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THE DEATH SHIP

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**THE DEATH SHIP  
A STRANGE STORY;**

AN ACCOUNT OF A CRUISE IN "THE FLYING DUTCHMAN," COLLECTED FROM THE PAPERS OF THE LATE MR. GEOFFREY FENTON, OF POPLAR, MASTER MARINER.

BY  
W. CLARK RUSSELL,  
AUTHOR OF  
"THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR," "THE GOLDEN HOPE," "A SEA QUEEN,"  
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES  
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## CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—I SAIL AS SECOND MATE IN THE SARACEN	<a href="#">1</a>
II.—WE MEET AND SPEAK THE LOVELY NANCY, SNOW	<a href="#">7</a>
III.—THE CAPTAIN AND I TALK OF THE DEATH SHIP	<a href="#">18</a>
IV.—WE ARE CHASED AND NEARLY CAPTURED	<a href="#">33</a>
V.—WE ARRIVE AT TABLE BAY AND PROCEED THENCE ON OUR VOYAGE	<a href="#">50</a>
VI.—THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS AGAIN OF THE DEATH SHIP	<a href="#">62</a>
VII.—I CONVERSE WITH THE SHIP'S CARPENTER ABOUT THE DEATH SHIP	<a href="#">75</a>
VIII.—A TRAGICAL DEATH	<a href="#">88</a>
IX.—MR. HALL HARANGUES THE CREW	<a href="#">98</a>
X.—WE DRAW CLOSE TO A STRANGE AND LUMINOUS SHIP	<a href="#">110</a>
XI.—A CRUEL DISASTER BEFALLS ME	<a href="#">122</a>
XII.—I AM RESCUED BY THE DEATH SHIP	<a href="#">136</a>
XIII.—WY ZYN AL VERDOMD	<a href="#">147</a>
XIV.—MY FIRST NIGHT IN THE DEATH SHIP	<a href="#">168</a>
XV.—I INSPECT THE FLYING DUTCHMAN	<a href="#">177</a>
XVI.—VANDERDECKEN SHOWS ME HIS PRESENT FOR LITTLE MARGARETHA	<a href="#">194</a>
XVII.—I TALK WITH MISS IMOGENE DUDLEY ABOUT THE DEATH SHIP	<a href="#">211</a>
XVIII.—THE DEATH SHIP MUST BE SLOW AT PLYING	<a href="#">245</a>
XIX.—I WITNESS THE CAPTAIN'S ENTRANCEMENT	<a href="#">259</a>
XX.—I HOLD A CONVERSATION WITH THE CREW	<a href="#">270</a>

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THE DEATH SHIP.

[1]

### CHAPTER I. I SAIL AS SECOND MATE IN THE SARACEN.

I will pass by all the explanations concerning the reasons of my going to sea, as I do not desire to forfeit your kind patience by letting this story stand. Enough if I say that after I had been fairly well grounded in English, arithmetic and the like, which plain education I have never wearied of improving by reading everything good that came in my way, I was bound apprentice to a respectable man named Joshua Cox, of Whitby, and served my time in his vessel, the Laughing Susan—a brave, nimble brigantine.

[2]

We traded to Riga, Stockholm, and Baltic ports, and often to Rotterdam, where, having a quick ear, which has sometimes served me for playing upon the fiddle for my mates to dance or sing to, I picked up enough of Dutch to enable me to hold my own in conversing with a Hollander, or Hans Butterbox, as those people used to be called; that is to say, I had sufficient words at command to qualify me to follow what was said and to answer so as to be intelligible; the easier, since, uncouth as that language is, there is so much of it resembling ours in sound that many words in it might easily pass for portions of our tongue grossly and ludicrously articulated. Why I

mention this will hereafter appear.

When my apprenticeship term had expired, I made two voyages as second mate, and then obtained an appointment to that post in a ship named the *Saracen*, for a voyage to the East Indies. This was *anno* 1796. I was then two-and-twenty years of age, a tall, well-built young fellow, with tawny hair, of the mariner's complexion from the high suns I had sailed under and the hardening gales I had stared into, with dark blue eyes filled with the light of an easy and naturally merry heart, white teeth, very regular, and a glad expression as though, forsooth, I found something gay and to like in all that I looked at. Indeed it was a saying with my mother that "Geff,"—meaning Geoffrey—that "Geff's appearance was as though a very little joke would set the full measure of his spirits overflowing." But now, it is as an old poet finely wrote: [3]

My golden locks time hath to silver turn'd,  
(O time, too swift, and swiftness never ceasing!)  
My youth, 'gainst age, and age at youth have spurn'd,  
But spurn'd in vain!

And here it is but right to myself that I should say, though as a sailor I am but an obscure person, yet as a man I may claim some pride and lustre of descent, an ancestor being no less a worthy than one of the boldest of Queen Elizabeth's sea-captains and generals—Edward Fenton, I mean, who was himself of a sound and ancient Nottingham stock; illustrious for his behaviour against the Spaniards in 1588, and for his explorations of the hidden passage of the North Sea, mentioned with other notable matters in the Latin inscription upon his monument by Richard, Earl of Cork, who married his niece. [4]

But enough of such parish talk.

The master of the *Saracen* was one Jacob Skevington, and the mate's name Christopher Hall. We sailed from Gravesend—for with Whitby I was now done—in the month of April, 1796. We were told to look to ourselves when we should arrive in the neighbourhood of the Cape of Good Hope, for it was rumoured that the Dutch, with the help of the French, were likely to send a squadron to recover Cape Town, that had fallen into the hands of the British in the previous September. However, at the time of our lifting our anchor off Gravesend, the Cape Settlement lay on the other side of the globe; whatever danger there might be there, was too remote to cast the least faint shadow upon us; besides, the sailor was so used to the perils of the enemy and the chase, that nothing could put an element of uneasiness into his plain, shipboard life, short of the assurance of his own or his captain's eyes that the sail that had hauled his wind and was fast growing upon the sea-line, was undeniably an enemy's ship, heavily armed, and big enough to cannonade him into staves. [5]

So with resolved spirits, which many of us had cheered and heartened by a few farewell drams—for of all parts of the seafaring life the saying good-bye to those we love, and whom the God of Heaven alone knows whether we shall ever clasp to our breasts again, is the hardest—we plied the capstan with a will, raising the anchor to a chorus that fetched an echo from the river's banks up and down the Reach; and then sheeting home our topsails, dragging upon the halliards with piercing, far-sounding songs, we gathered the weight of the pleasant sunny wind into those spacious hollows, and in a few minutes had started upon our long journey. [6]

Yet, though my parting with my friends had not been of a nature to affect my spirits, and though I was accounted to be, and indeed was, a merry, careless fellow, I was sensible of an unaccountable depression as, amidst the duties which occupied me, I would cast glances at the houses of Gravesend and the shore sliding by, and hear, in momentary hushes, tremulous tinkling sounds raised by the water wrinkling, current-like under our round and pushing bows.

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## CHAPTER II.

 [7]

### WE MEET AND SPEAK THE LOVELY NANCY, SNOW.

For days and days after we had cleared the Channel and entered upon those deep waters, which, off soundings sway in brilliant blue billows, sometimes paling into faint azure or weltering in dyes as purely dark as the violet, according as the mood of the sky is, nothing whatever of consequence befell. We were forty of a company. Captain Skevington was a stout but sedate sailor, who had used the sea for many years, and had confronted so many perils there was scarce an ocean-danger you could name about which he could not talk from personal experience. He was, likewise, a man of education and intelligence, with a manner about him at times not very intelligible, though his temper was always excellent and his skill as a seaman equal to every call made upon it. We carried six twelve-pounders and four brass swivels and a plentiful store of small-arms and ammunition. Our ship was five years old, a good sailer, handsomely found in all respects of sails and tackling, so that any prospect we might contemplate of falling in with privateers and such gentry troubled us little; since with a brave ship and nimble heels, high hot hearts, English cannon and jolly British beef for the working of them, the mariner need never doubt that the Lord will own him wherever he may go and whatever he may do. [8]

We crossed the Equator in longitude thirty degrees west, then braced up to the Trade Wind that heeled us with a brisk gale in five degrees south latitude, and so skirted the sea in that great African bight 'twixt Cape Palmas and the Cape of Good Hope, formerly called, and very properly, [9]

I think, the Ethiopic Ocean; for, though to be sure it is all Atlantic Ocean, yet, methinks, it is as fully entitled to a distinctive appellation as is the Bay of Biscay, that is equally one sea with that which rolls into it.

One morning in July, we being then somewhat south of the latitude of the island of St. Helena, a seaman who was on the topsail-yard hailed the deck, and cried out that there was a sail right ahead. It was an inexpressibly bright morning; the sun had been risen two hours, and he stood—a white flame of the blinding and burning brilliance he seems to catch up from the dazzling sands of Africa as he soars over them—in a sky of the most dainty sapphire fairness; not a cloud—no, not so big as a fading wreath of tobacco smoke anywhere visible, so that the ends of the sea went round with the clearness of the circle of a glass table, only that a small wind, very sweet and pleasant to every sense, blowing a little off our starboard bow, fluttered the ocean into a sort of hovering look, and its trembling caused the wake of the sun to resemble the leaping and frolicking of shoals of wet and sparkling mackerel.

[10]

We waited with much expectation and some anxiety for the stranger to approach near enough to enable us to gather her character, or even her nationality; for the experienced eye will always observe a something in the ships of the Dutch and French nations to distinguish the flags they belong to. It was soon evident that she was standing directly for us, shown by the speed with which her sails rose; but when her hull was fairly exposed, Captain Skevington, after a careful examination of her, declared her to be a vessel of about one hundred tons, probably a snow—her mainmast being in one with her foremast—and so we stood on, leaving it to her to be wary if she chose.

Whether she had at once made sure of us as an honest trader, I cannot say; she never budged her helm by so much as the turn of a spoke, but came smoothly along, a very pretty shining object, rolling on the soft, long-drawn swell in such a way as to dart shadows across the moonlike gleaming of her canvas with the breathings of their full bosoms—so that the sight reminded me of the planet Venus as I once beheld her after she had passed from the tincture of the ruby into the quick light of the diamond, lightly troubled by the swift passage of a kind of gossamer scud, as though the winds on high sought to clothe her naked beauty with a delicate raiment of their own wearing, from which she was forever escaping into the liquid indigo she loves to float in.

[11]

After a little the English ensign was seen to flutter at her fore-topgallant-masthead. To this signal we instantly replied by hoisting our colour; and shortly after midday, arriving abreast of each other, we backed our topsail-yard, she doing the like, and so we lay steady upon the calm sea, and so close, that we could see the faces of her people over the rail, and hear the sound, though not the words, of the voice of the master giving his orders.

[12]

It was Captain Skevington's intention to board her, as he suspected she was from the Indies, and capable therefore of giving us some hints concerning the Dutch, into whose waters, in a manner of speaking, we were now entering; accordingly the jolly boat was lowered and pulled away for the stranger, that proved to be the snow, Lovely Nancy, of Plymouth—name of cruel omen as I shall always deem it, though I must ever love the name of Nancy as being that of a fair-haired sister who died in her fifteenth year.

As many of my readers may not be acquainted with sea terms, it may be fit to say here, that a snow is nothing more than a brig, with the trifling addition of a thin mast abaft her mainmast, upon which her trysail or boom mainsail sets. I guess these vessels will always bear this name until their trysail-masts go out of fashion.

[13]

But to return.

I know not why I should have stood looking very longingly at that Plymouth ship whilst our captain was on board her; for though to be sure we had now been at sea since April, whilst she was homeward bound, yet I was well satisfied with the Saracen and all on board. I was glad to be getting a living and earning in wages money enough to put away; my dream being to save so much as would procure me an interest in a ship, for out of such slender beginnings have sprung many renowned merchant princes in this country. But so it was. My heart yearned for that snow as though I had a sweetheart on board. Even Mr. Hall, the mate, a plain, literal, practical seaman, with as much sentiment in him as you may find in the first Dutchman you meet in the Amsterdam fish-market, even he noticed my wistful eyes, and clapping me on the back, cries out—

[14]

"Why, Fenton, my lad, I believe you'd be glad to go home in that little wagon yonder if the captain would let ye."

"I believe I would, sir," I replied; "and yet if I could, I don't know that I would, either."

He laughed and turned away, ridiculing what he reckoned a piece of lady-like sentiment; and that it was no more, I daresay I was as sure as he, though I wished the depression at the devil, for it caused me to feel, whilst it was on me, as though a considerable slice of my manhood had slipped away overboard.

It is one of the few pleasures time permits to old men to recall the sweet, or gay, or fair pictures which charmed them when young. And which of all our faculties is more wonderful as a piece of mechanism, and more Divine in its life-giving properties, than Memory, which enables the Spirit to quicken dust that has lain for many years in the womb of time; to attire it and to return to it its passions, emotions, and all other qualities; to put back the cycles the sun has run and oblige him to shine on forms which were then infants, but are now grass-hidden ridges; on houses then stately but now long since swept away; on meadows and orchards then bright with daisies, ruddy with fruit, but now covered with houses and busy streets whose sidewalks echo to the tread of

[15]

generations more dream-like in that past to which the aged eye turns than ever can be the dead who then lived.

'Tis thus when I think of that Plymouth snow; for leaning back in my chair and closing these eyes, that morning shines all around me; the tremulous sea of blue, of a satin sheen in its tiny rippings, shot with milder tints where the currents run as though they were the thin fingers of the wind toying with the bosom of the deep, bends to the distant sky upon whose lowermost reaches it flings the same opal lustre it gathers at its horizon; the air blows fitfully, like the warm breathings from a woman's sweet lips, and sometimes stills our sails and sometimes suffers them to flutter in sounds soothing as the murmurs of a midsummer night breeze amid the high branches of a sleeping oak. The snow had black sides but was painted white from her water-line; and though there was no lack of draining weeds and clustered shells upon her bilge and run, yet, with every slow roll from us, the wet whiteness, taking the meridian effulgence, broke out in a glory as of virgin silver, enriched by the marine adhesions, into the very likeness of a resplendent mosaic of precious metal and green glass. [16]

Such magic has the sea to beautify whatever it is permitted to possess long enough for its powers of enrichment to work their way! [17]

Her canvas flashed out of shadow into brightness with every lift of the swell; the ripples ran a dissolving tracery along her bends, as dainty to see as the choicest lace; the weather-clouded faces of her men looked at us over the stout bulwark-rail that was broken by a few open ports through which you spied the mouths of little cannon; and it was laughable to mark her figurehead, that represented an admiral in a cocked hat—a cheap dockyard purchase, no doubt, for the effigy was ridiculously out of character and foolishly too big for the vessel—bowing to the blue surface that flowed in lines of azure light to the cutwater, as though there were some mermaid there to whom he would be glad to "make a leg," as the old saying was.

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### CHAPTER III. [18]

## THE CAPTAIN AND I TALK OF THE DEATH SHIP.

After three-quarters-of-an-hour, or thereabouts, Captain Skevington returned. We then trimmed to our course again, and, ere long, the Plymouth snow was astern of us, rolling her spread of canvas in a saluting way that was like a flourish of farewell.

Whilst the jolly boat was being hoisted, the captain stood gazing at the snow with a very thoughtful face, and then burying his hands in his pockets, he took several turns up and down the deck with his head bowed, and his whole manner not a little grave. He presently went to the mate, and talked with him, but it looked as though Mr. Hall found little to raise concern in what the captain said, as he often smiled, and once or twice broke into a laugh that seemed to provoke a kind of remonstrance from the master, who yet acted as though he were but half in earnest too; but they stood too far away for me to catch a syllable of their talk. [19]

It was my watch below at eight o'clock that evening. I was sitting alone in the cabin, sipping a glass of rum and water, ready to go to bed when I had swallowed the dose. There was but one lamp, hanging from a midship beam, and the cabin was somewhat darksome. The general gloom was deepened by the bulkhead being of a sombre, walnut colour, without any relief—such as probably would have been furnished had we carried passengers—from table-glass or silver, or such furniture. I mention these matters because they gave their complexion to the talk I am now to repeat.

Presently, down into this interior through the companion hatch comes Captain Skevington. I drained my glass and rose to withdraw. [20]

"Stop a minute, Fenton," says he; "what have you been drinking there?"

I told him.

"Another drop can't hurt you," said he; "you have four hours to sleep it off in." With which he called to the boy to bring him a bottle of brandy from his cabin. He bid me help myself whilst he lighted a pipe of tobacco, and then said: "The master of the snow we met to-day warns us to keep a bright look-out for the Dutch. He told me that yesterday he spoke an American ship that was short of flour, and learnt from the Yankee—though how Jonathan got the news I don't know—that there's a Dutch squadron making for the Cape, in charge of Admiral Lucas, and that among the ships is the Dordrecht of sixty-six guns and two forty-gun frigates."

"But should we fall in with them will they meddle with us, do you think, sir?" said I. [21]

"Beyond question," he answered.

"Then," said I, "there is nothing for it but to keep a sharp look-out. We have heels, anyway."

He smoked his pipe with a serious face, as though not heeding me; then looking at me steadfastly, he exclaimed, "Fenton, you've been a bit of a reader in your time, I believe. Did your appetite that way ever bring you to dip into magic, necromancy, the Black Art, and the like of such stuff?"

He asked me this with a certain strangeness of expression in his eyes, and I thought it proper to

fall into his humour. So I replied that in the course of my reading I might have come across hints of such things, but that I had given them too little attention to qualify me to reason about them or to form an opinion.

"I recollect when I was a lad," said he, passing my answer by, so to speak, "hearing an old lady that was related to my mother, tell of a trick that was formerly practised and credited, too; a person stood at a grave and invoked the dead, who made answer." [22]

I smiled, thinking that only an old woman would talk thus.

"Stop!" cried he, but without temper. "She said it was common for a necromancer to invoke and obtain replies; but that though answers were returned, they were not spoken by the dead, but by the Devil. The proof being that death is a separation of the soul from the body, that the immortal soul cannot inhabit the corpse that is mere dust, that therefore the dead cannot speak, themselves, but that the voices which seem to proceed from them are uttered by the Evil One."

"Why the Evil One?" said I.

"Because he delights in whatever is out of nature, and in doing violence to the harmonious fabric of the universe."

"That sounds like a good argument, sir," said I, still smiling. [23]

"But," continued he, "suppose the case of men now living, though by the laws of Nature they should have died long since. Would you say that they exist as a corpse does when invoked—that is, by the possession and voice of the Devil, or that they are informed by the same souls which were in them when they uttered their first cry in this life."

"Why, sir," I answered, "seeing that the soul is immortal, there is no reason why it should not go on inhabiting the clay it belongs to, so long as that clay continues to possess the physical power to be moved and controlled by it."

"That's a shrewd view," said he, seemingly well-pleased. "But see here, my lad! our bodies are built to last three score and ten years. Some linger to an hundred; but so few beyond, that every month of continued being renders them more and more a sort of prodigies. As the end of a long life approaches—say a life of ninety years—there is such decay, such dry-rot, that the whole frame is but one remove from ashes. Now, suppose there should be men living who are known to be at least a hundred and fifty years old—nay, add an average of forty to each man and call them one hundred and ninety years old—but who yet exhibit no signs of mortality; would not you say that the bounds of Nature having been long since passed, their bodies are virtually corpses, imitating life by a semblance of soul that is properly the voice and possession of the Devil?" [24]

"How about Methusaleh, and others of those ancient times?"

"I'm talking of to-day," he answered. "'Tis like turning up the soil to work back into ancient history; you come across things which there's no making anything of."

"But what man is there now living who has reached to a hundred-and-ninety?" cried I, still struck by his look, yet, in spite of that, wondering at his gravity, for there was a determination in his manner of reasoning that made me see he was in earnest. [25]

"Well," said he, smoking very slowly, "the master of that snow, one Samuel Bullock, of Rotherhithe, whom I recollect as mate of a privateer some time since, told me that when he was off the Agulhas Bank, he made out a sail upon his starboard bow, braced up, and standing west-sou'-west. There was something so unusual and surprising about her rig that the probability of her being an enemy went clean out of his mind, and he held on, influenced by the sort of curiosity a man might feel who follows a sheeted figure at night, not liking the job, yet constrained to it by sheer force of unnatural relish. 'Twas the first dogwatch; the sun drawing down; but daylight was yet abroad, when the stranger was within hail upon their starboard quarter, keeping a close luff, yet points off, on account of the antique fit of her canvas. Bullock, as he talked, fell a-trembling, though no stouter-hearted man sails the ocean, and I could see the memory of the thing working in him like a bloody conscience. He cried out, 'May the bountiful God grant that my ship reaches home in safety!' I said, 'What vessel was she, think you?' 'Why, captain,' says he, 'what but the vessel which 'tis God's will should continue sailing about these seas?' I started to hear this, and asked if he saw any of the crew. He replied that only two men were to be seen—one steering at a long tiller on the poop deck, and the other pacing near him on the weather side. 'I seized the glass,' said he, 'and knelt down, that those I viewed should not observe me, and plainly caught the face of him who walked.'" [26]

"How did Bullock describe him, sir?" said I. [27]

"He said he wore a great beard and was very tall, and that he was like a man that had died and that when dug up preserved his death-bed aspect; he was like such a corpse artificially animated, and most terrible to behold from his suggestions of death-in-life. I pressed him to tell me more, but he is a person scanty of words for the want of learning. However, his fears were the clearest relation he could give me of what he had seen."

"It was the Phantom Ship he saw, you think, sir?" said I.

"I am sure. He bid me dread the sight of it more than the combined navies of the French and the Dutch. The apparition was encountered in latitude twenty miles south of thirty-six degrees. 'Tis a spectre to be shunned, Fenton, though it cost us every rag of sail we own to keep clear."

"Then what you would say, captain," said I, "is, that the people who work that ship have ceased to be living men by reason of their great age, which exceeds by many years our bodies' capacity of [28]

wear and tear; and that they are actually corpses influenced by the Devil—who is warranted by the same Divine permission we find recorded in the Book of Job, to pursue frightful and unholy ends?"

"It is the only rational view," he answered. "If the Phantom Ship be still afloat, and navigated by a crew, they cannot be men in the sense that this ship's company are men."

"Well, sir," said I, cheerfully, "I reckon it will be all one whether they be fiends, or flesh and blood miraculously wrought to last unto the world's end, for it is a million to nothing that we don't meet her. The Southern Ocean is a mighty sea, a ship is but a little speck, and once we get the Madagascar coast on our bow we shall be out of the Death Ship's preserves."

[29]

However, to my surprise, I found that he maintained a very earnest posture of mind in this matter. To begin with, he did not in the least question the existence of the Dutch craft; he had never beheld her, but he knew those who had, and related tales of dismal issues of such encounters. The notion that the crew were corpses, animated into a mocking similitude of life, was strongly infixed in his mind; and he obliged me to tell him all that I could remember of magical, ghostly, supernatural circumstances I had read about or heard of, until I noticed it was half-an-hour after nine, and that, at this rate, my watch on deck would come round before I had had a wink of sleep.

However, though I went to my cabin, it was not to rest. I lay for nearly two hours wide awake. No doubt the depression I had marked in myself had exactly fitted my mind for such fancies as the captain had talked about. It was indeed impossible that I should soberly accept his extraordinary view touching the endevilmnt of the crew of the Death Ship. Moreover, I hope I am too good a Christian to believe in that Satyr which was the coinage of crazy, fanatical heads in the Dark Ages, that cheaply-imagined Foul Fiend created to terrify the weak-minded with a vision of split-hoofs, legs like a beast's, a barbed tail, flaming eyes, and nostrils discharging the sickening fumes of sulphur.

[30]

But concerning the Phantom Ship herself—the Flying Dutchman as she has been styled—'tis a spectre that has too often crossed the path of the mariner to admit of its existence being questioned. If there be spirits on land, why not at sea, too? There are scores who believe in apparitions, not on the evidence of their own eyes—they may never have beheld such a sight—but on the testimony of witnesses sound in their religion and of unassailable integrity; and why should we not accept the assurance of plain, honest sailors, that there may be occasionally encountered off the Agulhas Bank, and upon the southern and eastern coast of the African extremity, a wild and ancient fabric, rigged after a fashion long fallen into disuse, and manned by a crew figured as presenting something of the aspect of death in their unholy and monstrous vitality?

[31]

I turned this matter freely over in my mind as I lay in my little cabin, my thoughts finding a melancholy musical setting in the melodious sobbing of water washing past under the open port, and snatching distressful impulses from the gloom about me, that was rendered cloud-like by the moon who was climbing above our mastheads, and clothing the vast placid scene outside with the beauty of her icy light; and then at seven bells fell asleep, but was called half-an-hour later, at midnight, to relieve Mr. Hall, whose four hours' spell below had come round.

[32]

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## CHAPTER IV.

[33]

### WE ARE CHASED AND NEARLY CAPTURED.

We talked occasionally of the Phantom Ship after this for a few days, the captain on one occasion, to my surprise, producing an old volume on magic and sorcery which it seems he had, along with an odd collection of books, in his cabin, and arguing and reasoning out of it. But he never spoke of this thing in the presence of the mate who, to be sure, was a simple, downright man, without the least imaginable flavour of imagination to render sapid the lean austerity of his thoughts, and who, therefore, as you may suppose, as little credited the stories told of the Dutchman's ship as the Ebrew Jew believes in our Lord.

Hence, as there were but the captain and me to keep this shuttlecock of a fancy flying, it fluttered before long to the ground; perhaps the quicker, because on the Sunday following our speaking with the Plymouth snow, there happened a piece of work, sharp and real enough to drive all ideas of visions and phantasms out of our heads.

[34]

It was ten o'clock in the morning when a sail was descried broad on the larboard beam. We gave her no heed at first. It being the Sabbath, and a warm sweet morning, the men having nothing to do, hung about the decks, smoking, telling stories and the like; and being cleanly attired in jackets and white trousers, they contributed a choice detail to the general structure of well-kept decks, shining brass work, massive shrouds soaring from the black dead-eyes to the great round tops, with further rigging of a similar kind ruling the topmasts to the cross-trees, and on yet to the topgallant heights, ropes crossing ropes and ratline following ratline, till the tracery, both in its substance aloft and its shadows below and in the inclined hollows of the sails, puzzled the eye with the complexity of a spider's web; whilst from the water-ways to the lower yard-arms and thence to the ends of the yards above, mounted the vast sheets of canvas, each central surface arching in snow to the raining light of the sun, like the fair full breasts of a virgin, passed the taut

[35]

bolt-ropes, narrowing as they rose till, the royal-yards being reached, the sails there swelled yearning skywards as though they were portions of the prismatic ribbed and pearly beds of cloud directly over the ship, rent from them by the sweep of our trucks and knitted by our seamen to those lofty spars.

It was not long, however, before we made out that the vessel down in the eastern quarter was steering large, and at the time the appearance of her canvas assured us of this, she slackened away her larboard braces to head up for us, hauling upon a bowline with a suddenness that left her intention to parley with us questionless. [36]

We hoisted the English ensign and held on a bit, viewing her with an intentness that brought many of our eyes to a squint; then the captain, observing that she showed no colours and was a big ship, put his helm up for a run.

No sooner had we braced in our yards, when the fellow behind us squared away too, and threw out lower and topmast studding-sails with a rapidity that satisfied us she was a man-of-war, apparently a liner. This notion, joined to the belief that she was a Dutchman, was start enough for us all. Our small company were not likely to hold their own against the disciplined masses of a two or three decker, even though she should prove a Spaniard. Our guns were too few to do anything with tiers of batteries heavy enough to blow us out of water. So as there was nothing for it but a fair trial of speed, we sprung to our work like hounds newly unleashed, got her dead before it, ran out studding-sail booms on both sides and sent the sails aloft soaking wet for the serviceableness of the weight the wetness would give, and stationing men in the tops and cross-trees we whipped up buckets of water to them, with which they drenched the canvas, till our cloths must have looked as dark as a collier's to the ship astern of us. [37]

It was very slow work at first, and we were thankful for that; for every hour carried us nearer to the night into which the moon now entered so late and glowed with such little power, even when she had floated high, that we could count, after sundown, upon several hours of darkness; but it was not long before it became evident to us all that, spite of the ceaseless wetting of our sails, the ship in our wake was growing. Then, satisfied of her superiority, and convinced of our nationality, she let fly a fore-castle gun at us, of the ball of which we saw nothing, and hoisted the Dutch colours at her fore-royal masthead, where, at all events, we could not fail to distinguish the flag. [38]

"Confound such luck!" cries Skevington at this. "How can our apple-bows contend with those pyramids of sails there? What's to be done?" he says, as if thinking aloud. "It's clear she's our master in running, and I fear she'll be more than our match on a bowline—with the weather gage too! And yet, by the thunder of Heaven, Mr. Hall, it does go against the current of any sort of English blood to haul down that piece of bunting there," says he, casting his eyes at the peak where our flag was blowing, "to the command of a Dutchman's cannon!"

"The wind's coming away more easterly," said the mate, with a slow turning of his gaze into the quarter he mentioned, "and it'll be breezing up presently, if there's any signification in the darker blue of the sea that way." [39]

It happened as he said; but the Dutchman got the first slant of it, and you saw the harder pulling of his canvas in the rounded rigidity of light upon the cloths, whilst the dusky line of the wind, followed by the flashings of the small seas, whose leaping heads it showered into spray, was yet approaching our languid ship, whose lower and heavy canvas often flapped in the weak air.

A couple of shot came flying after us from the man-of-war's bowchasers ere the breeze swept to our spars; and now the silvery line of the white water that her stem was hewing up and sending in a brilliant whirl past her was easy to be seen; aye, 'twas even possible to make out the very lines of her reef-points upon the fore-course and topsail, whilst through the glass you could discern groups of men stationed upon her fore-castle, and mark some quarter-deck figure now and again impatiently bound on to the rail and overhang it like a davit, with an arm round a backstay, in his eagerness to see how fast they were coming up with us. [40]

With all element of terror in it extinguished by time, it is a sight to recall with a sailor's fondness; for indeed the Dutchman was a fine ship, very tall, with port-lids painted red inside, so that with the guns projecting from them, in two tiers, the aspect was that of rows of crimson, wolfish jaws, every beast with his tongue out; her yards were immensely square, and her studding-sail booms extending great spaces of canvas far over the side, she showed upon the dark blue frothing ocean like some Heaven-seeking hill, fleecily clad with snow to twenty feet above the water-line, where it was black rock down to the wash of the froth. In the freshening wind, as it came up to us, I seemed to catch an echo of the drum-like roll of the briskening gale in those airy heights, and to hear the seething of the boiling stuff at her forefoot. But, thanks be to Heaven, there was now a swift racing of foam from under our counter, whence it streamed away with a noise delicious to hearken to, as though it was the singing of the rain of a thunder-cloud upon hard land; for whenever the breeze gathered its weight in our canvas the Saracen sprang from it meteor-fashion, and away we sped with helm right amidships, and the wind flashing fair over the taffrail. [41]

The excitement of this chase was deep in us when the captain gave orders to train a couple of guns aft and to continue firing at the pursuing craft; which was done, the powder-smoke blowing like prodigious glistening cobwebs into our canvas forward. Meanwhile, the English colours flew hardily at our peak, whilst preventer guys were clapped on the swinging-booms and other gear added to give strength aloft; for the wind was increasing as if by magic, the ribbed clouds had broken up and large bodies of vapour were sailing overhead with many ivory-white shoulders crowding upon the horizon, and the strain upon the studding-sail tacks was extremely heavy. But [42]



you saw that it was Captain Skevington's intention to make the Saracen drag what she could not carry, and to let what chose blow away before he started a rope-yarn, whilst we had that monster astern there sticking to our skirts; and by this time it was manifest that with real weight in the wind our heels were pretty nearly as keen as hers, which made us hope that should the breeze freshen yet we might eventually get away.

Well, at three o'clock it was blowing downright hard, though the weather was fine, the heavens mottled, the clouds being compacted and sailing higher, stormy in complexion and moving slowly; the sea had grown hollow and was most gloriously violet in colour, with plumes of snow, which curled to the gale on the head of each liquid courser; the sun was over our fore-topgallant yard-arm and showered down his glory so as to form a golden weltering road for us to steer beside. The ship behind caught his light and looked to be chasing us on wings of yellow silk. But never since her keel had been laid had the Saracen been so driven. The waters boiled up to the blackfaced turbaned figure under the bowsprit, and from aft I could sometimes observe the glassy curve of the bow sea, arching away for fathoms forward, showing plain through the headrails. A couple of hands hung grinding upon the wheel with set teeth, and the sinews in their naked arms stood out like cords; others were at the relieving-tackles; and through it we pelted, raising about us a bubbled, spuming and hissing surface that might have answered to the passage of a whirlwind, repeatedly firing at the Dutch man-of-war when the heave of the surge gave us the chance, and noticing the constant flash in his bows and the white smother that blew along with him, though the balls of neither appeared to touch the other of us. [43] [44]

Yet, that we should have been ultimately overhauled and brought to a stand I fully believe but for a providential disaster. For no matter how dark the dusk may have drawn around at sundown, the Dutchman was too close to us to miss the loom of the great press of canvas we should be forced to carry: at least, so I hold; and then, again, there was the consideration of the wind failing us with the coming of the stars, for we were still in the gentle parallels. But let all have been as it might, I had just noted the lightning-like wink of one of the enemy's fore-chasers, when to my exceeding amazement, ere the ball of smoke could be shredded into lengths by the gale, I observed the whole fabric of the Dutchman's towering foremast, with the great course, swelling topsail, topgallant-sail and royal, and the fore-topmast staysail and jibs melt away as an icicle approached by flame; and in a breath, it seemed, the huge ship swung round, pitching and foaming after the manner of a harpooned whale, with her broadside to us, exhibiting the whole fore-part of her most grievously and astonishingly wrecked. [45]

A mighty cheer went up from our decks at the sight, and there was a deal of clapping of hands and laughter. Captain Skevington seized the telescope, and talked as he worked away with it.

"A rotten foremast, by the thunder of Heaven!" he cried, using his favourite adjuration; "it could be nothing else. No shot our guns throw could work such havoc. By the height that's left standing the spar has fetched away close under the top. And the mess! the mess!"

With the naked eye one could see that. The foremast had broken in twain; its fall had snapped off the jibbooms to the bowsprit cap, and I do not doubt a nearer view would have shown us the bowsprit itself severely wrenched. I could not imagine the like of that picture of confusion—her studding-sails, having been set on both sides, drowned all her forward part in canvas, a goodly portion of which had been torn into rags by the fall; immense stretches of sail lay in the water, sinking and rising with the rolling of the ship, and dragging her head to the wind; her main topmast studding-sails, and all the canvas on that mast and the mizzen—the yards lying square—were shaking furiously, owing to the posture in which she had fallen; every moment this terrible slatting threatened her other spars; and it needed not a sailor's imagination to conceive how fearfully all that thunderous commotion aloft must heighten the distracting tumult on deck, the passionate volleys of commands, the hollow shocks of seas smiting the inert hull, the shouting of the seamen, and, as we might be sure, the cries and groans of the many upon whom that soaring fabric of yards, sails, and rigging had fallen with the suddenness of an electric bolt from the clouds. [46] [47]

For a whole hour after this we touched not a rope, leaving our ship to rush from the Dutchman straight as an arrow from a bow. But, Lord!—the storming aloft!—the fierce straining of our canvas till tacks and guys, sheets and braces rang out upon the wind like the clanking of bells, to a strain upon them tauter than that of harp-strings; the boiling noises of the seas all about our bow and under our counter, where the great bodies of foam roared away into our wake, as the white torrent raves along its bed from the foot of a high cataract! There was an excitement in this speed and triumph of escape from what must have proved a heavy and inglorious disaster to us all which put fire into the blood, and never could I have imagined how sentient a ship is, how participant of what stirs the minds of those she carries, until I marked the magnificent eagerness of our vessel's flight—her headlong domination of the large billows which underran her, and the marble-hard distention of her sails, reminding you of the tense cheeks of one who holds his breath in a run for his life. [48]

Distance and the sinking of the sun, and the shadows which throng sharply upon his heels in these climes, left the horizon in course bare to our most searching gaze. We then shortened sail, and under easy canvas, we put our helm a-lee, and stood northwards on a bowline until midnight, when we rounded in upon our weather-braces and steered easterly, Captain Skevington suspecting that the Dutchman would make all haste to refit and head south under some jury contrivance, in the expectation that as we were bound that way when he fell in with us so we should haul to our course afresh when we lost sight of him. Yet in the end we saw him no more, and what ship he was I never contrived to learn; but certainly it was an extraordinary escape, though whether due to our shot, or to his foremast being rotten, or to its having been sprung and [49]

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## CHAPTER V.

[50]

### WE ARRIVE AT TABLE BAY AND PROCEED THENCE ON OUR VOYAGE.

But though, after this piece of severe reality, Captain Skevington had very little to say about such elusive and visionary matters as had before engaged us, it was clear from some words which he let fall that he regarded our meeting with the Dutch battleship as a sort of reflected ill-luck from the snow that had passed the Phantom Dutchman, and the idea possessing him—as indeed it had seized upon me—that the Lovely Nancy was sure to meet with misadventure, and might have the power of injuring the fortune of any vessel that spoke with her intimately, as we had, caused him to navigate the ship with extraordinary wariness. A man was constantly kept aloft to watch the horizon, and repeatedly hailed from the deck that we might know he was awake to his work; other sharp-eyed seamen were stationed on the forecastle; at night every light was screened, so that we moved along like a blot of liquid pitch upon the darkness. On several occasions I heard Captain Skevington say that he would sooner have parted with twenty guineas than have boarded, or had anything to do with, the snow. Happily, the adventure with the Dutchman led the seamen to suppose that the master's anxiety wholly concerned the ships of the enemy; for had it got forward that the Lovely Nancy had sighted Vanderdecken's craft off the Agulhas, I don't question that they would have concluded our meeting with the snow boded no good to us, that we were likely ourselves to encounter the spectral ship—if indeed she were a phantasm, and not a substantial fabric, as I myself deemed—and so perhaps have refused to work the Saracen beyond Table Bay.

[51]

[52]

At that Settlement it was necessary we should call for water, fresh provisions and the like; and on the sixth of July, in the year 1796, we safely entered the Bay and let go our anchor, nothing of the least consequence to us having happened since we were chased, the weather being fine with light winds ever since the strong breeze before which we had run, died away.

After eighty-one days of sea and sky the meanest land would have offered a noble refreshment to our gaze; judge then of the delight we found in beholding the royal and ample scenery of as fair and spacious a haven as this globe has to offer. But as Captain George Shelvocke, in the capital account he wrote of his voyage round the world in 1718, there points out, the Cape of Good Hope, by which he must intend Table Bay, has been so often described, that, says he, "I can say nothing of it that has not been said by most who have been here before."

[53]

We lay very quietly for a fortnight, feeling perfectly secure, as you may conclude when I tell you that just round the corner, that is to say, in Simon's Bay, there were anchored no less than fourteen British ships of war, in command of Vice-Admiral Sir George Elphinstone, of which two were seventy-fours, whilst five mounted sixty-four guns each. Meeting one of the captains of this squadron, Captain Skevington told him how we had been chased by a Dutch liner, and he replied he did not doubt it was one of the vessels who were coming to retake—if they could—the settlement we had captured from the nation that had established the place. But I do not think the notion probable, as the Dutch ships did not show themselves off Saldanha Bay for some weeks after we had sailed.

This, however, is a matter of no moment whatever.

[54]

We filled our water casks, laid in a plentiful stock of tobacco, vegetables, hogs, poultry, and such produce as the country yielded, and on the morning of the eighteenth of July hove short, with a crew diminished by the loss of one man only, a boatswain's mate, named Turner, who, because we suffered none of the men to go ashore for dread of their deserting the ship, slipped down the cable on the night of our departure, and swam to the beach naked with some silver pieces tied round him in a handkerchief. Behold the character of the sailor! For a few hours of such drunken jollity as he may obtain in the tavern and amid low company, he will be content to forfeit all he has in the world. It was known that this man Turner had a wife and two children at home dependent upon his earnings; yet no thoughts of them could suppress his deplorable, restless spirit. But I afterwards heard he was punished even beyond his deserts; for being pretty near spent by his swim, he lay down to sleep, but was presently awakened by something crawling over him that proved a venomous snake called a puff-adder, which, on his moving, stung him, whereof he died.

[55]

It was the stormy season of the year off South Africa; but, then, a few days of westerly winds would blow us into mild and quiet zones, and, come what might, the ship we stood on was stout and honest, all things right and true aloft, the provision-space hospitably stocked, and the health of the crew of the best.

'Twas a perfectly quiet, cheerful morning when we manned the capstan; the waters of the bay stretched in an exquisite blue calm to the sandy wastes on the Blaawberg side, and thence to where the town stands; the atmosphere had the purity of the object-lens of a perspective glass, and the far distant Hottentot Holland Mountains, with summits so mighty that the sky appeared to rest upon them, gathered to their giant slopes such a mellowness and richness of blue, that

[56]

they showed as a dark atmospheric dye which had run and stained before being stanch'd, that part of the heavens, rather than as prodigious masses of land of the usual complexion of mountains when viewed closely. That imperial height called Table Mountain, guarded by the amber-tinted couchant lion, reared a marvellously clear sky-line, and there the firmament appeared as a flowing sea of blue, flushing its full cerulean bosom to the flat altitude as though it would overflow it. But I noticed a shred of crawling vapour gather up there whilst the crew were chorussing at the capstan, and by the time our topsails were sheeted home there was a mass of white vapour some hundred feet in depth, foaming and churning atop, with delicate wings of it circling out into the blue, where they gyrated like butterflies and melted. The air was full of the moaning noises of the south-east wind flying out of that cloud down the steep abrupt full of gorges, scars, and ravines; and what was just now a picture of May-day peace became, on a sudden, a scene of whipped and creaming ripples; and the flashing on shore of the glass of shaken window-casements through spiral spirtings of reddish dust; hands aloft on the various ships at anchor, hastily furling the canvas that had been loosed to hang idly to the sun; flags, quite recently languid as streaks of paint, now pulling fiercely at their halliards; and Malay fishing-boats, darting across the bay in a gem-like glittering of water sliced out by their sharp stems and slung to the strong wind.

[57]

Under small sail we stormed out toward the ocean, with a desperate screaming of wind in the rigging; but there was no sea, for the gale was off the land; and after passing some noble and enchanting bays on whose shores the breakers as tall as our ship flung their resounding Atlantic thunder, whilst behind stood ranges of mountains putting a quality of solemn magnificence into the cheerful yellow clothing of the sunshine, with here and there a small house of an almond whiteness against the leaves of the silver trees and sundry rich growths thereabouts, in a moment we ran sheer out of the gale into a light wind, blowing from the north-west.

[58]

I don't say we were astonished, since some-while before reaching the calm part we could see it clearly defined by the line where the froth and angry blueness and the fiery agitation of the wind ended. Still, it was impossible not to feel surprised as the ship slipped out of the enraged and yelling belt into a peaceful sea and a weak new wind which obliged us to handle the braces and make sail.

Here happened an extraordinary thing. As we passed Green Point, where the weather was placid and the strife waged in the bay no longer to be seen, a large ship of six hundred tons, that we supposed was to call at Cape Town, passed us, her yards braced up and all plain sail set. She had some soldiers aboard, showed several guns, had the English colours flying and offered a very brave and handsome show, being sheathed with copper that glowed ruddy to the soft laving of the glass-bright swell, and her canvas had the hue of the cotton cloths which the Spaniards of the South American main used to spread, and which in these days form a distinguishing mark of the Yankee ships. Having not the least suspicion of the turmoil that awaited her round Mouille Point, she slipped along jauntily, ready to make a free wind of the breeze then blowing. But all on a sudden, on opening the bay, she met the whole strength of the fierce south-easter. Down she lay to it, all aback—stopped dead. Her ports being open, I feared if she were not promptly recovered, she must founder. They might let go the halliards, but the yards being jammed would not travel. It swept the heart into the throat to witness this thing! We brought our ship to the wind to render help with our boats; but happily her mizzen topmast broke, and immediately after, her main topgallant-mast snapped short off, close to the cross-trees; then—though it must have been wild work on those sloping decks—they managed to bring the main and topsail yards square; whereupon she paid off, righting as her head swung from the gale, and with lightened hearts, as may be supposed, they went to work to let go and clew up and haul down, whilst you saw how severe was the need of the pumps they had manned, by the bright streams of water which sluiced from her sides.

[59]

[60]

It was a cruel thing to witness, this sudden wrecking of the beauty of a truly stately ship, quietly swinging along over the mild heave of the swell, like a full-robed, handsome princess seized and torn by some loathsome monster, as we read of such matters in old romances. It was like the blighting breath of pestilence upon some fair form, converting into little better than a carcase what was just now a proud and regal shape, made beauteous by all that art could give her of apparel, and all that nature could impart of colour and lustre.

[61]

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## CHAPTER VI.

[62]

### THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS AGAIN OF THE DEATH SHIP.

I had the first watch on the night of the day on which we left Table Bay: that is, from eight till midnight; and at two bells—nine o'clock—I was quietly pacing the deck, full of fancies struck into me by the beauty of the stars, among which, over the starboard yard-arms, hung the Southern Cross, shining purely, and by the mild glory of the moon that, though short of a day or two of being full, rained down a keen light that had a hint of rosiness in it, when Captain Skevington came out of the cabin, and stepping up to me stood a minute without speaking, gazing earnestly right around the sea-circle.

There was a small wind blowing and the ship, under full sail, was softly pushing southwards with a pleasant noise as of the playing of fountains coming from the direction of her bows.

[63]

"A quiet night, Fenton," said the captain, presently.

"Aye, sir; quiet indeed. There's been a small show of lightning away down in the south-west. The wind hangs steady but a little faint."

"The sort of night for meeting with the Demon Ship, eh, Fenton?" cried he, with a laugh that did not sound perfectly natural.

"There's no chance of such a meeting, I fear, sir."

"You fear?"

"Well," I exclaimed, struck by his quick catching up of me, "I mean that as the Demon Ship, as you term her, is one of the wonders of the world, the seeing of her would be a mighty experience—something big enough in that way to keep a man talking about it all his life." [64]

"God avert such a meeting!" said he, lifting his hat, and turning up his face to the stars.

I suppose, thought I, that our drawing close to the seas in which the Phantom cruises has stirred up his superstitious fears afresh.

"Did you speak to any one at Cape Town about Vanderdecken, sir?" said I.

"No," he answered. "I had got my bellyfull from the master of the snow. What is there to ask?"

"Whether others have lately sighted the ship."

"Why, yes, I might have inquired, certainly, but it didn't enter my head. Tell ye what, though, Fenton, do you remember our chat t'other day about bodies being endevilled after they pass an age when by the laws of great Nature they should die?"

"Perfectly well, sir." [65]

"Now," continued he, "I was in company a few nights since where there was one Cornelius Meyer present, a person ninety-one years old, but surprisingly sound in all his faculties, his sight piercing, his hearing keen, memory tenacious, and so forth. He was a Dutch Jew, but his patriotism was coloured by the hue of the flag flying at Cape Castle: I mean he would take the King of Great Britain and the States-General as they came. When he left we talked of him, and this led us to argue about old age. One gentleman said he did not know but that it was possible for a man to live to a hundred-and-fifty, and said there were instances of it. I replied, 'Not out of the Bible,' where the reckoning was not ours. He answered, 'Yes, out of the Bible;' and going to a bookshelf, pulled down a volume, and read a score of names of men with their ages attached. I looked at the book and saw it was honestly written, and being struck by this collection of extraordinary examples, begged the gentleman's son, who was present, to copy the list out for me, which he was so obliging as to do. I have it in my pocket," said he, and he pulled out a sheet of paper, and then going to the hatch called to the boy to bring a lamp on deck. [66]

This was done, the lamp put on the skylight, and putting the paper close to it, the captain read as follows: "Thomas Parr, of Shropshire, died Nov. 16, 1635, aged one hundred and fifty-two; Henry Jenkins, of Yorkshire, died Dec. 8, 1670, aged one hundred and sixty-nine; James Sands, of Staffordshire, died 1770, aged one hundred and forty; Louisa Truxo, a negress in South America, was living in 1780, and her age was then one hundred and seventy-five."

I burst into a laugh. He smiled too, and said, "Here in this list are thirty-one names, the highest being that negress, and the lowest one, Susannah Hilliar, of Piddington, Northamptonshire, who died February 19th, 1781, aged one hundred. The young gentleman who copied them said they were all honestly vouched for, and wrote down a list of the authorities, which," said he, peering and bringing the paper closer to his eyes, "consist of 'Fuller's Worthies,' 'Philosophical Transactions,' 'Derham's Physico-Theology,' several newspapers, such as the 'Morning Post,' 'Daily Advertiser,' 'London Chronicle,' and a number of inscriptions." [67]

I could have been tolerably sarcastic, I daresay, when he mentioned the authority of the newspapers, always understanding that those sheets flourish mainly on lies, and I should have laughed again had I not been restrained by the sense that Captain Skevington was clearly "bitten" on this subject, actually worried by it, indeed, to such lengths, that if he did not mind his eye it might presently push into a delusion, and earn him the disconcerting reputation of being a madman; so I thought I would talk gravely, and said, "May I ask, sir, why you should have been at the pains to collect that evidence in your hand about old age?" [68]

"A mere humour," said he, lightly, putting the paper away, "though I don't mind owning it would prodigiously gratify me if I could be the instrument of proving that men can overstep the bounds of natural life by as many years again, and yet possess their own souls and be as true to their original as they were when hearty young fellows flushed with the summer colours of life."

Some fine rhymes coming into my head, I exclaimed, "Cowley has settled that point, I think, when he says:—

"To things immortal time can do no wrong,  
And that which never is to die for ever must be young."

"A noble fancy indeed!" cried the captain. He reflected a little, and said, "It would make a great noise among sailors, and perhaps all men, to prove that the mariners who man the Death Ship are not ghosts and phantoms as has been surmised, but survivors of a crew, men who have outlived their fellows, and are now extremely ancient, as these and scores of others who have passed away unnoticed have been," said he, touching his pocket where the paper was. [69]

"When, sir, did Vanderdecken sail from Batavia?" I asked.

"I have always understood about the year 1650," he replied.

"Then," said I, calculating, "suppose the average age of the crew to have been thirty when the Curse was uttered—we'll name that figure for the sake of argument—in the present year of our Lord they will have attained the age of hard upon one hundred and eighty."

"Well?" said he, inquiringly, as though there was yet food for argument.

I shook my head.

"Then," he cried, with heat, "they are endeavilled, for it must be one of two things. They can't be dead men as the corpse in the grave is dead."

"One could only judge by seeing with one's eyes," said I.

"I hope that won't happen," he exclaimed, taking a hasty turn; "though I don't know—I don't know! A something here," pressing his brow, "weighs down upon me like a warning. I have struggled to get rid of the fancy; but our being chased by the Dutchman shows that we did not meet that Plymouth snow for nothing; and, by the thunder of Heaven, Fenton, I fear—I fear our next bout will be with the Spectre."

His manner, his words, a gleam in his eye, to which the lantern lent no sparkle, sent a tremor through me. He caused me to fear him for a minute as one that talked with certainty of futurity through stress of prophetic craze. The yellow beams of the lantern dispersed a narrow circle of lustre, and in it our figures showed black, each with two shadows swaying at his feet from the commingling of the lamplight and the moonshine. The soft air stirred in the rigging like the rustle of the pinions of invisible night-birds on the wing; all was silent and in darkness along the decks, save where stood the figure of the helmsman just before the little round-house, outlined by the flames of the binnacle lamp; the stillness, unbroken to the farthest corners of the mighty plain of ocean, seemed as though it were some mysterious spell wrought by the stars, so high it went, even—so one might say—as a sensible presence to the busy, trembling faces of those silver worlds.

In all men, even in the dullest, there is a vein of imagination; whilst, like an artery, it holds sound, all is well. But sometimes it breaks, God knows how, for the most part, and then what is in it floods the intelligence often to the drowning of it, as the bursting of a vessel of the body within sickens or kills with hemorrhage. I considered some such idea as this to be applicable to Captain Skevington. Here was apparently a plain, sturdy sailor, qualified to the life for such talk as concerns ships, weather, ladings and the like; yet it was certain he was exceedingly superstitious, believing in such a Devil as the ancient monks figured forth, also in the possession of dead bodies by demons who caused them to move and act as though operated upon by the souls they came from their mothers with, with a vast deal of other pitiful fancies; and now, through our unhappy meeting with that miserable snow, he had let his mind run on the Phantom Ship so vehemently that he was not only cocksure we should meet the Spectre, but had reasoned the whole fabric and manning of her out on two issues; either that her hands were survivors of her original crew, persons who had cheated Nature by living to an age the like of which had not been heard of since the days of Moses and the prophets, beings who,

Like a lamp would live to the last wink  
And crawl upon the utmost verge of life;

or that they were mariners who, having arrived at the years when they would have died but for being cursed, had been seized upon by the Devil, quickened by him, and set a-going with their death-hour aspects upon them.

These reflections occupied my mind after he had left me, and I don't mind confessing that what with my own belief in the Death Ship, coupled with the captain's notions and the fancies they raised in me, along with the melancholy vagueness of the deep, hazy with moonshine, the stillness, and the sense of our drawing near to where the Spectre was chiefly to be met, I became so uneasy that I contrived to spend the rest of my watch on deck within a few paces of the wheel, often addressing the helmsman for the sake of hearing his voice; and I tell you I was mighty pleased when midnight came round at last, so that I could go below and dispatch the mate to a scene in which his heavy mind would witness nothing but water and sky, and a breeze much too faint to be profitable.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### I CONVERSE WITH THE SHIP'S CARPENTER ABOUT THE DEATH SHIP.

And now for six days it veritably seemed as if we were to be transformed into the marine phantom that, unsubstantial as she might be, yet lay with the heaviness of lead upon Captain Skevington; for, being on the parallel of Agulhas, a little to the south of that latitude, and in about sixteen degrees west longitude, it came on to blow fresh from the south-east, hardening after twenty-four hours into a whole gale with frequent and violent gusts, and a veering of it easterly; and this continued, with a lull of an hour or two's duration, for six days, as I have said. 'Twas a taste of Cape weather strong enough to last a man a lifetime. The sea lay shrouded to within a

musket-shot by a vapour of slatish hue that looked to stand motionless, and past the walls and along the roof of this wild, dismal, cloud-formed chamber, with its floor of vaults and frothing brows, the wind swept raving, raising a terrible lead-coloured sea, with heads which seemed to rear to the height of our maintop, where they broke, and boiled like a cauldron with foam, great masses of which the hands of the gale caught up and hurled, so that the lashing of the spray was often like a blinding snowstorm, but so smarting that the wind was as if charged with javelins.

Look upon the chart and you will see that for measureless leagues there is in these waters no land to hinder the run of the surges. Hence, when a fierce gale comes on from the east, south or west, the seas which rise are prodigious beyond such language as I have at command to express. We lay-to under a storm staysail with topgallant-masts struck, yards on deck and the lower yards stowed on the rail, the hatches battened down and everything as snug as good seamanship could provide. Our decks were constantly full of water; by one great sea that fell over into the waist there were drowned no less than six of the sheep we had taken in at the Cape, with a hog and many fowls; the carpenter's leg was broken by a fall, and an able seaman was deeply gashed in the face by being thrown against a scuttlebutt; 'twas impossible to get any food cooked, and throughout that week we subsisted on biscuit, cheese and such dry and lean fare as did not need dressing. In short, I could fill a chapter with our sufferings and anxieties during that period.

I had supposed that when brought face to face with the stern harsh prose of such weather as this, the mournful, romantic stuff that filled the captain's head would have been clean blown out of it; but no! he repeatedly said to me, and I believe on more than one occasion to Mr. Hall, that he considered this weather as part of the ill-luck that was bound to come to us from our having spoken a vessel that had been passed within hailing distance by the Phantom Ship.

On the fifth morning of the gale, the pair of us being in the cabin, he informed me that a man named Cobwebb, who was at the helm the night before, had told him that some of the crew were for putting this foul storm down to one Mulder, or some such name, who was a Russian Finn, a sober, excellent seaman, and one of the only two foreigners in our forecabin; that to neutralise any magical influence he might possess, a horse shoe had been nailed to the foremast and the mainmast pierced and scored with a black-handled knife. He smiled at these superstitions but did not seem to suspect that his own, as being received by a man of thought and tolerable education, might by many be deemed much more worthy of ridicule.

But on the sixth day the gale broke, leaving our ship considerably strained, by which time, in spite of the current and the send of the sea, we had contrived to make forty miles of southing and easting, owing to our pertinacity in making sail and stretching away on a board at every lull.

It was shortly after this, on the Tuesday following the Friday on which the gale ended, that, it being my watch on deck from eight o'clock in the evening till midnight, I carried my pipe, an hour before my turn arrived, into the carpenter's cabin, which he shared with the boatswain, to give the poor fellow a bit of my company, for his broken leg kept him motionless. It was the second dogwatch, as we term the time, 'twixt six and eight o'clock, at sea, the evening indifferently fine, the wind over the starboard quarter, a quiet breeze, the ocean heaving in a lazy swell from the south, and the ship pushing forward at five knots an hour under fore and main-royals. The carpenter lay in a bunk, wearing a haggard face, and grizzly for lack of the razor. He was a very sensible, sober man, a good artificer, and had served under Lord Howe in the fleet equipped for the relief of Gibraltar, besides having seen a deal of cruising work in earlier times.

He was much obliged by my looking in upon him, and we speedily fell to yarning; he lighted a pipe, and I smoked likewise, whilst I sat upon his chest, taking in with a half-look round, such details as a rude sketch of the bo's'n's wife nailed to the bulkhead, the slush lamp swinging its dingy smoking flame to a cracked piece of looking-glass over against the carpenter's bed, an ancient horny copy of the Bible, with type pretty nigh as big as the letters of our ship's name, a bit of a shelf wherefrom there forked out the stems of some clay pipes, with other humble furniture such as a sailor is used to carry to sea with him.

After a little, the carpenter, whose name was Matthews, says to me, "I beg pardon, sir, but there's some talk going about among the men concerning the old Dutchman that was cursed last century. My mate, Joe Marner, told me that Jimmy—meaning the cabin-boy—was telling some of the crew this morning, that he heard the captain say the Dutchman's been sighted."

"By anyone aboard us?" I asked.

"Mebbe, sir, but I didn't understand that."

Now, as every hour was carrying us further to the eastward of the Cape, away from the Phantom's cruising-ground, and as, moreover, the leaving gossip to make its own way would surely in the end prove more terrifying to the nervous and superstitious on board than speaking the truth, I resolved to tell Matthews how the matter stood, and with that, acquainted him with what the master of the snow had told Captain Skevington. He looked very grave, and withdrew his pipe from his lips, and I noticed he did not offer to light the tobacco afresh.

"I'm sorry to hear this, sir," says he.

"But," said I, "what has the Lovely Nancy's meeting with the Dutchman got to do with us?"

"Only this, sir," he exclaimed, with his face yet more clouded, and speaking in a low voice, as one might in a sacred building, "I never yet knew or heard of a ship reporting to another of having met the Dutchman without that other a-meeting of the Ghost too afore she ended her voyage."

"If that be so," I cried, not liking to hear this, for Matthews had been to sea for thirty-five years, and he now spoke with too much emotion not to affect me, "for God's sake don't make your

thoughts known to the crew, and least of all to the captain, who is already so uneasy on this head that when he mentions it he talks as if his mind were adrift." [83]

"Mr. Fenton," said the carpenter, "I never yet knew or heard of a ship reporting to another of having met the Dutchman, without that other meeting the Ghost too afore she's ended her voyage," and thus speaking he smote his bed heavily with his fist.

I was startled by the emphasis his repeating his former words gave to the assurance, and smoked in silence. He put down his pipe and lay awhile looking at me as though turning some matters over in his mind. The swing of the flame, burning from the spout of the lamp put various expressions, wrought by the fluctuating shadows, into his sick face, and it was this perhaps that caused his words to possess a power I could not feign to you by any art of my pen. He asked me if I had ever seen the Dutchman, and on my answering "No," he said that the usual notion among sailors was that there is but one vessel sailing the seas with the curse of Heaven upon her, but that that was a mistake, as it was an error in the same way to suppose that this ocean from Agulhas round to the Mozambique was the only place in which the Phantom was to be met. [84]

"There's a ship," said he, "after the pattern of this here Dutchman, to be found in the Baltic. She always brings heavy weather, and there's small chance afterwards for any craft that sights her."

"I've been trading in the Baltic for five years without ever hearing that," said I.

"But it's true all the same, Mr. Fenton; you ask about it, sir, when you get back, and then you'll see. There's another vessel, of the same pattern, that's to be met down in the mouth of the Channel, 'twixt Ushant and the Scillies, and thereabouts. A man I know, called Jimmy Robbins, saw her, and told me the yarn. He was in a ship bound home from the Spice Islands; they were in soundings, and heading round for the Channel; it was the morning watch, just about dawn, weather slightly thickish; suddenly a vessel comes heaving out of the smother from God knows where! Jim Robbins was coiling down a rope alongside the mate, who, on seeing the vessel, screams out shrill, like a woman, and falls flat in a swoon; Jim, looking, saw it was the Channel Death Ship, a large pink, manned by skeletons, with a skull for a figurehead, and a skeleton captain leaning against the mast, watching the running of the sand in an hour-glass he held. She was seen by twelve others, besides Jim and the mate, who nearly died of the fright. And the consequence of meeting her was, that the ship Jim Robbins was in was cast away on the following night on the French coast, down Saint Brihos way, and thirty-three souls perished." [85]

The gravity with which he related this, and his evident keen belief in these and the like superstitions, now rendered the conversation somewhat diverting; for, as I have elsewhere said, though I never questioned the existence of the one spectral ship, in a belief in which all mariners are united, holding that the deep, which is full of drowned men, hath its spirits and its apparitions equally with the land, yet when it came to such crude mad fancies as a vessel manned by skeletons, why, of course, there was nothing for it but to laugh, which I did, heartily enough, though in my sleeve, for seamen are a sensitive people, easily affronted, more especially in any article of their faith. However, he succeeded, before I left him, in exciting a fresh uneasiness in me by asseverating, in a most melancholy voice, and with a very dismal face, that our having spoken with the snow that had sighted the Dutchman was certain to be followed by misfortune; and these being amongst the last words he exchanged with me before I left his cabin, I naturally carried away with me on deck the damping and desponding impression of his posture and appearance as he uttered them, which were those of a man grieved, bewildered, and greatly alarmed. [86]

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## CHAPTER VIII. A TRAGICAL DEATH.

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For some time after I had relieved the deck, as it is termed, that is to say, after the mate had gone below and left me in charge, I had the company of the captain, who seemed restless and troubled, often quitting my side as we paced, to go to the rail and view the horizon, with the air of a man perturbed by expectation. I need not tell you that I did not breathe a word to him respecting my talk with the carpenter, not even to the extent of saying how fancies about the Dutchman were flying about among the crew, for this subject he was in no state of mind to be brought into. [88]

The moon was rising a little before he joined me, and we stood in silence watching her. She jutted up a very sickly faint red, that brightened but a little after she lifted her lower limb clear of the horizon, and when we had the full of her plain we perceived her strangely distorted by the atmosphere of the shape—if shape it can be called—of a rotten orange that has been squeezed, or of a turtle's egg lightly pressed; she was more like a blood-coloured jelly distilled by the sky, ugly and even affrighting, than the sweet ice-cold planet that empearls the world at night, and whose delicate silver the lover delights to behold in his sweetheart's eyes. But she grew more shapely as she soared, though holding a dusky blush for a much longer time than ever I had noticed in her when rising off the mid-African main; and her wake, broken by the small, black curl of the breeze, hung in broken indissoluble lumps of feverish light, like coagulated gore that had dropped from the wound she looked to be in the dark sky. [89]

There was a faintness in the heavens that closed out the sparkles of the farther stars, and but a [90]

few, and those only of the greatest magnitude, were visible, shining in several colours, such as dim pink and green and wan crystal; all which, together with one or two of them above our mastheads, dimly glittering amidst feeble rings, made the whole appearance of the night amazing and even ghastly enough to excite a feeling of awe in the attention it compelled. The captain spoke not a word whilst the moon slowly floated into the dusk, and then fetching a deep breath, he said—

"Well, thank God, if she don't grow round it's because of the shadow on her. Keep a bright look-out, Mr. Fenton, and hold the ship to her course. Should the wind fail call me—and call me too if it should head us."

With which he walked quietly to the hatch, stood there a moment or two with his hand upon it and his face looking up as though he studied the trim of the yards, and then disappeared. [91]

My talk with the carpenter and the behaviour of the captain bred in me a sense as of something solemn and momentous informing the hours. I reasoned with myself, I struggled with the inexplicable oppression that weighed down my spirits, but it would not do. I asked myself, "Why should the cheap, illiterate fears of such a man as the carpenter affect me? Why should I find the secret of my soul's depression in the superstitions of Captain Skevington, whose arguments as to the endevilmnt of the dead exhibited a decay of his intellect on one side, as phthisis consumes one lung, leaving the other sound enough for a man to go on living with?" And I recited these comfortable lines of the poet:—

"Learn though mishap may cross our ways,  
It is not ours to reckon when."

Yet in vain. There was an intelligence of my spirits that was not to be soothed, and I found myself treading about the deck, stepping lightly, as a man might who walks upon ground under which the dead lie, whilst I felt so much worried, down to the very bottom of my heart, that had some great sorrow just befallen me I could not have been sadder. [92]

As the night wore on the moon gathered her wonted hue and shape, though her refulgence was small, for the air thickened. Indeed, at half-past ten all the lights of Heaven, saving the moon, had been put out by a mist, the texture of which was illustrated by the only luminary the sky contained, around whose pale expiring disc there was now a great halo, with something of the character of a lunar rainbow in the very delicate, barely determinable tinctures, which made a sort of shadowy prism of it, more like what one would dream of than see. The ocean lay very black, there was no power in the moon to cast a wake, the breathings of the wind rippled the water and caused a scintillation of the spangles of the phosphorus or sea-fire, the weight of the lower sails kept them hanging up and down, and what motion the ship had was from the swelling of the light canvas that rose very pale and ghostly into the gloom. [93]

I had gone to the taffrail and was staring there away into the dark, whither our short wake streamed in a sort of smouldering cloudiness with particles of fire in it, conceiving that the wind was failing, and waiting to make sure before reporting to the captain, when I was startled by the report of a musket or some small arm that broke upon my ear with a muffled sound, so that whence it came I could not conceive. Yet, for some minutes I felt so persuaded the noise had been seawards that, spite of there having been no flash, I stood peering hard into the dark, first one side then the other, far as the sails would suffer me.

Then, but all very quickly, concluding that the explosion had happened aboard and might betoken mischief, I ran along the deck where, close against the wheel, I found a number of seamen talking hurriedly and in alarmed voices. I called out to know what that noise had been. None knew. One said it had come from the sea, another that there had been a small explosion in the hold, and a third was giving his opinion, when at that instant a figure darted out of the companion hatch, clothed in his shirt and drawers, and cried out, "Mr. Fenton! Mr. Fenton! For God's sake, where are you?" [94]

I recognized the voice of Mr. Hall, and bawled back, "Here, sir!" and ran to him. He grasped my arm. "The captain has shot himself!" he exclaimed.

"Where is he?" said I.

"In his cabin," he answered.

We rushed down together. The great cabin, where we messed, was in darkness, but a light shone in the captain's berth. The door was open, and gently swung with the motion of the ship. I pushed in, but instantly recoiled with horror, for, right athwart the deck lay the body of Captain Skevington, with the top of his head blown away. It needed but one glance to know that he had done this thing with his own hand. He had fired the piece with his foot by a string attached to the trigger, standing upright with his brow bent to the muzzle, for the bight of the string was round his shoe, and he had fallen sideways, grasping the barrel. [95]

The sight froze me to the marrow. Had I killed him by accident with my own hand I could not have trembled more. But this exquisite distress was short-lived. It was only needful to look at his head to discover how fruitless would be the task of examining him for any signs of life. Some of the seamen who heard Mr. Hall cry out to me about this thing had followed us below, forgetting their place in the consternation roused in them, and stood in the doorway faintly groaning and muttering exclamations of pity. Mr. Hall bid a couple of them raise the body and lay it in its bunk and cover it with a sheet, and others he sent for water and a swab wherewith to cleanse the place. [96]

"You had better go on deck again, Fenton," says he to me; "the ship must be watched. I'll join you



presently."

I was glad to withdraw; for albeit there was a ghastliness in the look of the night, the sea being black as ebony, though touched here and there with little sheets of fire, and stretching like a pall to its horizon that was drawing narrower and murkier around us minute after minute, with the wing-like shadow of vapour that was yet too thin to deserve the name of fog; though there was this ghastliness, I say, aided by the moon that was now little more than a dim, tarnished blotch of shapeless silver, wanly ringed with an ashen cincture, yet the taste of the faint breeze was as helpful to my spirits as a dram of generous cordial after the atmosphere of the cabin in which I had beheld the remains of Captain Skevington.

[97]

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## CHAPTER IX.

[98]

### MR. HALL HARANGUES THE CREW.

The news had spread quickly; the watch below had roused out and most of the men were on deck, and they moved about in groups striving to find out all about the suicide. The death of a captain of a ship at sea is sure always to fill the crew with uneasiness; a sense of uncertainty is excited, and then again there is that darkening of the spirits which the shadow of death particularly causes among a slender community who have been for months associated as a family, and amid whom, every man's face, speech, and manner are, maybe, more familiar than his own brother's or father's.

Yet of all the souls on board I suspect I felt the captain's self-murder most sorely, for owing to there being in my mind much more that was akin to his own moods than he could find in Mr. Hall, we had had many and long conversations together. Then there was the Death Ship for me to recall, with his thoughts on it and his conviction that evil was sure to follow his boarding the Plymouth snow. Moreover, I was the last with whom he had exchanged words that night, and in his manner of quitting me, after looking at the moon, there was positively nothing that even my startled and imaginative mind could witness to indicate the intention that had destroyed him.

[99]

Presently Mr. Hall arrived on deck fully dressed, and stepping over to where I stood in deep thought, exclaimed, "Did you have a suspicion that the captain designed this fearful act?"

"No, not a shadow of a suspicion," I answered.

"'Tis enough to make one believe he was not far out when he talked of the ill-luck he expected from speaking a craft that had sighted Vanderdecken," said he, very uneasily, which made me see how strong was the blow his nerves had received; and running his eyes restlessly over the water here and there, as I might tell by the dim sparkle the faint moon-haze kindled in them. "Oh, but," he continued, as if dashing aside his fancies, "the mere circumstance of his being so superstitious ought to explain the act. I have often thought there was a vein of madness in him."

[100]

"I never questioned that," I replied.

"'Tis an ugly-looking night," said he, with a little tremble running through him, "there is some menace of foul weather. We shall lose this faint air presently." He shivered again and said, "Such a sight as that below is enough to make a Hell of a night of midsummer beauty! It is the suddenness of it that seizes upon the imagination. Why, d'y'e know, Fenton, I'd give a handful of guineas, poor as I am, for a rousing gale—anything to blow my mind to its bearings, for here's a sort of business," looking aloft, "that's fit to suffocate the heart in your breast."

[101]

Such words in so plain and literal a man made me perceive how violently he had been wrenched. I begged his leave to go below and fetch him a glass of liquor.

"No, no," said he, "not yet, anyhow. I must speak to those fellows there."

Saying which he walked a little distance forward, calling for the boatswain.

On that officer answering, he said, "Are all hands on deck?"

"I believe most of the crew are on deck, sir," replied the boatswain.

"Pipe all hands," said Mr. Hall.

The clear keen whistling rose shrill to the sails and made as blythe a sound as could have been devised for the cheering of us up. The men gathered quickly, some lanthorns were fetched, and in the light of them stood the crew near to the round-house. A strange sight it was; the shining went no higher than half-way up the mainsail that hung steady with its own weight, and as much of it as was thus illuminated showed like cloth of gold pale in the dusk; above was mere shadow, the round-top like a drop of ink upon the face of the darkness, the sails of so weak a hue they seemed as though in the act of dissolving and vanishing away; the crowd of faces were all pale and their eyes full of gleaming; the shadows crawled at our feet, and, with the total concealment of the moon at this time, a deeper shade fell upon the sea and our ship, and the delicate rippling of the water alongside seemed to stir upon our ears in a tinkling as from out of the middle air.

[102]

Mr. Hall made a brief speech. He explained to the men how, on hearing the report of a musket, he had sprung from his bed, and perceiving powder-smoke leaking through the openings in the door of the captain's cabin, through which some rays of light streamed, he entered, and seeing the body of the captain, and the horrid condition of the head, was filled with a panic and rushed

[103]

on deck. That the master had shot himself was certain, but there was no help for what had happened. The command of the ship fell upon him; but it was for them to say whether he should navigate the ship to her destination, or carry her back to Table Bay, where a fresh commander could be obtained.

He was very well liked on board, being an excellent seaman; and the crew on hearing this, immediately answered that they wanted no better master to sail under than he, and that, indeed, they would not consent to a change; but having said this with a heartiness that pleased me, for I liked Mr. Hall greatly myself, and was extremely glad to find the crew so well disposed, they fell into an awkward silence, broken after a little by some hoarse whisperings. [104]

"What now?" says Mr. Hall.

"Why, sir," answers the boatswain, respectfully, "it's this with the men: there's a notion among us that that there Plymouth snow has brought ill-luck to the ship, one bad specimen of which has just happened; and the feeling is that we had better return to Table Bay, so as to get the influence worked out of the old barkey."

"How is that to be done?" says Mr. Hall, coming easily into the matter, partly because of his shaken nerves, and partly because of the kindness he felt towards the hands for the way they had received his address to them.

Here there was another pause, and then the boatswain, speaking somewhat shyly, said, "The carpenter, who's heard tell more about the Phantom Ship and the spell she lays on vessels than all hands of us put together, says that the only way to work out of a ship's timbers the ill-luck that's been put into them by what's magical and hellish, is for a minister of religion to come aboard, call all hands to prayer, and ask of the Lord a blessing on the ship. He says there's no other way of purifying of her." [105]

"Can't we pray ourselves for a blessing?" says Mr. Hall.

The boatswain not quickly answering, a sailor says, "It needs a man who knows how to pray—who's acquainted with the right sort of words to use."

"Aye," cried another, "and whose calling is religion."

Mr. Hall half-turned, as if he would address me, then checking himself, he said, "Well, my lads, there's no wind now, and small promise of any. Suppose we let this matter rest till to-morrow morning; Mr. Fenton and I will talk it over, and you forward can turn it about in your minds. I believe we shall be easier when the captain's buried and the sun's up, and then we might agree it would be a pity to put back after the tough job we've had to get where we are. But lest you should still be all of one mind on this matter in the morning, we'll keep the ship, should wind come, under small sail, so as to make no headway worth speaking of during the night. Is that to your fancy, men?" [106]

They all said it was, and thereupon went forward, but I noticed that those who were off duty did not offer to go below; they joined the watch on the forecastle, and I could hear them in earnest talk, their voices trembling through the stillness like the humming of a congregation in church following the parson's reading.

Mr. Hall came to my side and we walked the deck.

"I am sorry the men have got that notion of this ship being under a spell," said he. "This is no sweet time of the year in these seas; to put back will, I daresay, be only to anger the weather that's now quiet enough, and there's always the risk of falling into Dutch hands." [107]

I told him of my talk with the carpenter, and said that I could not be surprised the crew were alarmed, for the old fellow had the Devil's own knack of putting his fancies in an alarming way.

"I laughed at some of his fancies," said I, "but I don't mind owning that I quitted his cabin so dulled in my spirits by his talk, that I might have come from a death-bed for all the heart there was in me."

"Well, things must take their chance," said Mr. Hall. "I'll speak to the carpenter myself in the morning, and afterwards to the men; and if they are still wishful that the ship should return to Table Bay we'll sail her there. 'Tis all one to me. I'd liefer have a new captain over me than be one." [108]

We continued until five bells to walk to and fro the deck, talking about the captain's suicide, the strangeness of it as following his belief that ill-luck had come to the ship from the Plymouth vessel, with other such matters as would be suggested by our situation and the tragedy in the cabin; and Mr. Hall then said he would go below for a glass of rum; but he refused to lie down—though I offered to stand an hour of his watch, that is from midnight till one o'clock—for he said he should not be able to sleep.

Most of the crew continued to hang about the forecastle, which rescued the deck from the extreme loneliness I had found in it ere the report of the fatal musket startled all hands into wakefulness and movement. The lanthorns had been carried away and the ship was plunged in darkness. There still blew a very light air, so gentle that you needed to wet your finger and hold it up to feel it. From the darkness aloft fell the delicate sounds of the higher canvas softly drumming the masts to the very slight rolling of the ship. I went to the binnacle and found that the vessel was heading her course, and then stepped to the rail, upon which I set my elbows, leaning my chin in my hands, and in that posture fell a-thinking. [109]

## WE DRAW CLOSE TO A STRANGE AND LUMINOUS SHIP.

Now I might have stood thus for ten minutes, when I was awakened from my dream by an eager feverish muttering of voices forward, and on a sudden the harsh notes of a seaman belonging to my watch cried out, "D'ye see that sail, right broad a-beam, sir?"

I sprang from my leaning posture, and peered, but my eyes were heavy; the night was dark, and whilst I stared several of the sailors came hurriedly aft to where I stood, and said, all speaking together, "There—see her, sir? Look yonder, Mr. Fenton!" and their arms, to a man, shot out to point, as if every one levelled a pistol.

Though I could not immediately make out the object, I was not surprised by the consternation the sailors were in; for, such was the mood and temper of the whole company, that not the most familiar and prosaic craft that floats on the ocean could have broken through the obscurity of the night upon their gaze without tickling their superstitious instincts, till the very hair of their heads crawled to the inward motions. In a few moments, sure enough, I made out the loom of what looked a large ship, out on the starboard beam. As well as I could distinguish she was close hauled, and so standing as to pass under our stern. She made a sort of faintness upon the sea and sky where she was: nothing more. And even to be sure of her, it was necessary to look a little on one side or the other of her; for if you gazed full she went out, as a dim distant light at sea does, thus viewed. [111]

"She may be an enemy!" I cried. "There should be no lack of Dutch or even French hereabouts. Quick, lads, to stations. Send the boatswain here." [112]

I ran to the companion hatch and called loudly to Mr. Hall. He had fallen asleep on a locker, and came running in a blind sort of way to the foot of the ladder, shouting out, "What is it? What is it?" I answered that there was a large ship heading directly for us, whereupon he was instantly wide awake, and sprang up the ladder, crying, "Where away? Where away?"

If there was any wind I could feel none. Yet some kind of draught there must have been, for the ship out in the darkness held a brave luff, which proved her under command. We, on the other hand, rested upon the liquid ebony of the ocean with square yards, the mizzen furled, the starboard clew of the mainsail hoisted, and the greater number of our staysails down. Whilst Mr. Hall stared in the direction of the ship the boatswain arrived for orders. The mate turned smartly to me, and said, "We must make ready, and take our chance. Bo's'n, pipe to quarters, and Mr. Fenton, see all clear." [113]

For the second time in my watch the boatswain's pipe shrilled clear to the canvas, from whose stretched, still folds, the sounds broke away in ghostly echoes. We were not a man-of-war, had no drums, and to martial duties we could but address ourselves clumsily. But all felt that there might be a great danger in the pale shadow yonder that had seemed to ooze out upon our eyes from the darkness as strangely as a cloud shapes itself upon a mountain-top.

So we tumbled about quickly and wildly enough, got our little batteries clear, put on the hatch-gratings and tarpaulins, opened the magazine, lighted the matches, provided the guns with spare breeches and tackles, and stood ready for whatever was to come. All this we contrived with the aid of one or two lanterns, very secretly moved about, as Mr. Hall did not wish us to be seen making ready; but the want of light delayed us, and, by the time we were fully prepared, the strange ship had insensibly floated down to about three-quarters-of-a-mile upon our starboard quarter. [114]

At that distance it was too black to enable us to make anything of her, but we comforted ourselves by observing that she did not offer to alter her course, whence we might reasonably hope that she was a peaceful trader like ourselves. She showed no lights—her sails were all that was visible of her, owing to the hue they put into the darkness over her hull. It was a time of heavy trial to our patience. Our ship had come to a dead stand, as it was easy to discover by looking over the side, where the small, pale puffs of phosphoric radiance that flashed under water at the depth of a man's hand from our vessel's strakes whenever she rolled, no matter how daintily, to the swell, hung glimmering for a space in the selfsame spot where they were discharged. Nor was there the least sound of water in motion under our counter, unless it were the gurgling, drowning sobbing you hear there on a still night, when the stern stoops to the drop of the fold, and raises that strange, hollow noise of washing all about the rudder. [115]

"I would to mercy a breeze would come if only to resolve her!" said Mr. Hall to me in a low voice. "There's but little fun to be got out of this sort of waiting. At this rate we must keep the men at their stations till daylight to find out what she is. Pleasant if she should prove some lump of a Dutch man-of-war! She shows uncommonly large, don't you think, Fenton?"

"So do we to her, I dare say, in this obscurity," I replied. "But I doubt that she's a man-of-war. I've been watching her closely and have never once caught sight of the least gleam of a light aboard her." [116]

"Maybe the officer of the watch and the look-out are sound asleep," said he, with a slight and not very merry laugh; "and if she's steered on her quarter-deck she'll be too deep-waisted perhaps for the helmsman to see us."

I heard him say this without closely heeding it, for my attention at that moment was attracted by what was unquestionably the enlargement of her pallid shadow; sure proof that she had shifted her helm and was slowly coming round so as to head for us. Mr. Hall noticed this as soon as I.

"Ha!" he cried, "they mean to find out what we are, hey? They've observed us at last. Does she bring an air with her that she's under control, or is it that she's lighter and taller than we?"

It was beyond question because she was lighter and taller, and having been kept close-hauled to the faint draught had made more of it than we who carried it aft. Besides, we were loaded down to our chain-plate bolts with cargo, and the water and other stores we had shipped at the Cape. Yet her approach was so sluggish as to be imperceptible, and I would not like to say that our gradual drawing together was not as much due to the current which, off this coast, runs strong to the westward, setting us, who were deep, faster towards her than it set her from us, as it was also owing to the strange attraction which brings becalmed vessels near to each other—often indeed, to their having to be towed clear by their boats. [117]

Meanwhile, the utter silence on board the stranger, the blackness in which her hull lay hidden, the strangeness of her bracing-in her yards to head up for us without any signal being shown that she designed to fight us, wrought such a fit of impatience in Mr. Hall, that he swung his body from the backstay he clutched in movements positively convulsive. [118]

"Are they all dead aboard? On such a night as this one should be able to hear the least sound—the hauling taut of a tackle—the rasping of the wheel-ropes!"

"She surely doesn't hope to catch us napping?" said I.

"God knows!" cried the mate. "What would I give now for a bit of moon!"

"If it's to be a fight it'll have to be a shooting match for a spell, or wind must come quickly," said I. "But if she meant mischief wouldn't she head to pass under our stern, where she could rake us, rather than steer to come broadside on?"

Instead of responding, the mate sprang on to the bulwark-rail, and in tones such as only the practised and powerful lungs of a seaman can fling, roared out—

"Ho, the ship, ahoy!"

We listened with so fierce a strain of attention that the very beating of our hearts rung in our ears; but not a sound came across the water. Twice yet did Mr. Hall hail that pallid fabric, shapeless as yet in the dark air, but to no purpose. On this there was much whispering among the men clustered about the guns. Their voices came along in a low, grumbling sound like the growling of dogs, dulled by threats. [119]

"Silence, fore and aft!" cried the mate. "We don't know what she is—but we know what we are! and, as Englishmen, we surely have spirit enough for whatever may come."

There was silence for some minutes after these few words; then the muttering broke out afresh, but scattered, a group talking to larboard, another on the forecastle, and so forth.

Meanwhile the vessels, all insensibly, had continued to draw closer and closer to each other. A small clarification of the atmosphere happening past the stranger, suffered a dim disclosure of her canvas, whence I perceived that she had nothing set above her topgallant-sails, though it was impossible to see whether she carried royal-masts, or indeed whether the yards belonging to those masts were crossed on them. Her hull had now also stolen out into a pitch-black shadow, and after gazing at it with painful intentness for some moments, I was extravagantly astonished to observe a kind of crawling and flickering of light, resembling that which burnt in the sea, stirring like glow-worms along the vessel's side. [120]

I was about to direct Mr. Hall's attention to this thing, when he said in a subdued voice, "Fenton, d'ye notice the faint shining about her hull? What, in God's name, can it be?"

He had scarce uttered these words when a sailor on the starboard side of our ship, whom I recognised by the voice as one Ephraim Jacobs, an elderly, sober, pious-minded seaman, cried out with a sort of scream in his notes— [121]

"As I hope to be forgiven my sins for Jesu's sake, yon's the ship that was curst last century."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A CRUEL DISASTER BEFALLS ME.

The mere putting into words the suspicion that had been troubling all our minds made one man in action of the whole crew, like the firing of forty pieces of ordnance in the same instant. Whatever the sailors held they flung down, and, in a bound, came to the waist on the starboard side, where they stood, looking at the ship and making, amid that silence, the strangest noise that ever was heard with their deep and fearful breathing.

"Great thunder!" broke in one of them, presently, "d'ye know what that shining is, mates? Why, it's the glow of timbers that's been rotted by near two hundred years of weather."

"Softly, Tom!" said another; "'tis Hell that owns her crew; they have the malice of devils, and they need but touch us to founder us." [123]

"Wait, and you shall see her melt!" exclaimed one of the two foreigners who were among our company of seamen. "If she is, as I believe, she will be manned by the ghosts of wicked men who have perished at sea; presently a bell shall strike, and she must disappear!"

As this was said there was a commotion forward, and the carpenter, borne by two stout hands, was carried into the midst of the crew, and propped up so that he might see the ship. I was as eager as any of the most illiterate sailors on board to hear what he had to say, and took a step the better to catch his words. A whole minute went by whilst he gazed; so strained and anticipative were my senses that the moments seemed as hours. He then said, "Mates, yonder's the Death Ship, right enough. Look hard, and you'll mark the steeve of her bowsprit with the round top at the end of it, and the spring of her aft in a fashion more ancient than is the ages of any two of the oldest men aboard. Note the after-rake of her mizzen-mast, and how the heel of the foremast looks to step in the fore-peak. That's the ship—born in 1650—Vanderdecken master—what I've often heard tell of—raise my head, mates!"

[124]

And here, whether through pain or weakness or horror, he fainted, but being laid upon the deck, and some water thrown over his face, he came to in a short while, and lay trembling, refusing to speak or answer questions.

A slight thinning of the vapour that hid the moon had enabled us to remark those points in the ship the carpenter had named; and whilst he was being recovered from his swoon, the moon looked down from a gulf in the mist, but her light was still very tarnished and dim, though blurred and distorted as was her appearance, yet there instantly formed round her the same halo or wan circle that was visible before she was hidden. But her apparition made a light that exquisitely answered to those two lines of Shakespeare—

[125]

"Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
Pale in her anger washes all the air."

For such radiance as fell really seemed like a cleansing of the atmosphere after the black smother that had encompassed us, and now we could all see the ship distinctly as she lay on our quarter with her broadside somewhat to us, her yards trimmed like our own, and her sails hanging dead.

It was the solemnest sight that ever mortal eye beheld. The light left her black, so there was no telling what hue she showed or was painted. Her bows lay low in the water after the old fashion, with head-boards curling to her beak, that doubtless bore an ornament, though we could not distinguish it. There she rose like a hill, broken with the bulwarks that defined her waist, quarter-deck and short poop. This was as much as we could discern of her hull. Her foremast stood close to where the heel of her bowsprit came; her mizzen-mast raked over her stern, and upon it was a yard answering to the rig of a felucca; the clew of its sail came down clear of a huge lantern whose iron frame, for all the glass in it was broke and gone, showed like the skeleton of some monster on her taffrail. It was a sight to terrify the stoutest heart to see the creeping of thin, worm or wire-like gleamings upon the side she showed to us. I considered at first she was glossy and that those lights were the reflection of the phosphoric fires in the water under her; but it was soon made plain that this was not so, as, though to be sure a greenish glare of the true sea-flame would show against or near her when she slightly leaned, as we did, to the swell, this charnel-house or touch-wood glimmer played all along her without regard to the phosphorescence under her.

[126]

[127]

Now, ever since I was first going to sea, I had, as I have said, believed in the existence of the Spectre Ship, which all mariners I have sailed with feared to encounter; but so many imaginative stories had come of her—some feigning, as the carpenter's version showed, that she was a death ship, filled with spectres who navigated her; others that she was a spectral bark, laden with souls, against whom the gates of Purgatory were closed; others that she was a vessel for ever beating against gales of wind, sometimes appearing in a tempest that surrounded her when the rest of the ocean was smooth, sometimes rising from the waves, sometimes floating among the clouds, buffeting up there as though the masses of insubstantial vapour were solid and massy folds and acclivities; I say I had heard so many stories that they had ended in leaving me with a belief of my own, which was that the Phantom Ship—rightly so named—was an airy incorporeal thing—a vision to be encountered but rarely in these parts, a sea-ghost that had been too often beheld in the course of years to be denied, and as truly a spectre in its way as any that may be read of in Holy Writ, or that has stood at the bedsides of men and women and delivered messages from futurity.

[128]

This being my belief, then, though I was mightily terrified by the ancient shape of the ship and the mystery of her purpose, and the darkness and silence that clothed her, I could not believe that she was the true spectre that the sailor dreads; for, that she was as substantial as our vessel—"a quarry of stout spurs and knotted fangs"—was undeniable, not more from her quiet, heaving motion than from the dull sounds I had now and again caught of the movement of her gear aloft, such as the scraping of a rope in a block, or the soft slap of a cloth against a spar by the heave of the fabric setting some light sail a-fanning.

[129]

"What think you of her, Fenton?" said Mr. Hall, speaking softly, but with much of his excitement and uneasiness gone. "Does she resemble the craft that the master of the snow told Captain Skevington he sighted hereabouts?"

"Why, yes, I think so," said I; "but it does not follow that she is the Phantom Ship. The Plymouth hooker's yarn owed a good deal to terror, and it would not lose in its passage through the brain of a lunatic, as I fear poor Skevington was."

"She has a very solid look—she is a real ship, but the like of her I have never seen, save in old prints. Mark those faint fiery stripes and spirals upon her. I do not understand it. The wood that yields such light must be as rotten as tinder and porous as a sponge. It could not swim."

By this time the mysterious ship had floated out her whole length, unless it were our vessel that had slewed and given us that view of her. No light save the lambent gleams on her sides was to be seen. We could hear no voices. We could discern no movement of figures or distinguish any outline resembling a human shape upon her. On a sudden, my eye was caught by an illumination overhead that made a lustre strong enough to enable me to see the face of Mr. Hall. I looked up conceiving that one of our crew had jumped aloft with a lantern, and saw at our main yard-arm a *corpus sant* or St. Elmo's light, that shone freely like a luminous bulb, poised a few inches above the spar. Scarce had this been kindled, and whilst it was paling the faces of our seamen who stared at it, there suddenly shone two bright meteors of a similar kind upon the strange ship; one on top of the topgallant-masthead that was the full height of the main spars, and one on the summit of a mast that stood up from the round top at the end of the bowsprit and that in olden times, before it was discontinued, would have been called the sprit-topmast. They had something of the glory of stars; their reflection twisted like silver serpents in the dark waters; and as though they had been flambeaux or lamps, they flung their spectral glow upon the strangely-cut sails of the vessel, upon her rigging and spars, sickling all things to their starry colour, dimly illuminating even the distant castle-like poop, showing clearly the dark line of bulwarks, whilst a deeper dye of blackness entered into the hull from the shadow between the *corpus sants* on high and their mirroring beneath. [130] [131]

"Thanks be to God for the sight of those lights!" exclaimed a deep voice, sounding out among the men. "It's a saint's hand as kindles them, I've heard; and there'll be a breeze with luck behind it presently."

"See, Mr. Hall!" cried I, pointing; "do you observe the figures of men? Look along the line of the forecastle—one, two, three—I count six there; and look right aft on that bit of a poop. Do you mark a couple of shapes viewing us as if with folded arms?" [132]

"Yes!" He paused, staring, then added, "Those lights are familiar enough to me, I've seen them scores of times," speaking in whispers, which trembled back to their former notes of consternation, "but there's something frightful about them now—and yonder one," pointing to our yard-arm, "and the sight they show. She's no natural ship," he said, pulling off his cap, and passing his hand over his forehead. "Would to God a breeze would come and part us."

"Hail him again, sir!"

"Hail him you, my throat is dry."

I walked right aft to bring me more abreast of the silent motionless figures on the stranger's poop, and jumping on to the rail caught hold of the vang of the spanker-gaff to steady myself, and putting a hand to my mouth, roared out, "Ship ahoy! What ship is that?" and stopped breathless, so that I seemed to hear the echoes of my own voice among the sails of the stranger. [133]

"What ship is that?" now came back in a deep, organ-like note, and the two figures separated, one walking forward, and the other stepping, as I had, on to the bulwark over the quarter-gallery.

"The Saracen, of London, bound to Indian ports," I responded.

"I will send a boat!" cried the man, in the same deep-throated voice.

"If you do, we'll fire into it!" screamed a seaman on our deck. "Mates—Mr. Hall, you see now what he is! Keep them off!—keep them off!" at which there was a sudden hurrying of feet, with many clicking sounds of triggers sharply cocked, by which I knew our men had armed themselves.

The *corpus sant* at our yard-arm vanished; in a few seconds it showed itself afresh midway up the mainmast, making a wild light all around it; those on the stranger burned steadily, and I believed a third had been kindled on her till I saw it was a lantern carried along the deck. There was a stillness lasting some minutes. What they were about we could not see; anon came a creaking, as of ropes travelling in blocks, then a light splash; the lantern dropped jerkily down the ship's side, plainly grasped by a man; flashes of phosphorus broke out of the water to the dip of oars, like fire clipped from a flint. I felt a faint air blowing, but did not heed it, being half-frenzied with the excitement and fear raised in me by what I could now see—thanks to the light of the St. Elmo fires, and the mystic crawlings of flames on the vessel's sides. I saw a boat, square at both ends, with the gunwale running out into horns, rowed by two figures, whilst a third stood upright in the bows, holding high a lighted lantern in one hand, and extending his other arm in a posture of supplication. [134] [135]

At this instant a yellow glare broke in a noon-tide dazzle from our own ship's rail, and the thunder of twenty muskets fired at once fell upon my hearing. I started with the violence of the shock breaking in upon me, heedlessly let go the vang that I had been grasping with my left hand, and fell headlong overboard.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### I AM RESCUED BY THE DEATH SHIP.

I rose to the surface from a deep plunge, but being a very indifferent swimmer it was as much as I could do—clothed as I was—to keep myself afloat by battling with my hands. I heard the rippling of the water about my ears, and I felt a deep despair settle upon my spirits, for I knew that the air that blew would carry my ship away from me and that I must speedily drown.

Indeed, to the first impulse of wind the Saracen had moved and I could see her, a great shadow, drawing away with the *corpus sant*, that a minute before had sparkled on her mainmast, now shining on her fore-topsail yard-arm. I had not the least doubt that, in the noise of the shooting, and amid the general alarm excited by the approach of the boat, neither the splash I had made in striking the water nor my disappearance had been noticed, and I remember thinking with the swiftness peculiar to persons in my situation—for as Cowper says—

"He long survives who lives an hour  
In ocean self-upheld——"

I say I remember thinking that even if I should be immediately missed it was most unlikely the crew would suffer Mr. Hall to stop the ship and seek for me, for they would be mad not to use the new wind and sweep away from waters accurst by the presence of what was undoubtedly the Death Ship, whilst if even Mr. Hall's persuasion should prevail, yet long before that time I should have sunk.

I struggled hard to keep myself afloat, freely breaking the water in the hope that the light and whiteness of it might be seen. Four or five minutes thus passed and I was feeling my legs growing weighty as lead, when I noticed a light approach me. My eyes being full of wet, I could see no more than the light, what held or bore it being eclipsed by the spikes or fibres that shot out of it; as you notice a candle flame when the sight is damp. I could also hear the dip and trickle of oars, and tried to shout; but my brain was giddy, my mind sinking into a babbling state, and in truth I was so exhausted, that but for the sudden life darted into me by the sight of the lamp, I am sure I should then and there have clenched my hands above my head and sunk.

The lantern was flashed full upon my face and I was grasped by my hair. He who seized me spoke, and I believed it was the voice of one of the men in my watch, though I did not catch a syllable of his speech. After which I felt myself grasped under each arm and lifted out of the water, whereupon I no doubt fainted, for there is a blank between this and what followed, though the interval must have been very short.

When I opened my eyes, or rather when my senses returned to me, I found myself lying on my back, and the first thing I noticed was the moon shining weakly amid thin bodies of vapour which the wind had set in motion and which sped under her in puffs like the smoke of gunpowder after the discharge of a cannon. I lay musing a little while, conscious of nothing but the moon and some dark stretches of sail hovering above me; but my mind gathering force, I saw by the cut of the canvas that I was on board a strange ship; and then did I observe three men standing near my feet watching me. A great terror seized my heart. I sprang erect with a loud cry of fear, and rushed to the rail to see if the Saracen was near that I might hail her, but was stayed in that by being seized by the arm.

He who clutched me exclaimed in Dutch, "What would you do? If you could swim for a week you would not catch her."

I perfectly understood him, but made no reply, did not even look at him, staring about the sea for the Saracen in an anguish of mind not to be expressed. Suddenly I caught sight of the smudge of her, and perceived she was heading away on her course; she was out on our starboard beam. I cast my eyes aloft, and found the yards of the ship I was in braced up to meet the wind on the larboard tack, whence I knew that every instant was widening the space between the two vessels. On mastering this I could have dashed myself down on the deck with grief and terror. One of the group observing me as if I should fall, extended his hand, but I shrunk back with horror, and covered my face, whilst deep hysteric sobs burst from my breast, for now, without heeding any further appearances, I knew that I was on board the Phantom Ship, the Sea Spectre, dreaded of marines, a fabric accurst by God, in the presence of men dead and yet alive, more terrible in their supernatural existence, in their clothing of flesh whose human mortality had been rendered undecaying by a fate that shrunk up the soul in one to think of, than had they been ghosts—essences through which you might pass your hand as through a moonbeam!

I stood awhile as though paralysed, but was presently rallied by the chill of the night wind striking through my streaming clothes. A lantern was near where the three men were grouped, no doubt the same that had been carried in the boat, but the dim illumination would have sufficed for no more than to throw out the proportion of things within its sphere, had it not been helped by the faint moonlight and a *corpus sant* that shone with the power of a planet close against the blocks of the jeers of the mainyard. 'Twas a ghostly radiance to behold the men in, but I found nerve now to survey them.

There were three, as I have said: one very tall, above six feet, with a grey—almost white—beard, that descended to his waist; the second was a broad, corpulent man, of the true Dutch build without hair on his face; in the third man I could see nothing striking, if it were not for a ruggedness of seafaring aspect. I could not distinguish their apparel beyond that the stout man wore boots to the height of his knees, whereas the tall personage was clad in black hose, shoes with large buckles, and breeches terminating at the knees; their head-dresses were alike, a sort of cap of skin, with flaps for the ears.

"Do you speak Dutch?" said the tallest of the three, after eyeing me in silence whilst a man could have counted a hundred. He it was who had responded to my hail from the Saracen, as my ear

immediately detected—now that I had my faculties—by the deep, organ-like melodiousness and tremor of his voice. [143]

I answered "Yes."

"Why were your people afraid of us? We intended no harm. We desired but a little favour—a small quantity of tobacco, of which we are short."

This speech I followed, though some of the words, or the pronunciation of them, were different from what I had been used to hear at Rotterdam. He spoke imperiously, with a hint even of passion, and, rearing himself to his full stature, clasped his hands behind him, and stared at me as some Indian King might at a slave.

"Sir," said I, speaking brokenly, for I was a slow hand at his tongue, and besides, the chill of my clothes was now become a pain, "first let me ask what ship is this, and who are you and your men who have rescued me from death?"

"The name of this ship is the Braave," he answered, in his deep, solemn voice. "I, who command the vessel, am known as Cornelius Vanderdecken; the three seamen, to whom you owe your life, are Frederick Houtman, John de Bremen, and this man," indicating the rough, uncouth person who stood on his left, "the mate, Herman Van Vogelaar." [144]

I felt a sensation as of ice pressed to my chest when he pronounced his own name, yet, recollecting he had called his ship the Braave, I asked, though 'twas wonderful he could follow my utterance—

"What port do you belong to?"

"Amsterdam."

"Where are you from?"

"Batavia."

I said, "When did you sail?"

"On the twenty-second of July in last year! By the glory of the Holy Trinity, but it is dreary work; see how the wind heads us even yet!" He sighed deeply and glanced aloft in a manner that suggested grievous weariness. [145]

"Last year!" I thought, a sudden elation expanding my soul and calming me as an opiate might, "if that be so why, then, though this ship had made a prodigiously long voyage of it from Java to these parallels, there is nothing wildly out of nature in such tardiness." Last year! Had I caught the true signification of the words he used?

"Pray, sir," said I, speaking in as firm a voice as the shivers which chased me permitted, "what might last year be?"

The mate, Van Vogelaar, growled out some exclamation I could not catch, the captain made a gesture with his hands, whilst their burly companion said in thick, Dutch accents, "It needs not salt water, but good, strong liquor to take away a Hollander's brain."

"Last year!" exclaimed Vanderdecken, unbending his haughty, imperious manner, "why, mynheer, what should be last year but 1653?" [146]

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### WY ZYN AL VERDOMD.

[147]

When he said this I felt like one in whom there is suddenly wrought a dual action of the brain; where from one side, so to say, there is darted into the mind thoughts utterly illogical and insane, which the same side marvels at, and seeks to reject, though if the fit linger the whole intelligence may be seized.

I recollect of seeking for confirmation of the words of the man who styled himself Vanderdecken, in the ship, and of noticing, for the first time, that upon the planks of the deck which were out of the reach of the *corpus sant*, were the same crawling, elusive fires, as of phosphorus, creeping and coming and going upon a dark wall, which I had observed on the vessel's sides. Several figures of men moved forward. Close beside me was a small gun of the kind carried by ships in the beginning of the last century, termed a light saker, and discharging a six-pound ball. There were three of these on the larboard side, and, in the haze of the moonlight and the sheen of the jelly-like star that shone with a pure, pale gold over my head, I could discern upon the bulwarks of the quarter-deck and poop several swivels furnished with handles for pointing them. I also observed a short flight of steps conducting to the quarter-deck, with two sets of a like kind leading to the poop, the front of which was furnished with a door and little window. [148]

These matters I took in with a sweep of the eye, for the light was confusing, a faint, erroneous ray glancing from imperfect surfaces and flinging half an image; and then an indescribable fear possessing me again, I looked in the direction where I had last beheld the smudge made by the Saracen, and, not seeing her, cried out wildly, in my broken Dutch, "Sirs, for the love of God follow my ship, and make some signals that she may know I am here!" [149]



"Skipper," exclaimed the smooth-faced, corpulent man, who proved to be the boatswain, named Antony Jans, "after their cowardly inhumanity in firing upon a small unarmed boat, and putting in peril the life of our mate, Van Vogelaar, we should have nothing more to do with her."

"Henceforth this Englishman will know that the Dutch are a merciful people," said Van Vogelaar, scornfully. "Had our nationalities been reversed, he would have been left to drown as a tribute to the courage of his comrades."

Whilst this was said, Vanderdecken continued to regard me steadfastly and with great sternness, then on a sudden relaxing his frown, he exclaimed in that wondrous voice of his, which put a solemn music into his least utterance: "Come, you shiver with the cold, and have the look of the drowned. Jans, send Prins to me; sir, please to follow." [150]

He motioned in a haughty manner towards the poop and walked that way. One desperate look I cast round the sea, and then with a prayer to God that this experience might prove some eclipse of my reason from which my mind would float out bright afresh ere long, I followed the great figure of the captain, but with a step so faltering from weakness and grief, that he, perceiving my condition, took me by the elbow and supported me up the ladder to the cabin under the poop.

Whether it was this courtesy or owing to a return of my manhood—and I trust the reader will approve the candour with which I have confessed my cowardice—whatever might be the reason, I began now to look about me with a growing curiosity. The interior into which Captain Vanderdecken conducted me, was of a dingy yellowish hue, such as age might complexion delicate white paint with. An oil lamp of a very beautiful, elegant and rare pattern, furnished with eight panes of glass, variously and all choicely coloured with figures of birds, flowers and the like, though the opening at the bottom let the white light of the oil-flame fall fair on to the table and the deck, swung by a thin chain from a central beam. The cabin was the width of the ship, and on its walls were oval frames, dusky as old mahogany, each one, as I suspected, holding a painting. Over the door by which the cabin was entered was a clock and near it hung a cage with a parrot in it. Of ports I could see no remains, and supposed that by day all the light that entered streamed through the windows on either side the door. [151]

The deck was dark as with age. At the after end there were two state cabins bulkheaded off from the living room, each with a door. The several colours of the lamp caused it to cast a radiance like a rainbow, and therefore it was hard to make sure of objects amid such an intricacy of illumination; but, as I have said, the sides of the cabin were a sickly dismal yellow, and the furniture in it was formed of a very solid square table, with legs marvellously carved, and a box beneath it, two benches on either hand, and a black high-backed chair—the back of withered velvet, the wood framing it cut into many devices—at the head or sternmost end of it. [152]

All these things were matters to be quickly noticed. The captain, first removing his cap, pointed to a bench, and lifting his finger, with a glance at the starboard cabin, said in a low tone, "Sir, if you speak be it softly, if you please," and then directed his eyes towards the entrance from the deck, standing erect, with one hand on the table, and manifestly waiting for the person he had styled Prins to arrive. A ruby-coloured lustre was upon his face; his waist down was in the white lamplight. He had a most noble port, I thought, such an elevation of the head, such disdainful and determined erectness of figure, as made his posture royal. There was not the least hint in his face of the Dutch flatness and insipidity of expression one is used to in those industrious but phlegmatic people. His nose was aquiline, the nostrils hidden by the moustachios which mingled with his noble Druidical beard. His forehead was square and heavy, his hair was scanty, yet abundant enough to conceal the skin of his head; his eyes were black, impassioned, relentless, and a ruby star now shone in each which gave them a forbidding and formidable expression as they moved under the shadow of his shaggy brows. He wore a coat of stout cloth confined by buttons, and a belt round his waist. This, with his small clothes which I have described, formed a very puzzling apparel, the like of which I had never seen. There were no rents, nor darns nor patches—nothing to indicate that his attire was of great age. Yet there was something in this commanding person that caused me to know, by feelings deeper than awe or even fear, by instincts indeed not explicable, such as must have urged in olden times the intelligence to the recognition of those supernatural beings you read of in Scripture, that he was not as I was, as are other men who bear their natural parts in the procession from the cradle to the grave. The tremendous and shocking fears of Captain Skevington recurred to me, and methought as I gazed at the silent, majestic seaman, that the late master of the Saracen who, by his ending, had shown himself a madman might, as had other insane persons in their time, have struck in one of his finer frenzies upon a horrible truth; the mere fear of which caused me to press my hands to my eyes with a renewal of mental anguish, and to entreat in a swift prayer to that Being, whom he who stood before me had defied, for power to collect my mind and for quick deliverance from this awful situation. [153]

Not a syllable fell from the captain till the arrival of Prins, a parched-faced, bearded man, habited in a coarse woollen shirt, trousers of the stuff we call fearnought, and an old jacket. He made nothing of my presence nor condition, scarce glancing at me. [154]

"Get this Englishman a change of clothes," said the captain. "Take what may be needful from my cabin. They will hang loose on him but must serve till his own are dry. Quick! you see he shivers."

All this was expressed in Dutch, but as I have before said, of an antique character, and therefore not quickly to be followed; whence I will not pretend that I give exactly all that was spoken, though the substance of it is accurately reported. [155]

The man styled Prins went to the larboard cabin at the end, whilst the captain, going to the table,

pulled from under it a great drawer, which I had taken to be a chest, from which he lifted a silver goblet and a strangely-fashioned stone bottle.

"Drink, sir," he exclaimed, with a certain arrogant impetuosity in his way of pouring out the liquor and extending the goblet.

'Twas neat brandy, and the dose a large mouthful; I tossed down the whole of it, and placed the goblet, that was very heavy and sweetly chased, on the table with a bow of thanks.

"That will put fire into your blood," said he, returning the cup and bottle to the drawer, and then folding his arms and looking at me under his contracted brows, with his back to the lantern whilst he leaned against the table. "Are you fresh from your country?"

[157]

I told him that we had sailed in April from the Thames, and had lately come out of Table Bay.

"Is there peace between your nation and mine?" he inquired, speaking softly, as though he feared to awaken some sleeper, though, let his utterance be what it would, 'twas always melodious and rich.

I answered, "No; it grieves me to say it, but our countries are still at war. I will not pretend, sir, that Great Britain has acted with good faith towards the Batavian Republic; their High Mightinesses resent the infraction of treaties; they protest against the manner in which the island of St. Eustatia was devastated; they hope to recover the Cape of Good Hope, and likewise their possessions in the Indies, more particularly their great Coromandel factory."

Mere courtesy would have taught me to speak as soothingly as possible of such things, though, but for the brandy, I doubt if my teeth would not have chattered too boisterously for the utterance of even the few words I delivered. In honest truth, I felt an unspeakable awe and fear in addressing this man, who surveyed me with the severest, most scornful gaze imaginable from the height of his regal stature.

[158]

"Of what are you speaking?" he exclaimed, after a frowning stare of amazement; then waved his hand with a gesture half of pity, half of disdain. "You have been perilously close to death," he continued, "and this idle babble will settle into good sense when you have shifted and slept." He smiled contemptuously with a half-look around, as though he sought another of his own kind to address, and said as one thinking aloud, "If Tromp and Evertzens and De Witt and De Ruyter have not yet swept them off the seas 'tis only because they have not had time to complete the easy task!"

[159]

As he said this the clock over the door struck two. The chimes had a hollow, cathedral-like sound, as though indeed it was the clock of a cathedral striking in the distance. Glancing at the direction whence these notes issued, I was just in time to witness the acting of an extraordinary piece of mechanism, that is to say, there arose to the top of the clock-case, that was of some species of metal—the dial plate of blue enamel protected with horn instead of glass—there arose, I say, the figure of a skeleton, imitated to the life, holding in one hand an hour-glass on which he turned his eyeless sockets by a movement of the head, whilst with the other hand he grasped a lance or spear that, as I afterwards perceived, he flourished to every stroke of the clock-bell, as though he pierced something prostrate at his feet. The figure shrank into the inside of the clock when the chimes were over. As if to complete the bewilderment under which I laboured, scarce had the second chime of the clock rung its last vibration, when a harsh voice croaked out in Dutch—

[160]

"Wy Zyn al Verdomd!"

I started, and cried out involuntarily and faintly, "My God!"

"It was the parrot that spoke," said Captain Vanderdecken, with a softening of his looks, though he did not smile. "Tis the only sentence she seems able to pronounce. It was all she could say when I bought her."

"Have you had her long, sir?" I inquired, feeling as though I lay a-dreaming.

"I bought her from a Chinaman of Batavia two days before we sailed as a gift for my eldest daughter——"

Here he was interrupted by the arrival of Prins. "The clothes are ready, skipper," said he.

On this Vanderdecken, motioning me to be silent—a piece of behaviour that was as puzzling as all other things—conducted me to the cabin from which Prins had emerged, and viewing the clothes upon the bed, said, "Yes, they will do; wear them, mynheer, till yours have been dried. Leave this door on the hook, you will then get light enough for your purpose from yonder lamp."

[161]

The dress consisted of warm knitted stockings, breeches of an old pattern, and a coat with a great skirt embellished with metal buttons, several of which were missing, and the remains of some gold lace upon the cuffs. In addition, there was a clean linen shirt, and a pair of South American hide boots, fawn-coloured. 'Twas like clothing myself for a masquerade to dress in such things, but for all that I was mighty pleased and grateful to escape from my own soaked attire, which by keeping the surface of the body cold prohibited my nerves from regaining their customary tone. I went to work nimbly, observing that Captain Vanderdecken waited for me, and was soon shifted, but not before I had viewed the cabin, which I found to be spacious enough. The bed was curious, being what we term a four-poster, the upper ends of the posts cleated to the ceiling, whilst the lower legs were in the form of dolphins, and had one time been gilt with gold. There were curtains to it of faded green silk—as I judged—ragged in places. There were lockers, a small table, on which lay a fore-staff, or cross-staff as it was often called, a rude ancient instrument used for measuring the altitude of the sun before the introduction of Hadley's

[162]

quadrant, and formed of a wooden staff, having a scale of degrees and parts of degrees marked upon it, and cross-pieces which could be moved along it. By it stood a sand-glass for turning to tell the time by. Against the bulkhead that separated this from the adjoining cabin were hung two ox-eyed mirrors, the frames whereof had been gilt, also four small paintings in oak-coloured borders richly beaded. I could see that they were portraits of females, dim, the hues being faded. The ceiling of this cabin showed traces of having been, once on a time, very handsomely painted with the hand. [163]

Other things I noticed were a copper speaking-trumpet and an ancient perspective glass—such as poets of Vanderdecken's time would style an optic tube—very weighty, and formed of two tubes. This thing stood on brackets, under which hung a watch, of as true a sphere as an orange, and of the size of one.

Indeed, look where you would, you could not fail to guess how stout and noble a ship this Braave, as her captain named her, must have been in those distant years which witnessed her birth.

My costume made me feel ridiculous enough, for, whereas the boots might have belonged to a period when Shelvocke and Clipperton were plundering the Spaniards in the south seas, the coat was of a fashion of about thirty years past, whilst the breeches were such as merchant captains and mates wore when I was first going to sea. However, being changed and dry, I stepped forth, bearing my wet clothes with me, but they were immediately taken from me by Prins, who had been standing near the door unperceived by me. On my appearing, Captain Vanderdecken rose from the chair at the head of the table, but seemed to find nothing in my dress to amuse him. The vari-coloured light was extremely confusing, and it was with the utmost pains that I could discern the expression of his face, but, so far as I made out, it was one of extreme melancholy, touched with lights and shades by his moods, which yet left the prevailing character unchanged. Indeed, the dreadful fancies of Captain Skevington smote me fiercely once again, for, as I live to say it, the countenance of this tall and haughty seaman did suggest to me the melancholy you notice on the face of the dead—meaningless as that look in them may be—but in his case irradiated by the tints and expressions of vitality, insomuch that I fully felt the force of the remark the master of the Plymouth snow had made to Captain Skevington touching the man he had seen on board the Death Ship, namely, that he was a corpse artificially animated and most terrible to behold for his suggestions of death-in-life. [164] [165]

"Will you go to rest?" said he.

"I am willing to do whatever you desire," said I. "Your kindness is great and I thank you for it."

"Ay," he replied, "spite of the war I'd liefer serve an Englishman than one of any other country. The old and the young Commonwealths should be friends. On either hand there are mighty hearts, you in your Blakes, your Ayscues, your Monks; we in our Van Tromp, whom the King of Denmark, to my great joy before I sailed, honourably justified to the people of Holland, and in Van Galen, Ruyter, with other skilled and lion-hearted men, whom I shall glory in greeting on my return." [166]

He seemed to reflect a moment, and suddenly cried, with a passionate sparkle in his eyes, "But 'twas cowardly in your captain to order his men to fire upon our boat. What did we seek? Such tobacco as you could have spared, which we were willing to purchase. By the vengeance of Heaven, 'twas a deed unworthy of Englishmen."

I did not dare explain the true cause, and said, gently, "Sir, our captain lay dead in his cabin. The men, missing the chief, fell into a panic at the sight of this ship, for she showed large in the dusk, and we feared you meant to lay us aboard."

"Enough!" he exclaimed, imperiously. "Follow me to your cabin." [167]

He led the way on to the deck and we descended the quarter-deck ladder.

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## CHAPTER XIV. [168]

### MY FIRST NIGHT IN THE DEATH SHIP.

I had been in too great a confusion of mind to heed the movements of the ship whilst I was under cover, but on emerging I now noticed that it had come on to blow very fresh. The vessel under larboard tacks—I could not see what canvas she carried—lay along very much, being light and tall, and rolled with peculiar clumsiness in the hollows. I caught sight of the water over the weather-rail, and judged with the eye of a seaman that what progress she was making was wholly leeway; so that we were being blown dead to the eastward, without probably "reaching," as it is termed, by so much as half-a-knot an hour. The moon was now deep in the west and showing a very wan and stormy disk. North-west, where the land lay, the sea looked to rise into a fluid blackness of thunder-clouds, wherefrom even as I glanced that way there fell a red gash of lightning. There was a heavy sound of seething and bombarding billows all about us, and the whole picture had a wildness past language, what with the scarlet glare of the northern levin-brands and the ghastly tempestuous paleness of the westering moon and a dingy faintness owing its existence to I know not what, if it were not the light of the foaming multitudinous surge reflected upon the sooty bosoms of the lowering clouds over our stern. [169]

Captain Vanderdecken stood for a moment looking round upon this warring scene, and flung up

his arms towards the moon with a passionate savage gesture, and then strode to a narrow hatch betwixt the limits of the quarter-deck and the mainmast, down which he went, first turning to see if I followed. I now found myself in a kind of 'tween-decks, with two cabins on either hand, in the doorway of the fore one, on the starboard side, stood the man Prins, holding a small lantern. [170]

"This, sir," said Vanderdecken, pointing to the cabin, "must serve you for a sleeping room; it has not the comfort of an inn, but 'tis easy to see you are a sailor, and, therefore, one to whom a plank will often be a soft couch. In any case, here is accommodation warmer than the bottom of the ocean."

With a cold and condescending salute he withdrew. Prins hung the lantern on to a rail beside the door, and said he would return for it shortly. I wanted to ask the man some questions about the ship and her commander, but there was something about him so scaring and odd that I could not summon up heart to address him. He appeared as one in whom all qualities of the soul are dead, acting, in sooth, like a sleep-walker, giving me not the least heed whatever, and going about his business as mechanically as the skeleton in the cabin clock rose and darted his lance to the chimes of the bell. [171]

The compartment in which I was to sleep was empty of all furniture saving a locker that served as a seat as well as a box, and a wooden sleeping-place, formed of planks, secured to the side, in which, in lieu of a mattress, were a couple of stout blankets, tolerably new, and a sailor's bag, filled with straw, for a pillow. I was wearied to the bone, yet not sleepy, and lay me down in my strange clothes without so much as removing my boots, and in a few minutes Prins arrived and took away the light, and there I was in pitch darkness.

And yet I should not say this, for, though to be sure no sensible reflection penetrated the blackness, yet when the lamp was removed and my eyes had lost the glare of it, I beheld certain faint crawlings and swarmings of phosphoric light upon the beams and bulkheads, such as were noticeable upon the outside of the ship, only not so strong. I likewise observed a cold and ancient smell, such as I recollect once catching the breath of in the hold of a ship that had been built in 1702 and which people in the year 1791 or thereabouts viewed as a curiosity. Otherwise there was nothing else remarkable. Whatever this vessel might be, her motion on the seas was as natural as that of the Saracen, only that her wallowing was more ponderous and ungainly. Yet, merciful Heaven! how did every bulkhead groan, how did every timber complain, how did every treenail cry aloud! The noise of the labouring was truly appalling; the creaking, straining, jarring, as though the whole fabric were being dashed to pieces. I had not immediately noticed this when I followed Captain Vanderdecken below, but it grew upon my ears as I lay in the blackness. Yet they were natural sounds, and as such they afforded a sort of relief to my strained brain and nervous, yea, and affrighted imagination. The stillness of a dead calm would have maddened me, I truly believe. Phantasms and other horrors of my fancy, rendered delirious by the situation into which I had been plunged, would have played their parts upon that stage of blackness, hideous with the vault-like stirring of the glow of rotted timber, to the destruction of my intellect, but for the homely thunder of the sea without and the crazy echoes within. [172]

I asked myself what ship was this? That she had a supernatural life, that he who styled himself Vanderdecken—which tradition reported was the name of the master of the Phantom Ship, though it has been averred that his real name was Bernard Fokke—I say that he and the others I had seen, more particularly the man Prins, had something goblin-like about them, something that carried them far out of the range of our common humanity, spite of the majestic port, the noble presence, the thrilling tones, like the music of distant summer thunder, of the commander, I could no more question than the beating of my own heart as I lay a-thinking. I knew by what I had heard and viewed already, even in the brief hours packed full of consternation, during which I had been on her, that I was aboard of the Flying Dutchman, the Phantom Ship, the Death Ship, the Sea Spectre, as she has variously been termed. [173]

Yet there was so much to puzzle me that I was fit to lapse into idiotcy. If Vanderdecken had sailed from Batavia in 1653, why did he speak of it as last year? If the Death Ship was a ghostly object, impalpable, an essence only as is a spirit, why was this vessel so substantial that, heavily as she resounded with the crazy echoes of her material state, no first-rate could hold a stouter conflict with the seas? If she had been battling off the Agulhas for one hundred and forty-three years, how came she to have oil and waste for her lanterns, clothes such as I wore, such as the men I had seen were habited in, brandy, blankets almost new like those I lay on, and other stores; for I might be sure, from the jar of brandy the captain had produced, that the crew ate and drank as all men do and must! [174]

These and other points I could not reconcile to my conviction that the ship I was aboard of was the craft dreaded by all men because of the great God's ban upon her and the misfortunes she brought to others with the very winds which filled her canvas. I would have given all I owned—though, alack! that would have been small enough if I lost what belonged to me in the Saracen—for leave to keep the deck, but I did not venture for fear of incurring the displeasure of Vanderdecken. So for several hours did I lay broad awake in my black dungeon of a cabin, watching the loathsome, ghostly phosphoric glow all about me, and listening to the bellowing of the wind that had grown into a storm, and marking the furious rolling of the ship, whose wild inner creakings put a note of frenzy into the thunder of the gale; but never once hearing the sound of a human call nor the echo of a man's tread, I then fell asleep, but not before the dawn had broken, as I might tell by the radiance, which was little better than an ashen twilight, that streamed down the hatch and showed in an open space above the cabin door. [175]

## CHAPTER XV.

## I INSPECT THE FLYING DUTCHMAN.

I had scarcely fully woke up, when the man Prins opened the cabin door and peered in, and perceiving me to be awake, he entered bearing a metal pitcher of water, an earthenware dish, and a rough cloth for drying the skin. He put down the dish so that it could not slide, for the ship was rolling very heavily, and then poured water into it, and said, as he was in the act of withdrawing with the pitcher, "The skipper is on the poop."

I answered by asking him for my clothes. He shook his bearded, parchment-coloured face and said: "They are still sodden," and immediately went out.

I might have guessed they could not be dry, but I presented so hideous a figure in the apparel that had been lent to me that I should have been glad to resume my own coat and breeches, wet or no wet; but there was no help for it. I rose and plunged my face in the cold water, used my fingers for a comb, which sufficed, since I commonly wore my hair rough, having much of it and hating a tye, and putting on my hat that had held to my head in the water, and that had not been taken from me to dry, I stepped out of the cabin, climbed the steps that led through the hatch, and gained what was in former times termed the upper deck; for let me make you understand me by explaining that, beginning right aft, first there was a poop-deck elevated above the quarter-deck, which in its turn was raised above the upper-deck, along which you walked till you arrived at the fore-castle that went flush or level to the bows and was fortified by tall, stout bulwarks, with ports for fore-chasers. [178]

For some considerable while I stood near the hatch gazing about me, as this was my first view of the ship by daylight. Right opposite soared the mainmast, an immensely thick "made" spar, weightier than we should now think of using for a craft twice this vessel's size; the top was a large circular platform, protected by a fence-work half as tall as a man, looped for the projection of pieces such as culverins, matchlocks and the like. Under the top hung the mainyard, the sail was reefed and the yard had been lowered, and it lay at an angle that made me understand that but little was to be done with this ship on a bowline. The shrouds, which were very stout, though scarce one of them was of the thickness of another, came down over the side to the channels there, and the ratlines were all in their places, only that here again there was great inequality in the various sizes of the stuff used. There were iron hoops round the masts, all of them rusty, cankered, and some of them nearly eaten up. I looked at the coaming of the hatch, and observing a splinter, put my hand to it and found the wood so rotten that methought it would powder, and I turned the piece about betwixt my thumb and forefinger, but the miraculous qualities of the accursed fabric were in it and iron could not have been more stubborn to my pinching. The guns, which I had on the previous night recognised as an ancient kind of ordnance called sakers, were as rusty and eaten into as the mast-hoops. [179]

How am I, who have no paint but ink, no brush but a goose-quill, to convey to you an idea of the mouldiness and rottenness of this ship? 'Twas easy to guess why she glowed at night, when you saw the rail of her bulwarks and marked a rugged unevenness such as I might liken to the jagged edge you observe through a telescope in the moon on the side where the earth's shadow is, as though time had teeth, indeed, and was for ever gnawing at these banned and sea-tossed timbers as rats at a floor. [180]

There lay a great hatchway in front of the mainmast covered with tarpaulings, handsomely mended in a score of places. These matters I took in with a sailor's quickness; also that the ship was blowing away to leeward under reefed courses, above which no canvas was shown; also that the foresail and mainsail had a very dingy, collier-like look, and had manifestly been patched and repaired many times over, though whether their capacity of standing to a gale was due to the cloth being stout and substantial still, or because of their endeavilment, I could not tell, nor did I like to conjecture. There was no one to be seen, but, as I afterwards found out, that was because the crew were at breakfast below. [181]

I ascended the quarter-deck, and, perceiving Vanderdecken standing on the poop, went up to him, touching my hat as a sailor's salute; but the coat I was rigged out in was so outrageously clumsy and ample, that the wind, which blew very hard indeed, filling and distending the skirts of it, was within an ace of upsetting me, but, happily, a lurch of the ship swept me towards a mizzen backstay, to which I contrived to cling until I had recovered my breath and the surprise I was under. There was a small house in the middle of this poop, about ten feet from where the head of the tiller would come when amidships, possibly designed for the convenience of the captain and officers for making their calculations when in narrow waters, and for the storing of their marine instruments, flags and the like. Be that as it may, Captain Vanderdecken beckoned me to it, and under the lee of it the shelter was such as to enable us to easily converse. [182]

I looked at him as closely as I durst. His eyes were extraordinarily piercing and passionate, with the cruel brilliance in them such as may be noticed in the insane; the lower part of his face was hidden in hair, but the skin of as much of it as was visible, for his cap was dragged low down upon his brows, was pale, of a haggard sallowness, expressed best in paintings of the dead where time has produced the original whiteness of the pigment. It was impossible that I should have observed this in him in the mani-coloured lamplight of the preceding night. Yet did not his graveyard complexion detract from the majesty and imperiousness of his mien and port. I could readily conceive that the defiance of his heart would be hell-like in obstinacy, and that here was a man whose pride and passions would qualify him for a foremost place among the most daring of [183]

those fallen spirits of whom our glorious poet has written.

He was habited as when I first saw him. We stood together against this deck-house, and whilst he remained silent for some moments, meanwhile keeping his eyes fixed on me, my gaze went from him to the ship and the sea around us. It was a thick, leaden, angry morning; such weather as we had had a dose of in that storm I wrote about, and of which forerunners might have been found on the preceding night in the lightning in the north-west and in the halo that girdled the moon. The wind was west-north-west; the seas had the height and weight you find in that vast ocean, amid whose hollows we were driving; 'twas all greyness and a flying of spumy rain and a heavy roaring coming from the head of every sea as it arched its summit for the thunderous downwards rush that filled the valley at its foot with a boiling of white water. The sky was a hard leaden blankness; and whenever there came a break of faintness amid the seemingly stirless ceiling of vapour, you would see the scud, thin and brown, like drainings of smoke from a chimney-pot, flying with incredible velocity to the east and south. [184] [185]

But it was the sight of the ancient ship that rendered the warring ocean so strange a scene that, had I never before witnessed a storm at sea, I could not have wondered more at what I saw. She was lying to under her reefed fore and mainsail, surging dead to leeward on every scend of the billows, and travelling the faster for the great height of side she showed. From time to time a sea would strike her with a severe shock upon the bow or the waist, and often curl over in a mighty hissing and seething, though the wet quickly poured away overboard through the ports. Through the skeleton-iron frame of what had once been a great poop lantern, the blast yelled like an imprisoned maniac, and shook the metal with a sound as of clanking chains. The vessel had her topsail and topgallant-yards aloft, and the sails lay furled upon them. The height of her poop, the depth of her waist, the roundness of her great bulwarked bows, her beak, which I could just catch a glimpse of under her bowsprit, the unequal thickness of the rigging, the indescribable appearance of the sails, the hugeness of the blocks aloft; the whole plunging and rolling amidst the frothing troughs, whilst at the long tiller, the end ornamented with a lion's head, stood a strangely-attired, muffled-up man, grasping a rope wound round the tiller-head, presented such a picture of olden times, made as living as the current moment by the action of the seas, the vitality of the persons I gazed at, the solid substantiality of the aged fabric itself, that the memory of it often chills my brain with fear that I am crazed, and that my experience is but a black and melancholy fancy victorious over my understanding. [186]

And I say would to Heaven this were so, for better that my soul should be racked by a diseased and disordered mind than that I should have suffered the heart-breaking sorrow, the irreparable loss it is my present business to relate in this narrative. [187]

The captain, having inspected me narrowly, asked me how I had slept. I answered "Well," for I was now resolved to present a composed front to this man and his mates, be they and their ship what they would. I had given my nerves play and it was about time I recollected I was an Englishman and a sailor.

"All vessels but mine," said he, in his thrilling, organ-like voice, glancing about him with a scowl, "catch the luck of the wind. Had the weather lingered as it was for another three days, we should have had Agulhas on the beam and the ship's head north-west. 'Tis bitter hard, these encounters of storms, when a few hours of fair wind would blow us round the Cape."

He clenched his hands fiercely, and shot a fiery glance at the windward horizon. [188]

Just then the man styled Herman Van Vogelaar, the mate, arrived, and without taking the least notice of me, said something to the captain, but what, I did not catch; it doubtless referred to some job he had been sent forward to see to. I was greatly struck by the rugged, weather-beaten look of this man; his face in the daylight discovered a mere surface of knobs, and warts, and wrinkles, with a nose the shape of one end of a plantain that has been cut in two, and little, misty eyes, deep in their holes, and surrounded by yellow lashes; his dress was that of a sailor of my own time. But what affected and impressed me even more than did the utter indifference manifested towards my presence by him and by the helmsman—as though, indeed, I was as invisible as the wind—was the pallor underlying the lineaments of this mate. Had I been asked what would be the complexion of men dug up from their graves after lying there, I should have pointed to the countenances of Vanderdecken and Van Vogelaar—yes, and to Prins and the seaman who steered. It was, in truth, as though Captain Skevington had hit the frightful reality in his dark and dreadful ideas touching the crew of this ship being men who presented the aspect they would have offered at the time of their death, and who, wearing that death-bed appearance, were doomed to complete the sentence passed upon them—no longer "pensioners on the bounty of an hour," as the poet Young terms us mortals, but wretches, rendered supernatural by the impiety of that fierce but noble figure, whose falcon-flashing eye looked curses at the gale whilst I watched him. [189]

The mate left us and went to the helmsman, by whose side he stood as if conning the ship. The captain showed no heed of my presence for a minute or two; when, glancing at me, he said, "'Tis fortunate you speak Dutch, though your pronunciation has a strange sound. For my part, I just know enough of your tongue to hail a ship and to say, 'I will send a boat.' Where did you learn my language?" [190]

"I picked it up during several voyages I made to Rotterdam," I replied.

"Do you know Amsterdam?"

"No, sir," said I.

He mused a little, and then said, "They will think me lost or sunk by the guns of the enemy. Add the long and tedious voyage out to the months which have passed since last July!" he sighed deeply.

"When did you sail from Amsterdam, sir?" I inquired, for I was as particular as he to say "mynheer."

"On the First of November," he answered.

"In what year?" said I.

He cried out, fiercely, "Are your senses still overboard that you repeat that question? Certainly last year—when else?" [191]

I looked down upon the deck.

"I have reason to remember my passage through the narrow seas," continued he, speaking in a softened voice, as though his sense of courtesy upbraided him. "I sighted the squadron of your Admiral Ayscue and a frigate hauled out in chase of me, but the Braave was too fleet for her, and at dusk we had sunk the Englishman to his lower yards!"

As he said this I felt yet again the chill of a dread I had hoped to vanquish strike upon my senses like the air of a vault upon the face. It was impossible that I could now miss seeing how it was. If this man, together with his crew, were not endeavilled, as Captain Skevington had surmised, yet it was certain that life was terminated in him with the Curse his wickedness had called down upon his ship and her wretched crew. Existence had come to a stand in his brain; with him it was for ever the year of our Lord 1653; time had been drowned in the eternity of the punishment that had come upon him! [192]

I lifted my startled eyes to Vanderdecken's face and convulsively clasped my hands, whilst I thought of the mighty chapter of history which had been written since his day, and of the ashes of events prodigious in their time, and in memory still, which covered—as do the lava and scoræ the rocks of some volcanic-created island—the years from the hour of his doom down to the moment of our meeting. The peace of 1654—the later war of 1665—Ruyter at Sheerness and Chatham and in the Hope—a stadtholder of Vanderdecken's country becoming a King of England—the peace of Ryswick—Malplaquet—the semi-Gallican founding of the Batavian Republic—with how much more that my memory did not carry? All as non-existent to this man at my side as to any human creature who had died at the hour when the Death Ship sailed on her last passage home from the island of Java! [193]

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## CHAPTER XVI.

 [194]

### VANDERDECKEN SHOWS ME HIS PRESENT FOR LITTLE MARGARETHA.

At this moment Prins stepped on to the poop, and informed the captain that breakfast was ready.

"Sir," said Vanderdecken to me, with a courtesy that I guessed to be as capricious as his passion, "you will have feared I meant to starve you."

"No, mynheer," I replied.

"You will find our fare poor," he continued. "Be pleased to follow me."

"Sir," said I, "forgive me if I detain you for an instant. I am too sensible of your kindness not to desire that you will enable me to merit it by serving you in the navigation of this ship in any capacity you choose to name, until we meet with a vessel that shall rid you of my presence." [195]

"You appear to have but a poor opinion of us Dutch," said he, still speaking with courtesy; "be pleased to know that a Hollander is never happier than in relieving distress. But come, sir, the shelter of the cabin will be grateful to you after this stormy deck."

I said no more, and gathering the flapping skirts of the coat on me to my side, that the gale might not sweep me off my legs, I followed him into the cabin under the poop, marvelling, as I went, at the miracle wrought on behalf of this ship, that her hold should still yield provisions and water for her crew after a century-and-a-half of use.

Now you will have deemed by this time that I had supped full enough of surprises. But conceive of my astonishment on entering the cabin, that was less darksome than I should have conceived it, on seeing a girl of from eighteen to twenty years of age, seated at the table on the right hand of the captain's chair! [196]

I came to a stand, struck motionless with astonishment; whilst she, uttering an exclamation of surprise, hastily rose and stood staring at me, leaning with her right hand on the table to steady herself. It was as certain that she had been as ignorant of my presence on board as I, to this instant, of her existence. The thought that instantly flashed upon me was that she was Vanderdecken's daughter, that the Curse that had fallen on the ship included her, as it had all others of the vessel's miserable company of men, and that in consonance with Captain Skevington's mad but astonishing theory, touching the people of this Death Ship, she discovered

the appearance she would have presented at the hour of her death, though vitalised in that aspect by the sentence that kept the Braave afloat and her people quick and sentient. I was the more willing to suppose this by her apparel, which was of the kind I had seen in old Dutch paintings at Rotterdam, for it consisted of a black velvet jacket, very beautifully fitting her figure, trimmed with fur and enriched with many small golden buttons; a green silk gown, plain and very full, as though made for a bigger woman. There was a rope of pearls round her neck, and I spied a diamond of great splendour blazing on the forefinger of the hand on which she leaned. She wore small red shoes and her hair was undressed. [197]

Observation and the power of comprehending what one sees are rapid, otherwise it would have been impossible for me to have mastered the details I have set before you in the short time that intervened between my entering the cabin and seating myself at the table. Yet, short as that time was, it enabled me to witness in this girl such sweetness, fairness and loveliness of face as I vow no man could conceive the truth of who had not beheld it with his own eyes. 'Tis an old poet who writes of "the still harmony, whose diapason lies within a brow," and of the "sweet silent rhetorick of persuading eyes," and another more delicately choice yet in fancy, of [198]

"The daintie touch,  
The tender flesh, the colour bright, and such  
As Parians see in marble, skin more fair,  
More glorious head and far more glorious hair;  
Eyes full of grace and quickness, purer roses——"

but of this beauty, shining sun-like in that labouring ancient cabin, gazing at me half-wistful, half-amazed, with an inclined posture of her form as though she would on a sudden race to greet me, what could the noblest poet of them all sing, only to tell of the soft violet of her eyes, of her hair of dusky gold, self-luminous as though the gilding light of a ruddy beam of sunset lingered amid the thick abundant tresses heedlessly knotted with a riband a little lower than the line of the ears, thence falling in a bright loose shower down her back, whilst over her forehead, white as though wrought out of the sea foam, the gilded curls were gathered in a shadow only a little darker than amber. [199]

All this I saw and more yet, for whilst I stood looking at her the mate of the ship, Van Vogelaar, arrived, and both he and the captain, and the man Prins, turning their faces towards me, the warmth, the life of her skin, the living reality of her surprise, the redness of her lips, the diamond glance of her eyes, were so defined by the paleness, the deathly hue, of the flesh of the men's skin, that the fear that she was of this doomed company fell from me, and I knew that I was face to face with one that was mortal like myself.

The captain pointed to the bench on his left hand. I approached the table, giving the girl a low bow before sitting. She curtsied and resumed her seat, but all the while looking at me with an astonishment that greatly heightened her beauty; nor could I fail to see by the slight, but visible changes in the expression of her mouth, that my presence was putting a pleasure in her that grew as perception of my actuality sharpened in her mind. [200]

A coarse, but clean cloth, that was a kind of duck or drill, covered the table, and upon it were a couple of dishes of cold meat, a dish of dried fish, another of dried plantains, a jar of marmalade, and a plate of a singular sort of cakes—yellow and heavy—resembling the crumb of newly-baked bread. These things were kept in their places by a rude framework of wood set upon the table and lashed to it underneath. Before each person there stood a silver cup—one of one design and size, another of another; also an earthen plate, of a grey colour, of Chinese baking, and of the kind exported years since in great quantities from Batavia; and a knife and fork of a pattern I had never before seen. On our seating ourselves, Prins went round the table with two jars—one holding a spirit, which I afterwards found was a kind of gin, and the other cold water, with which he manufactured a bumper for us three men, but the girl drank the water plain. [201]

Not a word was said whilst Prins was at this work. As he was filling my cup, the clock over the door struck eight, the skeleton appearing and flourishing his lance as before, and scarce was this ended when the parrot croaked out, "Wy zyn al Verdomd." I had forgotten this bird, and the harsh utterance and dreadful words coming upon me unawares so startled me that I half-sprang to my feet. The girl looked down on the table with a sad face, whilst Vanderdecken said, "'Tis the clock that excites that fowl; we shall have to hang her out of hearing of it."

He never offered to make me known to the fair creature opposite, but that did not signify, for, after stealing several peeps at me, she asked in Dutch, but with the artless manner of a child, and in a sweet voice, if I was a Hollander. [202]

I answered, "No, I am an Englishman, madam," feeling the blood warm in my face through the mere speaking with so delicate a beauty.

"I, too, am English!" she cried, in our own tongue.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, transported out of myself by hearing this, and by perceiving how warm, real and living she was. "But, in the name of Heaven, how is it that you are alone upon this strange ship, amid these mysterious men?" for that question I could no more forbear asking right out than I could conceal the admiration in my eyes, whilst I felt no diffidence in talking, as I made no doubt the English language was unintelligible to the others.

She swiftly glanced at me, but did not answer. I took this as a hint, and was silent. And yet it did not seem that Vanderdecken or Van Vogelaar heeded us. They appeared as men sunk in deep abstraction, even whilst they ate and drank. Some meat was put before me; Prins offered me a [203]



cake, and, being hard set, I fell to. I found the meat salt, but sweet and tender enough, and turning to the mate asked him what it was.

"Antelope," he replied, "yonder," pointing to the other dish, "is buffalo."

"Sir," exclaimed Vanderdecken, with a wonderful stateliness in his manner, "be pleased to despise ceremony here. Such as our fare is, you are welcome. Take as you may require, and Prins will fill your cup as often as you need."

I bowed and thanked him.

"The wind blows hard, Imogene," said he, addressing the girl. "It storms directly along the path we would take. It is miserable," he continued, turning to me, "that a change of weather should come upon us just about those parts where the breeze freshened into this gale last night. But we'll force her to windward yet—hey, Herman?—though—though——" he looked at the lady he had named Imogene and halted abruptly in his speech, but I noticed he could not quickly clear his face of the passionate mad look that darkened it, though it did not qualify the paleness of the skin, but was like the shadow of a heavy storm-cloud passing over the upward-gazing features of a dead man. [204]

The countenances of the mate and Prins darkened to his savage mood. May Heaven pardon me for the thought, but when I considered the bitter vexation of a head wind, and how this vessel was being blown dead away to leeward faster than any line-of-battle ship hove-to, I could not but secretly feel a sailor's sympathy with these unhappy persons, though that this would have been the case had Vanderdecken expressed with his tongue the fearful thoughts which he looked with his eyes I do not think possible, if I know myself at all. [205]

There fell a silence among us, through which we could hear the dreary howling of the wind, the falls of heavy masses of water upon the decks, and the lamentable complaining of the whole fabric, though as these noises were chiefly in the hold the notes rose somewhat dulled. Presently, feeling it indecorous in me to sit silent, I asked the captain what his cargo was.

He answered, "We have much wrought and raw silk, and cloves, musk, nutmegs, mace and pepper, wood for dyeing, drugs, calicoes, lacker-ware and such commodities, sir."

"And how many of a crew, sir?"

Van Vogelaar turned to look at me.

"Ask no questions," exclaimed the girl in English. "You will be misunderstood."

"Our guns are few, but the Braave is a swift ship," said the mate, with a very stern and sullen expression on his rugged face. "She has outsailed one English frigate, and by this time our Admirals should have left us little to fear from the fleets of your Cromwell." [206]

"Pray," said the lady, addressing Vanderdecken, and glancing in like a sunbeam upon this sudden darkness of temper, "tell me of this gentleman—how it happens he is here; I find he is my countryman. Converse with me about him."

If it were possible for human affection to touch into softness the fierce majestic countenance of the noble looking being, whose mien as he sate at the table might have been that of some dethroned emperor, with the pride of Lucifer to sustain him, I might seem to have witnessed the tenderness of it in his ashen, bearded face when he turned the cold glitter of his eyes upon the girl.

"We spoke his ship late last night, when thou wast asleep, Imogene, and Van Vogelaar went in our boat to buy tobacco, if they were willing to sell, but on seeing the boat they fired upon her. A light air blew, and the ship moved away. Our boat was returning, when she spied this gentleman fast drowning. Van Vogelaar dragged him out of the water, and—here he is!" saluting me with a grave inclination of the head. [207]

"Had we changed places," said the stormy-minded, rugged mate, "what would have been my fate?"

A colour flashed into Imogene's face, and she cried, "Oh, Herr Van Vogelaar, your pardon, if you please. English seamen are as humane as they are brave."

"Yes," said the mate, with a sneer that rendered his ugliness quite horrible with the distortion of it, "because English sailors are brave they fire upon an inoffensive boat, and because they are humane they leave their comrade to perish!"

"Madam," said I, softly, "the character of this ship was known to us." [208]

She slightly raised her eyes, and such a sadness came into them that I feared to see her shed tears. Meanwhile, Vanderdecken had his gaze fixed upon me. He seemed to be musing upon what the mate had said.

"It was your Commodore Young," said he, in his resonant voice, that, to be sure, sounded grandly after the harsh pipes of the mate, "who provoked us. Why should your nation exact the honour of the flag? Has it bred greater seamen than Holland? There is my friend Willem Schouten—many a pipe, when I was a young man, have I smoked with him in his summer-house at Hoorn. Does even your Drake surpass Schouten? No, no! It was not for England to be mistress of the seas!" he exclaimed, with a solemn shake of the head, not wanting in a grave kind of urbanity.

I caught a glance from the girl, but I needed no hint to keep my tongue still. 'Twas maddening and terrifying enough to hear this man speak of Schouten as a friend—Schouten, who greatly headed the grand procession of mariners such as Dampier, Byron, Anson, and many others who, [209]

since his day, have sailed round that Cape Horn—which the stout Hollander was the first to pass and to name—into the great South Sea.

And yet, spite of the effect produced upon me by this man's speech and references, I was sensible of a distinct pricking of my conscience by my patriotism. To hear England sneered at by the natives of a country which has been described by a poet that flourished in the days of Blake and Tromp as the "off-scouring of the British sand," and as the "undigested vomit of the sea," was by no means to my liking. But to remonstrate would have been but a mere warring with the dead.

The captain appeared to delight to talk of the war between the Dutch and the English. I remember that he praised our Commodore Bodley, and said that if the States' ambassador, Adrian Paaw, had been a person of understanding, the treaty might have stood. This I recollect, but very little more, for, to be plain, it was not only a frightful thing to listen to him, but my thoughts were thrown into the utmost confusion by the loveliness of the lady who confronted me—by the assurance of the sweet eyes, warm colour, and her maidenly youth, which lived in every movement, word, smile, or sad look of hers, that she was no true member of the unholy and fearful company she lived amongst; by my wondering how she came to be in this Death Ship, and how it happened that she was finely dressed; not to speak of other speculations, such as how the food upon the table was provided, and by what means this ship, which I knew had been struggling against the will of the Omnipotent for hard upon one hundred and fifty years, should be supplied with a liberal stock of the conveniences of life. [210]

But we had now done eating. The mate rose and quitted the table, but his place was shortly afterwards taken by another man whom I had not before seen, the second mate as I afterwards discovered, named Antony Arents. This person looked to be about fifty years of age. He wore high boots and a cloak and a soft flapping hat, which he threw down on entering. His left eye had a cast and the bridge of his nose was broken, but his countenance was of the true Dutch character, and in some points he was like the boatswain, Antony Jans, whom I had seen on deck when waking into consciousness, only that he had less flesh to his belly. But in him was the same ghastly hue of skin you saw in the others; 'twas in his hands as in his face; had you come across him in his sleep you would have said he had been dead some days. And, indeed, never did I view a corpse made ready for casting overboard that had the aspect of the dead so strong upon it as these men. He helped himself to food, taking not the least notice of me. [211]

Prins meanwhile had put a box of tobacco and some long clay pipes upon the table, one of which Vanderdecken took and filled, asking me to smoke. I thanked him, wondering what sort of tobacco time had converted this weed into, took the tinder-box from the captain and lighted my pipe. Well, if this was an ancient tobacco age had not spoil its qualities. It smoked very sweet and sound. [212]

"We are on short allowance," said the captain. "Our stock has run low. It will be a hardship if we should come to want tobacco."

I made no reply, being determined to learn all I could about this ship and her people from Miss Imogene before offering suggestions, for though there is no living man whose nose I would not offer to stroke for calling me a coward, yet I am not ashamed to say this Captain Vanderdecken terrified me and I feared his wrath. [213]

The girl, with her elbows on the table and her fair chin resting on her hands, which made an ivory cup for her face, watched me continuously with eyes whose brightness the large and sparkling diamond on her forefinger did not match by many degrees of glory.

"Are you long from England?" says she to me presently in Dutch, that Vanderdecken might know what we talked about.

"We sailed in April last," I replied. "And you, madam?"

She either did not hear the question or would not answer.

"Are you married?" asked the captain of me, smoking very slowly to get the true relish of the tobacco, whilst the second mate chewed his food with vacant eyes, squinting straight ahead or meeting in a traverse on his plate. [214]

"No, sir," I replied.

"Are your parents living?" he said.

"My mother is alive," I answered.

"Ah!" said he, speaking as one in a reverie, "A sailor should not marry. What is more uncertain than the sea? The mariner's wife can never make sure of her husband's return. What will mine be thinking if we continue to be blown back as we are now by these westerly gales? It seems longer than months, yea, it appears to me to be years, since I last beheld her and my daughters standing near the Schreyerstoren, weeping and waving their farewells to me. My eldest girl, Geertruida, will be grown sick at heart with her long yearning for the parcel of silk I have for her. And Margaretha—" he sighed, softly. Then turning to Imogene, he said, "My dear, show this gentleman the toy I am taking home for my little Margaretha."

She rose with a look of pain in her face, and stepped to the cabin that was next the captain's. I now understood why he had desired me to speak in subdued tones last night, for that was the room in which she slept. The ease with which she moved upon that heaving deck was wonderful, and this verse of a ballad came into my head as I watched her go from the table to her cabin— [215]

"No form he saw of mortal mould,

It shone like ocean's snowy foam;  
Her ringlets waved in living gold,  
Her mirror crystal, pearl her comb."

Ay, the ocean might have owned her for a child, with such dainty, elegant ease did she accommodate her form to the sweep and heave of its billows, as denoted by the motions of the ship; as some lovely gull with breast of snowy down and wings of ermine airily expresses the swing and charge of the surge by its manner of falling in each hollow and lifting above each head on outstretched pinion. Her costume too, that was so strange a thing, giving to this interior so romantic an appearance that, had the ship been still and you had looked in at the cabin door, then, with this lady's beauty and dress, the majestic figure of Vanderdecken smoking in his high-backed chair, the second mate at his food, Prins standing like one that dreams, all the faces but the girl's and mine ghastly, the strange beauty of the lamp that swung over the table, the oval frames holding paintings so bleared and dusky that it was difficult to make out the subjects, the dim and wasted colour of the cabin walls, and the bald tawdriness of what had been rich giltwork, the clock of ancient pattern, the parrot cage—I say, had you been brought on a sudden to view this interior from the door, you might have easily deemed it some large astonishing picture painted to the very height of the greatest master's perfection. [216]

In a moment or two Miss Imogene returned, and coming to the table placed upon it a little figure about five inches tall. It was of some metal and had been gaily coloured as I supposed from what was left of the old tints. Its style was a red cloak falling down its back, a small cap with a feather, shoes almost hidden with great rosettes, hose as high as the thigh, and then a sort of blouse with a girdle. Both arms hung before in a very easy and natural posture and the hands grasped a flute. [217]

Vanderdecken, putting down his pipe, took a key from under the cloak of the figure and wound the automaton up as a clock, when it instantly lifted the flute to its mouth, in the exact manner of life, and played a tune. The sound was very pure though piercing, the melody simple and flowing. In all, the figure played six tunes without any sound of the clock-work within, and it was undoubtedly a very curious and costly toy.

The second mate stalked out in the middle of this performance, having finished his meal, and showing no more sensibility to what was doing than did the table the figure played on. The eyes of the man Prins had a sickly, faraway look, to be imagined only, for no one could describe it. Vanderdecken lighted his pipe when the automaton struck up, and nodded gravely to the fluting with as much pleasure in his face as so fierce and haughty a countenance could express. The girl stood leaning upon the table, with a listlessness in her manner and constantly regarding me. [218]

Scarce had the sixth tune been played, when the parrot called out from his cage, "Wy zyn al Verdomd!" clearly showing that she knew when the entertainment was over. Her pronouncing these words in Dutch robbed them somewhat, to my ear, of their tremendous import, but still it was a terrible sentence for the creature to have lighted on, and I wondered what her age was, for she could not have been newly-hatched when Vanderdecken bought her, as—he had told me—she then spoke the same words. However, the captain was full of his flute-player, and neither he nor Imogene noticed the parrot. [219]

"This should delight my little Margaretha," said he, lifting the figure and examining it; "'tis as cunning a toy as ever I saw. I bought it at Batavia, from an old friend of mine, Meeuves Meindertszoom Bakker, who had purchased it of a sailor belonging to the company's ship, Revolutie, for eight ducats. 'Twill rejoice my child; you shall present it to her, Imogene. I would not sell it for five hundred dollars; 'tis worthy to be John Muller's work."

He ceased speaking, lifting his hand; then exclaimed, "Hark! how the wind continues to storm."

He gave the figure to the girl who returned it to her cabin.

In a few minutes he put down his pipe and bade Prins bring him his skin or fur cap, and then rose, impressing me as keenly as though I viewed him for the first time by the nobility of his stature, his great beard flowing to the waist, the sharp supernatural fires in his eyes as if the light there were living flames. In silence he quitted the cabin, acting like a man influenced by spells, without the governance of the logic of human behaviour. [220]

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## CHAPTER XVII.

 [221]

### I TALK WITH MISS IMOGENE DUDLEY ABOUT THE DEATH SHIP.

Being in the way now of enjoying a talk with Imogene, the ridiculousness of the dress I was in struck me, and I asked Prins, who was clearing the table, whether my own clothes were yet dry. He answered they were hung up in the furnace near the cookhouse, by which I suppose he meant the caboose, and that when they were dry he would bring them to my cabin.

"In these things," said I, addressing Imogene in English, whilst I turned my head about to catch a sight of my tails, "I feel like a fool in a carnival. What ages this garb represents I cannot conceive, but it surely does not represent less than a century of fashion." [222]

"And what must you think of my attire?" said she, seating herself in the captain's chair, which her

beauty made a throne of in a breath, the light of her hair gilding it. "But all things are wonderful here," she added, with a half-glance at Prins, whose movements and manner as he removed the dishes from the table were as deaf and soulless as the behaviour of the figure that had just piped to us. "You know, of course, what ship this is?"

I said "Yes," in a subdued voice, and sat down on the end of the bench near her, adding, "Will the captain take it amiss if we converse?"

"No," she answered, "but should he forbid it and then find you speaking to me, his temper would be dreadful. He is a terribly passionate man. Yet he is gentle to me, and speaks of his wife and children with exquisite tenderness."

"His wife and children! God help him!"

[223]

"Oh!" she cried, trembling, "I cannot express to you the horror and pain I feel when I hear him talk of them as though he should find them as they were—altered by the length of a year only—when he parted from them. He does not know that he is cursed—none of them on board this ship know it of themselves."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed. "Surely their repeated failures to pass the Agulhas point must convince them that the will of God is opposed to their attempts and that they are doomed men."

She leaned her fair cheek upon her hand with a thoughtful absent expression in her violet eyes, though they remained fixed upon me with a child-like simplicity extraordinarily fascinating. I particularly noticed the beautiful turn of her wrist, the fairy delicacy of her nostrils and mouth, and the enchanting curve of her chin to her throat. Her figure was full, and in the swell of her breasts and the breadth of her shoulders, fining down into a waist in admirable harmony with her stature and make, you might seem to have witnessed every assurance of robustness. But you found a suggestion rather than a character of fragility in the beauty of her face that caused the very delight you took in the gold and lilies and violets of her loveliness to grow pensive. There was a complete absence of embarrassment in her manner towards me.

[224]

"If you please, what name am I to know you by?" she asked.

"Geoffrey Fenton," I answered, "and you?"

"Imogene Dudley." I bowed to her, and she continued, "Are you a sailor?"

I raised my hands half-mockingly, and said, "Do I not look my calling?" but recollecting my apparel, I burst into a laugh and exclaimed, touching the faded finery upon the cuff of my coat, "You will have thought me a beadle or a footman."

[225]

She shook her head smiling, but instantly grew grave, and now spoke in a most earnest voice. "I will tell you all I know about this ship and about myself. My father was Captain Dudley, of Portsmouth, and nearly five years ago, as closely as I can reckon time where time has ceased to all the others, he commanded a ship named the Flying Fish, and took me and my mother with him on a voyage to China. We called at Table Bay, but when we were off the coast where Algoa Bay is situated, the ship was set on fire by one of the crew entering the hold with a lighted candle and attempting to steal some rum. The flames quickly raged, the ship was not to be saved, the boats were lowered and my mother and I and a seaman entered one of them, but suddenly the ship blew up, destroying the boats that were against its side, and when the smoke cleared off nothing was to be seen on the water but a few pieces of blackened timber. Our boat had been saved by my father ordering the man to keep her at a good distance lest a panic arose and she should be entered by too great a number. The shock so affected my mother that she lost her mind." Here Imogene hid her face. When she looked at me again her face was wet, nevertheless she continued: "She died on the night following the loss of the ship, and I was left alone with the sailor. We were many leagues from the land, we had no sail, the oars were heavy. I was too weak and ill to help him with them, and the fierce heat soon melted the strength out of him, so that he left off rowing. He was good to me, gentle and very sorrowful about me. I cried so much over losing my father and mother, and at our dreadful situation, that I thought my heart would break, and I prayed that it might, for indeed I wanted to die." She drew a deep hysteric breath, tremulous as a long bitter sob. "We drifted here and there for five days, after which thirst and hunger bereft me of my senses, and I remember no more till I awoke in this ship. I then learnt that they had passed our boat close, and had stopped the vessel to inspect her. The seaman was dead, and they supposed me dead too, but Captain Vanderdecken, fancying a likeness in me to his daughter Alida, called to his men to bring me on board. They did so and found life in me."

[226]

"And you have been in this vessel ever since!" cried I.

"Ever since!" she responded.

"That is to say," I exclaimed, scarcely realising the truth, "for hard upon five years!"

She hid her eyes and shook her sweet face in the cover of her hands, as if she could not bear to think of it. I waited a little, partly that she might have time to recover her tranquillity, and partly that Prins might make an end of his business and go, though, let me declare, he gave us no more heed than had he been the clock; much less, indeed, than did the parrot that, having rounded her head, after the manner of those birds, till her beak was uppermost, watched us with the broadside of her face, and therefore with one eye, with horrid pertinacity and gravity.

[228]

"But can it be, Miss Dudley," said I, "that Captain Vanderdecken never intends to part with you?"

She looked up quickly, and said, "My position is incredibly strange. He has a father's fondness for me, and declares that, as I have no relations, I shall be one of his children, and live with his wife

and daughters at Amsterdam. But he has no sense of time. Neither he nor the miserable crew can compute. To him and the others this is the year 1654, and he supposes that he sailed from Batavia in July of last year, that is, as he conceives, in 1653. At first I tried to make him understand what century this was, but he patted my cheek, and said my senses had not returned, and, when I persisted, he grew angry, and his temper so terrified me that I feigned to agree with him, and have ever since done so." [229]

I reflected, and said, "It must be as you say, and as I have already noted; for, did the Almighty grant him and his crew any perception of the passage of time, is it conceivable that he would talk of his wife and children as still living, and be eager to return to them? When did you discover that this was the Phantom Ship?"

"I had heard that there was such a vessel from my father, and when Captain Vanderdecken talked to me and I marked the colour of his face and the appearance of the crew, and the glow that shone upon the vessel in the dark, with other strange things, such as her ancient appearance, I soon satisfied myself."

"Father of Mercy!" I cried, "what a situation for a young girl!" [230]

"When I felt sure of the ship," she said, "I should have drowned myself in my misery and terror, only I dreaded God's wrath. I felt that if I humbly resigned myself to His Holy Will He would suffer the spirits of my father and mother to be with me and watch over me. But, oh! what a tedious waiting has it been, what bitter weariness of sea and sky! Again and again have I entreated Captain Vanderdecken to put me on board some passing ship, but not conceiving of the years which run by, and every tempest that obstructs him melting as a memory into the last, so that the rebuffs of a century past are to him as forgotten things, or possessing the same sort of recentness that in a day or two this gale, which is now blowing, will have, he thinks to encourage me by saying that next time he is certain to round the headland, that, as he has adopted, so he must not part with me, but carry me in his own ship and under his own protection to his wife and home." [231]

I understood her and admired the cleverness with which she rendered intelligible to me the state of mind of the captain and crew of this ship, that is to say so far as concerned their incapacity to compute the passage of the days. For is it not evident that if these men knew that they were doomed never to round the Cape, they would cease striving to do so? And would they not long ago have understood the character of the Judgment that had been passed upon them had they been permitted to comprehend that year after year rolled on, ay, even into centuries, and still found them beaten back regularly from the same part of the ocean to the passing of which their struggles had been directed? How far memory in them was suffered to go back so as to count the number of times they were driven afresh to the eastwards, I could not imagine; but no doubt Imogene, who knew Vanderdecken well, was right when she said that the recollection of the last rebuff melted into every present one, so that, in short, in this respect they were as men without memory. And this must have been so, for they worked with hope; whereas hope would have long since died in them could they have recollected. [232]

"What are your thoughts," I asked her, "as regards their mortality? Are they human?"

"Yes, Mr. Fenton, they must be human, for they think of their homes and wives and children," she replied.

I was struck with this, though I said, "Might not their very yearning be a part of the Curse? For if you extinguish their desire of getting home, the impulse that keeps them striving with the elements would disappear, and they would say, 'Since we cannot get westwards and so to Europe, we'll head for the east and make for the Indies?'"

"It is a thing impossible to reason upon," she exclaimed, sadly, and pressing her hand to her brow. "The Great God here, in this ship, has worked in miracles and mysteries for purposes of His own. Who can explain His ways? Sometimes I have thought by the dreadful hue of the skin of their faces that they are men dead in body, but forced into the behaviour of living beings by the strength of the Curse that works in them." [233]

I replied that in saying this she had exactly hit upon the fancy of my late captain, who had taken his own life on the previous evening, which fancy now struck me as an amazing inspiration, seeing that it was her own opinion and that my own judgment fully concurred in it.

"'Tis impossible," said she, "that they can be as we are. They are supernaturally alive. Oh! it is shocking to think of. Is it not wonderful that my long association with these people has not driven me mad? Yet the captain loves me as a father; such is his tenderness at times when he talks of his home and strives to keep up my heart by warranting that next time—it is always next time—we shall pass the Cape and all will be well with us, that I am lost in wonder he could have ever so acted as to bring the curse of an eternal life of hopeless struggle upon him and his men." [234]

"Ay," cried I, "and why should his men be accursed?"

"I have often asked myself that whilst watching them," she replied. "But then I have answered, why should innocent little children bear in their forms, and in their minds too, the diseases and infirmities caused by the wickedness and recklessness of persons, perhaps several generations removed from them? We dare not question—'tis impious, Mr. Fenton. In this ship especially must we be as mute spectators only, for we are two living persons standing amid shadows, and viewing so marvellous a mystery that I tremble to the depth of my soul at the thoughts of my nearness to the Majesty of an offended God!" [235]

By this time Prins had quitted the cabin, and the girl and I were alone. There was a great weight

of sea running, and the rolling of the ship was very violent. This end of the vessel was so tall that it rose buoyant from the head of every billow that leapt at her afterpart; but the thunder of the seas smiting her in the waist would roar like a tempest through the ship; you could hear the waters washing about the deck there; then the groaning and complaining below was continuous, and the sounds which penetrated the cabin from the gale in the rigging made you think of the affrighted bellowing of bulls chased by wolves in full cry.

"There seems to be a fierce storm blowing," said Imogene, who had watched my face whilst I listened; "but since I have been in this ship there have been far wilder tempests than this." [236]

"No doubt, in all the weary years you have spent here. What has been your experience of the winds which regularly oppose the ship? Do they happen naturally, as in the case of this one, which was plentifully betokened by the look of the moon and other signs, or do they rise on a sudden—in such wise, I mean, as would make one see they were for this vessel only, and are a temporary change in the laws of nature hereabouts that the Curse may be continued?"

"I cannot answer; all that I can speak to is this: as punctually as we arrive at a given place the wind heads us, as used to be my poor father's term and as all seamen say. And sometimes it blows softly and sometimes it rises into fury. But let it come as it will the vessel is blown or driven back a great many leagues, but how far I cannot say, for Vanderdecken himself does not know."

I would not trouble her with further questions touching what I will call the nautical routine of the ship and the manœuvring of the unhappy creatures the vessel carried, because already I suspected that I should have rather more leisure than I should relish to look into these matters myself. But as she manifestly took a pleasure in conversing with me, and as I wished to obtain all the information possible about this Death Ship, and as, should Vanderdecken forbid my associating with or addressing her, there might be no one else on board of whom I could venture to make inquiries, I determined at once to push my researches as far as courtesy permitted. [237]

"I trust, Miss Dudley," said I, finding a singular delight in the pure virginal resting of her violet eyes, sparkling like the jewels of a crown, on mine as I talked to her, "that my questions do not tease you—"

"Oh, no!" she interrupted. "If you but knew how glad I am, how it gives me fresh heart to hear you speak, to see your living face after my long desolating communion with the people of this ship!" [238]

"Indeed I can conceive it!" said I. "May God grant that what I viewed last night as a most dreadful misfortune, full of terror, ay, even to madness, may prove the greatest stroke of good luck that could have befallen me. But of what is to be done we must talk later on. I shall require to look about me. Tell me now, madam, if you will, how is this ship provisioned? Surely these men are not miraculously fed; and 'tis certain that the meat I tasted this morning has been cured since 1653!"

She smiled and said, "When they run short of food or water they sail for some part of the coast where there is a river. There they go on shore in boats, armed with muskets, and come off with all that they can kill."

"Ha!" cried I, fetching a deep breath, "there is some plain sailing in this unholy business after all. But how do they manage for ammunition? Surely they must long ago have expended their original stock?" [239]

"I can but guess. About a twelvemonth ago we met with an abandoned ship, out of which Vanderdecken conveyed a great quantity of tobacco, powder, money and articles of food, a few cases of marmalade and some barrels of flour. Whether these shipwrecked vessels are left lying upon the sea for him to take provisions from by the Power that has sentenced him to his fearful fate I cannot say, but since I have been in this vessel we have fallen in with three deserted ships, both floating and ashore on the coast, and this may have been their method throughout of providing themselves with what they needed, backed by such further food as I have never known them to miss of with their muskets and fowling-pieces." [240]

"So!" cried I, greatly marvelling. "Now I understand how it happens that the captain can lend me such latter-day clothes as these from his seventeenth-century wardrobe, and that you—forgive me, madam—are attired as I see you."

She answered, "In their hold they have a great quantity of silks and materials for making gowns for women. This jacket," said she, meaning that which she was wearing, "is one article out of several chests of clothes Captain Vanderdecken was carrying home for his wife and daughters and friends. Do you notice the style, Mr. Fenton?" she added, turning about her full and graceful figure that I might see the jacket, "it is certainly of the last century. In the captain's cabin is the portrait of one of his daughters dressed in much the same way."

"You, at all events," said I, "are not likely to run short of clothes." [241]

"Oh!" she answered, with a toss of her head, half of weariness, half of scorn as it seemed to me, "there is a chest in my cabin full of clothes fit for the grandest Duchess in England. I use such as come most readily to my hands. What need have I," she exclaimed, pushing her hair from her forehead, "to care whether the colours I take match, or whether the gown is too full. This jacket fits me as do all the clothes that were intended for Geertruida Vanderdecken." Then, noticing my eyes resting on the pearls, she said, taking the beautiful and costly rope in her hands, "There is a great stock of finery of this kind in the ship. About a fortnight or three weeks after I had been rescued, the captain ordered Prins to bring a large case into the cabin; it was put upon the table

and the captain opened it. 'Twas like a jeweller's shop in miniature, containing several divisions, one full of pearl ornaments, another of rings, of which he bid me choose one to wear, and I took this," holding up her forefinger whereon the jewel blazed, "a third of earrings and many other trinkets; some, as I should fancy, more ancient than this ship, others of a later time. How he got much of this treasure I know." [242]

"How?" asked I, deeply interested.

"Well," said she, letting fall the pearls around her neck to toy with the ring, "a fair proportion he had purchased for a merchant of Amsterdam; chiefly eastern jewellery that had made its way from Indian cities to Java; other parcels he was taking home on his own account; but much of it, too, along with a store of further treasure—some of which I have seen, and which consists of virgin silver, bars of gold, coated with pewter to deceive the pirates and buccaneers, candlesticks and crucifixes of precious metal—he found in the wreck of a great Spanish ship which lay abandoned and going to pieces on a shoal off the coast of Natal. This happened during his progress from Batavia to the Cape, before he was cursed, and therefore it falls within his memory. What other treasure there is, his men have no doubt brought away from the wrecked vessels they have examined for food, powder and the like, during the years they have been sailing about this ocean." [243]

"So," cried I, lost in amazement by what I heard, "it is in this fashion that the Phantom Ship supplies her wants. As ships grow more numerous, her opportunities will increase, for 'tis terrible to think of the number of vessels which go a-missing; and, besides, this is the road to India, along which pass the most richly freighted of Europe's merchant fleets. Now I understand how Vanderdecken manages to keep his crew supplied with clothes, and his ship with sails and cordage. But, Lord!" cried I, "if there be nothing magical in this, yet surely the Evil Spirit must be suffered to have a hand in the keeping of the bones of this old fabric together!" [244]

As I said this, Prins entered the cabin, and said, shortly, "Your clothes are dry, mynheer; they are below."

On which Imogene rose, and giving me a bow, went to her own cabin.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

 [245]

### THE DEATH SHIP MUST BE SLOW AT PLYING.

I stood a moment or two at the door watching the clock whilst it struck, and greatly admiring the workmanship of the skeleton that rose and speared with his lance, keeping time to the sonorous chiming, which sang with a solemn interval between each beat. The great age of this time-keeper was beyond question, but the horn that protected the face of it prevented me from perceiving if there was any maker's name or date there.

As the skeleton sank, I could not but admire the aptness of the mechanism to the condition of the ship and her crew, for what could surpass the irony of this representation of Death perpetually foiled in his efforts to slay Time, which was yet the case of Vanderdecken and his men, whose mortality was constrained to an endless triumph over that force which drives all men born of woman through Nature into Eternity. [246]

The parrot hanging near, I stayed yet to look at her and then spoke to the creature in my rugged Dutch, but to no purpose; with the slow motion of her kind she contorted herself until, with her beak uppermost, she brought her larboard eye to bear full upon me; and so fixed and unwinking was her stare that I greatly disliked it, nay, felt that if I lingered I should fear it, and was going when she brought me to a stand by a hollow "Ha! ha! ha!" just such a note as fancy would give to the ghost of a Dutchman, who had been large, fat and guttural when alive, could the spectre of such a one laugh in his coffin or in a vault. The age which this bird had attained made her mere appearance chilling to the blood, though I am aware these creatures are long-lived and that no man with certainty could say they might not flourish two hundred years and more. She was not bald. All her feathers were sound and smooth. Yet, as I made my way to my cabin, it terrified me into downright despondency to conceive of this parrot sharing in the Curse that Vanderdecken had provoked. For if this soulless fowl could be involved in the general fate merely because it happened to be in the ship, why might not my lot prove the same? Oh, my heart! To think of becoming one of the crew, partaking their horrid destiny, and in due course dying to live again accurst and miraculously, my soul—as theirs—existing in my body like one of those feeble lamps with which the ancients illumined their tombs! [247]

But I was young and was not without an Englishman's courage. I could gaze backwards and perceive in my life no sin such as should fill me with remorse and hopelessness in a time like this. I believed in my Creator's goodness, and reaching my darksome cabin, I knelt down and prayed, and after awhile recollected myself and felt the warmth of my former spirit. [248]

I was mighty pleased to recover my own clothes; they gave me back the sense of my being my true self again, whereas the masquerading attire Vanderdecken had lent me occasioned a wretched feeling as of belonging to the ship. When I had shifted myself, I neatly folded the captain's coat, breeches and the rest, and then sat down on my bed to think over my conversation with Miss Dudley. What to credit, what to make of her, I hardly knew. She was so beautiful where

all was ugly, so fresh where all was decayed, so young where all was withered, so radiant where all was darksome that, on board such a ship as this, that had been consigned to the most dreadful doom the imagination of man could conceive of, how was I to know that she was not some part of the scheme of retribution—a sweet and dazzling tantaliser, a mocker of the home affections of the miserable ship's company, a lovely embodiment of the spirit of life to serve some purpose of an inscrutable nature in its influence upon such spiritual vitality as was permitted to the corpse-like beings who navigated this Death Ship. [249]

But this was a fleeting fancy only, and was rendered utterly ridiculous by recurrence to her transporting figure, the golden warmth of her hair and complexion, and above all to the fragility of her lineaments, which stamped her mortal. No! her story was the truth itself; but this I understood, if Vanderdecken were never to comprehend his doom, there was stern assurance of his holding the girl to his ship until she died; because, as she had pointed out, he had adopted her and desired to take her home, and would never understand he was powerless to do so, even should time represent the truth to him in her face, should she ever grow old enough for wrinkles and grey hairs. [250]

Had I been sent to deliver her? God knoweth, I thought. Yet, what was my own case? Would they refuse to let me leave them? Well, that idea did not frighten me, for he is a poor sailor who cannot find a means of escape from a ship he dislikes, even though she should be commanded by Old Nick himself. But suppose they compelled me to go, set me ashore in their boat, or hailed some unsuspecting vessel that would receive me. I should then be powerless to rescue Imogene from this frightful situation, for as to subsequently helping to succour her, first of all I doubted whether I should find a sailor in any part of the world willing to ship for a cruise in search of Vanderdecken's craft, and next, even if I should be able to range a line-of-battle ship alongside this venerable frame, how should human artillery advantage us in such a conflict? 'Twould be but another defiance of the Divine intention, and what mariner was to be found who would embark on any adventure against this dread Spectre of the Deep when, by so doing, he would feel that he was fighting a Vengeance which would swiftly deal with him for so great an act of impiety? [251]

However, no good could come of meditations of this kind in that gloomy cabin filled with the echoes of the groaning in the hold and the washing and shocks of the seas without. I felt a seaman's curiosity to have a good look at a ship of which there were a thousand stories afloat in every fore-castle throughout the world, and so I climbed through the hatch on deck, dressed in the style in which I had made my first appearance. The second mate, Antony Arents, conned the vessel, standing near the helm with his arms folded in a sullen, moody posture, even so as to resemble a man turned into stone. Vanderdecken was at the weather-rail, erect and noble-looking, his legs parted in the attitude of a stride that he might balance himself to the rolling deck. He stared fixedly to the windward, his great beard, disparted, blowing like smoke over either shoulder, and his brows lowered into a contemptuous scowl upon his sharp, burning eyes. The ship was under the same canvas I had before noticed on her. Her yards were as closely pointed to the wind as the lee braces could bring them, but whereas in our time a square-rigged vessel close-hauled can be brought to within six points, that is to say, if the gale be north she can be made to head east-north-east, yet this ship, as I easily gathered without looking at the compass, lay no closer than eight-and-a-half or nine points, the wind blowing west-north-west and we lying by as close as the trim of the yards would suffer us, at about south-by-west. [252]

In short, we were being driven at the rate of some three or four miles an hour dead to leeward, broadside on. Now, as I am writing this in the main that all mariners may have a just and clear conception of the sort of ship Vanderdecken's vessel is, I particularly desire that this matter of her not being able to sail within eight or nine points of the wind be carefully noted; for, then you shall understand how fully with her own tackling, and yards and canvas, she helps out and fulfils her doom. [253]

If ever you have read the account of my Lord Anson's voyage round the world, you will recollect, in the second chapter of Book II., the narrative, given at length, of the time occupied by the Gloucester in fetching and casting anchor off Juan Fernandez. She could make no way at all in beating or reaching. She was first sighted from the island on the 21st of June; she was still striving against the head wind on the 9th of July; then she was blown away, and reappeared on the 16th, and it was not until the 23rd of that month that she was seen opening the north-west point of the bay with a flowing sail, which means that she had a fair wind, and which may also be said to signify that had the wind not favoured her she might have gone on struggling for years without making the island. Think, now, of a vessel very nearly fitted as our ships are rigged, occupying thirty-two days—a whole month and a day atop—in covering a distance which, when the Gloucester was first sighted, was reckoned at four leagues! [254]

Is it, then, surprising that a vessel constructed considerably more than a century earlier than the ships of Anson's squadron, in an age when the art of building was little understood, when a ship's hull was as tall as a great castle, when all things aloft were ponderous, when the immense beam, helped yet by the wide channels, gave such a spread to the shrouds that they could make of the breeze no more than a beam wind when braced up as sharp as the yards would come—is it surprising, I say, that this Dutchman, so constructed, should never be able to contend with a contrary wind? I am the more pleased to point this out because I have heard it particularly affirmed that if Vanderdecken were a good seaman he would laugh at a north-wester though there should be no other wind in those seas; for he need do nothing but make a long board to the south, to as far, say, as fifty degrees, in order, with his starboard tacks aboard, to pass the Cape and enter the Atlantic, where he would probably catch the south-east trade wind and so make good his return. But this presupposes no Sentence, even if the ship were capable of sailing close- [255]



hauled.

To resume. Neither the captain, nor the second mate, nor the seaman at the tiller, taking the least notice of me, I determined to keep myself to myself till it should please Vanderdecken to address me; so I got under the lee of the house where I had conversed with the captain before breakfast, and gazed about. It was as dirty a day as ever I remember—the heavens of the colour of drenched granite, the sea-line swallowed up in spray and haze, out of which there came rolling to the ship endless processions of olive-coloured, prodigious combers. The storming aloft was a perpetual thunder. Upon every rope the gale split with a shriek, and there was a dreary clattering of the cordage, and as the vessel swang her spars to windward, an edge of peculiar and hurricane-like fierceness would be put into the wind, as though it were driven outrageously mad by the stubborn swing of the masts against its howling face. Nothing was in sight save over against our weather-quarter a Cape hen, poised on such easy wings that the appearance of the bird made a wonder of the weight of the blast; its solitariness gave a heavy desolation to the aspect of the pouring, warring scene of frothing summits and roaring hollows. The reefed courses under which the vessel lay were dark with wet from the showering of the sea, of which great, green, glittering masses striking the weather-bow, raised such a smoke of crystals all about the fore-castle that the vessel looked to be on fire with the steam-like, voluminous whiteness soaring there. [256] [257]

There were a few men on the decks that way, muffled up to their noses; but I did not see them speak to one another nor go about any kind of work. They had the same self-engrossed, nay, entranced air that was visible in those, such as the two mates and Vanderdecken, whom I had already observed. The ship offered an amazing picture as she soared and sank upon the billows, half-hidden by storms of froth swept by the wind betwixt the masts with wilder screamings than a hundred mad-houses could make. The great barricaded tops, her spritsail topmast standing up out of another top at the end of the bowsprit—she had no jibboom—and the long yard, after the lateen-style, on her mizzen-mast, gave her so true a look of the age in which she had been built that it would be impossible for any sailor to see her and not know what ship she was. None other resembling her has been afloat since the age of William III., nor is it conceivable that the like of her will ever be seen again. [258]

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## CHAPTER XIX. [259]

### I WITNESS THE CAPTAIN'S ENTRANCEMENT.

I had been on deck about a quarter of an hour when Vanderdecken, who all this time was standing motionless at the rail looking—as who shall tell with what fancies in him and what visions—at the windward sea, came down to the lee of the house as though he all along knew I was there, though I can swear he never once turned nor appeared to see me, and said—

"Is the lady in the cabin?"

"She went to her room, sir," I replied.

"Did she tell you her story?" he said, bringing his beard to its place with both hands, and viewing me with a severity that I began to think might be as much owing to the cast of his features as to his nature. [260]

I replied that she had told me how he had met with her in an open boat, how her parents had perished, and how he had felt a father's pity and love for her and was taking her home.

"To adopt her," he exclaimed. "She shall be a child of mine. My wife will soon love her, and she will be a sister to my daughters. She has no relatives, and such beauty and sweetness of heart as hers must be cared for, since how does the world commonly serve such graces when they meet in a friendless woman?"

Surely, thought I, he that can talk thus cannot be endeavilled! And yet does not the great Milton bestow the tenderness of a sister and a daughter on Sin when she reconciles Satan and Death? Something of human nature there must ever be even in those who most strictly merit Heaven's chastisement; and the lustre of the glory in our beginning, though it wane till its glow is no brighter than the dim, fiery crawlings upon this ship's side at night, is never utterly extinguished in the blackest spirit of us all. [261]

I had no desire to talk of Miss Dudley lest I should put him into a passion by some remark touching the number of years she had now been on board, or by blundering in some other like manner. If she was to escape through me it behoved me to keep my thoughts mighty close and secret, for let what would be the state of being he had entered into in two centuries of existence, his eyes were like a burning-glass, as though he could focus by them the fires of suspicion and scorch a hole through your body to your soul to learn what was passing there. So putting on an easy manner and throwing a glance aloft and around, I said, "I fear, mynheer, you find weather of this kind strain your ship a good deal."

"Like all vessels she will work in such seas as this," he replied. [262]

"How often is she careened?" I asked.

"How often should she need it, think you?" he replied, with sudden temper.

I said, warily, "I cannot imagine."

"I have commanded the Braave for five voyages," said he, softening a little, "and only once—that is during the second voyage—did she prove leaky. But this voyage she has been troublesome, and I have had to careen her twice."

Twice only, thought I; but you could see that his memory had been shaped so as to fit his doom, and that remembrance of all that befell him and his crew from the time when his sentence was first pronounced faded almost as swiftly as they happened, like clouds upon the blankness of the heavens, so that the very changes that would illustrate the passage of time to you or me, such as the alteration in the rigs and shapes of the ships he met, or the growth into womanhood of the girl he had rescued, would be as unmeaning to him and his fellows as to men without memory. Yet was it manifestly part of the Curse that he should have a keen and bright recollection of his house, his family, Amsterdam, the politics and wars of his age and the like. For if the faculty was wholly dead in him, he would be but as a corpse without that craving for home which perpetuates his doom. [263]

"Is there any good spot for careening on the coast, east of the Cape?" said I, eager to gather all I could touching the practices and inner life of this wondrous ship without appearing inquisitive.

He answered, "Yes, there is one good place, 'tis in a bay; I cannot name it, but it is to be found by the peculiar shape of the mountains at its back. If ever you should be in these seas and need to careen, choose that place, for besides that you may refresh your crew with, and lay in a good store of—when in season—oranges, plums, wild apricot, lemons, plantains, and other fruits, with abundance of such fish as cod, hake, and mullet, and comforts and dainties such as plovers, partridges, guinea-fowl, and bustards; you will there find a salt spring, the water of which, on boiling, yields salt enough for any quantity of curing, and what should not be less useful to you as a mariner to know is, that about the shore you find scattered a kind of munjack which, when boiled with sand and tempered with oil, is as good as pitch for paying your seams with." [264]

So, thought I, and thither, then, is it that you are led when your ship needs to be overhauled or when your provisions run low. With oakum worked from such ropes as he would find on abandoned ships, and the munjack he spoke about, he would have no trouble in keeping the frame of the vessel tight, more especially as the supernatural quality that was in his own life was in that of his ship likewise, so that the timber stood as did his skin, albeit the one would often need repairs just as the body of the other was sustained by meat and drink. [265]

"I thank you for your information, captain," said I.

"If," he continued, "you let the plantain dry it will crush into an excellent flour. The cakes we had at breakfast were formed of plantain-flour."

"It is wonderful," said I, "how the mariner forces the sea and the land that skirts it to supply his needs."

"Ay," he exclaimed. "It is as you say. But no sailors surpass the Dutch in this particular direction."

It seemed as if he would go on speaking, but, looking, that I might attend to his words, I observed that the whole man, with amazing suddenness, appeared to undergo a change. He stood motionless, gazing at the leeward sea, his features fixed, not the faintest working in them, and nothing stirring but his beard. He was like one in a fit, save for the frightful vitality he got from the glare in his eyes, which were rooted as though they beheld a phantom. I drew away from him with a shudder, for his aspect now was the most terrible revelation of his monstrous and unearthly existence that had been made to me. The change was of the violence of a catalepsy, and this quick transition from the intelligent, if death-like, looks of a man, speaking of homely matters to a mute, petrified figure, to which the fire of the eyes imparted an inexpressible element of horror, so terrified me that I felt the sweat-drops in the palms of my hands. As to reasoning on this condition of his, why, I could make nothing of it. It looked as if the death that was in his flesh and bones, finding his spirit, or whatever it was that informed him, languid, as the senses became through grief or sickness, asserted its powers till it was driven into its hiding-place again by the re-quickening of the supernatural element that possessed him. It was also apparent that this unnatural gift of life did but give vitality to a corpse; and that even as a disinterred body that still wears the very tint of life, as though but just dead, falls into dust on the air of Heaven touching it, so do I strictly believe that Vanderdecken and his crew would instantly crumble into ashes, which the wind would disperse, were the power that keeps them intelligent and capable of moving suspended. By which I mean that they would not decay slowly, as the dead in Nature do, but that they would dissolve into dust as men who deceased a hundred years ago. [266]

These thoughts are not gay. But what think you of the reality? Never could I so fully compass all the horror of the Curse as now, when I turned my gaze from the figure at my side, majestic in his marble motionlessness and alive in the eyes only, to the strained, grey, streaming ancient ship, tossing her forking bowsprit to the sullen gloom on high, bringing her aged, patched and dingy courses, groaning at their tacks, with a sulky thunder against the screaming gale, as though their hollows dimly reverberated yet the cannonading of the vanished fleets of Blake and Tromp; washed by seas which fled in snow-storms over her forward decks, heavily and dimly rolling broadside to the wind that was blowing her with diabolic stubbornness back along the liquid path that she had so lately sailed over! Think of such a life as this, never-ending! Great Mercy! Would not even a year of such a struggle prove to us distracting. Oh, 'tis a merciful provision indeed that these poor wretches should have had all sense of time killed in them, and that their punishment should lie in a perpetual cheating of hope too short-lived as a remembrance to break their hearts. Yet there were now two persons in this Death Ship to whom such solace as was permitted to the [267] [268] [269]

accurst crew would not be granted, and who, if they could not get away from the vessel, would have to lead a more terrible life than even that of the Dutch mariners, unless they destroyed themselves as Captain Skevington had. And for some time I could think of nothing but how I was to rescue Miss Dudley and make my own escape, for one thing I had already resolved: never to leave the girl alone in this ship.

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## CHAPTER XX.

[270]

### I HOLD A CONVERSATION WITH THE CREW.

There was nothing in sight. Indeed, in that thick gale a vessel would have had to come within a mile of us to be visible. As Vanderdecken neither stirred nor spoke to me, I feared he might take it ill if I hung by his side, for how was I to tell but that he might consider I should regard the withdrawal of his attention as a hint to begone. I therefore walked aft, the second mate no more heeding me than if I had been as viewless as the air, whilst the helmsman, after turning a small pair of glassy eyes upon me, stained with veins, directed them again at the sea over the bow, his face as sullenly thoughtful as the others, albeit he handled the tiller with good judgment, "meeting her," as we sailors say, when she needed it, and holding a very clean and careful luff.

[271]

My curiosity being great I ventured to peep into the binnacle, or "bittacle" as it was formerly called, a fixed box or case for holding the mariner's compass. The card was very old-fashioned, as may be supposed, yet it swung to the movement of the ship, and I could not suppose that it was very inaccurate since by the aid of it they periodically made the land where they hunted for meat and filled their casks. As neither Vanderdecken nor Antony Arents offered to hinder me from roaming about, I determined, since I was about it, to take a good look at this Death Ship. I examined the swivels which were very green with decay, and tried to revolve one on its pivot, but found that it was not to be stirred. The tiller had been a very noble piece of timber, but now presented the aspect of rottenness that all the rest of the wood in the ship had, yet it had been very elegantly carved, and numerous flourishes still overran it, though the meaning of the devices was not to be come at. The rudder head worked in a great helm-port, through which a corpulent man of eighteen stone might have slipped fair into the sea underneath. The gale made a melancholy screeching in the skeleton lantern, and I wondered they did not unship the worthless thing and heave it overboard. I looked over the side and as far down as I could carry my sight, and I observed that the ship was of a sickly sallow colour, not yellow—indeed, of no hue that I could give a name to, though the original tint a painter might conjecture by guessing what colour would yield this nameless pallidness after years and years of washing seas and the burning of the sun.

[272]

I then thought I would step forward, not much minding the washing of the seas there, and passed Vanderdecken very cautiously, ready to stop if he should look at me, but he remained in a trance, like a stone figure, all the life of him gone into his eyes, which glared burning and terrible at the same part of the ocean at which he stared when I first observed him stirless; so I stepped past and descended to the quarter-deck, where there was nothing to see, and thence to the upper deck.

[273]

Here, near the mainmast, were two pumps of the pattern I recollected noticing in a ship that had been built in 1722, and that was afloat and hearty and earning good money in 1791. In front of the mast lay two boats, one within the other, the under one on chocks, both of the same pattern, namely, square stern and stem, with lengths of the gunwales projecting like horns. The top one, for I could not see the inside of the lower boat, had been painted originally a bright scarlet; she contained seats and half-a-dozen of oars short and long, all with immensely broad blades, which had also been painted a bright red. The rusty guns, the ends of gear snaking in the froth along the scuppers, the cumbersomeness of the blocks of the maintack, along with the other furniture of that groaning and half-bursting sail, the grey old cask answering for a scuttlebutt lashed to the larboard side, the ancientness of the tarpauling over the great hatch; these, and a score of other details it would tease you to hear me name, gave a most dismal and wretched appearance to all this part of the tossed, drenched, spray-clouded fabric labouring under a sky that had darkened since the morning, and against whose complexion the edges of the sails showed with a raw and sickly pallor, whilst above swung the great barricaded tops and the masts and yards to and fro, to and fro, how drearily and wearily!

[274]

The bulwarks being very high, enabled me to dodge the seas as I crept forwards, and presently I came abreast of the foremast, where stood Jans, the boatswain, along with three or four seamen, taking the shelter of a sort of hutch, built very strong, whence proceeded sounds of the grunting of hogs, and the muttering of geese, hens and the like. As I needed an excuse to be here—for these fellows believed the time to be that of Cromwell and Blake, and looked upon an Englishman as an enemy, and, therefore, might round upon me angrily for offering to overhaul their ship—I said to Jans, in my civillest manner—

[275]

"Are the men who rescued me last night here? I shall be glad to thank them."

"Yonder's Houtmann," said he, bluntly; "the other's below."

I turned to the man named Houtmann, and saw in him an old sailor of perhaps three-score, with a drooped head, his hands in his pockets, a worn, wrinkled, melancholy face, his complexion, like

that of the others, of the grave; he was dressed in boots, loose yellow, tarpaulin trousers, and a frock of the same material; he had a pilot-coat on, a good sou'-west cap—such as I myself wore aboard the Saracen—and there was a stout shawl around his neck. [276]

I put out my hand, and said, "Houtmann, let an English sailor thank a brave Hollander of his own calling for his life."

He did not smile—showed himself, by not so much as a twitch in his face sensible of my speech, save that in the most lifeless manner in the world he held out his hand, which I took; but I was glad to let it fall. If ever a hand had the chill of death to freeze mortal flesh, his had that coldness. No other man's skin in that ship had I before touched, though my arm had been seized by Vanderdecken, and this contact makes one of the most biting memories of that time. Will you suppose that the coldness was produced by the wet and the wind? Alas! he withdrew his hand from his pocket; but, even had he raised it from a block of ice, you would not, in the bitter bleakness of the flesh, have felt, as I did, the death in his veins, had he been as I was. [277]

The others were variously attired, in such clothes as you would conceive a ship's slop-chest would be fitted with from pickings of vessels encountered and ransacked in a hundred and fifty years. They had all of them a Dutch cast of countenance, one looking not more than thirty, another forty, and so on. But there was something in them—though God knows if my life were the stake I should not be able to define it—that, backed by the movements, complexions and the like, made you see that with them time had become eternity, and that their exteriors were no more significant of the years they could count than the effigy on the tomb of a man represents the dust of him.

"It blows hard," said I to Jans, making the most of my stock of Dutch, and resolved to confront each amazing experience as it befel me with a bold face. "But the Braave is a stout ship and makes excellent weather." [278]

"So think the rats," exclaimed Houtmann, addressing Jans.

"A plague on the rats!" cried Jans. "There's but one remedy: when we get to Table Bay the hold must be smoked with sulphur."

"I never knew rats multiply as they do in this ship," said one of the sailors, named Kryns; "had we been ten years making the passage from Batavia, the vermin could not have increased more rapidly."

"Where do the crew sleep?" said I.

Jans pointed over his shoulder with his thumb to a hatch abreast of the after-end of the fore-castle bulwark. The cover was over it, for there the spray was constantly shooting up like steam from boiling water, and filling the iron-hard hollow of the foresail with wet which showered from under the arched foot-rope in whole thunderstorms of rain. Otherwise I should have asked leave to go below and explore the fore-castle, for no part of this ship could, I thought, be more curious than the place in which her crew lived, and I particularly desired to see how they slept, nay, to see them sleeping and to observe the character of their beds, whether hammocks or bunks, and their chests or bags for their clothes. [279]

I said, "It will be dark enough down there with the hatch closed?"

"Ay," said the youngest-looking of the seamen, named Abraham Bothma—I took down their names afterwards from Imogene's dictation, conceiving that the mentioning of them would prove of interest to any descendants of theirs in Holland into whose hands this narrative might chance to fall—"but we keep a lamp always burning."

"But should you run short of oil!" said I, timorously, for I had made up my mind to pretend to one and all that I believed they had sailed from Batavia in the preceding year, and the question was a departure from that resolution. [280]

"Oil is easily got," exclaimed Jans, roughly. "What use do you English make of the porpoise and the grampus? Is not the seabird full of it? And fish you in any bay along the coast 'twixt Natal and Cape Town, and I'll warrant you livers enough to keep your lamps burning for a voyage round the world. And what ship with coppers aboard can be wanting in slush?"

"Heer Jans," said I, "I am a sailor and love to hear the opinions of persons of my own calling. Therefore I would ask you, do not you consider your ship greatly hampered forward by yonder sprit-topmast and the heavy yards there?" And to render myself perfectly intelligible, I pointed to the mast that I have already described as being fixed upright at the end of the bowsprit, rising, so to speak, out of a round top there, and having a smaller top on the upper end of it. [281]

"How would you have her rigged?" asked he, in a sneering manner.

"Why," said I, cautiously, "as most of the ships you meet are rigged—with a jibboom upon which you can set more useful canvas than spritsails."

On this, Bothma said, "Let your country rig its ships as it chooses, they will find the Dutch know more about the sea and the art of navigating and commanding it than your nation has stomach for."

I could have smiled at this, but the voice of the man, the deadness of his face, the terrifying life in his eyes, the sombre gravity of the others, standing about me like people in their sleep, were such a corrective of humour as might have made a braver man than I am tremble. I dared not go on talking with them, indeed, their looks caused me to fear for my senses, so without further ado I walked aft and entered the cabin hoping to find warmth and recovery for my mind in the beauty [282]

and conversation of Imogene.

The cabin was deserted. The darkness of the sky made it very gloomy, and what with its meagre furniture, the unhealthy colouring of its walls, trappings of gilt and handwork, once I daresay very brilliant and delightful, but now as rueful as a harlequin's faded dress seen by the sun, it was a most depressing interior, particularly in such weather as was then storming, when the ceaseless thunder of bursting surges drove shock after shock of tempestuous sound through the resonant fabric, and when the shrieking of the wind, not only in the rigging but along the floor of the stormy sky itself, was like the frantic tally-hoing of demons to the million hounds of the blast.

Not knowing how to pass the time, I went to the old, framed pictures upon the sides, and found them to be panels fitted to the ship's plank, and framed so as to form as much a part of the structure as the carving on her stern would be. But time, neglect, dirt or damp—one or all—had so befouled or darkened the surfaces that most of them were more like the heads of tar barrels than paintings. Yet here and there I managed to witness a glimmering survival of the artist's work; one representing the fish market at Amsterdam, such of the figures as were plain exhibiting plenty of humour; another a Dutch East Indiaman, of Vanderdecken's period, sailing along with canvas full, streamers blowing, and the Batavian colours standing out large from the ensign staff; a third was a portrait, but nothing was left of it save a nose whose ruddy tip time had evidently fallen in love with, for there it still glowed, a mouth widely distended with laughter, and one merry little eye, the other having sunk like a star in the dark cloud that overspread most of this panel. This, I supposed, had been the portrait of a sailor, for so much of the remainder as was determinable all related to Amsterdam and things nautical. Having made this dismal round, I sat me down at the table, sternly and closely watched by the parrot, whose distressing, croaking assurance I had no wish to hear, she being my only company if I except the clock, whose hoarse ticking was audible above the gale, and the skeleton skulking inside, whose hourly resurrection I was now in the temper to as greatly dislike as the bird's iterative denunciation.

I wondered how the young lady contrived to pass her time. Had she books? If so, they would doubtless be dull performances in old Dutch, fat and wormy volumes bound in hard leather—as sluggish in their matter as a canal, and very little calculated to amuse a spirited girl. Evidently, in the five years she had been sailing with Vanderdecken, she had learnt what she knew of Dutch; she spoke fluently, and with a good accent, though, to be sure, it was the Dutch of 1650. I constantly directed my eyes towards her cabin, in the hope of seeing her emerge, for I felt mighty dull and sad, and longed for the sight of her fair and golden beauty; and all the while I was wondering how she had endured, without losing her mind, the dreadful imprisonment she had undergone and was yet undergoing, and the still more fearful association of the captain and his men.

I also employed myself in turning over several schemes for escaping with her, but nothing that was really practicable offered. Suppose we met with an unsuspecting ship—I mean a vessel that did not know we were the craft that has been called the Flying Dutchman—Vanderdecken, being willing to get rid of me, sends me to her in a boat. I cry out that there is a young lady left behind breaking her heart for home, whereupon explanations would follow to prove the vessel the Death Ship! What would happen? In all probability, if I had managed to board the vessel we met, her crew, to preserve her from the Curse, would fling me overboard. In any case, away they would run directly the truth was known. Indeed, acquainted as I was with the terror with which Vanderdecken was viewed by all classes of mariners, 'twas positive that, though he had no suspicion himself of the dread he inspired, the story that would have to be told concerning Miss Dudley to account for her detention in the Phantom Ship would end in resolving those we encountered to have nothing to do with either her or me, but to bear a hand and "up sticks!"

As to getting away with her in one of the Dutchman's boats, first, how was I to hoist the boat over the side unperceived? Next, suppose that was to be managed, then on his missing us would not Vanderdecken, a man of fierce resolution, hunt after and perhaps find us, when I should be at the mercy of one in whom there was a great deal of the devil, and who, Heaven knows, could not revenge himself more awfully than by keeping me in his ship. Several projects I thought of, and then a strange idea came into my head. Here was a girl without mother or father, and, as I gathered, entirely friendless and penniless, as indeed in this latter article she could hardly help being as the child of a sailor. Suppose I should succeed in escaping with her? How could an association such as ours end but in a wedding? And did that consideration agitate me? Faith, though I had only known her since this morning, I reckoned, being young and in an especial degree an admirer and lover of the kind of beauty and sweetness this girl had in perfection, it would not need many days to pass before my heart would be hers.

Forthwith my imagination grew sunny. Many bright and delightful ideas occurred to me. Would not my tremendous experience find a glorious crowning in the hand of this girl and her endowment by Vanderdecken, who loved her, out of those chests of treasure and coin which he had in his hold? Would it be impossible for me to persuade him, say after the next gale which blew him back from Agulhas, to put us aboard some vessel homeward bound along with a chest of treasure for his wife as an earnest of what was coming, and so enable me to convey Miss Dudley straight to Amsterdam there to await his arrival? It was but a young man's fancy, pretentious and inconsistent with my opinion of the captain's temper and his ignorance of the Curse that lay on him; and it was not perhaps strictly honest. Though if you come to consider that his doom would never suffer him to use the riches he had in his ship, nor to know whether I had faithfully carried Miss Dudley to his house on the Buitenkant—where I afterwards heard he was living when he sailed—you will not judge me harshly for thus idly and merrily dreaming.

I was in the midst of this castle-building when the hour of noon was struck by the clock. I

watched the figure of Death hewing with his lance, but with an abstracted eye, my mind being full of gay and hopeful fancies. But the moment the last stroke had rung, the parrot cried out:—

"Wy Zyn al Verdomd!"

with so fierce an energy that it broke up my thoughts as you destroy a spider's web by passing your finger through it, and I dropped my chin on to my breast with my spirits dashed.

END OF VOLUME I.

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## Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors repaired. Inconsistent hyphenation fixed.

P. 7: scare an ocean-danger -> scarce an ocean-danger.

P. 39: easy do be seen -> easy to be seen.

P. 45: most greivously -> most grievously.

P. 48: how participant of what stirs the minds -> how participant of what stirs the minds.

P. 52: we had had run -> we had run.

P. 53: the replied he did not doubt it was one of he vessels -> he replied he did not doubt it was one of the vessels.

P. 216: Prius -> Prins.

P. 237: manœuvring -> manœuvering.

P. 244: the the Evil Spirit -> the Evil Spirit.

P. 245: admire the patness -> admire the aptness.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEATH SHIP: A STRANGE STORY, VOL. 1  
(OF 3) \*\*\*

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