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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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#### THE DEATH SHIP.

[1]

### CHAPTER I.

#### IMOGENE SAYS SHE WILL TRUST ME.

A half-hour passed, and during that time I had sufficiently recovered from the distressful croak of the parrot to wonder, as any sailor would, how the ship was navigated; for I could not doubt that the clock kept pretty close to the true time, since the easting and westing made by the ship was small, never, perhaps, exceeding ten degrees; and the circumstance of noon having struck set me wondering in what fashion the captain and mates navigated the ship, whether they used the cross-staff or relied on dead reckoning, or were supernaturally conned.

[2]

At half-past twelve arrived Prins, to prepare the table for dinner. I was so dull that his coming was extremely welcome, and I watched him go about his work with interest, not, perhaps, unmixed with fear. Out of the great drawer, under the table, he withdrew the cloth, knives, forks, silver goblets and the like, which had been set out for breakfast; but his movements were those of a marionette rather than a man's, he scarcely looked at what he did, putting a goblet here, a knife and fork there and so on, with the lifeless air of an object controlled by mechanism. Small wonder that the unhappy wretch should know his business! He had been at it long enough! Yet it wrung my heart to watch him and to think that he would still be arranging the cabin tables for meals, and attending upon Vanderdecken and his mates when Heaven alone knows how many times the wave of civilisation should have followed the sun round the globe, and how often our British Islands should have lapsed into their ancient savageness and emerged again.

[3]

Whilst he was at this work, Miss Dudley stepped out of her cabin. She came to a stand, not instantly recognising me in my own clothes, but quickly satisfying herself, she advanced with a smile and sat down near me, with no further sign of timidity than a slight blush which greatly heightened her beauty.

"Where is Captain Vanderdecken?" said she.

"I left him on deck three-quarters of an hour since," I answered. "We were talking when he suddenly broke off, and I should have supposed him in a fit but for his erect posture and the fiery life in his eyes."

"This happens to them all," said she, "as you will find out. I do not know what it means or why it should be."

"Possibly," I exclaimed, recalling the conjecture I have already written down, "the death in them grows too strong at periods, for the power that sustains them, be it demoniac or not, and then follows a failure of the vitality of the body, which yet leaves the spirit—as one sees it flashing in Vanderdecken's eyes—strong enough to recover the corporeal forces from their languor. But how terrible is all this for you to be living familiarly with!—the sweet, fresh, human life of the world your beauty would adorn and gladden, hidden from you behind the melancholy sea-line, and the passage of months, yes, and of years, finding you still aimlessly beating about these waters, with no better companions than beings more frightful in their shapes and behaviour as men than were they phantoms which the hand could not grasp and whose texture the eye can pierce."

[4]

"What can I do, Mr. Fenton? Captain Vanderdecken will not part with me. How can I escape?" she cried, with her eyes brimming. "If I cast myself overboard, it would be to drown; if I succeeded in gaining the shore when we anchored near to the coast, it would be either to perish upon the broiling sands, or be destroyed by wild beasts, or be seized by the natives and carried into captivity." [5]

"But if a chance offered to make good your escape without the risks you name, would you seize it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well," said I, speaking with such tenderness and feeling, such a glow and yearning in my heart that you would say the tiny seed of love in my breast, watered by her tears, was budding with the swiftness of each glance at her into flower, "whilst I have been sitting melancholy and alone I have turned over in my mind how I am to deliver you from this dreadful situation. No scheme as yet offers, but will you trust me as an English sailor to find a means to outwit these Dutchmen, ay, though the Devil himself kept watch when they were abed?... One moment, Miss Dudley—forgive me, it had not been my intention to touch upon this matter until time had enabled you to form some judgment of me. But when two are of the same mind, and the pit that has to be jumped is a deep one, it would be mere foppery in me to stand on the brink with you, chattering like a Frenchman about anything else sooner than speak out and to the point as a plain seaman should." [6]

"Mr. Fenton," she answered, "I will trust you. If you can see a way to escape from this ship I will aid you to the utmost of my strength and accompany you. You are a sailor; my father was of that calling, and as an English seaman you shall have my full faith."

It was not only the words, but her pretty voice, her sparkling eyes, her earnest gaze, the expression of hope that lighted up her face with the radiance of a smile rather than of a smile itself, which rendered what she said delightful to me. I answered, "Depend upon it your faith will animate me, and it will be strange if you are not in England before many months, nay, let me say weeks, have passed." [7]

Here leaning her cheek in her hand she looked down into her lap with a wistful sadness in her eyes.

Not conceiving what was passing in her mind, I said, "Whatever scheme I hit upon will take time. But what are a few months compared with years on board this ship—years which only death can end!"

"Oh!" she answered, looking at me fully, but with a darkness of tears upon those violet lights, "I don't doubt your ability to escape and rescue me, nor was I thinking of the time you would require or how long it may be before we see England. What troubles me is to feel that when in England—if it please God to suffer me to set foot once more upon that dear soil—I shall have no friend to turn to." I was about to speak, but she proceeded, her eyes brimming afresh: "It is rare that a girl finds herself in my situation. Both my father and mother were only children and orphans when they married, my mother living with a clergyman and his wife at Rotherhithe as governess to their children when my father met her. The clergyman and his lady are long since dead. But were they living, they would not be persons I should apply to for help and counsel, since my mother often spoke of them as harsh, mean people. The few relations on my mother's side died off; on my father's side there was—perhaps there yet is—an uncle who settled in Virginia and did pretty well there. But I should have to go to that country to seek him with the chance of finding him dead. Thus you will see how friendless I am, Mr. Fenton." [8]

"You are not of those who remain friendless in this world," said I, softly, for can you marvel that a young man's heart will beat quickly when such a beauty as Imogene Dudley is, tells him to his face that she is friendless. "I implore you," I added, "not to suffer any reflection of this sort to sadden or swerve you in your determination to leave this ship——"

"No, no!" she interrupted, "it will not do that. Better to die of famine among the green meadows at home than—oh!" she cried, with hysterical vehemence, "how sweet will be the sight of flowers to me, of English trees, and hedges blooming with briar roses and honeysuckles. This dreadful life!" she clasped her hands with a sudden passionate raising of her eyes, "these roaring seas, the constant screaming of the wind that bates its tones only to make a desolate moaning, the company of ghost-like men, the fearful sense of being in a ship upon which has fallen the wrath of the majesty of God! Oh, indeed, indeed it must end!" and burying her face in her hands she wept most grievously, sobbing aloud. [10]

"What will end, mynheer? And what is it that causes thee, Imogene, to weep?" exclaimed the deep, vibratory voice of Vanderdecken.

I started, and found his great figure erect behind me, a certain inquisitiveness in the expression of his face, and much of the light shining in his eyes that I had remarked when he fell into that posture of trance I have spoken of. I answered as readily as my knowledge of his tongue permitted, "Miss Dudley weeps, sir, because this gale, as others have before, retards the passage of your ship to Amsterdam; and 'tis perfectly natural, consistent, indeed, with the wishes of all men in the Braave, that she should wish the baulking storm at an end." [11]

He came round to his high-backed chair, and seated himself, and, putting his arm along the table, gently took Imogene's wrist, and softly pulled her hand away from her face, wet with her tears, saying, "My dear, your fellow-countryman is right; it is the sorrow of every creature here that this gale should blow us backwards, and so delay our return; but what is more capricious than the

wind? This storm will presently pass, and it will be strange," he added, with a sudden scowl darkening his brow, and letting go Miss Dudley's hand as he spoke, "if next time we do not thrust the Braave into an ocean where these north-westerners make way for the strong trade wind that blows from the south-east."

She dried her eyes and forced a smile, acting a part as I did; that is to say, she did not wish he should suspect her grief went deeper than I had explained; though I could not help observing that in directing her wet, sweet, violet eyes, with her mouth shaped to a smile, upon him, a plaintive gratitude underlay her manner, an admixture of pity and affection, the exhibition of which made me very sure of the quality of her heart. [12]

To carry Vanderdecken's thoughts away from the subject he supposed Miss Dudley and I had been speaking about, I asked her in Dutch what she had been doing with herself since breakfast. She answered in the same language that she had been lying down.

"Have you books?" said I.

"A few that belong to the captain. Some are in French and I cannot read them. The others are in Dutch. There is also a collection of English poetry, some of which is beautiful, and I know many verses by heart."

"Are these works pretty new?" said I.

She answered, "Of various years; the newest, I think, is dated 1647." [13]

"Ay," said Vanderdecken, "that will be my friend Bloys Van Treslong's book upon the tulip-madness."

Finding him willing to converse, I was extremely fretted to discover that, owing to my ignorance of the literature and art of his time, I could not "bring him out" as the phrase runs, for looking into the Batavian story since, I find scores of matters he could have told me about, such as the building of ships at Hoorn, the customs of the people, the tulip-madness he had mentioned, the great men such as Jan Six, Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Van Campen who designed the Stadhuis and others, some of whom—as happened in the case of the great Willem Schouten—he may have known and haply smoked pipes of tobacco with.

But be this as it may, we had got back again to the gale when Prins brought in the dinner, and in a few minutes arrived the mate, Van Vogelaar, whereupon we fell to the meal, Imogene saying very little and often regarding me with a thoughtful face and earnest eyes as though, after the maiden's way in such matters, she was searching me; I taciturn, the mate sullen in expression and silent, as his death-like face would advertise the beholder to suppose him ever to be, and Vanderdecken breaking at intervals from the deep musing fit he fell into to invite me to eat or drink with an air of incomparable dignity, hardened as it was by his eternal sternness and fierceness. [14]

At this meal I found the food to be much the same as that with which we had broken our fast. But in addition there was a roasted fowl and a large ham; and into each silver goblet Prins poured a draught of sherry—a very soft and mellow wine—which I supposed Vanderdecken had come by through the same means which enabled him to obtain coats for his own and his men's backs, and ropes for his masts and sails, and brandy and gin for his stone jars—that is, by overhauling wrecks and pillaging derelicts, for certainly strong waters were not to be got by lying off the coast and going a-hunting. [15]

Yet though the wine put a pleasant warmth into my veins, insomuch that I could have talked freely but for the depressing influence of the captain and his mate, them it no more cheered and heartened, it gave them no more life and spirit than had they been urns filled with dust into which the generous liquor had been poured. Several times, indeed, whilst I was on board that ship, have I seen Vanderdecken, Vogelaar, and Arents swallow such draughts of punch out of bowls, as would have laid me senseless in five minutes, yet these capacious jorums gave rise in them to not the least signs of jollity; as, indeed, how should it have been otherwise, for their brains were dead to all but the supernatural influence that kept them moving—dead as the works of a going watch—and what is there in the fumes of wine to disorder embodied ghosts? [16]

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## CHAPTER II. [17]

### VANDERDECKEN EXHIBITS SOME TREASURE.

When Vogelaar left the cabin to relieve Arents on deck, Vanderdecken exhibited a disposition to talk. He gently took Imogene's chin in his hand and chided her very tenderly, yet without the slightest quality of what we should call pleasantness in his manner. For this would have brought him to some show of good-humour, whereas never during the time I was thrown with him did I see the least light of merriment on his face; I say, he chided her, but very gently, for crying at the delay caused by the storm, and exclaimed, motioning to me, "Here is a seaman. He will tell you that this is a stormy part of the ocean, and that at this season of the year we must look for gales from the north-west; but he will also know that these tempests are short-lived and that a breeze from the east, north or south, must carry us round the Cape as fairly as our helm controls us." [18]

"Oh! that is so indeed, Miss Dudley," said I, quickly, and darting a meaning glance at her; and

wishing to change the subject I went on: "Mynheer, when I was in your cabin last night shifting myself, I noticed a cross-staff. 'Twould be of no use to you to-day, the sun being blotted out. Failing an observation, upon what method do you rely for knowing your position?"

"What else but the log?" he exclaimed. "I compute entirely by dead-reckoning. The staff hath often set me wide of the mark. The log fairly gives me my place on the sea card, and then there is the lead."

I bowed by way of thanking him, for in this direction I gathered by his rejoinder as much as he could have acquainted me with in an hour's discourse, besides, the earnest regard of the pair of sweet light eyes opposite reminded me that I must be very wary in showing myself inquisitive. [19]

"You have a sharp sight, sir," said Vanderdecken, but speaking without any fierceness, "to see that fore-staff in my cabin by the faint light there was. What else did you observe?"

I told him honestly, for I could imagine no challenge to his wrath in answering, that I had seen a speaking-trumpet, sand-glass, pictures, and the like. But as though Imogene knew him better and desired to shield me, she instantly said, "Oh, captain, will not you show Mr. Fenton the pictures of your wife and children? They will charm him, I know."

On this he called Prins to bring the pictures. If ever I had doubted this ship was the veritable Flying Dutchman the portraits would have settled my misgivings once and for all. The material on which they were painted was cracked in places, and the darkness of age lay very gloomy and thick upon them. They were all of a size, about ten inches long and six inches broad. He put his wife before me first and watched me with his fierce eyes whilst I pored upon the painting. The picture was that of a portly lady in a black close-fitting cap, the hair yellow, the bosoms very large, a square-shouldered heavy woman of the true Dutch mould, round-faced, not uncomely, and perhaps of five and forty years of age. How she was dressed I could not tell, but the arms were bare from the elbows, and they and the hands were, methought, very delicately painted and exquisitely life-like. The others were those of girls of different ages. Which of them Captain Vanderdecken imagined Miss Dudley to resemble I could not conceive; there was nothing in these darksome likenesses, albeit they represented maidenhood and infancy, to suggest a resemblance to the English beauty of the fragile, large-eyed, gold-crowned face of Imogene Dudley. [20]

She that was named Geertruida was of a style that came close to good looks, eyes merry, dainty mouth, but cheeks too fat. Here was little Margaretha, for whom the piping swain had been purchased, peering at me with a half-shy, half-wondering look out of the dusky background.

As I returned them one by one, the captain took them from me, lingering long upon each and making such comments as "'Tis Johanna to the life!" meaning his wife. "What art is more wonderful than this of portrait painting? No age is likely to beat our time, and no nation the Dutch. How alive is the eye here! Methinks if I spoke angrily to her she would weep!" or "You will find this girl," meaning Geertruida, "a true sister, Imogene, homely, honest and innocent, so fond of fun but yet so dutiful, that there is no woman in all Holland who would make a better wife," or "Ah! little one, thy father will be with thee ere long," stopping to kiss the painting of his daughter Margaretha. [21]

Prins stood by to receive the pictures, but Vanderdecken hung over this one for some minutes, falling motionless, insomuch that I thought another one of his strange fits or trances had seized him; and perfectly still for those moments were Miss Dudley and I, often glancing at each other as though both of us alike felt the prodigious significance imported into this spectacle of a father's love, by the bellowing of the wind, and the long, yearning, sickening, broadside rushes of the ship, ruthlessly hurled back by the surge and storm into the deeper solitude of those waters whose confines she was never to pass.

Now Arents left the table, never having given us, nor our talk, nor the pictures, the smallest imaginable heed. His going brought Vanderdecken back to life, so to speak; and he handed the picture of his child to Prins. I looked at him, expecting, though God knows why, to see a tear. But whatever sensibility Heaven had permitted this man to retain did not appear in his face. Had it been cast in brass it could not have been harder and more impenetrable. His eyes were full of their former passionate scornful life and light. They made me think, supposing him to show now as he would have appeared at the time of his death, that he was one who would have met his end full of impatience, imperious rage, and savage decrrial of the holy ordinances of Nature. [23]

But oh, the sadness, the sadness of the spectacle I had contemplated! This tender perusal by a husband and father of the beloved lineaments of those whom he deemed living, ay! and still looking as they looked at him from the canvas, but who had been dead so many years that time had perhaps erased the name from the stone that marked the burial-place of the youngest of them all—the little Margaretha! And how much longer would these portraits last, I asked myself? 'Twas certain by the evidences of decay in them that they had not the vitality of the ship and of those who sailed her. What then? The years would blot them out. Yet mercy he would surely deserve who loved his wife and children as this man did. And I still sometimes fondly hope that memory may be permitted to serve him in lieu of his eyes, so that in gazing upon the time-blackened canvas he may as truly see with intellectual sight the faces of his dear ones as though they stood out bright, fresh and life-like, as at the hour in which they were painted. [24]

All the time I looked at these pictures I would notice Miss Dudley watching me, quickly averting her gaze when mine met hers. I put down this scrutiny to her wish to gather my character, though I need not at this distance expect to be reproached for my vanity if I say that I thought that was not her only reason for following me with her eyes. I pray you consider the life she had [25]

led since the destruction of her father's ship and the loss of her parents; how that she was now grown to be a woman; and how that I was not only a young, but bright, fair, merry-eyed sailor, her own countryman, of the calling she loved for her father's sake, and the sweeter to her sight for breaking in upon her mournful life and offering to snatch her from the frightful companionship of the Death Ship's crew.

But more of this anon.

Whilst Prins was in the captain's cabin hanging up the pictures, she exclaimed, "It is a dull and dreary day. How are we to kill the time?"

As she spoke the clock struck, and the parrot, instead of using her customary expression, laughed out loudly, "Ha! ha! ha!"

"That bird," said I, "seems to know what we are talking about. It is a pretty notion of hers to laugh at your inquiry when she sees how vainly old Death in the clock yonder stabs at time." [26]

This I spoke in English.

"What do you say, mynheer?" demanded Vanderdecken.

"Oh, captain!" exclaimed Miss Imogene, as if she was carrying on the sense of my remarks, "could not we prettily dispatch an hour by looking at some of the treasure you have below?" She laid her little white hand on his, and pleaded with her eyes. "It will be a treat to Mr. Fenton to see the fine things you have, and I am still childish enough to love the sparkle of precious stones."

He turned to me and said, "Sir, I have no objection, but our countries are at war, and in case of your being transshipped I have to ask you, on your honour as a gentleman and a seaman, not to give information of the objects the lady desires me to show you." [27]

I never before witnessed a finer dignity in any man's air than that which ennobled him as he spoke. I gave him my assurance, feeling that I cut but a mean figure in my manner of answering after his own majestic and haughty aspect and the rich and thrilling tones in which he had delivered himself, nor will I pretend that I was not moved at the vanity and idleness of the obligation of silence he imposed upon me, for whatever treasure he had would be as safe in his ship as on the sandy bed of the sea, even though on my escaping I should go and apprise all the admirals in the world of its existence.

He said no more but, calling to Prins, ordered him to clear the table, bring pipes and tobacco, and then take some seamen with him into—as I understood—the half-deck and bring up two chests of treasure, those which were lashed on the starboard side, close against the bulkhead. The cloth was removed, we lighted our pipes, and after we had waited some little while, Prins, with several sailors, appeared, bearing among them two stout, apparently very heavy, chests, which they set down upon the cabin floor, taking care to secure them by lashings and seizings to the stanchions, so that they should not slip with the ship's lurches. [28]

The sailors interested me so much that, whilst they were with us, I looked only at them. It was not that there was anything in their faces, if I except the dreadful pallor, or in their attire, to fix my attention; it was that they were a part of the crew of this accursed ship, participators in the doom that Vanderdecken had brought upon her, members of a ghostly band the like of which it might never be permitted to mortal man to behold again. One had very deep-sunk eyes, which shone in their dark hollows with much of the fire that gave a power of terrifying to those of the captain. Another had a long, grizzly beard, over which his nose curved in a hook, his little eyes lay close against the top of his nose, and his hair, that was wet with spray or rain, lay like new-gathered seaweed down to pretty near his shoulder-blades. This man's name, I afterwards heard, was Tjaart Van der Valdt, whilst he that had the glowing eyes was called Christopher Roostoff. [29]

They all went about in the soulless, mechanical way I was now used to, and, when they had set down the chests, Prins dismissed them with an injunction to stand by ready to take them below again. The cases were about three feet high, and ranging about five feet long; they were heavily girt with iron bands, and padlocked with massive staples. Prins opened them and flung back the lids, and then, to be sure, I looked down upon treasures the like of which in quality, I'll not say quantity, in one single ship, the holds of the Acapulco galleons could alone rival, or the caves in which the old buccaneers hid their booty. Miss Dudley, seeing me rise, left her seat, and came to my side. Vanderdecken stepped round, and leaned against the table, his arms folded, and his body moving only with the rolling of the ship. [30]

I should speedily grow tedious were I to be minute in my description of what I saw, yet I must venture a short way in this direction. In one box there were fitted four trays, each tray divided into several compartments, and every compartment was filled with precious stones, set in rings, bracelets, bangles and the like, and with golden ornaments, such as birds for the hair, broches, necklets, chains for wearing about the waist or neck, and other such things of prodigious value and beauty of device. I asked leave to examine some of these objects, and on picking them up noticed that some were of a much more antique character than others, insomuch that I said to Miss Imogene in English, "I suspect that much of these splendours our friend will have collected at different periods." [31]

She answered in our tongue, "He can tell you what he purchased at Batavia, or what was consigned to him for delivery at Amsterdam, but his memory after that is a blank, and the last wreck he can recall, in which he found several quintals of silver and unminted gold, is the Fryheid that he met—I cannot tell where—in a sinking condition."

"There is more treasure aboard than this!" cried I.

"Much more!" she replied. Then turning to Vanderdecken, who had fixed his eyes on me without moving his head, she said, "I am telling Mr. Fenton that these chests represent but a handful of the treasure in this ship."

"I am dazzled by what I see, mynheer, said I, speaking whilst Prins raised the trays disclosing many hundreds of guineas' worth of ornaments and stones. "Had I but the value of one of these trays alone this should be my last voyage." [32]

"Ay," said he, "there is much that is beautiful here. Much that will yield good sums. But a large number of the articles in that chest belong to a merchant; there are likewise consignments, and my own share is but a speculation."

The other chest had but one tray, in which lay many golden crucifixes of different sizes, goblets, flagons, candlesticks, all gold, whilst beneath were numbers of a kind of small bricks or bars of pewter, which Miss Imogene told me were gold that had been originally disguised in this way as a blind to the pirates. In addition were several great canvas bags, into which Prins, moving always as an automaton, thrust his hand, bringing forth different sorts of coins, such as rix-dollars, ducatoons, ducats, Batavian rupees, Spanish dollars, and even schillings, worth no more than six stivers apiece. [33]

There is a pleasure in looking at bright and sparkling objects, at the beauty of gold worked into strange or fantastic shapes, at jewels and stones in their multitude, gleaming out in twenty colours at once. And had I been a picaroon or a woman, I could not have surveyed this collection with sharper delight, though I hope you will not suppose that I felt the buccaneer's thirst for the things. But when my glance went to Vanderdecken, all the shining seemed to die out, and the richest of the jewels to lose its glory.

Not that this was actually so; it was the reflection excited in me that darkened the radiance of that treasure. There stood the great, majestic captain, with his arms folded over his beard, and his eyes fixed on the chest, frightfully symbolising—more wildly and sternly than could the corpse of a miser lying in a coffin, into which had been poured all the ducats he had hoarded in his life—the worthlessness of that wealth of which the desire makes devils of men in secret oppressions and bitter, hidden cruelties. Had Vanderdecken been veritably dead—recumbent—a corpse—the sight of him alongside those cases of costly things would not haply have affected me; 'twas the simulation of life in him, his unhallowed and monstrous vitality, that rendered his typification of the uselessness after death of that for which many among us sell our hearts, nay, diligently toil to extinguish the last spark of the Heavenly fire which the Creator sends us into this life radiant with; as who, looking at a babe's face, but sees?—that rendered, I say, his typification terrible. You could see he took no joy whatever in the contents of the cases; he eyed them stonily; you witnessed no pricking up of his ears to the tinkling and jingling rattle made by the coins as Prins poured them out and back again. Nor, had the money been shingle and the jewels and gold ornaments pieces of coal, could Prins have worked with duller eyes or more mechanical motions. [34]

I said to Miss Imogene, pointing as I spoke to the chests that Vanderdecken might suppose we talked of the treasure in them, "He does not appear to care the snap of a finger for what is there. If the sense of possession is dead in him, why should he take whatever he can find of jewels, gold or silver, from the ships in which he is fortunate enough to find such things?" [35]

"If your brain will not help you to such matters, how should mine?" she replied, with a faint smile. "The idea has never before occurred to me, but be sure 'tis a part of his punishment. He may feel no pleasure in the possession of his wealth; yet he knows it is on board, and it may be intended to render every gale that beats him back more and more bitter and hard by delaying him from carrying his cargo home." [36]

This was shrewdly imagined, I thought, though it did not satisfy me, because since 'twas sure that he had lost recollection of preceding gales, succeeding ones could not gain in bitterness. In truth, we were afloat in a fearful and astonishing Mystery, from which my eagerness to deliver the sweet and fragrant girl by my side grew keener with every look of hers that met mine, and with every glance I directed at the captain and around the ancient interior that time had sickened to the complexion of the death which worked this ship in the forms of men.

Having satisfied me with a sight of these treasures, Vanderdecken ordered Prins to have the chests removed, and we then returned to the table to smoke out the tobacco that remained in our pipes.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### IMOGENE AND I ARE MUCH TOGETHER.

So far I have been minute, accounting for every hour and all things which happened therein since I was picked up by the mate of the Death Ship and put aboard her. My first impressions were keen and strong, and I have sought to lay them before you in the order in which they occurred. But to pursue this particularity of narrative, to relate every conversation, to regularly notice the striking of the clock, the movements of the skeleton, and the hoarse comminatory croak of the parrot, would be to speedily render this tale tedious. Therefore let me speak briefly for a little space.

The storm blew with steady fury for six days, driving the tall fabric to leeward to a distance of many leagues every twenty-four hours, the course of the drift being as I should suppose—for it was impossible to put much faith in the compasses—about south-east by east, the larboard tacks aboard and the ship "ratching" nothing. It was so continuous and heavy, this gale, that it began to breed a feeling of despair in me, for I felt that if such weather lasted many weeks it would end in setting us so far south that we should be greatly out of the road taken by ships rounding the Cape, and so remote from the land, that should Vanderdecken desire to careen or water his vessel it would occupy us months to fetch the coast, so that the prospect of escaping with Miss Imogene grew small and gloomy. Added to which was the melancholy of the cell-like cabin in which it was my lot to sleep, the fiery crawlings, the savage squeakings of great rats, the grinding, groaning and straining noises of the labouring structure, likewise the sickening, sweeping, soaring, falling motions of the high light vessel, movements which, as we drove further south, where the seas were swollen into mountains by the persistent hardness of the gale and the vastness of the liquid plain along which they coursed, furious with the fiendish lashing of the thongs of the storm, grew at times so insupportable that, sailor as I was and used to the sea in all its moods, I would often feel faint and reel to a sensation of nausea. [38]

But Imogene was never in the least degree discomposed. She was so used to the ship that its movements were to her what the steadiness of dry land is to other women. She seldom came on deck however. Indeed, the gusts and guns were often so fierce—coming along like thunderbolts through the gale itself—that any one of them catching her gown might have carried her light figure overboard. Moreover, twenty-four hours after the gale set in, it drew up thick as mud; the horizon was brought within reach of a musket-shot; and out of this thickness blew the rain, in straight lines, mixed with the showering off the heads of the seas; the sky hung steady, of the colour of slate—no part lighter or darker than another, but so low that it appeared as if a man could whip his hand into it from our masthead whenever those reeling spars came plumb. [39]

As it gave me no pleasure to linger on deck in such weather, you may suppose that Miss Imogene and I were much together below. Often a whole morning or afternoon would pass without a soul entering the cabin where we sate. Whether Vanderdecken was pleased to think that Imogene had a companion—a fellow-countryman, with whom she could converse, and so kill the time which he would suspect from her recent fit of weeping hung heavy on her spirits; or that, having himself long passed those marks which time sets up as the boundaries of human passions, he was as incapable of suspecting that Imogene and I should fall in love, as he clearly was of perceiving the passage of years; 'tis certain he never exhibited the smallest displeasure when, perchance, he found us together, albeit once or twice on entering the cabin when we were there he would ask Imogene abruptly, but never with the sternness his manner gathered when he addressed others, what our talk was about, as if he suspected I was inquiring about his ship and cargo; though if, indeed, this was so, I don't doubt the suspicion was put into his head by Van Vogelaar, who, I am sure, hated me as much because I was an Englishman as because our panic-stricken men had fired upon him. [40]

It takes a man but a very short time to fall in love, though the relation of the thing, if the time be very short, is often questioned as a possibility, sometimes heartily laughed at as an absurdity, when deliberately set down in writing. Why this should be I do not know. I could point to a good many men married to women with whom they fell in love at a dance, or by seeing them in the street, or by catching sight of them in church and the like. I have known a man to become passionately enamoured of a girl by beholding her picture. And what says Marlowe? [41]

"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

Depend upon it, when passion is of slow growth and cultivated painfully, you may suspect a deficiency somewhere. Either the girl is not delightful of face and shape and her virtues and good qualities are hard to come at, or she is a tease and a coquette, and, in a manner of speaking, puts her foot down upon a man's heart and prevents the emotion there from shooting. There will be something wanting, something wrong, I say. Association may indeed lengthily induct one into a habit of affection, but the sort of love I have in my mind springs like a young god into a man's intelligence from a maiden's eyes. [42]

But whether this swift passion is more lasting than the affection that is formed by slower mental processes, and which of them is the safer to trust to, is no riddle for such as I to bother over. And in sober verity, I am sorry to have been led into these remarks, which certainly should be omitted if they were not necessary as an apology.

For the truth must be told, and it is this: that the very first morning I met Imogene I fell in love with her beauty, while the long days of the storm which threw us greatly together confirmed the first movement of my heart by acquainting me with the extraordinary sweetness, innocence, gentleness and purity of her nature. These qualities, unlike the enchanting hue and brightness of her eyes, the golden falls of her hair, and her many other fairy graces, were not quickly discoverable, but they stole out during our many conversations. Who that has been to sea knows not how speedily character is discovered on shipboard? And I say that before that gale was ended I was so much in love with this fair and tender girl that I could have laid down my life to serve her. [43]

This I should not have confessed, nor indeed made any reference to my love-passage, if it did not concern the influence exercised by the Death Ship on the lives and fortunes of those who have relations with her.

In this time our conversation was about all sorts of things—her parents, her home, her childhood, the loss of her father's ship, the friendless condition she would be in on her arrival in England



should I manage to deliver her from Vanderdecken. Though when she came to that, I begged her to dismiss her fears at once and for ever, by assuring her that my mother would gladly receive her and cherish her as her own daughter, having but me to love, who was always absent. At which a faint blush sweetened her cheeks as though she suspected what was in my mind; but I was careful to hurry away from the subject, since I did not wish her then to suppose I loved her, for fear that, not having had time, as I believed, to love me, she might fall into a posture of mind calculated to baffle my hopes of carrying her away from the Braave. I told her all about myself, of the famous Fenton from whom I was descended, of my voyages, of the Saracen, whose passage to India I feared would have an ill issue now that she had met the Dutchman, and I talked again of Captain Skevington's amazing, and, as I supposed, accurate theories touching the living-dead who navigated this ship. [45]

She had much to tell me of Vanderdecken and his ship; of unsuspecting vessels they had fallen in with, which had sold them tobacco, butter, cheese, and the like. Of others that had backed their topsails to speak, then taken fright and sailed away in hot haste. [46]

I asked her if it was true that the captain hailed passing ships for the purpose of sending letters home. She answered no; it was not true; that was the general belief as she had heard from her father; but, as Vanderdecken did not know that he was curst—as he went on year after year, firmly believing that next time he should be successful in rounding the Cape—why should he desire to send letters home, more particularly as he regarded the Braave as one of the swiftest vessels afloat. She added, "I have never seen him write a letter, and I am certain he has never endeavoured to send one."

"But if he finds a ship willing to speak, he will send a boat?"

"Yes, always; but merely for necessaries of which he is constantly in want. Now it is tobacco; another time it will be spirits. Some few weeks since we met a ship, from which he purchased several cases of marmalade and some hams, for which Van Vogelaar paid in coin that scared them, when they put the age of the money and the appearance of this ship together; for they threw the mate overboard, and instantly made off." [47]

"I suppose Van Vogelaar could not be drowned?" said I.

"No," said she; "he, like the rest, have no other business in life than to live. They had put the hams and marmalade into the boat, and when they threw him in the sea, he swam very quietly to his companions."

"What was the ship?" I asked.

"A Spaniard," she replied. "After they had put the ship before the wind I saw a number of them on the poop on their knees crossing themselves."

"I cannot understand," said I, "why this ship should be termed a Phantom. What could be more real than these timbers and the requirements of the people who navigate her?" [48]

"Besides," exclaimed Imogene, "if she is a Phantom, how could Vanderdecken write those letters in her which he is supposed to desire to send home? If you have a real letter, such as a person can put into his pocket and deliver, you must have real materials to produce it, ink, pens, paper, wafers, and something hard to sit upon, or kneel upon, or write upon."

"Certainly!" said I. "Of a Phantom the whole must be phantasmal. Suppose a ghost dressed, its attire must be as unsubstantial as the essence it covers."

"The truth about this ship is not known," she continued, "and it never can be known, because her influence is dreaded. Vessels on finding out her character fly from her, and those who sell to her unsuspectingly pass away without giving her further thought."

"Or," said I, gloomily, "perhaps are never more heard of." [49]

In this way would we talk, and you may conceive we were at no loss for topics. On several occasions she showed me some of the dresses Vanderdecken had furnished her with; of which I chiefly remember a chintz gown, spotted with roses, with sleeves swelling out like ruffs at the elbows; a pink dress, with a girdle to bring the waist close under the bosom; and a slate-coloured dress, with a red shawl for it, to be worn like a sash, and a kerchief for the throat; and I also recollect that she showed me some strange, very dainty caps, one to sit on the back of the head, another of black velvet and a feather, which she told me Vanderdecken had said was worn on the side of the head. She put it on to explain its use, and a man's true darling she looked in it.

Once she came into the cabin dressed in the pink dress with the high waist; and very sweet did she appear. But I said to her that of all the apparel she had shown me nothing pleased me better than the black velvet jacket in which I had first seen her, and thereafter she constantly wore it. [50]

In short, the clothes Vanderdecken had stocked her cabin with, including much fine linen, lace, collars, long gloves, shoes of several colours, and the like, were such as to suggest a costly theatrical wardrobe by reason of the variety of the styles representing fashions from the middle of the seventeenth century down to within twenty years of the time in which happened what I am here relating. It has been already explained how these things were gotten. You have only to consider that this ship sailed from Batavia in 1653, with a large stock of dresses, linen, jewellery, plate and so forth in her hold, besides her cargo, which stock Vanderdecken, in whom there must still work the thrifty instincts of the Hollander, just as he is suffered to love his pipe and bowl, and pine for both when the tobacco and spirits have run out, had replenished by appropriating such wares, treasure and apparel as he had a fancy for out of the ships he encountered abandoned at sea or cast away upon the African coast. You have only to consider this, I say, and [51]

bear in mind the great number of years he has been afloat, and how many scores of richly-laden merchantmen have passed and repassed that part of the ocean to which the Curse confines him, to find nothing to marvel at in any catalogue of the contents of the Braave that could be offered.

Besides having all these strange and often sumptuous articles of attire to show me and talk about, Imogene had a great deal to tell me concerning the weary years she had spent in the vessel, wondering how her life was to end, how she was ever to get to England or to any other civilized country if Vanderdecken refused to let her leave him, because of his fatherly affection for her and his conviction that he was homeward bound, and only temporarily delayed by the north-west gales which beat him back. She said that after a time she began to fear that she would lose her own language and be able to speak no tongue but the ancient Dutch in which Vanderdecken and his men conversed, to preserve herself from which calamity she regularly perused the collection of English poetry that the captain most fortunately had among his books. Her grief was that the book, instead of poems, was not the Holy Scriptures, but she knew many prayers and hymns her mother had taught her, and these she never omitted reciting morning and night.

[52]

You would have been touched had you heard her, marked the sadness that rendered Madonna-like the character of her fragile, delicate beauty, observed the girlish innocence of the expression that shone with the moisture of unwept tears in the eyes she fixed on me, and then considered how she had been bereaved, how frightful for tediousness and dullness, and for the association of the mysterious beings into whose society she had been cast, must have been the five years she had spent on the Death Ship. I remember asking if she knew what religion Vanderdecken was of; she answered she did not know for certain, but that she had heard him speak of his wife and family as having worshipped in the Oude Kerk.

[53]

"Indeed, Mr. Fenton," said she, "I don't believe he is or was of any religion at all. Van Vogelaar is a Calvinist; he told me so one evening when I was speaking with surprise of Antony Jans being a Catholic, as it is almost impossible to reconcile the fatness of that man with the austerities and mortifications of his creed."

"There can be no doubt," said I, "that Vanderdecken was—when human like you and me, without religion. His shocking defiance, and the condemnation that followed, proved that he acted out of sheer sin in his soul, and not out of a passing passion. And yet you would have supposed that a Dutchman, no matter how secretly impious, would have behaved with more discretion than this skipper."

[54]

"I dare say he would have been more discreet," said Imogene, "had he imagined what was to follow."

It was in this way, and in such talk, that we killed those six days of storm; and now I come to other matters.

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## CHAPTER IV. THE GALE BREAKS.

[55]

On the sixth day, during dinner, Vanderdecken said he believed we had seen the worst of the storm. There was a small lull in the wind, and a faintness sifting up, so to speak, from behind the peaks and valleys of the horizon into the sky all around, like a very dim dawning of fair weather innumerable leagues distant yet.

"I shall be glad to see the sun again," said Imogene.

"Let us get quit of these waters," exclaimed Vanderdecken, moodily, and often dropping his knife and fork to take his beard in both hands and stroke it with a fixed look in his eyes, which would have made you swear he beheld a vision, "and we shall have so much sun every day climbing higher and higher until it hangs right over our mastheads like a flaming shield that the coolness of the Biscayan Sea and the entrance of the English Channel shall be sweet as drink to a dry man."

[56]

"Pray, mynheer," said I, "how far to the eastwards do you suppose this gale has driven us?"

He looked at me with a sudden temper in his face as if he would crush me for daring to ask. Nevertheless, he answered, but with a deep thrill in the rich tremble of his voice, "About one hundred and fifty leagues, sir; and what of that?"

"Ay, and what of that?" exclaimed Van Vogelaar, who had turned a scowling eye on me on my asking this question.

"Why, nothing, gentlemen," I answered, warned by the violet eyes that dwelt upon me to slide out of this matter as quickly as I could. "The ground to be recovered is not great, and a pretty little south-east wind should float us, with square yards, round the Cape in three or four days."

[57]

Vanderdecken made no response; his eyes fell away from me to the table, at which he gazed in the posture of one who dreams waking. Van Vogelaar, on the other hand, continued to stare at me for a long minute, which, as he sate on my right hand and consequently had to turn his head and hold his face full towards me, proved a very severe trial to my temper, insomuch that I could have beat him for his insolence. But a very little reflection taught me to consider this steadfast,

surly and abusive regard as meaningless as a dead man's stare would be if moulded to the expression Van Vogelaar wore; so I waited till he should have made an end of his scrutiny, and the captain shortly after rising, I followed him on deck, the weather as yet being too heavy and wet for Imogene.

It was as Vanderdecken had said. The gale had broke and we might look for a clear sky presently, yet the sea still ran fearfully high, and the wash and weltering of it along the sea-line that was now indifferently clear, suggested a vast sierra whose sides beyond were in sunshine, whilst over our trucks lay the sombre twilight of the tempest. There was still a fine rain in the air, though not such as to cloud the ocean, but I was so fascinated by the picture of the Flying Dutchman's fight with the mighty combers which rolled at her from the north and west that I lingered gazing till I was pretty near as soaked as when I had been fished up and brought aboard. [58]

But a sailor makes no trouble of a wet jacket so long as he has a dry shirt for his back, which I had, thanks to Vanderdecken, who had been so good as to lend me several shifts of linen.

I do not know that I ever saw or heard of a ship that threw from her such bodies of foam as did this vessel. She would rise at the sea buoyantly enough, yet at every lean-to to windward for a giddy sliding swoop into the hollow, she hurled an enormous space of seething and spitting and flashing froth many fathoms from her, into which she would sink as though it were snow and so squatter, as 'tis termed, and lie there whilst you might count to ten or fifteen, ere rising out of it to the irresistible heave of the next leviathan sea. Often had I watched this picture during the six days, but the light breaking around the whole circle of the sea, like radiance dully streaming through greased paper, the decreasing force of the wind, that while leaving the surges still monstrous, suffered the ship to fall with deader weight to windward, thus enlarging the snow-like surface she cast from her whilst rendering it fiercer in its boiling, made this particular example of the ship's sea-going qualities a marvel in my sight, and I stood for a long time looking and looking. [59] [60]

If ever a man was to guess the deathless character of this craft it would be at such a time as this. The giant forces of nature with which she had warred were languishing. The beaten storm, not indeed yet breathless, was slowly silencing the desperate roar of its invisible artillery; the seas, like battering-rams, thundered against her sides, but with a gradual lessening of their fury, and the victorious ship, her decks streaming, her bows and sides hound-like with salival drainings, a fierce music of triumphant shoutings aloft, her reefed courses swollen as are the cheeks of trumpeters urging to the conflict, rose and fell, pitched and strained, among those liquid heights and hollows, every nerve in her ancient fabric strung taut for a battle that was to be repeated again and again, whilst the faintness round the horizon waxed into a delicate brightness of sunshine streaming off the edge of the canopy that still hovered on high, and the wind sank into whistlings, without admixture of thunderous intervals, and the surge-slopes drooped out of their savage sharpness. [61]

By seven o'clock that night the gale was spent, and there was then blowing a quiet breeze from the west-south-west. The swell rolled slowly from the quarter from which the wind had stormed, and caused the Braave to wallow most nauseously, but she grew a bit steadier after they had shaken the reefs out of the courses and made sail on her. I watched this business with deep interest. Vanderdecken, standing on the poop, gave his orders to Van Vogelaar on the quarter-deck. The sailors went to work with true Dutch phlegm and deliberateness, taking plenty of time to unknot the reef-points, then carrying the fore and main-jeers to the capstan, and walking round without a song, sullen and silent. There was no liveliness—none of the springing and jumping and cheerful heartiness you would expect in a crew who, after battling through six dismal days of black winds and lashing seas, were now looked down upon by a Heaven of stars, shining gloriously among a few slowly-moving clouds. [62]

Ay, you saw how dead were the bodies which the supernatural life in them kept a-going. They set their topsails, topgallant-sails and mizzen, which I have elsewhere described as a lateen-shaped sail secured to a yard, like to the triangular canvas carried by xebecs and gallies, then hoisted their jib or fore-staysail and let fall the clews of the spritsail, keeping the sprit-topsail handed. The larboard tacks were still aboard and the ship heading north, lying up for the coast that was now about two hundred and fifty to three hundred leagues from us. She made a wild picture, not wanting in solemnity either, yet charged with an element of fear. Twilight is but short-lived in those seas and it was dark—though the sky as I have said was full of radiant galaxies—some while before they had ended the business of crowding sail upon the ship. Amid the fury and froth of the gale the phosphoric gleamings of the timbers had been hidden; but now that peace had come and there was no other commotion than such as the long cradling swing of the swell produced, those grave-yard lights glistened out afresh and they made you think of the eyes of countless worms creeping in and out of the rottenness of an hundred and fifty years. It was certain that Vanderdecken and his mates saw these misty, sickly, death-suggestive glimmerings; for the faint lights trembled along the decks, twinkled upon the masts, shone with sufficient power on the sides to make—as I had observed when the ship first drew near to the Saracen—a light of their own in the black water; they must have been noticeable things to the crew, even as to Imogene and me; for they saw what we saw—the sun, the stars, the ocean, the sails, the directions of the compass—whatever was to be seen. [63] [64]

Why, then, was it that this fluttering, malignant sheen did not catch their notice? I know not. Maybe the senses permitted to them went so far only as to impel them to persevere in making the passage of the Cape. For besides these phosphoric crawlings, the aged condition of the ship, her antique rig, and a variety of other features illustrating the passage of time, would have been visible to them, had their perception not been limited by the Curse to the obligations it imposed.

After a little Vanderdecken went below, and presently returned bringing Imogene with him. On the poop 'twas all darkness save for the phosphorescence in the ship and the sea-fire over the side. The captain and the lady came close before I distinguished them.

"Fair weather at last, Mr. Fenton!" she exclaimed, after peering to make sure of me, and then stopping so as to oblige Vanderdecken to stop too, for he had her arm in his, and I think he meant to walk to and fro the deck with her. [65]

"Yes," I replied, "Heaven is merciful. Such another six days I would not pass through for the wealth in this ship."

"Pray speak in Dutch, sir, that I may follow you," said Vanderdecken, with a certain stern and dignified courtesy.

"If I could converse with ease, mynheer," said I, "I should speak in no other language aboard this vessel. As it is, I fear you do not catch half my meaning."

"Oh, yes! you are intelligible, sir," he answered, "though you sometimes use words which sound like Dutch but signify nothing."

"Nothing to you, my friend," thought I; "but I warrant them of good currency in the Amsterdam of to-day." In short, his language was to mine, or at least to the smattering I had of the Batavian tongue, what the speech of a man of the time of Charles II. would be to one of this century—not very wide asunder; only that one would now and again introduce an obsolete expression, whilst the other would occasionally employ a term created years after his colloquist's day. [66]

"But it pleases me, captain, to speak in my own tongue," said Imogene. "I should not like to forget my language."

"It will be strange if you forget your language in a few months, my child!" he answered, with a slight surprise.

A sudden roll of the ship causing the great mainsail to flap, he started, looked around him, and cried out with a sudden anger in his deep voice, to the steersman, "How is the ship's head?"

"North-by-east," was the answer.

"We want no easting," he cried out again, with the same passion in his voice, and strode with vehemence to the binnacle where stood Antony Arents, who had charge of the deck, and who had gone to view the compass on hearing the skipper call. [67]

"This will not do!" I heard the captain say, his deep tones rumbling into the ear as though you passed at a distance a church in which an organ was played. "By the bones of my father, I'll not have her break off! Sweat your braces, man! Take them to the capstan! If we spring our masts and yards for it she'll have to head nothing east of north!"

There was a fierce impetuosity in his speech that made the delivery of it sound like a sustained execration. Arents went forward and raised some cries. I could see the figure of Vanderdecken black against the stars, up and down which he slid with the heave of the ship. He was motionless, close to the binnacle, and I could imagine the stormy rise and fall of his broad and powerful chest under his folded arms. [68]

The watch came aft to the braces and strained at them. 'Twas a shadowy scene. There were none of those songs and choruses which seamen used to keep time in their pulling and hauling and to encourage their spirits withal. The boatswain, Jans, was on the fore-castle attending the fore: Arents stood on the quarter-deck. Occasionally one or the other shouted out an order which the dim concavities on high flung down again out of their hollows, as though there were ghosts aloft mocking at these labours. You saw the pallid shinings writhing about the feet of the sailors, and the sharper scintillations of the wood-work wherever it was chafed by a rope. When they had trimmed, but not yet with the capstan, Arents called to the captain, who returned an answer implying that the ship had come up again, and that the trim as it was would serve. Thereupon the men stole out of sight into the darkness forward, melting into the blackness as do visions of a slumberer into the void of deep and dreamless rest; Arents returned to the poop and stood near the captain, who held his place with the entranced stirlessness I was now accustomed to see in him. But, no doubt, his eyes were on the needle, and had I dared approach, I might have beheld a fire in his eyes keener than the flame of the mesh with which the binnacle was illuminated. [69]

"You would know him as one not of this world," said I to Imogene, "even should he pass you quickly in a crowd."

"There are some lines in the book of poetry downstairs which fit him to perfection," she answered

—  
"Thou hast a grim appearance, and thy face  
Bears a command in it; though thy tackle's torn,  
Thou shew'st a noble vessel."

"Ay," said I, "they are wonderfully pat; they might have been made for him."

"Here are others," she continued—

"He has, I know not what,  
Of greatness in his looks and of high fate,  
That almost awes me."

"And when his moods change these verses are always present—

[70]

'Read'st thou not something in my face that speaks  
Wonderful change and horror from within me?'"

She put a tragic note into her voice as she recited; the starlight was in her eyes, and they were fixed on me; her face whitened out to the astral gleaming till you saw her hair throbbing on her forehead to the blowing of the wind. She continued—

"I could quote a score of passages marvellously true of the captain and his fellows, serving indeed as revelations to me, so keen are the eyes of poets. And little wonder," says she, with a sigh, "for what else have I had to read but that book of poetry!"

"Just now," said I, "he asked if you thought it likely you should lose your language in a few months. This plainly shows that he supposes he met with you in his passage from Batavia—that is his last passage. Now, since his finding you dates nearly five years back, and you tell me that he has only memory for what happened within the past few months, how does it fall out that he recollects your story, which he certainly does, for he asked me if you had related it to me?" [71]

"It must be," she answered, "because he is constantly alluding to it in speaking of the reception his wife and daughters will give me. It is also impressed upon him by my presence, by my frequent asking him to put me on board a homeward-going ship, and so it is kept in his mind as a thing constantly happening—continually fresh."

"Suppose I should stay in this ship say for six months, never speaking of the Saracen nor recalling the circumstance of my coming on board, you believe his memory would drop the fact, and that he would view me as one who happened to be in the ship, and that's all, his mind stopping at that?"

"How he would view you I cannot say; but I am certain he would forget how you came here, unless there was incessant reference to the Saracen and to her men shooting at Van Vogelaar. But time would bear no part in this sort of recollection: he would still be living in the year of God 1653, and sailing home from Batavia; and if he thought at all he'd imagine it was in that year that you came on board his ship." [72]

Well, here was a piece of metaphysics a touch above my intelligence and above this sweet creature's too, for she could only speak as she believed, without being able to account for the miraculous conditions of this ship's life and of that of her crew. And indeed I should not have teased her with such questions but for a great craving to obtain a just conception of the amazing character who has been, and must ever remain, the terror of all mariners; whilst beyond this again was a secret dread lest this fair enchanting woman should have been chosen to play a part in the marine tragedy; which I would have a right to fear if I found Vanderdecken's relations with her, as regards his memory for instance, different from what they were in all other directions. Plainly I mean this: that if she were being used as a Divine instrument, then it was certain that I should not be suffered to deliver her from the Death Ship—an insupportable reflection at any time, but a mortal blow now that I had come to love her. [73]

Meanwhile, the giant figure of the Dutch captain stood motionless near the binnacle; close to him was the second mate, himself like a statue. The tiller-tackles, grasped by the helmsman, swayed him with every blow of the sea upon the rudder, yet even his movements had a lifelessness in them that was as apparent as though the man had been stricken dead at his post, and swung there against the dancing stars.

A quick jerk of the ship causing Imogene to lose her balance, she grasped my arm to steady herself by, and I took care she should not release me. Indeed, from almost the first hour of our meeting there had been a yearning towards me, a wistfulness of a mute sort underlying her demeanour, and this night I found assurance of it by her manner, that was not indeed clinging, having more of nestling in it, as if I was her refuge, her one hope. She may have guessed I loved her. I cannot tell. My eyes may have said much, though I had not spoken. But there was that in her, as she stood by my side, with her hand under my arm, that persuaded me her heart was coming to mine, and haply more quickly because of our sole mortality amid the substantial shadows of the Death Ship's crew. You felt what that bond meant when you looked around you and saw the dimly-looming figure of Vanderdecken beside the compass, the ghostly darkness of the second mate's form, the corpse-like swaying of the helmsman, as of an hanging body moved by the wind, and thought of the amazing human mysteries lost in the darkness forward, or slumbering in the hammocks, if, indeed, sleep was ever permitted to visit eyes which death was forbidden to approach. 'Twas as if Imogene stood on one side a grave, I on the other, and clasped hands for the courage we found in warm and circulating blood, over a pit filled with a heart-freezing sight. [74]

"We shall escape yet—fear not!" said I, speaking out of the heat of my own thoughts as though we were conversing on that subject.

"May our Saviour grant it!" she exclaimed. "See how black the white water around the ship makes her in spite of the strange fires which glow everywhere!"

I felt her shiver as she cried, "The vessel seems to grow more terrible to my fancy. It may be because we have talked so much of her, and your views of Vanderdecken and the crew have raised terrifying speculations in me." [75]

"We shall escape yet!" I repeated, hotly, for the very sense of our imprisonment and the helplessness of our condition for the time being, that might be long in terminating, was a thought so maddening that I felt in a temper to defy, scorn and spit in the face of the very Devil himself was he to appear. But I had her right hand pressed to my heart; 'twas sure she felt the comfort of [76]

it, and together for some while in silence we stood viewing the ship, the fabric of whose hull stood out as though lined with India ink upon the ashen tremble of froth that seemed to embrace her length like shadowy-white arms, as the wind blowing mildly into her sails forced her to break the water at her stern as she slid athwart the swell. She made a sight to shrink from! The sailor's heart within me sank to this feebly-luminous mystery of aged yet imperishable hull, holding within her creatures so unnatural that the eye of man can view the like of them nowhere else, and raising her structure of ancient sail and masts to the stars which glided in blue and green and white along the yards with the rolling of her. Little wonder that she should affright the mariner who meets her amid the lonely paths of the vast ocean she haunts.

[77]

I clasped my brow with bewilderment in my brain.

"Surely," I cried to my companion, "I am dreaming. It cannot be that I at this moment am standing on the deck of the Death Ship!"

She sought to soothe me, but she was startled by my behaviour, and that perception enabled me to rally. If she as a weak and lonely maiden could bravely support five years of life amid this crew, what craven was I to have my brain confused by only seven days' association, spent mainly in her company? Heaven forgive me. But methinks I realised our condition—all that it might hereafter signify—with a keenness of insight, present and prophetic, which would be impossible in her whose knowledge of the sea was but a child's when she fell into Vanderdecken's hands.

[78]

"We must have patience, courage and hope, Mr. Fenton," she said, softly. "Look at that starry jewel yonder," and she turned up her face to the cross that hung above the mizzen topmast-head, gleaming very gloriously in a lake of deep indigo betwixt two clouds. "It shines for me! and often have I looked up at it with full eyes and a prayer in my heart. It shines for you, too! It is the emblem of our redemption, and we must drink in faith that God will succour us from it."

She continued to gaze at it, and there was sheen enough to enable me to see a tender smile upon her upturned face. How sweet did she then appear, fairer than the "evening air clad in the beauty of a thousand stars," as the poet wrote. I looked up to that sparkling Cross and thought how strange it was that the Sentence pronounced upon this ship should doom her to sail eternally over waters above which there nightly rises the lustrous symbol of Compassion and Mercy.

[79]

"Take my arm, my child; 'tis chilly work standing," said the deep voice of the captain.

Again had he come upon us unawares, but this time he found us silent, together gazing at the Cross of stars. She withdrew her hand quickly from my arm and took his, showing wisdom in her promptness, as I was quick to see. Then, being alone, I went to the quarter-deck and fell to walking briskly. For Vanderdecken was right, the wind came bleak.

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## CHAPTER V.

[80]

### THE DEATH SHIP'S FORECASTLE.

Next morning was clear and sunny. I was up betimes, being always glad to get away from my cabin, in the which I needed all my long training at sea to qualify me to sleep, not only because of the rats and the noises in the hold, and those mystic fires in the timbers that never failed to send a shudder through me if I opened my eyes upon them in the darkness, but because of my bed, which was miserably hard and wretched in all ways, and in which I would lie down dressed, saving my boots and jacket, never knowing when I might not be obliged to spring on deck in a hurry, though I took care to refresh myself o' morn by going into the head, pulling off my shirt and sousing myself with a bucketfull of salt water—'twas an old canvas bucket, I remember—no man of the crew speaking to or noticing me.

[81]

This morning being very fine, the first bright day that had broken since I had been in the ship, I thought, since it was early, an hour to breakfast, Vanderdecken in his cabin and Arents alone on the poop-deck with the man who steered, that I would look a little closely into the vessel, and ascertain if possible where and how the men slept, where they dressed their food and the like. But first I snatched a glance around to see if any sail was in sight. No! 'Twas all dark-blue water meeting the clear sky in an unbroken girdle, that by holding its sapphire hue against the light azure of the heavens there, stood out with surprising sharpness. The swell left by the gale was not gone, but it came with a steady rhythmic flowing of folds from the north-west that seemed to soothe rather than to vex the ancient ship, and the heavings made the eastern sea-board a rich and dazzling spectacle, by catching the brilliant white sunshine on the polish of their rounded backs, and so carrying their burden of blinding radiance to the verge of the visible deep.

[82]

The ship was under all the canvas she had. That studding-sails have been for ages in use we know on the authority of Sir Walter Raleigh, in his writings on the improvements in ships since Henry the Eighth's days; yet I can answer that this Death Ship had no irons on her yards, nor could I anywhere see any spars that answered to the booms used for the spreading of those sails. However, even if she had been furnished with such canvas, this morning it would have been no use to her; for the breeze still hung, westerly and she was going close-hauled, steering something to the west of north and moving through the water at about three knots.

I spied the corpulent figure of Jans, the boatswain, forward of the fore-mast. He was standing with his arms folded, staring ahead. His posture somehow suggested a vacancy of mind, and you

[83]

thought of him as looking into God knows what distance, with the unmeaningness you observe in the fixed gaze of a babe sucking.

I could not say whether the decks had been washed down; they seemed damp, as if newly swabbed. One whom I supposed to be the ship's carpenter was sawing wood near the house in which were the live stock. Two others, hard by him, sat upon a sail, stitching at it. There was a seaman in the fore-top, but what doing I could not see; little more than his head showed above the barricade. I walked forward to where the boatswain stood, and, on observing that he took no notice of me, I touched him lightly on the shoulder.

He turned his round face, ghastly as death yet as fleshy and plump as life, and gazed at me. I felt nervous—it was dreadful to accost these conformations, which were neither men nor devils—but I was resolved to go through with the business I had on hand, impelled by the thought that if I was suffered to come off with my life from this experience there would be that to relate to the world beyond anything which seamen have told of the ocean life. [84]

I said to him, "Good morning, Herr Jans. Here, to be sure, is a fine sky with noble promise."

"True, sir," he answered, seeming to step out of the mystery of his stillness and vacancy without effort. "She looks fairly up: but so tedious a nor'-wester should be followed by a southerly gale!"

"Heaven grant it!" cried I, gathering courage from his civility. "You will be glad to see old Amsterdam again, no doubt!"

"Ay," said he, "I warrant you; and my wife, Amana, too, and my daughter, Tobina. Ha! ha!" [85]

His laugh was like that of the parrot, mirthless; and not a wrinkle stirred upon his countenance to give reality to his shocking merriment.

To come at what I wanted—for I did not wish Vanderdecken to arrive and see me forward—I said "Yes, meetings are made sweeter by a little delay. Pardon me, Heer: I am an Englishman not well acquainted with the shipboard usages of the Dutch. In the ship of which I was second mate, we had what is called a topgallant forecastle in which the crew slept——"

He interrupted with a shake of the head. "I do not understand," said he.

This was not strange, for as I did not know the Dutch words, I called it topgallant forecastle in English.

"They slept under a deck resembling the poop," said I.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. [86]

"Where do your crew sleep?"

"Down there," he responded, pointing to a hatch answering to the fore-forecastle of these times.

"Is it a comfortable cabin?" said I.

He made a face and spat behind his hand, which caused me to see that sailors in all times have been alike in the capacity of grumbling, and that even in this man, who by virtue of the age he had attained had long ceased to be human and was kept alive only by the Curse it was his lot to share with the skipper, the instincts of the seaman still lived, a few sparks among blackened embers.

"Judge for yourself if you will," said he. "My last ship was the Maagt van Eukhuysen, and though her forecastle raised a mutiny among us for its badness, I tell you, mynheer, 'twas as punch is to stale cold water compared to this."

He motioned me to descend, but I asked him to go first, for how was I to guess what would be my reception if the men saw me entering their abode unaccompanied? "Very good," said he, and catching hold of the coaming he dropped his great figure through the hatch, and I followed. [87]

We descended by a ladder in perfect correspondence with the rest of the fittings of this ship—the hand-rails carved, and the steps a sort of grating—different, indeed, from the pieces of coarse, rough wood nailed to the bulkhead, which in these days form the road down through the fore-forecastle. The light of the heavens fell fair through the hatch, but seemed powerless to penetrate the gloom that lay around. I was blinded at first, and stood a moment under the hatch idly blinking and beholding nothing. Then stepping out of the sphere of the daylight, there stole upon my sight the details of the place one by one, helped by the wan, sputtering and smoking flame of a lamp shaped like a coffee-pot, the waste or mesh coming out of the spout fed by what the nose readily determined to be slush. [88]

Jans stood beside me. "Can you see, mynheer?" said he.

"Ay, 'tis growing upon me by degrees," I replied.

"Master," exclaimed a hollow voice, proceeding from the darkest part of this forecastle, "if you could help me fill the bowl of a tobacco-pipe I should be grateful."

Very luckily I had the remains of what sailors term a prick of tobacco in my pocket, which Prins when he dried my jacket had very honestly suffered to remain there. The piece had been so hard pressed in the making, and rendered so water-proof by the rum in it, that my falling overboard had left it perfectly sweet and fit for smoking. By a stingy and cautious use of the knife there was enough of it to give all hands a smoke. I pulled it out and handed it to Jans to deliver to the man who had addressed me. Jans smelt it and said "Yes, it was tobacco, but how was it to be smoked?" [89]

I pulled out my knife, and stepping into the light under the hatch, put the tobacco upon one of the

ladder-steps and fell to slicing or rather shaving it, and when I had cut enough to fill a pipe bowl I rolled up the shreds in my hands, and taking a sooty clay pipe from Jans, charged it, and bade him light it at the lamp. He did so, speedily returning, smoking heartily, puffing out great clouds, and crying out, "Oh, but 'tis good! 'tis good!"

It is tiring work cutting up this kind of tobacco, and Jans now understanding how it was done, took the knife and the tobacco and shred about an inch of it, there being in all between three and four inches. Whilst this was doing I had leisure to gaze about me.

No sooner had Jans lighted his pipe, so that all could see he was smoking, than from several parts of that gloomy interior there slid a number of figures who quickly clustered around the ladder, over one of whose steps or treads the boatswain leaned, pipe in mouth, whilst he sliced and shaved. The daylight fell upon some of them, others were faintly to be seen in the dim illumination which the lustre, passing through the hatch, feebly spread. From rows of old hammocks, that died out in the gloom, these men had dropped, and mariners half-perished with hunger could not have exhibited more delirious eagerness for food than did these unhappy creatures for a pipeful of the tobacco Jans was at work upon. A dismaller and wilder, nay, a more affrighting picture I defy the imagination to body forth. It was not only that many of these unhappy people were half-naked—most of them still swinging in their hammocks, when I descended—it was their corpse-like appearance, as though a grave-yard had disgorged its dead, who had come together in a group, quickened and urged by some hunger, lust or need common to the whole, and expressing in many varieties of countenance the same desire. All about Jans they crowded, fifteen or twenty men; some thin, with their ribs showing, others with sturdy legs of the Dutch kind, some nearly bald, some so hairy that their locks and beards flowed down their backs and chests, some dark with black eyes, others round-faced and blue-eyed; but every man of them looking as if he was newly risen, Lazarus-like, from the tomb, as though he had burst the bondage of the coffin, and come into this fore-castle dead yet living, his body formed of the earth of the grave, and his soul of the Curse that kept him alive. [90] [91]

I had particularly hoped to see some of them sleeping, wondering what appearance they presented in slumber; also whether such as they ever dreamed, and what sort of expressions their faces wore. But the place was too dark to have yielded this sight even had I been at liberty to peer into their hammocks. When my eyes grew used to the twilight of the slush-lamp and I could see plain, I found there was not much to whet curiosity. Here and there stood a box or sea-chest. Against the aged sides, hanging by nails or hooks, were coats, trowsers, oilskins, and the like, most of them differing in fashion, swaying with the heaving of the ship. Some odds and ends of shoes and boots, a canvas bucket or two, a tall basket, in which were stowed the dishes and mugs the men eat and drank with, completed, with the hammocks overhead, all the furniture that I could distinguish of this melancholy, rat-gnawed, yea, and noisome fore-castle. [92]

By this time Jans was wearied of slicing the tobacco, and the fellow called Meindert Kryns was at work upon what remained of it. All who had pipes filled them, and I was surprised to find how well off they were in this respect, though my wonder ceased when I afterwards heard that amongst other articles of freight Vanderdecken had met with in a derelict were cases of long clay pipes. It was both moving and diverting to watch these half-clad creatures smoking, their manner of holding the smoke in their mouths for the better tasting of it, the solemn joy with which they expelled the clouds; some in their hammocks with their naked legs over the edge; others on the chests, manifestly insensible to the chilly wind that blew down through the hatch. No man spoke. If aught of mind there was among them, it seemed to be devoted to keeping their pipe-bowls burning. Jans stood leaning against the fore-mast, puffing at his pipe, his eyes directed into the gloom in the bows. That he had forgotten the errand that brought him below, that I had no more existence for him than would have been the case had I never fallen from the rail of the Saracen, was clearly to be gathered from his strange rapt posture and air. I touched him again on the shoulder, and he turned his eyes upon me, but without starting. 'Twas the easiest, nimblest way of slipping out of a condition of trance into intelligence and life that can be conceived. [93] [94]

I wished to see all I dared ask to look at, and said, "Where do you cook your food?"

"I will show you," he answered, and walked to some distance abaft the fore-castle.

I followed him painfully, for I could scarce see; indeed, here would have been total blackness to one fresh from the sunlight. There was a bulkhead with an opening on the larboard hand; we passed through it, and I found myself on a deck pretty well filled up at the after-end with coils of cable, casks, and so forth; a windward port was open, and through it came light enough to see by. In the middle of this deck was a sort of caboose, situated clear of the ropes and casks. 'Twas, in short, a structure of stout scantling, open on either side, and fitted with brick-work contrived for a furnace and coppers for boiling. A man—the cook, or the cook's mate—his feet naked, his shanks clothed in breeches of a faded blue stuff, and his trunk in a woollen shirt—was at work boiling a kind of soup for the crew's breakfast. Another man stood at a dresser, rolling paste. This fellow was a very short, corpulent person, with a neck so fat that a pillow of flesh lay under the back of his head. Never in my time had I viewed a completer figure of a Dutchman than this cook. You would have supposed that into this homely picture of boiling and pie-making there would have entered such an element of life and reality as was nowhere else to be found in that accursed ship. Yet so little was this so, that I do not know that in all the time I had been in the Braave I had beheld a more ghastly picture. It was the two men who made it so; the unreality of their realness, to comprehend which, if this phrase should sound foolishly, think upon the vision of an insane man, or upon some wondrous picture painted upon the eyes of the dying or opening upon the gaze of some enthusiast. [95] [96]



The flames of the furnace shot a crimson glare upon the first of the two men I have described; he never turned his head to look at me, but went on stirring what was in the copper. The place had much of the furniture of one of our present cabooses or galleys. There was a kind of dresser and there were racks for holding dishes, an old brass timepiece that was as great a curiosity in its way as the clock in the cabin, a chair of the last century, a couple of wooden bellows, and such matters.

I was moving, when the little, fat cook suddenly fell a-sniffing, and turning to Jans, said, "Is there tobacco at last?"

"No," answered Jans; "this Heer had a piece which he has distributed. 'Tis all gone. But there is a smoke left in this pipe; take it." [97]

He dried the sooty stem upon his sleeve, and handed it to the cook, who instantly began to puff, uttering one or two exclamations of pleasure, but with an unmoved countenance.

"Is there no tobacco on board?" said I, following Jans into the fore-castle.

"The skipper has a small quantity, but there is none for the crew," he answered. "Had your ship supplied us with a little stock 'twould have been a godsend; welcomer, sir, than the powder and shot you wantonly bestowed upon our boat."

We were now in the fore-castle, and this reference to the action of the terrified crew of the Saracen, in the hearing of the seamen who overhung their hammocks, or squatted on their chests, smoking, alarmed me; so with a quickly uttered "Good-morning" addressed to them all, I sprang up the ladder and gained the deck. [98]

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## CHAPTER VI.

### WE SIGHT A SHIP.

[99]

It was like coming out of a sepulchre to step from that fore-castle on deck where the glorious sun was and the swaying shadows, and where the blue wind gushed in a soft breathing over the bulwark-rails, with weight enough in it to hold the canvas stirless, and to raise a gentle hissing alongside like the seething of champagne. I spied Vanderdecken on the poop and near him Imogene, so I hastened aft to greet the girl and salute the great bearded figure that nobly towered beside her. She looked fragrant and sweet as a white rose in the dewy morn, wore a straw hat turned up on one side and looped to stay there with a parti-coloured rosette, and though this riband was faded with age and the straw yellow and dull through keeping, the gear did suit her beauty most divinely, and I could have knelt and kissed her hand, so complete a Princess did she appear in the royal perfections of her countenance and shape. [100]

To turn from the sparkle of her violet eye, the rosiness of her lip, the life that teemed in the expression of her face, like a blushing light shining through fragile porcelain, to turn from her to the great silent figure near her, with piercing gaze directed over the taffrail, his beard trembling to the down-rush of air from the mizzen, was to obtain a proper contrast to enable you to realise in the aspect of that amazing person the terrible conditions of his existence and the enormous significance of his sentence.

With a smile of pleasure at the sight of me, Imogene bade me good-morning, saying, "I am before you for the first time since you have been in the ship."

"I was out of my cabin half-an-hour ago, perhaps longer," said I. "What, think you, I have been doing? Exploring the sailors' quarters and inspecting the kitchen." And I tossed up my hands and turned up my eyes that she might guess what I thought of those places. Then meeting Vanderdecken's gaze, which he had brought to bear upon me with a frowning roll of the eyes, I took off my hat, giving him a bow. He greeted me in his imperious stormy way, and asked me what I thought of his ship. [101]

I replied, "She is a very fine vessel, sir."

"Did they lift the hatches to show the cargo to you?" he exclaimed.

I answered smartly, "No," perceiving that he was aware I had been below in the fore-part.

"How does my fore-castle show to your English prejudice?" he said.

"Oh, mynheer!" said I, smiling, with a look at Imogene, whose eyes were fixed in the quarter over the stern into which Vanderdecken had been staring, "so far from Englishmen being prejudiced, at all events, in naval matters, we are continually taking ideas from other nations, particularly from the French, whose ships of war we imitate and admire. Perhaps," said I, "that is one of the reasons why we are incessantly capturing the vessels of that nation." [102]

But the conceit was lost, because this man had flourished before we had become the terror of the French that our admirals have since made the English flag to be.

Imogene cried out in Dutch, "Do you know, Mr. Fenton, that there is a sail in sight?"

My heart gave a bound, and following the indication of her ivory-white forefinger, which pointed directly astern, I saw the tiny gleam of what was unquestionably a ship's canvas, resembling the curved tip of a gull's wing.

"Ay, to be sure, yonder's a sail!" I exclaimed, after keeping my eyes fixed upon it a while to make sure, and I added in Dutch, "Which way, madam, does the captain say she is steering?" [103]

"Directly after us," she replied.

"Judge for yourself, sir," said Vanderdecken, motioning with his hand toward a telescope that stood against the deck-house.

It was the ancient, heavy tube I had observed in his cabin. I picked it up, rested it upon the rail—it was too weighty for the support of my left hand—and worked away with it at the sail astern. It was a feeble old glass, magnifying, I should suppose, to the proportion of a crown to a groat. In fact I could see as well with the naked eye. It was Vanderdecken's telescope, however, and a curiosity, and still feigning to view the sail, I secretly ran my eye over the tubes, noticing, in very faint letters, the words, "Cornelius Van der Decken, Amsterdam, 1650," graved in flowing characters upon the large tube.

"She is heading after us, you think, mynheer?" said Vanderdecken as I rose. [104]

"I could not say, sir. Has she grown since you first observed her?"

"Yes."

He took the glass and levelled it very easily, and I met Imogene's gaze as she glanced from him to me, as though she was sure I could not but admire the massive, manly figure of that man, drawn to his full height, and in such a posture as one would love to see him painted in.

"She is certainly steering our course," said he, speaking with his eye at the tube, "I hope she may not prove an English man-of-war. Who can tell? If a merchantman, be her nationality what it may, we'll speak her for tobacco, for that's a commodity we must have."

I looked earnestly and with a face flushed with hope at Imogene; but she glanced away from me to the sail, signalling to me by this action in a manner unmistakable, to be wary. [105]

Vanderdecken put down the glass, cast a look aloft at the set of his canvas and the trim of his yards, and then called to Arents to heave the log. Some seamen came aft, in response to the second mate's call, and, bringing out a reel and sand-glass from the deck-house, measured the speed of the ship through the water, precisely as we at this day do, so ancient is this simple device of telling a ship's speed of passage through the water by paying out a line marked with knots to the running of sand! I heard Arents say that the vessel was going three knots and a half.

"At that rate," said I to Imogene, whilst Vanderdecken remained aft, watching in a soulless manner the automaton-like motions of the men engaged in hauling the line in and reeling it up, "that vessel yonder, if she be actually heading our way, will soon overhaul us."

"Mr. Fenton," said she, with subdued energy in her soft voice, "I earnestly pray you, neither by word, look or sign to give Captain Vanderdecken the least reason to suspect that you mean to escape from his ship and rescue me whenever the chance shall offer. I will tell you why I say this: just now he spoke of you to me, and said if an opportunity offered he should put you on board any vessel that would receive you, no matter where she was bound to, and then he asked what you and I chiefly talked about. There was more sternness in his manner than ever I recollect in him when addressing me." [106]

"If I thought him capable of human emotions," said I, "I should reckon him jealous."

"But he *has* human emotions—he loves his wife and children," she replied.

"Ay, but who is to know that that love is not left to linger in him as a part of his curse?" said I. "By which I mean, if he was not suffered to remember his wife and children and love them, he might not show himself very eager to get round the Cape. Possibly he wants to get rid of me, not because he is jealous, not because he dislikes me as a man, but because that malignant baboon, Van Vogelaar, may have been speaking against me, putting fears into his head touching his treasure, and working upon his duty as a Hollander—a compatriot of De Ruyter, God help him—to hate me as an Englishman." [107]

"But he loves me too, Mr. Fenton," said she.

"As a father might," said I, not liking this, yet amused by her sweet tenaciousness.

"Yes, as a father; but it shows he has capacity for other emotions outside those which you deem necessary for the duration of the Sentence."

"I ought to believe so if he hates me," said I, looking his way and observing that he had turned his back upon us and was watching the sail astern. "But be all this as it will, you shall find me as careful as you can desire." [108]

"If," said she, plaintively, "he should become even faintly suspicious of your intentions, he might set you ashore, should we not meet with a ship to receive you, and then what would become of you and what would become of me, Mr. Fenton?"

"Have no fear," said I; "he shall discover nothing in me to make him suspicious. As to his setting me ashore, that he could do, and whether I should be able to outwit him in such a manoeuvre, I cannot tell; but in no other way could he get rid of me, unless by throwing me overboard."

"He would not do that," she exclaimed, shaking her head; "nor do I think he would force you from this ship if he could find no ground for distrust. But something affecting you has worried his mind, I am certain, or he would not have declared his intention to send you to another vessel. He believes he is going straight home. Why, then, should he not be willing to carry you? Maybe he [109]

heard from Arents that you were below exploring the ship. Oh, Mr. Fenton, be cautious! If not for your own sake, then for mine!"

She involuntarily brought her little hands together into a posture of prayer with the earnestness of her entreaty, and her warmth flowed rosily to her cheeks, so that, though she spoke low, her manner was impassioned, and I saw how her dear heart was set upon my delivering her, and how great was her terror lest my thoughtlessness should end in procuring our separation. However, I had no time to then reassure her, though I resolved henceforth to walk with extraordinary circumspection, seeing that the people I had fallen amongst were utterly unintelligible to me, being so composite in their dead-aliveness that it was impossible to come at their motives and feelings, if they possessed any resembling ours. I say I had not time to reassure her, for Prins arrived to report breakfast, which brought Vanderdecken to us. [110]

Little was said at table, but that little was quite enough to make me understand the wisdom of Imogene's fears, and to perceive that if I did not check my curiosity to inspect the ship so as to be able to deliver a true account of this strange and fearful fabric, I stood to lose Imogene the chance of escape which my presence in the vessel provided her with. No matter which of the two mates had the watch on deck, Van Vogelaar always sat down to meals first, Arents following. He was beside me this morning as usual, coming fresh from his cabin; and when we were seated, Vanderdecken told him there was a ship astern.

"How heading, skipper?"

"As we go, without doubt. She hath grown swiftly since first sighted, yet hangs steady in the same quarter." [111]

"Let her hoist any colours but those of this gentleman's country!" said Van Vogelaar, with an ugly sneer.

"Should that happen, captain, will you fight her?" I asked, quietly.

"If she be a ship of war—no; for what are our defences against the culverins and demi-culverins of your ships, and how shall we match perhaps four hundred sailors with our slender company?" replied Vanderdecken, with an evil glitter in his eyes, and grasping his beard as his custom was when wrathful thoughts surged in him.

"She may prove a harmless merchantman—perhaps a sturdy Hollander—that will give you plenty of tobacco for a little of your silver," said Imogene, striking in with her sweet smile, and melodious voice, like a sunbeam upon turbulent waters.

"If you are in doubt why not shift your helm, gentlemen?" said I. [112]

"Ah, skipper!" cried Van Vogelaar, sardonically, "we have an adviser here. It is fit that a Dutch ship should be served by an English pilot!"

I held my peace. At this moment the clock struck, and the parrot, as though some fiend was inside her green bosom prompting her to breed trouble, cried out "Wyn Zyn al Verdomd!" with fierce energy, severely clawing her wires, and exhibiting more agitation than seems possible in a fowl of naturally dull and leaden motions.

"I believe she speaks the truth," exclaimed Van Vogelaar, turning his face towards the cage. "The parrot hath been known to possess a witch-like capacity of forecasting and divining."

"Oh, but you know, Heer, that she had that sentence by heart when the captain bought her," said Imogene, with a mixed air of distress and petulance in her face. [113]

"I know, madam," he replied, "that yonder bird never spoke those words with such energy as she now puts into them before this gentleman arrived."

Vanderdecken looked at him and then at me, but did not speak.

"What do you suspect from the increased energy of the bird's language?" said I, fixing my eyes upon the mate.

He would not meet my gaze, but answered with his eyes upon his plate, "What is your motive in examining this ship, sir?"

"The harmless curiosity of a sailor," I replied.

He was about to speak, but I lifted my hand, meaning to entreat silence whilst I continued, but he, mistaking the gesture for a threat, shrank very abjectly from his seat, proving himself a timorous, cowardly fellow, and the more to be feared, perhaps, for being so. "Captain Vanderdecken," said I, keeping my hand lifted, that he and his mate might understand I intended no menace, "I know not what base and degrading charges Herr Van Vogelaar would insinuate. I am an honest man and mean well, and, sir, add to that the gratitude of one whose life you have preserved. You were pleased, on one occasion, to speak kindly of my countrymen, and regret that feud should ever exist between two nations whose genius seems to have a common root. I trust that your sympathy with Britain will cause you to turn a deaf ear to the unwarrantable hints against my honour as an English seaman, dropped by your first mate." [114]

To this speech Vanderdecken made no reply; indeed, I would not like to swear that he had heeded so much as a syllable of it. Van Vogelaar resumed the posture on his seat from which he had started on my raising my hand and went on with his meal. Shortly after this Imogene left the table and entered her cabin, on which, weary of the sullen and malignant company of the mate, and the ghostly silence and fiery eyes of Captain Vanderdecken, I rose, bowed to the skipper, and went on deck. [115]

I walked right aft, past the helmsman, and stood gazing with a most passionate yearning and wistfulness at the sail astern. The stranger had not greatly grown during the time we had passed below, but her enlargement was marked enough to make me guess that she was overhauling us hand over fist, as sailors say, and I reckoned that if the wind held she would be within gunshot by three or four of the clock this afternoon. I went for Vanderdecken's glass and examined her again; the lenses imparted an atmospheric sharpness and pellucidity of outline which showed plainly enough the royals and topgallant-sails of apparently a large ship slightly leaning from the wind. I could not persuade myself that she was "reaching," for though our yards were as sharply braced as they would lie, the stranger, if she were close hauled, could have luffed up three or four more points, but as she held her place it was certain she was making a free wind and coming along with her yards braced-in somewhat. Therefore she was not bound to the westwards, and if for the Indian Ocean, what need had she to be heading due north? [116]

I put down the glass, but the yearning that rose within me at the sight of the vessel ceased when I thought of Imogene. Suppose that ship should prove the instrument of separating me from her! I had talked big for the sake of comforting her, of fearing nothing from Vanderdecken save being set ashore or tossed overboard, for I counted upon any and all ships we met refusing to receive me if they found out that this ancient fabric was the Flying Dutchman. But suppose Vanderdecken should heave me overboard on nearing a vessel, leaving it to her people to succour me if they chose? [117]

These were the fancies which subdued in me the eager wistfulness raised by yonder gleaming wing of canvas, whitening like a mounting star upon the blue edge of the ocean in the south.

Lost in thought, I continued gazing until presently I grew sensible of the presence of someone standing close beside me. It was Imogene. On the weather quarter was Van Vogelaar surveying the sail with folded arms and stooped head. His face wore a malignant expression, and in his stirlessness he resembled an effigy, wrought with exquisite skill to a marvellous imitation of apparel and shape.

"Where is the captain?" I asked.

"He is smoking in the cabin," Imogene answered.

"Yonder rascal is evidently my enemy," said I.

"All will be well if you show no curiosity," she replied, softly. "Do you not remember that I cautioned you at the very beginning? My belief is that the mate is mad you should know of the treasure in this ship, and will be eager to get rid of you lest you should contrive to possess it." [118]

"But how?"

"By acquainting the master of the ship you are transferred to with the wealth in this vessel. Add to this fear—for he has a share in all they recover from wrecks, and in a portion of the cargo—his hatred of you for your men firing at him."

"I begin to see," said I, "that there are several strokes of human nature still to be witnessed among these unhappy wretches, spite of their monstrous age, the frightfulness of the Curse they are under, and their being men who are alive in death—corpses reflecting vitality just as the dead moon shines. But needs must where the Devil drives; speculating will not serve; we must wait." [119]

I watched her whilst she looked at the sail in our wake; emotion darkened and lightened in the violet of her eyes as the blue folds of Heaven seem to deepen and brighten with the breathings of the wind; through her delicate lips her rose-sweet breath came and went swiftly. She started, looked at Van Vogelaar, aloft at the canvas, round the deck, with a sharp tremble running through her light form, and cried out with an hysterical swiftness, and in a voice full of tears, "You will not leave me to this wretched fate, Mr. Fenton! You will not leave me in this dreadful ship!"

I grasped her hand. "I swear before the Majesty of that offended God whose eye is on this ship as we thus stand, that if I am forced to leave you it will be at the cost of my life!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

### WE WATCH THE SHIP APPROACH US.

 [120]

We stood in silence for some moments, hand in hand; then finding Van Vogelaar furtively watching us, I quitted her side; at the same moment Vanderdecken came on deck.

I went to the foremost end of the poop and there stayed, leaning against the bulwark, my mind very full of thought. Though I had been in this vessel a week, yet now, as on many occasions, I found myself conceiving it to be a thing incredible that this craft should be the famous Death Ship of tradition, the talk and terror of the mariner's forecabin; and such a feeling of mystification thickened my brains that a sudden horror stung me from head to foot with the sensation the nervous are possessed with, when, in a sudden panic, they fear they are going out of their minds. But, by keeping my eyes fixed on Imogene, I succeeded ere long in mastering this terrible emotion, even to the extent of taking a cheerful view of my situation; first, by considering that, for all I knew, I had been led by the Divine hand to this ship for the purpose of rescuing the lovely girl from a fate more dismal and shocking than tongue could utter or imagination invent; and next, by reflecting that if God spared my life so that I could relate what I had seen, I should [121]

be famous among sailors as the only seaman that had ever been on board the Phantom Ship, as she is foolishly styled, eaten with her commander, mixed with her crew, beheld the discipline of her, and looked narrowly into all circumstances of her inner or hidden life.

It seemed to me incredible that any vessel could encounter her and not guess what she was, though, of course, I believed what Imogene had said, that now and again an unsuspecting ship would traffic with Vanderdecken in such commodities as the one wanted or the other had. If her character was expressed at night by the fiery crawlings like red-hot wire upon her, in the daytime she discovered her nature by signs not indeed so wild and terrifying, but to the full as significant in a sailor's eyes. Supposing her to have been built at Hoorn, in 1648—that date, I believe, would represent her birth—there would be nothing in the mere antiquity of her hull, or even in the shape of it, to convict her as Vanderdecken's ship; because the difference between the bodies and forms of ships of the time in which she was built and those of many vessels yet afloat and actively employed, would not be so great as to let the mariner know what she was. For instance, there was a vessel trading in my time between Strangford and Whitehaven that was an hundred and thirty years old. She was called the Three Sisters, and the master was one Donnan; she was also known by the name of the Port-a-Ferry Frigate. Her burthen was thirty-six tons, and 'twas positively known she was employed at the siege of Londonderry, in 1689. Now, here was a craft once beheld by me, who am writing this, that was nearly as ancient as the Flying Dutchman. She was often to be met coasting, and, in consequence of her having been the first vessel that ever entered the Old Dock at Liverpool, was ever after made free of all port charges. Yet, no sailor shrank affrighted from her, no grave-yard fires lived in her timbers; when encountered at sea she was regarded as a venerable piece of marine architecture, and that was all. But why? Because her rig had been changed. She had been a ship; when I knew her she was a brigantine. Aloft she had been made to keep pace with all improvements. Then her hull was carefully preserved with paint, her voyages were short, and she was constantly being renewed and in divers ways made good. [122] [123] [124]

But this Death Ship was now as she had been in 1653 when she set sail from Batavia for her homeward passage. Aloft she was untouched—that is, in respect of her original aspect, if I save the varying thickness of her standing gear, which would not be observable at a short distance. For a century and a half, when I met her, had she been washing about in this ocean off the Cape of Storms, and the exposure had rotted her through and kindled the glow of deadwood in every pore. It might be that the Curse which held her crew living was not yet quick in her. By which I mean that she had not yet come to that condition of decay which would correspond in a ship to the death of a human being, so that the repairs, careening, calking and the like which her men found necessary for her might be found needful for some years yet, when she would become as her crew were—dead in time but staunch and enduring so long as the Curse should be in force. [125]

These were the speculations of a troubled and bewildered mind. I glanced at the sail astern and guessed it would not be long before that shining pillar of canvas swept the hull beneath it on to the delicate azure that went trembling to the heavens there. Prins had brought a chair for Imogene and she sat near the tiller. Vanderdecken stood beside her, watching the distant ship. Van Vogelaar, who had the watch, stumped the weather side of the poop, often coming abreast of where I stood to leeward, and occasionally sending a scowling furtive glance my way. It was not my policy to intrude. Nay, the rising of that vessel in our wake furnished a particular emphasis to Imogene's advice to me, for if haply I should irritate Vanderdecken by some unwise remark or indiscreet behaviour, and the ship should turn out an Englishman and act in some such fashion as did the Saracen, my life might have to pay for the incivility of my countrymen. [126]

I had the yearning of the whole ship's company in me for a pipe of tobacco, but I had parted with all I owned—which now vexed me, for my generosity had brought me no particular kindness from the men—and had not the courage to solicit a whiff or two from the skipper's little store. Sometimes Imogene would turn her head as if to view the ship or glance at the sea, but in reality to mark if I was still on deck, but I could not discover in her way of doing this the slightest hint that I should approach her. Occasionally Vanderdecken addressed her, often he would stand apparently wrapped in thought, heeding nothing but the vessel astern, if one might suppose so from his eyes being bent thitherwards. From time to time Van Vogelaar picked up the glass and levelled it at the ship, and then put it down with an air of angry impatience—though you found the motion suggested rather than showed as an actually definable thing the counterfeit passion displayed in the gestures and carriage of an automaton. [127]

Leaning against the rail of the bulwarks as high as my shoulder-blades, I quietly waited for what was to come, yet with a mind lively with curiosity and expectations. What would Vanderdecken do? What colours would the stranger show? How would she behave? What part might I have to take in whatever was to happen? To be sure the stranger would not be up with us for some while yet, but since breakfast the breeze had slightly freshened, and by the rapid enlargement of those shining heights astern you knew that the wind had but to gather a little more weight to swiftly swirl yonder nimble craft up to within musket-shot of this cumbrous ancient fabric.

I looked over the rail, watching the sickly-coloured side slipping sluggishly through the liquid transparent blue, marbled sometimes by veins and patches of foam, flung with a sullen indifference of energy from the hewing cutwater, on the top of which there projected a great beak, where yet lingered the remains of a figure-head that I had some time before made out to represent an Hercules, frowning down upon the sea with uplifted arms, as though in the act of smiting with a club. It was easy to guess that this ship had kept the seas for some months since careening by observing the shell-fish below the water-line, and the strings of black and green weed she lifted with every roll. But, uncouth as was the fabric, gaunt as her aged furniture made [128]

her decks appear, inconvenient and ugly as was her rig, exhibiting a hundred signs of the primitiveness in naval construction of the age to which she belonged, yet, when I lifted my eyes from the water to survey her, 'twas not without a sentiment of veneration beyond the power of the horror the supernaturalism of her and her crew raised in me to correct. For was it not by such ships as this that the great and opulent islands and continents of the world had been discovered and laid open as theatres for posterity to act dazzling parts in? Was it not with such ships as this that battles were fought, the courage, audacity, skill and fierce determination exhibited in which many latter conflicts may, indeed, parallel, but never in one single instance surpass? Was it not by such ships as this that the great Protector raised the name of Britain to such a height as exceeds all we read of in the history of ancient or modern nations? What braver admirals, more skilful soldiers, more valiant captains, stouter-hearted mariners, have flourished than those whose cannon flamed in thunder from the sides of such ships as this? [129]

Ay, 'twas a structure to dream in when the soul could let slip the dread which the thought of the Curse and the appearance of the crew inspired; a wizard to hearken back the imagination to olden times and show the sun sparkling, and the Heavens blue, and the sea azure in pictures, not more dead, and not less vital either, than the company who manned her, who were beings with loving hearts and blood-fed skins in that distant age into which she drove fancy, romancing and recreating. [130]

The time passed; at the hour of eleven, or thereabouts the hull of the ship astern was visible upon the water-line. The breeze had freshened, and the long heave of the swell left by the gale was whipped into wrinkles, which melted into a creamy sparkling as they ran. Under the sun, upon our starboard bow, the ocean was kindled into glory; through the trembling splendour the blue of the sea surged up in fluctuating veins, and the conflict of the sapphire dye welling up into the liquid dazzle, where it showed an instant, ere being overwhelmed by the blaze on the water, was a spectacle of beauty worthy of life-long remembrance. Elsewhere, the crisped plain of the ocean stretched darker than the Heavens, under which were many clouds, moving with full white bosoms like the sails of ships, carrying tinted shinings resembling wind-galls, or fragments of solar rainbows, upon their shoulders or skirts, as they happened to offer them to the sun. [131]

By this time you felt the stirring of curiosity throughout the ship. Whatever jobs the crew had been put to they now neglected, that they might hang over the sides or stand upon the rail to watch and study the ship astern of us. Many had an avidity in their stare that could not have been matched by the looks of famine-stricken creatures. Whether they were visited by some dim sense or perception of their frightful lot and yearned, out of this weak emotion, for the ship in pursuit, albeit they might not have been able to make their wishes intelligible to their own understandings, God knoweth. 'Twas moving to see them; one with the sharp of his hand to his forehead, another fixedly gazing out of a tangle of grey hair, a third showing fat and ghastly to the sunlight, a fourth with black eyes charged with the slate-coloured patches of blindness, straining his imperfect gaze under a bald brow, corrugated into lines as hard as iron. [132]

Vanderdecken had left Imogene and stood on the weather quarter with the mate. The girl being alone, I walked aft to her and said in English, feigning to speak of the weather by looking aloft as I spoke, "I have held aloof long enough, I think. He will not object if I join you now?"

"No—his head is full of that ship yonder," she replied. "For my part I am as weary of sitting as you must be of standing. Let us walk a little. He has never yet objected to our conversing. Why should he do so now?" [133]

So saying she rose. Her sheer weariness of being alone, or of talking to Vanderdecken, was too much for her policy of caution. We fell to quietly pacing the poop deck to leeward, and with a most keen and exquisite delight I could taste in her manner the gladness our being together filled her with, and foresee the spirit of defiance to danger and risks that would grow in her with the growth of our love.

No notice was taken of us. The eyes and thoughts of all were directed to the ship. From time to time Vanderdecken or Van Vogelaar would inspect her through the glass. Presently Antony Arents and Jans, the boatswain, joined them, and the four conversed as though the captain had called a council.

"She is picking us up very fast," said I to Imogene, whilst we stood awhile looking at the vessel. "I should not like to swear to her nationality; but that she is an armed ship, whether French, or Dutch, or English, is as certain as that she has amazingly lively heels." [134]

"How white her sails are, and how high they rise!" exclaimed Imogene. "She leans more sharply than we."

"Ay," said I, "she shows twice her number of cloths. Is it not astonishing," I continued, softening my voice, "that Vanderdecken, and his mates and men, should not guess that there is something very wrong with them, from the mere contrast of such beautifully cut and towering canvas as that yonder with the scanty, storm-darkened rags of sails under which this groaning old hull is driven along?"

"Yes, at least to you and me, who have the faculty of appreciating contrasts. But think of them as deficient in all qualities but those which are necessary for the execution of the Sentence. Then their heedlessness is that of a blind man, who remains insensible to the pointing of your finger to the object you speak to him about." [135]

"Would to God you and I were quit of it all," said I.

"We must pray for help, and hope for it too!" she answered, with a swift glance at me, that for a

breathless moment carried the violet beauty and shining depths of her eyes fair to mine. An instant's meeting of our gaze only! Yet I could see her heart in that rapid, fearless, trustful look, as the depth of the Heavens is revealed by a flash of summer lightning.

Suddenly Vanderdecken gave orders for the ensign to be hoisted. The boatswain entered the little house, and returned with the flag which he bent on to the halliards rove at the mizzen topmast-head. The colours mounted slowly to his mechanical pulling, and they were worthy indeed of the dead-and-alive hand that hoisted them, being as ragged and attenuated with age as any banner hung high in the dusty gloom of a cathedral. But the flag was distinguishable as the Hollander's ensign, as you saw when it crazily streamed out its fabric, that was so thin in places, you thought you spied the sky through it. One should say it was a flag seldom flown on board the Dutchman, to judge from the manner in which the crew cast their eyes up at it, never a one of them smiling, indeed, though here and there under the death-pallor there lay a sort of crumpling of the flesh, as of a grin. 'Twas a flag to drive thoughts of home deep into them, and now and again I would catch one muttering to another behind his hand, whilst the most of them continued to steadfastly regard the ensign for many minutes after Jans had mastheaded it, as though they fancied home could not be far distant with that flag telling of it. [136] [137]

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CENTAUR FLIES FROM US.

Now the Dutch flag had not been flying twenty minutes when, my sight being keen, I thought I could perceive something resembling a colour at the fore-royal masthead of the ship. I asked Imogene if she saw it. She answered "No." I said nothing, not being sure myself, and was unwilling to intrude upon the four men standing to windward by asking for the telescope. On board our ship they had set the sprit-topsail, and the forward part of the dull, time-eaten, rugged old vessel resembled a Chinese kite. She was doing her best; but let her splutter as she would 'twas for all the world like the sailing of a beer-barrel with a mast steeped in the bunghole. And this, thought I, was the vessel that gave the slip to the frigate belonging to Sir George Ascue's squadron! The wake she made was short, broad and oily—a square, fat, glistening surface of about her own length—not greatly exceeding the smoothness she would leave aweather if drifting dead to leeward under bare poles; different indeed from that suggestion of comet-like speed which you find in the fleecy swirl of a line of foaming waters boiling out from the metalled run of a fleet cruiser, and rising and falling and fading into dim distance like a path of snow along a hilly land. [139]

On board yonder ship they would have perspective glasses of a power very different from the flat lenses in Vanderdecken's tubes; and since by this time it was certain they had us large in their telescopes, what would they be thinking of our huge, old-fashioned tops, fitter for the bowmen and musqueteers of Ferdinand Magellan and Drake than for the small-armsmen of even the days of the Commonwealth, of the antique cut of our canvas and the wild and disordered appearance its patches and colour submitted, of the grisly aspect of the wave-worn, storm-swept hull, of the peaked shape and narrowness of our stern, telling of times long vanished, as do the covers of an old book or the arches in an ancient church? [140]

Imogene and I continued our walk up and down, talking of many things, chiefly of England, whereof I gave her as much news, down to the time of the sailing of the Saracen, as I carried in my memory, until, presently coming abreast of the group of four, still on the weather quarter, every man of whom, turn and turn about, had been working away with the telescope at the ship, Vanderdecken called me by name and stepped over to us with the glass in his hand.

"Your sight is younger than ours, mynheer," said he, motioning towards Jans and the two mates. "What flag do you make yonder vessel to be flying at her fore-topgallant masthead?" [141]

I took the glass and pointed it, kneeling to rest it as before, and the instant the stranger came within the lenses I beheld Britannia's glorious blood-red St. George's Cross blowing out—a great white flag betwixt the fore-royal yard and the truck that rose high above. Pretending to require time to make sure, I lingered to gather, if possible, the character of the ship. From the cut of her sails, the saucy, admirable set of them, the bigness of the topsails, the hungry yearning for us I seemed to find in the bellying of the studding-sails she had thrown out, it would have been impossible for a nautical eye to mistake her for anything but a State ship, though of what rate I could not yet guess. There was a refraction that threw her up somewhat, and in the glass she looked to be swelling after us in a bed of liquid boiling silver, with a thin void of trembling blue between the whiteness and the sea-line. [142]

I rose and said, "The colour she shows is English."

Vanderdecken turned savagely towards the others and cried, "English!"

Arents let fly an oath; Jans struck his thigh heavily with his open hand; Van Vogelaar, scowling at me, cried, "Are you sure, sir?"

"I am sure of the flag," said I; "but she may prove a Frenchman for all I know."

Vanderdecken clasped his arms tightly upon his breast and sank into thought, with the fire in his eyes levelled at the coming ship.

"See there, gentlemen!" I exclaimed. "A gun!"

Bright as the morning was I had marked a rusty red spark wink in the bow of the vessel like a flash of sunshine from polished copper; a little white ball blew away to leeward expanding as it fled. An instant after, just such another cloudy puff swept into the jibs and drove out in a gleaming trail or two. Presently the reports reached our ears in two dull thuds, one after the other. [143]

Vanderdecken stared aloft at his canvas, then over the side, and joined the others. My excitement was intense; I could scarce contain myself. I knew there was a British squadron at the Cape, and 'twas possible that fellow there might be on a reconnoitring or cruising errand.

"You are sure she is English?" Imogene whispered.

"She is a man-of-war; she is flying our flag. I don't doubt she is English," I replied.

The girl drew a long tremulous breath, and her arm touching mine—so close together we stood—I felt a shiver run through her.

"You are not alarmed, Imogene?" I exclaimed, giving her her Christian name for the first time, and finding a lover's sweetness and delight in the mere uttering of it. She coloured very faintly and cast her gaze upon the deck. [144]

"What is going to happen?" she whispered. "Will they send you on board that ship—keeping me?"

"No! they'll not do that. If she be an Englishman and has balls to feed her cannon with——" I cried, raising my voice unconsciously.

"Hush!" she cried, "Van Vogelaar watches us."

We were silent for a space that the attention I had challenged should be again given to the ship. During the pause I thought to myself, "But can her guns be of use? How much hulling and wounding should go to the destruction of a vessel that has been rendered imperishable by the Curse of Heaven? What injury could musket and pistol, could cutlass and hand-grenades deal men to whom Death has ceased to be, who have outlived Time and are owned by Eternity?" [145]

Vanderdecken, who had been taking short turns upon the deck with heated strides, stopped afresh to inspect the ship, and as he did so another flash broke from her weather-bow, and the smoke went from her in a curl. The skipper looked at the others.

"She has the wind of us and sails three feet to our one. Let the mainsail be hauled up and the topsail brought to the mast. If she be the enemy her flag denotes, her temper will not be sweetened by a long pursuit of which the issue is clear."

Van Vogelaar, scowling venomously, seemed to hang in the wind, on which Vanderdecken looked at him with an expression of face incredibly fierce and terrible. The posture of his giant figure, his half-lifted hand, the slight forward inclination of his head as if he would blast his man with the lightning of his eyes—it was like seeing some marvellous personification of human wrath; and I whispered quickly into Imogene's ear, "That will be how he appeared when he defied his God!" [146]

It was as if he could not speak for rage. And swiftly was he understood. In a breath Jans was rolling forward, calling to the men, Arents was hastening to his station on the quarter-deck, and Van Vogelaar was slinking to the foremost end of the poop. The crew, to the several cries that broke from the mates and boatswain, dropped from rail and ratline, where they had been standing staring at the pursuing craft, and in ghastly silence, without exhibition of concern or impatience, fell to hauling upon the clew-garnets and backing the yards on the main.

So weak was the ship's progress that the bringing of the canvas to the mast immediately stopped her way, and she lay as dead as a buoy upon the heave of the sea. This done, the crew went to the weather side, whence, as they rightly supposed, they would best view the approaching vessel. [147] Jans held to the fore-castle, Arents to the quarter-deck, and the mate hung sullen in the shadows cast by the mizzen-shrouds upon the planks. My heart beat as quickly as a baby's. I could not imagine what was to happen. Would yonder man-of-war, supposing her British, take possession of the Braave?—that is, could she? English powder, with earthquake power, has thrown up a mighty mountain of wonders; but could it, with its crimson glare, thunder down the Curse by and in which, this ship continued to sail and these miserable men continued to live? I shuddered at the impiety of the thought, yet what ending of this chase was to be conjectured if it were not capture?

Vanderdecken, on the weather quarter, watched the ship in his trance-like fashion. How majestic, how unearthly, too, he looked against the blue beyond, his beard stirring and waving like smoke in a faintly moving atmosphere to the blowing of the wind! He wore the aspect of a fallen god, with the fires of hell glittering in his eyes and the passions of the damned surging dark from his soul to his face. Imogene and I had insensibly gained the lee-quarter, and our whispers were driven seawards from him by the breeze. [148]

"How will this end?" I asked my sweet companion. "If there be potency in the Curse this ship cannot be captured."

She answered: "I cannot guess; I have not known such a thing as this to happen before."

"Suppose they send a prize crew on board—the Sentence will not permit of her navigation beyond Agulhas—there is not a hawser in all the world stout enough to tow this ship round the Cape. As it is, is not yonder vessel doomed by her chasing us, by her resolution to speak us?"

There was a deep stillness fore and aft. No human voice broke the silence. You heard but the [149]



purring of the surges frothing against our sides, the flap of a sail to the regular roll of the fabric, a groan from the heart of her, the soft shock of the sudden hit of a billow. Nothing more. The silence of the unmeasurable deep grew into a distinct sense undisturbed by the gentle universal hissing that went up out of it. The sails of the oncoming ship shone to the gushing of the sunlight like radiant leaning columns of a porphyritic tincture breaking into moonlike alabaster with the escape of the shadows to the sunward stare of the cloths. Bland as the fairy glory of the full moon floating in a sea of ethereal indigo was the shining of those lustrous bosoms, each course and topsail tremulous with the play of the golden fringe of reef-points, and delicate beyond language was the pencilled shadowings at the foot of the rounded cloths. Like cloud upon cloud those sails soared to the dainty little royals, above the foremost of which there blew Britannia's glorious flag, the blood-red cross of St. George upon a field white as the foam that boiled to as high as the hawse pipes with the churning of the shearing cutwater storming like a meteor through the blue. Oh, she was English! You felt the blood of her country hot in her with the sight of her flag that was like a crown upon an hereditary brow, making her queen of the dominion of the sea, roll where it would! [150]

She approached us like a roll of smoke, and the wash of the froth along her black and glossy bends threw out the mouths of her single tier of cannon. She was apparently a thirty-eight-gun ship, and as she drew up, with a luffing helm that brought the after-yard-arms stealing out past the silky swells of the sails on the fore, you spied the glitter and flash of the gold-coloured figure-head, a lion, with its paw upon Britannia's shield. When she was within a mile of us she hauled down her studding-sails, clewed up her royals and mizzen topgallant sail, and drove quietly along upon our weather-quarter, still heeling as though she would have us note how lustrous was the copper, whose brightness rose to the water-line, and what finish that ruddy sheathing, colouring the snow of the blue water leaping along it with a streaking as of purple sunshine, gave to her charms. [151]

All this while, the master, mates and crew of the Death Ship were as mute as though they lay in their coffins. Vanderdecken leaned upon his hand on the rail above the quarter-gallery, and the motion which the heave of the ship gave to his giant form by the sweeping of it up and down the heavens at the horizon emphasised his own absolute motionlessness. Nevertheless, his gaze was rooted in the ship, and the brightening of the angry sparkle in them to the nearing of the man-of-war was a never-to-be-forgotten sight. [152]

"How is this going to end?" I whispered to Imogene. "Is it possible that they are still unable to guess the character of our vessel?"

The frigate had drawn close enough to enable us to make out the glint of buttons and epaulets on the quarter-deck, the uniform of marines on the forecastle, and the heads of seamen standing by the braces or at the guns along the decks. She now hauled up her mainsail but without backing her topsail, luffed so as to shake the way out of her, giving us, as she did so, an oblique view of her stern very richly ornamented, the glass of the windows flashing, and the blue swell brimming to her name in large characters, "Centaur."

"Ship ahoy!" came thundering down through the trumpet at the mouth of a tall, powerfully-built man erect on the rail close against the mizzen-rigging: "What ship is that?" [153]

Vanderdecken made no answer. The wind blew in a moaning gust over the bulwark, and there was the sound of a little jar and shock as the old fabric leaned wearily on the swell, but not a whisper fell from the men. Meanwhile it was grown evident to me that our ship was greatly puzzling the people of the frigate. It looked indeed as if the men had left their stations to crowd to the side, for the line of the bulwarks was blackened with heads. A group of officers stood on the quarter-deck, and I could see them pointing at our masts as though calling one another's attention to the Braave's great barricadoed tops, to her sprit-topmast, the cut and character of her rigging, and to the many signs that would convert her into a wonder, if not a terror, in the eyes of sailors.

"Ship ahoy!" now came down again, with an edge of anger in the hurricane note. "What ship is that?" [154]

At this second cry Vanderdecken broke into life. He turned his face forward. "Bring me my trumpet!" he exclaimed, in a voice whose rich, organ-like roll must have been plainly heard on board the frigate, whether his Dutch was understood or not. The ancient tube I had seen in his cabin was put into his hand. He stepped to the rail, and placing the trumpet to his mouth, cried, "The Braave."

"Where are you from?"

"Batavia!"

"Where bound?"

"Amsterdam!"

There was another pause. The line of heads throbbled with visible agitation along the sides, and I saw one man of the group on the quarter-deck go up to the captain, who was speaking our ship, touch his cap, and say something. But the other imperiously waved him off with a flourish of his trumpet, which he instantly after applied to his lips, and shouted out, "Haul down your flag and I will send a boat." [155]

Vanderdecken looked towards me. "What does he say?" he exclaimed.

I told him. He called to Van Vogelaar, who promptly enough came to the halliards and lowered

the flag to the deck. I watched the descent of that crazy, attenuated, ragged symbol. To my mind it was as affrighting in its suggestions of unholy survival as the whole appearance of the vessel or the countenance and mechanic manners of the most corpse-like man of the crew of her.

Scarce was the ensign hauled down when there came to our ears the silver, cheerful singing of a boatswain's pipe, the main-topsail was laid aback and the frigate's length showed out as she fell slightly off from the luff that had held her canvas trembling in the wind. We were too far asunder for the nice discernment of faces with the naked eye, but methought since there seemed no lack of telescopes aboard the frigate, enough should have been made out of the line of deadly faces which looked over our bulwark-rail, to resolve us to the satisfaction of that British crew. [156]

Again was heard the silver chirping of the boatswain's whistle; a pinnace was lowered, into which tumbled a number of armed seamen, and the blades of eight oars flashed like gold as they rose feathering from the first spontaneous dip.

"They are coming!" cried Imogene in a faint voice.

"Let us keep where we are," I exclaimed, "Vanderdecken does not heed us. If we move his thoughts will fly to you, and he may give me trouble. Dear girl, keep a stout heart. They will be sure to carry us to the ship—proud to rescue you, at least; then, what follows must come—you will be safe!"

She put her hand under my arm. Tall as were the bulwarks of the Braave, there was swell enough so to roll the ship as to enable me with every windward sway to see clear to the water where the boat was pulling. With beating hearts we watched. On a sudden the oars ceased to rise and fall; the seamen hung upon them, all to a man, staring at our ship with heads twisted as if they would wring their necks; then, as if impelled by one mind, they let fall their oars to stop the boat's way, all of them gazing with straining eyeballs. [157]

The officer who steered stood erect, peering at us under his hand. The ship, God knows, was plain to their view now—the age and rottenness of her timbers, her patch-work sails, the sickliness of such ghastly and dismal hue as her sides discovered, the ancientness of her guns and swivels; above all, the looks of the crew watching the boat's approach—an array of figures more shocking than were they truly dead, newly unfrocked of their winding sheets and propped up against the rail to horribly counterfeit living seamen. [158]

"Why have they ceased rowing?" cried Imogene, in a voice of bitter distress, and withdrawing her hand from my arm to press it upon her heart.

As she spoke a sudden commotion was perceptible among the men in the boat; the officer shrilly crying out some order, flung himself, as one in a frenzy, in the sternsheets; the larboard oars sparkled, and the desperate strokes of the men made the foam fly in smoke, whilst the starboard hands furiously backed-water to get the boat's head round swiftly, and before you could have counted ten she was being pulled, in a smother of froth, back to the frigate.

I was about to leap to the side and shout to them, but at the instant Vanderdecken turned and looked at me. Then it flashed upon my mind, "If I hail the boat, he and Van Vogelaar, all of them, may imagine I design to inform the frigate of the treasure!"—and the apprehension of what might follow such a suspicion held my feet glued to the deck. [159]

"They have guessed what this ship is!" said Imogene, in a voice full of tears.

I could not speak for the crushing disappointment that caused the heart in me to weigh down, heavy as lead. I had made sure of the officer stepping on board, and of his delivering the girl and me from this accursed ship on hearing my story, and acting as a British naval officer should when his duty as a sailor, or his chivalry as a man, is challenged; in conformity with that noble saying of one of our most valiant admirals, who, on being asked whither he intended to carry his ship—"To Hell!" he answered, "if duty commands!"

Yet one hope lingered, though faintly indeed; the captain of the frigate had imperiously commanded the boat to be manned, as I gathered by his manner of waving away the officer, who had addressed him in a remonstrant manner; would he suffer the return of the boat's crew until they had obeyed his orders? [160]

I watched. Headlong went the boat, smoking through the billows which arched down upon her from the windward, and her oars sparkled like sheet lightning with the panic-terror that plied them; the excitement in the ship was visible enough, discipline had given way to superstitious fear. I could see the captain flourishing his arm with threatening gestures, lieutenants and midshipmen running here and there, but to no purpose. The whole ship's company, about three hundred sailors and marines as I supposed, knew what ship we were, and the very frigate herself as she rolled without way, looked like some startled beast mad for flight, the foam draining from her bows to the slow pitching, as a terrified steed champs his bit into froth, and shudder after shudder going up out of her heart of oak into her sails, as you would have said to watch the tremble and filling and backing of them to the wind. [161]

It was as I had feared, and had the captain of the man-of-war promised to blow his ship and men into a thousand atoms if the boat's crew refused to obey his orders to board us, they would have accepted that fate in preference to the hideous alternative adventure. In a trice the pinnace was alongside the frigate, the crew over the rail, and the boat hoisted. The yards on the main flew round, royals and topgallant-sails were set, studding-sails were run aloft, and before ten minutes had elapsed since the boat had started to board us, the frigate, under a whole cloud of canvas, was heeling and gently rolling and pitching over the brilliant blue sea, with her head north east, her stern dead at us, the gilt there and the windows converting her betwixt her quarters into the [162]

appearance of a huge sparkling square of crystal, the glory of which flung upon her wake under it a splendour so great that it was as though she had fouled a sunbeam and was dragging the dazzle after her.

I looked at Imogene; her beautiful eyes had yearned after the ship into the dimness of tears.

"My dear, do not fret," said I, again calling her my dear, for I still lacked the courage to call her my love; "this experience makes me clear on one point: we shall escape, but not by a ship."

"How, if not by a ship?" she cried, tremulously.

Before I could reply, Vanderdecken looked round upon us, and came our way, at the same time telling Van Vogelaar to swing the topsail-yard and board his main tack.

"'Tis in this fashion," he exclaimed, "that most of the ships I meet serve me. It would be enough to make me deem your countrymen a lily-livered lot if the people of other nations, my own included, did not sheer off before I could explain my needs or learn their motives in desiring to board us. What alarmed the people of that ship, think you, mynheer?" [163]

"Who can tell, sir?" I responded, in as collected a manner as I could contrive. "They might suspect us hardly worth the trouble of capturing——"

He motioned an angry dissent.

"Or," I continued, abashed and speaking hurriedly, "they might have seen something in the appearance of your crew to promise a bloody resistance."

"By the Holy Trinity!" he cried, with the most vehement scorn, "if such a thing were conceivable I should have been glad to confirm it with a broadside!" and his eye came from the frigate that was fast lessening in the distance to his poor show of rust-eaten sakers and green-coated swivels. [164]

It was sure that he had no suspicion of the truth. Not knowing that he and his ship were accurst, how was it possible for him to guess the cause of the behaviour of the ships which fled from him? You would suppose that he and the rest of the crew discovered many signs of satisfaction and delight at this escape from a ship to whose commands they had hauled down their flag; instead, they hung upon the rail watching the frigate shifting her helm for a hasty flight without a murmur, a note of speech; nothing appeared in them but a dull, leaden, Dutch phlegmatic curiosity, if indeed this quality at all possessed them, and when Van Vogelaar sang out to them to brace round the yards on the main, they fell to the job of trimming sail and getting way on the ship with an incredible ghastly indifference in their countenances and in their movements, as they went about their silent labour. Indeed, whatever passions they had seemed to pertain to what was to come; I mean, the heaving in sight of a ship would make them eager for tobacco or for whatever else they needed and she might have; but when the incident, the adventure, the experience—call it what you will—was passed, they turned a black and passionless mind upon it, without the capacity of grief or gladness. [165]

It was an hour after our usual dinner-time, and Prins arrived to tell the captain the meal was on the table. He put Imogene's hand under his arm caressingly, and I followed them with one wistful look at the frigate that was already a toy and far off, melting like a cloud into the junction of sapphire ether and violet ocean. I saw Vanderdecken level a glance at her too, and as we entered the cabin he said, addressing me, but without turning his head, and leading Imogene to the table. "It will be a disappointment to you, mynheer, that your countrymen would not stay to receive you?" [166]

"It was your intention," said I, "that I should go with them?"

"Certainly," he answered, confronting me slowly and eyeing me haughtily; "you are an Englishman, but you are not my prisoner."

"We may be more fortunate next time," I said, coldly.

"'Tis to be hoped!" said Van Vogelaar, who had followed last, speaking in his harshest and sourest tone.

I turned to eye him; but at the moment the parrot, probably animated by our voices, croaked out, hoarsely, "Wy Zyn al Verdomd!" on which the fellow broke into a coarse, raw "ha! ha!" yet never stirring a muscle of his storm-hammered face. 'Twould have been like fighting with phantoms and fiends to war in words with these men. I am here, thought I, and there is yonder sweetheart to rescue before I am done with this Death Ship; and with a smile at her earnest, half-startled eyes I seated myself. [167]

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## CHAPTER IX.

### CAPTAIN VANDERDECKEN WALKS IN HIS SLEEP.

This incident of the English frigate satisfied me that it was Vanderdecken's intention to get rid of me at the first opportunity that offered. There could be no doubt that Van Vogelaar had poisoned his mind against me, for, certainly, at the start of this experience of mine, the skipper had treated me with humanity and a sort of heated, lofty courtesy; and since he deemed himself homeward bound, and regarded his vessel as a good sailer, he would not think it necessary to tranship me if

his mind had not been acidulated.

I remember when the evening came on that same day we had been chased and abandoned by the Centaur, walking up and down the lee-side of the short poop alone, Arents, who had charge, standing silent near the helmsman. I had worked myself up into great confusion and distress of mind. Dejection had been followed by a fit of nervousness, and when I looked around me at the unmeasurable waste of ocean darkling in the east to the growing shadows there, at the ancient heights of canvas above me, with the dingy rusty red of the western light slipping from the hollow breasts and off the sallow spars, till the edges of the sails melted into a spectral faintness upon the gradual gloom, at the desolate, grassy appearance of the decks, the dull motions, the death-like posture of the three or four men standing here and there forward—I felt as if the curse of the ship had fallen upon my heart and life too—that it was my doom to languish in her till my death—to love and yet be denied fruition—to yearn for our release with the same impotency of desire that governed the navigation of this Death Ship towards the home it was the Will of God she was never to approach. [169]

Yet in any other mood I should have found an exquisite repose for the soul in this interval. There was an aroma as of the tropics in the gentle north-west wind. The ship, faintly impelled, went with a small curl of silver at her bow, as softly along the sea as the reflection of a star slides upon the brow of a smooth swell. The peace of the grave was in the floating tomb, and had my spirits been easy there would have been something of the delicious rapture of intellectual enjoyment that the opium smoker is said to inhale through the stem of his pipe in the indolent watching of this ancient ship, swimming out of daylight into darkness, with the reflected hectic on the larboard beam creeping like vermilioned smoke up her masts and over her sails, and vanishing off the trucks like the trailing skirts of some heavenward flying vision. [170]

On turning from a short contemplation of the sea over the stern, I observed Imogene, at the head of the ladder conducting from the poop to the quarter-deck, watching me. It was the first opportunity which had offered for speaking with her alone since dinner-time.

"Captain Vanderdecken has gone to his cabin to take some rest," said she. "I knew you were above by your tread."

"Ah! you can recognise me by that?"

"Yes, and by the dejection in it, too," she answered, smiling. "There is human feeling in the echo; the footfalls of the others are as meaningless as the sound of wood smitten by wood."

"I am very dull and weary-hearted," said I. "Thanks be to God that you are in this ship to give me hope and warmth."

"And I thank Him, too, for sending you to me," said she.

I took her hand and kissed it; indeed, but for Arents and the helmsman, I should have taken her to my heart with my lips upon hers. "Let us walk a little," said I. "We will step softly. We do not want the captain to surprise us." [171]

I took her hand, and we slowly paced the deck.

"All the afternoon," said I, "I have been considering how we are to escape. There is no man among this ghostly crew who has a friendly eye for me, and so whatever is done must be done by me alone."

"You must trust no one," she cried, quickly; "the plan you light upon must be our secret. There is a demon imprisoned in Vanderdecken; if it should be loosed he might take your life!"

"I don't doubt it. And suppose I went armed, my conflict would be with deathless men! No! no! my plan must be our secret, as you say. But what is it? If but a gleam of light sank its ray into this darkness I should take heart." [172]

She pressed my hand, saying, "The frigate's abandoning of us has depressed you. But an opportunity will surely come."

"Yes, the behaviour of the frigate has depressed me. But why? Because she has made me see that the greatest calamity which could befall us would be our encountering a ship willing to parley with us."

"Is it so?"

"I fear; because Vanderdecken would send me to her, and separate us." Then bethinking me, by observing her head sink, how doleful and unmanly was such reasoning as this, such apprehension of what might be, without regard to the possibility of our salvation lying in the very circumstance or situation I dreaded, I said, heartening my voice, "Imogene, though I have no plan, yet my instincts tell me that our best, perhaps our sole chance of escaping from this ship will be in some necessity arising for her to drop anchor off the coast, for careening, or for procuring provisions and water. Think, my dear, closely of it! We dare not count upon any ship we meet taking such action as will ensure our joint deliverance. No body of seamen, learning what vessel this is, would have anything to do with her. Then, as to escaping from her at sea, even if it were in the power of these weak, unaided arms to hoist one of those boats there over the side unperceived, I know not whether my love for thee, Imogene—whether, O forgive me if I grieve you—"

She stirred her hand, as if to remove it, but I held it the tighter, feeling in the warm and delicate palm the dew that emotion was distilling there.

She was silent, and we came to a stand. She said in a weak and trembling voice: "You do not

grieve me. Why should I grieve to be loved?"

"You are beautiful and good and a sailor's child, my dearest," said I. [175]

"And friendless."

"No! bid me say I love thee?"

She bade me whisper, drawing closer to me. I swiftly kissed her cheek that was cold with the evening wind. Great Heaven! what a theatre was this for love-making. To think of the sweetest, in our case the purest, of emotions having its birth in, owing its growth to, the dreaded fabric of the Death Ship! Yet I, that a short while ago was viewing the vessel with despondency and fear and loathing, now for a space found her transfigured! The kiss my darling had permitted, her gentle speech, the caress that lay in her drawing close to me, had kindled a light in my heart, and the lustre was upon the ship; a faint radiance viewless to the sight, but of a power to work such transformation, that instead of a gaunt phosphoric structure sailing through the dusk, there floated under the stars a fabric whose sails might have been of satin, whose cordage might have been formed of golden threads, whose decks might have been fashioned out of pearl! [176]

We were silent for awhile, and then she said, in a coyly-coquettish voice with a happy note of music in it, "What were you saying, Mr. Fenton, when you interrupted yourself?"

"Dear heart!" cried I, "you must call me Geoffrey now."

"What were you saying, Geoffrey?" said she.

"Why," I replied, "that even were it possible for me to secure one of those boats, and launch it unperceived, my love would not suffer me to expose you to the perils of such an adventure."

"My life is in your keeping, Geoffrey," said she. "You need but lead—I will follow. Yet there is one thing you must consider: if we escape to the land, which seems to me the plan that is growing in you—"

I said, "Yes," watching the sparkling of the stars in her eyes, which she had fixed on mine. [177]

"Are not the perils which await us there greater than any the sea can threaten, supposing we abandoned ourselves to its mercy in that little boat yonder? There are many wild beasts on the coast; often in the stillness of the night, when we have been lying at anchor, have I heard the roaring and trumpeting of them. And more dreadful and fearful than leopards, wild elephants and terrible serpents—all of which abound, dear—crocodiles in the rivers and poisonous, tempting fruit and herbs—are the savages, the hideous, unclothed Kaffres, and the barbarous tribes which I have heard my father tell of as occupying the land for leagues and leagues from the Cape to the coast opposite the Island of Madagascar."

A strange shudder ran through her, and letting slip my hand to take my arm—for now that she knew I loved her she passed from her girlish coyness into a bride-like tenderness and freedom, and put a caressing manner into her very walk as she paced at my side—she cried, "Oh, do you know, Geoffrey, if ever a nightmare freezes my heart it is when I dream I am taken captive by one of those black tribes, and carried beyond the mountains to serve as a slave." [178]

There was so much truth in what she said that I could not listen to her without an emotion of distress; since, my own judgment forbidding the escape by the boat—if it were possible for us so to escape—her dread of the land was like the complete shutting out of all self-deliverance. However, I felt that no good could come of a conversation that insensibly led us into disheartening reflections, so I gradually worked our thoughts into another channel, and presently found myself breathing my passion afresh into her ear and hearkening to hurried answers, sighed rather than spoken, so gentle was her utterance. The dusk had thickened into night, the stars swung in glory to the majestic motion of the mastheads, there was a curl of moon in the west like a paring of pearl designed for a further enrichment of the jewelled skies, the phosphor trembled along the decks, and all substantial outlines swam into indistinctness in an atmosphere that seemed formed of fluid indigo. Visible against the luminaries past the quarter-gallery was the figure of the mate; but the helmsman near him was shrouded by the pale haze that floated smoke-like about the binnacle. Flakes of the sea-glow slipped slowly past upon the black welter as though the patches of stardust on high mirrored themselves in this silent ebony water. From time to time a brilliant meteor flashed out upon the night and sailed into a ball of fire that far outshone the glory of the greatest stars. The dew fell lightly; the crystals trembled along the rail and winked to the stirring of the wind with the sharp sparkle of diamonds; and though we were in the cold season, yet the light breeze, having a flush of northing in it, was pure refreshment without touch of cold, so that a calmer, fairer night than this I do not conceive ever descended upon a ship at sea. [179]

I was a young fellow in those days. My passion for the lonely and lovely girl who walked beside me was keen and hot; that she loved me as I loved her I could not be certain, for women are slower, and therefore the surer, in their capacity of loving than men; but that she did love me she made me know by a subtle sweetness of words and behaviour. I was young, I say, of a naturally merry and sanguine heart, and the gladness of my love entered into the night, smoothing out all the alarms and anxieties from my mind, and making me so much myself that for my light spirits I might have been on board some English ship with my sweetheart, swiftly heading for home, instead of treading with her the deck of a vessel accursed of Heaven, and moving through the night, a ghostly shadow palely gleaming with death-fires, on a voyage that was never to have an end. [181]

Thrice the clock struck in the cabin, and whenever the first chime sounded I would start as if we

were near land and the sound was the note of a distant cathedral bell; and punctually with the last stroke would come the rasping voice of the parrot, reminding all who heard it of their condition. Occasionally, Arents moved, but never by more than a stride or two; forward all was dead blackness and stillness, the blacker for the unholy, elusive shinings, the stiller for the occasional sighing of the wind, for the thin, shaling sound of waters, gently stemmed, for the moan now and again that floated muffled out of the hold of the ship. Twice Imogene said she must leave me; but I could not bear to part with her. The night was our own, yea, even the ship, in her solitude wrought by the silent figures aft and the tomb-like repose forward, seemed our own; and my darling, being in her heart as loth as I to separate, lingered yet and yet till the silver sickle of the moon had gone down red into the western ocean, and the clock below had struck half-past eleven.

[182]

Then she declared it was time, indeed, for her to be gone; should Vanderdecken come on deck and find her with me he might decide to part us effectually by sending me forward, and forbidding me to approach the cabin end; so, finding her growing alarmed, and hearing the quick beating of her heart in her speech, I said, "Good-night," kissing her hand, and then releasing her. She seemed to hurry, stopped and looked behind; I stood watching her; seeing her stop, I held out my arms, and went to her, and she returned to me. With what love did I kiss her upturned brow, and hold her to my heart!

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She was yet in my arms, when the great figure of Vanderdecken rose above the ladder, and ere I could release her he was close to us, towering in shadow like some giant spirit. The start I gave caused her to turn; she saw him, and instantly grasping my hand drew me against the bulwark, where we stood waiting for him to speak. Love will give spirit to the pitifullest recreant, and had I been the most craven-hearted of men the obligation to stand between such a sweetheart as Imogene and one whom she feared, though he stood as high as Goliath, would have converted me into a hero. But I was no coward; I could look back to my earliest experiences and feel that with strictest confidence. Yet, spite of the animating presence of Imogene, the great figure standing in front of us chilled, subdued, terrified me. Had he been mortal I could not have felt so; nay, had his demeanour, his posture, been that which intercourse with him had made familiar, I should not have suffered from the superstitious fears which held me motionless, and made my breathing laboured. But there was something new and frightful in the pause he made abreast of us, in the strange and menacing swinging of his arms, in the pose of his head defiantly held back, and in his eyes, which shone with a light that owed nothing to the stars, in the pallid gloom of his face. His gaze seemed to be rivetted on the ocean-line a little abaft of where we stood, and therefore did he appear to confront us. The expression in his face I could not distinguish, but I feebly discerned an aspect of distortion about the brow, and clearly made out that his under-jaw was fallen so as to let his mouth lie open, causing him to resemble one whose soul was convulsed by some hideous vision.

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Imogene pressed my hand. I looked at her, and she put her white forefinger to her mouth, saying in accents so faint, that they were more like the whispers one hears in memory than the utterance of human lips: "He is walking in his sleep. In a moment he will act a part. I have seen this thing once before;" and so fairly speaking she drew me lightly towards the deeper gloom near the bulwarks where the mizzen-rigging was.

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For some moments he continued standing and gazing seawards, slowly swinging his arms in a way that suggested fierce yet almost controlled distress of mind. He then started to walk, savagely patrolling the deck, sweeping past us so close as to brush us with his coat, then crossing athwartships and madly pacing the other side of the deck, sometimes stopping with a passionate violent suddenness at the binnacle, at the card of which he seemed to stare, then with denunciatory gesture resuming his stormy striding now lengthwise, now crosswise, now swinging his great figure into an abrupt stand to view the sea, first to starboard then to larboard, now standing aloft; and all with airs and gestures as though he shouted orders to the crew and cried aloud to himself, though saving his swift deep breathing that, when he passed us close, sounded like the panting of bellows in angry or impatient hands, no syllable broke from him.

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"Some spell is upon him!" I exclaimed. "I see how it is!—he is acting over again the behaviour that renders this ship accurst."

"I saw him like this two years ago; 'twas earlier in the night," whispered Imogene. "He so scared me that I fainted."

That Arents and the helmsman took notice of this strange somnambulistic behaviour in their captain I could not tell: he approached them as often as he approached us, and much of the dumb show of his rage was enacted close to them; but so far as I could judge from the distance at which we stood, their postures were as quiet as though they were lay figures, or passionless and in sensible creatures without understandings to be touched. It was a heart-subduing spectacle beyond words to tell of. Bit by bit his temper grew, till his motions, his frenzied racings about the deck, his savage glarings aloft, his fury when, in this distemper of sleep, his perusal of the compass disappointed him, were those of a maniac. I saw the white froth on his lips as he approached us close to level a flaming glance seawards, and had he been Satan himself I could not have shrunk from him with deeper loathing and colder terror. The insanity of his wrath, as expressed by his gestures—for he was as mute as one bereft of his voice by agony—was rendered the wilder, the more striking and terrible by the contrast of the night, the peace of it, the splendour of the stars, the silence upon the deep rising up to those luminaries like a benedictory hush! For such an infuriated figure as this you needed the theatre of a storm-tossed ship, with the billows boiling all about and over her, and the scenery of a pitchy sky torn by violet lightning and piercing the roaring ebony of the seas with zig-zag fire, and the trumpeting of the tempest

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deepened by a ceaseless crashing of thunder.

He continued to lash himself into such a fury that, for very pity, misery and horror, you longed to hear him cry out, for the expression would give relief to his soul, strangling and in awful throes. Suddenly he fell upon his knees; his hands were clenched, and he lifted them on high; his face was upturned; and as I watched him menacing the stars with infuriate gestures, I knew that even as he now showed so did he appear when he blasphemously dared his Maker. A soft gust of the midnight air blew with a small moan through the rigging. Vanderdecken let drop his arms, swayed a while as if he would fall, staggered to his feet, and with his hands pressed to his eyes as though indeed some sudden stroke of lightning had smitten him blind, came with wavering gait, in which was still visible a sullen and disordered majesty, to the poop ladder, down which he sightlessly went, steered by the wondrous, unintelligible faculty that governs the sleep-walker.

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I pulled off my hat and wiped my forehead, that was damp with sweat.

"Great God!" I cried. "What a sight to behold! What anguish is he made to suffer! How is it that his human form does not scatter, like one broken on a wheel, to the rending of such infernal passions as possess him?"

Imogene was about to answer when on a sudden the first stroke of midnight came floating up in the cathedral-note of the clock.

"Hark!" she exclaimed. "It is twelve! Arents will now be relieved by Van Vogelaar. If that malignant creature spies me here at this hour with you, oh, 'twould be worse through the report he would give than if Vanderdecken himself had surprised us. Good-night, Mr. Fenton!"

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She quickly slipped from my grasp, and faded down the ladder. As she vanished I put my hand to my heart to subdue its beating, and whilst I thus stood a moment the last note of the clock vibrated into the stillness on deck and scarcely less clear than had the accursed croak sounded close beside me, rose the parrot's detestable cry:

"Wy zyn al Verdomd!"

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## CHAPTER X.

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### WE SIGHT A DISMASTED WRECK.

Terrible as must have been the sufferings of Vanderdecken in the tragic passage through which his spirit had driven in a silent madness of sleep, yet next morning I could perceive no trace of his frenzy in the cold and ghastly hue of his face. I found him on deck when I quitted my melancholy cabin, and he responded to the good morning I gave him with a touch of civility in his haughty, brooding manner that was not a little comforting to me, who had been kept awake till 'twas hard upon daylight by remembrance of the spectacle I had witnessed, and by apprehensions of how a person of his demoniacal passions might serve me if I should give him, or if he should imagine, offence.

The draught—for the breeze was little more—had come more northerly, and the ship, as I might guess by the sun, was heading about north east. There were swathes and circles of gleaming ribbed clouds of gossamer texture all about the sky, and they looked as if some mighty hand had been swinging pearls, as a sower hurls seeds, about the heavens, which had been compacted by the wind into many different figures. They sobered the dazzle where the sun was, so that his wake lay upon the ocean in flashing streaks, instead of the fan-shaped path of glory he would have wrought had he shone in unstained azure.

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"There should be promise of a breeze, mynheer," said I, "in the shape and lay of those high clouds and the little dimness you notice to windward."

"Yes," he answered, darting a level glance, under his bushy, corrugated brows, into the North quarter; "were it not for what hath been sighted from aloft, I should be steering with my starboard tacks aboard."

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"What may be in sight, sir?" I asked, dreading to hear that it was a ship.

He answered, "The sparkle of a wet, black object was visible from the cross-trees at sunrise. Arents finds it already in the perspective glass from the fore-top. He reports it the hull of an abandoned ship. He may be mistaken. Your sight is keen, sir; we greatly need tobacco; but I would not willingly lose time in running down to a vessel that may be water-logged, and therefore utterly unprofitable."

"You wish me to go aloft and see what I can make of the object, sir?"

"If you will be so good," he answered, with a grave inclination of the head.

"Captain Vanderdecken," said I, "I should be glad to serve you in any direction. I only regret your courtesy will not put me to the proof."

He bowed again and pointed to the telescope to which Arents had fastened a lanyard that he might carry it aloft on his back. I threw the bight over my head and walked forward, guessing now that Vanderdecken's civility was owing to his intending to make me oblige him in this way. Coming abreast of the weather fore-shrouds, I jumped on to an old gun, thence leaped to the rail

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and swung myself into the rigging, up which, however, I stepped with the utmost caution, the seizings of the ratlines looking very rotten, and the shrouds themselves so grey and worn that they seemed as old as the ship herself, and as if generations of seamen had been employed to do nothing else but squeeze the tar out of them. There was a good-sized lubber's hole through which I easily passed, the barricadoes prohibiting any other entrance into the top; and when I was arrived, I found myself on a great circular platform, green as a field with moss and grass, and surrounded by a breastwork of wood to the height of my armpits, the scantling extraordinarily thick, but answering in age and appearance to the rest of the timber in the ship, with loop-holes for muskets and small cannon.

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The foot of the fore-sail having a very large curve, I had a clear view of the sea on both bows under it, and the moment I ran my naked eye from the windward to the leeward side, then I saw, fair betwixt the cathead and the knighthead, the flashing of what was unquestionably the wet side of a dismasted ship rolling to the sun. The regular coming and going of the sparkling was like the discharge of a piece fired and quickly loaded and fired again. I pointed the telescope, and the small magnification aiding my fairly keen sight I distinctly made out the hull of a vessel of between three hundred and four hundred tons, rolling with a very sluggish regularity and shooting out a strong blaze of light whenever the swell gave her streaming sides to the glory. I was pretty sure, by the power and broadness of this darting radiance, that her decks were not submerged, that indeed she would still show an indifferently good height of side above the water, and thereupon threw the glass over my back for the descent, pausing, however, to take a view of the ship from the height I occupied, and wondering not a little, with something of amusement, too, at the extraordinary figure her body offered thus surveyed.

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In fact, she was not three times as long as she was broad, and she had the sawn-off look of a wagon down there. After every swimming lift of her head by the swell, the droop of her bows have a smearing of froth into the large blue folds, that might have passed for an overflowing of soap-suds from a wash-tub; and upon that whiteness all the forward part of her stood out in a sort of jumble of pondrous catheads, curved headboards sinking into a well, out of which forked the massive boltsprit, as the people who fashioned it would have spelt it, with its heavy confusion of gear, yards, stays for the sprit-topmast, and the like. I had a good sight of the sails up here, and perceived they were like the famous stocking of which Dr. Arbuthnot, or Pope, or one of the wits of Queen Anne's reign, wrote; that is, that though they might have been the same cloths which the Braave sheeted home when she set sail from Batavia, yet they had been so patched, so darned, and over and over again so repaired, that to prove they were the same sails would be as nice a piece of metaphysical puzzling as to show that they were not.

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Yet the sun flung his light upon their many-hued dinginess, and as I looked up they swung to the heave of the ship with a hard blank staring of their breasts that seemed like the bending of an idiot's gaze at the clusters and wreaths, and curls of pearly vapour over the lee horizon, and though my glance was swift yet even in a breathless moment a confusion was wrought, as though the shining prismatic clouds were starting to sweep like some maelstromic brimming of feathery foam around the ship and founder her in gradual gyrations of blue ether and snow-like mist. Great God! thought I, here, to be sure, is a place to go mad in! To lie upon this dark green platform, to hearken to the spirit-whisperings amid this ancient cordage, to behold these darkened sails sallowly swelling towards some bloody disc of moon soaring out of a belt of sooty vapour, to listen to the voices of the fabric beneath and to the groans of her old age dying in echoes in the caverns of her stretched canvas—by my father's hand! thought I, if I am to save my brain I must put myself nearer to Imogene than this; so I dropped with a loud heart through the lubber's hole, and stepped down the ratlines as fast as my fears of the soundness of the seizings would suffer me to descend.

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"What do you see, mynheer?" asked Vanderdecken.

"The hull of a ship, sir," I replied. "She is deep in the water but not too deep for boarding, I believe, for the sunshine finds a wide expanse to blaze out upon when she rolls."

"Well," he exclaimed, "an hour or two can make but very little difference," and he sent his impatient, imperious gaze into the blue to windward, and fell to marching the deck athwartships, opposite the tiller-head, becoming suddenly as heedless of my presence as if I had been a brass swivel on his bulwarks. But I was less likely to be chagrined by his discourtesy than by his attention. It had, indeed, come to my never feeling so easy in my mind as when he perfectly neglected me.

Our bringing of that hull within sight from the deck ran into more than an hour or two. Close-hauled, and the breeze light, the Braave scarce seemed able to push her bows through the water at all. The bubbles and foam-bells slid past as languidly as the tide of ebb in its last quarter wrinkles against the stem of an anchored vessel.

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At breakfast nothing else was talked of, and little enough was said about it too. We were, in truth, a silent party. Every look of Imogene caused me to see how the memory of last night worked in her—a night of sweetness and terror—of kisses and caresses, and entrancing revelations—and of an horrific spectacle of enormous and speechless anguish, humanly devilish! On deck, in the early sparkling breeziness of the morning, I had been sensible of no recoil on meeting Vanderdecken; but at table I sat close to him; to his presence the recollection of the foam upon his lip, his fallen jaw, the soul-devouring, feverish restlessness of his enraged movements, his dreadful posture of imprecation, imparted insufferable emphasis; and when I quitted the cabin for the deck, not having spoken half-a-dozen syllables during the meal, the feeling of relief in me was like the removal of a cold hand from my heart.

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It was two hours-and-a-half after sighting the hull from the masthead, that it lay visible upon the sea from the deck. Luckily, the breeze had stolen a point or two westerly, which enabled our ship to keep the wreck to leeward of our bowsprit; otherwise, we should never have fetched it by two miles, without a board, and that might have ended in a week's plying to windward. The crew had long got scent of this object ahead, and being as keen for tobacco as was ever a sharp-set stomach for victuals, they were collected in a body on the fore-castle, where, in their dull, lifeless, mechanic way they stood staring and waiting. Although those who had the watch on deck had been at various sorts of work when the wreck hove into view over the fore-castle rail—such as making spun-yarn, sawing wood, (as I supposed for the cook-room) sail-mending, splicing old running gear, and the like—yet, I remarked they dropped their several jobs just as it suited them, and I never observed that either of the mates reprov'd them, or that the captain noticed their behaviour; whence I concluded that the Curse had stricken the ship into a kind of little republic, wherein such discipline as was found was owing to a sort of general agreement among the men that such work as had to be done must be done. [202]

I found myself watching the wreck with a keener interest than could ever possess the breasts of the wretched master, mates, or crew. Was any stratagem conceivable to enable me to use that half-sunk vessel as an instrument for escaping with Imogene from this Death Ship?

My dearest girl came to my side whilst my brain was thus busy, and in a soft undertone I told her of what I was thinking. She listened with eager eyes. [203]

"Geoffrey," said she, "you are my captain. Command me, and I will do your bidding."

"My darling," I replied, "if you knew what a miserable, nervous creature this Death Ship has made of me you would guess I was the one to be led, you to direct. But yonder craft will not serve us. No! Better that little boat there than a hull which the crew, ay, and perhaps the very rats have abandoned."

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## CHAPTER XI. THE DEAD HELMSMAN.

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I proved right in the estimate I had formed from the fore-top of the size of the wreck. Her burthen was within four hundred tons. We gradually drove down to her, and when we were within musket-shot Vanderdecken ordered the topsail to be laid aback. The breeze had freshened, the little surges ran in a pouring of silver-gushing heads, the broad-backed swell rose in brimming violet to our channels, and our ship rolled upon it helpless as an egg-shell. The wallowing of the wreck, too, was like the plashing and struggling of some sentient thing heavily labouring, with such fins or limbs as God had given it, to keep itself afloat.

That there was no lack of water in her was certain; yet, having the appearance of a ship that had been for some days abandoned, at which time it might be supposed that her people would imagine her to be in a sinking condition, it was clear that in a strange accidental way the leak had been healed, possibly by some substance entering and choking it. All three masts were gone within a foot or two of the deck. Her hull was a dark brown, that looked black in the distance against the blue, with the mirror-like flashing from the wet upon it; she had a handsome stern, the quarter-galleries supported by gilt figures, wherefrom ran a broad band of gilt along her sides to the bows. Under her counter there stole out in large, white characters, with every heave of her stern, the words "Prince of Wales," and 'twas startling to see the glare of the letters coming out in a ghastly, staring sort of way from the bald brow of the swell, as it sloped from the gilded stern. Her name proved her English. You could see the masts had been cut away, by the hacked ends of the shrouds snaking out into the hollows and swellings over the side. Her decks were heavily encumbered with what sailors call "raffle"—that is, the muddle of ropes, torn canvas, staves of boats and casks, fragments of deck fittings and so forth, with which the ocean illustrates her violence, and which she will sometimes for weeks, ay, and for months, continue to rock and nurse, and hold intact for very affection of the picture as a symbol of her wrath when vexed by the gale, and of her triumphs over those who daringly penetrate her fortresses to fight her. The confusion to the eye was so great, and rendered so lively and bewildering by the hulk's rolling that, scan her as you would, it was impossible to master details with any sort of rapidity. [205]

Suddenly Imogene, grasping my wrist in her excitement, exclaimed, "See! there is a man there—he seems to steady himself by holding the wheel—look now, Geoffrey, as she rolls her decks at us!" [206]

I instantly saw him. The wheel was in front of the break of the poop, where the cuddy or round-house windows were; and erect at it stood a man, on the starboard side, one hand down clutching a spoke at his waist, and his left arm straight out to a spoke to larboard, which he gripped. Methought he wrestled with the helm, for he swerved as a steersman will who struggles to keep a ship's head steady in a seaway.

"Is he mad?" cried I. "Ay, it must be so! Famine, thirst, mental anguish, may have driven him distracted. Yet, even then, why does not he look towards us? Why, were he actually raving, surely his sight would be courted by our presence."

"Pray God he be not mad," whispered Imogene; "he is certain to be a sailor and an Englishman;

and if he be mad, and brought here, how will these men deal with him?"

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"Yes; and I say, too, pray God he be not mad!" I cried; "for back me with a hearty English sailor and I believe—yes, I believe I could so match these fellows as to carry the ship, without their having the power to resist me, to any port I chose to steer for to the eastward;" for with her cry of, "He is sure to be a sailor and an Englishman," there swept into my brain the fancy of securing the crew under hatches, and imprisoning Vanderdecken and his mates in their cabins—the least idle, in sober truth, of all the schemes that had presented themselves to me.

"Hush!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, and as she closed her lips to the whisper, Vanderdecken came to us. But not to speak. He stood for some minutes looking at the wreck, with the posture and air of one deeply considering. The seamen forward gazed with a heavy steadfastness, too, some under the sharp of their hands, some with folded arms. I heard no speech among them. Yet though their stillness was that of a swoon, their eyes shone with an eager light, and expectation shaped their pallid, death-like faces into a high and straining look.

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There were no signs of life aboard the wreck, saving the figure of the man that swayed at the wheel. I was amazed that he should never glance towards us. Indeed, I am not sure that the whole embodied ghastliness of our Death Ship matched in terror what you found in the sight of that lone creature grasping the wheel, first bringing it a little to right, then heaving it over a little to left, fixedly staring ahead, as though such another Curse as had fallen upon this Dutch ship had come like a blast of lightning upon him, compelling him to go on standing at yonder helm, and vainly striving to steer the wreck—as terribly corpse-like as any man among us, and as shockingly vital too!

It struck my English love of briskness as strange that Vanderdecken should not promptly order the boat over, or give orders that should have reference to the abandoned hull; yet I could not help thinking that his Holland blood spoke in this pause, and that there intermingled with the trance-like condition that was habitual in him, the phlegmatic instincts of his nation—that gradual walking to a decision, which in Scotland is termed "takin' a thocht."

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After a while he said to me: "Mynheer, the wreck hath an English name; she will be of your country therefore. May I beg of you to take my trumpet and hail that person standing at the wheel?"

"I shall not need your trumpet, sir," said I, at once climbing upon the rail and thinking to myself that 'twas odd if there was not wanted a trumpet with a voice as thunderous as the crack o' doom to bring that silent, forward-staring man's face round to his shoulder.

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"Wreck ahoy!" I bawled, with my hand to my cheek, and the wind took the echo of my voice clear as a bell to the hulk.

There was not a stir in the helmsman beyond that dreary monotonous waving of his figure in his struggle to steady the wheel. I watched the foamless leaning of the wreck into the hollow, bringing her decks aslant to us, and the trailing and corkscrewing of the black gear that was washing over the side, and the sparkling of the broken glass of a skylight contrasting with the dead black of an half-dozen of carronades, and the squattering of the dead-eyes of her channels upon the blue volume of sea like the ebony heads of a row of negroes drowning; and then, wash! over she rolled to larboard, bringing a streak of greenish copper sheathing out of the white water which the fierce drainings from her side churned up, with a mighty flashing of sunlight off her streaming side, and a sharp lifting of the dark shrouds and stays and running ropes out of the seething welter, making her appear as though scores of sea-snakes had their fangs in her timbers, and that 'twas the very agony of their teeth, and the poison, which caused her to roll from them.

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I shouted again, and yet again; then dismounted.

"He is deaf!" said Vanderdecken.

"He is dead!" said I, for this was forced upon me, spite of the erect and life-like posture of the figure, and what resembled the straining of his arms to steady the wheel.

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## CHAPTER XII.

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### THE DUTCH SAILORS BOARD THE WRECK.

"Get the boat over," cried Vanderdecken, turning to Van Vogelaar, "and go and inspect the wreck. Look to the man first: Heer Fenton declares him dead; and particularly observe if there be aught that hath life in it aboard."

On this, Van Vogelaar went forward, calling about him. In a few minutes a white-faced seaman, with yellow beard trembling to the wind, and his eyes looking like a rat's with the white lashes and pink retinas, leisurely climbed aloft with a line in his hand, and swinging himself on to the main-yard, slid out upon the horses to the extremity, or yard-arm as it is termed, which he bestrode as a jockey a steed; and then hauled up the line, to the end of which was hitched a tackle. This tackle he made fast to the yard-arm, and by it, with the help of steadying-ropes or guys, some of the crew on deck hoisted the little boat out of the bigger one and lowered it away into the water alongside.

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I watched this business with a sailor's interest, wondering that so great a ship as this—great, that is, for the age to which she belonged—should carry no more than two boats, stowed one in the other after the fashion of the north-country coastmen. Nor was I less impressed by the aged appearance of the boat when she was afloat. She had the look of a slug with her horns, only that those continuations of her gunnel rail projected abaft as well as from the bows. And when Van Vogelaar and three of the crew entered her, then, what with the faded red of her inner skin, the wide, red blades of the short oars, the soulless movements of the seamen, the hue of their faces, the feverish unnatural shining of their eyes like sunshine showing through a cairngorm stone, their dried and corded hands, which wrapped the handles of their oars like rugged parchment—the little but marvellous picture acted as by the waving of a magic wand, forcing time back by a century and a half and driving shudders through the frame of a beholder with a sight whose actuality made it a hundredfold more startling and fearful than had it been a vision as unsubstantial as the Death Ship herself is mistakenly supposed to be.

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The wreck being within hailing distance, the boat was soon alongside her. The heavy rolling of the hull, and the sharp rise and fall of the boat, would have made any human sailor mightily wary in his boarding of the vessel, but if ever there was an endeavilled wretch among the Phantom's horrible crew, Van Vogelaar was he. The fiend in him stayed at nothing. The instant the boat had closed the wreck the fellow leaped, and he was on deck and walking towards the figure at the wheel, whilst the other—that is to say, two of them—were waiting for the hull to swing down for them to follow.

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The mate went up to the figure, and seemed to address him; then, receiving no reply, he felt his face, touched his hands, and pulled to get that amazing grip relaxed, but to no purpose. The others now joining him, they all stared into the figure's face; one lifting an eyelid and peering into the eye, another putting his ear to the figure's mouth. Van Vogelaar then came to the side, and shouted in his harsh and rusty voice that it was a dead man. Vanderdecken imperiously waved his hand, and cried, "Fall to exploring her!" and motioned significantly to the sky, as if he would have the mate misgive the weather, though there was no change in the aspect of the pearly wreaths and glistening beds of vapour, and the draught was still a gentle breeze.

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"Dead!" I whispered to Imogene; "yet I feared it!"

"Will he have been English, think you, Geoffrey?" she said.

"Yes!" cried I, feeling a heat rising to my cheeks, "name me a foreigner that would so gloriously have confessed his nation! English?—ay, a thousand times over! For what does that posture indicate, that stern holding to his place, that dutiful grip of his iron hands? What but those qualities which give the British sailor the dominion of the deep, and which rank him foremost among the noblest spirits the world has ever seen? He has died at his post—one of thousands who have as heroically perished."

I noticed Vanderdecken looking at the body. There was deep thought in his imperious, menacing expression, with a shadow of misery that his fierce and glittering eyes did but appear to coarsen and harshen the gloom of, and I wondered to myself if ever moments came when perception of his condition was permitted to him, for it truly appeared as though there were a hint of some such thing in him now whilst he gazed at the convulsive figure at the wheel, as if—Jesus have mercy upon him!—the sight of the dead filled his own deadly flesh with poignant and enraging yearnings, the meanings of which his unholy vitality was unable to interpret.

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When Van Vogelaar had spent about half-an-hour on the wreck, he and the others dropped over the side into the boat and made for us. We had scarce shifted our position, for the courses being hauled up and the topgallant-sails lowered, there was too little sail abroad for the weak wind then blowing to give us drift, and the swell that drove us towards the wreck would also drive the wreck from us. The mate came over the side, and stepping up to the captain, said, "She is an English ship, freighted with English manufacture; I make out bales of blanket, clothing and stores, which I imagine to have been designed for troops."

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"What water is in her?"

"Seven and a quarter feet by her own rod."

"Her pump?"

"She hath two—both shattered and useless."

"Does she continue to fill?"

"I believe not, sir; I would not swear to it; she rolls briskly, but," said he, sending his evil glance at the wreck, "it does not appear that she is sunk deeper since we first made her out."

"Yonder figure at the wheel is dead you say?"

"As truly dead a Briton as ever fell to a Dutchman's broadside." I exchanged a swift look with Imogene. "His eyes are glassy; his fingers clasp the spokes like hooks of steel. He must have died on a sudden—perhaps from lightning—from disease of some inward organ—or from fear." And there was the malice of the devil in the sneer that curled his ugly mouth as he spoke, taking me in with a roll of his sinister eyes.

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I watched him coldly. Remonstrance or temper would have been as idle with this man and his mates as pity to that unrecking heart of oak out there.

"What is to be come at?" demanded Vanderdecken, with passionate abruptness.

The other answered quickly, holding up one forefinger after another in a computative tallying

way whilst he spoke, "The half-deck is free of water, and there I find flour, vinegar, treacle, tierces of beef, some barrels of pork, and five cases of this—which hath the smell of tobacco, and is no doubt that plant." And he pulled out of his pocket a stick of tobacco, such as is taken in cases to sea to be sold to the crews. [221]

Vanderdecken smelt it. "'Tis undeniably tobacco," said he, "but how used?" His eye met mine; I took the hint, and said: "To be chewed, it is bitten; to be smoked, it has to be flaked with a knife—thus, mynheer." And I imitated the action of cutting it.

Some of the crew had collected on the quarter-deck to hear the mate's report, and seeing the tobacco in the captain's hand and observing my gestures, one of them cried out that if it was like the tobacco the Englishman had shown them how to use 'twas rare smoking! Whether Vanderdecken had heard of my visit to the fore-castle I do not know: he seemed not to hear the sailor's exclamation, saying to me, "Yes, mynheer, I see the convenience of such tablets; they hold much and are easily flaked." And then, sweeping the sea and skies with his eyes, he cried: "Get the other boat over: take a working party in her and leave them aboard to break out the cargo. The smaller boat will tow her to and fro. Arents, you will have charge of the working party—you, Van Vogelaar, will bring off the goods and superintend the transshipments. Away, now! There is stuff enough there to fill the hollowest cheek with fat and to sweeten the howl of a gale into melody. Away, then!" [222]

There was excitement in his words, but none in his rich and thunderous voice, nor in his manner; and though there seemed a sort of bustle in the way the men went to work to hoist out the large boat, it was the very ghost of hurry, as unlike the hearty leaping of sailors, fired with expectation, as are the twitchings of electrified muscles, to the motions of hale limbs controlled by healthy intellect.

Yet, to a mariner, what could surpass the interest of such a scene? As I leaned against the bulwark with Imogene, watching the little boat towing the big one over the swell, with now a lifting that put the leaning, toiling figures of the rowers clear against the delicate, vaporous film over the sky at the horizon—the red blades of the oars glistening like rubies as they flashed out of the water, and the white heads of the little surges which wrinkled the liquid folds melting all about the boats into creaming silver, radiant with salt rainbows and prismatic glories—and now a sinking that plunged them out of sight in a hollow, I said to my dear one, "Here is a sight I would not have missed for a quintal of the silver below. I am actually witnessing the manner in which this doomed vessel feeds and clothes herself, and how her crew replenish their stores and provide against decay and diminution. What man would credit this thing? Who would believe that the Curse which pronounced this ship imperishable should also hold her upon the verge of what is natural, sentencing her to a hideous immortality, and at the same time compelling the crew to labour as if her and their life was the same as that of other crews, in other ships." [223]

"If they knew their doom they would not toil," she answered; "they would seek death by famine or thirst, or end their horrible lot by sinking the ship and drowning with her." [224]

"How far away from the dread reality is the world's imagination of this ship, and the situation of her people!" cried I. "She has been pictured as rising out of the waves, as sailing among the clouds, as being perpetually attended by heavy black storms, and thunder claps and blasts of lightning! Here is the reality—as sheer a piece of prose at first sight as any salvage job, but holding in the very heart of its simplicity so mighty, so complicate, so unparalleled a wonder, that even when I speak to you about it, Imogene, and suffer my mind to dwell upon it, my mind grows numb with a dread that reason has quitted her throne and left me fit only for a madhouse!" [225]

"You tremble!" she whispered, softly; "nay, you think too closely of what you are passing through. Let your knowledge that this experience is real rob it of its terror. Are we not surrounded with wonders which too much thought will make affrighting? That glorious sun; what feeds his flaming disk? Why should the moon shine like crystal when her soil perchance is like that of our own world, which also gleams as silver does though it is mere dust and mould and unreflecting ashes? Think of the miracles we are to ourselves and to one another!"

She pressed my hand and pleaded, reproved and smiled upon me with her eyes. Was she some angelic spirit that had lighted by chance on this Death Ship, and held it company for very pity of the misery and hopelessness of the sailor's doom? But there was a human passion and tenderness in her face that would have been weakness in a glorified spirit. Oh, indeed, she was flesh and blood as I was, with warm lips for kissing, and breasts of cream as a pillow for love, and golden hair too aromatic for phantasy. [226]

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DUTCHMEN OBTAIN REFRESHMENTS.

Above an hour passed before the big boat, deeply laden, was towed by the little one from the wreck. Of what a proportion of her freight was composed I could not tell, much of it being in parcels and casks. They had made sure of the tobacco by bringing away, at once, all that they could find. I observed a number of hams stitched up in canvas, and some sacks of potatoes, two bags of which were lost by the bottoms bursting whilst they were being hoisted, on which Van Vogelaar broke into several terrible oaths in Dutch, though 'twas like a dramatic rehearsal of a [227]

ranting and bullying scene, for Vanderdecken took no notice and the men went on hoisting and lowering away in the old phlegmatic mechanic fashion as though they were deaf. There were likewise other kinds of provisions of which I need not tease you with the particulars. I believe that all the loading of the boat—in this her first trip, I mean—consisted of articles of food; for some of the parcels which puzzled me proved to contain cheeses and the others might therefore as well represent stores of a like kind. [228]

"Is it their custom to bring away the provisions first," I asked Imogene.

"As a rule," she answered, "they take whatever comes to hand, that is, if the articles be such as may be of use. What they chiefly secure as soon as possible is tobacco and spirits; then provisions and clothing; and then any treasure they may come across, and afterwards any portion of the cargo they may fancy that is light to handle, such as silks, pottery, and so forth."

"But they cannot take very much," said I, "or a few meetings of this kind would sink their ship for them with overloading." [229]

"There are many of us," she replied, "and the provisions they bring away do not last very long. The pottery they use and it is soon broken. Silk and such materials as they bring are light; and then, my dear, they do not meet wrecks every day, nor of the wrecks they meet may you count one in five that yields enough to sink this ship by a foot."

"I am heartily sorry," said I, "that they should find so much to eat aboard yonder hulk. With so goodly a store of provisions, Vanderdecken will not require to run into the land to shoot; and until this ship brings up I see no chance for ourselves."

She sighed and looked sadly into the water, insomuch that she suggested an emotion of hopelessness; but in an instant she flashed out of her expression of melancholy weariness into a smile and gave me the deep perfections of her violet eyes to look into, as if she knew their power over me and shaped their shining influence for my comfort and courage. [230]

When the boat was discharged of her freight, the men's dinner was passed over the side for the fellows to eat in snatches, working the while to save time. The wind remained weak and quiet, but it was inevitable that the hamper we showed aloft should give us a drift beyond the send of the swell; and to remedy this Vanderdecken clewed up his topsails and took in all his canvas, leaving his ship to tumble under bare poles, and by this means he rendered the drift of the vessel down upon the wreck extremely sluggish and scarcely perceptible.

All day long the big boat was towed to and fro, making many journeys and regularly putting off from the wreck very deep with freight. Vanderdecken ate his dinner on deck. You would have found it hard to reconcile any theory of common human passions such as cupidity, rapacity and the like, with his bloodless face and grave-yard aspect; and yet it was impossible to mistake the stirring of the true Dutch instincts of the patient but resolved greed in the air he carried whilst he waited for the return of the boat, in his frequent levelling of the telescope at the wreck as one who doubted his people and kept a sharp eye on them, in the eagerness his posture indicated as he hung over the rail watching the stuff as it was handed up or swayed by yard-arm tackles over the side, and the fierce peremptoriness of the questions he put to Van Vogelaar as to what he had there, how much more remained, and so on, though nothing that the mate answered, satisfactory as must have been the account he gave, softened the captain's habitual savageness or in any degree humanised him. Of the majesty of his deportment I have spoken; likewise of the thrilling richness of his voice, the piercing fire of his fine eyes and of his mien and bearing, so haughtily stately in all respects as to make one think of him, after a Pagan fashion, as of some god fallen from his high estate; but for all that he was a Dutchman at heart, dead-alive as he was; as true to his Holland extraction in 1796 as he had been an hundred and fifty years earlier, when he was trading to Batavia and nimbly getting money, and saving it, too, with as sure a hand as was ever swung in Amsterdam. [231]

The threads and lines and beds of vapour extending all over the sky served to reverberate the glory of the sunset, as the crags and peaks of mountains fling onwards the echoes of the thunder-clap. In the east it was all jasper and sapphire, reds and greens, and a lovely clear blue slowly burning to a carnelian in the zenith, where the effulgence lay in a pool of deep red with a haze of light like fine rain floating down upon it half white, half of silver; then followed a jacinthine hue, a lustrous red most daintily delicate, with streaks of clear green like the beryl, till the eye came to the west, where the sun, vastly enlarged by refraction, hung in enormous bulk of golden fiery magnificence amid half-curtained pavilions of living splendour, where 'twas like looking at some newly-wrought fairy world robed in the shinings of the Heaven of Christ to see the lakes and lagoons of amber purple and yellow, the seas of molten gold, the starry flamings in the chrysolite brows of vapour, and the sky fading out north and south in lights and tints as fair as the reflections in the wet pearly interior of a sea-shell gaping on a beach towards the setting sun. The small swell traversing the great red light that was upon the sea put lines of flowing glory under the tapestries of that sunset, and the appearance was that of an eager shouldering of the effulgence into the grey of the south quarter, as though old Neptune sought to honourably distribute the glory all around, and render the western sea-board ambient. [232]

Then it was, while the lower limb of the luminary yet sipped from the horizon the gold of his own showering, that the picture of the wreck, and the Death Ship heaving pale and stripped of her canvas, became the wonder that my memory must for ever find it. How steadfastly the dead seaman at the wheel kept watch! The quieted sea now scarce stirred the rudder, and the occasional light movements of the figure seemed like starts in him, motions of surprise at the Dutchmen's antlike pertinaciousness in their stripping of the hull. [233]

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And they? In that mani-coloured western blaze they partook more of the character of corpses, in those faces of theirs, which stared our way or glimmered for a breath or two over the bulwarks, than ever I had found visible in them by moonlight or lamplight or the chilling dimness of a stormy dawn. The sun vanished and the pale grey of evening stole like a curtain drawn by spirit-hands out of the eastern sea and over the waning glories of the skies, with a star or two glittering in its skirts; and the wind from the north blew with a sudden weight and a long moaning, making the sea whence it came ashen with gushings of foam which ran into a colour of thin blood on passing the confines of the western reflection. Vanderdecken, seizing his trumpet, sent a loud command through it to the wreck; but the twilight was a mere windy glimmering under the stars, which shone very brightly among the high small clouds by the time the boats had shoved clear of the hull and were heading for us, and the night had come down dark, spite of the stars and the silver paring of moon, ere the last fragment of the freight of rope, sail, and raffle from the wreck had been passed over the side from the big boat. [235]

It grew into a wild scene then: the light of the lantern-candles dimly throwing out the bleached faces and dark figures of the seamen as they hoisted the boats and stowed them one inside the other, the ship rolling on the swell that had again risen very suddenly as though some mighty hand were striving to press it down and so forcing the fluid surface into larger volumes, the heads of the seas frothing spectrally as they coursed arching and splashing out of the further darkness, the eastering slip of moon sliding like a sheering scythe among the networks of the shrouds and gear, and nothing to be heard but the angry sobbing of waters beating themselves into hissing foam against the ship's side, and the multitudinous crying, as of a distant but piercing chorussing of many women and boys, of the freshening wind flying damp through the rigging. [236]

It had been a busy day, it was still a busy time; but never throughout the hours, if I save the occasional cursing of the mate, the captain's few questions, his command trumpeted to the wreck, my talk with Imogene, had human voice been heard. It was not so noticeable a thing, this silence of the ghostly crew, in the broad blaze of sunshine and amid an exhibition of labour that was like sound to the eye, as now, in the darkness, with the wind freshening, sail to be made and much to be done—much of the kind that forces merchant seamen into singing out and bawling as they drag and pull and jump aloft. The wreck was a mere lump of blackness tumbling out to windward upon the dusky frothing welter, and I thought of the dead sentinel at the helm. What in the name of the saints was there in that figure to put into the sea the enormous solitude I found in the vast surface glimmering to where it melted in shadow against the low stars? What was there in that poor corpse to fling a bleakness into the night wind, to draw an echo as chilling as a madman's cry out of the gusty moaning aloft, to sadden the very star-beams into dull and spectral twinklings? The canvas shook as the silent sailors sheeted it home and voicelessly masted the yards. At three bells in the first watch the Death Ship had been wore to bring her starboard tacks aboard, and under all the canvas she had she was leaning before a small gale with her head to the southward and westward, her sides and decks alive with the twistings of the mystic fires which darkness kindled in her ancient timbers, and her round weather-bow driving the rude black surge back into boiling whiteness. [237]

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### MY LIFE IS ATTEMPTED.

Heading out to sea afresh! Once again pointing the ship's beak for the solitude of the ocean, and starting as it might be on a new struggle that was to end in storm and defeat, in the heavy belabouring of the groaning structure by giant surges, and in a sickening helpless drift of God alone knew how many leagues, ere the sky brightened into blueness once more! [239]

Never had I so strongly felt the horror and misery of the fate which Vanderdecken's hellish impiety had brought down upon his ship and her company of mariners as now, when I saw the yards braced up on the starboard tack, and the vessel laid with her head to the south and west. The fresh wind seemed to shriek the word "Forever!" in her rigging, and the echo was drowned in the wild sobbing sounds that rose out of each long, yearning wash of the sea along her dimly shining bends. [240]

How was I to escape? How deliver Imogene?

I was a sailor, and whilst the ocean found me business, whilst it defined the periods of its detentions of me, I loved it! The freedom of it was dear to my heart; it was my home; it was a glass in which was mirrored the image of the Creator I worshipped. But the prospect of continuously sailing upon it in the Death Ship, of fighting its subtle winds and furious storms to no purpose, converted it into a melancholy waste—a liquid plain of desolation—a mere Hell of waters upon whose sandy floor Hope, with tempest-torn wings, would speedily lie drowned, whilst its surface should grow maddening with the reflected icy sparkling of that Starry Crux, which shone but as a symbol of despair when the eye sought it from these accursed decks and beheld the quick light of its jewels trembling over the yard-arms of the Death Ship. [241]

Shortly after midnight the wind freshened, and it came on to blow with some weight. I had been in my cabin an hour, lying there broad awake, being rendered extraordinarily uneasy by my thoughts. The sea had grown hollow, and the ship plunged quickly and sharply with a heavy

thunderous noise of spurned and foaming waters all about her. It was sheer misery lying intensely wakeful in that desolate cabin, that would have been as pitchy black as any ancient castle dungeon but for the glimmering lights, which were so much more terrible than the profoundest shade of blackness could be, that had there been any hole in the ship where the phosphor did not glow, I would cheerfully have carried my bed to it, ay, even if it had been in the bottom of the fore-peak or in the thickest of the midnight of the hold. The rats squeaked, the bulkheads and ceilings seemed alive with crawling glow-worms, groans as of dying, cries as of wounded men sounded out of the interior in which lay stowed the pepper, mace, spices and other Indian commodities of a freight that was hard upon an hundred and fifty years old! [242]

I suspected from the motions of the ship and the hollow, muffled roarings outside, that a gale of wind was brewing, and I resolved to go on deck and take a look at the weather since I could not sleep, for if the wind was north west it would give us such a further drift to the eastwards as would set the African coast at a fearful distance for our round-bowed sea-wagon to come at. On the other hand, the gale might have veered to a quarter favourable to heading for Cape Agulhas. Should this happen, how would the Curse operate? Would the ship be permitted to near the Cape before being blown back? But I suspected the operation of no fixed laws in this doom. To suffer the Death Ship to draw close, to fill the minds of the crew with triumphant assurance of their weathering the Cape of Storms, would be a mere hideous tantalising of them that could surely form no part of the sentence which obliterated from their minds the recollection of past failures. For, let the readers of my narrative bear this steadfastly in view: that if Vanderdecken and his men knew of a surety that they were never to pass the cape into the South Atlantic Ocean, then, as beings capable of thinking and acting, they would long ago have desisted from the attempt and sought rest—if they could not procure death for themselves—haply in that same island of Java from which they had sailed. [243]

I crawled into my clothes by feeling for them, and groped my way on to the poop. The sky was black with low-flying cloud, from the speeding rims of which a star would now and again glance, like the flash of a filibuster's fusil from the dark shrubbery of a mountain slope. But there was so much roaring spume and froth all about the ship, that a dim radiance as of twilight hung in the air, and I could see to as high as the topmast heads. [244]

I stepped at once to the binnacle without noticing who had the watch and found the ship's head south-east by south. I could not suppose the ancient magnet showed the quarters accurately, but, allowing for a westerly variation of thirty degrees, the indication came near enough to satisfy me that the wind was as it had been ever since the night I first entered this ship—right in our teeth for the passage of the Cape, and that though we might be sluggishly washing through it close-hauled, we were also driving away broadside on, making a clean beam course for the heart of the mighty Southern Ocean. [245]

This vexed and harassed me to the soul, and occasioned in me so lively a sympathy with the rage that adverse gales had kindled in Vanderdecken, that had he contented himself with merely damning the weather instead of flying in the face of the Most High and behaving like some foul fiend, I should have deeply pitied him and considered his case the hardest ever heard of. The main-yard was lowered and a row of men were silently knotting the reef-points. The topgallant-sails had been handed, reefs tied in the topsails, and the vessel looked prepared for foul weather.

But though the wind blew smartly, with weight in its gusts and plenty of piping and screaming and whistling of it aloft, there was no marked storminess of aspect in the heavens, sombre and sullen as was the shadow that ringed the sea-line, and fiercely as flew the black clouds out of it in the north west; and with this appearance I essayed to console myself as I stood near the mizzen-shrouds gazing about me. [246]

Seeing a figure standing near the larboard-shrouds, I stepped over and found it to be Van Vogelaar. My direct approach made some sort of accost a formal necessity, but I little loved to speak with this man, whom I considered as wicked a rascal as ever went to sea.

"These nor'-westers are evil winds, mynheer," said I, "and in this sea they appear to have the vitality of easterly gales in England. What is the weather to be like? For my part, I think we shall find a quieter atmosphere before dawn."

He was some time in answering, feigning to watch the men reefing the mainsail, though by the light of the white water I could catch the gleam of his eyes fixed upon me askant.

"What brings you on deck at this hour?" said he, in his rasping, surly voice.

I answered, quietly, that feeling wakeful and hearing the wind, I rose to view the weather for myself. [247]

"A sailor is supposed to rest the better for the rocking of seas and the crying of wind," said he, with a mocking, contemptuous tone in his accents. "That saying is intended no doubt for the Dutch seamen; the English mariner nobly shines as a sailor in his own records, but you will admit, sir, that he is never so happy as when he is ashore."

"Sir," I replied, suppressing my rising temper with a very heavy effort, "I fear you must have suffered somewhat at the hands of the English sailor that you should never let slip a chance to discharge your venom at him. I am English, and a sailor, too, and I should be pleased to witness some better illustrations of Dutch courage than the insults you offer to a man who stands defenceless among you, and must be beholden, therefore, wholly to your courtesy."

He said, in a sneering, scornful voice, "Our courtesy! A member of a dastardly crew that would have assassinated me and my men with their small arms, hath a great claim upon our courtesy!" [248]

"I was aft, and ignorant of the intentions of the men when that thing was done," said I, resolved not to be betrayed into heat, let the struggle to keep calm cost what it would.

To this he made no reply, then after a pause, said in a mumbling voice as if he would, and yet would not have me hear him, "I brought a curse into the ship when I handed you over the side; the devil craved for ye, and I should have let you sink into his maws. By the holy sepulchre, there are many in Amsterdam who would have me keel-hauled did they know this hand had saved the life of an Englishman!" And he tossed up his right hand with a vehement gesture of rage.

I was a stoutly-built fellow, full of living and healthy muscle, and I do solemnly affirm that it would not have cost me one instant of quicker breathing to have tossed this brutal and insulting anatomy over the rail. But it was not only that I feared any exhibition of temper in me might end in my murder; I felt that in the person of this ugly and malignant mate I should be dealing with a sentence that forbade his destruction, that must preserve him from injury, and that rendered him as superior to human vengeance as if his body had been lifeless. And what were his insults but a kind of posthumous scorn, as idle and contemptible as that inscription upon a dead Dutchman's grave in Rotterdam, in which the poor Holland corpse after eighty years of decay goes on telling the world that in his opinion Britons are poor creatures? [249]

I held my peace, and Van Vogelaar went to the break of the poop, whence he could better see what the men were doing upon the main-yard. The enmity of this man made me feel very unhappy. I was never sure what mischief he meditated, and the sense of my helplessness, the idleness of any resolution I might form in the face of the supernatural life that encompassed me, made the flying midnight seem inexpressibly dreary and dismal, and the white foam of the sea carrying the eye to the ebony cloud-girdle that belted the horizon, suggested distances so prodigious that the heart sank to the sight of them, as to thoughts of eternity. [250]

I was running my gaze slowly over the weather sea-board, whence came the endless procession of ridged billows like incalculable hosts of black-mailed warriors, with white plumes flying and steam from the nostrils of their steeds boiling and pouring before them, and phosphoric lights upon them like the shining points of couched spears, when methought a dim pallid shadow, standing just under a star that was floating a moment betwixt two flying shores of cloud, was a ship; and the better to see, I sprang on to the rail about abreast of the helmsman, for my support catching hold of some stout rope that ran transversely aft out of the darkness amidships. What gear it was I never stopped to consider, but gripping it with my left hand swayed to it erect upon the rail, whilst with my right I sheltered my eyes against the smarting rain of spray, and stared at what I guessed to be a sail. I have said that the creaming and foaming of the waters flung from the vessel's sides and bows made a light in the air, and the sphere of my sight included a space of the poop-deck to right and left of me, albeit my gaze was fastened upon the distant shadow. [251]

All on a sudden the end of the rope I grasped was thrown off the pin to which it was belayed and I fell overboard. 'Twas instantaneous! And so marvellously swift is thought that I recollect even during that lightning-like plunge thinking how icy-cold the sea would be, and how deep my dive from the great height of the poop-rail. But instead of striking the water, the weight of me swung my body into the mizzen-channels by the rope my left hand desperately gripped. I fell almost softly against a shroud coming down to a great dead-eye there and dropped in a sitting posture in the channel itself which to be sure was a wide platform to windward and therefore lifted very clear of the sea, spite of the ship's weather rolls. My heart beat quickly, but I was safe: yet a moment after I had liked to have perished, indeed, for the rope I mechanically grasped was all at once torn from my fingers with so savage a drag from some hand on deck that nothing but the pitting of my knee against a dead-eye preserved me from being tweaked into the hissing caldron beneath. I could see the rope plain enough as it was tautened, through the pallid atmosphere and against the winking of the stars sliding from one wing of vapour to another, and perceived that it was the main-brace, the lowering of the yard or reefing the sail having brought it within reach of my arm. Then, with this, there grew in me a consciousness of my having noticed a figure glide by me whilst I stood on the rail; and, putting these things together, I guessed that Van Vogelaar, having observed my posture, had sneaked aft to where the main-brace—that was formed of a pendant and whip—was made fast and had let go of it, never doubting that, as I leaned against it, so, by his whipping the end off the pin it would let me fall overboard! [252]

I was terribly enraged by this cowardly attempt upon my life and was for climbing inboard at once and manhandling him, ghost or no ghost; then changed my mind and stayed a bit in the channel considering what I should do. Thin veins of fire crawled upon this aged platform as upon all other parts of the ship; but the shrouds coming very thick with leather chafing-gear to the dead-eyes made such a jumble of black shapes, that I was very sure Van Vogelaar could not see me if he should take it into his head to peer down over the rail. [254]

After casting about in my mind, the determination I arrived at was to treat my tumble from the rail as an accident, for I very honestly believed this: that if I should complain to Vanderdecken of his mate's murderous intention, I would not only harden the deadly malignity of that ghastly ruffian's hatred of me, insomuch, that it might come to his stabbing me in my sleep, but it might end in putting such fancies into the captain's head as should make him desire my destruction, and arrange with his horrid lieutenant to procure it. Indeed, I had only to think of Amboyna and the brutal character of the Dutch of those times, and remember that Vanderdecken and his men belonged to that age, and would therefore have the savagery which one hundred and fifty years of civilization, arts, and letters have somewhat abated in the Hollanders, to determine me to move with very great wariness in this matter. [255]

But I had been dreadfully near to death, and could not speedily recollect myself. The white heads



of the surges leaped, boiled and snapped under the channels, like wolves thirsting for my blood; and the crying of the wind among the shrouds, in whose shadows I sat, and the sounds it made as it coursed through the dark night and split shrilly upon the ropes and spars high up in the dusk, ran echoes into those raving waters below, which made them as much wild beasts to the ear as they looked to the eye.

But little good could come of my sitting and brooding in that mizzen-channel; so, being in no mood to meet the villain, Van Vogelaar, I very cautiously rose, and with the practised hand of a sailor crawled along the lap of the covering-board, holding by the rail but keeping my head out of sight, and reached the main-chains, whence I dropped on to the deck unseen among the tangled thickness of the shrouds, and slid, as stilly as the ghostliest man among that ghastly crew could tread, to my cabin.

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## CHAPTER XV. MY SWEETHEART'S JOY.

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Once asleep I slept heavily, and it was twenty minutes past the breakfast hour by the time I was ready to leave the crazy and groaning dungeon that served me for a bedroom.

I entered the cabin, but had scarcely made two steps when there sounded a loud cry in a girl's voice, half of terror, half of joy; a shriek so startling for the passions it expressed that it brought me to a dead stand. It was Imogene. I saw her jump from her seat, make a gesture with her arms as though she would fly to me, then bring both hands violently to her heart with a loud hysterical ha! ha! as if she could only find breath in some such unnatural note of laughter, whilst she stood staring at me with straining eyes that filled her violet beauty with a light like that of madness.

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The clock struck the half-hour as she cried, and the echo of her voice and the deep, humming vibration of the bell were followed by the parrot's diabolical croak:

"Wy zyn al Verdomd!"

"God in Heaven!" exclaimed Vanderdecken, in a tone deep with amazement, "I thought that man was drowned!"

It was a picture of consternation that I should not have dreamt to expect in men who had outlived life and in whom you would think of seeking qualities and emotions outside those which were necessary to the execution of their sentence. Vanderdecken, leaning forward at the head of the table upon his great hands, the fingers of which were stretched out, glared at me with a frown of astonishment. Prins—whose attendance upon me in my cabin had long been limited to his placing a bucket of salt-water at my door without entering—Prins, I say, arrested by my entry whilst in the act of filling a cup of wine for the captain, watched me with a yawn of wonder, and stood motionless as though blasted by a stroke of lightning; whilst Van Vogelaar, with his head upon his shoulder, the blade of the knife with which he had been eating forking straight up out of his fist that lay like a paralysed thing upon the table, eyed me with a sunk chin and under a double fold of brow; his level, enchained stare full of fear, and cruelty and passion.

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I saw how it was, and giving the captain a bow and my darling a smile, I went to my place at the table and sat down. Van Vogelaar shrunk as I passed him, keeping his eyes upon me as a cat follows the motions of a dog; and when I seated myself he fell away by the length of his arm, dropping his knife and fork and watching me. Imogene, breathing deeply, resumed her seat; nothing but Vanderdecken's amazement hindered him from observing her agitation, which was of a nature he could not possibly have mistaken, if indeed he still possessed the capacity of distinguishing such emotions as love.

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She merely said, letting out her words in a tremulous sigh: "O Geoffrey, thank God! thank God!" The food in front of her was untasted; but what grief there had been in her face before was lost in the confusion of feelings which worked in her loveliness with a vitality that made her red and white in the same moment. She repeated under her breath to herself: "Thank God! thank God!"

This, while the others stared.

I turned to Van Vogelaar. "Mynheer," said I, "you regard me with astonishment."

He shrank a little further yet, and, after a pause, said, "Are you man or devil?"

"Captain Vanderdecken," said I, "has your mate lost his reason?"

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On this Van Vogelaar cried out: "Captain, by the Holy Trinity, I swear it was as I have reported. This Englishman, after prowling on deck last night in the early hours of the middle watch, suddenly clambered on to the rail, for what purpose I know not, and leaned his weight against the starboard main-brace, the sail then reefing. I looked round—on turning again he was gone! and Nicholas Houltschausen, who was at the helm, swore he saw him rise black upon the white eddies of the wake."

Vanderdecken frowningly questioned me with his eyes. I should have been acting a sillier part than a fool's to have jested with these men, besides, I had long since resolved to be plain.

"Herr Van Vogelaar," said I, "doubtless refers to my having fallen into the weather mizzen-channel last night from the rail, whilst peering at what I believed to be a ship. The main-brace,

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upon which I had put my hand to steady myself, yielded very suddenly," and here I shot a look at the mate, "but I fell lightly, and after sitting a little to recover my breath, made my way to my cabin."

Van Vogelaar's death-like face darkened. An oath or two rattled in his throat, and returning to his old posture he fell to the meat upon his plate with the ferocity of some starving beast, insomuch that the veins about his forehead stood out like pieces of cord.

The feelings with which Vanderdecken received my explanation I could not gather. He gazed hard at me with fiery eyes, as though, mistrusting me, he sought to burn his sight down to my heart, and then, slowly resuming his knife and fork, went on with his breakfast in his familiar trance-like way, mute as a dead man.

I constantly exchanged glances with Imogene, but held my peace since she remained silent. She struggled to compose her face, but her joy at my presence shone through her mask of reserve, twitching the corners of her mouth into faint smiles, and dancing in her eyes like sunshine on the ripples of a sapphire pool. Her love for me spoke more in this quiet delight than she could have found room for in a thousand words. How sweet and fair she looked! The light of her heart lay with a fair rosiness upon her cheeks, which had been as pale as marble when she had risen with her shriek and laughter to my first coming. [263]

Presently Van Vogelaar left the cabin, going out scowling and talking to himself, but not offering so much as to glance at me. There was a piece of hung meat on the table, of what animal I did not know; it proved indifferent good eating. This and some cakes made of flour, with a goblet of sherry and water, formed my breakfast. I ate slowly, knowing that Vanderdecken would not smoke whilst I breakfasted, and wishing to tire him away that Imogene and I might have the cabin to ourselves. But my stratagem was to no purpose. He started suddenly from his waking dream—if, indeed, it was to be credited that any sort of intellectual faculty stirred in him when he lapsed into these cataleptic stillnesses—and bade Prins go and get cut up some of the tobacco they had removed from the wreck, and then erecting his figure and stroking down his beard, he looked from me to Imogene and back to me again, and said, "The weather promises to mend; but this wind must come from a witch's mouth—and a witch of deep and steady lungs. I hope you may not have brought us ill-luck, sir?" [264]

"I hope not," said I, shortly.

"There are malign stars in the heavens," he continued, in a voice that trembled richly upon the air, like the waving echoes of some deep-throated melodious bell, "and there are men born under them. North of the Baltic, on Muskovite territory, is a nation of wretches who can bewitch the winds and sail their ships through contrary gales. They are not far removed from Britain," said he, significantly. [265]

"They are as close to Holland, mynheer," said I.

"Oh, captain!" cried Imogene, "you do not wish to say that Mr. Fenton has had a hand in the fixing of this wind?"

He leaned his forehead upon his elbow, and stretching forth his other hand, drummed lightly on the table with his long, lean, leprous-coloured fingers as he spoke. "Why, Mynheer Fenton, Miss Dudley must allow that a curious luck attends you. How many of a crew went to your ship?"

"Forty, sir."

"Mark your star! Of forty men you alone fall overboard! But fortune goes with you and you are rescued by Van Vogelaar. Observe again! Of forty men you alone are delivered into a ship whose nation is at war with yours! Yet fortune still attends you and you are hospitably received, yea, even made welcome, and clothed, and fed and housed." [266]

I bowed.

"More yet! Last night you fell from the bulwark-rail. What sorcery is it that sways you into the mizzen-channel and presently, unseen, to your bed? Nicholas Houltshausen is noted among us for his shrewd sight. Did not he swear he saw you rise black after your plunge among the froth of the ship's wake? What was it that he beheld? Can the soul shed its body as the butterfly its skin and yet appear clothed, substantial, real as flesh and blood?"

"I exactly explained that accident," said I. "If there be sorcery in my having the luck to tumble into a ship's mizzen-chains instead of the water, then am I a witch fit for a broomstick and a grinning moon!"

"Captain Vanderdecken does but amuse himself with you, Mr. Fenton," said Imogene. "It is true, mynheer," she continued, putting on an inimitable air of sweet dignity, which was vastly reassuring to me as proving that she had recovered her old easiness of mind and was now playing a part, "that we believed you had fallen overboard last night, and this being our conclusion you may judge how greatly your entrance just now amazed us. For me, I was so frightened that I shrieked out, as you doubtless heard. Truly I thought you, the dead, arisen. Captain Vanderdecken cannot recover his surprise, and would have himself to believe that you are a sorcerer. You, who are so young, and an English sailor!" She laughed out, and a truer ring she could not have put into her forced merriment had she been a Pritchard, or a Clive, or a Cibber. "Indeed," she added, "to be a necromancer, you need a beard as long and as grey as the captain's." [267]

There was no temper in the look Vanderdecken cast upon her, nay, it almost deserved the name of mildness in him whose eyes were forever fiery with hot thought and passions of undividable [268]

character. But not the phantom of a smile showed in his face in response to her laughter.

"Madam," said I, putting on a distant air in conformity with the hint of her own manner, "I am no sorcerer. For your sake I would I were, for then my first business would be to veer this wind south, and keep it there till it had thundered our ship with foaming stem into the smooth waters of the Zuyder-Zee."

This seemed to weigh with Vanderdecken. He reflected a little and then said, with something of lofty urbanity in his mode of addressing me, "Had you that power, mynheer, I do not know that I should object to your presence were you Beelzebub himself."

Imogene's smile betrayed the delight she felt in her gradual, happy, nimble drawing of this fierce man's thoughts away from his astonishing suspicions of me as a wizard. [269]

"Have you ever heard, Mr. Fenton," said she, "of that nation to the north of the Baltic of whom Captain Vanderdecken has spoken?"

"Oh! yes, madam," I replied; "they are well known as Russian Finns, and are undoubtedly wizards, and will sell such winds to ships as captains require. I knew a master of a vessel who, being off the coast of Finland, grew impatient for a wind to carry him to a certain distant port. He applied to an old wizard, who said he would sell him a gale that should enable him to fetch the Promontory of Rouxella, but no further, for his breeze ceased to obey him when that point was reached. The captain agreed, holding that a wind to Rouxella was better than light airs and baffling calms off the Finland coast, and paid the wizard ten kronen—about six and thirty shillings of English money—and a pound of tobacco; on which the conjurer tied a woollen rag to the fore-mast, the rag being about half a yard long and a nail broad. It had three knots, and the wizard told him to loose the first knot when he got his anchor, which he did, and forthwith it blew a fresh favourable gale." [270]

"That is so?" demanded Vanderdecken, doubtingly, and folding his arms over his beard.

"I knew the captain, mynheer," I answered; "his name was Jenkyns, and his ship was a brig called the True Love."

"Did the first knot give him all the wind he wanted?" asked he.

"No, sir. It gave them a brisk west south-west gale that carried them thirty leagues beyond the maelstrom in the Norwegian sea; then shifted, on which Captain Jenkyns untied the second knot, which brought the wind back to its own quarter. It failed them again, but when the third knot was untied there arose so furious a tempest that all hands went to prayers, begging for mercy for choosing to deal with an infernal artist instead of trusting to Providence." [271]

It was not easy to make out the thoughts in Vanderdecken's mind, not less because of the half of his countenance being densely clothed with hair, than because of the white, iron rigidity of as much of his face as was visible; yet I could not doubt that he believed in those Finnish wizards from a sudden yearning in his manner, followed by a flashing glance of impatience at the cabin entrance, that was for all the world as though he had cried out "Would to God there was a purchasable wind hereabouts!" But the reader must consider that this man belonged to an age when wise men soberly credited greater wonders than Icelandic and Finnish wind-brokers.

By this I had made an end of breakfast, and Prins arriving with a jar full of the tobacco, flaked and fit for smoking, the captain filled his pipe, first pushing the jar to me, and then fell into one of his silences, from which he would emerge at wide intervals to say something that was as good as a warrant he was thinking no longer of the sorcery of my fall and appearance. When he had emptied his bowl, he went to his cabin. Imogene instantly arose and came to my side. [272]

"Oh, my dearest!" she whispered, with a sudden darkening of her eyes by the shadow of tears, "I did believe, indeed, you were lost to me for ever! My senses seemed to leave me when Vanderdecken accounted for your absence."

"Dear heart! My precious one!" I answered, fondling her little hand, which lay cold with her emotion in mine; "I am still with thee, and hope with us may remain fearless. But it was a narrow escape. Van Vogelaar came red-handed to this table. For hours he has had my blood upon his devilish soul. No wonder the villain quailed when I entered this cabin." [273]

"What did he do?" she cried.

"I believed I saw a ship," I answered; "I jumped on to the rail to make sure, and leaned against the brace that governs the main-yard. He slipped aft and let go the rope, meaning that I should fall overboard, but my grip was a sailor's, and I swung with the rope into the mizzen-chains."

"The wretch! He told Vanderdecken that you had climbed on to the bulwarks and fallen. I could kill him!" She clenched her white fingers till the jewels on them flashed to the trembling of the tension, and a delicate crimson surged into her face. "I could kill him!" she repeated.

"Hush, sweet one! It is our business to escape, and we need an exquisite judgment. I, too, could kill the treacherous ruffian, only that he is deathless. You, brave heart, will advise me that we are not to know of this thing. No, let it be an accident of my own doing. We are in a shipful of devils, and must act as if we believed them angels." [274]

Her face slowly paled, her fingers opened, and the angry shining faded out of her eyes leaving the soft, violet pensive light there.

"Yes, you are right; we must not know the truth of this thing," said she, musingly, after a little. "But be on your guard, Geoffrey; keep well away from that rogue. His Spanish treachery is made

formidable by his Dutch cunning. How swiftly he acted last night! His thoughts must have been intent for some time or even the demon in him would not have been equal to such readiness. See to your cabin door at night—O Geoffrey, he might steal in upon you."

I smiled. "He has spoken once; I shall not require a second hint."

"O that I had a man's arm, Geoffrey, that I might be your sentinel whilst you slept!"

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"Precious one! You shall sentinel me yet! Patience, meanwhile! It is this ship that makes home so distant. Once clear of this groaning vault and we shall be smelling the sweetbriar and the violet."

Vanderdecken came out of his cabin and went on deck. He walked with impetuosity and passed without regarding us. Through the open door leading to the quarter-deck I saw him stand a minute with his face upturned and then toss his hand with a gesture of baffled rage.

"He is cursing the wind," said Imogene. "How often has he done so since I have been in this ship! And when will a last day come to him, when there shall be no wind to curse, when death shall have paralysed his tongue and silenced his heart? How fiercely it now throbs! Surely there is more stormy passion in one day of its beating than in twenty years of a human pulse! O, my dear, that you had the northern wizard's power of evoking prosperous gales!"

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"I should be glad of that power," said I, "for better reasons than to help this man to fight against his Sentence. Can you guess what I would do? I would straightway blow this old ship ashore. Dread the Afric coast as you will, dear one, it will be our only chance."

"I dread it for its savages—the thought of captivity beyond the mountains is horrible! I have heard my father tell of the wreck of an East Indiaman named the Grosvenor, in which were ladies of distinction, who were seized by the natives and carried far inland and made wives of. That is not more than twenty years ago. O, Geoffrey, sooner than that—I would be content to die in this ship—to go on sailing about in her till my hair was as white as the foam about our keel!" and as she said this she grasped a handful of her golden hair and held it to me, unconscious in the earnestness of her fears of the child-like simplicity of her action. I put my lips to the tress, that flowed from her head through the snow of her hand and thence down like a stream of sunny light or the raining of the jet of a golden fountain, and told her not to fear, that I loved the natives as little as she, and would contrive to give them a wide berth; and then I changed the subject by wondering what the consequences would be if last night's business and Vanderdecken's talk this morning put it into the minds of the crew that I was as much a wizard as any Finn and could control the breezes if I chose.

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She shook her head. "Better that they should regard you as what you really are—an English sailor. Suppose they persuaded themselves that you could raise and sell winds, they might determine to test you, and imprison, even torture you in the belief you were stubborn and would not do their bidding; or, if they came to consider you a wizard, they might think your presence in the ship unlucky, and, being half-savages, with demons for souls, as I believe, and with instincts belonging to a time when the world was brutal and human life held in no account—there is no imagining how they would serve you."

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"Oh, Imogene!" cried I, "you are my good angel——"

"A true sweetheart must ever be that to the boy she loves," she whispered, looking down and softly blushing.

"You are my true sweetheart, Imogene! And how faithfully you are able to guide me through the marvellous experience we are both passing through, I know by the words you have just uttered," and I went on to tell her how Van Vogelaar had under his breath talked as if to himself of my being a curse in the ship.

As I said this, Prins came to the cabin door, and stood looking in. Perceiving him, Imogene rose and saying quietly, "He has perhaps been sent to report if we are together; go you on deck, dearest; I will join you, presently," went to her berth.

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END OF VOLUME II.

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## Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

Inconsistent hyphenation fixed.

P. 28: stancheons -> stanchions.

P. 33: schellings -> schillings.

P. 60: silival -> salival.

P. 63: rottenness -> rottenness.  
P. 197: mani-hued dinginess -> many-hued dinginess.  
P. 109: least my thoughtlessness -> lest my thoughtlessness.  
P. 227: Voeglaar -> Vogelaar.  
P. 248: assasinated -> assassinated.  
P. 249: solely -> solemnly.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEATH SHIP: A STRANGE STORY, VOL. 2  
(OF 3) \*\*\*

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