said; and he was turning to go to the cabin stairs when the low musical voice of his wife fell upon his ear, and though the darkness was so great that he could not see her he was aware that she was close at hand in conversation with some one whose voice seemed familiar.

He could not make out a word, but it was evident that whoever was speaking to Hester was addressing her in a low, passionate tone, while her replies were almost inaudible.

Who was it? Not the mulatto: his peculiar, harsh, grating voice was too familiar. This was the voice of some one who made his nerves thrill with rage and indescribable emotion; and yet in his confusion and excitement he could not make out who it could be.

"I cannot play the spy like this," said Dutch to himself, and, raging as he was with curiosity and mortification, he walked away; but his agony was unbearable, and, turning back, he approached the spot once more, to hear a half-stifled cry for help; then there was the noise of a slight struggle, and he darted forward to strike himself against the foremast and stagger back half-stunned, and lean against the side to collect his scattered thoughts.

For his forehead had come violently into collision with the mast, and for a few minutes memory forsook her seat, and a strange sense of sickness accompanied the oblivion.

This soon passed off, though, and now, thoroughly roused, Dutch retraced his steps, going with outstretched hands to the spot whence the voices had seemed to proceed, to find all perfectly still.

"But she was here," he muttered moodily; and recalling his determination to insist upon a full explanation, Dutch

walked straight to the cabin occupied by Bessy Studwick and his wife, and stood listening for a few moments before he knocked.

He could hear voices behind him, where it was evident that the captain and his friends were gathered, and upon listening more attentively he learned what he wished to know, but was never in doubt about—namely, the presence of Hester in the little cabin.

She was there, though, for he heard some one talking in a low tone, and that there was a low sob.

He waited no longer but knocked.

There was no reply.

He knocked again, and there was a rustling sound within which made his heart beat heavily, the blood rushed to his eyes, and a strange swimming affected his brain, as the horrible suspicion crossed his mind that it was not Bessy Studwick's voice he had heard, but the same that he had listened to on deck.

Fighting against the dizzy sensation, and striving to become calm, he raised his hands and stood in the attitude of one about to hurl himself against the door and burst it from its fastenings; but something seemed to restrain him, and he knocked again, and this time plainly enough, he heard Hester's voice in an excited whisper say,—

“He is there! pray, pray, don't open the door.”

It never occurred to Dutch that his wife could not know that it was he who knocked, for the hard jealousy that he had taken to his heart suggested and thought but evil of the woman he had sworn to love and protect. It was not Bessy Studwick, then, who was with her, and they dared not open the door. He had given up before, and sought no revenge; this time he would have it if he died.

“Open this door,” he said in a low deep whisper, full of the rage he felt, for in his mad cunning he told himself that if he raised his voice or broke in the door, he would alarm the occupants of the other cabin.

There was a dead silence for a few moments, and he was about to make a fresh demand as his hands clenched, and the veins in his forehead stood out throbbing from the excess of his wild emotion.

“Will you open this door?” he hissed again savagely, with his lips close to the panel.

“No,” exclaimed a firm voice. “Make the slightest attempt to enter again, and I will alarm the ship.”

Dutch Pugh's hands dropped to his side and a sigh like a groan burst from his lips as he staggered away on deck, and going to the side rested his aching head upon the rail.

“Am I mad?” he said to himself. “That was Bessy Studwick. Could it have been her I heard talking here on deck? No, that was impossible, for there was the struggle. Oh! Hester, Hester, my darling, forgive me if I am judging you wrongfully; I'd give my life to believe you true, and yet again to-night I am so ready to accuse you in my heart.

“It is no use, I will not lead this life of hell upon earth: she must—she shall explain her conduct. There was some reason more than I know for her coming on board here. Her conversations with that mulatto. That meeting to-night. Ha! is it possible? Yes! I have it at last: Studwick was right: Lauré's influence still with us. Bah! I believe I am half-mad,” he said, with a contemptuous ejaculation. “I will see her in the morning, and this trouble shall be cleared away.”

As he spoke he went down to the cabin he shared with the doctor, feeling lighter of heart for the resolution he had made, and telling himself that half his trouble might have been saved had he spoken to his wife. “She might even have come out of the trial unscathed,” he said, with a strong feeling of elation, and worn out mentally and bodily he threw himself half dressed into his berth, after opening the little window, for the heat was stifling.

“A good resolution at last,” muttered Dutch as he laid his head upon his pillow, and as he dropped off to sleep listening to the lapping of the water against the schooner's side, the sound seemed to form itself into a repetition of the words—“Too late, too late, too late,” until he fell into a heavy sleep.

Story 1--Chapter XXVII.

Hester's Trials.

That evening, for the second time in obedience to a fierce demand from Lauré, Hester Pugh crept timidly on deck as soon as it was dark, and then repenting of her venture she was about to retreat when she felt a grasp like steel clasp her wrist, and in a low voice that made her shudder Lauré began to upbraid her, speaking passionately of his love, and telling her that it was his wish to win her by his tenderness, and not by force, while she in turn told him of his cruelties, and piteously pleaded for mercy.

“Yes,” he said at last, “the same mercy that you have had on me,” and flinging his arms round her he drew her shuddering form tightly to his breast.

“Make a sound,” he hissed in her ear, “and you slay Dutch Pugh, perhaps all here on board except my party. Be silent and you shall be my happy, loving wife, a princess in wealth and station.”

Maddened by her position, Hester struggled fiercely and uttered a stifled cry for help, and at the same moment almost there came the sound of approaching feet, followed by the sound of a blow; and half fainting, she found herself loosened from the arms that held her, and ran, how she never knew, to her cabin, to fall exhausted into Bessy Studwick's arms.

"Lock the door, lock the door!" she panted, clinging tightly to her friend. "Oh Bessy, Bessy, if I could but die."

Bessy locked the door, and returned wondering to Hester's side.

"Hester, darling, your husband must be a perfect monster," she cried, taking the sobbing woman in her arms.

"No, no, no," wailed Hester, "he is all that is good and noble and true, but he thinks me wicked."

"How dare he treat you like this, if he does!" cried Bessy, indignantly, as she smoothed Hester's dishevelled hair.

"No, no, no, it was not he," panted Hester.

"Not he?" exclaimed Bessy. "Do you mean to tell me that you have been on deck to meet some one else?"

"Yes, yes, and I am afraid; oh, I am afraid," whispered Hester, with a shudder, as she clung more closely to her friend.

"Hester Pugh," said Bessy, gravely; and her voice sounded cold and strange. "You must explain. I cannot wonder at poor Dutch's conduct if you act like this."

"Bessy!" wailed Hester, clinging convulsively to her, "don't speak like that. Don't you turn from me too. I am innocent; I am innocent. Oh that I were dead—that I were dead!"

"Hush, hush, hush," whispered Bessy, trying to soothe her, for she was alarmed at the violence of her companion's grief. "Tell me all about it, Hester. Am I not worthy of your confidence?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," sobbed Hester, "but I dare not—I dare not tell you."

"Dare not, Hester?"

"No, no, no," she moaned. "Hush! listen! he is there. Bessy," she whispered, clinging to her, "kill me if you will, but do not let him touch me again."

As she whispered this appeal there came Dutch's summons at the door, repeated again, with at last Bessy's stern reply, and then silence.

"He is gone," said Bessy at last, her own heart beating furiously with emotion.

"No, no, he is waiting," wailed Hester, clinging to her; "he is always watching me."

"Hester," said Bessy, sternly, "who is that man?"

"I dare not tell you," whispered Hester, with a shudder.

"As an old friend of your husband, I insist upon your telling me. This is cowardly weakness."

"Yes, yes, I know," wailed Hester, in her helpless misery; "but for his sake, I dare not tell you."

"And you have not told your husband?"

"No."

"Has he asked you?"

"Yes—yes," sobbed Hester. "Oh, if I could but die!"

"Shame on you," said Bessy. "Hester, I loved your husband very dearly once, and thought it all past now; and I have tried to love you for his sake. I will not be a partner in this mystery. To-morrow morning he shall hear all I know."

"No, no, no," cried Hester, in affright. "You must not tell. For heaven's sake do not speak a word. Perhaps help may come."

"I shall tell him," said Bessy firmly.

"You do not know what you say," wailed Hester, growing more pallid by the faint light of the lamp.

"I know a true honest man is being deceived, and that some scoundrel has frightened his weak young wife into silence, and—"

She said no more, for Hester rose horror-stricken and threw herself upon her knees, imploring her silence, and then, utterly overcome by her emotion, fainted dead away.

So long-continued was the swoon that Bessy was about to summon assistance when there was a faint sigh, and she revived.

"I was just going to send for Mr Meldon," said Bessy, kindly, as she kissed her.

"That is not as you kissed me to-day, Bessy," said Hester, sadly. "I would tell you gladly—all—all, if I only dared."

She hid her face shudderingly, and then, clinging tightly to Bessy, they remained silent for what must have been quite a couple of hours, when Bessy, who had been dozing off to sleep, suddenly started up to find Hester awake and standing up in a listening attitude.

"What is it?" said Bessy, in alarm. "Hush! do you not hear?" whispered Hester, hoarsely. "He is maddened and has turned upon them. Oh Dutch, my husband! God—protect—"

She said no more, but stood with white face and starting eyes, listening, for at that moment there was the sound of struggling overhead, a hoarse shriek as of a man in mortal agony, a heavy fall—a rustling noise; and then, just by the little round window of their cabin, a heavy splash.

Story 1--Chapter XXVIII.

A Race for Life.

That had been a tremendously hot day, but in the excitement of the silver-seeking the weather had been unnoticed; but as the night came on it seemed almost suffocating to those who were not moved by such passionate emotions as Dutch Pugh and his wife.

Sam Oakum had been till quite late standing chewing his tobacco, as he looked over the side watching the golden green water that heaved gently against the stern of the vessel, for, moored as she was, she did not swing with the tide, and after a time he went and joined 'Pollo, whose galley was, after all, no hotter than the rest of the ship.

From where they sat talking in a low voice, the encounter between Lauré and Hester had not been heard, and when from time to time Oakum thrust out his head and took a look round to see the faint glow from the cabin skylight, all was as still as death, and he drew his head in again and went on talking.

"Don't gawp like that, 'Pollo," said Oakum at last, as his companion yawned in a fashion that was quite shark-like.

"I berry sleep and tired, Mass' Oakum, sah; I had berry hot day."

"There, I'll soon wake you up, my lad."

"No, sah, I hope you do nuffum ob de sort, for I want go asleep."

Oakum chuckled softly to himself, and then, just as 'Pollo was in the midst of a second yawn, he said:

"I wonder how much apiece the governors mean to give us."

'Pollo was wide awake on the instant.

"I no know, Mass' Oakum, sah, but dey get so much for demselves dat they give us great big whack."

"I dunno," said Sam. "We ought to have made a bargain. But there, let's go down and turn in."

"No, sah, I tank you," said 'Pollo; "it ten time more hot down below dere dan in my galley, where de fire full go. Nuff to cook all de boys in de forksel, and make 'em come up brown in de morning. I not bit sleepy now, and when I am I lie down here on de deck and hab rest."

"Well it is a bit better up here, 'Pollo, for you can breathe."

"Yes, sah; can get de wind 'nuff to kip going. But 'bout de silber, sah. You tink dey get up all from down below?"

"Yes, 'Pollo, and I suppose we shall start next to get to another sunken wreck, and unload her."

"I tink, sah, I take de schooner close up to dat old wreck off de lilly island."

"So do I, 'Pollo; and what's more I will."

"I tink, sah, we ought get berry big lot ob silber for ourselb. If I tought dey turn shabby, I say let Mass' Oakum and me go and get de whole ob de oder ship and cut de silber in two half, and take one apiece."

"Very pretty, 'Pollo, if we could do it: but as we can't, let's be content with what we get from the governors."

"Yah—yah—yah—yah," laughed 'Pollo softly.

"Now then, what are you grinning about?" said Oakum.

"I tink, sah, about de sunken ship and de silber."

"What of it?"

"I tink, sah, how funny it am if we came out here, find de sunk ship, pull up all de silber, and den if we go and lose de ship somewheres else, and all de silber go to de bottom again."

"I say, young fellow," growled Sam, "don't you get croaking like that. 'Taint lucky."

"No, sah; wouldn't be lucky lose all de silber again. I tink I know how much I go to hab for my share."

"Enough to make you an independent gentleman for life, 'Pollo."

"You tink so, sah?" chuckled 'Pollo.

"Sartin sure."

"Den I wear white hankcher and white wescoat ebery day; and make some darn niggah clean my boots free times over. Yah, yah, yah."

"Here, I shall be smothered if I stop up here much longer, 'Pollo," said Oakum, stepping out upon the deck, where all was dark and silent, only a very faint light now coming up through the cabin skylight.

"It am hot, sar, berry hot," said 'Pollo, and they stood at the side staring at the shore, where the undergrowth seemed to be lit up by a shower of fallen stars, which leaped and danced from leaf to leaf, while the very sea beneath them seemed alive with pale shining points of light, which glided softly along till some fish darted through the water and made the little starry dots flash into a long line of light. Against the side of the ship there seemed to be so much pale golden light rising and falling, showing the copper sheathing of the vessel, and surrounding it with a soft halo which made its shape just faintly outlined from stem to stern. The cables, too, by which it was moored could be faintly traced as lines of light illuminated and sparkling right to the sand below, and for some little time the two men stood watching in silence.

"Dat's shark," whispered 'Pollo, suddenly, as he pointed down to where the points of light flashed more vividly as they were agitated, and though they could not make out the shape of the monster, it was plain to see that some great fish was slowly gliding through the water.

"What's he hanging about after?" said Oakum, watching the place intently. "I should have thought it had been made too warm for them gentlemen, and they'd have give us a wide berth."

"He know somebody go to die soon," said 'Pollo, in a low voice. "Dat Mass' Studwick or pretty Missee Pugh."

"Don't you talk humbug," said Oakum, with a growl. "Phew! it's strange and hot; I shall go and turn in."

"You soon turn out again. Mass' Oakum, you go below. De cockroach hab fine game night like dis hyar, sah, and de skeetas buzz bout like anyfing. You top on deck and lay down under de awning. Dey coming on deck dose oder chap half baked, sah."

"How do you know?" growled Sam.

"I hear some one, sah, just now come crawl up, and—Oh, Goramighty, who hit me on de head?"

For just then there was a dull thud, a fall, and Sam Oakum felt himself seized from behind, and a hard hand placed over his mouth.

He was too sturdy a fellow, though, to submit to that, and wrenching himself free he sent one of his assailants one way, and the other sprawling over the body of 'Pollo, and darting aside, he gave a spring, caught at the inner side of the main shrouds, swung his legs up, and as the two men ran in pursuit of him they passed beneath him in the darkness, and he climbed softly up higher and higher, then crawling round to the outside, and clung there, gazing down into the darkness below, feeling that he had had a narrow escape for his life.

"The ship's been boarded in the dark," he muttered, as he listened attentively, seeing nothing, but making out something of the proceedings by the sounds below.

Now came the noise of the cabin hatches being secured; then there were short, sharp orders here and there, followed by a struggle, a wild cry, and a heavy fall. Then came the splash heard below in the cabin, and Oakum muttered to himself:

"There's one poor fellow gone to his long home."

Then he set himself to make out who it could be, but his attention was taken off directly by sounds of the alarm having spread below.

"And now how about all the silver?" muttered Oakum. "That's about the size of what this here means."

Sam was right, for the ship had been seized for the sake of the silver found, and that which was to be discovered, for Lauré had decided that it was not safe to stay any longer. He had been waiting his time, and had there been no chance of discovery he intended to let Parkley and Dutch go from wreck to wreck, and obtain all the sunken treasure possible before seizing the vessel. But now the plot seemed so ripe that if allowed to go further it might fail, so, exasperated by his encounter that evening, he had whispered his intentions to the men under his orders, unfortunately more than half the crew, and as Sam Oakum listened from aloft he could hear the scoundrels hurrying about, the hatches secured, and then proceedings followed that showed him that the alarm had fully spread.

First there was the shivering of a skylight, Captain Studwick calling out to know what the noise meant, followed by beating and kicking at the door; and then several shots were fired followed by a dead silence, broken by Lauré's voice giving orders in a sharp, business-like way.

"I wonder where poor old 'Pollo is," said Sam Oakum as he sat upon his perch thinking, and by force of habit he took

out his tobacco-box, helped himself to a bit, and began to consider about the perils of his position. Where he was would do very well for now, he argued, but as soon as the day began to break he would be seen, and then the probabilities were that he would be shot down.

"Leastwise, p'haps, they'll let me off as soon as I say I'll jyne 'em, but that won't come off. Now, who's in this game, I wonder? That yaller-skinned mulatto chap's one for a dollar, and there's rougs enough among those as came aboard with him to make up a pretty crew, I'll swear."

Sam sat thinking while the captors of the vessel were pretty busy down below, and at last, one plug of tobacco being ended, he started upon another, but this time not being so cautious, or rather having his attention taken up by what was passing below, he closed the steel tobacco-box with a loud clear snap, and in the stillness of the night this sounded so clearly that he knew he must be discovered.

To change his position was the work of a few moments, and while he was in the act of moving there was a sharp flash, and the report of a pistol, followed by another and another, the bullets whistling close by him.

"There's some one up in the rigging," said Lauré sharply. "It's that black cook."

"No," said another voice, "we fetched him down first off, and he's been pitched below."

"Who is it, then?" said Lauré sharply.

"I think Oakum was on deck," said another voice.

"Here you, Sam Oakum, come down," said Lauré, in a clear, loud voice. "Come down and you shall not be hurt."

"That's nice palaver after sending bullets to fetch a man down," said Sam to himself, "and after pitching one poor chap to the sharks. I think I'll stay where I am."

"Here, two of you to the port, and two to the starboard shrouds. Take your knives with you, and if the scoundrel won't give in, fetch him down best way you can."

Sam Oakum drew a long breath as he heard these words, and then, the rigging beginning to quiver, he set his teeth, and began to make cautiously for one of the stays, intending to get to the next mast if he could, and so steal down on deck, where, if he could contrive to reach the poop, he might climb over and join those below through the cabin windows.

It was ticklish work, though, for as he glided and swung from place to place, he could hear by the hard breathing that he was closely pursued. Spider-like, too, the touching of the various ropes by his enemies gave him fair warning that he was in danger, though, unfortunately, his movements were in the same way telegraphed to his enemies.

At last they came so near that his capture seemed certain, or if not capture, he felt sure that a blow from a knife would be his portion. For just as he was going to pass on to the shrouds he had reached, he felt by their vibration that some fresh men were coming up, and seizing a rope he swung himself out clear from the top and hung there, gently swaying about, hearing his pursuers pass close by him, so near that he could have stretched out one hand and touched them.

As far as he could judge, he was now just over the cabin skylight, and his heart bounded, for somewhere about here ought to be the top of the wind-sail hung up in the rigging, so that the great canvas tube might convey the fresh air below to take the place of the hot.

"If I could only reach that," thought Sam, "I might slip inside, and go down with a run into the cabin."

He felt about gently for some few moments—not a very easy task, swinging as he was—and then to his great joy he felt his leg come in contact with the rope that suspended the sail, threw his legs round it, and slid down to the top; then, feeling for the opening in the side, he thrust in his leg and held on for a moment while he drew his knife and opened it with his teeth, determined to sell his life dearly if he should be assailed.

It was well he did so, for, directly after squaring his elbows so as to make all the resistance possible to a rapid descent, he let himself glide into the long canvas sack; but, in spite of his efforts, he went down with a rapid run, not as he expected into the cabin, but upon the deck, where he lay struggling for a few moments before he could get his knife to work and rip up a sufficiently-large slit to allow of his rolling out, and then leaped to his feet, ready to meet the first attack that came.

The darkness befriended him, for no one dared fire for fear of hitting a friend, and though the noise of his fall brought his enemies round, it was only to seize one another; and in the midst of the confusion he escaped, and dashed off in a hard race, closely pursued by half-a-dozen scoundrels, whose purpose evidently was to hunt him overboard.

Twice over he ran right into some one's arms, and once he ran full tilt against an enemy, and sent him rolling over on to the deck. Shouts and oaths rang around him, and over and over again poor Oakum felt that his only chance of escaping from one horrible death was by seeking another.

"But no," he muttered, "I'm not going to be served like that;" and he dodged round mast, galley, and boat, crouching under bulwarks, and escaping over and over again by a miracle as he tried hard to think of some means of baffling his pursuers. The cabin skylight was too strongly covered with wirework, he thought, or he would have tried to leap through; and as to leaping overboard, swimming beneath the cabin window, and calling to those who were prisoners to lower down a rope, that was not to be thought of after the sight he had seen that night in the luminous water.

"I should be torn to pieces," he muttered. "Take that, you mutinous ruffian," he added, as he struck out fiercely at one of his enemies, lying down the next moment flat on the deck, so that a pursuer fell over him, and fell with a crash.

Try how he would, the fugitive was beaten; at every turn in the darkness an enemy seemed to spring up in his way, and as he heard the whish of blows directed at him he wondered he had escaped so long.

But a man running for his life is hard to overtake, especially if he have the darkness for his ally: and so it was that at the end of five minutes, during which Sam had been a dozen times within an ace of being taken, he was still at large, standing panting close to the fore-castle hatch, while his enemies were creeping cautiously up, ready to make a spring.

"If I'm to be threw overboard," muttered Sam, "I won't go alone, anyhow. If the sharks is to be fed, they shall have a double allowance;" and setting his teeth with a vicious grating noise, he prepared for a run aft.

The darkness was now more intense than ever, for a thick mist had come off the land, enshrouding the deck so that Sam could not see the knife he grasped in his hand, but his ears were strained so that he could make out the panting breath of his enemies as they came nearer and nearer, and to his horror he found that they had spread themselves right across the deck; and his imagination suggested that they had joined hands so as to make sure that he did not escape, literally dragging the deck from astern forward, so he knew that they were certain of him this time.

His only chance seemed to be to run out on the bowsprit, and to try to get by one of the stays upon the foremast, but the men were so close that he felt sure they would cut him down before he had gone a yard.

Crouching down, and backing, he was close to the capstan, when his foot came in contact with a fender—one of those heavy pads of cordage and network used to keep ships' sides from grinding on a stone wharf.

In an instant he had caught it up, and raising it in both hands above his head he waited his time, and then, as the men closed up, he hurled it with all his force against the nearest, catching him full in the chest, and sending him down like a skittle, when, as he uttered a cry, the others believing that the man they sought to capture had sprung upon him, closed in with a shout, and Oakum dashed by them again.

His triumph was but short-lived, for the men were after him directly, chasing him now more savagely than ever. Once or twice his bare feet had slipped on the wet deck, and he had shuddered, believing it to be blood; and forgetting the place, as now, panting and nearly exhausted, he was running on, feeling that the time had come to stand at bay, one of his feet glided over the boards and as he made an effort to save himself by a leap, there was a heavy crash, a fall, and he knew no more.

Story 1--Chapter XXIX.

Awakening.

How long Dutch had been asleep he could not tell, but he was dreaming of some fresh trouble. He was diving, and one of the sharks kept striking him blows on the helmet, the noise seeming to reverberate within his brain, when, making an effort, he dragged the helmet off so as to more clearly see his enemy, and strike at it with his knife, when he awoke to hear noises overhead, the beating of feet, and, as he leaped out of his cot, struggling, a horrible cry, and he stood paralysed as the next moment the cabin door was banged to, and sounds came as of ropes being piled upon it.

"In God's name, what does this mean?" said the doctor, who had leapt out of his berth, and was hastily dressing.

"Heaven only knows," replied Dutch. "But quick! Miss Studwick! My wife! Get to their cabin door. Indians, perhaps, from the shore—an attack—we must save them."

"Even at the expense of our lives," said the doctor in a low voice. "Have you taken my revolver, or my gun?"

"No, no. Mine are gone, too," exclaimed Dutch. "Never mind, man, we have our hands: quick!"

They rushed out of the cabin, nearly oversetting Mr Parkley and the naturalist; but, paying no heed, Dutch rushed to the little cabin where his wife was clinging to Bessy Studwick, tried the door to find it fastened, and then with one kick sent it off its hinges.

"Hester!" he cried hoarsely, "Hester!"

For answer she sprang to his neck, and clung there with a sigh of relief,—

"This way," he said, "into the main cabin. Thank heaven, you are safe."

"And you," she moaned, as she felt his strong arms round her; and catching one of his hands convulsively she pressed it upon her heart, while her lips sought for his in vain. "Dutch—Dutch—husband—call me wife once more."

"I'd give my life to do so, Hester," he whispered passionately, the unknown peril of the night having broken down the icy barrier that had existed for so long.

"Dutch," she whispered back, "if truth to you deserves the right to be called your wife, you may speak the word."

"But it is no time to speak now," he exclaimed. "Some terrible calamity has befallen us."

"Yes, yes, it was what I feared," she moaned, clinging more tightly to him.

"You feared," he said. "But stop! Now in this time of peril, Hester, when in a few moments we may be separated for ever, tell me the truth; you were speaking to some man, and even to-night?"

"Yes, Dutch," she said.

"It was that mulatto?"

"Mulatto!" she said bitterly. "It was Señor Lauré."

"Lauré," he exclaimed. "Yes, I half suspected him, and you knew he was on board and did not warn us," he added, in a tone of disgust, as he tried to free himself from his wife's embrace.

"I could only warn you at the peril of your life, Dutch," she said. "He threatened me."

They were interrupted by the voice of the captain shouting for the door to be opened.

"Are you there, doctor?" said Dutch.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And Miss Studwick?"

"I am here," said Bessy, quietly. "Hester, give me your hand."

It was pitch dark, and they dared not light a lamp for fear of making marks of themselves for those on deck, especially as, in reply to the captain breaking the cabin skylight, a couple of pistol shots were fired down, fortunately without effect.

Just then Captain Studwick spoke.

"I cannot understand this," he said. "There must be some treachery somewhere, or we have been boarded in the night. It cannot be an Indian attack. Dutch Pugh, can Lauré have overtaken us?"

"Overtaken us! Poor children that we were to try to fight him with brains," said Dutch bitterly; "he has never let us out of his sight."

"What!" cried Mr Parkley.

"He has been on board from the first with half-a-dozen picked men."

"And he was the mulatto?" cried Captain Studwick. "Curse the fellow! Then we are indeed undone."

There was a few moments' silence, and then Captain Studwick spoke again.

"I always felt that there was something wrong—always. Bear me witness that I did, Pugh, and yet I could not tell what it was."

"You did," said Dutch, who was listening intently.

"But this is no time for talking," cried Mr Parkley excitedly. "The scoundrel! the villain! to outdo us like this; and at such a time, when we have just succeeded in getting the treasure. Only to think of it, we have been working like this for him."

"It has not come to that yet," said Dutch, quietly, and his voice sounded strangely in the dark. "We are fastened down here, of course, Studwick?"

"Yes, I have tried hard, but they have secured us," said the captain.

"How many are we here?" said Dutch.

"Don't talk like that, Mr Pugh," said Wilson, the naturalist. "You never mean to fight."

"Englishmen always mean to fight, Mr Wilson," said Dutch, sternly, "when there are women to protect."

"That was well said," exclaimed a voice from the far end of the little saloon. "I wish I was a strong, hearty man like you."

"I wish so too, my boy," said Captain Studwick between his teeth. "Poor lad, his soul is strong if his body is weak."

"Answer to your names, you who are here," said Dutch; and in return he repeated those of the captain, Mr Parkley, the doctor, naturalist, and John Studwick. "The ladies, I know, are here," he added.

"Would to heaven they were not!" muttered the doctor.

"There's more here nor you've called over," said a gruff voice.

"That's Rasp," cried Mr Parkley eagerly.

"Yes, and there's a couple o' sailors here too," said the old fellow, "on'y they've lost their tongues."

"Who are they?" asked the captain, sharply.

"Here's Dick Rolls here, capen," said a rough voice.

"And who is that speaking?" said the captain.

"Robert Lennie, your honour," was the reply.

"The two men I suspected," whispered the captain to Dutch. "We've been on the wrong scent throughout."

"Miss Studwick had better go with my wife into the forecabin," said Dutch; and his lips trembled as at the words "my wife" he heard a faint sob. Then there was a low rustling noise, and in a moment more all was still.

"Now, captain, quickly," said Dutch; "had you not better serve out the arms?"

"They would have been served out before now, Pugh," was the reply, "if we had had them."

"You don't mean," gasped Dutch, as he recollected missing his own pistol from its shelf in the little cabin.

"I mean that while our minds have been fixed on the silver," said the captain bitterly, "sharper brains than ours have been dead on seizing the golden opportunities. I have searched and there is not a weapon left."

A low murmur ran round the cabin; and then there was perfect silence, as they all stood there in the pitchy darkness and stifling heat—for the wind-sail had been withdrawn—listening intently to the sounds above, for it was evident now that some fresh disturbance was on foot—in fact, the noise of the discovery of Oakum now began to reach their ears, accompanied directly after by the sound of shots.

"They are not all enemies on deck, then," said Dutch, eagerly. "*Who* can that be?"

"It must be Oakum or Mr Jones," exclaimed the captain.

"Surely we have more true men on board than that," said Dutch, who in this time of emergency seemed to take the lead.

"I hope so," was the captain's remark; and then once more there was silence on deck, following upon a sharp order or two that they could not make out.

Just then Dutch felt a hand laid upon his arm.

"Who is this?" he said, in a low voice.

"It is I—Meldon," said the doctor in the same tone. "Lean towards me, Mr Pugh."

"What do you wish to say?" said Dutch.

"Shall we be obliged to fight, Mr Pugh?" whispered the doctor.

"Are you afraid, sir?" was the reply.

"Perhaps I am; it is only natural, Mr Pugh," said the doctor. "I have seen so much of death that I have learned to fear it more than a rough sailor or soldier, perhaps; but I was not speaking for myself."

"I am glad of that," said Dutch, with something of a sneer, for he was annoyed at being interrupted at such a time.

"You need not sneer, Mr Pugh," said the doctor quietly. "What I fear is that if we come to some bloody struggle, it may mean death to some here."

"It is pretty sure to, sir—especially to me," he muttered, "if I get him by the throat. Who is that moving there?" he said aloud.

"On'y me, Mr Pug," said a rough voice, and the doctor went on.

"You misunderstand me, Mr Pugh," continued the doctor, in a whisper. "I mean that the shock might be fatal to young Studwick, and I am sure it would be, in her delicate state, to your wife."

"My wife should have stayed ashore, sir," said Dutch, rather harsh, for he resented this interference.

"Your words are very bitter, Mr Pugh," said the doctor, coldly, "and, excuse me, not manly at such a time. Ever since that night when I was called in to Mrs Pugh, and she had that series of swoons—"

"You called in to my wife," said Dutch, who was startled by the words; "that night?"

"Yes, Miss Studwick sent for me, as I was close at hand. Did you not know?"

"No, no," said Dutch, "I was away from home. I—I forgot—I did not know."

"I mean when I found her so weak and ill. You must know—that night I carried her up to bed."

"Yes—yes," said Dutch, in a strange voice that he did not know for his own. "You mean that night when you carried her in your arms—to her bedroom—there was a light there."

"Of course. Miss Studwick held it for me," said the doctor. "I thought you would recollect."

"Yes—yes," said Dutch strangely. "I had forgotten. My God, I must have been mad," he muttered.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, in a low whisper.

"Nothing, nothing; go on, sir, pray."

"I am glad I have awakened your interest," said the doctor. "You thought me officious, but indeed, Mr Pugh, she needs your care and thought. That night I thought she would have died; some trouble, I fear, had given her incipient brain fever, and I really dread what may happen if she is subjected to this shock. If anything can be done."

"I shall see, I shall see," said Dutch hoarsely. "It was you, then, who carried her up-stairs—not our regular practitioner," he added, with his voice trembling.

"No," said the doctor; "I thought you knew."

"Don't speak to me any more now, doctor," said Dutch, feeling for Mr Meldon's hand, and pressing it warmly. "God bless you for this. I shall never forget it."

"It is nothing, Pugh, nothing," said the other warmly. "Forgive me if I seemed to resent your words; I know you are much troubled now."

"Hark!" exclaimed Dutch; "listen."

There was a rush across the deck, evidently far forward, and once more silence.

"Heaven forgive me!" said Dutch to himself; and then, in spite of the terrible peril they were in, he felt his way to the further cabin, and in a low voice whispered his wife's name.

"Hester—here!"

With a faint cry of joy, she stretched out her hands to him, for there was that in his voice which made her heart leap.

"Dutch! Dutch!" she whispered, as she wreathed her arms round his neck, and clung to him tightly.

"Hester, darling," he whispered, "you should curse me, and not treat me so. My darling, I have been mad, and have but just learned the truth. Forgive me, dear, forgive me. One word, for I must go."

"Forgive you?" she whispered back, as she pressed her lips to his in a long passionate kiss. "Husband, dear husband, tell me you believe in me again."

"Never to doubt you more, darling," he groaned. "I cannot tell you now. Loose me—quickly—I must go."

"No, no," she whispered; "not yet, not yet—one more word, Dutch, one more word."

"Stand ready there, everyone," cried the captain, in a loud stern voice, "and close up, gentlemen. Let every man aim at getting the weapons from the cowardly villains. Be firm: we have right on our side."

There was a sharp rustling noise, and the loud tramp of feet overhead; and then the captain's voice was heard once more out of the darkness.

"Quick there! Where is Dutch Pugh? The scoundrels are coming down."

The noise overhead increased as Dutch tore himself from his wife's arms, and hurried to join the defenders; but the captain's words were premature, as, after a few minutes, the sounds seemed to go forward once more and almost to cease, and just then Rasp's voice was heard.

"I've been having a rummage about, and here's two or three tools to go on with. S'pose you take this, Mr Pug, it's your shark knife; and here's one for you, Mr Parkley, and one for the captain. Is there any gent as would like an axe?"

"Give it to me," said the doctor. "Have you anything for yourself?"

"Only another chopper," said the old fellow, "but it's as sharp as a razor."

The diving implements in Rasp's cabin had been forgotten by all save him, and these he now passed round, sending a thrill of satisfaction through all present, for it was like doubling their strength; and, as they all, well-armed now, stood round the door, there was a rush of feet overhead, the sound of curses, a heavy fall, and those below felt mad with rage at being unable to go to the aid of some one who was evidently fighting on their side, when there was a tremendous crash, and something heavy fell through the skylight to the floor by their side.

In an instant Dutch sprang upon the man who had fallen through, held his knife at his throat, and hissed,—

"If you stir, you're a dead man. Stand ready to strike down the next one who comes through," he added to his

friends.

"Who's a-going to stir?" said a surly voice. "I'm too beat out. There, you needn't be skeared; no one else won't come down that way."

"Oakum!" exclaimed Dutch, taking his knee from the prostrate man's chest.

"I ain't quite sure yet," said the old fellow. "It was me—what them warmint had left; but you've most squeezed out the little bit of breath as I had."

"My good fellow," exclaimed the captain, "I'm very glad you've escaped. Are you wounded?"

"I'm blessed if I know, capen," growled the old fellow, rising and shaking himself. "I'm precious sore all over and pumped out, but I can't feel any holes in my carkidge as yet. How's everyone here?"

"Unhurt at present," was the reply.

"Got the ladies safe?"

"Yes."

"That's a blessing," muttered the old fellow.

"But who has been killed?" whispered Dutch in a low voice.

"Well, that's about what I was a-going to ask you, gentlemen," said Oakum. "Far as I can make out, there's the whole of the watch. Bob Lennie—"

"Some one hit me on the nose and tumbled me down the hatch, first go off," growled that worthy.

"That's good," said Sam. "Well, then, they've done for Dick Rolls, I know."

"No they ain't," said the sailor, in an injured tone. "I got a chop on the head, and it's bleeding fine, and I bolted down here. Where's the good o' you going and telling such lies, Mr Sam Oakum?"

"Well, third time never misses," muttered Sam. "What's come o' Mr Jones?"

There was no reply here.

"He wouldn't jyne the mutineers, would he?" said Sam after a pause.

"No," said the captain sternly.

"Then it was him as they've cut down and chucked overboard."

"Where are the other men?" said the captain, after a horrified pause caused by Sam Oakum's announcement.

"Them as arn't in the swim is down in the forksel," said Sam, gruffly, "with all the chain cable piled atop on 'em, I expect; but it seemed to me as if the deck was swarming in the dark with fellows, all a trying to let daylight into your ribs."

Story 1--Chapter XXX.

After the Fight.

The silence on the deck now seemed ominous to those who were listening intently for some warning of the enemy coming down, but the long, weary hours passed without any fresh alarm, and they all stood in that pitchy darkness and stifling heat, waiting for the danger that did not come.

"I'm getting so anxious about my birds," said Mr Wilson suddenly from one corner of the cabin. "How shall I get to feed them?"

No one spoke for a moment or two, and then Sam Oakum exclaimed:

"You won't want no more birds, sir. You're a-going to be kep' in a cage yourself;" and the two sailors tittered to themselves, but no one else spoke.

"I say," exclaimed Oakum, all at once, "what's come o' the stoard and old 'Pollo?"

"I'm here, Mr Oakum, sir," said a weak voice, and then there was a low wailing noise.

"That's old fatty, sure enough," said Oakum, "and he's a-crying. But what's come of 'Pollo?"

There was no answer to this, and Sam was heard to bring his hand down on his leg with a vigorous slap.

"I remember now," he exclaimed. "They brought him down on the deck when they went at me, but it was all knocked out of my head. Poor old 'Pollo! Poor old chap! I liked his honest old black physog somehow, if it wouldn't wash white. If he's killed," he muttered sternly between his teeth, "someone's got to answer for it afore long."

The hours dragged on, and then it seemed as if the darkness had suddenly grown less opaque; then one haggard face and then another could be dimly made out, and at last, as if with a rush, up came the sun, and the saloon was flooded with light reflected through the windows off the glorious dancing water; and the prisoners began to look from one to the other, and always at haggard anxious faces.

Dutch, finding that all was still outside, walked softly to the little cabin where Bessy Studwick and his wife had been placed for safety; and as the door was open he could see that Hester was sleeping peacefully with her head resting on her friend's lap, while pale and anxious looking, Bessy held only her hands, and sat up watchful as she had been all night.

Dutch stole in, and bending down kissed his wife's forehead tenderly, making her start slightly and utter a low sigh, but a happy smile came upon her lip directly, and the sunshine which flooded the little cabin lit up her thin, worn face, giving it so sweet and pure an air that Dutch groaned to himself as he thought of the past, and then stole away, but with a load taken from his breast, as he thought of the revelation he had heard from the doctor, and his heart leaped with joy as he thought of how in the future he would try to wipe away the misery he had inflicted upon the suffering woman.

He was brought back to the present, though, directly by finding a kind of conference going on amongst his friends as to the future, and their proceedings to defend themselves and retake the ship.

The meagreness of the resources was now seen at a glance, for though a portion of the party was pretty well-armed, the others were helpless.

The captain made a full inspection of his cabin to find that every weapon had been carefully removed; and, to make matters worse, not an article likely to be used as a means of defence had been left behind.

At least this was the first impression, but the doctor suddenly remarked that he had a stick in his cabin, and running in he returned with it, and handed his keen long diver's knife to Oakum.

"You'd better keep it, sir," said the old fellow contemptuously. "Them chaps has got heads and hearts too hard to be hurt with a bit of a stick. Oh, that's the game, is it? Well, I'll keep the knife then."

This remark was made on seeing Mr Meldon draw a long, keenly-pointed three-edged sword out of the stick, a weapon likely to prove fatal to any one upon whom it was used.

Unfortunately for the defenders of the cabin, they had but little with which they could make a barricade. There was the bedding, and a few chairs, but even if these were piled up, but little could be done, as Dutch pointed out to the captain in a low voice.

"I am no judge of fortifications," he said with a bitter smile, "but look up."

The captain glanced at the skylight, and stamped with vexation.

"We have not so much as a pistol, Captain Studwick, and the enemy have only to place three or four there to fire down upon us and we are done for."

"Would you give up then, Pugh?" said the captain sternly.

"Not so long as I can strike a blow," was the reply; and the same spirit seemed to nerve all present.

There was not much time left them for consideration, for it was evident that full preparations were going on above. Voices were heard talking and orders being given, but the men kept away from the broken skylight, and the suspense grew more intense.

It was during this interval that Mr Meldon went to the inner cabin, where, weak and feverish, John Studwick lay, watched over now by his sister and Hester Pugh, who seemed to have awakened to a new life as she exchanged glances once with her husband, the trials they were in seeming as nothing compared to the horrors of the past.

As the doctor approached, the young man turned to him impatiently.

"Well," he said, "have you come to make me strong, so that I can fight these scoundrels with you?"

"I wish I could," was the quiet reply.

"Bah! Doctor's talk," said John Studwick bitterly. "You know you can do me no good. Why do you pester me?"

"Don't speak to me like that," he replied; "I have tried my best to help you."

"Yes, yes, I know. But there, go. You worry me by staying, and this heat makes me so weak."

"Yes, I will go directly," said the doctor; but he first went to the cabin window, secured a piece of string to a cloth, and lowered it down, soaking it, and drew it up.

As he did so, a good-sized shark turned over and made a snap at the white, moving cloth, and the doctor shuddered, for it seemed to him that any attempt to escape from the ship to the shore would be in vain, for, as if in anticipation of coming carnage, the sharks were gathering round the doomed ship.

"Lay that upon his forehead, Mrs Pugh," he said quietly; and as she turned to the locker upon which the young man lay, Mr Meldon hastily caught Bessy's hand in his and held it.

"I shall fight for you to the last," he said in a low whisper. "Do not think ill of me for speaking now; but, Bessy, I love you—very dearly, and—and we may never meet again. Say one kind word to me before I go."

She snatched her hand from his hastily, and looked upon him in a scared manner. What she would have said was checked by a sharp cry from the captain.

"Quick all!" he shouted, "they are coming."

The doctor rushed back into the little saloon, and he was only just in time, for the door had been quietly unfastened from without, and headed by Lauré, armed to the teeth, the enemy, to the number of eight, suddenly appeared, and the two sides stood face to face.

"There, throw down those knives," he said in a sharp voice, "fools and idiots. The tables are turned now. Parkley, Pugh, you little thought that my day would come, but it has. Now, surrender!"

There was no reply by words, and the Cuban read the intention of those he sought to master by their determined front.

"Do you want to be shot down where you stand?" he cried.

"Better that than trust to the mercies of such a scoundrel as you," cried Dutch, passionately.

"Ah, my brave diver and shark slayer, are you there? Put down that weapon; I don't want you hurt, nor you neither, Master Rasp, for you have to work for me." There was no reply for a moment or two, and then Dutch spoke to the men who were with the Cuban.

"I warn you all," he said; but as he spoke he could see that he was addressing men who were infuriated with drink. "I warn you all that we are desperate, and shall fight to the last. Come over to our side, and help to secure that scoundrel, and you shall all be richly rewarded. Fight for him, and if you escape death now, the law must overtake you for piracy, and you will be hung."

There was a loud laugh at this, and the captain whispered:

"Shall we make a bold charge?"

"No: stand firm," said Dutch; and the little poorly-armed party closed up more determinedly.

"What does that mean?" thought Dutch as, at a word from the Cuban, three of the men ran back up the cabin steps.

His answer came almost directly.

"Will you surrender?" cried Lauré savagely.

"No," was the reply.

"Then your blood be upon your own heads," he yelled. "Fire!"

He raised his own revolver as he spoke, and began to fire shot after shot at those before him, while at the same moment three shots came crashing from behind them through the skylight.

Then, headed by the Cuban, the enemy dashed into the cabin, striking right and left with the cutlasses with which they were armed, and for a few minutes there was a desperate struggle, in which for the time, though weakened by two of their men going down at the first shots, and others being wounded, the cabin party held their own, everyone fighting manfully: but the three men who had been sent to fire through the skylight came shouting down to reinforce their comrades, and thus turned the scale.

The captain went down with a terrible cut across the forehead; Mr Parkley had a bullet through the shoulder. The doctor drove his sword through one of the scoundrels, and then it broke short off, while another stabbed him in the back.

As for Dutch, he singled out Lauré, and made a desperate attack upon him with his long, keen knife, the shot the Cuban fired at him having merely grazed his neck, but directly after they were separated in the struggle as the furious knot of combatants swayed to and fro. But he rid himself of another antagonist, and seizing the cutlass with which he was armed again made at the Cuban.

As he approached, Lauré raised his revolver once more, took steady aim, and was about to fire; but regardless of this, Dutch struggled to get at him, when a wild shriek from a voice he knew made him turn for a moment, and that threw him off his guard. Poor Hester had been a horrified witness of the struggle, and had seen Lauré's deadly aim. Till that moment her lips had been sealed, but now the involuntary cry escaped her, and as Dutch turned, the shot struck him on the shoulder, fortunately only ploughing a shallow flesh wound; but the next moment a blow from another hand struck him down, and the rest being mastered, the men, by Lauré's orders dragged out two injured comrades and, securing the weapons, left the slippery cabin and secured the door.

Story 1--Chapter XXXI.

Renegades.

When Dutch recovered his senses, it was to find his head resting in his wife's lap, and the doctor busily engaged in bandaging his wounds, and as the misty sense of wonder passed off, a feeling of thankfulness came upon him, and he pressed the little soft hand that held his, for his great horror had been lest Hester should have fallen into Lauré's hands. The joy he felt was heightened, too, by seeing Bessy Studwick there as well, busily attending her father, and then going from one to the other, carrying water, for the heat was terrible, and the wounds caused a thirst that was almost maddening. But, painful as they were, not one man had received mortal injury, and the doctor's words were more healing even than his bandages.

Some hours passed, and then the cabin door was opened, and food and water carried in by three of the men; and then, with Lauré fully armed behind him, came 'Pollo, who with swab and pail was ordered to remove the blood that liberally besprinkled the cabin floor.

His lips parted to speak, as he was at work where Oakum sat up with bandaged head, contentedly chewing his tobacco; but a significant motion of the Cuban's hands made him turn hastily away.

This did not close Oakum's lips, though, for he said, quietly,—

"Glad to see they ain't polished you off, 'Pollo, old man."

The black did not answer, and the Cuban came round, looking curiously at his prisoners' injuries, and scanning one after the other, ending by ordering the cabin skylight to be taken off, and the sailors and Oakum to take possession of the forecabin, thus separating them from their friends.

"I don't want to stifle you all," he said, quietly. "Now, listen and remember. We are all well-armed on deck, and a careful watch will be kept, consequently any man who attempts violence will be shot down. I shall treat you all well, and you can have the run of this part of the ship for the present. To-morrow we sail for a fresh sunken galleon, gentlemen. I am much obliged to you for clearing this one out, and I shall require your services for the next."

"For clearing this one out." The words roused an echo in Dutch's breast as now, for the first time, he recalled his discovery of the gold, and, in spite of the pain he was in, his heart throbbed with joy. The Cuban knew nothing of the gold, which must be worth far more, he calculated, than the silver, and this was a secret confined to his own breast.

The Cuban's plans were plain enough to them now. His object was to force them to work at the recovery of more treasure, and then perhaps make sure of what he had by killing them all afterwards; and Dutch made a mental vow that not a single descent would he make to further the villain's aim, but as he did so he shuddered at the thought of what a powerful engine he could bring to bear by means of Hester, who was likewise in the Cuban's power.

As this thought struck Dutch, his purpose wavered, and he felt that he would be the Cuban's slave to save Hester from ill.

The greater part of the crew sided now with Lauré. Six of the men had been in his pay from the first, and it was their restlessness that made him hasten his plans to their development, for he had had hard work to keep them quiet, but now that the change in authority had taken place he ruled them with a rod of iron, and there was not a man who did not shrink from his look and obey him like a child. The colour with which he had stained himself remained still, but it was no longer the cringing mulatto who paced the deck, but the keen, clever Cuban, ever watchful, ever on his guard, and ready to take every precaution to secure the treasure he had won; and over this, night and day, he had an armed sentry, as if suspicious of any attempt on the part of his prisoners to rob him of it by throwing any portion overboard.

Instead of setting sail at once, he altered his mind, and nearly a month glided by—a month of misery to the prisoners, who, however, were well cared for, and made to parade the deck for a couple of hours every evening, just as an owner might exercise the beasts he kept; and Dutch knew well enough why this was done, so that he and his companions in misfortune might be ready and strong to continue their work at their tyrant's order; but all the same there was one source of satisfaction to Dutch Pugh, for he saw how cumbered the Cuban was with his success, and in his greed for wealth at present there was a respite from his insolent advances towards Hester, who was allowed to stay unmolested with her friends.

Meanwhile the troublesome and painful wounds of those injured healed fast under the doctor's care; and he was called upon to dress the cuts of three of Lauré's men, who, in spite of the desperate resistance, had, saving one who died two days afterwards, escaped with trifling injuries.

The question of retaking the ship had often been mooted; but, unless some special opportunity occurred, this at present was out of the question; but many a plan was proposed and canvassed in the saloon during those dark hot nights, Sam Oakum giving it out as his idea that the best thing to do would be to take to the boat some night, and get away after laying the wires of the battery in connection with the dynamite cartridges, and blowing the ship and hose within it to perdition.

Dutch shuddered as he heard the proposal, one which he scouted as being as cowardly as it was horrible, but there was one thought which made him embrace even such a terrible plan as that.

The prisoners had been aware that something was afloat on deck, but what they could not make out, and any attempt to gain information was in vain, for when they saw 'Pollo, who brought them their meals, which, thanks to him, were good and palatable, Lauré was always watching, and to make matters worse it was very evident that the black was currying favour with the Cuban, and belonged now to the opposite faction.

At last, after vainly planning and giving up each plot as futile, the prisoners sat about in the cabins or wearily gazed out of the windows one morning, waiting for change. The wounds were healing fast, and gave but little trouble, and

Hester, in spite of the close imprisonment, had changed rapidly for the better, joining with Bessy in ministering to those who suffered with them, and making more than one eye bright as their owners made a vow that no harm should befall them while they had a hand to raise. Dutch had long known now how causeless had been his jealousy, and how bitterly his young wife had been persecuted; while she had borne all in silence lest, as so important a stake was in question, she might offend the Cuban, and so injure not merely her husband's prospects, but those of Mr Parkley, to whom they were both indebted so much.

All was very quiet below, and one day had so strongly resembled another that the prisoners watched them pass in a way that grew more and more hopeless, when they were startled by the loud rattle of the heavy chain with which their door had been of late secured, and, followed by four of his partners in iniquity, Lauré presented himself, gave a sharp look round, and then in a hard commanding tone exclaimed:—

“Every man on deck!”

No opposition was made to his orders for the moment, and the captain, Mr Parkley, Meldon, and Wilson went up on deck, where they found Oakum, Rasp, and the sailors, but Dutch drew back as he saw Lauré's eyes turned upon Hester and her companion.

“Have him up, lads,” exclaimed the Cuban, with flashing eyes; and Dutch was seized and dragged to the door way, Lauré drawing a pistol and holding it to his head until he was on deck.

“Now you,” exclaimed Lauré, brutally; and with tottering gait John Studwick obeyed him, but there was a look on his eyes as he passed the Cuban that made him start uneasily, and then with a contemptuous laugh he turned it off and followed him on deck.

Dutch heaved a sigh of relief as he saw that Lauré stayed with them, had them ranged along by the starboard bulwarks, and then addressed them.

“We sail from here directly,” he said, “and as I don't want to be hard on men who have got to work for me, I am going to make you an offer, on which condition you can have your liberty on deck. I shall make the same offer to you all, though I suppose there will be some fools among you who will not take it. What I propose is this, that such of you as like to swear you will make no attempt to escape or fight against me can go about, except at night, when you will all be locked up again; but you have to bear this in mind, that anyone who runs from his promise will be shot like a dog, or pitched over to the sharks. Now then, captain, will you help to navigate the ship?”

“No, sir,” was the reply.

“Well, Mr Parkley, my disappointed speculator, what do you say?”

“I have nothing to say to such a scoundrel,” replied Mr Parkley.

“You will stop on deck, doctor?”

“I shall stay with my friends, sir.”

“So shall I,” said Mr Wilson, stoutly.

“As you like. I needn't ask you, I suppose, my clever diver, but you had better stay and get strong,” said Lauré, with a sneering laugh; “you will have plenty to do by-and-by.”

Dutch made no reply, but looked defiance.

“Just as you like,” said the Cuban, grimly. “Now, you two sailors, stop and help work the ship, and you shall have four times the pay that those fools were going to give you. I'll give you a heap of ingots apiece.”

Lennie and Rolls were evidently tempted, but they looked at Sam Oakum, who was cutting off a piece of tobacco in the most nonchalant way.

“Well, why don't you speak?” cried Lauré sharply.

“'Cause we're a-going to do same as him,” growled Rolls, nodding at Oakum.

“And what are you going to do, Sam Oakum?” cried Lauré, who was getting wroth at his plan for reducing his prisoners being foiled. “Come, my man, I'll make it well worth your while to turn over on my side. The game's up with those you have served, and if you hold out you will be forced to work with a pistol at your head; but if you come over to me, and help me well to navigate the ship, and get the treasure from a couple more galleons, I'll make you a rich man for life.”

This was a painful moment for Dutch and his friends, for, instead of indignantly refusing, the old sailor, whom they thought so staunch, hesitated, and turned and whispered to Rasp, who was by his side.

“Come, look sharp I've no time for fooling,” cried Lauré. “What do you say?”

Oakum looked at his fellow-prisoners, then at Rasp and the two sailors, and gave his quid a fresh turn before speaking.

“S'pose I says, 'No; I'll stick trumps to my old skipper?'" he growled.

“Well, then,” said Lauré, showing his teeth, “you'll have to work twice as hard, you'll have three days given you to

carry the schooner to the next sunken wreck, and if you don't do it in that time I shall send a bullet through your head."

"Thankye," said Oakum. "Well now, suppose as I says I'll fight for you, sail the schooner, and help get up some more treasure, what'll you give me?"

"Oakum!" exclaimed Dutch, who had believed strongly in the old man's faith.

"You be blowed," growled Oakum. "I must take care o' myself. Now then, gov'nor, what do you say?"

"I'll give you a hundred of those silver ingots down below. That will make you a rich man."

"Won't do," said Sam, stoutly. "I ain't going to cut my old skipper for no hundred on 'em. Make it two hundred and I'll take you."

"Oakum, if you have a spark of manly feeling in you!" cried Dutch.

"Ain't got a spark, Mister Dutch Pugh. It was put out that day of the fight."

"You scoundrel!" cried the captain.

"Same to you, captain," said Oakum, coolly. "Now then, gov'nor, what do you say? Is it to be two hundred, or is the proposal off?"

"I'll give you the two hundred," said Lauré, with flashing eyes, for he knew that Oakum would be invaluable to him, and very likely bring Rolls and Lennie over—the three being the best sailors in the ship.

"And 'bout grog?" said Oakum.

"As much as you like when the work's done," said Lauré.

"And 'bacco?"

"Of course."

"And I ain't to be a common sailor?"

"No, under me you shall have command of the ship, as far as navigation goes."

"Then I'm on," said Sam Oakum, giving his leg a slap, after a glance at the armed men on one side and his captive superiors on the other.

There was a murmur of dissatisfaction from the captain and the others at this secession, and Oakum turned upon them sharply.

"What are you a growling about?" he exclaimed, throwing off his former tones of respect. "You can't spect a man to stick to you always. Your game's up, his is on.—I'm going on his side. Why not? I'm a pore man, and I shall be a pore one if I don't make some tin this trip."

"You're quite right, my lad," said Lauré, slapping him on the shoulder, and then turning a malignant look on his prisoners.

"One must know which way his bread's buttered," growled Sam. "Say, my lads," he continued, to Rolls and Lennie, "you can go down and be boxed up under hatches if you like, only if I was you I should say to the new skipper, 'Give's twenty of them bars a piece, and we'll stick to you to the end.'"

"I'll give you twenty ingots a piece, my lads," said Lauré. "Will you come over?"

"I'm a-going to do just the same as Master Oakum does," said Lennie.

"I'm on too," growled the other, with what sounded a good deal like a curse.

"That's good. Step over here then," said the Cuban. "You are free men."

There was another angry murmur from the prisoners, as they saw their party lessened by three; but there was a greater trial in store for them, for just then Oakum turned sharp round on old Rasp, who was taking snuff viciously as he leaned back and looked on.

"I say, old beeswax," said Oakum, "now's your time to make your bargain. You're a fool if you stop there."

"For heaven's sake, Rasp, don't listen to him," cried Mr Parkley.

"What have you got to do with it?" snarled Rasp, angrily. "He says right. Your game's up, and if we're a-going diving again, I may just as well be paid for it as work for nowt."

"Come, then," said the Cuban, whose face flushed.

Rasp took a couple of steps forward, and the Cuban met him.

"What'll you make it if I come and dive for you and get all the rest of the treasure? You can't work it proper without

me, so I tell you."

"I'll give you the same as Oakum," said the Cuban eagerly.

"Same as him!" snarled Rasp, "and him a common sailor. How are you going to get your treasure. I won't dive?"

"With this," said Lauré, tapping his revolver.

"Not out o' me, you can't," said the old fellow, giving a poke at an imaginary fire. "If I says as I won't dive, pistols couldn't make me—there."

"We shall see about that," said Lauré, sharply.

"There, I don't want to fight," said Rasp, to Mr Parkley's great astonishment, for he had looked upon the old diver as truthfulness itself. "Here's the plunder, and there's no call to quarrel over it. I tell you what: say ten per cent, on all we get, and I'm your man."

"Ten per cent!" exclaimed Lauré.

"Well, you'll save by it," said the old fellow. "Shan't I work the harder, and get all the more?"

"There's my hand upon it," said the Cuban; and they shook hands, while Mr Parkley uttered a low groan, and Dutch's eyes glittered with rage.

"That will do," said the Cuban, who could ill conceal his triumph. "Now then, down below with you, captain, and you my clever adventurers. You have played with me, you see, and your cards are all trumped. Now, take my advice and wait patiently till you are wanted, for if you try any tricks against me, the stakes may mean your lives."

All had gone below except Dutch and Mr Parkley, who turned round and addressed their renegade followers.

"As for you, Rasp," exclaimed Mr Parkley, "if anyone had sworn to me you could be such a scoundrel, I would have called him a liar."

"You keep a civil tongue in your head," snarled Rasp. "I worked faithful for you, and you made your money. Now it's my turn. You'll have to work, and dive too—d'yer hear, and I'm going to make the money."

The Cuban looked on curiously as these exchanges took place, and his face flushed with pleasure as he saw Dutch turn upon Oakum, just as he was cutting himself a fresh plug of tobacco with his great clasp knife.

"You cowardly old traitor," cried Dutch; and, unable to contain himself, he caught the old sailor by the throat and shook him violently.

This treatment seemed to rouse the old fellow into a state of ungovernable passion, for, giving way in the surprise of the moment, he was driven back against the cover of the cabin hatch, but, recovering himself directly, with a savage oath he raised his knife and struck Dutch Pugh a fearful blow full in the chest, and the young man staggered back along the deck.

Story 1--Chapter XXXII.

Oakum's Messenger.

Sam Oakum followed Dutch as he staggered back, his knife entangled in the loose jacket he wore, and, dragging it furiously out, he was going to strike again, when a couple of the sailors seized his arm, and, frowning and swearing, he allowed himself to be held back, while, panting and white with rage, Dutch exclaimed—

"Coward, as well as traitor, you will get your reward!"

"Here, let go, will you?" cried Sam, furiously, making a desperate effort to get free, but the men held on, and Lauré interposed—

"Let him go, Oakum, let him go," he said, smiling with satisfaction. "You can serve him out by-and-by, as you call it—some day when he is diving," he added, with a peculiar look.

Oakum gave a savage growl like that of a bear, and glared at Dutch, who was now half forced below, hurt in mind, but very slightly in body, for Oakum's clumsy stab had gone between his ribs and arm, merely tearing his jacket.

Lauré gave his orders, then Oakum took the command, and, the men readily obeying, the anchors were hove up, and, after their long stay, the schooner sails were once more shaken out, and the vessel began to glide gently along through the limpid waters of the beautiful bay.

During the next two days the Cuban kept a suspicious watch over Sam, but as he went direct at his work with a good deal of ardour, and knocked 'Pollo down for coming up smiling at him, he rose greatly in Lauré's favour; and on the third morning, when the Cuban came on deck and saw Sam busily scanning with his glass the shore along which they had coasted, he came and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"You know the next place, then?" he said.

"Well, I dunno whether it's the same as your'n," said Sam, with a grin. "Mine lies just under that bit of an island off yon point."

"Where the rocks lie piled up like an old castle, and there's a little cove only about big enough to take this ship?" said the Cuban.

"That's him, capen," said Oakum, showing his yellow teeth. "Say, I think it ought to be another hundred bars, capen, for this."

"Wait and see, my man. If it turns out as well as the last, I may behave handsomely to you; at any rate, if you serve me well, I shall not be shabby—handsome—shabby, that is what you say, is it not?"

"I say handsome," said Oakum quietly, "never mind the shabby."

That afternoon the schooner was comfortably moored over where the sunken vessel lay, and this time there was no difficulty in finding the place, for about six fathoms below the surface the black timbers could be seen, and the Cuban rubbed his hands with glee, telling Oakum that this would be the richest find, as it was here he had himself dived and obtained the ingots.

"And was the tother one of the places you knowed of?" said Sam.

"Yes," replied the Cuban; "and I know of far more yet."

"Didn't you dive down at t'other place?"

"No," said the Cuban, lighting a cigar. "I sent down a black, who was a splendid swimmer—one of my slaves."

"Suppose he goes and clears off the silver unbeknownst to you?" said Sam, grinning.

"He will not do that," said the Cuban, quietly exhaling a cloud of smoke.

"How do you know, capen?" said Oakum. "I never trusts niggers," and as he spoke he scowled at 'Pollo, who was crossing the deck, and who slunk away.

"Because he is gone where I should send any man who was likely to prove treacherous to me," said Lauré, in a low, hissing whisper. "That fellow began to talk too much, and one night he fell overboard—somehow. It is impossible to say how."

The two men stood gazing in each other's eyes for a few moments, and then the Cuban added slowly—

"I never boast, and I never forgive. A man is a fool to his own interests who tries to escape me. Your worthy employers thought that they had quite got rid of me, and had the field open to themselves. You see where they are? Now, if such a man as that old Rasp were to play fast and loose with me, that old man would die. Don't tell him I said so; it would make him uncomfortable, and it is better a man should not know that he is likely to die. Take a cigar, my good friend Oakum."

"Thanky, no, capen, I always chews," said Sam; and then, as the other moved and went forward, Sam added, "He's a devil, that's what he is—a devil."

Old Rasp was sitting on a coil of rope close at hand polishing up one of the helmets ready for the morrow's use, and just then the two men's eyes met, and a peculiar wink was exchanged, but they did not speak; and the rest of the evening was spent in making preparations for the morrow's descents.

Since he had been on deck, Sam Oakum had once or twice seen a little canary, one that Mr Wilson used to pet a good deal, feeding it and training it so that it would sit on his finger, and feed from his hand, and this bird set him thinking.

Quite half the birds were dead, but there were several surviving, thanks to 'Pollo, who had given the little things seed and water, and cleaned out their cages. He had begun to talk to Oakum about them, but the old sailor turned upon him savagely.

"You go and attend to your pots and pans," he roared, "you black lubber;" and 'Pollo shrunk from him with a frightened, injured air; and as the black crept away Oakum suspected that the Cuban was close at hand, as he always was whenever either of the seceded party spoke together.

"Poor old 'Pollo!" said Sam to himself, as he sat down opposite the cage and began thinking.

"Now, I wonder, little matey," he said softly, "whether, if I let you loose, you'd find your master, and take him a message."

He sat thinking for a while, and then shook his head.

"No, I'm sartain it wouldn't do; no, not even if you could talk like a poll parrot."

He strolled on deck, and saw that there was a sentry by the broken skylight and another by the cabin hatch, and this was always the case, for the Cuban kept up the strictest discipline, one so perfect that if anything like it had been the rule under Captain Studwick the vessel could not have been taken.

Sam watched his opportunity, too, when the prisoners came on deck, but he soon found that any attempt to obtain a word with either, even if they had not avoided his glance, would have been fatal to the enterprise which he had in

hand.

"I shall have to take to the bird," he said at last, and at daybreak the next morning he opened its cage door, and the little thing flitted out upon deck, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy its liberty, flying into the rigging, chirping, and ending by descending the cabin hatch, attracted thereto by a peculiar whistle, but after a time it came up again, suffered itself to be caught and replaced in its cage.

"That'll do," said Sam to himself, and he went about his work, while that morning the whole of the diving apparatus was rigged up, and Rasp carefully inspected the ground.

"It's all right," he said to the Cuban. "Now, then, have 'em up. Here, let's send old Parkley down."

Mr Parkley was summoned on deck, and his first idea was to refuse to descend.

"You'd better go down," said Rasp grinning. "If you don't go with the soot on it's my belief that you'll have to go down without."

There was no help for it, and he put on the diving-dress and went down, Dutch being summoned on deck directly after, to find Lauré and his men all armed; and he felt that resistance was vain, and he, too, went down, and then with Mr Parkley worked to clear away the sand and weeds that had collected in the hold of the vessel.

A few ingots were found and sent up directly, but it was evident to both, as they compared notes, that the work of many days must follow before they could get at the bulk of the treasure that lay below.

And so another day passed, Dutch still finding, to his delight, as he went below, that the desire for the treasure was still the prominent feeling in Lauré's mind.

The next morning, at daybreak, Mr Wilson was first astir, and Dutch had just joined him to sit by the cabin window and enjoy the fresh morning breeze, which was deliciously cool, when a bright, sharp chirp was heard, and the canary flew down through the broken skylight and alighted on the table.

"Dick, Dick!" cried Mr Wilson, with the tears of joy in his eyes, "pretty Dick;" and the little thing flew on to his finger, turning its head first on one side and then on the other, as it looked up in his face with its bright beady eye.

"What's that under its wing?" said Dutch, sharply.

"Paper," was the reply; and, sure enough, tightly tied beneath the little pinion was a tiny piece of doubled-up paper, which, on being opened out, bore these words in pencil:

"Keep a steady hand at the wheel, and wait. Friends on board. Work and wait."

"Can that mean treachery?" said Dutch doubtfully; and, going to their berths, he read the words softly to the captain and Mr Parkley, and asked their opinions as well as that of the doctor.

"No," said the latter; "that's no treachery, but from a friend."

"I see it all," whispered Dutch, with his face flushed with joy.

"What do you mean?" said the captain.

"I knew old Oakum and Rasp could not be such scoundrels. Their behaviour was all a blind. They are our friends."

"That must be it," acquiesced the others; and it was decided not to send any message back, but to let the bird go.

This was done, and that day the divers steadily worked on with old Rasp, who was closely watched by the Cuban, tyrannical to a degree, while Oakum never once looked at them.

Sand, rock, and what was harder to move, namely, masses of coral, were dragged away that day, and the Cuban's impatience was somewhat alleviated on the sight of a few more stray ingots, forerunners of what he hoped to get later on, and again night put an end to their labours, the tired divers, who on this day had been helped by the captain, doctor, and naturalist, all working like common sailors, and watched by armed men.

They were up and waiting beneath the cabin skylight the next morning before the day broke, and once more came the bird with a welcome message.

It was very brief, but it gave them hope in the midst of their despair, for it ran as follows:—

"You'll get no more writing, for it ar'n't safe-like, friends working for all on you. Never mind, lads, watch under cabin light till something comes."

This was enigmatical, but it set them on their guard, and they worked that day more cheerfully, feeling that a plot must be on foot for their rescue, Dutch's only fear, as he gazed at the two women, being that it might come too late.

That night Dutch, weary as he was, himself watched beneath the cabin hatch, but many weary hours passed without anything but the talking of the watch being heard; and at last he felt that at all hazards he must sleep, when he started, for something round and soft suddenly fell through the open light upon his head, and feeling about on the floor his hand came into contact with a handkerchief, in which something soft was tied up. A powder evidently—yes, gunpowder.

He stood pondering with about a couple of pounds of the combustible in his hand, thinking of what power it would have if exploded, and longing for the battery and the dynamite cartridges, as he thought that if matters came to the worst he would blow up the ship sooner than the women should suffer insult.

During the next few days the diving work progressed steadily, and, with the exception of a few interruptions by sharks, all went well; but not the slightest sign struck Dutch as evincing a desire on the part of Rasp or Oakum to make any communication, and both he and his friends were puzzled, wondering which of them would be the faithful one, for they felt that they would be too sanguine if they imagined that both were on their side, though Mr Parkley was as convinced that Rasp was at work for them as Dutch was that it was Oakum.

All the while both were working hard in their interest to contrive the re-capture of the ship, but the difficulty was that the whole party were so watched that they could find no means of communication, but still they hoped.

Oakum had found where the arms were stowed in the fore cabin, which Lauré had taken for his own use, and which he shared with one of the men, whom he seemed to trust entirely, but who was a thoroughly drunken scoundrel, and who used to make Mr Meldon's blood boil by the way he used to stand and watch Bessy Studwick whenever she was on deck in the evening, for Lauré had insisted that the women should share his prisoners' walk for a couple of hours each day.

"If I could get at those tools," thought Oakum, "and pass 'em down, we should be all right, and might make the scoundrels shake in their shoes." But no opportunity occurred, and the glorious bright days glided by.

The treasure had been thoroughly reached at last, and in a hopeless way Dutch and Mr Parkley worked on, bullied sharply by Rasp, who threatened short supplies of air if more work were not done, and the consequence was that an immense treasure in silver bars was recovered, though for the most part terribly corroded and mingled with calcareous matter.

At last the time arrived when Mr Parkley came up announcing that the last ingot had been found, and that nothing remained but the black and rotting wood.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Lauré angrily; "there must be hundreds more. Here, you Pugh, it is your turn to go down now. Make a good search, and don't come back till you have found more."

The eyes of the two men encountered as Lauré spoke, and a strange foreboding feeling came over Dutch as he slowly made his preparations. It seemed to him that it was quite possible, now the treasure of two sunken galleons had been recovered, Lauré might forego further search, having determined to make sure of his find, and if this were the case, the young man argued, he might now begin to put in force some of his former tactics. What if he were now to try to get rid of him for Hester's sake—for the sake of the woman who had repelled all his advances, but who was now completely in his power.

True he had hardly noticed her of late, but there was that in the Cuban's eyes that told of smothered volcanic passion that might at any moment burst into flame, and Dutch felt that if he escaped from injury that evening he would try and bring forward the plot that must be now nearly ripe, and strike before it was too late.

There were men on board who would, after the first blow was successfully struck, he argued, be ready to side with the victorious party, irrespective of whom it might be, and this blow must be struck, and at once, before it was too late.

He was brought back to the realities of his position by a few sharp words from Lauré, supplemented by a brutal jerk from Rasp, while as he secured portions of his waterproof dress, and glanced round the deck, everything seemed to be imprinted on his brain with vivid force. There was the last heap of wet silver, mingled with stone, shell, and seaweed, the little streams of water trickling from it to the scuppers, and there by the pump, which it had become their duty to work, were the captain, the doctor, and Mr Wilson, while just emerging from the cabin, and supporting John Studwick each by a hand, came Hester and Bessy to lead the invalid to a seat by the side.

Dutch saw Lauré's eyes flash as Hester came on deck, and the young man's veins tingled with rage.

But he was helpless, and could only obey. And, besides, he felt that this was no time for annoyance coming to his young wife; so, exchanging glances with her, and trying to impart confidence in her breast, though he felt none, he prepared to go down.

But first he took one glance round at the beautiful sea and shore, and then, with the foreboding of coming danger on the increase, he assumed his helmet; it was roughly secured by Rasp; and he walked to the ladder at the side with the old fellow guiding him.

As he turned to place his feet on the steps, it might have been imagination, but certainly Rasp looked at him through the glass windows of the helmet in a peculiar way, and more significant still the young man felt the life-line thrust into his hand.

"Then there is danger," thought Dutch, as he lowered himself down, and his heart began to beat violently; but as his head disappeared beneath the surface of the water, and the old familiar sensations of diving were experienced, he began to smile at his terrors, and to accuse himself of want of manliness.

"Rasp's rough behaviour is all a blind to throw dust in Lauré's eyes, and the look and the significant placing of the life-line in my hands means that something is to take place to-night."

He was convinced of this now, and reaching the bottom he took up an iron rod, and began to move slowly about over

the rotten timbers that had been uncovered, and to probe and search in all directions. The sand had been cleared out of the vessel all but amidships, and there they had at the first attempt come upon remains that showed how a large number of the crew must have been below deck when the ship sunk; and as the silver seemed to lie away from here, Dutch and Mr Parkley had agreed to leave the bones buried in the sand where they lay; but now that this imperative order had come from their taskmaster Dutch took the piece of iron, and began to search with it by thrusting it down into the sand.

He shuddered as he did so, for he could tell that it certainly came in contact with buried bones, sometimes, by the feel, with a skull, and several times he left off with a shudder, resuming his task in a hopeless way, and wondering whether success were to attend their effort, and when it would be made.

Just then the recollection of the rich treasure in gold that was known only to himself came to his mind, and he smiled as he thought of what would be Lauré's feelings if he knew what had been left behind. And as he thought of this, he thrust the iron rod down once more, and his heart began to beat again, for, unless he was much mistaken, there beneath the remains of the former occupants of the galleon lay just such a receptacle as the one he had formerly found.

He probed again and again, making deep holes in the sand, which were filled up directly he withdrew the rod; and now, marking out the spot, he became convinced, not that it was gold, but that another goodly treasure of metal lay beneath the sand.

It were all plain enough, just a square receptacle, all metal, he believed gold, but certainly silver was there, and as soon as he thrust the probe down outside that square it went down, down through wood and sand to any depth.

"It is another treasure of gold," exclaimed Dutch, and his words sounded strangely to him as they were spoken in the hollow of his helmet, and he paused to consider whether he should announce his discovery, or keep it secret like the last.

"It shall be a secret," he said. "We may live to survive this unfortunate voyage, and if we do, may come again, for here is what would recompense us for all our pains, and it is no uncertainty; no, there is the treasure, and—"

He signalled sharply for more air, looking up through the clear bright sunlit water, and as he did so feeling that the supply was stopped, he saw that the long india-rubber tube had been cut, and was sinking slowly towards him, like some strange grey snake.

Story 1--Chapter XXXIII.

In Peril.

Hester turned shuddering away as she saw Lauré's eyes fixed upon her, and soon began to tremble as she recalled a previous occasion when under a threat the Cuban exacted a promise from her, one that, believing her husband's life at stake, she had given.

She tried to look in other directions, to devote herself to attending upon poor, weak John Studwick; but it was impossible, and strive how she would, her attention was constantly drawn back to the Cuban, who, with a smile upon his lip, watched her anxiety, and horrified her by coming to where the tube ran from the air-pump over the side, and picking it up held it in his hand as he glanced at her white face.

Then he threw it down again, and turning to the men about him, spoke first to one and then to another, with the result that each of the scoundrels seemed placed upon his guard, and to be ready for any emergency.

Lauré, according to his custom, was armed to the teeth, carrying quite a little arsenal in his belt, and, after going round to the men, he advanced to where Rasp was standing.

"Is that fellow working well?" he said aloud.

"Pretty well," growled Rasp, taking some snuff. "Getting a bit lazy, though. He don't work like he did when he was at it for himself."

Lauré walked up and down the deck three or four times, and then stopped short by Hester, who shrank from his touch as he laid his hand upon her arm.

"When is pretty Hester Pugh coming to make amends for all her coldness?" he said, with a smile.

She did not speak, only cowered away, with her eyes fixed on his, like a bird beneath the glance of a snake.

"I say, when is pretty little Hester going to reward me for all my patience and perseverance?" he repeated. "No, no! don't run away, little timidity. I am very dreadful, am I not? I am a terrible fellow to seize upon the ship, and make the scoundrels who tried to rob me work for my treasure. What—no answer?"

Hester could not have spoken had she wished, for her position seemed to paralyse her. An indignant word might cause the wretch who persecuted her to endanger once more her husband's life, and so she crouched there trembling.

The doctor and Captain Studwick were at the pumps, but she dare not appeal to them lest more mischief should befall, and hence she sat there trembling, feeling how thoroughly they were in the monster's power.

"She is coy and angry at our neglect," said Lauré, sneeringly. "Well, well, we must excuse it, for we have been too busy even to think of love. Let us apologise, then, and say that we love her more than ever; and now that the work is nearly done, we are going to seek our reward henceforward here, Hester."

He laid his hand once more upon her arm, but she shrunk shuddering away, and the Cuban walked angrily to the side, where, with the tube in his hand, he stood gazing down, and watching the action of Dutch as he moved from place to place far below in the pure water.

He glanced round once, and saw that Hester, with dilated eyes, was watching his every movement, and feeling that he had, as it were, her heart-strings in his hand, he pretended to ignore her presence on the other side of the deck, and played with the tube that was the life of Dutch Pugh, now pinching it or bending it so that the supply of air was slightly hindered, when Rasp, unobserved, signalled to those at the air-pump with one hand, causing them to accelerate their toil and so keep up the supply.

Just then, though so weak that he could hardly walk, John Studwick crossed the deck. Bessy would have accompanied him, but he hoarsely told her to keep back, and so soft and slow was his step that he had his thin white hand upon the Cuban's arm before the latter was aware of his presence.

"You cowardly cur!" said John Studwick, glaring at him with his unnaturally bright eyes, and with his hollow cheeks burning with a hectic flush. "I can hardly think it possible that God can let such a villain live."

Lauré started as if he had been stung, and his hand sought one of the pistols in his belt.

"Pistols, yes," said John Studwick. "But pistols or no pistols, if I had the strength of a man instead of being a helpless wreck, one of us should not leave this deck alive."

Captain Studwick and the doctor were intensely excited, but they dared not leave the air-pump lest the supply should fail for Dutch; but Mr Wilson drew nearer, and stood with parting lips and trembling hands watching the scene, while some of the armed crew now began to take an interest in the affair.

"Go down to your berth—to your kennel—sick dog that you are," cried Lauré savagely, as he showed his white teeth like the animal he mentioned. "Speak to me like that again, and you shall not live long enough to see your pretty sister become my mistress, like Hester Pugh."

"You cowardly ruffian!" cried the young man, tottering on the brink of the grave as he was, and as he spoke he sprang at Lauré's throat, clinging there with both hands, and in his surprise the Cuban staggered back. But only for a moment; the next Lauré had shaken him off, and as the feeble man tottered away the ruffian drew a revolver, cocked it rapidly, and fired at the invalid as he fell.

The bullet flew up through the rigging, for Wilson struck up his arm, and Lauré turned savagely upon him, while the captain and the doctor were starting from the air-pump to go to Wilson's aid, when they were paralysed by a shout from Rasp.

"Pump, pump! or you'll kill Dutch Pugh."

Hester uttered a wild shriek, and the handles flew round again as she darted to the air-pump, and as if feeling that she could help her husband, seized the tube.

This cry and her act saved Wilson's life, for Lauré, not a yard from him, was taking deadly aim at his head, his furious countenance bearing plainly stamped on it the determination to slay. Seeing Hester's act, then, he lowered the pistol, stuck it in his belt, and, as if the opportunity had come, and an excuse for revenge, he drew the keen sword he carried and with one cut divided the air-tube as it lay upon the deck.

Hester uttered another cry, and then stood like the rest, paralysed, as the tube writhed like a living creature, undulated, and then rapidly ran over the side, when the woman's whole nature seemed changed. From a gentle, timid, shrinking creature she was transformed into one reckless of life and free from fear, and, throwing herself upon Lauré, she caught the sword by the hilt, and tried to wrest it from his hand, while he, astonished at the change, gave way.

The cutting of the tube had set the two men free, or it would have gone hard with Hester. Captain Studwick flew to her help, armed with an iron screw-hammer that he had caught up, while the doctor seized a lever and ran to assist, but only to receive a heavy blow from behind, as, at a call from Lauré, his men closed in, and the struggle became general.

Story 1--Chapter XXXIV.

Rasp's Plans.

Dutch Pugh's doom was not sealed, for, as he was struggling on, holding his breath, and trying to reach the ladder and climb up before he should become senseless, there came help.

It was Lauré's act he knew, and even in those excited moments he could tell that here was the meaning of the forebodings he had felt, and the thought of Hester left in the villain's power half maddened him as his temples throbbed, his senses began to reel, and he staggered, and felt that something was holding him back from the haven of safety he sought to reach.

Pleasant old memories began to float before his vision—days when he had wandered with Hester through the sunny country lanes, and she confessed her love for him; and all seemed bright and beautiful. He was in no pain, and he only knew that he had just reached the ladder, and was trying to ascend, when a dark cloud floated before his eyes—a cloud of dark-red blood, and then there was a shock and a concussion, and he knew no more.

The shock was the jerking of the life-rope, and the concussion was his helmet striking against the side of the ladder, for as the struggle went on, Rasp gave the word to Oakum and 'Pollo, they hauled together, and, in spite of the weight, ran Dutch up to the side in a few moments, dragged him through the gangway, and as he lay on the deck Rasp rapidly stooped down and, turning a screw, threw open one of the plate-glass eyes of the helmet.

"Further this way," whispered Rasp again, and, Oakum stooping down with him, they dragged the senseless man along the deck, away from the struggle that was going on.

At the end of two or three minutes, Oakum and Rasp, who felt that the time was not ripe, and that any attempt at resistance on their part would have resulted, as they were unarmed, in failure, saw the captain, Mr Meldon, and Wilson driven below, Mr Parkley, in his cumbersome diving suit, being thrust down directly after; and then the conquerors turned towards John Studwick, who was lying panting where he had been dashed, with his sister holding his head in her lap, while Hester had run to the side of her husband.

Old Rasp ground his teeth as, at the Cuban's orders, the invalid was roughly raised by the men, in spite of Bessy's shrieks, dragged from her, and thrown down the hatchway, while Bessy was dragged to the fore cabin and thrust down there.

"I'm a saving of all this up, Sam Oakum," whispered Rasp. "I shall pay it all off on Mr Blackguard here some day."

"Some night," whispered Sam Oakum back in a choking voice, "and that's to-night."

"What did you drag that dog here for?" cried the Cuban, now coming up, sword in hand, and making a thrust at the prostrate figure, as Hester tried to relieve Dutch of his helmet.

"Here, mind what you're after," said Rasp, snappishly, warding off the blow with an iron bar. "Don't be a fool. 'Spose you spyle that ingy-rubber soot, how are we going to get another?"

The Cuban turned upon him furiously, but as the quaint old fellow seemed not in the least afraid, he turned it off with a laugh.

"What did I pull him up for, eh?" said Rasp. "Why, becos I haven't done with him. I haven't forgot my percentage on the silver, captain, and this one's worth half-a-dozen of that t'other old chap."

"You're a strange fellow, Rasp," said the Cuban.

"Strange, am I? I've been a diver this forty year a'most, and I've never had such diving as this afore. It's too good to be spyled because you get wild, so now then."

"You're right, Rasp," said the Cuban, laughing, as Hester darted an indignant look at the gruff and apparently heartless old fellow. "Here, a couple of you, throw this dog down in the cabin."

As a couple of the men approached, the Cuban took a turn up and down the deck, and Hester started as Rasp, while apparently leaning over the helmet, whispered:

"Don't you resist, my pretty one, but go as he tells you; there's help a coming."

Lauré turned sharply back, stooped down, and caught the trembling woman by the wrist.

"Enough of this," he exclaimed sharply, for one peculiarity of the man was that every time he was about to proceed to some act of violence he worked himself into a rage. "You come to me now."

Hester hung back from him and tried to cling to her prostrate husband, but, remembering the words of old Rasp, she suffered Lauré to lead her forward.

"That's more sensible," he said, with a look that made her shrink. "To-morrow we will change cabins with those aft."

He led her to the hatch, down which Bessy had been thrust, and ordered her to descend, which she did after a trembling glance at her husband, who still lay insensible, but with Rasp and Oakum bending over him, and the next moment, finding that she was evidently in the part that the Cuban had had furnished for his own use, and beyond which was his little sleeping cabin, she was clasped in Bessy Studwick's arms.

"Why have you not thrown that dog overboard or below?" cried the Cuban, returning to where Dutch lay.

"Don't you be in such a 'nation hurry," growled Rasp. "I'm not going to have my helmets and diving tackle misused by nobody. These things may be worth fifty thousands pounds yet, and if they're bruised or have holes broke in 'em, how are we to get 'em mended?"

As he spoke, Rasp, with Oakum's help, dragged off the india-rubber suit and removed the helmet very carefully.

"There," he said, "now you can have him; and none of your pitching him down like you did the others. He's valuable, he is."

The Cuban kicked the senseless man brutally as he lay, and, two of the sailors taking him by the legs and arms, he

was dragged to the hatch, and then drawn heavily down the stairs.

"If I don't warm the wax o' that fellow's ears for all this, Sam Oakum, my name ain't Rasp," said the old fellow, laughing to himself. "I want one of these here diving suits very pertickler, my friend, very pertickler indeed. Ho, ho, ho!"

"Right," said Oakum, in a low voice. "To-night, mind."

"Oakum," said the Cuban sharply; and the old sailor faced round, wondering whether he had been heard, while Rasp went on mending and arranging his diving tackle as if nothing was the matter.

"Sir to you," said Sam.

"I shall sail to-night or to-morrow morning. Have all ready."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Sam cheerfully; and then to himself, "Perhaps you will, and for a longish voyage."

"We've got all the silver here, and I think I shall try one more spot."

"All right, capen," said Sam; "nothing like having a good cargo while you're about it."

"Have all ready," said the Cuban gloomily.

"Right, capen," said Sam, "but—"

"Well, what?" said the Cuban, looking sharply round as if in search of danger; but the shore was on every side verdant and beautiful, the sea calm and bright, and nothing to show the horrors of the ship but a few spots of blood upon the white deck.

"I was on'y going to say as if I was skipper I should put off the start till the morning."

"Why?" said the Cuban, looking at him searchingly.

"The sun'll be down afore we could work out of this snug place so as to ketch the breeze, and there's a rock there, and a rock there, and a couple more to starboard, and three off yonder to port. I shouldn't like to take off a bit of the schooner's keel, or poke a hole in her bottom, with all that silver aboard. A man likes to obey orders, capen: but when he's got a stake in the safe running of the cargo, it makes him partickler like."

"You're right," said the Cuban. "At daybreak, then."

"Daybreak it is," said Sam, giving his trousers a hitch; and taking out a little silver pipe, he blew a shrill note. "All hands ahoy!" he roared, and as the men collected, he set to work clearing away the lumber, coiling ropes ship-shape, hoisted a boat that had been down over the side, and then altered his mind and had it lowered again. "We shall want it for towing her head round in the morning," he said, and so busied himself so as to have everything well forward, while the Cuban looked on with an approving eye.

"You shan't be forgotten for all this, Sam Oakum," he said.

"Thankye, capen, thankye," said Sam, as the Cuban walked forward, and the old sailor filled a pipe for an extra luxury, just as it was getting dark.

"Here, you black-faced son of a coal-hole, give's a light," cried Sam, loudly, as he went to the galley where 'Pollo was busy preparing tea for all on board.

"Yes, Mass' Oakum," said the black, flinching from a blow aimed at him as he spoke, when, to the poor fellow's horror, Sam seized him by the scruff of the neck, pushed his head into an open barrel, and whispered:

"Don't you make a sound, 'Pollo, old man. It's all my larks. Don't laugh, you lubber, but get your biggest carving knife, and hide here in the middle watch: there's a game on, my lad, and I want you to help to retake the ship."

"Oh, golly, Mass' Oakum, sah, dat I will; I bress de lor', sah, you not big rufiyun offer all. I bress de lor'."

"Hush! hold your tongue, lad. Mum's the word. Now then, you black nigger, look alive with that grub," he said aloud. "I'm 'most starving."

He came out puffing away at his pipe as the Cuban came slowly along the deck, looking suspiciously at Sam, who, however, did not seem to heed his look, but fixing himself on the bulwark, with his legs under him, and his arm round one of the shrouds, he half-shut his eyes, and smoked away as if with real enjoyment, blinking at the shore, and all the while ripening his plans for the fierce work to be undertaken that night.

Story 1--Chapter XXXV.

Prisoners.

Meanwhile, to Hester's horror, she found that they were to be prisoners in Lauré's cabin, and that the drunken scoundrel who shared it with him kept coming down blinking and leering at them, making their very blood run cold.

His offensive manner was, however, for the time stopped by the Cuban, who came down, and pointing to the inner cabin bade them go in there.

Their only course was to obey, and the two trembling women crouched together, dreading the coming night, and yet hoping that some successful effort would be made for their release.

“Let us hope and pray, Bessy,” said Hester, trying to be cheerful, in spite of her misery. “Dear old Rasp’s words were not uttered without meaning.”

“But is he to be trusted?” sobbed Bessy; “he was with our enemies.”

“Trusted? yes,” cried Hester; “his behaviour must have been to deceive the wretches, and he and old Oakum are working for our release.”

“If I could only be as hopeful as you are, Hester.”

“I *am* full of hope now,” cried Hester. “I can wait, and feel strong and full of energy, with my husband’s trust. Time back I could have died in my misery.”

As the hours passed on, they could hear the Cuban and his companion talking in the next cabin, and the clink of glasses told that they were drinking.

All on deck was very still. They had heard the sounds of preparation till nightfall, and then everything became very quiet; and, clinging together, the two women sat with every sense on the strain, listening for the danger they knew to be at hand, while they hoped for the rescue that might come.

It grew rapidly dark, and their cabin was only lit by the gleams that came beneath and through a few ventilation holes in the door, a glance through which, once timidly taken, showed the Cuban drinking heavily with his companion, who grew more stupid and riotous, while the only effect upon Lauré was to make his eyes glow as he sat glancing from time to time at the door.

Every now and then, too, some allusion to the prisoners made the women’s hearts palpitate with horror, and more than once Hester glanced at the little window as if through that she must seek for the help that was so long in coming, for that she knew would be protection from the outrage she dreaded for them both.

Neither spoke now of their fear, but clung the closer as they listened, till suddenly they heard Lauré rise and go on deck, when their breathing became more even, and they sighed with relief.

But hardly had the Cuban’s foot left the steps, when his companion raised his head from the table where he had been simulating sleep, and glancing round for a moment he rose and came to the inner cabin door, opened it, and thrust in his head.

“Come here, my birdie,” he said thickly. “One of you has got to be my wife, and let’s see, you’re the captain’s,” he continued with a hoarse laugh, as he thrust Hester aside and caught Bessy in his arms, holding her tightly in spite of her struggles, till she uttered a long and piercing shriek.

The next moment there was a rapid step on the stairs and the Cuban rushed savagely into the cabin, sword in hand.

He made for the ruffian who held Bessy, but as soon as he realised whom the scoundrel had, he uttered a hoarse laugh, and, as if incited by his companion’s example, he threw the sword upon the table, and caught Hester in his arms.

For a few moments she struggled hard, but her strength failed; and as she felt how powerless she was becoming, she tried to shriek, but, as if prepared for this, Lauré, laughing, placed one hand upon her lips, while the other clasped her to him so tightly that she could not move.

Just then, however, Bessy, who had been struggling long and bravely with her assailant, uttered a series of piercing screams, freed herself from his grasp, and, half-mad with fear and horror, threw her arm round Hester.

“Curse you, you noisy jade,” cried the Cuban, furiously; and he struck her brutally across the mouth with the back of his hand as he released Hester, who sank shivering on the cabin floor.

“Here, come away, now,” cried the Cuban, sharply; and, thrusting his companion before him, he hurried out and secured the door, leaving the two prisoners sobbing in each other’s arms, while the light through the holes in the door streamed in long rays above their heads.

Hester was the first to recover herself, and she rose and tried to comfort her stricken companion, than whom now she seemed to be far the stronger in spirit.

“Help must come soon, Bessy,” she whispered. “They will have heard our screams.”

“It would be better to die,” sobbed Bessy. “There is no hope—no hope whatever.”

“What!” cried Hester. “No hope? And with my brave, true husband on board? I tell you help will come, and soon.”

“When it is too late,” sobbed Bessy. “Those wretches will soon be back.”

“Hush, listen,” whispered Hester; and she stole to the door to peep through one of the holes, and see the drunken ruffian sitting there with his head down upon the table, apparently asleep.

The Cuban had evidently gone on deck, and, nerved now to take some desperate course, Hester stole back to where Bessy crouched.

"Get up—quickly," she whispered. "We must escape from the place now."

"But where, where, unless overboard?" wailed Bessy.

"To the deck—to the other cabin. They will fight for us. Dutch will save us from another such outrage as this."

Bessy rose up directly, endeavoured to be firm, but she tottered, and had to cling to the slighter woman.

They stood by the door while Hester tried it, but their hearts sank as they found that they were more of prisoners than they imagined, for the door was fastened on the outside, while to make their position more painful there were no means of securing it from within.

All seemed very still; so still, in fact, that they could hear plainly the heavy breathing of the ruffian who was sleeping there alone; and as they stood trembling and listening it seemed as if a light step was coming down the cabin stairs.

It came so cautiously and stealthily that they did not dare to move lest they should not hear it. For a moment Hester was tempted to change her position, and gaze through the door, but a slight clicking noise arrested her, and she remained listening and hopefully considering whether this could be some of the promised help.

All was silent again for a time, and then there was another strange click, and something fell upon the floor, as if a sword had been knocked down.

This was followed by a sharp rustling noise, and the sleeping ruffian rose up, growled loudly, pushed the lamp on one side, so that it creaked over the table, and then seemed to lay his head down again, and began to breathe heavily.

A minute or two that seemed an hour passed away, and still the two women listened, feeling certain that help was coming, especially as the rustling noise once more commenced; and then, as they waited longingly for the unfastening of their prison door, they plainly heard the Cuban's step on the deck, and directly after he began to descend.

Their hearts sank as they heard him coming, and they shrank away from the door, when, to their surprise, just as they were about to attribute the sounds they had heard to fancy, there was a flash as if the lamp had been raised from the table, a heavy blow, a crash as of breaking glass, and a tremendous struggle ensued in what was evidently total darkness, for the lamp had been overturned, and not a gleam shone through the door.

Oaths and curses mingled with the struggling noises which fell upon the trembling women's ears as the two men engaged, crashed against the bulkheads, and once came so violently against the door of communication that they threatened to break it in.

This lasted for about five minutes, when the Cuban's voice was heard shouting for lights.

The noise of the struggle had now ceased, and Hester found courage enough to look through the door, as a gleam of light shone through; and she saw three sailors entering the cabin with a lantern, which cast its light upon the bruised and bleeding face of the Cuban, who was kneeling on the chest of the ruffian who had been sleeping in the cabin.

"The drunken fool flew at me as I came in," exclaimed Lauré, savagely.

"I didn't," growled the fellow. "You hit me on the head with the lamp."

"You knocked it over in your drunken sleep," shouted Lauré. "Here, get up: you shall stay here no longer. Go and sleep on deck."

The man rose in a heavy, stupid way, and, muttering to himself, left the cabin and went on deck, while, under the Cuban's orders, the men who had come down fetched another lamp, and cleared away all the traces of the struggle.

It was now evidently long past midnight, and as soon as Lauré was left alone, Hester and her companion began to tremble once more for their fate.

The Cuban was evidently restless and uneasy, for he kept getting up and walking to the stairs and listening, as if in doubt; but as an hour glided by, and all seemed perfectly still, he remained longer in his seat, and at last, as Hester watched him, she saw his glance turned towards the inner cabin, and to her horror he rose and, with a peculiar smile upon his face, came and laid his hand upon the lock of the door.

Story 1--Chapter XXXVI.

Retribution.

The supreme moment seemed to have come, and with her heart beating furiously Hester made up her mind to make one more effort to reach the deck, shouting the while for help, and then if no other help came, she told herself that she could seek it in the sea.

Her hands clasped those of Bessy for a moment convulsively, and then dropping them, she stood upon her guard as the lock was shot back, the door was flung open, and in an instant Lauré caught her in his arms, when, as her lips

failed to utter a shriek, there was a heavy fall on deck, the noise of feet hurrying to and fro, a crash, and with an oath Lauré rushed across the cabin, and Hester staggered back trembling into Bessy's arms.

"What does it mean?" the latter whispered hoarsely.

"Help at last," panted Hester, as the noise on deck increased. Shots were fired, there was another heavy fall, and the clashing together of steel, followed by the voice of Lauré culling to his men to come on.

Before they dared to hope for safety, Dutch literally leaped down into the cabin, with a cutlass in his hand, followed by Mr Meldon, both men pale with excitement and stained with blood.

"Quick!" cried Dutch, catching his wife by one hand; "the scoundrels may prove too many for us."

"Bessy, darling," whispered Mr Meldon, hoarsely; and for a moment he folded her in his arms before leading her hastily on deck after Dutch, who had already hurried Hester below into the main cabin.

Bessy followed her on the instant, and the two men rushed forward again to where a desperate fight was going on, which resulted in Lauré and his party being driven below, but not until some severe wounds had been given on either side.

Then hatches were clapped on, and cables coiled over them, before the party dared to breathe freely and congratulate themselves on their success.

"It is more than I dared to hope for," said Dutch, as they stood clustered round a lantern placed upon the deck, "for it was a bitter struggle."

"Bitter, indeed," said Mr Parkley, with a sigh. "I little thought our silver was going to be so stained with blood."

"It may be all washed off yet," said John Studwick, who was standing by, looking ghastly pale.

"What do you mean?" said his father.

"That you have not got it home yet," was the reply; "and will not while that scoundrel is on board."

"Then he shall not stay on board long," exclaimed the captain, angrily. "There is the land, and a boat shall take him, and all he likes to claim as his followers, as soon as morning dawns."

Hester shuddered as she crept close to her husband, and felt as if she could never cease to fear as long as the villain was at large; but his words comforted her, and for the rest of the night long careful watch was kept, and not without need, for several attempts were made by those below to force their way on deck.

Morning came, though, at last, as bright and sunny as if man never troubled the earth with his struggles, and as the sun arose the extent of the past night's troubles were more clearly seen; for the doctor's account showed that of their own party four had rather serious wounds, while two of the enemy lay dead, having succumbed to their injuries during the night.

To get rid of the dangerous party below was the next thing; and at last surrounding the fore-castle hatch, the cable was cast off, and as soon as the opening was laid bare Lauré darted up, sword in one hand, pistol in the other, but Dutch seized one hand, Captain Studwick the other, and he was disarmed, and roughly thrown down into the little cabin from which Hester had been rescued, and the hatch secured.

Having now no leader, the other men came sulkily on deck, and gave up their arms without a struggle, and all were ordered over the side into the boat, a plentiful supply of beef and biscuit was furnished to them, with a couple of guns and ammunition, and they were rowed ashore, to make the best of their way to any settlement they could find.

"And now for the señor," said Captain Studwick, as he returned with his well-armed party, after setting Lauré's followers ashore.

"We must not set him ashore with those scoundrels," said Dutch, firmly, "or he will contrive some plot to get back with them and retake the ship."

Hester shuddered as she heard his words.

"What would you do, then?" exclaimed Mr Parkley.

"Keep him on board until we find some place to set him ashore, a couple or three hundred miles away—anywhere away from here."

There was so much reason in Dutch's words that it was decided to follow his advice, repugnant as it was to have the villain with them in the ship.

"And now then," said the captain, "my motto is, homeward bound; though we cannot sail with wind and tide like this."

"But we must not stay so near the land," exclaimed Mr Parkley, glancing uneasily towards the sands, where the followers of the Cuban had been landed.

"I'm afraid we must," was the reply; "but surely we can contrive to keep our prize, now we have got the upper hand."

The feeling that they could neither sail nor get rid of Lauré acted like some great depressing influence on board, but the matter was inevitable, for to have set him ashore would have been like putting fire to gunpowder, which was safe enough left alone, so careful arrangements were made, and these being in the face of them thoroughly secure, a more satisfactory influence began to pervade the vessel, and the partners congratulated one another on the escape they had had.

As for Oakum and Rasp, they went from one to the other, chuckling and enjoying the interpretation that had been placed upon their behaviour, Oakum in particular seeming to think it the height of human enjoyment to have been thought such a scoundrel when he was straining every nerve to save his friends.

Night had fallen again, and to ensure against further surprise, Dutch, Mr Parkley, and the captain were all on deck, well-armed and watchful, meaning to keep their posts till daybreak, when the schooner was to start on the head of the tide.

Nothing more had been seen of the men set ashore, for they had plunged at once into the forest; and the Cuban was so well secured that little was to be feared from him; but all the same an uneasy feeling prevailed, and Dutch told himself that he should not feel satisfied till they were well at sea, and on reporting this to Mr Parkley, that individual replied:

“Neither shall I, Dutch Pugh, nor yet when we have got the treasure safe home; for you see if that scoundrel does not go to law. What’s that you say, Rasp?” he said, turning sharply, for the old man was close behind.

“Oh, don’t you take no notice of me. I was only chuntering to myself. I couldn’t help hearing what you said to Mr Pugh there.”

Almost contrary to their expectations, the night passed without any alarm, and at daybreak, the tide still not serving for a couple of hours, Dutch and his friends went to lie down, leaving the deck in charge of Oakum and Rasp, with instructions to call them at a specified time.

Dutch, however, felt that he could hardly have dropped asleep when a strange feeling of uneasiness came over him, and, reproaching himself for leaving the deck even now, he awoke fully to sit up and try to get rid of the confusion which oppressed him.

For a few moments he could not tell whether he was awake, or dreaming that he was once more busy diving, for there was the clanking of the air-pump, splashing of water beside him, and heavy feet passing overhead.

But it was no dream. Hardly had the deck been placed in charge of its deputies, than Rasp beckoned up ‘Pollo and the two sailors who had been so faithful to them, and began to talk in a low voice, saying something which evidently gave them the greatest satisfaction, and Rasp softly chuckled and rubbed his hands as he turned to Oakum.

“I don’t like it,” said the old fellow; “it’s cowardly.”

“Not it,” said Rasp; “and if it is, what then? I only mean to give him a dose of it, and if he dies, why that’s his fault.”

“And ours,” said Oakum.

“Yah!” ejaculated Rasp. “Look here, old squeamish, that chap’s a tiger, and if he gets loose, he’ll be the death of all on us, won’t he?”

“Devil a doubt on it,” said Oakum.

“Very well, then: I’ve got a score to pay him off,” growled Rasp; “so’s them poor fellows who’ve got the mark of his knife on them; and, besides, I kep him from cutting my soots to pieces on purpose to give him a taste.”

“But it’s like murder,” said Oakum.

“It was like murder for him to cut that there chube when the best diver in England was down; and now we’ll see how he likes it.”

“What, and cut the toob?” said Oakum, with a look of horror on his honest face.

“Not I. I’ll only send the warmint down, and give him a quarter of an hour, that’s all.”

Oakum gave way, and felt a grim kind of satisfaction in helping to bring the Cuban on deck, where, in spite of his struggles, he was forced to assume one of the diving suits, and almost before he knew it the helmet was thrust over his head and secured, making him a complete prisoner, at the mercy of his tormentors.

“Now let the sharks have a go at him if they like,” said Rasp, as he forced the prisoner to the side. “I’ve a good mind not to give him a safety-line; but there, I won’t be shabby.”

As he spoke he secured the rope to the Cuban’s waist, and then, as he fully realised that they were going to send him overboard, he made a desperate struggle to free himself, but all in vain. There were five to one; the gangway was open, and, acting all together, Lauré was forced to the side, and fell backwards into the sea with a sullen plunge.

Story 1--Chapter XXXVII.

“Good-Bye.”

Rasp had placed a man at the pump and a supply of air was being kept up, a supply now augmented by another man being sent to help turn the wheel, while with a grim look of satisfaction Rasp took hold of the life-line and tightened it a little, to feel the unwilling diver's movements.

"He'll be pulling hard directly," chuckled the old fellow. "Only let him see a shark—one of his first cousins—a villain. Wonder what Mr Dutch'll say when he knows how we've been serving out the scoundrel as—"

"What does all this mean?" exclaimed Dutch, coming so suddenly upon the group that they started asunder, and the air-pump stopped.

"On'y giving that rascal a lesson in diving," growled Rasp.

"Whom? What do you mean? You surely don't mean to say that Lauré, the prisoner—"

"They're on'y having a lark with him, sir," said Oakum.

"Quick, there! Pump, you scoundrels," exclaimed Dutch; and the wheel spun round once more. "Rasp, Oakum, pull here. You dogs, if mischief has befallen that man I can never forgive you."

Setting the example he hauled upon the life-line, and 'Pollo running to his help, the Cuban was dragged to the surface, and lay motionless on the deck as Dutch freed him of his helmet and exposed his livid face.

"Quick! Call up Mr Meldon," cried Dutch; but that gentleman was already on deck, and, to the great relief of Dutch, declared the Cuban to be still alive.

It had been a narrow escape for him, as, between dread and the want of air, another few seconds would have sufficed to finish his career. As it was, quite an hour escaped before he recognised those who had worked hard to restore him, and then it was with a malignant grin of disappointed malice.

"He'll do now," said the doctor; and as the patient seemed disposed to sleep, they left him—Oakum, who was exceedingly penitent for the part he had taken, being stationed as sentry at the door.

Meanwhile Captain Studwick had taken advantage of the breeze and tide, and the schooner was once more under way, threading her course amongst the rocks, and gradually leaving the cocoanut-fringed strand behind.

Everyone was on deck watching the receding shores, and in full expectation of some new danger springing up to hinder their homeward journey, for with the treasure they had on board it was determined to tempt fortune no more, but to make all speed across the Atlantic as soon as they had cleared the inland sea.

Favourable winds sped the schooner at a rapid rate through the water, and all seemed so peaceful and happy that it raised a feeling of dread in those who had found the other portion of the voyage so rife with peril. Rasp shook his head, and said that they were not safe home yet, while Oakum was away; but as soon as Oakum began to croak and prognosticate evil, he changed his tone, and declared that they would soon be safely home.

The voyage home to Hester and Bessy seemed like a glimpse of heaven, for Hester was ever by the latter's side, striving hard to make her forget the past, and revelling in her loving, grateful looks; while Bessy, though no words passed, knew that Meldon loved her with all his heart, though for her sake and lest he should arouse the jealous susceptibilities of her brother, he maintained silence. But she knew that the day must come when he would speak, and her heart leaped with joy as she saw his patient assiduity in attending to her brother, who now turned daily more and more towards him, and sought his help.

But the presence of two sick men was not without its influence on the little crew of the ship, and Captain Studwick, looked with nervous dread for what he saw must come ere long, and felt that the events might again be looked upon as an ill omen.

For though Mr Meldon said it not in so many words, he gave him fully to understand that poor John Studwick's days were growing very few.

In fact the doctor felt that it was an open question whether Lauré or John Studwick would be the first to leave them, for the former seemed never to have recovered from the shock of his descent, but lay in a helpless, raving state, evidently growing weaker day by day, till, in place of getting up to sit and watch the sea from the cabin window, he now rarely rose, and then only with the assistance of old Rasp, who, as a kind of recompense for being the cause of his state, constituted himself his nurse, and waited on him night and day.

"I hate him like the very old 'un," growled Rasp, when talking about him to Oakum; "but as I've had my bit of a go at him for what he did, I ain't going to see him die like a dog for want of help."

And so the days glided on till the schooner, with her freight of silver, was in mid-ocean, and still the fates favoured them. It was a lovely evening, and the sun was descending fast in the west, turning the sea into one heaving mass of orange and gold. Nearly every one was on deck—Mr Parkley and the captain together talking of the future of the voyage, and Mr Wilson seated with his chin resting on his hand gazing pensively at Bessy, who was kneeling beside the mattress on which her brother lay, his great eyes looking towards the golden-flooded sky. Dutch and Hester, too, were together, silent and thoughtful, while the solemn grandeur of the scene seemed to impress even the men forward, for they sat about the deck almost without a word.

It was with quite a start, then, that Dutch saw the doctor come up softly from below and approach him with a solemn look upon his face.

"Is anything wrong?" said Dutch, though he almost read what the other had to say.

"Your enemy will soon be powerless to work you evil, Mr Pugh," was the reply; "he is dying, I think, fast."

Hester shuddered and clasped her husband's arm.

"Poor wretch!" exclaimed Dutch. "There," he cried, impetuously, "don't talk of enemies at such a time. I forgive him the ill he did to me. May God be merciful too!"

"Amen," said Hester beneath her breath; and then she shuddered and clung more closely to her husband, for so shaken had her nerves been that it seemed to her even now they were not free from the Cuban's influence.

"Can you not save his life?" said Dutch. "He should have time to repent."

"But would he?" said Mr Meldon. "I fear life to him would only be the opportunity to work us all more ill."

"For heaven's sake, don't think of that, man," cried Dutch. "Have you tried all you could to save him?"

"I have tried all I know," said the doctor earnestly. "I cannot think of one hour's lapse of duty."

"No, no, of course not," said Dutch, holding out his hand. "I insult you by such a supposition."

"Miss Studwick is beckoning to you, Mr Meldon," exclaimed Hester suddenly; and turning they saw her upon her knees evidently in alarm.

"Poor fellow!" muttered the doctor almost in a whisper; but the young couple heard him, and stood watching anxiously, for though John Studwick's death was expected, they had hoped that he might first reach home.

He had been gazing for quite an hour at the glorious sky, and had apparently been no worse than usual; but now the change had come suddenly, and no one knew it more than he.

For just as Bessy was bending over to speak to him, startled slightly by his lengthened silence, he turned to her and smiled lovingly and tenderly as his thin hand pressed hers.

"Kiss me, Bessy," he said, in a low, strange voice; and as she gazed at him with dilating eyes, and pressed her lips to his, he said gently, "The doctor!"

It was then that Bessy beckoned anxiously to Mr Meldon, who came hastily across the deck and knelt down, taking the hand feebly stretched out to him.

"Not the pulse, doctor, the palm," said John Studwick, his face lighting up with a strange unearthly smile.

"I'm not jealous now. Be kind to my darling sister. Good-bye."

As Bessy burst into a fit of sobbing and lowered her head upon his breast, he laid his hand upon her glossy curls. Then seeing his father bending eagerly over him, he tried to raise his other hand, but it fell back, his lips formed the words "Good-bye" once more; and, as his eyes smiled up in his father's face, the lines around them gradually hardened, the pupils dilated in a fixed stare, and those who gazed down upon him knew that the spirit had fled to its lasting home.

Story 1--Chapter XXXVIII.

A Puzzling Case.

It was about an hour later that the doctor went below to his other patient, to find him lying perfectly still and hardly breathing, so softly his pulsation seemed to rise and fall, while, faithful to his post, Rasp was by his side.

Lauré was evidently sleeping, and, after a brief examination, Mr Meldon turned thoughtfully away, for there were peculiarities in the case which he could not fathom.

As he reached the deck, he was touched on the shoulder, and, turning sharply, he found Rasp behind him.

"Is he going to die to-night, doctor, like t'other poor chap?"

"I can't say, Rasp," was the reply. "His case puzzles me. To-night he sleeps so easily that he seems to me better, and as if he were rallying fast."

"Oh no, he ain't," said Rasp, shaking his head oracularly; "that's the artfulness of his nature. He's a-dying sharp."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I heerd him a muttering to hisself when he thought as I warn't listening, and then he got talking to hisself in his foreign lingo; and when I came into sight again he began picking at his blanket."

"May be," said Mr Meldon, "but all the same, he is certainly better."

"Yah! stuff!" ejaculated Rasp, as he descended to the cabin. "He's dying fast, and it's going to be to-night. I can feel

it as plain as can be, poor chap. But he's an out and out bad 'un, and only got what he deserves."

Rasp took several pinches of snuff in succession.

"How rum this snuff is to-night," he muttered, as he settled himself on the locker opposite where Lauré lay, and then proceeded to watch the night through, after refusing the help of Oakum and 'Pollo, both of whom had offered to relieve him, and in the course of half-an-hour he was sleeping heavily.

And so a couple of hours glided away; when, just as all was perfectly silent on board the schooner, and all save the watch on deck slept soundly, Lauré, the Cuban, rose from his simulated sleep, and after a glance at Rasp stole to the locker in which lay his clothes, slipped them on silently, and then made softly for the deck.

It was no tottering walk of a feeble man, but the quick, soft cat-like tread of some one full of life and energy, and bent upon some set design. And so it was; for the time for the execution of the fell purpose upon which his mind had been fixed ever since he had lain there, feeble at first from the shock, but daily growing stronger and meditating revenge, had arrived.

He was too well acquainted with the routine of the schooner not to be fully aware of what he could do, and while the man bent drowsily over the wheel, and Oakum and another were on the look-out in the bows, he took the falls in his hands, and cleverly let the boat on the davits glide down and kiss the softly heaving wave almost without a sound, but not until he had secured the painter to one of the pins, after which he slid down the falls with the activity of a boy, unhooked the boat, and climbed back on deck.

Next he paused to listen for a few moments in the darkness, and then with cat-like step descended into the portion of the vessel which had been set apart for the store connected with the diving apparatus.

It was evident that he had often been here before, as he seemed to know where everything was kept; and after lifting down the large jar of the galvanic battery, which, from the care with which he took it was evidently half-full of acid, he bore it to the steps, and then placing his hand on a particular shelf he took down a canister of dynamite cartridges and placed it against the bulkhead.

This done he felt along the shelf to where, days before, he had placed a large reel of thin silk-covered wire, and tying it to the loop of metal in one of the cartridges, he backed slowly out of the cabin, unwinding the wire as he went till he reached the deck, where he continued his way to the side, and lowered the reel into the boat.

The next thing was the awkward jar of the battery; but his plans had all been made, and with a piece of cord he lowered it down carefully, raising it again and again until he felt that it rested safely in the bottom of the boat.

Water was already there, and provisions that he had been storing up for days; and now the first sound that had left his lips escaped in the form of a low demoniacal chuckle as, lightly raising himself upon the bulwark, he sat there for a moment, and he shook his fist in the direction of the cabin.

"Curse you!" he muttered. "You thought to outwit me, but you did not know your enemy. Sink! perish with the silver that carries you down, for revenge is sweet even at such a cost."

He swung himself down by the ropes hanging from one of the davits, and there felt that he had outwitted himself for the boat was not beneath his feet, and he was getting nearly exhausted by his efforts.

"I shall have to let go," he muttered; "and in the darkness I shall never reach the boat again."

He swung himself to and fro, and struggled hard to reach the boat, but though he nearly touched it each time, he was never near enough to trust himself to lose his hold, and with the perspiration running down his face, and his hair bristling with horror, he began to thoroughly realise that his long rest in bed had weakened him terribly. The thought was horrible now that he had been brought face to face with it—that he who had been so careful in laying his plans for the destruction of others had been caught in his own trap, and was himself called upon to die. The idea was terrible. He was not fit to die. When roused by his passions to fight desperately, he could, perhaps, have faced death with a certain amount of manly composure, but now swinging at the end of this rope, to hold on till he could cling no longer, and then plunge suddenly into the sea to feel the black rushing and thundering waters close over his head—it was too horrible to be borne.

He made a desperate struggle to get his legs up, and cling with them to the rope, but his strength was gone, and he only weakened himself, and hanging now at the full stretch of his arms, feeling, as the sinews of his wrists seemed ready to crack, that any moment he must leave go, he—

The thought was too horrible. He could not face death; sooner must he shriek for help and forego his revenge—anything to be saved.

His lips parted, and he tried to yell loudly, but a harsh gurgle was all that came now from his dry throat. He tried again and again, but horror had paralysed him, and he could do nothing but pant hoarsely like one in a nightmare, and believe that, after all, this was but some fearful dream from which he would awaken, as he often had before, bathed with perspiration, and shivering with dread.

At last he tried to close his starting eyes, and hide from his distorted vision the horrible resemblance of the davit above him to the gallows, as he swung to and fro by the rope. But even this relief was denied him, for it seemed as if the whole muscular strength of his body was condensed in his arms, by which he clung to the fall, and power had left him to perform any other act than that of clinging for life. The deadly sense of terror increased, and with men at either end of the vessel ready to come to his help—men who, by the slightest effort of will, could have saved him—he

felt he must die. He would have called them to his help now regardless of the exposure of his plans, but it was too late: he could do no more than hold on, and wait till he fell.

No torture could possibly have been greater than that felt by this wretch as he softly swung to and fro within a few inches of the safety he had provided, and yet unable to reach it. A thousand thoughts rushed through his brain, but they were mostly regrets that he had been unable to compass his revenge; that he had neglected his opportunities when he might have made himself the master of Hester, seeing how thoroughly he had her in his power, and his bared teeth glistened in the darkness as a wave curled and, splashing against the side of the schooner, sent forth a phosphorescent flash.

And now he told himself that it was all over; he must die unrevenged, unable to make a single struggle, for the last moments had come, his muscles were relaxing, the sense of terror was growing more dull, and he must fall. His eyes were staring straight up at the davit, now black above his head, just faintly seen through the darkness, and it seemed more than ever the instrument of his death as the slipping rope for a moment scorched his hands, his eyes convulsively closed as the strain on the muscles of his arms ceased, and he fell.

But not to plunge into the black waters beneath him, and only a few feet from where he had hung, for the wave that curled against the side, and with its phosphorescent glare shewn his distorted features, swept the boat beneath his feet, and he sank all of a heap in the bows, to lie there motionless as the boat rose and fell. For he was utterly prostrate, and it was some minutes before he could realise that he was still alive.

When, however, by slow degrees the feeling came upon him that he was safe, no thanks rose to his cracked, dry lips, but a smile of malignant satisfaction, for revenge was still open to him, and as soon as he could recover himself somewhat, he might put his plan into execution.

For fully half-an-hour Lauré lay there crouching in the bows of the boat waiting for the strength that would enable him to achieve his nefarious ends, while the watch hung drowsily over the bulwarks, and those below slept peacefully, in ignorance of the horrible fate that was in store.

At last, like some deadly monster uncoiling its folds, the Cuban began to move, and his first attempt was to reach a bottle of spirits, from whose gurgling throat he drank with avidity, the potent fluid giving him the restoration he sought. Then as the blood began to tingle in his veins, he sat up, looked round, and gently chafed his benumbed arms.

A slight motion in the fore part of the ship roused him to the necessity for immediate action, and now with eager haste he cautiously felt about, and placed the galvanic battery in a convenient spot, took hold of the reel of fine silk-covered wire, arranged it so that it was not entangled, and then, having assured himself that all was right, he took out his knife and cut the boat's painter, floating now gently away in the wake of the schooner, while as he did so he let the wire run rapidly out so that a connection was kept up.

There must have been at least a hundred yards of wire, and the schooner glided away so gently that there was never any stress on the frail metal cord, till the last rings ran off the reel, when Lauré, with a cry of exultation, checked the progress softly and felt for the wire's end.

The schooner could hardly be distinguished now, and there was not a moment to lose, for if the wire were tightened till it dragged on the boat it must part, so with trembling eagerness the Cuban twisted the slight metal strand twice round his left hand, while with his right he placed the end against the brass connection of the plates in the battery.

The work was instantaneous.

As he touched the connection with the tiny point of copper there was a hissing noise in the jar, a little point of light darted at the end of the wire, and simultaneously a hundred yards away in the darkness there was a tremendous flash, the darkness was illuminated by a fountain of sparks, which rose high in air, driven by a fan-like wave of flame; the fire curved over, and the sparks fell hissing into the sea.

As the flame rose, spreading wider and wider, there was a roar as of thunder, a rush as of the wind in a tempest struck Lauré, the boat rocked to and fro, shipping no small amount of water, and the wire twisted round the Cuban's hand cut and bit into the flesh ere it snapped short off.

But he did not feel the pain, and saw not the danger to which he was exposed as he gazed straight beyond him at the doomed ship, and exulted in the wild shriek of horror that he had heard as the noise of the explosion died away.

He heard no more, for an awful silence fell upon the ocean, now blacker than ever, and rising up in the boat he held out one hand, shaking his fist in the direction where a faint glow told him of burning fragments of the wreck, and then with a shriek of exultation he cried—

“Sink, sink, with your accursed freight. Who wins now?”

He tottered as he spoke, and though straining his voice to hurl out his curse at the schooner and those on board, it was but a feeble cry, and he fell back senseless over the thwarts to lie in the bottom of the boat, with the water that had been shipped washing over him.

Story 1--Chapter XXXIX.

The Catastrophe.

The occupants of the cabin had sat long that night, talking of poor John Studwick's peaceful end, and then separated, feeling low-spirited and heavy, as if some fresh trouble were in store; but Bessy had said good-night to Meldon, with her hands resting lovingly in his, and she did not shrink away when he pressed his lips to her forehead.

It had been arranged that the remains of the dead should be committed to the deep next day, and at last all had retired, after the captain and Dutch had heard the doctor's report of Lauré's state, which caused them some uneasiness, for if he recovered they felt that much trouble was in store.

But there was not the faintest suspicion of danger: trusty men were at the look-out and helm, and it had been arranged that Dutch was to take turns with the doctor and captain to visit the deck during the night, the doctor having his patient to watch. Then there was Rasp, too, who would be on the move several times during the night, and all promised well.

And so the time wore on till Dutch, who had lain down in his clothes, rose and kissed his sleeping wife as she lay there peacefully dreaming. All was very still, and on reaching the deck he found the darkness intense, but, guided by the faint glow from the binnacle lantern, he went aft to where Lennie was softly crooning to himself some old ditty about "Coming back to Sairey in the good ship Jane."

"Yes, sir, all right," said the sailor; "the breeze keeps nice and steady, only it's like sailing in a tar barrel, it's so awful black."

Dutch went forward and found Sam Oakum leaning with his elbows on the bulwark, matched by his companion on the other side of the bowsprit gazing straight ahead.

"Right as nails, sir," said the old sailor, "only I was a thinking, being a man as never used it, if this here sea looked as black in the sunshine as it do now, what a fortune a man might make in bottles o' ink. You might go on filling 'em up, sir, for ever and ever, amen, and there'd be plenty left to sail the ships in all the same."

"It is black, Sam," said Dutch, "and I often wonder that you sailors are not afraid of being run down, or of running into some other vessels."

"There's plenty o' room," said Sam, "and as to being afraid, what's the use? We're too busy. 'Course there is a collision sometimes, but not often, thank goodness."

"Keep a sharp look-out," said Dutch, turning to go.

"Ay, ay, I'll keep a sharp look-out," said the old fellow. "Lord, it's ticklish work, sailing with all this silver aboard, and I shall be glad when we're safe in. How's the prisoner, sir?"

"I'm going down to see," replied Dutch; and going to the hatch, he descended, to find Rasp sleeping soundly, and the lamp burned down to a dim light, that did not show the state of the Cuban's berth.

Dutch shook the old diver roughly, and he started up muttering, while, as the former turned up the lamp, he started with surprise.

"Where is—"

The words had not left his lips when there was a tremendous concussion, a deafening roar, and the two men were thrown down, to struggle up again, with the air of the little cabin filled with a strange choking vapour, which nearly suffocated them before they had staggered up the steps to sink helplessly on the deck, now covered with burning fragments which kept showering down.

As Dutch fell, stunned and confused, on the fore part of the deck it seemed to him that he heard wild shrieks and cries for help from the direction of the stern cabins, but he was too helpless to comprehend what had taken place till he heard Oakum speaking to him and shaking his arm.

"Are you killed, Mr Dutch?" said the old fellow. "Oh, do say you ain't."

"I don't think I'm hurt, Sam," faltered Dutch, as he struggled to his feet. "I feel stunned, though," and he clung to the old sailor to keep from falling backwards.

"Here's poor old Rasp killed," exclaimed Oakum, "and the ship sinking. Quick, to the boat."

"You're an obstinate old liar," exclaimed Rasp, staggering to his feet. "I ain't killed. Who's been a-doing of this?"

"Here, quick, Oakum," exclaimed Dutch, who, now that he could think, had his first thoughts for his wife and friends, "the ship must be going down. Help me to reach those astern."

"There's no getting to them, if they're alive," exclaimed Oakum; "the whole of the schooner's blown out amidships."

"Ahoy!" there came a voice from beyond the great black gulf in the centre of the schooner, which now began to blaze.

"Who's that? Ahoy!" shouted Dutch. "Captain Studwick?"

"Right! Who's with you there?"

"Oakum, Rasp, and one of the men," cried Dutch. "Who's with you?"

"I think all," replied the captain, shouting across the gulf.

"Is my wife—Miss Studwick—safe?" faltered Dutch; and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, he muttered a prayer of thankfulness.

The question then arose—was the schooner sinking?

"I think not," shouted the captain, for a disposition was shown to get out the boats. "If she was sinking, she would not begin to blaze like that down in the hold. It seems to me that the explosion struck upwards, and that she is sound below—for the present."

And so it proved; for the dynamite had ripped up the deck and snapped off the mainmast as if it had been the stem of a flower, and it now lay alongside, with such of its ropes as were out of water blazing.

Not a moment was to be lost, and buckets being brought into requisition, the flames were attacked, for portions of the wreck below began now to blaze fiercely. One of the pumps, too, was set to work, and for long hours nothing was heard but the hissing of the flames as they were attacked by the water; but all that could be done was to keep them from increasing, and when at last the morning broke, it was to show two groups, one forward, the other astern, sullenly drawing buckets of water and dashing them into a hissing gulf of fire in the centre of the schooner, from which rose a column of black smoke to spread overhead and form a cloud like a funeral pall for the unlucky ship.

As the wind wafted the smoke on one side, Dutch waved his hand in token of encouragement to his wife, who stood with Bessy by the wheel, their task being to keep the ship's head in one direction, so that the flames and heated vapour should not be driven astern. But all was done now in a hopeless duty-driven fashion, for those on board now realised the fact that it was only a matter of hours before the fire would eat its way through the side, and the work they tried so hard to do would be accomplished by the ship sinking beneath the waves.

"It's of no use," said Captain Studwick at last. "Dutch Pugh, Oakum, lower down that boat and come aft."

This was done in a steady, deliberate manner, although at any moment a fresh explosion might have taken place, and the schooner gone down. And into the boat Oakum, Rasp, the sailor, and Dutch lowered themselves, paddled along the side, and joined their companions in misfortune aft.

As Oakum made fast the painter, and they all stood on the deck, Captain Studwick exclaimed:

"Where is Lauré? We must not leave him to perish."

"Is he not with you?" said Dutch.

"No," said the captain, bitterly.

"Has the poor wretch, then, been blown up in the explosion?"

"Heaven knows," cried Mr Parkley, "but if he is missing, that explains all. It is his work."

"It was those blowing-up cartridges o' yourn," growled Oakum.

"Of course it was, stupid," snarled Rasp, turning on the old sailor fiercely, "but the cartridges wouldn't go off by themselves, would they?"

"You said he was better, doctor," said the captain.

"Yes, so much so that the change was puzzling."

"This was his work, then," cried the captain. "He was well enough to take some terrible revenge upon us."

"And to perish himself in accomplishing it," said Dutch.

"Don't know that," said the captain. "One of the boats has gone."

"But it may have been destroyed in the explosion."

The captain shook his head and walked to the side where the ropes and blocks hanging from the davits showed plainly enough that a boat had been lowered down.

As he pointed to this the diabolical plot was made perfectly manifest, and its objects saw plainly enough how the villain had compassed their destruction.

"And I was so deceived," exclaimed the doctor, stamping upon the deck in his rage. "The scoundrel was ill at first, but the latter part of the time it was subterfuge. Dutch Pugh, this is my fault. I must go back to hospital to learn my profession."

"Suppose, gentlemen, we begin to load the boat with necessaries and construct a raft," said the captain, bluntly. "It strikes me that we have but little time to spare. Mr Parkley, your silver is going back to its home at the bottom of the sea."

"Yes," said that gentleman, "and where it will lie, for there seems to be a curse with it all along."

The boat already launched was as rapidly as possible supplied with water, cold provisions, compass, and sail; and, as

soon as these were in, Dutch suggested, and his proposal was agreed to, that his wife and the captain's daughter should be lowered down in—case of any sudden disposition shown by the ship to sink; but they objected to leave yet until one sad duty that had to be attended to was done.

A funeral at sea is a sad event, and it was more painful here at such a time, when it was a question whether before long everyone present would not have to seek a resting-place in the sea. Below lay the body of poor John Studwick, just as the doctor and Sam Oakum had arranged it, wrapped in a piece of sail-cloth, with a few heavy pieces of iron at the feet, waiting to take its last plunge.

The second boat, only a small one, had also been laden with provisions and water, so that in case of emergency there was nothing to do but to leap into one or the other and push off; and though Captain Studwick proposed making a raft, that was deferred until after the funeral.

It was a solemn scene as the body was reverently brought up from below and laid by the open gangway. The fire still burned slowly and steadily, and the smoke rose and floated away like a great black plume far over the golden water, on whose long swell the schooner rose and fell as easily as if there was no ruin in her midst. All was perfectly still and peaceful as, the arrangements having been made, Captain Studwick stood at the head of the silent, muffled figure, book in hand, and with trembling voice read the prayers for the dead, while those who clustered round forgot their sufferings and all dangers as they listened to the solemn words.

At last the captain stopped and made a sigh, when Sam Oakum gently raised the end of the hatch upon which the body lay, and with a slight rustling noise it glided off with a heavy plunge into the sea, Bessy uttering now a low wail and throwing herself on the deck.

She lay motionless there as, struggling hard to maintain his firmness, the captain finished the solemn words laid down for such an occasion, and then, closing the book, he was the stern man of business again. He gave his orders sharply, and Dutch took his wife in his arms, made fast a rope round her, and lowered her into the larger boat, Bessy submitting herself, as Mr Meldon helped, to be lowered to her side.

Mr Wilson and the doctor followed, Oakum and one of the sailors being the next, so as to take the management of the boat, with orders to push off and lie at about a hundred yards' distance.

Hester half rose, with outstretched hands, but a word from Dutch reassured her as he set to with the captain and the rest on board to lower down such necessaries as the cabin contained to freight the second boat.

This work had been going on for about half-an-hour; the boat had been loaded as far as was safe, and coops, spars, rope, casks, and hatches were being thrown over, with axes and a saw lashed to them, so as to construct a kind of raft from the boats, whose object was to bear the heavier portion of their freight, and also to act as a kind of breakwater in case the sea should roughen, when the boats could lie to leeward and wait until some vessel hove in sight to rescue them from their perilous position.

The fire still blazed furiously, melting down the silver, old Rasp said, and this latter worthy had given a great deal of trouble, from the fact that he considered that the only thing worth saving was the diving apparatus. He had strewed the deck with various articles which he had brought up, only to be peremptorily rejected. And now all left on board found that their minutes there were numbered; but still they toiled on, till a warning cry from Oakum in the further boat drew their attention to a strange hissing noise where the fire burned most fiercely.

"She's sinking," cried Dutch, as the schooner gave a heavy roll.

"Yes, quick! over with you all," cried the captain. Then, with a groan, "Poor old schooner! she deserved a better fate."

One by one they slid down the rope left ready into the boat, till all were in save the captain and Dutch, neither of whom would go first.

"Quick, quick!" cried Mr Parkley, "or we shall be sucked down."

"Push off!" roared the captain, who saw their peril; and as they hesitated he seized the rope and swung himself down, Dutch leaping headlong into the water at the same moment.

It was a close shave, for as Dutch rose and caught at the boat's gunwale the oars were dipped and plied manfully, while the schooner blazed now with suddenly increased fury, as if the flames meant to secure all they could before the waters seized their prey. The vessel had begun to roll heavily, and the flames, which had now caught the mizen and fore masts, were running rapidly up the rigging, starting in tongues of fire from the tarry ropes, and curling up the masts till they were perfect pyramids of fire.

Three more heavy rolls succeeded, with the hissing of the fire increasing to a shriek, when a cloud of steam began to rise, and the schooner careened over, so that those in the last boat, as they toiled to get sufficiently far away, could see right down into the burning hold. This lasted but for a few moments though, and then the burning masts, with their fluttering sheets of flame, rose up perpendicular, and with a dive forward the vessel plunged down, there was a rushing sound, a tremendous explosion as the steam and confined air blew up the stern deck, and then the hull disappeared, followed slowly by the burning masts, while the small boat, with all the spars and raft material, was drawn towards the vortex.

"Pull," shouted Captain Studwick, and the oars bent as every possible effort was made, but slowly and surely the boat was drawn back towards where coops and hatches, casks and planks, eddied round for a few minutes, and then disappeared.

Dutch had been dragged on board, and, like the captain, he helped at an oar, wondering the while at the power with which they were sucked towards the whirlpool, round which they at last began to sail.

No earthly power could have saved them had they not been able to delay their backward progress for a few minutes; as it was, when they neared the vortex, and over which a barrel was drawn, the bows of the boat were about to plunge down, but by a tremendous effort. Dutch dragged the little vessel round, and a succession of fierce tugs sent her once more away from the centre, and another minute's struggle saved them, for the waters were less troubled now, and the danger past.

As they lay off, though, they saw very few of the objects selected return to the surface, and at last, heartsick, but thankful for their escape, they gave up the idea of the raft as hopeless, and now steadily rowed to join their consort.

Story 1--Chapter XL.

A Dreary Time.

The occupants of the two boats, as they lay together that evening beneath the spangled canopy of heaven, little thought that the third of the schooner's boats lay within a few miles of them, with Lauré on board, or they would not have slept in turn so peacefully and in such calm hope of being saved, for as the schooner sank with its treasure it seemed to all on board that with the silver sank the kind of curse that had been upon them all along.

It was an empty sense of superstition, but it influenced them and cheered them on through the long, sunny, scorching days as they bent to their oars and toiled on; and in the evenings, when, taking advantage of the soft breezes, the little sails were spread, and they crept on ever north and east in the hope of gaining the course of one of the vessels going south or west. But the days stole slowly by, and no sail gladdened their sight, and at last, as the water grew low in the little breakers and the provisions threatened to become exhausted, Dutch felt his heart sink, and told himself with a bitter smile that they had not yet worn out the power of the curse, if curse there were.

After long days of rowing, in which every man in the boats took part in urging them up the sides of the long rollers and then down their hill-like descent, the feeling of weary lassitude made itself more and more felt. They suffered, too, from their cramped position in the boats, but no one murmured. Even Rasp and Oakum ceased to wrangle, and the former pursed up his wrinkled mouth and followed the example of Oakum in whistling for a favouring wind.

At times the breeze would come, and, the sails filling, the boats sped onwards, but the few miles they made before the wind again dropped seemed as nothing in the immensity of the watery space around, and at last, half-delirious with the heat, after being reduced to a few drops of warm water each day, the sun went down like a great globe of fire, and Dutch Pugh felt that the time had come when they must die.

A re-arrangement of the occupants of the boat had long been made, so that both Dutch and Meldon were by those they loved, and now it seemed that the nuptial bed of the latter would be that of death. Hope seemed long before to have fled upon her bright wings, leaving only black despair to brood over them like the eternal night. Hardly a word was spoken in either boat, and once more the rope had been passed from one to the other so that their desolate state might not become more desolate by parting company during the night.

The night in question had fallen as black as that when the schooner was blown away, but no one heeded it, neither did they listen to the ravings of poor Wilson, who lay back in the stern sheets talking of his birds, and calling some particular pet by name. Then he would whisper Bessy's name, and talk to himself constantly about his love for her, till at last the poor girl would be roused from her state of lethargy, and laying her head on Meldon's breast sob for a few minutes—dry hysterical sobs—and then subside once more. Oakum sat twisting up a piece of yarn, crooning scraps of old songs, and 'Pollo would now and then, in a half-delirious fashion, try to sing the fragment of a hymn; but these attempts had grown now more and more spasmodic, and with the knowledge bluntly felt now that they had but a few fragments to support them on the following day, and no water, all sat or lay in a kind of stupefied despair, waiting for the end.

Upon Dutch Pugh had of late fallen the leading of the little party, for Captain Studwick had been taken ill from over-exertion with his oar beneath the burning sun, and before dusk Dutch had directed a longing gaze round the horizon in search of a sail, but in vain; and now he sat with Hesters head resting upon his lap, her large bright eyes gazing up into his, as longingly and full of love as ever, till, in the madness of his despair, as he saw her dying before him, he had strained her wasted form to his breast, and held her there when the darkness fell.

"Is there no hope, Dutch?" she whispered to him, faintly, as her lips rested close by his ear.

"Yes, always—to the last, darling," he whispered.

"I am not afraid to die," she whispered back; "it is for you. If I could only save your life."

He covered her lips with his kisses, and her arms passionately embraced his neck, till a kind of heavy stupor fell on both, even as on all the others in the boat. The rest of the food was eaten next day, and then they sank back in their places to die.

But their fate was not that of Lauré, whose boat was never seen again. 'Ere another day had passed, a fast steamer sighted them where they lay, and bore down upon them as 'Pollo, the only one with strength enough left, hoisted a handkerchief upon one of the oars and held it aloft.

It was but just in time, and long and energetic was the attention required before the little party was out of danger,

and by that time the port of Southampton was reached, and the next day—home.

Story 1--Chapter XLI.

Conclusion.

Quite a year elapsed before the subject was broached again from a business point of view. Mr Parkley had been a good deal disheartened by his losses, and shook his head when Dutch suggested a second trip.

"No, no," he said; "no more chance."

"Suppose there is no chance in the matter," said Dutch, quietly; and he then proceeded to tell of that which he had kept a secret in his own breast ever since—to wit, of the rich treasure of gold he had found, after the silver had been removed.

"Is this a fact, or some dream left by our troubles when coming home?" said Mr Parkley, who looked at him in doubt.

"A fact," said Dutch; and he described exactly where the treasure lay.

"That's enough," exclaimed Mr Parkley. "I had made a vow that I would never be tempted again; but I will this once, Dutch—this once, my lad."

He kept his word, and though Hester shivered at the idea, she saw her husband's great desire for the trip, gave way, and prevailed upon him to consent to take her.

For a time he held out, so painful were the recollections of the last voyage; but on Captain Studwick taking the command of the vessel they were to sail in once more, and the doctor and his newly-made wife begging to accompany them, he agreed.

Rasp insisted upon going again, because Oakum was likely to interfere, and Oakum insisted on being one of the party because old Rasp would be there to meddle: where Sam Oakum went, 'Pollo was sure to be his companion.

The result was that the vessel, well found and manned by a good crew, sailed one day, made a rough but prosperous voyage to the Gulf of Mexico, and there, in the placid weather they enjoyed, made first for one of the sunken galleons, where, after the removal of the sand, and the destruction of sundry sharks, so great a treasure in golden ingots was brought to the surface and carefully stowed away as made Mr Parkley propose that they should tempt fortune no further, but up anchor and go back home.

Dutch, however, was of too manly a grit to go away without exploring the other galleon, and, on this being reached, a second golden store was rescued from the wave where it had been three hundred years—a treasure large enough not only to recompense all past losses, but to make its winners wealthy for life.

So far from any imaginary curse attending this voyage, it was accomplished without difficulty, and home reached once more, with the mysteriously won treasure, of which there was much talk, but little information gained; for, saving what oozed out from the well-paid sailors, nothing was known, Mr Parkley saying that perhaps one of the Spanish States might put in a claim.

And so ended the eventful search for the gold and silver of the Spanish galleons—wealth won by conquest by the filibustering followers of Philip of Spain, but never enjoyed by them when dragged by torture from the simple-hearted Peruvians, who had hidden it in the tropic sands. What might have been its purpose had the treasure reached the Spanish Court, who can tell? Suffice it that, as far as money could do so, it made happy several English homes, not the least happy that of the man who, with true penitence, sought in the rest of his career to recompense the woman who had been the object of his doubts.

"Yes," said he, "I was mad, and bent on seeking treasure when I had a greater one at home. Ah, Hester, love, I have gone down many times, and have found strange things, but I shall never reach to the bottom of your heart, or gather all its most secret depths of love, so long as I am what I am, *Dutch the Diver*."

Story 2--Chapter I.

Story Two — Violets in the Snow.

On one side there was a square, with trees that tried to look green in summer, but in winter time stuck in scraggy form out of the soot-peppered snow, with a beadle who wore a gold band round his hat and lived in a lodge, out of which he issued every morning with a thin rattan cane to keep away the boys; on the other side there was a row of goodly mansions, with a mews for the horses and carriages of the grandees who inhabited those mansions; and down between square and mansions, hidden behind the mews, as if it was a brick-and-mortar snake, there was Gutter-alley.

People said, how could such a dirty, squalid, unhealthy, beggar-inhabited place get there between the mansions of the rich. People said so to the parish officers, and the parish officers shook their heads; not so much as to say that they did not know, but to imply thereby, a great deal, as if the wickedness of the inhabitants had something to do with it. Then people said so to the dwellers in Gutter-alley in an ill-used fashion, to which Gutter-alley very reasonably replied that it must get somewhere, which was perfectly true; that it squeezed itself up as much out of the way as it

could, which was also quite true; that it—to wit, Gutter-alley—did not get between the square and the row of mansions, but that the square came and sat upon it on one side, and the row of mansions came and sat upon it on the other, which was true again; and lastly, Gutter-alley said, where was it to go, for it must have living room? Then people who knew its squalor said that it was all very shocking, and that a meeting ought to be held. And it was very shocking, but a meeting was not held; and Gutter-alley stood where it had stood before, in the year of our Lord 1862, when there was a very great exhibition building very close at hand; and Gutter-alley remained an exhibition itself, staying as it did where, without much effort, it could have thrown a stone into the grounds of a palace.

Story 2--Chapter II.

Now, whether in summer or winter, poor people can patronise as well as rich; and so it fell out that the custom in poverty-stricken, hunger-pinched Gutter-alley was for the poor folk there to speak condescendingly to old Dick Bradds, when he stood at the door of Number 5, with his poor old head on one side as he looked up the court; head on the other side as he looked down. "Dickey" he was generally called, and more than one stout costermonger—they did a deal in costering in Gutter-alley, and if you penetrated into the rooms of the human rabbit-warren, fish could be found mingled with furniture, turnips amongst the wash-tubs, and a good full bucket of mussels often formed the seat of the father of a family while he helped his wife to make up ropes of onions for the morrow's sale—well, many a stout costermonger told his wife in confidence that old Dickey Bradds always put him in mind of a moulting thrush. No inapt simile, and doubtless taken from the life, for there were always plenty of feathered captives to be seen in Gutter-alley.

It was quite true Dick—old Dickey Bradds—did look very much like some aged and shabby bird, lame of one leg; and when he stood on a cold winter's morning peering up and down through the fog that loved to hang about the court, no one would have felt at all surprised to have seen the old man begin to peck, or to whet his long sharp old nose against the door-post.

Not that Dick did do anything of this kind—he only gave two or three keen one-sided bird-like looks about before slowly hopping up-stairs to his room on the second floor—the front room—to wait for Jenny.

A keen old blade though was Dick—a piece of that right good true steel so often to be found in the humblest implements, while your finely-polished, gaily-handled, ornamental upper-ten-thousand cutlery is so often inferior, dull of edge, and given to shut up just when they are wanted the most. Dick was not human hurried up, but a piece of fine old charcoal-made steel. Toil and hard usage had ground and ground Dick till there was little left of him but the haft, and seventy years of existence rubbing away through the world—that hard grindstone to some of us—had made that haft very rickety of rivet and springs. Certainly there was blade enough left to cut in one direction, but you could not trust Dick for fear of his giving way, or perhaps closing upon the hand that employed him.

It was so with poor old Dick when he left the great auction-rooms, where he had been kept as long as was possible; and, being proud, Dick would not believe in Nature when she told him that he had grown to be an old man, and that the time had gone by when he was lusty and strong, and able to lift great weights; and when Dick's fellow-porters told him that a piece of furniture was too heavy for him to lift, he only felt annoyed, and grew angry and stubborn.

The fact was that Dick knew from old experience how hard a matter it was for even an industrious man to get a living in the great city; and for him, whose livelihood depended entirely upon his muscles, to turn weak and helpless meant misery, privation, and perhaps the workhouse for his old age.

That was what Dick thought, and therefore he fought hard against even the very semblance of weakness, making a point always at the auction-rooms of doing far more than he need, rushing at heavy pieces of furniture, tiring himself with extra work, and making himself an object of sport to the thoughtless, of pity to his older fellow-servants of the firm.

The consequence was that poor old Dickey Bradds had to go one day to the hospital, to lie there for many weary weeks, and come out at last lame and uncured, for at threescore and ten there is not much chance of a man building up new tissue, piling on fresh muscle and strength, and renewing the waste of so many years.

Poor old Dick left the hospital a confirmed cripple, but hopeful ever of regaining his strength and activity—at least he said so, whether merely to cheer up his grandchild or to mask his sufferings, that was known only to his own heart.

Story 2--Chapter III.

Now this was how old Dick became a cripple.

It was early in winter, and there was a heavy sale on at the rooms, for the furniture of a noble mansion had been sent up from the country, and bargain-hunters and Jew brokers were there that day in force, chaffering, running down the value of the goods they coveted, and turning the crowded room into a Babel of confusion.

The sale was progressing, and under the superintendence of one Joseph Brown, the head porter, the lots had been submitted to competition with ease and facility. Old Dick had as usual been working very hard, but, not content to show the others his power, he sought to do more.

"You can't take that there chist o' drawers down," said the head porter, a man most careful in the way in which he looked after the corners and polish of pieces of furniture, saving them from scratch and chip. So careful, in fact, was Brown that he had never had time to look after the polish and corners of her Majesty's English, which he chipped and scratched most terribly. So "you can't take that there chist o' drawers down," said Brown, "it's too much for you;"

and he meant it kindly, though his words were rough.

“You wouldn’t ha’ talked to me like that ten year ago, Joe Brown!” quavered Dick, turning angrily upon the porter, for he was hurt and annoyed at being spoken to before the other men.

“I didn’t mean to hurt the poor old chap,” said Brown at home to his wife that night, “for I like old Dick, who’s as honest and true-hearted an old chap as ever stepped. All the years we’ve been together I never knew Dick do a man an ill turn; while the way he turns out o’ Sundays to take that there granchile of his to a place o’ wasshup ought to be a patten for some on us.

“In course I wouldn’t ha’ spoke to him in that way ten years ago: for why? ’cos he could ha’ carried the chist o’ drawers easily; but ’stead o’ actin’ sensible, he was that proud, bless you, that he wriggled hisself under ’em like a young cuckoo with a hegg, hystes hisself up slowly by taking hold of the bannisters, and then begins to stagger downstairs.

“Now then: lot ’underd and two, waitin’ for lot ’underd and two,’ they calls out below. ‘Comin’—comin’—comin’,’ pants out Dick; and I see as it was too much for the poor old chap, who felt touched at being thought past his work, though the governors only expected him to take down the light things. So seeing how matters stood, I steps forrard to help him, when if he didn’t seem to shut up all at once like; and that there chist o’ handsome French-polished mahogany drawers, ’underd and two in the catalogue, went downstairs a deal too fast for its constitution.

“Poor old Dick! he never groaned nor made no fuss when we got him down to the cab to take him to the ’orsepittle, although his poor old leg was broke, through his coming down a whole flight arter that there chist o’ handsome French-polished mahogany drawers; but his lips was shaking, and his face drored as he gets hold of my button and pulls me to him, and says, says he, ‘This’ll be a sad upset for my Jenny, but don’t let ’em frighten her, Joe Brown, don’t please. You’re a married man and got feeling, though I spoke nasty to you just now. Please go and tell her gently, yourself. O, Joe, I shan’t be able to help in many more sales.’

“Poor old chap, how the tears did run down his cheeks as he whispered me again—

“Don’t say it’s much, Joe; tell her it’s a bit of a scratch, and she isn’t to fidget about me. Tell her gently, Joe; good bye, Joe; I shall be over again to-morrow or next day, Joe; and, Joe,’ he calls out in his weak piping way, as the keb begins to move, ‘Joe,’ he says, ‘just take my aporn and give the lookin’-glass in the big wardrobe a bit of a rub before it comes down; and don’t forget about Jenny.’

“Poor old Dickey: got his ’art in his work, he had; and somehow as he went off, and I knew as we shouldn’t never see him again at work, if we ever see him at all, my nose wanted blowing to that degree that nothing couldn’t be like it; and it’s my belief, Sarah, if I hadn’t been roused up by a call for the next lot, that I should have turned soft; for you see, says I to myself, I says, suppose as that had been me.

“But he told me to tell Jenny gently, and I did.”

Story 2--Chapter IV.

Old Dick went no more to porter at the rooms when he came out of the hospital; his smoothly-shaven face did not peer out of windows where he was hanging out hearthrugs with, pinned upon them, the bills announcing the capital modern household furniture for sale; but when he returned to Gutter-alley, Dick would always be clean-shaven of a morning, spending an hour over the process, pulling out wrinkles to get at the silver stubble lurking in the bottoms of the furrows, and stopping at times, when his hands grew tremulous, to rest. Many was the time that his grandchild, Jenny, would have to run down in haste to fetch a bit of cobweb from the cellar to stay the bleeding when that tremulous old hand did make a slip, for the nap upon Dick’s Sunday hat was too scarce to be used up in so wanton a way.

But at last Dick would strop and put away his razor and shaving-brush, hang up the little glass, and then tie on a clean white apron, take his round carpet-cap down from a nail and carefully put it on so as not to disarrange his grey locks, and then sit patiently nursing his porter’s knot and waiting, as he used to tell Jenny, for a job.

“Strong, my little lass? Strong as ever,” he’d say. “If I could only get this leg right;” and then Jenny would drop her work, take his old face between her plump little hands, kiss him tenderly, and tell him to wait a little.

So old Dick Bradds used to wait on, day after day, waiting for the jobs that never came, and the injured leg did not get right. The old man’s strength sufficed to carry him down to the front door and back again. Down he would go slowly, holding tightly by the balustrade, one leg always first, till he reached the bottom, where the mat should have been, only they could not afford mats in Gutter-alley, and then as regularly as possible the old man, in his thankfulness at being able to walk so far, would take off the old carpet-cap and say softly, when there was no one by, “Thank God!” and the same again when, after a visit to the front door and a glance up and down the court, he had slowly and painfully made his way up to his own room.

Jenny would have helped him; but no: the old man could not shake off the belief that he was in a state to do heavy work and to help his child. There was too much determination left yet in the old piece of steel, and heedless of rust and weakness Dick struggled up and down.

People used to say that Sharpnesses, the great auctioneers, ought to have pensioned old Bradds, but they were people who made money fast, and knew its value in too worldly a way to pension worn-out servants, so old Dick had to live as he could.

Jenny was Dick's support—Jenny, his grandchild—Jenny Blossom, as they called her in Gutter-alley. She was the last of the family—father, mother, and another child had died in Gutter-alley, where fevers used to practise and get themselves into full strength before issuing out to ravage the districts where sanitary arrangements were so perfect.

The place was very foul, but somehow Jenny grew brighter day by day, and the old crones of the alley used to chuckle and say no wonder, for flowers always thrived in the dirt. At all events, the foul odours did not take the bloom from her cheek, and when fever or cholera held high revel, Jenny had passed scatheless through trials when scores had fallen around.

Every one spoke well of Jenny; untidy women with bare arms and rough hair always had for her a pleasant look; great hulking market-attending men, with hoarse voices, would always stand aside for Jenny to pass; and the slatternly girls of the alley, though they occasionally glanced at her with envious eyes, displayed no open jealousy. Away from Gutter-alley it was different, but in the forty houses of the court, and their four or five hundred inhabitants, there was not one who did not look up to Jenny Blossom.

And no unsuitable title was that—Jenny Blossom; for whether taken in connection with her young and blooming face, or her trade, the name seemed equally adapted. Ask for her as Jane Bradds, and people would have shaken their heads; though the mention of Jenny Blossom brought a bright look into perhaps a scowling face; and Number 5 in the court was indicated directly.

Story 2--Chapter V.

Number 5 in the court! Come up the four flights of creaking stairs to the only bright thing in the crowded place—the only bright thing likely to meet the eye, where squalor, misery, poverty, wretchedness, filth, and sickness ran riot. Breakfast is over, and, so that Jenny's needle shall not be stayed, Dick has himself washed and put away the two cups and saucers, and now sits by the fire drying the splashes upon his white apron. His carpet-cap is upon his head, and his porter's knot rests against his chair. The only sound in the room is the click of Jenny's thimble, as it sends the sharp needle flying through the hard slop-work upon which she is busy.

Pretty? Well, yes, there is the beauty in her face of youth. No Grecian-cut lines or finely chiselled features, but the simple bright countenance of an English girl, as she bends over her work.

Jenny's face was never pale, spite of the mephytic gases of Gutter-alley; but the rosy flush upon it deepened as a step was heard upon the stairs, followed by a tap at the door.

A querulous "Come in!" from old Dick, and then a tall, stout young fellow entered, bearing a basket of violets, whose sweet fragrance filled the room.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Harry?" said the old man. "Had you got money enough?"

"O yes, plenty; but I spent it all," was the reply. "The flowers are rare and fresh this morning."

"That's right, Harry—that's right," quavered the old man. "Set 'em down—set 'em down. And now what's to pay?"

"Pay? What for?" was the rather gruff response, as the new-comer looked hard the while at Jenny.

"For your trouble, Harry. You ought to take something for your trouble."

"'Tisn't trouble!" said the young man, more gently, still looking hard at Jenny, who never raised her eyes from her work. "When I'm at market, as I've often said before, it isn't much to bring home a few bunches of flowers. I should like to bring them every morning, if I may."

He still glanced at Jenny, as if he hoped that the permission might come from her; but she made no sign, and old Dick himself broke the awkward silence by thanking the young man once more, and he then took his departure with a disappointed aspect.

The flower-bearer slowly descended the stairs, nettled at the calm, patronising manner adopted by the old man.

"Poor old chap," he muttered; "I wonder what he really does think."

He said no more, for at the foot of the stairs he encountered a smartly-dressed youth, apparently a junior clerk in some city office.

The look which passed between the young men was of no very friendly character; but, directly after, each went upon his way, thinking of his rival—the violet-bearer to his little half stall, half shop, where he, in a very humble fashion, contrived to make a good living—the other, smiling with contempt, ascending to old Dick Bradds' abode.

For be it known that fair young Jenny Blossom was not without suitors, who were both at this time anything but peaceful at heart, since there was plenty of jealousy and annoyance at Jenny's coldness. They called it coldness, though hardly with justice, for the visits were none of Jenny's seeking, since she, poor girl, loved her grandfather, and though she confessed to herself that it was kind of Harry Smith to bring the violets, and to save her from going to the wet, cold market so early in the morning, yet she would very much rather that both—well, that Mr John Wilson, Sharpnesses' clerk, would stay away.

But John Wilson was quite a favourite with the old man, and the intimacy had arisen when at several times the former had been the bearer of various small gratuities from the great auction firm to their old porter, while he was weak

from his accident. Dick admired the young fellow's appearance and his smart way of dressing, so different from the fustian of Harry Smith, and upon more than one occasion he proved that years had not made him perfect, for said he, "Only think what a good thing it would be for you, my pet," referring, of course, to John Wilson's attentions; "what would become of you if I were taken away?"

Jenny said nothing, and the old man talked on under the impression that affairs were as they were years before, and quite oblivious of the fact that Jenny had been for some time past his sole stay and support; and that if the young girl, with her busy fingers morning and evening, and the sale of her violets in the cold streets in the afternoon, could supply sustenance for both, her fate would not have been so very hard had he been taken away.

But there were other feelings animating the breast of old Dick Bradds, and he would have liked to see that the young girl had some one to take his place as protector before the great change came, about which he never attempted self-deceit.

Story 2--Chapter VI.

Gutter-alley was certainly a gloomy home, but somehow time glided on as swiftly there as in more favoured spots. A year soon sped. The attentions of the young men had been incessant, but they had made no progress in their suits, for the love of Jenny continued to be centred in her grandfather, and if she had any to spare it was devoted to the row of flowers in her window, sickly plants which, sheltered though they were from the cold weather without, grew long of stalk and leaf as they strained and struggled to reach the light. But Jenny's patience was vain; the flowers always ended by drooping, turning yellow, and slowly withering away, even as drooped the wretched birds, supposed to be fowls, which pecked about in the alley, dropping a feather here and a feather there in their perpetual moult and raggedness, but about which fowls there was a legend known to every child in the court, in which it was related that the feathery scarecrow known as "the hen" had once laid an egg—a real genuine egg like those labelled at the cheesemonger's as "Sixteen a shilling," though no one had ever been found, from the owner of the fowls to the youngest inhabitant, who could conscientiously declare that he or she had seen that egg in its new-laid form.

For, as has been before hinted at, Gutter-alley had an atmosphere of its own, where not only flowers had their life dried out of them, but human beings grew more sickly day by day. The children became pale and stunted of growth; their elders unwholesome of mien and habit. It was one of Death's London strongholds, and the visits of parish surgeon and undertaker were frequent here. The close crowded court was one of the spots where typhus lived till it was tired, surfeited with the ill it had done, when for a time it slept.

It was summer, and there was much meeting of women in the court, where they would stand together after their fashion, with apron-wrapped arms, to gossip and compare notes. Now there was a funeral, and that had to be discussed, being considered a decent berryin, wherein all took deep interest, for most likely the majority had subscribed their mites to assist the neighbour in trouble. No matter how poor the sufferers, a decent funeral must be had; and it was no uncommon thing for the undertaker to be called upon to take off the bare, wretched, poverty-stricken aspect of the parish shell by decking it with a few rows of black nails, and a breast-plate and set of handles.

Now the doctor had been seen to go into Number 8. Where would he go next? How was Mrs Rose? Was Banks's child better? Would Widow Robinson and the five little ones have to go to the workhouse? Plenty of such questions were discussed in those days; and it happened that as four of the women were watching for the return of the doctor from one house, that, laden as usual, Harry Smith came up the road, set down his basket, and then, taking out almost an armful of moss roses, he was about to enter the door of Number 5, when one of the women partly covered her face with her apron, and then whispered something to the young man, which made him hesitate for a moment. Directly after he smiled, shook his head, and entered the house, to return in a few minutes without the roses.

The next morning he found that there was still a discussion going on in the court, and on approaching the door of Number 5 it was shut, and entrance was denied.

He could not see any one, a parish nurse said, for the fever was very bad in the house, as at many more in the court; and the young man sighed as he went away to encounter John Wilson at the end of the alley, glancing down it for a moment before passing on again.

For the fever was bad indeed, and once and twice a day shabby funeral processions left the place. Now that the trouble had come, parish meetings were held, and timid men made some little paltry attempts at battling and staying the progress of the distemper. But in spite of all they could do, the fever still raged; and at last, when he came one morning, Harry Smith learned from the women of the court that Jenny Blossom lay a-dying.

No one now saw the blooming girl, basket in hand, go out to sell her fragrant flowers, and Number 5 was shunned as the blackest plague spot in the court.

But still, day by day, came Harry Smith to the door, where he was never admitted. Not laden now with heavy bunches of flowers, but bearing a few sweet buds, to send by the hands of the nurse to the sick girl's room. Twice over though had Hany to stop shuddering, to let the bearers of something pass. Shuddering from no selfish fear, but lest *some one* might have been suddenly snatched away. For in those times he knew that it was not long before the cold harshly-shaped coffin was called into requisition, and his dread was great until the woman at the house set him at rest.

Then came Harry's turn: one morning he tried to rise for his market trip, but only to find that he had been stricken down by the enemy, and he was soon fighting hard with the fever that had fastened on him.

It was a long hard fight that, but Harry was young and hopeful, he had much to live for, and he won the victory, but

only to be left weak as a little child, and unable to stir from his humble bed.

As soon as he could crawl about, by the help of a stick, Harry's steps were directed to Gutter-alley, where, after a long and painful walk, he stood leaning against a wall for support, feeling deadly faint, for there was another funeral at Number 5.

"From which room?" he asked huskily, for there was one of the court women at his side.

"Second floor front," was the reply, and the young man groaned, impotent to ask further questions.

"Is it—is it?" he could say no more; but the woman divined his thoughts.

"No, no!" she answered eagerly, "the poor darling has been spared. It is the old man who is gone to his long home. Jenny has been about this fortnight now, and nursed the old man through it all."

"Was it fever?" asked Harry, more for the sake of speaking than from curiosity, for he wanted to conceal his weakness as far as he could.

"Some say it was; but I don't think so," she replied. "But you ought to be at home, with the rain falling like this. Why, you look fit to be in your bed and nowhere else."

"Yes, yes," said Harry, "I'll go soon."

"He was very old," said the woman; "I knew him years ago, when I lived over there, before he broke his leg. I've been to see Jenny, God bless her! She's half brokenhearted, and has now no one to look up to."

Harry Smith, in spite of the inclement, wintry weather, stopped by the mouth of the court awaiting the coming of the funeral, and a faint flush came into his hollow cheeks as he thought of the woman's last words, and wondered whether Jenny would now choose a protector, and whether that protector would be John Wilson.

Story 2--Chapter VII.

Harry Smith, the very shadow of his former self, waited until the procession neared, and then stood aside to let the one sad woman pass to the shabby funeral carriage, after which he made his way back into the court, to listen to the narrative of the sad havoc worked by the disease while he had been tossing in delirium upon his own pallet. But he went home sad and yet happy, as he pondered upon some information he had gained from the neighbours; for he learned for certain that no one whose visits he had dreaded had passed up the court to Number 5.

The days glided on. It was the depth of winter, and the snow lay thickly upon the house-tops. It was churned up into a black mud sometimes in the streets; but, in spite of powdering blacks, it still struggled to lie white and pure upon the ledges and window-sills. The storm came again and again, and Jenny's window-sill was covered, and somehow in the morning, when she rose, there lay a tiny bunch of sweet violets in amongst the snow. From whence did the offering come? There was but one explanation—it must have been thrown across from a neighbour's window; and morning after morning the flowers were there, and as Jenny took each bunch and placed it in water she thought of the market and its floral treasures even at that season of the year, and a blush burned hotly in her cheek, for she remembered who had brought roses during the illness, and wondered why he had ceased to come.

There was much for Harry to ponder upon, though, in the long hours during which, for want of strength, he was compelled to remain idle; he thought of his own rough ways and garb, as compared with the bearing and dress of his favoured rival; telling himself that he was mad and foolish to expect that Jenny could prefer him to the man chosen by her grandfather. If she could only read his heart aright, he thought that there might be hope for him; but how could he expect that!

And time still sped on, giving to Harry Smith once more muscle and vigour, but little peace of mind, since now Jenny declined to let him bring her flowers, for she kept entirely to her needlework, lodging with an old widow on the opposite side of the court. But the flowers once more began their struggle for life in Jenny's window, and with better success, for there was quite an hour's more sun on that side of the way, so that the once bare window-sill grew gay with bright-hued blossoms.

But as Jenny grew brighter with her flowers, day by day, Harry Smith's heart grew sad within, for with her consent or not—how could he tell?—John Wilson, the fair-weather friend, was frequently to be seen by the young girl's side, as she was going to and from the warehouse whence she obtained the work which made sore her little fingers. Harry knew not that poor Jenny was pestered sadly, and went to the warehouse at different hours each day, so as to avoid a meeting. Harry judged only from what he saw, and grew daily more disheartened and sad. He did not rail against her, he only blamed his own folly, and at last made up his mind to leave the country—his attention having been taken by the inducements held out by emigration placards.

But this was not until nearly a year had passed, and now that his mind was fully made up, he watched for an evening when he could see Jenny alone, and tell her—he thought he would like to tell her how he had loved her—before he went.

Harry's words were nearly left unsaid; for it happened that one evening he saw Jenny hurrying through the busy streets laden with the work she was taking home, and at a short distance behind he could make out John Wilson following rapidly in her steps.

The sight made the young man's heart sink within his breast, and he was about to turn back when he saw that the

young girl was panting beneath her burden, and half angrily he hastened up, and asked if he might carry it, determined for this time not to be driven away.

And it came to pass that evening that as they stepped into the quieter streets the bells of one of the old churches began to peal up joyfully for a practice, and it may be they inspired the young man with hope to declare his intentions, and then to his own surprise he grew warm and eloquent, reproaching his companion even for her conduct towards one who had loved her long and well.

"O Jenny!" he exclaimed, "I have always looked upon you as a violet growing therein—"

"A violet in the snow," she said archly, as she gazed in his face; and—well, the street was very dark—he held her for a moment in his arms.

She shrank from him startled and angry, and he felt hurt once more.

"Ah!" he said bitterly, as they reached the door in the alley, "fine feathers make fine birds, and perhaps Jenny Blossom likes such birds to watch for her, and follow her about."

"Can I help it, Harry?" said Jenny softly, as she laid one little work-scarred hand upon his. "I have no one to protect me," and before he could speak again she had hurried up-stairs.

There must have been something more than the ordinary interpretation of those words, so effectually to drive away Harry Smith's anger. Perhaps it arose from the way in which they were said. At all events John Wilson must have imagined that a fresh plague had broken out in the court, for he came near no more; and at one regular hour every evening Harry was to be seen accompanying the dainty little maiden to the warehouse, turning himself into a regular pack-horse with parcels, and all to the great hindrance of the emigrating scheme.

And so weeks—months passed, and then something more must have been said; for one day Harry Smith was seen busily carrying Jenny's flower-pots from her lodging to his own home, which could have been from no other reason than that Jenny had at last consented to tend them there, and send brightness to the honest young fellow's home. And so it passed, for from that time Jenny Blossom's name faded out of the chronicles of Gutter-alley. Year after year, though, when tiny little blue-eyed children were born to Harry in the cold wintry season, there was a fancy of his which may be recorded. It was only the fancy of a rough, honest worker—a soldier in the fight for life; but all the same, the idea had its tinge of poetry. The idea was this—to say that the tiny blossoms that came to find this world in its wintry garment of purity were like Violets in the Snow.

Story 3--Chapter I.

Story Three — Nil Des.

John Richards' Housekeeper.

"Git along, do, with such clat."

"But, Keziah—dear—only listen to me! Here's winter coming on fast, and what could be a better time for getting it over? What's cold got to do with it, Keziah, when there's a warm and manly heart beating away for you at such a rate as to keep you warm and itself too? Say yes, Keziah!"

"I won't."

"Only think of how happy we should be, with you at your housekeeping, and me with my tallers!"

"And smelling ten times worse of burnt mutton-chops than you do now when you come."

"Smell, Keziah! Oh, what's smell when him as smells loves you? Ah, Keziah! I did think you'd got a heart that I could melt like good quality fat; but it's a stringy and gristly heart, Keziah, one as is full of pride. On my bended knees I ask you to say yes."

"Git up, do, with your clat. The idee of going down on the carpet like that, just for all the world like a man in a stage-play. Such stuff indeed. If you don't get up directly I'll run out of the room, that I will. Do you take me for a silly girl? at my time of life too."

"No, Keziah," said the man of bended knees, rising slowly to stand once more, a fat, podgy little fellow, whose anxious face grew more ludicrous each moment. "No, Keziah, I only take you for a very hard-hearted woman."

"Don't be a noodles, Peter," exclaimed Keziah. "Didn't I always tell you, when I gave consent for you to come and see me, that I'd never think of marrying till Miss May was settled?"

"Yes, you did," said Peter, "but she's such a long time over it."

"Stuff!" said Keziah.

"But she is indeed," cried Peter, trying to catch one of the lady's hands in his. "You see she's only nineteen, and can afford to wait a few years. But you see, dear, I'm forty, and you are—"

"Yes, I know, I'm forty, too, and I'm not ashamed of it, so you needn't twit me with that," said Keziah snappishly. "I'm

in no hurry to change my name into Pash—Pash indeed. I'm sure Bay's ever so much better."

"It is! I know it is," said Peter, "and I didn't twit you about your years. Ain't I always said that you were just growing into your prime? But I see how it is: it's pride—it's the pride of the composites, Keziah, and you're trying to throw me over after I've been a true lover all these years."

"Are you going to talk sense; or am I to leave you to chatter that sickly twaddle to the cat?—true lover indeed!"

"Go it!" cried Peter, "it's pride! I can see through it all. Why don't you be open with me? But, mark my words, Keziah, there's more sterling substance in a short six, or even a height, than in all your grand composites, as set themselves up for sparm or wax. I'm tallow, I am, and I respect tallow. I like people not to be ashamed of their position. We can't all be wax, nor yet sparm, so why not be content as a good honest dip, or a mould! Why, even your twelve or fourteen has a honesty about it that your sham, make-believe imitation wax don't possess—things as won't stand so much as a draught of air without flaring, and guttering down, and spattering all over your carpets. It's pride, Keziah, and that's all about it."

"No, it ain't," said Keziah quietly.

"To throw me over like this," continued Mr Pash in injured tones, "and after all my attentions and presents."

"Presents, indeed!" exclaimed the lady, "attentions!—very delicate attentions. Kidneys, that you got out of the nasty fat that you buy of the butchers."

"But I never brought one as was the least tainted," said Peter, "and you always said there was nothing nicer for supper."

"And, pray, who always ate a good half?" retorted Keziah angrily.

"But I never should have touched 'em if they hadn't been so gloriously cooked—such brown—such gravy! O, Keziah, don't be hard on me," sighed Peter.

"Peter Pash!" exclaimed the lady indignantly, "you're a great goose; and if I didn't know that you'd been sitting here three hours without nothing stronger than small beer before you, I should say you'd been drinking. Now, once for all, you can come if you like, or you can stay away if you like. I'm not going even to think about getting married till Miss May's settled, and that won't be well, never mind that. Now go home."

"Yes, my dear," said Peter in a resigned way, and taking his hat off the sideboard he began to brush the nap round and round very carefully. "But you're very hard on me, Keziah."

"Didn't I tell you to go?" said the lady.

Peter Pash sighed and drew the back of his hand across his mouth, but then his heart failed him, and he shook hands and said "good-night"—words which seemed thrown back at him by the lady of his heart; directly after he withdrew in accordance with the line in italics which appeared at the bottom of his tallow-chandler's trade card—"N.B. Orders punctually executed!" leaving Keziah Bay, cook and housekeeper to John Richards, the old money-lender, of Walbrook, nipping her lips together, beating one foot upon the fender, and frowning very fiercely at the fire.

For this had been a very exciting affair for Mrs Keziah Bay, since, heretofore, Peter Pash's custom had been to come three times a week to Walbrook, where he would sit in the half kitchen, half sitting-room, of the dingy old mansion—a house built in the days when merchants condescended to live over their offices, with bedrooms looking down upon warehouse or yard—sit and smoke a pipe while Keziah darned her master's stockings; stare at her very hard, sup, and say "good-night," and then go. That was the extent of Peter Pash's courting. He had certainly once before said something respecting wedding, and been snubbed into silence; but only that once; hence, then, this had been rather an exciting time at Walbrook, and for more reasons than that one.

Mrs Keziah Bay had not been thoughtfully tapping the old-fashioned brass fender with her foot for more than five minutes before the door softly opened and a slight girlish figure entered, to steal quietly to the comely dame's side, kneel down, and clasp two little white hands round her waist.

"That means trouble, I know," said Keziah sharply, but all the same one of her hands was passed caressingly over the soft brown hair, and her lips were pressed to the white upturned forehead. "That means trouble, and worry, and upsets, or you wouldn't come to me. Now, what is it? But there: I know: you've been thinking about Frank Marr; haven't you?"

A sigh was taken for an affirmative answer, and Keziah continued:

"What's Mr Brough been here for to-night?"

"Don't talk about it—don't ask me!" cried the kneeling girl, who now burst out into a passion of weeping. "O, 'Ziah, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

"Why, tell me all about what you're crying for, to be sure," cried Keziah sharply; but all the same with a motherly attempt or two at soothing. "Surely master hasn't been at you again about Mr Frank, has he?"

"O, yes—yes," sobbed the girl; "and it does seem so cruel and hard. O, 'Ziah, I've no one to talk to but you—no one to ask for help. He talks as if Frank could help being poor, and not prospering in his business, when, poor fellow, he strove so hard."

"But what did he bring all that up for?" cried Keziah. "Mr Frank hasn't been here these two months, I'll swear. Did you say anything?"

"No, no!" sobbed the girl, bursting into a fresh paroxysm of weeping.

"Then some one must have brought it up. There, I see plain as plain. Bless him! He ought to be boiled in his own sugar, that he ought! He's a nice fellow, he is, for a sugar-baker, to come here tattling and setting people against other people."

"What do you mean?" sobbed May Richards, gazing wonderingly at her comforter.

"Mean? Why, that that old Tom Brough ought to be ashamed of himself to come tattling to master about Mr Frank. That was it, wasn't it?"

"No, no!" sobbed the poor girl wearily.

"Then what did he come for?" said Keziah.

There was a pause, during which May wept bitterly.

"I shall go and ask master myself," said Keziah authoritatively, as she half rose. "I'm not going to have my child upset like this for nothing."

"No, no, no!" sobbed May. "Pray stay, 'Ziah—dear 'Ziah, don't be angry, and I'll tell you all."

"Then what is it?" said Keziah.

"Mr Brough—"

"Well?"

"Mr Brough has been to talk to papa."

"Well, go on, child, for goodness' sake, and do wipe your eyes. He's been to talk to master, and what about, pray?"

"About me," sobbed May.

"Well, and pray what about you?"

"He came to propose, and papa gave him leave."

"To propose what?" said Keziah. "There, for goodness gracious in heaven sake, child, speak out and do not keep on riddle-me-riddle-me-reeing in that way. What did he want? Why!" she exclaimed, as a sudden light seemed to break upon her, "he ain't broke, and come after money? Not he though, he's as rich as a Jew. What does it all mean?"

"He came to propose, and papa ordered me to accept him," sobbed Mary; "and when I told papa that I considered myself engaged to poor Frank, he was ready to strike me, and he cursed him, and called him horrible names, and said he would sooner see me dead than married to such a beggar, and that I was to accept Mr Brough's offer."

"What!" exclaimed Keziah, her eyes dilating as she caught May by the shoulders, and seemed to look her through and through. "Do you mean to tell me that old Tom Brough, the sugar-baker, wants to marry you, and that master said he should?"

"Yes, yes," sobbed May. "O, 'Ziah, I'm half brokenhearted. What shall I do?"

"Do!" cried Keziah fiercely; "I'd have knocked their heads together. Old Tom Brough! An old villain! An old rascal! He's sixty, if he's an hour. It's a good job for him he's gone. Sneaking out as he did, and giving me five shillings when he went. Ah! if I'd have known when he was with me there in the passage, I'd have given it him!"

May clung to her, sobbing more than ever. "I'd—I'd—I'd have wrung his neck," cried Keziah furiously; and then she burst out into a contemptuous laugh, as she strove to comfort the weeping girl, kissing her, wiping her eyes, and holding her to her breast. "There—there," she said, "let it be now, and I'll talk to them both. I'll let them see that money is not going to do everything. Tom Brough, indeed! A carneying old rascal, with his smooth tongue and pleasant ways; an old deceiver. I thought better things of him. But I haven't done with them all yet; I don't believe there's a man under the sun good for anything. But there goes the bell."

Keziah Bay rose to leave the room, but May clung to her imploringly.

"You will not say a word?" she said pleadingly.

"And why not, pray?" Then seeing the agitation and fear in the poor girl's face she continued, "Then I won't—not to him; for it would be like trying to turn a rushing bull;—but I'm not married yet, Peter Pash," she muttered as she left the room, "nor she isn't married yet, John Richards and Thomas Brough, alderman and big man as you are. We're a poor weak, helpless lot, that we are, and it's my belief that men are born with but one idea, and that is that they ought to persecute us women."

Under Temptation.

There is, and there always was, about Walbrook something of an exasperating nature. I don't care whether you journey upon wheels, or by means of your nature-given supports, you shall always find an obstruction. The pathways are as narrow and awkward as the road; and while there is always a perky, impudent-looking, heavily-laden truck, with its handle either cocked up in defiance, or pointed down insultingly, as it obstructs the horse-drawn traffic, there is sure to be some one carrying a box of stationery, or a bale of paper-hangings, or something or another with hard, harsh corners, to come in contact with your front or your back, to injure your hat, or tear your coat with a ragged nail, or jostle you off into the gutter. It don't matter when you go down Walbrook, passing by the sombre Mansion House, and seeking to be at peace in the quiet shades of Budge-row, or Watling, you shall certainly have your feathers ruffled, mentally of course; therefore, it was not surprising that Frank Marr, a sturdy young fellow of goodly aspect, and some eight-and-twenty years, should look angry and frowning as he sought the house of old John Richards.

Not that it was at all surprising for people either going to or coming from John Richards' office to look lowering of brow, for interviews with that gentleman were none of the most pleasant; they had too much to do with interest, and renewing, and bill stamps, and too little to do with hard cash—unless it were for repayments—to be gratifying to any one.

But Frank Marr's business, as he thought, did not relate to money; and without hanging about the passage in the hope of catching sight of May Richards, his old playmate and boyhood's love, he asked to be, and was shown at once into the presence of old John Richards,—“Grab-all,”—“Grind-'em,”—“Screw-bones,”—“Publican,”—for by all these pleasant sobriquets was the money-lender known.

But Frank Marr, merchant, who had just passed through the Bankruptcy Court, after five years' hard struggle with unforeseen difficulties, and paid ten shillings in the pound, after all the expenses had come out of his estate—Frank Marr knew that he had chosen a bad morning for his visit. John Richards' enemy had him by the leg; and swathed and bandaged, suffering terribly from gout, but transacting business all the same, as many a trembling client knew to his cost, he sat with a curious smile upon his face as the young man entered.

“Now for a fierce volley of rage and curses,” thought Frank; “he shall hear me, though, all the same!” But to his great surprise the old man greeted him most civilly.

“Well, Mr Marr, what's in the wind, eh? Little accommodation bill, eh? Whose names?”

“No, Mr Richards,” said Frank, dashing at once into the subject nearest his heart, “I have not come about money.”

“Indeed!” said the money-lender, grinning with pain, but still speaking suavely. “Pray what is it, then?”

“I have had news this morning, Mr Richards.”

“Good, I hope. An opening, perhaps, for business?”

“No, sir! Bad news—vile news—cruel news!” cried the young man excitedly.

“Sorry, very sorry,” said Richards, quietly. “Pray what is it, then?”

“It is the news of slave-dealing in this city, sir,” said Frank. “Of a father making a contract with a rich purchaser for the sale and delivery of his only child, as if she were so much merchandise, and I come, old man, to tell you to your face that it is cruel, and a scandal to our civilisation. But I beg pardon, Mr Richards; I am hot and excited. I am deeply moved. You know I love May, that we have loved from childhood, and that we are promised to one another. Don't interrupt me, please.”

“I'm not going to,” said the old man, still quietly, to the other's intense astonishment.

“I know what you would say to me if I were to advance my pretensions now. But look here, Mr Richards—I am young yet, May is young. I have been very unfortunate. I have had to buy experience, in spite of my endeavours, in a very dear school; but there is time for me to retrieve my position. I shall get on—I feel assured. For heaven's sake, then, let this cruel affair be set aside: give me a few years to recover myself, and all will yet be well, I am sure. You will break her heart if you force her to marry this old man.”

“Who told you of this?” said John Richards, still calmly.

“I cannot tell you,” said Frank.

“Did May write to you?”

“No,” said Frank warmly; “she promised you, sir, that she would not. I, too, promised you that while my affairs were in such a state I would not hold communication with her. We have kept our words, sir, even as we intend to keep those upon another point. I have neither spoken to nor heard from May for months.”

“Only gone to church to sit and stare at her,” said John Richards quietly.

“It were hard indeed, sir, if that poor gratification were not afforded me,” said Frank. “But now, sir, pray hear me—pray listen to me. Think of the misery you would inflict.”

“Stop now, and hear me,” said the old money-lender quietly, though his lips quivered with pain. “Your name is Frank; now be frank with me. You are at the present time penniless, are you not?”

Frank had hard work to suppress a groan as he bowed his head and thought of how, had he been given time, he could have paid every creditor in full, and had to spare, instead of his poor assets being more than half swallowed up in costs.

"You came here expecting a stormy interview, did you not?"

"I did!" said Frank.

"To be sure! and now I am going to show you that old Grab-all is not so black a devil as he is painted."

"Good heavens, sir!" cried Frank joyfully.

"Stop a bit—stop a bit—don't be rash, young man; for perhaps I am not going to favour you in the way you may expect, though I do feel disposed to help you. Now look here: I suppose five hundred pounds would be a great help to you just now?"

"It would start me in life again, sir," said Frank, sadly; "but I should not feel justified in commencing upon borrowed capital at high interest."

"Did I say a word about borrowed capital or high interest?"

"No, sir, but—"

"Yes, yes—of course—I know—old Grind-'em will have sixty per cent, they say, eh? But look here, suppose I were to give you five hundred pounds to start with!"

"Give! give! Give me five hundred pounds in hard cash, sir! Mr Richards, why do you play with my feelings?"

"Play, young man?" said the money-lender quietly. "I am not playing—I am in earnest. I tell you that I will give you, now, this minute, five hundred pounds. There," he said, "give me that cheque book," and he pointed to a safe in the wall. "I'll write you one now this instant; and with five hundred pounds you have the key to a fortune. You may die rich as I am, Frank Marr."

"But you have a condition: you wish to buy something with this five hundred pounds, Mr Richards," said Frank sternly.

"I only want five minutes of your time," said the old man.

"What to do?"

"To write half a dozen lines at my dictation."

"And to whom?"

"To my daughter."

"Their purport?"

"That you break with her, and set her free, now and for ever."

"If I do," cried Frank fiercely, "may God in heaven bring down—"

"Stop, stop, you rash, mad fool!" cried the old man excitedly. "Look here, Frank Marr: you have not a penny; your mother is almost starving; you are living together in a beggarly second-floor room at a tallow-chandler's. You see I know all! You are suffering the poor old lady's murmurs day by day, and she reproaches you for wasting her little all in your business. Look here: be a man, and not a love-sick boy. I'll be frank with you. Mr Brough has proposed, and I approve of him for a son-in-law. He is elderly, but a better-hearted man does not exist; and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that May has gone to a good home; while you have the chance, and at once, of doing your duty by your old mother. She wants change of air, Frank, and more nourishment. Five hundred pounds clear, Frank, to start with, and on your obtaining one name, one respectable name, beside your own, I'll advance you five hundred more—at five per cent, Frank, my good fellow—at five per cent.—a thing I never before did in my life. I'll do it at once, this very hour, and you can pay the cheque into a banker's, start a new account, and a prosperous one. There, I'll find you a name—your uncle, Benjamin Marr; I'll take him; he's a respectable man, and good for five hundred pounds. He'll do that for you. Now, my good lad, sit down and accept my offer."

"Does the devil tempt men still in human form?" gasped Frank, as with veins starting he stood panting for breath before the old man.

"Pooh! nonsense! absurd! Now, how can you talk such silly book-trash, Frank Marr? I thought five years with me as clerk would have made another man of you. You ought never to have left me. Throw all that folly aside, and look the matter in the face like a man. Now you see how calm and how lenient I am. I might play the tyrant, and say that May shall be Mr Brough's wife, and all that sort of thing; but I want to spare everybody's feelings. I don't want any scenes. Come, now: you give her up; you will write to her, eh?"

Frank Marr's voice was hoarse as he spoke; for he had felt the old man's words burning as it were into his brain, as scene after scene presented itself to his imagination. There on one side wealth, prosperity, comfort for the old and ailing woman whom he had, as he told himself, in an evil hour robbed of the comforts of her declining years; a new career, and the means to pay off that other ten shillings in the pound, so that he could once more hold up his head

amongst his fellow-men. On the other side, the sweet, loving face of May Richards, whom he thought he loved as man never yet loved. He told himself that without a moment's hesitation he should defy the temptation to gain a hold; but for all that he temporised, and John Richards saw it, and stretched out his hand to take a pen.

"But you will give me time to recover myself?" said Frank.

"What for? I don't understand," said Richards.

"For May's sake," pleaded Frank.

"Stop! Not another word!" cried the old man, now speaking fiercely. "I told her last night that I'd sooner see her dead than your wife. I tell you the same. But I will not be angry, nor yet harsh—I was put out last night. Now, once more look here: Five hundred pounds in cash—a free gift, mind—and five hundred more as an easy business loan, renewable year after year during my life, so long as the interest is punctually paid. Nothing can be easier for you. Think now, to give up a boy's milk-and-water love I offer you what to a man in your present position is a fortune—a thousand pounds. And you will take it?"

Frank tried to speak, but he seemed to be choking.

"A thousand pounds, which means future prosperity—which means, as well, a score of rich and beautiful women to choose from."

Frank had not heard a door open behind them; he had not seen May, pale as ashes, standing motionless listening to every word; he could only hear the words of the tempter, and the scratch, scratch of a cruel pen, sharp as a needle, dipped apparently in some subtle venom, writing the words *one thousand pounds* on his heart at the same time as in that little slip-book, while the poison was coursing through his veins, making them to beat and throb.

"One thousand pounds, John Richards; payable to Frank Marr, Esquire, or his order," said the old man aloud, but as if speaking to himself; "and all for giving up a boy-and-girl love affair. Pish! I am getting into my dotage. Look here, Mr Marr," he said, speaking up, "I only want you to write the few lines I dictate, and to get that name to the bill, and here is the cheque ready. You'll get on, now, I feel sure," he said, in cool, business-like tones, but watching his victim like a cat the while. "Bought wit is better than taught wit. Shall I order you a glass of wine?"

"God help me!" groaned Frank Marr as, making an effort to speak, he tore at his throat for an instant, snatched at his hat, and then rushed out of the house.

"Expensive, but safe!" said John Richards, with a bitter smile, as he pinned the cheque to its duplicate. "What, you here?"

"Father!" cried May, coming forward and speaking in tones that should have pierced even his heart, had it not been stony to the very core; "O, father, what have you done?"

"Spent hundreds of my hard-earned pounds to free you from a bankrupt lover—a scoundrel whose every thought was on my cash, whose every calculation was as to how many years I should be before I died; upon a man who had not the heart to stand up for you, who valued you at less than five hundred pounds; and yet you reproached me with wishing to sell you to a rich husband, when he is a pure, sterling, true-hearted man, the only one I know that I could trust—a man you have known from a child, and one who has long loved you. Suppose he is grey-headed, what then? You can trust in his experience and—eh? What? Why? What the deuce! talk of the—How are you, Brough? glad to see you. Got the gout awful this morning. Don't stop; I'm bothered and sick with pain. Take May up-stairs. My dear, give Mr Brough some lunch."

Then, in an undertone, he spoke to the new-comer:

"I've done it for you, Brough; smoothed the way, and the day's your own. Bought him off for five hundred."

"And has he taken it?" said the new-comer, a handsome, florid, elderly man.

"As good as taken it. It's all right, I tell you. She knows it too. Go and comfort her up, Brough; comfort her up."

"Poor child, poor child," muttered Mr Brough, taking a cold stony hand in his; and the tears rose to his eyes as he read in the despairing look directed at him the truth of the old money-lender's words. The next minute he had led May Richards up-stairs and was seated by her on one of the sofas, gazing pityingly at her, for with her face covered by her hands the poor girl wept as though her heart would break.

Story 3--Chapter III.

Tom Brough.

For a good quarter of an hour no word was spoken; then again taking one of the unresisting hands in his, May's new courtier talked long and earnestly, telling of how, with no ardent passion, but with the chastened love of one who had known a bitter disappointment, he had long watched her and waited.

"And now, at last, May, I ask you to be an old man's wife," he said. "Yours shall be no life of slavery; but there, you have known me long, and for some time past," he said tenderly; "I have not been without hope that you loved me in return."

"Mr Brough," sobbed May, throwing herself on her knees at his feet, "I do love you, I have loved you ever since I was a child—loved you as one should love a dear father. Have I not often come to you with my girlish troubles; but you surely never can mean this—you cannot wish what you say? How can I be your wife, when you know how long—how long—O, Frank, Frank, Frank!" she cried, with a wail of despair that seemed to thrill through her suitor's heart, and raising her in his arms he kissed her tenderly—as lovingly as might a father—and placed her on a sofa at his side, drawing her nearer to him in spite of a slight resistance, as he tried to whisper a few words in his endeavour to soothe the fierce burst of despair that shook the poor girl's frame.

"There, May—my child," he said at last, "try and command yourself," when a thought seemed to strike him, and, though evidently troubled and reluctant, he rose to go, tenderly taking leave of the weeping girl.

But before he could reach the door, May had him by the hand.

"Dear Mr Brough," she said beseechingly, "I cannot think that you would wish to make me unhappy for life."

"Indeed, no," he said gently, as he held both her hands in his. "I would devote my life to making you happy."

"But you know—for some time—Mr Frank Marr—"

Then the recollection of what she had heard and seen that morning seemed to flash across her brain, scathing her as it passed, and with a wild look she sought to withdraw her hands, but they were fast held.

"Nay, my child," said Mr Brough tenderly, "I love you too well to wish to give you pain. I would sooner suffer myself than cause a pang to your gentle little heart. Show me that Frank Marr is worthy of you—that is, that your father's words which he told me were either untrue, or that he had been deceived; tell me, in fact, that by waiving my claims I can give you happiness, and I will do so, and at once, even though—" His voice trembled as he spoke, and then he added hastily: "But you are much agitated; I will go. Only one question before a painful subject is buried for ever—Are you aware that Frank Marr was with your father this morning?"

May bowed her head, for the words would not come.

"And you know of the offer made and accepted? Good God, what a brute I am!" he exclaimed, as he had just time to catch May in his arms, and save her from falling.

"That's just what you are!" exclaimed a harsh voice, and the visitor became aware of the presence of Keziah Bay, who indignantly caught the fainting girl from him, and apparently without much effort bore her from the room.

It was with a quiet, thoughtful face that Tom Brough, the well-known wealthy, charitable sugar-baker, made his way to one of the City chop-houses, and sat down in a dark box to think for quite an hour, with a newspaper before his face, a newspaper that the impatient waiter swooped down at a good half-dozen times, but never asked for on account of its being in the hands of so excellent a customer. But never a word read Tom Brough; it was only a blind behind which he wished to think on that eventful morning; and he thought till his countenance lightened, for it seemed to him that his way ahead was very clear, and in that way ahead he saw himself a happy man, cheered by May's smiles, in spite of his years, and playing with her children; and at last, his own eyes dewy and twinkling, his bright grey hair glistening, and the ruddy hues of his open countenance ruddier than ever, he laid aside the paper just at a moment when, unable to bear it any longer, the waiter was swooping down with the fell intent of striking and bearing off the sheet. But just as he stooped to seize it, the paper was dropped, and he was standing face to face with the old and regular attendant at the place.

"Charles," said Mr Brough, "I think I'll take a chop."

"And hysters, sir?" said Charles.

"And oysters," said Tom Brough.

"Port *or* sherry, sir?" said Charles respectfully.

"Pint of port—yellow seal," said Tom Brough with a sigh of content, and then he leaned back and looked up at the dingy soot-darkened skylight, till the hissing hot chop was brought, moistening his lips from time to time with the glass of tawny astringent wine, seeing, though, no yellow glass, no floating blacks, nothing but a bright future; and then he ate—ate like a man who enjoyed it, finished his fifth glass of port, and walked to his office, brisk, bustling, and happy.

"Gentleman been waiting to see you two hours, sir," said a clerk.

"Bless my soul, how tiresome!" he muttered. "I wanted to do as little as possible to-day; and if news came that the sugar crops were a failure to a cane, I believe I'm so selfish that I shouldn't care a—"

But, whatever might have been the proper finish of that sentence, it was never uttered; for, bustling forward with an easy elastic step, the pleasant countenance suddenly became grave as opening the door of his inner office Tom Brough stood face to face with pale, stern-looking Frank Marr.

Story 3--Chapter IV.

Hopeless.

If there is anything obstinate in this life it is Time, whom poets and painters are so fond of depicting as a goose-winged, forelocked, bald-headed, scraggy old gentleman, exceedingly hard up for clothes, but bearing an old, overgrown egg-boiler, and a scythe with a shaft that, however well adapted for mowing in his own particular fields, would, for want of proper bend and handles, if he were set to cut grass in some Essex or Sussex mead, make that old back of his double down in a grander curve than ever, and give him such a fit of lumbago as was never suffered by any stalk of the human corn he delights to level. Just want the hours, weeks, and months to seem extended, and they shrink like fourteen-shilling trouser legs. Just want the days to glide by so that some blissful moment may be swift to arrive, and one might almost swear that the ancient hay-maker had been putting his lips to some barrel, and was lying down behind a hedge for a long nap. He had been busy enough though at Walbrook, as many a defaulting bill acceptor knew to his cost, and small mercy was meted to him by John Richards. The time, too, with May seemed to speed by, as evening after evening it brought her December, in the shape of Tom Brough—always pleasant, cheerful, and apparently happy, if he gained one sad pleasant smile.

For there was a sadness in May Richards' face that was even at times painful; but she seemed to bear her cares patiently. Only once had she sought to talk to her father, to find him even gentle.

"You had better throw it all aside," he said. "Take my advice, child, you will find it better."

"But I must see those papers, father," she said hoarsely.

She had followed the old man into his office, and stood facing him as he laid one hand upon his great iron safe.

He did not seem to heed her for a few minutes; but at last he spoke.

"You will not destroy them?" he said. "No."

The next minute the great iron door opened with a groan, and he had placed a cancelled cheque bearing Frank Marr's name on the back, and a couple of other documents before her.

She stood there and read them through, word for word, twice, and then they dropped from her hand, and gazing straight before her she slowly left the place.

He had sold her, then. He had preferred worldly prosperity to her love, and she had been deceived in him as hundreds of others were every day deceived by those in whom they trusted. But one document she held to still—the one in her desk, the little desk that stood by her bed's head, and that letter she had read night after night, and wept over when there was none to see, till the blistering tears had all but obliterated the words on the paper. But no tears could wash them out from her heart, where they were burned in by anguish—those few cold formal words dictated by her father—that he, Frank Marr, feeling it to be his duty, then and there released her from all promises, and retained to himself the right without prejudice to enter into any new engagement.

She had been asked to indite a few lines herself, setting him free on her part, but she could not do it; and now, after the first month of agony, she was striving hard to prepare herself for what she felt to be her fate.

But all seemed in vain, and one day, almost beside herself with the long strain, Keziah found her pacing the room and wringing her thin hands.

"You sha'n't marry him, and that's an end of it!" cried Keziah fiercely. "I'll go over and see him to-night and talk to him; and if I can't win him round my name isn't Bay. I'll marry him myself if it can't be done any other how, that I will. Cheer up, then, my darling. Don't cry, please, it almost breaks my heart to see you. He's a good old fellow, that he is; and I'm sure when he comes to know how you dread it all he'll give it up. If I only had that Mr Frank—What? Don't, my little one? Then I won't; only it does seem so hard. Married on the shortest day, indeed! I daresay he'd like to be. There's no day so short nor so long ever been made that shall see you Tom Brough's wife, so I tell him. Now, only promise me that you'll hold up."

"Don't talk to me, please. I shall be better soon," sobbed May; and then after an interval of weeping, "'Ziah, I know you love me: when I'm dead, will you think gently of me, and try to forgive all my little pettish ways?"

"When you're what?" cried Keziah.

"When I'm dead; for I feel that it can't be long first. I used to smile about broken hearts and sorrow of that kind, but, except when I'm asleep and some bright dream comes, all seems here so black and gloomy that I could almost feel glad to sleep always—always, never to wake again."

"O, O, O!" cried Keziah, bursting into a wail of misery, but only to stop short and dash away a tear right and left with the opposite corners of her apron. "There, I won't have it, and if you talk to me again like that, I'll—I'll—I'll go to Mr Brough at once. No, my child, I'm not going to sit still and see you murdered before my very eyes if I know it. But though I don't want to be cruel I must tell you that your poor affections really were misplaced; for that Frank Marr is as well off now and as happy as can be. He lodges, you know, at Pash's, and they've got all the best furnished rooms that he got ready for me; not that I was going to leave you, my pet; and he's making money, and taking his mother out of town, and all sorts, I can tell you."

It did not escape Keziah's eye how every word was eagerly drunk in, and feeling at last that she was but feeding and fanning a flame that scorched and seared the young life before her, she forbore, and soon after left the room.

"But if I don't see Mr Tom Brough, and put a stop to this marriage, and his preparations, and new house, and furnishing," she cried, "my name isn't Keziah Bay?"

And Keziah kept her word.

Story 3--Chapter V.

Mr Pash Looks Green.

Keziah Bay had made up her mind to go to Mr Tom Brough, and, attended by Peter Pash as her faithful squire, she started, loading him to begin with in case of rain, for on one arm Peter carried a large scarlet shawl, and under the other a vast blue-faded gingham umbrella, with a great staghorn beak and a grand ornamental brass ferule.

But Peter Pash looked proud at the confidence placed in him, and, following rather than walking by the side of his lady, he accompanied her to Finsbury-square, in one corner of which place lived Tom Brough.

All the same, though, Peter Pash was not comfortable, for he did not know the object of Keziah's mission. What was she going to Mr Brough's for? It was not because she was sent—she had declared that before starting, and when pressed for her reason she said that she was "going because she was going," and Peter did not feel satisfied. In fact, before they were half-way to Finsbury, Peter was fiercely jealous, and telling himself that he was being made a fool of.

"You'd better let me carry that umbrella if you are going to bring it down thump at every step like that," said Keziah.

"No, thank you, I can manage it," said Peter, as, tucking it once more beneath his arm, he trotted on by her side, trying to make up his mind how he should find out the truth of his suspicions.

"It only wants a little looking into," said Peter to himself, "and then you can find out anything. I can see it all now. And do they think they are going to deceive me? No, I've boiled down and purified too much not to be able to separate the wrong from the right. She's going to ask him if he means to marry her instead of Miss Richards, and if he don't, she'll fall back on me. But she won't, for I don't mean to be fallen on, and so I tell her."

"Here we are," said Keziah, stopping short in front of Mr Brough's house.

"Yes, here we are," said Peter, with what he meant for a searching look.

"Now, look here, Peter," said Keziah, "I'm going to see Mr Brough, and you'll wait outside till I come back."

"But what are you going for?" said Peter.

There was no reply save what was conveyed in a hitch of Keziah's shawl, and then, her summons being responded to, she entered, leaving Peter perspiring on the door-step, brandishing the great umbrella and peering at the door with eyes that threatened to pierce the wood—varnish, paint, and all.

Meanwhile, Keziah was ushered into the room where Tom Brough was seated, rosy and hearty, over his decanter and glass.

"Well, Keziah," he said, "and how are all at home? Take a chair."

The visitor did not condescend to reply until the door was shut, when, folding her arms, she stood looking at him with a fierce uncompromising aspect.

"I've come about that poor girl," she said at last.

"About what poor girl?" said Tom Brough.

"That poor girl whose heart's being broken up into tiny bits by you and him—her father," cried Keziah, fiercely, "and I've come to know if you ain't ashamed of yourself. There, hold your tongue, and listen to what I've got to say; I haven't said anything to him at home, because it's like talking to stone and marbles. But I've come to talk to you."

"Talk away, then," said Tom Brough, pleasantly.

"I'm going to," said Keziah, angrily, "and don't you think, Mr Brough, that you're going to get rid of me like that, because you are not, so now then. This marriage can't go on."

"Why not?" said Tom Brough, offering a glass of wine, which was refused.

"Because I'm not going to see my darling that I've nursed and tended ever since she was a baby driven into her grave to please you. There, keep off—gracious, if the man isn't mad!"

Keziah half shrieked the last words, for, leaping from his seat, Tom Brough made a rush at her, chased her round the table with an activity hardly to have been expected from one of his years, followed her out on to the landing as she hastily beat a retreat, down the stairs, along the passage, and caught her on the door-mat, where, after a sharp scuffle, he succeeded in imprinting a couple of sounding kisses upon her cheek before she got the door open, and, panting and tumbled, rushed out nearly to the oversetting of Peter Pash, who, with his eye to the keyhole, had seen the chase in part, heard the scuffle in full, and now stood gazing grandly at the panting object of his affections.

"Keziah!" he exclaimed at length, "I thought better of you."

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed the irate dame.

"I thought you had been a woman as could be trusted," he said, sadly.

"Trusted, indeed!" cried Keziah. "Why, he's a madman, that's what he is. He's off his head because of this wedding: see if he ain't."

"Keziah!" said Peter, loftily, "I've done with you."

"Give me that umbrella," cried Keziah, snatching the great gingham from his hand. "Now just you speak to me again like that, young man, and I'll talk to you."

"I'll see you home. I won't be mean," said Peter. "But you've broken a true and trusting heart, Keziah."

"Hold your tongue, do," she cried; "just as if I hadn't enough to bother me without your silly clat. I did think he'd be open to reason," she added half aloud.

Peter did not answer, but walked by Keziah's side till they turned down by the Mansion House and entered Walbrook, when with a start the latter caught Peter by the arm and pointed down the deserted way to where a light figure was seen to hurriedly leave John Richards' door, and then to flit beneath lamp after lamp in the direction of Cannon-street.

"Where's she going?" exclaimed Keziah, hoarsely. "What is she out for to-night?"

"Who is it?" said Peter, though it was for the sake of speaking, for he knew.

"She's mad, too, and we're all mad, I believe," cried Keziah. "O, Peter, if you love me as you say, hold by me now, for there's something going wrong; don't lose sight of her for an instant, if you value me. Make haste, man, and come on."

"That's cool!" said Peter, "and after me seeing some one else kissing and hugging you."

"Quick, quick!" cried Keziah, excitedly catching Peter's hand in hers; and then together they passed down Walbrook and across the street at the bottom, both too fat and heavy to keep the light figure in sight without great exertion.

Down one of the hilly lanes and into Thames-street they panted, with the light drapery now lost sight of, now seen again at some corner, and then to disappear down one of the dark fog-dimmed openings, up which came the faint odour of the river and the low lapping noise of its waters against the slimy steps below.

"Quick, quick!" said Keziah hoarsely, "or we shall be too late."

Her earnest manner more than her words seemed to impress Peter Pash, and hurrying along he was the first to catch sight of the light figure they chased now standing motionless on the edge of a wharf, while the wind came mournfully sighing off the river, in whose inky breast, all blurred and half-washed-out, shone the light of star and Keziah's breath seemed drawn in deep groans, as for a few minutes she stood, as it were, paralysed. Then recovering herself, and motioning Peter back, she advanced quickly, and just as the light figure gave a start and seemed about to step forward, she threw her arms round it and held it tightly, sobbing hysterically the while.

But only for a few seconds.

"Here, Peter, quick," she cried, "that shawl. And were you looking for me, my pet? We've been walking. But never mind, we've found you now, and I won't leave you again. Don't talk—don't say anything, only come home quickly!"

Without a word, without resistance, May Richards suffered herself to be led homeward, merely gazing from time to time at her old servant in a half-dazed way as if she could not understand the meaning of it all, nor yet why she was being led with Keziah's arm so tightly holding hers.

And so they walked back to find the door in Walbrook ajar, with Tom Brough standing in the entry.

"Go back now, Peter," whispered Keziah, "and not a word of this to a soul."

"But what's he here for?" said Peter, in the same tone.

"You miserable jealous pate," whispered the old servant fiercely, "if you don't be off—"

She said no more, for Peter *was* off, and then she turned to Mr Brough.

"You may well look," she whispered to him, as he said a few unnoticed words to May. "All your doing—all your doing. Another minute, and the poor lamb would have been sleeping in the river."

Tom Brough started, and then caught May in his arms, and bore her up-stairs, where for quite an hour she sat in a dazed, heedless way that troubled Keziah more than would a passionate outburst.

"If she'd only cry," she whispered at last to Mr Brough, "But you won't press for it now, Mr Brough; you won't, sir, I'm sure. People say you're a good man, and that you're kind and charitable. Look at the poor thing; her heart's broke—it is indeed."

"I'm going now," said Mr Brough in answer, and then when Keziah accompanied him down to the door, "Do not leave her for an instant, if you love the poor child; and, look here, Keziah, the wedding must take place, and it is for her good—*mark me*, for her good. I love her too well to make her unhappy, and if you do your duty you will help me all you can."

Keziah closed the door without a word, and a minute after she was kneeling beside and crying over the heartbroken

girl.

Story 3--Chapter VI.

Hard-Hearted.

Time glided on.

"You've come again, then?" said Keziah Bay.

"Yes, I've come again," said Mr Peter Pash. "Trade's very brisk, Keziah."

"Is it?" said that lady, in the most indifferent of tones.

"Yes, things are looking up well," said Mr Pash, "and my lodger has dropped dips and taken to composites. You know what that means, of course."

"Not I," said Keziah indifferently. "I don't trouble my head about such things."

"You're always a-snubbing me, Keziah," said the little man dolefully. "It's no good for me to try and please you."

"Not a bit," said Keziah with a smile. "You ought to know better than to come wherrittin' me when there's so much trouble in the house."

"But it ain't our trouble," said Peter Pash. "Why, if I was to make myself unhappy about other folks' candles, where should I be? Now, I say, Keziah dear, when's it to be?"

"Once for all, I tell you," said Keziah, "that until I see poor Miss May happily settled, I won't bother about that nonsense; so you may hold your tongue, for I can see what you mean."

Peter Pash gave a great groan of despair, but the next minute he was patiently submitting to a severe cross-examination concerning the habits and customs of his lodger Frank Marr.

"He's no good, Peter," said Keziah at last, "and the sooner you get rid of him the better."

"But he pays his rent very regular," said Peter, "and that's a consideration, you know. And he's a good son, and pays no end of attention to his mother. And I say, Keziah, dear, I've seen Mr Brough, and I ain't a bit jealous now."

Keziah snorted.

"He's been to my place twice to see Mr Marr, and they're the best of friends, and he tells me it was only his fun, and Mr Marr don't seem to mind a bit. And I say, Keziah dear, now that Miss May is really going to get married and settled, sha'n't we make it right now?"

"Now I tell you what it is, young man," said Keziah fiercely, "I hate the very name of marrying, and if you say another word to me about it I'll never have you at all. When I want to be married I'll ask you, and not before, so now be off."

"But will you want to some day?" said Peter pitifully.

"Perhaps I shall, and perhaps I sha'n't; I'm seeing enough of it to satisfy me, so I tell you."

Peter groaned.

"Now don't make that noise here," cried Keziah snappishly. "If you can't behave yourself, you'd better go."

"I won't do so any more, dear," said Peter softly. "How's poor dear Miss May?"

"O, don't ask me—poor lamb!" cried Keziah.

"It is to be, isn't it?" said Peter.

"To be! Yes. They've talked her into it, now that your fine Mr Marr has proved himself such a good-for-nothing. It's to be, sure enough, and I wish them all joy of what they've done. They're killing her between them, and then they'll be happy. Get married! There, don't drive me wild, Peter Pash, but be off out of my sight, for I hate the very sound of the word, and don't you come here any more till I ask you."

Peter Pash groaned; and then rising he departed in a very disconsolate state of mind, for he considered himself to be far more worthy of pity than May Richards.

Story 3--Chapter VII.

May's Marriage.

The wedding day, and for once in a way a crisp, bright, hearty, frosty time—cold but inspiring; and at ten o'clock, pale and trembling, but nerved for her trial, May Richards stood suffering Keziah to give the finishing touches to her dress before starting for the church. There was to be no form; May had stipulated for that. The wedding was to be at

an old City church hard by, and in place of meeting her there Tom Brough had arrived, and was in the dining-room talking to old Richards bound to an easy-chair with gout, and too ill to think of going to the church.

As May entered at last, led in by Keziah, defiant and snorting, Tom Brough, active as a young man, hurried to meet the trembling girl, caught her in his arms, and kissed her fondly, heedless of the sigh she gave.

“Don’t look like that, my darling,” he whispered. “I’m going to make you happy as the day is long.”

May’s only reply was a look so full of misery and despair, that Keziah put her apron to her eyes and ran out of the room.

For a moment there was a shade as of uneasiness crossed old Richards’ face—it might have been a twinge of gout—but it passed on the instant.

“Don’t look like that, May!” he exclaimed angrily. “If you don’t know what is for your good you must be taught. Now, Brough, time’s going—get it over, man. She’ll be happier as soon as you have her away.”

“Yes, yes,” said Tom Brough tenderly. “Come May, my child, have you not one look for me?”

May placed her hands in his, and looked up in his face with the faintest dawning of a smile upon her lip, and this time she did not shrink back when he kissed her forehead, but hung upon his arm as if resigned to her fate; the sound of wheels was heard in the narrow street; the friends ready to accompany them were summoned from the room below—two old friends of Mr Brough’s, for old Richards had, as he often boasted, no friends; May was led out, the door was heard to close, wheels rattled away, and then, for a wonder, there fell a dead silence upon Walbrook, one which seemed to affect old Richards, even as he sat there looking haggard and drawn of feature, thinking of the past, and of the day he wed his own wife long before gold had become his care—almost his god. For the first time remorse had seized upon him, and it wanted not the words of Keziah Bay, who now entered the room, for reproach to be heaped upon his head.

But Keziah’s words were not fierce now, only the words of sorrow; and at last she sank down sobbing before him, and said:

“O, Master Richards—Master Richards—what have you done?”

He did not turn round fiercely to bid her begone, but shrank from her, farther and farther, into his great roomy chair, and at that moment, could he have done so, he would have arrested the farther progress of the ceremony, for remorse was beating strongly at his heart.

But the time was passed now, and with him action was impossible. He sat there motionless, listening to the sobs of his old servant till nearly an hour had passed, when suddenly Keziah rose, wiping her eyes, and saying,—

“I hadn’t the heart to go and see it, and now it is too late!”

“Yes, yes,” said old Richards softly; “it is now too late!”

The next moment Keziah was hurrying from the room, for there was the sound of wheels and a heavy knocking at the door, which she opened to admit old Tom Brough, red and excited, and his first act upon the door being closed was to catch Keziah round the waist, to hug her and give her a sounding kiss before waltzing her down the passage, she struggling the while till she got free, and stood panting, trembling, and boiling over with ire.

“It’s all right, ’Ziah!” he exclaimed, “the knot’s tied.”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that you ought,” panted Keziah, darting away to avoid another embrace. “And pray where’s Miss May?”

Tom Brough did not answer, he only hurried into the drawing-room, where old Richards sat upright, holding on by the arms of his chair.

“Where’s May?” he gasped, looking ashy pale; “why have you not brought her back?”

“Because she was not mine to bring,” said Tom Brough coolly. “Flunk Marr waylaid me, and he’s carried her off and married her.”

“Brough! this is a plot, and you are in it,” exclaimed old Richards fiercely, as he saw the serio-comic smile upon his friend’s countenance.

“Well, yes, I had a little to do with it,” Brough said quietly.

“And is dear Miss May really married to Mr Frank?” cried Keziah.

“Silence, woman,” roared old Richards. “Brough, I’ll never forgive you. You’ve planned all this with that beggar, and he’s swindled me out of a thousand pounds, and robbed me of my child! A rascally, lying beggar.”

“Gently, gently, my dear Richards,” said Tom Brough, coolly. “I don’t think that now I have taken him into partnership he is quite the beggar you imagine. What with that and your thousand, and what we—*we*, friend Richards—will leave them when we die, I don’t think there will be many men hold up their heads much higher in the City than Frank Marr. On the whole, I think your child has done well.”

“Brough, Brough,” exclaimed old Richards excitedly, “what does this all mean? In God’s name tell me, or I shall have

a fit.”

“In God’s name,” said Tom Brough, slowly and reverently, “it means that I, blessed as I have been with wealth, could not commit the grievous sin you wished against that sweet child I loved her too well to condemn her to such a fate, and Frank Marr found me more open to appeal than he did his father-in-law. I told him to come again to your office when he had been to me, and at my wish he accepted all your terms, though not without a deal of forcing on my part. He’s a fine, noble-hearted young fellow, Richards, and listening to me I tried to make matters work for the good of us all.”

He looked at old Richards as he spoke, but the old man was scowling at the wall.

“Would you have murdered your child, Richards?” said Tom Brough. “I tell you, man, that had your will been law the poor girl would not have lived a year, while now, with the husband she loves, she is waiting to ask your forgiveness for that for which I am solely to blame.”

“Keziah,” said Mr Brough softly, after a pause, and he whispered a few words in her ear—words whose effect was to send her from the room, but only to return in ten minutes, followed by Frank Marr, leading in his trembling wife.

Story 3--Chapter VIII.

Can’t it be To-Morrow?

There will doubtless be those ready to say that such things do not happen in real life—that rich men do not take poor men into partnership, nor yet give up handsome young wives on their wedding morn; but in spite of all that cynics may declare, there are men with hearts so large still to be found in this business-like world of ours—men who are ready to do any good to benefit another. And there are times when people do perform very eccentric acts, in proof of which must be related what took place in Walbrook that same evening, at a time when there was a merry party in the drawing-room, and old Richards’ face wore an expression that it had not worn for years. There came a ring at the door bell—a sneaking under-handed sort of ring; and on Keziah opening the door—behold Peter Pash!

“May I come in?” he said, modestly.

“Come in? yes, man,” cried Keziah, catching him by the coat, and giving him a snatch so that he was pulled into the passage, and the door banged behind him.

The next moment, to Peter’s utter astonishment—for he was ignorant of the morning’s changes—Keziah’s arms were round his neck.

“Peter dear, can’t it be to-morrow?”

“What! will you have me, then?” cried the little man in ecstasies, and the next moment there was the sound of such a kiss heard in that passage that it rolled along, vibrating from floorcloth to ceiling, and actually echoed; not that one would have recorded the fact, only this was such a tremendously big kiss, and one that echoes is really worthy of mention.

It could not “be to-morrow,” but it happened very soon after, and Tom Brough gave away the bride, while, talk about illuminations, Peter Pash’s house was a sight that drew together twelve small boys and an old woman, who stayed till the last dip went out and smelt unpleasant in the best room window; but it is not every man that can have an illumination at his own expense and of his own manufacture.

The gout proved too much for old Richards before another twelvemonths passed; but every one said that during the last year of his life he was another man.

The End.

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